

Megiddo Message

November/December, 2006



*Stand still,
and consider the wondrous works of God.
Job 37:14*



YOU MAY RUN BUT YOU CAN'T HIDE

Have you ever felt like running from a responsibility? I am not suggesting that you are a fugitive from justice, or that you are on the FBI's "most wanted" list. The cause may be an insulting boss, or an impossible job, or unfavorable consequences, or an elderly parent. Or feelings of guilt may be haunting you. Whatever the cause, much as you want to escape, you have a commitment that holds. You do not run because you know that running would not solve anything. And if you did run, you could not hide.

Long ago Adam and Eve tried it—without success. In fact, their experience is so typical that it is part of an allegory that shows us deep, spiritual truths about ourselves. The first thought to flash into the minds of these two people was to avoid the consequences of their misbehavior. So they ran. But the only benefit was so much exercise, because they could not hide. They could not hide because *"The eyes of the Lord are in every place,"* seeing both the evil and the good (Prov. 15:3). They could not hide because *"Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight."* They could not hide because *"all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account"* (Heb. 4:13).

Did Adam and Eve truly think they could run and hide from Divine justice? Today it is becoming hard to run and hide even from human eyes. If you take your pager, or your cell phone, or your laptop, or even your atomic wristwatch, there is no sure hiding place. GPS will find you.

The Global Positioning System (GPS) was first designed and built by the US Department of Defense in 1994. Today GPS reaches to the far corners of the globe. But it is much more than a defense tool. Of obvious benefit to the soldier, the pilot, the scientist, the map-maker, GPS also serves the hiker, the hunter, the forest ranger, and the ordinary driver of a car who wants to know where he/she is in relation to a destination.

How does GPS work? The system is made up of 24+ satellites that orbit the earth about 12,000 miles above us. These satellites continually broadcast precise time signals to GPS receivers on the earth. Receiving signals from three or more satellites, a GPS receiver with the right equipment can calculate its location in any weather, any time, anywhere on earth, accurate to as close as half an inch! GPS means you may run, but you can't hide! (see <http://www.garmin.com/aboutGPS>; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Satellite_navigation for details of GPS equipment)

Does the Global Positioning System seem beyond comprehension? I would like to suggest that there is another GPS in use that is even more powerful and more precise than any system developed by the DOD. It is God's Positioning System. Our great Creator, who is from everlasting to everlasting, has a system by which He operates the universes. Its powerful

broadcasters are His ministering angels, who keep contact with every part of His vast creation (Heb. 1:14). Though we know nothing of the intricacies of this system or how it functions, we do know that it is far more sophisticated and far more precise than the GPS of the Defense Department.

What does the Bible tell us about God's GPS? First, it is not limited to Planet Earth. And it never, never fails. Consider these known capabilities:

- ❑ Heavenly GPS knows where you are and what you are doing this very moment (Ps. 139:3). It knows every time you come and go (Ps. 121:8 NLT).
- ❑ Heavenly GPS knows what anyone is doing anywhere on Planet Earth. His *"eyes are open to all the ways of the sons of men"* (Jer. 32:19).
- ❑ Heavenly GPS knows every word you said this morning to your spouse (child, parent, boss, friend). *"There is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O Lord, You know it altogether"* (Ps. 139:4).
- ❑ Heavenly GPS knows what you thought but *did not say* this morning to your spouse (child, parent, boss, friend). *"I know every thought that comes into your minds"* (Ezek. 11:5 NLT).
- ❑ Heavenly GPS knows even your most carefully concealed motive (Ps. 44:20–21; 1 Cor. 4:5). Have you done something you would like to keep secret? With God there are no secret sins, only *known* sins. *"You look deep within the mind and heart, O righteous God"* (Psa. 7:9 NLT).
- ❑ Heavenly GPS knows every time you sit down and stand up (Ps. 139:2).

The book of Job records the same fact. *"For His eyes are on the ways of man, and He sees all his steps. There is no darkness nor shadow of death where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves"* (Job 34:21–22).

King David had firsthand experience with heavenly GPS. Much as he wanted to run at times, he knew he could not hide. *"I can never get away from your presence! If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I go down to the place of the dead, you are there. If I ride the wings of the morning, if I dwell by the farthest oceans, even there your hand will guide me, and your strength will support me"* Ps. 139:7–10).

What was David's response? Did David say, "That's scary!"? No, he only bowed his head as he said humbly, *"Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too great for me to know!"* (Ps. 139:6).

There was a time David had sinned horribly. Being human, his first instinct was to run. And he ran. But in his heart David knew he could not hide from God's all-seeing eye. Can't we

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God Seeks the Penitent

Scripture: Isaiah 55:1-9

“When You said, ‘Seek My face,’ my heart said to You, ‘Your face, Lord, I will seek.’” In these words the Psalmist relates the ready response of his own eager heart to the call of God. The first action was God’s: “When You said, ‘Seek...’” God gave the invitation. Whether it came from the voice of an angel, or an open revelation, or through His written Word, the message was, “Seek my face”; to which this ready heart replied, “Your face, Lord, I will seek” (Ps. 27:8).

“Seeking” plays an important part in the Divine scheme. It operates in two directions and both at the same time. Men seek God, and God seeks men.

The Christian world lays great stress on God’s seeking after man but almost totally overlooks the need for man to seek God. Actually, this is exactly the reverse of the Biblical emphasis, which repeatedly stresses our need to seek God—our need to seek God is mentioned at least a dozen times to every single mention of God seeking us!

THE INVITATION: SEEK

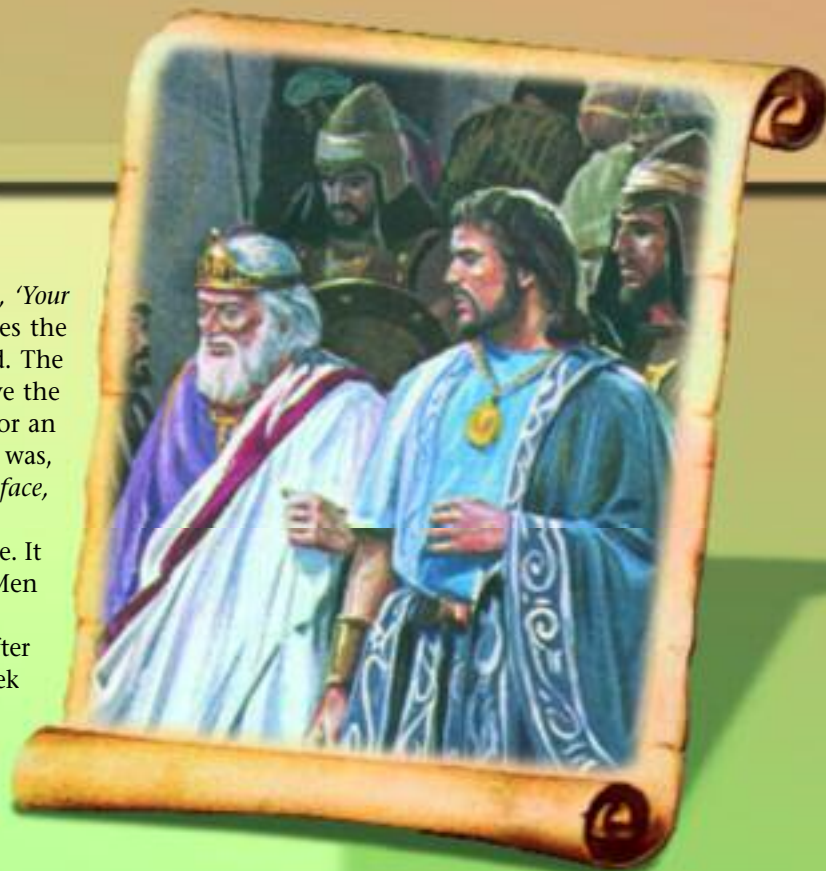
God said to David: “Seek My face” (Ps. 27:8). Again and again we are invited to seek God. “Seek Me and live... Seek good and not evil, that you may live; so the Lord God of hosts will be with you” (Amos 5:4,14).

The aged King David advised the young King Solomon to seek the Lord. Why? “If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will cast you off forever” (1 Chron. 28:9). Jesus also told us to seek. “Seek, and you will find.” And that seeking must be wholehearted, as the Lord had said through His prophet Jeremiah years earlier: “You will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart” (Jer. 29:13).

To Isaiah, seeking the Lord was all important, and ought to be done in a timely manner. “Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon” (Isa. 55:6-7). Here the seeking process is also spelled out. Seeking the Lord is an appropriate response: “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts.”

And this seeking must be done at the right time: now. Why? In the words of God’s prophet Hosea: “...it is time to seek the Lord, till He comes and rains righteousness on you”

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King David advising his young son Solomon to seek the Lord. “If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will cast you off forever.” –1 Chron. 28:9

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BACK COVER POEM

Like A Christian

FRONT COVER : Edgemont Wetland Reserve taken by Ed Shayler from his home in Calgary, Canada. This ravine is approximately half a mile wide by four miles long and is home to many birds and animals.

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"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).

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.

THE HERALD AND THE KING

OUR PLANET will soon witness the greatest events in its history. For centuries God has been silent. But that silence will soon be broken by the arrival of Elijah the prophet, who comes to herald the Second Advent of Jesus Christ. "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord...lest I come and smite the earth with a curse" (Mal. 4:5-6).

Then shall follow the King of kings and Lord of lords, to begin His momentous work of transforming our world into the glorious and eternal Kingdom of God.

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(Hos. 10:12). The time is now. If we delay, we will miss the “rain” of “righteousness.”

“Seeking” God’s face is one of the prerequisites to His hearing our prayers and forgiving our sins—we ignore it at our own peril. *“If My people, who are called by My name, will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways”* (2 Chron. 7:14)—each step is vital.

HOW DO WE SEEK?

Exactly what is this “seeking” we must do? How do we seek God?

Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance defines “seeking” as: “to search out (specifically in worship or prayer), to strive after, ask, beg, beseech, desire, enquire, request....to seek (lit. or fig.), to worship God, to be about, desire, endeavor, enquire.”

To seek God means to take definite steps toward having His approval, His favor, His protection. In Him is our only hope of life beyond the grave. In Him we live and move and exist. If we want the eternal life He is offering, there must be in the heart of each of us a burning desire, a consuming eagerness, a longing to know and worship the one True and Almighty Creator. God wants us to be gripped by the hope He has set before us, to love it so much and to long for it so intensely that it will be constantly on our minds. So all-absorbing will it be that it will affect every aspect and attitude of our lives. Only then can we be said to be truly seeking God.

“Who ... desires life and loves many days” (Ps. 34:12) is the criteria God has set. Those who desire life immortal will not take the things God gives for granted. The tremendous prize He has offered will stir their hearts. They want life, they want joy, they want happiness, they want fellowship with God and His saints, and they want all these blessings eternally. And the only way to obtain them is to seek God.

WHOSE INITIATIVE?

God does not force His way into anyone’s life. He appeals to our sense of values to desire something better than we can secure in this world. Even before this, those who seek Him feel a dissatisfaction with things as they are. He appeals to those who long for something more, something better, something lasting—which only God can give.

Seeking God is one solid condition of obtaining God’s rewards. And we must seek diligently. For *“Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that there is a God and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him”* (Heb. 11:6 NLT).

David expressed his longings after God in these descriptive words: *“As the deer pants for streams of water, so I long for you, O God. I thirst for God, the living God. When can I come and stand before him?”* (Ps. 42:1–2 NLT).

Can we today say as much for our seeking after God? How much does God mean to us?

GOD SEEKS

Now let us consider the other side: God’s seeking. God’s whole plan for the glorifying and perfecting of planet Earth is in behalf of the men and women who will belong to His finished creation, His new world, His coming Kingdom. The prophet Ezekiel, using the illustration of a shepherd and his sheep, described the way God seeks: *“As a shepherd seeks out his flock on the day he is among his scattered sheep, so will I seek out My sheep and deliver them...”* (Ezek. 34:12). Come what may, His true sheep are never beyond the reach of His far-seeing eye.

In Proverbs 8, Divine Wisdom, personified as a woman, addresses all who will hear. *“Listen as wisdom calls out! Hear as understanding raises her voice! She stands on the hilltop and at the crossroads. At the entrance to the city, at the city gates, she cries aloud, ‘I call to you, to all of you! I am raising my voice to all people. How naive you are! Let me give you common sense. O foolish ones, let me give you understanding. Listen to me! For I have excellent things to tell you. Everything I say is right’* (Prov. 8:1–6 NLT).



THE PARABLE OF THE LOST SHEEP

Among the most loved passages of the Bible is the parable of Jesus, commonly known as the Parable of the Lost Sheep. This parable is about a shepherd who had one hundred sheep, lost one of them, then left the ninety-nine and went seeking the one that was lost. It is recorded in Luke 15.

"What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance" (Luke 15:3-7).

There are a few points we should especially note. The shepherd leaves the 99 "in the wilderness." Also, the one sheep he seeks is "one sinner who repents." The 99 are "just persons [just in their own estimation] who need no repentance." What was Jesus' message? Who are the lost, why are they lost, and what are the conditions by which God will reinstate them?

Jesus' immediate lesson was likely for the Jews in His audience, who were very satisfied that they were God's chosen ones and did not need Jesus or His message or any change in their way of life. They were like the 99 sheep that the shepherd left in the wilderness. God had called them as a nation and given them opportunity.

But they had closed their ears to God's message, were satisfied with the outward rituals of the law, and were no longer living as God's people. What was Jesus' message? He was more interested in one who would "repent" than in 99 self-satisfied, self-righteous ones who, in their view, "need no repentance."

Even if the lesson was directed immediately to the Jews, its application is universal: God is not seeking the self-righteous, who are satisfied with their own standard of right and wrong. He is looking for those who are willing to be taught, who respond to the call to "repent." Doesn't it echo through all of Jesus' teachings? His very first sermon was, "Repent" (Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:15). The scribes and Pharisees (whom He called "whitened sepulchers," "fools," "blind guides," and "serpents"—see Matt. 23) were called to "repent." The publicans and sinners were called to "repent." His own disciples were to "repent." Those who observed the fate of the people on whom the tower of Siloam fell were called to "repent" (Luke 13:3-5). The churches He later addressed in a series of letters (in the book of Revelation) were called to "repent" (Rev. 2:5, 16, 21, 22; 3:3, 19). Repentance is no simple statement of "I'm sorry," but an actual *turning* from sin.

Why was this necessary? Because God does not see as man sees. He judges not by accomplishments or prestige in this world but by the heart. He is seeking the humble, the penitent, the contrite, those who will acknowledge their sin and turn from it.

But someone may object: Aren't you forgetting that Jesus clearly says in the parable that the shepherd is seeking the *lost* sinner? Yes, Jesus says He is seeking the "lost," but being lost is not the only condition. He is seeking the lost who are penitent and want to be found. The lost He is seeking have a desire to repent and return. Does God prefer hardened sinners to obedient followers? Never!

God knows our state. He knows we come out of sin and will stray into sin. But He is looking for penitence. And here is the lesson of the parable—not God's unconditional love for the *sinner* but for the *penitent*. He desires that the wicked *turn* from his sin and do "what is lawful and right" (Ezek. 33:14). His appeal is always, "Repent, and turn

"What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing.... I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance."

—Luke 15:3-7

from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O house of Israel?" (Ezek. 18:30-31). God wants us to realize the seriousness of sin, and the dreadful consequences of straying from the narrow way to life, and to be anxious to repent and return.

And once we return, so great is His love and so abundant His forgiveness that the penitent one is completely reinstated. In fact, *"None of his sins which he has committed shall be remembered against him; he has done what is lawful and right; he shall surely live"* (Ezek. 33:16).

Can we be sure that God seeks those who go astray? He does. In fact, Peter tells us that He does not want *"anyone to perish, so he is giving more time for everyone to repent"* (2 Pet. 3:9 NLT). Repentance is God's whole concern in working with men. *"A heart broken with penitence, O God, never wilt Thou despise"* (Ps. 51:17 Moffatt). The Apostle Paul also recognized this attribute of God when he wrote, *"Don't you realize how kind, tolerant, and patient God is with you? Or don't you care? Can't you see how kind he has been in giving you time to turn from your sin?"* (Rom. 2:4 NLT).

When we look for examples of those who went astray and were brought back, we immediately recall David, who sinned grievously. By the letter of the law, David should have died for his sin. What servant of God could go so far as to commit both adultery and murder? David did both! But did the Lord forsake David because he sinned terribly? Did He say, If David can do a thing like that, I'll just forget him—there are better men than that!? He could have. But God could read David's heart, and knew David would repent. So He sent the prophet Nathan to reprove the King; and David, humble and penitent, was the lost sheep brought back with rejoicing.

Who of us today, some three thousand years later, can read David's heart-rending prayer of penitence recorded in Psalm 51 and not be warmed and stirred as he pleads, *"God, be merciful to me because you are loving. Because you are always ready to be merciful, wipe out all my wrongs. Wash away all my guilt and make me clean again. I know about my wrongs, and I can't forget my sin"* (vs. 1-3 NCV).

OTHER PENITENTS

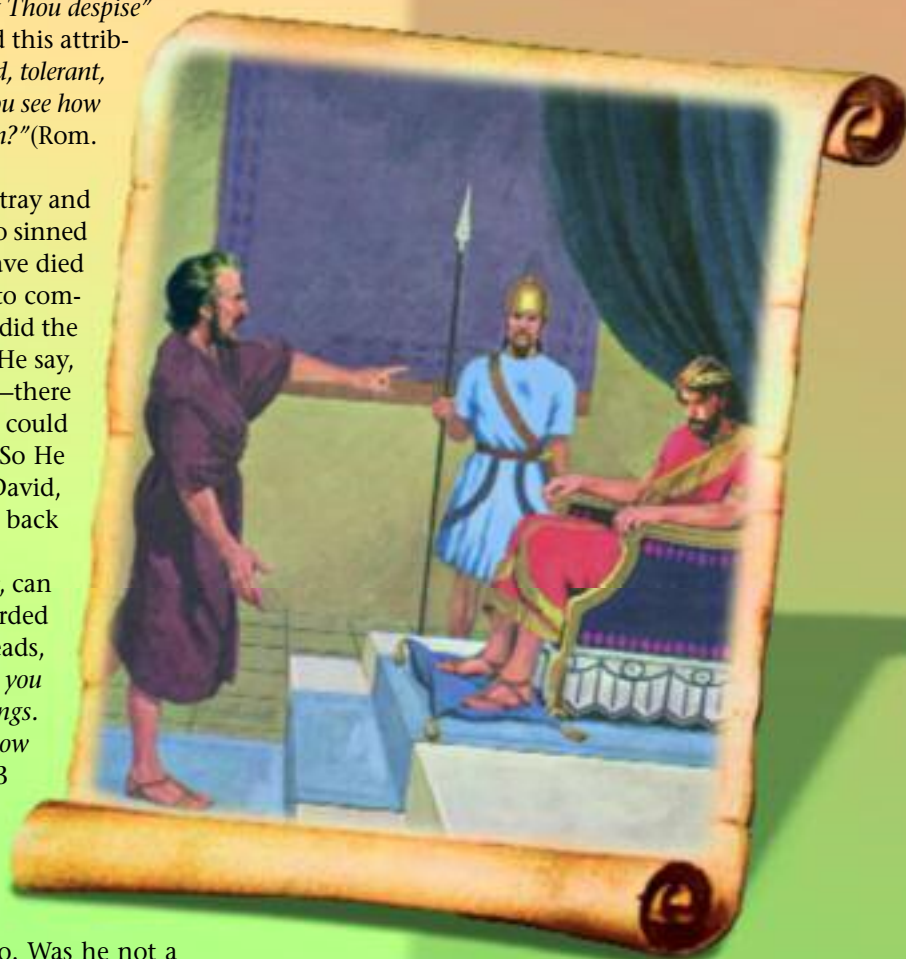
Think, too, of the Apostle Peter, one of The Twelve, denying Jesus when his loyalty was needed most. Jesus even warned Peter of what he would do. Was he not a lost sheep? But did Jesus forsake him because he strayed? Did he say, If Peter isn't going to be any more dependable than that, I don't need him!? No, Jesus turned and *"looked"* on Peter (Luke 22:61), and Peter went out, ashamed, humiliated, penitent. And only a short time later—after the resurrection—we hear Jesus sending a special message to his beloved Peter (Mark 16:7).

Zacchaeus was another "lost sheep." What did this tax collector do to demonstrate the depth of his repentance? *"I will give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, and if I have overcharged people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much!"* (Luke 19:8 NLT). Jesus' response to Zacchaeus is almost identical to that found in the parable of the Lost Sheep (Matt. 18:15): *"The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost"* (Luke 19:10)—that which was lost and is truly penitent, like Zacchaeus.

Oh, that we could follow the Divine Example and find our joy in turning from sin and doing right; in true, heartfelt, godly repentance!

THE LOST COIN

Next in Luke 15 is the Parable of the Lost Coin. *"Suppose a woman has ten valuable*



Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man!...Why have you despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in His sight?... Thus says the Lord: 'Behold, I will raise up adversity against you from your own house;... For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, before the sun.'"

So David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." And Nathan said to David, "The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die."

— 2 Sam. 12:7-13

silver coins and loses one. Won't she light a lamp and look in every corner of the house and sweep every nook and cranny until she finds it? And when she finds it, she will call in her friends and neighbors to rejoice with her because she has found her lost coin" (Luke 15:8-9 NLT).

What did the woman do who lost it? She searched diligently, as for something of great value. Jesus' comment on this parable is almost identical to His comment on the lost sheep: *"In the same way, there is joy in the presence of God's angels when even one sinner repents."* Again, Jesus' focus is on his repentance, not on the fact that he is a sinner.

THE LOST SON

The third parable in Luke 15 also discusses something lost: a son, the prodigal. Again, the parable focuses on repentance. The prodigal, contrary to the wishes of his father, goes out and wastes all his substance, then comes to himself, sees his mistake, repents and returns.

Who are the lost in the above? They are people who know God and His plan of salvation, yet repent and return to God.

Can you and I not be sincerely grateful for this merciful provision of our merciful God? Have we not time and again needed His mercy when we went our own willful way? Are we not *"lost"* so far as God is concerned every time we allow our own evil ways to lead us? Are we not *"lost"* when we stubbornly refuse to obey; or when we know the right and prefer our own *"comfortable"* way, when we think our own thoughts and pursue our own course of action contrary to the advice of those who are over us in the Lord?

How easily we may be lost! And how dreadful if we continue in a *"lost"* condition, unrepentant and unaware of our plight!

Let us also look closely at the reasons why the *"lost things"* were lost in Jesus' parables.

Why did the *"lost sheep"* get lost? Maybe it did not keep its eye on the shepherd, or did not follow the shepherd's instructions. Or perhaps it became preoccupied with some little thing near at hand. Translated into the temptations that face us today it may be some petty gratification, a bit of selfishness, a moment of forbidden self-satisfaction, or a boost of pride. Whatever the reason, *"the sheep"* goes astray. But God in His love and mercy gives a second chance. He warns, He reproves, He chastens, He instructs, He even shows it the way back to the fold and offers to help it return. But only as *"the sheep"* repents can it be brought back.

If we may draw a lesson from the Parable of the Lost Coin, we observe that coins are different from sheep. The coin had no power to lose itself. It was not lost through its own wanderings. Someone lost the coin. Here is a lesson on the power of example. How seriously a wrong example can affect those around us—our husband or wife, our child, our friend, our co-worker. Someone may actually be lost because of our wrong attitude or example!

The lost son was lost by his own foolishness. He refused to listen to advice, bent only on gratifying his *"wants."* But before long he began to realize how little the world had that was satisfying; he began to feel the pain of real want. As a result, he *"came to himself"* and returned home, humble and penitent.

Isn't this a lesson on the need to be open and honest with ourselves, to be anxious to see our own faults, acknowledge when we have done wrong so that we can be one who is again *"found"*? God does not expect to find those who never stray, who never disobey, who follow the shepherd perfectly from day one without a slip; but He does seek those who will repent and return, and humbly listen to Him. In the words of the Psalmist, who spoke from the depths of his experience, *"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart—These, O God, You will not despise"* (Ps. 51:17).

Sin separates from God. Sin bars us from God's favor. Sin will ultimately separate from life. Why not use the method outlined in Scripture and repent and turn, now while there is still time? ♦

"And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

"But the father said to his servants, 'Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' And they began to be merry."

—Luke 15:21-24



NEHEMIAH: God's Man for the Hour

Have you wondered why a godly man like Nehemiah was still living comfortably in Persia while

thousands of his fellow Jews were struggling in Jerusalem? Zerubbabel led the first return to Jerusalem in about 538 BC after the edict of Cyrus that allowed captive people to return to their homelands. In 458, Ezra led the second return—about 13 years before we hear of Nehemiah. At that time Nehemiah may have been too young, or he felt he could not leave.

In any case, when word reached Nehemiah through Hanani, his brother, of the desperate conditions in Jerusalem, he was distressed. After all the years since Zerubbabel's return, the walls were still broken down and the burned gates were not repaired. His Jewish brethren were discouraged and oppressed. Immediately Nehemiah saw he was the instrument to help his struggling people. But how?

Instinctively Nehemiah turned to the God he loved and worshiped. He poured out his petition for God's help and guidance. Nehemiah did not merely sit down and wring his hands. Nor did he rush immediately into the presence of the king. He knew the importance of preparation, and spent a prolonged period of time in the presence of God. He wept, mourned, fasted, and prayed.

For four long months, Nehemiah rehearsed the situation and spread it before the Lord. Likely his brother and other Jewish travelers despaired of any good coming from their appeal to Nehemiah. No doubt they asked him, "Nehemiah, if you are going to do something, why don't you get at it?"

We do not know the reason for the delay. It certainly wasn't like Nehemiah to procrastinate or to hope the problem would go away. It may be that Nehemiah was waiting for a suitable occasion to approach the king. Or maybe having put it into God's hands he was biding God's time.

Then suddenly one day, Nehemiah saw his opportunity when the king noticed his sadness and asked the reason. Here was the moment Nehemiah had been waiting for, preparing for, praying for. Realizing the intense importance of his reply to the future destiny of his people, Nehemiah paused to send a quick prayer to the God of heaven before he replied to the king. It was a short prayer, because the king would not tolerate a long delay.

The prayer brought quick results. King Artaxerxes seemed favorable to Nehemiah's deep desire to help his people in Jerusalem. Encouraged by the king's response, Nehemiah made three simple requests. First, he asked the king to send him to repair the ruins at Jerusalem. This was a daring request.

Just as one might expect, the king's response was "How does this affect me?" because Nehemiah was his cupbearer. So the king asked how long his cupbearer would be gone. Nehemiah set a time for his return.

The King was satisfied, but Nehemiah had more to ask. He asked the King to give him letters of safe conduct addressed to the Persian governors through whose territories he would have to pass. These letters would give him official authorization to pass through those lands. They would also be a silent way of obtaining the king's endorsement of his mission.

The third request was for a letter to the manager of the king's forest for timber for the city gates and for a house for himself.

The king granted all of Nehemiah's requests. But notice that Nehemiah did not attribute the granting of his requests to the king, or to his own wise preparations. He gave all credit to God: "The king granted me," he said, "according to the good hand of my God upon me." What a magnificent statement! What spiritual stature!

Armed with royal letters Nehemiah set out for Jerusalem. The king had not only appointed him official governor of Judea but had also given him a military escort, even though he was taking a much smaller company than Ezra had taken. Perhaps it was the king's way of enhancing the authority of the newly appointed governor.

Nehemiah in Jerusalem

We have no record of Nehemiah receiving a welcome to Jerusalem, but we are told "when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard of my arrival, they were very angry that someone had come who was interested in helping Israel" (Neh. 2:10).

Nehemiah gave us this account. "Three days after my arrival at Jerusalem, I slipped out during the night, taking only a few others with me. I had not told anyone about the plans God had put in my heart for Jerusalem. We took no pack animals with us, except the donkey that I myself was riding. I went out through the

Valley Gate, ... to inspect the broken walls and burned gates....

The city officials did not know I had been out there or what I was doing, for I had not yet said anything to anyone about my plans. I had not yet spoken to the religious and political leaders, the officials, or anyone else in the administration. But now I said to them, 'You know full well the tragedy of our city. It lies in ruins, and its gates are burned. Let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem and rid ourselves of this disgrace!' Then I told them about how the gracious hand of God had been on me, and about my conversation with the king. They replied at once, 'Good! Let's rebuild the wall!' So they began the good work" (Neh. 2:11-18). The thought of how God's favor would help them succeed put their fears to rest.





Why did Nehemiah choose nighttime to inspect the broken walls and burned gates? There may be several reasons. Perhaps, he wanted to see for himself, unhindered, and unobserved. He needed the cooperation of many people, and knew that there was nothing like firsthand information about the problem. When he had carefully considered the situation, then he would present a realistic strategy.

Nehemiah also wanted to avoid drawing the attention of the enemies. By keeping his mission a secret and surveying the walls by moonlight, Nehemiah not only avoided unhealthy gossip about his arrival but this action probably prevented enemies from being alerted to his plans. Only after careful planning would he be ready to go public with his mission from God. As it turned out, Nehemiah's caution and tact were prudent, for the enemies had many friends and in-laws among the Jews who were only too ready to pass on any information to Tobiah and the other enemies.

Nehemiah's hope, his energy, his enthusiasm, his determination and his godly example were contagious, and many an Israelite became a Nehemiah in his turn, and helped to strengthen the heart and hand of his neighbor. So the work on the wall went ahead.

Nor did Nehemiah's energy abate, once the work was under way. With tireless vigilance he superintended the building, directed the workmen, noted the problems, and provided for emergencies. Along the whole extent of about three miles of wall his influence was constantly felt. And in all his activities, never did he forget the one source of his strength: the God of heaven. His heart was constantly uplifted to God, and we can be sure his prayers ascended again and again to the great Overseer. *"He will prosper us,"* said Nehemiah confidently, and his words strengthened the hearts of the workers on the wall.

Who were the enemies—wily, fierce and persistent? First there was Sanballat. Governor of neighboring Samaria, he doubtless wanted to control Judea as well. He appears to have been a worshiper of Jehovah, at least outwardly—perhaps to win the sympathy of the high priest's family, as a way into Israel. His scheme worked, and his daughter married the high priest's son.

Then there was Tobiah the Ammonite, probably an official of the Persian government. Both he and his son married Jewish women, so again they may have cherished dreams of possessing Israel.

Another enemy was Geshem, or literally, "the Arabian." He was evidently an influential person. A memorial unearthed by archaeologists testifies to Geshem's fame in North Arabia. His name is also mentioned in an Aramaic dedication inscribed on a silver bowl from an Arabian shrine in Egypt. The inscription shows that Geshem was indeed king of the tribes folk and desert traders of Kedar in North Arabia. The Persian kings maintained good trade relations with the Arabs.

United in their schemes, these three set themselves to defeat the rebuilding.

First they ridiculed the effort, declaring the enterprise impossible, and predicting failure. *"What do these feeble Jews?"* exclaimed Sanballat mockingly. *"Will they fortify themselves? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned?"* Tobiah was still more contemptuous. *"That which they build, if a fox should go up on it, he should even break down their stone wall."*

Words, words, words. What harm could they do? They had not dared threaten violence, because they knew Nehemiah was acting under the king's commission, and feared to oppose the king. But now in their anger they conspired together to fight against Jerusalem—at least to spread rumors of attack.

At the same time the Samaritans were plotting against Nehemiah and his work, some of the leading men among the Jews were becoming disenchanted, and sought to discourage the work by exaggerating the difficulties. *"The work is too hard,"* they complained, or *"There is so much rubbish, we are not able to build the wall."*

Discouragement, especially from within, is a hard enemy to fight. But Nehemiah made God his true and sure defense, and kept on with the work. His attitude was, *"If God be for us, who can be against us?"*

Nevertheless the enemies persisted. Jerusalem was surrounded: on the north, Samaria. On the south, Arabia. On the east, Ammon. On the west, Ashdod. All these hostile forces, stirred up by Tobiah and Sanballat, came against Jerusalem. Angered because their earlier devices had failed, and finding that more than ridicule and foxes were needed to stop the work, they purposed to fight against Jerusalem. Since the King had authorized the rebuilding, open attack was out of the question. But there were other ways. They could infiltrate; they could cause confusion or fear; they could fight by terrorism. They could intimidate; and unfortunately for Nehemiah and his cause, they had the support of

some very influential Jews like Eliashib the high priest.

They tried everything. But Nehemiah's courage remained firm. The record says, "*We made our prayer unto our God.*" Nehemiah's personal motto was "Watch, work and pray."

When the wall reached mid-height all around, and the builders were getting tired and discouraged, their opponents threatened to stop them by force. At this point, Nehemiah prayed, then made security arrangements for the work to continue. He posted an armed militia day and night, and instructed each worker to carry a weapon. Since the working parties were spread out along the wall at some distance from each other, he commanded that all should rally to him when they heard the sound of the trumpet. And the trumpeter stayed by Nehemiah. Altogether, it was a plan of vigilance, preparedness, and action.

It worked. When the enemy saw these vigorous precautions, they relented.

Next they plotted against Nehemiah's life. Four times they tried to entice him to meet them at one of the villages, hoping to kill him, but four times Nehemiah answered, "*I am doing a great work, and I cannot come down. Why should the work cease, while I come down to you?*" The fifth time, Sanballat sent an open letter full of lies, accusing Nehemiah of attempting to make himself king. Nehemiah was unmoved.

When the walls were almost complete, Sanballat, Tobiah, and company tried one last time to stop Nehemiah. They sent a "warning" to Nehemiah to take refuge in the temple because his life was in danger. Nehemiah again sensed their ploy, and refused to accommodate them. Nehemiah stood firm and the wall was completed in 52 days.

Oh, that God had more Nehemiahs to serve Him today!

NEHEMIAH

Meets A Challenge

SCENE TWO

Characters:

Amaz Jew who is a fence sitter
Barach Jew who is staunch
Benjamin Jewish boy
Zaccur lazy nobleman from Tekoa
Nathan Jew from Mizpah
Ada weak faith but very vocative Jewess
Miriam average Jewess
Deborah young Jewess
Nehemiah Governor of Judah
Nathan Nehemiah's body guard
Zaccur Nehemiah's body guard
Eliashib High Priest (very pompous)
Meshullam priest who married Sanballat's daughter

Scene: Partially built wall. Amaz and Barach are trying to move a very large stone. Zaccur is giving orders; clearly does not want to help. Benjamin is filling a basket with rubble. Ada and Deborah enter carrying water jars as curtain opens.

Zaccur: Are you ready Amaz, Barach? (*both nod*) Ready... set... push. (stone doesn't move). Again: Ready, set, PUSH-HH. (*stone doesn't move, men stop and wipe brows*)

Amaz: I'm thirsty.

Deborah: (*goes over to workers*) Here, have some water.

Zaccur: Woman, you are hindering the work. Fill that jar over there. (*points to jar*) Benjamin, come help these men.

Benjamin: Yes, my lord.

Zaccur: Now, the three of you: Get ready, set, pushhhhh. (*very enthusiastically*) It's moving! Push harder! (*pause*) Oh, you let it go. (*Stone falls back into previous position*) Next time you'll move it! Once again...get ready. (*the men with little enthusiasm get into place*)

Ada: Zaccur, your men need your muscles more than your voice.

Zaccur: Mind your words, old woman. (*pompously*) I'm Zaccur son of Imri, ruler of half of Tekoa.



Nathan: *(running in out of breath)* Where is Nehemiah? Our enemies are gathering to attack us.

Zaccur: Who's attacking us?

Ada: Where?

Nathan: It's Sanballat and Tobiah, and Geshem, the Arabs, the Ammonites, the Philistines....I must warn Nehemiah. Have you seen him?

Barach: He was here earlier—*(cut off)*

Amaz: Nehemiah went that way. *(points off stage)*

Nathan: Men, go get your weapons ready. We'll have to fight!

Barach: I am sticking at my work until Nehemiah says—*(cut off)*

Benjamin: *(climbs on low stone) (excitedly)* I see Nehemiah. He is over there *(points in opposite direction)*, near the Fish Gate.

(Nathan rushes off stage. Zaccur follows. Ada begins to wail, throws shawl over her head and cries anxiously.)

Ada: *(wailing)* Ohhhh *(groans)* I just *knew* no good would come of this Nehemiah and his big ideas.

Deborah: *(fearfully)* Oh, ohhh, what can we do?

Ada: They will kill us!

Miriam: *(hurrying in)* Ada, who will kill us?

Amaz: *(laments)* We are going to be destroyed.

Miriam: *(shakes Ada by shoulder)* By whom, Ada? Tell me!

Deborah: By our enemies!

Ada: The Samaritans, the Ammonites, the Arabians—they are a people without mercy.

Miriam: What about our children?

Ada: *(lamenting)* The God of heaven has forsaken His people. We are afflicted, persecuted, hungry—

Amaz: *(laments)* Have we not suffered enough for the sins of our fathers?

Barach: *(emphatically)* It is for *our own* sins we suffer, Amaz.

Ada: *(wailing & moaning)* Our enemies outnumber us.

Deborah: *(fearfully)* What can we do?

Benjamin: *(fearfully)* We are defenseless—

Amaz: *(shaking fist)* I'll fight those despised heathen to the death.

Ada: *(shoots back)* It will be *your* death Amaz, not theirs.

Barach: *(sternly)* Amaz, you'll do what you're told.

Ada: *(excited)* Look! They're coming this way.

Miriam: Where?

Benjamin: *(fearfully)* Who?

Deborah: *(looks scared)* The enemy?

Ada: No! *(reproachfully)* Nehemiah and his men.

Barach: *(firmly)* Come, Benjamin. Let us be found at our work. *(He picks up a tool. Benjamin puts stones in basket but keeps looking in Nehemiah's direction)*

Miriam: Ohhh, *(excitedly)* I must warn my husband and sons. *(exits while talking)* Come, Deborah. You tell Jared and—*(Deborah follows)*

Ada: *(weeping, sits on the large stone, rocking back and forth)* We are finished. Where is the God of our fathers? Where is the God of our fathers?

Amaz: *(snaps at Ada)* Woman, keep quiet. *(Ada continues to weep and mumble)*

Amaz: *(in stage whisper)* Ada, be still! The governor comes. *(Ada says no more but continues rocking back and forth)*

(Nehemiah enters with two body guards, Nathan and Zaccur. Surveys the situation.)

Nehemiah: My people, I see you know of the impending danger. Rumor is that they will attack when we are off guard. So—we will *never* be off guard! But neither must our work cease.

Nathan: My lord, how can we do it?

Nehemiah: We shall arm ourselves—and keep on with this great work on the wall until it is completed.



Nathan: I live in Mizpah. Shall I go get my spear?

Nehemiah: No. In this emergency, let every man remain in Jerusalem. I shall provide weapons and food...Let each inform his neighbor.

Barach: Yes, my lord.

Nathan: Immediately.

Zaccur: We will.

Nehemiah: This evening, all leaders and captains shall assemble in the Broad Place before the court of the Temple for further instructions.

Amaz: *(in fearful tone)* I fear all our labor is for nothing—

Ada: *(begins to wail again)* Oh! They will stop us! They will destroy us!

Nehemiah: *(firmly)* They will *never stop us* because the God of heaven is with us. Brethren, be strong and of good courage, and our God shall fight for us!

Amaz: *(naively)* Then we *need* no weapons!

Barach: You fool! God helps those who help themselves.

Nehemiah: Remember whom you defend: Jerusalem, your wives, your children, your heritage and the very future of Judah. *(resolutely)* We shall *all watch* while we work.

(enter Eliashib and Meshullam in rather of a hurry)

Eliashib: Shalom.

Meshullam: Shalom, my lord.

Nehemiah: Shalom. *(dryly)* What brings the High Priest in such haste?

Eliashib: *(very affected voice)* Our situation is urgent, my lord Nehemiah.

Nehemiah: *(still dryly)* So I perceive. What have you to say?

Eliashib: Nehemiah, we desire to end this war.

Nehemiah: So do I.

Eliashib: *(too eager)* Then give us leave to speak to them. They might listen to *us*.

Nehemiah: *(suspicious)* You want to speak to our enemies?

Eliashib: *(taken aback)* If—if you call them that.

Nehemiah: *(with strong feeling)* What else can you call mockers, slanderers, trouble makers, idol worshippers—

Eliashib: *(urgently, yet suavely)* Nehemiah, hear us. *(proudly)* I am the High Priest of our people, son of Seraiah. *(very suavely)* I wish only the best for Jerusalem.

Nehemiah: *(suspicious)* Eliashib, what is your plan?

Eliashib: *(suavely)* The Samaritans only wish a part in our Temple worship, my lord.

Nehemiah: *(plainly)* But—they don't worship *our* God.

Eliashib: *(persuasively)* Can't you see? If we allow them to be part of us, they will be drawn to worship our God. But if we reject them, they will remain idolaters and our enemies.

Nehemiah: *(out of patience with him)* Eliashib, I have heard you out because I must believe you sincere. But ask yourself: Which of these Samaritans or Ammonites have given up their *false gods*?

Eliashib: *(still hopeful—in affected voice)* But ohhh—it takes time, Nehemiah!

Nehemiah: Time is *not* the answer, Eliashib! Can't you see? If we allow idolaters in our midst, they will teach our

people their idolatrous ways and adulterate the pure Faith—the Faith of our fathers.

Eliashib: *(Eliashib tries to interrupt; Nehemiah waves him aside)* But, but—

Nehemiah: *(emphatically)* No! Our people would copy them as they have in the past. It is inevitable. Have you forgotten Jeroboam and the two calves, or Ahab and Jezebel's gods, or Solomon and his foreign wives? I could go on and on. *(emphatically)* Can we *not learn* from our own history—or—*(sarcastically)* are your memories weak?

Meshullam: Nehemiah, I remember Ruth. She was a Moabitess and her blood flowed through King David's veins.

Nehemiah: *(shoots back)* Then you must remember what she said.

Nathan: Ruth declared, "*Your people shall be my people, and your God my God...*"

Nehemiah: *(emphatically)* Exactly! She came to Israel's God with *all* her heart and soul. She renounced her father's gods. Have Sanballat or Tobiah or any of their people renounced their sensuous gods?

Meshullam: *(entreating in feigned voice)* Give them time, Nehemiah. Perhaps they will.

Eliashib: *(persuasively)* Sanballat is very influential. As an enemy he is *dangerous*. As a friend he could be *valuable*. I urge you to reconsider.

Nehemiah: *(very emphatically)* I shall *never compromise* with an idolater, Eliashib. As long as *I* am governor of Judea, I shall take every measure to wipe out every semblance of idolatry in my realm.

Eliashib: *(mutters)* You have the authority, Nehemiah, I shall not argue that. *(wags finger threateningly)* But you shall be judged for your harshness, nevertheless.

Nehemiah: By whom?

Eliashib: By the future, Nehemiah.

Nehemiah: *(with conviction yet reverently)* I shall be judged by God, who searches and knows the heart.

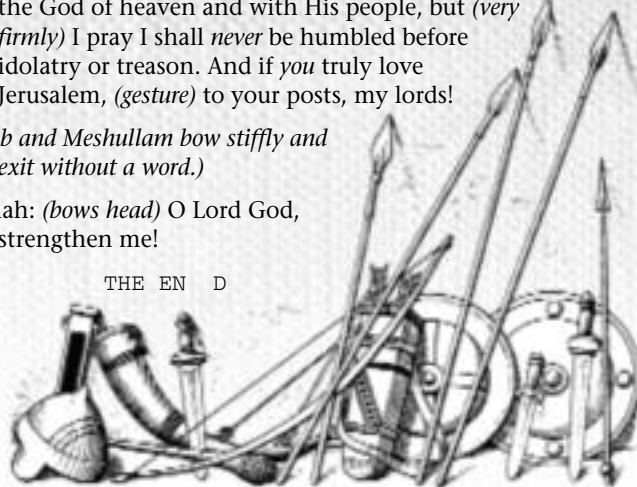
Eliashib: *(untouched)* The heart of man can err.

Nehemiah: *(with conviction and reverently)* So true, Eliashib. I pray I shall always walk honestly and humbly with the God of heaven and with His people, but *(very firmly)* I pray I shall *never* be humbled before idolatry or treason. And if *you* truly love Jerusalem, *(gesture)* to your posts, my lords!

(Eliashib and Meshullam bow stiffly and exit without a word.)

Nehemiah: *(bows head)* O Lord God, strengthen me!

THE EN D



FAITH in Action



by RUTH E. SISSON

THE LAST LAP OF JOURNEY THREE

 Read Acts 21:15–17

Saying goodbye to Philip and his household in Caesarea, Paul and company set out on the last lap of the journey. The text reads that they “*packed and went up to Jerusalem*,” a distance of about 65 miles. It is possible that they planned the number of days spent in Caesarea in order to reach Jerusalem by Pentecost (21:10). Remember, this was Paul’s goal, “*if possible*” (20:16).

1. Who went with Paul and company from Caesarea to Jerusalem? (21:16)

Perhaps the believers in Caesarea saw this as a one-time opportunity to spend time with this dynamic leader and spiritual giant of the Church. If they were eager to learn about Christ and faith in everyday life, here was the man who could say “*Copy me, as I copy Christ*” (1 Cor. 11:1 Moffatt Bible).

2. Where would this company of about nine brothers stay when they reached Jerusalem? (21:16)

Would the Gentile Christians find hospitality lacking among Jewish brethren in Jerusalem? Very possibly. Old allegiances die hard.

The Church in Jerusalem being largely Jewish, there was still a large amount of prejudice. Jews simply did not keep company with Gentiles. They did not enter each others’ homes; they did not eat together, or worship together. Even though Paul was officially an apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15), and was teaching by the power of the Holy Spirit that in Christ there was “*neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision*” (Col. 3:11), Jewish Christians still had a problem looking upon Gentile Christians as equals. For centuries Jews had been taught that they were God’s people; they were the called ones; they had to keep separate from Gentiles. Seeing Jews and Gentiles as “*one in Christ*” was a gargantuan leap of faith! Even when God affirmed His choice of Gentiles by

Acts 21:15–20a (NLT)

15 Shortly afterward we packed our things and left for Jerusalem.

16 Some believers from Caesarea accompanied us, and they took us to the home of Mnason, a man originally from Cyprus and one of the early disciples.

17 All the brothers and sisters in Jerusalem welcomed us cordially.

18 The next day Paul went in with us to meet with James, and all the elders of the Jerusalem church were present.

19 After greetings were exchanged, Paul gave a detailed account of the things God had accomplished among the Gentiles through his ministry.

20 After hearing this, they praised God.



giving them the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:45), many a loyal and believing Jew still clung to a confidence that God had something special for the Jew.

Was there a possibility that every Jewish Christian home in Jerusalem might not be open to Paul and his Gentile brothers? We do not know, but a brother named Mnason let everyone know that his home (near Jerusalem) was open to them. They could count on his hospitality for as long as they needed it.

Mnason was apparently an old timer from the earliest days of the Church. From the text it also looks as though he may have been visiting at the Church in Caesarea when Paul arrived, and traveled with the company back to Jerusalem.

Was Mnason a believer who was present in the upper room, when the Holy Spirit was first given at that very special Pentecost some three decades earlier? Did Mnason remember the stoning of Stephen? Did he know about the early ministries of Peter, James, and John? And now Paul and company, including Luke, were to be guests in his home! Think about the opportunity this would have given Luke the historian to gather information about the early days of Christianity in Jerusalem.

3. What kind of welcome did Paul and company receive when they reached Jerusalem? (21:17) _____
4. What did the Jerusalem Church say when they saw the very large gift of money that Paul and the Gentile brethren had brought them? _____

The travelers received a gracious welcome at the Jerusalem Church. What is most conspicuous about this reception is what is not said. There is not a word about the very large gift that the Christian brothers and sisters in far away Asia and Macedonia and Greece sacrificed dearly to send, and that Paul and his Christian Gentile brothers had risked their lives to bring to Jerusalem. Is it an oversight? Or was it a case of “thanks but no thanks”?

Why the silence? One can only guess. Luke being the historian and an on-the-scene reporter, this detail would not have escaped his notice—unless he thought their gratitude for the gift would be assumed because of the glad reception Paul received. Or did Luke, in generosity to the ungrateful Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, choose silence rather than censure?

Day Two in Jerusalem

 Read Acts 21:18–20

5. What did Paul and company do the second day in Jerusalem? (21:18) _____

It was a historic occasion. This is the first time we know of Gentile believers



A closer look

Gentile company

The nine brothers who had accompanied Paul to Jerusalem represented believers in far-away Churches—in places like Macedonia, Galatia, Pamphylia, Asia. Recall the reason they had come with Paul: to share the responsibility of delivering a gift of money to their suffering brothers and sisters in Jerusalem. Paul had asked them to come along so that they could help protect from thieves who lay along the way. They were also present so that they could witness that the funds were properly handled and there could be no complaints or suspicions of mishandling.



A closer look

The Missing “Thank You”

Have you ever thought about the long-term effects of an unspoken “thank you”?

Have you thought about the effects of a “thank you” that was not even felt because some prejudice or gripe came between?

After all the effort and time and sacrifice and love that Paul and his Gentile brethren invested in the gift they brought to the parent Church at Jerusalem, could it be there was no gratitude?

Did prejudice get in the way of gratitude? Could it be possible that the Church at Jerusalem was not even appreciative of the gift they so much needed—because those far-away brothers and sisters were Gentiles?

It is hard to imagine that so significant an effort went unnoticed, or unresponded to, when the Great Apostle had given it so much effort (Rom. 15:25–27; 2 Cor. 8:1–7, 14; 9:1–7). But this was not the first or the last time human hearts have been ungrateful.

Have I thanked God today for His gifts, or is my “thank you” sometimes missing, too?



PHOTOS COURTESY OF “BIBLEPLACES.COM”

(left) The Hinnom Valley in Jerusalem as it is today. The Gentile brothers accompanying the Apostle Paul must have thrilled at the first sight of Jerusalem.



Insight

Jew vs. Gentile

It is probably as difficult for us in the 21st century to understand the built-in prejudices of the 1st century Jew as it would have been for the 1st century Jew to comprehend modern-day diversity. Jewish people who had been schooled in the traditions of their forefathers for generations could not easily set them aside. For them, violating Jewish customs and Jewish laws meant violating one's honor before God. Could they do it? They would rather die! Again and again Paul had to remind them that keeping Jewish laws was not the way to salvation.



from Greece visiting the mother Church in Jerusalem. Can't we feel Paul's excitement as he introduces these new family members at headquarters?

6. Who was present at the meeting? (21:18) _____

We can imagine the Apostle's glowing face as names roll off his tongue like a roll call—Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, Perga, Ephesus, Corinth, Philippi, Berea, Thessalonica, Athens, Illyricum. These were not just places but people, and greetings, and faces, and struggles, and prayers, and victories. These were places plus accounts of mighty miracles, long sessions of questions and answers, pleadings and exhortings. These were places plus stories of beatings, and imprisonment, and persecution. Never had the Jerusalem Church, which was largely Jewish, heard the like of this.

Jews Meet Gentiles in Jerusalem

Can we reconstruct that meeting as it might have been? Picture the elders and guests gathered in a large room in a building near the temple. The atmosphere is charged with expectancy. The zealous and ardent missionary Paul and a group of Gentile brothers have just arrived in Jerusalem. What an opportunity to hear firsthand the account of their missionary experiences from the great Apostle himself.

Remember that Paul had no telephones, no video, no e-mail, and even very limited snail mail to keep connected with the Church at home. Reports and letters traveled mostly by human messengers, and their reports were often seriously incomplete, some even inaccurate. (Paul himself had been in Jerusalem only a few times since his conversion. It seems that he went there at the end of his second missionary journey some five years previous, but the record sounds as though the visit was brief—see Acts 18:22).

James, the brother of Jesus and the leader of the Church, calls the meeting to order with prayer, and immediately turns it over to Paul.

As Paul takes the floor, he beckons to his Gentile brothers to follow him to the front of the room. The great Apostle sets the stage by giving a brief recap of his first missionary journey and how it was divinely endorsed. "Very likely some of you remember how the Holy Spirit said to the believers in Antioch, prior to our first journey, 'Now separate to me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them'" (Acts 13:2). Then he tells how he and Barnabas, with the youthful John Mark (they know about John Mark), set out from Antioch in Judea for Gentile lands: first to Cyprus, then on to Antioch in Pisidia, to Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. He tells, too, about the severe persecution they suffered at the hands of obstinate Jews almost everywhere they went. But—best of all—he tells about the serious, enthusiastic, new believers they left behind in each city—men and women who wanted to turn from idols to serve the true and living God.

Then Paul tells of their eagerness to revisit the new brethren, those infant churches he and Barnabas had set up on their first journey through Asia. How were they getting on? What difficulties might they be encountering? Were they still holding on to the new faith? And so he took Silas and retraced their steps to Antioch, Iconium, Derbe and Lystra.

"And, speaking of Lystra..." Paul's face lights up, "there we found a young man eager to join us." Beckoning to **Timothy** to step forward, the seasoned missionary introduced his young helper affectionately. "Timothy, my dear son in the faith, has worked by my side ever since through thick and thin. The home of his mother, Lois and his grandmother Eunice in Lystra is a blessing and a haven for weary Christian travelers."

One by one, he introduces his traveling companions, telling briefly about each one's background, where he lives, how he came to believe, and a little about the Church he represented.

"After we left Lystra," he continues, "the Holy Spirit guided us to the city of Troas, on the east coast of Asia. At Troas a physician and as it turned out, a

beloved brother joined our group. Brother **Luke**, would you please come forward?" And Paul presents Luke, giving a brief resume of his background, and the great personal help he has been to Paul and the Christian cause. "Luke," he explains, "loves history, and right now he is gathering information to write an account of our travels so that generations after us will be able to read about us and learn from our experiences."

"While we were at Troas," Paul continues, "I had a vision from the Lord. I saw a man of Macedonia standing and pleading with me, saying, '*Come over to Macedonia and help us*'" (Acts 16:9). "We realized immediately this was a command from the Lord, so Silas, Timothy, Luke and I found passage on a ship sailing to Macedonia.

"We disembarked at Neapolis, and from there made our way to Philippi, the principal city of Macedonia," and Paul tells about Philippi. And about "the dear brethren we left at Philippi." He tells about Lydia, and the meetings by the river, the healing of the slave girl, the beatings and imprisonment, the great earthquake, the miraculous deliverance, and—best of all—the conversion of the jailer and his household. "When we left Philippi, we left behind a small but sincere group of believers that has grown into a spiritually thriving Church" (see Acts 16:26–31).

"From there we went on to Thessalonica, another city of Macedonia," Paul explains. "What loving brethren we have there, our crown and our joy in the Lord! We have two brothers with us to represent our family in Thessalonica. **Aristarchus**, and **Secundus**, would you please step forward?" Paul had so much he could say about that zealous Church, and their enthusiastic faith.

"When we were chased away from Thessalonica by jealous Jews, we went on to Berea," he continues. "Would Brother **Sopater** please come forward? This brother represents a Church that showed their sincerity from day one. It was 'what do the Scriptures say' that mattered to the Bereans. You have to admire these brothers and sisters who wanted the facts! They searched the Scriptures eagerly and earnestly, to verify that everything we were teaching them was true."

Paul tells of traveling on to Athens, and Corinth, then back to Ephesus for a short visit, and a promise to return. Then the weary travelers turned toward their home Church in Antioch.

"The next year we started out again taking the northern route through Asia to Ephesus, where we stayed for over two years, so that all in Asia heard the Word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks" (19:10). "Among the fruit of that journey is Brother **Trophimus**, from the Church at Ephesus. Even though Ephesus is known to you as a city of idolatry, we have a very dedicated family of brothers and sisters there. Trophimus can tell you more about them." Before Paul concludes, he has introduced also brothers **Gaius** from Derbe in Galatia, and **Tychicus** from Colosse, and "**Titus**, my own son in the faith."

Many a Jerusalem Christian left that meeting with a love and thrill for those distant brethren who shared their hope and faith in the good news of the Gospel. What in all the world can compare with the bonds of Christian love and fellowship, not only for this life but for the life to come!

It was a historic meeting in the early Church, one never to be forgotten.

7. What aspect of his Gentile ministry did Paul emphasize in his report to the Jerusalem elders? (21:19) _____
8. What was the response of the Jerusalem elders when they heard Paul's accounts? (21:20) _____

Paul was Christ's slave, Christ's prisoner, Christ's minister, laboring more abundantly for Christ's sake, preaching everywhere "*the Kingdom of God*" (Acts 19:8; 20:25). Everywhere he went he was strengthening the believers, and encouraging them "*to continue in the faith, reminding them that they must enter into the Kingdom of God through many tribulations*" (Acts 14:22 NLT). ♦

to be continued



Insight

The Old or the New? The Law of Moses or Christ?

There was no question about the gospel Paul was teaching. Adhering to the rites and ceremonies of the old law of Moses was not required. Now one's loyalty was to Christ and all that He taught, not to the law of Moses. Christ was "*the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes*" (Rom. 10:4). "*Before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law... the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ...but after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor*" (Gal. 3:23-25). "*God sent forth His Son ... to redeem those who were under the law*" (Gal. 4:4-5).

Further, obedience to the law of Moses would not bring salvation. "*Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses*" (Acts 13:38-39). The offerings and sacrifice under Moses' law could not take away sin (Heb. 10:4); nor could they make those who offered them perfect (Heb. 10:1).

But to the loyal Jew, the "right" way for conscience' sake was likely a combination of the old plus the new. The loyal Jew understood that obedience to Christ was all that mattered for salvation; yet in his mind and heart he felt security in the disciplines and structures of the old law. Who could say that amount of loyalty was wrong? Realize, too, that these Jews were still living with visible parts of the old Jewish system. They still worshiped in the temple; they still observed the Sabbath; they still kept the Jewish holy days and adhered to many Jewish customs.

It is likely that remnants of the old system remained as long as the temple at Jerusalem stood and the Jews could congregate. After that, no doubt, its influence dissipated.



Youth in Christ

As Crazy As A Loon?

Just a minute, Mother." The voice was Jessie Loon's. Her mother had just called her for supper. "I want one more dive into the lake," Jessie added to herself. "Mother won't mind."

But mother did mind. "Jessie," she said when her daughter finally arrived, "I have done everything I know to break you of your habit of being a dilly-dally. 'Just a minute. Just a minute.' I hear that from dawn till dark. Until you break yourself of that habit, suppose I call you instead of Jessie, 'Jessaminute.'"

Jessie was a nice little bird, except for that one habit of hers, and quite fond of her mother. When she was very young her mother would take her on her back for a boat ride around the lake. Also she taught her how to dive and how to swim under water.

"It is much easier to catch the fish if you can swim under water," her mother said. "Also under water is a safe place to hide from the hunter."

"What is a hunter?" asked Jessie.

"A hunter," explained her mother, "is a dreadful man who comes in the fall with a long gun which goes, 'Boom! Boom!' It scatters shot far and wide and sometimes kills the water fowl."

To teach Jessie safety she and her mother often played a game which they called "Hide and Hunter." They made believe that the hunter was a wolf, and arranged a set of signals. Mrs. Loon was able to make a sound very much like the cry of a wolf.

One such cry meant,

"Danger. Be on the alert." Two meant, "Run and hide in the bushes." And three, "Dive under the water, and swim as fast as you can."

As Jessie grew older she became tired of the Hide and Hunter game and preferred to swim around the edge of the lake, catching bugs and tadpoles. One day as she was preening* herself in the sun on the lakeshore she heard one shrill cry from her mother, who was out in the middle of the lake fishing—"Danger. Be on the alert."

"That silly old game again," thought Jessie. "I don't want

***Preen:** To dress or smooth up as feathers.



Her mother would take her on a ride around the lake.

to play it now. I'm enjoying the sun."

Then came two wolf-like cries from her mother—"Run and hide in the bushes."

Jessie called back, "Just a minute, Mother. I'm just about done preening."

Unseen by Jessie, a hunter was creeping up behind her. He heard the sound when she spoke to her mother, and turning in her direction started to raise his gun.

Well, that would have been the end of Jessie Loon but for the quick action of her mother.

I sometimes wonder how the expression "As crazy as a loon" began, because what Mrs. Loon did to save her little daughter that day was anything but crazy.

She began coming across the lake half running, half flying, as if she were crippled, straight toward the hunter and screaming at the top of her voice one wolf-like cry right after the other. Jessie had never heard her mother scream like that in all her life. She knew danger was near. In a flash she had dived into the lake and was swimming under the water as fast as she could.

The hunter turned from Jessie, who to him was just a little loon, and leveled his gun at Mrs. Loon. "Boom!" went his gun as he pulled the trigger.

At the same instant Mrs. Loon dived straight into the water.

A few minutes later as the hunter waded around in the shallow water looking for the loon he thought he had killed, two loons, one large, one small, were climbing out of the water at the other side of the lake. Not until that moment did Jessie realize her mother had been wounded. "I suppose I did not dive quite soon enough," said Mrs. Loon as she picked a shot out of her leg. "But I wanted to be sure you were safe."

"Oh, Mother," cried Jessie. "I am sooooo sorry. You might have been killed by that awful hunter." Then a little later, "Mother, please don't call me 'Jessaminute' anymore because I will never, never be a dilly-dally again."

"All right," answered her mother. "It was worth being shot at to hear you make that promise. I do hope you won't forget."

And Jessie didn't! She was cured once and for all of being a dilly-dally. ♦

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What people were killed by great hailstones sent by God to assist Joshua and the Israelite army?

a. Egyptians b. Amorites c. Edomites d. Moabites

THEY WERE KILLED

- Which prophet said *"If I am a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men."*?
a. Jeremiah b. Nehemiah c. Elisha d. Elijah
- What general was deceived and then killed in revenge for killing his brother?
a. Joshua b. Abner c. Sisera d. Joab
- Who was the first individual killed by God for being wicked?
a. Lot's wife b. Peleg c. Er d. Cain
- The Lord sent a pestilence on Israel that killed 70,000 people because David was disobedient and numbered the people of Israel.
a. True b. False
- Who cried out with a loud voice, *"Lord, do not charge them with this sin"* just before he died?
a. Paul b. Stephen c. John the Baptist d. Absalom
- God was speaking of whom when He asked, *"What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground."*
a. Aaron b. Joseph c. Abel d. Cain
- What son of Saul was murdered by two servants who stabbed him and carried his severed head to David?
a. Ishbosheth b. Jonathan c. Mephibosheth d. Abinadab
- Who, along with his household, was swallowed up by the earth for rebelling against Moses?
a. Caleb b. Uzzah c. Abiram d. Ananias
- This was David's lament for whom? *"I am distressed for you, my brother _____. You have been very pleasant to me; your love to me was wonderful surpassing the love of women."*
a. Saul b. Jonathan c. Abner d. Amnon
- A young dancer requested the head of this prophet as a reward for her dance.
a. John the Baptist b. James c. Elisha d. Ezekiel

THE EARLY CHURCH

- What Church had two bickering women named Euodia and Syntyche?
- At what Church was Paul accused of turning the world upside-down?
- What Church was the scene of a burning of wicked books?
- In what Church did Paul raise up Eutychus, who had fallen to his death out of a window?
- At what Church were believers first called *"Christians"*?
- What city's Church possibly began in the home of Lydia, the seller of purple?
- To which of the seven Churches of Asia did Jesus say, *"You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess"*?
- Which of the seven Churches of Asia was *"neither hot nor cold"*?
- For which Church was a gift of money collected because of a famine in their area?
- What Church was encouraged by Jesus' words, *"Be faithful unto death and I will give you a crown of life"*?
- What event might be called the birthday of the Early Church?

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ABOVE

On picture: (b) Amorites (Joshua 10:5-13)

THEY WERE KILLED

- (d) Elijah (2 Kings 1:9-10)
- (b) Abner (2 Sam. 3:26-27, 30)
- (c) Er (Gen. 38:7)
- (a) True (2 Sam. 24:10-15)
- (b) Stephen (Acts 7:60)
- (c) Abel (Gen. 4:9-10)
- (a) Ishbosheth (2 Sam. 4:5-8)
- (c) Abiram (Num. 16:1-3, 27-33)
- (b) Jonathan (2 Sam. 1:26)
- (a) John the Baptist (Mark 6:22-27)

EARLY CHURCH

- Philippi (Phil. 4:1-3)
- Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-6)
- Ephesus (Acts 19:1, 13-19)
- Troas (Acts 20:6-10)
- Antioch of Syria (Acts 11:26)
- Philippi (Acts 16:12-15)
- Thyatira (Rev. 2:18-20)
- Laodicea (Rev. 3:14-16)
- Jerusalem (Acts 11:27-30)
- Smyrna (Rev. 2:10)
- Pentecost (Acts 2)

WHEN IS CHRISTMAS?

“When is the anniversary of the birth of Christ? and when is the beginning of the Jewish sacred year? Is it in December, or May, October, or January?”

When was Christ born? The exact date cannot be known with certainty, but it is widely known that December 25 is not the true date of the birth of Christ. December 25 was selected for the observance during the fourth century to conveniently coincide with the winter solstice.

There are a number of Biblical points against the December date for Christ's birth. First, the Bible tells us that shepherds were tending their flocks the night Jesus was born. According to history, the shepherds tended their flocks only during the lambing season, which came in the spring. Winters in Judea being cold and rainy, sheep were usually sheltered. Also, winter not being a suitable time to travel in Judea, the Emperor would not have ordered a census at that season. It was a Roman census that brought Joseph to Bethlehem.

The history of the pagan December festivals dates back to more than two thousand years before Christ was born. The winter solstice season was celebrated by Egyptians, Assyrians and Babylonians. During the days of the Roman Empire, December 25 was hailed as Brumalia, the birthday of the new-sun after its long journey southward. Kindled fires and lighted candles were tokens of festivity to welcome the date. It was a time of wild license, excited happiness, revelry and unrestrained idolatry.

How did Christ's birth come to be associated with the December festivals? In about the fourth century after Christ the December 25 celebration was “Christianized” and added

*December 25 was
“Christianized” and added to
the church calendar because of
its popular appeal.*

to the church calendar because of its universal attraction and irrepressible popular appeal. An expanding church (soon to be the united Roman Catholic Church) wanted to worship Christ and to celebrate His birth. At the same time they wanted to win the favor of thousands of pagan worshipers who might, with a few concessions, come into the “fold.” To limit church ranks by strict enforcement of narrow principles such as Jesus taught was unpopular. Even some of the so-called “Christians” themselves wanted to celebrate it. *The Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia* explains that the celebration of the win-



A snow-covered garden on the Mt. of Olives near Jerusalem.

ter solstice was “too deeply entrenched in popular custom to be set aside by Christian influence.... The pagan festival with its riot and merrymaking was so popular that Christians were glad of an excuse to continue its celebration with little change in spirit and in manner.”

In the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* we find this comment about December 25: “This was the date of a pagan festival in Rome, chosen in AD 274 by the emperor Aurelian as the birthday of the unconquered sun, which at the winter solstice begins again to show an increase of light. At some point before AD 335 the church at Rome (not the God of heaven) established the commemoration of the birthday of Christ, the sun of righteousness, on this same date.” Christ, they rationalized, was the “Sun of righteousness”—could He not be symbolized by the physical sun and connected with the sun worship festival? This was how St. Augustine justified the selection of the date: Christians, he said, should celebrate December 25 not on account of the sun or any sun god but on account of the Sun of righteousness. Even he did not claim it to be Christ's actual birth date.

Is there anything in the Bible to support the observance of December 25? There is nothing, absolutely nothing. On the contrary, God through Paul says, “*And what union can there be between God's temple and idols? ... Therefore, come out from them and separate yourselves from them, says the Lord. Don't touch their filthy things, and I will welcome you. And I will be your Father, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty*” (2 Cor. 6:16–18 NLT).

So when was Christ born? Because the exact date cannot be known with certainty and we feel that the Bible gives ample evidence that He was born in the spring, most likely on the sacred Hebrew new year, Abib 1 (or Nisan), the members of the Megiddo Church set aside this day each year to honor Christ and remember the Hebrew new year. This year (2007) Abib 1st falls on April 17–18 (the first new moon after the spring equinox). It is a time to praise God for another new year and to honor Jesus Christ, our soon coming King. Plan now to join us for this sacred season. ♦

(For further evidence on the date of Christmas and New Year, send for our leaflet, “*Christ the Savior Is Born.*”)

CHRISTIAN UNITY

by JOHN DAVIES

Christian unity not only matters, it is essential. Jesus prayed for unity among the believers (John 17:20–23). So did the Apostle Paul, when he wrote: *“May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Rom. 15:5–6 NIV).

God wants us to be united in our belief in those fundamental truths taught in the Bible. In fact, we must have unity in belief and practice before we can be part of God’s family. We are encouraged by the timely advice of the Apostle Paul when he wrote: *“Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you”* (2 Cor. 13:11).

What does it mean to live in unity?

Unity in Christ means taking the mind of Christ for our mind. It means becoming one with Him in principle and in practice. It means we bring Christ into every decision we make and ask, “What would Jesus do?” It means we take directions for our lives from Him; we let our lives be controlled by His mind, by what His Word says, using only the language He honors, and acting always to honor Him.

There is yet another point to remember: Taking the mind of Christ means giving up our own. The culture tells us to be individuals, to make our own judgments without regard to any higher authority. But this is not God’s way. As long as we keep our own mind, there can be no unity. Unity with Christ means we are forfeiting the right to be our own boss, to think as the culture around us, to promote our own selfish interests.

To be in unity is a decision we must make and keep making. The Word says *“Forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity”* (Col. 3:13–14 NIV).

Ephesians 4:13–14 (NIV) tells us our duty to one another is building one another up *“until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, being blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.”*

We should be committed to unity with Christ and His teachings wherever God has put us. We may not be one of the leaders of the Church, but we can still be part of the body, even if we are worshiping from the church pew. Just be committed to living as part of the body of Christ. Don’t even leave a question mark as to where you stand. Don’t leave room for even a little crack in the door that lets you out of your responsibility.

Consider Ephesians 4:2–6 (NIV): *“Be completely humble and gentle, be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one*

hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”

“Make every effort” means we actually have to do something to belong to “one Lord,” and “one faith,” and “one God and Father of all.” It will not be easy. If we pray for unity and yet still hold a grudge against a brother or sister, we cannot expect God to approve. We must show every day that we have something to live for. Our God is the living God, and He has asked us to live in harmony, live in peace, live in unity.

Unity in Christ does not come by chance. It comes by putting the interests of others ahead of our own, submitting to the law of Christ. What a glorious testimony to His truth it is when His worshipers sing together, pray together, minister together, get down and do life together. This is a rare and precious thing, and God says that where *“brothers live together in unity”* He will command a blessing, *“even life for evermore”* (Ps. 133:1,3 NIV). It may be difficult sometimes, but with such a promise it is worth it. ♦

Obituary

Helen I. White

We have received word of the passing of Helen I. White, at the age of 99. Sister Helen was a long time member of the Megiddo Church and a steady correspondent as long as health permitted. The following is from her daughter, Mrs. Carole Bertol, of Saint Joseph, Missouri, who survives her.

This letter is to inform you of the passing of my mother, Helen White, on September 26, 2006. Her death was peaceful. She had been under hospice care for some months, and declined rapidly in late summer.

As you know, Helen’s mother, Maude Miller (known among you as “Grandma Miller”) and her sister-in-law, Ruth Miller, were long-time residents at the Megiddo Mission. My mother spent a year in the 1970s taking care of her mother at the Mission, attending daily services and participating in the Mission activities while she was there. She also made many visits to Rochester over the years. I believe some of the Church members will remember her.

My mother’s abiding faith in the precepts of your Church sustained her through a long life and was a great comfort to her as her health grew more fragile.

Thank you so much for the service you mailed to me in August. It was a very helpful guide in planning my mother’s funeral tribute.

—Carole Bertol

Note: Mrs. Bertol enclosed a newspaper notice that included the following:

Helen I. (Miller) White, 99, St. Joseph, passed away Sept. 26, 2006 at a local health care facility. She was born Jan. 30, 1907 in Anabel, Missouri, and lived in St. Joseph since 1949. She was a homemaker and loved gardening.

Helen was preceded in death by her husband, Bob White, in 1969, her parents, a brother and a sister. Survivors are a daughter, Carole Bertol; and four nieces.

A graveside service and internment was in Mount Auburn Cemetery.

BATS Are Not Blind, But They Are AMAZING!

by PATRICIA A. FLEMING

I could never have imagined how awesome it would be to watch a bat emergence!

My husband and I stood at the edge of the opening of the Bracken Cave, not realizing fully what was about to happen. This cave, the home of the largest colony of Mexican Free-tailed bats in the United States, is estimated to contain between 20 and 30 million bats. Since it is a nursery colony, they are mostly females.

The sun was just setting as we waited expectantly. Then we saw one, then another, then several, then more and more until the bats were streaming out of the cave in a circular motion that looked like a twisting river of beating wings rising into the darkening sky! What an experience!

The bats leave the cave at speeds up to 35 miles per hour, and may even increase their speed to between 40 and 60 miles per hour as they spread out in several directions. Their purpose is to hunt for insects. It is estimated that this colony alone consumes 200 to 250 tons of insects in a single night.

This amazing experience raised many questions in my mind about these uniquely wonderful creatures. What creative genius these small creatures manifested. I wanted to learn more.

Bats are unique

Found mostly in the tropics but some in all types of habitats except at the Poles, bats are unique. Evolutionary scientists have tried to associate them with one family of animal or another, but there is no ideal "fit." The earliest bat fossil skeleton found is said to date back some 50 million years. And it is said that this bat had the same structure that bats have today—isn't this evidence that they were created, not evolved?

Some 950 species of bats have been documented worldwide, and these make up about 20% of all mammal species. These are classified as belonging to two primary orders, the megabats, which are mostly fruit and nectar eaters, and the microbats, which feed mostly on insects. Three species of vampire bats feed on blood taken from other mammals or birds.

The bat "sees" with its ears

Each kind of bat has its own sense for locating food sources. Fruit bats use their eyes and sense of smell. The microbats use echolocation, a method scientists are unable to explain by their theories of



Some bats hibernate during the winter, squeezing together to preserve heat. They are mammals, yet they become stiff and cold; breathing almost stops.



(above) **Mother with new born.** Bats are mostly nocturnal, and sleep during the day hanging upside-down.



The world's **lightest** mammal, the bumblebee bat, weighs less than a penny—with a wingspan of about 6 inches. The **largest** bats weigh up to two pounds, and have a wingspan of up to 6 feet!

Voracious bats subsist on moths, mosquitoes, fruit flies, and other insect enemies of man. No species found in the United States bites humans except in self-defense; most have teeth too small to puncture the skin.



evolution. How did the bat survive while it was developing the amazing senses that allow it to “see” the source of food precisely enough to catch it in flight—in pitch black darkness? This truly remarkable ability could only have been given them by their Designer.

Echolocation is like being able to use one’s ears to “see.” The bat emits very high pitched sounds, of 30,000 to 90,000 cycles per minute, from a specialized larynx. These sounds bounce off objects (like an echo) and are received back by the bat’s very efficient external ears and highly sensitive inner ears. This information received back tells the bat the direction in which an object lies, the speed it is traveling, its size, its shape, and even its surface texture.

Even more amazing, the bat is able to separate its own sounds from those emitted by other bats around it. And all this occurs while the bat is flying at full speed!

In order for the bat’s hunting trip to be successful, the sending and receiving organs in the bat’s brain must work in perfect unison. The “seeing” is so successful that in a single night a bat may consume a volume of insects equal to half its weight!

How exact is the bat’s sonar equipment? A man-made sonar can pick up echoes of between 12 millionths and 6 millionths of a second apart. Bats can distinguish echoes that are only 2 or 3 millionths of a second apart. So precise a means of communication is no accident of evolution. Only the Great Creator could have planned and executed such a system for these small creatures.

The bat’s amazing wing

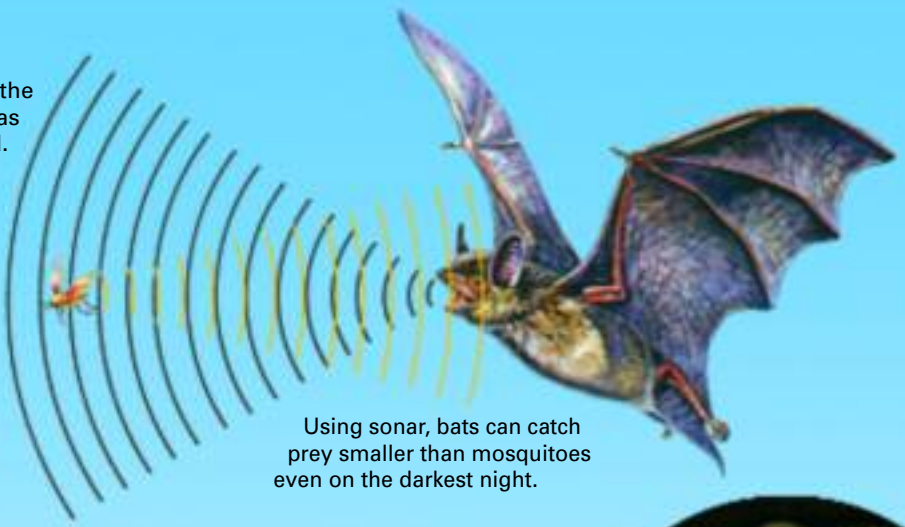
A bat’s wing is another amazing part of its body. Bat wings are literally long fingers covered by a thin double membrane of skin. The outstretched wing resembles a hand with four fingers spread. These wing bones themselves show evidence of design. The bones are long; and being somewhat flattened instead of round as in other mammals, they are strong, yet much more flexible. The skin that covers the wings is also more elastic than ordinary skin and very resistant to punctures and tears. One double membrane of skin stretches over the wing bones and down the bat’s body to the hind leg. In some bats, another membrane stretches from the hind leg to the tail. This leaves the hind legs free so that the bat can use them to hang upside down to roost. Did such design come about by chance?

The bat’s wing design also contributes to its success as an effective insect hunter. The bat does not glide but like a bird propels itself, moving its wings in a figure eight pattern. The bat has exceptional control over its wings so that it can change directions suddenly to catch a nearby insect or to avoid a collision. Some even use their wings as nets to help catch their prey.

Bat pups

Female bats give birth to one pup or on occasion two pups per year. When the baby is ready to be born the mother will turn herself right-side up and use her tail to catch the newborn pup. The pups have their eyes

When a bat detects an insect, the buzzes increase to as many as 200 pulses per second.



Using sonar, bats can catch prey smaller than mosquitoes even on the darkest night.

Bat sonar is many times more efficient, weight for weight, than any sonar or radar developed by humans. Even though thousands of animals may be flying together through a cave—in what has been called “a veritable ultrasonic Babel”—each bat can follow its own signals.



The mother bat suckles her pup a few days, even while hunting, then hangs it up.

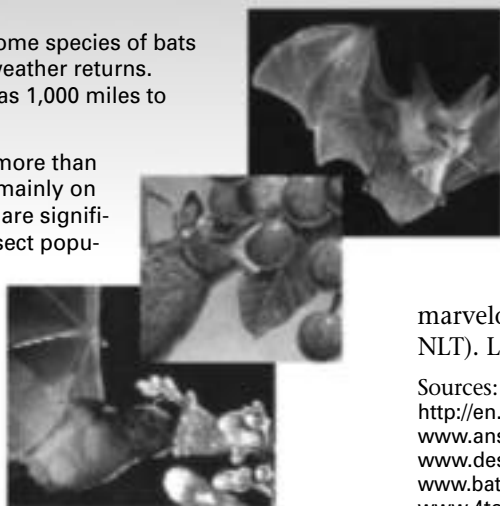
Week-old gray bats cluster for warmth in a cave. Nurseries may contain 300 young per square foot. Yet mothers apparently identify their own offspring!



Within three weeks the young bat must fly, begin to hunt using its sonar, and, returning to the cave, execute a midair flip and grasp the ceiling.

Interesting Bat Facts

- Bats are important in the balance of nature, helping to control the volume of insects in the world.
- Bats roost in caves, hollow trees, foliage, crevices in rocks, and in spaces under the bark of trees. Three species have adhesive disks on their wrists and ankles that facilitate moving and roosting on smooth surfaces.
- Bats have few predators that feed exclusively on bats, but many animals, including hawks, owls, mice, skunks, foxes and snakes will eat bats.
- In temperate climates bats are remarkably long-lived. Little brown bats have been recorded as living as long as 30 years.
- During the cold winter, some species of bats hibernate until warmer weather returns. Others migrate as much as 1,000 miles to warmer areas.
- Nearly two thirds of the more than 900 species of bats feed mainly on insects—the reason they are significant in controlling the insect population.



closed for the first day, and the mother may carry the baby with her the first day or two as she hunts. Then she will hang it up in the roost and return to feed it several times during the night. Here again is evidence of the Great Creator's work. Can evolution explain maternal instincts?

How can a mother bat find her own baby in the midst of a crowd of several million baby bats? This time it is not by echolocation but by the ability of the mother and baby to hear and recognize each other's distinctive voices. (How did the baby survive before it "learned" to distinguish its mother's voice?!) How truly awesome is our Creator's work!

The pups grow and develop quickly. From about three to five weeks of age most species' young are ready to fly off and hunt for themselves.

Ecological balancers

Bats are very important to the ecological balance of the world. They play an indispensable part in insect control. The fruit eating bats are important pollinators and spreaders of the fruit's seeds. Bat guano is one of the best natural sources of high nitrogen fertilizer to be found anywhere.

How true are the words of Scripture about our marvelous Designer: *"His understanding has no limit"* (Ps. 147:5 NLT). Let us give Him the honor and glory He is due. ♦

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HOW WAS I TO KNOW ?

"As you read what I have written, you will understand what I know about this plan regarding Christ." –Eph. 3:4 NLT

It is enough to drive well-meaning teachers out of their minds!

It was concert season in high school, and the music students were getting ready for their big Christmas extravaganza. The music teacher handed out all the information every student needed to know about rehearsals and times and responsibilities. She didn't just hand it out once—she gave out copies a couple of times just to make sure everyone was without excuse and that everyone knew the details. The notes and the teacher's statements to the students made it clear, for example, when rehearsal was and that it was absolutely, unequivocally mandatory.

So what happened on the day of rehearsal?

Well, one mother called in a panic wondering what time her teenager was supposed to show up for practice. How was she to know, she wondered? Another called the teacher and said, "Oh, we're taking Tommy to Grandma's for the day. I'm sure it's okay if he misses rehearsal, right?" When the teacher kindly reminded the parent that practice had already started and that if the student didn't want to fail he'd better be there, she heard the mom say, "Well, why didn't somebody tell me? How was I to know?"

They should have known, because the message had been clearly given.

If this upsets the music teacher, imagine the disrespect we are showing to God, our heavenly Father, when we ignore His message to us in the Bible! What must He think when we live by our own rules, get ourselves in trouble because of our wrong choices, and then say, "How was I to know what I should do?"

God sent His prophets, *"rising up early and sending them"* (Jer. 7:13; 7:25; 11:7; 25:3–4; 35:15), warning about the dire consequences of apostasy. But Judah paid no heed.

God sent Jesus, warning of the destruction of Jerusalem, that when they saw the city surrounded by armies, they should *"flee"* (Luke 21:20–21). But who listened?

God sent prophets, apostles, pastors, teachers... (Eph. 4:11–13). But how many paid attention?

The Bible gives us warning upon warning of the work that God will soon do on the earth. But how many are concerned? Isn't that why Jesus said, *"He who has ears to hear...!"* or *"Take heed...!"* or *"Verily, verily I say unto you...."*

The Bible is God's note sent home to us, telling us what is going to happen, and exactly what He expects. It teaches us how to treat each other, how to behave in a godly way, how to live day in and day out to glorify God.

Don't neglect God's notes. ♦



Hard Hearts and Deaf Ears

by JEAN TREHARNE

However many times we read the Bible, there is always something more to be learned. Different points strike our minds that we hadn't thought of before.

At the moment I'm reading Jeremiah again. What a thankless task was set before him. I'm sure many a time he was sorry the Lord was sending him to tell a people who would neither listen nor repent. Like Jonah, he would have been happy to run away.

"The Lord said to him, Go up and down the streets of Jerusalem, look around and consider, search through her squares. If you can find but one person who deals honestly and seeks the truth, I will forgive this city" (Jer. 5:1 NIV). "A horrible and shocking thing has happened in the land: The prophets prophesy lies, the priests rule by their own authority, and my people love it this way" (Jer. 5:30–31 NIV). What a terrible spiritual condition!

Poor Jeremiah! He tried so hard, but we read, *"To whom can I speak and give warning? Who will listen to me? Their ears are closed so they cannot hear. The word of the Lord is offensive to them; they find no pleasure in it" (6:10 NIV).* It must have been very hard for Jeremiah to know where to start. The people of his home town of Anathoth where his father was priest, didn't want to know and soon plotted against him.

"Let us destroy the tree and its fruit; let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name be remembered no more," they schemed against him (11:19 NIV).

Later we read, *"Your brothers, your own family,...even they have raised a loud cry against you. Do not trust them, though they speak well of you" (12:6 NIV).* Even his family was against him. Jeremiah, however, continued to tell the people to repent of their sins and turn away from their idols. God through Jeremiah even tried to alarm them by telling them details of what was soon to happen, but to no avail.

"Those destined for death, to death; those for the sword, to the sword; those for starvation, to starvation; those for captivity, to captivity" (15:2).

It is sad to think of Jeremiah all alone. He was told not to marry and have a family, also that all the sounds of joy and gladness would soon be taken from the city. So a family would only have been an extra worry. However, at one time the Lord told him to buy a field. The Lord was using Jeremiah to show the surety of His promise, that there was hope for the future and one day his people would return to this property in Judah.

We feel for Jeremiah trying so hard to get the people and their king to hear the words of the Lord. Not only was Jeremiah sent to speak to them, but God told him to write His words in a scroll and to read it at the temple. It was of no

use. When it was read in the hearing of the king, he had no fear but burned up the scroll bit by bit. In fact, after this Jeremiah and Baruch would have been arrested had the Lord not hidden them.

From then on it seems everyone was trying to kill Jeremiah. He was accused of deserting to the Babylonians and was put in a dungeon for a long time. If it had not been for the king wanting to hear good news from the Lord, he might have died there. But, the king later ordered for Jeremiah to be in the courtyard of the guard and even given bread and water. It was the Lord's way of keeping Jeremiah safe through a time of siege, while many thousands on the streets were dying.

Next Jeremiah was thrown into a pit after being accused of discouraging the soldiers. He sank down into the mud. He was saved when Ebed-Melech went to the king, who told him to take 30 men and pull Jeremiah out of the cistern before he died. So then Jeremiah was back in the courtyard of the guard.

We are almost thankful to hear of the capture of the city by Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. 39:11–14; 40:1–6). When Gedaliah was left in charge of Judah and the poorest of the people, some more Jews joined him. But poor Jeremiah ended up among the many captives on the way to Babylon. Again, God was there with Jeremiah. King Nebuchadnezzar gave his captain of the guard special instructions regarding the prophet Jeremiah. One wonders if Daniel in Babylon may have been instrumental in this unusual treatment of this much maligned prophet. Jeremiah was given a choice to continue to Babylon where he would be treated well or he could go back to Jerusalem under Gedaliah, the new governor. Jeremiah chose Jerusalem. He must have had great hope for the future as Gedaliah was the grandson of godly Shaphan, but this was short lived. Soon Gedaliah was assassinated. Once again Jeremiah found himself on the move, and this time to a place where he did not want to go—Egypt. God warned the remaining Jews through Jeremiah not to go down to Egypt for they would all die there, but they went anyway.

Over and over Jeremiah received word from the Lord to go and speak to the people, but the people wouldn't listen. They kept on with their sins, and burned incense and made cakes to the Queen of Heaven. They had no intention of changing their ways.

We don't know of your end, Jeremiah, but we feel for you. However, if you were here today the people would not listen, either. All these years later, people have not changed. They want their own way. But a great change is coming. The very King you prophesied is coming soon, and you will see Him! He will *"reign and prosper,"* as you foretold (Jer. 23:5), and He will be called *"the Lord our righteousness"* (Jer. 33:14–16). When He comes, you will live again, and you will be greatly rewarded for all you endured. We want to be there to meet you and enjoy your reward with you. ♦



Focused On *Gratitude*

At this time of year we focus on the many blessings that fill our hearts with gratitude to God, the Creator of heaven and Earth. As I have gathered produce from the garden this year I have been especially struck by how beautiful the colors of the various fruits and vegetables are. The dark purple blackberries, the red tomatoes, the red, green and yellow peppers, the various colors of lettuce, are so pretty in the harvest basket. Not only are they pretty but they are good for us too. The flavors are wonderful. Fruits, vegetables and flowers also delight our sense of smell. Every season of the year offers a variety of things to stimulate our senses and remind us what a Great Creator we serve. He provides with abundance. In spite of the drought we suffered this year there is still plenty to supply our needs and some left to share with friends and family. We are so grateful for all.

Another thing we are grateful for is the abundance of spiritual food we receive. The wonderful weekly sermons we hear via the Web, the beautiful and inspiring Megiddo Message, the daily meditations, and the Bible Study CDs all give us an abundance of food for the soul. We are encouraged to study more and to live what we learn.

There is no lack of stimulating thought here. We are grateful to each of you who give of your time and talents to prepare and deliver this spiritual food to us. It is really a dry and thirsty land out here.

Our physical and spiritual blessings are more than can be numbered. But it is good to try. We must never take for granted the gifts we receive from each other and from our Heavenly Father. We are the most blessed people on the face of the earth, for we have the knowledge that will give life eternal if we will let it work in our lives and produce a perfect character. Let us each strive harder everyday to be worthy of that far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory that is promised to each of the overcomers.

I want to be on the winning side. Thank you for helping me.

—PAF in Texas

An old-fashioned story with an up-to-date lesson

A Cheap Boy

One day a boy went to sell a wagon-load of corn to a doctor. The man who weighed it was near-sighted; so he did not notice when the boy stepped onto the scales, to make the corn weigh more.

The doctor, watching from his office window, was much surprised to see that Jack Gile, the squire's son, would cheat. He left his office and sauntered over to the corn-crib where Jack was shoveling in the corn. With his last shovelful, Jack jumped into the crib to pick up the nubbins. Quickly the doctor closed the door of the crib and locked it.

"Oh, Doctor," called the boy, "you have locked me in!"

The doctor was walking away, but he turned around saying, "Well, isn't that right? I bought you."

"Bought me?" cried Jack. "I am sure I do not know what you mean."

"Yes—how much do you weigh?"

"About ninety-eight pounds," the boy replied.

"Well, that is a little over a bushel and a half of corn," said the doctor, "and is worth about one dollar and twenty-five cents. A cheap boy, to be sure. I'll settle with your father."

"I didn't mean to sell myself," said Jack, ready to cry. "This is the first time I ever did it, Doctor, and I'm so sorry I cheated."

"If I let you go, will you promise you will never be dishonest again?" asked the doctor.

"Yes, I promise!" said Jack earnestly; and the doctor let him out of the corn-crib, a sadder and a wiser boy. ♦

WE GATHER TOGETHER

*We gather together to ask the Lord's blessing;
He chastens and hastens His will to make known;
The wicked oppressing now cease from distressing,
Sing praises to His name: He forgets not His own.*

*Beside us to guide us, our God with us joining,
Ordaining, maintaining His kingdom divine;
So from the beginning the fight we were winning;
Thou, Lord, wast at our side, all glory be Thine!*

*We all do extol Thee, Thou leader triumphant,
And pray that Thou still our defender wilt be.
Let Thy congregation escape tribulation;
Thy name be ever praised! O Lord, make us free!*

Traditional Thanksgiving Hymn (A translation by
Theodore Baker: 1851-1934)



THANKSGIVING DAY PRAYER

*Heavenly Father, on Thanksgiving Day
We bow our hearts to You and pray.
We give You thanks for all You've done
Especially for the gift of Jesus, Your Son.
For beauty in nature, Your glory we see
For joy and health, friends and family,
For daily provision, Your mercy and care.
These are the blessings You graciously share.
So today we offer this response of praise
With a promise to follow You all of our days.*

—Mary Fairchild

You cannot pour deep spirituality into a shallow life.
Try deepening your life by adding gratitude.

*No one who ever truly followed Christ
ever went astray.*

When God takes your picture, He doesn't
touch up the photos.

YOU MAY RUN BUT YOU CAN'T HIDE

(continued from page 2)

feel the shame he felt as he said, "O God, You know my foolishness, my sins are not hidden from You" (Ps. 69:5)? These are not empty words. They reflect the deep strivings of a heart that wanted to be found out. They describe David's heart, your heart, my heart when we face our wrong and say, in the words of the song, "It's me, it's me, oh Lord, standin' in the need of prayer." Much as we want to run and hide, something in us cries out to God. We want the heavenly GPS to see that we have turned from our waywardness and are seeking forgiveness, just as the Divine record outlines (Isa. 55:6-7).

Is it possible that you and I, tiny creatures of dust on a tiny planet in space, can really be known in the records of the great God of heaven? Is it possible that we can even belong to His family? The answer is yes! In fact, the heavenly GPS is so effective that He promises, "Before they call, I will answer, and while they are still speaking I will hear" (Isa. 65:24).

There is no reason to run and hide. God has the better plan. Let the Word of God search out every area of sin so we can eradicate it. Then the heavenly GPS will reveal an honest and receptive heart, one ready to accept His guidance; one that will never be lost—now or eternally! ♦

COMPLACENCY

Complacency saps energy, dulls attitudes, and causes a drain on the brain. The first symptom is satisfaction with things as they are. The second is rejection of things as they might be. "Good enough" becomes today's watchword and tomorrow's standard.

Like water, the man who is complacent follows the easiest course—downhill.

God often uses small matches to light great torches.

Christian contentment is part of the learning process of becoming a mature Christian.

*It takes discipline to change your mind
about something when you know you ought to
but would rather not.*

EMPTINESS

Certain psychiatrists have come to the conclusion that the vast neurotic misery of the world could be termed a neurosis of emptiness. People cut themselves off from God, and life eventually turns empty, inane, meaningless, without purpose.

Have you included God in your plans?



Like A Christian

Father, help me to TALK like a Christian:
to speak in such a way that I build another up
instead of tearing down his reputation.

Father, help me to DRESS like a Christian:
I want others to recognize me as a representative of Your cause;
a member of Your family.
I want people to know me for what I am inside myself.

Father, help me to EAT like a Christian:
to eat healthily, moderately, gratefully,
giving thanks to You for every good thing You have provided;
I give thanks to You for providing my food, and
for the one who prepares my food.

Father, help me to DRIVE like a Christian:
to be as courteous to my fellow drivers on the highway
as I would be to them in person.

Father, help me to GIVE like a Christian:
not grudgingly or with any thought of return;
I want to give without others knowing,
with Your approval my sufficient reward.

Father, help me to SLEEP like a Christian:
to be at peace with You, and to put
my life in Your keeping.

Father, help me to LIVE like a Christian.
I want to follow the Master, who was never guilty of any wrong;
who showed Your will in the smallest details of life;
help me to imitate His example—His holiness, His submission,
His purity, His devotion, His love in every detail of my life. Amen.

—Selected