

The Heartbeat of 

The Remnant

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A ministry of
The Berean Voice



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~ The Berean Voice Board

It is our goal that the content of this magazine bring honor and glory to God. All Scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version unless otherwise notated. In the event of discovering any errors in content or detail, please count it to our oversight and kindly bring it to our attention.

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Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We are trusting that each of you as our readers are doing well and continuing to trust the Lord. The pandemic has created a bit of a backlog for us, along with some personal issues we have been working through, so this issue is coming to you somewhat behind schedule. Our apologies.... We plan to get the next issue printed within the next several months to get back on track.

In the last issue's editorial, I wrote about an obscure news article which revealed that many folks across the world were surprised by the positive outcomes they were experiencing through the need to stay at home during the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. They were enjoying family time. They were finding camaraderie in facing this challenge together. They were finding excitement in the adventure of discovering new ways to function and survive. And they were finding renewed vision and purpose in life.

However, as time has passed, this seems to have been short-lived by all who did not have a deeper level of stability in their lives. After a varying amount of time has elapsed for many folks, reality has begun to set in. Some have lost their jobs. Some have lost loved ones. Some have gone through a time of sickness. Many have been starved for fellowship with other human beings. For the elderly living in nursing homes and assisted-living facilities, and those requiring hospitalization, life has become a very lonely existence indeed, since most of these places have not allowed visitors to enter their doors.

The world is trying to find any way possible to cope and survive. There are phone conference lines. There are chat lines. There are webinars geared towards the issue. Many are doing their part to fill the gaps that this pandemic has created in the lives of the people around them.

As we step back to gain a clearer perspective of the unfolding events brought about by the pandemic, the last number of months have been a time of change and uncertainty for most. There's the economic future, "Is my job secure?" "What about my bills?" "What about my housing?" Then there's the greatly politicized nature of numerous issues—race inequality, conspiracy theories about the pandemic, and the government mandates regarding our

response to the virus pandemic. Add to this the polarization in our country regarding politics—who is telling the truth on issues, and who will be the best option to lead the country after the upcoming election.

Despite everything else that is going on, the virus and its effects seem to be on everyone's mind. On August 15, 2020 there was an article published by CNN, written by Ryan Prior, titled: "1 IN 4 YOUNG PEOPLE ARE REPORTING SUICIDAL THOUGHTS". For those wanting to read the article, it can be found here:

<https://www.cnn.com/2020/08/14/health/young-people-suicidal-ideation-wellness/index.html>

This article recognizes that there were positive effects during the onset of the pandemic and the resulting stay-at-home orders. This article goes on to say that as time has passed this event is different than most past events, such as tornadoes, hurricanes, earthquakes, and even the circumstances of 9/11. Most of these events have been localized and brief in their destructive effects, while the Covid-19 pandemic has dragged on for so long that it is becoming a way of life—with no end in sight, and its beginning is fading into our forgetful past.

According to the news article, the CDC has published data from a survey which was conducted to determine the outcome of the negative effects of the pandemic. Following are some facts as presented in the article:

- *Suicidal ideation is up among young people since last year*
- *As many as one in four people ages 18 through 24 having seriously considered suicide in the 30 days preceding the survey (researchers surveyed 5,412 adults in the US between June 24 and 30.)*
- *In the general US population ... 11% of adults surveyed had seriously considered suicide in the past 30 days before they completed the survey.*
- *The number of Americans reporting anxiety symptoms is three times the number at this same time last year, the CDC said.*
- *The results reflect a nation increasingly on edge.*

How sad it is to ponder this reality. As I read this news article, I had to wonder whether the percentages are the

...continued on page 17

By Their Fruits

Barry Grant
Arcahaie, Haiti

A verse that has always caught my attention, one that has caused my spine to tingle is found in Matthew chapter seven. *Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? –Matthew 7:22.*

Jesus gives us a picture of a large group of people standing before Him on Judgment Day. They thought they lived their lives for Him. They were gifted people—prophesying, casting out devils, and doing many wonderful things in the name of Jesus—they seemed like good Christians. However, in the next verse we read that Jesus will say to them that He never knew them. Jesus even tells them to depart from Him. He sends them to hell, forever.

I remember an account that reminds me of these verses. Years ago, I was working for a steel joist company. It was a normal Friday morning, we were working hard, as was required of each of us. The line boss came out and announced a meeting with the whole plant after the shift was over. We all wondered what the meeting was about. We asked around but it seemed that no one knew. After the shift, we all stood in a large circle and waited for the boss. He soon entered the room with another man. It was the manager of the whole company. Prior to these men coming in, we were all talking casually with each other, there was laughter and loud voices. The boss had a large stack of envelopes, and I heard a buzz go around about bonus checks. Everyone looked excited, except for the boss.

Then the boss started talking, “We have been watching all of you very closely over the past four weeks. We have been looking at your work ethic, how hard you try, and whether you’re on time. We have been looking at many different areas. Your supervisors will give each of you an envelope with your name on it. Do not open this letter until you are off the premises. When you do open it, you will find some instructions. For most, it will say to return to work at the

normal time on Monday. But for 27 of you, it will say that you are fired. For those included in that number, we did not like what we saw during our time of evaluation, so we decided that we need to release you from your employment here.”

You could hear a pin drop. Fear was seen on every face. I remember wishing I had worked harder, been more involved. I regretted taking my job for granted. It was a terrible feeling, I had worked there for years, but did that matter?

I wasn’t fired that day, but 27 others were. They thought they had done enough. They thought they were safe since they had put in their time. But they were wrong, and now nothing could be done. It was over.

What about us? Do we gauge our walk with God based on eternity? Do we wonder what will happen on the day of judgement? How can we know?

Jesus says a few verses earlier that we will know each other by our fruits. There is much talk in the Word of God about fruit. We know what type of tree one is, by examining its fruit. When we first moved to Haiti, we didn’t know what kinds of trees were there. I remember looking up at a large tree on our property and wondering what kind it was. Then something gave it away. There were small avocados hanging from its branches. In the church today, it seems that people do not want to talk about this. But I assure you that we should talk about it before it is forever too late. Looking back, we would have loved to talk about this at the factory before that day when some of the employees were fired.

So, what is the fruit of a Christian? We know that being a good person and dressing in a certain way are not determining factors of a godly life. It is not the church we attend, the family we were born into, our culture, or the color of our skin. Many would agree that these things are not what identifies us as Christians. Some may think that the fruit of a Christian is being a good, morally upright, and

loving citizen of society. There are many people who are law-abiding citizens, loving and peaceful, taking care of their own needs and the needs of others. Yet it is still possible for them to do all these good things and still go to hell.

We hear the world (and some in the church) proclaiming loudly that it's only the heart that matters. We know they are saying this so they can excuse the lack of visible fruit. Even though their outside is bad, they want people to think that their heart is good, and that that's all that really matters.

They are correct about the heart being important. You can't change or fix anything simply by putting on a form when the heart is still selfish and wicked. However, they are wrong about the heart being good and the outside being bad. This is impossible. Jesus says, *Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also* –Matthew 23:26.

You cannot have a clean heart and a sinful appearance. However, on the flip side, you can have a clean appearance and yet still have an ungodly heart. So how do we tell? What is this fruit that Jesus is talking about?

We will talk about the fruit of the Spirit shortly, but first I would like to talk about something else that I believe defines a Christian. Something that can separate the sheep from the wolves, even if they both appear to be the same.

A desire to serve Jesus. When God converts a person's soul, that individual is a new creature, and desires to serve God with his whole being. That person does not need to be forced to do what pleases God. There is much talk today in the church about structure and rules, however, this was not always the case. So why is this such a big issue today? Maybe there are unconverted people in the church. Perhaps people are too independent and do not want to be told what to do. You can tell a church member to dress modestly, but if their heart is not changed, you will face problems. They will try to be as worldly as they can, and still be within the 'law' of the church. Or they will simply refuse to do it and the church soon gives in and no longer requires their people to dress and live modestly. Should the church need to force its people to be modest? Should the church need to force its people to be Christ-like? Absolutely not. When a soul has been redeemed and transformed by the blood of Christ, that person, in return, will, because of his changed nature, live a sacrificial life for Him. We obey His commandments with grateful hearts!

For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous –1 John 5:3.

A heart that has not been made new by God's Spirit will not passionately desire to live for God. One can religiously go to church—many unbelievers attend church services

regularly. One can dress right and act right, but if their heart does not pant after the things of God, these things will have no profit. Much of what they do is to receive the praise of men, not the glory of God. It is no wonder that many churches of today are accepting drift.

It is a beautiful thing to see someone truly desire to live for God. They desire to seek the face of their Creator, their Savior. They live for the Kingdom, for the brotherhood. To obey God and serve Him is a necessity; it is the only thing that really matters to them. Their 'all' truly is on the altar. They love reading the Word and spending time alone with God. Their desires and their will have been sacrificed on the altar of their God.

People have told me that we need to give a new Christian some room. "Some room for what?" I ask. Some room for sin... for carnality? Absolutely not. Every example in the Bible says differently. Every conversion brought a tremendous change, a new creature. Many people confuse 'grace to learn and to grow' in the faith as an 'excuse for sin'. The Scriptures define new Christians... *As newborn babes, and commands each of us to desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: -1 Peter 2:2.* So new Christians don't need space to continue for a time in their ungodly ways, but they do need space to grow *...in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man -Luke 2:52.*

When someone comes declaring they have been converted, it is easy to find out. We simply go over some scriptures that explain practical, foundational doctrines like non-conformity, non-resistance, and such like. Some see it as God's Word and soak it in. Many folks sit in astonishment as I read such verses to them—Scripture verses they have never heard before. Usually they simply believe what they just heard from God's word, and it changes them. That is a Christian who wants to be taught, who wants to be disciplined. They tend to come with a teachable attitude asking questions about that which they have read in God's Word and don't understand.

But what about so many others? They hear the same scriptures and they argue—they argue with the Bible and the person sharing the Scripture with them, but ultimately, they are arguing with God. They will usually admit that it's what the Bible says but they want to know why it says that. They are not wanting to change their life for God. They want to be a Christian, yes, but they also want to live how they want. They do not desire to obey God. We can continue working with them, but it is clear: their heart pants after the things of the world and the pleasures of this life.

Picture with me a man living 1,000 years ago. He is locked in a dungeon, where everything is as black as coal. It is musty and stinks. He has been arrested for preaching the gospel. His ankles and wrists are raw and bloody from the

large, heavy chains that keep him bound in the tiny cell. He's claustrophobic, weary, and worn. His back is bloody. His aching limbs have been stretched to the breaking point. He talks to God, but God does not answer. He pleads for deliverance but hears nothing in return. He thinks back on his life, his faith. Then he wonders the dreaded thought: "God, are you there? Are you real?" Silence. His faith is being tried to the extreme. He knows that if he continues to hold to his beliefs, a fire awaits him. Why? Why die for a God that allows him to go through this agony? Why die for a God that will not speak? "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?"

Now picture this man... is you.

Do we really believe in God, a God who's not seen and often not heard? If our faith does not exist, then God will not exist when we really need Him.

God wants us to put all our faith in Him, all the time. We walk by faith, NOT by sight... even when things are going well. When we find ourselves in terrible times, God is still near, leading us and giving us courage to go on! We are used to simply trusting in Him, in His word.

For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry? -Luke 23:31.

God loves a heart that is turned toward Him, fully yielded, and surrendered. He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him!

Do we have the fruit of the Spirit of God? Do we act like Christians? Do we look like Christians?

I was asked to preach for a large church that I had never been to before. I went with my family and sat while the seats filled up with hundreds of people. I was amazed at how these people were dressed. There were short miniskirts and skimpy tops, much worldly fashion and style. The service began and I realized quickly that this was not a good place for my family, so I took them home and returned by myself. The rock music was still going, and the dancing was pushing my limits. After two hours it was time for the message. I stood and told the large crowd that I was the new President of America. Laughter filled the auditorium. I then asked them if they believed me. "No!" they shouted. I asked why they didn't believe me, and they responded with different answers. One yelled, "You don't look or dress like the president!" Another said, "You wouldn't be here if you were the president!" Yet another said that I didn't sound like the president. I told them that I didn't understand. I asked how they can say that they are Christians—They don't look like it! They don't act like it! They don't sound like it!—Yet everyone believes them!

It seems that we judge everything by its fruit, except for

Christians. For Christians we are expected to judge by what they claim. This world thinks they can simply imagine what Jesus wants and then please Him in any way they personally choose. However, the Bible is clear: *Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them -Matthew 7:16-20.*

The Bible says that *...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance...* -Galatians 5:22-23. Are these the things that people see when they look at you and I? I know it is easy to justify not having one or more of these fruits by saying, "I'm working on it," or "I'm praying about it." Jesus does not say that this fruit is something that Christians should work to attain. He simply says that these are the fruits, or product, of the indwelling Spirit of God. If we pursue worldly ambitions, or if we desire to fit in with the world, we cannot expect this fruit to be evident in our lives. I believe this is the fruit of a suffering man, a person that has been giving his all, and desires to give his all to the Lamb that was slain.

Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire -Matthew 7:19.

When we give something our all, whether it's our work, our school, or raising a family, it feels good—it is fulfilling. When we serve God with all our being, the same is true. There is a very rewarding feeling, a feeling of peace that passes all understanding.



Faith and REASON

Darren Drayer
Ossian, IN

As a young man I remember hearing a popular slogan about faith: “Faith begins when reason ends.” As a young Christian, I thought it was a great life slogan. As I mature in my walk with Jesus, I look back on this particular slogan and shake my head. I can think of no better way to misrepresent faith than by claiming it exists apart from reason.

One simple reason for rejecting this view is because it misrepresents faith. A quick search on Google turns up this definition of faith: “complete trust or confidence in someone or something.” We use this definition all the time. I might tell you I have *faith* in my wife, I have *faith* in my employer to give me a paycheck, or I have no *faith* in alcohol to give me a good time. This is the same way the Bible defines faith.


Hebrews 11:1 affirms that faith is “confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.” Biblical faith is simply a state of mind that has confidence and trust in the Lord. I have *confidence* that I will one day walk on the new Earth, and I have *confidence* that the Holy Spirit is working in the hearts of Christians. My *confidence* is based on, not apart from, reason. The more Jesus shows himself trustworthy, the more I trust (have confidence in) Him.

One aspect of Christ’s dependability is His word. The Old Testament was written by prophets and leaders who correctly predicted future events and ruled nations. The New Testament was written by Apostles or people that were closely associated with the apostles. We have more manuscripts of the Bible than any other work in antiquity.

The Bible gives an honest portrayal of its heroes and correctly describes ancient leaders and places. In short, I trust in the Bible because it stands alone above all other books in terms of its authorship, preservation, honesty, and accuracy. The more I read it and read about it, the more my faith—and trust—increases.

Luke bases his whole Gospel on the premise that more knowledge gives more faith. He begins his book with this introduction: *Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled [or been surely believed] among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught. -Luke 1:1-4. (NIV)*

The apostle Paul argues that faith in God is so grounded in reality that no one has a legitimate claim against God’s existence. He writes, *The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. 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 people are without excuse -Romans 1:18-20. (NIV)*



Knowledge of nature builds my faith in Jesus. Scripture teaches that God created all life in six days, that there was a global flood, and that animals produce after their own kind. All across our earth, the rocks cry out their testimony of the global flood. People have uncovered billions of fossils—mostly marine animals—in rock layers that were laid down by water. Animals too, live out what the Bible teaches about kinds. We can observe animals changing all around us. They change sizes, colors, and eating habits. Fish in caves lose their ability to see. Birds’ beaks adjust to the environment. In all this intricate change, all animals exist within the Biblical framework of their own kind. Sharks remain sharks; frogs remain frogs; iguanas remain iguanas; and gibbons remain gibbons. The more I learn and observe about nature, the more my faith (confidence) increases.

In some discussions of faith, it is natural for the words of Jesus to come up. After His resurrection, Jesus visits Thomas and tells him, ...*Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed* –John 20:29. (ESV) From this, it is tempting to define faith as “believing without seeing.” That would be missing the point. I’m not claiming any superiority to Thomas, but he *should* have believed without seeing Jesus. All the *evidence* pointed to it. First, his good friends, who had proved themselves trustworthy, said Jesus was alive. Second, Jesus had plainly said He would be resurrected (see Matthew 16:21). Third, Jesus had already proven He was divine by His ability to raise the dead, control the weather, heal the sick, and multiply food. Thomas had all he needed to believe Jesus rose from the dead. Yet, he went against all *reasoning* and said he needed more evidence.

When confronted with the resurrected Christ, Thomas repented of his disbelief and followed Christ into martyrdom. Unfortunately, the spirit of disbelief in the face of evidence still lingers in our world. Atheists claim, in spite of all evidence to the contrary, that life can come from nothing. They claim, without any evidence, that fish turned into frogs. They blindly cling to various theories such as: The Big Bang, Punctuated Equilibrium, and Descent with Modification. They have **NO** workable evidence, yet they still claim to base all their thoughts on observable, repeatable reality. Christians, who with good intentions, tell them that faith begins where reason ends, unwittingly play right into their hands. This world does not need a social media definition of faith. They need to see faith for what it is: confidence in the living God based firmly in reason.



From Childhood to Adulthood

Parenting Teens

Donald Brechbill
Chambersburg, PA

**That our sons may
be as plants grown
up in their youth;
that our daughters
may be as corner
stones, polished
after the similitude
of a palace
—Psalm 144:12.**

The vision of every godly parent is to see their children grow into mature adulthood. We want our children to develop biblical convictions that will govern their lives and allow them to become independent of parental guidance.

This was the vision of every Jewish father. To celebrate their child's transition to personal responsibility, a ceremony was held called *bar mitzvah* for boys, and *bat mitzvah* for girls. This was traditionally done at the age of thirteen. *Bar mitzvah* means "a son of the commandment" and *bat mitzvah* "a daughter of the commandment". After *bar mitzvah* a son was considered to be "under the law" and responsible for his own actions. Prior to this event, his parents were accountable for his actions.

Most of us are not of Jewish descent; however, our Lord Jesus was. We find him at the age of twelve sitting in the temple visiting with the doctors, both hearing them and asking them questions. And all that heard him were

astonished at his understanding and answers. (see Luke 2:47) Jesus demonstrated an amazing level of maturity at the age of twelve. Even his parents were amazed. Yes, he was divine, yet as a human he demonstrated the potential for early maturity given the right set of values and disciplines.

The teen years are transitional years. Teens are transitioning from childhood to adulthood; from being dependent on parents to learning to be independent. This transition is a process that must be understood by both the parents and the child. Too much freedom too soon, can leave the child feeling insecure and can result in bad choices that can have life-long consequences. Too little freedom can squelch a child's character growth and can become fertile ground for rebellion.

The teen years are growing years. Just as a plant needs diligent cultivation throughout its life cycle, so a child needs ongoing direction throughout his teen years. After

**Happy is that
people, that is in
such a case: yea,**

**happy is that
people, whose
God is the LORD
—Psalm 144:15.**

Jesus' episode in the temple we read, *And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them...*

—Luke 2:51. We will look at some things that parents can do to nurture maturity in their children, but first we will consider several relationships that are foundational to healthy maturity.

Parental relationship

The relationship between the parent and the child in the teen years is largely a reaping of what that relationship was throughout the formative years of childhood. Unless there is a major spiritual crisis that dynamically changes the relationship—such as an evangelical conversion on the part of either the parent or the child—we (as parents) reap during the child's teen years that which we have sown during their childhood.

Raising teens is a rewarding experience if there has been a healthy foundational relationship established throughout childhood. If the parent has been physically and emotionally present; if the parent and child have been communicating openly and freely; and if the parent has lovingly maintained the role of authority and control, then a foundation has been laid for a more mature level of relating during the teen years.

In the absence of this kind of parental relationship, the child entering the teen years will try to fill this void with other relationships. Most often, if a parental relationship is lacking, a child will seek to fill that void through relationships with their peers. Peers are great friends but are a poor substitute for a parent. We have been created to be relational. Teens especially crave significance through relationship.

There are two things that every teen is looking for in parental relationship. One is identity and the other is affirmation. Two burning questions in the heart of every teen are “Who am I?” and “Am I OK?”

The identity factor

When children are young, they assume their family

identity. As children grow into adolescence and become more independent, they begin to view themselves as someone more than merely Dad's son. They begin to develop an identity of their own.

This movement toward “being my own person” becomes evident in many of the choices that they make such as:

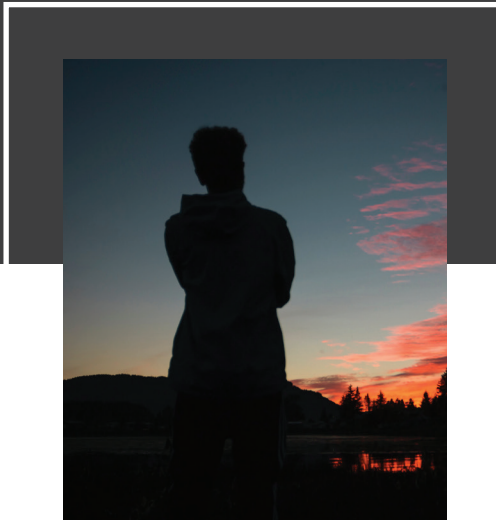
- How they dress
- Their choice of music
- Their choice of friends
- Whether or not they choose to serve their parent's God
- Whether or not they choose to worship in the church of their upbringing

Admittedly, there are other influences that can affect a teen's choices in these areas, but for the most part these choices reflect the relationship between the child and the parent. Where the parent has exerted a positive influence on the child, that child will be more inclined to adopt the values of the parent.

When the parental relationship has broken down or has never been nurtured, or if the relationship has been nothing more than a master/slave relationship, that child will seek to identify with someone other than the parent. This will manifest itself in choices of dress, music, friends, and activities that the parent will not approve of. This is often called “teenage rebellion”.

Is “teenage rebellion” always the fault of the parent? No, but if you are not actively involved in building and maintaining a relationship with your teen, it is likely to happen. It is important to note that there is a rebel in the heart of every person. In my last article I stressed the importance of confronting that rebel spirit when our children are young and impressionable.

This rebel spirit will not be fully conquered until it is



surrendered to God through an evangelical conversion experience. Only a work of the grace of God upon the heart can subdue the inborn rebellion against God and parental authority.

Know the heart of your child and seek to lead them into loving submission to the Lord Jesus Christ. Only in a relationship with Jesus Christ can our children find their true and lasting identity. Parental authority has a place in shaping and controlling our children when they are young. As our children grow into adulthood, we come to realize that parental authority has limitations and our children need to be controlled by an influence beyond ourselves.

It is never too late to build a relational bridge. If you are feeling that you have failed in your relationship with your children, it's never too late to call them to your side and humbly seek to restore what is missing. Even if your children are gone from home, I can assure you that they long for a relationship with mom and dad.

The affirmation factor

Every teen longs to be affirmed by their parents, especially their father. You can affirm your teen by looking for and acknowledging positive character traits. There is a place for corrective criticism from parent to child, but criticism that demeans is not constructive; it's destructive. For every critical comment you should have several positive compliments. In other words, you earn the right to criticize what is wrong by blessing what is right.

You can affirm your teen by treating them with dignity and respect. You can ask, "How do you feel about...?" Or "What do you think we should do...?" You are not surrendering your parental responsibility by probing your son's or daughter's mind for their perspective. You are actually causing them to be "grown up in their youth" by forcing them to think as adults.

You can affirm your teen by treating him with common courtesy. Simple things like "please" and "thank you", "I'm sorry", "pardon me", "good bye", "have a good day", "drive

safely", and "God bless you", expresses worth and value to your teen. If these simple courtesies are common in your home your children will return them to you. Think about how you feel when someone says to you, "Oh, excuse me, I'm sorry." You feel a sense of respect,

value, and dignity. That is a simple gift that every parent can give to his child.

You can affirm your teen by entrusting him with responsibility. I grew up on a dairy farm. We had plenty of opportunity to develop character and skills. I remember one day when I was 16 years of age, my dad needed a concrete block wall built out in the barn. I volunteered for the job. Dad provided the blocks and the mortar and got me started. Then I was on my own. Did I build a professional-looking wall? No, but I was quite proud of the outcome and that wall lasted for many years. Dad trusted me to do a man's job and I did it.

Affirming is not flattery. Flattery is praise that is not sincere and often is not true. Affirming is recognizing and encouraging the good that you see in another. I have encountered grown men who have wept bitterly because they had never received affirmation from their father. Even Jesus received affirmation from His Father when His Father said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

(2) Relationship with God

Our first responsibility in evangelization is to our children. If we cannot evangelize our children, how can we expect to win others to the Lord? We have a distinct advantage in relating our faith to our children in that we are living with our children. They can and do observe how our faith is lived out in everyday life. This should be the most convincing evidence for the validity of our faith.

Unfortunately, how parents live out their faith, or rather fail to live out their faith, can become a huge stumbling block to their children. Our children are keenly aware of any inconsistency in our Christian profession.

Conversely, if our children see that the power of God

**As arrows are
in the hand
of a mighty
man; so are
children of
the youth
–Psalm 127:4**

is evident in our lives, if they see their parents demonstrating faith in God that carries them through difficult times, if they see their parents demonstrating a graceful rest in the Lord, and if, in the home Jesus Christ is exalted and worshipped, they will be convinced to make their parents' God, their God.

It is the reality of the gospel lived out in daily life that is the most convincing evidence for the validity of our faith. Our children should be our first witnesses to the transformational work of the gospel in our hearts.

How does a parent lead his child to salvation? Salvation is a work of God; however, God uses human instrumentality to accomplish His work. Parents play a major role in leading their children to Christ. Be aware of evidence of conviction. If a child is quiet and withdrawn, or irritable and restless, or belligerent and defiant, it may be that the spirit of God is working in their heart.

Hopefully, you have nurtured a relationship that allows you to probe their heart and gently lead them to Jesus for forgiveness and cleansing. Most of our children's conversions were initiated by a parent. We recognized signs of conviction and lead them to brokenness and repentance and to receive salvation through faith in Christ.

The early teen years are an ideal time for a child to surrender his/her life to Jesus if he has not already done so. When active rebellion sets in, a teen often makes choices that lead to painful reaping and sometimes irrevocable consequences. A life of dedicated service to God is the only life of blessing and fulfilment.

Relationship with the church

There is one more relationship that dramatically affects the formation of a teen's life and convictions and that is the local church. We gain both our sense of identity and our understanding of the reality of the Christian faith through our experience of worship and relationship within the local church. After parental relationship, this is the next most significant influence in a teen's life.

It is important that we worship in a church that presents the gospel as a transformational relationship with God through faith in Jesus. It is also important that our church life consists of warm, loving relationships in a close-knit community.

The reason that I mention this is that some parents have the mistaken idea that they can provide all the spiritual direction and relationships that their children need. This may seem to work when the children are small and close at hand, but as our children grow into adulthood, they will seek a broader world of relationships. The local church and community of associated churches provides this broader base of fellowship.

It is important to worship in a church that you can support and that you can encourage your children to support. Many children have been lost to the faith because mom and dad were not supportive of the church where they were worshipping. It is far better to move on and find a church that you can support than to stay in a church and be in a state of constant opposition.

I am not encouraging church hopping. It is important to children, especially your teens, that there is stability in church life. Find a church that you are comfortable with, hopefully while your children are young, and stick with it. There are always logistical exceptions and your children will adapt to these, but for the most part a stable church life produces youth who have a strong sense of identity and purpose.

As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth –Psalm 127:4. This verse reminds us that our children are a mighty defense against the enemy. If properly honed (trained) and balanced (taught disciplines) our children will have the potential to outlive us both in years and in usefulness. When you release the arrow your children will go places both in time and in the world that you will never see. *Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate –Psalm 127:5.*





Seven Pictures of *Divine Tenderness*

By Harold S. Martin
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We read in Ephesians 4:32 that we are to be *kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you*. The phrase “even as God hath forgiven you” indicates something about the infinite tenderness of God in His attitude toward sinful persons.

It is impossible for any of us to totally comprehend the nature of God. The being and attributes of God have always been a profound study. And when we study the nature of God, we must be careful not to dwell upon one attribute to the neglect of another. For example, often His mercy is magnified, and His majesty is played down; sometimes His love is emphasized, and His wrath is denied.

One of the most beautiful and comforting of God's attributes is that of His tenderness. “Tenderness” is an emotion which expresses warm affection and seeks to share the joys and sorrows of another. God is a tender God! And the tenderness of God is sadly needed in these harsh, loveless days when tenderness is a scarce commodity among human beings. Look, for example, at the hard and unlovely faces of some of the people who pass by at the market or the grocery store. Such disgruntled people may be unusually intelligent, but they have not discovered the secret of a calm and satisfied life—and surely have not acquired the qualities of gentleness and tenderness.

In Ephesians 4:32, the Apostle Paul (who himself was once a bitter persecutor of God's people), now urges the

Christians at Ephesus to emulate the tenderness of God, when he says: *...be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you*. Our lives should demonstrate the quality of tenderness, otherwise we will find ourselves hard, bitter, unfeeling, and loveless. Contact with the tenderness of God can soften our characters. John, (the Son of Thunder) was later transformed into the Apostle of Love. The dying thief was likely the equivalent of a modern gangster, but in the presence of Jesus (who was praying for His enemies), the thief was broken up and transformed into a new person.

The Scriptures present us with several illustrations and pictures of God's tenderness, and hopefully these snapshots of divine tenderness will help us develop a new sense of charity and gentleness in our own daily living.

1. An Eagle That Fluttereth

God is described as follows in Deuteronomy 32:11-12: *As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: So the LORD alone did lead him....* The Children of Israel are spoken of here under the figure of “Jacob” (their father). The passage illustrates God's instruction and training of Israel during the forty years in the Wilderness. Moses is reviewing those years for the younger generation, just before crossing the Jordan to enter into the land of Canaan. Three aspects of the eagle's care are indicated here by Moses. (Keep

in mind that the eagle builds her nest high above the ground, often as high as the top of a four-story building.)

a) *The eagle stirs up her nest*, compelling the young eagles to fly. Wings that are developed and strengthened in the nest must learn to fly, and so out go the young! The mother eagle destroys the nest twig by twig, until the small eagles are so uncomfortable that they just need to go. And so, it is that God sometimes acts toward us; He tears our nest to pieces, especially if we become too settled among the things of the world, and too self-satisfied with our own accomplishments.

b) *The mother eagle flutters over her young* in order to teach by example how to fly. It almost seems at times like the small eagles (in learning to fly) might fall to their death in a bottomless pit far below, but the mother is determined to teach her brood to use their wings. The mother stays near and is quickly ready to help the small eaglets if they are in trouble.

c) *The mother eagle spreads abroad her wings* in order to protect and hide her young from an attack. With her wings, the mother bird can drive off assailants and soar away with her young. At a considerable altitude she will drop the small eagles, compelling them to use their wings—and then, if through any cause they cannot use their wings—she rapidly darts down and places her body beneath the young so that they can rest on her back.

All this is a beautiful glimpse into the tenderness of God. He stirs up our nests; He makes us use our wings; but He constantly shelters us with His strong presence. We face hard places; there are times when the pressure is great and the heat is on—but like the eagle, the Lord undergirds and sees us through! The people of Israel were cast out from their permanent homes in Egypt and brought into the fierce Sinai Desert, but God stood by them and saw to it that none was forsaken. In Deuteronomy 32, God is pictured as an eagle that flutters over her young.

2. A Father Who Pitieth

Another picture of the tenderness of God is given in the 103rd Psalm. *Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.* (Psalm 103:13-14)

The Fatherhood of God is a beautiful truth, but it is a reality only for those who have received Christ as Savior. God is fatherly to all people; He sends rain on the just and the unjust; He is responsible for the creation of each person; but in a spiritual sense, He is the Father only of those who are reconciled to Him by faith in His Son, Jesus Christ.

There is always a lack in life if one has never had the benefit of a father's influence. Human fathers know how to

pity their children when they are in distress. The tenderness of a good father will cause him to punish a child, but not in wild anger. So it is with God. Often, as a father, I could feel the heartbeat in the arms of our children (when they were small, and they knew punishment was coming). My wife and I are the parents of six children. When one misbehaved, I would hold the wrist tightly and explain the misdemeanor—and a sense of pity nearly always overwhelmed me. So it is with the Lord.

All of our children at some time or other were in difficult settings. One time our second son fell out of the automobile and on to the blacktop highway. Our third son broke his leg while kicking a football playing by himself in the front yard. Our second daughter had a portion of bone removed from her hip and grafted onto a weak spot on the ankle. Our oldest daughter was thrown from an automobile when rounding a curve on a dirt road. Our oldest son took some nails from a neighbor and had to make an apology. Every honest father feels a tender love for his offspring, and our Father, God, senses the same kind of tenderness for those who have committed their lives to Him. *...the LORD pitieth them that fear him.* (Psalm 103:13).

God knows that we are frail and subject to decay, and that we soon sink under a heavy load. He knows that we are easily broken under the pressure of severe trial, and so He tempers His dealings with us, so that we are not tested beyond that which we can bear. *Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him.* (Psalm 103:13).

3. A Bridegroom Who Rejoiceth

The third picture of the tenderness of God is that of a bridegroom who is in the midst of rejoicing. Isaiah 62:5 says, *...as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee.* This is another glimpse into the tenderness of God. Watch the young man as his wedding day approaches. Notice the fond expression when he is in the presence of the girl who will become his bride. There is a rich joy and a deep satisfaction in his soul as he awaits the time when the two shall be united in the bonds of matrimony.

Believers are spiritually joined in marriage to Christ. The bride of Christ is His Church (Revelation 21:9), and some day he is coming to claim His own.

Once a bridegroom takes his bride, he is supposed to possess her until death parts them. The bridegroom endows the bride with all his worldly goods, and they become each other's. Thus, it is in the spiritual realm: The bride and the bridegroom typify the relation existing between Christ and the Church. As the bride of Christ, the believer has been endowed with all that the Lord Jesus has; we are joint heirs with Him, but we are physically absent from Him now.

Surely, we long for the time when He will return to claim His bride, and God's people will enjoy His presence throughout eternity. ...*as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee.* (Isaiah 62:5).

4. The Mother Who Comforteth

Another picture of God's tenderness is found in the mother that comforts her child. Isaiah 66:13 says, "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you."

A good mother is a precious person, and a mother's attitude toward her child gives us another insight into the heart of God. It is to the mother that a child usually runs when there are tears to be kissed away. The little poem says:

"Who ran to help me when I fell,
And would some pretty story tell,
Or kiss the place to make it well?
...My mother."

God reveals himself in the Bible by using more than three hundred names. One of the names for God is "El Shaddai"—a term which means "the breasted one." A fretful child will often soon fall asleep upon the tender pillow of a mother's breast. One of the wonders of the nature of God is the fact that He is able to function both as a father and a mother. Our God combines in one entity all the qualities of noble-hearted fatherhood, and all the qualities of gentle, tender motherhood. As a father, He can inspire courage and fortitude when we are in the troubled hours of life, and like a concerned mother, He can bring comfort and peace.

God says (in Isaiah 66:13), concerning the future of Israel, *As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you....* Our God is a tender God.

5. A Shepherd Who Seeketh

In Ezekiel 34 we are given another illustration of the tenderness of God. The passage says, *As a shepherd seeketh out his flock ... so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day. And I ... will bring them to their own land, and feed them upon the mountains of Israel....* (Ezekiel 34:12-13)

Some of the latter chapters of the Book of Ezekiel tell how God will regather the Jews out of the countries into which they were scattered and bring them back into their own land. Sad things are happening to the Jewish people today. One television program in the Middle East depicted hatred for the Jew by showing girls biting off the heads of live snakes, and a little boy killing a puppy and then drinking its blood—all in an attempt to show how they feel toward the despised Jew. But God is not through with Israel. In Ezekiel 34:16, God says, *I will ... bring again that*

which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick.... In verse 14 of the same chapter, He says, *I will feed them in a good pasture....* God is like a good shepherd who has a tender concern for his sheep.

The prophets portrayed the compassion of Jesus under the same figure. Isaiah 40:11 says, *He shall feed his flock like a shepherd....* Jesus himself used the symbolism when He said, *I am the good shepherd....* (John 10:11) The Apostles in the New Testament represented Jesus in the same way. See Hebrews 13:20 and 1 Peter 5:4. Also, in Luke 15, the tenderness of Jesus is pictured as a shepherd (willing to give his life so that straying sheep might be found).

If any of us is drifting; if any of us has stumbled; be assured that our Lord Jesus will appropriately punish, but at the same time He is waiting to tenderly place us on His shoulder and bring us home to God—if we are meek enough to put ourselves into His care. In Ezekiel 34:12-16, God says to the people of Israel, *As a shepherd seeketh out his flock ... among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and ... I will feed them in a good pasture ... and I will ... bind up that which was broken...* These words again picture for us something of the tenderness of God.

6. A Refiner Who Sitteth

In Malachi 3, God is said to be "like a refiner's fire" (verse 2), and then in verse 3, we read: *And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness.* (Malachi 3:3)

Refining and smelting (referred to in Isaiah 1:25) have to do with the purifying of metals. Smelting means "to purge away impurities by the process of separating metal from its ore, by the use of heat." The person who did the smelting was called a "refiner." The refiner used some kind of furnace to intensify the heat, and the metal was heated until it appeared in liquid form. Silver melts at 1,763°F. When heated to the melting point, impurities tend to float on top of the liquified metal, and they can be dipped off, or dissolved with an alkali—and then the pure metal shines with a new brightness.

The refiner (according to the passage in Malachi 3:3) "sits." He must sit and keep his eye fixed on the heated metal, for if the crucible of silver gets too hot, then its quality becomes damaged. The refiner sits by the heated metal and watches carefully for long periods of time, carefully dipping off the impurities as they appear at the surface.

In the Bible, God is pictured as the purifier of human hearts. Sometimes He really turns on the heat!! God's people are like teabags; they are not worth much unless they've

been in hot water. But even though the Lord allows us to experience the furnace of trial and affliction, we can be sure that He is purifying us in wisdom and love. The Lord Jesus constantly stands by our side and carefully watches our progress. He knows when the silver is ready and how to dip off the impurities. And when the dross is removed, He can see His own image reflected in the new brilliance of our lives. Malachi says that the Lord will sit like a refiner of silver and will purge us like gold and silver that we may offer unto the Lord an offering of righteousness.

The tenderness of God is a beautiful truth. Even in the midst of trial, He sits with us and works out a good purpose.

The hymn-writer says:

Does Jesus care when my heart is pained
too deeply for mirth or song;
as the burdens press and the cares distress—
and the way grows weary and long?
Does Jesus care when I've said 'Goodbye'
to the dearest on earth to me;
and my sad heart aches till it nearly breaks—
is it aught to Him? Does He see?

The chorus says:

*Oh yes He cares, I know He cares;
His heart is touched with my grief;
when the days are weary and the long nights dreary,
I know my Savior cares.*
And indeed He does!

7. A Hen That Gathereth

Jesus says, as recorded in Matthew 23:37, *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem ... how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!* Here, the Lord Jesus compares His saving, persevering mercy to a hen covering her brood with her wings in times of danger.

Jesus knew that the Roman armies were about to totally destroy the city of Jerusalem, and thus He pleaded with the inhabitants to seek the shelter which He so willingly offered. Doubtless, Jesus often watched a mother hen calling her young beneath her sheltering wing, and He saw how the little chicks would rush for protection. But here were people who brazenly refused God's protection, and the tenderness of Jesus was stirred.

This message on divine tenderness would be incomplete if we failed to say that if the forgiveness of God's tender heart is spurned, and if one goes on in carelessness and loose living—then another side of God's nature is seen. Tough, hard, and unbending justice must operate upon the individual—if God's love is finally rejected. If a soul dies without Christ, then the righteous judgment of the Almighty will fall upon the guilty sinner. Therefore, may each Christian (as opportunity affords) urge sinners to be wise, and to respond to the tenderness of God, while the invitation to flee from the "wrath to come" is still being extended. And if you have never turned over your life to Jesus, remember that our God (in tenderness) calls for sinners to embrace the arms of Jesus and find refuge for the guilty soul.

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same for the church as they are for the world. A verse of scripture came to mind: *If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable* –1 Corinthians 15:19. As Christians...

- ...we have HOPE!
- ...we have HOPE IN CHRIST!!
- ...we have HOPE both IN THIS LIFE and FOR ETERNITY!!!

Considering all this we should have a smile on our faces, hope in our hearts, and an encouraging word on our lips for all with whom we come in contact. Let's be especially observant as we interact with the people around us—family, friend, and even the stranger. Who knows, maybe the neighbor next door is feeling all alone and discouraged. Or perhaps our best friend from church has been struggling with a burden that seems more than they can bear. As we pray, we can ask God to bring people to our minds that would be blessed by our assistance of one sort or another. We never know when our smile or encouraging word will help make a change in someone's eternal welfare.

Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself. But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For every man shall bear his own burden –Galatians 6:1-5.

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able... –1 Corinthians 10:13.

My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience –James 1:2-3.

In these verses, I see a number of things that God wants us to use to live by.

- 1) God will not allow us to be tempted above that which we are able to endure. This is according to His fact, not according to our feeling.
- 2) Each of us WILL fall into temptations, but as we see God's sovereignty involved in our trials, we can rest as we "count it all joy".
- 3) When it seems that our faith is being tried and tested, sometimes seemingly almost to the breaking point, we can rest assured that God is in the middle of it and that He is up to something according to His will.
- 4) God will allow burdens into each of our lives and He expects each of us to "bear our own burdens".
- 5) God will allow our fellow man to go through times of difficulty, during which God expects us to see our struggling brother or sister and do whatever we can to help ease the burden—through prayer, words of encouragement, or deeds of assistance.

In closing, I will leave you with several verses that Paul wrote to the church of Galatia. *And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.* –Galatians 6:9-10. As strangers and pilgrims here on this earth, let's not lose sight of our Eternal Home, our Sympathetic Savior, our Sovereign God, and our Abba Father.



Little Ramona's Pride

Lydia M. Bauman
Shreve, OH

A True Story

Ramona* was a little girl who was very busy and active. Like other four-year-olds, there were a lot of things Ramona could do. She could ride a bike, climb a tree, wash dishes, write her name, and ride her pony all by herself. One of Ramona's favorite things to do was to ride horses. Her family had two horses and a pony. How fun those evenings were when they would hitch their pony, Tony, to the cart, and the whole family would take turns riding. Or when Ramona and three of her sisters would pack onto Tony's back and go for a ride.

There were lots of things Ramona could do, but sometimes she thought she could do more than she really could. And sometimes she thought she was bigger than she really was.

One beautiful Summer evening, some guests came to Ramona's house. When guests came, that usually meant a fun time.

On this particular evening, after supper, Ramona's older siblings were riding horses with the guests. It looked like so much fun as they trotted around the pond and through the lawn. Ramona wanted to ride too, but she had to wait her turn. While she waited, she played on the lawn with Clifford, the dog. She soon tired of that and went for a spin on her bike. Then an idea popped into her mind. She ran off to the pasture entrance and climbed up the gate. She liked to pretend she was a monkey, swinging on the bars and climbing up and down. Then she tried balancing on a bar and taking her hands off the gate. Her siblings

and their guests were riding nearby. Ramona threw her arms into the air, and while balancing on the gate, yelled to the riders, "Look at me! Look at me!" She felt very big to be balancing on the gate. Suddenly, her foot slipped and, down she went, into the dust. She blinked with surprise and quickly jumped up, brushing off her dress. She looked around, embarrassed, but no one seemed to notice. She climbed back up the side of the gate and began playing again. Ramona grew impatient, waiting for her ride. No one seemed to remember that she wanted to ride the horses. She thought it would be fun to see how high she could balance on the gate, so she climbed as high as she dared. She wanted others to see how brave she was, so waving her arms, she shouted, "Hey everyone! Look at me!" But again, her foot slipped off the gate. This time, however, she narrowly escaped falling to the ground. Ramona's dad saw her and walked over to her. "Ramona," he said, "I want you to stay off the gate."

Ramona got down and tried to find something else to do. After playing for a while, her father's command to stay off the gate seemed to slip from her mind, and she started climbing on the gate again. Then Ramona's older sister, Elise, walked over, and quietly told her, "Ramona, you shouldn't be showing off to our guests." Ramona didn't like that advice. Into one ear and out the other it went. She assured herself that she wasn't showing off! She was just... well, just playing.



**Names in this article have been changed*

She climbed up just as high as she could, and once again, she waved her arms in the air, crying, “Look at me, everyone!” Suddenly, before she knew what was happening, she had landed on the ground with a thud and began to cry at the top of her lungs. Sure, she felt some pain, but mostly she was shocked and ashamed.

Ramona’s father came over to her and picked her up, making sure she wasn’t badly hurt, and carried her to the house. It was yet light outside, and still early in the evening, but he took her upstairs to her bed.

Before putting her to bed, he talked with her. Ramona was still crying, and Papa attempted to dry her tears. “Ramona, listen, can you be quiet for a bit? Why do you think you fell?” She sniffled and shrugged her shoulders. Papa continued, “If you would have obeyed me, and stayed off the gate like I told you to, you would not have fallen. Elise also told you to stop showing off, but you didn’t listen. Do you know that showing off is really pride? The Bible says, *Pride goeth before*

destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall –Proverbs 16:18.

Ramona nodded her head. “Are you sorry for disobeying me, Ramona?” Papa asked. “Yes, Papa, I am sorry” she replied tearfully. Papa decided to let her fall and going to bed early be her punishment this time. Ramona would have preferred a spanking instead of needing to go to bed early, which was a great grief to her little heart. But it was good for her because it caused her to repent.

Ramona never forgot this lesson, partly because of her fall, and partly because she was sent to bed early and missed the fun of riding horses. Not only had she been proud in showing off, she had also been willfully disobedient to Papa.

Elise had written a tune to the verse that Papa had mentioned to Ramona. From then on, whenever Ramona sang that song, she remembered how true that verse proved to be for her.

Here is the song that Ramona sang:

The image shows two lines of musical notation in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. The first line contains the melody for the first part of the verse: "Pride goeth before destruction, and an". The second line contains the melody for the second part: "haugh - ty spir - it be - fore a fall." The lyrics are written below the notes, with hyphens indicating syllables that span across notes.





In the World, but not of it

Leonard Martin
Bethel, PA

It is August 2020, over four months since the coronavirus pandemic started, and it is still affecting our lives. People are still getting sick. The government and its decisions continue to be at the center of a lot of our conversations. The cause and cure are ongoing topics. The difference between those that believe the coronavirus to be a real threat and those that believe it to be primarily an agenda of political nature are becoming more distinct as this virus slowly makes its way through our communities, churches, and society as a whole.

The mandates being issued by the governors of many of our states are forcing God's people to make decisions on issues we have not faced before. At what point does the government cross the line of interfering in our religious freedoms by putting in place mandates that will affect how we do church? How should we relate to the differences among us concerning the mandates? Should we or should we not follow them? What should our attitude be towards those in authority when we feel that they are doing things that are politically motivated? What should we do with all the "unbelievable things" that are being passed around, even from well-meaning Christians from what they would consider to be very valid and from legitimate sources? What should we do

with the many, what seem to be, "conspiracy theories" that are being propagated and peddled from one person to another in such a manner that makes it hard to refute them? I, in no way, am going to attempt to answer how a church should relate to the specific mandates but would like to address some concerning attitudes and other responses that have been observed throughout our plain communities.

One of the most concerning issues is the attitude that people have had and are having toward the government. In 1 Peter, the apostle Peter calls us to "honor the king" and the Apostle Paul admonishes us in Romans 13 to be "subject to the higher Powers, for there is no power but of God". The word honour, as used in 1 Peter 2, in reference to the king, means to "prize" or to "fix valuation upon." A verse like this and others would indicate that when we speak of our government and, for that matter, others, our attitude should be one of respect. The words and the tone of voice we use should reflect that commitment. Our choice of words and the tone we use will speak volumes. They reflect our attitude.

I personally believe that we as the plain community have done a lot of damage to our "light" and "witness" by refusing to wear the mask in required public settings. But God looks deeper than our actions and we should too. The remarks like

“no one will tell me I have to wear that thing” and others similar to that have their roots in a “lack of respect.” God clearly tells us, though we may not be able to always obey in every situation, respect and honor is always to be seen and heard in our attitudes and speech.

The apostle Paul is a good example of one who had a heart to honor those in authority and repented when he failed to do so. When Ananias the high priest asked the ones by him to smite him, he called the high priest a “whited wall”. When told that he had reviled the high priest, he was very quick to apologize for his wrong even though the high priest was wrong in asking them to hit him. It might remind us of the little saying, “Two wrongs do not make a right.”

Having a bad attitude because the government is making what we think are wrong decisions will not bring about right! As we find our way through these mandates, let’s make sure we do not sin against those in authority by speaking about them in a disrespectful manner. Let us repent of any bad attitudes and make sure our heart is in a position to honor and then the words and tone we use will convey the same.

Another area that is extremely hard to know how to respond to is that of all the negative information that is floating around surrounding Covid-19. Many of the plain community tend to distrust the government’s way of handling the situation. Because of this we are quick to believe and pass on negative information as fact. How do we know what is true and what is not? We need to be so careful, even when the information comes from what we believe to be a reliable source, because the more this negative information is passed along, the more folks will distrust the government. Case in point, there have been numerous deaths that were not directly connected to Covid-19; however, it was reported that Covid-19 was marked on the death certificate as being the cause of these deaths. After fact checking some of these supposed cases, it was found that some of these reports were not true. Since several reports have been verified as untrue, I no longer know what to believe. I think we should all be very careful what we do with the information we come across and do all we can to verify the information before passing it on as fact. If it is hard to believe, it is all the more important to check the facts or not pass it on until it has been proven.

Throughout this time period it seems that the conspiracy theories have just escalated. A lot of speculation surrounds the origin of Covid-19, the possible underlying motives, and secrecies the government has in how they are handling the whole Covid-19 dilemma. How do we know if the many propagated theories are true? If they are true, how will that affect the way I live for the other kingdom now? Will it change the way I live? Will it somehow help me prepare for these supposed difficulties that are coming?

In Luke 21, we have a verse talking about future events: “Men’s hearts failing them for fear of things that are coming on the earth.” Are we going to respond to the future in faith or in fear? The media proclaims Covid-19 to be a very dangerous, infectious virus. This perception has caused many in our world to start buying and hoarding for fear of things coming on the face of the earth. We now have articles and theories being peddled by many that seemingly will cause fear of the government and what they are planning to do and ultimately men’s hearts will fail for fear.

The Apostle Peter said that ... *God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind* –2 Timothy 1:7. Whether these claims are true or not, the Bible still calls us in Philippians to think on ... *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...* –Philippians 4:8. To spend even a little time following these theories will have a negative and spiritually draining effect on our lives and the lives around us. Thinking about them not only promotes fear but also makes it even more difficult to respect and honor the government. In reality, some or many of these things may not even be true. As Christians we try to be a peaceful and trusting people, yet this tends to make us vulnerable to be quite gullible. We are quite willing to believe negative claims, allegations, and theories without checking the facts to see whether they could even be true or not. My appeal would be to continue to seek those things that are above, to think on the things that are noble and virtuous.

As believers, we are facing another challenge. The unity within our groups is being challenged in ways it has not been before. We differ in thought on how much the government should interfere in our services. Should we even be having church if the governor would rather that we would not? What about the wearing of masks in our services? Some feel one way and others think differently. These mandates and how we should respond to them can be quite controversial! Now, as much as ever before, we need to extend lots of grace as we sort these things through with each other. We must give some room to each other to understand and relate to it a bit differently. We need much grace with one another and dare not allow these things to become a point of contention. I believe God wants to use these difficulties to draw us closer to Him and each other, but the enemy of our souls is doing his best to have it destroy our love and commitment to each other. Let us seek peace and ensue it!





When God's Way Works

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We asked the Lord for him, our third child, third son. He came with the springtime, the crowning creation of new life, bewailing his shuffled surroundings. Folks commented on his wail: they thought it was adorable. We thought so, too. We loved him, we snuggled him, and we called him Judson.

Sterling and I had committed, prior to Judson's birth, to take our youth group on a mission trip to Mexico. The date to leave for this trip fell five weeks after Judson came. As the leader's wife, I was responsible to take food along to feed our group for the entire time. Making lists and shopping for it consumed me with preparation.

Judson did his own preparing. He developed bowel trouble. He went seven days without a messy pampers. I asked my midwife about it, but she was unruffled by the occurrence. When it went another seven days until the next full diaper, I asked his pediatrician. She, too, was unconcerned. So, we headed for Mexico: Sterling and I, our five-week-old baby, and two vanloads of youth.

Although the preparation had been taxing for me, the time in Mexico was like vacation. My only requirements while there were to take care of my baby and oversee

mealtimes. But Judson didn't like the trip at all. I cuddled him for hours, sitting under a tarp on a dramatic hillside, overlooking the construction site where our group was laboring. Judson acted restless and uncomfortable with me. He cried if anyone else held him. I felt something was amiss, but I had no definite signs of what, except that day after day passed without a dirty diaper.

On our sixth night in Mexico, I laid Judson on his cot. But the Lord drew me back, prompting me to pull him into bed beside me. I felt this nudge distinctly and obeyed, although I had let Judson sleep in the cot the other nights. We slept. Somewhere in the night, Judson awoke, refusing to be pacified. I tried this and that, half asleep myself. Suddenly he screamed out, only to choke mid-scream and then go limp.

"Sterling!" I yelled. "Turn on the flashlight! He's not breathing!" I sat up in bed, examining my baby in the flashlight's beam. His little face worked desperately, but no breath or sound came forth. Within seconds, his breath returned, and he screamed again. Then he choked. As surely as an invisible hand clutching his fragile neck, his breath ceased, and his eyes bulged in terror. I swiped my finger through his mouth, checking for something lodged

in his airway, finding nothing. Shuddering, Judson gasped and cried. Tears forced themselves out of his eyes. “Oh, pray,” I begged. Sterling prayed, jumbling pleas together in a heavenward heap as our baby ceased breathing again. The episode repeated itself several more times: seconds of terrified screaming, then seconds of tortured silence. Sweat popped out on Judson’s face. It was agonizing to watch. Thoughts flew through my head: Our baby’s going to die. Just like that. No warning. Out here with no medical aid. Oh God! Help us, help us, help us! How does one just watch their baby die?

“I’m getting the missionary’s wife,” Sterling decided. I stammered dangling prayers while supporting Judson. When the missionary’s wife appeared, I handed him to her, grateful for the presence of a woman older than I. We prayed together, begging God to intervene. Judson began to cry and breath normally while she examined him. She handed him back to me as he calmed down.

“I don’t know what it is,” she said, after we told her the story. We thanked her for rousing in the night, then returned to our room. I cried while Judson peacefully slept in my arms.

“I sense it was a demoniac display,” Sterling stated. “If the devil can get us scared over what could happen to our baby while we are out in the boondocks, then he can get us to pack up our whole group and leave. The devil knows there are good things happening here, spiritually; this is not the time to flee. We can’t let him fill us with fear.”

I agreed. The unusual way Judson’s breath came and went looked as if an evil hand was gripping his neck. There seemed to be no natural explanation otherwise for the horrifying event. Sterling laid his hand on Judson and prayed, specifically rebuking the devil, and seeking the protection of God. We laid us down in peace and safety and slept.

In the morning, Judson seemed untroubled by the episode, although his restlessness increased. Eight, nine, and then ten days passed with no bowel movement. He cried, his soft, adorable cry agitating my heart. As we traveled back to the States, I fretted over the way he drew back from nursing, squirming and fussing until he fell asleep instead.

Then he began spitting up. When he finally spit up bright yellow liquid, I was alarmed. On the eleventh day, we visited a nurse practitioner in a Mennonite colony in Mexico. She examined Judson, listened to my report, and calmly replied, “And this is your first child?”

“No,” I responded, matching calm with calm. “This is my third.” She met my eyes then, silently, and reexamined Judson. She gave him a suppository, suggesting all babies are

different. And so, they are. This one certainly was! With the topical relief of the suppository, Judson seemed to feel better.

He was seven weeks old when we came home. From the time he was three weeks until he was seven months, he struggled with his bowels.

On Sundays, people fingered his tiny face, commenting on his sweet little cry. Other days, I huddled in the rocker, hearing but not hearing his sweet little cry. Some days it seemed it never stopped. I held him except while he napped. I became familiar with his cycle: a span of days with no mess in which he gradually grew grumpier, a slacking off nursing, and finally, outright crying until I gave him the temporary relief of a suppository. Contrary to regular suspicion, he was not constipated. It appeared to my mother-sense that something within him did not naturally trigger his bowels to move.

“Grain free,” prompted one book. “It could be Hirschsprung’s, which can be naturally treated by going grain-free.” So, I ate grain-free. Five weeks dragged by on my altered diet. Judson didn’t seem to notice my efforts.

His pediatrician listened to my recital of his routine, then ordered a test for Hirschsprung’s.

The test came back clear. I gratefully resumed eating grains, only to meet with new advice the next Sunday. An experienced mother sought me out in the nursery where I took refuge from the noisy fellowship hall, rocking my sonny, rocking, rocking, rocking. “Have you considered dairy-free?”

Well, no, I hadn’t.

“I think you should try dairy-free,” she decided. Like a well-thumbed medical manual, she recounted the reasons for this route.

His pediatrician didn’t approve of the dairy-free idea. I visited her office after three weeks of it. “You need the fats in dairy to keep up your milk supply,” she scolded. “Besides, the first sign of a milk intolerance is blood in the stool, not lack of stool.”

I didn’t mind stopping the dairy-free diet. We tried other things. Judson held enemas in stubbornly. A prescribed dosage of laxative didn’t produce results. At one point, the doctor instructed me to just wait it out with Judson, convinced his bowels would move on their own. Judson outwaited me. By 17 days along, I resorted to suppositories to give my miserable baby relief.

But it wasn’t only the digestive mystery that gave us heartache over my baby. Even on a freshly emptied system, he was cantankerous. Mealtimes became misery. Judson fought when I sat down at the table to join the family for a



meal. I became used to pinning him over my shoulder while I quickly ate, one-handed. Except I didn't become used to it. I never became accustomed to his fussing. I learned to do the housework while he napped, as anything other than tending him was impossible when he was awake.

Church was also a sore spot. Judson acted worse in any place of activity, but he became unreasonable at church. I wrestled with him until he fell asleep, usually in time for me to hear the last part of the sermon.

Fellowship meals were a disaster. Judson screamed. He would let no one touch him other than me, and even then, I couldn't calm him down. By the time we had fixed plates and fed our little family, I was exhausted and ready to go home. It seemed like he was afraid of something. What it was, I couldn't figure out.

Gradually I became aware he even acted afraid of Sterling. Whereas our other boys by this age had learned to recognize Sterling as "more fun than Mommy", Judson didn't. He pulled away from his daddy. He resisted Sterling's efforts to make up, clinging to me fiercely.

And my mother-instinct, grounded deep beneath the waves of weariness, responded. In an oxymoron of emotions,

I no sooner handed Judson to someone else than his obvious desperation for me tugged at my heart; and I would take him back, nestling him close, calming him down. It seemed even as he ruled and berated and emptied me, his intense need fulfilled me. I didn't understand it.

"I think you need to get him on a quality probiotic," my mother-in-law suggested. That sounded good, at least on Sunday evening. Somehow the weeks passed, and I didn't find time to locate a quality probiotic.

"Try a good multivitamin," another friend advised after observing us during prayer meeting. "It really could be worms. I knew this little girl who was totally unreasonable; she just screamed and screamed, and once they treated her for worms, it totally cleared up..."

That sounded good, too. It also sounded huge. I didn't know where to begin research on "worms", nor did I have the mental space.

When he was about six months old, we had the worst stint with him: almost a week wherein he cried and cried, refusing to nurse or be comforted. We requested an anointing by our ministry. We waited expectantly after the anointing. Within hours Judson was back to his restless fussing. We waited

a couple more days before updating his pediatrician. Per her advice, Sterling & I took him to the hospital, where a specialist in pediatric gastroenterology could help us. It frightened us to take our puzzling, vulnerable baby to the hospital. “Pray for us,” we requested as we told our families and brotherhood about it.

By the time we checked in to the hospital, Judson had perked up. The nurse showed us to a room. She laid Judson in the cold, caged hospital bed and dressed him in a coarse gown. While we waited for the doctor to come in, Sterling and I marveled at the change in our son. He lay in the bed quietly, fingering the rails and looking around. Not for three minutes, not for 30, but for an hour, finally drifting off to sleep. This was unheard-of behavior for Judson. We looked at each other sheepishly.

“I feel pretty foolish,” I confessed to Sterling. “What are the doctors going to think when they find this healthy little fellow? What about the huge hospital bill?” I covered my face with my hands.

Sterling shrugged, as puzzled as I. “I think people must have been praying.”

That was the turning point in Judson’s physical wellbeing. The hospital released us the next day, signing a bill of good health in Judson’s report. They couldn’t find anything wrong with our child. Soon thereafter, his bowel trouble cleared up. He became regular as the sunrise, all too regular for the lady who hitherto had needed no extra diapers, wipes, or clothes. We praised the Lord for answered prayer.

But he still cried. Months passed while we looked ahead to each accomplishment: maybe when this tooth comes in, maybe when he starts crawling, maybe when he starts walking. Judson crawled at six months, walked at ten months, ate—or more accurately didn’t eat—table food, and still he fussed. I walked around with a little “leech” on my skirt some days. Other days I didn’t walk. Sterling attempted to hold him while I ate supper, but Judson hated that worse than he hated sitting with me for meals, and I would soon relent to his pleading cries. About the only time he was content was while he slept. Most puzzling was his apparent fear of Sterling and his irrational behavior at church.

“Are we just spoiling him?” I asked Sterling. “Maybe he just doesn’t want to sit still in church like any other baby.”

Sterling thought. “If that was so, then why would he resist fellowship meals so fiercely? That should be a fun time. Or if you were spoiling him, why wouldn’t he want to do fun things like come outside with me, or eat snacks?”

I didn’t know. I didn’t think I was spoiling him, but I couldn’t tell. I thought even a spoiled baby should enjoy being away from its mother occasionally. Not Judson. He rode around with me continually, one hand clutching my neckline, the other hand pushing himself away to see where we were headed. If he didn’t like our direction, he often attempted to steer me by surprisingly strong lunging. His anxious, overly alert actions puzzled me. Perhaps something more was wrong, something relating to his nervous system.

“You know, when we took in my niece, she had bonding issues,” one sister told me over fellowship meal. Judson had his open mouth turned away from her, so we were actually visiting over the hubbub in the hall. “She had never bonded with anyone due to her poor home situation. I took to carrying her around with me everywhere I went until she bonded with me. The way Judson acts insecure, even when he is with you, makes me think he hasn’t bonded. Perhaps that’s why he panics whenever you put him down.” Maybe. But where and when would he have gotten bonding issues?

“Did he have a traumatic birth?” the lady inquired.

I thought it over. “Well, no...” I glanced back at the scary episode in Mexico. Perhaps that had undone the natural bonding process. Or maybe the time in the hospital. Maybe his stint with whooping cough as an eight-month-old. As these moments scrolled through my mind, I realized Judson’s babyhood really had been difficult. Maybe there was good reason his emotional balance was off kilter. He did seem insecure now. Frightened. On “survival mode” all the time, me being his dubious source of momentary safety. If he did have bonding issues, then I would have been doing the wrong thing his entire baby life. I repeatedly tried to let other people, like his grandmothers, hold him, hoping he would realize he was fine with them. It didn’t work. Talking with this lady caused me to look doubtfully at my tactics, worried I had hurt Judson worse by doing this. At least carrying him around all the time would be free.

I procured a baby carrier and took to wearing him as I worked. He loved it, but my back did not. I soon gave that practice up, too, after no hopeful signs of bonding occurred. If my spirit was going to be worn down by caring for this child, at least my back didn’t need to be.

We tried discipline. After all, we were working on raising two other boys, and discipline was not a new thing in our home. It didn’t seem we had done anything different with Judson than we did with the other boys, but the results were certainly different. Judson responded with uncontrollable terror. The soft infant cry was long gone. We were unsure how to teach him to be happy in Sterling’s care, for discipline

only seemed to heighten his distress. And how does one teach a child to play away from his mother? After a few exhausting sessions at church, wherein he refused to respond, we began to feel a spanking wasn't the tool to get through to him. Indeed, it felt we never got through to him. But if a spanking didn't work, how else could we teach him? I recalled seeing other mothers clamp their hands over their toddler's mouth to teach them that wailing didn't bring the desired result. Perhaps he needed to be taught how to stop crying. I tried it for a while.

Shortly after Judson turned one, his behavior reached a terrible climax. He was big enough to refuse direction or pacification. Discipline seemed to make him go crazy. Finally, I reached for a book about child development. One description on a condition called retained fear reflex described our child exactly. With simple therapeutic practice, the book promised, we could correct this. However, we would need an expert in this field to work with us, teaching us the therapy.

"What do you think?" I asked Sterling after sharing the book's information with him.

His face looked unsure. "I don't know," he pondered aloud. "This isn't what I would have been taught about raising a child. I always thought love, prayer, and consistent discipline were the keys to normal childcare. We have no proof other than fussiness that something is wrong with Judson. I hesitate to label him."

I did, too. While we both acknowledged the special needs of some children, and the gift of specially trained caregivers, we didn't want to hastily tack an excusing name on Judson's behavior.

But the exhaustion of caring for him rolled back in like a fog the next day. We talked about the retained fear reflex again. We'd tried the love, definitely. We'd tried prayer, at least in a measure. The consistent discipline was another matter. Unlike our other boys, it didn't seem to work with Judson. According to the text on retained fear reflexes, discipline could be accomplishing the opposite of its intention.

"You may call and get an appointment with the therapist," Sterling decided. "It's worth a try. She's a Christian, too, and isn't suggesting anything beyond physical exercises to retrain the brain."

So I did. The therapist lived eight hours away, which was nothing to brush aside. But the promise of help seemed worth the drive to us. In the meantime, I shared with a few people what we were thinking. A few of them promised to pray for us. My mother-in-law offered a children's supplement for

calming and focus. I also made it to the health food store and procured a probiotic and multivitamin. The time for the therapist appointment drew close.

"I don't see how we can go," Sterling said a few days before. "Our weeks have been super busy, and we are all tired. I can't see how we can fit in a two-day road trip just for one short appointment. But I guess we'll have to. If it helps Judson, that will be worth it."

Tension tugged at my neck, too, just thinking about the trip. That week we made a concentrated effort on Judson's training. We worked with him firmly, attempting to bring his will into line with ours. He despised it. Any time Sterling took him, he reacted violently. I set aside times each day to sit with him on the sofa, holding his hands and requiring silence, with middling results.

The Sunday before we needed to head out to the appointment, we accepted a dinner invitation to a home we were not very familiar with. I spent the time wrestling with my small son, swallowing mouthfuls of pride and comfort while doing so. Meanwhile, Sterling talked with the men about our struggles with Judson, referencing the idea of his fearfulness and the route of therapy.

"Have you ever thought about how Judson must feel when you discipline him in the way I observed your wife do earlier?" one of the men questioned gently. "I noticed the expression in Judson's eyes as she restrained him, covering his mouth. He looked terrified. If you really think he has this issue with fear, perhaps you should try looking at discipline from his point of view. One of our children also responded unreasonably to our regular methods of training until I began to describe to them what I was about to do..." With discretion, this brother shared an experience with their child.

Sterling was stunned and blessed by the gentle insight. The men shared a little more. It was as if we had been too close to the situation to fully see it, and the Lord had given us perspective from a wise onlooker. We agreed to cancel the childhood development appointment and rethink our training methods. We decided to try clearly explaining to Judson our expectations and the consequences of disobedience. Instead of restraining him, demanding surrender to our desires, we agreed to use repeated small switches to reprimand his willfulness.

"I'm going to take this week to completely focus on mealtimes," Sterling decided. "Of course, that means you will take the brunt of this, since you feed Judson two out of three meals. But I will try to take the heavier load. I'm also going to fast and pray for answers for this child. We've tried

to train him at mealtimes before but have never stuck it out more than a day or two. There's always 'something going on' and we slack off. But this is important. Too important to keep letting 'life' interfere."

I agreed with him. My spirit rose with hope and rest in this decision. Something about the therapy route had not seemed correct, yet we had been desperate for an answer.

That week was tough. The other boys ate alone while I spent extended time at the table with Judson. He screamed at my clear expectation of sitting still and eating. He writhed, he gagged, he cried. I prayed and switched. At supper time, Sterling took over. Judson resisted this still more wildly. The first evening it was three hours before our child obeyed and swallowed a small amount of food for his father. Several more evenings passed with similar time frames. Sterling worked with Judson gently and firmly, speaking to him, spanking, holding. I tried to block out the sound. My commitment to stand behind my husband in this all tussled with my emotions, but I didn't give in this time when Judson looked at me with begging eyes.

By the end of the first week, Judson showed steps of improvement. He stopped crying at mealtimes. He sat in his highchair, eating a few bites for us obediently. With a comically pathetic expression, he would offer Sterling and I each one of his little paddies to hold while he ate, as if that gave him courage. We continued with intentional training in this area alone. By the end of the second week, his behavior all around had improved. He began to let loose of me, seeking entertainment on his own, toddling around the house with happy babbling. I watched in amazement while he did normal baby things: exploring the toy box, climbing on sofas, dabbling in toilets. He ventured outside alone, soon learning to play with balls and trucks. I stopped giving him the various supplements since he was doing so well.

Then one gladsome day when the boys chorused "Daddy's home!"; Judson squealed in delight. The next evening when Sterling arrived, he squealed again, this time happily heading for the door. I opened it for him. He toddled to the truck where Sterling was. Sterling carried him into the house. Judson looked at me triumphantly from his daddy's arms with a burbling comment on the situation. He made no move for me. We knew then Sterling had won his heart. From that time until now, he has been a different child.

Now we watch him with delight. His little countenance is bright and beaming, his eyes clear and content. He is evidently secure. He has become a joy to have around, charming our family with his toddling antics. Not only

has he bonded with Sterling, he has widened his circle of acceptance to others as well. He interacts well with his brothers. He responds reasonably to training in other areas. We love him, this third little son of ours.

So what really was wrong with Judson? I think he had a physical abnormality in the first months of his life, causing him discomfort. His was a rocky babyhood. In retrospect, I see that spoiling him crept in unawares.

Somewhere in the transition between need and demand, I began to cater to his little self. It was sneakily gradual. Incredibly early on, he obviously realized that crying controlled me. I couldn't see it. We couldn't see it. We couldn't see it until after we began to take back the parental control in his training. We still don't know when it happened or how. But this we do know: God's way works.

Prayer works. The rod of correction works. A wife standing behind her husband as he disciplines his child in love works. In a plan that defies human reasoning, let alone worldly teaching, the process of molding Judson's will firmly bonded him to his father. This created security in his small world. Sterling is in charge. Judson is at rest and safe in this. It removed from him the burden of controlling his world. He is free to relate to either of us, free from the tyrannical demands of his small selfish nature. Something about the clarity of his daddy being the authority in his life has also established my authority over him.

Over two years have passed since Sterling began turning Judson's heart and will towards his own. Today, Judson is a joyful, well-adjusted boy. He sits quietly in church and devotions; he enjoys fellowship meals and his friends; he eagerly spends time with either Daddy or Mommy. Stubbornness, anxiety, and mealtimes are three areas that require daily diligence in training him—more diligence than our previous two children needed, combined! But the good news is Judson responds well to discipline. Some days it feels like we aren't getting anywhere until we look back at how far our son has truly come. We praise the Lord for His intervention in our lives by using a perceptive brother to speak into the situation. God's Word, God's way, has the keys for raising a happy child.

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What Is Right About My Music?

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Many people ask, “Is listening to secular music a sin? Is there anything wrong with CCM (Christian Contemporary Music)? Is it okay for Christians to listen to rap, rock, country, pop, or rhythm and blues?” For the sake of this article, I am going to refer to all the music listed above as “secular” music.

Should Christians only listen to “A cappella” music? Music is compelling, and it can have a significant effect on how we live our lives. Music influences us negatively or positively. We should ask the question, “Does the music that I listen to draw me closer to God, or does it push me away from Him and closer to Satan?”

The primary purpose of music is to worship (the expression of reverence and adoration to something or someone). Yet at times we as believers still fail in listening to good wholesome music. This is a problem since most secular music is evil and promotes things that God hates.

Secular music is very catchy and addicting. The flesh would rather listen to secular music than to godly music. This type of music negatively influences the mind and is not profitable. If the song encourages evil, promotes worldliness, gives you bad thoughts, changes your actions for the wrong, and influences your speech for the wrong, we should not be listening to it. When it comes to music, we can comfortably lie to ourselves in this area. Have you lied to yourself? Have you said, “God is OK with this type of music,” yet deep down in your heart, you know He is convicting you, and that He is NOT OK with it?

Secular music is often sensual. The meaning of sensual is “of arousing gratification of the senses and physical.” Is the music that we listen to sensual? Does it put our mind in a state of just going with the beat? How do our bodies want to respond when we listen to such music? If our bodies swing with the rhythm of the music, it is not honoring to the Lord; it is not bringing glory to His name; it is not putting

our mind and body in a position to worship the Lord.

We always worship something when we listen to music. If we are concentrating on music that is not of God, we are worshipping our flesh, the world, or even the devil. Usually, music like CCM tends to draw attention to ourselves and not to God. Music like this is very sensual. Can we truly worship God when we listen to this type of music?

CCM is a genre of modern popular music in which the lyrics are focused on matters concerned with the Christian faith. It formed as those affected by the 1960s’ “Jesus movement” revival began to express themselves with a more contemporary style of music. Before that, it was hymns and other gospel songs that were prevalent in the church at the time. Whether we know it or not, much of the CCM adds a pulsating beat (syncopation) at a place that it is not naturally supposed to be. The pulsating beat that is relevant in CCM does not appeal to the spirit of man in worship, rather, it appeals to the flesh. The type of music that appeals to the flesh is not of God but is of the devil. Today, CCM is a term that is used to refer to pop, rock, or praise & worship styles of rhythm and beat, so long as the lyrics fall under the definition of CCM.

Philippians tells us that we are supposed to think on ... *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.*

Secular music does not pass the Philippians 4:8 test. Most secular music has lyrics that are impure, while all of it has a rhythm or beat that is against God’s order. The devil uses it all to influence people to sin or to think about sin. It will affect you in some way. Is the influence of the music that we listen to good or bad? For example, if we are concentrating on music that affects our thoughts or

lifestyle in the wrong way, then it is a negative influence that we must put out of our lives.

The Hebrews started the tradition of using music without accompaniment after the fall of the second temple in 70 A.D., at which time instruments were not allowed during a period of mourning after the fall. Throughout history up until The Renaissance, instrumental music was mostly associated with dancing and merry making. As one could not have too much fun in places of worship, this kind of amusing music was not popular with religious leaders.

A cappella is an Italian phrase which means “in the style of the chapel”. It was initially used to refer to music that was sung in a chapel or small worship space without accompanying instruments, as opposed to a large church where an organ usually attended vocal music. The term has since come to mean any music sung without accompaniment, whether sacred (religious) or secular (non-religious). A cappella music can be sung by a large choir, a small group, or as a solo.

In Orthodox and Conservative Jewish congregations, the tradition of singing mostly A cappella still exists. In these synagogues, it is customary for a cantor to chant or sing an authoritative text from the scriptures which the congregation responds to in kind. The only instruments used might be a pitch pipe to give everyone a starting note or a ram’s horn on a special occasion or a holiday.

The early church developed the tradition of A cappella singing from the Hebrews’ Jewish tradition, chanting psalms, or other scriptures and using a cantor as a leader. Gregorian chant was the dominant form of church music starting around 590 A.D. It is a single, simple, melodic line half-spoken, half-sung in a free rhythmic style. In the early church, instrumental music was associated with the sinful outside world and was considered a negative influence.

The tradition of unaccompanied sacred vocal music continued during The Renaissance. Although instruments sometimes doubled or substituted for a vocal line, vocal music mostly stood on its own. The sound of a choir of voices in a chapel with excellent acoustics had a particularly ethereal effect.

Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina was one of the most significant composers of The Renaissance in Italy, writing hundreds of masses and motets for the church. ‘The Palestrina Style,’ as it is called, was a sophisticated A cappella form using many voices singing with different music and text coming in at different times. This was called polyphonic, as opposed to homophonic, which means one melodic line sung together or in the same rhythm.

The Apostle Paul writes, *Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; –Ephesians 5:19*. Does that sound like making music with instruments? Or does it rather seem like singing praises to God from the heart?

And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them –Acts 16:25. When Paul and Silas were in prison, and they were in stocks singing at midnight, I don’t believe that they were singing to bring glory to themselves. They were singing to bring glory to God the Father. The result of them giving God the glory is quite astounding. There was an earthquake, the foundations of the prison shook, the doors flew open, and everyone’s prison bands broke. At the end of this happening, the jailor came trembling before Paul and Silas and asked: “What must I do to be saved?”

Colossians also tells us that we should *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord –Colossians 3:16*. Do we let psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs teach us, admonish us, and encourage us?

I wonder what hymn Jesus sang with His disciples at the last supper before He went out to the Mount of Olives. I doubt that they were singing to themselves. I believe they were singing to their heavenly Father.

Pure and holy music is a blessing from the Lord. It is such a beautifully powerful thing that we should not take for granted. Sometimes God uses it to speak to us. I firmly believe that all Christians need to be listening to godly music throughout the week, not just on Sunday. It helps me stay calm, be encouraged, and keep my mind on the Lord. When my mind is on the Lord, I can go through the day blest.

We need to discipline ourselves with the things of God. We also need to get rid of things in our life that we know God is not pleased with. Godly music (music that draws our spirit and mind to the things that are from God) is the type of music that believers should listen to. Worship is what it boils down to, do we worship God or something else?

Jesus says, *But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him –John 4:23*.

So, let us sing in sincere worship to our Creator, let us give God the glory for the voices that He has given us, and let us sing and listen to godly, wholesome songs to our God.





The Strait Gate

To Life

Lee Rufener
Athens, WI

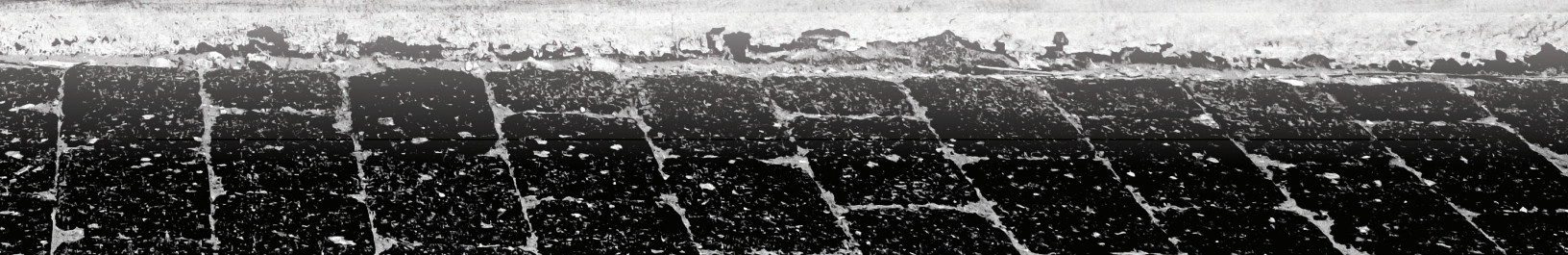
Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it –Matthew 7:13-14.

Of all the word pictures painted by our Lord, it seems this one remains, for the most part, unexplored. On numerous occasions the disciples asked their Master to explain the parables he taught. The parable of the Wheat and Tares resulted in a detailed explanation that leaves little doubt to His intent. ...*He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels –Matthew 13:37-39.* But in the picture presented as the strait gate, we receive few defining details and are even told that there be but few that will even find it.

The parable is followed by some intense teaching against false prophets, corrupt fruit, and empty words. Some souls will have a pretense of powerful prophecy while missing the gate. Others put forth a front of fruitful freedom but are foreigners to the strait gate. All professing words of goodness, grace, and godliness avail us nothing to the entrance into this gate. Those tramping through the broad gate are obviously more than just the world's gross, hardened

sinners. Rather, the two gates seem to be representative of those who have entered a religious pursuit of life.

Straight and Narrow, as ascribed by the early American revival movement, generally meant “a life of abstinence” from the vices of sin. This is certainly not an entirely wrong perception, yet it seems to differ from the profession of the broad group that had *prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works? –Matthew 7:22.* To free ourselves from the dregs of evil is quite indispensable to any good living, but he that would enter the strait gate will be *he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. –Matthew 7:21.* Also, to place asceticism, *the doctrine that a person can attain a high spiritual and moral state by practicing self-denial, self-mortification, and the like. –dictionary.com*, at the portal of the post seems to invite a works-based, monastic kingdom. Self-denial sings in perfect harmony with the Christian life but will never be found as the sole melody. The ordinances of this world, such as ... *Touch not; taste not; handle not [are] ... after the commandments and doctrines of men. –Colossians 2:20-22.* While we applaud the efforts of anyone who has



denied himself of this world's ease and enjoyment for the betterment of others, we cannot offer it as the prescription of the strait gate to the abundant life.

Some will attest that the gate is "Jesus" and all who will enter the kingdom must enter through Him. This certainly carries some merit, as well. In another parable, Christ described Himself as *the door of the sheep* –John 10:7. Who would care to deny Christ of such a preeminent position? Yet, we have noticed that the "Jesus only" movement has opened the gate so broadly that it can hardly be considered "strait".

Regardless of our interpretation of what the gate may represent, the decided emphasis given here is upon the adjectives, *straight and narrow*, as opposed to *wide and broad*. **Strait** (*Sten-os'*) means *narrow (from obstacles standing close about)* –Strongs. **Narrow** (*Thlee'-bo*) means *to crowd (literally or figuratively): afflict, narrow, throng, suffer tribulation, trouble* –Strongs. Here we find some solid definition to our entrance. We must endure an uncomfortable squeeze between two posts if we are to find life. Here we can behold the testimonies of those who have entered there.

- ...we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; (*Thlee'-bo*) –1 Thessalonians 3:4.
- ...they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted (*Thlee'-bo*), tormented – Hebrews 11:37.
- We are troubled (*Thlee'-bo*) on every side, yet not distressed... –2 Corinthians 4:8.

Herein is an entrance beyond the discipline being taught by the scribes. ...*when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes* –Matthew 7:28-29. The strait gate of Christ rested in a principle beyond word-worn profession. *But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!* –Luke 12:50. This is where Christ got His authority: tenaciously doing the will of His Father in heaven by submitting Himself into the hands of men.

One Thing Needful

...*The scribes came upon him with the elders, And spake unto him, saying, Tell us, by what authority doest thou these things? or who is he that gave thee this authority? And he answered and said unto them, I will also ask you one thing; and answer me: The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say, Why then believed ye him not? But and if we say, Of men; all the people will stone us: for they be persuaded that John was a prophet. And they answered, that they could not tell whence it was. And Jesus said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things* –Luke 20:1-8.

If the scribes, priests, and elders could have answered this one question they could have understood the power source of His authority. There is an authority of heaven and an authority of men. These two make up the posts of a very strait gate. At times they may even conflict, leaving the conscientious Christian feeling stuck between a rock and a hard place. When earthly authorities overstep their bounds leaving no room to serve God in a Biblical manner, we must choose ...*to obey God rather than men* –Acts 5:29. It is here that we will experience the *thlee'-bo* of the gate.

There is a God-given authority vested in men by their position: government authorities, workplace authorities, parental authorities, and church authorities, to name a few. *Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation* –Romans 13:1-2. This is strong language that we dare not ignore. Yet the disciples answered such authorities ...*and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard* –Acts 4:19-20. While the disciples carried no personal angst against the rulers, there was a narrow way that they were walking in. **Narrow**, not because they served God alone, but because they had dual posts to submit to. **Patriotism** wants to serve man to the exclusion of God.

Modern Christianity wants to serve God to the exclusion of man. Both paths are broad, for in either case, we move the opposite post to a position that is less hurtful to our humanity and more pleasing to our palate.

Submission Activates Power.

The authority ushered in by Christ Jesus left His followers astonished and amazed—*But when the multitudes saw it, they marvelled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men* –Matthew 9:8. Their experience with authority was a mere social, hierarchical subordination that left them oppressed, pushed down, and forced into subservience. Christ exemplified a new and narrow way. It was not a casting away of civil authority but an empowerment of it. It was a strait gate that respected the authorities enough to volunteer to transport a soldier's pack the second mile. Today, it is an inner authority that empowers us to respond respectfully and to glorify God while doing it. *Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake* –Romans 13:5. To embrace our authorities in our heart is ultimately the inner channel to freedom and a deterrent to legalism, for it takes to task the issue of sin, sulking, and selfishness, while replacing it with righteousness, well-being, and peace. While many disdain these earthly authorities and remove them as far as possible from their hearts' compliance, they only succeed to broaden the posts and thus forfeit the life that the strait gate brings. There are a mere few who will find the blessedness within the posts.

These will find life within the confinements of the strait and narrow provided by God and...

...Governments

The humble request of the centurion of Capernaum made Jesus marvel—...*Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel* –Matthew 8:10. He was a man with authority... and under authority. He seemed to understand the correlation in subjection to earthly authority and the exercising of it, for he entreated Christ not to come under his roof but to ...*speak the word only, and*

my servant shall be healed –Matthew 8:8. The gate formed by his overseers and the sincere love of his servants under him often left but little room for personal preferences. Yet, the power entwined in his speech was such that the Son of God readily complied with his request!

Joseph repeatedly found himself in tight places between God and the people he served. This resulted in being raised to the second ruling power in the most prominent nation on the earth. Esther and Daniel experienced similar plights. At times, the posts were so narrow that they wondered if they might perish, but the end result was always power... power to live in holiness, power to respond in righteousness, power to overcome victoriously, and power to endure faithfully unto the end.

...Masters

While slavery has been predominantly eradicated in our modern world, the relationship to a master still exists. Employers exercise authority over their servants and greater responsibility is ultimately given to those who submit wholeheartedly to it. The authority given to Eleazer is amazing and inspiring. Abraham trusted him to secure a wife for Isaac; He was even permitted to determine the rules. This colossal commitment left the indentured servant in a tight squeeze between the Master God and his master Abraham. *And he said, O LORD God of my master Abraham, I pray thee, send me good speed this day, and shew kindness unto my master Abraham* s–Genesis 24:12.

The American workforce has grown very accustomed to refusing anything they esteem as an unreasonable mandate from their employers. In faithless defiance they readily strike and kick the posts further apart to their broad preferences. This attitude has left them spiritually anemic and powerless. The Ethiopian eunuch served God while also serving under Queen Candace. Though his world was narrowed beyond what most of us could ever imagine, ...*he went on his way rejoicing* –Acts 8:39, His life stands as a stellar testimony to Isaiah's prophecy ...*neither let the eunuch say, Behold, I am a dry tree* –Isaiah 56:3.

...Parents

Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth –Ephesians 6:1-3. This one should be obvious to any spiritually awakened individual. Children, who have parents, have an evident advantage in life and those who respect them, fare even better. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? –Hebrews 12:9. Life is found by those who can embrace their earthly fathers and the “Father of spirits”. Those who claim God as their Father while viewing their parents as a mere obstruction to the path they wish to walk in, will sooner or later be walking through the broad gate to destruction.

...Husbands

As Jesus entered into dialogue with the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well, he began to describe a life that she desperately wanted—... *Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw. Jesus saith unto her, Go, call thy husband, and come hither* –John 4:16. Christ was seeking to convince her that the abundant life will be found between the two posts. She had previously had five husbands and undoubtedly had not found contentment with any of them. Women who stand up for their rights kick at the narrowness of the gate and forfeit their God-ordained dignity. A woman at rest within the confines of her authorities is not oppressed but is actually liberated and empowered. *For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head...* –1 Corinthians 11:10. The headship veiling is not just a symbol of submission, nor is it merely a form of protection, it is spiritual power. Her wholehearted subjection fuels a dynamic marriage as she embraces her husband as “lord”, and in doing so, she becomes a faithful vessel of liberty, power, strength, and delegated influence.

...Church Leaders

These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee –Titus 2:15. Many self-proclaimed believers reject any outward display of authority in the Church. To the western mind, church authority is negatively associated with legalism, communism, bondage, and heaviness. But just as a disregard for spiritual authorities stripped Saul of his kingship, so likewise this attitude robs the believer of true authoritative power and nobility. *For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry...* –1 Samuel 15:23. Efforts to choose ...a way which seemeth right unto a man... –Proverbs 14:12, leads to bondage, but choosing to walk in surrender and subjection leads to liberation and life. Satan promised Jesus the entire world if He would only throw off the “yoke” of obedience to God. Instead, He set His face like a flint, endured the constraint of subordination, and ultimately liberated the entire world.

Subjection Produces Spiritual Authority

God’s authority and earthly authorities are rooted within the opposing posts of the strait gate. Those fully subject unto them both experience a living authority found within the gate. It brings power unto people rather than power over people. It produces liberty in Christ... the right to the tree of life... freedom from fear... health to our bones... power over unclean spirits... grace to train children... strength to preach and convert souls... and it is the ultimate deterrent to legalism. Faith that comes through wholehearted and humble subjection is the most suspect and under-estimated power available to mankind. *Few there be that find it. Why?* Because it is fastidiously founded and formulated between the posts of the strait gate and the narrow way.



A large, leafy tree with a thick trunk stands on the left side of the image. The tree's branches spread out across the upper half of the frame. The background is a clear blue sky with some light clouds. In the foreground, there is a field of tall green grass. The overall scene is peaceful and natural.

A Suffering Savior

He was born in a stable, meant for beasts of the field.
It was from the beginning that His will He would yield.

He was never well-liked; despised by all men;
Laughed to scorn, reviled—again, and again.

Yes, His mission on this earth was unusual indeed,
Not seeking money and friends or trying to succeed.

He knew His purpose was to please His Father,
With the trifles of earth, He would not bother.

It surely wasn't easy, to be the King of kings.

And suffer as a criminal, taking what that brings.

Ten thousand angels, He could have summoned south,
But the stricken Savior opened not His mouth.

With His eyes on the reward, He persevered the pain;
Was cruelly stripped and beaten, and ultimately slain.

But why would He suffer so willingly there;

Enduring the cross, all the pain He did bear?

Because He treasured us, an atonement for our sin
He made when He bled and died there to make us His kin!

I thank God now for that sacrifice so great;
Providing the Lamb and transforming my fate.

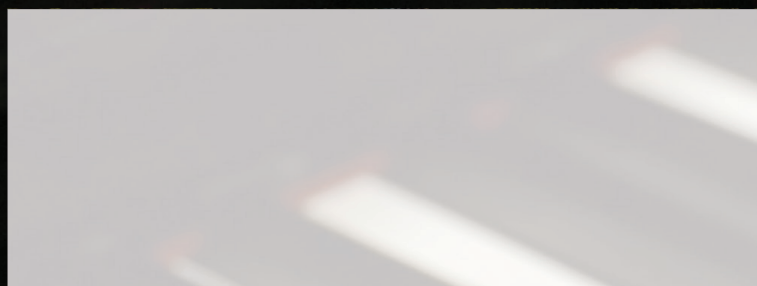
I say, "A wonderful Savior, is Jesus my Lord;"
Now the Father and I—a relationship restored!

-Barry Grant

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There hath no temptation taken you but such as is
common to man: but God is faithful, who will not
suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able...
-1 Corinthians 10:13