

The Heartbeat of 
The Remnant

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A ministry of 
The Berean Voice



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“The Berean Voice” is an outreach ministry of Faith Christian Fellowship, a church located in Holmes County, Ohio. It is operated by a board of directors, which ultimately answers to the elders of the church.

As a non-profit ministry, we desire to work with the Lord, for without Him we can do nothing. We are trusting God to provide for the ongoing work of this magazine and our other outreach projects through the free-will offerings of His people. Would you join us in prayer for this work and ongoing need?

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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. The year 2021 is fast drawing to a close and what a year it has been. Well, not just 2021, but also the year 2020. Recently, I saw a sign outside a church that read something like, “Sorry, normal is not coming back, but Jesus is”. How true; both statements—what was considered normal before Covid *isn't* coming back, and, Jesus *is* coming back.

Just the other week I was speaking with a brother who commented that he believes that with the way everything has been unfolding since Covid-19 began its global spread, that surely, we have entered the beginning of the end of time. If we but look around us certainly we each see the signs of unrest, uncertainty, and apprehension unfolding since the beginning of the pandemic. Lawlessness is on the rise—looting and rioting has become more commonplace in some of the larger cities of the USA, and in other parts of the world.

Our Magazine Schedule

This issue of the magazine is running behind schedule by several months, for which we offer our apologies to our readers. Primarily, the blame rests on my (Curvin's) shoulders as the editor. There are, for the most part, two main contributors for this delay—1) long term complications from Covid-19, and 2) the unexpected need to move on a very short notice.

I (Curvin) never fully recovered from getting Covid-19 in October of 2020. Then during the late summer of 2021, our family contracted another virus which took its toll on my already weakened immune system. For most of August and September my main focus was simply trying to survive from day to day. My lungs, my mind, and my energy were all functioning well below normal (to put it mildly). I thank God that finally I was able to find a doctor who prescribed several strong drugs. Within three to four days, I started to recover quite rapidly. Since then, my physical and mental abilities have returned to almost 80 percent of where they were prior to when I initially contracted Covid. It has been a long, hard journey and I am thankful that God saw fit to grant me healing. I thank each one who has prayed for us during this time, and I wish each of you God's richest blessings.

Since our move we are mostly settled in to our new accommodations, and with my renewed health, I am feeling encouraged and energized to once more press into the

harness of my editorial duties. Please pray for us as a board as we consider making some changes in our endeavors to prevent any future lag in production of a similar nature.

Covid-19 and Vaccines

Our (Curvin and Eileen's) oldest daughter is working part-time in a nursing home and is going to nursing school to become an LPN—both of which are pushing the Covid vaccine. Add to this my year-long battle with Covid and my interest has been keenly aroused as I have followed many of the news reports and research results regarding Covid-19, the various treatment options, and the ensuing vaccines.

We (The Berean Voice) ran a series of articles in past issues of The Remnant evaluating vaccines in general. We tried to present a fair and balanced view, while defining a perspective, that overall, vaccines (as they were originally designed) are valid and important for the sake of public and personal health. We discouraged folks from taking a strong “anti-” position, no matter which side of the issue they were on. We also gave recognition to the reality of possible severe side effects (however rare they might be) of various vaccines. Through it all, we endeavored to point out the unspeakable suffering and loss associated with specific diseases that vaccines have been proven to be very effective in preventing. Such diseases as polio, smallpox, mumps, and tetanus to name a few.

Suddenly we have a whole new set of circumstances to consider and evaluate. Covid-19, a run-away virus with nothing in the medical arsenal to stop its global spread, and geneticists, flush with pride and enthusiasm regarding their recent advances in genetics and medicine. Prior to Covid becoming a public issue, the world of genetics had advanced to the point of gene editing and genetic engineering. This means they have dissected the human body down to cells, genes, and DNA to the point of being able to manipulate the human body according to their will (not God's will) whether for good or ill. (Perhaps we can go into this more in detail in a future article.)

Vaccines have originally and traditionally been understood to act somewhat in this manner. First, the origin of any specific disease was studied, and the responsible organism or micro-organism was discovered. Second, lab technicians or some other professionals would take the causative agent (virus or bacteria) and work with it to develop a weakened form. Third, they would assemble this weakened form into a controlled dosage amount containing a limited number

...continued on page 29

Gossip

Barry Grant
Titanyen, Haiti

The Bible calls all of God's people to grow. We are constantly being changed and perfected into the image of Jesus Christ. We do not all grow together, and we do not all grow in the same way or at the same speed, but as a true Christian, continued growth is essential. Grow we must!

If we are not growing, we are, at best, dying. The world has pushed for a system that expects everyone to be happy just how they are. Even in many churches of our day, it is only expected to accept everyone exactly how they are. It is considered unkind to expect people to change. This type of thinking is heresy and will lead to certain apostasy.

I was once working with a man that professed to be a Christian. However, he had a raging temper. One day he got very angry, cursing, and yelling. I stopped him and calmly told him that this behavior is not acceptable in the Christian's life. He angrily told me it's how his grandfather was, and how his father is, and how he would always be—there would be no changing. I explained to him that unless he changed this ugly pattern, it would be how his son would be, and possibly generations to come. Let us not forget that ... *with God all things are possible* –Matthew 19:26. And not only is it good to be changing, but it is a must!

The reason that I am talking about change is simply to lead us to a topic all too common among us, a topic that many just accept as normal... gossip.

If we read through our bibles, there are many verses that address this topic. *A talebearer revealeth secrets: but he that is*

*A talebearer
revealeth secrets:
but he that is of
a faithful spirit
concealeth the
matter.*

Proverbs 11:13

of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter –Proverbs 11:13.

I'm sure there are very few people who would say gossip is good. So why is there so much of it among us? It is because it is natural. It is natural for one to desire to go and tell things to others, even if we are not sure if it is true. For example, if my

children and I take a walk and we see something impressive, instantly the children are excited to go home and "tell mommy". They each want to be the one to tell her. The closer we get to the house, the quicker they begin to walk. Soon there is a mad dash for the house and the first one in the door blurts out the news without tact or discretion. Then the ones that did not get to "tell mommy the news" are disappointed.

If it is natural to be a tale bearer, why must we be careful? Because the Bible says it will cause strife among us. It is also natural to lie, cheat, and steal.

The definition of a tale bearer is, *one who runs from house to house tattling and telling news, an idle tattler.*

So, because it is natural for us to gossip, it will take effort on our part to **not** gossip. It will take work; we will gossip unless we purposefully avoid it.

Below is a list of some ideas that could help us avoid being a talebearer or spreading gossip. As we go through these points, let's remember that if we want to change, we must first have a desire to change.

1. Be slow to speak.

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath –James 1:19. What does it mean to be slow to speak? Does it mean to speak less or does it . . . mean . . . to . . . talk . . . slowly?

There was a time in my life that I tried my hand at driving truck to earn an income. On my first day driving I was a bit nervous. I was approaching the city of Cincinnati and got off the interstate... on the wrong exit. This would not have been a big problem if I could have just gotten back on the interstate, but I could not, and there was no turning back.

So, I wiggled my 53-foot trailer around the cobblestone streets of that little Cincinnati suburb. I very much regretted taking the wrong exit. After crushing some trash cans and clipping a few trees I vowed to never do it again. *From now on I will be 'slow to exit'*, I thought to myself.

Because I never wanted to make that mistake again, I needed a

plan. I began double and triple checking everything before the exit. I was extremely careful. I would look at the GPS, it would say the exit number, the road number and the city that exit would lead me to. The next exit I needed was exit 116 for I-75 N, Dayton. When I approached the exit, I verified what the signs said, first the exit number, 116, then the road number and the city. Only after everything lined up did I exit. If the signs would have verified everything but instead of Dayton it said Cincinnati, I would not exit, since not everything lined up. I never missed the right exit after that day. Now, did I exit less? Well yes, and no. Being 'slow to exit' did keep me from exiting unnecessarily, but I did not exit less than was necessary.

When we speak, we must remember that once words leave our lips, they can never be taken back. Maybe we can try to change what we say, but the words we speak are there for eternity.

When we are called to be slow to speak, it means that we need to carefully consider everything we say... before we say it. This may result in less speaking and more thinking. *Will what I say hurt someone? Is what I am about to say true? Is it profitable? Will it draw attention to myself?* If we follow this plan, then we will not be constantly regretting the things that we say.

2. Do not assume anything.

We have probably all been in a situation where an account we had previously shared with others comes back to us, but the details are much construed.

When we are telling someone about an account that we heard, there are often details that we do not know. It is common for us to assume things and then act as if they are facts. For example, someone might say "did you hear that Jack's grandfather passed away?"

"No, was it from Covid?"

"I assume so."

The next day the story quickly is told, "did you hear that Jack's grandfather died from Covid?" And just like that the rumor mill is started. If the first person would have responded with a simple, "I don't know" then it could have changed everything. Often when we assume things, the truth is smeared, and people get hurt.

When we hear about a teenager being involved in an accident, we may say "he was probably drinking," or if someone loses their job, we may assume "it was because of his temper." The list goes on and on, but remember, assuming things is usually what starts a long line of rumors that is not easily corrected. If we don't know something, it is ok to say so! Which brings us to our next point.



3. Do not think you must know everything.

I have marveled at how in Genesis 45 Jacob hears that his son Joseph is yet alive. After many years of thinking that animals mauled his beloved son, the very sons that told him the original story now have a completely different report—he is yet alive! After he confirms this, he does not try to figure out what happened on the day that his sons returned with the coat of many colors—all torn and bloody. It was almost as though he knew it would not benefit the situation, so he decided that he *did not need to know*. I imagine that I would be calling for a meeting ASAP, trying to find out the details of these new circumstances. There are times that we think we must know something, now! But if we just stop and think, do we really need to know? Maybe we could greatly simplify our lives by not requiring that we know everything. Not that many years ago (before the internet and cell phones) people only knew what was in their own small world, now with all the technology of our day, we can know almost anything that we want to. But does it really benefit us?

We live in a world that thinks it needs to know everything; newspapers tell us things that mean nothing at all to us. Not only do we continue to waste our time reading about it, but we also then think that we must share this useless information with everyone else we know. In a time where most Christians agree the end is near, we could spend our time encouraging one another. We could be talking about the scriptures or discussing the sermon from the past Sunday. When we think we must tell everyone everything about everyone else or ourselves, it creates the perfect platform for gossip. Before saying something, ask yourself the question, “Do people need to know this information?”

This is the main reason that social media has become so popular—a young man decided to create a social media website on which people from all over the world could gossip, one with another. People could talk about all kinds of useless information. He became the richest man in the world. He had found exactly what people wanted, a platform to gossip about others and boast about themselves. Now we can easily discover anything about anyone!

It’s no wonder that we are not as spiritual as we desire to be. Often if we would direct our speech away from ourselves, and onto more important matters, our conversations would be more fulfilling. Remember this, if you do not need to know something, do not worry about it, (most times we only want to know, so we can tell others.) Then we can put down our devices and pick up our Bibles.

4. Correct idle talk.

Something that has been very helpful for me, is apologizing to people when I find myself talking out of place. This has a lasting

impression on how we talk in the future. If we know that we can say whatever we want and yes, we may regret it later, but life goes on, then we will not likely change. However, if we make it a point to call back a neighbor and apologize for some foolish jesting, we will be more careful in the future. In any case, making our wrongs right helps keep us accountable to ourselves.

Usually when I call people back and say that I should not have been talking as I was, they usually say they did not think anything of it, and that is probably true. But it’s not always just about what others think. If we feel God convicting us of some error in our speech, we must make it right. Because foolish talk is accepted in our day, it’s easy to get sucked in and it does not seem wrong. I wonder how our talk today would have fit in 500 years ago. If our conscience is working properly, we will feel convicted when we talk idly. Then to keep our conscience working properly we must respond to the Holy Spirit’s call to repent. When we ignore this call, we soon stop hearing it, we can say whatever we want, and nothing will bother us.

Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell –James 3:5-6.

I challenge all who read this article to join me in putting forth a valiant effort to watch how we talk, to try to make a point to make each word count, to be slow to speak, to not assume anything, to not think we must know everything, and finally, to be quick to correct any gossip shared by us or others. I believe this will help us to point the next generation in the right direction and to show those around us that we truly are of another Kingdom.

*While pursuing things, not found on earth
One could certainly find, a brand new birth.
The things of earth, do fade away.
And make for a certain, brand new day.
Concern for self, pleasure and toy.
Is replaced by peace, love and joy.
Does it make sense to only live for today?
And forget about forever, and the narrow way?
For what is your life, the disciples say?
But only a vapor, that vanishes away!
Can wisdom speak, and give its defense?
Forgetting our lives is all that makes sense!
For eternity awaits, not to some but all.
Don’t trade for that life, this life so small!
Come unto me, the great Master speaks.
And all will find rest, yes each who seeks!*



A Shot Across the Bow

Edward Martin
Glenmont, OH

“A shot across the bow” is a secular term that originated with the British Navy in the 1700’s. Ships are identified by their ‘colors’ (flags) which represent a vessel’s purpose and nationality. In the days before radio, if a ship wasn’t flying its colors, other ships, especially in times of war, would fire a ‘warning’ shot across the bow in order to prompt the offending ship to confirm their identity by raising their flag.

Sending a *shot across the bow* was introduced at a time when the British navy ruled the seas and wars were fought, not just on land, but also from the decks of ships. The idea of *the shot across the bow* was not to actually hit the ship, but to send a cannon ball near enough to get their attention and let them know that a further escalation of force was imminent if they did not respond satisfactorily.

The Anabaptist church¹ of America has lived in relative peace, suffering no real persecution for its faith since WWI. During the first world war, about 150 American Mennonite young men were court-martialed and imprisoned for refusing military orders. Also, two Mennonite church leaders, Samuel H. Miller of Ohio, and Lewis J. Heatwole of Virginia were tried and convicted under the Sedition Act. Facing this type of pressure, many young Mennonite men gave up their faith and joined the army, including around 2,000 Mennonites in Germany.²

Sure, there have been instances since then when individuals or even whole congregations were put to the test for their faith. These situations have been rare and localized, yet even during these times of testing those believers were able to continue living in reasonable comfort.

The church of America and specifically the congregations of the plain people (Amish, Mennonites, etc.) have been able to go about their daily life, while living in ease and prosperity. They have been able to freely go to church on Sunday, decide what standard of life they would maintain, and where they would build their communities and raise their families. The Anabaptist churches of America have been in control of their lifestyles.

This all changed for some families and some churches in October of 2021, when God allowed Satan to fire a *shot*

across the bow of the church. Satan seemingly has signaled that going forward he is ready for more serious battle. It is almost as though he is demanding that the Anabaptist church show its real colors.

On October 16, 2021, missionaries in Haiti, sixteen American and one Canadian, were taken hostage by a criminal gang, who then demanded a ransom for their release. Shockwaves reverberated throughout the Anabaptist community. For decades, this kind of activity has been experienced by churches in other parts of the world such as Africa, Asia, and in various Communist countries—“but not in America”. Now, however, the churches are facing a new reality—their loved ones no longer possess “guaranteed” safety in foreign countries simply because they are American citizens.

Dear church, the battle line is being drawn. The devil knows his time is short (see Revelation 12:12). Satan and his minions are in full battle array, but the church... not so much. It appears the church hardly remembers its purpose here on earth. The armor of God gets in the way when one wants to strive for prosperity and ease of living. Nonetheless, the battle line is drawn whether the church is prepared or not. Although the most recent, this kidnapping is not the only warning sign around us that should awaken the church out of its slumber. Let’s look at some other situations that demand our attention.

The following list is provided in summary form only. Each point could be made into its own lengthy article, but for the sake of time and space we will simply list them to stimulate each believer to consider and research for themselves.

1. The authoritarian approach of containing Covid-19

During the initial surges of Covid-19 infections in the spring and summer of 2020, many countries shut down most public interactions for a time. Many governments also shut down places of worship and in extreme cases some have even forbidden believers from singing together.

Many churches tried to find their way on a fine line between the separation of church and state and submitting

themselves to the civil authorities out of respect. However, basically everything about the various mandates had an undermining effect on that which is essential for the health of the believer—fellowship with other believers, corporate worship, corporate prayer, and corporate singing. Not to mention all the one-anothering commands in God’s Word—pray for one another, exhort one another, confess your faults one to another, bear ye one another’s burdens, and the list goes on.

The foundation of this all is that God designed us to “need” one another, and to interact “face-to-face” and “in-person”. Virtual worship and trying to fellowship behind a mask will eventually lead to spiritual death. In the past, mask-wearing was usually associated with hiding one’s identity when committing a crime, such as robbing a bank. If we look back through history using this thinking, we see it again and again, a mask was primarily used “to hide” one’s face or identity from those who they met.

How would God have His people respond to these types of mandates? Perhaps, for a very brief time (several weeks) it could be beneficial to wear a mask during worship; but long-term, I don’t think so. When we are interacting with the public our witness for God might shine more brightly if we would be sensitive regarding others when it comes to mask wearing and social distancing. If we are trying to be a witness for Christ, yet the whole time we are interacting, the other person is extremely offended that we are not being more careful, then they probably will not receive a thing we have said about our faith.

2. The transgender movement

The transgender movement is destroying the fabric of morality in America. For years there has been a push by some to influence the society in America to accept immorality and equality between men and women. To counteract this push, in the late 1840s and the 1850s, numerous laws were passed forbidding the public act of cross-dressing. How far has society been influenced? In 2016, Target, the second largest retailer in America, created a new company policy that now allows transgender people to use the bathroom of their choice in its stores. Are we, the people of God, going to take our children into a Target bathroom, full well knowing they may see someone of the opposite gender perhaps partially undressed in what normally would be a private place?

3. The advent of social media

Social media allows people to communicate instantly across large communities or networks of people, digitally. This has caught the church completely unprepared. Social

media has changed the fabric of America and the world. It has been the main force causing the divisiveness and hatred we are seeing all around us in the public. In a moment of anger, a person can send a forceful message to thousands of people saying things they never would say in person.

In the same manner, using social media, an erring young person can plant a seed of discord in the hearts of many people at once. This may be by bitter words, a suggestive picture, or an edgy song. The destruction of social media is greater than we can imagine. According to some on-line accounts, the founders of the largest social media corporations will not allow their own children to use social media. This should raise concern and caution, yet the church carelessly turns its head the other way.

4. Degradation of law and order

There has been a big push in the recent years by some liberal politicians and organizations to defund the police and even to decriminalize crime. Some cities are no longer requiring monetary bail for lawbreakers to bail out of jail. Others are not arresting shoplifters. The results are coming in; many major cities have the highest crime rates in decades, looting and rioting is commonplace in some areas, and several cities have precincts that have depreciated into complete anarchy.

This may seem like it’s not affecting us directly, but the spirit of lawlessness is creeping into our churches. Members are openly questioning the ongoing value of long-held practices. From the most conservative to the most progressive, individuals and families alike are fleeing to less-restricting churches, while some are leaving the faith completely. *This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come –2 Timothy 3:1.*

5. Pornography

Pornography used to be found in magazines, in brown paper wrappers, hidden behind the counters of certain stores. Today it is easily accessible on any digital device, from the simple flip phone, to the smart phone, to the work computer, and even some word processors. Many churches are dull to this fact. Many church leaders have no idea what their young people are doing in the area of digital technology.

These are only five of the warning signs of a spiritual war looming on our horizon. There are more that could be added to this list. The strength of these attacks by the enemy of our souls are such that the church has not experienced in decades. But for many local congregations the outlook for the church is dim—she is completely unprepared, her guards are down, the armor is off, and the sword is dull and

unsharpened. Her young people know how to make and spend money, how to have a good time, and how to live for the moment. They are inexperienced in battle and have little to no experience in the area of suffering. If it takes the lengthy captivity of seventeen men, women, and children to wake the church up, to God be the glory!

So where does this take us? The church needs to join the New Testament Jews who after Peter's Pentecostal sermon asked, *...Men and brethren, what shall we do?* –Acts 2:37. We need to...

...Turn to biblical repentance.

Throughout the ages when the people of God turned in genuine repentance God moved. *If my people, which are called by my name [this includes the Anabaptist church], shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways [covetousness, worldliness, immorality, idolatry, pride, etc.]; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land* –2 Chronicles 7:14.

...Become preachers of righteousness.

For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent... –Romans 10:13-15.

Preaching the gospel was the hallmark of the early church. It was the reason for their existence; the purpose to which they were commissioned in the first place. Likewise, the early Anabaptists were fiery preachers in the public marketplace even though they knew it would likely cost them dearly, possibly even their very lives. Yet that did not stop them.

The spiritual war is real. We know which army will be triumphant. Why would we not recruit soldiers for the winning side? The rest will burn in hell.

...Make disciples of all people.

The present-day Anabaptist churches are good at making disciples from their own. They focus on their young people to keep them within the church. That is not wrong, in fact it is a necessary function of the church. But in His commission in Matthew 28:19-20 Jesus said to make disciples of *all* nations. This kind of discipleship is not commonplace in the Anabaptist church today. Proof of this can be found by looking through our church directories. Most surnames are of Mennonite and Amish familiarity and have been for centuries. Where is our burden? What is our passion?

We need to give credit to those who are reaching out to

their neighbors and going to far-away lands. Obviously, this is happening or there would not have been seventeen missionaries to kidnap. Yet in most places only a few serve in these capacities while most of the church goes about business as normal. The church needs to honestly evaluate if they are doing all that God would have them do, whether at home or abroad, whether through giving or going, whether by praying or by serving, whether by discipling or by evangelizing—each member has Spirit-given gifting to persevere in God-ordained responsibilities. Let us each be faithful in these, the last times.

...Make a clear separation from the world.

The early Anabaptists, as well as the early Christians, strongly eschewed worldliness. Irenaeus, a church leader around the year 180 A.D. wrote, "Christ has not merely related to us a story about a poor man and a rich one. Rather, He has taught us some things: In the first place, He taught that no one should lead a luxurious life. No one should live in worldly pleasure and perpetual feasting. No one should be a slave of his lusts and forget God."³

Conclusion

So, my dear brothers and sisters, the shot has been fired across the bow. The battle line is drawn. Which flag are you going to raise? Will it be the white flag of surrender acknowledging defeat? Or will it be the banner of Jesus Christ, the Captain of the armies of the Lord? To each person who claims to be a part of the church of Jesus Christ, you have been bought with a price, the end is near, and the enemy of our souls is as determined as ever to cause you to lose out. Let us each be honest with ourselves and God. Which side are we on? What decisions are we needing to make to get on the winning side? What decisions are we needing to make to stay on the winning side? May God help each of us; *...he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved* –Matthew 24:13.

Endnotes:

- 1 The term "Anabaptist church in America" is used throughout the article to denote the various congregations, conferences, and denominations who adhere to the teachings of Jesus and the apostles in the New Testament and were reaffirmed in faith and practice by the Anabaptist reformers of the 1500's.
- 2 Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online/World War (1914-1918)
- 3 Ante Nicene Fathers 1.464

God in the Cloud

Lee Rufener
Athens, WI

*...behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud –
Exodus 16:10*

What a strange phenomenon is this concentrated mass of vapor that navigates the sky above us. In one instance, a cloud can minister such immense blessedness and hope, while in another it can be the instigator of nagging dubiety and even the arousal of ragged fear. Clouds were often, no doubt, the welcome shade to the heads of weary fishermen upon Galilee and the propagator of hope to the toiling farmer. How often they part at mid-day to allow the sun's beaming rays to reach the earth and at evening provide the opaque structure for the exquisite beauty of a silver lineation.

We may marvel to see an airplane weighing over 700,000 pounds mount up with wings and soar through the heavens. Yet a cloud can carry millions of tons of water without any of the dynamics of intervention at all. They are formed when moist, warm air rises to a cooler elevation and water condenses onto microscopic "seeds" such as dust, ash, or bacteria. If there's more water vapor than places for it to condense, ice crystals can also serve as seeds and take on moisture. But they may become too heavy for the updrafts to support, then behold, it is time for the umbrella. *He bindeth up the waters in his thick clouds; and the cloud is not rent under them –Job 26:8.*

To the parched land in Elijah's day, the smallest of clouds (...like a man's hand... –1 Kings 18:44) was the answer from the Almighty that He was again prepared to bless His people with rain. Yet, to others like Job and Jeremiah, the cloud represented the ultimate emblem of doubt, despair, and discouragement. *Terrors are turned upon me: they pursue my soul as the wind: and my welfare passeth away as a cloud –Job 30:15.* And, *Thou hast covered thyself*

with a cloud, that our prayer should not pass through – Lamentations 3:44.

It is often in such stressful conditions that God chooses to hide Himself in a cloud. At these times, we grope through the thick foreboding fog in search of the pathway of light, but we find it not. In our discouragement, we may long for the beam of a cloudless day, but it eludes us. We know that God is in the midst of the mist, but we cannot apprehend Him nor see His blessedness. *With clouds he covereth the light; and commandeth it not to shine by the cloud that cometh betwixt –Job 36:32.*

Why would our God, who loves to commune with the vessels of His own creation, choose to hide Himself in a cloud? Why does He often hide His will from our searching and aching hearts? Our finite minds often wonder what glory could possibly arise from a distant God, and to what purpose is this waste? While we would never expect it to be God's divine plan to leave us in a foggy stupor forever, it may be His will for a time. Like a stroll through the valley of the shadow of death, there can be eternal character wrought in the soul who has experienced a seasonal lack of clarity in their path. We are well aware that *...the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day –Proverbs 4:18.* Still, most of us have, at times, experienced the hopeless fog that surrounds our present and future.

In these times we *...meet with darkness in the daytime, and grope in the noonday as in the night –Job 5:14.* In our bedraggled discouragement, we can easily lose sight of the goodness of God. Our resulting lack of thankfulness is a sure road to a host of other temptations, while the

giant of despair rises overhead in an attempt to weaken our resistance to sin.

We know that *Elias [Elijah] was a man subject to like passions as we are... –James 5:17*. Few of us have ever experienced a victory as exhilarating as when he triumphed over the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. But many of us can well relate to the discouragement that followed as he came unto Horeb and lodged in a cave there.

This is the same place as the Mount Sinai where the first great mountain scene opens before us in the Scriptures. Then it was Moses who met God in the cloud. The law was given, and God's glory was so marvelously manifest and *...so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake –Hebrews 12:21*. This mount that might be touched was a formidable and intimidating mountain flanked by dark granite "stern, naked, splintered peaks and ridges of indescribable grandeur, and it is germinated by the bold and awful front of Horeb, rising in frowning majesty from twelve hundred to fifteen hundred feet in perpendicular height."

With his vision clouded over and his spirit ebbing away at an all-time low, Elijah heard from God in astounding methodology. *...And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake: And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out... –1 Kings 19:11-13*.

Somehow, we have come to believe that an earthshaking experience is the epitome of God's manifest presence. We reckon that God was closer to Elijah on Mt. Carmel than on Mt. Horeb. It was Elijah's day in the sun while speaking on Mt. Carmel. He chided the people and mocked the prophets. He preached boldly in the name of the Lord and commanded the people to repent of their duplicity. But now his voice has been silenced and he is listening... listening to the still small voice calling into account his own actions and ambitions. Thus, if we will but stop and listen, it is more likely that our dismal failures will escort us to the front porch of our Lord than our successes ever will.

This is the blessed ministration of the cloud. It is often the vehicle that the Lord will use to bring us to the place where we can truly receive His manifest glory in our hearts. This is not the white fluffy cumulus clouds of a balmy summer day, but rather, the flat and featureless stratus clouds that blanket the heavens from east to west and totally eclipse all

rays of heavenly sunshine. They can enshroud the day at full noon with an arsenal of gloom that rankles our hearts to the core. The little things that on other days had little effect on our attitudes now seem to tower as giants before us. We may face advents that we know are beyond our control, but our minds refuse to enter into rest. In times like these, if there happens to be an unfortunate soul on the other end of our conversation experiencing a similar plight, we may experience firsthand that *...man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward –Job 5:7*. At other times, our melancholy mood may be content to withdraw and feed itself with our own reclusive pity and foggy misery.

Some, in their desperation, turn to medication for the mind (psych meds) and there find a limited valve of relief. But God has not brought us into the cloud so that we may seek the help of physicians and psychologists. The ministration of the cloud is to shut off all other alternatives so that we may receive of Him the full blessedness of His consolation. God is willing that we should sacrifice the shimmering sunshine of today for the fullness of His presence tomorrow.

Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away –James 4:14. In bygone years, I have preached on this verse, exhorting souls concerning the brevity of life and encouraging them to not squander their years away. But I had totally ignored the foundation of it. *Ye know not what shall be on the morrow...* This, perhaps, seems trite to the young at heart, but as the fruit of my age continues to ripen, I have a growing appreciation for the common and obvious idioms. Our modern scientific world is so adamantly pursuing the love of life that it cannot appreciate the life of love that is begotten through suffering. While those in ages past who have *suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; –1 Peter 4:1*, I see no reason why those who experience the frail sufferings of the clouded mind may not share the same glory if we will but endure and trust to God the results.

We are an arrogant people who lean on the earthly predictions of tomorrow. We fancy that we can plan our retirement and schedule our life's events with immaculate detail. The weather forecasters inform us in what climate we will be dwelling. Our insurance gives assurance that we will not be subject to future poverty. Our freezers and bank accounts are full enough to see us well past tomorrow, and we have grown accustomed to believing that we *... sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow –Revelation 18:7*. But the sorrow of heart cannot be so easily absolved by earthly amenities.

Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a

little time, and then vanisheth away –James 4:14. Our life is a vapour (cloud) because we know not what shall be on the morrow. Amidst all our technology we cannot absolve that fact. It is here that we must lay aside all our intuitions, expectations, and ambitions of what our life ought to be and find our God in the cloud.

He holdeth back the face of his throne, and spreadeth his cloud upon it –Job 26:9. To what benefit is the cloud cover over the face of God’s throne? If it were easily beholden, most of us would be content to dwell with Him from afar. But because of the impending fog, we must draw nigh to experience His fulness. How thankful we ought to be that it is so, for how devastating would be our spiritual loss if it were not. If our self-sufficient life were always vibrantly full and God were easily apprehended, we would lose...

...Faith

Guarantee that our trials will end happily ever after, and our prayers will naturally go numb. In faith, we believe in God’s provision, but the fact that we know not what a day will bring forth demands that we fall upon our feeble knees and pray. There may be many things that make it hard for us to trust in God, but the shrouded tomorrow makes it easier. Researchers have spent millions in their efforts to control the weather. They have sown every imaginable cloud seed into the air, in efforts to produce rain clouds. After reviewing 40 years of cloud-seeding efforts in an area north of Israel, researchers at Tel Aviv University have concluded that cloud seeding doesn’t actually produce any additional precipitation. How thankful we should be. The more we can control the unknown morrow, the less faith in the Master of the Universe we need.

Jacob, in leaving behind an angry brother, a disappointed father, and a severed tie with his mother, faced an altogether unknown future. This is a part of the ladder to the throne, and it fortifies our commitment to our omnipotent God. Now we know in part and see in part, and perhaps that fractional sliver brings us more inner wealth than if the whole were fully understood. If our future were amply within our manipulative power, we would formulate a perfect utopia supplied with the perfect number of children living sumptuously in the perfect home supported by the perfect job surrounded by perfect behavior that is perfectly sterile and dead.

...Hope

I question if we realize how deeply our debt is to the unexpected. The Hebrew writer declares our hope to be ... *an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast... –Hebrews 6:19.* Children are happy because they have big dreams.

Often the anticipation and planning of an event is almost as enjoyable as the excursion itself. Every day is a bright new window to the unspoiled hopeful mind. Experiences can often bring us to the brink of cynicism and bitterness when viewed through yesterday’s disappointments. Jacob, upon the marvelous reunification with his son, Joseph, still remarked ...*few and evil have the days of the years of my life been... –Genesis 47:9.* Though this may seem natural, it needs not so to be. Paul states that ...*tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: –Romans 5:3-4.* Surely, if we knew what was in store tomorrow (both good and evil) the invigorating element of hope would dwindle. Eve feigned that life would be better if she could only secure more knowledge. But what blessed hope was forfeited in her lustful pursuit of clarity.

...Love

There is a wistful tenderness in true love that nothing but uncertainty can give. It is uncertain wonder that encompasses the way of a young man with a maid. The unknown perils of tomorrow drive a mother to love and prayer for her children. It is the vision of a bright tomorrow for his family that moves a father to diligence in his daily work. Wherever husband and wife are knit together in the heavenly sacrament of wedded hearts, the mystery that enfolds tomorrow is like the minor chord in a great melody. It speaks in joy of a suggested sorrow and brightens sorrow with encircling joy. Would Jacob’s seven-year wait have seemed like a few days if he had known what the morrow would bring? If we knew everything, love would be too hard. If we knew everything, love would be too easy. If we knew everything, we would be brokenhearted. If we knew everything, we would be unconcerned. In other words, it makes us stronger not to know the worst. It makes us more tender not to know the best. For in our clouded and darkened lens there ...*abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity –1 Corinthians 13:13.*

It is no coincidence that while the disciples ...*beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight –Acts 1:9.* And so we dare not be surprised that, at times, we shall be called on to suffer the mental strain and stress of an obscure and unknown morrow. *Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away –James 4:14.* There is a coming day when we shall see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power.



A Ministry to Parents of Lost Children

A sermon preached by Dale Heisey in Huaral, Peru

Transcribed and abridged by Regina Martin of Huaral, Peru

God's will is for beautiful homes, where children are brought to God. We find this in both testaments of the Bible. But sometimes things go wrong in our homes. Let's explore some of those things.

Sometimes parents come to the church with grown children. So the parents are joining the church, but the children are already here, there, and the other place.

Some parents come to the church with their children and send them to a Christian school, but one parent goes astray. The other parent tries to bring the children up, but the gate is left open and one by one the children leave. Can we blame those children and call them rebellious when parents gave them such an example? All rebellious children are lost, but not all lost children are rebellious.

Sometimes families harbor resentment and roots of bitterness as a result of church problems or some other negative life experience. Maybe one of the parents or the children have a bitter root and cannot find healing or restoration, so the gate is left open.

Sometimes there are failures in the home, as it was in our case—failures in my own life.

In some homes the husband mistreats the wife. He may be an excellent speaker at church and can give an eloquent devotional but is a tyrant at home, yelling at the children, or demeaning his wife. His life is not in accordance with his words over the pulpit and his prayers at home. Can we blame the youth who are lost from this kind of home?

Sometimes bad influences lead to wrong decisions—either in the life of the parent or the child. Whatever the case, sheep are lost, and someone needs to find them.

I want to help and bless parents whose hearts are heavy with a son or daughter who has strayed away from the fold. I am also a parent of a lost child, so I will not be throwing stones at anyone but rather talking about myself, and to myself. It is hard to open our hearts about subjects that hurt, subjects that weigh on us heavily, subjects hard to talk about, so I want to share with much compassion and hope.

I am sharing not only for parents of lost children, but also to parents who may someday have lost children. Tomorrow something may happen that you have not experienced heretofore. God forbid, but if that happens, perhaps these words will help you. I also am speaking to those who God wants to use to bring back the lost sheep.

Christ spoke much of searching, finding, and bringing the lost back to the fold. In the following verses we'll see His heart in the matter.

- *These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel –Matthew 10:5-6. Seek and bring the lost sheep! They were once part of the fold; they belong here. They are lost sheep, not goats. Jesus says, seek there first.*
- *But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel –Matthew 15:24.*
- *How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray? –Matthew 18:12.*
- *For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost –Luke 19:10.*
- *While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled –John 17:12. Father, Mother, your child is not a son of perdition, but a sheep Christ is searching for. Keep this clear in your mind. As we are seeking the lost Christ is interceding and fighting for us; He does not want to lose any soul.*
- *That the saying might be fulfilled, which he spake, Of them which thou gavest me have I lost none –John 18:9.*

Any godly parent is conscious of the devastating possibility that someday, in their home, a child could go astray. Job was very conscious of this possibility with his ten children.



And day after day, Job, with this preoccupation, went to the altar and offered sacrifices to the Lord in case something evil had entered his children's hearts—some temptation, a failure. He wanted to make sure his prayers were continually ascending to God on their behalf because he did not know what they were facing, and he was conscious of the tragedies that could happen. Job was concerned, but Eli was not.

A prophet came to talk to Eli about his sons. "Eli, your sons..."

"Oh yes, it's true..."

"Eli, wake up! Eli!"

Yet Eli spoke mildly to his sons. "Sons, it's no good thing that I hear about you..."

No concern. No heavy heart. No tears; no zeal.

Indulgent parents suffer loss. *The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame*—Proverbs 29:15. This is a principle, showing what the rod, accompanied with correction and admonition, will produce in your child's life. It also shows what will result from indulgence and loose reins—do it if you wish, go ahead, it's your life—that child will bring shame to his parents. We cannot change this biblical principle: indulgence makes children go astray.

David experienced this: *And his father had not displeased him at any time in saying, Why hast thou done so? and he also was a very goodly man; and his mother bare him after Absalom*—1 Kings 1:6. This resulted in a lost child who never



THE PRODIGAL SON

returned to the fold. David mourned the loss of Absalom.

Abraham's son Ishmael mocked his other son Isaac; this was painful for him. Rebecca's heart was afflicted because of Esau's poor choices, and she did not want Jacob to follow the same way. Parents like Rebecca, David, and Abraham understand a parent's pain. I also understand.

The ministry to the lost sheep is not only for parents; the whole church needs to be involved. No one should be pointing fingers at parents of lost children as if they're inferior. This is a ministry for all of us, and they need our help for their heavy load. They need to feel the blessing and intercession of all of us. They need to hear their child prayed for at prayer meeting; they need encouraging notes

and words. You should be telling them things like, "This week I saw your son in town and spoke with him a bit and I just wanted to tell you, there's hope. Take courage; let's keep pressing on!" It is hard to have a lost child; it is harder yet if the church is not supporting, understanding, praying, and seeking with us. We need your help, brethren.

First, what does God want me to learn from this experience? The first thing we need to do is look at our relationship with our spouse. Do our children see affection, support, and agreement in our relationship? Is your spouse the joy of your life, the crown of your head? In many cases of lost children, there are marriage problems. I should focus on restoring relationships here. I should ask my wife, "Am I causing grief in your life? If you could change anything in my life, what would it be?"

Children will catch on when our relationship improves.

Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them –Matthew 18:19-20. Parents, this applies to you as a couple, interceding for your child.

Does your home have a court? Football is played in a ball court. At each end of the ball court is a goal, and that goal does not have elastic borders. If you go outside, someone will blow a whistle and maybe even toss you a card. The game is played inside the ball court, and our home is the same. If your home is without limits and definition, if your child does not know when they are outside and when they are inside, you will likely lose children. Any home without defined order will not see a lost child returning. Ask Eli if you doubt what I'm saying. This is not the time to give up; it is the time to surrender. What does God want, to do in my life? Saying I can't, or I give up, is not surrender. We need to say "Lord, let me humble myself and bow in your presence, here I am what do You want to do in my life?" This is surrender.

Parents often respond wrongly: "The problem was the church, so I'll leave." I'm sorry, but the problem is not there. You'll load up your washer, your dog, and... yourself. When you unload at the new place, you will still be there, without change, without opening yourself, without surrender. Moving to another country or sending your child to another country so that no one will find out the shame is not a solution; your child will find out why you sent them away.

But perhaps the church agrees it would be better for you to move, and that is another story. There was a national family in Costa Rica with nine children whose children were going astray one by one. The Dad came to the church asking what to do and the counsel was that they move their family to one of our churches. Their children began returning one by one. The last one who returned is their oldest daughter who was out of the church for twenty years. She returned with two children, divorced from her husband. Today she is a jewel in the church. Brethren, there is hope! This is not the time to give up, to compare, to lay down with all four paws in the air. It is time to humble ourselves and surrender.

Some parents defend their lost children. "It was the pastor, the schoolteacher, the school board." "They were always picking on his faults." "Others took advantage of my child." "They didn't understand the situation." This is not the way to win your child back. God is working in your life, so humble yourself. Others make mistakes. You cannot change them; you can only change yourself.

We will not win our children by giving them whatever they want. This removes the ball court, the order. This will drive them

further from home; this is not instructing children in 'the way'.

Some parents do something worse than all this, they reject their lost children. Why? They feel shame. My wife normally takes a photo album along when we travel—photos of where we live, and photos of our children. There is one page that I almost wish no one would see; one picture which looks different than the rest. But I admire that my wife, Suzanne, without shame, opens the photo album and shows it. When I only have shame of where my children and grandchildren are, I am hindering God's work in their lives, and it is time for me to humble myself because no child is restored with that attitude in the parent. If the child feels shame from the parent, the distance between them will grow.

David rejected Absalom. When Joab got permission for Absalom to return to the city, David granted permission, but said let him go home, I don't want to see him. That was the last chance David had to reject his son. After that we see the forest, the great tree, the hair caught in the branches, the mule going on, and the young man hanging there with three arrows in his heart. Absalom died and David suffered. He rejected his son when he had the chance to hug him, forgive him, and bring him home.

These processes are not accidents. If we are ashamed of our son or daughter, then we are trying to save ourselves when our job is to save our child. Trying to save my own reputation doesn't work.

My response to hard situations in my family must be, "Lord, what can I learn from this; what do you see in my life? Am I the cause? How did I contribute to my child's decision and to where he is now?" "Brethren, how did I contribute to this wrong choice of my child?" My purpose must be to save my child, not to protect myself.

I should maintain respect for my child even if he is living in a wrong way. I should talk about him in such a way that if someday he would hear me talking about him, he would say, "You mean Daddy talked about me like that? Daddy was talking with respect and honor about me?" It is impossible to hide the attitude we have towards our children. If our words are full of blessing and appreciation, a child will pick up on that. Pour healing oil on the words you speak about your lost child. But we also need to tell the brethren the facts of what we are facing with this lost child so that everyone can 'dial 911', figuratively speaking.

Every brotherhood should be interceding for and encouraging parents of the lost. These homes should not feel like failures because outstanding children with much promise have come from the same homes, the same parents. Yes, there are needs, there are areas in which the parents should improve, but the home is not a failure.

When Christ left this earth, he promised to send a paraclete (advocate/counselor/comforter) to his children. The paraclete is similar to a lawyer in a court in defense of the condemned, to make sure that help is available. The church should be this paraclete. We are not here to pull out ‘guns loaded with bullets’ and fire them at the parents of lost children. Rather, we need to heal and encourage.

Parents, be careful how you talk about your church leaders and about the agreements the church has decided on. If we are discontent, our child will likely catch on, and our discontentment may be one reason why they are where they are. How is my commitment to the church? Am I on the edge, or in the middle of the warmth and fellowship of the brotherhood?

And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse –Malachi 4:6.

This verse contains an important secret. No matter how hard a parent tries to pull a lost son toward himself, it doesn’t work. No matter how much we criticize the church, the preachers, or the school, it doesn’t work. I have some counsel for you. Examine your attitudes toward your parents and the other authorities in your life, and your relationships with them. Very likely if things are broken there, they will be broken between you and your child. If there are problems between you and your child, the problem likely began between you and your authorities. You can change. Get on your knees and ask God for the opportunity to establish a new relationship with whichever authority figure you are struggling. While that relationship is getting fixed and is growing, the heart of the child begins to change and turn. This can happen even while the child is still in a ‘far-off country’.

Ask God to give you the heart of the prodigal son’s father. The child left with one-third of his father’s goods, a significant sum in any hacienda (estate or plantation). The father watched his son walk off and from that day he began praying, searching—”My son, my son, where are you?” One day the son in the far-off land decided he would arise and return to his father, though he did not consider himself worthy to be called a son anymore. “Daddy, make me as one of your servants.”

What caused this great change in the son? I think the first change was in his father’s heart. I want God to give me that same heart, that same attitude so that my son will say, “I will arise and go to my father.”

I want to share some precious promises we have found for parents of lost children.

- *Thus saith the LORD; A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rahel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not. Thus saith the LORD; Refrain*

thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears: for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the LORD; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy. And there is hope in thine end, saith the LORD, that thy children shall come again to their own border –Jeremiah 31:15–17.

- *Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him ... But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children’s children; To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them –Psalms 103:13 – 18. (Parent, be sure you are in this camp of those who fear Him.)*
- *But thus saith the LORD, Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered: for I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children –Isaiah 49:25.*
- *And all thy children shall be taught of the LORD; and great shall be the peace of thy children –Isaiah 54:13.*
- *As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the LORD; My spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed’s seed, saith the LORD, from henceforth and for ever –Isaiah 59:21.*
- *For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call –Acts 2:39.*

All this time we are praying, crying often, feeling a great burden, and examining ourselves. And all this while God has a chisel in His hand, forming the image of Christ more perfectly in our lives. As we surrender to Him and His Spirit moves in us, what emerges is worth more than what was there at the beginning and your son or daughter in a far-off land will realize that Daddy and/or Mommy is not like they used to be.

There is hope for your children. Make sure all is well between you and God, between you and your wife, between you and your father or mother. Stop criticizing others and take all responsibility on yourself. Never speak degradingly of your child. And while these changes are taking place in your heart and spirit, God is working in the heart of your child while they are yet in a ‘far off country’.



An Upside-Down Lesson

Simon Martin
Glenmont, OH

“And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as unto the Lord, and not unto men.”
Colossians 3:23

When I was younger, I lived in western Iowa with the rest of my family. We lived on a small property with a big farmhouse and several old outbuildings. My siblings and I went on many adventures, some of which got us in trouble. In this story, I will tell you of a time I got myself into some big trouble.

We had a long shed with a roof that was higher on the one side than the other. Sometimes in the winter the south wind would drift the snow all the way up to the roof on the short side. Then we would climb to the top of the roof and sled down the roof and all the way to the bottom of the drift.

One snowy, winter day, when I was about seven years old, my dad, and my older brother, and I were in an old overgrown pasture cutting firewood. Dad was running the chainsaw while my brother and I were pulling the firewood on sleds to the shed where we stacked it.

After a while, I got tired of stacking firewood. I slipped away and went to the shed where the snow had drifted up to the edge of the roof again. I climbed up and walked over to the side where

it was further down to the ground. I looked over the edge and right there was a big, deep snowdrift—just perfect to jump into. That is just what I did! After I did it once, I had to do it again, so up I climbed once more. Meanwhile, my brother and dad kept working without me.

I walked to the edge of the roof and prepared to jump. I closed my eyes and leaped over the edge. Suddenly, I was violently yanked out of my exhilarating jump. A rusty old nail had been sticking out right on the edge of the roof. The bottom of my overalls had gotten caught on the nail and there I was, stuck, hanging upside down in midair! The ground below me was way too far for me to reach. And there was no way I could pull myself back up. I was stuck! I immediately panicked and began screaming wildly for help. Dad was running the chainsaw, so he didn't hear my desperate cries. I was in trouble!

Finally, after what seemed like a very long time, I saw my brother trudging through the snow with the sled, going back for another load of firewood. When he heard my screams, he looked



at me in great surprise. Then he left his sled behind and ran as fast as he could to get dad. I heard the chainsaw shut off, then after a bit I heard them coming. When they got to me, hanging there in utter helplessness, they quickly helped me down. After they got me unhooked and back on my feet, we went back to cutting firewood. I had learned my lesson—I made sure to not goof off anymore until we were finished.

That day, I learned that even if our work is boring and we don't enjoy it, the best thing to do is to keep at our work until we are done. Being lazy gets us in trouble. When we get caught up in the habit of laziness, it is much easier for us to give in to sins like disobedience and lying. Those things will have devastating effects in our lives. Always remember, sin starts like a tiny spark, but if we do not put that spark out, it can become a raging fire.



Dear Lydia,

Sheryl Zeiset
Tanzania, East Africa

You asked me for advice the other day about how to disciple your daughters. I have only two daughters and they are still young, so I don't have a lot of experience. I can only share from the desires I have for them and from the experiences I had with my own mother.

At 15 years of age, I was an introvert to the extreme. The only person I shared deeply with was myself. I had decided that I needed no spiritual interaction with others and could quite easily make it on my own. I was wrong, of course. I am so grateful for my mother who knew that and began chipping away at my heart. We walked the hay field together as we untangled questions on peers, modesty, and relationships. We took long walks down our dirt road; cried and laughed together over life's perplexities. She taught me how to sew, and how to work even when I was tired. Most of this was done by example, not that she always had perfect lectures ready when I needed them. She was often tired too, but I never heard her complain. People say, "more is caught than taught" and this is true with a mother and her daughters.

I expected my mom's input in my life, and she was not afraid to tell me what to do. Have you noticed how unpopular this is in our generation? I hear young girls talk about "researching" and "finding out what they believe", often coming to different conclusions than their mothers. This confuses me. I trusted my mother's opinions and convictions a lot more than my own and wanted to learn from her. I did not have enough confidence in my own thinking to make my own decisions. I wonder what changed.

I wonder if social media and the internet have anything to do with it? When I was young, we had an outdated version of an encyclopedia and a dictionary on our bookshelves. That was the extent of our research options. Also, I only had a few friends. They all lived a few miles from our house. We went to school together and sat together on the front bench at church. We knew each other's dirty feet in the garden and how we smelled after milking a cow. We didn't know what a smart phone was, or even a 'dumb' phone. The only phone

we had was the one on the bookshelf with the long cord. The phone numbers we needed were handwritten on a piece of paper taped to the wall. The only music we listened to was the imperfect melodies we produced around the kitchen table. Our world was indeed small. But I think we needed a small world because we weren't mature enough to figure it all out or to "research" it all on our own.

Compare that with what our young people need to face today. Many of them are given a smart phone in their teen years. There are shelves of books, and all the music they would ever want in a confusing mixture of good and evil. There is a vast amount of information. There are podcasts and sermons. And there are friends—hundreds of them if you're popular. All this on a little handheld device. I wonder if parents really know what books their teens are reading, or what music they're listening to. I wonder if they know the "pastors" and "teachers" they're listening to. In addition to this, there's the friend group on social media. Young people are influenced by their peers and they're certainly not mature enough to handle a few hundred of them from all over the world. The innocent fun is a major influence, often bigger than the influence of church and family.

So my advice, Lydia, is that you shelter your daughter. I know, it's not popular and people will think you're quite old fashioned. But don't allow your daughter to be enticed by a group of friends on her phone. Show her how to cultivate relationships by living and working with others, not by posting her most beautiful photos online for her friends to 'like'. Help her plan events with a few friends you trust. Associations are powerful, so know who your daughter's friends are. Eliminate the hundreds of 'virtual' friendships, encourage wholesome face-to-face interaction, and the things her hands can touch and create. Help her discern these things by pointing her to God.

If your daughter needs a cellphone, make sure you know what she is using it for. Help her make those decisions and be her accountability. Keep communication lines open. This is your responsibility.

In my girlhood years, my mother kept us close. We lived and worked together every day. It reminds me of the verse: *And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up* –Deuteronomy 6:7. The simple duties of home, lived out as a family unit is God’s design. This is how my mother touched the hearts of her daughters and lived out a practical faith for us to imitate.

You have seen the sparkle in your daughter’s eyes, the excitement. “Mom, can I please spend the night with Jenny? Please?” Or perhaps you’re at a reunion and all the girl cousins are piling together in one room. What do you say? You love to see your daughter happy, and you want her to have fun. My advice is, don’t say yes to the classic sleepover when your daughter is with other girls for the night without your presence. If you’re visiting as a family and she is sleeping with cousins or friends, make sure she has a bed to herself. Be watchful and be wise.

Once your daughter is old enough to be wanting a job, make sure you have a vision. Is her job helping her grow in becoming selfless and hardworking? Or is it feeding a selfish and affluent lifestyle? Take note of the environment and the people she is with. The things she is learning and experiencing—good or bad—will affect her for life. Maybe it is necessary for her to help with financial needs or maybe there’s not enough to do at home; still there is a need to carefully evaluate and consider the long-term outcome. Is her job replacing opportunities of service or of learning homemaking skills? Is your daughter’s job helping her to develop a spirit of contentment and service or is the extra money a stumbling block to her?

Lydia, protect your daughter’s reserve. Keep her accustomed to modest clothes that cover her body well. Don’t buy tight leggings and t-shirts for her to wear to bed. Don’t trade her modest reserve for faddish clothes even if it’s only for bed. Teach her to cover her body modestly not only when she’s in public, but also when she’s around the house in the evening. It’s okay to feel out of sync with what “everyone” else is doing. You are making these choices with a purpose—to protect your daughter.

We live in an evil world. Be discerning with the books you allow your precious daughter to read. Her conscience is being shaped by what she is reading, so keep the books wholesome. If you are homeschooling, be discerning with the curriculum you use. The brightly colored, popular books are not worth it if they compromise your values, so choose books that your child can wholeheartedly follow.

Educate your daughter in the basic facts of life. This world is not a safe place, so teach her what evil men can do and

what to watch for. Teach her to speak out—or yell—if she senses something to be wrong or feels unsafe. She needs a safe place with you where she can discuss any fears or questions that she has. Teach her the beauty of God’s plan for marriage and raising a family in simple words that she can grasp, starting from a young age and adding to it as she grows. Ignorance does not produce innocence.

Don’t think of this letter as a recipe, Lydia. Being a mother is not a science like cake baking, it is spiritual work. Love Jesus. Make Him the focus of your life and your daughter will be silently influenced in His ways. Speak of Him as you disciple your daughter. You are guiding her towards Jesus so she can have a personal encounter with Him and begin her own journey.

Like me with my mother when I was 15, so likewise, your daughter is depending on you to make the difference in her life.

With love,

Your sister



The Search for Happiness

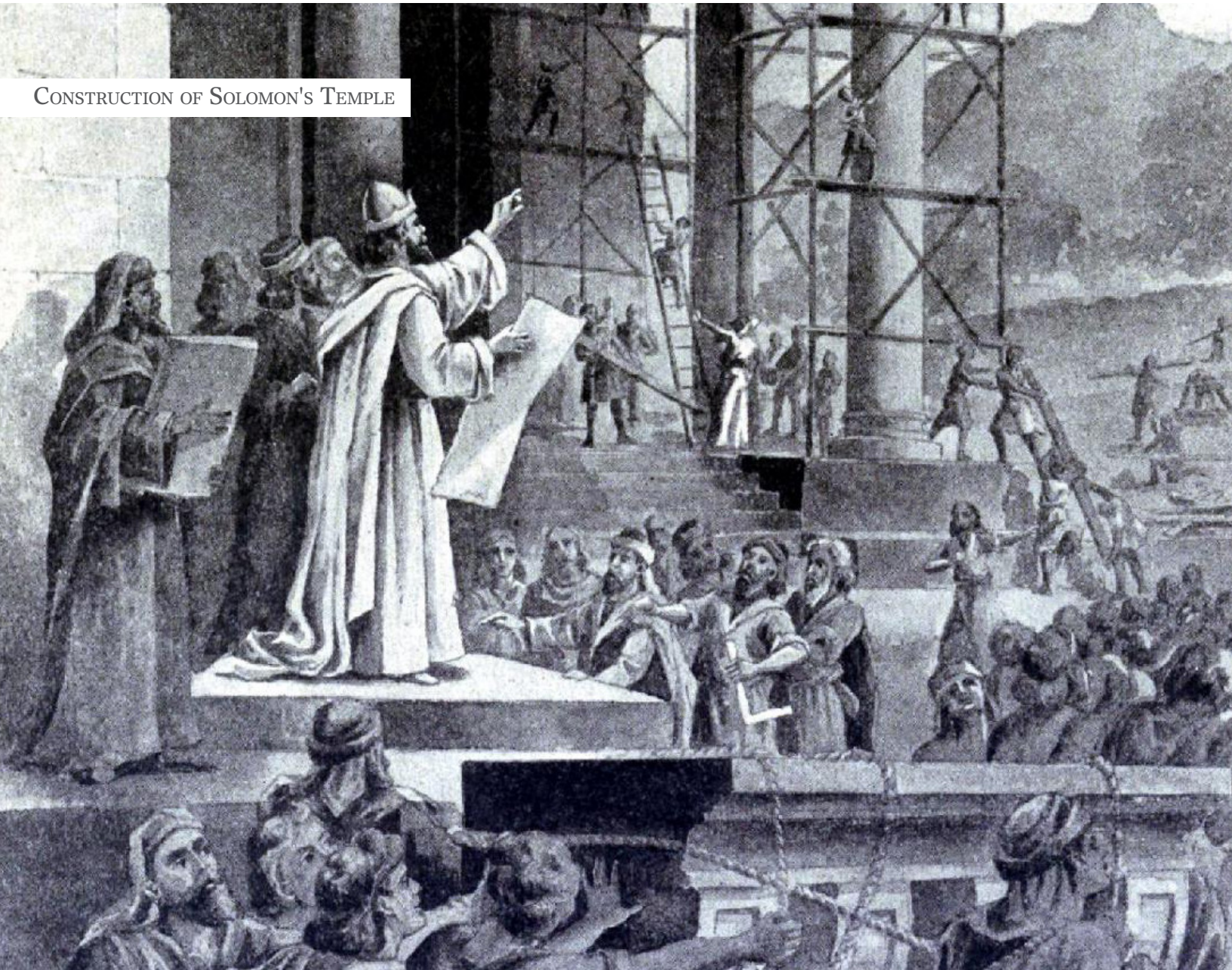
Harold S. Martin
A Bible Helps Tract No. T14

The Book of Ecclesiastes (in the Bible) gives King Solomon's experiences when trying to find happiness "under the sun." The phrase "under the sun" simply means that Solomon was trying to find happiness here on earth, under the sun, apart from God. We want to look at some of the things that Solomon tried, and found inadequate, in his pursuit of happiness.

1. Solomon Tried Luxury

Solomon first surmised that the material things of life would fill the vacuum in his soul. Thus, he gave himself to the purchase of possessions, hoping to satisfy the hunger in his heart. He filled his coffers and made his barns bulge. His wealth was immense; his palace was magnificent; his

CONSTRUCTION OF SOLOMON'S TEMPLE



household was huge. If he wanted to build something, he built it. If he wanted to do anything, he did it. Read Ecclesiastes 2:4-11. If any man could have found permanent pleasure in material things, King Solomon should have been that man.

Did all this material wealth make Solomon happy? Did it fill the aching emptiness of his heart? Listen to his own words—*Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, ... and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun* –Ecclesiastes 2:11. Happiness cannot be found in luxuries and material things.

2. Solomon Tried Learning

When King Solomon discovered that material prosperity does not give peace of mind, he turned to another pursuit. He gave himself to the acquiring of knowledge, hoping by this to stifle the monotony that haunted his earthly life. Read Ecclesiastes 1:17-18.

Solomon became a prolific student. A careful study of the book of Proverbs reveals the comprehensive reach of this man's mind. He knew the natural environment of the beast of the field; he understood the nature of the flight of the bird in the air; he knew the customs of the fish in the sea. Solomon burned the midnight oil. He drank deeply from the well of knowledge—but even this never brought peace and happiness. A formal academic education is useful and is required as a preparation for many jobs in life, but the training of the mind does not insure peace in the heart. And so, in the search for happiness, we find that learning is not the answer.

3. Solomon Tried Liquor

After discovering that luxury and learning would not satisfy the deeper needs of the soul, Solomon turned to drinking. He thought, perhaps, that in wine, he could find the answer to the problems of life. Read Ecclesiastes 2:3 in the Bible. Being a man of wealth, Solomon ordered the best beverages that the times could produce—but he soon discovered (like many others since his day) that: *Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise* –Proverbs 20:1.

Liquor never brings permanent satisfaction. One who is under the influence of alcohol (for a short while) is transported out of the land of hard reality into the land of make-believe—and there for a while he can laugh at his problems—but when the drug wears off, he is right back where he started. Drinking is not the way to try and solve life's problems.

4. Solomon Tried Lust

Solomon found no solution to his monotony in luxury and liquor and learning, and so he turned to lust. He married 700 women and had 300 concubines (see 1 Kings 11:1-3). If anyone seems to be envious of Solomon and his 700 wives, keep in mind that this meant 700 birthdays to remember, and certainly lots of “in-law” problems. No wonder Solomon declares: *And I find more bitter than death the woman, whose heart is snares and nets, and her hands as bands [fetters]...* –Ecclesiastes 7:26. And so we see that lust toward many strange women did not satisfy the emptiness of Solomon's heart.

Some people seem to think that finding a new partner to marry will bring happiness in life, but in most cases the new marital arrangement is less than ideal. Others seek experiences with a variety of sexual partners—but the guilt, the danger of contracting AIDS, and the displeasure such conduct brings to God can never lead to happiness.

5. Solomon Turned to the Lord

The message of the Bible is that apart from God, life is full of weariness and disappointment. King Solomon was gifted with a keen intellect; he was versed in the affairs of human life; he was fed with every dainty thing this earth could produce. But still he was a stranger to the sweet peace which every human heart craves. There is nothing under the sun that can permanently satisfy the thirsty heart. Solomon found that life (with all its experiences) is but emptiness and a striving after the wind—if it is lived apart from God.

But Solomon did not let the matter rest with seeking happiness in luxury and learning and the other earthly pursuits. He turned to the Lord. He says, ... *I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him* –Ecclesiastes 8:12. It is vain to seek happiness under the sun. Instead, we should fear God, and remember our Creator and serve Him, because He is going to bring every work into judgment. We are told in the Bible that God loves each individual human being, and that He sent Jesus to die in our place so that we might be free from the penalty for sin and have everlasting life (John 3:16). Jesus stands ready to come into our lives if we are willing to open the door of our hearts to Him in repentance (Revelation 3:20). Why not repent, believe, and give your heart to Jesus today? He says that those who come to Him will not be cast out (John 6:37).

Print copies of this tract may be obtained from:

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To All Young People

Kenneth Hopkins
Greenville, OH

I enjoy interacting with young people, whether it's working together on a jobsite or sharing about things of a spiritual nature. I find myself being stimulated by young people. They have sharp perception, agile mobility, quick responses, and energetic pursuit of plans, all of which is admirable when directed in the right manner. *The glory of young men is their strength: and the beauty of old men is the gray head* –Proverbs 20:29. I am not revealing my age, only that I am still a young man myself when compared to eternity.

God has much to say to you young people as you advance from depending entirely upon your parents, to assuming responsibility for your own course in life. *But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself... –Daniel 1:8.* Whether you're aware of it or not, your early life's experiences and the way you choose to respond to them will have much to do with the way you face your battles later in life. God is not wanting to stand in the way of all your youthful desires (provided they are godly desires). He is more concerned about the long-term results of your choices, than He is about your short-term satisfaction.

Most middle age and older people who struggle with situations in life, are struggling because of an earlier experience. While we thank God for His forgiveness through repentance and faith in the cleansing blood of Jesus, a fruit-bearing life in Christ Jesus is a life where sin does not reign. *What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? ... Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof* –Romans 6:1-12.

This is known as Christian warfare, or the battle ground.

This is where the mighty power of God is displayed in calling sinful men to a walk of holiness through the power of the Holy Ghost. It has been said, we are not on a cruise ship, but a battleship. I am amazed at how much of Jesus' teachings and parables are to young people. For lasting fulfillment in life, I'm pleading with each young person to commit in their heart to not defile themselves—*For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world* –1 John 2:16. Consider, after all of Solomon's experience with sin, these words: *Good understanding giveth favour: but the way of transgressors is hard* –Proverbs 13:15. It is true that God created humanity to serve Him, and any advancement otherwise is often followed with negative consequences. I am not big on giving check lists, but I will suggest a formula as a start.

First, begin with Bible reading and Bible study early in life. If you are older and have not done so, it is never too late to start—begin now. Even if there's sin in your life, it's not too late to pursue God while He gives you understanding. *Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word* –Psalm 119:9. The apostle John explains why he has written to the young men of his day, *...I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one* –1 John 2:14. The flesh is always revealed in weakness; all strength comes from the Lord who gives life. These young men were strong because they had the word of God abiding in them and through God's strength, they were experiencing victory with life's battles. John not only commends them but encourages them to continue in the Lord's strength as he further admonishes these young men against lusting



after the world: *Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him –1 John 2:15.*

While God’s Word introduces God to us and what He has done to reach us, knowing God reveals who we are along with our own weaknesses. This is how He calls us to conviction and repentance. Many people stop short of yielding their whole life to God to walk with Him in holiness, thus hindering His work of grace in their life, which also hinders their witness to others for Him. Many Bible studies of our day emphasize the goodness of God, which is needful, but they stop short of revealing our sin nature and calling us to repentance.

Let’s examine what the Bible says about lusts. Lusts are defined as a desire or craving for that which is forbidden. Notice the end results of lusts. Paul tells young Timothy to: *Flee also youthful lusts... –2 Timothy 2:22.* Notice this is not speaking about a sin act, but the desire or craving thereof. Paul cautions young Timothy concerning worldly gain calling it ...hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition –1 Timothy 6:9. and to ...*abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul –1 Peter 2:11.* Notice this is fleeing from the desire, or the attraction before any sin is committed. *But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death –James 1:14-15,* This shows the downward spiral of living with lust. God did not intend for us to live in the misery of bondage to lusts.

Secondly, develop a prayer life with your Creator, God. Jesus said in His Sermon on the Mount, *Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall*

be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened –Matthew 7:7-8. John reiterates Jesus’ call to prayer as he closes his 1st epistle. *And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him –1 John 5:14-15.* What an offer, what a promise! If you have unholy desires and attractions, pour out your heart in confession to God asking Him for cleansing by the Blood of Jesus. Be completely honest, and specific with your confession. To ask, requires humility by depending upon, and trusting a source other than yourself. You may need to ask repeatedly. *Be careful [troubled] for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God –Philippians 4:6.*

If you can’t find relief, choose a trusted prayer partner to pray with you. You don’t have to live with unholy desires; thank God He has offered a means to overcome lusts. God promises peace and joy to anyone who gives their life entirely to Him. May God empower you: *Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ –2 Corinthians 10:5.* And, *If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed –John 8:36.*

God Bless us all as we continue walking with Him in faithfulness.



Weight Loss

PART 2

Vincent “John” Waldron MD
Gladys, VA

There are around 70 million Americans who are considered obese. Obesity is not a derogatory term, but simply the term that doctors use to indicate people whose Body Mass Index (BMI) is over 30. (The BMI is calculated based on height and weight.)

No one wants to be overweight. Americans spend an estimated 33 billion dollars annually on weight loss products and yet their weights remain uncontrolled.

In the last issue we went over some myths about weight loss. This time we will focus more on important things we can do to help control our weight and to discipline our appetites.

KNOW YOURSELF

The first step of weight loss is doing an honest inventory of yourself. When do you eat? What foods/meals do you struggle with? How many calories are in each meal and snack you eat?

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? –Jeremiah 17:9. There is a real tendency for us to underestimate how much we eat, the size of our portions, and how often we snack. The key here is to write down everything we eat for a few days. If it goes in our mouth, it needs an entry in a food journal.

Making a list of these things will let us know what our weaknesses are. It is important to remember that it isn't enough to write down just what things we eat, but also the portion size. There is quite a difference between the caloric content of a half cup of mashed potatoes (107 calories) and a cup and a half of mashed potatoes with 5 tablespoons of gravy (400 calories).

SHOP WITH A PURPOSE

You shouldn't go grocery shopping when you are hungry.

Once we've identified the edibles that are our weaknesses, it is important that we don't buy those things. If we struggle

with cookies or potato chips, it is better to not buy them in the first place than it is to get a package of them and hope that we have the self-control not to eat them all after we bring them home.

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; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it –1 Corinthians 10:13. Many verses in the Bible put more of a focus on us fleeing temptation instead of overcoming it.

MAKE YOURSELF ACCOUNTABLE

Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up –Ecclesiastes 4:9-10.

Too often when we are struggling with something, we try to fight the battle by ourselves. Gaining control of our appetites is best accomplished with help from other brothers and sisters in the Lord.

It helps to have someone else you can discuss your plans with. If it is an exercise regimen or a diet plan, we all do better when we are travelling the same journey as someone else. Whether it is encouragement or prodding to do better, we need someone who will help us on our way.

DON'T DRINK CALORIES

We all need to drink. Drinking an excessive amount of water won't make you lose weight, unless it is replacing drinks that have calories.

Black coffee, unsweetened tea, and water are all good choices that naturally have no calories. Artificial sweeteners are options for people who desire some sweetening in their drinks. However, as time goes by, we find more things that aren't healthy about artificial sweeteners, but they certainly are low calorie.

AVOID EATING IN THE EVENINGS

There are a number of problems with eating in the evenings. First of all, the quality of the food tends to drop with evening snacking. Most of us don't sit down with a bag of carrot sticks or celery, but rather we reach for snacks that aren't as healthy.

A second issue is that our metabolism slows down when we are sleeping. This is a good thing, because it leads to restful sleep, but if we eat too close to bedtime, our body is not going to digest that food very well and it will end up being put into fat stores rather than being burned for energy.

CUT OUT SUGAR AND REFINED GRAINS

Everybody eats carbohydrates (sugar), but the type of carbohydrate does make a big difference how our body deals with them. White flour and granulated sugar are heavily refined, so much so that they have little nutritional value, other than the calories that they hold.

When we eat refined grains and sugars, our bodies release large amounts of insulin to take care of them. We have sugars spikes, followed by low sugars, then we feel hungry again quite quickly. This leads us to begin the cycle all over again.

Eating grains that are not refined, like whole wheat flour, gives our bodies something that is digested more slowly and in a healthier manner. Cutting back on processed products will not only get off this roller coaster ride of sugar spikes and sugar lows but will also make us feel better in the long run.

CHOOSE A DIET

There are a lot of different options out there when it comes to diets. There are Keto Diets (low carbohydrate), low calorie, plus many others. Most diets will work, but they can be quite difficult to endure, since they require the person following them to eat a very limited number of foods. A number of studies have looked at low fat and low carbohydrate diets and found that they perform similarly in terms of weight loss.¹

From a medical standpoint, the key is to choose a diet plan that we can stick with for more than a week or two. Too often, diets are short-term fixes for long-term problems.

It is crucial as well to consider our personal struggles and weaknesses. It is even helpful to consider underlying health issues. Someone with heart issues needs to be careful of the salt they take in, while someone with diabetes should choose a diet that is low in carbohydrate intake.

THINK ABOUT FASTING

Fasting is something that has been a Christian discipline

for many years. *Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance... –Matthew 6:16-18.* Jesus had an expectation that His followers would fast. The word used here is 'when' not 'if.' Clearly there was an expectation from Jesus that they would have times of abstinence from eating.

Jesus responded to a question about why His disciples weren't fasting: *...Can ye make the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days –Luke 5:34-35.* Even though His followers did not fast while He was on earth, they certainly did following His ascension.

It is important to remember that fasting is not about impressing other people (this seemed to be a big reason why the Pharisees fasted). It is also not intended to be a magic potion that makes our Heavenly Father listen to our prayers and do what we ask.

SPIRITUAL BENEFITS OF FASTING

There are benefits to times of abstinence from food. Some of these are physical (we'll touch on them later), but Scripture tells us that there are spiritual benefits, particularly when fasting is combined with prayer.

To begin with, fasting is a time when we learn to deny ourselves our desires. Jesus said *...If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me –Luke 9:23.* Our desire for God must be greater than our desire for anything else—even more than our need for food. Fasting is a way of focusing our hearts on what is truly important.

The words of Job, *...I have esteemed the words of His mouth more than my necessary food –Job 23:12,* speaks of just this attitude.

Another thing that fasting leads us to is appreciating our blessings more. We've all probably heard the adage—"Hunger is the best seasoning."

Our society is blessed with an abundance of food as well as many material things. Fasting for a period of time will lead us to appreciate that abundance rather than take it for granted. Times of feasting are of greater enjoyment if we also have times of fasting.

Fasting also seems to bring some special power for Christians. In Mark 9:28,29 the disciples asked Jesus *... Why could not we cast him [the evil spirit] out? –Mark 9:28.* His response was that *...This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting –Mark 9:29.*

God's power does not wax and wane. It is always strong to save. But somehow, when we deny ourselves, it gives the

Spirit a more free course to work His perfect will in our lives. Maybe the reason that God's Spirit does not move in the American church in the 21st century the way we would like is simply that His people don't deny themselves and focus on their Lord enough.

I am sure there are many other reasons to think about fasting. The early church had times of feasting and times of fasting. We should as well.

PHYSICAL BENEFITS OF FASTING

There are a number of benefits to what researchers call "Intermittent Fasting." Even if there was no spiritual benefit to fasting, it still would be worth considering. Typically, when researchers look at it, they have people fast for 24 hours at least one day a week. The studies show a number of things that improve with fasting.

Weight Loss

First, when people fast on a regular basis they find that they are able to control their weight more easily. Many studies show significant weight loss for people who fast on a regular basis.² Obviously, this is not going to be true if fasting is only done once or twice a year, but it does seem to help when done regularly.

Blood Pressure Reduction

Another thing that we see with intermittent fasting is blood pressure reductions. A study showed a reduction in systolic blood pressure of about seven points for people who were doing regular fasting.³

Healthy Cholesterol

It also seems that fasting done regularly reduces the level of fats in our blood stream—both cholesterol and triglycerides. Over time, this, combined with reductions in blood pressure should lead to reductions in vascular disease, such as strokes and heart attacks.

Healthier Insulin Levels

Fasting also seems to help significantly with insulin resistance. This is one of the core issues with adult-onset diabetes. Studies show that when people fast regularly, their insulin levels drop.⁴ Reduction of insulin resistance and insulin levels could slow someone's progress to developing diabetes or help those who have diabetes to get control with less medication.

Better Sleep Patterns

One final benefit seems to be better sleep patterns. People who fast in the evenings seem to sleep better than those who eat a big evening meal.⁵

Fasting isn't the solution for all of our health problems, but it certainly does have significant health benefits.

INTERMITTENT FASTING IN PRACTICE

There are a number of different fasting plans that are popular. One is simply to alternate normal eating days and "fasting" days.

A fasting day is typically not a total fast, but a day where the number of calories are limited to 25 percent of what is normally required to maintain weight (typically around 400 to 500 calories).

Another option is a 5:2 plan where there are 2 days of fasting per week and 5 normal eating days.

One final thing, which isn't really fasting, is time-restricted eating. In this timed eating, people only eat or drink calories for an eight-hour window each day. People will only drink water, black coffee, or unsweet tea for the time from 6 pm to 10 am and they can then eat between 10 am and 6 pm.

CONCLUSION

There are many different diet plans from which we can choose. It is important to choose a plan that we can stick with for the long run. I like the term "lifestyle changes" rather than "diet" because most people treat diets as a short-term fix. It is more important to decide on a pattern of eating and stick with that.

Even more importantly, we need to commit to denying ourselves and focusing ourselves on God. Regardless of our weight, we need to have a God-controlled life. Regular fasting can (and should) be a part of that. Taking time away from food and filling it with prayer will lead us to a closer walk with God and opens the door to His Spirit moving in our lives, which is what we really need most of all.

Endnotes

1. <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2673150/>
2. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4516560/>
3. <https://content.iospress.com/articles/nutrition-and-healthy-aging/nha170036>
4. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6521152/>
5. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6292409/>





...continued from page 3

of the viruses or bacteria. Fourth, individuals would be given a specific dosage of this “vaccine” thus introducing their body to a weakened form of the disease through a “controlled” minimal “load” of the causative agent. Thus, the individual was afforded a “safe” manner of contracting the disease in order for their body to easily, efficiently, and effectively fight it off, thereby developing antibodies. Once these “real” antibodies were developed in that person’s body, that individual was, for all intents and purposes, immune against that disease if they were to ever come in contact with it at a later date.

However, the vaccines for Covid-19 act more like the vaccines do for the flu—both are not true vaccines when compared to the original design, purpose, and function of vaccines. In fact, in September of 2021, the CDC changed the definition of a vaccine from that which produces “immunity” to that which produces “protection”. This is because, just like the flu vaccine, the Covid-19 vaccines are known to not necessarily “prevent” (through immunity) a person from contracting the disease at a later date. This is in contrast to such diseases as polio, tetanus, and smallpox which when receiving a vaccine for, the bodies of most individuals will develop immunity, thereby preventing that person from contracting the disease at a later date.

So, this wholesale push trying to get as many individuals vaccinated for Covid-19 is a completely different story. 1) Any vaccine manufactured using mRNA technology, by definition, is an experimental drug, in that it has not been proven using the standard procedures of safety and efficacy trials. 2) The silencing of critics is questionable, problematic, and alarming, not to mention a clear violation of free speech in the USA. 3) The overwhelming drive to sideline safe and effective drugs that have been proven to work is alarming and raises huge question marks. Add to this that one of the most reputable medical journals in the world retracted the key article (because it was determined to be a fraud) which was being referenced by the medical professionals to claim that one of these drugs was not only not effective, but also dangerous.

There have been numerous claims by reputable medical professionals that these vaccines cause birth defects when given to pregnant mothers, and that they cause infertility issues. It is now openly admitted that the vaccines are known to cause some people to develop heart problems after receiving it. And there are multiple claims of sudden deaths resulting shortly after receiving the shot. Since we believe that we are created in God’s image, and that our

bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit, we should be very cautious about taking this step. At the very least, as God’s image bearers, we are recommending that Christians should wait until time proves these claims either true or false, before making the decision of giving in to this push.

Simply stated, we would caution that New Testament Bible-believing Christians should not get this vaccine until they have done their own research, have carefully prayed about it, and have consulted other individuals of like-precious faith. Why? 1) This technology is similar in nature to what the world’s geneticists have developed to create synthetic life in the laboratory. 2) This technology is using manmade/synthetic stuff (for lack of a better term) to manipulate the created makeup of our bodies to do what they (whoever it is that is behind the technology) think that it should do. No longer are we talking about discovering a pathogen then introducing a weakened form of that “naturally-occurring” pathogen to the body to allow a God-created response to develop antibodies. Here we are now talking about introducing something man-made into a God-created body and trying to “trick” the natural responses through a synthetic means. This is unprecedented in nature, and in scope, and only time will tell what all negative outcomes will result.

Bottomline, all of history tells the same story: Any time something new is created or manufactured and then put into public use, there are ALWAYS “bugs” to work out.

Vaccine Booklet

Several issues ago, we told our readers that we were moving forward with putting all those articles into booklet form. With the emergence of the Covid-19 vaccines we held off on this printing until we could evaluate how those articles and the new “type” of vaccines would agree or disagree with each other so as to not send a wrong message. As God provides direction we will move ahead with this project in the very near future. Our apologies to any of our readers who were anticipating these booklets by this time.

Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen. – Jude 1:24-25.



A Guided Tour Through Heaven

A Study in Revelation 21-22

Harold S. Martin

A Bible Helps Booklet No. 371

It is a thrilling experience to see the harbor surrounding New York City for the first time. The skyline of tall buildings, the beauty of the harbor, and the attraction of the Statue of Liberty all bring a sense of excitement to those who visit the city. Even more thrilling than seeing New York City will be the first glimpse of Heaven. Some of the most reassuring words in Scripture are found in the final chapters of Revelation. It will be exciting to explore the heavenly realms which/h will be the final abode of God's people.

In the last chapters of the Revelation, we are shown something of the beauty which those who have followed the Lamb will enjoy throughout eternity. The New Jerusalem will be the abode of the redeemed. Conditions within the New Jerusalem are at least symbolic of the conditions that will exist in eternity. God is planning the very best for His children, and the fulfillment of His plans will far surpass even our greatest expectations.

1. The New Heaven and the New Earth (Revelation 21:1-8)

The earth as we know it will not last forever. God will create a new earth (Isaiah 65:17), and He will provide a dwelling place for His people. Revelation 21 refers to the eternal home of the Redeemed—the “Father’s house with many mansions” (John 14:2). It is one of the most beautiful and comforting chapters in the whole Bible, a chapter we

never tire of reading. It is not certain whether the new heaven and the new earth will include a renovation of the present earth, or whether there will be a completely new earth. Those whose names are written in the Book of Life will be in the presence of the Lord in the realm of Heaven. We are strangers and pilgrims here on earth, people who desire a better country.

When John says that the first heaven and the first earth passed away, the Apostle is not saying that they become extinct; he is merely hinting that they will be changed from one condition to another. The heavens and the earth that we are familiar with now will be completely renovated and recreated by fire (2 Peter 3:7).

In the New Jerusalem, old experiences will be excluded. Heaven will be a beautiful place where believers will experience fellowship with Christ. Death will vanish, and so will sorrow and crying and pain. Residents of Heaven will rest from labor (Revelation 14:13) and will experience everlasting joy. These promises are true and can be counted upon (verse 5).

Christians in the Western world today don't seem to talk much about Heaven. Why should they? There are sports such as hockey and football; there is recreation such as travel and television; there are exotic foods and fancy fashions; there are crafts and trinkets and shopping trips; there are stocks and bonds and money markets. There are

so many fascinating and exciting things to talk about in this materialistic age that Heaven is ignored by multitudes. Many folks are so blessed in this life that the attraction of Heaven is almost forgotten.

Those who see this world as their home look upon leaving it as a supreme tragedy. But those whose hearts are fixed upon doing the will of God, thrill at thoughts about Heaven. The excitement of seeing Jesus, dwelling with Him, and being like Him should thrill our hearts and cause us to love the Lord with a burning devotion for doing His will. The Bible says that all who have this hope in them purify themselves as He is pure (1 John 3:3).

New things will be encountered in the New Jerusalem (verse 5). There will be a sense of complete satisfaction. The fountain of the water of life will be freely given. John 4:10 indicates that Jesus Himself is that “living water” that satisfies the thirst of the soul. Jesus said to John, “I am the Alpha and the Omega” (verse 6). In Heaven, there will be a full inheritance of all the good things enumerated in these chapters, including the presence of Jesus Himself (verse 7).

Certain people will be shut out. People whose lives are characterized by the eight traits listed in verse 8 will be excluded from the heavenly inheritance.

The fearful (NKJV, cowardly) are those who are apprehensive and lack confidence and turn back from following Christ. It is the cowardly who deny Christ because of “the fear of man.” Those who fear to stand boldly for Christ, lest they be ridiculed by others, are manifesting the spirit of cowardice.

The unbelieving are those who refuse to trust Christ for salvation, and deny the truth of His Word (John 3:18).

The abominable speaks of those who are polluted, having allowed themselves to become stained and contaminated with the filthy evils of this world. They pursue styles of living which are altogether contrary to the teachings of the Bible.

The murderers are those who have a disregard for the value of human life. Everyone knows that “murder” involves more than sticking a knife into another person in order to snuff out his life. It is possible to cast looks that are filled with murder, and to speak words that are intended to slay others. In the United States of America, drunk drivers kill dozens of persons every day.

The whoremongers (NKJV, sexually immoral) are those caught up in rape, incest, adultery, fornication, homosexuality, whoredom, bestiality, lasciviousness, harlotry, lewdness, and a whole realm of related impurities which are labeled as sin by God’s Word.

The sorcerers are those who supposedly use evil supernatural powers over people. Sorcery includes magic, spiritism, witchcraft, and demon worship. The Greek word is pharmakeia, meaning “the use of drugs.”

The idolaters are those who worship false gods, including those who are given over to covetousness and selfishness (Colossians 3:5; Ephesians 5:5).

The liars are those who practice falsehood, either in speech or in silence. God condemns all who make a lie, speak a lie, or act out a lie.

The text does not say that everyone who has ever committed any of these sins will be excluded from Heaven, but those whose lives are habitually characterized by these traits will be prohibited from entry.

Those who fall into the categories stated above will be banished from the Lord’s presence and will suffer in a fire that shall never be extinguished. The “second death” (verse 8) is defined in Revelation 20:14 as “the lake of fire.”

2. The Description of the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:9-27)

John tells about the glory of the New Jerusalem. It is a place of unique construction and beauty. The street of the

city will be made of pure gold (verse 21). There will not be any need for lights in the heavenly city because the radiant glory of God will illuminate it.

In verses 9-10 John saw two aspects of the saints' relation to the Lord: He saw the saints—as the bride, the Lamb's wife—and also as the holy city. How can the saints be a city and at the same time a wife? When we speak, for example, of New York City, we may mean the material city and its buildings, or we may mean its people. We say, "New York is a large city"—meaning the material city. Or we say, "New York is a wicked city"—meaning its people. Both symbols can have a meaningful connotation.

Verse 12 states that the names of the twelve tribes of Israel will be written on the twelve gates that pierce the walls of the city, and the names of the twelve apostles will be engraved on the twelve foundations of the city (verse 14). Each foundation will be inscribed with the name of an apostle, and each gate will be named for an Israeli tribe.

John saw an angel measure the city; it will be a large city shaped like a cube (or perhaps a pyramid)—1,500 miles long, 1,500 miles wide, and 1,500 miles high, with dwelling places at various levels. There will be no housing shortage in Heaven. The city will be large and spacious (verses 15-17). There will be plenty of room for all who believe in Jesus Christ. The New Jerusalem will be a place of great magnitude, and without knowing all the details, we can be certain that the city will be large enough to accommodate all who are destined to live there. One Bible student estimates that 20 billion people could live in a cube this large, with each person able to have a private 75-acre mansion.

The abode of the redeemed will be a place of beauty and radiance (verses 18-21). It will be beautiful beyond the power of words to describe. The gates are pearls. Each of the twelve foundations is a gem of unusual brilliance.

The material beauty of the city will be amplified by the absence of tears and sorrow. We see in verse 4 that God "will wipe away every tear from their eyes." Human hands are poor at drying tears. Neighbors and friends can try to sympathize and bring comfort, but only God can stop the fountain of tears. Every tear that has been shed on earth will be wiped away and forgotten in Heaven. Even death will be banished in the world to come.

In the circle of every family, a mother, a wife, a husband, or a son has been taken by death; but over in the heavenly city, death will be a thing of the past!

There is no temple in the city because the Lord God Himself (and the Lamb) are the temple of the new city. The saints will now be in the immediate presence of the Lord. There is no need of light from the sun or the moon, for God Himself is the source of light (verse 23).

In verses 25-27 we learn that no wicked person or evil thing will be permitted to enter the portals of the New Jerusalem. Not everybody who talks about Heaven is going there. Those who do abominable works and are given to falsehoods will not be there. Only those whose names are in the Book of Life will inhabit Heaven.

3. The Joys of the Heavenly City (Revelation 22:1-10)

At the center of the heavenly city is the presence of God and of the Lamb. John's eye is drawn to the river of life and to the tree with leaves that are intended for the healing of the nations. The "pure river of water" is mentioned in verse 1. Most of earth's cities are built along the banks of important rivers, which soon become polluted by the very cities to which they give rise. In the heavenly city, the river flows out from the throne of God. It is no muddy stream, but a pure river containing the very essence of life itself.

The "tree of life" is mentioned in verse 2. This reminds us of the Garden of Eden where the test of loyalty to God had to do with a tree. The "tree of life" was not at first forbidden to Adam and Eve, but once sin entered, God put Adam and Eve beyond the reach of that tree. Had Adam and Eve eaten of the tree in their fallen condition, they would have been doomed to live forever in their sins.

Seeing the face of God (verses 3-4) will be Heaven's crowning joy. It will be exciting to see the God who created us and the Christ who redeemed us. What a thrill to be in the presence of Jesus, the One in whom we trusted for our salvation and about whom we have sung so many songs. The joy of Heaven will focus on the fellowship of His presence. Heaven will be a place of rest—not sleepy inactivity, but the cessation of sorrow and temptation. There will be activity as we go about our duties. There will be the delight of knowledge which will be complete and full.

The saints have always looked forward to the heavenly city. Abraham looked for a city "which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Hebrews 11:10). The Bible says that the great city let down from God is made of real materials. Why would God tell us of streets of gold and gates of pearl if it were not a real city? Heaven will be a real place. It is not going to be a cloudy, hazy mixture of nothing.

There have been many advances in science to make life here on earth more convenient, but they pale into the background when compared with the wonders which God has prepared for his people. The hymn writer says, "I will sing you a song of the beautiful land, the far-away home of the soul; where no storms ever beat on the glittering strand, while the years of eternity roll." Joy unspeakable and full of glory awaits God's people on the other shore!

4. The Finished Work of Christ (Revelation 22:11-16)

Throughout the New Testament epistles, the return of Christ is expected to take place at any moment. Paul says that the “day of the Lord” will come “as a thief in the night” (1 Thessalonians 5:2). It is not wise to wait until some ideal time to turn one’s life over to Christ, for all too soon, at an unexpected time, the opportunity for salvation will be gone. Those who have missed out will be lost forever.

The time of the end may be so near at hand that there will be no time for people to change their lifestyles. The point is this: our choices lead to consequences, and when the Lord returns, the opportunity for repentance will have passed forever. What each person is then, he will be on into eternity. Those who are unjust will remain unjust; the righteous will be holy still (verse 11).

In verse 16 Jesus describes Himself as “the Root and Offspring of David,” and “the Bright and Morning Star.” Jesus (as man) is both the ancestor of David and also a descendant of David. Jesus (as God) is like a bright star in the early morning which heralds the end of the night, and the dawn of a new day. His Second Coming will herald the arrival of the eternal home in Heaven.

Accepting or rejecting the sacrifice of Christ will determine our future destiny (verses 12-15). When the Lord comes, our destinies will have been fixed. Those who have accepted Christ and lived for Him have the provision of the cross to support them (verse 14).

Those “who do His commandments” (verse 14)—not just do them, but do them because they have had their robes washed in the blood of Christ—will have a right to the tree of life and will spend eternity in the heavenly city.

By way of contrast, those who are vile and unclean will be cut off from all that is holy and noble and beautiful. The filthy and the unrighteous will go out into the next world to continue in the same filthiness (verse 11). Those who hear the truth but continue to do wrong, fix their destiny in the place of damnation.

5. The Final Witness of the Spirit (Revelation 22:17-21)

It is fitting that the Bible should close with a reference to the Holy Spirit. He is the Author of the Book. He had part in the original creation. He has been active down through the ages of human history. He continues to call and plead with men and women and boys and girls to come to Jesus and find salvation through Him Who will be the Victor over the forces of evil. There are three things the Spirit has to say before the Scriptures are brought to a close.

a. The last invitation (Revelation 22:17)

The word “come” is the grandest word in the gospel. It rang out in the days of Noah when God was about to pour out His wrath against the world (Genesis 7:1). Once again, the Spirit calls for men and women (all persons) to come and believe the message of the gospel. The choice is entirely up to the individual. It is for “whoever desires.” We have the awesome power of opening the door of our hearts to Jesus, or we can shut the door, and lock Him out forever. When we take sides with Jesus, we are on the winning side!

b. The last warning (Revelation 22:18-19)

The initial scope of the warning has to do with the book of Revelation. The Lord guards this book which so many have scorned. The Revelation opens with a blessing pronounced upon those who read it and keep it, and closes by announcing a curse upon those who tamper with it. Similar warnings are found in other parts of the Bible (Deuteronomy 4:2; Proverbs 30:5-6).

c. The last promise (Revelation 22:20-21)

The last promise of the Bible is related to our Lord’s return. Jesus never designated a set time, but He spoke often of the certainty of His coming. The last prayer of the Bible is “Come, Lord Jesus!” Surely this is the desire of each person who loves Him. We often echo these same words. We are anxious to see an end to sin and sorrow and suffering. We want to see Jesus and to be like Him and to live with Him in eternity. The final invitation of the Bible is a call for men and women to come and believe the message of the Gospel. No one should delay, for none of us knows just when Jesus will return. And until that day, *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen –Revelation 22:21.*

May each brother and sister in Christ who reads this article persevere in the faith until the day dawns and the Bright and Morning Star appears!

Print copies of this booklet may be obtained from:

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Freedom

...where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty [freedom] -2 Corinthians 3:17.

This world grapples after freedom,
Constantly chasing and snatching at this goal.
It seems at times to be a fanciful illusion,
For in the fight for freedom, they bicker for control.

Then in our lives, we look around and are tired.
Tired of restraint that seems to bind.
So, we run, and toss off the offensive fetters,
Only to find we've donned another of a different kind.

Freedom is a deceitful master,
He tempts with the promise of being unrestrained.
But when our own will is made to be ruler,
Freedom becomes the enemy to which we are chained.

We battle for our rights, and amid all the fighting,
Blindly destroy what we'd set out to win.
Our thirst for liberty has fermented and ripened
Into a danger that will kill us from within.

The "freedom" of this world is but vanity;
A lie saying we're free when we do as we please.
For in selfishness, we will not find refuge,
But a vice of death that the enemy does squeeze.

So where is this freedom we all dream of—
Freedom in this world, and in our soul?
It seems that no matter where we run, it eludes us,
And what we claim to hate, subtly has control.

True freedom is obtainable—not a fantasy.
It is found where few men condescend to seek.
The trouble is when we look for what we call freedom,
We, with the eye of selfishness, critique.

There is One who has purchased our freedom,
Seeing our lost and dying state.
He received our punishment, paid our debts,
Now our acceptance of this gift He does await.

In Christ, we are offered true freedom;
He has purchased and made us free.
And to follow His example of love and service,
Is how we experience true liberty.

We were created to serve and bring glory.
The question is, to whom will we bow?
There's one who would love to subvert and destroy;
And another, the Master, only the good does avow.

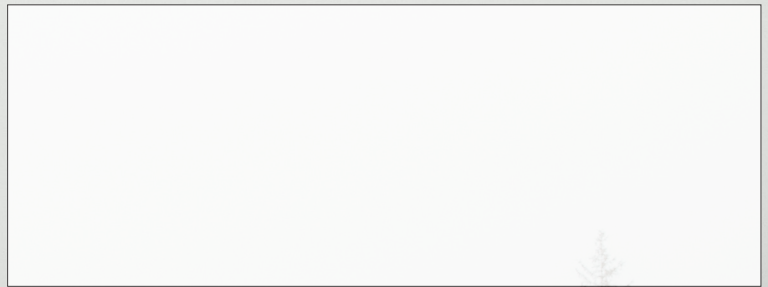
Let's accept and run after this King who has saved us,
Restoring the freedom that we so lack.
It's not a battle to achieve all our selfish desires,
But the need to get our true reason for living back.

—by Adrianna Fanton

The Heartbeat of
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I the LORD *search the heart*, I
try the *reins*, even to give every man
according to *his ways*, and according to
the *fruit of his doings*. JEREMIAH 17:10