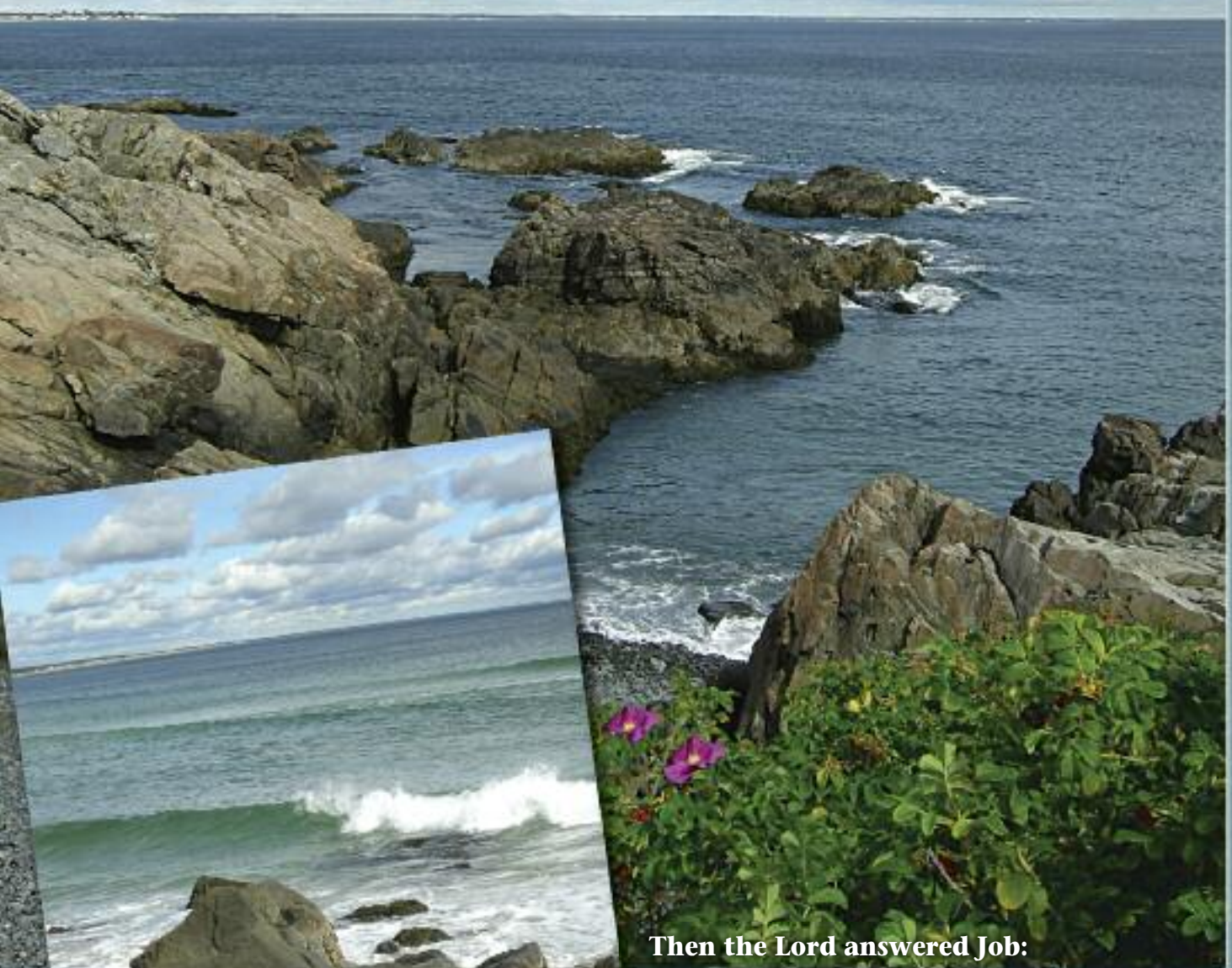


Megiddo Message

Summer 2010



Then the Lord answered Job:

"Where were you ... when I put limits on the sea ... and said, 'You may come this far, but no farther; this is where your proud waves must stop'?" – From Job 38:4, 11 NCV



“THUS IT SEEMS TO ME...”

Ask a group of Bible students, ministers or laypersons the meaning of a verse of Scripture, and listen to the responses. You are likely to get as many different ideas as you have persons to ask. I recall my father telling many years ago about visiting a Sunday school class taught by his brother. He told how his brother would read a Bible verse, then ask each one in the class what it meant. “Brother Harry, what do you think this passage means?” Brother Harry would respond, “I think it means...” and give his opinion. “What does it mean to you, Sister Nellie?” and Sister Nellie would give her opinion. And so he would continue around the room until each had offered a thought. To each, his brother would respond with an enthusiastic “Brother Harry, that’s good, good, good!” or “Wonderful thought, Sister Nellie!” Each explanation was heartily accepted—and each was different. My father was distressed. What was his brother teaching? Wasn’t he telling the class that anything you happen to think about the Bible is right, that any idea is acceptable? Who was showing respect to the Author of the Bible? If you had written the book, would it matter to *you* that no one gave any consideration to what *you intended* to say?

The approach is as up-to-date as the current push for globalization. Every person’s opinion or belief is to be valued, and above all, his or her right to that opinion. At the same time the Bible is placed on a par with other works of literature, without regard to its Divine authorship and authority. Why? If the Bible is merely another book, then I am free from accountability to a higher power.

But the Bible is not like a work by Shakespeare, Homer, or Hemingway. It is the Word of the God of heaven, revealing what God wants men to know about issues of eternal life and death. It bears the authority of God because in it, “*holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit*,”—the Holy Spirit being the means God used to communicate with chosen men so that their writings would have Divine authority (2 Pet. 1:21). We disregard the authority of Scripture at our own peril.

How did “thus it seems to me” get into Christianity? In the early years after Jesus was taken to heaven, as the Church grew and spread, its adherents came more and more under the influence of Greek thought and culture. The result was a weakening confidence in the authority of Scripture and a growing reliance on human thought. Jesus accepted and taught from the Hebrew Scriptures. But the Hebrew belief in one all-powerful, all-just God was too restrictive to progressive minds of the first century who had been educated in the multicultural thinking of the Greeks. And so the new leaders of the Church began to turn away from the teachings of Jesus and His apostles. This change was prophesied (see 2 Tim. 4:3-4; also 2 Thess. 2:3; Dan. 7:25; 8:12). Fundamentally it was a change in confidence. For the Hebrew, the reality of truth was based on “*thus saith the Lord*,” while the Greek thought centered around “thus it seems to me.”

Our culture today continues to emphasize the value of the individual and “thus it seems to me.” But the authority of God stands unchanged. All the “I think’s” in the world cannot change one word

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 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).

Front cover photos: Along the Marginal Way Walkway, at Ogunquit, Maine taken by Margaret Tremblay



As we learn we grow. And as we grow we learn. And as the demands of the Christian life increase, so does our strength increase to meet them.

NURTURING

YOUR LIFE IN CHRIST

The essence of all life is growth. When we cease to grow, we cease to live. The Bible describes our life in Christ as a growth. We need to “grow in grace” (2 Pet. 3:18). We grow as “newborn babes” (1 Pet. 2:2). We have to “grow up” in Christ “in all things” (Eph. 4:15). We must “increase” in the knowledge of God (Col. 1:10).

This very special life begins when we are “brought forth by the word of truth” (James 1:18), when we acquire a working knowledge of the plan of God and what we must do to be saved. At that point we are like the seed freshly placed in the soil. We have the potential to grow, but we need also...

THE RIGHT ENVIRONMENT

A seed falling on hard pavement is just as “alive” as the seed falling into rich soil, but the seed in rich soil soon becomes a flourishing plant, while the seed on the pavement dies.

What is the right environment for the seed of God’s Word? It is the rich soil of a receptive heart that is open to evidence and conviction, and filled with nutrients drawn from the Word of God.

Then the growth process begins. The simple fact that the soil surrounds the seed is not enough. The seed must break through its protective covering and send down roots to draw from its environment the nutrients necessary for growth. In the same way the spiritual seed in our hearts must send roots into the soil of true belief, and draw in the nutrients that produce deep conviction that will, in turn, produce a strong faith and support spiritual growth.

What is the source of faith? The Bible tells us “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). We must use our God-given senses to absorb the evidence God has provided to produce faith.

My belief in God and His Word is confirmed by evidence I see all around me of His handiwork, from the smallest blade of grass to the hundred million stars that dot the Milky Way galaxy and the countless galaxies beyond.

Neither I nor anyone else living today made the ground that produces the food I eat to sustain my life.

Neither I nor any before me has made the earth turn on its axis, or the sun rise, or the seasons come and go, or the rain fall.

Scientists today can scarcely begin to fathom the wonders in a single living cell, to say nothing of producing it.

Yes, I believe in God!

Furthermore, I believe in God because of the message He caused to be written. He gave me a mind so that I could learn to read and understand language, so that I could comprehend His written message. He has not chosen to come down and speak to me in person, but has arranged for me to have the information contained in His Word. What a wonderful provision!

Finally, I believe that I can live the life God asks of me because others before me have done it (see Hebrews 11). If they could, so can I.

Such are the growth inspiring thoughts that we can draw from the Word of God. Feeding on more and more of these thoughts is sure to result in rapid spiritual growth.

What about the times when I feel like running away from my responsibilities? I have made a commitment which cannot be reversed. Having seen the truth revealed in the Word of God, I can't "unsee" it. Having believed, I cannot "unbelieve" it. Having agreed to serve God, I cannot "un-agree." I have made a promise to God and I cannot go back on my word (Eccl. 5:1-3). And I have no reason to go back, because God has promised to be with me and support me, and has assured my success if I continue faithful to the end (see 1 Cor. 10:13; Heb. 13:5).

Why would I want to default on my agreement anyway? Just because I grow fainthearted or tired, nothing has changed. The facts have not changed, nor will they. What was a fact when I verified and accepted it is still a fact in my moments of discouragement. Truth is unchanging; only my fickle feelings have changed. If God was God and the Bible was true and the foundations of my faith solid and sure yesterday, they are just as true and solid and sure today.

There will be times when our faith may waver. But someone has said that we should never doubt in the dark what God taught us in the light. Have you ever felt tired simply because you needed food? The same is true of faith. Set to work at once to draw in a fresh supply of the nutrients, and you will have the strength of faith again.

The Word of God is ours for that very purpose. It 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).

Help One Another

What else can we do to promote our growth?

Believers should help and encourage one another. *"Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching"* (Heb. 10:24-25). We help one another as we worship together, pray together, work together, grow together.

The early Christians gathered to worship and pray and praise God together, and exhort one another (Col. 3:16-17). Their togetherness was a vital part of their lives.

Peter wrote to his brethren to *"stir up"* their

pure minds (2 Pet. 3:1). We, too, need stirring up. We need to utilize every available resource. As we act on what we know, we will be motivated to do more and more.

We also need the discipline of our personal study and meditation, taking time to feast on the heavenly realities, to fill our minds with what is good and pure and wholesome and true. We can do this even as we work, or walk, or drive, or rest. Our whole life is part of our growth into holiness.

Then we need ...

THE RIGHT PROCESS

Growth takes time.


A minister once told of teaching homiletics to seminary students. When the classes had scarcely begun, a young man in the class stood up and said, "Mr. Brown, I want you to be hard on me. I can take it." The minister recalls that if he had told the young man the honest facts, he would surely have discouraged him. He might have said, "Son, if you could know how badly you preach, you'd give up." But he recalls, "I didn't say it, because I knew he had potential. He was in the process of becoming something, he just hadn't made it yet."


This is how God views us. He does not discard us because we start out imperfect and immature. He sees us as *"newborn babes"* who need to grow.


Be Patient!


Have you ever felt like the young student who said, "Tell me everything that's wrong with me, I can take it"? God knows better. He knows that a full knowledge immediately would discourage us. And so He has arranged that we comprehend little by little. The more we comprehend, the stronger we grow. And the stronger we grow, the more we comprehend.


The evidence God has provided has everything we need to produce a solid, supporting faith. It makes us able to say:

 I am a Christian because I have committed myself to follow Christ (Luke 9:23) as He is revealed in the Word of God, the Bible.

 I believe the Bible and its teachings because I and those in whom I have confidence have spent considerable time and effort verifying its facts, as we are commanded to do (2 Tim. 2:15), and I am fully satisfied that it is indeed the Word of God.

 I believe the Bible is true because it teaches one message of salvation from beginning to end, one harmonious Gospel.

 I believe the Bible because of the many prophecies upon its pages which have come to pass just as foretold.

 I believe the Bible because I am convinced by the harmony of its teachings that it is the divine revelation of God. The Bible reveals the mind and plan of one all-powerful God who is behind all the magnificent creation that surrounds me, the God who gives me life and breath and all my mental and physical powers.



"A pupil is not superior to his teacher; but every one, when his training is complete, will reach his teacher's level"
—Luke 6:40, NEB.

Even our Perfect Pattern, Jesus, had to grow. He had to learn. We read that *"Jesus increased in wisdom and stature"* (Luke 2:52) and so must we. He grew—He increased. He *"learned obedience by the things which He suffered"* (Heb. 5:8), just as we must learn.

"How-To's" FOR GROWTH

Do God's demands seem unreasonable, impossible, quite above and beyond us? Are humans capable of living by His laws? Can we imagine that our heavenly Father, who has

all wisdom and all knowledge, would ask something of us that we are not capable of? We know He would not.

How do we clear ourselves of a wrong? The Bible formula is simple: Quit it, and God will forgive. Does the Bible say this? Yes! *"Let him who stole steal no longer"* (Eph. 4:28).

"Let the wicked forsake his way... and let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon" (Isa. 55:7).

"If the [wicked] turns from his sin and does what is lawful and right,... none of his sins which he has committed shall be remembered against him" (Ezek. 33:14, 16).

Suppose I have a **quick temper**. What can I do about it? The Bible says, *"Cease from anger, and forsake wrath"* (Ps. 37:8). Can I do it? Something happens that sparks my fury—what can I do? Immediately turn to God in prayer, and ask God's help. Yes, I have yielded to anger again and again, and I know I should not. Somehow, I just can't let it go by. But the law says, *"Cease...."* What can I do? By committing the situation to God, and telling myself it is in His hands—that my task is to keep calm—I can let the provoking situation drop. Besides, what good would my feelings of anger do anyway? Probably only make the matter worse! By keeping calm I am able to think more sanely. With thoughts like these dominating our mind, our impulse to anger is lessened, and we are stronger to resist next time.

Or suppose my besetment is **envy**. I have a problem seeing people who have more than I have. Yet the law of God says I must lay aside all *"malice, all deceit, and hypocrisy and envy..."* (1 Pet. 2:1), and I must be *"content"* with what I have (Heb. 13:5).

So the challenge comes, when I find out

about someone's new acquisition or fine accomplishment. Naturally, I immediately start comparing their *"much"* with my *"little."* Did you ever try *sharing* their joy, instead of feeding your envy? By complimenting them and rejoicing with them, the feeling of envy is lost in a spirit of happiness. Is it not a better way?

Or **foolishness** may be a temptation. A witty and colorful person is popular, and I am accustomed to making light or silly remarks, a quick jest, a witty comment. But the law of God says *"No"* to all such, and that the very *"thought of foolishness is sin"* (Prov. 24:9). Jesus' list of evils that proceed from within and *"defile a man"* starts with evil thoughts and ends with foolishness (Mark 7:20–23). There has to be a way of holding on and holding in while we are growing.

Then comes the perfect opportunity. The witty comment jumps into our mind. Our first impulse is to say it. But then we remember the Word of God and we say a quick *"I must NOT!"* to ourselves. The silence may seem deafening or flat, but—we didn't say it! Haven't we taken a long step toward conquering our foolishness?

Is **lack of integrity** a problem? Perhaps we are given to just a little shading of the truth. Of course, we wouldn't take anything big, but no one will notice—a few copies at the office, or some pens from the supply cupboard, or a *"sick"* day when we weren't really sick—small things that *"everybody"* does. We know it is wrong—all dishonesty is wrong. We cannot be dishonest and be true to Christ. Suppose the grocery clerk fails to charge us for an item, or gives us too much change? When we speak of it and show our intent to make it right, we have taken another step toward our goal.

There are numerous ways to grow in integrity. However, to reach the maturity of Christ, to have clean hands and a pure heart (Ps. 24:4), we need only remember our goal and do what is right one situation at a time.

Perhaps we have what used to be called the **gift of gab**. We really enjoy holding people's attention. The first question we should ask ourselves is, Is it true? Then, Is it kind? Then third, Is it necessary? If it passes these tests, we still must be careful in our telling. Are we tempted to add a bit of color, or dress it up to hold attention? Do we restrain our tongue, even when we can think of ways to tell it bigger and better? If we do, we have taken another step toward Christian maturity.

Or it might be that we let our **eyes** linger on

sights that are not clean. A magazine cover in the grocery store, a website that promotes the current culture, an advertisement on a billboard—would Jesus have allowed Himself to look at such? We know we are placing images in our mind that we will have to work hard to erase. Yet our curiosity overpowers our will, and we yield. How do we resist? Remember Jesus' promise is to "the pure in heart" (Matt. 5:8), and look away.

And so on and on. Christian growth includes every area of our lives: from the words we speak, to the pictures we look at, to the things we buy, to what we think about and our basic convictions and attitudes about life. The apostle Paul covered it all when he said,

"Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31).

This is the "how-to" of Christian growth, the everyday process which, repeated over and over and over again, will bring us to the moral stature of Jesus Christ (Eph. 4:13).

Grow, Grow, Grow...

The process is nothing more or less than obeying the command in Isaiah 1:16–17: "Cease to do evil, learn to do well."

May God grant us the strength to grow and keep growing, to nurture that new life in Christ until it is complete and mature in every good work, and we are ready to be presented faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy (Jude 24–25). ♦

God does not expect the new life in Christ to be complete and perfect. But He does expect it to GROW.

BIBLE LET-US PATCH

Let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. —1 Thess. 5:8

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. —Heb. 10:23

Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works. —Heb. 10:24

Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us. —Heb. 12:1

Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. —2 Cor. 7:1

Let us...come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. —Heb. 4:16



Let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. —Heb. 13:15

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all. —Eccl. 12:13

Let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. —1 John 3:18

Let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. —Gal. 6:9

Let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. —Rom. 13:12

Let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another. —Rom. 14:19

Let us search out and examine our ways, and turn back to the Lord.

Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation. —Psalm 95:1

Let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. —Heb. 12:28

Let us lift our hearts and hands to God in heaven. —Lam. 3:40–41

Let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith. —Gal. 6:10

Let us exalt His name together. —Psalm 95:1



SPIRITUAL GROWTH MARKERS

MEASURING GROWTH

How does one measure growth in character? How can we know that we are growing, and be encouraged to keep growing?

The Bible gives a number of markers that are helpful in tracking spiritual growth. Each is a change we need to see increasing in our lives as we mature in our Christian faith. After you read them, you may want to do a self-check, to see how you measure up. Then put the list in a convenient place, perhaps under the cover of your Bible, and a few months from now do another self-check, and see if you can identify where you have grown, or need to grow.

Why is this important? Because God has a standard for those who will live in His kingdom. They must grow up in Christ *"in all things"* (Eph. 4:15).

Our great Creator put growth at the very heart of His creation. Trees blossom, and the blossoms develop slowly into ripened fruit. Seeds sprout and grow into a tree, or a plant. Eggs crack open, and tiny chicks wiggle out on the way to becoming full sized fowl. A child is born and grows to maturity. In each case, a living entity absorbs nutrients from its environment, cells multiply, and the result is growth.

Becoming *"like Christ"* is also a growth process. God has set the standard each must reach, and it is the stature of Jesus Christ (Eph. 4:13). Reaching this standard requires growth and time. He does not expect His child to reach maturity in one giant leap. Act by act, each must become like Christ—kind, forgiving, truthful, patient, gentle, humble, longsuffering, and every other quality Christ exemplified. The apostle Paul called it *"[growing] up into Him in all things"* (Eph. 4:15).



THINKING MORE OF OTHERS

The growing Christian will think more of others, and less of him or her self.

The apostle Paul described this quality as brotherly love, that is, concern for one's brothers and sisters in the faith above oneself. By instinct our first thought is, "How will this affect me?" But the growing believer thinks, "How can I encourage my brother or sister in the faith?" What is the end result of developing this Christ-like spirit? It is to *"Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others"* (Phil. 2:3-4).

As Christians, we must be *"kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving*

preference to one another" (Rom. 12:10). We must "bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). And, "as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10).

APPLY: How can I practice putting another's interests ahead of my own?



LESS SLIPS OF SPEECH

2 If you are growing spiritually, you will make less slips in your speech. What does this mean?

The Book of James uses this very phrase, as translated in the Moffatt Bible: "We all make many a slip, but whoever avoids slips of speech is a perfect man; he can bridle the whole of the body as well as the tongue" (James 3:2, Moffatt).

Slips of speech have many forms. In our secular culture today many people feel no sense of guilt or shame in using coarse, vile, God-dishonoring words. Vile, vulgar, or slang words, cursing and swear words are used freely in the workplace or marketplace, even in schools. As Christians representing the high cause of Jesus Christ, we must be constantly on guard. It is so easy to "slip" and use a "bad" word we have heard. Taking God's name in vain is a gross offense against God. The law in ancient Israel was, "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain" (Ex. 20:7). God was to be honored by one's speech as well as by one's behavior.

This principle is reinforced in the New Testament, where the apostle Paul is explicit. Writing to the Ephesians, he put "obscene stories, foolish talk, and coarse jokes" among the forbidden, saying that such should not be even mentioned among brethren of Christ (Eph. 5:4 NLT). The believer's speech must be "with grace" (Col. 4:6). No "corrupt word" must "proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers" (Eph. 4:29).

Hasty words, harsh words, proud words, hateful words, thoughtless words, demeaning words, discouraging words— all are out of character for the growing Christian. Do we wonder that the Bible says the one who avoids "slips of speech" is a "perfect man"? Remember what Jesus said: "By your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned" (Matt. 12:37).

APPLY: Ask a trusted Christian friend to tell you when you slip, so that you can learn to avoid the slips.



MORE "EASILY ENTREATED"

3 What does that mean?

"Easily entreated" describes one's attitude toward well intended counsel. James says

"...the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy" (James 3:17). To be "easy to be entreated" means to be receptive to advice, teachable, correctable, humble. These are all qualities in which the Christian must grow; they are qualities not found in nature. Naturally, "All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes" (Prov. 16:2). Most of us must grow in character to be able to take advice or criticism in good spirit, and benefit from it.

King David noted the vital nature of this spiritual growth marker when he said, "Let the

*The heart is a garden where thought-flowers grow,
The thoughts that we think are the seeds that we sow;
Each kind, loving thought bears a kind, loving deed,
While a thought that is selfish is just like a weed.*

*We must watch what we think the livelong day,
And pull out the weed-thoughts and throw them away,
And plant loving seed-thoughts so thick in a row
There will be no more room for the weed-thoughts to grow.*

righteous strike me; it shall be a kindness. And let him rebuke me; it shall be as excellent oil; let my head not refuse it" (Ps. 141:5).

APPLY: What can I do to be "easily entreated"?

MORE DISCIPLINED

4 Christian discipline is the ability to command one's mind, body and emotions in obedience to the law of God. Growing Christians will see themselves becoming stronger in their personal self-disciplines as they apply the Bible command to be "temperate in all things." The apostle Paul noted this trait in athletes of his time, who willingly submitted to discipline to



achieve their goal. *"Everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown"* (1 Cor. 9:25).

The Olympics were a well-known event in Corinth, and these people could identify with the discipline required.

The word temperate means "having one's emotions, impulses, or desires under control, self-control, discipline" (BDAG). Another Lexicon defines it as, "To command one's self, to be a chief of one's self, to make one's heart be obedient, to command one's own desires, to

be the master of what one wants" (LN). Just as the athlete who would achieve must have strong, disciplined muscles, so the Christian must grow strong spiritual muscles to stand against one's nature and obey the Law of God.

APPLY: What can I do to develop strong spiritual muscles?

WILLING TO FOLLOW

5 All of us are naturally individualists. We want to be self expressing, and choose our own course. The current culture strongly encourages this pattern of life.

The growing Christian must go contrary to nature, and become more and more able to follow—follow a pattern of life laid down by others—follow Christ. Even those who lead must be His followers—didn't the Master say: "Follow Me"? (Luke 9:23).



The cry of the culture today is "Me first." By instinct this is the cry of the very young child. But as we mature, we learn the benefit of following instructions, following the guidance of others, following our teachers and leaders. And we learn to choose carefully whom we will follow.

The apostle Paul went further than even being a follower when he called himself the

"bondservant of Christ" (Gal. 1:10; Eph. 4:1). He had given up his right to be himself. So complete was his dedication that he could say, "Not I but Christ..." (Gal. 2:20).

Following Christ means giving up. It means giving up our instinct to follow the crowd, or keep in step with the culture. It means giving up our will and our way. This is a long step toward our goal.

APPLY: What can I do to show that I am willing to give up the goals of this world and follow Christ?

NEW VALUES, TASTES, INTERESTS

6 "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Cor. 5:17). How is this possible? The growing Christian will be changing in every way. The driving interest of his life will no longer be money and material goods but a growing appreciation for deeper values of love, courage, faith, and obedience to Christ. The old goals will no longer attract. The old activities will no longer satisfy. The music he once enjoyed will lose its appeal. The conversation he wanted to be part of will seem empty and meaningless. The entertainment he used to enjoy will repel him.

Why? Because he has new goals and new interests, all centered around his faith in God and his overpowering desire for future life. The believer knows that he must have his life pleasing to God, or there will be no eternal reward.

Will former friends be offended? Perhaps, some will "think it strange that [we] do not run with them" and may even be critical and disparaging (1 Peter 4:4).

But there is the new to replace the old. The apostle Paul advised the believer to pursue "righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Tim. 2:22).

There is nothing to compare with the bonds of Christian love in the household of faith, those who share a common love for God and a common longing to live in the kingdom of Christ. That is why the Bible advises believers to "not forsake assembling together" but to exhort and encourage one another, "and so much the more as you see the Day approaching" (Heb. 10: 24–25; see also Heb. 3:6; Eph. 2:19–20).

APPLY: What steps can I take toward actively changing my tastes and interests?

My God! let my faith be
A living, growing thing in me
That takes control of heart and hand
And binds me to a loftier plan,
That keeps me calm amid the strife,
And trains me for a richer life;
A life that sees beyond earth's woe
To joys that only angels know;
A life that tastes, e'en here, with Three,
The bliss of immortality.

MORE CONTENT

7 As you take on new values and new interests, you will find that you are happier—partly because your happiness no longer depends on circumstances or things.

One mark of the current culture is a restless discontent. That is often created artificially by advertisers. When we look at the Bible heroes of faith, we see people whose happiness was independent of things. For example, the apostle Paul could say: *“I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content”* (Phil. 4:11). Paul “had learned” contentment—it was not his natural bent. Where was he when he wrote these words? He was in prison—not the place we would associate with perfect contentment. How could he be content? Because he was living for satisfactions that no one could take away from him. He viewed present problems as temporary, and God’s blessings as eternal (2 Cor. 4:17–18). The secret of his contentment was his commitment to godliness. He said, *“Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content”* (1 Tim. 6:6–8).

What does the Word of God advise? *“Let your lives be free from the love of money”* (Heb. 13:5 NASB).

APPLY: *What about my goals in life? Are they in money and things, or are they in the deeper values of character?*

MORE HUMBLE

8 What does humility mean to the average person today? Probably not much. Our culture today worships success, power, ambition, wealth. Humility does not fit in such a context. Why? It is at least partly because humility has been given the wrong definition. The “meek” person has been viewed as one who has low self-esteem. Even ministers have praised a feeling of worthlessness, as though God’s ideal is for us to be nobodies, helpless sinners crying out to Jesus to pull us out of the mud and muck.

Nothing could be further from the humility God honors.

Humility is not devaluing ourselves or doubting our abilities. It is not denouncing who we are or what we have done. Rather, humility is having the strength to submit to a

superior authority (the law of God) and say when found in the wrong, “I am sorry, I was wrong,” then turn around and do what is right.

Humility is having the strength to decline the honors of this world and wait for the only honor of real value, the honor God will give (John 5:44).

Humility is an expression of the love that *“does not parade itself, is not puffed up”* (1 Cor. 13:4).

As you grow in humility, you will find you have less and less interest in the honors of this world—they are only a flash compared with the eternal honors God has to give (see 2 Cor 4:17–18).

MORE DISCERNING

9 As you mature in your Christian life, you will grow in discernment.

What is discernment? It is the ability to dis-

*O that I may grow!
What though time cuts its furrow in my face,
My heart still steadfast, grows in grace
Faith with added days still keeping pace.
O that I may grow!*

tinguish between right and wrong, as God sees it. Discernment is the first step toward making the right decisions. The Bible says those who are of full age *“Have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil”* (Heb. 5:14).

In a culture that has redefined sin to allow or tolerate many types of deviant behavior, the Christian faces a real challenge to adhere to the Law of God, not the culture. Whatever our society says, God’s definitions have not changed. Discernment means, becoming sensitive to sin, according to His standard. As God told Moses, *“Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it”* (Deut. 12:32).

APPLY: *How can I increase my sensitivity to sin?*

LESS HURT FEELINGS, MORE PEACE

10 All of us have an instinct to protect our own feelings and opinions. As you mature in the Christian life, you will be less sensitive to the opinions and judgments of others, and less likely to be hurt.

Often the root problem is pride. We trust our own judgment above all others. One cannot suffer from hurt pride who has no pride to hurt. The Bible says, *"Great peace have those who love Your law, and nothing causes them to stumble"* (Ps. 119:165).

What is the Christian standard? *"Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to*

THE SEEDS WE SOW!

*The soil will nurture and will grow
Whatever kind of seed we sow.
If weeds are planted, rest assured
That weeds we'll have when
they're matured;
We cannot expect from seeds to rise
A flowered vine of paradise.
The soil of life will likewise grow
Whatever kind of seed we sow
Regardless of the plant we breed,
The product rises from the seed.
So onward as through life we go,
We all must watch the seed we sow.*

one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:31–32).

APPLY: *What can I do to avoid being "hurt"?*

MORE GENUINE JOY

11 Have you noticed how many times happiness and joy describe the serious, growing Christian? The second fruit of the spirit (Gal. 5:22) is joy. Why? Because the Christian has hope in the future. We are looking for the return of the Lord Jesus, who will *"transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body"* (Phil. 3:20–21).

The Christian has joy because we have a

strong support through the difficulties of life. The apostle Paul could say, *"I am filled with comfort. I am exceedingly joyful in all our tribulation"* (2 Cor. 7:4). Writing to the Church at Philippi, from prison, he still was writing about joy and telling them to *"rejoice in the Lord always"* (Phil 4:4). In fact, in that short letter he mentions joy and rejoicing at least eighteen times. Why could he rejoice? Because he was looking ahead to the crown of life which he would share with all the faithful ones when Christ returns (2 Tim. 4:8). Fellow believers could share his joy, because they too could be part of that future joy. *"For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For you are our glory and joy"* (1 Thess. 2:19–20).

A GROWING FAITH

12 The growing Christian will keep growing in faith—faith in the Word of God, faith in the promises of God, faith in God Himself that He will do as He has promised, along with faith in one's self and one's ability to please God in hope of receiving the eternal blessings God has promised.

Why is it so important to grow in faith? Because *"without faith it is impossible to please [God]"* (Heb. 11:6). The growing Christian will keep focused on ways to develop and increase in faith. How does faith come? By hearing the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). How does one grow in faith? By going deeper into the Word of God, feeding on it, meditating on it, keeping it fresh and alive in one's mind. It will be the delight of the godly person to be meditating in it *"day and night"* (Ps. 1:1–3).

Hebrews 11 is a record of God's heroes, and how did they achieve? Each of them won *"by faith."* Even though many times they had direct divine guidance, still they were working *"by faith"* because none of them had seen the final outcome of the committed life, none had received the reward. They lived by faith that God would do as He had promised.

APPLY: *What can I do to build my faith?*

MORE HUNGER FOR GOD AND HIS WORD

13 The more you learn about God and His Word, the more you will want to learn. Appetite is a definite sign of spiritual growth. The psalmist felt this longing deeply when he wrote, *"As the deer pants for the water brooks, so*

pants my soul for You, O God" (Ps. 42:1). So deeply was he longing for the knowledge of God and His ways that he prayed, "Teach me, O Lord, the way of Your statutes, and I shall keep it to the end. Give me understanding, and I shall keep Your law; indeed, I shall observe it with my whole heart" (Ps. 119:33–34).

The more we learn, the more we will want to learn. The opposite is also true. If we fill our minds with the interests of this world, our appetite for spiritual things will wane.

APPLY: *What can I do to increase my appetite for the knowledge of God?*

MORE GRATITUDE, LESS COMPLAINT

14 Another measure of our spiritual growth is a growing sense of gratitude to God. Think about it: you have been rescued from a life of hopelessness, where you had no future and no sure goals. In the family of God, you have limitless possibilities, possibilities limited only by your imagination. How many times did David say, "Oh, give thanks unto the Lord for He is good, for His mercy endureth forever"? Again and again the apostle Paul interjected an exclamation of grateful joy into his letters. We see it in all the Bible authors. Even Jesus said, "Father I thank Thee..." (see Matt. 11:25; 15:36; 26:27; Luke 10:21).

As we realize how much God has done for us and is doing for us, our gratitude will grow. When we are serving God we have the promise of this life in which to serve Him, along with the promise of life in the world to come. What could be a greater cause for growing gratitude! And as we grow in gratitude, we will have even less reason to complain. The command is, "Do all things without complaining and disputing" (Phil. 2:14). Why no complaining? Because every disadvantage is an opportunity for spiritual growth. Does someone dislike us? It is an opportunity to practice Christian love. Did our plans fail? It is an opportunity to learn to take defeat in the right spirit, and try again. Is something beyond our control? It is an opportunity to trust God.

APPLY: *Think about your total dependence on God and others. Who started your heart beating? Who makes the air that you breathe every moment in order to live? Keep thinking until you have reviewed everything about your life that you did not do yourself, and thank God.*

MORE PRAYER

15 As you mature in your Christian faith, you will want more and more to keep in touch with our Heavenly Father. Prayer will become the pivot point of our life, and whatever you do, you will want to ask God's blessing on it, and His guidance through it.

The serious believer will be constantly seeking God's counsel and direction, and prayer is our one means of communication with God today. That is why Paul wrote, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:6–7).

Will God hear when we pray? The promise is, "The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their cry. The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles. The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit" (Ps. 34:15, 17–18). He promises that if we seek Him we will find Him if we seek Him on His terms (Isa. 55:6–8).

BRIGHTER VISION OF THE FUTURE

16 One of the most vivid marks of spiritual growth is a brighter view of the promises of God. Why? Because the things of this life no longer satisfy one who has been captured by the goal of eternal life in Christ's Kingdom.

The apostle Paul had his eye on that goal. "If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead" (Phil. 3:11). He wanted future life. He wanted the eternal crown (1 Cor. 9:27). He wanted the "far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. 4:17), and to obtain it he was willing to suffer the "light affliction" of the moment, because he knew that it was preparing him for a share in the things which

My Opportunity

*An opportunity to grow
presents itself today,
To leave my former self behind
and walk the narrow way,
To rise above the bitter words
and evil thoughts that blight,
Seek honor only from my God
and sink all self from sight.
An opportunity is mine to heed
God's loving, warning voice
To flee from each besetting sin,
make this my only choice,
To bear my cross through every hour,
and never once complain,
Press forward, upward for the prize,
perfection's heights to gain.*

M. Walton, Ohio

are eternal (2 Cor. 4:18). That is why he said, *"I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus"* (Phil. 3:14). He had in his mind a bright picture of the reward Christ would be bringing from heaven, and was eagerly waiting for *"The Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body"* (Phil. 3:20–21).

The apostle Paul—like every serious believer—had a passion for life. We are willing to forego the normal satisfactions of life because we have caught a glimpse of something infinitely better. We want to live when the prophecy is fulfilled: *"Death is swallowed up in victory. O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?"* (1 Cor. 15:54–55).

All of God's servants in other ages shared a bright, clear picture of coming events in the plan of God. From the allegories in the book of Genesis to the revelations that the apostle John received and recorded, the Bible messages focus forward to the culmination of God's plan for our earth. It was the hope that kept them going through difficult trials. That hope was the motivation of their lives; and as we grow in faith, it will become *"ever brighter unto the perfect Day"* (Prov. 4:18).

And now?

The purpose of this list is not to be a spiritual report card but an evaluation of one's individual Christian growth. As we grow in knowledge of the Word of God, and as we grow in knowledge of ourselves, we will see

ourselves growing in these virtues and can encourage ourselves. And if we can change in one area of our lives, we can do it in another. We can live pleasing to God and receive His approval. God helping us, we can become full grown men and women in Christ and one day have an eternal place in His everlasting Kingdom on earth. ♦

"THUS IT SEEMS TO ME..."

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

of God's plans or promises. If we want to know His mind and His commands, we must go to His Word and take all that He has said, in the context in which it was written. The Bible must be one Divine harmony, not tidbits for us to interpret to our own liking, according to "thus it seems to me."

God wants us to think and reason. He says, *"Come now, and let us*

reason"—but within the boundaries of His Word, not with the philosophers of this world (Isa. 1:18). He wants us to study His Word, internalize it, meditate on it until it becomes the framework of our actions, part of our very being (1 Tim. 4:13, 15-16). We must go to the Bible to learn God's thoughts, not to find support for our own or someone else's preconceived idea or opinion. "I think" is not a sufficient response to questions about our eternal destiny.

If you are concerned about a human issue, you can listen to human opinions all day long. But when it is a matter of eternal life or death, be sure you have a *"thus saith the Lord"* for what you believe.

Everything else is just someone's "thus it seems to me..." and utterly worthless toward obtaining any promise of eternal life. ♦



Break Up Your Fallow Ground

*Sow for yourselves righteousness;
Reap in mercy;
Break up your fallow ground,
For it is time to seek the Lord...
—Hosea 10:12*

With the arrival of another growing season, my thoughts go back to my teen years. Where I lived with my family in Georgia, drought conditions during the summer months were common, and we did what we could so that our crops could benefit from whatever moisture was in the soil. For example, we would “bar off” fields for planting corn. This meant making furrows as deep as possible, planting the corn seed in the bottom of these furrows, and covering the seed about an inch deep. As the corn grew, we plowed around it for weed and grass control. At “laying by time” we added more fertilizer and plowed it for the last time. The corn roots were then about a foot underground, the soil having been leveled from plowing.

As the season progressed, the corn leaves began to curl during the day due to lack of rain. We anxiously watched to see if they would uncurl at night, and hoped for rain. Just one more soaking rain while the leaves still uncured at night, and we would have a crop.

Obviously, these conditions would not produce a good crop, perhaps only about one third what it could have been with irrigation or more rain.

Our world today is experiencing a spiritual

drought. It takes deeply rooted faith plants and “honest” soil to produce the sweet fruits of right doing (Gal. 5:22–24; James 3:18).

BREAKING THAT FALLOW GROUND

Jesus pointed out the importance of having the right kind of heart-soil in His parable of the Sower (see Matt. 13:3–8). As a parallel illustration, I want to share with you another experience from my teen years, when I had a job of breaking up some very hard, fallow ground for a dairy farmer. I think we can glean a good spiritual lesson from it.

If you are not familiar with fallow ground, it is soil that can be productive but which, for one reason or another, has not been plowed or tilled for some time. If the soil happens to be a heavy clay mixture, it can become very hard after just a few years of lying idle.

The ground that belonged to this particular dairy farmer was not typical fallow ground; it was hard Georgia red clay—the kind bricks are made from. This was reason enough for it to be lying fallow. Up to that time, none of the local land owners had equipment powerful enough or safe enough to break it up properly. The previous owner had had a John Deere tractor, but no one would consider using it for this purpose because it would probably have overturned on

***fallow:** soil that is left untilled, or unsown after plowing; dormant, inactive (Meriam-Webster Dictionary)*

the first round, resulting in a very serious accident. Of course I did not know that at the time, or I would have been more nervous myself.

The tools of choice were a big Oliver tractor pulling a subsoiler, a type of very strong plow that goes deep into the soil.

Ah! It was a teen's delight to have such power at his command! Round and round I went with one foot on the clutch, in case the front wheels of the tractor went too high off the ground, and the other foot pressing first the left and then the right brake (both brakes were on the right side of the tractor). I used the brakes to guide the tractor because the front wheels were off the ground almost as much as on it. But the fallow ground gradually gave way as the tough clods—some more than 4 feet across and some more than one foot thick—kicked out from under the large tractor wheels! The right tools and a great deal of youthful determination made it happen!

Did the broken up soil produce? Abundantly! And the dairy cows loved the sweet cane that was chopped into silage and later mixed with other feed.

DIFFERENT SOILS

Soil can have different features, some more desirable than others. If soil is too sandy, it is like a sieve; it will not hold water and nutrients easily wash out. If the soil has too much clay, it is not possible to break up without heavy equipment. Neither is desirable. Even a weed has difficulty thriving, and the farmer, looking for an easy crop, will not likely take on either kind of soil.

The ideal soil would be one that has a high concentration of humus and perhaps some clay. But in a drought-prone area, as where we were, a heavy clay soil certainly had its advantages—if you could break it up. It will then soak up any rain that fell and hold it much like a huge shallow covered reservoir. Clean out the chicken houses and stables, spread it on the soil before plowing in the seed, and you had a fertile soil that would produce, even in a time of drought.

SPIRITUAL SOIL

From the earliest records, the Jewish people were cultivators of the soil. Isn't it only natural, then, that the metaphors and imagery in their language drew heavily from agricultural

settings? But how meaningful their words become when understood and applied in this context.

When Hosea said, "Break up your fallow ground," no one thought of heading to the field with plow and ox. They knew what he meant: "Don't be so hard-hearted and stubborn. Listen to what the Lord tells you, and do it!"

Seeds will not germinate and produce a crop unless they are sown in soil that has the proper nutrients. As Jesus taught in the parable of the sower, the Word of God, represented by the seed (Luke 8:11), will not produce the precious fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control—unless it finds lodging in an honest and sincere heart. And this is the very heart that others often scorn, even reject. I am reminded of the Word of God to Samuel when He sent Samuel to anoint someone to replace Saul as king. When Samuel thought, "Surely this is the one," God responded, "No. This one I have rejected also." God wanted a special heart, one that would choke the seeds of doubt, and the thistles and thorns of disobedience. God wanted a heart that hated evil and delighted in obeying His every command.

And here my thoughts go back to that hard, red Georgia clay. Rejected and despised, it was not what the growers would call ideal. Hardly anything would grow in it, not even weeds and thorns. But break up the clods, work with it, and keep working with it, and it would produce. It would produce abundantly, even in times of drought.

SPIRITUAL CLODS

The human heart can be as hard (unbreakable) as stone, as porous (open or permeable) as sand, or as dense (impenetrable) as clay or a mixture of clay and sand. Which kind of heart would God choose? Certainly not the heart that can't be broken; that heart will not accept the seeds of His Word and grow the fruits of the Spirit.

Nor would He select the heart that is like sand. This kind of heart will take in anything. It is not discriminating, and has no stick-to-it-iveness. Whatever goes in goes right out again. It is blown about by every wind of doctrine, and the result is only so many sand dunes blocking the way to progress.

God is looking for hearts that are more like that hard red clay, one that will not accept just

any seeds that come along but which can be broken by cultivation. Such a heart will thrive in hard times and good, in the rainy season or in drought. Such a heart will accept the good seeds of God's Words and will produce a harvest of good fruit.

Again and again God through His prophets tried to impress the people with the need for spiritual hard work. He commanded through Jeremiah, *"Break up your fallow ground, and do not sow among thorns"* (Jer. 4:3). And Hosea said, *"Break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord."* In other words, break those hard hearts, pay attention to God's words of warning. He will send the rain, and you will reap a harvest of mercy and righteousness (Hosea 10:12).

God looks for hard hearts, but only those that can be broken.

I can still see (and feel) that old Oliver tractor, front wheels off the ground, pitching left and right breaking up one clod after another. But after the harvest, I could look back with joy.

Now I think of those clods as clods of unrighteousness, and with my eye on the Kingdom, the work becomes a delight. And from time to time, I even shout for joy, as I see one of those most stubborn clods broken to pieces!

But like the hard red clay, our hearts are difficult to break up. It is hard to let go those besetting sins of pride, self-centeredness, anger, impatience, envy, selfish ambition. It isn't until we are dissatisfied with being worthless and desolate that we seek something better. It is then that a few, a very few will allow the plow of discipline to penetrate their hard hearts, digging deep and breaking up the clods of sinful attitudes and thoughts. Like the subsoiler, the Word of God is powerful and will penetrate deeply, if we but let it.

When the showers come, the clay soil soaks up the precious water of life, and like a reservoir will hold it. Then when the drought comes, the clay soil continues to produce, while plants in the sand wither and die. And like the clay that yields to the subsoiler, the loyal Christian will yield to the Word of God.

Just as the clay soil continues to produce in times of drought, the Christian will continue to produce the sweet fruits of the Spirit when tests come. And the greater the test, the sweeter and more abundant the fruit.

There are many clods to break up, but we

are willing because we want something far better, and we have learned how to get it. *"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart—these, O God, You will not despise"* (Ps. 51:17).

Jesus came to teach us how to break up those clods of unrighteousness; and there is only one way we can do it: by following His instructions carefully!

So what shall we do? Break up that fallow ground, let the seeds of Truth inside and drink deep of the water of life. Let those seeds sprout and take deep root and grow, no matter how dry and barren it is all around you. When the King arrives, He will be looking for one thing—fruit—fruit in abundance! Not just any fruit will do. He will be looking for the choicest fruits. He will be examining our fruits carefully; if one blemish is discovered the whole crop will be rejected, only the sweetest fruit of the Spirit will be accepted—love, joy, peace, patience—you get the idea.

Yes, all that hard work and sacrifices you put into breaking up those stubborn clods of evil really pays big!

You saw the stubborn will; the deceitfulness and wickedness of your own heart. You cried out to God in brokenness of heart and He sent you showers of blessings giving you all the time and resources required for you to get rid of every blemish. Now you can present your offering to the King with confidence.

"For as the earth brings forth its sprouts, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to sprout up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to sprout up before all the nations" (Isa. 61:11 ESV).

One day will be the last day, and the Lord will come looking for your fruits. So remember the old Oliver tractor breaking up the clods of that hard red clay and be encouraged. Though despised and scorned by a world that does not recognize God or appreciate righteousness, we can break up the clods of our hearts. Then, when He comes, He will find us bearing choice fruits for the King. ♦

Now when they heard this, they were cut in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? – Acts 2:37

The Pentecost Question: What Shall We Do?

This question propounded to Peter and to the other Apostles at the close of Peter's powerful sermon on the Day of Pentecost is a statement of conviction. The sermon was bearing fruit. At least some of the people who listened to Peter were aware that they had consented with their religious leaders in taking the life of the innocent One, and, although done ignorantly, they felt condemned.

If as individuals we would obtain the greatest possible good from a practical lesson, we must apply it to ourselves and say, "What shall I do?" Salvation is strictly a personal matter. Others can point out the way of salvation, others can help us see our faults, yet the burden of the work lies with ourselves; hence the timeliness of the query, "What shall I do?"

When the people thronged about John the Baptist as he baptized in Jordan, they asked him: "What shall we do then?" (Luke 3:10). His answers show a practical approach to the problem of right living. John's response to his naturally covetous countrymen impressed the need for sharing: "He that has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise." To the tax gatherers he impressed the lesson of honesty and integrity. "Collect no more than that which is appointed for you." The soldiers likewise demanded of him, "And what shall we do?" His answer to them was emphatic: "Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely; and be content with your wages"—surely an unwelcome directive for soldiers!

When the young firebrand Saul was struck down by a light brighter than the noonday sun, he realized for the first time that he had been fighting against God. His first utterance after Jesus revealed His identity to him was, "Lord, what will You have me do?" From that

moment his life was changed. From Paul's own statements we learn that when it pleased God to reveal His Son to him that he should preach among the Gentiles, immediately he "conferred not with flesh and blood" (Gal. 1:15–17). Paul did not consult with his old acquaintances among the Pharisees, or with the persecutors whose cause he so recently had championed, or even with his own feelings. He made a 180° turn, becoming the strongest supporter of the cause which he had tried to destroy.

"What shall I do?" was the question the jailer asked Paul and Silas at midnight after the earthquake had miraculously broken their chains. However, the answer to that question: "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved," is not as simple as it is sometimes represented to be. To believe in the Lord Jesus Christ is not merely to believe that such a man as Jesus Christ once lived on earth and accept Him as one's personal Saviour. To believe in the Lord Jesus Christ is to comply with the demands in all that He taught, i.e., to accept willingly the discipline that His superior teachings impose on our lives and daily bear our cross of self-denial. (Luke 9:23; Phil. 1:29–30)

When the people heard Peter's preaching on the day of Pentecost, they were "pricked in their heart." What Peter said had burned in, and they were moved to ask, "What shall we do?" We need such conviction today; without it we shall make no spiritual progress. The gospel is the "power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16), and it must be a power to us. When shown that we have been walking in rebellion to Divine law and doing things that displease God, jeopardizing our chances for eternal life, we should be "pricked" in heart. If we are not concerned when we learn we have done

wrong, we shall have no incentive to do better.

When Paul wrote the letter to the Church at Corinth chastening them for sins that had been reported to him, they were pricked in heart. What Paul wrote in that letter made them “sorry.” And they not only asked “what shall we do?” but at once set about to correct the wrongs. A great cleansing followed. Paul’s heart was warmed by their response. *“I am not sorry that I sent that severe letter to you, though I was sorry at first, for I know it was painful to you for a little while. Now I am glad I sent it, not because it hurt you, but because the pain caused you to repent and change your ways. It was the kind of sorrow God wants his people to have, ... [it] leads us away from sin and results in salvation. ... Just see what this godly sorrow produced in you! Such earnestness, such concern to clear yourselves, such indignation, such alarm, such longing*

to see me, such zeal, and such a readiness to punish wrong. You showed that you have done everything necessary to make things right” (2 Cor. 7:8–11 NLT).

God wants us to be ashamed when we do wrong. He wants us to repent and do what is right. *“Let the wicked forsake his way”* (Isa. 55:7). No other attitude can be fruitful. He wants us to be pricked at heart. In Ezekiel 36:25–26, 31 (NLT), the Lord vividly pictures the cleansing power of His word when given free rein in the heart broken by penitence:

Life is too short and eternity too long to trifle away any time in indecision. What should we do? When a Divine command reaches our intellect we should fly to obey it. It is the only sure course toward receiving a favorable decision at Judgment Day. ♦



Crowns and Crowns

How often in the Bible, God’s high achievers, those who will be given immortality when Jesus returns and have a place with Him in His kingdom, are pictured as having or wearing crowns. This is appropriate, because these “overcomers” will share His throne (Rev. 3:21). They will be His associate rulers (Rev. 20:4). The crown is the headdress of a sovereign. It represents royal distinction, which these honored men and women will have. It is a mark of high honor and dignity.

Notice how frequently the Bible speaks of the crowns of the faithful. They are promised:

A “crown of life” if they stand the test (Jas. 1:12).

“The crown of glory that does not fade away” when *“the Chief Shepherd appears”* (1 Pet. 5:4).

The **“crown of righteousness”** that has been laid up for the Apostle Paul and *“all who have loved His appearing”* (2 Tim. 4:8).

“A crown of life” for being *“faithful until death”* (Rev. 2:10).

Jesus emphasized that one must persevere, hold fast to his faith and virtue, *“that no one may take your crown”* (Rev. 3:11).

The glorious being pictured figuratively in Revelation as riding on a white horse and called *“Faithful and True”*—a being composed of Christ and His glorified saints—is said to have on His head **“many crowns,”** representing the distinction that Christ will have awarded each of His faithful ones (Rev. 19:12).

Jesus is already *“crowned with glory and honor”* (Heb. 2:9). And when He returns, He will crown each of His distinguished co-rulers. What honor and praise and happiness will be theirs! With immortal life and vigor pulsing through their being, these victors will know the meaning of everlasting—supreme—honor and joy! ♦



Broader Fields

From the early years of Jesus' life, as they might have been.

The carpenter looked up from his bench in surprise as a shadow darkened his doorway. It was the heat of the day, and few men were abroad except by necessity; who would be coming to his shop at this hour? A stranger stood before him, a Greek by his appearance, well dressed and prosperous looking. He would have been dignified had he not been so warm and somewhat out of breath, and his clothing so dusty and disheveled. His flanking escort of a dozen street urchins and a few stray dogs was not conducive to dignity, either. Nevertheless he smiled pleasantly and his voice was smooth and cultured as he spoke.

"Are you Jesus, the son of Joseph?"

"The same, Sir."

"You are a wheelwright?"

"No." The stranger's face fell, then brightened as the carpenter added, "I make wheels, though, sometimes."

"That's better. I hope this is one such time."

Then he told his story. He was a merchant of Alexandria, Demetrius by name, traveling by chariot from Egypt to Damascus by way of Capernaum. Curiosity, nothing else, had led him to turn aside from the main highway to see the village of Nazareth; and at the outskirts of the town his horses had taken fright and in the ensuing runaway the chariot had struck a large stone and both wheels had collapsed in a shower of spokes. He himself had been thrown out early in the excitement, but was uninjured. Three streets down lay the wreckage. The car-

penter examined the surviving pieces carefully.

"I can do it," he announced. "Not so fine or so graceful as these, but good, honest, oaken wheels which will carry you to Damascus and back, and much more. Many of these pieces we can use again. It will take a little time."

"How long?"

"Ten days, at the least. Longer, if you want them painted."

"Ten days!" The merchant made a wry face, then smiled faintly in resignation. "All right; I'll have to make the best of it."

"I can get at it immediately. My younger brother helps me, and perhaps your charioteer can lend a hand. I wish you a pleasant stay in Nazareth, Sir. It is a nice little town, and I think you'll like it. We do, and we live here all the time. We have a good inn, and while we have no places of amusement, from the top of our hill you may have one of the finest views in all Palestine."

Day by day the wheels took form in the little workshop on a side street. Demetrius spent much of his time there. For one thing, there was little else to see or do in this prosaic, dusty village; for another, he was studying this young carpenter. That Jesus was no ordinary provincial artisan he had learned the first day, and each succeeding day strengthened the conviction that here was a youth of exceptional ability and promise. In fact, the entire family seemed to be unusual, well above the average. Joseph, the father, prematurely aged and disabled by an

injury some years before, sat in a corner of the shop most of the time, giving instruction when needed. As for Mary, the carpenter's mother, she was a woman one does not forget, a veritable queen, dignified and spiritual, yet practical and motherly, possessing that indefinite something which sets the exceptional person apart. There were several younger brothers and sisters who ran in and out of the shop. James and Josés, the largest of the boys, helped with the work from time to time. Young Jesus was kind and patient with them all, but a strict disciplinarian when necessary.

Strangest of all was their attitude toward the Jewish religion. They were all pious Jews, yet not at all like the Jerusalem rabbis he had met. In fact, he thought, the scribes and Pharisees would do well to come to Nazareth for instruction. To this family, moral principles ranked far above ritual formalities and technicalities; a very commendable thing, Demetrius told himself. For many of the Jewish taboos they seemed to have little or no regard. For instance, they seemed to feel no sense of ceremonial defilement from their association with him, a Gentile; and he was almost stunned with surprise the day he was invited to dine in their humble home. At the table the conversation naturally turned to religion. Demetrius was an educated man, a free-thinker in religion, taking what he liked from every faith and philosophy, and it was natural that he should feel somewhat superior to these unschooled outlanders, sincere and blameless though they might be.

"I have read your Law and some of the Prophets," he said, "and I have the deepest admiration for the Jewish conception of the One God, righteous and just. It is by far the loftiest conception of the Deity I have found in all my studies. Yet some features of your faith are not so acceptable; in fact, I might say they almost repel me. For instance, the tremendous amount of attention given to ceremonial details—the distance one may travel and the weight of a burden which may be carried on the Sabbath day, the washings and the sacrifices, and such like. These things seem too petty and time-wasting to be the work of so great a God as yours. I say these things frankly, because I think you people are too broadminded to take offense."

"Your charges are only too well founded," replied Jesus, gravely. "There is far too much emphasis placed by our teachers on ceremony and ritual. In fact, with most of us it has completely supplanted the religion of Moses and

Elijah, which is, in the words of Micah, '*to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.*' But bear this in mind: These things which repel you—all these hair-splitting technicalities—are not to be found in the Law or the Prophets, but in the great mass of literature which has accumulated in five hundred years of priestly interpretation and speculation. So far as saving truth is concerned, the vast bulk of these writings is worthless. You know"—with a smile—"our people spent some time in Babylon, and unfortunately they brought back a good many Babylonian ideas."

"But," Demetrius argued, "in your Law, the very writings of Moses, there is prescribed a very elaborate ritual, is there not?"

"That is true. But only as a shadow or type of the great eternal realities."

"Explain your statement." The Greek was attentive, the food forgotten. Anything in the nature of a subtle or abstract philosophy interested him, and this promised to be different. And from a twenty-something smalltown carpenter it was doubly amazing.

"Well, it is too vast a subject to go through in one day, or two—and those wheels are waiting. But one point will show what I mean. Our Law prescribed various sacrifices, the death of a lamb or bullock. Now it is inconceivable that a God such as we worship could have any pleasure or interest in the death of a beast; but it had deeper meaning. In our natural, untamed condition we are of no use to God; we are mere animals. To be accepted by Him we must make a complete change from evil to good, laying aside the old nature and taking on the new, what we may call dying to sin, slaying the beast within us. This is a continual, daily process, and is the only sacrifice acceptable to God. The literal offering was only a type, a picture or drama to teach the people the deeper meaning of the living sacrifice God was looking for from them.

"When the people came, as they often did and do at this day, to regard the shadow more than the substance, the prophets protested: '*Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.*'"

*Demetrius was an educated man,
a freethinker in religion,
taking what he liked from every
faith and philosophy.*



"I see.... Something to think about."

"Incidentally," the young man continued, "the system had other moral benefits. There was a time when we were a pastoral people, all our wealth being in the form of our flocks and herds. Later came the fruits of the earth. To make a free-will offering of that which God had given us, but which we considered our property, called for self-denial and generosity, which was a wholesome discipline for a people naturally covetous and grasping. Again, Moses commanded many washings of bodies, clothing and utensils. All this was a shadow of the reality proclaimed by Isaiah: *'Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do well.'* And in this case, too, there were other benefits, for the keeping of these ordinances made us a clean and healthy people when much of the ancient world was encrusted with filth. The Prophets, not the rabbis, are the true expounders of the Law; but unfortunately there are few today who know or care to know its true meaning."

"Remarkable! I see you have something to give the world of thought, even the world of Greek learning. I shall have to ask you more. What I should like to know is this: What are you doing here in this little place? Why aren't you in Jerusalem, teaching in the temple?"

Jesus ignored the question.

"Yes, ours was the greatest code of laws ever given to any people—great because from God. Yet even it, when it has served its purpose, shall be replaced by something better—" He broke off suddenly, as though he had said too much, then went on in an easier tone. "We have a good little synagogue here in Nazareth,

and tomorrow is the Sabbath, so the shop will be closed. Perhaps you would like to worship with us."

"May I?"—in surprise.

"With pleasure."

So impressed had Demetrius been with the confidence and wisdom displayed by Jesus at the dinner that he was a little surprised and disappointed to note that he took no active part in the service but stood obscurely in the congregation during the reading and sermon. When the time came for the instruction of the children, the visitor remembered how earnestly and tactfully the carpenter had talked to the village boys who stopped to watch him work, and fully expected to see him as teacher of a class, but not so. Later, in conversation with a native, he discreetly voiced this surprise. The man shook his head.

"He is a good boy," he whispered, "but the rabbi doesn't like him. He has strange ideas..."

Demetrius decided to have his new wheels painted. It was unnecessary, but the truth was, he wanted more time to observe this young genius, for such he certainly was. A plan was taking form in his mind. His old patronizing attitude had faded out, and now he often felt himself subtly on the defensive, as if in the presence of a superior. Although he asked questions occasionally, he never undertook to engage the carpenter in argument or debate; it would have seemed presumptuous. It was all very strange, that he, a wealthy, powerful, cultured business man should be spending so much precious time in a hot, dusty, unheard-of little town in the highlands of Galilee, for no better reason than the fascinating influence of a clever young Jewish workman; but here he was. Truth was stranger than fiction. ♦

TO BE CONTINUED

ANSWERS FROM PAGE 28

LIKE PUNISHMENTS

1. Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:1-2)
2. Paul (Acts 21:26-32)
3. Pilate (Mark 15:15)
4. Zechariah, son of the priest Jehoiada (2 Chron. 24:15-22)
5. Peter (Acts 12:1-4); Paul and Silas (Acts 16:19-24)
6. Elijah (1 Kings 19:1-3)
7. The guest without the wedding robe (Matt. 22:11-13)

LIKE FEARS

1. Moses (Ex. 4:1-5)
2. The ten spies (Num. 13:1-2, 33; 14:30-36)
3. Joseph's brethren (Gen. 50:15)
4. King Saul (1 Sam. 15:9-11, 24)

LIKE PRAYERS

1. Stephen (Acts 7:54-60)
2. Isaac (Gen. 25:21)
3. Elisha (2 Kings 4:32-37)
4. Solomon (1 Kings 3:7-9)
5. Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. 20:1-4, 18-19)

LIKE GIVING

1. Jacob (Gen. 37:3)
2. Joseph (Gen. 41:45)
3. John the Baptist (Luke 1:13)
4. David (1 Sam. 17:38)
5. Solomon (1 Kings 10:10)
6. Jacob (Gen. 43:11-15)

Is Christ Our Pascal Lamb?

“I would like you to explain 1 Corinthians 5:7, ‘For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us.’ Jesus was crucified on the Passover, and I believe this makes Him our Pascal Lamb, the perfect sacrifice for our sins. Isn’t this significant?”

The belief you state is widely accepted, but is it the correct understanding of the passage? Is it God’s plan that we receive eternal life as a result of Christ’s merits, when Paul says God will give eternal life to *“those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality”* (Rom. 2:7). If our future depends on accepting Christ as our substitute, why was Paul concerned about being disqualified unless he himself finished the race? (1 Cor. 9:26–27). And why did Jesus write to the seven Churches in the last book of the Bible that they must repent or they would lose all? (see Revelations, chapters 2 and 3).

Let us first consider the context. In First Corinthians 5, Paul is sharply reproving his Corinthian brethren for being too tolerant of an immoral person in their midst. Instead of taking action against the offender and removing him from their congregation, they were apparently doing nothing about it—and even glorying in it. *“Your glorying is not good,”* he says plainly (v.6).

The sin among the Corinthians was abominable to God, says Paul, and the leaders of the Church should have taken action to remove it. By allowing it to remain, they were placing a stain upon the whole congregation.

To illustrate the contaminating effects of their sin, Paul draws an analogy with the unleavened bread eaten at Passover. Like Jesus (Matt. 16:6; Luke 12:1), he uses leaven as a symbol of the contaminating evil: *“Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven [the evil they were allowing] leavens the whole lump?”* The sin they were permitting was ruinous. What should they do? *“Purge out [“cleanse thoroughly”—SHG] the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened.”* In other words, remove the sinful ones from the church.

Paul’s next comment is about *“Christ our Passover”* being sacrificed. Since Paul has just

used leaven as a symbol of the evil in the Church, the *“passover”* must be spiritual also. What is *“Christ our Passover”* that has been sacrificed? Paul is speaking of Christ’s spiritual sacrifice, His total giving up of Himself to do the will of His Father.

“Therefore,” Paul continues, *“let us keep the feast [our spiritual Passover to God], not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth”* (1 Cor. 5:6–8). Paul wanted them *“unleavened,”* without the wickedness in their midst.

Paul’s advice here could apply to any of us when we sin. He is saying to the Corinthians, Make a new start by keeping a *spiritual* Passover, and renew your commitment to God. Celebrate that Passover by a spiritual cleansing of your hearts, getting rid of the *spiritual* leaven of evil (*“of malice and wickedness”* – vs. 8) and in its place have the spiritual unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. Christ set the example. He did it, and so can you.

There may be yet another reason for Paul’s reference to the Passover or Feast of Unleavened Bread in this connection. Originally the Passover rite was an act of obedience which the Israelites performed in order to secure the mercy of God and escape the plague of death. The destroying angel had been directed to destroy all the firstborn—unless he saw blood sprinkled upon the doorpost of the house, in which case he would *“pass over”* that house.

The observance of the Passover was directly binding upon all Israelites as a remembrance of their miraculous deliverance from Egypt. But the observance had meaning far beyond that. It was also associated with the establishing of a covenant relationship with God or renewing a relationship that had been broken by sin. In the time of King Hezekiah, after a time of apostasy, the king directed a major temple clean-up operation. When the renovations were complete, the first step toward restoring regular worship was the observance of the Passover, to bring the people into a right relationship with God (2 Chron. 30 and 31). In the time of Josiah, after another period of apostasy, the

Passover was again kept—"with great joy." The people heard the law and agreed to keep it.

The Corinthian situation was parallel. There had been serious sin, and might Paul have been saying that the relationship broken by their sin needed to be restored? Passover, in its spiritual significance, would be a renewal, a clearing out the old leaven of malice and wickedness (1 Cor. 5:8) and partaking of the "unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." In doing this they would be seeking God's forgiveness and entreating His favor.

Also, consider the following:

- 1) Was Christ literally the passover Lamb? He **was not crucified on the Jewish Passover, but on the "preparation" day** (see John 13:1; 18:28; 19:14, 42; Luke 23:56; Matt. 26:2, 20; 27:62). Therefore Christ's crucifixion does not parallel the killing of the Pascal Lamb in time.
- 2) **The words "for us" (Christ... was sacrifice for us) are not in the best Greek manuscripts**, and the majority of the new translations omit "for us" (see the NIV, NEB, RSV, NJB, TEV, ESV, among others). The passage should read, "for even Christ our Passover is sacrificed."
- 3) **The verse does not say Christ is our Passover Lamb.** There is no mention of Lamb, only the word Passover, which refers to the feast day, with all of its activities. The Passover observance was memorializing the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt.
- 4) **The passover lamb was not one lamb sacrificed for all.** On the night of the first Passover, the Israelites were to kill a lamb, and use its blood to mark the door posts of their house, so that the destroying angel would pass over their household. Each family, or group of families, if the family was too small, were to provide their own lamb for the feast, and for the blood on the door post. It was not one lamb sacrificed for all. Again, the parallel with Jesus' death on Calvary is missing.
- 5) **The Passover lamb was eaten as part of a celebration of deliverance; it was not a sacrifice to remove sin.** In fact, the whole Passover ceremony had nothing to do with absolving sin. It was celebrating the Israelites' deliverance from Egypt.
- 6) **Christ was not a literal lamb being literally killed and shedding literal blood.** If Christ is the **spiritual** lamb of God, He must shed **spiritual** blood, and be a

spiritual sacrifice to be consistent. And the lamb must be eaten along with **spiritual** bread that is spiritually unleavened with malice and wickedness—to qualify as the **spiritual** bread of "sincerity and truth" (vs. 7–8).

Paul's spiritual application completely removes any efficacy from the literal shed blood of Christ in this passage. In Israel, the Passover lamb was literally killed, and its blood used on the door posts. Christ, being the *spiritual* representation of the lamb, must shed *spiritual* blood. Christ's literal shed blood could not be a parallel with the killing of the lamb. This is a serious issue. We must be consistent, comparing spiritual things with spiritual (1 Cor. 2:13). The literal lamb shed its literal blood: the spiritual lamb (Christ) must shed spiritual blood, i.e., His own life-long sacrifice as the submissive, totally obedient Lamb of God.

This spiritual sacrifice is consistent with a God who "never wanted or took delight in sacrifices, offerings, burnt offerings, and sin offerings, which are offered according to the law" (Heb. 10:8 ISV). Christ did not come to literally sacrifice Himself for the sins of the world, but as it was written of Him, "See, I have come to do Your will" (v. 9).

DO CHILDREN HAVE GUARDIAN ANGELS?

"Do little children have guardian angels in heaven watching over them? I am thinking about the words of Jesus in Matthew 18:10."

The text in question reads: "Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 18:10).

First we must determine who are the "little ones" Jesus was speaking about.

In Matthew 18:1, Jesus was addressing His disciples: "At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying...." They had a question: "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" To answer them, Jesus called a child to Him and said: "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (vs. 3–4). Being "greatest in the kingdom of heaven" has two conditions, He says: 1) be "converted," and 2) "become as little children."

Often God's spokespersons compared the quality of humility, or humbleness of mind, to child-likeness. Solomon, at the beginning of his career, was described as *"but a little child"* (1 Kings 3:7). Jeremiah said of himself that he was not able to speak: *"I am a youth"* (Jer. 1:6). He did not feel capable of filling the role God was calling him to fill. This is the spirit Christ wanted to see in His disciples, an illustration of humility, which at this time they lacked.

Then in Matthew 18:5, Jesus said, *"Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me."* Drawing from the lesson He had just given them, Jesus now called His disciples little children. This fact is confirmed by the following verse: *"...whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin."* Notice it reads: *"these little ones who believe in Me."* At this point Jesus had to be referring to His disciples as the *"little ones,"* because a child young in stature and in years would not be capable of sufficient understanding to be said to *"believe in [Him]."* The disciples were the believers Jesus was speaking of; they were Christ's *"little ones"* when they were humble, trusting and obedient.

These same *"little ones"* are the children Jesus speaks about in verse 10, the text in question: *"Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones"*—these *"little ones who believe in Me"* (v. 6). Why? *"For I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven."*

Guardian angels are part of God's loving provision for His people in all ages. As we read in Psalm 34:7, *"The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them."* God sends His angels to minister to *"those who will inherit salvation"* (Heb. 1:14). Psalm 91 promises the same protection to those who belong to the Father: *"He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways"* (v. 11).

Jesus is saying, Don't *"despise"* – i.e., don't look down on or think meanly of these humble believers. They may seem unimportant here, but God recognizes them. In the Divine scheme they are the VIPs! The angels who dwell in the presence of My Father are looking out for them.

It was said of the angel Gabriel who appeared to Daniel and years later to Zacharias and to Mary (see Dan. 9:21; Luke 1:19, 26) that He stood *"in the presence of God."* The angels watch over *"these little ones who believe"*—earnest, committed, humble disciples who

"will inherit salvation" (Heb. 1:14).

WHY POLYGAMY IN THE BIBLE?

"If the Bible's New Testament policy of one wife is the best principle—and I believe it is—why was so much polygamy allowed in Old Testament times?"

Polygamy was practiced by people who were serving God in Old Testament times, but we do not have any record where it was either commanded or commended. Nor do we read where God condemned it. During the time of the patriarchs and the early days of the Israelite nation, Israelite law allowed for a man to take a second wife if the first wife was not able to bear children so as to perpetuate the family. An example is the case of Sarah giving Abraham her handmaid for a wife. According to the Bible dictionary, the children of such a union were reckoned as children of the first wife by adoption, and were eligible for a legal share in the father's inheritance.

In the Hebrew family, children were considered the richest of blessings. Because children were needed for the strength of the family, the tribe, and the nation, a childless woman felt disgraced. To have many children was the chief blessing she could desire. Childlessness meant sorrow and humiliation. Notice the distress of Abraham and Sarah when for so many years they had no heir born of their own flesh (Gen. 15:2–3; 16:2). How could the promise of God to Abraham through his descendants be fulfilled when he had no children?

When the Israelites were possessing the land of Canaan, numbers meant military prowess and power.

In the case of Jacob, polygamy was likely prompted by the desire for descendants, so that the nation could grow strong and powerful. Moses, however, was inspired to write into the law that kings were not to multiply wives unto themselves (Deut. 17:17), as David and Solomon both did in later years.

The apostle Paul's recommendation that a Bishop should be the *"husband of one wife"* (1 Tim. 3:2) shows that monogamy (one wife) was and is God's ideal. ♦

A past century story with a present lesson



The courtroom was very quiet. The boy standing before the judge's bench was certain to be handled in typical Maloney fashion.

Mike Faverty, bailiff in Western City's Juvenile Court, watched Judge Maloney as he studied the legal papers before him. Public opinion in the city had been demanding action to deal with the city's juvenile delinquency.

"I wonder how tough he'll get with this boy," said Mike to an assistant.

The Judge looked down at the white-faced, poorly clad boy of fourteen before him. The youth shifted his position uneasily. "I will postpone giving a decision on this case until Friday," said the Judge quietly. "I wish to talk to the defendant in my chambers."

In his chambers, Judge Maloney faced Jimmy Buergin and Mr. Olson. His well-known stern face wore a warm smile. "We've got to do something about this, Jimmy. Organizing a gang to throw rocks at trains filled with passengers just won't do."

Jimmy looked up at the Judge, and then out of the window into the cold gray of Western City's atmosphere. "I'll do something about it, Judge." The boy's tone was defiant.

"What, Jimmy?" asked the judge, looking serious.

"I'll throw some more rocks at some more trains, Judge!" threatened Jimmy with an angry snarl in his voice.

A momentary flash in the Judge's gray eyes disappeared, as a warm smile came to his lips. He put his hands on the boy's shoulders. "I know something better than that, Jimmy."

The snarl deepened. So did the Judge's smile. He went to his desk and wrote a note. Handing it to Mr. Olson, he said, "You may go. I'll handle this. Will you please hand that slip of paper to Mr. Faverty?"

The Judge turned to the boy again. "We're going to take a ride, Jimmy. I want to show you something."

"Jimmy," said the Judge, as they were driving along, "it's a good thing that you and your outfit weren't good shots. You broke only two windows. Most of the rocks bounced off the sides of the trains, I understand."

"Yeh, too bad!" The defiance was still there, but mixed with perplexity. "What are ya' gonna' do?"

"You'll see."

They rode on in silence, but soon the car turned up the driveway leading to the Judge's home. A few moments later they entered the Judge's living room, and there, to Jimmy's great surprise, were Mr. Faverty, Mr. Olson and four solemn-faced ragged youths.

"We got them, sir," said Mr. Faverty to the Judge. "It took some fast work, but the precinct captain in that district knew just where to go."

"Fine," said Judge Maloney. "You see, Jimmy, I didn't have the other boys come to court today because I wanted to study your case first, since you're the oldest. After I had talked to you, I asked Mr. Olson and Mr. Faverty to get the other boys. Now I think all of us are about ready to go down to the basement quarters."

The boys looked frightened, wondering what was ahead.

The Judge led the way down the long winding stairs.

"Rather a big house for an old bachelor," said the Judge. "I'm all alone in the world, but there are a lot of things which I like to have around."

They entered a door at the end of a corridor. The room was a large one. The floor was covered with a gigantic model railway system. The Judge pressed some buttons on a control table, and two shinny streamliners began moving along the miniature tracks.

"Want to throw rocks at them, boys?"

The Judge studied the boys. All five faces

were intent on the moving trains. There was no evidence of a snarl.

"What a layout!" exclaimed Jimmy. He dropped to his knees as the streamliners roared by. The other boys did likewise. After a few moments, Jimmy jumped to his feet.

"Could we—could we—run them, Judge?"

"I'm going to give everything in this room to you and your friends, Jimmy," said the Judge quietly.

"Your Honor!" protested Mr. Faverty. The other boys jumped to their feet, excitedly.

"Oh, you've got to earn it," said the Judge. He met the bewilderment in the boys' faces with a smile.

"You see, I had to earn it before I got it," the Judge declared. "I've had to earn a lot of things. I don't have any family, but I'm able to have these things by doing for others. I want to share them with you now."

"Do you mean you're going to give us these tracks and trains?" asked one boy. "Where could we put them?"

"I said you had to earn it. You boys did enough to be sent to reform school." The Judge hesitated.

"I don't want to handle your case that way," continued the Judge. "I guess I really don't need these trains any more—not as much as you do. You're going to have charge of them in the new boys' club being built."

"You mean, Judge—" That was all Jimmy could say.

"We'll put you boys on probation. When the club gets going, you will organize a model railroad room on one floor. You will have to set up the room, and most of the responsibility for taking care of it will be yours. Carry it out, and there will be no reform school."

"Oh, thanks, Judge." The chorus of voices was excited with genuine enthusiasm.

"You see," said the Judge, "there are other ways to get excitement than by throwing rocks. Running these trains can be exciting, and it's all within the law, too. Let's see what good railroad men you can be. If you run into engine trouble, I'll try to help you, as one railroad man to another. Now clear out, boys. I'll see you next Tuesday afternoon down at the new club. See how many more boys you can get interested."

The boys made a noisy departure, thanking the Judge, promising their support in the new venture.

The Judge turned to the two amazed men,

who stood watching the departing boys.

"Well, I'll be, Judge!" Mike Faverty spoke first.

"How did you happen to think of something like that?"

The Judge fingered the switches on the control table, a reminiscent smile on his face. "It has been many months since I've been down in this room. I used to spend a lot of time working on these trains. I got interested in them when I was a boy on the East side, just like Jimmy. Then one day I met old Judge Ronen, and he told me about trains. You see, men," the Judge spoke slowly, "I once had engine trouble, too." ♦

—Reprinted from *Sunshine Magazine*

WHY SMOKE?

There is NO good reason to smoke, unless you want to die by inches.

DON'T SMOKE!

You hear it everywhere—because there is NO good reason to smoke.



“While many smokers believe their habit helps contain their waistlines, that’s only a fringe benefit.

Nicotine, the highly addictive substance found in tobacco, is so toxic that only 60 milligrams—an amount roughly equal to one-fifth of an aspirin tablet—would kill you on the spot. That’s why young people trying their first cigarettes can become nauseated. Tolerance develops over time, whether nicotine is absorbed through lung tissue, oral or nasal membranes, or the skin.

Most cigarettes contain from 0.5 to 2.0 milligrams of nicotine, and only about 20 percent of that reaches the bloodstream. Though such a level is far from lethal, it is enough to be a powerful stimulant. Nicotine acts on acetylcholine receptors similar to those that prompt muscles to contract. It can temporarily improve concentration and motor nerve performance. It increases heart rate while damping nerve signals from muscles, perhaps causing a sense of relaxation. Indirectly, it triggers release of the neurotransmitter dopamine, active in the brain’s pleasure centers. [The release of dopamine is also] the reason behind cocaine’s addictiveness.

Such reinforcement explains why it is so hard to stop smoking—despite our knowledge that each cigarette cuts 14 minutes off the average smoker’s life span.”

—from *Everyday Science Explained* by Curt Suplee, prepared by the Book Division, National Geographic Society, Washington, D.C.

FACT: *Nicotine is so toxic that only 60 milligrams—an amount roughly equal to one-fifth of an aspirin tablet—would kill you on the spot.*

LIKE PUNISHMENTS

1. Absalom was banished from his father's house.
These two friends of Paul were banished from home.
2. Peter and John were beaten by the Jews for preaching the Gospel.
This apostle also received a beating from the Jews.
3. At Philippi Paul and Silas received many stripes and were cast into prison.
This man had his soldiers do the same thing to Jesus.
4. Adoram, who was over the tribute, was stoned to death.
This son of a priest was also stoned to death upon order of a king.
5. For Herodias' sake Herod put John the Baptist into prison.
These disciples were also cast into prison for declaring the truth.
6. Roman emperors persecuted faithful Christians.
Wicked Jezebel made this prophet's life miserable.
7. The man who failed to make use of his talent was cast into outer darkness.
This guest in Christ's parable came to a great event unprepared and received the same punishment.



LIKE FEARS

1. The shepherds of Bethlehem feared a strange sight.
This shepherd also feared a strange sight in a strange land.
2. The men of King Saul's army feared the giant Goliath.
These men of Israel also feared giants.
3. Adonijah feared his own brother, Solomon.
These men also feared their own brother.
4. Pilate knowingly did wrong for fear of the people.
Fearing the people, this ruler did the same thing.

LIKE PRAYERS

1. In the hour of His death Christ prayed for His enemies.
This early Christian prayed likewise in the hour of his death.
2. Hannah prayed for a child.
This man did likewise.
3. Elijah prayed for a mother's son.
This prophet also prayed for a mother's son.
4. Manoah prayed for wisdom to teach his son.
This man prayed for divine guidance for the nation.
5. King Hezekiah prayed for God's protection.
This king of Judah proclaimed a fast and prayed for the same thing and praised God in advance for the victory.

LIKE GIVING

1. Hannah gave her son Samuel a coat.
This man gave his son a coat.
2. King Saul gave David a wife.
Pharoah gave this young man a wife.
3. An angel gave Jesus His name.
An angel gave this relative of Jesus his name.
4. Jonathan gave this lad his artillery (bow and arrows).
King Saul also gave this lad his artillery.
5. The wise men gave Jesus precious gifts.
This king received gifts from the Queen of Sheba.
5. Jacob sent droves of animals ahead as gifts for his brother whom he feared.
This man sent the best of the land as presents to the Egyptian governor.

ANSWERS ON PAGE 22

THE WONDER OF METAMORPHOSIS



Newborn monarch, hanging from the shattered walls of its discarded house, expands its soft, fleshy wings by pumping a clear green fluid into them from its contracting body. In a couple of hours when the wings are dry, the beautiful insect will fly. Who designed this unique process?

Unless you are working in the field of biology or science, metamorphosis is not likely a part of your everyday vocabulary. But for a number of creatures in our everyday environment, it is very much a part of life—and a wonder! You have probably admired a beautiful butterfly flitting from flower to flower. Or if you are near a body of water in the spring months, you may have listened to the evening calls of frogs or toads.

But have you realized that this butterfly, or that frog or toad is only part of the story of its life? Think back to that biology textbook, where you saw a picture of a creepy, crawly caterpillar, and right beside it, emerging slowly from a chrysalis or a pupa, was the beautiful adult butterfly you admire. And that frog or toad you heard when you were near the pond: think about the stages it came through—and stand in awe of our wonderful Creator!

The Process

To get from caterpillar to butterfly, or from tadpole to frog, requires a process called metamorphosis. The word comes from two Greek words, *meta*, meaning “change,” and *morphe*, meaning “form.”

...for the Butterfly

In the larva stage the butterfly or moth is a flightless hungry caterpillar, its one goal to consume as much of its plant host as it can, as fast as it can, to grow as big as it can. Then, responding to hormone changes within its body, it forms a chrysalis or a pupa. While in this seemingly inactive state, awesome changes take place. The cells of body parts no longer needed are broken down, and their components are used to build new cells for new body parts. Short legs become long elegant legs, and new wings develop for the butterfly. When all the changes are complete, the adult emerges. Now stop and think: Who orchestrates all things re-deployment of its parts, and makes new ones?

As the butterfly slowly flaps its long, shriveled wings, the wings fill with fluid, which expands them into the beautifully colored wings which will carry it from flower to flower as it feeds on nectar or seeks out the right kind of plant on which to lay its eggs.



Monarch egg

A monarch female may lay more than 400 eggs. She knows just where to lay them—on the undersides of milkweed leaves, which will be the chief source of food for the larvae when they hatch. What came first—milkweed or monarch? They were designed for each other.



Newly hatched caterpillar first devours the eggshell from which it came, then starts devouring the milkweed leaf, its regular diet.



Monarch caterpillar prepares for metamorphosis



Starting to unzip



After attaching itself to a stem by a silk “button” the larva wriggles out of its old skin for the last time to expose a tough new skin which hardens almost immediately.

(below) It has now entered the pupa or chrysalis stage.



Strand of golden beads studs this pupa or chrysalis. Sealed against evaporation in a waxy jade envelope, the caterpillar awaits transformation.

Amazing transformation



Inside the chrysalis, the caterpillar's eyes, legs, and body are broken down into a thick liquid. Slowly, the parts of the adult butterfly begin to form. This process may take days, weeks, or even months.

Amazing details:

Caterpillars grow so fast that they must shed their old skin every few days to make room for their fast growing bodies. In two weeks, a caterpillar may grow 2700 times its original size.

A 6 pound baby that grew at this same rate would weigh 8 tons in two weeks!!



Watch out!

Some caterpillars, like the monarch, feed on toxic plants—apparently for their own defense. The toxins they eat become part of their tissues, making them poisonous or distasteful to predators as caterpillars and even as adults!



So much is happening... silently... inside

As a chrysalis, its final stage of pre-adulthood, the insect isn't hibernating as might appear. It is remaking itself furiously. All unseen (and all unguided?), inside the chrysalis, it is growing proboscis, huge compound eyes, long segmented legs, oversized wings and new muscles to power them.

This very specialized mouthpart that develops inside the chrysalis is the butterfly's long flexible snout that uncoils like a garden hose. The emerging

butterfly will use this snout (proboscis) to sip sugary nectar from flowers.

Butterflies also have excellent color vision, useful for identifying both nectar-rich flowers and host plants for egg-laying. Was this designed?—often their eggs are laid on very specific plants on which the larvae feed after it hatches.

cicada larva

The metamorphosis process varies among insects. Many do not go through all four stages. Grasshoppers and crickets do not have a pupa stage.

One of the most amazing is the Periodical cicada. Its larvae live underground for 17 years before they emerge as adults!

...for the Amphibians

Amphibians are another example of metamorphosis. The little wiggling tadpoles that hatch from the eggs of frogs or toads have small mouths and long tails to

propel them through the water. For breathing they have gills, but they have no legs at all. When the time is right, a hormone inside their bodies signals that it is time for change. Suddenly, they sprout legs, first long back legs, then shorter front legs. The tail disappears. The mouth changes from a small round opening to a large mouth in which is a long sticky tongue for catching insects. The breathing organ changes from gills to lungs. The result is a creature prepared to live out of the water—a complete change from the swimming tadpole.

Now think about the wonder of these changes. The little creature did not plan it. Nor did anyone living today arrange it. The scientists who give their lives to studying these wonders can only observe and discover. These changes were preprogrammed into the DNA of these creatures by the Great Creator so that each new generation would be like the one before it. Should we not be filled with wonder and awe His wisdom?

Sources:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metamorphosis>



Text coming



MIXED INGREDIENTS

"We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

This is one of the most frequently quoted verses in the New Testament. If we love God and are fulfilling His purpose, we discover that all the experiences of our life fit into a pattern for good. The Lord makes us equal to the pressures that are thrust upon us, and we emerge from these situations with a dimension of trust that is invaluable.

A leaf out of life will help reinforce this proposition. My mother was a master in the art of biscuit making. When I was too young to help I was always underfoot. But when I was big enough to help her, I was nowhere around. As I watched her make biscuits, she would take a sifter filled with flour from the bin. As she turned the handle, the useable flour was collected in the mixing bowl while the lumpy, hard pieces remained in the sifter.

At this point I would think of the golden brown, velvet-textured biscuits that would be served at the next meal. My mouth watered as I thought about the finished product. Then I would say to myself, "If these biscuits are going to be so tasty, and enjoyable, everything Mother puts in them must taste good." But did you ever try a handful of sifted flour? You would blow white dust and your mouth would be full of paste.

Next, Mother added some melted shortening—and that is not very good eating either. I later learned that the recipe called for a series of other ingredients that were not appetizing by themselves. But Mother could mix these things together in a way that made the final product a rare treat.

Why can't we be that reasonable in our service to God? If we look at each thing that happens in an isolated way we may decide that life is composed of many unpleasant experiences. But the Lord knows how to put these items together in the right formula so that the product becomes something valuable and meaningful.

That is how *"all things work together for good to those who love God"* (Rom. 8:28).

From *"Everyday with Paul"* by Mendell Taylor. Used by permission.



PROMISE YOURSELF...

- T**o be so strong in character that nothing can disturb your peace of mind;
- T**o be just as enthusiastic about the success of others as you are about your own;
- T**o learn from your mistakes, and move on with new resolves;
- T**o wear a cheerful countenance at all times that reflects your confidence in God;
- T**o give so much time to the upbuilding of yourself and others that you have no time to complain;
- T**o think purity, think courage, think faith, think self-control, then work to translate those thoughts into actions;
- T**o be too trusting for fear, too noble for anger, too strong for hate;
- T**o focus on living at your best today and leave the future in God's hands.

My Opportunity

*An opportunity to grow presents itself today,
To leave my former self behind
and walk the narrow way,
To rise above the bitter words
and evil thoughts that blight,
Seek honor only from my God
and sink all self from sight.
An opportunity is mine to heed
God's loving, warning voice
To flee from each besetting sin,
make this my only choice,
To bear my cross through every hour, and
never once complain,
Press forward, upward for the prize,
perfection's heights to gain.*

M. Walton, Ohio

*O that I may grow!
What though time cuts its furrow in my face,
My heart may ever love unto grace,
Faith with added days still keeping pace.
O that I may grow!*

*My God! let my faith be
A living, growing thing in me
That takes control of heart and hand
And binds me to a loftier plan,
That keeps me calm amid the strife,
And trains me for a richer life;
A life that sees beyond earth's woe
To joys that only angels know;
A life that tastes, e'en here, with Three,
The bliss of immortality.*

