

Megiddo Message

AUGUST, 2002

Come and see
the works of God.

— PSALM 66:5

REPENT! NO OTHER WAY

Repent: *to feel sorry for wrong doing*

The theme of repentance runs through the New Testament from the ministry of John the Baptist to the book of Revelation.

John the Baptist came *“preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying: Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!...Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance”* (Matt. 3:1–2, 8), or as it is phrased in the New Living Translation, *“Prove by the way you live that you have really turned from your sins and turned to God.”*

As soon as Jesus started to preach, He picked up the same theme, *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”* (Matt. 4:17). *Again He said, “I have not come to call the [self] righteous, but sinners to repentance”* (Luke 5:32).

One day some men came to Jesus and told Him of Pilate’s killing some Galileans and mingling their blood with their sacrifices. It was a horrible thing to do. Our Lord replied from a different standpoint: *“Do you think those Galileans were worse sinners than other people from Galilee?...is that why they suffered? Not at all! And you will also perish unless you turn from your evil ways and turn to God”* (Luke 13:2–3). Speaking of a local disaster that had taken the lives of 18 people, Jesus added the same comment: *“Unless you repent you will all likewise perish”* (Luke 13:5).

When the Apostle Paul saw sin in his Corinthian Church, his heart yearned for them. If only he could move them to repent! He poured out his heart to them in an appealing letter. Success! It was the turning point! They *repented*. *Hearing of it, he rejoiced, “not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death”* (2 Cor. 7:9–10).

What is repentance? Repentance is more than changing one’s mind. Repentance is a 180 degree turn. It is both a turning *against* and a turning *toward*.

The first step in repenting is turning against the wrong. When I repent, I actually develop a feeling of strong dislike, even hatred, against the wrong (against the selfish attitude, or the lying, or the anger, or the illicit pleasure—or whatever wrong) that I allowed myself to indulge in. As long as I still feel pleasure in doing the wrong, I have not repented.

Then repentance is a turning *toward*. Repentance carries not only a sense of hating sin but also a determination to turn and go God’s way. It is a turning *away from sin* and *toward* God.

What does this mean? Repentance is not simply a reaction to getting into trouble. Judas “repented,” then went out and committed suicide. Many people may be sorry for the consequences of their sin, but that is not repentance.

Repentance is contrition of heart. God is holy, and we cannot violate that holiness and receive His eternal blessings.

We need to repent, because we need God’s forgiveness, and the two are inexorably linked. When and only when we repent, God forgives. *“Let the wicked forsake his way...and he will abundantly pardon”* (Isa. 55:6–7). That is what our Lord taught His disciples: *“that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name”* (Luke 24:47).



Repentance is a 180 degree turn. It is both a turning against and a turning toward.

We want to feel the pain of the consequences sin will bring. Sin leads to death, eternal death. What is so terrible about leprosy? One type of the disease attacks the nerves so that a local anesthesia results. The unfortunate victim does not sense the danger because there is no sense of pain. The same major problem affects us when we do not sense the painful consequences of our sin and so go on, blithely assuming that we can do as we please and escape the consequences.

Jesus was unsparing in denouncing those who heard and did not repent. He did not call sin by a gentler name to lessen the hurt. To Jesus, sin was an offense against a holy God and needed immediate—and radical—attention. *“If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you...and if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you”* (Matt. 5:29–30).

In the medical realm, a doctor who would minimize the seriousness of cancer and recommend a “wait and see” approach would not be doing his patient a kindness. Likewise the cancer of sin needs the early, drastic treatment of repentance.

“Repent, and turn yourselves from your idols...repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity will not be your ruin...for why should you die?” (Ezek. 14:6; 18:30).

When you sin, repent! It is a life and death matter. ♦

Will You **WIN** Life's Marathon?

A marathon has three basic parts: the start, the race, and the finish. To win you need to excel in all three. An experienced marathoner has said, "You can have the fastest time out of the starting blocks known to man, but if you are slow on the turn or sloppy in the long stretch, your record start will not be sufficient for victory. Or you can be unbeatable on the open track, but if you drop out 50 yards short of the goal, the rest of the effort is for nothing. But when you set out for the goal, you must finish."

There will be varying degrees of speed and ability. But when we set out to run in the race for eternal life, when we are running for the Lord, His advice to us is *Finish*.

The record in Hebrews 11 is all about finishers. *Why* did they finish so well? What kept them running all the way to the end? It was simply this: they had caught a glimpse of the eternal prize at the end of the race, and they *wanted* it! With all that was in them *they wanted it!* They wanted that better, lasting prize more than anything else they could imagine!

They wanted it so much they could think of nothing else! Whatever they were doing, the picture of that prize was on their minds. They were moved by it, driven by it, captured by it. Everything in their lives was seen in relation to it. That is why they are said to have lived "*by faith*"—faith in God and His ability to fulfill His promise to them; faith that with His help *they could win that prize!*

Let's look closer at the record of the winners in Hebrews 11. Picture it as a long corridor where each wall is covered with large portraits of the winners. There are portraits of Abel, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Jacob, Isaac, and many more. The corridor is too long to see them all. As we gaze far down the corridor, the pictures become less and less distinct. We can only guess at what is too distant to distinguish; but can't we imagine at the far end a space reserved for portraits of winners still in the running? For, as the writer of Hebrews says, "*God had far better things in mind for us that would also benefit them, for they can't receive the prize at the end of the race until we finish the race*" (Heb. 11:40 NLT).

Near the front of the corridor, suspended in the center, imagine a large plaque on which are inscribed these glowing words: "*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let*

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The Bible compares living the Christian life to running a race. What do the two have in common?

Like a race, the Christian life has:

1. a goal to be reached
2. a prize to be won
3. rules to be followed
4. a limited amount of time for running

Like a race, the Christian life requires:

1. perseverance
2. sacrifice
3. endurance
4. commitment
5. determination

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MEGIDDO MEANS...

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

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.

Will You WIN Life's Marathon?

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us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb 12:1-2 NIV).

"Let us...let us..." Can't you feel the personal appeal to each runner? "Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us." The winners are not all chosen; the portraits on the wall are not all in place. There is yet room.

What can we do to win life's Marathon? How can we get our portrait displayed in this great hall of heavenly fame? How can we win this marathon? How can we get our name among those great men and women of God, those giants of faith?

This is the very thought that the author of Hebrews was pondering. His answer outlines a four-step action formula:

1. Lay aside every weight.
2. Lay aside every sin.
3. Run with perseverance.
4. Focus on Jesus our great Example.

We can be people of great faith. We can live at the cutting edge of Christian growth and development. We can succeed and some day be named among God's heroes, if we follow these steps.

Let's look closely at each step.

STEP 1: Lay aside every weight.

Notice that *weights* are listed ahead of *sins*. The author knew that we would be concerned about *sin*; but he wanted to be sure we didn't overlook something equally serious: the *weights*.

The Greek word for "weight" is *ogkos* and means "a mass, a burden, hindrance." It is literally used of that which makes the arm ache, that which causes bending or bulging or discomfort. It is something that would not be desirable to one running a race.

As runners in the race for eternal life, the first rule is to rid ourselves of anything that hinders, anything that makes the running harder, if it is within our power to do so. Anything that does not help, *hinders* because it lessens our chances of winning the race. As Christian contestants, we want to be as free as possible to *run* and WIN!

If we were standing still, some things might not seem burdensome at all. *But we are not standing still*. We are men and women on the run, spiritually speaking, and cannot risk carrying anything needless. And if it comes down to a choice between the weight we are carrying

A religious teacher once told of a lesson he learned in his sixteenth year that stayed with him all his life. These are his words:

"I went out for the high school cross country team. On the first day of practice, the coach took us by bus to a course that ran up and down several hills over four miles. The prospects for those of us who were not in good shape, or who had never run distance races before, were particularly dismal on that late afternoon.

"Before he fired the starting gun, that coach said something I have never forgotten: 'What I am asking you to do today is to finish the race. If you don't plan to finish, then I don't want you to start. Simply stay where you are when the gun is fired. But if you start, then you *will* finish. You may slow down, or even stop for a bit, but you will not quit. Once you start, I want you to cross this finish line—*no matter what.*'

"The first mile was almost euphoric. The cool, fresh autumn air was a natural boost to my dogged determination to run a good race. But after a mile and a half or so the joy began to fade. By two miles, whatever pleasure there had been in all of this was totally gone. From then on, it was sheer drudgery. It was even worse for

some of my teammates. Some would stop for a bit of relief, then fall back into the panting procession.

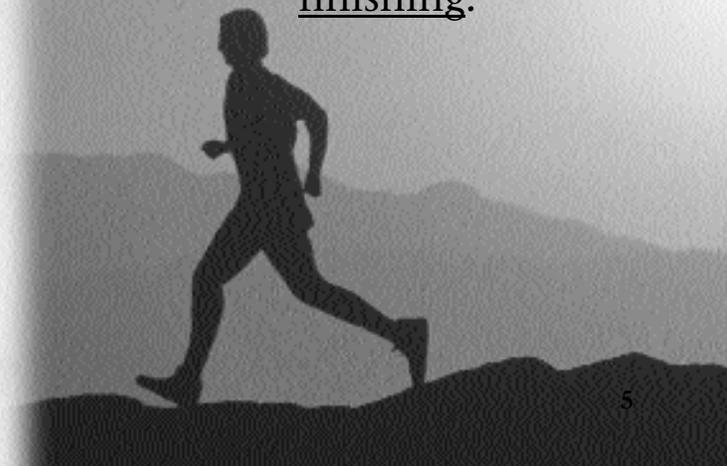
"My legs started to cramp. I did not know thigh muscles could ever get tired. I felt my breath would leave me forever. My lungs and chest cavity were in almost unbearable pain as I approached an enormous upward hill near the 2-1/2 mile mark.

"There is one thing and one thing only that kept me going: *Before I started, I had agreed to finish.* My body was spent, my mind screamed, 'Quit!' But the choice had been made when the gun went off. The issue was not open for renegotiation. There were no options, no short cuts. In inexpressible agony, I kept on running.

"I can barely remember crossing the finish line. I was told I came in fifth or sixth, but even that was not important. Every ounce of energy I knew had gone into finishing."

Then he comments, "Over the years, I have thought back to that experience as being an incredible picture of what it is to live the Christian life. In fact, the Scriptures more than once use a race as a metaphor of our life with Christ. And it is no mere sprint—it is a marathon." ♦

**When you start,
you must commit to
finishing.**



Traits of a Champion

1. *Self-analysis.*

The successful athlete knows his strengths and weaknesses, and engages in critical appraisal that is honest, but never negative. If you tell yourself you can't succeed, you kill all honest effort.

2. *Self-competition.*

A winner knows he can only control his own performance, so he competes against his own best effort, not that of others.

3. *Focus.*

The champion is always "present," concentrating on the task at hand.

4. *Confidence.*

The successful control anxiety by setting tough but reasonable goals. As goals are reached, new goals are set. By reaching goals, confidence increases.

5. *Toughness.*

This is a mental trait that involves accepting risk and trying to win, rather than trying not to lose. A winner sees change as opportunity and accepts responsibility for his own destiny.

6. *Have a plan.*

Talent alone is not enough. Plan to succeed through many small steps. Start taking those steps immediately. Keep taking those steps every day.

Everyone can develop these Christ-like traits. Everyone!

and the eternal prize, who would choose the weight!

But how can we discover these weights? How can we learn to recognize what hinders us?

One way is to take the advice of runners who have gone before us. If *they* found something an encumbrance, it will likely prove the same for us.

The second way to discover what hinders us is to *actually run*. As long as we take life easy and comfortable, the weights present little problem—we may even tell ourselves that they are needful. But when we start running, and look at them honestly, we quickly discover they are a burden.

What are some of these weights?

One might be the things we allow our eyes to look upon. TV is full of dangers, designed to pull us away from God. How easily a picture gets lodged in our minds, and how hard it is to *dislodge* it. The best "cure" is prevention: choose carefully, and avoid looking upon anything unholy, impure, unedifying.

Or it may be the books or magazines we read. Here again, ideas once in the mind are hard to uproot. Read only the best, and you will have taken a long step toward thinking about only the best.

Sometimes we may find ourselves reading what is not "wrong," but neither is it edifying. Are we, in this subtle way, adding to our weights? For remember, we are runners, and we do not want any encumbrance.

What we do not put into our minds we do not have to worry how to get out.

Another weight might be a relationship or even a hobby. It might be recreation or some healthful activity—good in its place, but so prone to get "out of place." Here is the Christian's challenge: to do all as to the Lord, allowing it to consume only a predefined portion of our time or interest. Our *first* concern must be the promoting of spiritual growth in ourselves and others. Anything that does not serve this purpose is a weight.

Even our occupation may be a weight. *Some* circumstances are beyond our control, but many others are a direct result of the choices we make. When we may choose, it is our Christian duty to choose wisely, governed first and always by our commitment to "run." The best "running" decision may look very unwise in this world; but if a lesser

position means more time to serve the Lord and a less "draining" environment, shouldn't we be glad to make the sacrifice?

The highest positions, the best wages, the bigger responsibilities may be attractive from a this-world point of view, but for the Christian runner they may be serious "weights"; and if they cost us the eternal crown, what have we gained?

The Apostle Paul, a prime runner in this race, gave us an exercise very useful in identifying these weights. It is his standard for worthy thinking:

"And now, my friends, all that is true, all that is noble, all that is just and pure, all that is lovable and gracious, whatever is excellent and admirable—fill all your thoughts with these things" (Phil. 4:8 NEB). We must keep our mental vision focused on things spiritual, things true, right, and good. Whatever does not meet this high standard is a weight.

In our secular minded age, it is all too easy to depend on the earth-



ly and forget the heavenly. When we are doing our best to discover the weights that hinder us, God will help us. Through one means or another, He will make known what we fail to see. It is His promise: *"If in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you"* (Phil. 3:15). He is serious about helping all would-be winners. When He sees men and women putting forth a maximum effort in the race, demonstrating that they are really serious about running, He helps.

O how watchful we must be, and how we need to entreat God's help in discovering the weights that hinder us. How subtle they are, how easily they slip into our hands. What we see, what we read, what we think about, what we enjoy, what we love—all need to be seen from the standpoint of winning the race. Any activity, even that which is lawful, can absorb too large a portion of our thought and interest and become a weight. When we are serving God, every aspect of our lives deserves careful scrutiny; our one question: *Is this the fastest, surest route to the Kingdom?* Is this pleasing to the Lord? What else will matter at all, if only we can cross the finish line on time!

STEP 2: Lay aside...the sin which besets.

Now we come to that dreadful word which God hates, and which every follower of His must learn to hate: sin. "Sin" refers especially to giving in to the promptings of our lower nature, anything that would bring the disfavor of God upon us. Sin is the transgressing of God's law, stepping over the line (1 John 3:4).

The *"sin that besets."* The word "beset" is especially meaningful here. It is derived from two Greek words meaning that which "thwarts in every direction, that which hinders the competitor." Here is the peril of sin in the context of the race. Again and again it would thwart our efforts to win, and must be forcefully set aside.

The warning is to every runner in the race for life. No one is exempt. We all have sin that besets, though fortunately all have not the same sin. For one it is pride, for another impatience, for another stubbornness, or sensitiveness, or jealousy, or immorality, or lying, or deceit, or a combination of these. It is any of the evils that plague our carnal nature and separate us from God. Any sin—it matters not what its nature—will hinder our running and disqualify us from receiving the prize. If we would win, we must *"lay aside [every]...sin which besets."*

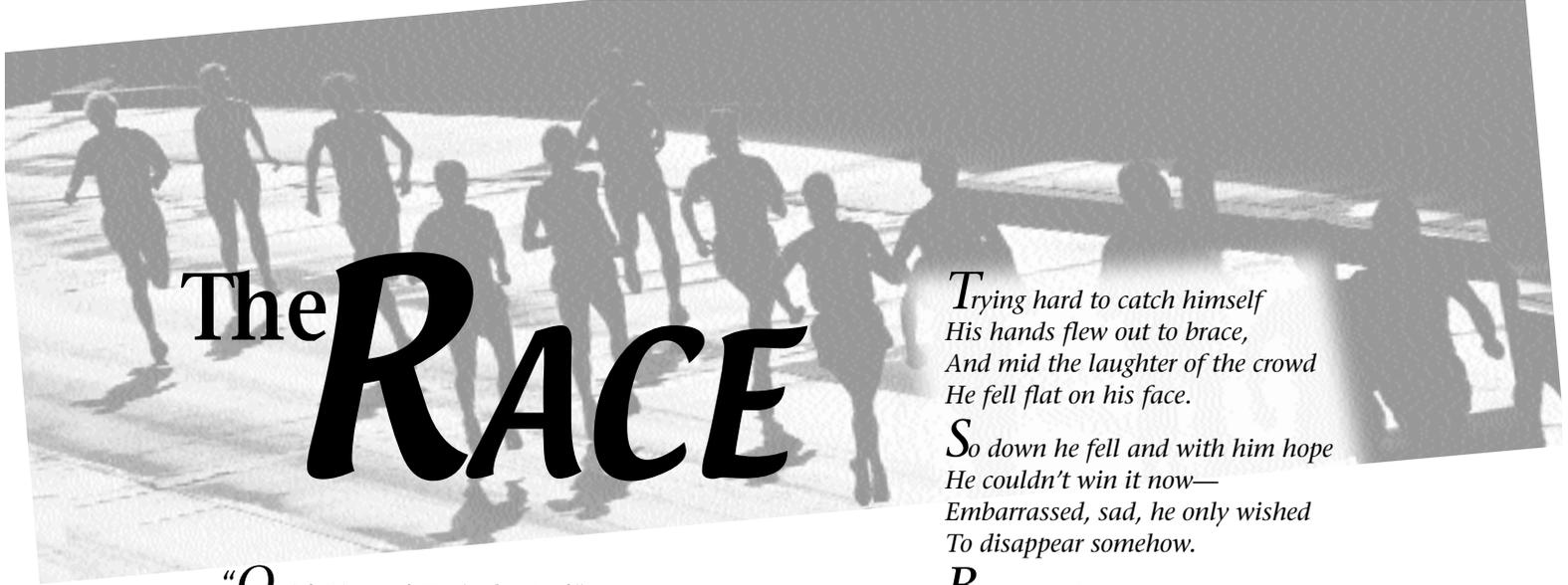
In keeping with the thought of Hebrews 11, the author focuses especially on the sin of unbelief. This was a sin that confronted each of the heroes of faith, and which they conquered valiantly. Four times the author of Hebrews repeated the fact that the Israelites died in the wilderness *"because of unbelief."* Thirty-one times he reminded his readers of the power, or value of faith. The Israelites *"entered not in because of unbelief"* (Heb. 4:6). In them the spoken Word of the Lord brought no results, *"not being mixed with faith in them that heard it"* (Heb. 4:2). And the warning is given to all: *"Let us labor therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief"* (Heb. 4:11).

Again we read, *"Be careful..., dear brothers and sisters. Make sure that your own hearts are not evil and unbelieving, turning you away from the living God"* (Heb. 3:12 NLT). The warning is solemn, the danger imminent to all. We are never completely free from the threat of unbelief. We are never so strong or so sure-footed that we do not need to reinforce our faith.

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*Focus on Jesus.
He ran the race, He set
the pace, He achieved
the goal.*





The RACE

*“Quit! Give up! You’re beaten!”
They shout out and plead.
“There’s just too much against you now.
This time you can’t succeed!”*

*And as I start to hang my head
In front of failure’s face,
My downward fall is broken by
The memory of a race.*

*And hope refills my weakened will
As I recall that scene;
For just the thought of that short race
Rejuvenates my being.*

*A children’s race—young boys, young men;
How I remember well.
Excitement, sure, but also fear;
It wasn’t hard to tell.*

*They all lined up so full of hope:
Each thought to win that race.
Or tie for first, or if not that,
At least take second place.*

*And fathers watched from off the side,
Each cheering for his son.
And each boy hoped to show his dad
That he would be the one.*

*The whistle blew and off they went!
Young hearts and hopes afire.
To win, to be the hero there
Was each young boy’s desire.*

*And one boy in particular
Whose dad was in the crowd,
Was running near the lead and thought,
“My dad will be so proud.”*

*But as he speeded down the field
Across a shallow dip,
The little boy who thought to win,
Lost his step and slipped.*

*Trying hard to catch himself
His hands flew out to brace,
And mid the laughter of the crowd
He fell flat on his face.*

*So down he fell and with him hope
He couldn’t win it now—
Embarrassed, sad, he only wished
To disappear somehow.*

*But as he fell his dad stood up
And showed his anxious face,
Which to the boy so clearly said:
“Get up and win the race!”*

*He quickly rose, no damage done
Behind a bit, that’s all—
And ran with all his mind and might
To make up for his fall.*

*So anxious to restore himself
To catch up and to win
His mind went faster than his legs;
He slipped and fell again!*

*He wished that he had quit before
With only one disgrace.
“I’m hopeless as a runner now;
I shouldn’t try to win the race!”*

*So he jumped up to try again.
Ten yards behind the last—
“If I’m to gain those yards,” he thought,
“I’ve got to move real fast.”*

*Exerting everything he had,
He gained eight or ten,
But trying so hard to catch the lead
He slipped and fell again!*

*Defeat! He lay there silently
A tear dropped from his eye—
“There’s no sense running anymore:
Three strikes I’m out, why try?”*

*The will to rise had disappeared
All hope had fled away;
So far behind, so error-prone:
A loser all the way.*

*“I’ve lost, so what’s the use,” he thought.
“I’ll live with my disgrace.”
But then he thought about his dad
Who soon he’d have to face.*

Get up," an echo sounded low.
"Get up and take your place.
You were not meant for failure here.
Get up and win the race."

With borrowed will, "Get up," it said,
"You haven't lost at all,
For winning is not more than this:
To rise each time you fall."

So up he rose to win once more,
And with a new commit
He resolved that win or lose,
At least he wouldn't quit.

So far behind the others now.
The most he'd ever been—
Still he gave it all he had
And ran as though to win.

Three times he'd fallen stumbling:
Three times he'd rose again.
Too far behind to hope to win
He still ran to the end.

They cheered the winning runner
As he crossed first place,
Head high and proud and happy;
No falling, no disgrace.

But when the fallen youngster
Crossed the line, last place,
The crowd gave him the greater cheer
For finishing the race.

And even though he came in last
With head bowed low, unproud,
You would have thought he won the
Race to listen to the crowd.

And to his dad he sadly said,
"I didn't do so well."
"To me you won," his father said.
"You rose each time you fell."

And when things seem dark and hard
And difficult to face,
The memory of that little boy
Helps me in my race.

For all of life is like that race.
With ups and downs and all.
And all you have to do to win
Is rise each time you fall.

Quit!" "Give up, you're beaten!"
They still shout in my face.
But another voice within me says:
"GET UP AND WIN THE RACE!"

—Author unknown

Will You WIN Life's Marathon?

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But do we realize the magnitude of the Israelites' failure? These people, who failed because of unbelief, saw mighty demonstrations of the power of God. To them was visible the glory of the Lord filling the Tabernacle. Angels guarded and directed their way, a pillar of fire by night and a cloud by day. Angels stepped in to destroy or to bless, as needed. Could privileged people who saw all this fail "because of unbelief"? Yet they did.

What does this say to us, we who have seen neither the cloud, nor pillar, nor the open glory of the Lord?

Naturally we are inclined to think of unbelief as a minor thing, but it is not so in Scripture. In the eyes of God, unbelief is sin. To fail to believe when God has given volumes of evidence is an affront to Him. It is saying by our actions that we know more, we know better. It is a rejection of His knowledge, His mandates, His law. It is a closing of our eyes to the wonders of His work and the marvels of His handiwork. How can we do it? How can we be so foolish, so blind?

History records many instances where unbelief was paralyzing, even deadly. This is why the book of Hebrews places such emphasis on faith. The author introduces the honor roll of faith with these challenging words: "Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him" (Heb. 11:6 NIV).

If we really believe, if we are fully convinced that the immortal crown can be ours, nothing whatever will be able to keep us from winning it. Nothing! We will run, and we will win!

STEP 3: Run with perseverance.

The third part of being great men and women of faith is that we must actually run—and keep running.

What does it mean "to run," in everyday terms?

Running suggests steady, rapid, vigorous, continuous action, by which we make visible progress down the racecourse.

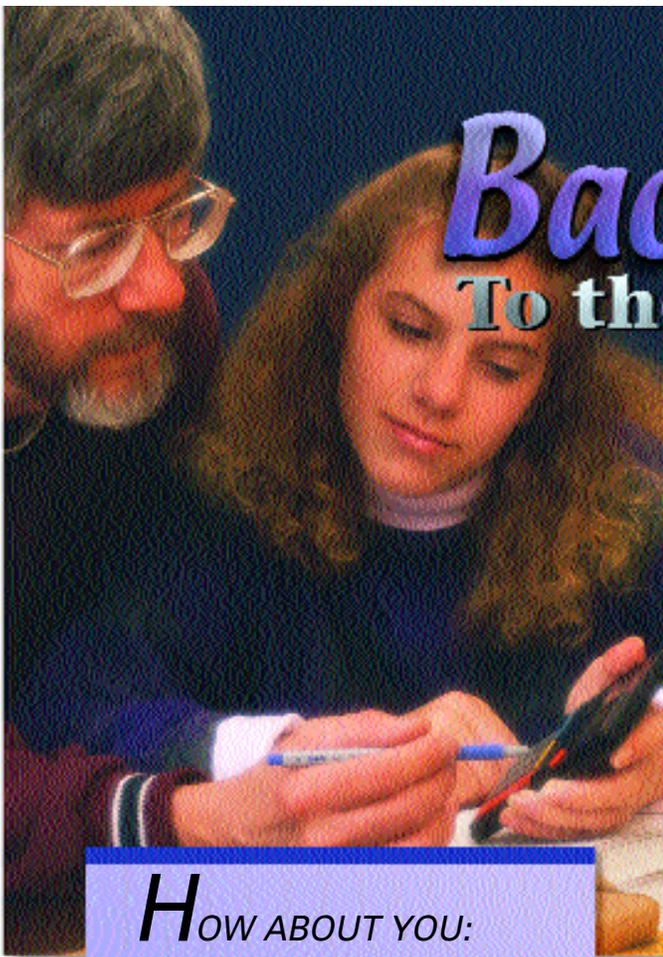
To "run" in the Christian race means doing all in our power to be examples of the believers, in word, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity (1 Tim. 4:12); to think right, feel right, do right. It means loving whatever God loves, and hating everything He forbids. And it means doing it all quickly, rapidly, right now.

We have no time for indecision. If we would win, we must run now.

And we must run *with patience*. Naturally we grow tired of anything we must repeat over and over and over again. It is not natural to keep running day after day, year after year. But if we would obtain the prize, we must run today, tomorrow, and as long as God gives us another tomorrow.

As the Apostle Paul put it, citing his own experience, "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like

continued on page 17



Back To the Beginning

by RUSSELL HAMBY

"I can't! I just can't do it!" Diana cried out. She wadded up the paper and burst into tears.

"What can't you do?" Dad looked up from his reading.

"I can't get these figures to balance," sniffed Diana. "Tomorrow when I turn in our club treasurer's report, everyone will think I'm dumb. And Janet will be happy!"

Dad looked at Diana's report. "Speaking of Janet, I haven't seen her lately. I thought she was your best friend. Why would she be happy if you make a mistake in your report?"

Diana hesitated. "Well, we both wanted to be treasurer, and we quarreled. I got elected, but she still tried to tell me how to do the job. I finally informed her that I'd do things my own way. Since then we haven't been speaking," Diana said sadly.

"I'm sorry to hear that, and I know God must be, too," began Dad. Suddenly he pointed to some of the figures on the report. "Say, Diana, go back to the beginning and add up your figures again. See what you get."

Diana tried it, and it worked. "I found my mistake, Dad!" she exclaimed. "I missed that one little figure at the very top! Now it's right."

"It often helps to go back to the beginning," Dad said. "You know, Diana, I think it would be a good idea to go back to the beginning of your quarrel with Janet, too."

"What do you mean?" asked Diana.

"It sounds like both of you wanted your own way in the beginning. That was selfish. Then you hurt each other by using cutting words," Dad explained. "How about going to Janet and apologizing for wanting your own way? Listen to what she has to say. 'I'm sure she has some good ideas.'"

Diana sighed. "Dad. She was wrong, but so was I. I'll go back to the beginning and tell Janet I was wrong. I want us to be friends again." ♦

TO MEMORIZE: "You ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow." —2 Cor. 2:7 NIV

HOW ABOUT YOU:

Is there someone with whom you've had a disagreement? Are you sure it was all that person's fault? What might you might have done wrong?

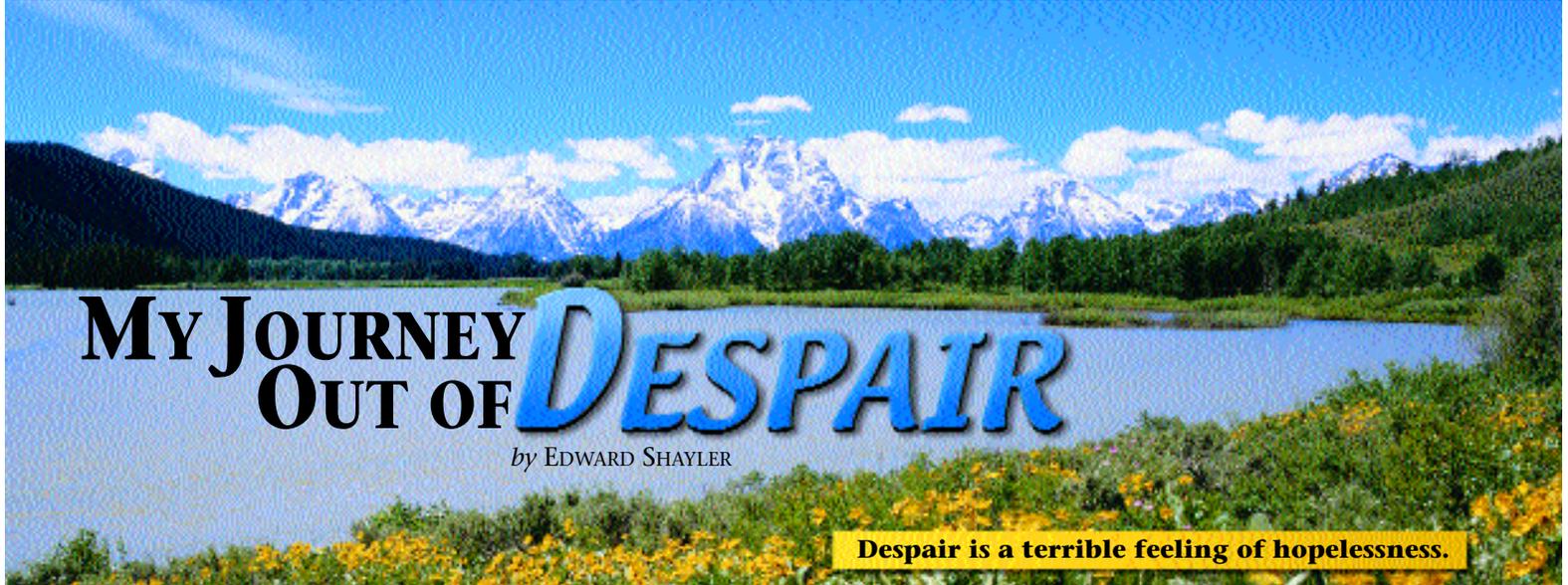
Take the initiative: confess your sin to God; then go to the other person and apologize. A restored friendship will make you both happy.

Don't carry old grudges.

FROM THE BIBLE:

"So if you are standing before the altar in the Temple, offering a sacrifice to God, and suddenly remember that a friend has something against you, leave your sacrifice there beside the altar and go and apologize and be reconciled to him, and then come and offer your sacrifice to God." —Matt. 5:23-24 TLB

Taken from *The One Year Book of Family Devotions*, Vol. 1, Children's Bible Hour, c 1988. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers. All rights reserved.



MY JOURNEY OUT OF DESPAIR

by EDWARD SHAYLER

Despair is a terrible feeling of hopelessness.

In the beginning of our lives, we have no understanding of what despair is. We become aware of despair only as we live our lives. Yet I am almost sure that I am not the only one on earth that has experienced it.

There is a slow process by which it becomes a reality. First we become aware of a sensation of pleasure and begin to pursue it with great abandon, all the while being told by our peers what great progress we are making, progress that is visible in the prizes we acquire and the treasures that we covet.

But whatever the prizes and treasures, we also learn very soon that there is a price that must eventually be paid. The recipient *must* pay that price, and sometimes the price is almost overwhelming. At other times we may refuse to pay it or defer the obligation, and the result is some degree of despair.

My first encounter with such a prize was at a very early age when growing up on my Grandfather's homestead. The land was of poor quality, and stony; in fact, my grandfather had labored on it for years and was barely able to feed the remaining family. His children had all grown up and left as soon as they were of age. I worked with the remaining children from daylight to dark, trying to help. I saw the food, nice shoes, clothes and rigs that other people enjoyed and could not understand why our situation should be so different. I began to envy others, and this caused a feeling of hopelessness.

At eleven years of age I was suddenly sent to a large city to live, and for the first time I experienced the possibility

that my dreams would come true. Quickly I forgot about the beautiful things of nature: the scent of fox willow in the spring, of newly mown grass, of rain on the parched earth, the taste of wild strawberries, and the view of the stars at night in the country.

My new home did not in any way help fulfill my dreams, but it did indeed expand the plans behind them by making me acquainted with numerous possibilities: electric lights, elevators, street cars, trains, high buildings, airplanes, streets, bridges. My new parents were also poor and it was a time of depression, so possessions were sparse, but we did have hot and cold water, flush toilets, bathtubs, electric lights, and an insulated (rented) house. There was also a radio that could be used, but only with permission.

I had done well in school, living at home was no longer an option; the new parents could not support the increased family. Though employment was scarce, I found a job shining shoes in a shoeshine parlor, and was able to earn enough pay for everything I needed. But it had no future.

About this time my oldest brother, whom I loved deeply, became reinfected with a terrible disease (osteomyelitis) he had contracted seven years earlier, and was in the hospital. When I was visiting him in the hospital—a visit that turned

out to be the last—he told me he did not want to live, that there was no hope for him to ever recover, and that he had finally made peace with God. He would not change his mind. We prayed together and I left. The next morning we were notified that he had died in his sleep, he was twenty-one years old.

Soon after, war broke out. I could see that joining the army would eventually be mandatory. Enlisting almost immediately seemed like the best option. It was not long before I was well on my way, receiving compliments from my peers. I married, was promoted several

“I think you ought to know, dear brothers and sisters, about the trouble we went through in the province of Asia. We were crushed and completely overwhelmed, and we thought we would never live through it. In fact, we expected to die. But as a result, we learned not to rely on ourselves, but on God who can raise the dead. 2 Cor. 1:8–9 NLT

times, and given more responsibility.

Now I had arrived. I began to forget the pleasant feeling of being with my brother, the faith one of my teachers had in me, the delight of numerous street car rides with friends, and the pleasure of evening walks in the park and an ice cream cone with Lorna. Now new responsibilities required my full attention and they had to be performed with the dignity of a top sergeant who

had a strong voice. Many times during this period it was not according to my dream, but I was caught in a situation that demanded many moments of truth without being considerate of others. When a person's life is at stake it can cause a plan of selfishness; somehow I squeaked through it.

During this time, despair became a full partner in my daily life. The worst

“But we hold this treasure in pots of earthenware, so that the immensity of the power is God's and not our own. We are subjected to every kind of hardship, but never distressed; we see no way out but we never despair.” 2 Cor. 4:7–8 NJB

time was toward the very end of the war, when I had been a prisoner in a Japanese camp for almost four years. The future looked bad for us, an invasion was imminent, and we were working in coal mines. Our captors assured us that when the invasion occurred, they would put us down the mine and blow the mine up. We watched with fear as the defenses were being prepared. Thousands of troops were moved into our area, and civilian men, women and even children were being armed. The large Allied battleships began to shell along the coastline about ten miles away. Air raids were intense. It became difficult to sleep. There was no sign of hope. In fear everyone stopped talking. All of us were in great despair; we could not see a way out.

The atomic bomb was not even remotely considered; it came as a complete surprise. When it suddenly became a reality, my first reaction was to fall to my knees and THANK GOD. I was aware of the terrible price that the enemy must have paid, that it was now their turn to face despair. At the same time I was aware of the great loss of life that would have happened on both sides had the invasion occurred.

The ELATION!!! Of being free again and without fear, returning home and being with Lorna once more was almost overwhelming. It was an experience I wanted to continue. But reality had to

be faced. Military training is not a useful asset to build a solid footing in the land of commerce. I found myself ill equipped to fit into this strange new (civil) world. Social life became my refuge. Revelry was the favorite part. Many others were doing the same. Each would have a more convincing tale to tell than the other. It was a world of falsehoods, where to be successful was a matter of exposure. It became an expensive proposition, but I would not give up my pursuit. Maybe, just maybe things would get better.

Meanwhile my wife had become indifferent, my children were growing up without me, we became estranged, and once again life had no purpose. My old friend despair became a constant companion, and defeat was the result. I had lost everything that had been dear, and that terrible feeling of hopelessness surfaced again. Fear drove the chariot, and I didn't even like “me.” What could be done? In a sober moment of clarity a wonderful thought surfaced: Yes, I had forgotten the only help there was left. “GOD, PLEASE HELP ME,” I cried.

He did.

That was the last time I experienced despair. God has helped me ever since that day, but it has required work on my part. My attitude had to change. There were some who explained the changes I needed to make in order to find peace. I was encouraged to seek a permanent relationship with God. Yet the past kept surfacing, and the hopeless feeling that God would reject me for a wasted life made any spiritual effort seem useless. I had read the Bible, but could not see how forgiveness was possible. The only remaining solution was to completely change my attitude.

For the first time in my life I felt humble, and this experience caused a complete reversal in life, along with a deep gratitude to God for just being alive. Now instead of asking, “What can God do for me?” my desire became, “What can I do for God?” At least now I had purpose.

Amazing things began to happen—

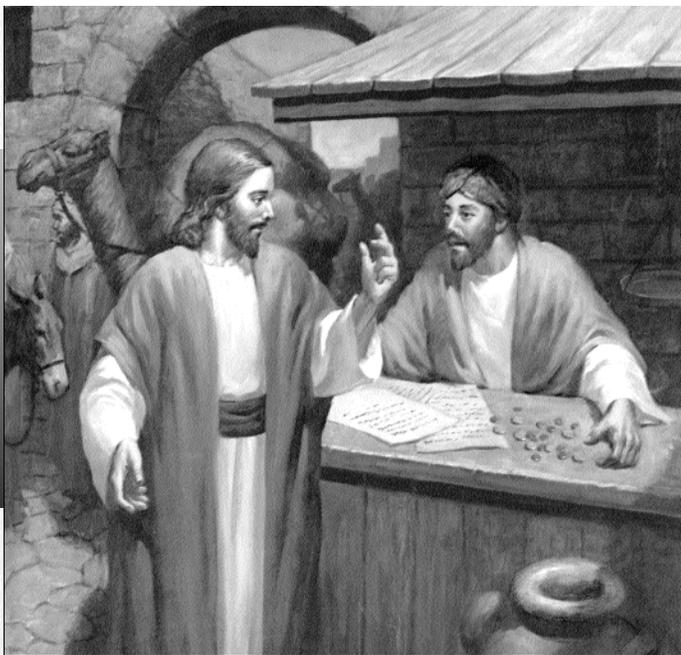
like getting a full night's rest, a new job, a raise in pay, a house of our own, holidays. Lorna was a great help and encouragement. She invited me to accompany her to a church in Rochester, New York, of which she was a member. Since we planned a trip east anyway, it seemed reasonable for me to go, and there were many questions to ask.

On that first visit to Megiddo, instead of the condemnation I expected, I found a foundation of hope, a welcome and a friendliness that gave me a determination to seek more answers and understanding. This has been constant for almost thirty years.

Now that DESPAIR has turned to joy and HOPE, life has become a wonderful, meaningful adventure, and the lonely feeling seems so far away that it is hard to remember. Now brothers and sisters are just moments away who are willing to share help for anyone who needs it, and GOD is not far off. My past only reinforces my determination to find the reality of my dream and the ultimate life that can be ours. Today I can remember the scent of fox willow, of newly mown grass, and the earth when it rains; the taste of wild strawberries, and the pleasure of evening walks in the park and an ice cream cone with Lorna.

What was the reason for my despair? I had no faith. Faith would have provided a plan instead of dreams, and most of the predicaments would never have existed. This does not mean escaping hardship but it places a person in a much better position to overcome despair at its beginning. How do I know? Because the hardships I have encountered since, have only given me a better understanding and purpose for EVERLASTING LIFE.

Consider what St. Paul said in 2 Tim. 4:7–8, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.” Here is a man who should have been full of despair, but there is no place in the Scripture that even alludes to it. He was so full of hope there was no place for despair. ♦



Know Your Bible?

WOMEN OF THE BIBLE

1. What prophetess sat under a palm tree as she judged Israel?
2. Who, at the command of Joab, brought about reconciliation between David and Absalom?
3. Who was the wife of King Agrippa?
4. Who saved Joash, the young prince, by hiding him for seven years in the temple?
5. Who was Asenath?
6. Who was Rebekah's nurse?
7. What queen began her reign by destroying all but one of the royal family?
8. Who made amends for her churlish husband by being kind to David, and later married him?
9. Who slew Sisera, and in what way?
10. Who was the wife of Ananias, who joined him in his lie?
11. Who was Ishmael's mother?
12. Who led the dances of the women after the passage of the Red Sea?
13. What was Dorcas' other name?
14. Who was Keturah?

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON THIS PAGE

WOMEN OF THE BIBLE

1. Deborah (Judges 4:4-5)
2. The wise woman of Tekoah (2 Sam. 14:1-33)
3. Bernice (Acts 25:13)
4. Jehosheba, the aunt of Joash (2 Kings 11:1-3)
5. The wife of Joseph (Gen. 41:45)
6. Deborah (Gen. 35:8)
7. Athaliah (2 Kings 11:1)
8. Abigail (1 Sam. 25:1-42)
9. Jael, wife of Heber, by driving a nail into his temple as he lay asleep (Judges 4:18-22)
10. Sapphira (Acts 5:1-10)
11. Hagar (Gen. 16:15)

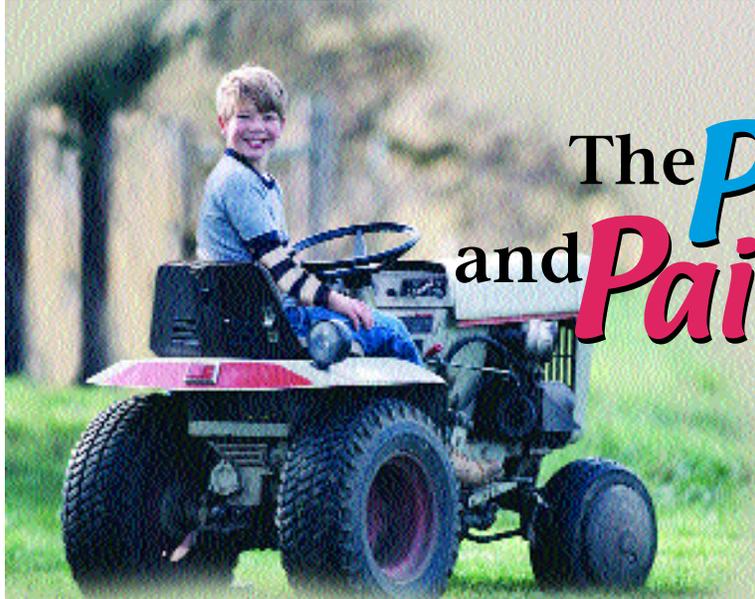
12. Miriam (Ex. 15:20-21)
13. Tabitha (Acts 9:36)
14. One of Abraham's wives (Gen. 25:1)

ABOUT THE TWELVE

1. When Jesus called them from their fishing boat (Matt. 4:21-22)
2. Tax collector (Matt. 9:9)
3. Cast out unclean spirits and to heal all manner of sickness and disease (Matt. 10:1)
4. Simon (Peter), Andrew, James the son of Zebedee, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus (also

called Judas, brother of James), Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot (replaced by Apostle Paul) (Matt. 10:2-4; Luke 6:14-16)

5. Israelites (Matt. 10:5-6)
6. Shake off the dust of their feet (Matt. 10:14)
7. A spirit (Matt. 14:26-29)
8. Peter (Matt. 14:29)
9. Thirty (Matt. 26:14-16)
10. "The other disciple" (believed to be John) Peter (John 20:2-6)
11. Thomas (John 14:1-7)
12. Andrew (John 1:40-41)
13. Four: Peter, Andrew, James and John (Matt. 4:18; Luke 5:10)



The Pleasures and Pains of GROWING UP

A Christian Message To Today's Youth

Let's give pleasure a try. Let's look for the "good things" in life.' But I found that this, too, was meaningless" (Eccl. 1:13; 2:1 NLT).

Changing is also a part of adolescence. The most important part of this text is: "Remember also your creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come, and the years draw near, of which you will say, 'I have no pleasure in them'" (12:1 ESV). "Evil days"—that is the author's view of old age. It is sad, but probably a flashback on his own dilatory attitude toward life. For if Solomon remembered his Creator in the days of his youth, he was hardly out of his youth when he forced God into the remotest area of his life, and the aging king saw no pleasure as he looked ahead. So he is saying to the young, take advantage of your time of physical virility and strength. Make the most of these years, make them count for your Creator.

During adolescence, the body does begin coming into its own. Enormous physical changes take place, suddenly we're as tall as most of the adults who used to look like giants. Suddenly we can compete, at least physically, on a more equal footing in the adult world. Yet these pleasurable changes can also bring pain. During the teenage years, we often feel like our body has turned on us—it is out of control. The hands that were a reasonable size are too large, feet, once so nimble, suddenly are stumbling. Our body is changing and growing—and we don't know what to do with it.

Changing is a big part of growing up. In fact, it is a part of every stage of life. The sooner we accept it, the more happiness we will find.

Centering is another part of adolescence. Solomon says, "Remember your creator in the days of your youth" (12:1 NIV). The word "remember" implies prior knowledge, the assumption that God was not a total stranger during childhood years. Adolescence is a time of recalling and reshaping. If we learned of God during childhood, we can develop that knowledge through prayer and studying the Word of God as we face the challenges of adolescence and young adulthood. Life will take on meaning and purpose, and we will feel confident as we take steps toward maturity.

Deciding is another part of growing up. As adolescents, we face many decisions. Our writer reminds us, "Be happy, young man, while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth." In other words, do what you feel like, enjoy the vitality of youth. But—don't forget his next statement: "Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you to judgment" (11:9 NIV). An ominous note? Perhaps, but a very necessary one. We need to remember that we are accountable for our lives. We are accountable for our decisions, and we

T Read: Ecclesiastes 11:8 through 12:14

through all his pessimism, the writer of Ecclesiastes has a few good things to say about the years of youth. For instance, "If a man live many years, let him rejoice in them all; but let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many" (11:8 ASV). That is to say, "Be grateful for every stage of life. Celebrate all of it. But remember, you only live once." Now this speaks to me. I have to say that every succeeding period of my life has been the best. I have no desire to return to any of them. I rejoice in them all.

He goes on to add these words: "Remove grief and anger from your heart and put away pain [literally, evil—footnote] from your body, because childhood and the prime of life are fleeting" (11:10 NASB). It is not easy to do this, to dismiss the pain which results from evil at any life stage. Trying to avoid the hurt and frustration of adolescence by saying, "It's only an illusion, just a phase you're passing through," doesn't work well. Pain—for adolescent or adult—is very real.

Adolescence is often that period of life when you begin to feel and see as if for the very first time. It's like having your eyes peeled and your heart opened so that deep pleasure—and deep pain—are experienced at new levels. What has been previously unperceived or undefined now bursts onto the stage of emotional awareness. Pain, anger, shame, ecstasy all take on new meaning as we start understanding what is going on inside our hearts and minds.

These new realities prod us toward action. Now, we are awake, and we want to do something—plan a life, learn some truth, enjoy ourselves, get on with it! Suddenly we run out of patience. There is an emotional ferment in adolescence that can stimulate important activity, and those of us who are older need to stay in touch with it.

Are you ready for your own experiences? The writer of Ecclesiastes was no exception. Have you thought about the things in this world that you would like to try? He would say to you immediately, "Been there, done that." And in each case the outcome was the same. In each case there is pleasure and pain, promise and threat. He wrote: "I devoted myself to search for understanding and to explore by wisdom everything being done in the world. I soon discovered that God has dealt a tragic existence to the human race....I said to myself, 'Come now,

must decide how best to invest our lives. Will we take charge of our lives, or will we allow outside pressures to dominate us? Will we go by what we know to be right, or will we listen to our undisciplined conscience that says, "If it feels good, I'll do it"? Be warned: this decision will bring pain. The pressures of the world around us are powerful. Studies in juvenile delinquency often blame parents for much of the problem—and rightly so. But increasingly, other factors, like peers, the media, and greater mobility make the task of deciding even more crucial for today's young person.

Again we should listen to our Old Testament author: "Fear God, and keep his commands, for this is the duty of every person." A life committed to obedience to God cannot go wrong. Why? Because God is the judge, and "God will judge us for everything we do, including every secret thing, whether good or bad" (Eccl. 12:13-14 NLT).

To live as one responsible to God means stretching ourselves to follow the model of Christ. It also means taking care of that self God has given us—physically, emotionally, spiri-

tually. It means taking seriously the great gift of MY LIFE.

We bear a direct responsibility to God for what we do with our life—it really is His property.

Experiencing, changing, centering, deciding—all of these are important areas for young people and all promise pleasure and pain. But be sure that the life committed to God and His way will win in the end.

Whatever our stage in life, let us start immediately to care enough about ourselves to be responsible to God. As much as we change ourselves, that much we change the world.

Now don't think the world will change in a summer vacation, or that you will change your own life in two weeks. But in a lifetime you can begin changing the part of the world you touch most directly, by modeling the life of Christ in your own conduct.

"Remember your Creator in the days of your youth" (12:1 NIV). It is a great time to remember, to deepen the journey of our own personal faith.

Today really is the first day of the rest of our life! ♦

Dear God

My name is Rachel Shepherd and I am 14 years old, and I live in Knox, Indiana. My grandmother receives your monthly magazine, and recently, I wrote a poem. She gave me this e-mail address so I could ask you if you would be interested in publishing my poem. I would be very grateful if you could read it and send me a reply. Thank you.

*Dear God,
I'm writing You this letter,
though I'd rather bow my head,
but I'm in school right now, You see,
and a prayer must not be said.
Oh, we can pierce our noses,
and our tongues and eyebrows, too,
but it makes us awful people,
if we should speak to You.
Our hair can be bright purple,
yellow, orange, blue, or green,
but we would be in trouble,
if a Bible should be seen.
We can kiss and hug and fondle
in these high school halls,
we can trade in drugs and cursings,
we can have huge fights and brawls.
But one word of God or Jesus,
one bowed head or spoken prayer,
we are seen as hardened criminals:
Break the rules? I do not dare.*

*I may not be able to carry Your Word,
but that's all right, You see,*

*because I've hid it in my heart,
And that's the best for me.*

*Now I pray:
I pray for my friends and loved ones,
And help each one to see,
that You are the way, the truth, the life,
And only You can save me.*

*I pray for the weak and tired, Lord,
And help them to pull through,
but if not, I pray they made the choice,
to obey and follow You.*

*And lastly I pray for myself
that You show me the way to go,
and help me understand and learn,
and as a Christian, grow.*

*So now I end this letter,
and thank You God, Amen.
I want You to hear this prayer,
I can't wait to speak again.*

by RACHEL SHEPHERD (age 14)

ABOUT BAPTISM

“In reading your magazine (the Megiddo Message) on a monthly basis, I find that baptism is never mentioned as a commandment of Jesus for entrance into the Kingdom. Please advise as I find this rather peculiar. Thanks in advance.”

You are correct, we do not mention it often, although it is a good question.

Is baptism a Scriptural ordinance? Definitely.

There is no mention of water baptism being commanded as a rite to be observed in the Old Testament. The first mention of it is with the arrival of John the forerunner of Jesus. Jesus was baptized, and He commanded His apostles to baptize. However, a study of the subject indicates that it was part of a special arrangement for a special time when the disciples were also given the Holy Spirit power and were able to perform miracles. In fact, baptism was generally associated with receiving the Holy Spirit (see Acts 8:12–16; 2:38–41; 10:45–48; 19:3–6). When Jesus commissioned His apostles to go out and teach, He said, *“Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them...”* etc. (Matt. 28:19). It is recorded also at the close of the gospel of Mark: *“Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved...”* (Mark 16:15–16). A few verses later it is stated that this commission was fulfilled. *“They went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following”* (Mark 16:20).

Since the power to perform miracles was given only for a time, we believe that the requirement to baptize ended with the withdrawing of that power, at the end of that age. For this reason we do not believe the Bible teaches that literal baptism is necessary for salvation today.

“You are correct about the fact that water baptism wasn’t mentioned in the Old Testament, just as the Gentiles weren’t party to the promises made in Genesis 12:7 to Abram. Not until Jesus taught the new covenant of hearing, believing, confessing, and obeying was it necessary for the Gentiles to even listen to Him or the disciples.”

If the Gentiles were not part of the promises made to Abraham in Genesis 12:7, why does the last statement of the promise in Genesis 12:3 read: *“In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed”*? Doesn’t it seem that the blessing on Abraham was to affect people outside Abraham’s family as well as inside it? Surely all families on the earth are not descended from Abraham!

In the last book of the Old Testament (Malachi), the prophet stated that God’s goodness would be recognized *“beyond the borders of Israel”* (Mal. 1:5).

Actually, God never denied His message or His blessings to anyone who would listen, whatever their nationality happened to be. Ruth was a Moabitess, and even came into the lineage of Jesus. Elijah was sent to help a foreigner in the city of Zarephath during the famine (1 Kings 17:8–16). In the New Testament the authors took great care to state that *“God is no respecter of persons”* (nationality or blood) but only of character (Acts 10:34–35; Rom. 2:11; Eph. 6:9; Col. 3:25; Jas. 2:1; 1 Pet. 1:17). In every age and among every people, the one who wanted to receive God’s eternal blessings had to listen to and obey God, even during Old Testament times (see Ex. 19:5–6; Jer. 7:23).

“Jesus showed how important baptism was by having John baptize Him. John records Jesus’ statement and commandment to Nicodemus in John 3: 1–7. John 3 v5 reflects that if a man is not born again of water he will not enter the Kingdom.”

It seems that you equate being “born of water” to being “baptized of water.” I am not sure this can be upheld by the definitions of the words as used in Scripture. The word “baptize” is translated from the Greek *baptizo*, and means a burying, an immersing. The word translated “born” in John 3 is *gennao*, and means “to bear, beget, bring forth, conceive, be delivered of,” as in a human birth. This was Nicodemus’ understanding of it, as shown by the question he asked Jesus (John 3:4).

Notice also that Jesus says one must be *“born of water”* AND *“of the Spirit”* before he can enter the Kingdom. Two different births are indicated, and the second birth (born of the Spirit) indicates a physical change, according to Jesus: *“The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit”* (John 3:8). Notice the wording: *“so is every one that is born of the Spirit.”* Those who inherit the Kingdom, who are *“born of the Spirit,”* receive a physical change so that they are able to come and go like the wind!—superhuman ability.

“If what you say is true that this act was only for a short period of time then the Kingdom of God has already been established and we have all lost out.”

How can anyone living on earth today “have lost out on the Kingdom”? The Kingdom, when established, will be worldwide, and it will last forever; it will not end. The prophet Daniel included both facts in his description of this Kingdom which *“the God of heaven”* will set up, saying that it will supersede all former kingdoms and *“it will never be destroyed... it will last for ever”* (Dan. 7:27; 2:44).

Jesus will have “dominion...from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth” (Ps. 72:8). “The Lord shall be king over all the earth” (Zech. 14:9). And Jesus’ own words, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10)—all tell us that when the Kingdom comes we will see and know it.

“One last note to look at is in Paul’s letter to the Galatians. In Gal. 3:26–29 Paul also speaks of baptism and being heirs according to the promise.”

We believe that the baptism which is binding on us today is not a physical rite but a level of spiritual commitment, a total immersing of ourselves in Christ’s teaching, which means learning it, believing it, and practicing it. Gal. 3:26–29 confirms this. The text reads: “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” Wouldn’t this “baptizing” have to be more than a physical immersing in water? Notice the result of it: those who have been baptized “have put on Christ.”

There is no evidence in Scripture that the physical act of immersion changed one’s behavior. The baptism that accomplishes this change is the one Paul spoke of in Romans 6, in which we are “buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:3–5). The result of this spiritual baptizing “into death,” this immersing in Christ that is so complete that it is a “death,” results in a drastic change of behavior, so drastic that it is called “walking in newness of life.” The result of this baptism is the making of an upright character which God will accept and bless in His Kingdom.

“Again I say if your statement is correct about baptism being for only a period of time then what hope have we?”

We have hope of life eternal if we cooperate with the spiritual baptism Christ preached, that baptism which means immersing oneself in the teachings of Christ, which results in total commitment, a dying to one’s former life so that one can live the new life in Christ, extends through the whole time the Gospel is preached. And this spiritual baptism is still required. ♦

Will You WIN Life’s Marathon?

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a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize” (1 Cor. 9:24–27 NIV).

STEP 4: Focus on Jesus, our Great Example.

Perhaps the most important element in running the race with perseverance is where we focus our vision. We are to “fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.”

A right focus is essential to a life of faith. “Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God” (Col. 3:1–3 NIV).

Why focus on Jesus? Because He is our perfect example. He ran the race, He set the pace, He achieved the goal. And if we follow in His footsteps, we can win, too.

What was His key to success? It was His concentration on the goal. He kept His eye fixed on it: “for the joy set before him.”

Looking forward has been the pattern of all God’s winners. It was the pattern of Abraham long ago. He was “looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (Heb. 11:10 NIV).

Those great saints set their hope and their hearts on eternity. They lived in the present as in the light of an eternal future. Every one of them would have said with Paul, “Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (2 Cor. 4:16–18 NIV).

These great men and women of faith were not victims of the society in which they lived. And they were not running by chance. They were running to win! They knew what motivated them. They were pilgrims, strangers, sojourners passing through life, not clinging to what was along the way but moving toward what lay beyond it. They believed that God had prepared something eternal for them, and above everything else they wanted it!

This was the dominant thought of the Apostle Paul when he wrote, “But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body” (Phil. 3:20–21 NIV).

Like Paul, our home is not here. We are not citizens of this world. We are here only for the purpose of running—and winning—the race. Our eye is fixed on what lies ahead. We live with an eternal perspective.

This is not natural. By nature we incline to the earthly, not the heavenly. Our natural bent is strong, and at times we must deal ruthlessly with it. The pain is acute, the temptation to relax almost overpowering. But we are not the first to confront these problems. Runners before us have had them, and have conquered them; and so can we.

The Lord wants us to get on with this business of living as holy people, stay on the track and finish the race. There is no time to dwell on past “good” running, no time to ponder our beginnings. There is only just time to finish the race.

What lies at the finish line? It is “the crown of life” (James 1:12), the fadeless wreath of immortality, with glory and honor beyond our fondest imaginations. Is it attainable? Of course it is, or we would not be running. Our Lord attained it, and all the winners before us, and all the hosts of heavenly angels!

In their victory we can see the certainty of our own—it’s a Marathon we mean to win! ♦

A photograph of a forest path. The path is dirt and leads into a dense forest of tall, moss-covered trees. In the distance, a family of raccoons is visible on the path. The scene is lush and green, suggesting a summer or late spring setting.

Around the Bend

*We never know what waits around the bend;
The Master Planner must have planned it so,
That we may fully savor each day's blend
Of happiness and sadness as we go.*

*For even joy's full flavor would be lost
Were it not given us in morsel size;
And sorrow would exact too great a cost,
Were not tomorrow's pain screened from our eyes.*

*There is a comfort comes with each day's end,
A hope that clings to things beyond our sight.
We never know what waits around the bend—
enough to know that dawn shall follow night.*

—Selected

Anger is the wind that blows out the light of reason.

It isn't your position that makes you happy or unhappy; It's your DISposition.

Oh, to have an eraser that would wipe out painful memories of sins forgiven, those stabbing memories of the times we've disobeyed God's holy law. Thank God that we can turn, and that He will forgive and that those sins can be erased!

God does more than hear your words. He reads your heart.

For every minute you are angry you lose 60 seconds of happiness.

The heaviest load a man carries on his back is a pack of grudges.

Advice is seldom welcome; and those who need it most seem to like it the least.

By failing to prepare we prepare to fail.

When it's hardest to pray we need to pray the hardest.

TODAY

This is the beginning of a new day God has given me to use as I will. I can waste it or use it for good. What I do today is important, because I'm exchanging a day of my life for it. When tomorrow comes this day will be gone forever, leaving in its place something that I have traded for it. I want it to be gain, not loss; good, not evil; success not failure, in order that I shall not regret the price I paid for it.

Faith in God makes the present tolerable and the future glorious.



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

Time spent in prayer is not time lost, it is time gained.

God puts work into your life; He expects you to put life into your work.

When you flee temptation, be sure you don't leave a forwarding address.

You will never hear those who love God's Word murmur or complain.

Tomorrow is often the busiest day of the year.

He who has slight thoughts of sin never had great thoughts of God.

Walking with God now will lead to the Glory Land.

Christianity is the one place where surrender brings victory.

What we know is very little, but what we are ignorant of is immense.

ABC's *for* FATHERS

Always trust your children to God's care.

Bring—not send—they to church and Sunday school.

Challenge them to high goals.

Delight in their achievements.

Exalt the Lord in their presence.

Frown on evil.

Give them genuine love.

Hear their problems.

Ignore not their childish fears.

Joyfully accept their apologies, and apologize when you are wrong.

Keept their confidence.

Live a good example before them.

Make them your friends.

Never ignore their endless questions.

Open your heart to their love.

Pray with them every day.

Quicken your interest in their spirituality.

Remember their needs.

Show them how to get along with others.

Teach them to enjoy work.

Understand they are still young.

Verify your statements.

Watch carefully what company both you and they keep.

eXpect them to obey.

Yearn for God's best for them.

Zealously guide them in Bible truth.

—Author Unknown

