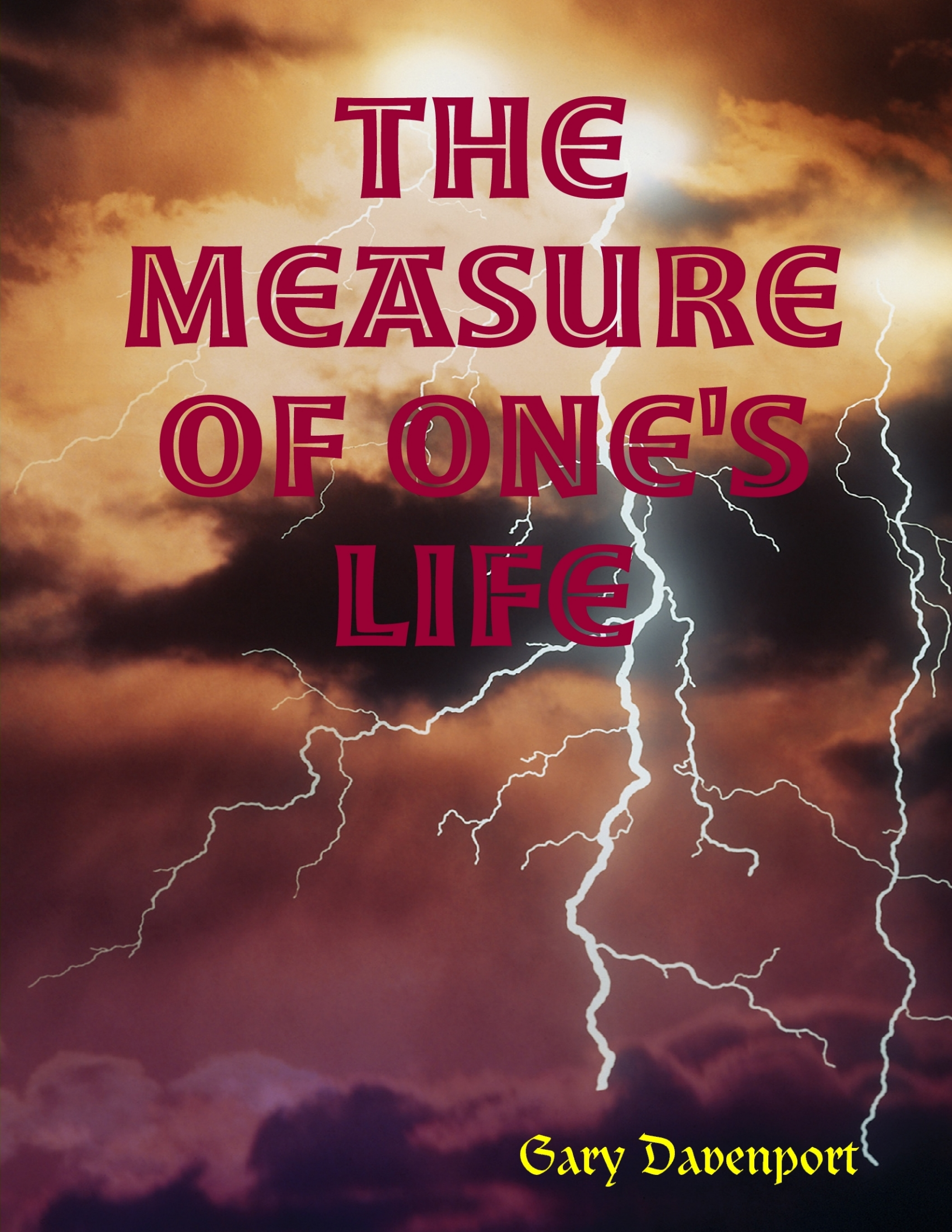
THE MEASURE OF ONE'S LIFE
Gary Davenport

The Measure of One's Life

"Let us so live that when we die even the undertaker will be sorry." (Mark Twain)

A devotional book by Gary Davenport

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[1] Boyle Roche, Instant Quotation Dictionary, p. 97.
[2] British playwright George Bernard Shaw
[3] *Coffee Break*
[4] Dorothy Bernard
[5] John Donne (1572–1631)
[6] Lucius Annaeus Seneca (c. 4 b.c.–a.d. 65)
[7] Tim Hansel
[8] Carmina Gadelica, quoted in "*Reflections*," Christianity Today, Vol. 44, No. 13.
[9] Vance Havner
[10] Martin Luther King, Jr. Leadership, Vol. 16, no. 3.
[11] Corrie ten Boom (1892–1983)
[12] Ibid

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1
A beginning…

"Disappointment is the nurse of wisdom" [17]

There was five inches of snow on the ground outside the house, glistening beneath the street's only light, settling in for another cold mid-winter night's sleep in the Northeast corner of Ohio.

The week's weather had been on a roller coaster, seeking to discern between the high 10's and the mid-30's, which certainly put the beautiful layer of 'God's gift' in these parts at risk for another day.

The movie on the small television in the bedroom suddenly garnered even more attention than before, as lawyer Jan Schlichtmann (played by John Travolta) sat haggardly before a questioning judge. His life had seemingly come to a roadblock, and his demeanor displayed a frustration that spoke volumes considering the otherwise 'high marks' for the good intentions he had displayed throughout his career.

Viewed by some as an 'ambulance chaser,' he would acknowledge often through the movie, *A Civil Action,*[18] that money *did matter*. In fact, it mattered a lot *if one wanted to drive expensive cars and dress impeccably in the finest of 'threads' and enjoy life's finer things*.

[17] Boyle Roche, Instant Quotation Dictionary, p. 97.

[18] Jan Schlichtmann, a tenacious young lawyer, is confronted with the litigation of a lifetime in this unbelievable real-life story. Several families in the small town of Woburn, Massachusetts, have suffered the tragic losses of their children to the rare cancer known as leukemia. After having their claim rejected by most law firms in town, these citizens approach Schlichtmann with the possibility that the deaths of their children may have had to do with Woburn's drinking water supply being contaminated by a couple of local businesses. The rub lies in the fact that these businesses are offshoots of two of the most powerful national corporations in the country! Schlichtmann must push his skill and craftiness as a lawyer to the limit in order to oust his opponents, who are working with a limitless bankroll.

But this character struggled with good times and even better intentions. He eventually would grow 'sentimental' toward his clients, which was not to be considered by a "smart lawyer who wants to win the important cases."

His problem was simple: he came to care about the client. And it cost money for small law firms to defend poor clients against deep-pocketed corporations who wanted only to "wear you down" until a settlement became a necessary evil.

He was penniless. Broke. And empty. Life should have been better. It had often lived up to the dream, but only for a moment in what seemed like a timeless daze of hard work and high ambitions.

The judge asked a series of questions, each determined to discover why his life was in such desperate condition. Where is all the money you made as a lawyer? The possessions one accumulates in his lifetime? "Do you expect your creditors to believe that you have nothing but $14 in your checking account and a portable radio," she quizzed.

Then the words came forth: "Where is the money, the property, the belongings, **the things by which one measures one's life?"**

The measure of one's life! The measure of one's life? What an intriguing statement. What a question? The suggestion is that one's life is judged based upon accumulation of things. Stuff.

And the implication is that if one does not have this all-empowering stuff, that life is of little account.

A merchant, some few years ago, failed in business. He went home in great agitation. "What is the matter?" asked his wife.

"I am ruined; I am beggared; I have lost my all," he exclaimed, pressing his hand upon his forehead.

"All" said the wife. "No, I am left."

"All, papa," said his eldest boy, "here am I."

"And I, too," said his little girl, running up, and putting her arms around his neck.

"I'm not lost, papa," repeated Eddie.

"And you have your health left," said his wife.

"And your hands to work with," said his eldest; "and I can help you."

"And your two feet, papa, to carry you about, and your two eyes to see with, papa," said little Eddie.

"And you have God's promises," said the grandmother.

"And a good God," said his wife.

Where would we be without our good God, One who has shown Himself daily for His love and devotion to us? And isn't it comforting to know that God *"…causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."* (Matthew 5:45)

Those words are certainly expressed to each of us through God's divine word: *(Jeremiah 31:3) "The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness."*[19]

If we're prone to wonder if God really cares for us at all, the apostle John gives us a reassuring reply: *""For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)*

He reveals even more in his later epistle, seeking to give confidence to those who were surrounded by the wisdom-filled Gnostics of the day: *"How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him." (1 John 3:1).*

We often find ourselves questioning those things which once were most certain in our life. We move from doubt to despair and eventually discouragement or disappointment.

The company of the discouraged is a very noble company. Not too long ago, the Hayden Planetarium in New York City issued an invitation to all those who were interested in applying to be a part of the crew on the first journey to another planet. Eighteen thousand people applied. They gave the applications to a panel of psychologists, who examined them thoroughly and came to the conclusion that in the vast majority of incidents, those who applied did so because they were discouraged with their lives here and hoped they could find a new life somewhere else. [20]

"Disappointment to a noble soul is what cold water is to burning metal; it strengthens, tempers, intensifies, but never destroys it. [21]

Even good marriages can be shaken to their foundations by circumstances that allow disappointment to breed. But the couples I've observed who have come through to the other side have done so first by God's grace and second by holding firmly to each other. They have affirmed that the "we" they possess together is stronger than the "it" of the circumstances and disappointment. [22]

We don't often see the larger picture since we are so close to the daily details.

The lone survivor of a shipwreck, marooned on a lonely island, managed to build a hut in which he placed all he had saved from the wreck. He prayed for rescue and anxiously scanned the horizon every day to signal any passing ship.

One day on returning from a hunt for food he was horror-stricken to find his hut in flames. All his possessions had gone up in smoke!

The next day a ship arrived. "We saw your smoke signal yesterday," the captain explained.

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[19] All scriptures are from *The Holy Bible, New International Version*, Original work copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society.
[20] Bruce Thielemann, "Dealing with Discouragement," Preaching Today, Tape No. 48.
[21] Eliza Tabor, *Instant Quotation Dictionary*, p. 97.
[22] Elizabeth Cody Newenhuyse, *Marriage Partnership*, Vol. 7, no. 3.

A Christian who was in very difficult circumstances fell on his knees in despair to cry to God, "When am I going to get out of all these trials?" But by a slip of the tongue he actually prayed, "What am I going to get out of all these trials?" The change of that one word "when" to "what" was just what the Lord wanted and the hard-pressed Christian realized it. There is something more important than escaping from trials -- it is learning what our Heavenly Father wants us to gain from them. [23]

Corrie ten Boom used to say, "When the train goes through a tunnel and the world gets dark, do you jump out? Of course not. You sit still and trust the engineer to get you through."

The apostle Paul said it best*: "Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."(Romans 5:3-5).*

He laid it clearly on the line in its ultimate contrast later, in *Romans 8:18: "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."*

He even realized that the difficult times were intended to reveal his own weaknesses, and force him to rely more upon the eternal God: *"To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me." (2 Corinthians 12:7-9).*

The apostle Peter also needs our attention: *"Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you." (1 Peter 4:12-14).*

And the end result isn't so bad, either, is it? *"And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast."* (1 *Peter 5:10)* If it takes a broken heart to draw us closer to God, then our prayer should be, "Break my heart." Anything that draws us closer to God has great value.

Do you have wind chimes at your house? The next time you face a storm, listen carefully. Along with the howling wind, you might hear a beautiful sound from the chimes. They are making music in the midst of a storm. That is a parable of our lives. In the face of the greatest storms of our lives, we can make beautiful music.

If you want to see what's in a sponge—just squeeze it. The contents will reveal themselves under pressure. The same thing will happen to you. When the pressure gets tough, you will see what's inside your heart and soul.

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[23] *Pulpit Helps*, November 1994, p. 8.

Minimizing Disappointment

I make the point annually to watch Jimmy Stewart's popular holiday portrayal of George Bailey in *It's A Wonderful Life*[24] (required viewing in my estimation for all who work daily to make a difference in people's lives).

In a scene in the early minutes of the presentation, angels are talking in heaven of this person, George, in their endeavor to know more about him and enter into his world to offer assistance.

Clarence, the 2nd grade level guardian angel who eventually is assigned to task, asks, "What's the matter with George. Is he sick? Is he in trouble?" "Much worse," is the reply, "he's discouraged."

George gets his wish ("I wish I'd never been born") and eventually is led through a process of seeing the world as it would have been had he never been born. The conclusion for his circumstances is identical to others – we do make a difference and our positive actions and kind words accumulate much greater than we could ever imagine.

People indeed observe and model what they see and hear from us. It's humbling but certain that we have an influence in the eternity of another's soul.

We each occupy a small fraction of space in this world. We do and must make a difference in the lives of others.

Ponce de Leon went on a fruitless quest for the fountain of youth. What if he had found it? While we might enjoy a longer life, that would not solve our most serious problem. There is a fountain of spiritual youth. It is available to everyone in the word of God.

Many people have sustained themselves in times of crisis with the little slogan, "This too shall pass." That definitely puts things in perspective. When we look at all our troubles down here, we recognize it is temporary.

Everyone I know wants both a peaceful and fulfilling life. Nevertheless, most feel that in some way life is not cooperating with their desire. Life keeps setting up barriers. The only way to get peace and fulfillment is to make the right decisions about how we are going to conduct our life. We can't control what happens to us, but we can determine the principles by which we live.

The fact is, our life is the sum total of our decisions. Some decisions are momentous and some are trivial. Some are easy and some hard. Every day of our life is filled with decisions.

All of us are faced with choices. Written over the fundamental ones are the words whosoever chooses me must give and hazard all he has. Jesus told us that. He said "*Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.*"

We can be fulfilled. Remember, the quality of our life is determined by the quality of our decisions. Fulfillment is ours for the taking. The choice is up to us.

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[24] A good but slightly ineffectual man tries to off himself after an error that really wasn't his fault. In Christmas carol fashion, his crusty-but-lovable guardian angel shows up to give him a tour of the world without his presence, and it isn't a pretty place. Moral courage, small-town American life, civic cooperation, and family love are glorified; corporate greed and self-involvement are vilified; at the climax, a blanket of snow like spun sugar makes everything pure and clean like redemption itself.

Do decisions ever come hard to you? Are you like the man who had to fill out a job application? One question said, “Do you have trouble making decisions?” The man replied, “Well, yes and no.”

Or perhaps we’re like the wife, who struggled with knowing what to say when asked a relatively simple question. Overheard: "Has your husband lived up to all the things he said before you were married?"

"No. He's only lived up to one of them." "Which one is that?" "He said he wasn't good enough for me." [25]

Overcoming Disappointment

One of the biggest causes of anger is disappointment over not getting what we expect. We expect life to work out in our favor--we want to be loved and appreciated and all that. But the truth is we'll never get everything we want or expect. If we can accept that fact, it will do a lot to minimize our big disappointments. Disappointment is often the salt of life. [26]

John Calvin understood it when he expressed that we should “…let us not cease to do the utmost that we may incessantly go forward in the way of the Lord; and let us not despair because of the smallness of our accomplishments.”

Life often comes in horrible waves of despair and disappointment. But behind those realities is also the goal of discipline, with the purpose of character and holiness:

"And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it."(Hebrews 12:5-11).

Robert Hamilton understood this eternal concept and expressed it well:

"I walked a mile with Pleasure, She chattered all the way,

And left me none the wiser, For all she had to say.

"I walked a mile with Sorrow, And not a word said she.

But oh, the things I learned from her, When Sorrow walked with me."

The Devil's Tool Sale

"It was advertised that the Devil was putting his tools up for sale. On that date the tools were laid out for public inspection. They had prices marked on them, and there were a lot of treacherous instruments: hatred, envy, jealousy, deceit, pride, lying, and so on. Laid apart from the rest of the Devil's tools was a harmless-looking tool, worn more than any of the others and priced very high.

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[25] Ron Dentinger, Dodgeville, Wisconsin Chronicle; *Reader's Digest*, February, 1995, p. 59.
[26] Theodore Parker, Instant Quotation Dictionary, p. 97.

"What's the name of this tool?" asked one of the customers.

"That," the Devil replied, "is discouragement."

"Why have you priced it so high?"

"Because discouragement is more useful to me than all the others. I can pry open and get inside a man's heart with that when I cannot get near him with any other tools. It's badly worn because I use it on almost everyone, since so few people know it belongs to me."

Even the most successful, spiritually mature people face disappointment and discouragement. The challenge is to honestly face the problems without fooling yourself or giving up, but rather acknowledge your need for help, get help from others and obey God in the midst of problems. [27]

"Life is filled with difficulties and perplexities," King Solomon concluded, "and there's much that nobody can understand, let alone control. From the human point of view, it's all vanity and folly. But life is God's gift to us and He wants us to enjoy it and use it for His glory. So, instead of complaining about what you don't have, start giving thanks for what you do have—and be satisfied!" [28]

The Anchor Holds!

This very day many are suffering in dire circumstances of war and natural disaster. Our hearts and our hands go out to those who have suffered unimaginable trauma. A question looms in the minds of those affected:

Is there ANY hope?

When faced with difficult circumstances, the Psalmist was also on the verge of despair. He wrote: *"My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me all day long, 'Where is your God?'"* (Psalm 42:3). Yet, he reminded himself of the ONLY true source of hope in any and every circumstance: *"Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God" (Psalm 42:5).*

Is there any hope? YES! Our hope is in God.

A preacher was putting the finishing touches on a sermon that he was soon to deliver when his telephone rang. Answering the phone the preacher heard the words of a student: *"Last night my child died."* The preacher thought to himself, "What can I say to him?" Then he made up his mind: "I will say to him what I would say to anyone. It's captured in this gospel song [by Edward Mote]:

When darkness veils His lovely face, I rest on his unchanging grace;
In every high and stormy gale, My anchor holds within the veil.
His oath, His covenant, His blood, Support me in the whelming flood;
When all around my soul gives way, He then is all my hope and stay.

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[27] John W. Yates II, *Preaching Today*, Tape No. 42.
[28] Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Satisfied – Ecclesiastes.*

On Christ, the Solid Rock I stand; All other ground is sinking sand, All other ground is sinking sand.

Because of Christ, one may proclaim along with the writer of the book of Hebrews: *"This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast"* (Hebrews 6:19). An anchor is used to provide stability, even in the times of storm.

In the same way, one's hope in Christ gives stability in the storms that life brings. This hope extends beyond the storms of this life – even beyond the grave – to an eternity with God in the Paradise of Heaven (Revelation 21:4).

The basis of this hope is a relationship with God -- who loved us so much that He gave His Son to die for our sins so that we might have hope beyond the troubles of this life. We can share in this hope if we will believe in Christ and trust Him (Acts 16:31), repent of our sins (Acts 17:30-31), confess Jesus before men (Romans 10:9-10), be baptized (immersed) for the forgiveness of our sins (Acts 2:38), and "LIVE" in this hope by continuing to follow Him (1 John 1:7; 3:3).

Are YOU downcast and disturbed with the struggles of this life? Put YOUR hope in God. He ALONE is our Savior and our God - the anchor for our soul.

And the Anchor holds!

DISAPPOINTMENT

Blessed is he who expects nothing, for he shall never be disappointed. Alexander Pope (1688–1744) [29]

Disappointment is often the salt of life. Theodore Parker (1810–1860)

Disappointment, parent of despair. John Keats (1795–1821)

Disappointments that come not by our own fault, they are the trials or corrections of heaven; and it is our own fault if they prove not to our advantage. William Penn (1644–1718)

Every cloud has a silver lining. English Proverb

Have some of your carefully created castles been washed away? Mine have. Several times along my life's journey, I had nowhere to turn except into my heavenly Father's arms. There I remained quiet, soaking up his love for as long as I needed. Then I saw his hand begin a new creation for my life, a new direction, a new service for him and his kingdom. Waves need not always destroy. We must allow our heavenly Father to use them to redirect our lives. Jean Otto

If you expect perfection from people, your whole life is a series of disappointments, grumblings, and complaints. If, on the contrary, you pitch your expectations low, taking folks as the inefficient creatures

[29] All quotations at the end of each chapter are from *Quotations for the Christian World by Edythe Draper*

which they are, you are frequently surprised by having them perform better than you had hoped. Bruce Fairfield Barton (1886–1967)

Out of every disappointment there is treasure. Satan whispers, “All is lost.” God says, “Much can be gained.” Frances J. Roberts

There are no disappointments to those whose wills are buried in the will of God. Frederick William Faber (1814–1863)

When life becomes all snarled up, offer it to our Lord and let him untie the knots. Richardson Wright (b. 1885)

DISCOURAGEMENT

Discouragement comes when we insist on having our own way. Oswald Chambers (1874–1917)

Discouragement is disenchanted egotism. Giuseppe Mazzini (1805–1872)

He that is down need fear no fall, He that is low, no pride. John Bunyan (1628–1688)

I could lie down like a tired child, And weep away the life of care Which I have borne and yet must bear. Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822)

In times of dryness and desolation we must be patient, and wait with resignation the return of consolation, putting our trust in the goodness of God. We must animate ourselves by the thought that God is always with us, that he only allows this trial for our greater good, and that we have not necessarily lost his grace because we have lost the taste and feeling of it. Saint Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556)

Never doubt in the dark what God told you in the light. Victor Raymond Edman (1900–1967)

We should not be upset when unexpected and upsetting and discouraging things happen. God in his wisdom means to make something of us which we have not yet attained and is dealing with us accordingly. J. I. Packer (1926–)

When we yield to discouragement, it is usually because we give too much thought to the past or to the future. Therese of Lisieux (1873–1897)

Devotional Readings

(Psalms 88) "A song. A psalm of the Sons of Korah. For the director of music. According to mahalath leannoth. A maskil of Heman the Ezrahite. O LORD, the God who saves me, day and night I cry out before you. {2} May my prayer come before you; turn your ear to my cry. {3} For my soul is full of trouble and my life draws near the grave. {4} I am counted among those who go down to the pit; I am like a man without strength. {5} I am set apart with the dead, like the slain who lie in the grave, whom you remember no more, who are cut off from your care. {6} You have put me in the lowest pit, in the darkest depths. {7} Your wrath lies heavily upon

me; you have overwhelmed me with all your waves. Selah {8} You have taken from me my closest friends and have made me repulsive to them. I am confined and cannot escape; {9} my eyes are dim with grief. I call to you, O LORD, every day; I spread out my hands to you. {10} Do you show your wonders to the dead? Do those who are dead rise up and praise you? Selah {11} Is your love declared in the grave, your faithfulness in Destruction ? {12} Are your wonders known in the place of darkness, or your righteous deeds in the land of oblivion? {13} But I cry to you for help, O LORD; in the morning my prayer comes before you. {14} Why, O LORD, do you reject me and hide your face from me? {15} From my youth I have been afflicted and close to death; I have suffered your terrors and am in despair. {16} Your wrath has swept over me; your terrors have destroyed me. {17} All day long they surround me like a flood; they have completely engulfed me. {18} You have taken my companions and loved ones from me; the darkness is my closest friend."

(Psalms 143) "A psalm of David. O LORD, hear my prayer, listen to my cry for mercy; in your faithfulness and righteousness come to my relief. {2} Do not bring your servant into judgment, for no one living is righteous before you. {3} The enemy pursues me, he crushes me to the ground; he makes me dwell in darkness like those long dead. {4} So my spirit grows faint within me; my heart within me is dismayed. {5} I remember the days of long ago; I meditate on all your works and consider what your hands have done. {6} I spread out my hands to you; my soul thirsts for you like a parched land. Selah {7} Answer me quickly, O LORD; my spirit fails. Do not hide your face from me or I will be like those who go down to the pit. {8} Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you. Show me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul. {9} Rescue me from my enemies, O LORD, for I hide myself in you. {10} Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground. {11} For your name's sake, O LORD, preserve my life; in your righteousness, bring me out of trouble. {12} In your unfailing love, silence my enemies; destroy all my foes, for I am your servant."

2
Working for worth…

"Life is a series of inspired follies."[30]

A mother overheard her son's little six-year-old friend ask why babies are spanked when they are born. The youngster replied, "To get them used to it."

From the human point of view, life appears futile; and it is easy for us to get pessimistic. The Jewish writer Sholom Aleichem once described life as "a blister on top of a tumor, and a boil on top of that." You can almost *feel* that definition!

The American poet Carl Sandburg compared life to "an onion—you peel it off one layer at a time, and sometimes you weep." And British playwright George Bernard Shaw said that life was "a series of inspired follies."

When you were studying English literature in school, you may have read Matthew Arnold's poem "Rugby Chapel" in which he includes this dark description of life:

> *Most men eddy about Here and there—eat and drink,*
> *Chatter and love and hate, Gather and squander, are raised*
> *Aloft, are hurl'd in the dust, Striving blindly, achieving Nothing; and then they die—*

What a relief to turn from these pessimistic views and hear Jesus Christ say, *"I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly"* (John 10:10). Or to read Paul's majestic declaration, *"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58).*

Do you have a dream? You need one. Dreams give hope. They display a powerful image of what life can be. Has your dream been shattered? Worse yet, has your dream turned into a nightmare and come true? For all of us dreamers, there is hope.

[30] British playwright George Bernard Shaw

Life is “not in vain” if it is lived according to the will of God! This mind-set makes all the difference! It gives us a focus as we wake each morning and begin pondering the new day. It makes calculation easier when we wonder what lies ahead – and helps erase those things past, over which we no longer have control.

A little girl was working very hard and could not be induced to stop and rest. This was before the day of electric lights. When asked, "Why do you not stop and rest?" she replied, "I have just one little candle, and it will soon be burned out. I wish to do what I can while the candle burns." So it is with us. Our little day will soon be gone. May we do what we can while the candle burns. [31]

We live in a time of unprecedented discoveries, many of which tend to make life longer and living more comfortable and enjoyable. But with change and progress the inexorable law of change and decay also operates. Strange that so few in this world prepare for the inevitable. [32]

Henri J. Nouwen is credited with a profound statement: Sometimes I think of life as a big wagon wheel with many spokes. In the middle is the hub. Often in ministry, it looks like we are running around the rim trying to reach everybody. But God says, "Start in the hub; live in the hub. Then you will be connected with all the spokes, and you won't have to run so fast." [33]

I want to accept the challenge offered by Mark Twain: "Let us so live that when we die even the undertaker will be sorry."

If we make that choice, we might prefer to adopt the positive lifestyle of Jeanne Hendricks, who said that “Living is not a spectator sport. No one, at any price, is privileged to sit in the stands and watch the action from a distance. Being born means being a participant in the arena of life, where opposition is fierce and winning comes only to those who exert every ounce of energy. “

Or perhaps we like the Yiddish Proverb: “Life is the biggest bargain. We get it for nothing.”

One of the many outlooks we need to pursue is the one by Solomon offered in the much-overlooked book of *Ecclesiastes.* It’s often presented as a book for those in their 20’s to help them avoid coming mistakes or one for those in their 50’s due to their coming “midlife crisis.” It seems certain that this wise and powerful king seemed to go through one.

In his *Unfolding Message of the Bible,* G. Campbell Morgan perfectly summarizes Solomon’s outlook: “This man had been living through all these experiences under the sun, concerned with nothing above the sun … until there came a moment in which he had seen the whole of life. And there was something over the sun. It is only as a man takes account of that which is over the sun as well as that which is under the sun that things under the sun are seen in their true.[34]

Since it is one of the Old Testament wisdom books, *Ecclesiastes* would have something to say about both wisdom and folly. There are at least thirty-two references to “fools” and “folly” and at least fifty-four to

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[31] William Moses Tidwell, "Pointed Illustrations."
[32] L. Nelson Bell. Christianity Today, Vol. 1, reprinted Vol. 40, no. 10.
[33] Henri J. Nouwen in "Moving from Solitude to Community to Ministry", Leadership (Spring 1995). Christianity Today, Vol. 40, no. 13.
[34] Fleming H. Revell Company, 1961, p. 229.

"wisdom." King Solomon was the wisest of men (1 Kings 4:31) and he applied this wisdom as he sought to understand the purpose of life "under the sun." The Preacher sought to be a philosopher, but in the end, he had to conclude, *"Fear God, and keep His commandments"* (12:13).

Because we live so close to the biblical text, we often fail to note its power to summon and evoke new life. The Bible is our firm guarantee that prophetic construal of another world are still possible, still worth doing, still longingly received by those living at the edge of despair, resignation, and conformity.[35]

John Locke once said, "The Bible is one of the greatest blessings bestowed by God on the children of man. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth without mixture for its matter. It is all pure; all sincere; nothing too much; nothing wanting."

From the human point of view, nothing seems more permanent and durable than the planet on which we live. When we say that something is "as sure as the world," we are echoing Solomon's confidence in the permanence of planet Earth. With all of its diversity, nature is uniform enough in its operation that we can discover its "laws" and put them to work for us. In fact, it is this "dependability" that is the basis for modern science.

Nature is permanent, but man is transient, a mere pilgrim on earth. His pilgrimage is a brief one, for death finally claims him. At the very beginning of his book, Solomon introduced a topic frequently mentioned in Ecclesiastes: the brevity of life and the certainty of death.

Abraham Lincoln had ten guidelines by which he lived and governed his life He followed these guidelines until the day he died:

1. You cannot bring about prosperity by discouraging thrift.
2. You cannot help small men by tearing down big men.
3. You cannot strengthen the weak by weakening the strong.
4. You cannot lift the wage earner by pulling down the wage payer.
5. You cannot help the poor man by destroying the rich.
6. You cannot keep out of trouble by spending more than your income.
7. You cannot further the brotherhood of men by inciting class hatred.
8. You cannot establish security on borrowed money.
9. You cannot build character and courage by taking away man's initiative and independence.
10. You cannot help men permanently by doing for them what they could and should do for themselves.

As far as wealth and pleasure are concerned, God gives to us *"richly all things to enjoy"* (1 Tim. 6:17). *"The blessing of the Lord makes one rich, and He adds no sorrow with it"* (Prov. 10:22, nkjv). The wealth and pleasures of the world do not satisfy, and the quest for power and position is futile. In Jesus Christ we have all that we need for life and death, time and eternity.

[35] Walter Brueggemann, *Finally Comes the Poet*, in *Christianity Today, "Reflections*," Vol. 44, no. 9.

So I suggest that we seek God and discover Him and make Him a power in our life. Without Him all of our efforts turn to ashes and our sunrises into darkest nights. Without Him life is a meaningless drama with the decisive scenes missing.

But with Him we are able to rise from the fatigue of despair to the buoyancy of hope. With Him we are able to rise from the midnight of desperation to the daybreak of joy. St. Augustine was right--we were made for God and we will be restless until we find rest in Him. [36]

Contentment

To a large extent, we're searching for that elusive place of contentment. The *Holman Bible Dictionary* describes contentment as "an internal satisfaction which does not demand changes in external circumstances."

Hebrews 13:5-7 summarizes the teaching in advising believers to be free of the love of money and to depend on God's promise not to forsake His people: *"Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith."*

Worry has become an obsession in our modern world. A look at the self-help section in any bookstore will reveal its prevalence. Hospitals and waiting rooms are filled with people who have physical problems caused by overwhelming anxiety. In addition, there are many people whose lives are disrupted or made unenjoyable because of paralyzing fear.

Christians like to hide their worry by labeling it Christian concern. In spite of protestations to the contrary, Christians do worry. But, do they have to? Not if they learn from Jesus how to win over worry.

Paul spoke in similar terms in 1 Timothy 6:6-10: *"But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."*

It' ain't no use putting up your umbrella till it rains. – Alice Caldwell Rice

The believer can be content no matter what the outward circumstances: *Philippians 4:11-13: "I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength."*

When we look at life against the message of the life of Jesus and His teachings, the risen life is not easy: it is also a dying life. [37] We should make it our priority and purpose.

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[36] Martin Luther King, Jr., in *The Words of Martin Luther King Jr.,* compiled by Coretta Scott King. *Christianity Today*, Vol. 43, no. 1.

[37] Thomas Merton in He Is Risen. Christianity Today, Vol. 43, no. 5.

Contentment finds an opposite in the form of worry. The words of Jesus early in His public ministry suggest that food and lodging should be enough for the godly: Matthew 6:34: *"Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."*

There is plenty to worry about (vs. 25). There is no shortage of potential items to worry about. Jesus mentions several matters of common concern: life, health, possessions, We could add our own list of concerns: accidents, aging, weather, or criticism.

There is nothing accomplished by worry (vv. 26-33). It is senseless. The rest of God's creation does not worry, but God provides for them. Will he not do the same for us. This does not say we should not work, only that we should not worry while we work (v. 26, 28). It is fruitless. It will not add an inch to your height or a hour to your life. In fact, it may well take away from your life (v. 27). It is harmful. Worrying makes us look like the heathen, and it destroys our witness. [38]

Worry, he says, is characteristic of a heathen, and not of one who knows what God is like (verse 32). Worry is essentially distrust of God. Such a distrust may be understandable in a heathen who believes in a jealous, capricious, unpredictable god; but it is beyond comprehension in one who has learned to call God by the name of Father. The Christian should not worry because he believes in the love of God.

"It is distrust of God to be troubled about what is to come; impatience against God to be troubled with what is present; and anger at God to be troubled for what is past."

Worry gives a small thing a big shadow. Worry is an indication that we think God cannot look after us. Worry is like a rocking chair. It gives you something to do but doesn't get you anywhere.

Jesus goes on to advance two ways in which to defeat worry. The first is to seek first, to concentrate upon, the Kingdom of God. We have seen that to be in the Kingdom and to do the will of God is one and the same thing (*Matthew* 6:10). To concentrate on the doing of, and the acceptance of, God's will is the way to defeat worry. We know how in our own lives a great love can drive out every other concern. Such love can inspire a man's work, intensify his study, purify his life, dominate his whole being.

We must trust the heavenly father to provide for us as he has promised (v. 32b). We also need to live one day at a time. Handle each worry as it comes. Many will never come to pass. Those that do occur can only be handled in the present (v. 34).

It was Jesus' conviction that worry is banished when God becomes the dominating power of our lives.

Simon Patrick said, "It is distrust of God to be troubled about what is to come; impatience against God to be troubled with what is present; and anger at God to be troubled for what is past."

What seems clear is that we often worry about things over which we have no control, or about events and circumstances that never occur. For this, we lose the joy of today and add a burden to an already difficult day.

Life's too short for worrying. "Yes, that's what worries me," we reply.

[38] *Sermon Outlines For Seekers* by J. Michael Shannon.

Rather we should know that one is given strength to bear what happens to one, but not the one hundred and one different things that might happen. [39]

John Dryden commented that "Only man clogs his happiness with care, destroying what is, with thoughts of what may be."

Only one type of worry is correct: to worry because you worry too much.

We should leave tomorrow's trouble to tomorrow's strength; tomorrow's work to tomorrow's time; tomorrow's trial to tomorrow's grace and to tomorrow's God.

It ain't no use putting up your umbrella till it rains.[40]

Solomon got involved in all kinds of projects, hoping to discover something that would make life worth living. He started with *great works* (4-6), including houses (1 Kings 7), cities (2 Chron. 8:4-6), gardens, vineyards, orchards and forests (1 Kings 4:33), and the water systems needed to service them. Of course, Solomon also supervised the construction of the temple (1 Kings), one of the greatest buildings of the ancient world.

Solomon accumulated *wealth* (7b-8a), in flocks and herds (1 Kings 8:63) as well as gold and silver (1 Kings 4:21 and 10:1ff). He was the wealthiest and wisest man in the whole world, yet he was unhappy because activity alone does not bring lasting pleasure.

There can be joy in the *doing* of great projects, but what happens when the task is finished? Solomon found delight *in* all his labor (2:10); but *afterward,* when he considered all his works, he saw only "vanity and vexation of spirit" (2:11). The journey was a pleasure, but the destination brought pain.

"Success is full of promise until men get it," said the American preacher Henry Ward Beecher, "and then it is a last-year's nest from which the birds have flown."

Work

We must not conclude that Solomon was condemning work itself, because work is a blessing from God. Adam had work to do in the Garden even before he sinned. *"The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it"* (Gen. 2:15, niv).

In the Book of Proverbs, Solomon exalted diligence and condemned laziness; for he knew that any honest employment can be done to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31). But work *alone* cannot satisfy the human heart, no matter how successful that work may be (Isa. 55:2).

Solomon's conclusion: Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole of man.

This is what makes man whole. And the secret is to enthrone God in the days of our youth. If you want to find the secret of living so that the heart is satisfied and the spirit is enriched and fulfilled according to God's

[39] C. S. Lewis (1898–1963)

[40] Alice Caldwell Rice

intention for you, then *"Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come."* Enthrone God in the center of your life and you will discover all that God has intended your life to be. And you will be able to rejoice all the days of your life.

Affirmative Living

Joseph was called, derisively, the dreamer. Some of his dreams were prophetic. He saw himself as a leader of men. Joseph dreamed of using his considerable talents to do great things for God and his family. Joseph's dreams enabled him to live affirmatively.

Affirmative living means recognizing the presence of God in your life. Whatever happened to Joseph never caused him to give up on God. In fact, everything that happened to him only drew him closer to God. Do you notice the presence of God in your life? Do you believe he has a plan for you? If not, you need to dare to dream again.

Affirmative living means making the best of bad situations. Joseph was hated and sold into slavery. He was unjustly accused and placed in prison. Though forgotten, he never lost hope. We couldn't have blamed him if he had. But, whatever happened to Joseph, he kept on making the best of it. He was sold into slavery only to become the head servant. Sent to prison, he took over the administration. Brought before the king, he became Pharaoh's right hand man.

Affirmative living means maintaining your principles even when inconvenient. Joseph faced his biggest challenge when accosted by his master's wife. He could have given all kinds of excuses to give in, but he was willing to do what was right, in spite of the consequences. Have you been mistreated? If so, you need to dare to dream again.

Affirmative living means recognizing God is in control. Joseph, when he was finally reunited with his brothers, said to them, "What you did to me you meant for bad, God used for good." Joseph believed that ultimately God is in control, and that all things work together for good. Have you wondered if God has deserted you, or if your life has any purpose at all? If so, you need to dare to dream again.[41]

I sing with the hymn, "Through many dangers, toils, and snares I have already come," but I can also say, "'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home."

I can testify to the fact that the Debater's conclusion is apt: Life is fulfilled only when God is enthroned in the center of an individual's life and that individual acts in obedience to his ruler. But the philosophy that begins and exists and ends in the dust, and then says that the dust is everything -- that this is all life is intended to be, that vanity is everything -- is utter folly.

The Debater's conclusion is that everything is indeed vanity unless you put God in the center of life.

WORRY

'Tain't worthwhile to wear a day all out before it comes. Sarah Orne Jewett (1849–1909)

A day of worry is more exhausting than a day of work. Sir John Lubbock (1834–1913)

Don't tell me that worry doesn't do any good. I know better. The things I worry about don't happen.

[41] *Sermon Outlines For Seekers* by J. Michael Shannon.

If only we would stop lamenting and look up. God is here. Christ is risen. The Spirit has been poured out from on high. All this we know as theological truth. It remains for us to turn it into joyous spiritual experience. A. W. Tozer (1897–1963)

If we bring into one day's thoughts the evil of many, certain and uncertain, what will be and what will never be, our load will be as intolerable as it is unreasonable. Jeremy Taylor (1613–1667)

No man ever sank under the burden of the day. It is when tomorrow's burden is added to the burden of today that the weight is more than a man can bear. Never load yourself so. George Macdonald (1824–1905)

Seventy percent of all patients who come to physicians could cure themselves if they only got rid of their fears, worries, and bad eating habits. O. F. Gober

To carry care to bed is to sleep with a pack on your back. Thomas Chandler Haliburton (1796–1865)

When worry is present, trust cannot crowd its way in. Billy Graham (1918–)

Worry never robs tomorrow of its sorrow, it only saps today of its strength. Archibald Joseph Cronin (1896–1981)

Worry: the interest paid by those who borrow trouble. George W. Lyon

Your ship is equal to the load of today; but when you are carrying yesterday's worry and tomorrow's anxiety, lighten up or you will sink.

PAST/PRESENT/FUTURE

Every man's life lies within the present; for the past is spent and done with, and the future is uncertain. Marcus Aurelius Antoninus (121–180)

Finish every day and be done with it. You have done what you could. Some blunders and absurdities no doubt crept in; forget them as soon as you can. Tomorrow is a new day; begin it well and serenely and with too high a spirit to be cumbered with your old nonsense. This day is all that is good and fair. It is too dear, with its hopes and invitations, to waste a moment on the yesterdays. Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882)

Gratitude looks to the past and love to the present; fear, greed, lust, and ambition look ahead. C. S. Lewis (1898–1963)

Our continual mistake is that we do not concentrate upon the present day, the actual hour, of our life; we live in the past or in the future; we are continually expecting the coming of some special hour when our life shall unfold itself in its full significance. And we do not observe that life is flowing like water through our fingers, sifting like precious grain from a loosely fastened bag. Father Yelchaninov

The past cannot be changed; the future is still in your power. Hugh Lawson White (1773–1840)

Time is a threefold present: the present as we experience it, the past as a present memory, and the future as a present expectation. Saint Augustine of Hippo (354–430)

Devotional readings

(Philippians 3:7-14) "But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. {8} What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ {9} and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ--the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. {10} I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, {11} and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. {12} Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. {13} Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, {14} I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."

(Philippians 4:13) "I can do everything through him who gives me strength."

(Hebrews 11:8-10) "By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. {9} By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. {10} For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God."

(James 4:13-15) "Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." {14} Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. {15} Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.""

3
Searching for direction…

A man called his neighbor to help him move a couch that had become stuck in the doorway. They pushed and pulled until they were exhausted, but the couch wouldn't budge. "Forget it," the man finally said. "We'll never get this in." The neighbor looked at him quizzically and said, "In?"[42]

Is it possible that *Time* magazine was right when they described the Bible as a book "more revered than read"?

The Bible needs to be treasured, but more than that it needs to be internalized. It provides the eternal road-map to heaven, which certainly ought to be the direction we're wanting to travel.

There is something wonderful about a beaten-up heavily marked, tattered Bible. Madeleine Delbrel, the French activist who lived a little more than a generation ago, stuffed her Bible with snapshots, clippings, ticket stubs, postcards and other detritus to remind her that she was praying in the world of people and events. She called these scraps "icons of humanity" that prompted one to celebrate the "liturgy of life."

It involves a decision…and some planning. At the spiritual level, planning means taking the initiative. It's not about sitting around until you are absolutely certain God is calling you to a particular task, direction, country, or ministry. Nor is it waiting for the doors to open so you can go there easily. Planning is an act of faith. Jesus never told his disciples to wait for an invitation. He told them to go. [43]

We must realize that you cannot pull people uphill who do not want to go; you can only point up. [44] We must come to see each day as David Brainerd saw it: "As long as I see anything to be done for God, life is worth having; but O how vain and unworthy it is to live for any lower end!"

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[42] *Coffee Break*
[43] Brother Andrew in *The Calling*. Christianity Today, Vol. 40, no. 8.
[44] Amy Carmichael in *Learning of God*. Christianity Today, Vol. 39, no. 9.

Dr. Reid Vipond of Canada shares a story of an oil company that needed a suave public-relations man for its office in the Orient. After interviewing several candidates, the officials decided to ask a local missionary to take the position. Company executives met with this man of unusual gifts. Whatever their proposition, his answer was always "No." "What's wrong?" asked one interviewer. "Isn't the salary big enough?" The missionary replied, "The salary is big enough, but the job isn't."

In attempting to recruit John Sculley, the 38-year-old president of Pepsi-Cola, Steve Jobs, founder of Apple Computer, issued a tremendous challenge to Sculley. He asked: "Do you want to spend the rest of your life selling sugared water or do you want a chance to change the world?"

Duke's basketball coach, Mike Krzyzewski, gave a great talk to the University Retirees Association. He told them about a friend of his in Southern California who was coaching a basketball team where out of 15 of the young men, 10 had never known a father. He noted how he and his fellow coaches were spending more time trying to be daddies to their players than coaches.

Then Krzyzewski said, "Things are in too big a mess in the American family for you people to be sitting around playing bridge, or moving to some retirement community in Florida. We need you. We need your wisdom, your patience, your free time. We need you to be adopting kids, stepping up and taking responsibility for kids that, while they may not be your own, they are all of our responsibility."[45]

Coming to Know God

In the early days of the automobile a man's Model-T Ford stalled in the middle of the road. He couldn't get it started no matter how hard he cranked nor how much he tried to advance the spark or adjust things under the hood. Just then a chauffeured limousine pulled up behind him, and a wiry, energetic man stepped out from the back seat and offered his assistance. After tinkering for a few moments the stranger said, "Now try it!" Immediately the engine leaped to life. The well-dressed individual then identified himself as Henry Ford. "I designed and built these cars," he said, "so I know what to do when something goes wrong." God, as our creator knows how to "fix" us when our lives are broken by sin.

God is not discoverable or demonstrable by purely scientific means, unfortunately for the scientific minded. But that really proves nothing. It simply means that the wrong instruments are being used for the job.

A Sunday School teacher saw one of her little boys drawing furiously with a set of crayons. "What are you doing, Johnny?" she asked. “I'm drawing a picture of God," said Johnny. "But Johnny," said the teacher, "nobody knows what God looks like." Replied Johnny: "Well, they will by the time I'm through with THIS!"

In looking for a challenge or some direction in life, the most challenging task we can approach is the zeal to come to know God. Think how that process might begin with some questions/answers:

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[45] William H. Willimon, ,*Wittenberg Door*, July/August 1996, p. 26.

Name: God.

Also known as: The Almighty, Jehovah, the Father, Lord.

Occupation: Sustainer and ruler of the universe.

Address: Everywhere.

Sex: Does not apply.

Place of birth: Does not apply.

Social Security: None.

Mother's maiden name: None.

Dependents: Everyone.

Honors received: Too numerous to list.

God doesn't fit a mold, does he? He is, to put it mildly, unique. One of a kind. Indescribable, some would say! God is beyond cataloging, and no computer resume, no investigating committee, not even a CIA computer could give an exhaustive profile of who He is and all that He's done.

God cannot be grasped by the mind. If he could be grasped, he would not be God. Yet we cannot give up! We can't throw up our hands and dismiss Him as a mystery...we need Him!

Imagine a sheer, steep crag with a projecting edge at the top. Now imagine what a person would probably feel if he put his foot on the edge of this precipice and, looking down into the chasm below, saw no solid footing nor anything to hold on to.

This is what I think the soul experiences when it goes beyond its footing in material things, in its quest for that which has no dimension and which exists from all eternity. For here there is nothing it can take hold of, neither place nor time, neither measure nor anything else; our minds cannot approach it.

And thus the soul, slipping at every point from what cannot be grasped, becomes dizzy and perplexed and returns once again to what is connatural to it, content now to know merely this about God, that it is completely different from the nature of the things that the soul knows. [46]

It's amazing in this world the way people respond to God, as they understand Him...it's very different: some grovel before totems; others bring offerings of chickens and goats; others kneel five times daily to chant prayers; others go into trances. Some believe in God so intensely they preach in foreign lands; others deny His existence by their silence.

We need to come to see God in people around us. We need to know Him in a personal way.

I'm thinking of a little boy named Timmy. Timmy was very afraid of the lightning and the thunder. His mom and dad went into his room during a thunderstorm and said, "Now, Timmy, don't be afraid. God is right here in the room with you."

He said, "Okay, Mommy and Daddy, I won't be afraid."

[46] Gregory of Nyssa (d. about 395), "Eastern Orthodoxy," Christian History, no. 54.

But then as the mommy and daddy went into their room and started to get ready for bed, the lightning clapped, and the thunder rolled, and Timmy screamed bloody murder. Timmy's daddy and mommy went back into the room and said, "Honey, we thought we told you, you don't need to be afraid. God is right here in the room with you."

Timmy said, "Mommy and Daddy, I know God is right here in the room with me, but I need someone with skin on." [47]

What is God like? Answers don't come easy, because of the immensity of the subject. God is huge, filling the universe. Also people might know the right words, but they seem to become hollow shells because they can't comprehend them.

We say that God is holy, righteous, loving, gracious, Father-Son-Spirit, but we don't know what all this means. How do we know the words are empty? We can tell by the way many Christians behave! Our behavior exposes our failure to understand the words coming out of our mouths. We can talk about God, but we do not know Him! God is not like us -- He's one of a kind! God is different from men. Anyone trying to know God and learn to relate to Him must begin with this fundamental truth.

God is not optional! Unlike everything else, God is absolutely necessary, like water for fish. We can't just "take God or leave Him" -- He is inescapable, even more so than death and taxes. We must not be too "familiar" with God, or regard Him as optional...we must learn to let God be God.

A. W. Tozer wrote concerning the desperate need for the church to revise its concept of God due to a very distorted conception of Him: It is my opinion that the Christian conception of God current in these middle years of the twentieth century is so decadent as to be utterly beneath the dignity of the Most High God and actually to constitute for professed believers something amounting to a moral calamity.[48]

Tozer goes on to say, The heaviest obligation lying upon the Christian Church today is to purify and elevate her concept of God until it is once more worthy of Him—and of her.[49]

A. W. Pink is of the same opinion: The god of this century no more resembles the Sovereign of Holy Writ than does the dim flickering of a candle the glory of the midday sun. The god who is talked about in the average pulpit, spoken of in the ordinary Sunday school, mentioned in much of the religious literature of the day, and preached in most of the so-called Bible conferences, is a figment of human imagination, an invention of maudlin sentimentality. The heathen outside the pale of Christendom form gods of wood and stone, while millions of heathen inside Christendom manufacture a god out of their carnal minds.[50]

One day it occurred to me that God is the most fascinating person alive and that getting to know Him could well be the most helpful thing that ever happened to me. The more I probed His nature the more convinced I became that knowing Him is the solution to most of my problems. I became convinced that knowing God better

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[47] Thomas Tewell, "The Tenacity of a Bulldog," Preaching Today, Tape No. 141.
[48] A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1961), p. 10.
[49] Ibid., p. 12.
[50] Arthur W. Pink, *Gleanings in the Godhead*, pp. 28-29.

was the answer to many of their problems as well. I decided that I want to get to know God intimately, and that I want to help others get to know Him as well, if I possibly can.

God is knowable, and He does want to be known. As a matter of fact, He tells us that our eternal state depends upon knowing Him. Jesus said, *"And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent" (John 17:3).* Knowing God and His Son Jesus is the heart of the whole matter of eternal life. The word *know* in this verse does not refer to a casual acquaintance either. It is the kind of knowledge that comes through living contact and personal relationship. If knowing God is that important, maybe we ought to talk about how we can get to know Him.

A mother was approached by her young son, who asked, "Mommy, did God make Himself?" Realizing that such questions by children are very important and must be answered, she dropped what she was doing and sat down with her youngster for a little talk. Pointing to her wedding band, she said, "This is a 'love ring,' which your daddy gave me when we were married. Look at it closely and tell me where it begins and where it ends."

The youngster examined it carefully and then said, "There's no starting place and stopping place to a ring." The mother replied, "That's the way it is with God. He had no beginning and has no end, yet He encircles our lives with His presence. He is too wonderful, too great, for our minds to understand. Nobody ever made God -- He always was!" Somehow the boy realized that for God to be God, He could not have been created. He had to be without beginning and without end.

Martin Luther once was so depressed over a prolonged period that one day his wife came downstairs wearing all black. Martin Luther said, "Who died?" She said, "God has." He said, "God hasn't died." And she said, "Well, live like it and act like it."

Crisis and change often bring people to times of self-examination and reflection and even prayer. It was just such a time for young Isaiah when he went to the temple to pray (Isaiah 6:1-9). King Uzziah's reign had begun with such promise, but unfortunately, pride overtook Uzziah and he presumed to do, in the temple, what was forbidden. He was struck with leprosy and he died, not in the palace, but the leper ward. Any crisis, even a small one, can be an opportunity for a fresh vision of God. If we consider what Isaiah saw, it might help our spiritual eyesight. Like Isaiah, we can find new inspiration and renewed commitment.

Isaiah saw his Lord: It was a time of reverence. He needed to see God. He had placed so much confidence in a visible king that he had previously felt little need to reach out to the invisible king. He saw God in all His majesty; God was "high and exalted." He saw God in His power: "*The train of his robe filled the temple."*

He also saw God in His holiness. The seraphs, covered in humility, sing "*Holy, holy, holy."* The seraphs' song underscores the fact that we have a holy God. In our desire to stress the love of God, we should never rob Him of His awesomeness.

Isaiah saw his sin: It was a time of repentance. This is a natural reaction after coming to terms with the holiness of God. When we capture a vision of God, we must be willing to see ourselves as we really are, even if it grieves us.

It is a refreshing thing to see that Isaiah mentioned his own sin before he mentioned the sin of his neighbors. Isaiah saw his own sin and said, *"I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips."*

Isaiah saw his cleansing: It was a time of restoration. God did not deny Isaiah's sinfulness, but he did provide an escape. A seraph took a coal from the altar, where the sacrifice for sin was made, and seared Isaiah's lips, sterilizing them. There was no reason for Isaiah to continue to feel unworthy. He had been made pure.

Isaiah saw his mission: It was a time of recognition. When God says, "Go!" we go. There is no debating. We don't say, "There he is, send him." We don't worry about how the people will respond. Isaiah was warned ahead of time that the people would not respond as they should. [51]

It doesn't matter what the people do, we must be faithful. God sent the people a message not because they wanted it, but because they needed it.

The message Isaiah would bring his people was the message he had received. There is forgiveness and purpose with God, if you will just turn your life over to his care and authority.

There is change and chaos in the world, but I say to you, "God is still on the throne." If you doubt it, just look around. He might be closer than you think. Maybe you can say, "I saw the Lord, high and exalted, and that has made all the difference."

How does God reveal Himself? One way is in nature.

David proclaimed that *"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. {2} Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. {3} There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. {4} Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. In the heavens he has pitched a tent for the sun, {5} which is like a bridegroom coming forth from his pavilion, like a champion rejoicing to run his course. {6} It rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other; nothing is hidden from its heat." (Psalms 19:1-6)*

Paul lays a heavy responsibility upon every human being, who can learn at a stated level that he is left without excuse if he does not respond with a changed life: *"The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, {19} since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. {20} For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. {21} For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. (Romans 1:18-21)*

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[51] *Sermon Outlines For Seekers* by J. Michael Shannon.

The Apostle Paul taught us that God reveals something about His holy standards through man's conscience.

(Romans 2:14-16) Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, {15} since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.) {16} This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.

But none of these give us very many particulars about God's personality or nature. We need something more. We need to have Him talk with us.

And He does that, not through spooky voices or mystical experiences, but through Scripture. They are God's words to us. They were given by the breath of His mouth:

(Matthew 4:4) Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

(2 Timothy 3:16-17) All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, {17} so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

(2 Peter 1:20-21) Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. {21} For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

In the Bible God tells us what He is like. We learn how He thinks, how He feels, and how we can expect Him to act. If we want to know God, we must begin by opening the Bible and reading what He has to say about Himself.

But God is infinite, and we are finite human beings. How can the finite ever really understand the infinite? How can the human ever truly know the divine?

It seems that God must reveal Himself to us in some way more personal than mere written words if we are ever to know Him genuinely. And that is exactly what He did through Jesus Christ.

(John 1:14-18) The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. {15} John testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'" {16} From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. {17} For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. {18} No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.

(Hebrews 1:1-3) In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, {2} but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. {3} The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

Jesus Christ is the out-shining of God's glory and the perfect expression of God's essential being. To know Him is to know God.

Jesus Himself made that claim when He said: *"If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him. (John 14:7).*

While Jesus has returned bodily to Heaven, God has given us both the inspired record of His life as well as the spiritual faculties we need to know Him personally. We can know Christ just as intimately as if we walked with Him on earth as His first disciples did. And to know Him is to know God.

WHY IS KNOWING GOD SO IMPORTANT?

1. It shapes our moral and ethical standards.
2. It directly affects our response to pain and hardship.
3. It motivates our response toward fortune, fame, power, and pleasure.
4. It gives us strength when we are tempted.
5. It keeps us faithful and courageous when we are outnumbered.
6. It enhances our worship and prompts our praise.
7. It determines our lifestyle and dictates our philosophy.
8. It gives meaning and significance to relationships.
9. It sensitizes our conscience and creates the desire to be obedient.
10. It stimulates hope to go on, regardless.
11. It enables us to know what to reject and what to respect while I'm invited to planet Earth.
12. It is the foundation upon which everything rests!

A March (1994) poll for U.S. News and World Report's issue found that 93% of Americans say they believe in God or a universal spirit. Of those polled, 65% say religion is losing its influence on American life, although 62% say religion is increasing its influence in their personal lives. Other findings:

- The Bible is the actual word of God to be taken literally, word for word: 34%
- The Bible is the inspired word of God, but not everything in it can be taken literally: 46%
- The Bible is an ancient book of legends, history and moral precepts, recorded by man: 16%
- God is a heavenly father who can be reached by prayers: 76%
- God is an idea, not a being: 11%
- God is an impersonal creator: 8%

	Yes	**No**
There is no one set of values that is right	48%	44%
Each individual must determine what is right or wrong	70%	25%
The president should be a moral and spiritual leader	78%	17%
Our government would be better if policies were more directed by moral values	84%	9%
Individual freedom is critical to democracy in this country	91%	4%

- God is the moral guiding force of American democracy 55% 35%
- Nearly 60% of Americans say they hold their current religious beliefs because of their parents' example.
- More than 8 of every 10 Americans today believe that it's possible to be a good Christian or Jew even without attending a church or synagogue.

GOD

God doesn't care so much about being analyzed. Mainly, he wants to be loved. Philip Yancey (1949–)

God doesn't reveal his grand design. He reveals himself. Frederick Buechner (1926–)

God has no need of his creatures, but everything created has need of him. Meister Eckhart (c. 1260–c. 1327)

God is the great reality. His resources are available and endless. His promises are real and glorious, beyond our wildest dreams. J. B. Phillips (1906–1982)

God is the light in my darkness, the voice in my silence. Helen Adams Keller (1880–1968)

God wets you with his rain, but he also dries you with his sun.

God will inevitably appear to disappoint the man who is attempting to use him as a convenience, a prop, or a comfort for his own plans. God has never been known to disappoint the man who is sincerely wanting to cooperate with his own purposes. J. B. Phillips (1906–1982)

It takes all time and eternity to know God. Oswald Chambers (1874–1917)

Nothing in all creation is so like God as stillness. Meister Eckhart (c. 1260–c. 1327)

Only God can put the touch on something that changes it from the common place to something special, different, and apart. R. C. Sproul (1939–)

People grow up with all sorts of notions of what God is like. They may see God as an Enemy, or a Policeman, or even an Abusive Parent. Or perhaps they do not see God at all and only hear his silence. Because of Jesus, however, we no longer have to wonder how God feels or what he is like. When in doubt, we can look at Jesus to correct our blurry vision. Philip Yancey (1949–)

Simply reading the Bible, I encountered not a misty vapor but an actual Person. A Person as unique and distinctive and colorful as any person I know. God has deep emotions; he feels delight and frustration and anger. Philip Yancey (1949–)

The characteristics of God Almighty are mirrored for us in Jesus Christ. Therefore if we want to know what God is like, we must study Jesus Christ. Oswald Chambers (1874–1917)

The Christian does not understand God in terms of love; he understands love in terms of God as seen in Christ. Joseph Fletcher

The favorite place of God is in the heart of man. Jewish Proverb

To accept the will of God never leads to the miserable feeling that it is useless to strive anymore. God does not ask for the dull, weak, sleepy acquiescence of indolence. He asks for something vivid and strong. He asks us to cooperate with him, actively willing what he wills, our only aim his glory. Amy Carmichael (1867–1951)

We can seek God and find him! God is knowable, touchable, hearable, seeable, with the mind, the hands, the ears, and eyes of the inner man. A. W. Tozer (1897–1963)

When we have nothing left but God, then you become aware that God is enough. Agnes Maude Royden (1876–1956)

Do not try to imagine God, or you will have an imaginary God. A. W. Tozer (1897–1963)

God the Father is both far away and near at hand; his voice is, at once, deafening in its thunderousness, and too still and small to be easily audible. Malcolm Muggeridge (1903–1990)

How can we little crawling creatures, so utterly helpless as he has made us, how can we possibly measure his greatness, his boundless love, his infinite compassion, such that he allows man insolently to deny him, wrangle about him, and cut the throat of his fellow-men? How can we measure the greatness of God who is so forgiving, so divine? Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948)

Incomprehensible? But because you cannot understand a thing, it does not cease to exist. Blaise Pascal (1623–1662)

Then alone do we know God truly, when we believe that God is far beyond all that we can possibly think of God. Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)

We know God easily, if we do not constrain ourselves to define him. Joseph Joubert (1754–1824)

What is God? The universal intelligence. What is God did I say? All that you see and all that you cannot see. His greatness exceeds the bounds of thought. He is all in all. He is at once within and without his works. Lucius Annaeus Seneca (c. 4 b.c.–a.d. 65)

Devotional Readings

(Psalms 23) "A psalm of David. The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. {2} He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, {3} he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. {4} Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. {5} You prepare a table before me in the

presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. {6} Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever."

(Psalms 139) "For the director of music. Of David. A psalm. O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. {2} You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. {3} You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. {4} Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD. {5} You hem me in--behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me. {6} Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. {7} Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? {8} If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. {9} If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, {10} even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. {11} If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me," {12} even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you. {13} For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. {14} I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. {15} My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, {16} your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. {17} How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! {18} Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand. When I awake, I am still with you. {19} If only you would slay the wicked, O God! Away from me, you bloodthirsty men! {20} They speak of you with evil intent; your adversaries misuse your name. {21} Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD, and abhor those who rise up against you? {22} I have nothing but hatred for them; I count them my enemies. {23} Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. {24} See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

4

Chasing after courage…

"Courage is fear that has said its prayers."[52]

Have you ever felt as if you wanted to run away from God? Maybe you thought the responsibilities of the Christian life were too heavy for you, or you just could not be the person you were supposed to be and do the things God was asking you to do.

If you could just get away, things would be better. Or maybe the model of a Christian husband or wife was too overwhelming and you could not live up to it.

Or you knew how a Christian parent was supposed to treat his children but you seemed to fall short several times a day. Maybe you committed yourself to teach a class of children for a year but you just did not want to face them another Sunday. Or you knew God expected you to flee temptation but you could not seem to resist it, and now you feel as though God is on your back.

If you could just get away from Him for awhile, go someplace where He could not see you, then everything would be all right.

That is exactly what the prophet Jonah thought. God told him to go to the city of Nineveh and preach against its wickedness, but that was the last thing in the world Jonah wanted to do. Nineveh was the capital of a proud and powerful nation, and he was sure the people there would reject him, maybe even try to kill him for pointing out their sin.

If they did repent God would probably hold back the punishment He had predicted and Jonah would become the laughingstock of the whole city. As far as he was concerned there was no way he would ever go to Nineveh.

[52] DOROTHY BERNARD

"But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. So he went down to Joppa, found a ship which was going to Tarshish, paid the fare, and went down into it to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD" (Jonah 1:3).

It is mentioned twice in that verse that Jonah wanted to get away from God's presence. Somehow he had developed the ridiculous notion that God did not live in Tarshish.

Do you share his sentiments? Do you think there might be some place on this earth where you can hide from God?

Jonah should have known better. As a prophet in Israel he was certainly familiar with the inspired Psalms of Israel's greatest king. David had written a powerful message about trying to run away from God's presence: *Where can I go from Thy Spirit? Or where can I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend to heaven, Thou art there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, Thou art there. If I take the wings of the dawn, If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, Even there Thy hand will lead me, And Thy right hand will lay hold of me. If I say, "Surely the darkness will overwhelm me, And the light around me will be night," Even the darkness is not dark to Thee, And the night is as bright as the day. Darkness and light are alike to Thee (Psalm 139:7-12).*

If God is an infinite spirit then He is not only free from the limitations of time, but He is free also from the limitations of space. He is omnipresent, that is, present everywhere all the time. No other living being has that attribute. Every other being is restricted to a particular place at a particular time. I cannot be in Ohio and Fort Lauderdale at the same time. Angels cannot even do that. Satan cannot do it.

But God is wholly present in every part of His domain at the same instant. He is not partly present in one place and partly present in another, but He is as fully present in every particular place as if He were in no other place. God cannot be split into little pieces. Wherever He is, He is in the fullness of His being.

While I do not fully understand it, there is no question but that God claims omnipresence for Himself in His Word. David assured us that there was absolutely no place he could go to escape the presence of God, even if he wanted to. Not even pitch-blackness could screen him from God's presence, because God sees in the dark as well as in the light.

Daniel confirmed that: *It is He who reveals the profound and hidden things; He knows what is in the darkness, And the light dwells with Him (Daniel 2:22).*

Jeremiah proclaimed the same truth to the people of his day. The land was filled with dishonesty, profanity, and immorality, and the false prophets of the day were not only condoning it but actually participating in it (Jeremiah 23:11,14). They assured the people that God would not judge them for their sin (verse 17). That is when God spoke through Jeremiah: *Am I a God who is near, declares the LORD, And not a God far off? (verse 23)*

I read somewhere about a little boy who believed it too: He was just a little lad, and on a fine Lord's day, was wandering home from Sunday School and dawdling on the way. He scuffed his shoes into the grass; he found a caterpillar, he found a fluffy milkweed pod and blew out all the filler. A bird's nest in the tree o'erhead, so wisely placed and high, was just another wonder that caught his eager eye.

A neighbor watched his zigzag course and hailed him from the lawn, asked him where he'd been that day, and what was going on. "Oh, I've been to Sunday school," (he carefully turned the sod, and found a snail beneath it). "I've learned a lot 'bout God." "M'm, a very fine way," the neighbor said, "for a boy to spend his time. "If you'll tell me where God is, I'll give you a brand new dime." Quick as a flash his answer came, nor were his accents faint, "I'll give you a dollar, Mister, if you'll tell me where God ain't."

And knowing this fact about God's omnipresence is sufficient to give me the courage I need to be courageous each day I have upon this earth, *"…because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."*[53]

When we truly accept this fact, we can respond with courage. Conviction becomes our strength. We become bold in our words and our actions. We grow more immune to the normal despair brought on by pressure presented by peers.

Victor Frankl, the eminent German Jewish doctor, was arrested by the Gestapo during World War II. As he was being interrogated by the Nazi secret police, Frankl was stripped of all his possessions--his clothes, his jewelry, his wedding band. His head was shaved. He was repeatedly taken from his prison cell, placed under bright lights, and questioned for hours. He underwent many savage, senseless tortures. But Frankl realized he had one thing left: "I still had the power to choose my own attitude. Bitterness or forgiveness, to give up or go on."

One of the most difficult realities of the future is the regret of the past. We must strive not to paralyze ourselves with such lingering doubts of mistakes-past that we aren't moving forward. The following words (author unknown) depict our best-hoped aspirations:

I'd rather be the ship that sails, And rides the billows wild and free,
Than to be the ship that always fails To leave its port and go to sea.

I'd rather feel the sting of strife Where gales are born and tempests roar
Than to settle down to useless life, And rot in dry-dock on the shore.

I'd rather fight some mighty wave With honor in supreme command,
And fill at last a well-earned grave Than die in ease upon the sand.

I'd rather drive where sea storms blow, And be the ship that always failed
To make the port where it would go Than be the ship that never sailed.

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, and comes short again and again, because there is not effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at best knows in the end the

[53] Joshua 1:5; Deuteronomy 31:6

triumphs of high achievement and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat. [54]

Let's remind ourselves of some of the places God specifically promised to go with us, then begin to acknowledge His presence in those situations, and learn to share them with Him. He will be pleased, and at the same time things will go better for us.

He Is With Us in Temptation.

A man had a sign on his door which said, "Lead me not into temptation, I can find it for myself." We can all make that statement. Temptation will make itself known on a daily basis. We will never triumph over temptation pretending it doesn't exist. We cannot afford the luxury of thinking it can't happen to us. Thanks be to God who can give us the victory over temptation.

The Apostle Paul taught us that our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit. God the Holy Spirit lives within us and goes everywhere we go. That should provide an added incentive for us to flee from sin. As Paul put it, *"Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?"* (1 Corinthians 6:18-19).

The believer's body is a mini-temple, a sacred dwelling place for the omnipresent God, and we must treat it as such. Sexual relations outside of marriage defile the temple of God. They dirty up God's dwelling place. To be conscious of God's presence is to guard the purity of His home.

But respect for God's home is not the only deterring power of this doctrine. If we love our Lord and want to please Him, the knowledge that He is with us is going to have an influence on where we take Him and what we do in His presence. We usually try not to offend someone we truly love. While we may be tempted to do something of which they disapprove when we are separated from their watchful eye, we seldom entertain the thought of doing it when they are standing right there looking at us. The next time you are tempted to disobey God's Word and disregard His will, visualize Him standing there watching the whole scene. He is there, you know, so we might as well think about it. Sometimes we act like ostriches with our heads in the sand. We think that because we cannot see God, He cannot see us. But He does.

The eyes of the LORD are in every place, Watching the evil and the good (Proverbs 15:3).

He Is With Us in Need.

The writer to the Hebrews had something to say about God's presence. Some of the folks to whom he was writing had lost their jobs because of their faith in Jesus Christ, and they were facing desperate needs. They were probably worrying about how their needs would be met and, worse still, they were envying people who had everything they needed. They would benefit from this pertinent exhortation: *"Let your character be free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, 'I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you'" (Hebrews 13:5).*

[54] Theodore Roosevelt. *Leadership*, Vol. 15, no. 3.

We may not have everything in life we want, but we do have the Lord. He is right there with us all the time. He sees all our needs and He will meet every one of them in His own time and in His own way. Some may be saying, like those Hebrew Christians of old, "But I have this bill due tomorrow that I can't pay."

That situation could be God's way of encouraging you to reevaluate your lifestyle. He wants us to be diligent, to work hard, to seek His wisdom about every penny we spend, and to stay out of debt. Unpaid bills sometimes reveal that we have been overly enthusiastic about gratifying our desires rather than merely meeting our needs. The next time you are tempted to spend money on something you do not need, remember that the omnipresent Lord of the universe is right there with you. Ask His advice before you move ahead. Then trust Him faithfully to supply every need. That is what He promised to do (Philippians 4:19).

He Is With Us in Loneliness.

I want you to meet a lonely woman. Hagar was a slave, uprooted from her home in Egypt and taken to be the handmaid of Abraham's wife, Sarah. She had gotten pregnant by Abraham at Sarah's suggestion, and the resultant situation had brought such tension and turmoil to their household that she finally ran away to the wilderness—unloved, unwanted, pregnant, and absolutely alone in a strange land, the victim of someone else's sin.

That was when the Lord appeared to her with tender words of encouragement and advice, and she called His name El Roi, the God who sees (Genesis 16:13). She had come to the comforting realization that God was right there with her, that He saw her in her loneliness, and that He cared. Ezekiel called Him Jehovah-Shammah, the Lord who is there (Ezekiel 48:35).

He is the same God today. He sees us in our loneliness and offers us words of encouragement and advice. He is the God who is there, and He still cares. Most of us prefer a warm body near us when we are lonely, a hand we can touch, and a voice we can hear. God may provide that for us in His perfect time. But meanwhile, He is with us, and the very fact that we are physically alone can make His presence more precious than it would be if there were people around us. To believe that He is with us can help to dispel the aching loneliness.

Hope (looking with courage to the future) prevents us from clinging to what we have and frees us to move away from the safe place and enter unknown and fearful territory. [55]

He Is With Us Through Difficult Service.

Many godly people in Scripture faced tasks which they believed were beyond them, but the confidence to carry on came through the assurance of God's presence. For example, when Moses was called by God to return to Egypt and deliver the people from bondage, he shuddered at the enormity of the task. When he tried to beg off, God said, *"Certainly I will be with you"* (Exodus 3:12). That was just the encouragement he needed to go on.

After the nation's sin with the golden calf, God told Moses to lead the people on to their promised land. But he was afraid to go until the promise was reaffirmed. Finally it was: *"My presence shall go with you, and I will give you rest" (Exodus 33:14).*

[55] Henri J. Nouwen in The Wounded Healer. Christianity Today, Vol. 40, no. 13.

The promise of God's presence was the inspiration he needed to do the job he was called to do.

When Joshua took over the leadership of the nation after Moses' death, he struggled with the same lack of confidence. But God was right there to encourage him: "No man will be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I have been with Moses, I *will be with you;* I will not fail you or forsake you" (Joshua 1:5). "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for *the LORD your God is with you* wherever you go" (verse 9). If God would be with him, he could conquer the land against insuperable odds.

When our Lord's disciples heard His commission to make disciples of all nations, they must have trembled at the vastness of what they were being asked to do until the Lord added, *"And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).* That would make all the difference in the world.

He Is With Us in Danger.

The Apostle Paul faced many dangerous situations in the course of his apostolic ministry, one of which was in Corinth. The Jews there were disturbed at the great numbers of people turning to Christ and the situation seemed to be as potentially explosive as a barrel of TNT beside a campfire.

Paul seriously considered leaving. *"And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, 'Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city'"* (Acts 18:9-10). The key to Paul's courage was in those words, *"I am with you."*

God said much the same thing to the tiny nation Israel when she was surrounded by giant world powers which threatened to destroy her. *Do not fear, for I am with you; Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, Surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand (Isaiah 41:10).*

That is also His promise to us. There is nothing to fear for the child of God. He is present in all the places people sometimes fear. He is on that airplane, in that elevator, in that cramped room, on those high places, in that wild animal infested jungle, in that new and strange situation with people we do not know, in that operating room during delicate surgery, in the recovery room where the pain and discomfort are fierce.

Why should we fear anything when God is there? The Psalmist put it so beautifully: *God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, And though the mountains slip into the heart of the sea (Psalm 46:1-2).*

He Is With Us in Death.

Death is the ultimate source of fear and anxiety for many people. But again, God is right there with us.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I fear no evil; for Thou art with me;
Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me (Psalm 23:4).

When we face the death of a loved one, this thought brings greater consolation than all the well intentioned words of our human friends put together: God is with us. And when we face our own departure from this earthly scene there is no reason for alarm. God will accompany us right into Heaven's glory.

Sometime ago someone handed me this interesting account: I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord and across the sky flashed scenes from my life. For each scene, I noticed two sets of footprints in the sand, one belonging to me, the other to the Lord. When the last scene of my life flashed before me, I looked back at the footprints in the sand. I noticed that many times along the path of my life there was only one set of footprints. I also noticed that it happened at the very lowest and saddest times in my life.

I questioned the Lord about it. "Lord, You said that once I decided to follow You, You would walk with me all the way. But I have noticed that during the most troublesome times in my life, there is only one set of footprints. I don't understand why in times when I needed You most, You would leave." The Lord replied, "My precious child, I would never leave you during your times of trial and suffering. When you see only one set of footprints, it was then I carried you."

What more can we ask? Wherever we go, whatever we face, our omnipresent Lord is with us. Ignore Him no longer. Let Him be part of every situation and circumstance. The awareness of His presence will add an exciting new dimension to the quality of your life and to the confidence you enjoy in living.

Let me repeat an earlier point for emphasis and application here: Knowing this fact about God's omnipresence is sufficient to give me the courage, confidence, and comfort I need to be courageous each day I have upon this earth, *"…because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."*

Tim Hansel reminds us that "the Bible is a first-hand story of goose-bump courage in very ordinary people who were invaded by the living God."

If there are two words that should be said in the same breath and said regularly to ventilate our hope, that should be flamed together, branded as a signature of our faith, they are the words "faith" and "courage." It takes courage to believe, and in order to have that courage, we must believe. [56]

From time to time, lobsters have to leave their shells in order to grow. They need the shell to protect them from being torn apart, yet when they grow, the old shell must be abandoned. If they did not abandon it, the old shell would soon become their prison--and finally their casket.

The tricky part for the lobster is the brief period of time between when the old shell is discarded and the new one is formed. During that terribly vulnerable period, the transition must be scary to the lobster. Currents gleefully cartwheel them from coral to kelp. Hungry schools of fish are ready to make them a part of the food chain. For awhile at least, that old shell must look pretty good.

We are not so different from lobsters. To change and grow, we must sometimes shed our shells--a structure, a framework--we've depended on. Discipleship means being so committed to Christ that when he bids us to follow, we will change, risk, grow, and leave our "shells" behind. [57]

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[56] Fay Angus in *Running Around in Spiritual Circles*; Christianity Today, Vol. 36, no. 5.
[57] Brent Mitchell in *Fresh Illustrations for Preaching & Teaching* (Baker) from the editors of *Leadership*.

In *A Pretty Good Person*, Lewis Smedes writes: A federal judge had ordered New Orleans to open its public schools to African-American children, and the white parents decided that if they had to let black children in, they would keep their children out. They let it be known that any black children who came to school would be in for trouble. So the black children stayed home too.

"Except Ruby Bridges. Her parents sent her to school all by herself, six years old.

"Every morning she walked alone through a heckling crowd to an empty school. White people lined up on both sides of the way and shook their fists at her. They threatened to do terrible things to her if she kept coming to their school. But every morning at ten minutes to eight Ruby walked, head up, eyes ahead, straight through the mob; two U.S. marshals walked ahead of her and two walked behind her. Then she spent the day alone with her teachers inside that big silent school building.

"Harvard professor Robert Coles was curious about what went into the making of courageous children like Ruby Bridges. He talked to Ruby's mother and, in his book The Moral Life of Children, tells what she said: "There's a lot of people who talk about doing good, and a lot of people who argue about what's good and what's not good," but there are other folks who "just put their lives on the line for what's right." [58]

Far better is it to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checkered by failure, than to rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy much nor suffer much, because they live in the gray twilight that knows not victory or defeat. [59]

The only fight which is lost is that which we give up. [60]

In June l955, Winston Churchill, who was then near the end of his life, was asked to give a commencement address at a British University. At this time he was physically infirm; he had to be helped to the podium. Then he held on to the podium for what seemed an interminable amount of time. He stood with his head down but then finally raised that great leonine head of his, and the voice that years before had called Britain back from the brink of destruction sounded publicly for the last time in history.

"Never give up. Never give up. Never give up." With that, Churchill turned and went back to his seat. I'm told there was silence, and then, as if one person, the whole audience rose to applaud him, because he was a man whose life and words were together. Again and again throughout Churchill's political career, he had known setbacks. Three times, his career apparently was over, he was sent off to oblivion, and yet somehow he had a sense that there was still something left after the worst. [61]

Fear doesn't want you to make the journey to the mountain. If he can rattle you enough, fear will persuade you to take your eyes off the peaks and settle for a dull existence in the flatlands. [62]

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[58] Bob Campbell in Fresh Illustrations for Preaching & Teaching (Baker), from the editors of Leadership.
[59] Theodore Roosevelt, *Marriage Partnership*, Vol. 7, no. 3.
[60] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Christian History*, no. 32.
[61] John Claypool, Birmingham, Alabama, *Leadership*, Vol. 12, no. 2.
[62] Max Lucado, *Christian Reader*, Vol. 32, no. 3.

Henry Ward Beecher is credit as saying that “God planted fear in the soul as truly as he planted hope or courage. It is a kind of bell or gong which rings the mind into quick life on the approach of danger. It is the soul's signal for rallying.“

Once you've faced the very thing you fear the most, it is no longer quite so fearful. [63]

Words can never adequately convey the incredible impact of our attitude toward life. The longer I live the more convinced I become that life is 10 percent what happens to us and 90 percent how we respond to it. [64]

Being positive is part of being a hero--maybe the hardest part, because if you are a hero you're smart enough to know all the reasons why you should be discouraged. [65]

The best decision-makers are those who are willing to suffer the most over their decisions but still retain their ability to be decisive. [66]

Maybe we need the confidence of Alexander McClaren, who courageously replied, “Only he who can say, "The Lord is the strength of my life," can say, "Of whom shall I be afraid?"

During World War I, a British commander was preparing to lead his soldiers back to battle. They'd been on furlough, and it was a cold, rainy, muddy day. Their shoulders sagged because they knew what lay ahead of them: mud, blood, possible death. Nobody talked, nobody sang. It was a heavy time.

As they marched along, the commander looked into a bombed-out church. Back in the church he saw the figure of Christ on the cross. At that moment, something happened to the commander. He remembered the One who suffered, died, and rose again. There was victory, and there was triumph.

As the troops marched along, he shouted out, "Eyes right, march!" Every eye turned to the right, and as the soldiers marched by, they saw Christ on the cross. Something happened to that company of men. Suddenly they saw triumph after suffering, and they took courage. With shoulders straightened, they began to smile as they went. You see, anything worthwhile in life will be a risk that demands courage. [67]

We certainly want to avoid the charge being leveled toward us that we were neutral at a crucial point of our life. Dante said in the 13th century that “the hottest places in hell are reserved for those who, in a period of moral crisis, maintain their neutrality. “

Today our culture is far less likely to raise up heroes than it is to exalt victims, individuals who are overcome by the sting of oppression, injustice, adversity, neglect or misfortune. ... Success, as well as failure, is the result of one's own talent, decisions and actions. Accepting personal responsibility for victory, as well as for defeat, is as liberating and empowering as it is unpopular today.[68]

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[63] Ruth Senter, *Christian Reader*, Vol. 32, no. 2.

[64] Charles R. Swindoll, Christian Reader, Vol. 33, no. 4.

[65] Michael Dorris. *Leadership*, Vol. 16, no. 4.

[66] M. Scott Peck. Leadership, Vol. 15, no. 3.

[67] Gordon Johnson, *"Finding Significance in Obscurity*," Preaching Today, Tape No. 82.

[68] U.S. Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas in a speech at Regent University, quoted in the *Christian Leader* (Oct. 1996), Christianity Today, Vol. 41, no. 2.

Ed was a motion picture producer who had finished his most recent film. During the next year as every independent film producer does, he had been working hard to try to sell his picture to one of the majors. Being unsuccessful in his attempts to sell the majors, he had then approached many of the minor motion picture distribution companies. He had finally aroused some interest in a smaller motion picture distribution company and had arranged for a showing of his picture to their top executives.

At the conclusion of the showing, the president of the motion picture distribution company turned to Ed and said, "There is nothing particularly wrong with your picture. The story is all right, the quality is fine, the acting is acceptable, but if it is going to be a money maker there are three changes that need to be made. There are three different locations in your film where we need to add sex scenes so that the picture will have some kind of box office appeal. With the addition of these three scenes, we can assure you of a million dollars in profit for your share of what this picture will gross when released by us."

Ed needed to make a sale badly because of the current conditions in his own company, but he responded by saying, "Thank you for looking at my film. I appreciate your taking time to consider this as one of your projects for distribution, but I am sorry that we will not be able to make the changes that you have suggested." Ed knew to whom to say "No."

He had the courage to act on his convictions.

However, taking a stand against the crowd is not easy. This is a struggle that exposes our strength or weakness. In past years South Africa was a climate of racism and black men often suffer humiliation from white inhabitants. A Bantu was sent to the theater to get tickets for his white employer. There was a single line and upon inquiry he was told to get in the white man's line although in South Africa this is forbidden. Suddenly a black haired youth elbowed him out of line. This haughty action was followed by similar actions of a teenage girl. Then a real bull of a man with closely cropped hair seized the native and hurled him into the street. The theater manager told him to get back in line, but again he was thrown out. Then a voice sounded clear above the rumble of the complaints. A man of about fifty, with whitened temples and in the open neck attire of a farmer, shouted with a voice ringing with threat and authority, "Let this fellow in. What's the matter with you?" The crowd cowered and the lowly native was placed in front.

The South African farmer risked his reputation and the crowds disapproval, but he stood firm. This is goodness. And, it costs. Contrast this with the Indiana teenagers arrested for shoplifting. They admitted they did not need the merchandise, but stole it because everybody was doing it. Investigation revealed they did not feel they had done wrong since the crowd had placed a sanction on it.

I have always appreciated the 'dry bones' message of Ezekiel 36-37, when God revealed His plans for the deliverance of Israel and the restoration of His name among the nations. His motives were clear: *"It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone….'For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land….I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and*

put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws."

"You will live in the land I gave your forefathers; you will be my people, and I will be your God. I will save you from all your uncleanness. I will call for the grain and make it plentiful and will not bring famine upon you. I will increase the fruit of the trees and the crops of the field, so that you will no longer suffer disgrace among the nations because of famine. Then you will remember your evil ways and wicked deeds, and you will loathe yourselves for your sins and detestable practices."

(Ezekiel 37:1-14) "The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. {2} He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. {3} He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" I said, "O Sovereign LORD, you alone know." {4} Then he said to me, "Prophesy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! {5} This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. {6} I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.'" {7} So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. {8} I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them. {9} Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live.'" {10} So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet--a vast army. {11} Then he said to me: "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.' {12} Therefore prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. {13} Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. {14} I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.""

God revealed His power and might, and the reality that literally nothing is outside of His control; He can do what He wills when He wants! He needs us to realize this and be willing participants! He who loves God with all his heart dreads neither death, torment, judgment, nor hell, for perfect love opens a sure passage to God.

In the midst of a storm, a little bird was clinging to the limb of a tree, seemingly calm and unafraid. As the wind tore at the limbs of the tree, the bird continued to look the storm in the face, as if to say, "Shake me off; I still have wings."

Hope prevents us from clinging to what we have and frees us to move away from the safe place and enter unknown and fearful territory. The only fight which is lost is that which we give up. We must be careful for nothing, prayerful for everything, thankful for anything.

We must have plenty of courage. God is stronger than the devil. We are on the winning side. Success is never final; failure is never fatal; it is courage that counts. The great need for anyone in authority is courage. Courage is almost a contradiction in terms: it means a strong desire to live taking the form of readiness to die.

Courage is not limited to the battlefield or the Indianapolis 500 or bravely catching a thief in your house. The real tests of courage are much deeper and much quieter. They are the inner tests, like remaining faithful when nobody's looking, like enduring pain when the room is empty, like standing alone when you're misunderstood

A sailor was given liberty to go ashore when his ship docked at a large southwestern American city. He visited a park famous for its trees and tropical flowers. As he walked across an open grassy sunlit area, he noticed bees flying all around him. Suddenly, all the bees began to settle upon him. They were all over his clothes, his hands, and his face. Panic gripped him, and though he wanted to run in fear, he forced himself to stand stock still. There were hundreds, maybe thousands, of bees all over him. He hardly dared to breathe. "Look at that sailor," he heard a woman's voice say. After what seemed an eternity to the sailor, slowly the bees departed one by one until they were all gone. His uniform was soaked with perspiration, but he had not been stung once. Sometimes it is better to stand stock still in the midst of danger than to run in panic and fear and possibly to bring about the very end one wishes to avoid. Scripture says, *""Whoever flees from the terror will fall into a pit, whoever climbs out of the pit will be caught in a snare; for I will bring upon Moab the year of her punishment," declares the LORD."* (Jeremiah 48:44)

COURAGE

’Tis nothing for a man to hold up his head in a calm; but to maintain his post when all others have quitted their ground and there to stand upright when other men are beaten down is divine. Lucius Annaeus Seneca (c. 4 b.c.–a.d. 65)

A great deal of talent is lost in this world for want of a little courage. Sydney Smith (1771–1845)

A man without courage is a knife without an edge. Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790)

Do not ask the Lord for a life free from grief, instead ask for courage that endures. Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checkered by failure, than to take rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy much nor suffer much because they live in the gray twilight that knows not victory nor defeat. Theodore Roosevelt (1858–1919)

Fear can keep a man out of danger; but courage can support him in it. Sir Thomas Fuller (1608–1661)

I am only one, but I am one. I can’t do everything, but I can do something. And what I can do, I ought to do. And what I ought to do, by the Grace of God, I shall do. Edward Everett Hale (1822–1909)

I do not ask to walk smooth paths nor bear an easy load, I pray for strength and fortitude to climb the rock-strewn road. Give me such courage I can scale the hardest peaks alone, and transform every stumbling block into a stepping-stone. Gail Brook Burket

It takes guts to leave the ruts. Robert Harold Schuller (1926–)

The test of courage comes when we are in the minority; the test of tolerance when we are in the majority. Ralph Washington Sockman (1889–1970)

Devotional Readings

(Ephesians 6:10) "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power."

(Isaiah 40:26) "Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing."

(Ephesians 1:18-21) "I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, {19} and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, {20} which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, {21} far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come."

5
Facing change…

"Change is the nursery of music, joy, life, and eternity."[69]

Mark Twain was both wise and observant…and was "right on" when he said that "the only person who likes change is a wet baby."

Harry Emerson Fosdick laid it out plainly for us to see and comprehend: "Christians are supposed not merely to endure change, nor even to profit by it, but to cause it.

We might also add: and embrace it!

Change is one of the most threatening things many of us face in life and yet we encounter it every day. The universe itself is changing. Scientists tell us that all observed systems are continually changing from order to disorder, and that every transformation of energy is accompanied by a loss in the availability of energy for future use. In other words, our universe is running down.

Besides that, the world we live in is changing. Highly sophisticated technical developments have radically altered our lifestyle, and now they threaten our very existence. Ideological developments have changed the balance of world power and threaten our freedom as a nation. Governments are toppled and new ones established overnight, and sometimes it seems as though revolutions are as common as eating and sleeping. Every day the news reports focus on some new changes occurring in our world.

People change. One day we may be in a good mood, the next day in an ugly mood. And it is disconcerting if we never know what to expect from our wives, our husbands, our parents, or our bosses. Nice people sometimes get irritable and touchy. Fortunately, grouchy people sometimes get nicer.

But we all change. That is the nature of creaturehood, and that is the nature of life. We find it unpleasant and intimidating at times. We would rather keep things the way they always were because the old and the

[69] JOHN DONNE (1572–1631)

familiar are more secure and comfortable, like an old shoe. But shoes wear out and need to be replaced, as does most everything else in life. So we struggle to adjust to change.

We grow and we strive to better ourselves, and that is change. Sometimes our sense of well-being collapses around us; we lose our health, our loved ones, our money, or our material possessions, and that is change. Our bodies begin to wear out; we can no longer do the things we used to do, and that is change. It is all unsettling and unnerving, but it is inevitable. What can we do about it? Is there anything unchanging that we can hold on to in a world where everything is so tenuous and transitory?

We live in a time of unprecedented discoveries, many of which tend to make life longer and living more comfortable and enjoyable. But with change and progress the inexorable law of change and decay also operates. Strange that so few in this world prepare for the inevitable. [70]

The past, present, and potential difficulties of the future find their 'rest' when we realize that if we are to better the future we must disturb the present. [71]

An unnamed psalmist asked that question in a moment of great trial. The inspired title of Psalm 102 says, *"A Prayer of the Afflicted, when he is faint, and pours out his complaint before the LORD."* This man is in trouble. He is facing some devastating changes in his life. Listen to his lament.

Do not hide your face from me when I am in distress. Turn your ear to me; when I call, answer me quickly. For my days vanish like smoke; my bones burn like glowing embers. My heart is blighted and withered like grass; I forget to eat my food. Because of my loud groaning I am reduced to skin and bones. (verses 2-5).

All day long my enemies taunt me; those who rail against me use my name as a curse. (verse 8).

Is there some kind of life preserver a person can hang on to when, like this psalmist, he feels as though he is about to go under? Is there something solid, stable, and unchanging? There is, and he is going to tell us about it. *But you, O LORD, sit enthroned forever; your renown endures through all generations. (verse 12)*

There is a God who will never cease to exist. But He is more than eternal. He is absolutely unchanging.

In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. {26} They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. Like clothing you will change them and they will be discarded. {27} But you remain the same, and your years will never end.(verses 25-27)

This is one of the first great Biblical statements of God's *immutability.* Simply stated, that means God is unchangeable. He is neither capable of nor susceptible to change. And that makes sense.

Any change would probably be for the better or for the worse. God cannot change for the better because He is already perfect. And He cannot change for the worse, for then He would be imperfect and would therefore no longer be God.

Created things change; they run down or wear out. It is part of their constitutional nature. But God has no beginning or end. Therefore He cannot change.

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[70] L. Nelson Bell. Christianity Today, Vol. 1, reprinted Vol. 40, no. 10.
[71] Catherine Booth in *The Life of Catherine Booth (Vol. 2)*; Christianity Today, Vol. 40, no. 6.

The obvious question is, “So God is immutable. What does that mean to me?” If we really want to know Him, then it means everything, for a God who changes would not be worth knowing. We would not be able to trust Him.

Do you trust a friend who changes his attitudes or actions toward you from one day to the next? Of course not. You are not going to open your heart to him, share your feelings with him, or tell him your weaknesses and your needs.

If he is sympathetic and helpful on some occasions but disinterested or judgmental on others, you probably will not take the chance. If he keeps your intimate secrets to himself sometimes but spreads them around on other occasions, you are not going to confide in him anymore.

Human friends sometimes act that way but God never changes. We can trust Him.

And He is never in a bad mood. That is different from us. We get disagreeable periodically. We growl at our spouses, snap at our children, criticize our fellow workers. Not God! His mood never changes. What a pleasure to know that whenever we approach Him through the merits of His Son He receives us warmly and lovingly.

That is one thing that makes prayer such a pleasure. We know that He is always open to our requests. He never gets tired of our coming to Him. In fact, He keeps inviting us to come. *“Call to Me, and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know”* (Jeremiah 33:3).

“Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you” (Matthew 7:7). *“Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask, and you will receive that your joy may be made full”* (John 16:24).

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God” (Philippians 4:6).

We would have little interest in praying to a God who might be listening, but who, on the other hand, might be out for a walk or taking a nap. Elijah taunted the prophets of Baal with the possibility that their god might be doing one of those very things (1 Kings 18:27). But we have the assurance that the Lord’s ear is always open to our prayers.

The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous, And His ears are open to their cry (Psalm 84:15).

Some will object, “What sense is there in praying to an unchangeable God? Hasn’t He already made up His mind what He is going to do? How can our prayers change anything?”

We know that prayer changes things because God told us that it does. He decided in eternity past that He would take certain actions, provide certain benefits, and bestow certain blessings when we come to Him in prayer.

So we come because He asked us to come and we make our requests known because He promised us that it would make a difference. We have the assurance that if we ask anything according to His will He hears and answers us (1 John 5:14-15). We can count on Him to be faithful to His promise.

Maybe we can understand what difference prayer makes by visualizing a mother caring for her sick child. Before she tucks him in bed for the night she gives him his medicine and quietly reassures him of her presence. She knows he will cry out to her during the night, and when the cry comes it does not change her mind about anything. She responds exactly as she planned to respond and does precisely what she knew would be best for him. But her help comes in answer to his request. That is the way she planned it. God has some good things prepared for us, but His plan is to give them to us in answer to our prayers. So ask and you will receive.

Since God is immutable we can always count on Him. We cannot consistently count on our human friends. They let us down at times. Their actions are sometimes affected by how they feel or how we have treated them. Their love is conditioned on our performance. But not God's. His love is everlasting and therefore unchanging (Jeremiah 31:3). He always acts on the basis of love. Likewise, His kindness is everlasting and therefore unchanging (Isaiah 54:10).

He always acts on the basis of kindness. We can count on it. The better we know Him as the immutable God, the more we shall be able to trust Him and hold on to Him for stability and strength when everything around us is changing.

This is a great doctrine, and it would be beneficial for us to keep it in mind. But unfortunately one of our most glaring defects as mortal human beings is our inability to remember what we have learned about God when we need it most. Did you know that God has given us a visible sign to help us remember His immutability? It is the rainbow.

When Noah and his family emerged from the ark God promised them that He would never again destroy the whole earth with a flood. He said, *"I set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a sign of a covenant between Me and the earth" (Genesis 9:13).*

He has not destroyed the whole earth by water again. He is a God of His Word. He always does what He says He will do (Psalm 135:14b). He never changes.

I appreciate the conviction that can state "if your religion does not change you, then you should change your religion. [72]

We do not want, as the newspapers say, a church that will move with the world. We want a church that will move the world. [73]

Only a fool would argue that the church should change its doctrine to keep up with the times. One does not arrive at moral judgments by counting noses. Nor does one derive ethical systems from surveys. [74]

In 1848, Ignez Semmelweis discovered the simple technique of having a physician wash his hands in a chlorine solution before delivering a baby. This procedure immediately reduced the maternal mortality rate in the clinic from 18 percent to 1 percent! Twelve years later, in 1860, in the same clinic, 35 out of 101 mothers died. What happened? Semmelweis was perceived as a flake, a disrupter, someone who had extreme political

[72] Elbert Hubbard. *Leadership*, Vol. 15, no. 4.
[73] G.K. Chesterton, *The New Witness*; Christianity Today, Vol. 30 no. 8.
[74] Andrew M. Greeley in America (Nov. 7, 1992); Christianity Today, Vol. 37, no. 2.

views. Physicians didn't take him seriously, so nobody listened. In June 1865 Semmelweis, in despair, was duped into entering a mental sanitarium, where he killed himself two weeks later. It was another two decades before Lister and Pasteur came along.

It was said of the apostles, *"These that have turned the world upside down are come hither" (Acts 17:6).* There is a story told of an eccentric English evangelist who took that text for one of his open-air sermons in a new place. He began by saying, "First, the world is wrong side up. Second, the world must be turned upside down. Third, we are the men to set it right." In the man's quaint phrases, this is really the purpose of the gospel. It is God's way of making things right. [75]

Over a hundred years ago, in a Scottish seaside inn, a group of fishermen were relaxing after a long day at sea. As a serving maid was walking past the fishermen's table with a pot of tea, one of the men made a sweeping gesture to describe the size of the fish he claimed to have caught. His hand collided with the teapot and sent it crashing against the whitewashed wall, where its contents left an irregular brown splotch.

Standing nearby, the innkeeper surveyed the damage. "That stain will never come out," he said in dismay. "The whole wall will have to be repainted." "Perhaps not." All eyes turned to the stranger who had just spoken. "What do you mean?" asked the innkeeper. "Let me work with the stain," said the stranger, standing up from his table in the corner. "If my work meets your approval, you won't need to repaint the wall."

The stranger picked up a box and went to the wall. Opening the box, he withdrew pencils, brushes, and some glass jars of linseed oil and pigment. He began to sketch lines around the stain and fill it in here and there with dabs of color and swashes of shading. Soon a picture began to emerge. The random splashes of tea had been turned into the image of a stag with a magnificent rack of antlers. At the bottom of the picture, the man inscribed his signature. Then he paid for his meal and left.

The innkeeper was stunned when he examined the wall. "Do you know who that man was?" he said in amazement. "The signature reads 'E.H. Landseer!'" Indeed, they had been visited by the well-known painter of wild life, Sir Edwin Landseer. God wants to take the stains and disappointments of our lives and not merely erase them, but rather turn them into a thing of beauty. [76]

The following story comes from the Internet: The U.S. standard railroad gauge (distance between rails) is four feet, eight-and-one-half inches.

"Why such an odd number? Because that's the way they built them in England, and American railroads were built by British expatriates.

"Why did the English adopt that particular gauge? Because the people who built the pre-railroad tramways used that gauge.

"They in turn were locked into that gauge because the people who built tramways used the same standards and tools they had used for building wagons, which were set on a gauge of four feet, eight-and-one-half inches.

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[75] A.B. Simpson in *The Best of A.B. Simpson*; Christianity Today, Vol. 32, no. 2.
[76] Ron Lee Davis in *Mistreated*; Leadership, Vol. 12, no. 3.

"Why were wagons built to that scale? Because with any other size, the wheels did not match the old wheel ruts on the roads.

"So who built these old rutted roads?

"The first long-distance highways in Europe were built by Imperial Rome for the benefit of their legions. The roads have been in use ever since. The ruts were first made by Roman war chariots. Four feet, eight-and-one-half inches was the width a chariot needed to be to accommodate the rear ends of two war horses."

Maybe "that's the way it's always been" isn't the great excuse some people believe it to be. [77]

Two frogs were neighbors. One inhabited a deep pond, far removed from public view; the other lived in a gully containing little water, and traversed by a country road. The Frog that lived in the pond warned his friend to change his residence and entreated him to come and live with him, saying that he would enjoy greater safety from danger and more abundant food. The other refused, saying that he felt it so very hard to leave a place to which he had become accustomed. A few days afterwards a heavy wagon passed through the gully and crushed him to death under its wheels.

Some churches and some Christians are so afraid of change that they don't realize how they can ultimately weaken the cause of the Kingdom of God.

Change is a challenge and we need to accept that challenge because it's the way God planned it. And God's plans are good.

CHANGE

Change is the handmaiden nature requires to do her miracles with. Mark Twain (1835–1910)

Every end is a new beginning. Robert Harold Schuller (1926–)

Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself. Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910)

Everything in life that we really accept undergoes a change. So suffering must become love.Katherine Mansfield (1888–1923)

If we try to resist loss and change or to hold on to blessings and joy belonging to a past which must drop away from us, we postpone all the new blessings awaiting us on a higher level and find ourselves left in a barren, bleak winter of sorrow and loneliness. Hannah Hurnard (1905–1990)

If you're going through difficult times today, hold steady. It will change soon. If you are experiencing smooth sailing and easy times now, brace yourself. It will change soon. The only thing you can be certain of is change. James C. Dobson (1936–)

In this life we will encounter hurts and trials that we will not be able to change; we are just going to have to allow them to change us. Ron Lee Davis

[77] Clark Cothern, Tecumseh, Michigan. Leadership, Vol. 19, no. 1.

Keep changing. When you're through changing, you're through. Bruce Fairfield Barton (1886–1967)

People can cry much easier than they can change. James Baldwin (1924–)

The immutability of God appears in its most perfect beauty when viewed against the mutability of men. In God no change is possible; in men change is impossible to escape. Neither the man is fixed nor his world, and he and it are in constant flux. A. W. Tozer (1897–1963)

The reasonable man adapts himself to the world: the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore all progress depends on the unreasonable man. George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950)

Today is not yesterday. We ourselves change. How then, can our works and thoughts, if they are always to be the fittest, continue always the same. Change, indeed, is painful, yet ever needful; and if memory have its force and worth, so also has hope. Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881)

When I came to believe in Christ's teaching, I ceased desiring what I had wished for before. The direction of my life, my desires, became different. What was good and bad had changed places. Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910)

Devotional Readings

(Psalms 55) "For the director of music. With stringed instruments. A maskil of David. Listen to my prayer, O God, do not ignore my plea; {2} hear me and answer me. My thoughts trouble me and I am distraught {3} at the voice of the enemy, at the stares of the wicked; for they bring down suffering upon me and revile me in their anger. {4} My heart is in anguish within me; the terrors of death assail me. {5} Fear and trembling have beset me; horror has overwhelmed me. {6} I said, "Oh, that I had the wings of a dove! I would fly away and be at rest-- {7} I would flee far away and stay in the desert; Selah {8} I would hurry to my place of shelter, far from the tempest and storm." {9} Confuse the wicked, O Lord, confound their speech, for I see violence and strife in the city. {10} Day and night they prowl about on its walls; malice and abuse are within it. {11} Destructive forces are at work in the city; threats and lies never leave its streets. {12} If an enemy were insulting me, I could endure it; if a foe were raising himself against me, I could hide from him. {13} But it is you, a man like myself, my companion, my close friend, {14} with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship as we walked with the throng at the house of God. {15} Let death take my enemies by surprise; let them go down alive to the grave, for evil finds lodging among them. {16} But I call to God, and the LORD saves me. {17} Evening, morning and noon I cry out in distress, and he hears my voice. {18} He ransoms me unharmed from the battle waged against me, even though many oppose me. {19} God, who is enthroned forever, will hear them and afflict them-- Selah men who never change their ways and have no fear of God. {20} My companion attacks his friends; he violates his covenant. {21} His speech is smooth as butter, yet war is in his heart; his words are more soothing than oil, yet they are drawn swords. {22} Cast your cares on the LORD

and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall. {23} But you, O God, will bring down the wicked into the pit of corruption; bloodthirsty and deceitful men will not live out half their days. But as for me, I trust in you."

(Matthew 18:3) "And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

(Hebrews 12:17) "Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. He could bring about no change of mind, though he sought the blessing with tears."

(James 1:17) "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows."

(James 4:9) "Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom."

6
Pursuing Peace…

"No sleep can be tranquil unless the mind is at rest."[78]

"God made man simple; man's complex problems are of his own devising." --King Solomon.

"Because we lack a Divine Center, our need for security has led us into an insane attachment to things. We really must understand that the lust for affluence in contemporary society is psychotic. It is psychotic because it has completely lost touch with reality. We crave things we neither need nor enjoy. 'We buy things we do not want to impress people we do not like.' … We are made to feel ashamed to wear clothes or drive cars until they are worn out. The mass media have convinced us that to be out of step with fashion is to be out of step with reality. It is time we awaken to the fact that conformity to a sick society is to be sick." ----Richard Foster.

Peace is rare: Less than 8 percent of the time since the beginning of recorded time has the world been entirely at peace. In a total of 3,530 years, 286 have been warless. Eight thousand treaties have been broken in this time.

But we don't always want to be so grandeur in our thinking. After all, I don't start wars and I certainly can't halt them.

We might rather dwell on this little piece of real estate that can be called 'mine' and leave it at that…to work on the attainable, casting aside the greater ideals. Why not think more simply?

[78] Lucius Annaeus Seneca (c. 4 b.c.–a.d. 65)

Well, life doesn't always allow for that. While it is true that the bathtub was invented in 1850 and the phone in 1875, and in 1850, you could have sat in the tub without having the phone ring, that doesn't always answer the day's issue.

Peace is not the absence of trouble, but the presence of God.

Media mogul Ted Turner wanted to see if anybody had a real vision of a future world at peace and in harmony with the environment. He said his quest ended in disappointment. Turner told an Atlanta gathering of contributors to his Cable News Network's World Report a few years back that he funded a competition to find a book that gave a workable plan for a world of peace.

"With 10,000 manuscripts, we did not have one plausible treatise on how we could get to a sustainable, peaceful future," Turner told the gathering. The board chairman of Turner Broadcasting System Inc. said that, without a feasible plan, the prospects of creating peace are grim. "You've got to have a vision," Turner said. "We can achieve it." It's too bad that Ted didn't read the manuscript about the Prince of Peace.[79]

In the fall of 1892, D. L. Moody boarded a ship in Southampton bound for New York. Three days into the journey, Moody, lying on his bunk, was startled by a loud noise, and the vessel began to shudder. The large shaft that drove the propeller had broken and smashed through the side of the ship. Water began pouring in and it was soon apparent that the ship would sink.

Moody was no stranger to dangerous situations. He'd been shot at in the Civil War. In Chicago, during the great cholera epidemic, he fearlessly visited the sick and dying. "But on the sinking ship," Moody wrote in his memoirs, "it was different. It was the darkest hour of my life. I had thought myself superior to the fear of death," but that illusion quickly vanished. "I could not endure it."

Moody went to his cabin and on his knees poured out his heart to God. What happened? Moody said, "God heard my cry, and enabled me to say, 'Thy will be done!'" He went to bed and fell asleep. He wrote, "I never slept any more soundly in all my life."

At three in the morning, Moody's son awakened him with good news: a steamer had heard their distress signals. Seven days later, they were towed into safe harbor.[80]

I remember hearing of a young man who went to a minister of Christ in great distress about his spiritual state. He said to the minister, "Sir, can you tell me what I must do to find peace?" The minister replied, "Young man, you are too late." "Oh!" said the young man, "you don't mean to say I am too late to be saved?" "Oh, no," was the reply, "but you are too late to do anything. Jesus did every thing that needed to be done twenty centuries ago."

All men desire peace, but very few desire those things that make for peace. The second of the two most popular Christian greetings is "peace" (eirene). It is roughly the equivalent of the Hebrew shalom. But, though it is related to this word, it also means more.

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[79] The Columbus Dispatch, 5-10-93, p. 2B

[80] Harold J. Sala, Heroes, (Promise, 1998); quoted in Men of Integrity, Vol. 4, no. 2, (March/April 2001).

Above all, peace is God's gift to man, achieved by him at the cross of Christ. It is peace with God (Rom 5:1) and is to express itself both in peace of mind (Philippians 4:6, 7) and in a very practical peace between all those who know God.

This latter peace should be seen, as William Barclay notes: in the home (1 Cor. 7:12-16), between Jew and Gentile (Eph. 2:14-17), within the church (Eph. 4:3; Col. 3:15), and indeed in the relationships of the believer with all men (Heb. 12:14). The apostle Peter suggested its priority for our life: *"….he must seek peace and pursue it." (1 Peter 3:11b).*

However painful or difficult, or, on the other hand, however inconspicuous or humdrum life may be, the Christian finds his peace in accepting and playing his part in the master plan.[81]

In life troubles will come which seem as if they never will pass away. The night and storm look as if they would last forever; but the calm and the morning cannot be stayed; the storm in its very nature is transient. The effort of nature, as that of the human heart, ever is to return to its repose, for God is peace.[82]

Jesus Christ lived in the midst of his enemies. At the end all his disciples deserted him. On the cross he was utterly alone, surrounded by evildoers and mockers. For this cause he had come, to bring peace to the enemies of God. So the Christian, too, belongs not in the seclusion of a cloistered life but in the thick of foes. [83]

I believe it to be a grave mistake to present Christianity as something charming and popular with no offence in it. We cannot blink the fact that gentle Jesus meek and mild was so stiff in His opinions and so inflammatory in His language that He was thrown out of church, stoned, hunted from place to place, and finally gibbeted as a firebrand and a public danger. Whatever His peace was, it was not the peace of an amiable indifference. [84]

Peacemaking is an action that springs out of an attitude. When the heart's wrong, there can't be peace. Selfishness is a gangrene, eating at the very vitals. Sin is a cancer, poisoning the blood. Peace is the rhythm of our wills with Jesus' love-will. Disobedience breaks the music. Failure to keep in touch makes discord. The notes jar and grate. We have broken off. The peace can't get in. Jesus made peace by his blood. We get it only by keeping in full touch with him. [85]

We would do well to acknowledge that which cannot be changed. Edwin Markham put it well:

At the heart of the cyclone tearing the sky And flinging the clouds and the towers by,
Is a place of central calm; So here in the roar of mortal things,
I have a place where my spirit sings, In the hollow of God's palm.

[81] J. B. Phillips (1906–1982)
[82] George Macdonald (1824–1905)
[83] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Christian History, no. 32.
[84] Dorothy L. Sayers in *A Careless Rage for Life*, Christianity Today, Vol. 37, no. 4.
[85] S.D. Gordon in *The Bent-Knee Time*; Christianity Today, Vol. 34, no. 4.

A few years ago Ann Landers wrote a column in which she tried to depict what the earth would be like after a nuclear war. And she asked all of her readers to clip the article and to send it to the White House. The President, Ronald Reagan, wrote her a letter about two weeks later in which he acknowledged that he had received over two hundred clippings. But then he went on to suggest, "I think you sent them to the wrong place. They should have been sent tot he Kremlin."

While it may have been true that much of the problem could be laid at the feet of the Soviet Union rather than the United States, it's also true that we often look at the problem with "those other guys" and fail to examine ourselves.. That's often the problem about peace, isn't it? It's with those other guys. [86]

I've been told that there are places in Europe where you can sink a spade into the earth, and in just two or three spadefuls of earth, you can dig up prehistoric artifacts and also bits of metal from much more modern times. In one spadeful of earth you might come up with a flint fist hatchet, which was used in prehistoric times to crush the skull of an enemy, and in that same bunch of earth, you will also find a bit of shrapnel from some shell fired during the Second World War.

Crushing the skull in the one instance, blowing a person to bits in the other--that is a kind of parable of the history of humankind, isn't it? War after war after war. The absence of peace. [87]

Frustrated? Wondering where to turn? Paul's formula for understanding peace comes from a spiritual perspective, but we might need to make one more acknowledgement: I'm reminded of the Peanuts cartoon with Lucy saying to Charlie Brown, "I hate everything. I hate everybody. I hate the whole wide world!" Charlie says, "But I thought you had inner peace." Lucy replies, "I do have inner peace. But I still have outer obnoxiousness" [88]

Paul has the better response: *"All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: {19} that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. {20} We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. {21} God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Corinthians 5:18-21).*

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. We should also diligently wish to work for peace in this world where peace is difficult to find. We might ask daily these questions:

1. Do I strive to live in harmony with others?
2. Do I strive to be sympathetic to the feelings of others?
3. Do I give the benefit to others I would give to myself?
4. Do I tend to insult or bless?

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[86] Bruce W. Thielemann, *"Hark! The Herald Angels*," Preaching Today, Tape No. 63.

[87] Ibid, Tape No. 63.

[88] Barbara Brokhoff, *New and Improved Jesus?* C.S.S., 1991, p. 53.

5 Do I spread goodwill with my conversation?

6. Do I pray for people to be in harmony with God and others?

You should pray when you're in a praying mood, for it would be sinful to neglect such an opportunity. You should pray when you're not in a praying mood, because it would be sinful to remain in such a condition.

Never let a day begin without it. *"My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O LORD; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up." Psalm 5:3*

Never let a day end without it. *"Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and He shall hear my voice." Psalm 55:17*

Never face a situation/problem without it. *"Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding.." Proverbs 3:5*

Never neglect it when it seems unnecessary. A little boy when asked by minister if he prayed everyday, said, "Not everyday. Sometimes I don't need anything." That's the response of an immature individual.

Keep submitting your heart to God. *"And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful." Colossians 3:15.*

Peace is the deliberate adjustment of my life to the will of God.

Everything starts with your thought life. *"If you sow a thought, you reap an attitude. If you sow an attitude, you reap an action. If you sow an action, you reap a habit."*

"... every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. Do not err, my beloved brethren." James 1:14-16

You can fill your mind with many different things. If you want peace, though, you must fill your mind with God. *"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." Philippians 4:8*

Men and women of the 21st century are worn out, fatigued, and overcommitted. The man with a full resume always pays a price to get it. Something has to suffer when we are an elder, a businessman, a civic leader, and a sportsman. When we run in the fast lane, precious little time remains for God and our family. Wouldn't you like to get out of the fast lane?

Prayerfully ask God to help you make the right choices. If you were speeding down the inside lane of a busy interstate highway at 80 miles an hour and decided to get off the road, you wouldn't swerve sharply without warning. You would turn on your blinker and start to work your way over. Even then you would have to wait for an exit ramp.

God is not so much interested in your position as He is in your attitude, in where you are as in where you are going. When we make the decision to get out of the fast lane, God will help us, will bless the direction in which we are moving. He will empower us to make the adjustment, to find an exit.[89]

Winston Churchill said "an appeaser is one who feeds a crocodile -- hoping it will eat him last." I'm reminded of what happened just prior to World War II. Neville Chamberlain, the British prime minister, had a policy of appeasement in regards to Nazi Germany. Whatever Hitler wanted he gave in return for a guarantee of peace. As he got off the airplane he waved in the air the peace treaty signed by Hitler. He spoke bravely of "peace with honour" and "peace in our time." Just two weeks later Hitler's armies invaded Czechoslovakia.

We have our peace movements, and all we want is peace abroad and at home. But if by peace we mean appeasing tyranny, compromising with gangsters and being silent because we haven't the moral fortitude to speak out against injustice, then this is not real peace. It is a false peace. It is a farce and it is a hoax.[90]

Peace is not an absence of war, it is a virtue, a state of mind, a disposition for benevolence, confidence, justice. [91] Herbert Hoover said, "Peace is not made at the council tables, or by treaties, but in the hearts of men."

> Peace does not mean the end of all our striving, Joy does not mean the drying of our tears;
> Peace is the power that comes to souls arriving Up to the light where God himself appears.
> Joy is the wine that God is ever pouring Into the hearts of those who strive with him,
> Light'ning their eyes to vision and adoring, Strength'ning their arms to warfare glad and grim.[92]

A young soldier was going off to fight in World War II against the Japanese. As his father put him on the train and waved good- bye, he turned with bitter tears and said, "If my son is killed, I hope every Jap in the world is killed!"

A year later the son was killed. Soon $10,000 in life insurance money arrived. The father did a most surprising thing with the money: he sent it to the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board and designated it for missions to the Japanese.

How could the father do this? Obviously, he got the peace, the shalom, that Jesus speaks of in our text.

PEACE

A great many people are trying to make peace, but that has already been done. God has not left it for us to do; all we have to do is to enter into it. Dwight Lyman Moody (1837–1899)

Emotional peace and calm come after doing God's will and not before.

Erwin W. Lutzer (1941–)

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[89] Patrick M. Morley, The Man in the Mirror (Zondervan, 1989), quoted in Men of Integrity, Vol. 2, no. 4.

[90] Billy Graham in, The Quotable Billy Graham. Compiled and Edited by Cort R. Flint and the Staff of Quote, (Anderson, S.C.: Droke House, 1966).

[91] Benedict Spinoza (1632–1677)

[92] Geoffrey Anketell Studdert-Kennedy (1883–1929)

First keep the peace within yourself, then you can also bring peace to others. Thomas à Kempis (c. 1380–1471)

For most men the world is centered in self, which is misery: to have one's world centered in God is peace. Donald Hankey (1874–1917)

God is a tranquil being and abides in a tranquil eternity. So must your spirit become a tranquil and clear little pool, wherein the serene light of God can be mirrored. Gerhard Tersteegen (1697–1769)

If there is righteousness in the heart, there will be beauty in the character. If there is beauty in the character, there will be harmony in the home. If there is harmony in the home, there will be order in the nation. If there is order in the nation, there will be peace in the world. Chinese Proverb

If we have not quiet in our minds, outward comfort will do no more for us than a golden slipper on a gouty foot. John Bunyan (1628–1688)

Five great enemies to peace: greed, ambition, envy, anger, and pride. Petrarch (1304–1374)

It is madness for sheep to talk peace with a wolf. Sir Thomas Fuller (1608–1661)

Nobody studies peace. There are no courses in peace, no examinations, no discoveries, and alas, no advances. We are no farther on the road to peace than were the ancient Greek city-states, and perhaps we're farther away. Sydney J. Harris (1917–1986)

Peace cannot be kept by force. It can only be achieved by understanding. Albert Einstein (1879–1955)

Peace does not dwell in outward things, but within the soul; we may preserve it in the midst of the bitterest pain if our will remain firm and submissive. Peace in this life springs from acquiescence, not in an exemption from suffering. François Fénelon (1651–1715)

Peace is not the absence of conflict from life, but the ability to cope with it.

Peace is one of those things, like happiness, which we are sure to miss if we aim at them directly. Dorothy L. Sayers (1893–1957)

Peace is the deliberate adjustment of my life to the will of God.

Peace is when time doesn't matter as it passes by. Maria Schell

Peace won by compromise is usually a short-lived achievement. Winfield Scott (1786–1866)

To be glad of life because it gives you the chance to love and to work and to play and to look up at the stars—to be satisfied with your possessions but not contented with yourself until you have made the best of

them—to despise nothing in the world except falsehood and meanness, and to fear nothing except cowardice—to be governed by your admirations rather than by your disgusts; to covet nothing that is your neighbor's except his kindness of heart and gentleness of manners—to think seldom of your enemies, often of your friends, and every day of Christ—these are little guideposts on the footpath to peace.

Henry Van Dyke (1852–1933)

To thee, O God, we turn for peace . . . but grant us too the blessed assurance that nothing shall deprive us of that peace, neither ourselves, nor our foolish earthly desires, nor my wild longings, nor the anxious cravings of my heart.

Søren Aabye Kierkegaard (1813–1855)

REST

How shall we rest in God? By giving ourselves wholly to him. If you give yourself by halves, you cannot find full rest; there will ever be a lurking disquiet in that half that is withheld. Martyrs, confessors, and saints have tasted this rest, and "counted themselves happy in that they endured." A countless host of God's faithful servants have drunk deeply of it under the daily burden of a weary life—dull, commonplace, painful, or desolate. All that God has been to them he is ready to be to you. The heart once fairly given to God, with a clear conscience, a fitting rule of life, and a steadfast purpose of obedience, you will find a wonderful sense of rest coming over you.

Jean Nicolas Grou (1731–1803)

Not without design does God write the music of our lives. Be it ours to learn the time, and not be discouraged at the rests. They are not to be slurred over, not to be omitted, not to destroy the melody, not to change the keynote. If we look up, God himself will beat the time for us. With the eye on him, we shall strike the next note full and clear.

John Ruskin (1819–1900)

Devotional Readings

(Psalms 46:10) ""Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.""

(Philippians 2:13) "for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose."

(1 Timothy 6:6-10) "But godliness with contentment is great gain. {7} For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. {8} But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. {9} People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. {10} For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."

(Psalms 77:6) "I remembered my songs in the night. My heart mused and my spirit inquired:"

(Psalms 119:15) "I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways."

(Psalms 119:27) "Let me understand the teaching of your precepts; then I will meditate on your wonders."

(Psalms 119:148) "My eyes stay open through the watches of the night, that I may meditate on your promises."

(Psalms 143:5) "I remember the days of long ago; I meditate on all your works and consider what your hands have done."

(1 Thessalonians 4:11) "Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you,"

7

Experiencing Joy…

Happiness is a feeling. Joy is an attitude. A posture. A position. A place.[93]

It says in the Declaration of Independence that we have the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Those words are the preamble to the American dream. But more than 225 years later, the innocent, hopeful intentions of our founding fathers have become blind and dangerous compulsions.

We all know we can't buy happiness, and we are often surprised by what brings us happiness and frustrated by what we believe *should* make us happy.

It has been suggested that we are becoming a nation of men and women who, in the quest for happiness, all too often fall short of achieving any kind of inner peace. Instead of life's journey being an exhilarating adventure into the unknown, for many of us it is a compulsive and tiring trek, an exhausting journey where the next stop for replenishment never seems to arrive.

George Santayana: "A string of excited, fugitive, miscellaneous pleasures is not happiness; happiness rsides in an imaginative reflection and judgment, when the picture of one's life, or of human life, as it truly has been or is, satisfies the will, and is gladly accepted."

"Many apparently successful people feel that their success is underserved and that one day people will unmark them for the frauds they are. For all the outward trappings of success, they feel hollow inside. They can never rest and enjoy their accomplishments. They need one new success after another. They need constant reassurance from the people around them to still the voice inside them that keeps saying, "If other people knew you the way I know you, they would know what a phony you are.".[94]

[93] Tim Hansel
[94] Howard Kushner

Happiness is not about having what we want…but wanting what we have! In many ways, happiness is within us waiting to be discovered.

Fewer than 10 percent of Americans are deeply committed Christians, says pollster George Gallup, who adds that these people "are far, far happier than the rest of the population." Committed Christians, Gallup found, are more tolerant than the average American, more involved in charitable activities, and are "absolutely committed to prayer." While many more Americans than this 10 percent profess to be Christians, adds Gallup, most actually know little or nothing of Christian beliefs, and act no differently than non-Christians. "Overall," says Gallup, "The Sunday School and religious education system in this country is not working."

They (we) need to discover the difference between happiness and joy! If our goal in life is to match our will to God's in serving Him, then we will always have work to do. In that work we will be content. And in that contentment we will find joy.

The Bible talks plentifully about joy, but it nowhere talks about a "happy Christian." Happiness depends on what happens; joy does not. Remember, Jesus Christ had joy, and He prays *"that they might have My joy fulfilled in themselves.*" [95]

I was told recently of a Russian view of happiness: An Englishman, a Frenchman and a Russian were discussing happiness. "Happiness," said the Englishman, "Is when you return home tired after work and find your slippers warming by the fire." "You English have no romance," said the Frenchman.

"Happiness is having dinner with a beautiful woman at a fine restaurant." "You are both wrong," said the Russian. "True happiness is when you are at home in bed and at 4 a.m. hear a hammering at the door and there stand the secret police, who say to you, 'Ivan Ivanovitch, you are under arrest,' and you say, 'Sorry, Ivan Ivanovitch lives next door.'"

Statistics show that despite conflicts, married people are generally happier, live longer, and contribute more to society than those who remain single or leave a spouse. [96]

People seem to believe that they have an inalienable right to be happy--"I want what I want and I want it now." No one wants to wait for anything and, for the most part, no one has to anymore. Waiting is interpreted as pain. ... People walk into my office and say they are Christians, but I see no difference except that they want to be happy and now expect God to make it so.

The problem is that, in this country, you can have what you want when you want it most of the time. ... People like the fact that they can buy a 50-foot tree and instantly plant it in their yard. Why on earth would anyone want to wait on relationships or wait on God? [97]

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[95] Oswald Chambers in Run Today's Race, from Christianity Today, "Reflections" (8/9/99).

[96] Harold L. Myra, Marriage Partnership, Vol. 5, no. 1.

[97] Psychologist Kim Hall, interviewed in *The Door* (Sept.-Oct. 1992). Christianity Today, Vol. 37, no. 9.

In the grand and deeply moving prophesy of the ancient prophet Isaiah, it was foretold that when Christ comes He would impart to His people *"the oil of joy"* for mourning (Isaiah 61:3). Joy has always been one of the most significant hallmarks of God's people. Joy springs from the presence of God in a person's life!

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's personal experiences certainly proved correct the statement that "the cross of Christ destroyed the equation religion equals happiness." [98]

Millions of men and women across the centuries attest to a transformation in their lives. It is what is meant by Paul in Romans 14:17: *"The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."* God is here! He is alive! He is in charge!

Can this statement be said of you? Now that I know Christ, I'm happier when I'm sad than I was before when I was glad." [99]

I ask you, "Do you have that joy?" It's obvious that many people don't. And you've been around them, haven't you? They're grumps, they're gripers, they're very negative about virtually everything that happens in life, complaining almost all the time. As a result, they just aren't much fun to be around.

One of my favorite stories about a person with a grumpy personality begins with a man going into the doctor's office. As he walked in, he was met by the receptionist. He told her that he had a sore on his chin that he want-ed the doctor to examine.

She said to him, "Down the hall, first door to the right, & take off your clothes." "But ma'am," he said, "it's just a sore on my chin. I don't think all that is necessary." She repeated, "Down the hall, first door to the right, & take off your clothes." "But ma'am," he said. "Down the hall, first door to the right, & take off your clothes."

So he went down the hall, took the first door to the right, walked in & saw another man already sitting there in his boxer shorts, shivering. He said to him, "Boy, that receptionist is really something, isn't she? I just have a little sore on my chin & she told me to come down here, go through this door & take off my clothes." The man in the boxer shorts said, "You think that's bad? I'm the UPS delivery man.

There are some difficult people, aren't there? "Some cause happiness whenever they go; some, whenever they go." And what they need is a personality transplant.

There are only three kinds of persons; those who serve God, having found Him; others who are occupied in seeking Him, not having found Him; while the remainder live without seeking Him, and without having found Him. The first are reasonable and happy, the last are foolish and unhappy; those between are unhappy and reasonable. [100]

Let me give you a definition of "joy." "Joy is an evidence of the presence of God in your life." If God is in your life, if you are filled with the Spirit of God, then this fruit of the Spirit will be obvious in your life. (**J**esus **O**thers **Y**ou)

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[98] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, from a sermon preached in Spain. Christianity Today, Vol. 30, no. 12.
[99] John C. Wheeler

[100] Pascal in *Pensees;* Christianity Today, Vol. 32, no. 2.

Now don't mistake happiness for joy. It's easy to do that. The Bible mentions "joy" or "rejoicing" 330 times. But it only mentions "happiness" 26 times. Happiness depends upon what happens to you. So if all the circumstances are right, then you can be happy. But joy comes from inside.

Kaufmann Kohler states in the *Jewish Encyclopedia* that no language has as many words for joy and rejoicing as does Hebrew. In the Old Testament thirteen Hebrew roots, found in twenty-seven different words, are used primarily for some aspect of joy or joyful participation in religious worship. Hebrew religious ritual demonstrates God as the source of joy.

In contrast to the rituals of other faiths of the East, Israelite worship was essentially a joyous proclamation and celebration. The good Israelite regarded the act of thanking God as the supreme joy of his life. Pure joy is joy in God as both its source and object.

If you want to live longer and have a more effective witness for Christ, let his joy in your heart spill over into happy laughter. When you laugh, your diaphragm goes down, your lungs expand, and you take in two or three times more oxygen than usual. As a result, a surge of energy runs through your body.

Dr. James J. Walsh said, "Few people realize that their health actually varies due to this factor. Happy individuals recover from disease much more quickly than sad, complaining patients; and statistics show that those who laugh live longer."

C. S. Lewis in his autobiography, *Surprised By Joy*, writes, "Joy is never in our power and pleasure is. I doubt whether anyone who has tasted joy would ever, if both were in his power, exchanged it for all the pleasure in the world."

Joy is really the underlying theme of *Philippians* - joy that isn't fickle, needing a lot of "things" to keep it smiling . . . joy that is deep and consistent - the oil that reduces the friction of life.[101]

If we can convince people that we are on to something that's full of joy, they'll stampede one another to follow us. [102]

Clyde Reid says in his book, *Celebrate the Temporary:* "One of the most common obstacles to celebrating life fully is our avoidance of pain. We do everything to escape pain. Our culture reinforces our avoidance of pain by assuring us that we can live a painless life. Advertisements constantly encourage us to believe that life can be pain-free. But to live without pain is a myth. To live without pain is to live half a life, without fullness of life. This is an unmistakable, clear, unalterable fact. Many of us do not realize that pain and joy run together. When we cut ourselves off from pain, we have unwittingly cut ourselves off from joy as well."

Asking the Age-old Question: "What are you looking for?"

(Eccl 2:10-11) "I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor. {11} Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun."

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[101] - Charles R. Swindoll, *Man to Man* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996) 68.
[102] William Treadwell, Leadership, Vol. 1, no. 3.

We are all looking for something that brings JOY. Our perpetual busyness rat-race is a search for JOY!

1. We are trying to find a spiritual experience within the material world.
2. We are trying to find something that validates our life.
3. We are trying for an eternal reality in every day life.
4. We are trying to find "God-with-us" in the material things of life.

Biblical truth: True joy is found only in Jesus Christ! (Gal 5:22) *"But the fruit of the Spirit is…joy…"*

Luke's gospel is the gospel of joy, while Paul's letter to the Philippians is the epistle of joy--even though it was written from prison. The New Testament continues to stress OT usages of joy, but also adds the thought of "joy in suffering and pain." The joy of service is also stressed to a greater degree in the teaching of Christ and the apostles.

Every Life Needs Joy More Than Happiness:

Happiness is external	Joy is internal
Happiness is based on chance	Joy is based on choice
Happiness is based on circumstances	Joy is based on Christ

The Joy of Living

We may put it this way-whatever be the ingredients of the Christian life, and in whatever proportions they are mixed together, joy is one of them. In the Christian life joy always remains a constant. *'Rejoice in the Lord,'* Paul writes to his Philippian friends, and he goes on to repeat his command: *'Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice' (Phil. 3.1; 4-4). 'Rejoice always,'* he writes to the Thessalonians (I Thess. 5.16). It has been said that 'Rejoice!' is the standing-orders of the Christian.

Every virtue and all knowledge is to be irradiated with joy; even the patience and the endurance which might well be bleak and grim things are to be lit with joy. *'The kingdom of heaven,' Paul wrote to the Romans, 'is righteousness and peace and joy' (Rom. 14:17).*

There is no virtue in the Christian life which is not made radiant with joy; there is no circumstance and no occasion which is not illumined with joy. A joyless life is not a Christian life, for joy is the one constant in the recipe for Christian living.

When we examine the references to joy in the New Testament in all their variety and their multiplicity, they fall into a certain pattern, and they tell us of certain spheres in which the Christian joy is specially to be discovered.

(a) There is the joy of Christian fellowship.

The New Testament is full of the simple joy of what can best be called 'togetherness'. It is a joy even to see such fellowship. Paul writes to Philemon to tell him what joy and comfort he has received from the sight of Philemon's love and from the sight of the way in which the saints have been refreshed by Philemon's loving care (Philemon 7).

In the famous saying the heathen looked at the Christian church and said, 'See how these Christians love one another.' It must never be forgotten that one of the greatest evangelizing influences in the world is the sight of true Christian fellowship, and one of the greatest barriers to evangelism is the sight of a church in which fellowship has been lost and destroyed. It is a still greater joy to enjoy Christian fellowship.

It rejoices Paul's heart that his Philippian friends have remembered him with gifts (Phil. 4:10). To see Christian fellowship is great, to be wrapped around in it is greater yet. It is a joy to see Christian fellowship restored.

When Titus came back from the troubled church at Corinth with the news that the breach was healed and fellowship restored, then Paul rejoiced (I1 Cor. 7:7, 13). It is a joy to experience Christian fellowship reunited. The New Testament knows the simple joy of meeting friends again. John trusts that he will meet his friends again, and then his joy will be complete (II John 12).

In the New Testament there is nothing of religion which isolates a man from his fellow-men. The New Testament vividly knows the joy of making friends and keeping friends and reuniting friends, for friendship and reconciliation between man and man are the reflection of fellowship and reconciliation between man and God.

(b) There is the joy of the gospel. *There is the joy of the new discovery.* It may be said that the gospel story begins and ends in joy. It was tidings of great joy that the angels brought to the shepherds (Luke 2.io), and the wise men rejoiced when they saw the star which told them of the birth of the king (Matt. 2.io). So in the beginning there was joy.

There is the joy of receiving the gospel. It was with joy that Zacchaeus received Jesus into his house (Luke 19.6). The Thessalonians received the word with joy (I Thess. i.6). Repeatedly Acts tells of the joy which came to men when the gospel arrived in their midst. Philip's preaching brought joy to Samaria (Acts 8.8); after his baptism the Ethiopian eunuch went on his way rejoicing (Acts 8.39). There was joy in Antioch of Pisidia when the Gentiles heard that the gospel was to leave the synagogue and come out to them (Acts 13.48). The New Testament makes it clear that conversion should be one of the happiest experiences in all the world.

There is the joy of believing. It is Paul's prayer for the Christians at Rome that the God of hope will fill them with all joy and peace in believing (Rom. i5.i3). It is the joy of their faith that Paul wishes to increase for the Philippians (Phil. 1.25). The New Testament makes it clear that Christian belief is followed by Christian joy. It was said of Burns that he was haunted rather than helped by his religion. There have always been those who have made an agony of their religion. But for the New Testament belief and joy go hand in hand.

There is a certain sternness in this Christian joy. It is a joy which rejoices even in discipline and in testing. James bids his readers to count it all joy when testing comes (James 1.2). The Christian joy is like the joy of a woman whose travail has passed and whose child has come (John 16.2 1, 22).

It is a notable thing how often in the New Testament joy and affliction walk hand in hand. In spite of persecution the Christians in Antioch are filled with the Holy Spirit and with joy (Acts 13.52). The Christian may be sorrowful but he is also rejoicing (II Cor. 6:10). The gospel brought tribulation to Thessalonica but it also brought joy (I Thess. 1.6).

This joy in tribulation can be a very wonderful thing, and its wonder lies in the fact that it is endured and undertaken for Jesus Christ. Peter and John left the Sanhedrin and its threats rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus (Acts 5.40. Peter encourages his people by telling them that when they suffer they are sharing the sufferings of Christ himself (I Peter 4. 13).

The most startling passage in the New Testament is in Col. 1.24 where Paul says that he rejoices in his sufferings. *'In my flesh,' he says, 'I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church.'*

How can there be anything lacking in the sufferings of Jesus Christ? How can anyone in any sense complete what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ? Let us take an analogy. It may be that in his laboratory or his operating theatre or his research room a scientist or a surgeon or a physician toils and sweats and labours and suffers and endangers and risks and destroys his own health to find some cure or some help for the pains and ills of men.

But that discovery remains useless until it is taken out from the laboratory and made available for men all over the world. And it may well be that those who take it out to men have to sweat and toil and suffer and sacrifice to make it available. And it may accurately and fitly be said that their sufferings to make the gift available to men fill up and complete the sufferings of the great man who made the original discovery.

The work of Jesus Christ is done and completed. But it has still to be made known to men. Time and time again in history men have laboured and suffered and died to tell men of that which Jesus Christ did for them. And in their sufferings they may well be said to be completing the sufferings of Jesus Christ himself. Here is the great uplifting thought that, if ever our loyalty to Jesus and our service of him cost something, it means that we to are completing the sufferings of Jesus Christ. What higher privilege could there be than that? If this is so, it is true that ours is a joy which no man taketh from us (John 16.22).

(c) There is the joy of Christian work and witness. *There is joy in the sight of God in action.* The Seventy returned with joy, because the devils were vanquished at the name of Christ (Luke10:17). At the sight of Jesus' wonderful works people rejoiced because of the glorious things that were done by him (Luke 13.17; 19.37).

There is joy in the sight of the spread of the gospel. Barnabas was glad when he saw the Gentiles gathered in at Antioch (Acts 11.23). The tale of the spread of the gospel brought great joy to the brethren (Acts 15.3). The gospel is the last thing which any Christian wants to keep to himself. The further it spreads and the more who share it, the greater his joy. There is the joy of the teacher and the preacher in the Christian progress of his people. The news of the obedience of the Christians in Rome has spread abroad and Paul is glad on their behalf (Rom.16:19).

The unity of the congregation is the joy of the minister (Phil. 2.2). Even in his absence Paul rejoices at the steadfastness of the Christians at Colossae and the progress of the Christians at Thessalonica (Col. 2.5; I Thess. 3.9). John rejoices when his children walk in the truth (II John 4). `No greater joy,' he says, 'can I have than this, to hear that my children follow the truth' (III John 4).

It must never be forgotten that, as the New Testament sees it, *the object of all Christian preaching is to bring men joy*. 'These things have I spoken to you,' said Jesus, 'that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full' (John 15.11). Jesus' object in speaking to his disciples was that they might have his joy fulfilled in themselves (John 17.13).

John's aim in writing to his people was that his and their joy might be complete (I John 1.4). It is Paul's desire for the Corinthians that he may work with them for their joy (II Cor. 1.24). Paul would wish to be spared for a little while longer that he may help the Philippians in their progress and joy in the faith (Phil. 1.25).

It may be that a preacher has to awaken sorrow and penitence in his people; it may be that he has to awaken fear within their hearts; it may be that he has to rouse them to self-loathing, and to humiliation. But no Christian sermon can ever end there. The sermon which leaves a man in dark despair is not a Christian sermon, for after the shame and the humiliation of penitence there must be the joy of forgiveness claimed and the love of God experienced. No man should ever rise from a Christian service without the possibility of joy flaming and blazing befbre him.

Stanley Jones tells of Rufus Moseley 'the most bubbling Christian' he ever knew. Someone said of him: 'The first time I heard him I thought he was crazy, but the second time I heard him I knew he was crazy.' Someone once asked Mosely if he thought that Jesus ever laughed. 'I don't know,' he said, 'but he certainly fixed me up so I can laugh.'

It may be that in the end of the day the greatest of all will be the joy in the people whom we have brought to Jesus Christ. To Paul it is the Philippians and the Thessalonians who are his joy and his crown (Phil. 4.1; I Thess. 2.19, 2o). The writer to the Hebrews urges those who are set in leadership and authority to be so faithful to their trust that they may render account at the end of the day not with grief but with joy (Heb. 13.10.

And so we come. to the end, for this joy is nothing other than the joy of God, for the joy of God is the joy of one who finds things which have gone lost, like the shepherd and the lost sheep (Luke 15.5, 7; Matt. 18.13); like the joy of the woman who found the coin that was lost (Luke 15:10); like the joy of the father whose lost son came home (Luke 15.32).

For man and God alike the greatest of all joys is the joy of love reborn and love restored, and the joy of the pastor in his people is nothing other than the joy of God.

SOME ENEMIES OF JOY

Sometimes we're robbed of joy by the differences between generations. There have always been generation gaps, but it seems to me that generation gaps are more obvious now than they've ever been before.

A second enemy of joy is unresolved guilt. A lot of people are unable to accept themselves, & to accept the forgiveness of God. You may have come through a divorce & you feel that you're inferior in the sight of God. Or you may have had a brush with the law & you feel that you're not welcome in God's house. Or that people would not understand if they knew the secrets of your life.

David was the same way in the O.T. He had committed adultery, & he felt enormous guilt over it. He wrestled with the guilt & finally came to God in Psalms 51:12 & prayed, *"Restore to me the joy of your salvation..."*

A third enemy might be a wounded ego. A lot of us walk around with our feelings exposed, just waiting for someone to say the wrong thing or not to say anything at all. And it happens. People don't always act the way we would like. They don't always say the right things. Sometimes they offend us, & our feelings are hurt. We feel unloved & unneeded & left out.

The fourth enemy of joy is unpleasant circumstances. All of us, I think, begin life with unrealistic expectations as to what life is going to be like. I know that I started out thinking, "Well, I'll marry the perfect woman." And I did. "And we'll have perfect children." And we do. And that we would live in the perfect house, & make lots of money. Which we haven't. And we would be wondrously happy all of our lives, & there would never ever be any problems.

But problems do come, & they come to everybody. You may lose your job. Your children may disappoint you. There may be heartaches. Your health may break. Problems do come.

But here's the good news. Even though the circumstances are unpleasant, God still wants to give you joy, to change who you are, & the way you think.

True joy allows us to live with this motto: Today, when I awoke, I suddenly realized that this is the best day of my life, ever! There were times when I wondered if I would make it to today; but I did! And because I did I'm going to celebrate!

Today, I'm going to celebrate what an unbelievable life **I** have had so far: the accomplishments, the many blessings, and, yes, even the hardships because they have served to make me stronger.

I will go through this day with my head held high, and a happy heart. I will marvel at God's seemingly simple gifts: the morning dew, the sun, the clouds, the trees, the flowers, the birds. Today, none of these miraculous creations will escape my notice.

Today, I will share my excitement for life with other **p**eople. I'll make someone smile. I'll go out of my way to perform an unexpected act of kindness for someone I don't even know. Today, I'll give a sincere compliment to someone who seems down. I'll tell a child how special he is, and I'll tell someone I love just how deeply I care for her and how much she means to me.

Today is the day I quit worrying about what I don't have and start being grateful for all the wonderful things God has already given me. I'll remember that to worry is just a waste of time because my faith in God and his Divine Plan ensures everything will be just fine. And tonight, before I go to bed, I'll go outside and raise my eyes to the heavens. I will stand in awe at the beauty of the stars and the moon, and I will praise God for these magnificent treasures. As the day ends and I lay my head down on my pillow, I will thank the Almighty for the

best day of my life. And I will sleep the sleep of a contented child, excited with expectation because I know tomorrow is going to be the best day of my life, ever! [103]

A treadmill becomes a treadmill because it doesn't answer our real needs. It carries us along, gathering momentum because we're secretly feeling worse – we secretly give up hope, as feeling better seems increasingly elusive.

The Workaholic Test

1. Is work the primary source of your identity.
2. Do you believe work is good, and therefore the more you do the better person you are? Do you brag about the "long hours?
3. Do you feel you are unworthy unless you are pushing to the point of fatigue?
4. Do you think you are indispensable; do you often work while you're sick?
5. Do you control your work or does your work control you?

The Eight Characteristics of a 'Driven' Person

1. Are you gratified only by accomplishment, and the need to acquire more?
2. Are you preoccupied with the symbols of accomplishment, status symbols like: titles, office size, flow charts and special privileges?
3. Are you obsessed with growing "it" bigger, faster?
4. Does your personal integrity sometimes lose out to your ambition?
5. Do you sacrifice people and people skills for the job?
6. Do you find ambition is a competition to have and hold onto more than others?
7. Do you have a temper when things don't go your way?
8. Are you abnormally busy, and too busy for the pursuit of ordinary relationships in marriage, family and friendship – even God?

JOY

Great joys, like griefs, are silent. Shackerley Marmion (1603–1639)

Happiness is caused by things that happen around me, and circumstances will mar it; but joy flows right on through trouble; joy flows on through the dark; joy flows in the night as well as in the day; joy flows all

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[103] By Gregory M. Lousig-Nont, Ph.D. from *Chicken Soup for the Surviving Soul,* Copyright 1996 by Jack Canfield, Mark Victor Hansen, Patty Aubery & Nancy Mitchell, R.N.

through persecution and opposition. It is an unceasing fountain bubbling up in the heart; a secret spring the world can't see and doesn't know anything about. The Lord gives his people perpetual joy when they walk in obedience to him. Dwight Lyman Moody (1837–1899)

I cannot choose to be strong, but I can choose to be joyful. And when I am willing to do that, strength will follow. Tim Hansel

I have met people so empty of joy that when I clasped their frosty fingertips it seemed as if I were shaking hands with a northeast storm. Others there are whose hands have sunbeams in them, so that their grasp warms my heart. It may be only the clinging touch of a child's hand, but there is as much potential sunshine in it for me as there is in a loving glance for others. Helen Adams Keller (1880–1968)

I have no understanding of a long-faced Christian. If God is anything, he must be joy. Joe E. Brown (1892–1973)

I know not how God will dispose of me. I am always happy. All the world suffers; and I, who deserve the severest discipline, feel joys so continual and so great that I can scarce contain them. Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection (c. 1605–1691)

If you have no joy in your religion, there's a leak in your Christianity somewhere. Billy Sunday (1862–1935)

Joy has something within itself that is beyond joy and sorrow. This something is called blessedness . . . is asked for and promised in the Bible. It makes the joy of life possible in pleasure and pain, in happiness and unhappiness, in ecstasy and sorrow. Where there is joy, there is fulfillment. And where there is fulfillment, there is joy. Paul Johannes Oskar Tillich (1886–1965)

Joy is distinctly a Christian word and a Christian thing. It is the reverse of happiness. Happiness is the result of what happens of an agreeable sort. Joy has its springs deep down inside. And that spring never runs dry, no matter what happens. Only Jesus gives that joy. He had joy, singing its music within, even under the shadow of the cross.
Samuel Dickey Gordon (1859–1936)

Devotional Readings

(Matthew 6:25) ""Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?"
(John 10:10) "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."
(Philippians 4:4) "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!"

Some needed comments

The snow and deer pictures were taken in Gary and Terry's yard during their first winter in Mentor, Ohio, in 2004-2005. It's easy to see that Terry and I have two great grandsons, Brinson and Aiden, who are pictured at the beginning of many of the chapters. The picture of Brinson holding the dandelion flower at the beginning of chapter 7 has a special story, which is told in two emails sent to the family by their father, Eric:

Gary and Terry Davenport

"One of Brinson and Aiden's favorite things to do on a walk is pick dandelions (and drag large sticks around…I wonder where they got that). By the end of today's walk Aiden has accumulated quite a collection of sticks, branches, rocks, and dandelions. He continuously would drop one at a time and have to reshuffle all his treasure in order to bend over and pick the dropped one back up without dropping the rest. Brinson was satisfied with just one large branch

"Aiden collected every dandelion that we passed but Brinson would not pick any because they weren't big enough…he was holding out for a 'really big one.' We got back to our house and he still had not found a dandelion that met his specs. We decided that we would pray for God to make a really big dandelion for Brinson to find on our next walk. At dinner and at bed time Brinson prayed for it. God says that if we ask in faith he will answer and Brinson fully expects to find his flower from God on our next walk. I invite you to pray along with us. Somewhere in our neighborhood tonight God is bringing up a little seed just for Brinson. It will go unnoticed by everyone except for one little boy…the little boy that it was made for. God is good and faithful…and I know that he will thoroughly enjoy watching Brinson search for his gift."

The next morning the following email and picture came from Eric: "This morning Brinson prayed for his flower for breakfast and as he, Aiden, and Wendy were walking into their school he looked down and saw a big, yellow dandelion by the door. Obviously, he was very excited and kept it with him all day long. If only we all had faith like a child." *(In Him, Eric).*

8
Practicing Patience…

A handful of patience is worth more than a bushel of brains

A train was filled with tired people. Most of them had spent the day traveling through the hot dusty plains and at last evening had come and they all tried to settle down to a sound sleep. However, at one end of the car a man was holding a tiny baby and as night came on the baby became restless and cried more and more. Unable to take it any longer, a big brawny man spoke for the rest of the group. "Why don't you take that baby to its mother?"

There was a moment's pause and then came the reply. "I'm sorry. I'm doin' my best. The baby's mother is in her casket in the baggage car ahead." Again there was an awful silence for a moment.

Then the big man who asked the cruel question was out of his seat and moved toward the man with the motherless child. He apologized for his impatience and unkind remark. He took the tiny baby in his own arms and told the tired father to get some sleep. Then in loving patience he cared for the little child all through the night.

I cannot think of a virtue that is more desperately needed, or harder to produce in our lives, than patience. And we're not often prone to waiting. It reminds me of the prayer offered by the impatient Christian: Dear God, please grant me patience. And I want it right now.

The story is told of a young Christian who went to an older Christian for help. "Will you please pray for me that I may be more patient?" he asked. So they knelt together and the old man began to pray. "Lord, send this young man tribulation in the morning; send this young man tribulation in the afternoon; send this young man..."

At that point the young Christian blurted out, "No, no, I didn't ask you to pray for tribulation. I wanted you to pray for patience." "Ah," responded the wise old Christian, "it's through tribulation that we learn patience."

WHAT IS PATIENCE?

"Patience" (*makrothumia*) is the quality of putting up with others, even when one is severely tried. The importance of patience is evidenced by its being most often used of the character of God, as in the great text from Joel: *"Return to the LORD, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and repents of evil" (2:13, RSV).*

Ulrike Ruffert had an interesting take on this, as well: "Patience is the ability to put up with people you'd like to put down."

"Patience is self-restraint which does not hastily retaliate against a wrong." That's pretty good. When someone does you a wrong, how do you respond - with patience or anger?

Here's another: "Patience is the ability to accept delay or disappointment graciously." How do you deal with delay or disappointment? For some that's really tough. Yet, patience is the ability to accept it without becoming upset.

Finally, perhaps this speaks to each of us? "Patience is the powerful attribute that enables a man or woman to remain steadfast under strain - and continue pressing on."

Maybe that is where some of us are. We're dealing with difficult circumstances. We're a raising a child, or we're caring for aging parents, or maybe we've had a loved one who is ill and we've spent long hours at the hospital or nursing home.

We're weary, but patience is the quality that says, "This too, will pass. It's almost over. I can keep on keeping on."

This is my favorite definition: "Patience is a calm endurance based on the certain knowledge that God is in control."

In the midst of a storm, a little bird was clinging to the limb of a tree, seemingly calm and unafraid. As the wind tore at the limbs of the tree, the bird continued to look the storm in the face, as if to say, "Shake me off; I still have wings." [104]

From the spiritual realm, and because of our devotion to petitions through prayer to God, we learn valuable lessons. As a rule, prayer is answered and funds come in, but if we are kept waiting, the spiritual blessing that is the outcome is far more precious than exemption from the trial. [105]

The word translated for patience (m*akrothumia)* expresses a certain attitude both to people and to events. It expresses the attitude to people which never loses patience with them, however unreasonable they may be, and which never loses hope for them, however unlovely and unteachable they may be.

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[104] Wayne A. Lamb in *100 Meditations on Hope*; Christianity Today, Vol. 40, no. 4.
[105] J. Hudson Taylor (1832-1905), English Missionary to China, Founder of the China Inland Mission. "*Money II*," Christian History, Issue 19.

It expresses the attitude to events which never admits defeat, and which never loses its hope and its faith, however dark the situation may be, and however incomprehensible events may be, and however sore the chastening of God may be.

The story is told of an artist who went to visit an old friend. When he arrived, she was weeping. He asked why. She showed him a beautiful handkerchief that had great sentimental value, but which had been ruined by a spot of indelible ink.

The artist asked her to let him have the handkerchief, which he returned to her by mail a few days later. When she opened the package she could hardly believe her eyes. The artist, using the inkblot as a base, had drawn on the handkerchief a design of great beauty. Now it was more beautiful and more valuable than ever.

Well, as desirable as patience may be, as the young Christian found out, it is not easy to develop patience. For instance, I think developing patience is difficult because it **goes against human nature.** We aren't born patient, are we?

When a baby wakes up in the middle of the night and is hungry, or its diaper is wet, it doesn't lie there and think, "I know Mom and Dad are tired. So I'll just wait until a more convenient time to let them know that I need something to eat or my diaper changed."

No! That baby cries impatiently and continues to cry until it receives the attention it demands. Children aren't very patient. Have you ever traveled with a child? That can be quite an experience.

How about the little 4-year-old boy who was traveling with his mother and constantly asking the same question over and over again: "When are we going to get there? When are we going to get there?"

Finally, the mother got so irritated that she said, "We still have 90 more miles to go. So don't ask me again when we're going to get there."

The boy was silent for a long time. Then he timidly asked, "Mom, will I still be four when we get there?"

A second reason why developing patience is difficult. It's because there are weeds of pride, selfishness and anger that can choke out the fruit of patience.

A couple of years ago a survey revealed that we have become an impatient and often times angry nation. You see it at work. You see it in school. You see it on the highways.

A man's car stalled in heavy traffic just as the light turned green. All his frantic efforts to get the car started failed, and a chorus of honking horns behind him made matters worse. He finally got out of his car and walked back to the first driver behind him and said, "I'm sorry, but I can't seem to get my car started. If you'll go up there and give it a try, I'll stay here and honk your horn for you."

Thirdly, patience is difficult to develop because it's contrary to our culture. We don't live in a relaxed culture. Go to most third world countries today and you'll find a much different lifestyle. They're more laid back. They think, "Whatever happens, happens. It'll be all right." And they wonder why we're so uptight.

It's because we're on a fast track, and in a rat race. We're in a world of fast food and quick print and expressways and 10-minute oil changes and instant cameras and microwaves.

One Calvin and Hobbes comic strip pictured his father sitting at a computer saying, "It used to be that if a client wanted something done in a week it was considered a rush job, and he would be lucky to get it. Now, with modems, faxes, and car phones everybody wants everything instantly." About that time Calvin walks by holding a microwave dinner, reading the instructions. "It takes six minutes to microwave this," he says. “Who’s got that kind of time?"

I think another reason that patience is difficult to develop is because we have convinced ourselves that impatience is a virtue. So you hear people say, "Well, I may be impatient, but I get things done."

We like "type A" personalities, hard-charging people who get things done, and somehow impatience is seen as a virtue. Proverbs 14:29 says, *"A patient man has great understanding, but a quick-tempered man displays folly." Proverbs 15:18 says, "A hot-tempered man stirs up dissension, but a patient man calms a quarrel."*

A young man was very upset with his mother. They had argued, and at work that day he wrote her an angry letter giving all the things that he felt were wrong with her. It was a very nasty letter. After sealing the envelope, he handed it to a co-worker to mail it for him. Well, the co-worker knew what was in the letter, so he put it in his pocket. "Maybe he’ll have second thoughts about it. I can always mail it tomorrow," he thought.

The next day, when he went to work, his friend was sitting there all forlorn, saying, "Oh, I wish I had never written that letter. I’d give $100 to have it back." Well, you know what happened, don’t you? His friend pulled it out of his pocket and said, "Here it is."

Patience in marriage works a lot like faith. It demonstrates the certainty that what we hope for--physical, emotional, spiritual oneness--is waiting for us, even though we cannot see it in the here and now. [106]

Sometimes expectations push us, making us grow in ways we wouldn't otherwise. You can't just automatically say no. Maybe God is opening a door. [107]

Thomas a Kempis offers this advice: “First put yourself at peace, and then you may the better make others be at peace. A peaceful and patient man is of more profit to himself and to others, too, than a learned man who has no peace.”

Christians, of all people, should understand that the MasterCard mentality is not the way to master life. The pattern Jesus established was one of deferring desires--not because the fulfillment of desiring is wrong, but because "my time has not yet come." Most of us think our time has come five minutes after the desire first pops into our minds. [108]

People often discuss the importance of delayed gratification; what do you mean when you talk about "displaced gratification"? In delayed gratification, we put off something so that we can enjoy something even better later on--avoiding a "sex life" before marriage, for instance, so that we can more fully enter into a deeper love of the marital union. In displaced gratification, we put off something so that the gratification can go to somebody else. Within marriage, for example, we put our spouse's needs ahead of our own.

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[106] Harold B. Smith, *Marriage Partnership*, Vol. 9, no. 1.
[107] Bonnie Halcomb, *Leadership*, Vol. 5, no. 3.
[108] Joel Belz in *World* (May 11, 1987). Christianity Today, Vol. 33, no. 8.

When William Booth finally left the Salvation Army, he sent a one-word telegram to every member of his army. That one word embodied the guiding principle of Booth's life: "Others."

What is the reward of displaced gratification? The man or woman who understands delayed and displaced gratification realizes that "others" are what it's all about. Instead of demanding our rights and satisfaction, we can work for the rights of others, we can find fulfillment in seeing other people satisfied, and we can serve instead of trying to conquer. Displaced gratification is the oil that keeps our society running smoothly.

Where do you draw inspiration to live this way? Learning to put the needs of others above your own is the "displaced gratification" my father taught me about. The ultimate understanding of displaced gratification is reflected in the life of Christ, who gave up heaven for earth, who could have been crowned king, and who could have called ten thousand angels to rescue Him from the cross. Instead He accepted brutal, humiliating torture on our behalf. He put serving others ahead of serving His own needs. [109]

Would you consider yourself to be a patient person? Do you show patience in your life? No doubt many of us struggle with this. No doubt we all could use a little more patience. It's so often the case, is it not, that we allow ourselves to become guilty of impatience.

You know, it can even be said that in some ways, impatience lies at the heart of almost every sin you can think of. Just look back to the beginning of sin, when Eve was tempted by the serpent in the garden of Eden. The serpent tells her that if she were to eat of the forbidden fruit, she could be like God, knowing good and evil. She saw that the tree was desirable for gaining wisdom. She became impatient for that wisdom, she became impatient with the command of God which said to her that she did not need to have that wisdom, so she ate, and she gave some to her husband, and he ate.

We should simply wait on him. So doing, we shall be directed, supplied, protected, corrected, and rewarded. [110]

Consider also the Ten Commandments, and how impatience will cause you to break each and every one of them:

- Command 1: You shall have no other gods before me. Why would we want other gods? Because we are impatient with God, and we think that perhaps some other gods can give us more of what we want than God.
- Command 2: no graven images. We make graven images because we are impatient with the way of worship which God commands of us in his Word, we impatiently want to make an image of Him that we can see. Remember how the Israelites were impatient when Moses was up on the mountain, so they made a golden calf.
- Command 3: no taking God's name in vain. We take His name in vain in cursing because we become impatient in reaction to something which has happened to us. Can you think of any instance where you would swear in anger when you are not being impatient?

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[109] John Ashcroft, former governor of Missouri, was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1994. He is author of *Lessons from a Father to His Son*; Men of Integrity, Vol. 1, no. 2.

[110] Vance Havner, Christian Reader, Vol. 32, no. 4.

- Command 4: remember the Sabbath. We break Sabbath, doing unnecessary work because we are impatient to see that that work gets done. We can't wait until Monday to do what we want to do.
- Command 5: honor your parents. You do not show your parents the proper respect which God commands of you because you are impatient with their weaknesses.
- Command 6: no killing. You show anger toward your neighbor, perhaps even going so far as killing them, because you believe that they did something wrong to you, and you are too impatient to leave it to God to avenge.
- Command 7: no adultery. You lust after someone sexually, you commit some sexual sin, because you are too impatient with respect to having your physical desires satisfied in the proper context of marriage.
- Command 8: no stealing. You steal from your neighbor, because you are too impatient to actually earn for yourself that which you stole. Someone steals a car to sell for money, they are too impatient to earn their money in a legitimate job.
- Command 9: no bearing false witness. Someone lies about their neighbor, bearing false witness against them, because they are too impatient to let the truth takes its course.
- Command 10: no coveting. You envy what belongs to your neighbor, because you impatiently believe that God has not given you enough. You are impatient with His providence, knowing that He has promised to take care of all your needs, but not believing that he is taking care of them fast enough.

I would dare say that there is hardly a sin which you could think of which somehow is not connected, if not directly, than at least indirectly, to impatience.

It should not be surprising then, that impatience is so completely contrary to the will of God. It should not surprise us that God commands his people to be patient. As Ephesians 4:2 says, *"Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love."*

And Colossians 3:12 - *"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience"*

We have been called by God to live as his chosen, redeemed people, and as redeemed people, washed clean by the blood of Jesus Christ, we should be living as patient and humble people, putting up with one another as people who share a common bond of love.

This is not just simple moralism here. I am not just trying to promote a feel-good, let's-all-try-to-get-along, sort of attitude. People of God, this is the will of God for His people. This is what redeemed people will be like, having the Holy Spirit live in their hearts, producing in them the fruit of patience. This is the will of our God for our entire lives.

We must be patient with our brothers and sisters in the Lord. But now, consider this: if you are sitting there thinking, "Yeah, that's right, that so-and-so over there, he sure has to be more patient", then you yourself are being impatient with that brother or sister, and you had better look to your own heart to see where you yourself can be more patient.

In a crowded department store a young mother had the added difficulty of a small girl pulling and tugging at her side and whispering incessantly. Suddenly the harassed mother pleaded softly, "Quiet, Susan, just calm yourself, and take it easy."

An admiring clerk commented on the mother's psychology, then turned to the child, "So your name is Susan."

"Oh, no," interrupted the mother, "her name's Joan. I'm Susan."

Harvey Mackay in his book *Swim with the Sharks* tells of the 88 year old President of Japan's largest enterprise, Matsushita Electric, answering an interviewer's questions on the future of his company. The interview went as follows:

Question: "Mr. President, does your company have long-range goals?"

Answer: "Yes."

Question: "How long are your long-range goals?"

Answer: "Two hundred fifty years."

Question: "What do you need to carry them out?"

Answer: "Patience."

A chaplain who was ministering to a seriously wounded soldier was requested by the dying man to write a letter to his former Sunday school teacher. "Tell her I died a Christian because of what she taught me in that class in church. The memory of her earnest pleas and the warmth of her love as she asked us to accept Jesus has stayed with me. Tell her I'll meet her in Heaven." The message was sent, and some time later the chaplain received this reply: "May God forgive me. Just last month I resigned my position and abandoned my Sunday school pupils because I felt my work had been fruitless. How I regret my impatience and lack of faith! I shall ask my minister to let me go back to teaching. I have learned that when one sows for God, the reaping is both sure and blessed!"

PATIENCE

“Take your needle, my child, and work at your pattern; it will come out a rose by and by.” Life is like that; one stitch at a time taken patiently, and the pattern will come out all right like embroidery.

Oliver Wendell Holmes (1809–1894)

A delay is better than a disaster.

All comes at the proper time to him who knows how to wait.

Saint Vincent de Paul (1581–1660)

Be patient with everyone, but above all with yourself.

Saint Francis of Sales (1567–1622)

Don’t jump to conclusions too quickly; many things lie unsolved, and the biggest test of all is that God looks as if he were totally indifferent.
Oswald Chambers (1874–1917)

God often permits us to be perplexed so that we may learn patience. T. J. Bach

Have patience! All things are difficult before they become easy.
Persian Proverb

Never become irritable while waiting; if you are patient, you’ll find that you can wait much faster.

Never think that God’s delays are God’s denials. Hold on; hold fast; hold out. Patience is genius. Comte Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon (1707–1788)

One moment of patience may prevent disaster; one moment of impatience may ruin a life. Chinese Proverb

Patience and diligence, like faith, remove mountains. William Penn (1644–1718)

Patience means waiting without anxiety. Saint Francis of Sales (1567–1622)

Patience: accepting a difficult situation without giving God a deadline to remove it. Bill Gothard

Please be patient. God isn’t finished with me yet.

The times we find ourselves having to wait on others may be the perfect opportunities to train ourselves to wait on the Lord. Joni Eareckson Tada

We do not obtain the most precious gifts by going in search of them but by waiting for them. Simone Weil (1909–1943)

We must wait for God, long, meekly, in the wind and wet, in the thunder and lightning, in the cold and the dark. Wait, and he will come. He never comes to those who do not wait. Frederick William Faber (1814–1863)

Devotional Readings

(Romans 2:4) "Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?"

(Romans 9:22) "What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath--prepared for destruction?"

(Galatians 5:22) "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,"

(Colossians 3:12) "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience."

(1 Timothy 1:16) "But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life."

(2 Timothy 3:10) "You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance,"

(2 Timothy 4:2) "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction."

(Hebrews 6:12) "We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised."

(James 5:10) "Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord."

(2 Peter 3:15) "Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him."

9

Being a Blessing…

There is no plant in the ground but is full of his virtue. There is no form in the strand but is full of his blessing.[111]

"A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God."

Solomon made it clear that not only were the blessings from God, but even the *enjoyment of the blessings* was God's gift to us (v. 24). He considered it "evil" if a person had all the blessings of life from God but could not enjoy them (6:1-5).

This is the first of six "conclusions" in Ecclesiastes, each of which emphasizes the importance of accepting life as God's gift…enjoying it in God's will. Solomon is not advocating "Eat, drink and be merry, for to-morrow we die!" That is the philosophy of fatalism not faith. Rather, he is saying, "Thank God for what you do have, and enjoy it to the glory of God."

Paul gave his approval to this attitude when he exhorted us to trust *"in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy" (1 Tim. 6:17, nkjv).*

It is easy to see why the Jewish people read Ecclesiastes at the Feast of Tabernacles, for Tabernacles is their great time of thanksgiving and rejoicing for God's abundant provision of their needs.

The important thing is that we seek to please the Lord (v. 26) and trust Him to meet every need. God wants to give us wisdom, knowledge, and joy; these three gifts enable us to appreciate God's blessings and take pleasure in them.

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[111] Carmina Gadelica, quoted in "*Reflections*," Christianity Today, Vol. 44, No. 13.

It is not enough to possess “things”; we must also possess the kind of character that enables us to use “things” wisely and enjoy them properly.

It is related that during the Civil War a Confederate soldier who was placed far out in a lonely wood to watch suddenly felt a strange dread and fear come over him. The moon was shining dimly in the deeply wooded place. And while it seemed strange and unwise, he felt constrained to sing softly the old song, "Jesus, Lover of my soul let me to Thy bosom fly," and the stanza, "Other refuge have I none." This he did, and immediately felt relieved of his fear.

A few years later, when the war was over, he was at a meeting and sang the same song. After the song, a stranger came up to him and said, "I never saw you before, but I have heard that voice before." Then he asked him if he sang that song one night during the war. Then he related to him how he and some of his men, who were Union soldiers, were hidden behind trees and had their guns turned on him and were ready to fire! "But," said he, "as we heard that song, 'Jesus, Lover of my soul,' and, 'Other refuge have I none,' I said to my men, Don't shoot that man,' and we slipped away and left you. I shall never forget the voice I heard that night."

There is only one refuge and that is Jesus, and we need Him at the end of the way.[112]

Allen Redpath wrote that you never lighten the load unless you first have felt the pressure in your own soul. You are never used of God to bring blessing until God has opened your eyes and made you see things as they really are.

All that is required to make men unmindful of what they owe to God for any blessing is that they should receive that blessing often and regularly. [113]

The story is told of an only survivor of a wreck who was thrown on an uninhabited island. After a while he managed to build himself a hut, in which he placed the little all that he had saved from the ship. He prayed to God for deliverance and anxiously scanned the horizon each day to hail any passing ship. One day on returning from a hunt for food, he was horrified to find his hut in flames. All he had was going up in smoke! The worst had happened, it appeared; but that which seemed to have happened for the worst was in reality for the best. To the man's limited vision it was the worst. To God's infinite wisdom it was the best, for which he had prayed. The next day a ship arrived. "We saw your smoke signal," the captain said.

That hardship can actually be a blessing--or "a severe mercy," to recall Sheldon Vanauken's book of that title--is a profoundly Christian insight seldom heard these days, even from the clergy, who so often seem preoccupied with being "pastoral" or superficially popular. [114]

I've seen numerous ‘pictures’ of the pilgrims at the first American Thanksgiving. While their circumstances were alluded to slightly, it is often not realized the depth of their supposed despair.

Do you know half of their number died the first year they were here? They had a hard time, and it was a cold winter. Dangers lurked everywhere, but those pilgrims didn't think of the death of their loved ones and the

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[112] William Moses Tidwell, "*Pointed Illustrations*.

[113] Richard Whately (1787–1863)

[114] Editorial in *New Oxford Review* (July-Aug. l988). Christianity Today, Vol. 34, no. 6.

dangers and the cold weather. They didn't let that obscure the blessings of God. They went together, and they thanked the Lord for the blessings they had received. Sometimes we need to put down our assets alongside our losses. Everyone of us is more blessed than we are hurt.

I remember reading a story not long ago about the "elevated" in Chicago--a train that when it comes into the downtown, it's on a high track. A young man was riding that train day after day as a commuter. And as the train slowed up for the station where he got off, he could look through an open curtain into a room of a building and see a woman lying in a bed.

She was there day after day, for a long time, obviously quite ill. He began to get interested in her since he saw her every day. Finally he determined to find out her name. He discovered her address, and he wrote her a card, assuring her that he was praying for her recovery. He signed it: "The young man on the elevated."

A few weeks later, he pulled into the station, and he looked through that window and the bed was empty. Instead there was a great huge sign: GOD BLESS YOU, MY FRIEND ON THE ELEVATED! [115]

It sounds rather trite to say it, but it is a fact that the everyday blessings of life are so basic that we often take them for granted.

The late Dr. Paul Rees tells the true story of a man whose job was to transport people who had been committed to a mental hospital. After delivering a patient one day, he was walking back to his car when he heard a voice call out, "Hey you!" It came from one of the upper floors. Looking up, the man called back, "Are you speaking to me?" "Yes, I am," came the reply, "I want to ask you a question. Have you ever thanked God that you have a healthy mind?" To say the least, the driver was stunned. He said, "I suddenly realized that I had been bringing people to this facility for some fifteen years. Yet I had never once thanked God for a good mind!"

When spring came to England after the devastating bombing raids of 1941 by Nazi Germany, a strange thing occurred. It brought a beautiful, botanical resurrection. The explosions brought to the surface seeds of plants which were thought to be extinct. Some 95 different flowers and shrubs were found suddenly growing and blooming in the bomb-pocked landscape of England. Likewise, adversity, in life often turns up unexpected and undeveloped parts of our lives. The bombs of adversity and suffering often resurrect long-dormant flowers. [116]

It doesn't say enough , but what it does say is good. I'm referring to Ralph Waldo Emerson's reflection on success.

How do you measure success? To laugh often and much;

To win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children; To earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends;

To appreciate beauty; To find the best in others

To leave the world a bit better whether by a healthy child, a redeemed social condition, or a job well done;

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[115] William Hinson, *"A Breath of Fresh Air,"* Preaching Today, Tape No. 114.
[116] The Sermon Builder, February 1983, p. 40.

To know even one other life has breathed because you lived, this is to have succeeded.[117]

We had better bear our troubles bravely than try to escape them. Indeed, sometimes God will place certain obstacles in the life of a Christian to prevent sin or harm. However, if we try to remove these obstacles, we will ultimately come to regret it.

We must remember that no matter how difficult our tribulations may seem to us, there are always others who are in a worse situation than us!

A certified public accountant did something that maybe all of us should do. He decided to open a journal with God. He wanted to write everything that God gave him and everything that he gave to God. He started keeping a debit and credit book with God.

If someone did him a favor, he put it down as God's gift to him. He credited God with the sun, his food, his health, his friends and relatives, and a thousand other benefits he received. On the other hand, he put down what he did for God. Finally he gave up saying, "It is impossible for me to balance the books. I find that God is indeed my creditor and what I have done for Him is next to nothing." [118]

Dr. James J. Walsh said, "Few people realize that their health actually varies due to this factor. Happy individuals recover from disease much more quickly than sad, complaining patients; and statistics show that those who laugh live longer."

BLESSINGS

Every misery I miss is a new blessing. Izaak Walton (1593–1683)

If you don't get everything you want, think of the things you don't get that you don't want. Oscar Wilde (1854–1900)

It would be a blessing if each human being were stricken blind and deaf for a few days at some time during his adult life. Darkness would make him more appreciative of sight; silence would teach him the joys of sound. Helen Adams Keller (1880–1968)

Reflect upon your present blessings of which every man has many; not on your past misfortunes of which all men have some. Charles Dickens (1812–1870).

Devotional Readings

(Matthew 5:1-12) "Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, {2} and he began to teach them, saying: {3} "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. {4} Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. {5} Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. {6} Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. {7} Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. {8} Blessed are the pure

[117] Poem by Ralph Waldo Emerson, quoted in *Freedom for Ministry*, By Richard John Neuhaus, (Harper and Row, 1956), p. 90.
[118] PULPIT HELPS, July, 1991

in heart, for they will see God. {9} Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. {10} Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. {11} "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. {12} Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

10
Accepting Authority…

Our world is fast becoming a madhouse, and the inmates are trying to run the asylum. It is a strange time when the patients are writing the prescriptions, the students are threatening to run the schools, the children to manage the homes, and church members—not the Holy Spirit—to direct the churches.[119]

The descriptive phrase has long caught my attention: *Sons of Thunder*. It is the signature title given to James and John, the sons of Zebedee, two of Jesus' apostles.

They were in the fishing business so they knew what it meant to work long hours. They were able to stay up late, concentrate on a given task, and certainly usually had dirty hands.

But they longed for something more grandeur.

They were quick to follow our Lord when He called them. They were among the inner three (along with Peter), And they were faithful to their calling, dying for the cause of Christ after denying self and living for him in their life.

They revealed their ambition and were taught a valuable lesson following a request likely presented on their behalf by their loving and devoted mother (Matthew 20:17-28): *"Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom."*

The incident recorded in this section happened while Jesus and His disciples were going up to Jerusalem for the last time, journeying via Jericho, from Ephraim in the wilderness.

The ambitious request for the chief places of honor in the kingdom was therefore made little more than a week before their Lord was crucified. How little must they have dreamed what was coming!

[119] Vance Havner

Jesus spoke about a cross, but they were interested in a crown. They wanted reserved seats on special thrones! There were several things wrong with their request. To begin with, it was born in ignorance. *"Ye know not what ye ask,"* Jesus replied. Little did Salome realize that the path to the throne is a difficult one. James was the first of the disciples to be martyred, and John had to endure hard days on the Isle of Patmos. These three believers wanted *their* will, not God's will, and they wanted it *their* way.

Another factor was their lack of heavenly direction. They were thinking like *the world:* James and John wanted to *"lord it over"* the other disciples the way the unsaved Gentile rulers lorded it over their subjects. Their request was *fleshly* (sensual), because they were selfishly asking for glory for themselves, not for the Lord. No doubt they felt relieved that they had gotten to Jesus with this request before Peter did!

Finally, the request was not only of the world and the flesh, but it was of *the devil*. It was motivated by pride. Satan had sought a throne (Isa. 14:12-15) and had been cast down. Satan had offered Jesus a throne and had been refused (Matt. 4:8-11).

Satan magnifies *the end* (a throne) but not *the means* to that end. Jesus warned Salome and her sons that the special thrones were available to those who were worthy of them. There are no shortcuts in the kingdom of God.

The result of this request was "indignation" on the part of the other disciples—probably because they had not thought of it first! The wisdom from above always leads to peace; the wisdom of this world leads to war (James 3:13-4:3). Selfishness will only result in dissension and division.

This disagreement gave Jesus the opportunity to teach a practical lesson on leadership. In His kingdom, we must not follow the examples of the world. Our example is Jesus, not some corporation president or wealthy celebrity. Jesus came as a servant; therefore, we should serve one another. He came to give His life; therefore, we should give our lives in service to Him and others.[120]

William Barclay offers a three-fold observation. It sheds light in three directions. First, it sheds a light on the *disciples*. It tells us three things about them. It tells us of their *ambition*. They were still thinking in terms of personal reward and personal distinction; and they were thinking of personal success without personal sacrifice. They wanted Jesus with a royal command to ensure for them a princely life. Every man has to learn that true greatness lies, not in dominance, but in service; and that in every sphere the price of greatness must be paid.

That is on the debit side of the account of the disciples; but there is much on the credit side. There is no incident which so demonstrates their *invincible faith in Jesus*. Think of when this request was made. It was made after a series of announcements by Jesus that ahead of him lay an inescapable Cross; it was made at a moment when the air was heavy with the atmosphere of tragedy and the sense of foreboding. And yet in spite of that the disciples are thinking of a Kingdom.

It is of immense significance to see that, even in a world in which the dark was coming down, the disciples would not abandon the conviction that the victory belonged to Jesus. In Christianity there must always be this invincible optimism in the moment when things are conspiring to drive a man to despair.

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[120] Warren Wiersbe, *Be Series…Matthew.*

Still further, here is demonstrated the *unshakable loyalty* of the disciples. Even when they were bluntly told that there lay ahead a bitter cup, it never struck them to turn back; they were determined to drink it. If to conquer with Christ meant to suffer with Christ, they were perfectly willing to face that suffering.

It is easy to condemn the disciples, but the faith and the loyalty which lay behind the ambition must never be forgotten.

Out in the world, said Jesus, it is quite true that the great man is the man who controls others; the man to whose word of command others must leap; the man who with a wave of his hand can have his slightest need supplied. Out in the world there was the Roman governor with his retinue and the eastern potentate with his slaves. The world counts them great. But among my followers service alone is the badge of greatness.

Greatness does not consist in commanding others to do things for you; it consists in doing things for others; and the greater the service, the greater the honour. Jesus uses a kind of gradation. "If you wish to be *great*," he says, "be a *servant*; if you wish to be *first of all* be a *slave*." Here is the Christian revolution; here is the complete reversal of all the world's standards. A complete new set of values has been brought into life.

The strange thing is that instinctively the world itself has accepted these standards. The world knows quite well that a good man is a man who serves his fellow-men. The world will respect, and admire, and sometimes fear, the man of power; but it will love the man of love. The doctor who will come out at any time of the day or night to serve and save his patients; the parson who is always on the road amongst his people; the employer who takes an active interest in the lives and troubles of his employees; the person to whom we can go and never be made to feel a nuisance-these are the people whom all men love, and in whom instinctively they see Jesus Christ.

John Fletcher recounted a situation worthy of our consideration, teaching an obvious lesson: One day having offended his father who threatened to correct him, he did not dare to come into his presence but retired into the garden. When he saw him coming toward him, he ran away with all speed. But he was presently struck with deep remorse, and said to himself: "What! Do I run away from my father? Perhaps I shall live to have a son that will run away from me!" And it was several years before the impression which he then received was worn off.

You may have read about the Ohio college graduate who placed a contraceptive on his mortar board as he went forward to get his degree - and had a stuffed parrot on his shoulder.

Now I know a lot of people get a kick out of graduation. But the following Monday this graduate was to report to the Great American Insurance Company in Cincinnati for a $35,000-a-year job as an internal auditor. The following Monday he was summoned to the office and fired for showing "a total disrespect for authority." Out of control. [121]

When Toyohiko Kagawa first came into contact with Christ-ianity, he felt its fascination, until one day the cry burst from him: "O God, make me like Christ." To be like Christ he went to live in the slums, even though

[121] Ben Haden, *Changed Lives*

he himself was suffering from tuberculosis. It seemed the last place on earth to which a man in his condition should have gone.

Cecil Northcott in *Famous Life Decisions* tells of what Kagawa did. He went to live in a six foot by six hut in a Tokyo slum. "On his first night he was asked to share his bed with a man suffering from contagious itch. That was a test of his faith. Would he go back on his point of no return? No. He welcomed his bed-fellow. Then a beggar asked for his shirt and got it. Next day he was back for Kagawa's coat and trousers, and got them too. Kagawa was left standing in a ragged old kimono. The slum dwellers of Tokyo laughed at him, but they came to respect him. He stood in the driving rain to preach, coughing all the time. 'God is love,' he shouted. 'God is love. Where love is, there is God.' He often fell down exhausted, and the rough men of the slums carried him gently back to his hut."

Kagawa himself wrote: "God dwells among the lowliest of men. He sits on the dust heap among the prison convicts. He stands with the juvenile delinquents. He is there with the beggars. He is among the sick, he stands with the unemployed. Therefore let him who would meet God visit the prison cell before going to the temple. Before he goes to Church let him visit the hospital. Before he reads his Bible let him help the beggar."

Therein is greatness. The world may assess a man's greatness by the number of people whom he controls and who are at his beck and call; or by his intellectual standing and his academic eminence; or by the number of committees of which he is a member; or by the size of his bank balance and the material possessions which he has amassed; but in the assessment of Jesus Christ these things are irrelevant. His assessment is quite simply-how many people has he helped? [122]

Colin Urquhart understood that if you accept the authority of Jesus in your life, then you accept the authority of his words.

Self-chosen authority is an impertinence. Jesus said that the great ones in this world exercise authority but that in his kingdom it is not so; no one exercises authority over another because in his kingdom the king is servant of all. If a saint tries to exercise authority, it is a proof that he is not rightly related to Jesus Christ. [123]

AUTHORITY

Authority is God-ordained, but authoritarianism and raw power, in almost all forms, is dangerous. James C. Dobson (1936–)

If you accept the authority of Jesus in your life, then you accept the authority of his words. Colin Urquhart (1940–)

Devotional Scriptures

(Matthew 8:9) "For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it.""

[122] William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew.*
[123] Oswald Chambers (1874–1917)

(Matthew 9:6) "But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. . . ." Then he said to the paralytic, "Get up, take your mat and go home.""

(Matthew 9:8) "When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe; and they praised God, who had given such authority to men."

(Matthew 10:1) "He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness."

(Matthew 20:25) "Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them."

(Matthew 21:23-24) "Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. "By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you this authority?" {24} Jesus replied, "I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things."

(Matthew 28:18) "Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."

(Mark 1:22) "The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law."

(Mark 1:27) "The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching--and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him.""

(John 2:18) "Then the Jews demanded of him, "What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?""

(John 5:27) "And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man."

(John 10:18) "No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.""

(John 17:2) "For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him."

(Acts 1:7) "He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority."

(Acts 9:14) "And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.""

(Acts 26:10) "And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them."

(Acts 26:12) ""On one of these journeys I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests."

(Romans 7:1) "Do you not know, brothers--for I am speaking to men who know the law--that the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives?"

11
…Choosing Character

The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.[124]

His words were intentionally piercing, wanting them to find their mark in the hearts of the Pharisees. They needed what was being offered. Their souls were in trouble.

"For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven."[125]

Their problem was pronounced: they coveted the attention given to those in places of spiritual authority, wanting the acclaim and fanfare. They liked to be noticed when performing 'acts of righteousness.' They looked down on people, and had replaced praying to God for praying about themselves to God.

They received the praise of men, but God had other words when referring to them, even in public. Hypocrites! Brood of vipers! They noticed specks of sawdust in other's eyes and missed the plank in their own!

Forty-eight percent of American workers admit to taking unethical or illegal actions in the past year. *USA Today* listed the five most common types of unethical/illegal behavior that workers say they have engaged in because of pressure:

--Cut corners on quality control

[124] Martin Luther King, Jr. Leadership, Vol. 16, no. 3.
[125] Matthew 5:20

--Covered up incidents

--Abused or lied about sick days

--Lied to or deceived customers

--Put inappropriate pressure on others.

D. L. Moody was certainly seeking our attention when he said that “character is what a man is in the dark.”

Honest Abraham Lincoln understood this principle: “Character is like a tree and reputation like its shadow. The shadow is what we think of it; the tree is the real thing.”

Bryant Kirkland has character—a minister of his church for 25 years. But now Dr. Kirkland's beloved wife has Alzheimer's and is unable to respond. I mean, you talk about suffering. Some of you know what that's like when love is one way, don't you, when you love and the person cannot love you back. But Dr. Kirkland doesn't complain about it. He loves his beloved wife one way. He loves her and loves her and loves her.

And you know what's happened as he's hung in there? His suffering has produced endurance, and his endurance has produced character. He is a man of integrity. He is one of the great religious leaders of this time in history at the age of 80 because he has character. His sermons ring true with authenticity and fire because we know he's been there, and he's been steadfast. But that doesn't come in a week. [126]

The supreme test of goodness is not in the greater but in the smaller incidents of our character and practice; not what we are when standing in the searchlight of public scrutiny, but when we reach the firelight flicker of our homes; not what we are when some clarion-call rings through the air, summoning us to fight for life and liberty, but our attitude when we are called to sentry-duty in the grey morning, when the watch-fire is burning low. It is impossible to be our best at the supreme moment if character is corroded and eaten into by daily inconsistency, unfaith-fulness, and besetting sin.[127]

Mark Twain’s advise? Always do right; it will gratify some people and astonish the rest.

God is more concerned about our character than our comfort. His goal is not to pamper us physically but to perfect us spiritually. It is right to be contented with what we have, never with what we are.

The story is told of an Irishman who was being tried in a Kansas town. His was a petty offense. The judge asked if there was anyone present who would vouch for his character. "To be sure, your Honor," he declared, "there's the sheriff." The sheriff looked amazed. "Your Honor," he said, "I do not even know the man." "Your Honor," came back the Irishman as quick as a flash, "I've lived in this county for more than twelve years, and the sheriff does not know me yet. Isn't that a character for you?"

How we live makes a difference. And our character lives on even after the dirt is pushed onto the casket.

In the old cemetery at Winchester, Virginia, that starlit abbey of the Confederacy, there is a monument to the unknown Confederate dead. On it are cut these two lines: Who they were, none knows, What they were, all know.

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[126] Thomas Tewell, "The Tenacity of a Bulldog," Preaching Today, Tape No. 141.

[127] F.B. Meyer in *Our Daily Walk*. Christianity Today, Vol. 36, no. 10.

In all our journey as a believer, we will have two categories of spiritual experiences. One is tender, delightful, and loving. The other can be quite obscure, dry, dark, and desolate. God gives us the first one to gain us; he gives us the second to purify us.[128]

No professional football team that plays its home games in a domed stadium with artificial turf has ever won the Super Bowl. A climate-controlled stadium protects players and fans from the misery of sleet, snow, mud, heat, and wind. Everyone is comfortable. But athletes who brave the elements are disciplined to handle hardship. Apparently such rigors have something to do with the ability to win the Super Bowl.

Long before there was football, the Christian's playbook declared the purpose of hardship. It builds Christlike character. [129]

For several summers during the mid-1990s, Dave Wolter, head women's basketball coach for Concordia University in Irvine, California, flew to Asia and put on basketball clinics for both players and coaches.

On one flight, his plane experienced mechanical trouble at 30,000 feet. Panic broke out. People were screaming, crying and standing up in the aisles. Wolter, on the other hand, sat calmly and prayed. When a woman sitting next to him saw how different his demeanor was to the rest of the passengers, she shouted in Wolter's face, "Why aren't you hysterical?"

Fortunately, the crew was able to correct the problem, and nervous tranquility was restored in the cabin. For the rest of the flight, Dave answered the woman's question as she and several others listened intently to how his faith in Christ Jesus enables him to face death with confidence.

Our Christian influence has an effect not only through our words, but also through our actions. Stated another way, the fish symbol on the rear bumper of our car definitely makes a statement, but people will probably pay more attention to how we drive.[130]

Our task as laymen is to live our personal communion with Christ with such intensity as to make it contagious.

What other people think of me becomes less and less important; what they think of Jesus because of me is critical.

Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, vision cleared, ambition inspired, and success achieved.

Billy Graham often says, "Mountaintops are for views and inspiration, but fruit is grown in the valleys."

It is our choices . . . that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities.

Character is not made in a crisis. It is only exhibited in a crisis! A flaw in one's character will show up under pressure.

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[128] Michael Molinos, 17th-century spirituality writer. Leadership, Vol. 19, no. 3.

[129] Greg Asimakoupoulos, Naperville, Illinois. Leadership, Vol. 19, no. 3.

[130] Steven B. Borst, *Men in the Church* (Concordia, 1998), quoted in Men of Integrity, Vol. 2, no. 4.

The Christian character is simply a life in which all Christian virtues and graces have become fixed and solidified into permanence as established habits. It costs no struggle to do right, because what has been done so long, under the influence of grace in the heart, has become part of the regenerated nature.

The bird sings not to be heard, but because the song is in its heart, and must be expressed. It sings just as sweetly in the depths of the wood with no ear to listen, as by the crowded thoroughfare.

Beethoven did not sing for fame, but to give utterance to the glorious music that filled its soul.

The face of Moses did not shine to convince the people of his holiness, but because he had dwelt so long in the presence of God that it could not but shine.

Truest, ripest Christian life flows out of a full heart --a heart so filled with Christ that it requires no effort to live well, and to scatter the sweetness of grace and love.

It must be remembered, however, that all goodness in living begins first obeying rules, in keeping commandments. Mozart and Mendelssohn began with running scales and striking chords, and with painful finger-exercises.

The noblest Christian began with the simplest obedience. The way to become skillful is to do things over and over, until we can do them perfectly, and without thought or effort. The way to become able to do great things, is to do our little things with endless repetition, and with increasing dexterity and carefulness.

The way to grow into Christlikeness of character, is to watch ourselves in the minutest things of thought and word and act, until our powers are trained to go almost without watching in the lines of moral right and holy beauty. To become prayerful, we must learn to pray by the clock, at fixed times.

It is fine ideal talk to say that our devotions should be like the bird's song, warbling out anywhere and at any time with sweet unrestraint; but in plain truth, to depend upon such impulses as guides to praying, would soon lead to no praying at all.

This may do for heavenly life; but we have not gotten into heaven yet, and until we do we need to pray by habit.

So of all religious life. We only grow into patience by being as patient as we can, daily and hourly, and in smallest matters, ever learning to be more and more patient until we reach the highest possible culture in that line.

We can only become unselfish wherever we have an opportunity, until our life grows into the permanent beauty of unselfishness.

We can only grow better by striving ever to be better than we already are. and by climbing step by step toward the radiant heights of excellence. [131]

Character is like the foundation of a house. Most of it is below the surface.

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[131] By J. Wilbur Chapan, "*Present Day Parables."*

In Acts 27, the angel appears to Paul and says that he will reach Rome safely and that everyone aboard the ship will be saved. As Paul says later, "Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head." Absolute blanket, unequivocal authority.

But Paul doesn't settle down in his bunk and go to sleep. He goes out on deck, and seeing the sailors escaping, he says to the soldiers, "Unless these men stay with the ship, you cannot be saved."

Paul says that depending on what human beings do -- two sets of them: the pagan soldiers and sailors--in the next 30 seconds the Word of God will be true or false.

It's as if the Word of God dangles over the side of the ship alongside the lifeboats. The lifeboat is about to be cut off; a knife's cut can do it. The Word of God could be falsified in a second by the soldier saying, "Who are you?" Or the sailors saying, "We don't care; we're off on our own."

For Paul, God's sovereignty is the springboard on which he bounces in faith to obediently do what he must do so they do what they must do so that what God says will be done is done.[132]

John Wooden remains today as one of the great coaches of our generation. He rose to prominence not just as a winning basketball coach but as mentor to literally thousands of individuals at UCLA and the world through his books and speeches.

One of his principles was that we are to be concerned more with our character than with our reputation, because our character is what we really are, while our reputation is merely what others think we are.

Tom Landry, the legendary football coach of the Dallas Cowboys, said “I’ve seen the difference character makes in individual football players. Give me a choice between an outstanding athlete with poor character and a lesser athlete of good character; and I’ll choose the latter every time. The athlete with good character will often perform to his fullest potential and be a successful football player; while the outstanding athlete with poor character will usually fail to play up to his potential and often won’t even achieve average performance.”

If you cheat in practice, you'll cheat in the game. If you cheat in your head, you'll cheat on the test. You'll cheat on the girl. You'll cheat in business. You'll cheat on your mate. Sow a thought, reap an act. Sow an act, reap a habit. Sow a habit, reap a character. Sow a character, reap a destiny.[133]

In a speech delivered in New Haven, Conn., on March 6, 1860 -- just two months before the Republican Convention that nominated him, Abraham Lincoln said this: "What we want, and all we want, is to have with us the men who think slavery wrong. But those who say they hate slavery, and are opposed to it, but yet act with the Democratic party -- where are they?

Let us apply a few tests. You say that you think slavery is wrong, but you denounce all attempts to restrain it. Is there anything else that you think wrong, that you are not willing to deal with as a wrong?

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[132] Os Guinness, Preaching Today, Tape No. 21.

[133] George Munzing, "Living a Life of Integrity," Preaching Today, Tape No. 32.

Why are you so careful, so tender of this one wrong and no other? You will not let us do a single thing as if it was wrong; there is no place where you will allow [slavery] even to be called wrong!

We must not call it wrong in the Free States, because it is not there, and we must not call it wrong in the Slave States because it is there; we must not call it wrong in politics because that is bringing morality into politics, and we must not call it wrong in the pulpit because that is bringing politics into religion; we must not bring it into the Tract Society or the other societies because those are such unsuitable places, and there is no single place, according to you, where this wrong thing can properly be called wrong!

When wealth is lost, nothing is lost; when health is lost, something is lost; when character is lost, all is lost.

Every man has three characters -- that which he exhibits, that which he has, and that which he thinks he has.

The expression of Christian character is not good doing, but God-likeness. If the Spirit of God has transformed you within, you will exhibit divine characteristics in your life, not good human characteristics. God's life in us expresses itself as God's life, not as human life trying to be godly. The secret of a Christian is that the supernatural is made natural in him by the grace of God, and the experience of this works out in the practical details of life, not in times of communion with God.

What we stand up for proves what our character is like. If we stand up for our reputation, it is a sign it needs standing up for! God never stands up for his saints, they do not need it. The devil tells lies about men, but no slander on earth can alter a man's character.

God alters our disposition, but he does not make our character. When God alters my disposition, the first thing the new disposition will do is to stir up my brain to think along God's line. As I begin to think, begin to work out what God has worked in, it will become character. Character is consolidated thought. God makes me pure in heart; I must make myself pure in conduct. [134]

Carl Sandburg, describing Abraham Lincoln, calling him a man of steel and velvet. On February 12, 1959, Sandburg referred to him in these terms: Not often in the story of mankind does a man arrive on earth who is both steel and velvet, who is as hard as rock and soft as drifting fog, who holds in his heart and mind the paradox of terrible storm and peace unspeakable and perfect. . . .While the war winds howled, he insisted that the Mississippi was one river meant to belong to one country. . . .While the luck of war wavered and broke and came again, as generals failed and campaigns were lost, he held enough forces . . . together to raise new armies and supply them, until generals were found who made war as victorious war has always been made, with terror, frightfulness, destruction . . . valor and sacrifice past words of man to tell.

In the mixed shame and blame of the immense wrongs of two crashing civilizations, often with nothing to say, he said nothing, slept not at all, and on occasions he was seen to weep in a way that made weeping appropriate, decent, majestic.

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[134] Oswald Chambers (1874–1917)

Today our culture is far less likely to raise up heroes than it is to exalt victims, individuals who are overcome by the sting of oppression, injustice, adversity, neglect or misfortune. ... Success, as well as failure, is the result of one's own talent, decisions and actions. Accepting personal responsibility for victory, as well as for defeat, is as liberating and empowering as it is unpopular today.[135]

Have you ever watched the icicle as it is formed? Have you noticed how it froze, one drop at a time, until it was a foot long, or more? If the water was clean, the icicle remained clear, and sparkled brightly in the sun; but if the water was slightly muddy, the icicle looked foul, and its beauty was spoiled.

Just so our characters are formed. One little thought or feeling at a time adds its influence. If each thought be pure and right, the soul will be lovely, and will sparkle with happiness; but if impure and wrong, there will be deformity and wretchedness.

During his time as a rancher, Theodore Roosevelt and one of his cowpunchers lassoed a maverick steer, lit a fire, and prepared the branding irons. The part of the range they were on was claimed by Gregor Lang, one of Roosevelt's neighbors. According to the cattleman's rule, the steer therefore belonged to Lang. As his cowboy applied the brand, Roosevelt said, "Wait, it should be Lang's brand."

"That's all right boss," said the cowboy.

"But you're putting on my brand," Roosevelt said.

"That's right," said the man.

"Drop that iron," Roosevelt demanded, "and get back to the ranch and get out. I don't need you anymore. A man who will steal for me will steal from me."

The late C.S. Lewis said that people can ask only three basic ethical or philosophical questions. To describe them, he used the metaphor of ships at sea. When sailing ships leave port to embark on a journey, sailors must determine three things, according to Lewis. First, they must know how to keep from bumping into one another. This is a question of "social ethics." In other words, how do we get along with one another on this journey called life? Second, they must know how the individual ships remain seaworthy. This is "personal ethics," and it deals with the individual's vices and virtues - with character. Finally, sailors must decide where the ships are going. What is their mission and their destination? This last question is the ultimate one for us. What is the purpose of human life? Why are we here?

Charles Spurgeon wrote, "A good character is the best tombstone. Those who loved you, and were helped by you, will remember you when forget-me-nots are withered. Carve your name on hearts, and not on marble. Integrity is "a better long-term investment than the best Certificate of Deposit known to man!"

Bob Hope once said, "If you haven't got any charity in your heart, you have the worst kind of heart trouble." When someone mentions the word "charity," we usually think about giving material things, such as

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[135] U.S. Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas in a speech at Regent University, quoted in the *Christian Leader* (Oct. 1996). Christianity Today, Vol. 41, no. 2.

food, clothing or money, to needy people. However, the book "*Hope Again*" contains a true story about Tom Landry, the great coach of the Dallas Cowboys, and the late Woody Hayes. The story illustrates a different kind of charity, but real charity nevertheless.

Years ago, Woody Hayes was fired from his job as coach of the Ohio State football team. The reason Hayes was fired was that he struck an opposing player on the sidelines during a football game. The press had a field day with the firing, and piled criticism and shame on the former Buckeye coach.

Few people could have felt lower than Hayes felt. Not only did he publicly lose control of himself and do a foolish thing, but he also lost his job and much of the respect others had for him.

At the end of that season, a large, prestigious banquet was held for professional athletes. Tom Landry was invited, and he could bring a guest. Who did Landry take with him as his guest? Woody Hayes, the disgraced man everyone was being encouraged to criticize and scorn.

The game of football has rules against piling on someone who has been tackled. The reason for those rules is simple: prevent needless injury to the player who is down. The world would be much better if we actually lived by such rules. But when someone makes a mistake or is going through difficult times, one of the first responses of many people is criticism and gossip. Another response is to shun someone who is down. Either response piles on more pain--needless pain.

Tom Landry did not pile needless pain on Woody Hayes. Landry had charity in his heart. Charity, in the form of mercy. So Landry reached out with mercy to help a fallen man get up and begin climbing the hill back to a mended life.

So remember two things. First, instead of piling on the pain when someone is down, be merciful. Apply the principle in the Good Samaritan story that Jesus taught-- to be the one to come to the aid of one who's fallen, not one who passes by on the other side of the road-- and help fallen people up the hill they have to climb.

The second point is that there is an interesting thing about hills. When you help a person up a hill, you find yourself closer to the top, and the better it will be when you need mercy. Yes, we all need mercy. Romans 3:23 tell us that *"...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."*

"Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy."

CHARACTER

A bad tree does not yield good apples. Danish Proverb

A man never discloses his own character so clearly as when he describes another's. Johann Paul Friedrich Richter (1763–1825)

A man shows his character by what he laughs at. German Proverb

Character builds slowly, but it can be torn down with incredible swiftness. Faith Baldwin (1893–1978)

Character gives splendor to youth and awe to wrinkled skin and gray hairs. Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882)

Character is distilled out of our daily confrontation with temptation, out of our regular response to the call of duty. It is formed as we learn to cherish principles and to submit to self-discipline. Character is the sum total of all the little decisions, the small deeds, the daily reactions to the choices that confront us.

Character is not obtained instantly. We have to mold and hammer and forge ourselves into character. It is a distant goal to which there is no shortcut. Sidney Greenberg

Every human being is intended to have a character of his own; to be what no other is, and to do what no other can do. Channing Pollock (1880–1946)

Human improvement is from within outward.
James Anthony Froude (1818–1894)

Our outward imperfections are a reminder of God's priorities. He is concerned with character; not the deception of outward beauty. Erwin W. Lutzer (1941–)

Right is right, even if everyone is against it; and wrong is wrong, even if everyone is for it. William Penn (1644–1718)

Show me the man you honor; and I will know what kind of a man you are. Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881)

We live in deeds, not years; in thoughts, not breaths; in feelings, not in figures on a dial. We should count time by heartthrobs. He most lives who thinks most, feels the noblest, acts the best. Philip James Bailey (1816–1902)

What you possess in the world will be found at the day of your death to belong to someone else, but what you are will be yours forever. Henry Van Dyke (1852–1933)

When the Spirit of God moves into a man's heart, he will make that man generous, but he will never make a fool out of him. He will make the man happy, but he will never make him silly. He may make him sad with the woe and the weight of the world's grief, but he will never let him become a gloomy cynic. The Holy Spirit will make him warmhearted and responsive, but he will never cause him to do things of which he will be ashamed later. A. W. Tozer (1897–1963)

When we see men of worth, we should think of becoming like them; when we see men of a contrary character; we should turn inward and examine ourselves. François Alexandre Frédéric, Duc de La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt (1747–1827)

When wealth is lost, nothing is lost; When health is lost, something is lost; When character is lost, all is lost!
German Proverb

You can't make a good cloak out of bad cloth. Spanish Proverb

You cannot carve rotten wood. Chinese Proverb

You cannot dream yourself into a character; you must hammer and forge yourself one. James Anthony Froude (1818–1894)

Devotional Readings

(Acts 17:11) "Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true."

(Romans 5:1-4) "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, {2} through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. {3} Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; {4} perseverance, character; and character, hope."

(1 Corinthians 15:33) "Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character.""

12
Recovering from Guilt…

The purpose of being guilty is to bring us to Jesus. Once we are there, then its purpose is finished. If we continue to make ourselves guilty—to blame ourselves—then that is sin in itself.[136]

Satan really gets around!

While he is not omnipresent, like God, his influence has a daily influence against us. And our desires allow an opportunity for nose-to-nose combat.

When we succeed, we're relieved. When we fail, Satan enters into his favorite position of all. He loves to accuse us of our sin and cause us to feel the guilt.

And his work is greatly enhanced if he can cause you guilt even when God has granted forgiveness!

Satan wants you to feel guilty. He wants you to experience regret and remorse, but not repentance. He wants to keep accusing you so that you focus your attention on yourself and your sins.

Paul had a situation like that in the church at Corinth. One of the members had fallen into sin and had refused to repent and make things right with God and the church.

In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul told the church to discipline that man; and apparently they did, for Paul wrote, *Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority.*[137]

At first, when this sin was detected, the Corinthian believers were very complacent and refused to act. Paul's letter shocked them into their senses; but then they went to the other extreme and made it so hard on the offender that they would not forgive him! So Paul had to counsel them, *So that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort him, lest somehow such a one be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. Wherefore I urge you to reaffirm your love for him…in order that no advantage be taken of us by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his also schemes.* [138]

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[136] Corrie ten Boom (1892–1983)
[137] 2 Corinthians 2:6
[138] 2 Corinthians 2:7, 8, 11

Excessive guilt and sorrow can only lead to depression, despair, and defeat. Sometimes it leads to destruction; even Christians have been known to attempt suicide in order to escape satanic accusation. What, then, is your defense against Satan's accusations?

It is true that Satan stands at our right hand to resist us and accuse us. But it is also true that Jesus Christ stands at God's right hand to intercede for us!

It's not unusual that those of us who 'ought to know better' don't often do better. We can even learn from the youngest among us.

A man went to steal corn from his neighbor's field. He took his little boy with him to keep a lookout, so as to give warning in case anyone should come along. Before commencing he looked all around, first one way and then the other; and, not seeing any person, he was just about to fill his bag when his son cried out, "Father, there is one way you haven't looked yet!" The father supposed that someone was coming and asked his son which way he meant. He answered, "You forgot to look up!" The father, conscience-stricken, took his boy by the hand and hurried home without the corn which he had designed to take.

I have heard often of the anonymous man who felt 'guilty' for some past tax returns. He wrote, "Gentlemen: Enclosed you will find a check for $150. I cheated on my income tax return last year and have not been able to sleep ever since. If I still have trouble sleeping I will send you the rest. Sincerely, A Tax Payer."

To err is human, a little plaque on my office desk proclaims, but to blame it on the other guy is even more human!

It might be a way of life for some to believe that we have only one person to blame, and that's each other.

It's sad, but I've learned that often the greater a person's sense of guilt, the greater his need to cast blame on others.

What's the natural response when we've seen God? We're convicted of sin. *"Woe is me, for I am undone*." The closer I walk with God, the more quickly I feel my sin and realize how much I need God.

It's like a huge mirror with a great big light over it. When we stand away from the mirror, things look pretty good: suit looks in order; tie looks straight; the hair, what's left of it, is combed.

But as we begin to move towards the mirror, things begin to show up. The suit has a spot on it. The tie is a little bit wrinkled. The hair is out of place. The closer we get to the bright light, the more we realize our defects.

It's the same way when we get close to God. When we get close to him, we realize how much we need him and how far we are from him. We're convicted of our sin. [139]

Man does not like to admit that his sinfulness and rebellion are at the heart of the problems of society. He's much more comfortable discussing imperfections, weaknesses, mistakes, and errors in judgment. These terms are socially acceptable, and almost everyone identifies with them. But an outright acknowledgment of guilt before a holy God, a 100-percent acceptance of responsibility for wrong-doing, runs against the grain. Yet this kind of honesty is the first step to the freedom from sin and guilt that God longs to give us and has provided in the death of Christ.

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[139] Rod Cooper, "Beholding the King," Preaching Today, Tape No. 150

When the preacher says we need forgiveness, he's not just fanning moonbeams with his hat -- we need forgiveness! Human nature in the raw is not nice at all. When surveyors promised not to tell, 31 percent of the people questioned confessed infidelity, 91 percent regularly tell lies, 36 percent regularly tell dark lies -- the kind that hurt people. Half of all workers confess to calling in sick when they're not, and only thirteen percent of all Americans believe in all ten commandments.[140]

When missionaries first came to Labrador, they found no word for forgiveness in the Eskimo language. So they had to make one which meant, "not being able to think about it anymore."

The Chinese consider Jesus' teaching about forgiveness unmanly. A Christian Chinese was once explaining forgiveness to a group of people gathered in the chapel by the mission hospital. He said, "I will tell you how we obey this commandment. When you are sick or hurt, you come to the hospital and we nurse you, dress your wounds, and care for you, but you go away and revile us and lie about us. Then, when you are sick once more, you come back and we nurse you, and care for you again and again. That is forgiveness.

Some heed admonitions to gentleness and treat those about them with great kindness, but are unmercifully hard on themselves. They exercise little understanding where their own faults are concerned. True, we should, like Paul, feel we are least of all the saints, but one cannot let this feeling of unworthiness keep us from effective service for the Master. Some have never forgiven themselves for past mistakes or great sins. Their lives are lived in torment, and beneath the surface is a soul writhing in agony.

C.S. Lewis had this to say about forgiveness: "I think that if God forgives us we must forgive ourselves. Otherwise it is almost like setting up ourselves as a higher tribunal than Him."

If God were not willing to forgive sin, heaven would be empty.

Jesus never attacked the sinner. He simply said, "I am willing to forgive you." Meanwhile, he attacked the self-righteous with a vengeance, because He knew that until they felt guilty, they couldn't be forgiven.

Doing an injury puts you below your enemy; revenging one makes you even with him; forgiving it sets you above him.

The heaviest load any man carries on his back is a pack of grudges.

I get a ‘kick’ out of the story of Frederick the Great, King of Prussia, who visited a prison and talked with each of the inmates. There were endless tales of innocence, of misunderstood motives, and of exploitation. Finally the king stopped at the cell of a convict who remained silent. "Well," remarked Frederick, "I suppose you are an innocent victim too?" "No, sir, I'm not," replied the man. "I'm guilty and deserve my punishment." Turning to the warden, the king said, "Here, release this rascal before he corrupts all these fine innocent people in here!"

Christians aren’t perfect—just forgiven.

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[140] Associated Press, 4-29-91

It is important that we learn to distinguish between Satan's accusations and the Spirit's conviction. A feeling of guilt and shame is a good thing if it comes from the Spirit of God. If we listen to the devil, it will only lead to regret and remorse and defeat.

Like a log tossed on a frozen lake, God's word may appear to be rejected and ignored, but when the cold, hard heart thaws, the "log" of truth sinks in and becomes a part of that life.

Guilt works like an inescapable video-tape machine that refuses to forget the mistakes we've made.

Guilt **can** be good, since it makes us aware of the need for a turn around.

Many of the later-model cars are equipped with theft alarm systems. The more sensitive ones can be annoying to the general public. ... But that obnoxious sensitivity is purposefully designed to be protection against unwanted entry.

God has built into each of us an alarm system to warn us of the unwanted entry of sin into our lives. The alarm system is called guilt. Guilt is our friend. Without it we would go on in sin until we were dominated and defeated by it.

In our pleasure-seeking, anything-goes, feel-good society, guilt is anathema. We run from it ... but we can't rid ourselves of it! ... The only thing that can "wash away" our sin and guilt before God is the blood of Jesus Christ.[141]

Erwin Lutzer, in his book *Managing Your Emotions*, writes: "We all know that Alexander the Great conquered the world. But what few people know is that this mighty general could not conquer himself. Cletus, a dear friend of Alexander's and a general in his army, became intoxicated and ridiculed the emperor in front of his men. Blinded by anger, quick as lightning, Alexander snatched a spear from the hand of a soldier and hurled it at Cletus. Though he had only intended to scare the drunken general, his aim was true and the spear took the life of his childhood friend. Deep remorse followed his anger. Overcome with guilt, Alexander tried to take his own life with the same spear, but was stopped by his men. For days he lay sick calling for his friend Cletus, chiding himself as a murderer."

Lutzer concludes by saying, "Alexander the Great conquered many cities. He conquered many countries, but he failed miserably to conquer his own self."

When the Spirit of God convicts you, he uses the Word of God in love and seeks to bring you back into fellowship with your Father.

When Satan accuses you, he uses your own sins in a hateful way, and he seeks to make you feel helpless and hopeless. Judas listened to the devil and went out and hanged himself. Peter looked at the face of Jesus and wept bitterly, but later came back into fellowship with Christ.

When you listen to the devil's accusations (all of which may be true), you open yourself up to despair and spiritual paralysis. "My situation is hopeless!" I have heard more than one Christian exclaim, "I'm too far gone---the Lord could never take me back." When you have that helpless, hopeless feeling, you can be sure Satan is accusing you.

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[141] Anne Graham Lotz in *The Glorious Dawn of God's Story*. Christianity Today, Vol. 43, no. 7.

Charles Wesley has put all of this into a beautiful hymn:

Depth of mercy! Can there be Mercy still reserved for me!
Can my God His wrath forbear, Me, the chief of sinners spare!
I have long withstood His grace, Long provoked Him to His face,
Would not hearken to His calls. Grieved Him by a thousand falls.
Lord, incline me to repent; Let me now my sins lament;
Now my foul revolt deplore, Weep, believe, and sin no more.
Still for me the Savior stands, Holding forth His wounded hands;
God is love! I know, I feel, Jesus weeps and loves me still.

We need to depend on what God's Word says, not on how we feel. Rest on the grace of God---he has chosen us, and he will not forsake us.

When Satan wanted to lead the first man and woman into sin, he started by attacking the woman's mind. This is made clear in 2 Corinthians 11:3: *But I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.*

Why would Satan want to attack your mind? Because your mind is the part of the image of God where God communicates with you and reveals His will to you.

The doctor says, "You are what you eat." The psychologist says, "You are what you think." Satan knows the tremendous power of your mind, and he tries to capture it for himself. If Satan can get you to believe a lie, then he can begin to work in your life to lead you into sin.

A new product called "Disposable Guilt Bags" appeared in the marketplace. It consisted of a set of ten ordinary brown bags on which were printed the following instructions: "Place the bag securely over your mouth, take a deep breath and blow all your guilt out, then dispose of the bag immediately." The wonder of this is that the Associated Press reported that 2,500 kits had been quickly sold at $2.50 per kit. Would that we could dispose of our guilt so easily.

There is nothing on this earth powerful enough in itself to dispose of our guilt. We cannot fix ourselves, which is what many of us are trying to do. That which makes it possible to be forgiven, to be cleansed, to be healed, that which makes it possible for us to receive our life back again, fresh and clean and new, is the power of God's Grace in the Cross of Jesus Christ.

True guilt is a valuable asset for living. It helps us when we hurt others or betray our own standards and values. God uses guilt to influence us to change our minds about what we are doing, leading us to repentance. If we never felt guilt, we would not follow rules or standards, obey the law, or have good relationships with loved ones. [142]

Only the inspired Word of God can reveal and defeat the devil's lies. You cannot reason with Satan, nor (as Eve discovered) can you even safely converse with him. Man's wisdom is no match for Satan's cunning. Our only defense is the inspired Word of God.

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[142] Brenda Poinsett in *Understanding a Woman's Depression*. Christianity Today, Vol. 34, no. 4.

It was this weapon that our Lord used when he was tempted by Satan in the wilderness.

One solid solution is deciding what we will allow ourselves to ponder: *Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things(Philippians 4:8).*

Our Lord went through some one-on-one temptations from Satan but did not use His divine power to defeat Satan. He used the same weapon that is available to us today: the Word of God. Jesus was led by the Spirit of God and filled with the Word of God.

The Word of God is *"the sword of the Spirit"* (Ephesians 6:17); and the Holy Spirit can enable us to wield that sword effectively. If you and I are going to defeat Satan's lies, we must depend on the Word of God. This fact lays several responsibilities upon us.

We must know God's Word. There is no reason why any believer should be ignorant of **his** Bible. The Word of God is available to us in many translations. We have the Holy Spirit within us to teach us the truths of the Word (John 16:13-15).

There are a multitude of Bible study helps available. We can turn on the radio and listen to excellent preachers and Bible teachers expound God's Word. In local churches, there are ministers and teachers who minister the Word; and in many areas, there are seminars and Bible study groups for further study. If an intelligent believer today does not know his Bible, it is his or her own fault!

This mean, of course, taking time to read and study the Bible. No one will master God's Word in a lifetime of study, but we should learn all we can. We must make time, not "find time," to read and study the Word of God.

Just as a machinist studies the shop manual, and the surgeon studies his medical texts, so the Christian must study the Word of God. Bible study is not a luxury; it is a necessity.

One more thought: I have known people in my life who "want to want to." They want to do something for the betterment of mankind (or even a simple deed for their spouse) and will think about it and even talk about it with others. But they never seem to be 'moved to action.'

Many people seem to have an ingrown appreciation for "Ziggy", the lovable, roly-poly, albino cartoon character. He comes across as being "real."

In one Ziggy episode, he spots water dripping from the ceiling and comments, "I should fix the roof." Then he notices how dirty the floor is and adds, "I should give the floor a good scrub, too."

On a tour of his house he also took note that he should fix the cracked plaster, should clean out the closet, and that he should use his time better. In the final frame of the comic strip, Ziggy is perched in his easy chair reprimanding himself. "I should stop 'shoulding' myself."[143]

James 4:17 *"Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins."*

Finally, leaving behind guilt and grasping forgiveness, we are then allowed the glory of moving forward and beginning again.

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[143] Fritz Ridenour, *How to Be a Christian Without Being Perfect*, p. 167

In 1986 Bob Brenley was playing third base for the San Francisco Giants. In the fourth inning of a game against the Atlanta Braves, Brenley made an error on a routine ground ball. Four batters later he kicked away another grounder. And then while he was scrambling after the ball, he threw wildly past home plate trying to get the runner there. Two errors on the same play. A few minutes later he muffed yet another play to become the first player in the twentieth century to make four errors in one inning. Now, those of us who have made very public errors in one situation or another can easily imagine how he felt during that long walk off the field at the end of that inning. But then in the bottom of the fifth, Brenley hit a home run. Then in the seventh, he hit a bases-loaded single, driving in two runs and tying the game.

Then in the bottom of the ninth, Brenley came up to bat again, with two outs. He ran the count to three and two and then hit a massive home run into the left field seats to win the game for the Giants. Brenley's score card for that day came to three hits and five at bats, two home runs, four errors, four runs allowed, four runs driven in, including the game-winning run.

Certainly life is a lot like that--a mixture of hits and errors. And there is grace in that. [144]

Forgiven souls are humble. They cannot forget that they owe all they have and hope for to free grace, and this keeps them lowly. They are brands plucked from the fire--debtors who could not pay for themselves--captives who must have remained in prision for ever, but for undeserved mercy--wandering sheep who were ready to perish when the Shepherd found them; and what right then have they to be proud? I do not deny that there are proud saints. But this I do say--they are of all God's creatures the most inconsistant, and of all God's children the most likely to stumble and pierce themselves with many sorrows. [145]

Ronald Reagan's attitude after the 1982 attempt on his life made an impression on his daughter, Patti Davis: "The following day my father said he knew his physical healing was directly dependent on his ability to forgive John Hinckley. By showing me that forgiveness is the key to everything, including physical health and healing, he gave me an example of Christ-like thinking."

Oscar Wilde said, "Always forgive your enemies -- nothing annoys them so much."

GUILT

A guilty conscience is a hidden enemy. Indian Proverb

All those people weighed down by the obsessive fear of "doing something wrong," or who utter so many prayers that their very number suggests that the utterer has his doubts about their being heard, are not a very good advertisement for the way of God. Paul Tournier (1898–1986)

Guilt suggested by the judgment of men is a false guilt if it does not receive inner support by a judgment of God. Paul Tournier (1898–1986)

Keep clear of concealment, keep clear of the need of concealment. It is an awful hour when the first necessity of hiding anything comes. The whole life is different thenceforth. When there are questions to be feared and eyes to be avoided and subjects which must not be touched, then the bloom of life is gone. Phillips Brooks (1835–1893)

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[144] Nancy Becker, "A Theology of Baseball," Preaching Today, Tape No. 115.

[145] J. C. Ryle in *Foundations of Faith*. Christianity Today, Vol. 32, no. 4

Psychiatrists require many sessions to relieve a patient of guilt feelings which have made him sick in body and mind; Jesus' power of spiritual and moral persuasion was so overwhelming that he could produce the same effect just by saying: Thy sins be forgiven thee. Malcolm Muggeridge (1903–1990)

Religion without guilt just tries to make God a big "pal" of man.
A. W. Tozer (1897–1963)

FORGIVENESS

A retentive memory is a good thing, but the ability to forget is the true token of greatness. Elbert Green Hubbard (1856–1915)

Alas! if my best Friend, who laid down his life for me, were to remember all the instances in which I have neglected him, and to plead them against me in judgment, where should I hide my guilty head in the day of recompense? I will pray, therefore, for blessings on my friends, even though they cease to be so, and upon my enemies, though they continue such. William Cowper (1731–1800)

As we practice the work of forgiveness we discover more and more that forgiveness and healing are one. Agnes Sanford

Forgiveness is a funny thing—it warms the heart and cools the sting. William Arthur Ward (1812–1882)

Forgiveness is not that stripe which says, "I will forgive, but not forget." It is not to bury the hatchet with the handle sticking out of the ground, so you can grasp it the minute you want it. Dwight Lyman Moody (1837–1899)

Forgiveness ought to be like a cancelled note—torn in two and burned up, so that it never can be shown against one. Henry Ward Beecher (1813–1887)

He that demands mercy, and shows none, ruins the bridge over which he himself is to pass. Thomas Adams (1612–1653)

You must choose to forgive whoever has wronged you. Forgiveness is not an emotion, it is a decision of the will. Erwin W. Lutzer (1941–)

Devotional Readings

(Matthew 26:28) "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."

(Mark 1:4) "And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins."

(Luke 3:3) "He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins."

(Acts 2:38) "Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

(Acts 5:31) "God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel."

(Acts 10:43) "All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.""

(Acts 13:38) ""Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you."

(Ephesians 1:7) "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace"

13
Gaining the Victory…

The first step on the way to victory is to recognize the enemy.[146]

About the only time I play golf is when I play with one of my two sons, Eric or Gregory.

On one occasion, we were walking to the club house just before we were to tee off. Knowing I had not played for some time, Eric offered me a word of advice: “Dad, until you build up your confidence, why don’t you drive with an iron at first?” “Eric,” I responded, “I have all the confidence in the world. What I lack is ability.”

Confidence can be a very good thing. It can also be a mill stone around one’s neck. Being confident simply is not enough. The crucial issue is in whom, or in what, is our confidence. Ill-founded confidence is deadly. Well-founded confidence is proper and good.

Paul speaks to such issues when he tells us that we have an “overwhelming victory” available in Christ: *"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."*[147]

The original language of scripture is strong here. This “over-whelming victory” is not something small at all. By comparison, in football it is <u>not</u> willing 10-7 on a late field goal, but being ahead 100-0 at the half! It’s claiming the laurel in the 100-meter dash by 50 meters!

It’s overwhelming! It’s a victory! It’s all possible because of God’s acts toward us!

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[146] Corrie ten Boom (1892–1983)

[147] Romans 8:35-37

Just imagine: God is for us! God is not against us!

This statement, *"God is for us,"* cannot be interpreted or applied apart from His purpose (8:28). God is not "for us" in some nebulous, undefined way. We do not have the promise that God will deal with us in any way that we ask or desire.

The prosperity gospelizers promise a God who is a kind of magic genie, as though we need but inform Him how He can serve us. God is "for us" in a way that produces the "good" He has purposed and prepared for us in eternity past. It is God's pre-rogative to define "good," not ours.

Romans 8 is the Christian's "Declaration of Freedom," for in it Paul declares the spiritual freedoms we enjoy because of our union with Jesus Christ.

Although the Bible is a book offering the good news of salvation from sin, it is also a book that presents the bad news of condemnation for sin. No single book or collection of writings on earth proclaims so completely and vividly the totally desperate situation of man apart from God.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul declared, *"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23).* Because of that sinfulness, all unbelievers are under God's condemnation and are *"by nature children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3).*

Sin places men under the power of Satan, the ruler of the present world system (John 12:31). They are under the control of *"the prince of the power of the air"* and *"of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience"* (Eph. 2:2).

But remember: the believer is to be judged for his faithfulness to Christ. He will be judged for how responsible he is—for how well he uses his "spiritual gifts" for Christ—for how diligently he serves Christ in the work of God. The judgment of the believer will take place at the great *judgment seat of Christ.*

The key to every aspect of salvation is in the simple but infinitely profound phrase **in Christ Jesus.** A Christian is a person who is **in Christ Jesus.** Paul has already declared that *"all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death," and that "therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection" (Rom. 6:3-5).*

Our being in Christ is one of the profoundest of mysteries, which we will not fully understand until we meet Him face-to-face in heaven. But Scripture does shed light on that marvelous truth. We know that we are in Christ spiritually, in a divine and permanent union. *"For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive," Paul explains (1 Cor. 15:22).*

Believers are also in Christ in a living, participatory sense. *"Now you are Christ's body," Paul declares in that same epistle, "and individually members of it" (12:27).*

We are actually a part of Him and, in ways that are unfathomable to us now we work when He works, grieve when He grieves, and rejoice when He rejoices. *"For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body,"*

Paul assures us, "whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:13). Christ's own divine life pulses through us.

Many people are concerned about their family heritage, about who their ancestors were, where they lived, and what they did. For better or worse, we are all life—linked physically, intellectually, and culturally to our ancestors. In a similar, but infinitely more important way, we are linked to the family of God because of our relationship to His Son, Jesus Christ. It is for that reason that every Christian can say, *"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me" (Gal. 2:20).*

Since God did not spare his own Son, but gave him up to benefit us all, we may be certain, after such a gift, that he will not refuse anything he can give

The Son willingly endured the agony of the cross in order to do the will of His Father and to bring glory to Him. The Father willingly gave up His Son so that by means of His sacrifice the Son might be glorified (see John 17:1-5; Philippians 2:5-11). Imagine the heart of the Father as He heard the plea of His Son in the Garden of Gethsemene. Amazing love, how can it be, that Thou, My God, should die for me?

If God gave up His beloved Son, His precious Son, then it is not difficult to believe that He will "*freely*" give us "all things." The "all things" must, however, be limited to all those things which are essential to bring about the "good" He has purposed for us. And these things are freely given "*with Him*."

Some have great confidence but in the wrong thing. The lyrics of a popular "Christian" song say something like: "I have determined … to be invincible …" This song writer has far too much confidence—in himself.

Paul gives us every reason to be confident, not in ourselves but in our salvation and in the sovereign God who is accomplishing it.

Heed well Paul's words here. They offer hope and confidence in the midst of a fallen world. To everyone who is in Christ by faith, they are words of comfort and reassurance.

The story is told of a man who operated a drawbridge. At a certain time each afternoon, he had to raise the bridge for a ferry boat and then lower it quickly for a passenger train that crossed at high speed a few minutes later.

One day the man's young son was visiting his father at work and decided to go down below to get a better look at the ferry as it passed. Fascinated by the sight, he did not watch carefully where he was going and fell into the giant gears. One foot became caught and the boy was helpless to free himself.

The father saw what happened but knew that if he took time to extricate his son, the train would plunge into to the river before the bridge could be lowered. But if he lowered the bridge to save the hundreds of passengers and crew members on the train, his son would be crushed to death.

When he heard the train's whistle, indicating it would soon reach the river; he knew what he had to do. His son was very dear to him, whereas all the people on the train were total strangers. The sacrifice of his son for the sake of the other people was an act of pure grace and mercy.

That story portrays something of the infinitely greater sacrifice God the Father made when He sent His only beloved Son to earth to die for the sins of mankind—to whom He owed nothing but condemnation.

Knowing this fact and living based upon its certainty is difficult. Paul tells us that God understands that and "*the Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children."*

The Holy Spirit is the connecting link of our relationship with God. God has given us the Spirit as a guarantee that we are saved, the children of God (2 Cor. 5:5).

We can call God, *"Abba! Father!"* because we are identified as God's children by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children and heirs of God (Rom. 8:16-17). This does not come about because of direct intervention of God in some intuitive, experiential way. We can only be children of God by being obedient to His will (1 John 4:1-3; 5:1-3; 2 John 7-9).

John says the Spirit dwells in those who obey God (1 John 2:3-4; 3:24). "The basis of our assurance of being children of God is not subjective emotionalism. It is rather the objective criteria of keeping the commandments of the Lord. When this is done, the Holy Spirit bears witness with the spirit of man." [148]

This directs us to another statement of Paul: *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).*

The story is told of an airliner which began to develop trouble in mid-air. One engine began to smoke. Over the speaker came the pilot's reassuring voice informing the passengers of a small problem. One engine had caught fire, but it had been extinguished. With three remaining engines, the plane would easily reach its destination. Then a second engine failed. Once again, the pilot calmly assured the passengers there was no danger; two engines would suffice. A third engine failed. Now the pilot informed the passengers that it would be necessary to land short of their destination. Finally, the fourth engine failed, and from their windows the passengers saw the plane's crew in parachutes descending to the earth.

The pilot's calm and reassuring voice again came over the speaker: "Ladies and gentlemen, we are having a problem with the airplane. We will need to make an emergency landing. The pilot and crew have abandoned the plane and are parachuting to safety. There is no need to panic. The plane is operating on automatic pilot, and everything is under control … control … control …"

There are times in life when things seem to be out of control. At those times atheists and agnostics are quite convinced, following our analogy, that the plane has no pilot. If ever there was a pilot, he has bailed out, leaving them to themselves to face threatening dangers.

We who are Christians believe there is a God. When life goes smoothly for us and God's blessings are evident, we are tempted to believe we are in control. We may even think we do not need God.

When the bottom falls out and the trials of life seem to be swallowing us up so that we seem to lose control, we may still believe that God is in the cockpit. But we may begin to question whether God is **really** in control. We may be tempted to think God's control over creation might be limited and fallible.

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[148] "*Alive In The Spirit*", Jimmy Jividen, p140

Whatever the Christian sees happening, we may be assured that it is not only under God's control, but its purpose is to produce what is for God's glory and for our good.

When life's trials cause some to wonder if God even exists, and others to wonder whether He is in control, the Christian may be assured that God is there. He is in charge of bringing about His purpose for His glory and our good. Let us savor the truth of God's sovereignty. While His sovereignty brings terror to the hearts of unbelievers, it is music to the Christian's ears.

In the center of main street in Enterprise, Alabama, stands one of the strangest monuments in the world. It's a memorial to an insect! Handsomely carved in stone is the likeness of a boll weevil. Many believe that divine providence was involved in the circumstances that led to the erection of this unusual statue.

In early plantation days almost everyone in the community raised cotton. But as the years rolled on, a serious pestilence infested the area in the form of a small beetle that punctured the boll of the plant. As a result, it became almost impossible to bring a season's growth to maturity.

George Washington Carver, along with several other scientists, became deeply concerned about the situation and began intensive studies to see if any substitute crop could be grown in that part of the country. Raising peanuts was the answer, for they could be planted and harvested with very little loss.

In time, cotton gins were forgotten in that region, and it became known as an outstanding peanut center of the world. Soon the farmers' profits far exceeded what they had earned from their best cotton yield. In the end, they realized that the destructive insect they had feared had actually triggered the research that brought them prosperity.

The Lord often allows trials to unsettle our lives for a blessed purpose. Perhaps we are trying to "grow cotton" when we should be "raising peanuts." If so, the delays and disappointments we experience are just the gracious "boll weevils" sent to redirect us so that we will plant the crop of God's choosing!

In his book *Forever Triumphant*, F. J. Huegel told a story that came out of World War II. After General Jonathan Wainwright was captured by the Japanese, he was held prisoner in a Manchurian concentration camp. Cruelly treated, he became "a broken, crushed, hopeless, starving man."

Finally the Japanese surrendered and the war ended. A United States army colonel was sent to the camp to announce personally to the general that Japan had been defeated and that he was free and in command. After Wainwright heard the news, he returned to his quarters and was confronted by some guards who began to mistreat him as they had done in the past.

Wainwright, however, with the news of the allied victory still fresh in his mind, declared with authority, "No, I am in command here! These are my orders." Huegel observed that from that moment on, General Wainwright was in control.

Huegel made this application: "Have you been informed of the victory of your Savior in the greatest conflict of the ages? Then rise up to assert your rights. Never again go under when the enemy comes to oppress. Claim the victory in Jesus' Name."

Huegel observed, "We must learn to stand on resurrection ground, reckoning dead the old-creation life over which Satan has power, and living in the new creation over which Satan has no power whatever."

"*O death, where is thy sting? 0 grave, where is thy victory?* This is so true that even Satan cannot deny it. Christ's resurrection and victory over sin, death and hell is greater than all heaven and earth. You can never imagine his resurrection and victory so great but that in actuality it is far, far greater.

Some will tell you that triumph will come by the development of human beings--the gradual evolution of their potentialities. We should just give it time, wait and see. Everything's coming up roses. World War I dealt that theory the cutting blow. World War II broke its spirit. Vietnam laid it in its grave. The takeovers of Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan shoveled the dirt of interment on it. Will human progress stop people and nations from sinning? Will human progress and achievement ever wipe away all tears from our eyes or heal our broken hearts? To ask these questions is to answer them.

No, the final victory will not come through some natural progress of human development, nor through the religious forces that are operative in the world right now. The victory will come not by an improvement of the present order but through its complete overthrow and supercession.

The high point of human history will be the sudden appearance on the field of battle of the captain of our salvation. And he will come in glory, and it will be comparable to what John beheld: *Look, I see a great white horse. And there is a rider on that horse whose name is Faithful and True, and there are many crowns upon his head.* [149]

Retired football coach Gene Stallings tells of an incident when he was defensive backfield coach of the Dallas Cowboys. Two All-Pro players, Charlie Walters and Cliff Harris, were sitting in front of their lockers after playing a tough game against the Washington Redskins. They were still in their uniforms, and their heads were bowed in exhaustion. Walters said to Harris, "By the way Cliff, what was the final score?" In our competitive society, we sometimes fail to remember that excellence isn't determined by comparing our score to someone else's. Excellence comes from giving one's best, no matter the score.

Having studied our text of Romans 8:31-39, let me leave you with some avenues for future thought, study, prayer, and application.

First, the sovereignty of God is the basis for our security. We dare not be confident in ourselves. We dare not doubt that we shall be more than conquerors. This would be to deny His Word and to distrust God. We, like Paul, should be absolutely convinced concerning these things, based upon the Word of God. Our security is rooted in God, in His sovereignty, and in His unfailing love.

Second, our security and confidence in God is the basis for our service. It is not doubt, nor fear, nor guilt which should motivate our service, but a confidence in God mixed with deep and abiding gratitude. Because we are secure in Christ, we may serve. We need not focus on ourselves but on Him. Since He is the *"author and finisher of our faith,"* we must *"fix our eyes on Him"* (Hebrews 12:1-2)

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[149] R. Geoffrey Brown, "Look! A Great White Horse!," Preaching Today, Tape No. 111.

Third, our security is never an excuse for sloppiness. Some would abuse the doctrine of God's sovereignty and the believer's security. They would sinfully suggest that since God is in control, it matters not what we do. This is just the opposite of the truth. God's sovereignty is the basis for our diligence and obedience. If we trust in ourselves, this would be folly, because we will fail. But when we trust in God, we know that we ultimately cannot fail and that our efforts are not in vain.

Fourth, the Scriptures never raise any doubt that God will finish what He started at salvation. The question raised in Scripture is not, "Will the saints endure to the end?" The question is rather, "Are we sure that we are in Christ?" The security of the believer is never brought into question in the Scriptures. Whether or not we are a believer is a question which is raised, and rightly so. The Bible gives us the examples to follow (Acts 2:38; 8:4-29; 9:1-20; 22:1-16; 10:1-48; 16:12-15, 22-34; 18:8; 19:1-6).

Fifth, the basis for our salvation and our security is found in the work of Christ on the cross of Calvary. Did you notice that every fear, every dread, in this text is the result of sin? And did you notice as well that every cure goes back to the cross of Calvary?

Here is God's means of redemption. Here is the measure of His love. Here is the assurance and confidence that God's purposes and promises will never fail. No wonder we must continually go back to the cross.

We should never grow weary of going back to the cross. Here is where our salvation began. Here is where it was finished. *That God sent Jesus to the cross is the measure of His love for us. That God would raise Jesus from the dead is the measure of His power. When such love and power meet, we, as sons of God, have every reason to be confident.*

Finally, the security of the believer requires a response. Paul's conclusion reminds us that biblical revelation requires a response. The security of the believer in the sovereign love of God should produce humility, gratitude, dependence, confidence, and praise.

Let us ponder these closing words of Romans 8, especially in contrast to the agonizing cry at the end of chapter 7. Let us savor our security, and let us stand fast, knowing that our labor in the Lord is not in vain.

Inspirational Thoughts

The smile of God is victory. John Greenleaf Whittier (1807–1892)

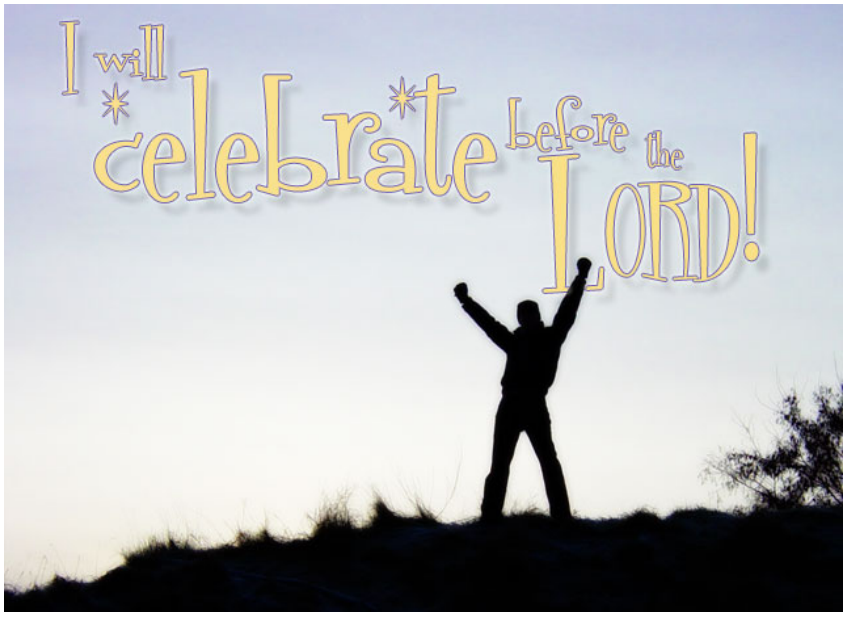
The triumphant Christian does not fight for victory; he celebrates a victory already won. The victorious life is Christ's business, not yours. Reginald Wallis

True triumphs are God's triumphs over us. His defeats of us are our real victories. Henry Alford (1810–1871)

Devotional readings

(Romans 8) "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, {2} because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. {3} For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, {4} in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit. {5} Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. {6} The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; {7} the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. {8} Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.

{9} You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. {10} But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. {11} And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you. {12} Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation--but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. {13} For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, {14} because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. {15} For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." {16} The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. {17} Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. {18} I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. {19} The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. {20} For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope {21} that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. {22} We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. {23} Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. {24} For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? {25} But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. {26} In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. {27} And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will. {28} And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. {29} For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. {30} And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. {31} What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? {32} He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? {33} Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. {34} Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died--more than that, who was raised to life--is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. {35} Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? {36} As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." {37} No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. {38} For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, {39} neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."



14
Willing to Worship…

A man can no more diminish God's glory by refusing to worship him than a lunatic can put out the sun by scribbling the word darkness on the walls of his cell.[150]

Erwin Lutzer said, "If we haven't learned to be worshipers, it doesn't really matter how well we do anything else. "

Realizing the awesome presence of God is quite a discovery. It changes our life. Our worship. Our Eternity.

The plea is a simple one:

Bring yourself and your spirit of worship.
Bring reverence for God and His house.
Bring your offering (the tithe plus).
Bring a spirit of love and fellowship.
Bring a hearty handshake and a smile.
Bring a kind word and helpful thoughts.
Bring your willingness to help sing, and sing out of your heart.
Bring a friend or relative.
Be sure to bring your visiting friend.
Bring your best each Sunday to worship.
Get the church-going habit.

In their book *Lessons from History*, Will and Ariel Durant observed, "There is no significant example in history, before our time, of a society successfully maintaining moral life without the aid of religion."

I hope Charles Spurgeon was incorrect, when he observed that " I believe a very large majority of churchgoers are merely unthinking, slumbering worshipers of an unknown God."

[150] C. S. Lewis (1898–1963)

We have crowded God out of the center by replacing Him with ourselves. And it is much worse to have a false idea of God than no idea at all.

A wife remarked to her husband after the church service: "Did you see the hat Mrs. Jones was wearing?" "No," said her husband, "I didn't." "Did you see the new dress Mrs. Smith had on?" she asked. "I'm afraid I didn't," said her husband. To this his wife replied: "Well a lot of good it does YOU to go to church!"

God used to rage at the Israelites for frequenting holy groves. I only wish I could find one. Somehow, in the secularizing sweep in our world, we have lost the light out of the treetops. We've lost the sense of holiness that somehow permeates the sacred groves, and there isn't anything sacred to most of us anymore.

We have gone all the way from pantheism to pan-atheism--from a view of life that found God in everything to a view of life that finds God in nothing. [We have gone] from a view of life where everything was holy to a view where we hardly ever see anything holy anymore. [151]

The majority of us do not enthrone God, we enthrone common sense. We make our decisions and then ask the real God to bless our god's decision. [152]

The one essential condition of human existence is that man should always be able to bow down before something infinitely great. If men are deprived of the infinitely great, they will not go on living and will die of despair. The Infinite and the Eternal are as essential for man as the little planet on which he dwells.[153]

Men must worship something, if they do not worship an unseen Being who loves and cares for them, they will worship the works of their own hands; they will secretly bow down to the things that they see, and hear, and taste, and smell; these will be their lords and master.[154]

A silent love is acceptable only from the lower animals. God has given us speech that we should call upon his name. Worship is to religion what fragrance is to the flower.[155]

G. Campbell Morgan told a story about a father and his young daughter who were especially close. They enjoyed spending time together. If he went for a walk or made a social call, she wanted to go along. But then he began to notice a change. When he asked her to accompany him on errands, she made excuses. As the weeks passed, he became concerned about it.

When his birthday came, she presented him with a pair of slippers she had made. Then he realized that she had been working on them while he was out of the house. "Darling, I like these slippers very much," he said gently, "but next time buy the slippers and let me have you all the days. I would rather have you than anything you can make for me."

Beyond any work we may do for God, time spent in His presence must take priority. He desires our fellowship first of all. If our worship is neglected, our work will be deficient.

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[151] Annie Dillard, Preaching Today.

[152] Oswald Chambers in *The Oswald Chambers Devotional Reader*. Christianity Today, Vol. 36, no. 9.

[153] Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Leadership, Vol. 19, no. 1.

[154] Frederick Denison Maurice, Virtue, Vol. 21, no. 1.

[155] Henry Van Dyke in *The Upward Path*. Christianity Today, Vol. 42, no. 7.

It's a necessary lesson to discover that worship does not satisfy our hunger for God; it only whets our appetite.

If we yearned after God even as much as a cow yearns for her calf, we would be the worshiping and effective believers God wants us to be. If we longed for God as a bride looks forward to the return of her husband, we would be a far greater force for God than we are now. [156]

God wants us to worship Him. He doesn't need us, for He couldn't be a self-sufficient God and need anything or anybody, but He wants us. When Adam sinned it was not he who cried, "God, where art Thou?" It was God who cried, "Adam, where art thou?"[157]

It is a terrible thing to be grateful and have no one to thank, to be awed and have no one to worship. [158]

Ten Values of Church Attendance:

1. It keeps your heart in constant tune with God.
2. It keeps your mind on the great necessity for having God's word spread throughout all nations.
3. It improves your character by learning the great examples that Christ gave to us.
4. It improves your disposition by learning to be meek and humble like Christ.
5. It helps in your everyday life by learning to love one another, even as Christ loved you.
6. It teaches you to give and know the wonderful joy you receive by giving.
7. It teaches you to pray, for prayer is the answer to many of your problems.
8. It gives your soul great joy and comfort to worship and know that God is near.
9. It shows the world that you are working for Christ and His Kingdom.
10. It is what Christ intended for you to do. *"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."*[159]

The church is not:

* An ark for the saving of a select few.

* A ferryboat to take effortless passengers to the shores of heaven.

* A life insurance company, with no obligation on policy holders except the payment of a small annual premium.

* A social set, welcoming certain people and excluding others from its fellowship.

* A Sunday pleasure club for the providing of pleasant occupation on the day of rest.

The church is:

* A lifeboat for the rescue of sin-wrecked and perishing souls.

* A family, in which love and service are expected from each member to each member.

* An organized community, with constant activities and continual growth and development.

* A company of believers who have found the one way of life and obey the one Lord of life.

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[156] A. W. Tozer in *Men Who Met God*. Christianity Today, Vol. 30, no. 15
[157] Ibid, Tozer.
[158] Phillip Yancey, *Open Windows, Marriage Partnership*, Vol. 5, no. 4.
[159] Manhattan Messenger, Pulpit Helps, May 1996, p. 25.

* A union of those who love for the benefit of those who suffer.

* A center of social worship, in which the spiritual life of each is helped by the spiritual life of his fellow.

* The representative -- the "body" -- of Jesus Christ on the earth, reflecting his spirit and controlled by his will.

I like the following list, which speaks not only to sporting events but also worship: The reasons why I'm giving up sports (football in the fall, baseball in the summer, basketball in the winter). I've had it all. I quit attending sports once and for all, and here are my excuses:

1. Every time I went, they asked for money.
2. The people I sat next to didn't seem friendly.
3. The seats were too hard and not comfortable at all.
4. I went to many games but the coach never came to call on me.
5. The referees made decisions that I couldn't agree with.
6. The game went into overtime and I was late getting home.
7. The band played numbers I'd never heard before and it wasn't my style of music.
8. It seems the games are always scheduled when I want to do other things.
9. I suspect that I was sitting next to some hypocrites. They came to see their friends and they talked during the whole game.
10. I was taken to too many games by my parents when I was growing up.
11. I hate to wait in the traffic jam in the parking lot after the game.

Adrian Rogers maintains that Americans attend church at least three times in their life. When they are hatched, matched, and dispatched. The first time they throw water. The second time they throw rice. The third time they throw dirt.

Reasons for attending church fall into two categories -- good and bad. In the bad column are these: Attending is socially acceptable. God is angry if I don't. Going merits His favor. I feel better. Such motivations dishonor God, and some are the devil's lies.

In the good column are these reasons: God's Word commands it. I need Christian fellowship. Others need my encouragement. I can hear the Word. I can meet God.

A story might help to explain. One day the telephone rang in the minister’s office of the Washington church attended by the President. An eager voice said, "Tell me, do you expect the President to be there Sunday?" "That I cannot promise," the minister said patiently. "But we do expect God, and we fancy it will be incentive enough for a reasonably large attendance.

Ted Malone, whose radio show came on early in the morning, told of the Idaho shepherd who wrote: "Will you, on your broadcast, strike the note 'A'? I'm a sheepherder way out here on a ranch, far away from a piano. The only comfort I have is my old violin. It's all out of tune. Would you strike 'A' so that I might get in tune?"

Malone honored the request. Later he received a "thank you" note from the distant shepherd saying, "Now I'm in tune."

One of the purposes and responsibilities of personal and public worship is to enable the aspirant to keep tuned to the Great Shepherd.

One of the joys of the Christian life is to help others recapture the missing note!

Have you known of someone who could have written this following letter: "Dear Minister: You often stress attendance at worship as being very important for a Christian, but I think a person has a right to miss now and then. I think every person ought to be excused for the following reasons and the number of times indicated:

Christmas (Sunday before or after)
New Year (Party lasted too long)
Easter (Get away for holidays)
July 4 (National holiday)
Labor Day (Need to get away)
Memorial Day (Visit hometown)
School Closing (Kids need break)
School Opens (One last fling)
Family Reunions (Mine & wife's)
Sleep late (Saturday night activities)
Deaths in Family
Anniversary (Second honeymoon)
Sickness (One per family member)
Business Trips (A must)
Vacation (Three weeks)
Bad Weather (Ice, snow, rain, clouds)
Ball games
Unexpected Company (Can't walk out)
Time changes (Spring ahead; fall back)
Special on TV (Super Bowl, etc.)

"That leaves only two Sundays per year. So, you can count on us to be in church on the fourth Sunday in February and the third Sunday in August unless providentially hindered. Sincerely, A Faithful Member."

No Excuse Sunday

To make it possible for everyone to attend church next Sunday, we are going to have a special "No Excuse Sunday." Cots will be placed in the foyer for those who say, "Sunday is my only day to sleep in." Murine will be available for those with tired eyes... from watching television too late on Saturday night. We will have steel helmets for those who say, "The roof would cave in if I ever came to church." Blankets will be provided for those who think the church is too cold, and fans for those who think the church is too hot. We will have hearing aids for those who say, "The Minister speaks too softly," and cotton for those who say he preaches too loudly.

Score cards will be available for those who wish to list the hypocrites present. Some relatives will be in attendance for those who like to go visiting on Sunday. There will be 100 T.V. dinners for those who cannot go to church and cook dinner also. One section will be devoted to trees and grass for those who like to seek God in nature. Finally, the sanctuary will be decorated with both Christmas poinsettias and Easter lilies for those who have never seen the church without them.

Just suppose the Lord would begin tomorrow to make people as sick as they claim to be on Sunday. Just suppose the Lord would take away the child whom the parents use as an excuse for staying away from church. Some things sound humorous, but they are serious! What is your excuse? See you next Sunday!?

One hour with God infinitely exceeds all the pleasures and delights of this lower world. A. W. Tozer said, "We are called to an everlasting preoccupation with God."

Orthodox Jews avoided Samaria because there was a long-standing, deep-seated hatred between them and the Samaritans.

The Samaritans were a mixed race, part Jew and part Gentile, that grew out of the Assyrian captivity of the ten northern tribes in 727 b.c. Rejected by the Jews because they could not prove their genealogy, the Samaritans established their own temple and religious services on Mt. Gerizim.

This only fanned the fires of prejudice. So intense was their dislike of the Samaritans that some of the Pharisees prayed that no Samaritan would be raised in the resurrection! When His enemies wanted to call Jesus an insulting name, they called Him a Samaritan (John 8:48).

He made it clear that all religions are not equally acceptable before God, that some worshipers act in ignorance and unbelief.

It was a devastating statement to say that worship would no longer be limited to the Jewish temple. This ties in with John 2:19-21 and also Stephen's statement in Acts 7:48-50. John's Gospel clearly reveals that there is a new sacrifice (John 1:29), a new temple (John 2:19-21; 4:20-24), a new birth (John 3:1-7), and a new water (John 4:11). Jews reading this Gospel should realize that God has established in Jesus Christ a whole new economy. The Old Covenant Law has been fulfilled and set aside.

Arthur Pink had a specific perspective of those who offer false worship: 'They bring their bodies to the house of prayer but not their souls. They worship with their mouths but not in spirit and in truth.

"They are sticklers for early morning communion with God but they take no thought about keeping their hearts with all diligence.

"They boast of their orthodoxy but disregard the precepts of Christ.

"Multitudes of professing Christians abstain from external acts of violence, yet hesitate not to rob their neighbors of a good name by spreading evil reports against them.

"They contribute regularly to the church but shrink not from misrepresenting their goods and cheating their customers persuading themselves that business is business.

"They have more regard for the laws of man than those of God for his fear is not before their eyes."

In a false worship we may detect three faults. First, a false worship is a selective worship. It chooses what it wishes to know about God and omits the rest.

One of the most dangerous things in the world is a one-sided religion. It is very easy for a man to accept and hold such parts of God's truth as suit him and to disregard the remainder.

We would do well to remember that, although no man will ever grasp the whole orb of truth, it is total truth that we should aim at, not the snatching at fragments which happen to suit ourselves and our own position.

Second a false worship is an ignorant worship. Worship ought to be the approach to God of the whole man. A man has a mind and he has a duty to exercise it.

Religion may begin with an emotional response; but the time comes when that emotional response has to be thought out. E. F. Scott said that religion is far more than merely the strenuous exercise of the intellect, but that nonetheless a very great part of religious failure is due to nothing other than intellectual sloth.

To fail to think things out is in itself a sin. In the last analysis, religion is never safe until a man can tell, not only what he believes, but why he believes it. Religion is hope, but it is hope with reason behind it (1 *Peter* 3:15).

Finally, a false worship is a superstitious worship. It is a worship given, not out of a sense of need nor out of any real desire, but basically because a man feels that it might be dangerous not to give it.

Many a person will refuse to walk beneath a ladder; many a person will have a pleased feeling when a black cat crosses his path; many a person will pick up a pin with the idea that good luck will follow; many a person will have an uncomfortable feeling when he is one of thirteen sitting at a table.

He does not believe in these superstitions, but he has the feeling that there might be something in them and he had better play safe.

There are many people whose religion is founded on a kind of vague fear of what might happen if they leave God out of the reckoning. But real religion is founded not on fear but on the love of God and gratitude for what God has done. Too much religion is a kind of superstitious ritual to avert the possible wrath of the unpredictable gods. [160]

A man's spirit is the highest part of him. That is the part which lasts when the physical part has vanished. That is the part which dreams the dreams and sees the visions which, because of the weakness and faultiness of the body, may never be carried out. It is the spirit of a man which is the source of his highest dreams and thoughts and ideals and desires.

The true worship is when man, through his spirit, attains to friendship and intimacy with God. Genuine worship does not consist in coming to a certain place nor in going through a certain ritual or liturgy nor even in bringing certain gifts. True worship is when the spirit, the immortal and invisible part of man, speaks to and meets with God, himself immortal and invisible.[161]

I believe that if we are to be and to do for others what God means us to be and to do, we must not let adoration and worship slip into second place, "For it is the central service asked by God of human souls; and its neglect is responsible for much lack of spiritual depth and power."

Perhaps we may find here the reason why we so often run dry. We do not give time enough to what makes for depth, and so we are shallow; a wind, quite a little wind, can ruffle our surface; a little hot sun, and all the moisture in us evaporates. It should not be so. [162]

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160 The Gospel of John Vol. 1 and 2, *The Daily Study Bible Series Revised Edition* by William Barclay
[161] Ibid
[162] Amy Carmichael in *Edges of His Ways*. Christianity Today, Vol. 39, no. 13.

Let me recite some lines from some ancient prayers from the black church. We have some people in every tradition who pray pretty much the same prayer every Sunday if they're asked to pray. Many of these lines are well known all over the black church.

One of the lines is, "Lord, I thank you that the blood is running warm in my veins this morning and that my bed was not my cooling board." Cooling board is a reference to the slab of concrete or marble on which a dead body lies in the mortuary. They just let your body cool down.

You get these old saints who say, "Lord, I thank you that this morning when I rose, my bed was not my cooling board. One more day to praise you and thank you. You've been good."

Or another line is, "Lord, I want to thank you that you've allowed my golden moments to roll on." I love that line: "You could have stopped my life at any point, but you allowed my golden moments to roll on." God says, "I've been good to you. You ought to worship and praise me." [163]

We'll close with these words:
If my lips could sing as many songs as there are waves in the sea:
if my tongue could sing as many hymns as there are ocean billows:
if my mouth filled the whole firmament with praise:
if my face shone like the sun and moon together:
if my hands were to hover in the sky like powerful eagles
and my feet ran across mountains as swiftly as the deer;
all that would not be enough to pay you fitting tribute,
O Lord my God. [164]

WORSHIP

By making a lot of religious din we assure our faltering hearts that everything is well, and, conversely, we suspect silence and regard it as a proof that the meeting is "dead." A. W. Tozer (1897–1963)

God is looking for worshipers. And if the religious elite are too proud or too busy to learn to worship him, he seeks the worship of those whose lives are trapped in moral ruin.
Erwin W. Lutzer (1941–)

God wants worshipers before workers; indeed the only acceptable workers are those who have learned the lost art of worship. . . . The very stones would praise him if the need arose and a thousand legions of angels would leap to do his will. A. W. Tozer (1897–1963)

He who knows God reverences him. Lucius Annaeus Seneca (c. 4 b.c.-a.d. 65)

In worship we meet the power of God and stand in its strengthening. Nels F. S. Ferré (1769–1821)

If worship does not change us, it has not been worship. To stand before the Holy One of eternity is to change. Worship begins in holy expectancy; it ends in holy obedience.
Richard J. Foster (1942–)

If you can leave your church on Sunday morning with no feeling of discomfort, of conviction, of brokenness, of challenge, then for you the hour of worship has not been as dangerous as it should have been. The ease with which we go on being Christian sentimentalists is one of our worst faults. Paul Stromberg Rees (1900–)

Many regular church attenders consistently focus their minds on sporting events, business affairs, or matters of personal interest as soon as the sermon begins. Many so-called worshipers can tell you what dress the

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[163] Richard Allen Farmer, "The 'What's' and the 'Why' of Worship," Preaching Today, Tape No. 150.

[164] Hymn probably composed in the Talmudic period, 3rd-5th century A.D., in *Praying with the Jewish Tradition* (comp. Elias Kopciowski). Christianity Today, Vol. 41, no. 9.

minister's wife wore in the service, but cannot recall the text of the sermon or the application of the message to their lives. Richard Owen Roberts (1931–)

The one essential condition of human existence is that man should always be able to bow down before something infinitely great. The Infinite and the Eternal are as essential for man as the little planet on which he dwells. Fyodor Mikhaylovich Dostoyevski (1821–1881)

There are delights that the heart may enjoy in the awesome presence of God that cannot find expression in language; they belong to the unutterable element in Christian experience. Not many enjoy them because not many know that they can. The whole concept of ineffable worship has been lost. A. W. Tozer (1897–1963)

There may be worship without words! James Russell Lowell (1819–1891)

Those who worship God merely from fear would worship the devil, too, if he appear. Sir Thomas Fuller (1608–1661)

To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God. Archbishop William Temple (1881–1944)

Whatever is outward in worship must come as a direct result of what is inward—otherwise, it will be form without power.
Howard Brinton

Worship is a way of living, a way of seeing the world in the light of God . . . to rise to a higher level of existence, to see the world from the point of view of God. Abraham J. Heschel (1907–1972)

Worship isn't listening to a sermon, appreciating the harmony of the notes, and joining in singing hymns! It isn't even prayer, for prayer can be the selfish expression of an unbroken spirit. Worship goes deeper. Since God is spirit, we fellowship with him with our spirit; that is, the immortal and invisible part of us meets with God, who is immortal and invisible. Erwin W. Lutzer (1941–)

Worship renews the spirit as sleep renews the body. Richard Clarke Cabot (1868–1939)

Worship requires only a man and God.

Devotional Readings

(Matthew 4:9-10) ""All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." {10} Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'""

(Matthew 15:9) "They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.""

(Luke 4:7-8) "So if you worship me, it will all be yours." {8} Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'""

(John 4:20-24) "Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." {21} Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. {22} You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. {23} Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. {24} God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.""

(Acts 7:42-43) "But God turned away and gave them over to the worship of the heavenly bodies. This agrees with what is written in the book of the prophets: "'Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings forty years in the desert, O house of Israel? {43} You have lifted up the shrine of Molech and the star of your god Rephan, the idols you made to worship. Therefore I will send you into exile' beyond Babylon."

(Acts 17:23) "For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you."

(Romans 12:1) "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship."

(Philippians 3:3) "For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh--"

(Colossians 2:18) "Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions."

(Hebrews 9:1) "Now the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary."

(Hebrews 10:1) "The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming--not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship."

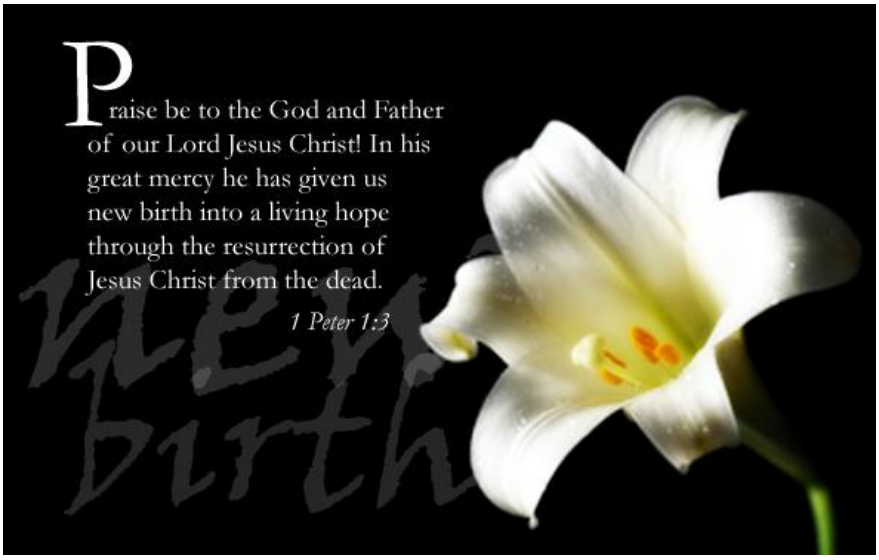
(Hebrews 12:28) "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe,"

(Revelation 14:7) "He said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.""

(Revelation 15:4) "Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.""

(Revelation 19:10) "At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.""

(Revelation 22:8-9) "I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. {9} But he said to me, "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers the prophets and of all who keep the words of this book. Worship God!""



15
Hungering for Hope…

He that lives in hope dances without a fiddle

Sometimes in spite of all the positive thinking we can generate, life is really terrible. Simple optimism will not do. Genuine hope ("confident expectation") must go beyond positive thinking. Genuine hope is not "Wishing for something you know isn't going to happen." It is not an idle wish at all.

Hope is a vigorous principle; it sets the head and heart to work and animates a man to do his utmost. [165]

I like the story about the boy and his father who were planning a fishing trip for the next day. That evening as the father was putting his son to bed, the boy hugged his father's neck and said, "Daddy, thank you for tomorrow."

If there are two words that should be said in the same breath and said regularly to ventilate our hope, that should be flamed together, branded as a signature of our faith, they are the words "faith" and "courage." It takes courage to believe, and in order to have that courage, we must believe. [166]

This nation was built by the power of hope. No painter ever set brush to canvas, no writer ever set pen to paper, no builder ever set brick on brick, no enterpriser ever built an enterprise without having hope that he or she could do what they were dreaming of doing. We have not begun to fathom the power of hope in creating better lives for ourselves and our children. [167]

We benefit from the foresight of those who have gone before, who lived as if they realized that vision is merely hope with a blueprint.

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[165] Jeremy Collier (1650–1726)

[166] Fay Angus in *Running Around in Spiritual Circles*. Christianity Today, Vol. 36, no. 5.

[167] Lewis Smedes, "Keep Hope Alive," Preaching Today, Tape No. 139.

Hope prevents us from clinging to what we have and frees us to move away from the safe place and enter unknown and fearful territory. [168]

It's the wise individual who can hope for the best, get ready for the worst, and take what God chooses to send.

Hope is also a powerful concept. Without hope in the future, we have no power in the present. Hope may keep us alive. Without hope there is no reason to live. It has been said, "Life without Christ is a hopeless end, but life with Christ is an endless hope."

"As long as I actively attack a problem, I am confident that the situation can be improved," says TV puppeteer Shari Lewis.

"About a decade ago I was told I had breast cancer and would need radical surgery. Hopeful there was another path, I sought other opinions, keeping hope alive long enough to find another surgeon and other treatments that enabled me to avoid radical procedures. And I've been totally healthy for lo these many years!

"I find that it works both ways. If you are hopeful, of course you can take action. The miracle occurs when you don't feel much hope, yet you push yourself into action anyway. Perhaps it is the brain, stimulated by the action, that brings you back to hope. I don't know why it works. I just know that it does."

It seems reasonable to hope in the Lord, but exert ourselves to accomplish that which is possible. We usually promise according to our hopes and perform according to our fears. God wants it to be lived in reverse!

I like the example of the hospice nurse, who had ministered to many as they faced death, trying to ease the transition. A minister asked her, "Do Christians die differently from others?" "Most definitely, yes," she replied, "Christians really do die better." Why do Christians die better? "They know it isn't over."

Hope is grief's best music. [169] Hope is like the clouds: some pass by, others bring rain. Hope is like the sun, which, as we journey toward it, casts the shadow of our burden behind us.[170]

During World War I, a British commander was preparing to lead his soldiers back to battle. They'd been on furlough, and it was a cold, rainy, muddy day. Their shoulders sagged because they knew what lay ahead of them: mud, blood, possible death. Nobody talked, nobody sang. It was a heavy time.

As they marched along, the commander looked into a bombed-out church. Back in the church he saw the figure of Christ on the cross. At that moment, something happened to the commander. He remembered the One who suffered, died, and rose again. There was victory, and there was triumph.

As the troops marched along, he shouted out, "Eyes right, march!" Every eye turned to the right, and as the soldiers marched by, they saw Christ on the cross. Something happened to that company of men. Suddenly they saw triumph after suffering, and they took courage. With shoulders straightened, they began to smile as they went. You see, anything worthwhile in life will be a risk that demands courage. [171]

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[168] Henri J. Nouwen in *The Wounded Healer*. Christianity Today, Vol. 40, no. 13.
[169] Henry George Bohn (1796–1884)

[170] Samuel Smiles (1812–1904)

[171] Gordon Johnson, "Finding Significance in Obscurity," Preaching Today, Tape No. 82.

Our lives take a definite turn toward optimism when we live our lives this way! Hope looks for the good in people instead of harping on the worst in them. Hope opens doors where despair closes them. Hope discovers what can be done instead of grumbling about what cannot be done. Hope draws its power from a deep trust in God and the basic goodness of mankind. Hope "lights a candle" instead of "cursing the darkness." Hope regards problems, small or large, as opportunities. Hope cherishes no illusions, nor does it yield to cynicism.

The apostle Peter offered this counsel: *"So, then, gird up the loins of your mind; be sober; come to a final decision to place your hope on the grace which is going to be brought to you at the revealing of Jesus Christ."* (1 Peter 1:13).

Peter has been talking about the greatness and the glory to which the Christian may look forward; but the Christian can never be lost in dreams of the future; he must always be virile in the battle of the present. So Peter sends out three challenges to his people.

He tells them *to gird up the loins of their mind*. This is a deliberately vivid phrase. In the east men wore long flowing robes which hindered fast progress or strenuous action. Round the waist they wore a broad belt or girdle; and when strenuous action was necessary they shortened the long robe by pulling it up within the belt in order to give them freedom of movement. The English equivalent of the phrase would be to roll up one's sleeves or to take off one's jacket.

Peter is telling his people that they must be ready for the most strenuous mental endeavor. They must never be content with a flabby and unexamined faith; they must set to and think things out and think them through. It may be that they will have to discard some things. It may be that they will make mistakes. But what they are left with will be theirs in such a way that nothing and nobody can ever take it away from them.

He tells them *to be sober*. Peter is appealing to them to maintain the essential steadiness of the man who knows what he believes.

He tells them *to set their hope on the grace which is going to be given to them when Jesus Christ comes*. It is the great characteristic of the Christian that he lives in hope; and because he lives in hope he can endure the trials of the present. Any man can endure struggle and effort and toil, if he is certain that it is all leading somewhere. That is why the athlete accepts his training and the student his study.

For the Christian the best is always still to come. He can live with gratitude for all the mercies of the past, with resolution to meet the challenge of the present and with the certain hope that in Christ the best is yet to be.[172]

We might be like the student athlete, who was contemplating the difficult height of the bar on the high jump. "I don't think I can make it," he said. "Think positive!" said a friend. "All right," the athlete said boldly, "I'm positive I can't make it."

Many of us think fondly of that dismal, old grey donkey Eeyore in the Winnie-the-Pooh children's books by A.A. Milne. While lovable and secretly goodhearted, he is usually gloomy and negative, always expecting the worst.

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[172] **The First Letter of Peter,** The Daily Study Bible Series Revised Edition by William Barclay.

During my years as a minister, I've met many people like that. They never accept responsibility because they're certain they'll fail. Or, they serve "faithfully" in the church, but gloomily imagine critics in every pew and corner.

Picture for a moment the person who "never receives enough attention," never initiates friendships, and assumes the church is really run by an inner circle where he or she will never be welcomed. Would you agree that person often sounds like Eeyore in this conversation with Rabbit?

"Nobody tells me," said Eeyore, "nobody keeps me Informed. I make it seventeen days come Friday since anybody spoke to me."

"It certainly isn't seventeen days--"

"Come Friday," explained Eeyore.

"And today's Saturday," said Rabbit. "So that would make it eleven days. And I was here myself a week ago."

"Not conversing," said Eeyore. "Not first one and then the other. You said 'Hallo' and Flashed Past. I saw your tail in the distance as I was meditating my reply. I had thought of saying 'What?'--but, of course, it was then too late."

"Well, I was in a hurry."

"No Give and Take," Eeyore went on. "No Exchange of Thought: 'Hallo--What'--I mean, it gets you nowhere, particularly if the other person's tail is only in sight for the second half of the conversation."

"It's your fault, Eeyore. You've never been to see any of us. You just stay here in this corner of the Forest waiting for others to come to you. Why don't you go to them sometimes?"

Eeyore was silent for a little while, thinking. "There may be something in what you say, Rabbit," he said at last. "I must move more. I must come and go."

"That's right, Eeyore. Drop in on any of us at any time, when you feel like it."

"Thank-you, Rabbit. And if anybody says in a Loud Voice, 'Bother, it's Eeyore,' I can drop out again."

We've all known other Eeyores. But as I chuckled over this conversation, another thought stabbed me. How much like Eeyore am I? How often to I expect the worst?

Do I anticipate defeat? Do I let that Eeyore-ish gloom dominate my spiritual life or my expectations of my family? Am I prone to suspect there's a hidden conspiracy in the church to "do things" without me?

In my little corner of God's forest, have I forgotten Paul's prayer? *"Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit"* (Romans 15:13).

How can I tolerate gloomy expectations when my Lord is Jesus, the God of creation? When my family is in his faithful care? When my church is his church, under his sovereign direction? And when every Eeyore I know in God's congregation is his Eeyore--including me! [173]

[173] Robert W. Harvey, Pastor, Bethel Presbyterian Church. Leadership, Vol. 1, no. 4.

My brother works with inner-city kids in Atlanta, and the society hasn't beaten them down yet. They still believe in the future. Ask them, "What are you going to do? What are you going to be?" They say, "I'm going to be an astronaut" or "I'm going to be a surgeon." They say, "I'm going to be a musician" or "I'm going to be a pro basketball player." They believe in the future.

As they grow older, ugly realism might set in. Did you see the movie *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*? In one of the most painful scenes Malcolm X realizes the system will not allow him to be a lawyer, and his dream is shattered.

It is not the way we deal with our human situation that is the basis for hope--hope is the basis for how we deal with our human situation.

If ever you have the chance to visit the catacombs in Rome, those tunnels under the ancient city, where many of the early Christians were buried, you can see the symbols of faith on their tombs. Three common symbols appear: the dove, the fish, and the anchor. The dove symbolizes the Holy Spirit. The letters of the Greek word for "fish," ichthus, stand for the words Jesus Christ, God's Son, Savior. The anchor came from the idea that as Christians were going through difficult, insecure times, their hope anchored their souls. [174]

In all things it is better to hope than to despair. In his book, *A Gift of Hope*, author Robert Veninga describes this transforming experience, which took place in the life of a 41-year-old man after he prayed: I left work early after hearing that I would lose my job. I got in my car and and went to my church. Unfortunately the minister was not there. But the chapel was open. I went in and stared at the cross. I started to cry. I told God that I didn't have the strength to get through this mess. And I asked for help. I must have sat there for a couple of hours. I brushed away my tears. Suddenly a whole load went off my shoulders. I can't explain it, but I went into that chapel crushed and I came out feeling strong. I actually felt that I could make it.

In a recent sermon, Bill Hybels shared this story: "A friend of mine has a brain-damaged daughter. Sometimes the sadness she feels over her daughter's condition overwhelms her, as it did recently. She wrote me this letter and gave me permission to quote from it: " '... I can hardly bear it sometimes. My most recent wave of grief came just last year before her sixteenth birthday. As the day approached, I found myself brooding over all the things that she would never be able to do. What did I do? What I've learned to do again and again: I did what I believe is the only thing to do to conquer grief, and that is to embrace it. ... I cried and cried and cried, and faced the truth of my grief head on.'

"People who face their feelings and express them freely begin the journey toward hope."[175]

Here's the good news of the gospel: we have a Jesus who creates dreams and visions for us. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is our hope today. It is our assurance that we have a living Savior to help us live as we should now, and that when, in the end, we set forth on that last great jourrney, we shall not travel an uncharted course, but rather we shall go on a planned voyage—life to death to eternal living.[176]

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[174] Stuart Briscoe, "Handling Your Insecurities," Preaching Today, Tape No. 119.
[175] *Preaching Today*. Leadership, Vol. 19, no. 1.
[176] Raymond MacKendree

Because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, believers have been "begotten again" to a living hope, and that hope includes the glory of God. But, what do we mean by "the glory of God"?

The glory of God means the sum total of all that God is and does. "Glory" is not a separate attribute or characteristic of God, such as His holiness, wisdom, or mercy. Everything that God is and does is characterized by glory. He is glorious in wisdom and power, so that everything He thinks and does is marked by glory. He reveals His glory in creation (Ps. 19), in His dealings with the people of Israel, and especially in His plan of salvation for lost sinners.[177]

I must insist that we take a few steps alongside the men on the road to Emmaus (*Luke* 24:13-35) to make certain we see the other side of this difficult coin. The whole situation seemed to these two men to have no explanation. Their hopes and dreams were shattered. There is all the poignant, wistful, bewildered regret in the world in their sorrowing words, *"We were hoping that he was the one who was going to rescue Israel."*

They were the words of men whose hopes were dead and buried. Then Jesus came and talked with them, and the meaning of life became clear and the darkness became light.

Life with Christ is an endless hope, without him a hopeless end.

A story-teller makes one of his characters say to the one with whom he has fallen in love, "I never knew what life meant until I saw it in your eyes." It is only in Jesus that, even in the bewildering times, we learn what life means.[178]

Do not look forward to the changes and chances of this life in fear; rather look to them with full hope that, as they arise, God, whose you are, will deliver you out of them. He is your Keeper. He has kept you hitherto. Hold fast to his dear hand, and he will lead you safely through all things; and, when you cannot stand, he will bear you in his arms. Do not look forward to what may happen tomorrow. Our Father will either shield you from suffering, or he will give you strength to bear it. [179]

In his book *Dare to Believe*, Dan Baumann illustrates the unique experience of knowing that something is ours, yet longing to enjoy it more fully. He explained that at Christmas time he would always do a lot of snooping, trying to find the gift --wrapped presents and figure out what was in them. One year he discovered a package with his name on it that was easy to identify. There was no way to disguise the golf clubs inside. Baumann then made this observation: "When Mom wasn't around, I would go and feel the package, shake it, and pretend that I was on the golf course. The point is, I was already enjoying the pleasures of a future event; namely, the unveiling. It had my name on it. I knew what it was." But only "Christmas would reveal it in its fullness."

The glories that await the Christian defy our comprehension. What we can grasp about them, however, fills us with great anticipation. We look longingly to that day when we shall enjoy heaven in all its fullness.

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[177] Warren Wiersbe, BE Series – *Be Hopeful*, 1 Peter
[178] Ibid, William Barclay.
[179] Saint Francis of Sales (1567–1622)

Fay Inchfawn wrote,

"Sometimes, when everything goes wrong; When days are short and nights are long;
When wash-day brings so dull a sky That not a single thing will dry.
And when the kitchen chimney smokes, And when there's naught so 'queer' as folks!
When friends deplore my faded youth, And when the baby cuts a tooth.
While John, the baby last but one, Clings round my skirts till day is done;
And fat, good-tempered Jane is glum, And butcher's man forgets to come.
Sometimes I say on days like these, I get a sudden gleam of bliss.
Not on some sunny day of ease, He'll come . . . but on a day like this!"

The Christian lives always and everywhere in a Christ-filled world.

Going down some old cement steps, I noticed an ant carrying a leaf on its back. The leaf was many times bigger than the ant. Then the ant came to a big crack in the cement that it couldn't cross. The ant stopped a moment. I wondered if the ant would turn back or proceed into the crack without the leaf. Instead, the ant put the leaf across the crack and then crossed the crack by walking across the leaf. On the other side, the ant picked up the leaf and continued on its journey.

It made me think that the burdens of today will be the bridges by which we will be able to cross the hard places in life in the future.[180]

Do not look forward to the changes and chances of this life in fear; rather look to them with full hope that, as they arise, God, whose you are, will deliver you out of them. He is your keeper. He has kept you hitherto. Do you but hold fast to His dear hand, and He will lead you safely through all things; and, when you cannot stand, He will bear you in His arms. Do not look forward to what may happen tomorrow. Our Father will either shield you from suffering, or He will give you strength to bear it. [181]

Two hundred years ago, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe wrote out nine prerequisites for contented living. Whether you're the eighth wonder of the world or not, these are the things that really matter.

1. Health enough to make work a pleasure:
2. Wealth enough to support your needs:
3. Strength to battle with difficulties and overcome them:
4. Grace enough to confess your sins and forsake them:
5. Patience enough to toil until some good is accomplished:
6. Charity enough to see some good in your neighbor:
7. Love enough to move you to be useful and helpful to others:
8. Faith enough to make real the things of God:
9. Hope enough to remove all anxious fears concerning the future.

A woman diagnosed with a terminal illness called on her minister to plan her funeral. She had some ideas about what she hoped would happen, but she was insistent about one thing: "I want to be buried with a fork in my hand."

[180] Bernabe Spivey. Leadership, Vol. 20, no. 23.
[181] St. Francis of Sales, Virtue, Vol. 20, no. 7.

Her incredulous minister demanded an explanation. "Oh, it's quite simple," the woman said. "In all my years of attending church socials and potlucks, I always remember that, when they clear the dishes, someone will say, 'Keep your fork.' It's my favorite part, because I know something better is coming. So I want people to see me there in that coffin with a fork in my hand and know: 'Her best is still to come.' " [182]

For the Christian, the dark shadow of death will be illuminated by the shining face of Jesus. Phoebe Cary wrote these words of hope:

One sweetly solemn thought comes to me o'er and o'er;
I'm nearer to my home today than I've ever been before;
nearer my Father's house, where the many mansions be;
nearer the great white throne, nearer the jasper sea;
nearer the bound of life, where I lay my burden down;
nearer leaving my cross; nearer wearing my crown!

HOPE

As long as matters are really hopeful, hope is a mere flattery or platitude; it is only when everything is hopeless that hope begins to be a strength. Like all the Christian virtues, it is as unreasonable as it is indispensable. G. K. Chesterton (1874–1936)

Hope has a thick skin and will endure many a blow; it will put on patience as a vestment, it will wade through a sea of blood, it will endure all things if it be of the right kind, for the joy that is set before it. Hence patience is called “patience of hope,” because it is hope that makes the soul exercise patience and long-suffering under the cross, until the time comes to enjoy the crown. John Bunyan (1628–1688)

Hope is an adventure, a going forward—a confident search for a rewarding life. Karl Augustus Menninger (1893–1990)

Hope is an echo, hope ties itself yonder, yonder. Carl Sandburg (1878–1967)

Hope is the last thing that dies in man, and although it be exceedingly deceitful, yet it is of this good use to us, that while we are traveling through life it conducts us in an easier and more pleasant way to our journey’s end. François, Duc de La Rochefoucauld (1613–1680)

Hope means expectancy when things are otherwise hopeless. G. K. Chesterton (1874–1936)

Devotional Readings

(Matthew 12:21) "In his name the nations will put their hope.""

(Acts 2:26) "Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will live in hope,"

(Acts 23:6) "Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, "My brothers, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead.""

(Acts 24:15) "and I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked."

[182] Peachey, J. Lorne. *The Mennonite*, quoted in Christianity Today, "Reflections," April 3, 2000, Vol. 44, No. 4, p. 72.

(Acts 26:6-7) "And now it is because of my hope in what God has promised our fathers that I am on trial today. {7} This is the promise our twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night. O king, it is because of this hope that the Jews are accusing me."

(Romans 4:18) "Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be.""

(Romans 5:2) "through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God."

(Romans 5:4-5) "perseverance, character; and character, hope. {5} And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."

(Romans 8:24-25) "For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? {25} But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently."

(Romans 12:12) "Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer."

(Romans 15:4) "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."

(Romans 15:12-13) "And again, Isaiah says, "The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in him." {13} May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

(1 Corinthians 13:13) "And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love."

(1 Corinthians 15:19) "If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men."

(2 Corinthians 1:7) "And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort."

(Ephesians 1:18) "I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.."

(Ephesians 4:4) "There is one body and one Spirit-- just as you were called to one hope when you were called--"

(Colossians 1:27) "To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."

(1 Thessalonians 4:13) "Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope."

(1 Thessalonians 5:8) "But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet."

(1 Timothy 6:17) "Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment."

(Hebrews 6:18-19) "God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. {19} We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain,"

16
Finding Friendships…

A faithful friend is an image of God, one of life's greatest assets.

Men's Life magazine surprised itself with a survey – asking its readers "What's the most important thing in your life?" And no, it was not sex, it was not career, it was neither fame nor fortune. The most important things to 63 percent of the men were their wives and ninety percent of married men called their wives their best friend.[183]

I am one fortunate guy. I married the 'love of my life' and get to spend every day with her, soon to be our 34th year. She **is** my best friend! Perhaps the only one who could stand me for 1,753 weekends, 12,270 days, 294,474 hours, 17,668,450 minutes (exact at the moment this is being written)…and counting!

She was in my parent's prayers since before our births, and in my deepest, most private utterances to God since the early teen years.

It's tempting to suggest that I am one ***lucky*** guy, except that it was more than luck that we found each other when we did. Too many things simply had to be worked out by God!

[183] *Associated Press*, 9/4/90

Norman Douglas said “to find a friend one must close one eye; to keep him, two.” That might be one way TJ looks at me?

It **is** true that a friend is one who knows all about you and likes you just the same. Terry is my friend, one who knows me as I am, understands where I’ve been, accepts who I’ve become, and still, gently invites me to grow. She one who makes me be my best.

She has a special quotation: “A friend is someone who knows the song in your heart and can sing it back to you when you have forgotten the words.”

Our marriage is a series of successive surprises. Happily married couples appreciate what they each bring to the relationship. Their union is more than just the process of addition. One plus one now equals a deep sense of valuing and being valued.

We’re working every day on our friendship. Our friendship depends on mutual care and a sense of trust. We’ve come to know that old friends are as comfortable as our favorite pair of shoes. New ones are as exciting as the best of life's adventures. And best of all, having friends gives us the privilege of being a friend.

I wish we knew the author who wrote:

There are those who pass like ships in the night. Who meet for a moment, then sail out of sight
With never a backward glance of regret; Folks we know briefly then quickly forget.
Then there are friends who sail together Through quiet waters and stormy weather
Helping each other through joy and through strife. And they are the kind who give meaning to life.

One man summarized what he had learned during a Dale Carnegie course: If you want to keep friends and have people like you, there are three things you must never do. Each one of these begins with a "C". The first one is, "Never complain"; the second, "Never condemn;" and the last one, "Never criticize."

I especially find C. S. Lewis’ words delightful: ‘Eros will have naked bodies; friendship naked personalities.” I suppose anything you can do together as a couple helps strengthen your marriage.

I heard Dr. Dobson on a radio station describe a problem I‘ve seen several times in marriages. The bride expects her new husband to always be romantic and to carry her emotionally. The groom expects to be able to go out to conquer the world and come home at night to his “help meet” who will stroke his male ego, bragging on him for the way he provides for the family. Dr. Dobson called both of these two selfish. He says that each partner in a marriage should look for ways to take care of the other. My job is to love my wife, not to evaluate her support of me. I believe that sounds like Paul in Ephesians 5:25. He writes, *“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.”*

The Bible says iron sharpens iron--butter doesn't sharpen iron. A man must be strong in who he is and a woman must be strong in who she is, like two pieces of iron. Sure, they'll rub together and it won't always be pleasant. But it will be beneficial. Working through their differences is what makes couples strong.

I love the poem that describes what I enjoy: O, the comfort -- the inexpressible comfort of feeling safe with a person, Having neither to weigh thoughts, Nor measure words -- but pouring them right out -- just as they are -

- Chaff and grain together, Certain that a faithful hand will take and sift them -- Keep what is worth keeping -- And with the breath of kindness blow the rest away.[184]

Real friends don't care if your socks don't match. Real friends have a great time doing absolutely nothing together. A real friend warms you by her presence, trusts you with her secrets, and remembers you in her prayers.

Our friends are the people whom we choose; usually friends are the same sort of people as ourselves. My neighbor is the man whom I do not choose; he is the man whom God gives to me. He is the man who happens to live in the house next to mine; he is the man who happens to sit opposite to me in the train; he is the clerk who works at the desk next to mine. I have no right to say that he is no concern of mine, because, if I am a Christian, I know that he is the man whom God has given to me.

A friend is one who warns you. A friend is someone who understands your past, believes in your future, and accepts you today just the way you are.

Are you cultivating such friends? Are you being a friend? Are there a few folks who will stand near you, sheltering you with their branches?

Jay Kesler has said that one of his great hopes in life is to wind up with at least eight people who will attend his funeral without once checking their watches. I love it! Do you have eight people who'll do that? [185]

"Two boys in the last war were devoted pals and friends. After a bitter battle one day, one of the boys found that his pal was missing and knew that he was somewhere out there in No-man's Land. He asked for permission to go out after his friend but the commander said it was no use for no one was alive out there after the withering fire of many hours. After great insistence, he was finally given permission to go. Some time later he came back with the limp body of his friend over his shoulder. The commander said, "Didn't I tell you it was no use to go?" to which the boy replied with radiance in his eyes, "But it was. I got there in time to hear him whisper, 'I knew you'd come.'"

We don't know the source of these words, but they speak to all of us who have that 'special person' in our life: A friend is: a push when you've stopped, a word when you're lonely, a guide when you're searching, a smile when you're sad, a song when you're glad.

A friend will joyfully sing with you when you are on the mountaintop, and silently walk beside you through the valley.

Our model for friendship is that of the Christian and Jesus Christ, who said to His disciples, *"You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you."* (John 15:14-15). Out of this passage we can compile a list of things for which we are chosen and to which we are called:

[184] The English poet and novelist, Dinah Craik
[185] Charles R. Swindoll, *Hope Again*, (Word, 1996), p. 121.

We are chosen for *joy*. However, hard the Christian way is, it is, both in the travelling and in the goal, the way of joy. There is always a joy in doing the right thing. The Christian is the man of joy, the laughing cavalier of Christ. A gloomy Christian is a contradiction in terms, and nothing in all religious history has done Christianity more harm than its connection with black clothes and long faces. It is true that the Christian is a sinner, but he is a *redeemed* sinner; and therein lies his joy. How can any man fail to be happy when he walks the ways of life with Jesus?

We are chosen for *love*. We are sent out into the world to love one another. Sometimes we live as if we were sent into the world to compete with one another, or to dispute with one another, or even to quarrel with one another. But the Christian is to live in such a way that he shows what is meant by loving his fellow men. It is here that Jesus makes another of his great claims. If we ask him: What right have you to demand that we love one another? His answer is: *"No man can show greater love than to lay down his life for his friends*-and I did that." Many a man tells men to love each other, when his whole life is a demonstration that that is the last thing he does himself. Jesus gave men a commandment which he had himself first fulfilled.

Jesus called us to be *his friends*. He tells his men that he does not call them slaves any more; he calls them friends. Now that is a saying which would be even greater to those who heard it for the first time than it is to us. *Doulos*, the slave, the servant of God was no title of shame; it was a title of the highest honour. Moses was the *doulos* of God (*Deuteronomy* 34:5); so was Joshua (*Joshua* 24:29); so was David (*Psalm* 89:20). It is a title which Paul counted it an honour to use (*Titus* 1:1); and so did James (*James* 1:1).

The greatest men in the past had been proud to be called the *douloi*, the slaves of God. And Jesus says: "I have something greater for you yet, you are no longer *slaves*; you are *friends*." Christ offers an intimacy with God which not even the greatest men knew before he came into the world.

The idea of being the friend of God has also a background. Abraham was the *friend* of God (*Isaiah* 41:8). In *Wisdom* 7:27, wisdom is said to make men the friends of God. But this phrase is lit up by a custom which obtained both at the courts of the Roman Emperors and of the eastern kings. At these courts there was a very select group of men called *the friends of the king*, or *the friends of the Emperor*. At all times they had access to the king: they had even the right to come to his bedchamber at the beginning of the day. He talked to them before he talked to his generals, his rulers, and his statemen. The friends of the king were those who had the closest and the most intimate connection with him.

Jesus called us to be his friends and the friends of God. That is a tremendous offer. It means that no longer do we need to gaze longingly at God from afar off; we are not like slaves who have no right whatever to enter into the presence of the master; we are not like a crowd whose only glimpse of the king is in the passing on some state occasion. Jesus gave us this intimacy with God, so that he is no longer a distant stranger, but our close friend.

Jesus did not only choose us for a series of tremendous privileges. He called us to be his *partners*. The slave could never be a partner. He was defined in Greek law as *a living tool*. His master never opened his mind to him; the slave simply had to do what he was told without reason and without explanation. But Jesus said:

"You are not my slaves; you are my partners. I have told you everything; I have told you what I am trying to do, and why I am trying to do it. I have told you everything which God told me." Jesus has given us the honour of making us partners in his task. He has shared his mind with us, and opened his heart to us. The tremendous choice laid before us is that we can accept or refuse partnership with Christ in the work of leading the world to God.

Jesus chose to be *ambassadors*. "I have chose you," he said, "*to send you out*." He did not choose us to live a life retired from the world, but to represent him in the world. When a knight came to the court of King Arthur, he did not come to spend the rest of his days in knightly feasting and in knightly fellowship there. He came to the king saying: "Send me out on some great task which I can do for chivalry and for you." Jesus chose us, first to come in to him, and then to go out to the world. And that must be the daily pattern and rhythm of our lives.

Jesus chose us to be *advertisements*. He chose us to go out *to bear fruit*, and to bear fruit which will stand the test of time. The way to spread Christianity is to be Christian. The way to bring others into the Christian faith is to show them the fruit of the Christian life. Jesus sends us out, not to argue men into Christianity, still less to threaten them into it, but to attract them into it; so to live that its fruits may be so wonderful that others will desire them for themselves. [186]

Believers form a bond of "friends," a spiritual bond founded by Christ Himself. Being a "friend" of Jesus is conditional. A person has to *know* and *do* His commandments in order to be a friend. The implication is clear: there is no way to be His friend apart from *knowing what He says*. It is His Word that tells men about Him. Therefore, a person has to diligently seek to learn His Word and to do what He says in order to know Him and to become His friend.

The point is clear: friends relate and commune with each other, *share* and *respond* to the word of each other, rejoicing when the word or conversation is that of joy; and helping when the word or request is that of needing help. They come to each other's assistance, in both good and bad occasions.

Two men were traveling together, when a bear suddenly met them on their path. One of them climbed up quickly into a tree and concealed himself in the branches. The other, seeing that he must be attacked, fell flat on the ground, and when the bear came up and felt him with his snout, and smelt him all over, he held his breath, and feigned the appearance of death as much as he could.

The bear soon left him, for it is said he will not touch a dead body. When he was quite gone, the other traveler descended from the tree, and jocularly inquired of his friend what it was the bear had whispered in his ear. "He gave me this advice," his companion replied. "Never travel with a friend who deserts you at the approach of danger."

Jesus Christ revealed and made known exactly what God told Him. It is *the Word of God* that gives birth and structure to the bond of "friends." Our relationship with Him brings substance and purpose. It provides

[186] Ibid, William Barclay.

focus as we seek to “work out our salvation” (bring it to maturity) in our daily endeavors. And what is done is for God’s glory, not ours!

When the first World War ended, the King and Queen of Belgium wanted to honor President Herbert Hoover for the aid they had received during the war from the United States. After considering the various honors, the monarch offered Hoover his choice of three decorations. President rejected all of the honors stating: "You have stood at the gateway of civilization and held back the tide of aggression, while we have only shared with you what we had to give. For that one does not ask for honors." The King and Queen responded, "He is our very great friend." Desiring to adequately express their appreciation for his efforts, they created a new order to which Hoover alone belonged, "Friend of the Belgian people."

We need to complete the apostle John’s instruction, because being a ‘friend of Christ’ has obligation and brings opportunity: *"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit--fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name."* (John 15:16)

The *supreme purpose* of believers is to go and bear fruit. Believers are the chosen and ordained of Christ, and they have been given the very same purpose of Christ Himself: to go into all the world and bear fruit among men. This is one of the great verses of Scripture.

Most of us have many acquaintances but very few friends, and even some of our friends may prove unfriendly or even unfaithful. What about Judas? *“Yes, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me”* (Ps. 41:9). Even a devoted friend may fail us when we need him most. Peter, James, and John went to sleep in the Garden when they should have been praying; and Peter even denied the Lord three times. Our friendship to each other and to the Lord is not perfect, but His friendship to us is perfect.

One day while he was a fugitive, David was near Bethlehem, his home city, and he longed for a drink of water from the well by the gate. Three of his mighty men were close enough to David to hear his sigh, and they risked their lives to bring their king the water that he wanted (2 Sam. 23:15-17). That is what it means to be a friend of the king.

Believers are not called to be an exclusive club of retirees who have it made and who can go about doing what they want, knowing they are eternally secure. Believers are the ambassadors of Christ in the world. Once they have been saved, their duty—their sole reason for being *appointed* and *left* in this world—is to deliver the message of their King.

Loneliness is a growing problem in our society. A study by the American Council of Life Insurance reported that the most lonely group in America are college students. That's surprising! Next on the list are divorced people, welfare recipients, single mothers, rural students, housewives, and the elderly. To point out how lonely people can be, Charles Swindoll mentioned an ad in a Kansas newspaper. It read, "I will listen to you talk for 30 minutes without comment for $5.00." Swindoll said, "Sounds like a hoax, doesn't it? But the person was serious. Did anybody call? You bet. It wasn't long before this individual was receiving 10 to 20 calls a day. The pain of loneliness was so sharp that some were willing to try anything for a half hour of companionship."

Vance Packard called us "a nation of strangers." Louise Bernikow calls loneliness "an American epidemic." A T & T urges us to "reach out and touch someone." The television, computer, and bank-teller machine eliminate the need for others. It doesn't have to be that way!

Paul Simon of Simon & Garfunkle wrote the following lyrics:

Don't talk of love, I've heard the word before; It's sleeping in my memory of feelings that have died.
I have no need of friendship, friendship causes pain. If I never loved, I never would have cried.
I am a rock; I am an island. I have my books and my poetry to protect me.
Shielded in my armor, Hiding in my room, Deep within my womb,
I touch no one and no one touches me. I am a rock; I am an island.

Maybe Paul's trouble can be summed up in the little word ***I***.

Unless and until we can live with ourselves, we cannot live with other people. But equally, unless and until we have learnt to live fully and creatively with others we cannot hope to live with ourselves. [187]

An English publication offered a prize for the best definition of a friend. Among the thousands of entries received were the following: "One who multiplies joys, divides grief"; "One who understands our silence"; "A volume of sympathy bound in cloth"; and "A watch which beats true for all time and never runs down." But the entry which won the prize said, "A friend--the one who comes in when the whole world has gone out."

Often the most loving thing we can do when a friend is in pain is to share the pain--to be there even when we have nothing to offer except our presence and even when being there is painful to ourselves.

This was pointed out in a poignant way due to funeral recently. A relative of a close friend had passed away suddenly and it was difficult on the family. I wanted to be of comfort but didn't really know what to say.

I went to the side of the casket with my friend and just stood in silence; words simply were not there. After a few minutes, we moved away and hug, again in silence.

Later, at home, I 'kicked myself' for not 'doing more…saying more, wanting to be a strong support.'

A few days later, a letter came in the mail: "Thanks for being there. I couldn't have made it without you," my friend wrote. Sometimes just our caring presence makes the difference!

Mr. Alter's fifth-grade class at Lake Elementary School in Oceanside, California, included fourteen boys who had no hair. Only one, however, had no choice in the matter. Ian O'Gorman, undergoing chemotherapy for lymphoma, faced the prospect of having his hair fall out in clumps. So he had his head shaved. But then 13 of his classmates shaved their heads, so Ian wouldn't feel out of place.

"If everybody has his head shaved, sometimes people don't know who's who," said 11-year-old Scott Sebelius in an *Associated Press* story (March 1994). "They don't know who has cancer, and who just shaved their head." Ten-year-old Kyle Hanslik started it all. He talked to some other boys, and before long they all trekked to the barber shop.

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[187] Esther de Waal in *Living with Contradiction: Reflections on The Rule of St. Benedict.* Christianity Today, Vol. 40, no. 8.

“The last thing he would want is to not fit in," said Kyle. "We just wanted to make him feel better." Ian's father, Shawn, choked back tears as he talked about what the boys had done. He said simply, "It's hard to put words to." [188]

"Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2).

Across the grasslands of East Africa, live some of nature's most fascinating animals. The rhinoceros, a two-horned terror of tremendous speed, size and agility, is feared by most of the creatures in the wild. Being one of the most dangerous animals in the world, the rhino is avoided by most animals, that is, except the buffalo bird. Watching the rhinoceros in his natural habitat, you would see these birds perched on his back. From time to time, some would be pecking into his back much as a woodpecker would work away at an old tree. Others would be flying about the head of the rhino and still others lighting on his ears and pecking away.

The most amazing thing is that the rhino does not attack, for the two have an understanding. From birth, the rhino has poor eyesight. In addition, his body is covered with parasites which he cannot control. The flock of birds on his back do him a great service by eating these parasites, which are the whole of their diet. If there is any danger in the area, these birds let out a shrill call warning the rhino of what he cannot see.

In return for this service, they are protected from their natural predators by one of Africa's largest mammals. In a real sense, these two totally different animals of the world kingdom are fulfilling the responsibilities of mutual friendship.

Helen Keller once said, "With the death of every friend I love -- a part of me has been buried -- but their contribution to my being of happiness, strength and understanding remains to sustain me in an altered world."

Sam Davis was a Confederate spy executed at Pulaski, Tennessee, for his crime. When captured by the Union army, he had in his possession some papers of vital importance. After examining the case closely, the officers in charge knew he must have had an accomplice in securing the papers. He was court-martialed, led out before the firing squad and blindfolded. Then the officer in charge put forward a proposition: "If you will give us the name of the man who furnished you this information, you may go free." Sam Davis did not hesitate in his reply, "If I had a thousand lives I would give them all before I would betray a friend." "Loyalty thou are indeed a gem, seldom found in the hearts of men." Most of us would be better off if we had a friend like Sam Davis.

It was an unusual occasion in Dallas. The men ranged from early 30's to 45. Before the price of oil plummeted, a number of them had been making more than $1 million a year. Now they were meeting in a hotel on a retreat. They were discussing perseverance. . . how to survive. . . how to make it. Some were unemployed. Some had lost their homes. Some had lost their businesses. As I recall, one or two had lost their wives. Some were still shocked that a Texas oil economy could plummet. They were talking about what it takes to persevere under such adverse circumstances. One book that came into great discussion by Jim Smith, the leader of the group, was *The Friendless American Male*. You see, women build a friendship primarily by sharing. But

[188] Sherman L. Burford, Fairmont, West Virginia. *Leadership*, Vol. 15, no. 3.

American males primarily build a friendship through activities. When you're hard pressed, when you begin to doubt your own ability, when you realize that what comes up can also come down, when you're hurt and on the inside bleeding. . . you need a friend. A SAFE friend. A friend with whom you can share not just the bright side of your life. . . but the dark side of your life. Not just the ups . . . but also the downs. That's why each man present at this retreat was urged: "If you don't have one friend, by all means, get one! Try out how safe you are with him. Share a confidence with him. . . see if it gets back to you be repetition. Gradually see how much you can trust him. . . so that you can at least bare your soul with one human being on the face of the earth. Because everyone needs such a friend."

The king of the comics, as far as I'm concerned, is still *Peanuts* by Charles Schulz. I love Linus, Lucy, Schroeder, Pigpen, the Little Red-Haired Girl, and Charlie Brown. There's a ring of reality to their relationships.

One sequence comes to mind. Linus has just written a comic strip of his own, and he wants Lucy's opinion. In the first frame, he tentatively hands Lucy his comic strip and says, "Lucy, would you read this and tell me if you think it is funny?"

In the next frame, you see Lucy patting her foot, and a little bit of a grin comes across her face. She looks at Linus and says, "Well, Linus, who wrote this?"

Linus with his chest heaved out and a great big grin says, "Lucy, I wrote that."

In the next frame, you see Lucy wadding it up, throwing it to the side, and saying, "Well, then, I don't think it's very funny."

In the final frame, you see Linus picking up his comic strip, throwing his blanket over his shoulder, looking at Lucy and saying, "Big sisters are the crab grass in the lawn of life."

We find that humorous. I dare say if you and I thought long and hard enough, we'd remember being the crab grass in the lawn of somebody else's life. None of us wants to be a loser. None of us wants to be a source of discouragement. And yet, if we're not careful, we can find ourselves being more pessimistic than optimistic, more discouraging than encouraging. [189]

Insomuch as anyone pushes you nearer to God, he or she is your friend. When Justin Armour was a rookie wide receiver with the Buffalo Bills, some veteran teammates invited him to a preseason party. Justin went, and couldn't believe what he saw: Gorgeous women everywhere, offering free sex to any of the guys who wanted it.

"It was the most eye-opening experience I've ever had," Justin says. "I had heard about things like this, but I was so naive. I got out of there as fast as I could!"

As a single Christian guy, Justin had committed to saving sex for marriage. To do so, he knows he's got to run from temptation.

"I'd rather not have my mind polluted by those things. Once you've been in a couple situations where's there's temptation, you learn how to avoid them and you don't go back." Justin also calls his best friend and accountability partner, Steve Stenstrom.

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[189] Rod Cooper, "The Kiss of Encouragement," Preaching Today, Tape No. 141.

“You need someone to hold you accountable for walking with Christ," says Justin. "Steve does that for me. He knows everything about my life, good and bad, and there's nothing he won't hold me accountable for." [190]

Henson Towne wrote: Around the corner I have a friend, In this great city that has no end. Yet days go by and weeks rush on, And before I know it a year is gone, And I never see my old friend's face; For life is a swift and terrible race. He knows I like him just as well as in the days when I rang his bell and he rang mine.

“We were younger then...and now we are busy, tired men...tired with playing a foolish game; tired with trying to make a name. "Tomorrow," I say, "I will call on Jim, just to show that I'm thinking of him. But tomorrow comes -- and tomorrow goes; and the distance between us grows and grows. Around the corner! -- yet miles away... "here's a telegram, sir." "Jim died today." And that's what we get -- and deserve in the end -- around the corner; a vanished friend.”

As the movie Brian's Song poignantly depicted, the friendship between Gale Sayers and Brian Piccolo deepened into one of the best relationships in the history of sports.

Then, during the 1969 season, Piccolo was cut down with cancer. He fought to play the season out, but he was in hospitals more than he was in the games. Gale Sayers flew to be beside him as often as possible.

They had planned, with their wives, to sit together at the Professional Football Writers annual dinner in New York, where Sayers was to be given the George S. Halas Award as the most courageous player in pro football. But instead Pick was confined to his bed at home. As he stood to receive the award, tears sprang to Sayer's eyes. The ordinarily laconic black athlete had this to say as he took the trophy:

"You flatter me by giving me this award, but I tell you here and now that I accept it for Brian Piccolo. Brian Piccolo is the man of courage who should receive the George S. Halas Award. I love Brian Piccolo and I'd like you to love him. Tonight, when you hit your knees, please ask God to love him too."

"I love Brian Piccolo." How often do we hear men say words such as those? But how much more enriched our lives could be if we dared to declare our affection as Sayers did that night in New York.

Alan Loy McGinnis relates the following: “In my hometown an obscure nurseryman died recently. His name was Hubert Bales, and he was the shyest man I ever met. When he talked, he squirmed, blinked his eyes rapidly, and smiled nervously. Hubert never ran in influential circles. He grew shrubs and trees, working with his hands the plot of land left by his father. He was anything but an extrovert.

“Yet when Hubert died, his funeral was the largest in the history of our little town. There were so many people that they filled even the balcony of the church. Why did such a shy man win the hearts of so many people? Simply because, for all his shyness, Hubert knew how to make friends. He had mastered the principles of caring, and for more than 60 years he had put people first. Perhaps because they recognized that his generosity of spirit was an extra effort for someone so retiring, people loved him back. By the hundreds.”

Henry Penn, former president of the Society of American Florists, tells what he calls one of the most memorable incidents of his life as a florist. One day two boys and a girl about ten years of age made a visit to his store. They wore ragged clothes, but had clean faces and hands. The boys took off their caps when they

[190] Mark Moring; Men of Integrity, Vol. 1, no. 1.

entered the shop. One of them stepped forward and said solemnly, "We're the committee and we'd like some very nice yellow flowers."

Penn showed them some inexpensive spring flowers but the boy said, "I think we'd like something better than that."

"Do they have to be yellow?" asked Penn.

"Yes, sir," was the reply.

"Mickey would like even better if they were yellow because he had a yellow sweater."

"Are these for a funeral?" the florist asked quietly.

The boy nodded. The girl turned to keep back the tears.

"She's his sister," the boy explained. "he was a good kid -- a truck -- yesterday -- he was playing in the street. We saw it happen."

Then the other boy added, "Us kids took up a collection. We got eighteen cents. Would roses cost an awful lot, Mister? Yellow roses?"

Touched by the story of the tragedy and the loyalty and love of these youngsters, Penn replied, "I have some nice yellow roses here that I'm selling for eighteen cents a dozen."

"Gee, those would be swell!" exclaimed one of the boys.

"Mickey would like those," the other one confirmed.

"I'll make up a nice spray," promised the sympathetic florist, "with ferns and a ribbon. Where shall I send them?"

"Would it be all right, Mister, if we took 'em now?" asked one of the boys.

"We'd kinda like to take 'em over and give 'em to Mickey ourselves. He'd like it better that way."

Penn accepted the eighteen cents. The "committee" carrying the kind of flowers "Mickey would like" walked out of the shop. Said Penn, "I felt uplifted for days. Unbeknownst to them, I had a part in their tribute to their friend."

As Terry says often, “the best vitamin for making friends: B1.”

TEN COMMANDMENTS OF FRIENDSHIP

1. Speak to people -- there is nothing as nice as a cheerful word of greeting.
2. Smile at people -- it takes 72 muscles to frown, but only 14 to smile!
3. Call people by name -- the sweetest music to anyone's ear is the sound of their own name.
4. Be friendly and helpful -- if you would have friends, be friendly.
5. Be cordial -- speak and act as if everything you do were a real pleasure.
6. Be genuinely interested in people -- you can like everyone IF YOU TRY.
7. Be generous with praise; cautious with criticism.
8. Be considerate of the feelings of others -- it will be appreciated.
9. Be thoughtful of the opinions of others.
10. Be alert to give service -- what counts most in life is what we do for others!

David Letterman’s Top 10 Signs You Have No Friends

1. No calls from salespeople pushing MCI’s “Friends and Family” plan.
2. You go to a video store and say out loud to yourself, “Well, what do you want to rent tonight?”

3. You send birthday cards to members of "The McLaughlin Group."
4. You are one of the five best solitaire players in the world.
5. Your initials are G.S., and you own a Major League baseball team in the Bronx.
6. At your funeral, the entire eulogy is, "Yep, he's dead."
7. Having a Super Bowl party means dressing up your dogs and tying then to the furniture.
8. James Taylor sings the first bars of "You've Got a Friend," notices you in the audience and stops.
9. You're still drinking from the same keg you bought on New Year's Eve 1987.
10. All your phone calls start with "900." [191]

FRIENDS

A friend is a person with whom I may think aloud. Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882)

A friend is someone with whom you dare to be yourself. C. Raymond Beran

A real friend is not so much someone you feel free to be serious with as someone you feel free to be silly with. Sydney J. Harris (1917–1986)

A true friend is forever a friend. George Macdonald (1824–1905)

Friends who understand each other speak with words sweet and strong which emerge from their hearts like the fragrance of orchids. Confucius (c. 551–479 b.c.)

Hold a true friend with both your hands. African Proverb

The best mirror is an old friend. George Herbert (1593-1633)

The only way to have a friend is to be one. Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882)

What is a friend? A single soul dwelling in two bodies. Aristotle (384–322 b.c.)

The glory of friendship is not the outstretched hand, nor the kindly smile nor the joy of companionship; it is the spiritual inspiration that comes to me when he discovers that someone else believes in him and is willing to trust him. Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882)

The highest privilege there is, is the privilege of being allowed to share another's pain. You talk about your pleasures to your acquaintances; you talk about your troubles to your friends. Father Andrew

The highest sign of friendship is that of giving another the privilege of sharing your inner thought. It is a personal gift in which there is self-commitment. Paul Tournier (1898–1986)

There is no wilderness like a life without friends. Baltasar Gracián y Morales (1601–1658)

Those who have resources within themselves, who can dare to live alone, who want friends the least, best know how to prize them the most. No company is far preferable to bad; we are more apt to catch the

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[191] *Late Show With David Letterman*," CBS, Reader's Digest, January 1996, p. 82.

vices of others than their virtues. Disease is far more contagious than health. Charles Caleb Colton (1780–1832)

To a friend's house the road is never long. Dutch Proverb

To speak painful truth through loving words is friendship. Henry Ward Beecher (1813–1887)

True friendship is like sound health, the value of it is seldom known until it be lost. Charles Caleb Colton (1780–1832)

Devotional Readings

(Luke 12:4) ""I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more."

(Luke 14:12) "Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid."

(John 15:13-15) "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. {14} You are my friends if you do what I command. {15} I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you."

(Acts 24:23) "He ordered the centurion to keep Paul under guard but to give him some freedom and permit his friends to take care of his needs."

(2 Corinthians 7:1) "Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God."

(2 Corinthians 12:19) "Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you? We have been speaking in the sight of God as those in Christ; and everything we do, dear friends, is for your strengthening."

(Philippians 2:12) "Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed--not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence--continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling,"

(Philippians 4:1) "Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!"

(Hebrews 6:9) "Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case--things that accompany salvation."

(1 Peter 2:11) "Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul."

(1 Peter 4:12) "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you."

(2 Peter 3:1) "Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking."

(2 Peter 3:8) "But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day."

17
Devoted to Family…

A happy family is but an earlier heaven. [192]

During a visit to the children's Bible class, a preacher looked into their serious faces and asked, "Why do you love God?" After a moment a small voice came from the back: "I guess it just runs in the family."

Some of us are blessed to be ‘lifers.’ It’s a phrase I first heard in Mansfield, Ohio, many years ago, used to describe a person “who has been around the church his whole life.”

What a blessed person! To have grandparents and parents who knew the value of God, Christ, the Bible, and the church! To attend worship and classes “every time the doors are opened” is a blessed way of life that benefits into eternity.

Some aren’t so fortunate, for many children don’t even feel as if they know their parents, much less the Lord. The story is told of a young boy who wanted a new suit of clothes, and he asked his mother if she would ask his father to buy it for him. The mother suggested that it might be better if the boy would ask the father himself. The response of the boy was, "Well, I would, but you know him much better than I do."

Sadly, it’s not easy to bring about much-needed change. Herbert Prochnow tells of a little girl who wrote in an essay on *Parents*: "We
get our parents at so late an age that it is impossible to change their habits."

In Japan, many workers are finding themselves either too busy or too stressed to visit their parents. An enterprising business is now offering a solution for lonely parents. For $1,130 a day, the Japan Efficiency

[192] Sir John Bowring (1792–1872)

Headquarters company will send actors to provide "family" time. The actors have been trained in psychology to ensure a more realistic family visit.1

Lee Iacocca said, “Your job takes up enough time without having to shortchange your family. Still, I've seen a lot of executives who neglect their families, and it always makes me sad. You can't let a corporation turn into a labor camp. Hard work is essential. But there's also a time for rest and relaxation, for going to see your kid in the school play or at a swim meet. And if you don't do these things while the kids are young, there's no way to make it up later on. I learned about the strength you can get from a close family life. I've had a wonderful and successful career, but next to my family, it hasn't really mattered at all.”

It is sad commentary on our times that families have become so fragmented and splintered some must hire a surrogate family to provide companionship. [193]

A family is more than a collection of human beings who are blood kin. A family is more than the sum of its parts. It is a living, shaping, powerful unit that teaches us our most important lessons in life. It teaches us who we are, how to act, whom to relate to, and what is important in life.

A popular book of a few years ago, *Jonathan Livingston Seagull,* extolled the "virtues" of independence and individuality at any price. The seagull is a popular subject for photography, and many people who vacation at the shore end up with some kind of souvenir bearing the picture of a seagull. It is easy to see why people like this figure. A seagull exults in freedom. When flying alone, he thrusts his wings back with powerful strokes, climbs higher and higher, and then swoops down in majestic loops and circles.

In a flock, though, the seagull is a different bird. His majesty dissolves into in-fights and cruelty. Concepts of sharing and manners do not seem to exist among gulls. They are so fiercely competitive and jealous that if you tie a ribbon around the leg of a gull, making him stand out from the rest, you sentence him to death. The others in his flock will furiously attack him with claws and beaks, hammering through feathers and flesh to draw blood. They'll continue until he is a bloody heap.

If we must have a bird as a model for our society, there is certainly a better choice. Consider the wild goose. The V-formation they use in flying enables them to fly with more ease and speed. The point position is the most difficult because of wind resistance, so the geese rotate this position every few minutes. The easiest flight is experienced in the two rear sections of the formation, and the stronger geese permit the young, weak, and older birds to occupy these positions. It is also probable that the constant honking encourages the weaker geese.

The seagull teaches us to break loose and fly alone, but the wild goose teaches us to fly in a "family." We can fly further with our Christian family than we could ever fly alone - and, as we fly, our efforts constantly help others in our family.

We should be aware that if we died tomorrow, the company that we are working for could easily replace us in a matter of days. But the family we left behind will feel the loss for the rest of their lives. And come to think of it, we pour ourselves more into work than into our own family, an unwise investment indeed, don't you think?

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[193] David Charlton, Proclaim 1. "Families For Hire," The Christian Reader, November/December 1992, 75.

So what is behind the story? Do you know what the word family means? Family: **F**ather **A**nd **M**other **I** **L**ove **Y**ou.

I am the second of nine children in my family. I'm used to hearing remarks about the size of our family. Once when my father had taken four of us to the grocery store, a woman asked him, "Are these all your children?"

"Oh, no," he innocently replied.

Seeing the look of relief on her face, Dad said with a twinkle in his eye, "The other five are at home."

He took to heart Solomon's words from Psalm 127: *"Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain. {2} In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat-- for he grants sleep to those he loves. {3} Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him. {4} Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth. {5} Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their enemies in the gate."*

Close friends of our family used to tease Mom (a nurse) and Dad (a chemist). "You do know what causes children, don't you?" they would ask. They made it crystal clear of their knowledge: "Some people put their efforts and their money into houses or vacations. We're investing in children."

We never know the love of the parent until we become parents ourselves.

A dad is a fellow who has replaced the currency in his wallet with snapshots of his family. The family you come from isn't as important as the family you're going to have.

There is a story about a father who became disturbed about the length of time his six year old son was taking to get home from school. The father decided he would make the trip to discover for himself how long it should take a small boy to cover the distance.

The father settled on 20 minutes but his son was still taking an hour. Finally the father decided to make the trip with his son. After the trip, the man said, "The 20 minutes I thought reasonable was right, but I failed to consider such important things as a sidetrip to track down a trail of ants -- or an educational stop to watch a man fix a flat -- or the time it took to swing around a half dozen telephone poles -- or how much time it took for a boy just to get acquainted with two stray dogs and a brown cat. "In short," said the father, "I had forgotten what it is really like to be six years old."

A family is a unit composed not only of children but of men, women, an occasional animal, and the common cold. [194]

People are blind to what they really need. They need family, and they need religion. Period. There is such an incredible strength in family, and religion gives you respectability, responsibility and a reverence for life. [195]

Desmond Tutu observed, "You don't choose your family. They are God's gift to you, as you are to them."

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[194] Ogden Nash

[195] Willard Scott, Marriage Partnership, Vol. 8, no. 4.

Children want to feel instinctively that their father is behind them as solid as a mountain, but like a mountain, is something to look up to.

In *Sources of Strength*, former President Jimmy Carter recalls: "I had just been inaugurated, walked down Pennsylvania Avenue, reviewed the parade with my family, and then begun to walk with my family, for the first time, toward the White House. Eager news reporters with cameras surrounded us, and my press secretary said, 'Don't anyone stop to answer questions.' Typically, Mama ignored him and stopped to talk to the press. The first question was 'Miss Lillian, aren't you proud of your son?' "Mama replied, 'Which one?'

Studies have shown that the child who has the lowest self-esteem is the one who isn't permitted to say anything at the dinner table. The one with the next lowest image of himself is the child who is allowed to dominate the conversation. Highest on the list is the youngster whose parents tell him, "Yes, you may speak up -- when it's your turn. [196]

It is said of James Boswell, the famous biographer of Samuel Johnson, that he often referred to a special day in his childhood when his father took him fishing. The day was fixed in his adult mind, and he often reflected upon many of the things his father had taught him in the course of their fishing experience together. After having heard of that particular excursion so often, it occurred to someone much later to check the journal that Boswell's father kept and determine what had been said about the fishing trip from the parental perspective. Turning to that date, the reader found only one sentence entered: "Gone fishing today with my son -- a day wasted."

Few have ever heard of Boswell's father; many have heard of Boswell. But in spite of his relative obscurity, he must have managed to set a place in his son's life which lasted for a lifetime and beyond. On one day alone he inlaid along the grain of his son's life ideas that would mark him long into his adulthood. What he did, not only touched a boy's life, but it set in motion certain benefits that would affect the world of classical literature. Too bad that Boswell's father couldn't appreciate the significance of a fishing trip and the pacesetting that was going on even while worms were being squeezed on to hooks.

Grandchildren are a different discussion! They bless our lives in ways we could never have imagined!

A woman had a very precocious grandchild who was visiting her. She was about 10 or 11 years old. She asked, "Grandma how old are you?" And grandma said, "Well, honey we don't tell our ages, it is not polite to ask a women her age." "Oh, come on grandma, tell me how old you are." "No, honey. I am not going to tell you how old I am." So, the girl disappeared. Grandma heard something up stairs and went up and found the little girl in her purse. The little girl had found her driver's license and she was adding up the date of birth to the present time, and she said, "Grandma you are 78 years old." "Now honey, you shouldn't be in there," grandma said. "Plus, grandma, I see that you got an F in sex."

Conveying Christian Values

1. Acknowledge that your child is a gift from God (see Ps 127:3, GNB).
2. Dedicate your child to the Lord to be used in his service (see 1 Sam. 1:11, RSV).

[196] Dr. Joseph Bobbit, child psychologist.

3. Make a personal commitment to God to grow as a Christian parent.

4. Identify your values and convey these values consistently in your behavior.

5. Express to your children love and acceptance.

6. View discipline as an ongoing process of helping your children ultimately to become self-controlled and self-disciplined.

7. Pray daily for each member of your family.

8. Maintain family worship and Bible study in your home.

9. Involve all family members in church activities.

10. Participate in events your church will offer to help you grow as a Christian parent. Be imitators of God as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loves us.

"A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you." {33} "Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked. {34} Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! {35} Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."" (Mark 3:32-35)

When the first Christians were made part of the New Testament church, begun on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, they knew hardly anything of Jesus and nothing at all of the "church (God's family)." Yet, immediately, they were thrust into a fellowship of other believers – a radical, consuming community which supplanted every other loyalty.

They "devoted themselves" to meeting with a relative strangers (Acts 2:42). They sold their possessions to support one another (Acts 4). They met daily with their new friends to worship and commune in each other's homes (Acts 2:46). They even rejoiced together when suffering persecution and ridicule!

All this had a revolutionary impact on the families, businesses, and friendships of these first Christians. Old loyalties were exchanged for new ones. The church became almost overnight the primary "reference group" for its members.

In the New Testament, the church commands the primary allegiance of disciples. No other group of people is allowed to take precedence over God's people.

Even family ties were subordinated to the family of God. Families of origin were put at risk and even broken: *(Mark 10:29-30) ""I tell you the truth," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel {30} will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields--and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life."*

All that mattered in the 1st Century was being in Christ. *"You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Gal. 3:26-29)*

In her best-seller, *What Is a Family?*, Edith Schaeffer devotes her longest chapter to the idea that a family is a perpetual relay of truth. A place where principles are hammered and honed on the anvil of everyday living. Where character traits are sculptured under the watchful eyes of moms and dads. Where steel-strong fibers are woven into the fabric of inner constitution. The relay place. A race with a hundred batons.

- Determination. "Stick with it, regardless."
- Honesty. "Speak and live the truth - always."
- Responsibility. "Be dependable, be trustworthy."
- Thoughtfulness. "Think of others before yourself."
- Confidentiality. "Don't tell secrets. Seal your lips."
- Punctuality. "Be on time."
- Self-control. "When under stress, stay calm."
- Patience. "Fight irriatability. Be willing to wait."
- Purity. "Reject anything that lowers your standards."
- Compassion. "When another hurts, feel it with him."
- Diligence. "Work hard. Tough it out."

And how is this done? Over the long haul, believe me. This race is not a sprint, it's a marathon. There are no 50-yard dash courses on character building. Relays require right timing and smooth handoffs - practiced around the track hour after hour when nobody is looking. And where is this practice track? Where is this place where rough edges cannot remain hidden, must not be left untouched? Inside your own front door. The home is God's built-in training facility.

Marriage and parenthood call for faith of the most radical sort. The Devil cannot bear to see married people agree well with each other.

Most would agree that the major contributing factor to the crime, violence, moral decay, and social upheaval in our society is the breakdown of the family.

Many couples in my generation need to learn that a happy home is not having a good paying job, a mortgage of $100,+, a brand new car every five years, trying to keep up with everyone else. Home is really a state of mind; ideally, it is a created situation where two people who love each other are committed to one another's well being, living in harmony, love, forbearance, and consideration.

The all-knowing and all-powerful God (who created, established, ordained, and instituted the home and who created its members) has provided a manual; a perfect plan for the home. He has given us divine guidelines for daily living in the home. We must in humility, **look** to God for strength, trusting that He has the answers. We need to daily **pray** to God with one another for assistance and then have the courage of our convictions to **apply** these Biblical principles.

When there is *continual* strife and unrest between family members, someone is likely not applying Biblical principles pertaining to the home. When one refuses to talk to the other, or refuses to forgive, or is stubbornly selfish, Biblical principles are again being refused and rejected.

There are at least two primary joys of a Christian home: First there is the joy of knowing that **someone cares for you**. God cares for me (John 3:16) and there is not a greater self-esteem builder in the world. God

created us with the desire to feel wanted, important, and necessary. He created the home to aid in fulfilling the need to feel needed!

In the Christian home, the husband and wife have said to one another, "***I care so much for you that I selected you from all others to share my life***." Likewise, our children should be convinced that we care for them!

Second, there is the joy of knowing that **there is someone I can depend upon!** A great joy to know this – standing together in good times and bad. Children need to know there is someone they can depend on when the trials of life come knocking.

Being able to depend upon someone is described in the word "commitment." In a proper home situation there is someone to whom I am committed and who is committed to me.

A question asked by many people in the 1990's is a complex and deeply felt one: is it possible to have a Christ centered home in today's world of trouble and sin?

Recent studies have listed many issues with which parents must cope today: finances (the cost of bearing, clothing, feeding, entertaining and educating children is the greatest in our history); working mothers (for the first time, a majority of American mothers hold jobs out-side the home, many out of necessity rather than desire; drugs, divorce, alcohol, crime, runaways, and abuse.

More than 1.6 million couples were divorced last year. Drugs and alcohol are on the rise among youngsters. The second leading cause of death between ages 14-24 is now suicide, and one child in nine can expect to appear in juvenile court before he turns 18.

A newspaper columnist who was disturbed by the rising suicide rate among teenagers blamed this trend on the loss of "the extended family." She said that most of today's youngsters do not possess a sense of belonging. They never felt close to a grandfather who went fishing with them, a grandmother who rode down a hill with them on a sled, an uncle who entertained them with tall tales, or an unmarried aunt who, when substituting for mother, washed their faces so vigorously that it felt like she was peeling off the skin.

The loss of the "extended family" is a serious matter. However, the causes for teenage suicide lie deeper. Many parents leave God out of their thinking entirely. They become so pleasure-oriented or success-minded that they all but ignore their children. Others disobey God's law through infidelity, breaking up homes and leaving children with only one parent - and many emotional scars. Indeed, the deepest need of our children is not merely the extended family, it is God made real to them through the extended family.

It might be of comfort to realize that the world has always been a difficult place in which Christians must live. It has always been opposed to God's values and God's will.

We might also be encouraged to remember a story recorded in 2 Chronicles 20, which shows a situation similar to the one we face today. Jehoshaphat had some men before him reporting the approach of a vast army, one the size of which his army could not defeat.

He inquired of the Lord his future and God's answer is recorded for us in 2 Chronicles 20:15-17: *"He said: "Listen, King Jehoshaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusa-lem! This is what the LORD says to you: 'Do*

not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's. Tomorrow march down against them. They will be climbing up by the Pass of Ziz, and you will find them at the end of the gorge in the Desert of Jeruel. You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the LORD will give you, O Judah and Jeru-salem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the LORD will be with you.'""

A truly Christian home is a place where sinners live; but it is also a place where the members of that home admit this fact and understand the problem, know what to do about it, and as a result grow by grace.

It is important that this environment be in place so all members of the family will have a loving, graceful, safe, and warm place in which to grow. It's vital that we treat each other in the same way Jesus treated His 12 apostles.

As they stumbled and fell and made mistakes, he was patient with them because of one simple point: He knew they were not yet what they would become. We need to "be patient, God's not finished with me yet!

Let's look in detail for a moment at three significant items that make all the difference in the world; (as they are discussed, think of the atmosphere or environment which these will create in the home):

Christians admit their sins.

Because they know the Bible says that no Christian is ever perfect in this life, they are free to admit their sins: 1 John 1:8-10: *"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us, if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives."*

What does it mean to you to know that your boss, parents, etc., can admit when they make a mistake and acknowledge sin? What response do you give to this kind of person? What kind of response is given to the person who thinks they are perfect, who acts like they never do wrong?

Christians are able to acknowledge the fact and, in time, learn to anticipate and prepare for sin. Christians, of all persons, should never rely upon rationalizations, excuses or blameshifting to try to euphemize their sins.

Because they can admit their sins, there can also be a certain amount of openness, honesty, and relaxation about the relationships that Christians sustain to one another, especially at home. Christians can pour their time and energies into the endeavor to replace sinful patterns with Biblical patterns of life.

Rather than wasting time minimizing or denying the fact of sin, Christians can concentrate on dealing with sin.

Christians know what to do about their sins.

Because they have the Bible as the standard of faith and practice, Christians not only know why problems occur in the home, but they know what to do about them! Is any sin too big for God? Can any sin be overcome in a loving, forgiving environment? We need to realize that each person in the Bible who stands before us a "great men and women of faith" are average people with sin in their life, which God helped remove.

Christians progress out of their sins.

Where there is spiritual life, there also will be spiritual growth. No Christian may remain the same

yesterday, today, and tomorrow. A fundamental presupposition of the Christian faith is that there will be growth out of sin into righteousness. Where there is Bible study, prayer and the fellowship of the saints, the Spirit of God will be at work to
produce His fruit.

The Christian home, then, is a place where sinful persons face the problems of a sinful world. Yet, they face them together with God and His resources, which are all centered in Christ. Sinners live in the Christian home, but the sinless Savior lives there too! "That is what makes the difference!

No one can better understand and repair a product than its creator. This is doubly true with regard to the home. God not only planned and designed the home itself, but he actually formed man and woman, its component parts.

How futile and how vain to seek everywhere but with God for balm and remedy when homes weaken and deteriorate! The Bible also tells us that our homes should be happy places and goes on to show us how to have them. Our homes can be happy and successful if we use spiritual principles and sound judgment in their formation and development.

What purposes shall we try to achieve in our homes? The first purpose is the personal development of each family member. This is not to say that one should view his home selfishly and think only in terms of what he can get out of it himself. Each family member experiences personal growth and receives a sense of genuine fulfillment by giving of himself in order to build a happy home.

The second purpose involves the accomplishment of certain social functions of the home. The primary social function is to provide a special companionship for each member of the family. To feel alone and unloved is one of the emptiest feelings on earth. But we must also prepare each member to be part of the larger group of society.

But the third purpose reaches into eternity: we must work toward achieving the spiritual development of the family members. We must never forget that marriage and the home is primarily a spiritual relationship.

We should daily be reminded of the question asked by Jesus in one of his most penetrating sermons, recorded for us in *Matthew 16:26-27: "What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done."*

What qualities of character do we need to possess and demonstrate in our homes in order to fulfill these purposes? Generally speaking, the development of Christian character is the single most important factor in achieving a successful home. The two marriage partners must desire success in their home, and genuine love is absolutely necessary! Each member of the family must take their differences into account and strive to communicate their feelings to each other.

There is a rising chorus in the world telling us that the American family is not beyond hope. Sociologist Theodore Caplow of the University of Virginia observes that while many Americans think the family is about to collapse, this whole idea is largely a myth fostered by the media.

Repeated surveys show that Americans have more, not less, solid relationships with family members than a generation ago! Certainly, since the events of September 11, 2001 and the terrorist attacks on our country, we are spending more time with family, looking at our value system, and turning to God as a country! How healthy are our families? Medical checkups are recommended today for good physical health. What if your family went in for a checkup? How would you do? What would be some of the tests the experts would run?

We might have the attitude a well-known politician had some years back: "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." What he meant was that things that seem to work well should be left alone.

We may feel that way about marriage. But there are several good reasons to get that checkup: **Things might not be going as well as we think.** Some married couples have been totally surprised to discover their mates were not at all happy. By the time they discovered something was wrong, it was too late.

There is a tendency in marriage for a movement in one direction to increase geometrically as time passes. Spouses who are drifting apart because of annoying little habits begin to blame each other for the creeping separation. As time passes, the tendency increases and becomes more difficult to reverse.

There is always the opportunity to make good relationships even better. If your family is happy, you may still discover something about yourself that will make for improvement. If accomplished athletes and artists still spend hours improving their skills, it is certainly possible that the best marriages can be further strengthened.

Even if your family is strong, there are predictable crisis in almost all families. Sonya Rhodes and Josleen Wilson in *Surviving Family Life* explore seven crisis living together. These include early marital adjustments, the birth of children, changes as children enter adolescence and later leave home, and caring for three generations under one roof. With preventative care, these challenges can become opportunities for growth.

The family needs regular checkups because relationships are never static. We either grow together or we grow apart. A marriage may reach its full potential at the very beginning and then begin to decline.

How To Do Your Checkup

Does your family have a central value system? Long before our society began to build marriages on the insecure foundation of romance, there were stable marital relationships.

When the Book of Genesis describes marriage as leaving father and mother, cleaving to one's spouse, and two people becoming "one flesh," it points to an irrevocable act. In a biblically based marriage, each person says, "I am with you, no matter what may happen."

Such a marriage proceeds not only from the heart but also from the mind. These promises cannot be made lightly or kept carelessly. This marriage is based both on love and fidelity. And faithfulness depends upon having a central value system.

The book of Proverbs has 209 of its 915 verses-- almost one-fourth --dedicated to instruction about rearing children, for instance. Consider just a few of them and think of the time parents should spend analyzing and putting into practice these concepts.

Proverbs 8:32-36: ""Now then, my sons, listen to me; blessed are those who keep my ways. "Listen to my instruction and be wise; do not ignore it. Blessed is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my doors, waiting at my doorway. For whoever finds me finds life and receives favor from the LORD. But whoever fails to find me harms himself; all who hate me love death.""

Proverbs 10:5: "He who gathers crops in summer is a wise son, but he who sleeps during harvest is a disgraceful son."

Proverbs 12:1: "Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates correction is stupid."

Proverbs 22:6: "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it."

The book tells parents to warn their children against the dangers of sexual experimentation, violence, drunkenness, bad language, criminal behavior, financial mismanagement, and disrespect for parents.

Strong buildings rest on solid foundations. Healthy families respond when they have a central value system that responds to a higher authority. If a family is deeply committed to Jesus Christ, they enjoy enormous advantages over the family with no spiritual dimension.

Persons who do not know or even recognize the existence and authority of God are not motivated to accept God's standard for marriage and the family or for anything else. They do not have the new nature or inner resources to fully follow those standards even if they wanted to.

We are drowning in a sea of marriage information today. A book on sex and marriage, whether from a secular or Christian viewpoint, is sure to sell. Many purportedly Christian books are as preoccupied with and indelicate about sex as their secular counterparts. Marriage conferences, seminars, and counselors abound—some of which may be solidly scriptural and well presented. But apart from a believer's being filled with the Holy Spirit and applying the ever-sufficient Word of God, even the best advice will produce only superficial and temporary benefit, because the heart will not be rightly motivated or empowered.

On the other hand, when we are filled with the Spirit and thus are controlled in divine truth, we are divinely directed to do what is pleasing to God, because His Spirit controls our attitudes and relationships.

James said, *"What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?"* (James 4:1). Conflicts in the church, in the home, and in marriage always result from hearts that are directed by the self rather than by the Spirit of God. When self insists on its own rights, opinions, and goals, harmony and peace are precluded.

The self-centered life is always in a battle for the top, and pushes others down as it climbs up in pride. The Spirit-centered life, on the other hand, is directed toward lowliness, toward subservience, and it lifts others up as it descends in humility.

Any society that has taken either the obvious nature of women or the Word of God into consideration has fashioned its best laws in line with His. Laws against murder find their source in the Ten commandments —just as do laws against stealing, adultery, perjury, and so on. The wife's submission to her husband is a divine principle that has been reflected to some degree in the legal codes of most societies.

For the past several hundred years western society has been bombarded with the humanistic, egalitarian, sexless, classless philosophy that was the dominant force behind the French Revolution. The blurring and even total removal of all human distinctions continues to be masterminded by Satan so as to undermine legitimate, God-ordained authority in every realm of human activity—in government, the family, the school, and even in the church.

Child/Parent Relationship

Cornell University's Urie Bronfenbrenner cites nine specific changes that have taken place during the past generation which have increasingly separated children and youth from the world of adults, especially the adults in their own families:

1. Fathers' vocational choices which remove them from the home for lengthy periods of time
2. An increase in the number of working mothers
3. A critical escalation in the divorce rate
4. A rapid increase in single-parent families
5. A steady decline in the extended family
6. The evolution of the physical environment of the home (family rooms, playrooms and master bedrooms)
7. The replacement of adults by the peer group
8. The isolation of children from the work world
9. The insulation of schools from the rest of society

This last factor has caused Bronfenbrenner to describe the current U.S. educational system as "one of the most potent breeding grounds for alienation in American society." When he wrote these words in 1974, this trend toward isolation was in full swing, and it has not been significantly checked since that time.

With one in four young people now indicating that they have *never* had a meaningful conversation with their father, is it any wonder that 76 percent of the 1,200 teens surveyed in *USA Today* actually *want* their parents to spend more time with them?

Andree Alieon Brooks, a *New York Times* journalist, in her eye-opening book *Children of Fast-Track Parents,* describes her interviews with scores of children and parents who seemed to "have it all": "If there was one theme that constantly emerged from my conversations with the children it was a surprising undercurrent of aloneness—feelings of isolation from peers as well as parents despite their busy lives."

Family members gave one another compliments and sincere demonstrations of approval. They tried to make the others feel appreciated and good about themselves.

A healthy family:

1. communicates and listens
2. affirms and supports one another
3. teaches respect for others
4. develops a sense of trust
5. has a sense of play and humor
6. exhibits a sense of shared responsibility
7. teaches a sense of right and wrong
8. has a strong sense of family in which rituals and traditions abound
9. has a balance of interaction among members
10. has a shared religious core
11. respects the privacy of one another
12. values service to others
13. fosters family table time and conversation
14. shares leisure time
15. admits to and seeks help with problems.

FAMILY

A family is a place where principles are hammered and honed on the anvil of everyday living. Charles R. Swindoll (1934–)

No other structure can replace the family. Without it, our children have no moral foundation. Without it, they become moral illiterates whose only law is self. Charles Colson (1931–)

Out of the mouths of babes come words we shouldn't have said in the first place. Parents have lots of trouble solving their children's problems, and children have even more trouble solving their parents' problems.

The first part of your life your parents learn to stand you, and the last part you learn to stand them.

Devotional Readings

(Psalms 1) "Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. {2} But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. {3} He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. {4} Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away. {5} Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. {6} For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish."

(Psalms 127) "A song of ascents. Of Solomon. Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain. {2} In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat-- for he grants sleep to those he loves. {3} Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him. {4} Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth. {5} Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their enemies in the gate."

(Psalms 128) "A song of ascents. Blessed are all who fear the LORD, who walk in his ways. {2} You will eat the fruit of your labor; blessings and prosperity will be yours. {3} Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your sons will be like olive shoots around your table. {4} Thus is the man blessed who fears the LORD. {5} May the LORD bless you from Zion all the days of your life; may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem, {6} and may you live to see your children's children. Peace be upon Israel."

18
Longing for Love…

Duty does not have to be dull. Love can make it beautiful and fill it with life.[197]

Paul gives us God's description of love (agape) in 1 Corinthians 13 and states quite boldly that all of those qualities really are manifestations of the first one, love -- that, after all, joy is love enjoying itself; peace is love resting; patience is love waiting; kindness is love reacting; goodness is love choosing; faithfulness is love keeping its word; gentleness is love empathizing; and self-control is love resisting temptation.

Love is the key; love is the main thing. This chapter, therefore, is setting forth that quality of love which is the work of the Spirit of God within us reproducing the character of Christ. Now once you have love all these other qualities that are part of the fruit of the Spirit are possible to you.

Love for God is not difficult, because all you need to do is be aware of how he has loved you -- in creation, in the supply of all you need, in leading and putting you in various places with various persons. But above all else he has loved you in having given his Son for you, having redeemed you, having forgiven you, having healed your inner hurt.

If we have the love of God in our hearts, then we can be patient; we can be peaceful; we can be good, loving, faithful, gentle, kind, and all these other qualities. But without love all we can do is imitate these qualities, and that is what produces a phony love. One of the most deadly enemies of the Christian cause is phony love.

That is why, in Romans, Paul says, *"Let love be genuine,"* {Rom 12:9a RSV}. When you come into the church, especially among the people of God, love must be genuine. If it is not, it is hypocrisy. If it is put on just for the moment, if it is an attempt to put on a facade, to act like you are kind, thoughtful. gracious, faithful, and

[197] Thomas Merton (1915–1968)

so on, but it all disappears as soon as the situation changes, that spreads death within the whole community. Genuine love, however, will produce all these qualities.

In his book *Mere Christianity,* C. S. Lewis wrote, "Do not waste your time bothering whether you 'love' your neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as we do this, we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him. If you injure someone you dislike, you will find yourself disliking him more. If you do him a good turn, you will find yourself disliking him less."

Dr. Halbeck, a missionary, saw lepers at work. He noticed two, particularly, sowing peas in the field. One had no hands; the other had no feet, these members being wasted away by disease. The one who wanted the hands was carrying upon his back the other, who wanted the feet. He, in turn, carried the bag of seed and dropped a pea every now and then, which the other pressed into the ground with his feet. And so they managed the work of one man between the two.

What makes life worth living? Love does. Paul contrasts love here with certain things that were highly regarded in Corinth and are still highly regarded in the world today. The loveless person produces nothing, is nothing, and gains nothing.

This thirteenth chapter of the Book of 1 Corinthians is about love. Since few subjects are more important, let me remind you of some of the reasons love holds such importance.

(1) The whole Old Testament Law is summed up by the one word, "**love**" (see Leviticus 19:17-18; Matthew 19:19).

(2) Love sums up the Christian's responsibilities in the New Testament (Romans 13:9).

(3) Love is the capstone, the crowning virtue, the consummation of all other virtues (Galatians 5:22-23; 2 Peter 1:5-7; Colossians 3:12-14).

(4) Love is the goal of Paul's instruction (1 Timothy 1:5).

(5) Love is the distinguishing mark of the true Christian (John 13:35).

(6) Without love, the value of spiritual gifts is greatly diminished (1 Corinthians 12:1-3).

(7) Love is greater than any of the spiritual gifts and is even greater than faith and hope (1 Corinthians 13:13).

(8) Love endures suffering under persecution, and Christians will be persecuted (Matthew 24:10; 2 Timothy 3:12).

(9) Love is easily lost, without one's even being aware of it (Revelation 2:1-7).

(10) Love is misunderstood and distorted by the unbelieving world.

(11) Love is vitally important to Christians, for it should govern our relationships with other Christians, especially those with whom we strongly disagree.

Love is patient.

I have always admired the spouse who said "I love you, not because you're perfect, but because you're so perfect for me." It reveals an acceptance and understand that is not shallow or weak.

The Greek word (*makrothumein*) used in the New Testament always describes patience with *people* and not patience with circumstances. It is the word used of the man who is wronged and who has it easily in his power to avenge himself and who yet will not do it. It describes the man who is slow to anger and it is used of God himself in his relationship with men.

Sometime ago one of our members complained after services because of a distraction during the Sunday morning worship. Two people were mumbling to each other, it seemed. Because I knew the situation, I was able to offer a quick and adequate explanation: "Forgive them," I said. "I need to explain that one of the people is a new Christian and doesn't speak much English, so the message is being translated."

Something similar also occurred: a young man was wearing a baseball cap during the Sunday morning class…one of the members commented on it to me after class ended. I explained calmly that the person had just concluded chemotherapy and was conscious of the fact that he'd lost most of his hair. To that person's credit, there was quick retreat from his words and thoughts.

All of a sudden everything changed. Patience replaced impatience. Why? **Because patience always hitches a ride with understanding.** The wise man says, *"A man of understanding holds his tongue"* (Prov. 11:12).

Before you strike out, tune in. *"It takes wisdom to have a good family, and it takes understanding to make it strong" (Prov. 24:3).* Before anything else, love is patient. May I urge you to do the same? *"God is being patient with you"* (2 Pet. 3:9). And if God is being patient with you, can't you pass on some patience to others? Of course you can. Because before love is anything else: Love is patient.

Fosdick points out that no one treated Lincoln with more contempt than did Stanton. He called him "a low cunning clown", he nicknamed him "the original gorilla" and said that Du Chaillu was a fool to wander about Africa trying to capture a gorilla when he could have found one so easily at Springfield, Illinois. Lincoln said nothing. He made Stanton his war minister because he was the best man for the job and he treated him with every courtesy. The years wore on. The night came when the assassin's bullet murdered Lincoln in the theatre. In the little room to which the President's body was taken stood that same Stanton, and, looking down on Lincoln's silent face, he said through his tears, "There lies the greatest ruler of men the world has ever seen." The patience of love had conquered in the end.

We might occasionally respond the way an elderly couple in a nursing home did. They were constantly fighting, arguing, yelling at each other as they had from the time when they were first married as young people. They would argue and fight from the time they got up in morning until they fall in bed at night. Finally one day the wife says to her husband, "I'll tell you what, let's pray that one of us dies. And after the funeral is over I'll go to live with my sister."

Robert Ingersoll, the well-known atheist of the last century, often would stop in the middle of his lectures against God and say, "I'll give God five minutes to strike me dead for the things I've said." He then used the fact that he was not struck dead as proof that God did not exist. Theodore Parker said of Ingersoll's claim, "And did the gentleman think he could exhaust the patience of the eternal God in five minutes?"

Patience is the red carpet upon which God's grace approaches us.

Love is kind.

"Love is kind," writes Paul.

Nehemiah agrees: *"You are God, ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abundant in kindness" (Neh. 9:17).*

David agrees, *"Your lovingkindness is better than life" (Ps. 63:3 NASB).*

Paul speaks of *"the kindness and love of God our Savior"* (Titus 3:4 NIV). He is exuberant as he announces: *"Now God has us where he wants us, with all the time in this world and the next to shower grace and kindness upon us in Christ Jesus. Saving is all his idea, and all his work. All we do is trust him enough to let him do it" (Eph. 2:7–8 MSG).*

If longsuffering (or patience) is the passive side of love, kindness is the active side. Kindness is: "… a word suggesting goodness as well as solicitousness. They are interested in true goodness, actively interested in the welfare of those about them. Obviously these people are doers; they do not claim good intentions but then plead helplessness because of weakness or apathy."

Kindness is the opposite of "having a chip on one's shoulder. A chip on one's shoulder predisposes one to hostile action with only the slightest provocation. But kindness in one's heart predisposes one to helpful action which only requires the hint of a need before it takes action.

In a world that is saturated with harshness, a kind disposition is a refreshing breeze. There is many a woman who would trade a handsome husband for a kind one. Kindness would stifle the plague of child abuse. More kindness among brothers in the Lord would alleviate so much church trouble. The Scriptures demand that we be kind to each another (Eph. 4:32). Kindness is characteristic of God and should thus characterize the Christian as well:

But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men (Luke 6:35).

And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you (Ephesians 4:32).

Soon after Angi and David's sixth anniversary, the couple's home burned to the ground. Angi's first act, when they were allowed to hunt through the blackened remains, was to search for their photo albums.

When she went to tell David that the pictures had indeed survived, she found him carefully placing in a box some charred, folded pieces of paper -- their courtship love letters."

As I watched David kneeling there in the ashes," she says, "I was overcome with the certainty that we were meant for each other. There, in the face of our greatest tragedy, our first thoughts were not of our material loss but of the potential loss of these precious parts of our life together. As I knelt to help him with the letters, I was certain that we hadn't lost anything that mattered after all."[198]

Jesus' invitation offers the sweetest proof of the kindness of heaven: *Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly*

[198] Reader's Digest, August, 1982

in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light. (Matt. 11:28–30 NKJV)

Farmers in ancient Israel used to train an inexperienced ox by yoking it to an experienced one with a wooden harness. The straps around the older animal were tightly drawn. He carried the load. But the yoke around the younger animal was loose. He walked alongside the more mature ox, but his burden was light. In this verse Jesus is saying, "I walk alongside you. We are yoked together. But I pull the weight and carry the burden."

The following letter was send to Ann Landers, the famous newspaper columnist who dispensed advise for those who wrote: "Dear Ann Landers: I have a message for that 16-year-old boy who has a "21-year-old problem" -- his brother. My brother drowned three weeks ago. One minute he was alive and full of fun. The next minute he was gone, forever.

"I never felt especially close to my brother. We fought and didn't agree on many things. But now I realize how much a part of my life he was. Sure, he got on my nerves, and I'd tell him to bug off. But now I remember all the favors he did that only a brother could.

"I'm just trying to urge people to think about what their brothers and sisters mean to them and to express their appreciation. I hope they do it today because tomorrow may be too late. -- Miss Him a Lot.

She responded this way: "Dear Friend: I'm sure your letter will make millions of brothers and sisters think. Thanks for expressing those beautiful sentiments. ---Ann Landers, 8-24-92

Dr. Smiley Blanton tells us that "Eighty percent of the problem patients that have come to me, come because good manners were never taught them as children. As adults, they made mistakes and were rejected. They couldn't play the game of life because they didn't know the rules."

Compassion lies at the heart of our prayer for our fellow human beings. When I pray for the world, I become the world; when I pray for the endless needs of the millions, my soul expands and wants to embrace them all and bring them into the presence of God. But in the midst of that experience I realize that compassion is not mine but God's gift to me. I cannot embrace the world, but God can. I cannot pray, but God can pray in me. When God became as we are, that is, when God allowed all of us to enter into the intimacy of the divine life, it became possible for us to share in God's infinite compassion.

Love is not jealous.

Jealousy or envy is resenting another person because of what they have or how they have succeeded. Envy possessively wants what somebody else has. Love, in contrast, is glad for somebody who is popular or successful or beautiful or talented or married or have children….the list could go on and on.

Jealousy is a feeling of displeasure caused by the prosperity of another, coupled with a desire to wrest the advantage from the person who is the object of one's envy. The loving person will rejoice at the success of others. Jealousy has destroyed many a home and church.

In despair and frustration, we often allow similar circumstances to cause a "flicker" to occur in our attitude. And this <u>can</u> become a problem: for what is a flicker today can turn into a fire tomorrow.

Suppose you spotted a flame in your house. Not a blaze and certainly not a fire, but tiny tongues of heat dancing on the hem of a curtain, on the fringe of the carpet, to the side of the stove. What would you do? How would you react? Would you shrug your shoulders and walk away, saying, "A little fire never hurt any house."

Of course not. You'd put it out. Douse it, stamp it, cover it—anything but allow it. You would not tolerate a maverick flame in your house. Why? Because you know the growth pattern of fire. What is born in innocence is deadly in adolescence. Left untended, fire consumes all that is consumable. You know, for the sake of your house, you don't play with fire.

Jealousy, or envy, has two forms. One form says, "I want what someone else has." If they have a better car than we do, we want it. If they are praised for something they do, we want the same or more for ourselves. That sort of jealousy is bad enough. A worse kind says, "I wish they didn't have what they have" (see Matt. 20:1-16). The second sort of jealousy is more than selfish; it is desiring evil for someone else. It is jealousy on the deepest, most corrupt, and destructive level.

The cure for jealousy? Trust. The cause of jealousy? Distrust.

Charles L. Allen in *The Miracle of Love* writes of a fisherman friend who told him that one never needs a top for his crab basket. If one of the crabs starts to climb up the sides of the basket, the other crabs will reach up and pull it back down. Some people are a lot like crabs.

Love does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

Πεοπερευομαι ("to brag") is used nowhere else in the New Testament and means to talk conceitedly. Love does not parade its accomplishments. Bragging is the other side of jealousy. Jealousy is wanting what someone else has. Bragging is trying to make others jealous of what we have. Jealousy puts others down; bragging builds us up. It is ironic that, as much as most of us dislike bragging in others, we are so inclined to brag ourselves. Charles Trumbull once vowed: "God, if you will give me the strength, every time I have the opportunity to introduce the topic of conversation it will always be Jesus Christ." He had only one subject that was truly worth talking about. If Christ is first in our thoughts, we cannot possibly brag.

C. S. Lewis called bragging "the utmost evil." It is the epitome of pride, which is the root sin of all sins. Bragging puts ourselves first. Everyone else, including God, must therefore be of less importance to us. It is impossible to build ourselves up without putting others down. When we brag, we can be "up" only if others are "down." Jesus, who had everything to boast of, never boasted. In total contrast, we who have nothing to boast of are prone to boast. Only the love that comes from Jesus Christ can save us from flaunting our knowledge, our abilities, our gifts, or our accomplishments, real or imagined.

Arrogance and boasting are the reverse side of the coin. Jealousy is my sinful response to the prosperity of others. Arrogance and boasting are my sinful response to my own prosperity. Arrogance (or pride) takes credit for my "success," as though it were due to my own merit or superior efforts. Boasting is letting other people know about my success in a way that tempts others to be jealous of that success.

Love is not Rude

The principle here has to do with poor manners, with acting rudely. It is not as serious a fault as bragging or arrogance, but it stems from the same lovelessness. It does not care enough for those it is around to act becomingly or politely. It cares nothing for their feelings or sensitivities. The loveless person is careless, overbearing, and often crude.

William Barclay translates our text as, "Love does not behave gracelessly." Love is gracious. Graciousness should begin with fellow believers, but it should not end there. Many Christians have forfeited the opportunity for witnessing by rudeness to an unbeliever who offends them by a habit the Christian considers improper. As with Simon, sometimes our attitude and behavior in the name of righteousness are more improper, and less righteous, than some of the things we criticize.

Love is much more than being gracious and considerate, but it is never less. To the extent that our living is ungracious and inconsiderate it is also unloving and unchristian. Self-righteous rudeness by Christians can turn people away from Christ before they have a chance to hear the gospel. The messenger can become a barrier to the message. If people do not see the "gentleness of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:1) clearly in us, they are less likely to see Him clearly in the gospel we preach.

Love Does Not Seek Its Own

I understand that the inscription on a tombstone in a small English village reads, Here lies a miser who lived for himself, and cared for nothing but gathering wealth. Now where he is or how he fares, nobody knows and nobody cares.

In contrast, a plain tombstone in the courtyard at St. Paul's Cathedral in London reads, "Sacred to the memory of General Charles George Gordon, who at all times and everywhere gave his strength to the weak, his substance to the poor, his sympathy to the suffering, his heart to God."

What's the cure for selfishness? Get your self out of your eye by getting your eye off your self. Quit staring at that little self, and focus on your great Savior.

If Christ becomes our focus, we won't be like the physician in Arkansas. He misdiagnosed the patient. He declared the woman to be dead. The family was informed, and the husband was grief-stricken. Imagine the surprise of the nurse when she discovered that the woman was alive! "You better tell the family," she urged the doctor. The embarrassed physician phoned the husband and said, "I need to talk to you about the condition of your wife." "The condition of my wife?" he asked. "She's dead." The doctor's pride only allowed him to concede, "Well, she has seen a slight improvement."

The story is told of a chauffeur who drove up to a cemetery and asked the minister who served as caretaker to come to the car, because his employer was too ill to walk. Waiting in the car was a frail old lady with sunken eyes that showed years of hurt and anguish. She introduced herself and said she had been sending five dollars to the cemetery for the past several years to be used for flowers for her husband's grave. "I have come in person today," she said, "because the doctors have given me only a few weeks to live and I wanted to see the grave for one last time."

The minister replied, "You know I am sorry you have been sending money for those flowers." Taken aback, she said, "What do you mean?" "Well, I happen to be a part of a visiting society that visits patients in hospitals and mental institutions. They dearly love flowers. They can see them and smell them. Flowers are therapy for them, because they are living people."

Saying nothing, she motioned the chauffeur to leave. Some months later the minister was surprised to see the same car drive up, but with the woman herself at the wheel. She said, "At first I resented what you said to me that day when I came here for a last visit. But as I thought about it, I decided you were right. Now I personally take flowers to the hospitals. It *does* make the patients happy and it makes me happy, too. The doctors can't figure out what made me well, but I know I now have someone else to live for."

As always, Jesus is our perfect model. He "did not come to be served, but to serve" (Matt. 20:28). The Son of God lived His life for others. God incarnate was love incarnate. He was the perfect incarnation of self-giving love. He never sought His own welfare, but always the welfare of others.

Love is not easily provoked.

The Greek *παροξυνο/*, here translated **provoked,** means to arouse to anger and is the origin of the English *paroxysm*, a convulsion or sudden outburst of emotion or action. Love guards against being irritated, upset, or angered by things said or done against it. It **is not provoked.**

The apostle does not rule out righteous indignation. Love cannot "rejoice in unrighteousness" (1 Cor. 13:6). To be angered by the mistreatment of the unfortunate or by the maligning and contradiction of God's Word is righteous indignation. But when it is truly righteous, indignation will never be provoked by something done against us personally. When Jesus cleansed the Temple, He was angered at the profaning of His Father's house of worship (Matt. 21:11-12). But on the many occasions when He was personally vilified or abused, He did not once become angry or defensive.

Like his Lord, Paul was only angered by the things that anger God. He responded strongly against such things as heresy, immorality, and misuse of spiritual gifts. But he did not become angry at those who beat him, jailed him, or lied about him (see Acts 23:1-5).

The being provoked that Paul is talking about here has to do with things done against us or that are personally offensive. Love does not get angry at others when they say or do something that displeases us or when they prevent us from having our own way (cf. 1 Pet. 2:21-24). Love never reacts in self-defense or retaliation. Being **provoked** is the other side of seeking one's own way. The person who is intent on having his own way is easily provoked, easily angered.

We get angry when another person gains a privilege or recognition we want for ourselves, because it is our "right." But to put our rights before our duty and before loving concern for others comes from self-centeredness and lovelessness. The loving person is more concerned about doing what he should and helping where he can than in having what he thinks are his rights and his due. Love considers nothing its right and everything its obligation.

Telling our wives or husbands that we love them is not convincing if we continually get upset and angry at what they say and do. Telling our children that we love them is not convincing if we often yell at them for doing things that irritate us and interfere with our own plans. It does no good to protest, "I lose my temper a lot, but it's all over in a few minutes." So is a nuclear bomb. A great deal of damage can be done in a very short time. Temper is always destructive, and even small temper "bombs" can leave much hurt and damage, especially when they explode on a regular basis. Lovelessness is the cause of temper, and love is the only cure.

Love that takes a person outside of himself and centers his attention on the well-being of others is the only cure for self-centeredness.

Love Does Not Take Into Account a Wrong Suffered

Paul tells us that love "**does not take into account a wrong *suffered***." I like what Morris writes on this point: "Paul's next point is that love does not, so to speak, go around with a little black book making a note of every evil thing. 'Love keeps no score of wrongs,' says Paul (the NEB translation). We find it hard to forget it when people offend us, often storing up such grievances.

Λογιζομαι (**take into account**) is a bookkeeping term that means to calculate or reckon, as when figuring an entry in a ledger. The purpose of the entry is to make a permanent record that can be consulted whenever needed. In business that practice is necessary, but in personal matters it is not only unnecessary but harmful. Keeping track of things done against us is a sure way to unhappiness—our own and that of those on whom we keep records.

The same Greek word is used often in the New Testament to represent the pardoning act of God for those who trust in Jesus Christ. "Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not *take into account*" (Rom. 4:8). "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not *counting* their trespasses against them" (2 Cor. 5:19).

Once sin is placed under the blood of Christ there is no more record of it. It is blotted out, "wiped away" (Acts 3:19). In God's heavenly record the only entry after the names of His redeemed is "righteous," because we are counted righteous in Christ. Christ's righteousness is placed to our credit. No other record exists.

That is the sort of record love keeps of wrongs done against it. No wrong is ever recorded for later reference. Love forgives. Someone once suggested that love does not forgive and forget, but rather remembers and still forgives. Resentment is careful to keep books, which it reads and rereads, hoping for a chance to get even. Love keeps no books, because it has no place for resentment or grudges.

Chrysostom observed that a wrong done against love is like a spark that falls into the sea and is quenched. Love quenches wrongs rather than records them. It does not cultivate memories out of evils. If God so completely and permanently erases the record of our many sins against Him, how much more should we forgive and forget the much lesser wrongs done against us (cf. Matt. 18:21-35; Eph. 4:32)?

Love Doesn't Rejoice in Unrighteousness

Love never takes satisfaction from sin, whether our own sin or that of others. Doing wrong things is bad enough in itself; bragging about them makes the sins even worse. To **rejoice in unrighteousness** is to justify it. It is making wrong appear to be right.

The rejoicing at sin, the taking pleasure in them that commit sin, the exultation over the fall of others into sin, are among the worst forms of malignity: *(Romans 1:32 NIV) Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.*

(2 Thessalonians 2:12 NIV) "…and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.

We cannot imagine taking delight in a tragedy that befalls a friend or loved one; yet when we delight in sin, we are delighting in that which offends and grieves our heavenly Father and which is tragedy to Him.

If we love God, what offends Him will offend us and what grieves Him will grieve us. *(Psalms 69:9 NIV) for zeal for your house consumes me, and the insults of those who insult you fall on me.*

Granville Walker said, "There are times when silence is yellow, times when we ought to stand on our feet and regardless of the consequences challenge the gross evils of the time, times when not to do so is the most blatant form of cowardice. But there are other times when silence is golden, when to tell the truth is to make many hearts bleed needlessly and when nothing is accomplished and everything is hurt by a loose tongue."

Sin can produce nothing but harm. In the unsaved person sin is evidence of his lostness. In a believer sin is evidence of disobedience and broken fellowship with God. To love a person is to hate his sin. Discipline in the church is necessary not only to protect the purity of the body but to help the sinning believer confront his wrong and to repent: *(Matthew 18:15-20 NIV) "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. {16} But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' {17} If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. {18} "I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. {19} "Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. {20} For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."*

Paul had reminded the Corinthians of his command: *(1 Corinthians 5:11 NIV) But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.*

Love Rejoices in the Truth

After mentioning eight negatives, things that love is not or does not do, Paul lists five more positives (see v. 4*a*). The first is a contrast with the last negative: love **rejoices with the truth**.

At first glance it may seem strange to contrast not rejoicing in unrighteousness with rejoicing in the truth. But the truth Paul is speaking about here is not simply factual truth. He is speaking of God's truth, God's revealed Word.

Love is consistent with kindness but it is not consistent with compromise of the truth. Compromising the truth is not kind to those whom we mislead by our failure to stand firmly in the truth.

"This is love," John tells us, "that we walk according to His commandments" (2 John 6).

Love, truth, and righteousness are inseparable. When one is weakened the others are weakened. A person who teaches falsehood about God's truth should not even be received into our home or given a greeting (v. 10). We are not to rejoice in a wrong doctrine that he teaches or in a wrong way in which he lives. Love rejoices in the truth and never in falsehood or unrighteousness.

On the other hand, love does not focus on the wrongs of others. It does not parade their faults for all the world to see. Love does not disregard falsehood and unrighteousness, but as much as possible it focuses on the true and the right. It looks for the good, hopes for the good, and emphasizes the good. It rejoices in those who teach the truth and live the truth.

A minister was known for his love and encouragement of the people of his church and city. When he died someone commented, "There is no one left to appreciate the triumphs of ordinary folk." Love appreciates the triumphs of ordinary folk. Our children are built up and strengthened when we encourage them in their accomplishments and in their obedience. Love does not rejoice in falsehood or wrong, but its primary business is to build up, not tear down, to strengthen, not weaken.

Love Bears All Things

Paul has just written that love "**does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth**" (verse 6). How can he now inform us that "**love**" accepts everything as truth, believing whatever one is told?

Love is *always* characterized by certain qualities, without exception. Throughout history, man has sought to excuse disobedience or sin by convincing himself that his situation is an exception.

Love does not justify sin or compromise with falsehood. Love warns, corrects, exhorts, rebukes, and disciplines. But love does not expose or broadcast failures and wrongs. It covers and protects. Henry Ward Beecher said, "God pardons like a mother who kisses the offense into everlasting forgetfulness."

Matthew's Gospel sheds further light on this matter of our silence when Jesus teaches His disciples about church discipline (Matthew 18:15-20). We are to go *privately* to a brother who has sinned against us, and if he repents as a result of our rebuke, the matter is settled, never to be made public.

If, however, this wayward brother resists and refuses to repent, then the matter once dealt with in the strictest privacy must now be dealt with in a way that becomes more and more public. After all efforts to turn the wayward brother from sin have been rejected, the whole church must be notified of his sin, and he must be publicly ex-communicated.

Love always seeks to keep the sin of a wayward brother as private as possible, but this does not mean we cannot and should not be confronted publicly, if all private efforts have failed.

During Oliver Cromwell's reign as lord protector of England a young soldier was sentenced to die. The girl to whom he was engaged pleaded with Cromwell to spare the life of her beloved, but to no avail. The young man was to be executed when the curfew bell sounded, but when the sexton repeatedly pulled the rope the bell made no sound. The girl had climbed into the belfry and wrapped herself around the clapper so that it could not strike the bell. Her body was smashed and bruised, but she did not let go until the clapper stopped swinging. She managed to climb down, bruised and bleeding, to meet those awaiting the execution. When she explained what she had done, Cromwell commuted the sentence. A poet beautifully recorded the story as follows:

At his feet she told her story; showed her hands all bruised and torn, And her sweet young face still haggard with the anguish it had worn, Touched his heart with sudden pity, lit his eyes with misty light.

"Go, your lover lives," said Cromwell; "Curfew will not ring tonight."

This quality is most often lived out by mothers. Jean Kyler McManus said: "God knew there should be mothers to hear each infant's cry, To pat away the little tears that fill a baby's eye . . . God knew there should be mothers to hear a child's first word, To listen with attention when a child's voice mist be heard . . . God knew that each and every child needs someone close each day To help them out, to cheer them up at home, at school, at play – To teach them how to share this world with sisters and with brothers – And so in His great wisdom. God created mothers."

This is a worthwhile prayer: " Dear Lord, Thank you for this child that I call mine; not my possession but my sacred charge. Teach me patience and humility so that the best I know may flow in its being. Let me always remember, parental love is my natural instinct but my child's love must ever be deserved and earned; That for love I must give love, That for understanding I must give understanding, That for respect, I must give respect; That as I was the giver of life, so must I be the giver always. Help me to share my child with life and not toclutch at it for my own sake. Give courage to do my share to make this world a better place for all children and my own."

Love Believes All Things

Love is not suspicious or cynical. When it throws its mantle over a wrong it also believes in the best outcome for the one who has done the wrong—that the wrong will be confessed and forgiven and the loved one restored to righteousness.

Love also believes all things in another way. If there is doubt about a person's guilt or motivation, love will always opt for the most favorable possibility. If a loved one is accused of something wrong, love will consider him innocent until proven guilty. If he turns out to be guilty, love will give credit for the best motive. Love trusts; love has confidence; love **believes**.

Love Hopes All Things

Even when belief in a loved one's goodness or repentance is shattered, love still **hopes**. When it runs out of faith it holds on to hope. As long as God's grace is operative human failure is never final.

Love Endures All Things

Ηυπομενο / ("to endure") was a military term used of an army's holding a vital position at all costs. Every hardship and every suffering was to be endured in order to hold fast.

Love holds fast to those it loves. It **endures all things** at all costs. It stands against overwhelming opposition and refuses to stop bearing or stop believing or stop hoping. Love will not stop loving.

Love bears what otherwise is unbearable; it believes what otherwise is unbelievable; it hopes in what otherwise is hopeless; and it endures when anything less than love would give up.

After love bears it believes. After it believes it hopes. After it hopes it endures. There is no "after" for endurance, for endurance is the unending climax of love.

The Permanence of Love

Love is far superior to the spiritual gifts. The great permanence of love clearly shows its superiority.

Love never fails, never ceases, and never vanishes. Love endures and lasts forever. But not so with spiritual gifts: the spiritual gifts shall cease to be and shall vanish. When? Spiritual gifts are only temporary; they are not permanent; therefore, they are far inferior to love. Spiritual gifts were only temporary tools available to the first century church to use in reaching and ministering to a lost and needy world.

Love is perfect and complete. We know nothing perfectly, and we can proclaim and predict the truth only with partial certainty. No person knows all the truth. However, a day of perfection is coming, and when it comes, only that which is perfect will stand and endure.

The point is this: love is perfect; therefore, love shall endure and be the primary trait between believers in eternity. Therefore, love is far superior to the gifts.

Love is mature—maturity of behavior. However, the day of maturity is coming, the day when he shall set aside all the childhood understanding and thoughts and become a mature man, a perfected man. Love is the great gift and quality existing upon earth today that shall endure throughout eternity; therefore, love is far superior to the gifts and abilities of men.

Love is being face to face with God—a perfect consciousness and knowledge of God. Our present relationship with the Lord is comparable to the reflection we see through a dark mirror. We can faintly see the figure, but it is not fully distinct nor clear. Therefore, we only see God and the truth in part and we only know God and the truth in part. However, the day is coming when we shall know God even as He knows us—perfectly.

Are You In Love?

A young man said to his father at breakfast one morning, "Dad, I'm going to get married." "How do you know you're ready to get married?" asked the father. "Are you in love?" "I sure am," said the son. "How do you know you're in love?" asked the father. "Last night as I was kissing my girlfriend good-night, her dog bit me and I didn't feel the pain until I got home."

Some years ago, Dr. Karl Menninger, noted doctor and psychologist, was seeking the cause of many of his patients' ills. One day he called in his clinical staff and proceeded to unfold a plan for developing, in his clinic, an atmosphere of creative love. All patients were to be given large quantities of love; no unloving attitudes were to be displayed in the presence of the patients, and all nurses and doctors were to go about their work in and out of the various rooms with a loving attitude. At the end of six months, the time spent by patients in the institution was cut in half.

Some strange conversations are often wrapped around the subject of "love." A 20-year-old daughter earnestly prayed before climbing into bed: "Dear God, I don't ask anything for myself, but I do pray for my mother. Please give mother a handsome son-in-law to love."

On the other hand, some seem to be over anxious about landing someone who will love them. The mountain man was doing the best he could to be chivalrous. He carried a washtub on his back and a chicken under his arm, had a cane in one hand and led a calf with the other. Still his new girlfriend was wary. Either that or she was trying to cover up what she really wanted. As they approached the dark woods she held back, saying, "I'm afraid to walk with you in there. You might try to hug me and kiss me." "How on earth do you think I could manage that?" the mountaineer asked. "As you can see, I'm pretty well loaded down." "Well," she said, "you COULD stick that cane in the ground, tie the calf up to it, and put the chicken under the washtub."

A story tells about a fellow who was far away from home, and in a small town. He had in his possession only one thing, a $1,000 bill, but nothing else, no small change, no identification, nothing. He was famished for food, ravenously hungry, but he could buy nothing, for no one would take his $1,000 bill. It was not until he found a way to break that bill down into small change that he could spend any of it.

Our love for God, quite similarly, must be broken down into small, spendable change.

The teachings of the Hasidic rabbis often provide insight into God's ways. One story comes from Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev in the Ukraine. He confessed that the learned the meaning of love from a drunken peasant. The rabbi was visiting a tavern owner in Poland's countryside. As he entered the tavern, he immediately noticed two peasants at a table. Both were gloriously in their cups. Arms around one another, they were protesting how much each loved the other. Suddenly Ivan said to his friend, "Peter, tell me, what hurts me?" Stunned, Peter sat back into his chair and blurted out, "How do I know what hurts you?" Ivan's response cut through the drunken stupor: "If you don't know what hurts me, how can you say that you love me?"

None of us are loved perfectly. . . I heard recently of a couple who were trying to raise their little three year old so that he would never know fear. They didn't paddle him, they never scolded him, they never said no, and they let him go where he wanted to go when he wanted to go, and do what he wanted to do when he wanted to do it.

Some may think that this sound like heaven. . . when it didn't sound like heaven to the person who was telling me this story. This young couple happened to live by a busy highway. They had to go to a social activity and so they asked my friend to take care of this little boy.

My friend said he had never had such a task on his hands before. Can you imagine trying to take care of a three year old that knew no fear? He was continually disappearing. . . and where did he want to go???? Of course, he wanted to go out and stand in the middle of the highway to watch the cars whiz by on either side. The young parents thought that they were loving the child perfectly but they were just preparing the child for hurt, injury, and pain.

A man was known to carry a little can of oil wherever he went. If he passed through a door that squeaked, he put a drop of oil on the hinges, and if a gate was hard to open, he oiled the latch. So he passed through life lubricating all the creaking places, and making it a little more pleasant for those who followed after him. There is no telling how many lives we could keep from "rusting and squeaking" and how many gates we could open to happiness, if only we would carry a little oil of brotherly love and human kindness in an effort to prevent lives of Christians from rusting away in sin.

John Haggai in his book *Lead On* tells about Dr. Claude H. Barlow, a missionary to China and one of the most revered foreigners to work in that land. A strange disease for which he knew no remedy was killing people. There were no research laboratories for this disease, so Dr. Barlow conducted his own research. He studied the disease, filling a notebook with his observations. He then procured a vial of disease germs and sailed for the United States.

Before he arrived, he took the germs into his own body, then went to the John Hopkins University Hospital to be observed. Claude Barlow was very sick now. He allowed his old professors at John Hopkins to use him for experimentation. A cure was found, which a healthy Claude Barlow took back to China with him. His efforts saved countless lives.

When asked about the experience, Dr. Barlow replied, "Anyone would have done the same thing. I happened to be in a position of vantage and had the chance to offer my body."

I doubt that just anyone would have done that, don't you? Only a person with a very special kind of love in his or her heart would make that kind of sacrifice. It is that very special kind of love proceeding from the heart of God that determined to make a supreme sacrifice so that you might be saved. Without that love we would all still be orphans in a strange and hostile universe. But that love does exist. It exists in the church . . . it exists among people around this earth who have had an encounter with Jesus.

Being In Love

C. S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity* wrote, “Being in love is a good thing, but it is not the best thing. There are many things below it, but there are also things above it. You cannot make it the basis of a whole life. It is a noble feeling, but it is still a feeling. Now no feeling can be relied on to last in its full intensity, or even to last at all....In fact, the state of being in love usually does not last....But of course ceasing to be ‘in love’ need not mean ceasing to love. Love...is a deep unity, maintained by the will and deliberately strengthened by habit; reinforced by the grace which both partners ask and receive from God....They can retain this love even when each would easily, if they allowed themselves, be ‘in love’ with someone else. ‘Being in love’ first moved them to promise

fidelity: this quieter love enable them to keep their promise. It is on this love that the engine of marriage is run: being in love was the explosion that started it."

At the entrance to the harbor at the Isle of Man, there are two lights, which guide the mariner into the harbor. One would think the two signals would confuse the pilot. But the fact is, he has to keep them in line, and so long as he keeps the two lights in line his vessel is safe. And it is just as we keep our eyes on the two signals -- the love of God, and the love of man -- that we keep the channel, and are safe from the rocks on either hand. [199]

The height of our love for God will never exceed the depth of our love for one another. Love is never lost. If not reciprocated, it will flow back and soften and purify the heart.

We can risk loving as passionately as God loves. For we know that the love God makes possible is no scarce resource that must be hoarded so that it may be distributed in dribs and drabs--a little here and a little there. Love is not a rare commodity; rather, the more we love with the intense particularity of God's love, the more we discover that we have the capacity to love. [200]

If you have love in your heart, you always have something to give. No one ever said it better than C. S. Lewis: To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket -safe, dark, motionless, airless -- it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable.... The only place outside Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers of love... is Hell.

We become vulnerable when we love people and go out of our way to help them. That's what the wealthy industrialist Charles Schwab declared after going to court and winning a nuisance suit at age 70. Given permission by the judge to speak to the audience, he made the following statement: "I'd like to say here in a court of law, and speaking as an old man, that nine-tenths of my troubles are traceable to my being kind to others. Look, you young people, if you want to steer away from trouble, be hard-boiled. Be quick with a good loud no to anyone and everyone. If you follow this rule, you will seldom be bothered as you tread life's pathway. Except you'll have no friends, you'll be lonely, and you won't have any fun!" Schwab had made his point -- love may bring heartache, but it's worth it!

Whenever people expend themselves, they want results. If they lay down life, they want someone's life raised up. If they empty themselves, they want someone to be filled. They want their sufferings to bear fruit.

If this doesn't happen, they're tempted to give up. The refusal of the gift quickly becomes a reason not to offer it. Instead of leaning into resistance with love, they'll back off and say, "Well, we tried."

However, the motive for offering love is not that it be successful. Christians want reponse, but they are not bound to it. They sacrifice for others because they are the recipients of sacrifice. They are the current generation of a long line of broken bodies and shed blood.

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[199] W. L. Watkinson

[200] Stanley Hauerwas, quoted in *Context* (Sept.l5, l989). Christianity Today, Vol. 34, no. 8.

This gift Christians have received, they freely give. They join the living history in enacting the dream of God, [which] is a people sustained and transformed by mutual sacrificial love. [201]

Do you love enough?

Show me a church where there is love, and I will show you a church that is a power in the community. In Chicago a few years ago a little boy attended a Sunday school I know of. When his parents moved to another part of the city the little fellow still attended the same Sunday school, although it meant a long, tiresome walk each way. A friend asked him why he went so far, and told him that there were plenty of others just as good nearer his home.

"They may be as good for others, but not for me," was his reply.

"Why not?" she asked.

"Because they love a fellow over there," he replied.

If only we could make the world believe that we loved them, there would be fewer empty churches, and a smaller proportion of our population who never darken a church door. Let love replace duty in our church relations, and the world will soon be evangelized. [202]

We'd be better people and have greater churches if we'd live according to this poem:

Lord, let me live from day to day In such a self-forgetful way,
That, even when I kneel to pray, My prayer shall be for others.

Help me, in all the work I do, Ever to be sincere and true,
And know that all I'd do for Thee, Must needs be done for Others.

Let "self" be crucified and slain, And buried deep, nor rise again;
And may all efforts be in vain, Unless they be for Others.

And when my work on earth is done, And my new work in heaven begun
May I forget the crown I've won, While thinking still of Others.

Yes, Others, Lord, yes, Others. Let this motto be;
Help me to live for Others, That I may live with Thee.

LOVE

A wise lover values not so much the gift of the lover as the love of the giver.
Thomas à Kempis (c. 1380–1471)

Agape love is . . . profound concern for the well-being of another, without any desire to control that other, to be thanked by that other, or to enjoy the process.Madeleine L'Engle (1918–)

Better to have loved and lost than not to have loved at all. Lucius Annaeus Seneca (c. 4 b.c.–a.d. 65)

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[201] Fr. John Shea in *U.S. Catholic* (March 1990). Christianity Today, Vol. 34, no. 7.
[202] Moody's Anecdotes, pp. 71-72

Christian love links love of God and love of neighbor in a twofold Great Commandment from which neither element can be dropped, so sin against neighbor through lack of human love is sin against God. Georgia Harkness (1891–1979)

Erotic and philia love are emotional. Christian love [agape] is an attitude, not feeling. Joseph Fletcher

God loved the world. Go thou and do likewise. Erwin W. Lutzer (1941–)

He who knows he is loved can be content with a piece of bread, while all the luxuries of the world cannot satisfy the craving of the lonely. Frances J. Roberts

Human things must be known to be loved: but divine things must be loved to be known. Blaise Pascal (1623–1662)

I have decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929–1968)

If God is love, he is, by definition, something more than mere kindness. And it appears, from all the records, that though he has often rebuked us and condemned us, he has never regarded us with contempt. He has paid us the intolerable compliment of loving us, in the deepest, most tragic, most inexorable sense. C. S. Lewis (1898–1963)

Immature love says: "I love you because I need you." Mature love says: "I need you because I love you." Erich Fromm (1900–1980)

In real love you want the other person's good. In romantic love you want the other person. Margaret Anderson (1893–1973)

Jesus redefines the meaning of love for neighbor; it means love for any man in need. George Eldon Ladd (1911–1982)

Joy is love exalted; peace is love in repose; long-suffering is love enduring; gentleness is love in society; goodness is love in action; faith is love on the battlefield; meekness is love in school; and temperance is love in training. Dwight Lyman Moody (1837–1899)

PATIENCE

"Take your needle, my child, and work at your pattern; it will come out a rose by and by." Life is like that; one stitch at a time taken patiently, and the pattern will come out all right like embroidery. Oliver Wendell Holmes (1809–1894)

A delay is better than a disaster.

A handful of patience is worth more than a bushel of brains. Dutch Proverb

All comes at the proper time to him who knows how to wait. Saint Vincent de Paul (1581–1660)

Be patient with everyone, but above all with yourself. Saint Francis of Sales (1567–1622)

Dear God, please grant me patience. And I want it right now.

KINDNESS

Be kind; everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle. Ian Maclaren (1850–1907)

Can you ever remember a time when you regretted having said a kind word?

Do all the good you can, By all the means you can, In all the ways you can, In all the places you can, At all the times you can, To all the people you can, As long as ever you can.

Forget injuries, never forget kindnesses. Chinese Proverb

Hatred and anger are powerless when met with kindness.

Have you had a kindness shown? Pass it on; 'Twas not given for thee alone, Pass it on;

Let it travel down the years, Let it wipe another's tears, 'Till in heaven the deed appears—Pass it on. Henry Burton (1840–1930)

JEALOUSY

In jealousy there is more self-love than love. François, Duc de La Rochefoucauld (1613–1680)

Jealousy is a blister on the heels of friendship.

Jealousy is the foolish child of pride. Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais (1732–1799)

Jealousy is the great exaggerator. Johann Friedrich von Schiller (1759–1805)

Love is blind; jealousy sees too much.Jewish Proverb

O jealousy! thou magnifier of trifles. Johann Friedrich von Schiller (1759–1805)

SELFISHNESS

Affluent society" is a euphemism, in the context of our poverty-stricken and starvation-ridden world, for selfishness. John Fowles (1926–)

Christ regarded the self-loving, self-regarding, self-seeking spirit as the direct antithesis of real living. His two fundamental rules for life were that "love-energy," instead of being turned in on itself, should go out first to God and then to other people. J. B. Phillips (1906–1982)

Glory built on selfish principles is shame and guilt. William Cowper (1731–1800)

He is a slave of the greatest slave who serves nothing but himself.

He who lives only for himself is truly dead to others. Publilius Syrus (First Century b.c.)

I doubt that there has ever been one recorded case of deep and lasting fulfillment reported by a person whose basic mind-set and only question was: What am I getting out of this? John Powell

If I really love God, my innate and persistent selfishness will have received its death-blow. Alexander Smellie

ANGER

A man who can't control his temper is like a city without defenses. JEWISH PROVERB

An angry man opens his mouth and shuts his eyes. CATO THE ELDER (234–149 B.C.)

Anger can be an expensive luxury. ITALIAN PROVERB

Anger is a weed; hate is the tree. SAINT AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO (354–430)

Anger is quieted by a gentle word just as fire is quenched by water. JEAN PIERRE CAMUS (1584–1652)

Anybody can become angry—that is easy; but to be angry with the right person, and to the right degree, and at the right time, and for the right purpose, and in the right way—that is not within everybody's power and is not easy. ARISTOTLE (384–322 B.C.)

Arrows pierce the body, but harsh words pierce the soul. SPANISH PROVERB

Control yourself! Anger is only one letter short of danger.

Devotional Reading

(1 Corinthians 13) "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. {2} If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. {3} If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. {4} Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. {5} It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. {6} Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. {7} It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. {8} Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. {9} For we know in part and we prophesy in part, {10} but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. {11} When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. {12} Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. {13} And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love."

19
Following after Faith…

Faith builds a bridge across the gulf of death.[203]

The story is told of a good woman known for her great calmness in the midst of many trials and for her simple faith. Another woman heard of her and said, "I must go and see that woman, and learn the secret of her strong and happy life." She went, and speaking to her asked: "Are you the woman with the great faith?" "No," she replied, "I am not the woman with the great faith; but I am the woman with the little faith in the great God."

It's my greatest blessing in life to have known some men and women who "lived their whole life for their death." People who loved the Lord daily and longed for eternity moment by moment.

They understood that the most important things in life are things we cannot see. They knew a faith that hasn't been tested can't be trusted. Their motto: without Christ, not one step; with him, anywhere!

As Abraham Lincoln said, "Faith is not believing that God can, but that God will!" Faith has never yet outstripped the bounty of the Lord. And faith is a gift but we can ask for it.

Faith comes by the word of God (Rom. 10:17). Thus, we trust a book, whose original we have never seen, to help us learn about a man we have never met, to save us through an event we have never seen, and take us to a place we have never visited. Nevertheless, we believe.

[203] Edward Young (1683–1765)

There are three kinds of faith in Christ: 1. Struggling faith, like a man in deep water desperately swimming; 2. Clinging faith, like a man hanging to the side of a boat.; 3. Resting faith, like a man safely within the boat (and able to reach out with a hand to help someone else get in).[204]

When people come in for counsel, and begin to list their many difficulties, I often ask a simple question, "How much time have you spent in Bible study the past month?" Without exception, those who have 'little faith' in themselves and in God working with them in their circumstances have spent little or no time in His Word.

Our need to be in charge of ourselves, others, and situations often makes our relationship with Christ life's biggest power struggle. We are reluctant to relinquish our control and allow Him to run our lives. We may believe in Him and be active in the church and Christian causes, but trusting Him as Lord of everything in life can be scary.

We live under the illusion that if we can acquire complete control, we can understand God, or we can write the great American novel. But the only way we can brush against the hem of the Lord, or hope to be part of the creative process, is to have the courage, the faith, to abandon control. For the opposite of sin is faith, and never virtue, and we live in a world which believes that self-control can make us virtuous. But that's not how it works. [205]

Even though we pray about our challenges and problems, all too often what we really want is strength to accomplish what we've already decided is best for ourselves and others. Meanwhile we press on with our own priorities and plans. We remain the script writer, casting director, choreographer, and producer of the drama of our own lives, in which we are the star performer. [206]

The principal work of the Spirit is faith ... the principal exercise of faith is prayer. [207] Our faith becomes practical when it is expressed in two books: the date book and the check book. [208]

We are encouraged to never doubt in the dark what God told us in the light. We should not put a question mark where God has put a period. To have faith is to believe the task ahead of us is never as great as the Power behind us. To me, faith means not worrying.

Faith is a reasoning trust, a trust which reckons thoughtfully and confidently upon the trustworthiness of God. [209] Faith is a refusal to panic. [210] Faith is a strong power, mastering any difficulty in the strength of the Lord who made heaven and earth. Faith is an activity; it is something that has to be applied.[211]

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[204] Dwight Lyman Moody (1837–1899)
[205] Madeleine L'Engle in *Walking on Water*. Christianity Today, Vol. 36, no. 4.
[206] Lloyd Ogilvie in *12 Steps to Living Without Fear*. Christianity Today, Vol. 32, no. 3.
[207] John Calvin, Christian History, no. 12.
[208] Elton Trueblood. Leadership, Vol. 11, no. 1.
[209] John R. W. Stott (1921–)
[210] D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899–1981)
[211] Corrie ten Boom (1892–1983)

We human beings instinctively regard the seen world as the "real" world and the unseen world as the "unreal" world, but the Bible calls for almost the opposite. Through faith, the unseen world increasingly takes shape as the real world and sets the course for how we live in the seen world.[212]

Understanding is the reward of faith. Therefore seek not to understand that you may believe, but believe that you may understand.

The Bible recognizes no faith that does not lead to obedience, nor does it recognize any obedience that does not spring from faith. The two are at opposite sides of the same coin. [213]

The writer to the Hebrews went on to say: *"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for. By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible."(Heb. 11:1-3)*

Faith is absolutely certain that what it believes is true and that what it expects will come. It is not the hope which looks forward with wistful longing; it is the hope which looks forward with utter conviction. Faith is not a sense, nor sight, nor reason, but taking God at his Word.

In the early days of persecution they brought a humble Christian before the judges. He told them that nothing they could do could shake him because he believed that, if he was true to God, God would be true to him. "Do you really think," asked the judge, "that the like of you will go to God and his glory?" "I do not think," said the man, "I know," [214]

A person who has faith is prepared for life and to do something with it. [215]

Moffatt distinguishes three directions in which the Christian hope operates. *It is belief in God against the world.* If we follow the world's standards we may well have ease and comfort and prosperity; if we follow God's standards we may well have pain and loss and unpopularity. It is the conviction of the Christian that it is better to suffer with God than to prosper with the world.

In the book of *Daniel*, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are confronted with the choice of obeying Nebuchadnezzar and worshipping the king's image or obeying God and entering the fiery furnace. Without hesitation they choose God (*Daniel* 3). The Christian attitude is that in terms of eternity it is better to stake everything on God than to trust to the rewards of the world.

The Christian hope is belief in the spirit against the senses. The senses say to a man: "Take what you can touch and taste and handle and enjoy."

The Christian hope is belief in the future against the present. Long ago Epicurus said the chief end of life was pleasure. But he did not mean what so many people think he meant. He insisted that we must take the long view. The thing which is pleasant at the moment may bring pain in the long run; the thing which hurts like fury

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[212] Philip Yancey (1949–)
[213] A.W. Tozer. Leadership, Vol. 12, no. 4.

[214] William Barclay, *The Letter to the Hebrews*
[215] Sadie and Bessie Delany, Christian Reader, Vol. 33, no. 2.

at the moment may bring joy in the long run. The Christian is certain that in the long run no man can exile the truth for "great is truth, and in the end she will prevail."[216]

It was precisely because the great heroes of the faith lived on that principle that they were approved by God. Every one of them refused what the world calls greatness and staked everything on God and history proved them right.

Many of us need to be more like the little girl whom the farmer found lost in his meadow. The farmer said to her, "Do not cry; I'll take you home." The little child snuggled up to him, and with a smile, said, "I knew you would; I was waiting for you." "Waiting for me?" said the man. "What made you think I was coming?" "I was praying you would" she said. "Praying? When I first heard you, you were saying A B C D E F G. What was that for?" She looked up again and said, "I'm just a little girl. I was praying all the letters of the alphabet and letting God put them together the way He wanted to. He knows I was lost, and He knows how to put them together better than I do."

What a difference if we would only let God put the letters of our lives together.[217] Faith does not struggle; faith lets God do it all. [218]

Hope stands up to its knees in the past and keeps its eyes on the future. There has never been a time past when God wasn't with us as the strength beyond our strength, the wisdom beyond our wisdom, as whatever it is in our hearts--whether we believe in God or not--that keeps us human enough at least to get by despite everything in our lives that tends to wither the heart and make it less than human. To remember the past is to see that we are here today by grace, that we have survived as a gift. [219]

Two little girls were on their way to school one morning. Having been detained in starting, they were very much afraid that they would be late. One said, "Let us kneel down and ask the Lord to not let us be late." The other said, "No, I think I will run as fast as I can, and pray to God while I am running to help me to get there on time."

Folding our hands in prayer is not an act of resignation. Prayer does not lead us to accept every circumstance with passive calm. Is prayer our steering wheel or our spare tire?

Two gentlemen were one day crossing the river in a ferryboat. A dispute about faith and works arose, one saying that good works were of small importance and that faith was everything, the other asserting the contrary. Neither being able to convince the other, the ferryman asked permission to give his opinion. Upon consent he said, "I hold in my hand two oars. That in my right hand, I call 'faith'; the other, in my left, 'works.' Now, gentlemen, please observe. I pull the oar of faith and pull that alone. See! the boat goes round and round, and the boat makes no progress. I do the same with the oar of works with precisely similar results -- no advance. Mark! I pull both together. We go on apace, and in a very few minutes we shall be at our landing place. So, in my

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[216] Ibid, William Barclay.
[217] *Knight's Illustrations* p. 186
[218] Corrie ten Boom (1892–1983)
[219] Frederick Buechner, Christian Reader, Vol. 35, no. 2.

humble opinion neither faith without works nor works without faith will suffice. Let there be both, and the haven of eternal rest is sure to be reached."[220]

Faith and works should travel side by side, step answering to step, like the legs of men walking. First faith, and then works; and then faith again, and then works again--until you can scarcely distinguish which is one and which is the other. [221]

When G. Campbell Morgan was young he used to visit several elderly ladies once a week to read the Bible to them. When he came to the end of Matthew's Gospel, Morgan read, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age." He added, "Isn't that a wonderful promise?" One of the ladies quickly replied, "Young man, that is not a promise. It is a fact!"

Saving faith is always a working faith. It not only trusts God for everyday needs but also motivates the doing of good deeds. One of the strongest evidences of the relevance of Christianity to human suffering and need is the good that believers do because of their relationship to Christ.

John Stott observed that ”every Christian should be both conservative and radical; conservative in preserving the faith and radical in applying it.” Put another way, if there are two words that should be said in the same breath and said regularly to ventilate our hope, that should be flamed together, branded as a signature of our faith, they are the words "faith" and "courage." It takes courage to believe, and in order to have that courage, we must believe. [222]

On day six of the ill-fated mission of Apollo 13, the astronauts needed to make a critical course correction. If they failed, they might never return to Earth.

To conserve power, they shut down the onboard computer that steered the craft. Yet the astronauts needed to conduct a thirty-nine-second burn of the main engines. How to steer? Astronaut Jim Lovell determined that if they could keep a fixed point in space in view through their tiny window, they could steer the craft manually. That focal point turned out to be their destination--Earth.

As shown in 1995's hit movie, Apollo 13, for thirty-nine agonizing seconds, Lovell focused on keeping the earth in view. By not losing sight of that reference point, the three astronauts avoided disaster.

Scripture reminds us that to finish your life mission successfully, *"Fix your eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith"* (Heb. 12:2).

There was a tightrope walker, who did incredible aerial feats. All over Paris, he would do tightrope acts at tremendously scary heights. Then he had succeeding acts; he would do it blindfolded, then he would go across the tightrope, blindfolded, pushing a wheelbarrow. An American promoter read about this in the papers and wrote a letter to the tightrope walker, saying, "Tightrope, I don't believe you can do it, but I'm willing to make you an offer. For a very substantial sum of money, besides all your transportation fees, I would like to challenge you to do your act over Niagara Falls." Now, Tightrope wrote back, "Sir, although I've never been to America

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[220] William Moses Tidwell, *"Pointed Illustrations."*

[221] William Booth in *The Founders' Messages to Soldiers*. Christianity Today, Vol. 36, no. 10.

[222] Fay Angus in *Running Around in Spiritual Circles*. Christianity Today, Vol. 36, no. 5.

and seen the Falls, I'd love to come." Well, after a lot of promotion and setting the whole thing up, many people came to see the event. Tightrope was to start on the Canadian side and come to the American side. Drums roll, and he comes across the rope which is suspended over the treacherous part of the falls -- blindfolded!! And he makes it across easily.

The crowds go wild, and he comes to the promoter and says, "Well, Mr. Promoter, now do you believe I can do it?" "Well of course I do. I mean, I just saw you do it." "No," said Tightrope, "do you really believe I can do it?" "Well of course I do, you just did it." "No, no, no," said Tightrope, "do you believe I can do it?" "Yes," said Mr. Promoter, "I believe you can do it." "Good," said Tightrope, "then you get in the wheel barrow."

Often, God is ready and willing to provide help and security to us, yet we're not strong enough in faith to allow it to occur.

One night a house caught fire and a young boy was forced to flee to the roof. The father stood on the ground below with outstretched arms, calling to his son, "Jump! I'll catch you." He knew the boy had to jump to save his life. All the boy could see however, was flame, smoke, and blackness. As can be imagined, he was afraid to leave the roof. His father kept yelling: "Jump! I will catch you." But the boy protested, "Daddy, I can't see you." The father replied, "But I can see you and that's all that matters."

At other times we place our aspirations for the future on items which are temporary or vain or weak.

In April of 1988, a TV cameraman jumped out of a plane with some other skydivers. His goal was to record the exciting jump of the skydivers as they fell to the earth. What's more, this footage was shown on the local TV news, but not for the reasons why the cameraman had originally recorded the event.

After several minutes of "free fall," the cameraman then filmed the skydivers as they one by one opened their parachutes. Of course, the final skydiver was the cameraman himself and the time came for him to pull his parachute ripcord.

However, when the cameraman reached for his ripcord, he realized to his horror and shock that he had no ripcord. It turns out that he had completely forgotten to put on his parachute.

For the next several minutes, the cameraman was able to capture the sheer terror as he ultimately fell to his death. Indeed, toward the end of the film, the picture went berserk and eventually went dead.

This story is not only tragic, but it is also ironic. Ironic because the cameraman took a plunge into what appeared to be an exciting and thrilling jump. But tragically, in a moment of foolish carelessness, he made the worst mistake of his entire life: he jumped to his own death. Yes, his faith had been based upon a parachute -- a life support -- that wasn't there.

In the same way, if we based our lives upon anything other than faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, then we will make the biggest mistake of our entire lives as well. That is, faith other than in Christ will lead to our spiritual deaths! What's more, this spiritual death will be for all eternity -- forever and ever!

Dr. John MacNeill once said that if he heard his little three-year-old girl crying piteously for a piece of bread, knowing that she must be very hungry and having the bread with him, he would not think of telling her to cry on for another hour and if she coaxed hard enough he would give it to her! Yet how slow we are to believe

that God means what He says, "How much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" (Luke 11:13) God is eager to come in His fullness. We need not to coax, but to receive.

Michael Faraday, the great scientist, was taken ill. When it became evident that the sickness that had fastened itself upon him would soon result in his death, a group of fellow scientists came to see him--not so much to talk about science as to talk about death.

One of them said to him: "Mr. Faraday, what are your speculations about your future?" With evident surprise to them he replied: "Speculations! I have none. I am resting on certainities." Then he quoted II Tim. 1:12: *"For I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day."*

Several years ago a scientist wrote an article entitled, "Seven Reasons Why I Believe in God." He said, "Consider the rotation of the earth. Our globe spins on its axis at the rate of one thousand miles an hour. If it were just a hundred miles an hour, our days and nights would be ten times as long. The vegetation would freeze in the long night or it would burn in the long day; and there could be no life."

He said, "Consider the heat of the sun. Twelve thousand degrees at surface temperature, and we're just far enough away to be blessed by that terrific heat. If the sun gave off half its radiation, we would freeze to death. If it gave off one half more, we would all be crispy critters."

He said, "Consider the slant of the earth." I think he said twenty-three degrees. "If it were different than that, the vapors from the oceans would ice over the continents. There could be no life."

He said, "Consider the moon. If the moon were fifty thousand miles away rather than its present distance, twice each day giant tides would inundate every bit of land mass on this earth."

He said, "Think of the crust of the earth. Just a little bit thicker and there could be no life because there would be no oxygen. Or the thinness of the atmosphere. If our atmosphere was just a little thinner, the millions of meteors now burning themselves out in space would plummet this earth into oblivion. These are reasons," he said, "why I believe in God." [223]

Imagine a ship filled with people crossing the Atlantic. In the middle of the ocean there is an explosion. The ship is severely damaged and slowly sinking. Most are dead, and the rest are rushing for the lifeboats. Now suppose one man doesn't know about the lifeboat, so he does not get aboard. He doesn't have knowledge, so he is not saved. Suppose another man knows about the lifeboat and believes it will save his life, but he is grief-stricken over seeing his wife killed, so he chooses not to get aboard and dies with his wife. He has knowledge and mental assent, but he is not saved. Others believe the lifeboat will save them, and they get into the boat. They are saved by faith, that is they have knowledge, mental assent, and trust. However, it is not their faith that saves them--no matter how much they have. It is the boat. Saving faith trusts Christ, and Christ saves. [224]

Everyone has faith in something--faith in some religion, faith in one's self, faith in fate, faith in evolution, faith in mankind. Even the atheist has faith in his own reason.

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[223] Frank Pollard, "Our Greatest Victory," Preaching Today, Tape No. 175.
[224] *Evangelism, A Biblical Approach*, M. Cocoris, Moody, 1984, p. 77

But there is only one real faith that works for time and eternity. True faith is faith in the one true God--the God who made us, who will judge us, and who has paid the price to save us. This faith is an understanding faith, for it is *"through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God"* (Hebrews 11:3).

It is a saving faith, *"for by grace ye are saved through faith, "for by grace ye are saved through faith"* (Galations 3:11), it is, therefore, a living faith, and a growing faith, *"because that your faith groweth exceedingly"* (II Thessalonians 1:3), and a working faith, because *"faith without works is dead"* (James 2:20).

There is more. The true faith is a justifying faith (it makes us righteous in the sight of God) because, *"being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ"* (Romans 5:1). It is a protecting faith because, with *"the shield of faith...ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked"* (Ephesians 6:16). It is a stable faith, *"for by faith ye stand"* (II Corinthians 1:24).

This faith is also a purifying faith, *"purifying their hearts by faith"* (Acts 15:9). Furthermore, asking faith receives answers to its prayers, *"in faith, nothing wavering"* (James 1:6), and a strong faith recoiling *"not at the promise of God through unbelief; but...strong in faith, giving glory to God"* (Romans 4:20).

Finally, the Christian faith is a triumphant faith. *"For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith"* (I John 5:4).

This faith--even our faith(!)--is an understanding, saving, living, growing, justifying, purifying, working, protecting, stable, asking, strong, triumphant faith!

We need to feed our faith and our doubts will starve to death. Faith is nothing at all tangible. It is simply believing God; and, like sight, is nothing apart from its object. We might as well shut our eyes and look inside to see whether we have sight, as to look inside to discover if we have faith.

We are all asked to do more than we can do. Every hero and heroine of the Bible does more than he would have thought it possible to do, from Gideon to Esther to Mary.

Faith is not a contract. Faith is surrender. If no other relationship in our experience is one of self-surrender, it's all contractual; people won't know how to believe.

Some people think the prayer of faith is crawling out on a limb and then begging God to keep someone from sawing it off. But that is not real prayer, that is presumption. If God makes it clear that he wants you out on a limb, fine--you will be perfectly safe there. If not, it is presumptuous to crawl out on that limb, expecting God to keep you there. [225]

An old lady in England who had stood the bombings with amazing fortitude was asked the secret of her calmness in the midst of such frightful danger. She replied, "Well, every night I says my prayers and then I remembers how the parson told us God is always watching; so I go to sleep. After all, there's no need for both of us to stay awake!"

[225] Ray C. Stedman in *Man of Faith*. Christianity Today, Vol. 40, no. 7.

Faith

A Christian who walks by faith accepts all circumstances from God. He thanks God when everything goes good, when everything goes bad, and for the "blues" somewhere in-between. He thanks God whether he feels like it or not. Erwin W. Lutzer (1941–)

A man can accept what Christ has done without knowing how it works; indeed, he certainly won't know how it works until he's accepted it. C. S. Lewis (1898–1963)

Beware of worshiping Jesus as the Son of God and professing your faith in him as the Savior of the world, while you blaspheme him by the complete evidence in your daily life that he is powerless to do anything in and through you. Oswald Chambers (1874–1917)

Don't be afraid to take a big step. You can't cross a chasm in two small jumps. David Lloyd George (1863–1945)

Eternal life does not begin with death; it begins with faith. Samuel M. Shoemaker (1893–1963)

Faith can put a candle in the darkest night. Margaret Sangster (1838–1912)

Faith grows only in the dark. You've got to trust him when you can't trace him. That's faith. Lyell Rader

Faith has no merit where human reason supplies the proof.
Pope Gregory the Great (c. 540–604)

Faith in God is a terrific venture in the dark. Oswald Chambers (1874–1917)

Faith instructs us in the depths of God. Faith stands above any human system, no matter how valid; it is concerned with the revealed data, with that glory which cannot be named by any human name, yet has desired to make itself known to us in words which all may understand. Jacques Maritain (1882–1973)

Faith is . . . doing the right thing regardless of the consequences, knowing God will turn the ultimate effect to good. Pamela Reeve

Faith is blind—except upward. It is blind to impossibilities and deaf to doubt. It listens only to God. Samuel Dickey Gordon (1859–1936)

One of the ways that our faith expresses itself is by our ability to be still, to be present, and not to panic or lose perspective. God still does his best work in the most difficult of circumstances. Tim Hansel

Put your faith to the test of life and see whether it will not justify your confidence. If God be really what our faith assumes, we shall find him unifying our thinking, satisfying our sense of beauty or of wonder, opening out to us an enlarging and enfranchising life.
William Adams Brown (1865–1943)

True faith is never found alone; it is accompanied by expectation. C. S. Lewis (1898–1963)

We should act with as much energy as those who expect everything from themselves, and we should pray with as much earnestness as those who expect everything from God. Charles Caleb Colton (1780–1832)

Devotional Readings

(Hebrews 11) "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. {2} This is what the ancients were commended for. {3} By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible. {4} By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead. {5} By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God.

{6} And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. {7} By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith. {8} By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. {9} By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. {10} For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

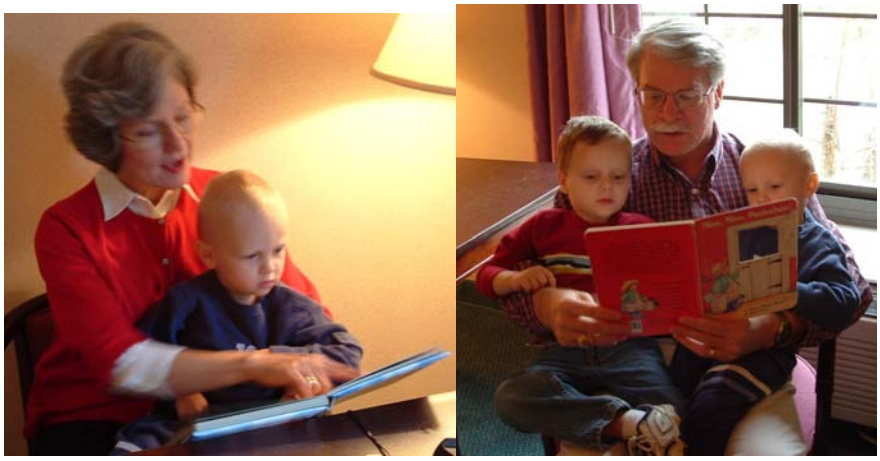
{11} By faith Abraham, even though he was past age--and Sarah herself was barren--was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise. {12} And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore. {13} All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. {14} People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. {15} If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return.

{16} Instead, they were longing for a better country--a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them. {17} By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, {18} even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." {19} Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death. {20} By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future.

{21} By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons, and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff. {22} By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions about his bones. {23} By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict. {24} By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. {25} He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time.

{26} He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. {27} By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible. {28} By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel. {29} By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land; but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned. {30} By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had marched around them for seven days. …..

{36} Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. {37} They were stoned ; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated-- {38} the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. {39} These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. {40} God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect."



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Powerful in Prayer…

The activity which we call prayer is, without a doubt, the very heart of religion.

That which distinguishes a deeply religious person from all other people is the fact that he has a definite place in his life for prayer. Prayer is a definite part of his life.

There is not in the world a kind of life more sweet and delightful than that of a continual conversation with God.

We are not told that Jesus ever taught His disciples how to preach, but He taught them how to pray. He wanted them to have power with God; then He knew they would have power with man.

Prayer is a form of communication between God and man and man and God. It is of the essence of communication between persons that they should talk with each other from the same basic agenda. Wherever this is not done, communication tends to break down. If, however, an atmosphere of trust can be maintained, then one learns how to wait and be still. It is instructive to examine the prayer life of the Master from this point of view.[226]

Prayer is much like a check to be countersigned by two parties. I sign the check and send it up to heaven. If Jesus Christ also signs it, it does not matter how large it is -- it'll be honored.

Abraham Lincoln faced some of our nation's most difficult situation with prayer, stating that "I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go."

The trouble with many who pray is that he/she says "Amen" and runs away before God has a chance to reply.

God wants us to communicate with Him because He has a great plan for our lives. For us to fulfill that plan, we have to hear what He's saying and what He's calling us to do. Prayer sometimes consists of sitting down and just being quiet and listening.

[226] Howard Thurman in *A Strange Freedom*. Christianity Today, Vol. 43, no. 5.

You know how people say, "Don't just stand there, do something"? I believe God is telling us, "Don't just do something, stand there." God wants us to be quiet sometimes and just meditate. We have to listen before we can learn and obey.

There come times in our lives when we in our desperation and pain run to God and dial our 911 prayers. Sometimes we're hysterical. Sometimes we don't know the words to speak. But God hears. He knows our number and he knows our name and he knows our circumstance. That help is already on the way; God has already begun to bring the remedy to us.[227]

Since September 11, 2001, when those Twin Towers were destroyed by terrorists in New York City, our country has been more accommodating to the 'idea' of prayer as opposed to the secular attitude of many of our citizens. Even our politicians have been seen to turn to prayer in a way unlike recent years.

But there is a natural cynicism in wondering if their actions are truly genuine, reminding me of an Indiana farmer who took his family to the nation's capital to see how their government worked. After visiting the House of Representatives, they went to the Senate gallery, where the chaplain of the Senate was speaking.

Daddy," asked the farmer's ten-year-old daughter, "does the chaplain pray for the Senate?"

"No," said the farmer. "He comes in, looks at the Senators, and then prays for the country."[228]

Many are unaware that the Declaration of Independence did not come into being until a day of fasting and prayer had been observed. Appointed by the Continental Congress, it was kept by all the colonies on May 17, 1776. At that time in our history, God and the Bible were given more reverence and recognition than they are today. When the nation was finally born, our forefathers rang the Liberty Bell with great enthusiasm, and a legend says that it cracked as they zealously proclaimed their freedom. Years later the White Chapel Foundry of London offered to recast the huge carillon, but their proposal was of course refused. Apparently the symbolic value of the damaged bell, which recalls the religious and patriotic fervor of those early days, is something that America still wishes to preserve.

This in itself is good; but in view of our nation's moral decline, the crack may also suggest a break in our basic ideals and a serious defect in our spiritual attitudes. We can remedy the situation and avert the judgment of the Lord only by repentance, prayer, and a return to the faith of our fathers. In this sense, there is no time for delay in "mending the bell."

These words have a profound historical significance: "Almighty God, we acknowledge our dependence upon thee, and we beg thy blessings upon us, our teachers and our country." This was the voluntary prayer the U.S. Supreme Court found violated the establishment clause of the Constitution in 1962 in Engel vs. Vitale. It reasoned that if this prayer was allowed, it would be a step toward establishment of a state-sponsored religion. The absurdity of this reasoning is self-evident.

The end of the Declaration of Independence provides: "with a firm reliance of the protection of divine providence...." At the opening of each day's session of the Supreme Court the crier states: "God save the United

[227] Leith Anderson, *Men of Integrity*, Vol. 2, no. 2.
[228] From *Quote Magazine*, reprinted in *Reader's Digest*, March 1992, p. 50

States and this honorable court." In 1952 the U.S. Supreme Court stated in Zorach vs. Clauson: "We are a religious people whose institutions presuppose a supreme being." Carved above the entrance to the Supreme Court is: "In God we Trust."

There are some of us within the legal system who desperately oppose the Supreme Court on this point and support those who courageously seek to change the law. Our children deserve better than the current moral anarchy.

Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance; it is adjusting to God's willingness. God never sleeps, so He is never disturbed when we approach Him. God does not answer our much praying in order to get rid of us, but because He loves us.

Howard Hendricks tells of a church in Dallas a few years ago having trouble finding a teacher for a junior high boys class: “The list of prospects had only one name and when they told me who it was I said, "You've got to be kidding." But I couldn't have been more wrong about that young man. He took the class and revolutionized it.

“I was so impressed I invited him to my home for lunch and asked him the secret of his success. He pulled out a little black book. On each page he had a small picture of one of the boys, and under the boy's name were comments like "having trouble in arithmetic," or "comes to church against parents' wishes," or "would like to be a missionary some day, but doesn't think he has what it takes."

"I pray over those pages every day," he said, "and I can hardly wait to come to church each Sunday to see what God has been doing in their lives."

Prayer does not fit us for the greater works; prayer is the greater work. Prayer . . . really is a silent surrendering of everything to God because it is not quite clear to us how we should pray.

What type things might we pray about? Pray for a tough hide and a tender heart. We might ask the lord to grant us a peaceful night and a perfect death. The best prayers have often been more groans than words.

Benjamin Franklin suggested that we “Work as if you were to live a hundred years; pray as if you were to die tomorrow.”

There are days when we can bring before God a deep and glad laughter of joy and gratitude. There will be other days when we can only muster a bitter, angry complaint. If it is honest, be confident that God will accept whatever it is we truly have to lift up before him, and he will make it serve his purpose and our good.[229]

F.B. Meyer offered that “the great tragedy of life is not unanswered prayer, but unoffered prayer.”

A 17-century Roman Catholic Frenchman named Francois Fenelon wrote, “Tell God all that is in your heart, as one unloads one's heart, its pleasures and its pains, to a dear friend. Tell Him your troubles, that He may comfort you; tell Him your joys, that He may sober them; tell Him your longings, that He may purify them; tell Him your dislikes, that He may help you to conquer them, talk to Him of your temptations, that He may shield you from them; show Him the wounds of your heart, that He may heal them; lay bare your indifference to good,

[229] Gardner Taylor, quoted in *Reflections*, Christianity Today, Vol. 45, no. 2.

your depraved tastes for evil, your instability. Tell Him how self-love makes you unjust to others, how vanity tempts you to be insincere, how pride disguises you to yourself and to others.

"If you thus pour out all your weaknesses, needs, troubles, there will be no lack of what to say. You will never exhaust the subject. It is continually being renewed. People who have no secrets from each other never want for subjects of conversation. They do not weigh their words, for there is nothing to be held back, neither do they seek for something to say. They talk out of the abundance of the heart, without consideration they say just what they think. Blessed are they who attain to such familiar, unreserved intercourse with God."

According to a poll on prayer for *Newsweek* in 1997, the following percentage said:

They ask for health or success for a child or family member when they pray -- 82

They ask for strength to overcome a personal weakness -- 75

They never ask for financial or career success -- 36

The following percentages stated their beliefs about the prospects of prayer:

God answers prayers -- 87

God doesn't answer prayers -- 51

They believe God does not play favorites in answering prayers -- 82

God answers prayers for healing someone with an incurable disease -- 79

Prayers for help in finding a job are answered -- 73

They believe that when God doesn't answer their prayers, it means it wasn't God's will to answer -- 54

They don't turn away from God when prayers go unanswered -- 82

According to researchers James Petterson and Peter Kim in their book, *The Day America Told the Truth: What People Really Believe about Everything that Really Matters*, God is alive and well. But fewer people are listening to what He has to say than ever before. While 90 percent of those questioned by the authors said they believe in God, few turn to Him when they face a moral issue.

If Petterson and Kim are right -- and other research results confirm America's spiritual drift -- then it's no wonder that those willing to do right often seem few and maligned.

Prayer is not a stratagem for occasional use, a refuge to resort to now and then. It is rather like an established residence for the innermost self. All things have a home; the bird has a nest, the fox has a hole, the bee has a hive. A soul without prayer is a soul without a home.

Weary, sobbing, the soul, after roaming through a world festered with aimlessness, falsehoods, and absurdities, seeks a moment in which to gather up its scattered life, in which to divest itself of enforced pretensions and camouflage, in which to simplify complexities, in which to call for help without being a coward. Such a home is prayer.[230]

R.A. Torrey offers the following prescription that will bring revival -- revival to any church, or community, or any city on earth. First: Let few Christians get thoroughly right with God. If this is not done, the rest will come to nothing. Second: Let them bind themselves together to pray for revival until God opens the windows of

[230] Abraham Joshua Heschel in *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity.* Christianity Today, Vol. 42, no. 5.

heaven and comes down. Third: Let them put themselves at the disposal of God for His use as He sees fit in winning others to Christ. That is all. I have given this prescription around the world... and in no instance has it failed. It cannot fail.

He also is credit with stating that "If all the sleeping folk will wake up, if all the lukewarm folk will fire up, if all the dishonest folk will confess up, if all the disgruntled folk will cheer up, if all the depressed folk will cheer up, if all the estranged folk will make up, if all the gossipers will shut up, if all true soldiers will stand up, if all the dry bones will shake up, if all the church members will pray up...then we can have a revival!"

The Untimely Death of Mrs. Prayer Meeting!

We are sorry to announce the passing of Mrs. Prayer Meeting. She died recently at the First Neglected Church on Ho-Hum Avenue. Born many years ago in the midst of a great revival, she was strong and healthy as a child, fed largely on testimony and Bible study she grew into world-wide prominence and was one of the most influential members of the Church family.

However, in recent years Sister Prayer Meeting has been failing in health, gradually wasting away until rendered helpless by stiffness of the knees, cooling of the heart, lack of spiritual sensitivity and the concern for spiritual things. Her last whispered words were inquiring about the strange absence of her loved ones, now so busy in the market place and places of wordly amusement on Wednesday evenings!

Experts, including Dr. Good Works, Dr. Socializing and Dr. Unconcerned disagree as to the fatal cause of her final illness. They all administered large doses of excuses, even ordered a last minute motivational bypass, all to no avail. A post-mortem examination showed that a deficiency of regular spiritual food, a lack of prayer and Christian fellowship, all contributed to her untimely demise.

The following prayer might be a good way to begin each and every day: I arise today through God's strength to direct me, God's might to uphold me, God's wisdom to guide me, God's eye to look before, God's ear to hear me, God's word to speak to me, God's hand to guard me, God's way to lie before me, God's shield to protect me, God's hosts to save me from snares of devils. From temptation of vices, From everyone who shall wish me ill, Afar and near, Alone and in a multitude.[231]

Let's consider some of the benefits which come from beginning the day with prayer: **1. It enables us to form a habit of close and ultimate union, communion, and fellowship with God.** The law and force of habit are well understood; for all men live and act, more or less under the influence of habit. Those who neglect their duty, or engage in sinful practices, will soon find that they are drawn to these things by an invisible and almost irresistible influence.

They may see many examples to warn them of the dangers which confront them, and they may feel keenly the awful forebodings and warnings of a guilty and an aroused conscience; but, in spite of all these, the force of habit generally overcomes all their fears and feeble resolutions. Under its still-increasing power they continue their neglect, or sinful practices, until their characters have been largely developed; and then it is well-nigh

[231] Attributed to St. Patrick, from "The Deer's Cry" (St. Patrick's Breastplate), translated by Kuno Meyer, quoted in "Reflections," Christianity Today, Vol. 44, no. 13.

impossible to change them. “An act often repeated hardens into a habit, and a habit long continued petrifies into character.”

On the other hand, if one begins his life on the ascending scale, and forms the right kind of habits, he will soon find that he will have little difficulty in ascending still higher and higher on his way to eternal life and a home with God.

These habits become helps and encouragements to him, and will cause him to hunger and thirst after the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.

The habit of prayer, and especially of secret prayer, is altogether in harmony with this general law of habit and the growth and development of human character. In no other religious exercise is one brought so near to God; and in no other can he be so familiar with the Creator of his body and the Father and Preserver of his spirit.

Furthermore, it is a law of nature that one forms attachment to and for those with him he associates, and even becomes like them in his character; and since this is true, it follows that no other act of devotion is so favorable for the cultivation of godliness. Those therefore, who have been most devoted to prayer, in its true sense, have always been the most pious and the happiest of men.

2. It serves to cultivate and educate our spiritual nature. It is generally understood that all parts of our nature are developed and strengthened by exercise; and if that is a law of our human constitution, then what can be more serviceable in the way of spiritual culture than the devotion to the practice of prayer, and especially private prayer?

When one prays in secret there is no motive; to try to deceive God, or to make a vain display of his person, dress, or good works. Instead, his mind turns upon itself; the conscience is awakened; and he sees himself in the light of God.

The practice of secret devotions brings one under the deep and solemn conviction that he is on holy ground, and that the eye of God is upon him; and with that feeling he is almost compelled to be humble, to repent of his sins, to forgive those who have sinned against him, to sympathize with the afflicted, to love and honor the Lord, and to endeavor to exercise all the powers of his being in harmony with the will of God.

There is, therefore, a deep significance in the words of Jesus: *“But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thine inner chamber, and having shut thy door, pray to thy Father who is in secret, and thy Father who seeth in secret shall recompense thee.”* (Matt. 6:6).

4. It serves to preserve us from many evils. It is impossible to live in this world without coming in contact with the influence of evil to some extent.

(John 17:15) My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.

(1 Corinthians 5:9) I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people--

(Ephesians 6:10-15) Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. {11} Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. {12} For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the

spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. {13} Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. {14} Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, {15} and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.

The worst enemies that anyone has are his lusts and passions.

(James 1:13-16) When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; {14} but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. {15} Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. {16} Don't be deceived, my dear brothers.

(1 Peter 2:1-2) Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. {2} Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation,

4. It secures to us and for us much positive good by fulfilling a condition upon which God has promised to bestow His blessings. Some have erroneously supposed that the influence of prayer is wholly subjective, or, at least, that it never extends beyond the narrow limits of our own earthly associations. The Bible, however, plainly teaches that God hears the prayers of His faithful children, and that He is influenced for good by them.

5. Prayer is a powerful and divinely appointed means of convicting, sanctifying and saving others. This is especially true of the family. The relation of the parent to a child is one of the nearest, dearest, and most interesting on earth; and for that reason it involves an influence which is peculiar to itself.

The example of the parent is to the child, during the most tender and impressible period of its existence, the standard of all that is right, noble, and magnanimous. The child's greatest concern is to imitate the parent, whether it be good or bad; and if the parent prays or neglects to pray, he may expect the child to follow.

The parent, therefore, is responsible for the proper exercise of the influence of prayer over his child; and it will be a terrible thing for him to stand before the Judge of all the earth and have his child say to him, "You were responsible for bringing me into the world, but you never taught me to read and study the Bible and to pray to the heavenly Father; and now it is too late."

Heaven is full of answers to prayers for which no one ever bothered to ask. On a gloomy day in 1857 a man in New York City by the name of Jeremiah Lanthier scanned the morning newspaper as he rode to his office. He was distressed to read that the depression gripping the nation was causing fear and panic among the people. Factories were stopping production and thousands were unemployed. Although Lanthier was not a big industrialist, but only a clerk, he had one important distinction. He was a man who had great faith in God!

Concerned with the grim economic situation, he sent a note to all his business acquaintances, telling them that each day at noon a prayer meeting would be held in his office. With high hopes he arranged 20 chairs in a circle, but the first day no one came. All alone he prayed fervently that God would bring about a great change in him and in America. The second day he was encouraged, for a few friends joined him. A short time later a

similar gathering was started on Wall Street, another on Williams Street, and finally a fourth on Broadway. Then like wildfire the movement spread to all parts of the country. The moral tone of the nation was affected, and there was a great upsurge in the spiritual life of the people. Some historians say that this effort of united prayer and faith was an integral part of the improvement in the economy which soon followed.

I learned early in life that we need to be careful what we pray for, because God might grant it. I prayed for patience, and it seemed my whole world fell apart…..disaster, difficulty, and despair one after the other. My mother had a simple explanation: “you prayed for patience and God put you in circumstances when patience was required.”

The following is also true: I asked God to take away my pride, and God said, "NO." He said it was not for Him to take away, but for me to give it up. I asked God to make my handicapped child whole, and God said, "NO." He said the child's spirit is whole, the body is only temporary. I asked God to grant me patience and God said, "NO." He said that patience is a by product of tribulation. It isn't granted it's earned. I asked God to give me happiness and God said, "NO." He said He gives blessings, happiness is up to me. I asked God to spare me pain, and God said, "NO." He said suffering draws you apart from worldly cares and brings you closer to Me. I asked God to make my spirit grow, and God said, "NO." He said I must grow on my own, But He will prune me to make me fruitful. I asked God if He loved me, and God said, "YES." He gave me his only Son who died for me, and I will be in Heaven someday because I believe. I asked God to help me love others as much as He loves me, and God said, "AH, FINALLY, YOU HAVE THE IDEA."

Many successful people have acknowledged in their memoirs that whenever they came to an impasse in their work and were completely baffled, they sought wisdom from the Lord.

This was true in the life of the inventor of the telegraph, Samuel F. B. Morse. In an interview, George Hervey inquired, "Professor Morse, when you were making your experiments at the university, did you ever come to a standstill, not knowing what to do next?" "I've never discussed this with anyone, so the public knows nothing about it. But now that you ask me, I'll tell you frankly -- I prayed for more light" "And did God give you the wisdom and knowledge you needed?" Yes He did," said Morse. "That's why I never felt I deserved the honors that came to me from America and Europe because of the invention associated with my name. I had made a valuable application of the use of electrical power, but it was all through God's help. It wasn't because I was superior to other scientists. When the Lord wanted to bestow this gift on mankind. He had to use someone. I'm just grateful He chose to reveal it to me." In view of these facts, it's not surprising that the inventor's first message over the telegraph was: "What hath God wrought!"

Every time you face a perplexing problem, seek wisdom from above. And when the answer comes, always be sure to thank God and give Him all the glory.

Good advice for difficult times? A sign in front of a church carried this admonition: "When your knees knock together, kneel on them." That's good advice! Quieting our hearts before God will calm our fears and renew our courage.

Scripture Readings

(Luke 18:1-8 NIV) "Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. {2} He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. {3} And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.' {4} "For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care about men, {5} yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming!'" {6} And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. {7} And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? {8} I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?""

(Matthew 7:11 NIV) If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

(Philippians 4:6-7) Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. {7} And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

(Hebrews 11:6) And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

(Matthew 7:21) "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

(James 1:1-8) James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings. {2} Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, {3} because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. {4} Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. {5} If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. {6} But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. {7} That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; {8} he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

Seven days without prayer makes one weak.

A man prayed, and at first he thought that prayer was talking. But he became more and more quiet until in the end he realized that prayer is listening. SØREN AABYE KIERKEGAARD (1813–1855)

A man without prayer is like a tree without roots. POPE PIUS XII (1876–1958)

A prayer in its simplest definition is merely a wish turned Godward. PHILLIPS BROOKS (1835–1893)

A prayer is not holy chewing gum and you don't have to see how far you can stretch it. LIONEL BLUE

A single grateful thought raised to heaven is the most perfect prayer. GOTTHOLD EPHRAIM LESSING (1729–1781)

Adoration is the highest form of prayer. LOUIS CASSELS (1922–1974)

Although posture is not important, I find that I am able to express my dependence better on my knees, a sign of our helplessness apart from the divine enablement. ERWIN W. LUTZER (1941–)

An ordinary simple Christian kneels down to say his prayers. . . . But if he is a Christian, he knows that what is prompting him to pray is also God: God, so to speak, inside him. But he also knows that all his real knowledge of God comes through Christ, the man who was God—that Christ is standing beside him, helping him to pray, praying for him. You see what is happening. God is the thing to which he is praying—the goal he is trying to reach. God is also the thing inside him which is pushing him on—the motive power. God is also the road or bridge along which he is being pushed to that goal. So that the whole threefold life of the three-personal Being is actually going on in that ordinary little bedroom where an ordinary man is saying his prayers. C. S. LEWIS (1898–1963)

Anyone who has ever tried to formulate a private prayer in silence, and in his own heart, will know what I mean by diabolical interference. The forces of evil are in opposition to the will of God. And the nearer a man approaches God's will, the more apparent and stronger and more formidable this opposition is seen to be. It is only when we are going in more or less the same direction as the devil that we are unconscious of any opposition at all. DAVID BOLT

Anything large enough for a wish to light upon is large enough to hang a prayer on. GEORGE MACDONALD (1824–1905)

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Arriving Home…

Snow is still on the ground in Northeastern Ohio. Some 67 inches has fallen since first being confronted with lawyer Jan Schlichtmann (played by John Travolta) sitting at that table in the courtroom.

We've come to realize (haven't we?) that life isn't about power, or fame, or education, or wealth. Life has higher ambitions for us to achieve. Our days are marked out differently that most.

And though we might become penniless, or go through troubles too difficult to even discuss without *much* emotion, "**the things by which one measures one's life"** has become clearly understood. Right?!

For those of us involved daily in other's lives through ministry, a "beginning and end" doesn't always follow each other in an orderly way. It's rare that we even see the "end of the matter" because people move away and we lose touch. We don't know if our counsel was the wisdom promised.

We just know that we have done our best to counsel and encourage. Prayers were offered in the beginning. And they continue even now.

That's why we often enjoy mowing the yard. Or shoveling the snow. Or watching that sporting end that has "an opening bell" and a concluding horn.

We see the end. It allows us to evaluate the process. We judge the results. There is the chance of closure.

I am drawn to the words of Solomon and Jesus on such matters. They give us the grand conclusion. The sum of the matter. It's crystal clear.

Matthew 6:33 "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14: "" Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil."

I am also warned not to follow the route of Eliphaz and Zophar and Bildad, those well-intentioned but weak-kneed friends of Job. They came to comfort and proved a burden. They spoke many words, had enough 'doctrine' to appear correct, but ended up of little help.

God gives us His biggest concern: "*After the LORD had said these things to Job, he said to Eliphaz the Temanite, "I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. {8} So now take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and sacrifice a burnt offering for yourselves. My servant Job will pray for you, and I will accept his prayer and not deal with you according to your folly. You have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.""*[232]

You have not spoken of me what is right. Wow!

It seems we can sin against God by saying things about Him that are not right! It certainly encourages us to listen more often and be willing to learn what we need. It humbles us. It puts us in a proper posture.

Then we are right where God wants us.

I was driving to a funeral a few years back listening to a sermon tape from an Arkansas minister who 'speaks the solid, undeniable truth in a loving way.' While the words met his usual high standard, the song sung just prior to the sermon got my attention.

It was new to me. The words were powerful. By the end, tears were literally streaming down my cheeks:

God Himself is with us, let us now adore him, And with awe appear before Him. God is in His temple, All within keep silence, And before Him bow with reverence, Him alone, God we own; To our Lord and Savior Praises sing forever.

God Himself is with us; Whom angelic legions, Serve with awe in heavenly regions. "Holy, holy, Holy," Sing the hosts of heaven, Praise to God be ever given. Bow Thine ear, to us here; Hear, O Christ, the praises, That Thy church now raises.

O thou fount of blessing, Purify my Spirit, Trusting only in Thy merit, Like the holy angels, Who beheld Thy glory, May I ceaselessly adore Thee. And in all, Great and small, Seek to do most nearly What Thou lovest dearly.[233]

If we are seeking to do most nearly what He lovest dearly, our lives will have proper focus, direction, and directives. Our purpose in life will be clearly marked.

We need to "…*find out what pleases the Lord."* (Eph. 5:10).

The final test is not what we think of ourselves, or what others may think. The final test is: *What will God say?* J. C. Ryle says, "The Lord Jesus winds up the Sermon on the Mount by a passage of heart-piercing application. He turns from false prophets to false professors, from unsound teachers to unsound hearers" [234]

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[232] *Job 42:7-8*

[233] *God Himself Is With Us* by Gerhard Tersteegen, 1729.

""Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!' ((Matthew 7:21-23).

Jesus is quite ready to concede that many of the false prophets will do and say wonderful and impressive things.

The Lord is not speaking to irreligious people, to atheists or agnostics. Nor is he speaking to pagans, heretics, or apostates. He is speaking specifically to people who are devotedly religious—but who are deluded in thinking they are on the road to heaven when they are really on the broad road to eternal damnation.

Obedience to His will is the test of true faith in Christ. The test is not words, not saying "Lord, Lord," and not obeying His commands. How easy it is to learn a religious vocabulary, and even memorize Bible verses and religious songs, and yet not obey God's will. Words are not a substitute for obedience, and neither are religious works. We are to *hear* God's words and *do* them (see James 1:22-25). We must not stop with only hearing (or studying) His words. Our hearing must result in doing.

There is no point in saying that we love a person, and then doing things which break that person's heart. When we were young maybe we used sometimes to say to our mothers, "Mother, I love you." And maybe mother sometimes smiled a little wistfully and said, "I wish you would show it a little more in the way you behave."

So often we confess God with our lips and deny him with our lives. It is not difficult to recite a creed, but it is difficult to live the Christian life. Faith without practice is a contradiction in terms, and love without obedience is an impossibility.

The words of an engraving from the cathedral of Lübeck, Germany, beautifully reflect our Lord's teaching here:

"Thus speaketh Christ our Lord to us, You call Me master and obey Me not,
You call Me light and see Me not, you call Me the way and walk Me not,
You call Me life and live Me not, you call Me wise and follow Me not,
You call Me fair and love Me not, you call Me rich and ask Me not,
You call Me eternal and seek Me not, if I condemn thee, blame Me not."

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[234] *Expository Thoughts on the Gospel: St. Matthew* [London: James Clarke, 1965], pp. 69-70.