

SUMMER 2016 • VOLUME 103, No. 2

Megiddo Message

*WHO is your
HERO?*

by RUTH E. SISSON

I'll Think About It

*"Whatever is true, whatever is honorable,
whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely,
whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence,
if there is anything worthy of praise,
think on these things" (Phil. 4:8).*

Have you ever suggested that someone take a certain course of action, when their reply was, "I'll think about it"?

By the tone of their voice you probably knew what they meant. Perhaps they were inferring that they had already pre-judged the idea and set it aside. Or maybe they were suggesting that it was not of any present interest, but if the idea should surface sometime in the future, they might give it thought.

Or perhaps they were saying, "Thank you, I intend to consider it seriously."

What did Paul mean when he said *"Think on these things"*? Was he giving take-it-or-leave-it advice, or was he seriously telling us what to do?

I believe the latter, because the Apostle Paul had credentials. Paul was a spokesman for God, commissioned by Jesus Christ Himself (see 1 Cor. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Gal. 1:1)—his words had authority behind them.

A closer look at the word translated *think* in Philippians 4:8 will show us that Paul meant much more than a passing thought. The Greek word is *logizomai*, which is translated "to reckon, count, compute, calculate, count over" (*Enhanced Strong's Lexicon*). To *"think"* as Paul meant it is to calculate the cost of committing oneself to those words in action.

What does this mean? It is good to think about things God approves, but the real value lies in application. The moral or spiritual truth of our faith becomes visible only when it transforms human nature, only when it changes living persons—like you, like me. Remove it from life, leave only high-sounding words (like purity, honor, loveliness, excellence), and you rob it of power.

Each term Paul used is a quality of life that is known only as it is lived. Paul confirms this thought in the sentence that follows: *"What you have seen...in me, do."*

How can we do this?

One way is to keep bringing to mind the lives of those dynamic personalities from Scripture who moved others to action: Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Jesus, Peter, Paul, John. Over and over again we need to renew the moving power which reaches us through their words recorded in the Word of God, which is sharper than any two-edged sword (Heb. 4:12). We must renew it, and use it to transform ourselves.

When we are confronted with an unwelcome suggestion, our unconscious thoughts quickly take control of our will. That is why it is important to discipline our minds by *"thinking on these things"* until they become automatic. If we discipline our minds to think wholesome, constructive thoughts as Christ did, they will become such a part of our nature that in any given situation we will automatically

*Finally, brethren,
whatever things are **true**,
whatever things are **noble**,
whatever things are **just**,
whatever things are **pure**,
whatever things are **lovely**,
whatever things are of
good report, if there is
any **virtue** and if there is
anything **praiseworthy**—
meditate on these things.*

—Philippians 4:8

WE BELIEVE...

- ★ **in God, the Creator** and sustainer of the earth, the world, the universes, and all life, in whom we *"live, and move, and have our being."*
- ★ **in the Bible** as our only source of true knowledge about God and His purposes and plans for His creation and for the salvation of humankind.
- ★ **in Jesus Christ**, the Son of God and our Perfect Example, who was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin; who ministered among His brethren, was crucified, resurrected, and taken to heaven and seated at the right hand of the Father, crowned with immortal glory, and who shall shortly return to be King of the whole earth.
- ★ **in the Holy Spirit**, the openly manifest power of God, which God bestowed at various times and in various ways to reveal His knowledge to humankind, to support His spokesmen, to confirm His utterances, and to demonstrate His supreme power and authority.
- ★ **in life as the gift of God**, and in our sacred responsibility to use it for God and His coming Kingdom.
- ★ **in humankind** as providing the raw material from which shall be selected and developed a superior, God-honoring people upon whom God will bestow the blessings of immortal life in His soon-coming Kingdom.
- ★ **in ourselves** as capable, with the help of God, of applying to our own lives the precepts and principles taught in the Word of God, in this way perfecting that high quality of moral character which God has promised to recompense with life eternal in His heavenly Kingdom on earth.
- ★ **in the promise of God**, that Jesus Christ will soon return to rid the earth of all sin and suffering and inaugurate an eternal and worldwide Kingdom of peace and righteousness, until God's will is done here as it is now done in heaven.

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Megiddo Message

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BDAG—Arndt, W., Gingrich, F. W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (1996). A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature; **DBL**—Swanson, J. (1997). Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains; **EDNT**—Balz, H. R., & Schneider, G. (1990-). Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament; **GES**—Gesenius, W., & Tregelles, S. P. (2003). Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldean lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures; **HAL**—Koehler, L., Baumgartner, W., Richardson, M., & Stamm, J. J. (1999). The Hebrew and Aramaic lexicon of the Old Testament; **LSJ**—Liddell, H. G., Scott, R., Jones, H. S., & McKenzie, R. (1996). A Greek-English lexicon; **LN**—Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament : Based on semantic domains; **SHG**—Strong, J. (1997). The new Strong's dictionary of Hebrew and Greek words. **THAYER**—A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (1889).

MEGIDDO MEANS...

"a place of troops" (Gesenius' Hebrew Lexicon);
"a place of God" (Young's Analytical Concordance).
Megiddo was and is a town in Palestine, strategically located, and the scene of frequent warfare. In the spiritual parallel, it is a place where soldiers engaged in spiritual warfare gather to renew their strength and courage (2 Cor. 10:4-5).

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WHO IS YOUR HERO?

Everyone needs a hero. Whatever our ideals, passions or pursuits, whether we are young or old, rich or poor, our hearts cry out for a hero to follow. Even a Plato needed a Socrates to inspire him. An Alexander the Great had to have an Aristotle.

Who is your hero?

Finding the “ideal” authority

As children, the first authority we recognize is our parents. As we mature, our peers begin to take on more and more the voice of authority, especially if our parents are not conscientious. Sometimes a child matures to respect the authority of the “gang” and rejects the authority of parents, police, and society. College and university students sometimes reject the advice and philosophy of parents and home and take that of a favorite professor or of some school of thought that appeals to them. Then, out of school, that authority becomes the “rules of the game” in their chosen profession or line of business.

But keen, discerning people soon discover that each succeeding hero has feet of clay. Parents are

Hero: *A person noted for feats of courage or nobility of purpose, especially one who has risked or sacrificed his or her life: a person noted for special achievement in a particular field.*

—Webster

imperfect. The gang is no wiser than oneself, the professor proves to be all too human, and business ethics are selfish and narrow. So the search for authority—the ideal authority—continues.

The same search for a hero can extend into religion, and some turn away disappointed. Others find the authority they need.

Choosing a hero

When one chooses a field, he or she very often—consciously or subconsciously—chooses a hero. If you want to be an artist, you might choose for your hero a Rembrandt or a Norman Rockwell. If to be a scientist is your dream, you might choose an Einstein. If your heart leans toward being an actor or actress, a musician or politician, you find one who is outstanding in that field and make that one your ideal. Against great odds you may fulfill your dreams. You may even go on to be among the world's greatest.

Then, only a little while later, you are caught by the brevity of life. Perhaps you gave little thought to the issues of life and death. Now you are old. Suddenly, you realize death is inevitable for you, too. Who can help you now? Where is your hero? As you realize that you must follow your hero to the confines of eternal darkness, you might wish that you could reconsider your choice of a hero.

But did you know that life doesn't have to end in defeat, not if you choose the right hero?

What makes a hero?

True heroism is not the fickle fame or fortune that society may heap on an individual one day and take away the next. True greatness is an inner quality expressed in courageous love and caring, giving and sacrifice. It may or may not be recognized or acclaimed, for when virtue is fundamental, it speaks for itself.

The true hero lights a torch that illuminates an ideal and makes life worth living—not only for oneself but for all whose lives he touches. The life of a great hero is a beacon showing others how to make the wisest and best choices.

Who?

Does your hero have qualities that win your admiration?

Are these qualities you wish for yourself?

Are they qualities that you can see yourself attaining? If you can answer yes to these questions, then look closer at this person and let this person's words and deeds live in you.

If you are satisfied with something you can see or experience in this present life, then choose a hero who best fits that course. But if you aspire to goals beyond this world, you must choose a hero who has "been there" and "done that." You must set your goals high, higher than any you see around you. After all, what is wealth when you die? What is honor?

HEROES
of GOD

Daniel

Date: Sixth Century BC

Place: Jerusalem until his mid-teens, then Babylon

Born into an upper-class Jewish family, Daniel was taken from his homeland with a group of captives while still a teenager (probably no older than 15 years of age) to the land of Babylon. In Babylon he was pushed through a highly concentrated course in the foreign culture, and quickly emerged as a man of outstanding ability. Chosen early to be advisor to the king, before his career ended Daniel had been advisor to two Babylonian kings and two Medo-Persian kings.

But most important, Daniel was a model of integrity, flawless to the core. A lifelong worshipper of the true God, he held to his faith against any and all opposition. His loyalty to God superseded every other loyalty, at the same time making him more loyal to his superiors.

Even though Daniel spent his entire lifetime, from early youth, in foreign lands, he never compromised his loyalty to God. Through him God revealed the future, and he was highly honored for being able to interpret dreams and visions, but always Daniel gave all credit

to his God, saying, "There is a God in heaven that reveals secrets."

When he was very aged, he was still serving the king (at that time King Darius, the Mede), but jealous comrades who could find no fault in him deceived

the king into issuing a decree that only the king could be worshipped. Daniel was caught, because he remained loyal to God, and thrown into a den of lions. But God delivered him, and he emerged unharmed.

Daniel went a long way for an ideal. In youth he resolved not to defile himself with the king's rich food, and at an advanced age he resolved to continue his daily prayers to the God of his fathers. His stand was not an easy one to take, but this is how Daniel lived by his highest ideals, and down through the centuries have come the ringing words: "Dare to be a Daniel."

Before God he bowed the knee; before men he stood erect and unafraid.

What is the lesson for us? Dare always to do right, and God will honor that kind of conviction, just as He has in the past. If you are faithful to God, He will be faithful to what He has promised.

*Dare to be a Daniel,
dare to stand alone!
Dare to have a purpose firm,
dare to make it known.*

Choose your hero carefully,
one who will demand the highest
achievement you can obtain.

HEROES of GOD

Moses

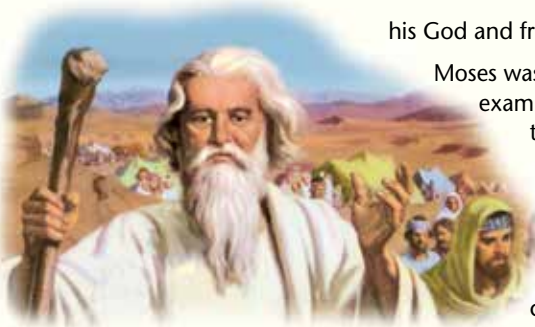
Time: 15th Century BC

Place: Egypt, Midian, Wilderness of Sinai

Occupation: Prince, shepherd, law-giver, prophet, leader of the Israelites

Recognition: meekest man (Num. 12:3)

According to Stephen in the New Testament, Moses' life divides into three 40-year segments. The first 40 years he spent in Egypt, being taught by his mother and the Egyptian schools. The second 40 years he spent alone in Midian, learning the lessons of life in the solitude of the desert. The third 40 years he spent leading the Hebrew people through the desert from Egypt to Sinai, being taught by the trials, discouragements, and tests which he personally received from



his God and from his people.

Moses was an outstanding example of a personality shaped by God. When God first called him to lead His people out of Egypt, Moses said he couldn't do it. But he cooperated and served, and his character grew.

Moses was God's man for a time of crisis.

Moses grew in character as he worked with a stubborn, rebellious and God-forgetting people. His task was to bring them through to Canaan, to be God's instrument in any way God chose, to transform them from a horde of undisciplined slaves into a self-respecting, independent, and God-honoring nation. Moses did all in his power to make it happen.

What can we learn from Moses? That when God gives a task, He gives also the strength and the ability to do it.

HEROES of GOD

Joshua

Time: 15th Century BC

Occupation: Slave, military commander and successor of Moses as leader of the Israelites.

It is an enormous privilege for a young man to serve an apprenticeship under a man of surpassing strength, goodness and knowledge. They are wise who recognize the worth of such tutelage and make use of the opportunity.

Joshua recognized his opportunity and allowed the lessons of his fellowship with



the great man of God Moses to mold his life and spirit. Joshua is the very image of the faithful servant and loyal officer.

Inevitably, Joshua learned to rely on his hero and leader and draw into the fabric of his own personality the traits of Moses' character.

Brave Joshua, faithful to the God whom Moses served, developed into another hero for us to pattern after.

Taking the torch which burned so brightly in Moses' hand, Joshua led the children of Israel into the Promised Land. He had learned his lessons well.

Joshua's challenge to us is, Take that torch and run, all the way to the Promised Land!

What is acclaim? Of what benefit is the highest recognition when you lie lifeless in the tomb?

To set your goals on anything in this world is to live and die and be forgotten, because all must be left at the mouth of the grave. Why not set your heart on the great wealth that you can have on the other side of death? Why not choose the one and only Hero who can bring you forth from the grave and crown you with happiness, riches and honor?

There is one such Hero, and He beckons you and me to follow Him. Accept His challenge and your life will become worthwhile. He will lead you through the dark valleys to the tallest of mountain peaks. He will lead you in danger and safety, in sorrow and joy, and in pain and comfort, in death and life. His hand is always outstretched to bring you through.

The Greatest Hero

This Hero never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never owned a home. He never had a family of His own. He never went to college. He never did one of the things that usually accompany greatness as we define it. Yet He is the greatest Man that ever lived. Though He lived 2000 years ago, today He still lives, not just in the hearts and minds of His followers but as a great individual, glorified at the Father's right hand and soon to return as King. You know His name: Jesus Christ.

This world judges the greatness of men and women by their wealth, by their influence, their achievements, their inventions, great writings, military might or discoveries. But Jesus was great for a reason far surpassing the greatest accomplishments in science, literature and invention. He was great because of the selfless, self-sacrificing life He lived. It was a life that will give life to us if we follow it to the end.

Jesus stands on the highest mountain peak beckoning us to follow. Is the summit too high for

us? Christ has given the command: *"Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect"* (Matt. 5:48). He is not saying that we must live perfectly from start to finish but that we must *"grow"* into holiness (Eph. 4:15), that we must

become pure even as Christ is pure (1 John 3:3), following the example of Christ as dear children of God (Eph. 5:1–2).

As we look at Christ and what the Scriptures tell us of Him, we see a character of majesty. His goodness draws us; His courage challenges us; His purity guides us; His love penetrates us; His optimism lifts us, His faith shines as a beacon ahead of us. And as we listen, can't we hear the echo of His words as still He calls: *"Follow me"*? In other words, do as I do.

Our Hero's profession in life was higher than that of one who pours his energies into pursuing the knowledge of this world. Christ was intense in His profession. He was seeking the highest knowledge that could be gained, knowledge taught by His heavenly Father. Into seeking this knowledge He poured His very life. Succeeding, He could say to others: *"Learn of me."*

So closely did Christ do the will of His Father that if we look to Him and know Him, we will also know the Father, for He taught only those words which the Father taught. Because He was made like us and battled every human tendency we battle, Jesus has gripped the hearts of men and women across 2000 years, and they have found in Him a Savior and a Pattern. He has brought men and women from despair to radiant hope; from defeat to victory; from immorality to purity; from cruelty to kindness; from wayward wandering to purposeful living. He has changed homes of strife to homes of peace.

When He returns He will come *"in all his glorious power. He will rule with awesome strength. See, he brings his reward with him as he comes"* (Isa. 40:10 NLT). He will come bringing the reward—first to a few, and then, in the end, to an innumerable host that will fill the earth with His glory.

Following Christ

Have you decided to follow Christ as your hero? Then you have determined that He is going to be your guide, your mentor in life. You have also discovered that Christ was well versed in the Scriptures, even at 12 years of age! Paul followed Christ, his hero, and wrote to Timothy, *"You have been taught the holy Scriptures from childhood...All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It straightens us out and teaches us to do what is right. It is God's way of preparing us in every way, fully equipped for every good thing God wants us to do"* (2 Tim. 3:15–17 NLT).

Bible heroes

Did Christ have heroes to admire? I think He did. From a very

HEROES
of GOD

Elijah

Time: 9th Century BC

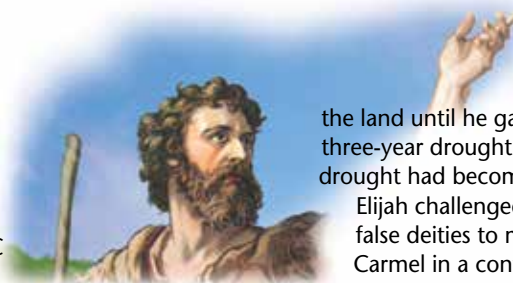
Place: Palestine, east of the Jordan River, then called Gilead

Occupation: Prophet and teacher

Elijah was a great prophet of the Lord, noted for his sudden appearances and bold denunciation of wickedness. He also performed many miracles.

Elijah's very name affirms his faith. Elijah means *"My God is Jehovah."*

Because of his firm stand for his God, this dynamic Israelite prophet found himself in conflict with the standards of his time. Under threat of death, he delivered God's message to the rebellious and apostate Ahab, then king of Israel, telling him that because of his nation's rampant wickedness and idolatry,



there would be no rain in the land until he gave the word. A three-year drought followed. When the drought had become a national crisis, Elijah challenged the priests of the false deities to meet him on Mt. Carmel in a contest, to show whose God could bring rain and end the drought. Even with the most desperate

incantations the false priests were powerless to bring rain. At the end of the day, Elijah offered a simple prayer to the God of heaven, who promptly answered with a deluge of rain.

So dedicated was Elijah to serving his God that the Lord took him up by a whirlwind to some other world, from which he will return one day, to prepare the way for the Second Advent of Jesus Christ.

We would do well to emulate Elijah's faith, courage and zeal. If Elijah could be true to God during a time of rampant idolatry and rebellion at every level of his society, what excuse have we for the least unfaithfulness today!

To acknowledge a Christ-like quality in someone, then make it your own, is to make Christ your hero. You are that much more like Him.

HEROES of GOD

Hannah

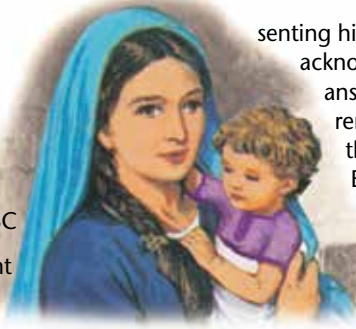
Date: Early 11th Century BC

Place: The region of Mount Ephraim in Palestine

Occupation: Wife of Elkanah, mother of Samuel, and prophetess.

Hannah, childless for many years, made a request of the Lord for a child. She vowed to the Lord that if He would give her a son she would, in turn, dedicate that child to Him.

The Lord blessed her with a son, and Hannah fulfilled her vow by bringing her small son (Samuel) to the sanctuary at Shiloh, pre-



senting him to the Lord with a grateful acknowledgment of His goodness in answering her prayer. The child remained at the Temple under the caring and watchful eye of Eli the priest. Hannah then sang a prophetic song as her heart rejoiced, not in Samuel, but in the Lord. She looked beyond the gift and praised the Giver. She rejoiced

in the salvation of the Lord and in expectation of the coming Messiah, who would bring salvation to His people.

Gratitude, trustworthiness and faith, all deep characteristics of Hannah's character, are qualities for us to emulate. For we, too, have made a vow to God, and we must keep it.

early age He studied the Scriptures, and learned of its heroes. He saw their strengths and made them His own. He saw their failures and determined to avoid their error. So great was His success that He could say, *"I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me"* (John 8:28). Doesn't this mean that He received instruction from the Father?

James recommended that we follow the heroes. *"My brethren,"* he wrote, *"take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience"* (5:10). Paul could even point to himself as an example to follow. *"Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern"* (Phil. 3:17).

We don't have a monopoly on Christ. There are many heroes from whom we can learn. Did they please God? So can we. Did they overcome the sin in their nature? So can we.

The writer of Hebrews was so impressed with the heroes of old that he devoted a whole chapter to them (Hebrews, chapter 11). Look closely at these heroes and analyze their character, their weaknesses and their strengths. Then answer these questions:

- What one characteristic stands out more than any other among these heroes?
- What can I do to add this feature to my character?
- Can I see any character flaw in them that is similar to mine? What is it?
- What sources were available to them to help them overcome?
- How did they respond to these sources?
- How can I apply what I learn to my life to help me overcome my character flaws?

Faith was the hallmark of the heroes of God. But no matter how much one may wish otherwise, faith is not cheap. It requires considerable investment of time and energy because faith is the reward of hearing, study, and application. We may claim faith, but did you know there is a dead faith? That means it is so shallow that when it is tested it will be shown to be just what it is—no faith at all. James tells us, *"faith without works is dead"* (James 2:20, 26).

Like any other specialized skill, it can only be developed by practice, by obeying the One in whom we place our faith.

Someone asked, "Why do I keep saying these bad words? I try not to." The answer is that we are creatures of habit. If you are accustomed to swearing and cursing, it will surface when least expected, no matter how much you wish to keep it a secret. Christ tells us to put away these things. If we follow His example there will be no stain of these ungodly

*Read Hebrews 11 thoughtfully,
and I believe you will agree:
to please God is to study and
emulate the lives of God's
heroes of faith.*

habits on our record, but it will take practice. Start practicing right now, and soon your record on this point will be clean. All God asks of us is that we *"stop doing wrong; learn to do right"* (Isa. 1:16–17 NIV).

Modern heroes

If we look about us we may find some heroes today who have features that are Christ-like. Mark that one who is ready to forgive, who is kind, longsuffering, self-sacrificing and learn from him. Look for the good and make it your own.

One modern hero from whom we can benefit is our own founder, the Rev. L. T. Nichols. His honesty, his attention to detail, his untiring determination to understand the Scriptures resulted in a monumental accomplishment from which many have benefited. His life is a legacy which we would do well to observe. Much can be learned from his care and effort to share his knowledge and faith. He spoke of God and to God as to a dear friend with a ready ear. First, last, and always his aim was to save himself and all who were willing to hear and obey his Hero, our Lord and Master.

Above all he was seeking the true Bible message, without the influence of human thought and theology. Through sleepless nights he persevered, relentless, if only he could learn the true teachings of the Word of God. He welcomed challenge. If he was wrong on any point he wanted to know it. Whenever he found himself in error he was ready to change.

He did find himself in error, again and again. Perhaps the greatest error he found was in the popular concept of the way to salvation. As soon as he discovered that in order to be saved one must obey all the commandments just as Jesus taught, he discarded the popular teaching on the subject and devoted the rest of his life to trying to persuade others to do as he did—to learn and apply the teachings of the Bible to his own life. His faith in God was complete. There could be no turning back.

HEROES of GOD

Timothy

Time: 1st Century AD

Place: Lystra, a city in Asia Minor (now Turkey)

Occupation: Minister of the Gospel, fellow-laborer with the Apostle Paul.

When the Apostle Paul set out on his first missionary journey, and passed through the city of Lystra, he probably had no idea that a youth who heard him preach would in just a few short years become his devoted assistant and faithful minister of the Gospel.

The youth's name was Timothy, a child of godly heritage through his Christian Jewess mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois. He had been quite literally cradled in the things of God. *"From a child"* he had known the faith.

When young Timothy first heard Paul preaching, he was captured by the great Apostle's

faith, devotion, and courage. Brother Paul was Timothy's hero! He would be like him!

In just a few years, he had joined Paul, and even though very young, he was ready to face the most difficult task, the most arduous journey, the most severe testing with his father-in-the faith.

In his New Testament letters, Paul mentions no one more frequently than Timothy, and speaks often of him as his son-in-the-faith, one who could be fully trusted to do as he himself would do. Did people look down on him and reject his message because he was young? Paul challenged him to make them look up to him because of his example of faith, courage, love, and purity (1 Tim. 4:12).

Wouldn't we like to see Timothy meet Brother Paul?

When you face a challenge that seems beyond you, remember loyal Timothy, loving Timothy, faithful Timothy. He was a young believer who took his religion very seriously. You can, too, and reap the same eternal benefits.

HEROES of GOD

Ruth

Time: Early 13th Century BC

Place: Country of Moab, east of Jordan and Bethlehem in Judah.

Because of a severe famine in Israel, Naomi, with her husband and two sons, had left their home in Bethlehem of Judea and had relocated to Moab. While in Moab, Naomi's sons married Moabite women. Soon after, Naomi's husband and both her sons died, leaving Naomi alone with her two daughters-in-law.

When the famine was over, Naomi wished to return to her homeland. Would her two daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah, go with her? When she asked them, their quick response was that they wanted to go with her.

But Naomi wanted to be sure. Life in Israel would be very different from the life they had always known in Moab. Were they sure they wanted to go? Did they really want to leave their families and their custom form of worship for a totally strange land and culture?

Orpah turned back at the thought, but Ruth insisted, *"Don't ask me to leave you and turn back....Your people*

will be my people, and your God will be my God....May the Lord punish me severely if I allow anything but death to separate us!" (Ruth 2:12–13 NLT)

Because of her unflinching dedication to Naomi and her God, Ruth was soon embraced by her new family in Israel, and gleaning in the fields of Boaz to support Naomi and herself. She became the wife of Boaz, the great-grandmother of David, and was among the ancestors of Jesus.

What devotion! Is your faith so intense that you will follow Christ wherever He leads?

HEROES of GOD

The Apostle John

Time: 1st Century AD

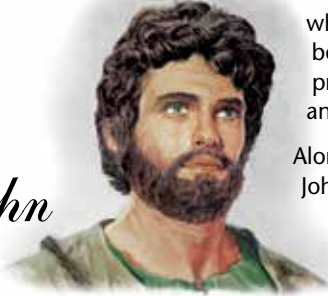
Place: Bethsaida in Galilee, Ephesus, Patmos

Occupation: Fisherman, an Apostle, writer and prophet

Known as: "Disciple whom Jesus loved"

When Jesus called the two sons of Zebedee to follow Him, He was opening the door to a lifelong career for James and John. For James it was a very short career (Acts 12:2). For John it was very long. Likely the youngest of the Twelve, John was also, as far as we know, the last to die. Among his latest assignments was the honorary task of writing the book of Revelation, one final direct communication from Jesus by way of an angel (Rev. 1:1).

We are deeply indebted to John as the author of five New Testament books (the gospel of John, three epistles, and Revelation). His writings show that he was a man



who thought deeply about what he believed, and did his best to comprehend the scope of Jesus' ministry and its meaning in eternal terms.

Along with the rest of the apostles, John was Jesus' constant companion during His swift-moving three year ministry. With Peter and James he belonged to Jesus' "inner circle," the privileged three. John

had the singular distinction of being called "the disciple whom Jesus loved."

But John was not a born saint. Like everyone else, he had to grow in character. By nature intolerant, vindictive, and hot-headed, he easily fell into competing for first place when the disciples were trying to decide "who should be the greatest" (Mark 10:35-37). But one reading his writings can also feel his eagerness to learn and his strong desire to become like his Lord. So deeply impressed was he with Jesus' example of love that he made it the subject of his First Epistle, pleading, "Dear friends, let us love one another; for love comes from God" (1 John 4:7 NIV).

Would we choose John for our hero? Right now is the time to become more like his Master and ours—in every loving word and deed.

The Hero: Christ

As we look through the pages of history at the heroes who have come and gone, we see many great men and women. But as we stand and gaze with our eyes fixed upon the farther shore, a single figure fills the horizon. He is the Savior, our Hero. Soon He will return and all the great heroes of the past will awake and join the living who are eagerly looking for Him.

It is impossible to express the greatness of our Hero, and for good reason—our minds are not able to comprehend His greatness. As the apostle John wrote, "There are...many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written" (John 21:25). There is just no greater than He. "God...has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:9-11).

The libraries of the world are full of books about Him. The Bible is a perennial best seller. Each year new books appear, telling of Jesus and His greatness. The Christian world try to express Him in symbols, the most common being the cross. But He is far greater than that.

What can I do to proclaim His greatness? How can I tell the world that Jesus Christ is my Hero, my Savior, my King? There is only one way: by following Him implicitly, by making my life imitate His. Ultimately, I want His character to be mine, His holiness, His purity, His patience, His peace.

Let us seek God's help in an all-out effort to be like our Hero. One day at a time, one moment at a time. Then someday we can live with our Hero—and be heroes too!

*Marching like the heroes,
Comrades of the strong,
Lift we hearts and voices,
As we march along.*

*So we sing the story
Of the brave and true,
Till among the heroes
We are heroes, too! ■*

*Study the lives of great
men or women and
learn their treasured secrets.
Let their lives give life to you.*

KNOW YOUR BIBLE

"Let the wise listen and add to their learning" -Proverbs 1:5



DEATH

1. Which queen met her death by being thrown from a window and trampled by horses?
2. Which prophet lay on a dead boy and restored him to life?
3. After having his skull broken by a thrown millstone, who had his armor bearer kill him so that, "men say not of me a woman slew me"?
4. What dressmaker was restored to life by Peter?
5. Which king, when he was wounded in battle, died in his chariot?
6. Who died on a mountain top after his priestly garments were put on his son?
7. What is the last enemy to be destroyed?
8. What woman fell dead after she lied about a property deal?
9. Who met his death on the gallows he had built for another man?
10. Who committed suicide by hanging because his advice was not taken?

DECEPTION

1. Who told an escaping enemy captain, he would be safe in her tent, then, after giving him a drink of milk, murdered him?
2. Afraid of recognition by King Achish, who deceived him by pretending "he was out of his mind"?
3. By wearing old clothes and pretending to be ambassadors, who did the Gibeonites deceive?
4. On his wedding night, who was deceived by his father-in-law?
5. Which king angered a witch because he had tried to deceive her by disguising himself?
6. Which two men, at different times, deceived kings by telling them their wife was their sister?
7. Who pretended not to know his brothers, then accused them of being spies and threw them in jail?
8. Who sent a woman of Tekoah, disguised as a mourner, to deceive David?

GOD'S HEROES

1. Accompanied by only an armor bearer, he climbed into an enemy garrison and killed 20 men.
2. He dared to attack vast armies of Midianites and Amalekites with only 300 men.
3. He killed two lion-like men and on a snowy day a lion in a pit.
4. During a terrible plague, in which thousands of people died, he bravely mingled with the stricken people to make atonement for them with God.
5. Aware that going before a king without his summons meant death, this person disobeyed the decree in an effort to save the Jews.
6. He disregarded a king's edict against petitioning God and continued praying even though it meant being thrown to lions.
7. Even though his life was threatened by Sanballat and Tobiah, he refused to hide in a temple behind bolted doors.
8. After Jesus' crucifixion he dared to ask Pilate for Jesus' body.
9. He fearlessly proclaimed the Gospel of Christ before small and great, Jew and Gentile.
10. He dared to face an enemy giant, armed with only a sling and stones for a weapon.

ANSWERS TO BIBLE QUESTIONS

GOD'S HEROES

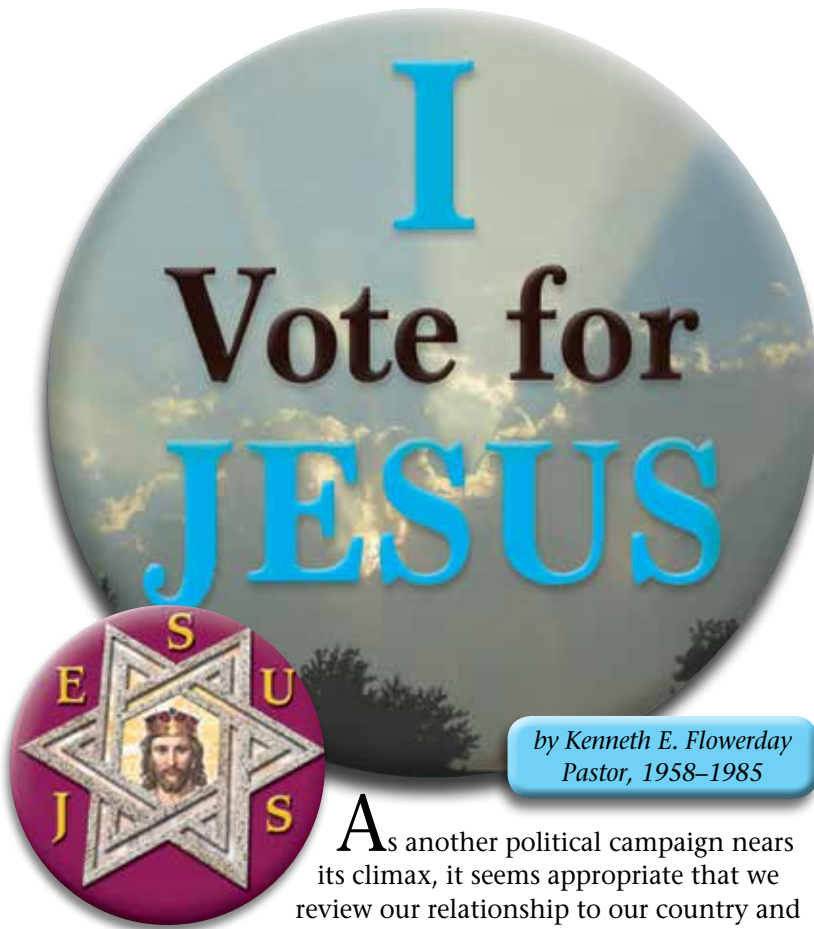
1. Jonathan (1 Sam. 14:13-14)
2. Gideon (Judges 7:7-22)
3. Benaiah (2 Sam. 23:20)
4. Aaron (Num. 16:46-49)
5. Esther (Esther 4:11-16)
6. Daniel (Dan. 6:6-13)
7. Nehemiah (Neh. 6:10-11)
8. Joseph of Arimathea (Mark 15:43)
9. Apostle Paul (Acts 9:15-17)
10. David (1 Sam. 17:4, 49)

DEATH

1. Jezebel (2 Kings 9:30-33)
2. Elisha (2 Kings 4:32-35)
3. Abimelech (Judges 9:53-54)
4. Dorcas (Acts 9:36-41)
5. Ahab (1 Kings 22:34-40)
6. Aaron (Numbers 20:28)
7. Death (1 Corinthians 15:26)
8. Sapphira (Acts 5:1-10)
9. Haman (Esther 7:9-10)
10. Ahithophel (2 Samuel 17:23)

DECEPTION

1. Jael (Judges 4:17-21)
2. David (1 Samuel 21:10-15)
3. Joshua (Joshua 9:3-9)
4. Jacob (Genesis 29:18-25)
5. Saul (1 Samuel 28:8-12)
6. Abraham (Genesis 12:11-19); Isaac (Genesis 26:7-9)
7. Joseph (Genesis 42:7-17)
8. Joab (2 Samuel 13:37-14:3)



The politician
must please the
people who elect
him; the Christian
must please God.

As another political campaign nears its climax, it seems appropriate that we review our relationship to our country and our politics.

We are citizens of a good land; we are inheritors of a great nation. We are grateful. God has blessed us far above what we have deserved, providing abundantly for our physical and spiritual needs. Our country rates first in many areas, ranging from the number of automobiles produced each year to the number of Bibles printed.

But unfortunately, our country is not all that it might be. It is not even all that it was. Our leaders realize it. Our educators, businessmen, philosophers and political scientists are aware of it. Thoughtful persons everywhere see it. During my own lifetime I have observed a shocking change in attitude in both the political and social climate. Economically, politically, morally and spiritually we are fast approaching the point of bankruptcy.

What can be done? Are we complacently to stand back and watch the avalanche progress? Is there nothing that we—you and I—can do? What is our duty?

Many people feel in all seriousness that every one should support some political

front. Choose better people for candidates to public office, they say, and give them your support. Let your voice be heard. Isn't this the principle upon which our nation was founded? Isn't this what democracy is all about, the voice of the people speaking out for what they feel is right? Join with others who also want to see a return to higher principles in government and speak out. After all, they say, isn't it the silent, non-committal, acquiescent majority who are responsible for the present situation?

This may well be the answer on a national scale. But our first concern as Christians must be individual, not national. Should we as serious Christians involve ourselves in trying to improve the politics of our nation?

Our answer is no.

This may be shocking to some who are sincerely interested in the good of the nation and want to see it continue for the advantages it gives to the cause of Christ. Refraining from all political involvement may seem to them like a betrayal of the very foundations of the faith upon which we stand. But before you draw too many conclusions either pro or con, I urge you to consider a few pointers found in Scripture.

To be sure, there is no verse of Scripture which says, "Thou shalt not engage in politics." But it does make some very definite statements and gives some examples from which we may learn. Consider just a few of these.

The Example of Jesus

First, there is the example of Jesus. Jesus was not a politician, or even a dabbler in politics. There is nothing in any of the Gospels that suggests that He was involved in any political maneuver, or that He supported any political personage, or debated any political issues of His time.

We can be certain that His non-involvement was not the result of a lack of incentive. The people of His time clamored for a man who could relieve them of the iron yoke of Rome. Jesus understood their feeling,

and He knew the circumstances that had caused their oppression. He even had the capability to do something about it. But He refused to play their game. He refused to have any part in it. He did nothing that could be interpreted as politically motivated.

Jesus stated His relationship to the government when He answered His questioners: *“Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s”* (Matt. 22:21). Pay your legal obligations, live as good citizens under law, respect authority and that is enough. Let the *“children of this world”* mind the affairs of this world. Your calling is to a higher allegiance.

This is what Jesus taught and practiced. His first and whole interest was to please His heavenly Father. *“I do always those things that please him,”* He could honestly say. And He told His disciples that as the Father had sent Him, *“so send I you.”* Involvement of those early Christians in the politics of the first century would have meant the end of them. Involvement in the politics of the twentieth century is no less threatening to us, and no less destructive.

The Example of the Apostles

Secondly, neither Paul nor any of the other Apostles had anything to do with politics. Simon the Zealot *had* had—the Zealots were a radical group in Palestine who were working to overthrow the Roman power. But Jesus would have none of this. Jesus did not even approve of the Apostles’ striving among themselves *“which should be greatest”* in the kingdom of God! How could He have tolerated the least seeking for greatness in the kingdoms of men?

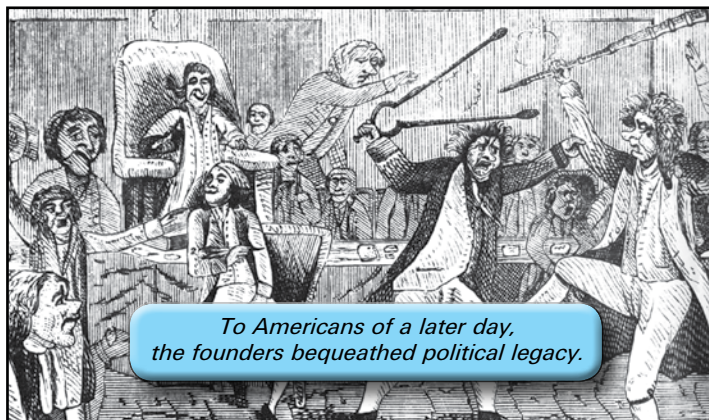
Paul could easily have been political material. Among the Jews he was highly qualified—*“circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless”* (Phil. 3: 5–6). He had the makings of whatever the world might need—statesman, lawyer, judge or president—he could have qualified above many. But he said, *“What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord”* (Phil. 3:7–8). He had caught a vision of something so much greater, that everything of the present seemed to shrivel into worthlessness. How could he

think of working to please men, as every politician must do? As he wrote, *“Do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ”* (Gal. 1: 10).

Paul gave one clear guideline for all our dealings with the present cosmos. He wrote: *“No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier”* (2 Tim. 2:4). As the soldier cannot get involved in civilian affairs, so the Christian cannot entangle himself in the politics and social affairs of his time. His God-given task had to take top priority. Paul could say of himself, *“This one thing I do”*—and that one thing had nothing to do with politics of this world.

The Example of Amos

Amos is another man who might have been political material, had that been his interest. He spoke with power against the oppression and evils of his day. But Amos was not a politician—he was a prophet. He called for no demonstrations; he made no promises of what he himself could or would do for the people. He did no campaigning for himself or his party. He sought no public office. He was already elected—elected of God, and he delivered the message God gave him to deliver. And that was all.



*To Americans of a later day,
the founders bequeathed political legacy.*

The slander and abuse which accompany political campaigns are a disgrace to the name of the nation.

What about all the good that might possibly come from our political support at some crucial point? The apostle Paul has the answer: We must never do evil that good may result (Rom. 3:8, NEB). It is our duty to do right just as far as we know, and trust God with the results. If some good cause is hindered by our lack of support, the results—whatever they may be—are in the hand of God, who doeth all things well. Do we not feel He is fully competent to direct the affairs of this world as He sees fit? Nothing can happen that will hinder His cause. Nothing can happen against His will. It is He, the *“most High”* who *“ruleth in the kingdom of men,”*

and giveth it to whomsoever he will" (Dan. 4:17). All authority finds its ultimate source in God; He will triumph in the end.

Politicking condemns itself so far as the Christian is concerned in yet another way. The politician must please the people who elect him; the Christian must please God. The best politician must at least occasionally seek popular approval and conform to popular opinion; the Christian must obey the injunction: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5). The politician must win popular support; the Christian never enjoyed this. Even in the first century the Christian community was accounted as "the offscouring of all things" (1 Cor. 4:13), a "little sect everywhere spoken against," and "the fewest of all people." Any group described as such could hardly expect to be accepted in political circles.

The very basics of politics are contrary to Christian principles. The political campaign is grounded in strife, competition, and rivalry, all of which Paul lists among the "fruits of the flesh," or traits of the lower nature. He says: "Now the works of the flesh are plain:...enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like." And Paul says, "I warn you,...that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (Gal. 5: 19–21 RSV). How often the political campaign degenerates into a battle of personalities, of wit, of who-can-promise-the-most lecturing. And the slander and abuse which accompany the campaigning are a disgrace to the name of the nation. Yet the cycle is repeated again and again. And is not the person who supports such activity guilty along with those who actually commit the misdemeanor?

There is yet another danger: Is the sincere Christian safe in supporting even that which looks innocent? How can he be sure that there is not some carefully concealed intrigue, deceit or double dealing? He may support a candidate in good faith—and the future may disclose another picture. No wonder the Psalmist said long ago: "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help" (Ps. 146:3).

Ask yourself:

If after considering the foregoing you still feel some duty to lend support in political affairs, ask yourself the following questions honestly in the fear of God:

Can I, as a professing Christian, obey the command to "keep...unspotted from the world" (James 1:27) and voluntarily work among those whose

principles and values are those of the world?

Can I "come out from the world and be...separate" (2 Cor. 6:17) and support political activities which are the very backbone of this present world?

Can I say with Paul that "Our citizenship is in heaven, from whence we look for the Saviour" (Phil. 3:20–21 ASV), and then spend my time and interest toward the governing of an earthly nation?

Can I live "soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world" (Tit. 2:12) if I place myself among people who are neither sober, righteous or godly?

Can I "walk honestly" among those who have no strong scruples against dishonesty—when it is more convenient? Can I say I have "renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully" (2 Cor. 4:2) if I join with those who have not made this profession?

Can I say I love God with all my heart, soul, mind and strength—if part is for politics?

Can I say with Paul that "I am crucified with Christ" if I am giving myself to human goals and human interests and human standards?

Paul could say of himself and his co-workers, "We have conducted ourselves in the world...in the holiness and sincerity that are from God" (2 Cor. 1:12 NIV). Can I say this of myself?

The Apostle set the standard for all time when he wrote to the Thessalonian brethren: "Study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands,...that ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing" (1 Thess. 4:11–12). Or as translated in the New International Version, "Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands,...so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders."

All present government—however good or bad—is only temporary. We have committed ourselves to a cause and a government which, once established, will be worldwide and eternal, with justice, equity and prosperity for all. Our whole interest is there—in the "world to come, whereof we speak." It is coming. Our whole effort now is to prepare ourselves for a place in it when it arrives. For this reason we say with Paul:

"We...are citizens of heaven, and from heaven we expect our deliverer to come, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transfigure the body belonging to our humble state, and give it a form like that of his own resplendent body," (Phil. 3: 20–21 NEB).

When King Jesus is on the ballot, I'll vote for Him, and I want to be ready to give Him my full support. Won't you do the same? ■

THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD, THEN AND NOW

When the Spirit Came at Pentecost...

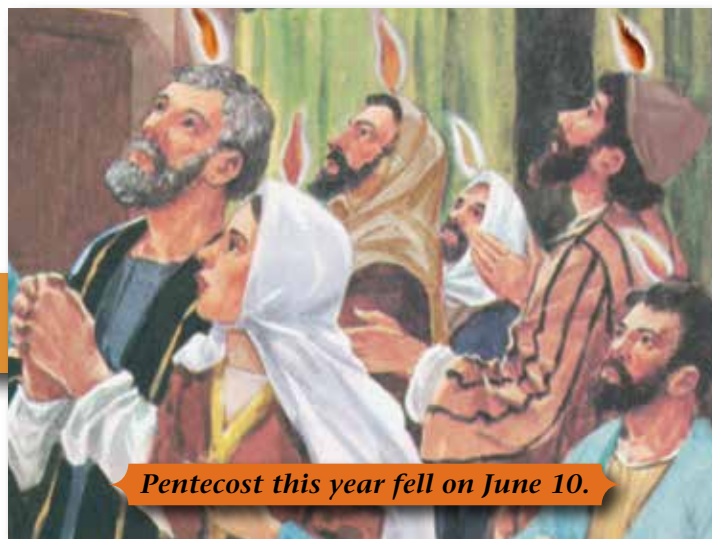
Everything during the last few months had been so sudden, so unexpected. Now it was all over, and Jesus had gone to heaven. What was there to do now but wait, yes, wait in Jerusalem, just as Jesus had told them to do. Just before He ascended, Jesus had told them to “*stay in the city [Jerusalem] until you have been clothed with power from on high.*” So they were there. Waiting.

They were waiting in expectancy for—what? Yes, they were expecting “*power from on high*” (Luke 24:49), but what would that be like? Their imaginations ran dry.

Ten uneventful days passed, and nothing significant had happened. Now Pentecost relieved the monotony. People were arriving from every part of the empire. Pentecost was an ancient Jewish festival still observed religiously by loyal Jews. Early in the morning the streets were already buzzing with the general commotion of gathering crowds.

But the followers of Jesus were not among them. They, about one hundred and twenty all together, were gathered in a large upper room, waiting. And as they waited, they wondered: just how and when would that power come? No one doubted that Jesus would keep His promise, but how? And *when*? They couldn’t help but wonder, too, what was Jesus doing? What was happening even now around the Father’s throne in heaven? How long would the journey take?

They did not have answers to their questions. There wasn’t much to do but wait. And pray. And they *did* pray. The Bible says they “*all joined together constantly in prayer*” (Acts 1:14 NIV). Can’t we imagine that they also talked? Can’t we almost hear them talking about their Lord and what He had taught them? How they missed His company, He whom they had come to know and appreciate; He who had been their close connection with the Father. We can imagine, too, that they talked about others in former days who had received power from God, men like Elijah, and Elisha, and the prophets. These men also had power from God. How did it come to *them*? On and on they talked, and then they prayed again.



Pentecost this year fell on June 10.

And then ... in the midst of it all ... “*when the Day of Pentecost was fully come,*” when “*they were all with one accord in one place ...*” suddenly coming, its arrival was still startling, shocking. “*Suddenly there came ...*” but not like anything they had imagined. There was something to see, something to feel, and something to hear! It sounded like “*a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind*” that “*filled all the house where they were sitting.*” It looked like “*cloven tongues like as of fire,*” and—most mysterious of all—somehow it physically “*sat upon each of them.*” No one present missed the effect: “*Everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability*” (Acts 2:1–4 NLT & NKJV).

Excited, they rushed into the street. The onlookers were astounded. “*Utterly amazed, they asked: ‘Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language?’*” (vs. 7–8)

Imagine people from 17 language backgrounds all understanding one speaker—without an interpreter!

NIV). The Holy Spirit broke language barriers as had never been done in the history of the world. Imagine people from seventeen or more different language backgrounds all understanding the apostles, *without an interpreter!*

WHAT DID IT MEAN?

What was this descending power all about? What did it mean? The apostle Peter, divinely inspired, took the floor and began to speak.

“Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let

me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say." In a calm, straightforward manner he explained what it was all about. This was something that had been foretold. It was in the prophecies, but even the apostles didn't expect it! "What you see this morning," says Peter, "was predicted centuries ago by the prophet Joel" (Acts 2:16 NLT).

Then Peter explained even more. Here is a fulfillment, he says, right in front of your eyes. And if you think this is spectacular, just realize what is still ahead. Amazing as all this

is, it is only a few sprinkles of rain compared with the heavy, worldwide downpour of power that is scheduled for the last days! When that downpour comes, said Peter quoting Joel who spoke for

God, "In the last days ... I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord" (Acts 2:17–20 NIV).

We can scarcely begin to imagine what that first Pentecost following Jesus' ministry was like—much less what that Greater Pentecost will be, when God pours His power on *all His servants* worldwide!

POWER PROPHESED

In addition to the outpouring of power, Pentecost brought a gigantic confirmation to the disciples themselves. If there was any faltering, any hesitating, any skepticism among them, Pentecost dispelled it.

The event was sudden, but not because Jesus had withheld information about it. Actually, He had spoken on several occasions of the power He would be sending. "Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the

Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified" (John 7:38–39 NIV). It would be a much greater measure of what Jesus had already given for special purposes, as when He sent out the seventy (Luke 10).

Just before His ascension Jesus told them explicitly to wait in Jerusalem, because, He said, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you" (Acts 1:8 NIV).

The night before His crucifixion, in His last discourse with His disciples, Jesus spoke of the power He would be sending. He called it a "Comforter," or "Helper." He would be going away, He explained, but He would not leave them alone. This "Comforter" would come, "which is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I have said to you" (John 14:26).^{*} The apostles heard, but little did they realize what the fulfillment of that prophecy would be like—and right within themselves.

THE PURPOSE OF THE POWER

What was the purpose of this Comforter, this power that Jesus was sending?

First of all, in the words of Jesus to His apostles, He was sending it to "teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance that I have said to you" (John 14:26). Jesus gave His apostles this power so that they could write an accurate documentary of His life, ministry and teaching for generations to come. We have this documentary in the form of the New Testament of our Bible, and we can know that it was accurate in its original form because the writers were guided by God's Spirit or power (2 Pet. 1:21; 2 Tim. 3:16–17).

^{*}The Holy Spirit was not a person, as the use of the pronoun "He" referring to "Comforter" might suggest. Because the original text was written in Greek and all Greek words have gender (masculine, feminine, or neuter), the pronoun used in Greek had to match the gender of the word to which it referred. For example, the word for "day" (*hemera*) is feminine; the word for "age" (*aion*) is masculine; "fruit" (*karpos*) is masculine; "city" (*polos*) is feminine. Thus, the pronoun for "fruit" would be "he," and the pronoun for city would be "she," and the pronoun for "comforter" is "he." A few of the newer translations have observed this fact, and have used the pronoun "it" in place of "he" in John 14:16 (see the Concordant Version, Goodspeed, Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott). Others solve the problem by avoiding the use of the personal pronoun form.

"You will receive power," Jesus had promised, and He sent it—at Pentecost (Acts 1:8).

Second, the power of the Holy Spirit was sent to confirm that the Apostles were sent by God. Having superhuman power from God added authority to their message (Mark 16:20). It told everyone that their message had Divine authority behind it. Paul said the Holy Spirit was given *"to confirm the promises made unto the fathers"* (Rom. 15:8). Again Paul says, speaking of his Gentile converts, *"I have won them over by the miracles done through me as signs from God—all by the power of God's Spirit"* (Rom. 15:19 NLT).

LIMITED POWER GIVEN FOR A LIMITED TIME

The power sent by Jesus on that day of Pentecost was a fulfillment of the prophecy made by Joel many hundreds of years earlier. Joel foretold two "rains," or two outpourings of power. The first was to be a "sprinkling" or "early rain" (Joel 2:23). Like any period of "rain," it would come and it would go; when its purpose was accomplished, it would cease.

The apostle Paul discussed this aspect of the power in His letter to the Corinthians. In 1 Corinthians 12 he tells how different persons had received different gifts. One had power to heal, another to teach; another could speak in tongues; another could interpret, and so on.

Then in the next chapter he explained that these gifts were limited. When their purpose was done, they would cease. *"For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away"* (1 Cor. 13:9–10). What is the "perfect"? The Psalmist says, *"The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul"* (Ps. 19:7).

When the Bible, or written Word of God, would be complete, knowledge and power by the Holy Spirit would no longer be needed. The written Word would supply everything needed by the man or woman who chose to serve God. As Paul also explained, *"All Scripture... given by inspiration of God... is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work"* (2 Tim. 3:16–17).

Since one of the primary purposes for which Jesus sent the Holy Spirit or Comforter was to enable the apostles to recall what they had been taught (John 14:26; 2 Pet. 1:21), it seems reasonable that the power ceased when that mission had been accomplished. Several of the newer translations of *"that which is perfect"* in 1 Cor. 13:10 suggest this meaning: *"when the*

time of fulfillment comes" (Knox Bible); *"when the complete comes"* (Phillips), *"when perfection comes"* (Williams). The same word is used to describe the *"good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God"* in Romans 12:2. Paul even combines his statement about the *"perfect"* with a discussion of complete and partial knowledge (1 Cor. 13:9–13).

When the writing of the Bible was completed (the Old Testament had been compiled before Jesus was born), about the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, open vision and revelation ceased (as prophesied, see Daniel 9:26); and the *"early rain"* Joel prophesied, the power of the Holy Spirit that Jesus had sent at Pentecost, was no longer needed—it was *"done away"* (1 Cor. 13:10); it disappeared (NIV).

THE SECOND COMFORTER

The Holy Spirit benefited us by making possible the arrival of a second "Comforter."

When Jesus, on the night before His crucifixion, spoke of the first *"Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit,"* He spoke also of *"another Comforter"* which is *"the Spirit of truth."* We read of it in John 14:16–17 (NIV), *"And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counselor [Comforter] to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth."* This *"Spirit of truth,"* the written Word of God (Jesus' *"words ... are spirit"* –John 6:63) would give support, guidance, and strength, and *this Comforter was prom-*

Angels direct and oversee
the lives of those who will be *"heirs
of salvation"* (Heb. 1:14).

ised to "abide forever"—nothing was said about the first Comforter being "forever." But as said above, the first Comforter, the power of the Holy Spirit, was necessary to make possible the second Comforter, so that the New Testament writers could accurately recall what they had seen and heard, and accurately write the knowledge God wanted preserved for future believers. What they wrote is part of the second Comforter, which we today have as the Bible.

GOD'S WORK IN OUR BEHALF TODAY

Over and over throughout the Scriptures, God gave special, temporary power for a limited purpose to select individuals, and when the purpose was accomplished it was withdrawn. The Holy Spirit power given at Pentecost was also temporary; and when its purpose was accom-

*Those who were trusted with the power of the Holy Spirit had a singular responsibility. If they apostatized, if they forsook the faith, there was no way back; there was no forgiveness available to them (Heb. 6:4–6). They had committed the unpardonable sin.



QUESTION & ANSWERS

"Rightly dividing the word of truth" -2 Timothy 2:15

by GERALD R. PAYNE

WHAT IS THE

"ONLY WAY TO HEAVEN"?

Is It John 3:16?

Part 2 (CONCLUSION)

Is the only way to heaven to believe that Jesus died for your sins and to accept Him as your personal Savior?

"For God so loved the world"

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

If Jesus did not die on the cross to pay the debt for our sins and set us free, then how are we to understand John 3:16? For what purpose did God give Jesus for us?

Psalm 40:6-8 is a prophecy about Christ's role at His first coming. Hebrews references this text and tells us what Christ said regarding it. *"In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure. Then I said, 'Behold, I have come—in the volume of the book it is written of Me—to do Your will, O God'"* (Heb. 10:6-7). Christ did not come to be a sacrifice for sin; He came to do His Father's will as an example of the obedience God requires of those who receive His eternal blessings.

The apostle Paul understood this plan when he said, *"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service"* (Rom. 12:1). It is not Christ's body offered but our bodies that, offered, become the *"living sacrifice"* that is *"holy, acceptable to God."* If Christ's literal body was offered as a literal sacrifice for sin, then we must do the same to be saved, because we are commanded to follow His example (1 Pet. 2:21). But Paul continues to tell us just what he means by offering our bodies as a living sacrifice: *"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God"* (Rom. 12:1-2). Jesus

offered His whole life to God by giving up His own will and desires, not Himself as a literal, bodily offering on the cross.

For clarification I would like to quote a passage by Paul in Romans 6, and insert some footnotes to point out Paul's intended meaning **as it relates to the rest of Scripture teaching.**

"For the death that He died,¹ He died to sin once for all²; but the life that He lives, He lives to God.³ Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin,⁴ but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.⁵ Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts.⁶ And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God" (Rom. 6:10-13).

"Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves⁸ to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?" (Rom. 6:16).

Paul, speaking of his own sacrifices and hardships, told his purpose in suffering for Christ's sake: *"that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection"*

¹death to sin, meaning Christ cannot sin

²once for all time for Himself giving us an example

³a Godly life

⁴more than just a pretense *"If iniquity be in thine hand, put it far away"* (Job 11:14). OR as the NLT has it *"Get rid of your sins, and leave all iniquity behind you."*

⁵to model your lives after Christ, see 1 John 2:5, 6

⁶be done with sin

⁷"dead" does not always refer to physical death. In this case it means being in sin, which is considered death because there is no hope of future life. If no longer living in sin then you can reckon yourselves to be alive from the dead

⁸one who gives himself up wholly to another's will—Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon to the New Testament

Christ did not come to be a sacrifice for sin; He came to do His Father's will as an example of the obedience God requires of those who receive His eternal blessings.

from the dead" (Phil. 3:10). Paul wanted to be "conformed to His [Christ's] death," that is, to make himself like Christ, without sin, "dead to sin" (Rom. 6:9).

■ **"God gave *His only begotten Son*"?**

Is Christ God's only son? Christ Himself said, "Whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother" (Matt. 12:50). We also read in Hebrews, "For it was fitting for Him...in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren" (Heb. 2:10-12).

So Christ is not the only Son God has. But He is His only Son of this earth in another way, as we will see next.

■ **"God *gave His only begotten Son*"?**

"Only begotten" comes from a single Greek word "monogenace" which is defined as "only; Also unique (in kind) of something that is the only example of its category" (BDAG).

How was Christ unique?

First, He was all human, not deity or part God and part man (Heb. 2:14-15). Nor was He part of a Trinity of beings who were "co-existent, co-eternal, and co-equal with God and the Holy Spirit, one God in three persons,"⁹ as is often claimed. Nor can anyone explain from Scripture how God came down from heaven and was born of a woman. ***Re-incarnation or pre-existence is nowhere taught in the Bible.***

The human nature of Jesus is evidenced by the following facts:

Jesus was ***"made of a woman, made under the law"*** (Gal. 4:4).

He was ***"made of the seed of David according to the flesh"*** (Rom. 1:3)

He was ***"made like unto His brethren"*** (Heb. 2:17)

He was ***"born"*** (Luke 2:10-11).

⁹The doctrine of the Trinity was a heated debate for centuries, an idea borrowed from the heathens, and finally made its way into the Church doctrine in its present form in the end of the 4th century. It is nowhere taught, or even alluded to in the Scriptures.

He ***"increased in wisdom and stature"*** (Luke 2:52).

He ***"learned obedience"*** (Heb. 5:8).

He ***"was tempted"*** (Matt. 4:1-10)

He ***"slept"*** (Matt. 8:24).

He was ***"weary"*** (John 4:6).

He ***"hungered"*** (Matt. 21:18).

He ***"thirsted"*** (John 19:28).

He ***"suffered"*** (Luke 22:44).

He ***"wept"*** (John 11:35).

He ***"died"*** (John 19:30-33).

None of the above attributes pertain to God Almighty. They describe human traits. Scripture describes God as having traits very different from these. For example:

God is from everlasting to everlasting (Ps. 90:2; Neh. 9:5). *He was not born nor can He die as did Christ.*

God cannot be tempted with evil, as Jesus was (James 1:13).

God does not slumber or sleep as did Jesus (Ps. 121:4)

God does not have to learn as did Christ (Job 37:16; Psalm 147:5; 1 John 3:20).

Second, Jesus was declared to be the Son of God.

The title "Son of God" is applied to Jesus more than 50 times in the New Testament. How could He be both the Father and the Son? The term "Son of man" is used 80 times to designate Him. Jesus is also spoken of as the Son of David, confirming His relationship to the family of David. Moses prophesied He would be raised up "from among his brethren" (Deut. 18:15, 18), not sent down from heaven as a preexistent being. And when He prayed He always prayed to the Father. Why would He have said, "I go to the Father" (John 16:16, 17, 28) if they were the same? Or why would He have said, "My Father is greater than I" (John 14:28) if they were co-equal?

Third, Jesus was without sin.

No one has the record Jesus had, for as Paul said, all have sinned (Rom. 3:23; 5:12). Only Jesus could say, "I do always those things that please him [the Father]...I seek not mine own glory:...I receive not honour from men" (John 8:29, 50; 5:41). Jesus showed exemplary discipline and self-control throughout all His

Only Jesus could say, "I do always those things that please him [the Father]...I seek not mine own glory:...I receive not honour of men."

Only an active belief can overpower our natural desires so that we become morally like Christ. If we do this, we will not perish but shall obtain everlasting life.

mortal life, even victories over temptation, because Jesus was *“in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin”* (Heb. 4:15).

In the context of John 3:16, Christ was unique, being an example of perfect obedience, never sinning once He learned better. And Peter tells us that *“Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps”* (1 Pet. 2:21). And despite what you may have been told, Paul agrees; *“Therefore I urge you, imitate me...Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ”* (1 Cor. 4:16, 11:1).

■ ***“That whoever believes in Him...”***

What does it mean to believe in Jesus?

First of all, the word *“believes”* is an active verb that couples faith with an active response to obey. True faith is a working faith. James says it well, *“But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?”* (James 2:20). This also agrees with the rest of Jesus’ statement, as we will soon see.

■ ***“That whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”***

The words *“perish”* and *“have”* (as in *“have everlasting life”*) are subjunctive; they satisfy an *“IF”* condition. In other words, *“everlasting life”* is something that results from *“If we believe in Him.”* Only an active belief can overpower our natural desires so that we become morally like Christ. If we do this, we will not perish but *shall* obtain everlasting life. But we must realize that both the eternal perishing and the everlasting life are options for the future; they are not present conditions. To put it another way: We will not perish and we will have everlasting life IF we carry our commitment, our belief, to a successful finish, even *“to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ”* (Eph. 4:13).

Christ did it perfectly all the way through.¹⁰ For the rest of us, the growth process includes many stumbles. For example, as outstanding as the Apostle Paul was, Hebrew of the Hebrews, stock of Abraham, called of Christ, what did he say? *“Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the*

upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:13–14). And several years later at the end of his life, he told Timothy *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing”* (2 Tim 4:7–8). For Paul it was a growth process, and so it is with us.

■ ***“That whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”***

“He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God” (John 3:18–21). *“Done in God,”* i.e., deeds done according to God’s commands.

Jesus is speaking of the world of believers, those who come to the light [to His true teaching, Jesus said *“I am the light of the world”*—John 8:12] that their deeds may be exposed through the Word. Unless our evil deeds are exposed [made known to us] we cannot put them away. Those who come to the light want their deeds exposed so they can put away all evil, as the prophet Isaiah said, *“Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, learn to do good”* (Isa. 1:16–17). Our conscience is not naturally a reliable guide; rather, *“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked”* (Jeremiah 17:9). And the very next verse is plain and pointed, *“I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings.”* Everyone will be given according to his own ways, not according to Christ’s payment of their penalty or Christ’s righteousness in their stead.

¹⁰This is not to say that Christ was instantly perfect; *“He learned obedience by the things which He suffered”* (Heb. 5:8).

Summary

First, God does not make mistakes. *"I the Lord speak righteousness, I declare things that are right"* (Isa. 45:19). He put a plan in place modeled after many other worlds like ours. He had lots of experience from an eternity in the past. Then are we to say we are wiser than He when we find fault with His plan by saying we cannot obey His Laws and do what He requires of us?

Second, God loves the world of believers. He even invites them to be His own sons and daughters if they meet His standards and conditions (2 Cor. 6:17-18). The whole earth will be their eternal inheritance (Matt. 5:5), and they will be His associates rulers, seated with Him on His seat of authority (Rev. 3:21) when He is King.

Third, God's plan has included an ideal, a perfect example in Jesus of the standard He requires all to reach who would be citizens of His kingdom. When God "gave" us His Son, He showed the entire plan of salvation from beginning to end, from birth to completion, even to crowning Him with immortality. Our job is to copy Christ's

example and keep at it until we measure up to God's standard of righteousness. God *"will render to each one according to his deeds: eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil"* (Rom. 2:5-8). If we follow His example to the end of our day of opportunity, we will **"not perish but have everlasting life"** when He returns as King of the whole earth. ■

Free paraphrase of John 3:16,

"For God so loved the world [of believers] that He gave His only begotten Son [unique because He accomplished what no other on earth has ever done by always doing the Father's will from start to finish] that whoever believes in Him [by understanding His teaching and obeying His commands until he becomes like Christ in character], should not perish but have everlasting life [after being approved by Jesus Christ when He returns and judges him faithful]."

I'll Think About It

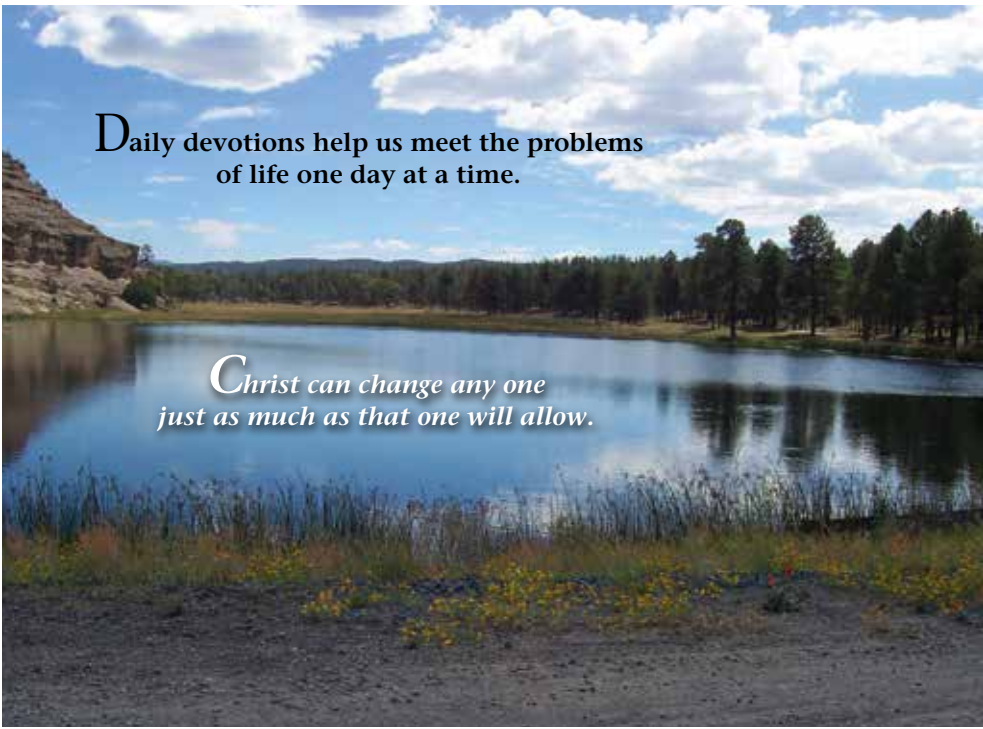
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respond as Christ would have.

The Greek word for *think* that Paul used also means calculate. It describes the thought process of a worker who makes careful calculations before beginning a task. Paul means for us to have right standards of action and to apply those standards in every situation. As he advised Timothy, *"Take heed to yourself, and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you"* (1 Tim. 4:16).

Is it possible? Some say it is not, but God says it is by the very fact that He asks it. He would not ask what we cannot do. What does the Psalmist, inspired by God, say? *"I enjoy living by your rules as people enjoy great riches. I think about your orders and study your ways. I enjoy obeying your demands, and I will not forget your word"* (Ps. 119:14-16 NCV).

Want to think about it? Certainly!—provided that thinking means ACTION! ■



Daily devotions help us meet the problems
of life one day at a time.

*Christ can change any one
just as much as that one will allow.*

Be Prepared!

One sure way to be ready when the Bridegroom comes is to be ready every day.

Jesus' parables teach powerful lessons. Near the end of His ministry, He used several to show the importance of keeping awake, alert, ready. He would be coming back, and He wanted His followers to *"stay awake and be prepared, because you do not know the day or hour of my return"* (Matt. 25:13 NLT).

The picture of the bridesmaids waiting for the bridegroom was a common one in ancient Palestine. If the bridegroom was coming from any distance, there was no knowing what time he would arrive, and since he was a supremely honored guest, not to welcome him when he arrived was a serious breach of manners.

Jesus divides His bridesmaids into two groups: wise and foolish. At the start of the parable, however, all look alike. No one knows who will be wise, or who will be foolish. All have lamps brightly burning, awaiting the arrival of the bridegroom. They do not know when he will come.

What makes the difference between the wise and the foolish? It is all a matter of how prepared they are. Those who are wise are prepared to hold out until he comes—they have taken an extra supply of oil in case he is late. The foolish ones let their oil run low, and are caught. When they try to remedy the problem, they return only to find that they missed out—the door is shut, and they are on the outside.

The Lesson: Be Prepared

There are many things in life which are impossible to accomplish at the

last minute. Unless we have prepared beforehand, we lose out. It is that way with learning. The time for the examination is not the time to prepare. It is that way with the skills of life. When the skill is needed is not the best time to learn it.

A Missed Opportunity

Jesus also emphasizes the need to seize an opportunity when it comes. Sometimes we hear of an actor, or a business person, or an artist who went straight to success because a position opened up suddenly right in front of them, and they could simply step into it. This is true, they happened to be in the right place at the right time. But they were also prepared for it. They did not see the opportunity and start then to get ready. They had prepared diligently in advance, and were ready for the opportunity when it came.

If this be true in the things of this world, it is still more true in the Divine scheme. God has openings for service, but we can take them only as far as we are prepared.

Things That Cannot be Borrowed

Jesus' parable says plainly that there are certain things which cannot be borrowed. The bridesmaids could not borrow oil. They had to go and buy for themselves.

What is that oil? It might be the oil of character. Character cannot be loaned from one person to another. It must be developed individually, forged by one's own decisions, thoughts and convictions.

Obedience is another quality that cannot be borrowed. God expects personal obedience to His commands, and holds each one accountable for what he does. As the apostle Paul declares, *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad"* (2 Cor. 5:10 NIV). In the day when each servant of God shall stand before Him to give account, it will be utterly impossible to fill the empty life with those Christ-like qualities of faith, endurance, courage, obedience. If we have not individually developed these qualities, we will not have them then.

In Jesus' parable of the ten bridesmaids, when the bridegroom arrived, the foolish bridesmaids were out buying oil for their lamps. On returning, they found that the feast had already begun. They had missed their one great opportunity.

Every day brings us opportunities which we must not neglect—opportunities to help one another, to grow in character, to become Christ-like in thought and attitude. These opportunities are here, right at hand. Altogether they are an open door, and we must go through it. If we don't, that door will shut—and we will find ourselves shut out of the joy and delights of the Marriage Feast.

Another truth Jesus emphasizes in this parable is that the failure of the foolish bridesmaids was final. The door was shut, and shut forever. Those who were in were inside forever, those

CONTINUED ON PAGE 24



Five of them were wise...

"The KINGDOM OF HEAVEN can be illustrated by the story of ten bridesmaids who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise.

The five who were foolish took no oil for their lamps, but the other five were wise enough to take along extra oil.

When the bridegroom was delayed, they all lay down and slept.

At midnight they were roused by the shout, "Look, the bridegroom is coming! Come out and welcome him!" All the bridesmaids got up and prepared their lamps.

So stay awake and be prepared, because you do not know the day or hour of My return. -Jesus

Then the five foolish ones asked the others, "Please give us some of your oil because our lamps are going out." But the others replied, "We don't have enough for all of us. Go to a shop and buy some for yourselves."

But while they were gone to buy oil, the bridegroom came. Then those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was locked.

Later, when the other five bridesmaids returned, they stood outside, calling, "Lord, Lord, open the door for us!" But he called back, "Believe me, I don't know you!"

So stay awake and be prepared, because you do not know the day or hour of my return. — Matt. 25:1-13 NLT



...and five of them were foolish.

who were out were outside forever. They had all anticipated entering, yet some were excluded permanently.

Some opportunities, once gone, are gone forever.

Centuries later, we read this parable and the question comes to our minds: Will I be shut in, or shut out?

One sure way to be ready when the Bridegroom comes is to be ready every day.

Keep Your Lamps Burning!

There is something about Jesus' parable that speaks to each one personally. God provides the lamp, but each of us is individually responsible to keep it burning. This means keeping it filled with oil. We do not have to fill others' lamps, only our own. We do not have to resist others' temptations, only our own. We do not have to shoulder others' loads, only our own.

When it comes to that last moment, when Christ the great Bridegroom comes, nothing will matter but the oil in our own lamp: our character, our faith, our record in heaven, which will witness for or against us.

The Jews had a proverb, "A door that is shut is not so easily

opened." The door in Jesus' parable was one such door. John Greenleaf Whittier put it in poetry when he wrote,

*For all sad words of tongue or pen,
The saddest are these:
"It might have been."*

Too Late

Why did the five foolish bridesmaids fail? If you were to ask them, they would likely blame the bridegroom: He came too late. If he had come when he was first expected, they would have been prepared. For a time, all seemed to be going fine. All the bridesmaids arose, trimmed their lamps and looked as though they were ready. But hour after weary hour went by, and ...

Suddenly, something is terribly wrong! Five of the lamps are going out!* *"The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil'"* (Matt. 25:8 NIV). It is a tragic hour for these five bridesmaids. The bridegroom is coming and they are not ready! In desperation they cry to their companions, *"Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out!" But the others replied, 'We don't have enough for all of us. Go to a shop and*

buy some for yourselves'" (25:9 NLT).

Remember the days of Noah? The time came when the door to the ark was shut, and those inside were safe and sound.

But it was too late for those outside. No matter how much they wanted to get in, they could not. The message is the same in Jesus' parable of the ten bridesmaids: *"Later the others also came. 'Sir! Sir!' they said. 'Open the door for us!' But he replied, 'I tell you the truth, I don't know you'"* (Matt. 25:11–12 NIV).

A godly character cannot be made in a moment. It must be carefully nurtured and cultivated over time. Old habits cannot be removed in a moment; they must be replaced one by one with good habits, and this takes time. *"Don't let the excitement of youth cause you to forget your Creator. Honor him in your youth before you grow old.... It will be too late then to remember him"* (Eccl. 12:1–2 NLT). If faith is not nurtured, it will fail, the light in your life will flicker and go out.

This was Jesus' message in Matthew 7, when He said, *"Not all those who say that I am their Lord will enter the Kingdom of heaven. The only people who will enter the Kingdom of heaven are those who will do what my Father in heaven wants. On the last day, many people will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, we spoke for you, and through you and through you we forced out demons and did many miracles.' Then I will tell them clearly, 'Get away from me, you who do evil, I never knew you'"* (Matt. 7:21–23 NCV).

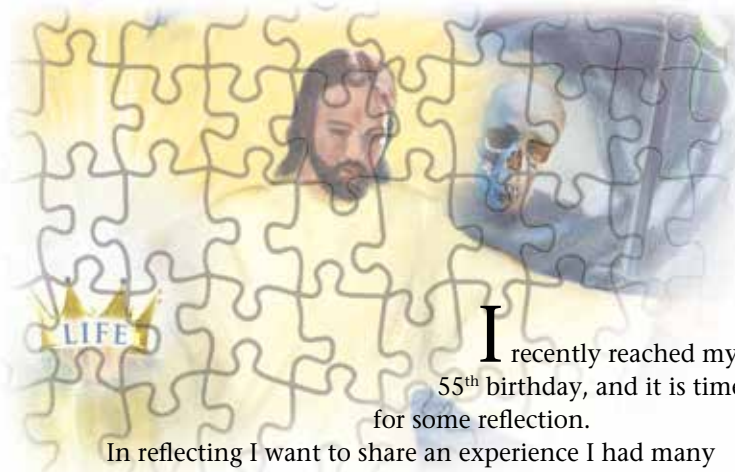
Who will enter? *"Those who do what my Father in heaven wants."*

Regarding the crisis of Christ's second coming, Paul said, *"You yourselves know full well..."*—they had heard it from Him many times. Today is no different. We have only one life in which to prepare for the coming Judge and King. If we let this opportunity slip away, it will be gone forever.

The lesson: *"Stay awake and be prepared, because you do not know the day or hour of my return"* (Matt. 25:13 NLT). ■

*The KJV erroneously states that the lamps have "gone out." But these words are in the present tense. The present tense represents a single statement of fact or reality viewed as occurring in actual time. In most cases this corresponds directly with the English present tense.—Logos Library System [tense voice mood]. The newer translations have corrected this error and have it in the present tense, "Our lamps are going out."

Some opportunities,
once gone, are gone forever.



“From That to This” (or “From Untruth to Truth”)

by RALPH CUBBAGE

I recently reached my 55th birthday, and it is time for some reflection.

In reflecting I want to share an experience I had many years ago with a jigsaw puzzle that was advertised as the world's most difficult puzzle.

When the puzzle arrived, I eagerly opened it, thinking I would work it quickly as I had done with previous puzzles.

Wrong! This one was different—it had *the same picture on the front and on the back!* I really pondered this one! It just wouldn't work like a normal puzzle. To put this puzzle together would require my utmost in concentration and patience.

After many tries, I began to fit it together, piece by piece. At times I would make what seemed like good progress, only to find that the entire section had no place to connect to the rest of the picture—because I had already used those pieces in another area *other side up!* It was only by constantly reviewing each one used successfully that I could make progress.

When finally it was all together, I felt good that I had conquered that jigsaw.

As I look back upon it, this experience says something to my life as a believer. From a child, I had been taught fundamental religion: the usual teachings about the creation, the fall of man, Satan, the immortal soul, that God loves everybody (regardless of character), the whole list from A to Z. But it was like a puzzle that could not be solved. So many questions kept going through my mind.

For years and years my questions went unanswered. My life could not have full meaning until I found the answers to these puzzling questions.

Then things began to change. I began to think more and more seriously about my beliefs. I responded to the Megiddo Church's ad for a booklet called *The Coming of Elijah and Jesus*, and read it. Other booklets followed, as well as the *Megiddo Message*.

At first, I just casually read, but it was like a puzzle. I couldn't see all the picture. Then I gradually realized that here in the Bible was the truth staring at me, and I wasn't doing anything about it! Here the answers were coming together, the puzzle slowly but surely was being solved. I took my Bible and earnestly compared it to what I had been taught. The more I studied, the happier I became. Slowly but surely in my mind, the shackles of the false

were replaced by the real truth of the Bible.

There were times when I said, “I don't understand it,” but just like that puzzle, good concentration and patience began to have its reward. After much study I could see the final picture emerging. All the old conflicts were being dispelled. What a blessed relief! That (untruth) was being replaced by this (truth). The more I studied, the more content I became.

In my opinion, the founder of the Megiddo Church, the Rev. L. T. Nichols, had done such a superb job of presenting the Bible plainly that any reasonable, thinking person had to admit (if he or she were totally honest) that here were the real teachings of the Bible.

The Bible is not an easy book to understand. Surface reading is not enough. Only to the honest seeker will the golden nugget be uncovered. I thank God, at long last, peace and satisfaction was becoming part of my life. Life, which had been boring and meaningless, was now exciting and meaningful. This is what happens when we seek to serve God in every area of our lives.

The same qualities of good concentration and patience that solved that jigsaw puzzle for me proved to be tools I needed to apply in my Christian life.

No, it hasn't been a picnic. You will lose friends, and many other things. But, my dear brothers and sisters, it's worth it. For the few things I have lost, God has restored above and beyond all my expectations. I now have new friends, friends that are loyal and genuine. Would I trade my **this** for **that**? *Absolutely NOT.*

When I envision (from reading God's Word) what God has in store for His faithful followers—even eternal life—it stirs up within me such a zeal to do and to be ALL that I'm capable of, and I am truly happy.

And so, to any honest seekers, to any that are discouraged, to any who wish life to have greater meaning, I humbly say: Please give the Word of God a chance. Be willing to change your ways, and follow “*thus saith the Lord.*” Open up your heart and mind to the full scrutiny of the Word. Don't cling to tradition, or any untruth, but study the Word and discover for yourself.

Once you have made the switch from **that** to **this**, you will be happier for doing so. I feel like Jude wrote (Jude verse 3): “*Beloved,...I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.*” ■



AWESOME DESIGNS

"Stand still and consider the wondrous works of God." -Job 37:14

Flying Marathoners: The Red Knots

Did you ever run in a marathon? Did you win? If you did, you thought yourself pretty distinguished, didn't you? But whether you won or not, the greatest victory was completing it—right? You became a marathoner.

Well, we red knots are flying marathoners. How long is the marathon you run? Something like 26 miles? Well, if we flew only 26 miles, we wouldn't think

we had gone anywhere. Every year—are you with me? Every year some of us red knots fly some 9,000 miles one way and back. And if we cross a large body of water, we may fly as many as 2,500 miles non-stop. We average speeds between 30 and 40 miles per hour. Now how do you feel about your marathon achievement? I'm sure we passed you long ago!

But I can't take any credit for this. All credit goes to my wonderful Creator, who designed my robust, muscular wings, and my fine, streamlined body that is able to carry its own food supply—fuel supply, I mean. Yes, I've been engineered to keep flying.

Why do we fly so much? We red knots have an obsession for daylight. The more daylight, the better. 24/7 is perfect. Impossible? We (rufa subspecies) are in the Arctic during the summer months (May, June, and July), when the sun there scarcely dips below the horizon, and we are at the southern tip of South America during the winter months (December and January), when the days are longest there!

Life for us begins in the Arctic summertime. This is where we raise our families. By late summer, we are on our way south. The first stopover for many of us is Delaware Bay, where the horseshoe crabs have just



(above) Breeding plumage of adult Red Knots.



(right) Winter or basic plumage of adults.

Did You Know...?

- ✓...that red knots are members of the sandpiper family.
- ✓...that the red knots have one of the longest migrations of any bird. Every year they travel more than 9,000 miles from the Arctic or tundra areas in the north to the southern tip of South America.
- ✓...that red knots have two plumages, one basic and one for breeding. While migrating northward, they gradually transition from basic to breeding plumage. The change back to their basic plumage begins at the breeding site but is most pronounced during the migration southward.
- ✓...that red knots can double their weight prior to migration.
- ✓...that they also are able to change the size of their digestive organs prior to migration and seasonally. For example, the size of their gizzard increases in thickness when feeding on harder foods on the wintering ground, and decreases in size while feeding on softer foods in the breeding grounds. These changes can be very rapid, occurring in as little as six days.
- ✓...that red knots eat a variety of hard shelled prey. Small animals are ingested whole, then crushed by the red knots' muscular stomach.
- ✓...that using a sensory organ in their bills that detects changes in water pressure, red knots are able to detect mollusks buried under wet sand.
- ✓...that when it is nesting time, the male constructs the nest and the female lays 3 or 4 eggs per day over a course of about 6 days, but development of the baby chicks does not begin until all the eggs are laid.
- ✓...that both parents share the duties of the incubation period (about 22 days) equally. [In this way, hatching of the clutch is usually synchronized.]
- ✓...that chicks are precocial at hatching, covered in downy cryptic feathers. And that within a day after hatching, red knot chicks leave the nest and begin foraging with their parents.
- ✓...that after the young are hatched, the parents migrate southward independently, the mother leaving first.
- ✓...that after the young have fledged they make their first migration southward on their own to a destination they have never seen.

laid their eggs. Someone has estimated that 100,000 of us devour 248 tons of horseshoe crab eggs during the time we are there. This rich food is excellent for refueling and rebuilding our muscular wings.

Then we're off to South America non-stop. That means going several weeks without eating. (Do you see why we need all those horseshoe crab eggs?) By late November we are at the tip of the continent, just when the daylight there is getting close to 24/7. Well

timed, isn't it?

Then in the spring (your spring) we head back north, stopping to refill our energy tanks in Brazil or Argentina, and again in Delaware Bay.

Scientists have found that when we refuel we actually triple the size of our liver and double the size of our flight muscles, which eventually serve as a source of protein for us. This is all very important to our survival.

And think about this. When we head for the Arctic, we have to have a little more than enough energy to arrive, because there may not be food immediately available in that region, and we need to build nests and raise our young while the days are longest. That is why, when we're on the ground, we eat so ravenously.

What about adverse weather? What if strong winds or storms blow us off course? In general, weather conditions are not a big problem. If we get blown off course, our Designer has provided us with an inside navigation system to get us back on course. I can't explain how it works, but I thank our great Creator that we are very seldom lost.

You call it "instinct," this marvelous programming in our brains that we didn't put there? When you think about it, isn't it fantastic? Yes, our little ones hatch actually knowing how to fly, and which direction to go. How do we judge distances so accurately? How do we navigate? How do we find the same stopovers every year (at the right time of year) when flying two or three thousand feet above the earth? There's no logical explanation—except that we are awesomely designed!

Every flap of my wings is another grateful "Thank You!" to my wonderful Designer. If He is able to keep little me flying all those miles, what can He do for you! ■

Sources for information in this article:

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The downy Red Knot chick blends into its environment.

THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD, THEN AND NOW

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 17

plished, it was withdrawn. Does that mean that we are left today without help or hope? Because we today do not see angels, because we do not have the ability to perform miracles or receive revelations from God, does that mean we are beyond the reach of God's help? Absolutely not!! Actually, the Holy Spirit was only one part—one *small* part—of God's work in behalf of His human children.

All through the ages God has worked on behalf of His children, sometimes openly and sometimes through human instruments or the arranging of circumstances. Often His word is referred to as the activities of God's "Spirit." Literally God's "breath," the term is used in a figurative sense to refer to His influence, His power, His knowledge, which is literally "God-breathed." The greatest resource is His written Word, from which we may draw strength, knowledge, and insight any day, anytime, anywhere. Then we can communicate with our heavenly Father through prayer. Through prayer we can find courage to tackle any stronghold of sin, strength for any test, and the assurance that every trial that comes to us has been pre-measured to our ability to endure (1 Cor. 10:13).

Then, too, how much help do we receive from God through His ministering angels as they direct and oversee the lives of those who will be "*heirs of salvation*" (Heb. 1:14)? The promise of Psalm 34:7 is without time limit. The only limitation is that the one receiving the benefit must be a

God-fearer. "*The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them.*"

The entire plan is designed to assure the success of those who are committed to Him and are living by His laws. The whole focus of His plan—past, present and future—is on the participants, His potential sons and daughters (2 Cor. 6:17–18).

God does not hear the call of those who are seeking Him, and arrange for their enlightenment, then leave them to the blind forces of chance. Those who are seeking Him with all their heart and soul and mind and strength (Jer. 29:13), who desire the future life He is holding out to His faithful, obedient children (Ps. 34:12–16; Prov. 3:13–18; Heb. 12:1–2), have His promise: "*I will never leave you nor forsake you*" (Heb. 13:5). There is also this promise: "*My God shall supply all your need*" (Phil. 4:19). And didn't the great apostle Paul say also, "*I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me*" (Phil. 4:13). There is nothing haphazard about the plan of God. Even though "*time and chance happen to them all*" (Eccl. 9:11), above all is the Divine hand guarding, guiding, working all things together for the eternal good of those who are seeking Him.

The second downpour of the Holy Spirit is coming, as "rain" prophesied by Joel (2:23–25). This promise will be fulfilled when the prophet Elijah comes to announce the approach of the Great King Jesus (Mal. 4:5–6; Matt. 17:11).

Who does not want to be part of that great outpouring of power, when God's Spirit is poured out abundantly, never to be removed! ■



THE GEOGRAPHY BOOK

(As told by Judge Petri)

Little things, often overlooked, are big factors in winning.

About 30 years ago, I happened to be in a bookstore in Cincinnati, when a little ragged boy not over 12 years of age came in and inquired for a geography book.

"Plenty of them," said the salesperson.

"How much do they cost?"

"One dollar, my lad."

The little fellow drew back in dismay, and taking his hand out of his pocket, commenced to count some pennies and little silver pieces that he had held till they were all damp with sweat. Three or four times he counted them. At last he looked up. "I didn't know they were so much."

He turned to go out, and even opened the door, then closed it again and came back. "I have only 62 cents," said he. "You couldn't let me have a geography book and wait a little while for the rest of the money?"

His little bright eyes looked up eagerly for the answer, and he seemed to shrink in his ragged clothes, when the man, not very kindly, told him that he could not do it.

The disappointed little fellow looked to me with a very poor attempt at a smile, then left the store. I followed him out and overtook him.

"And what now?" I asked kindly.

"I shall try another place, sir."

"Shall I go, too, and see how you succeed?" I asked.

"Yes, if you like," said the child in surprise.

Four different stores we entered, though none of them knew that we came together, and each time he was refused.

"Will you try again?" I asked him, as we left the fourth place.

"Yes, sir. I shall try all of them, or I wouldn't know whether I could get one or not."

We entered the fifth store, and the little fellow walked up manfully and told the gentleman just what he wanted, and how much money he had.

"You want the book very, very much?" asked the proprietor.

"Yes, sir, Very, very much."

"Why do you want it so very, very much?"

"To study, sir. I can't go to school, but I can study at home. All the boys have got one, and

they will get ahead of me. Besides, my father was a sailor, and I want to know about the places where he used to go."

"Does he not go to those places now?"

"He is dead," said the boy softly, dropping his head. Then he added after a while, "When I get big, I am going to be a sailor, too."

"Are you?" asked the gentleman, raising his eyebrows curiously.

"Yes, sir, if I live."

Well, my lad, I'll tell you what I will do. I will let you have a new geography book, and you can pay me the remainder of the money when you can, or I will let you have this one that is not new for 50 cents."

"Is it just like the others, only not new?"

"Yes, sir, just like the others."

Are all the leaves in it?"

"All the leaves are in it."

"Then it should do just as well as a new one, and I shall have 12 cents left toward buying some other book. I am glad they didn't let me have one at the other places."

The book seller looked at me inquiringly, and I told him what I had seen of the small boy. He was much pleased, and when he packaged the book for the little fellow, I saw him drop in a nice, new pencil and some clean white paper.

"A present my lad, for your perseverance. Always have courage like that, and you will make your mark."

"Thank you sir! You are very kind."

"What is your name?"

"William Haverly, sir."

"Do you want any more books?" I now asked him.

"More than ever I can get," he replied, taking in at one glance the books that lined the shelves.

I gave him a bank note. "It will buy some for you," said I.

Tears of joy came into his eyes.

"Can I buy what I want with it?"

"Yes, my lad, anything."

"Then the first thing I'll buy is a book for my mother," said he. "I thank you very much, and some day I hope I can pay you back."

He wanted my name, and I gave it to him. Then I left him standing by the counter, so happy that I almost envied him.

Many long years passed before I saw him again.



Shall I go, too, and see how you succeed?

Last year I went to Europe on one of the finest vessels that ever crossed the Atlantic.

We had beautiful weather until very near the end of the voyage. Then came a terrific storm, that would have sunk our ship and all on board, had it not been for the captain. Every spar was laid low, the rudder was almost useless, and a great leak was threatening to fill the ship. The crew were all strong, willing men, and the mates were practical seamen of the first class. But after pumping for one whole night and still the water was gaining on them, they gave up in despair and prepared to take to the boats, though they might have known that no small boat could ride in such a sea.

The captain, who had been below with his charts, now came up. He saw how matters stood, and with a voice that sounded distinctly above the storm, ordered every man back to his post.

It was surprising to see all those men bow before the strong will of their captain and hurry back to their pumps.

The captain then started below to examine the leak. As he passed me, I asked him if there was any hope. He looked at me and then the other passengers who had crowded up to hear the reply, and then said rebukingly,

"Yes, sir. There is hope as long as one inch

of this boat remains above water. When I see none of it, then I shall abandon the vessel, and not before. Everything shall be done to save it, and if we fail, it shall not be from inaction. Come, bear a hand, every man of you, at the pumps."

Three times during the day did we despair, but the captain's dauntless courage, perseverance, and powerful will mastered every mind on board that ship, and they went to work again.

"I will land you safely at the dock in Liverpool," said he, "if you will only be men."

And he did land us safely, but the vessel sank, moored to the dock. The captain stood on the deck of the sinking vessel, receiving the thanks and blessings of the passengers as they passed down the gangplank. I was the last to leave. As I paused, he grasped my hand and said,

"Judge Petri, do you recognize me?"

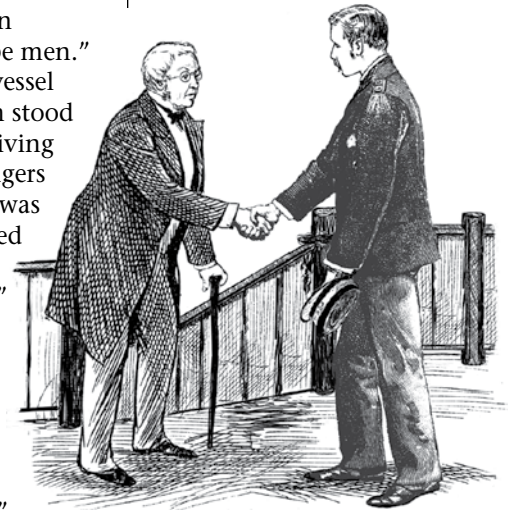
I told him I was not aware that I had ever seen him.

"You saw me years ago in Cincinnati. Do you remember the boy in search of a geography book?"

"Very well, sir."

"I am he," said he, "God bless you!"

"And God bless persevering Captain Haverly!" ■



Judge Petri, do you recognize me?

WHAT SMALL THINGS TELL

Mr. Phillips liked the young man he had just hired to stock shelves in his factory. There was something about the boy that made him stand out.

A week later he saw him pick up an empty soda can that someone had dropped and toss it into the trash bin.

"How do you like the new stock boy?" Mr. Phillips asked his manager.

"I like him. David listens well to instructions. Can't say that about most of them fellas."

"That's good. Give him a list of the things you want him to do. Make sure he understands what you want and then back off—let him be. Then let me know how well he does."

The following week the manager reported, "David keeps right at his work. He does his work well and is careful about details."

Of course, Mr. Phillips was pleased to hear this, but decided to test David himself. Just before David came to work the next day, Mr. Phillips knocked over several boxes of fittings which rolled every where.

Then he stepped into the manager's office to watch. When David came in, he looked surprised but immediately went to picking up the fittings and carefully sorting them, putting each size into its own box.

When Mr. Phillips saw that David was careful and faithful in little things, he said to him, "David, I like how you work. How would you like a job in our office? If you keep doing your work well, you may even become a manager someday."

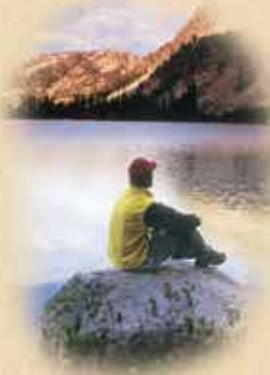
This businessman could guess that the

young man would be a good worker. He could tell by watching how well he did his work while he was young.

We can guess how good a father a boy will be by what he does now; or how good a mother a girl will be by what she does now. The little things we do, even when we are young, often indicate how well we will do big and important things when we are older.

That's part of what Jesus meant when He said, "*He who is faithful in small things is faithful also in big things; and he who cheats in little things also cheats in big things.*" ■

"Even a child is known by his deeds, whether what he does is pure and right." —Proverbs 20:11



O God, I pray this day for strength to be—
*Humble enough to believe Your Word;
 Wise enough to understand Your Word,
 And obedient enough to go out and do what You say.*

Help me, O God,
*To rid myself of all that keeps me from
 Being a good example of the faith I profess.*

Help me
*Never to demand from others what I do not even
 attempt to live up to myself;
 Never to contradict with my life what I say with my lips;
 Never to be one thing to people's face and
 another behind their back.*

Help me
*Never to make a promise and then break it;
 Never to do anything dishonorable to
 avoid trouble or make gain;
 Never to be disloyal to a friend or untrue to a loved one.*

Help me
*To so live that I shall never bring disgrace to
 You or Your cause. AMEN*

The Lord gets His best soldiers out
 of the highlands of affliction.

Good intentions die unless they
 are executed.

Avoid looking at temptation.
 The more you see of it,
 the better it may look.

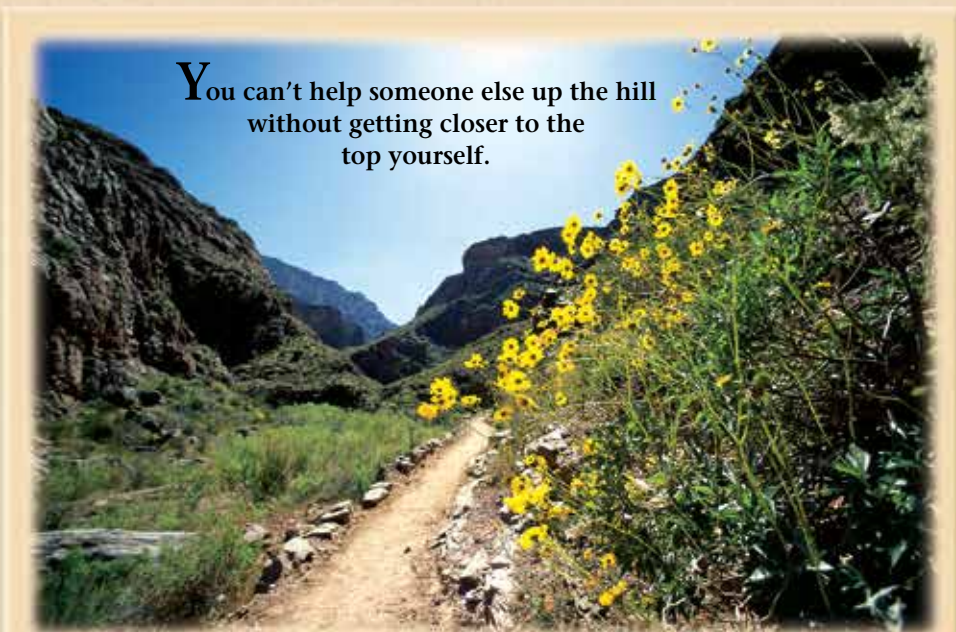
Knowing how forgetful we are, can't
 we bear patiently the
 forgetfulness of others?

Unless the Christian takes time
 each day to think of God and seek
 His will, he cannot serve Him.
 The most hurried day is
 exactly the time when we most
 need the help of God through
 His Word to steady and
 direct our lives.

The best way for Christians
 to grow to the stature of Jesus
 is to feast daily on the Bread of Life.

Getting the facts is only half
 of the job; the other half is to
 use them intelligently.

The heights of happiness
 and holiness are precisely
 the same slopes.



You can't help someone else up the hill
 without getting closer to the
 top yourself.

CHRIST'S RETURN

*The skies are growing darker
With the passing of the years,
And life becomes more restless
And on every hand are fears.*

*But as Christians we are waiting
For the breaking of the day;
We are certain Christ is coming—
He may now be on the way!*

*Deeper still will grow earth's darkness—
Still more awesome grows its night,
But for Christ our eyes are looking,
Soon will come that Day so bright.*

One of the most difficult things to give away is
kindness—it is usually returned.

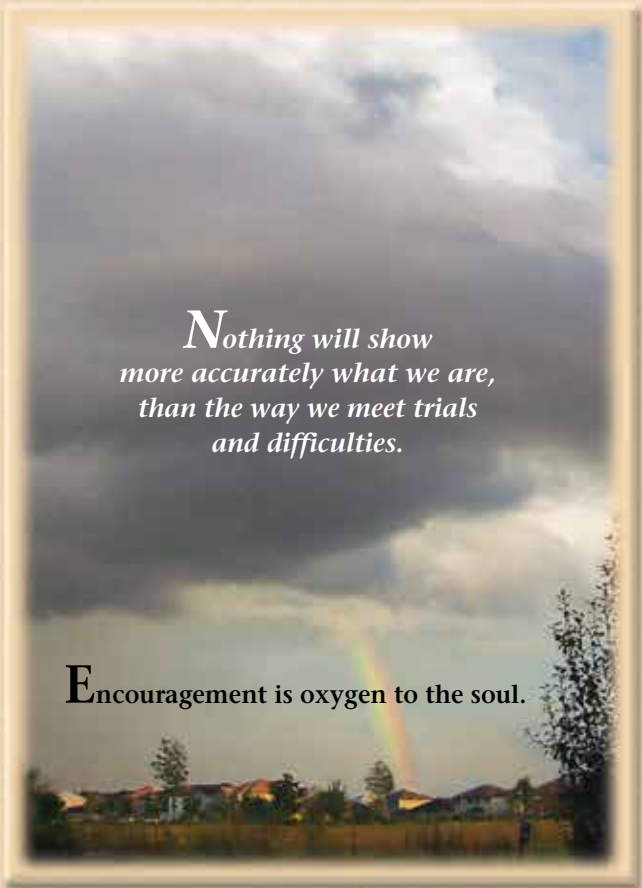
*You grow your faith as you nurture a plant,
by rooting it deep in the Word of God.*

The best time to do something is
between yesterday and tomorrow.

*Humility is the trait which enables us to see
ourselves as we are.*

We aren't judged by what we want to do and can't,
but by what we ought to do and don't.

*Days and weeks so quickly pass,
We must use them, or, alas
Soon our journey will be run,
With our labor still undone.
Deeds of good must now be done;
Victories must now be won,
Day by day, and week by week,
If we reach perfection's peak.*



*Nothing will show
more accurately what we are,
than the way we meet trials
and difficulties.*

Encouragement is oxygen to the soul.

*You're bound to touch some other life
by what you say and do...
So never think that when you sin
it injures only you.*

God will never leave you without
light enough to take the next step;
don't stop walking till the light gives out.

*Excellence is never cheap.
It is costly.
Constant care, serious preparation, and
continual application are required.
Excellence involves desire plus
discipline plus determination.*

*Your choices, not chance,
determine your ETERNAL destiny.*



The World as I See It

THE CENTER OF THINGS is the place where I am.
GOOD IDEAS are those that agree with mine.
BAD IDEAS are those that oppose mine.
FREEDOM is the right to do what I choose.

SINFUL PLEASURES are the bad things others do.
INNOCENT PLEASURES are the things I like to do.

A SENSIBLE PERSON is one who listens to what I say.
BENEVOLENCE is everyone giving handouts to me.
HUMILITY is everyone bowing to my whims.

PATIENCE is everyone bearing with me.
COOPERATION is everyone working with me.
HOSPITALITY is everyone entertaining me.
ENCOURAGEMENT is everyone complimenting me.

UNITY is everyone going along with me.
SYMPATHY is everyone feeling sorry for me.
RESPECT is everyone stepping aside for me.

THE RIGHT WAY is the way I would do it.
THE WRONG WAY is any other way of doing it.
A CONTENTIOUS PERSON is one who disagrees with me.
VISITATION is everyone coming to see me.

Do you think I'm happy? The fact is, I'm not!

*Happy are the humble-minded, the whole earth will
belong to them.* —Jesus (Matt. 5:5 paraphrase)