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Megiddo Message

The Lord
is our Maker...

we are the people
of his pasture.

—Psalm 95:6 NIV

ENVY-ROT

An Asaph Insight

Envy is a term we sometimes use loosely. We envy a person when we admire his or her achievement, possessions or appearance. But envy is more than this. It is a resentful desire to have something someone has. Allowed to grow, envy destroys happiness and health, and even leads to disaster. *"A heart at peace gives life to the body but envy rots the bones"* (Prov. 14:30 NIV). Like rot, envy spreads until one is consumed.

There is a recent story about a man so envious he stabbed eight people. During interrogation he said he would have committed suicide but was overpowered during the attack. He admitted that he did it out of envy; he wanted others to know they lived better than he and others of like status, even if he had to die.

Envy is an old problem. Cain murdered his brother Abel because God favored Abel above him. Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery because he was favored over them. King Saul was consumed by envy-rot. Even though he had been appointed by God as King over Israel, he became so jealous of David's popularity that he spared no resources in his effort to destroy David.

Are you feeling consumed with envy right now? Psalm 73 is the personal journal of another man who struggled deeply with envy. Asaph was so envious that he almost ended in disaster. *"I came so close to the edge of the cliff!"* he said, *"my feet were slipping, and I was almost gone"* (Ps. 73:2 NLT).

Asaph was a mature man and a seasoned spiritual leader. He authored 12 of our worship Psalms (Psalms 50, 73-83). His family elected him to be a Levitical singer in the temple. King David, a talented musician in his own right, recognized Asaph's talents and later appointed him minister of music for all worship services. Asaph was a shining jewel among his people until...until he began to lose focus.

Somehow the prosperity of the wicked started catching his attention. To quote his own words,

"They seem to live such a painless life; their bodies are so healthy and strong. They aren't troubled like other people or plagued with problems like everyone else.... [They] have everything their hearts could ever wish for!" (Psalm 73:3-8 NLT).

These were all the signs of envy-rot, but it came about so subtly that Asaph didn't recognize the problem until its rotting nature had almost destroyed him.

Asaph became despondent. *"Was it for nothing,"* he murmured, *"that I kept my heart pure and kept myself from doing wrong? All I get is trouble all day long; every morning brings me pain"* (Ps. 73:13-14 NLT).

Asaph's struggle went on and on until...until he went to the sanctuary of the Lord. Suddenly he realized their end. Suddenly he realized that they are every one on the road to destruction. Their dream life would end abruptly when God takes action. *"You put [the wicked] on a slippery path and send them sliding over the cliff to destruction"* (Ps. 73:18 NLT).

It was the same lesson a godly man named Job had learned long before. *"Evil people may have all the money in the world, and they may store*

WE BELIEVE...

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

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*A heart at peace
gives life to the
body, but envy
rots the bones.*

– Prov. 14:30 NIV



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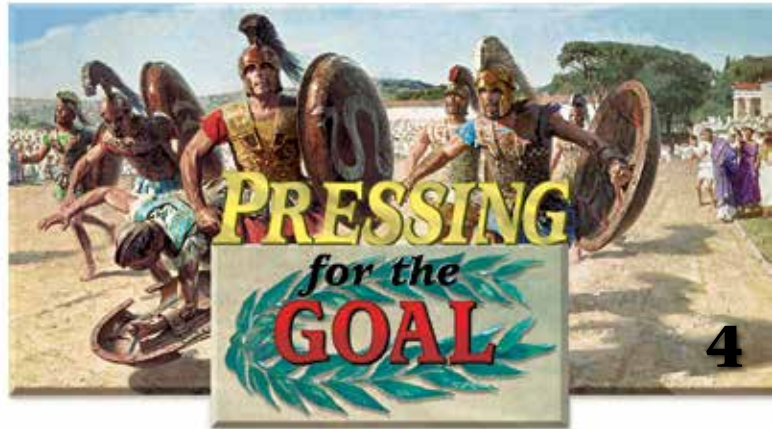
Bible Quotations: Unidentified quotations are from the King James Version or the New King James Version. Other versions are identified as used.

The following lexicons are abbreviated as:

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

MEGIDDO MEANS...

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



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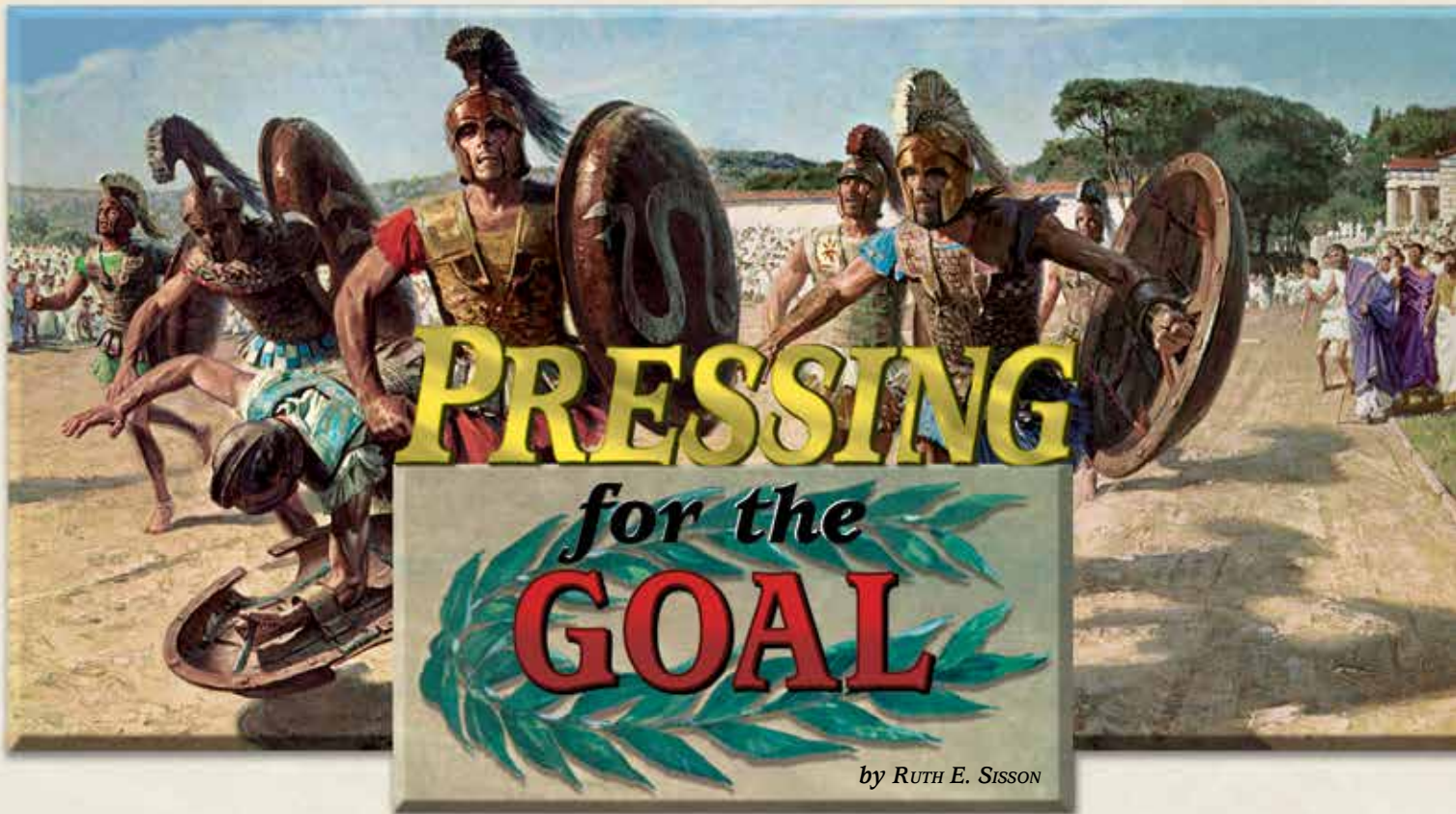
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FRONT COVER: Fall in New York State. Photo by David and Marie Sutton.



LESSONS FROM A WINNER

Dear brothers and sisters, I am still not all I should be, but I am focusing all my energies on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I strain to reach the end of the race" (Phil. 3:13–14 NLT).

Can't we feel the intensity in these words? Here is no casual man of the street. Here is one who sees himself on a race course, where there is only one purpose: to win!

Who is he? His name is the apostle Paul. He has the same spirit in his letter to the Corinthians:

"Run...to get the prize...a crown that will last forever."—Paul

1 Cor. 9:24–27 NIV

"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." Then he turns to his own personal running: *"I do not run like 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).

In both of these passages Paul draws his lesson from what has come down to us as the Olympics. It is a lesson his hearers will understand, for both Philippi and Corinth were cities in Greece.

The Greeks were avid sportsmen. We number our years from the birth of our Lord. The Jew numbers his years from the creation of the world according to Jewish tradition. The Roman numbered his years from the legendary founding of Rome by Romulus and Remus. The Greek numbered his years from the first Olympic games.

What the temple sacrifice was to the devout Jew, what the triumph of a victorious general was to the martial Roman, the Olympic games were to the sport-loving Greek. According to tradition, the first game was celebrated in 776 BC, at Olympia, Greece, and every fourth year thereafter. Every third year, similar games were held at Corinth.

When the time arrived for the Olympic games, spectators came from all over the Greek world. They sat on benches arranged in tiers around an oval, about six hundred feet long, called a stadium. The judges were chosen from the most distinguished men of Greece. Clothed in purple robes,

they sat in raised chairs to watch that the rules were observed, to penalize fouls, and to award prizes.

At first the program was confined to one day and a single event, the footrace. Later other races were added. Even so, the footrace remained primary. To win the Olympic race was the dream of every Greek youth. Winners became national heroes. Musicians sang their praise, sculptors immortalized their strength and beauty in marble, and their feats of skill and courage were recorded by the poets and writers of the time.

Weren't these contests a perfect illustration of the Christian seeking the eternal prize?

Paul could see many parallels, and his lessons are powerful.

Lesson 1: You Must Qualify

There were certain qualifications which one had to meet to participate in the Greek games. First, one had to be a citizen of Greece.

Citizenship is also a first requirement in the Christian race. There must be a primary commitment, a loyalty, a belonging. One must be "in Christ" to be in the running. And that means letting go the old loyalties and placing ourselves under Christ's law. Jesus Himself said, *"No one comes to the Father except through me"* (John 14:6 NIV).

Then there were rules which every participant had to learn and, most of all, abide by. It was well known that *"If anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules"* (2 Tim. 2:5 NIV). Both in training and in performing one had no liberty to disobey. Anyone found breaking the rules was automatically disqualified.

Likewise the runner in the Christian race must run by the rules. And this means obedience, exact obedience. It means giving up the freedom to do as we please. Paul had to do it. We have to do it. Like it or not, there is no other way to get the prize.

Lesson 2: You Must Train

Then there was the training. Said Paul, *"Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training"* (1 Cor. 9:25 NIV).

The honor of winning was well earned. When Paul spoke of the training involved, he was not exaggerating. There was no easy way to win a footrace. In his eagerness to win the champion's crown, the runner subjected himself to long and rigorous training.

So keen was the competition that the contestant knew he had not a whisper of a chance unless he kept in top condition. Those who competed in the Olympic games had already survived regional competitions. Anyone who was chosen for the Olympics was a picked athlete. They were the country's best, and they were all out to win.

So Paul emphasizes the need for rigorous discipline. Every part of the athlete's body and mind had to submit to discipline. And that discipline often meant giving up the good and even the better. But there was no other way. Anything that might prove the slightest hindrance to winning had to go.

The same is true of the Christian. If we have set our hearts on winning the immortal crown, we will allow nothing, absolutely nothing to interfere with our high goal. Again and again we need to practice saying "no" to our lower nature, to keep our moral muscles strong, to do anything we can—to win!

Paul admired the Greek athlete's coordination, grace, skill, and above all, his single-minded concentration on his goal. And so, when he wrote to the Corinthians, he said, *"This is my idea of a Christian. This is how he must discipline himself. He must not break training. He must concentrate his energies. He must keep his eye on the goal. It is the only way to win."*

Discipline—then or now—was not popular. No one likes to go without. No one naturally wants to give up. But there is an incentive. People do it all the time, says Paul, to win a little earthly glory. They do it for fame. They do it for honor. They do it for money. Why can't we do it *for an eternal crown!*

Lesson 3: You Must Run

There is another point here that we should observe. Paul said, *"I press," "I follow," "I... run."* All these words carry the idea of intense personal effort. One does not become a winning Christian by being at ease any more than one becomes a successful athlete by listening to lectures, watching films, reading books, or cheering at the games. He becomes a winning athlete only by running!

There is a popular phrase in reli-

**Keep your eye
on the goal—
it is the only
way to win.**



**Every one who wins
must run according
to the rules.**





Whatever might tempt you
to lose heart, keep running.
Focused. Determined.
Steady. True.

gion today that says "Let go and let God." A clever slogan, but does it really describe the process of Christian living? Does it describe how Paul won the race? Surely we need the help of God, and no one can run without God's help. But what player on the team would say, "All of you, just let go and the coach will win the game"? No, this is Paul's point: *everyone who wins must run.*

Who Will Win?

What were the outstanding differences between the Olympic runners and the Christian athlete? First, Paul points up an obvious fact that in the Greek races, there were many runners but only one could win.

Only one. But in the Christian race, every one who runs according to the rules can win. *Every one!* "So run" says Paul. "Run in such a way that you will win" (1 Cor. 9:24 NLT).

And what is the reward of winning? What is the pay for all the hard years of training and discipline? In the Greek games it was the shouts and cheers of the throng and a soon-to-fade wreath.

A tennis champion was asked how she felt about defeating great players and taking the big prize. She responded, "Any big win means that all the suffering, practicing and traveling are worth it. I feel like I own the world." When asked how long that feeling lasts, she replied, "About 2 minutes."

What a contrast with the honors God offers! For every true believer will receive an incorruptible crown when he stands before Christ's judgment seat. And this is just Paul's point: "They do it," he says, "to win a perishable wreath, a garland of leaves that will wither in a few days. We strive for an eternal crown that will never fade."

So Paul was training, disciplining, running. "I do not run aimlessly, I do not box as one beating the air; but I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I disqualify myself." The fear of being disqualified loomed large in his mind. Again it was a thought drawn from the Olympics. At every game a herald announced the rules of the contest, the names of the contestants, and the names and cities of the winners. He would also announce the names of any contestants who were disqualified. That was the category Paul did not want to be in. He saw himself both as a herald and as a runner. And he was concerned lest he get so busy trying to help others in the race that he ignored himself.

So put life into Paul's words as you see the glow of sweat on the athlete's face, and catch the labored panting of his breath. "Forgetting what lies behind"—the runner kicks out the cinders from beneath his spiked shoes. Is he thinking about the distance already covered? No! His eye is on the goal. "Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on."

Place this picture of the Christian athlete beside your mirror where you can compare it with the person you see reflected there. How well are we running for our goal, you and I? Are we running to win, or are we dawdling, loitering, making excuses for our failure to dig in with our spikes and run?

Oh, keep Paul's picture of the Christian athlete in the gallery of your mind. When you are tempted to droop, or lag, or drop out, let God arouse you through the picture of that athlete pressing hard toward the goal. And watch that you do not grow tired of the daily discipline and so lose the prize.

Another Race

In addition to the Olympic footrace in Paul's day was the less familiar chariot race. And it is just possible that this was the type of race he had in mind as he wrote: *"Forgetting all that lies behind me, and straining forward to what lies in front, I am racing towards the finishing point."*

Chariot racing required extreme skill in the charioteer. The chariot used was really only a small platform with a wheel on each side. The driver had very little to hold on to as he raced down the course. To maintain his balance and control the horses drawing the chariot, he had literally to lean forward and strain every nerve and muscle. The verb "reaching forth" that Paul uses means just this: "stretching as in a race."

Isn't it a picture of all-out effort? Paul is saying, "This is how you do it," and at the same time he is *showing* them by his life. No one who knew Paul and the Olympics could miss the graphic picture of the charioteer leaning forward with all his might, as he pressed his team to run faster and yet faster, so that he could be the first to cross the finish line.

Isn't this the spirit we need? Our eye on the goal and every muscle of our mind focused forward—to win!

Don't Be Self-Satisfied

What is the lesson in "forgetting the things behind"? Because they can too easily become hindrances instead of helps. The past should encourage us, but it should never satisfy us. A sanctified dissatisfaction is essential to progress.

There is danger in being too easily satisfied with our success, in thinking too well of ourselves and our victories. There is a story of a salesman who came out of his manager's office with a dismal look on his face. "You didn't get fired?" asked the secretary, who was the first to meet him.

"No, it's not that bad. But he sure did lay me out for my sales record. I can't figure it out. With the orders I've brought in during the past month, I thought I'd get a compliment, but instead he told me to get with it."

Later in the day the secretary asked her boss about Malcolm. The boss chuckled. "He's one of our best salespersons," he said, "but he's so easily satisfied with his performance. If I didn't go after him, he'd never do any better."

So with our Christian running. We may look at others and feel satisfied because we are ahead of them. But the issue is not how we compare with *them* but how we compare with *Christ*. It's not what *we* think, or what the *spectators* think, but what *the Judge* thinks. For one day we must all stand before the Judgment seat of Christ (Rom. 14:10–12). The Greek word for "judgment seat" is *bema*, the very same word which described the place where the Olympic judges gave out the prizes. Yes, just like the Olympic runners, we will stand there and be judged for what we have done. And if we have obeyed the rules and run the race, we shall receive the prize.

Don't Lose Heart

Can we imagine that Paul, who had seen the Lord Jesus and been fired with enthusiasm, was tempted to lose heart? Again and again we read in his epistles, "Don't lose heart."

What kept Paul going through all the extreme trials he had to face? It was the view of that prize, that glorious prize, the *"high calling of God in Christ Jesus."*

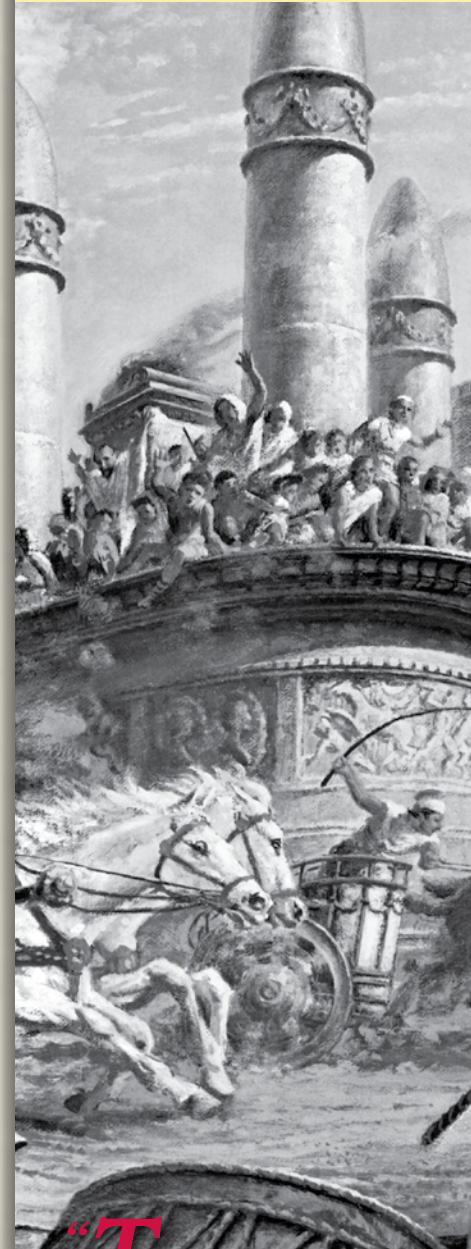
The prospect of the eternal prize kept him from losing heart. Christ had called him, he was serving Christ, and Christ would keep His promise. And so he said, *"Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all"* (2 Cor. 4:17 NIV).

Paul was a tremendous logician. When he thought about this comparison of present and future values, his active mind converted it to a picture, and he saw in his mind an enormous balance. In one side of the balance he put all the troubles they were going through, the hardship and the suffering. In the other side he put the heavenly glory. And what happened? The afflictions—which were only for a moment—were so light that they scarcely had any weight at all. And the heavenly glory was *weighty*, even *"a far more exceeding—and eternal—weight."* What a contrast!

Are we ever tempted to give up? We need to keep Paul's balance in mind.

We have a lot of ways of saying "I quit!" Throw in the towel... hang it up ... knock off" are phrases we use to express our feelings when we are ready to say, "I've had it and I'm through."

Who hasn't wanted to run away from the hassles, the disagreements, the petty irritations, the little trials—which seemingly



"They do it to win a perishable wreath.... We strive for an eternal crown."

—Paul

“Forgetting all that lies behind me,...I am racing towards the finishing point.”

—Paul



should not be—that come from trying to live as a Christian? How many times have we longed to be free from the restrictions, the rubs, the ridicule, the disagreeable things that go against us? If only we could forget the whole thing and be free!

But really, how big are our problems?

If anyone had overwhelming circumstances, Paul did. If anyone felt the impulse to run away from it all, Paul did.

It's all included in what Paul called “losing heart,” and what was his attitude? He said, “We don't do it.”

But what was his counter? Hear his secret: “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. 4:18).

The book of Hebrews gives us the same solution: “fix your eyes on Jesus” so you “will not grow weary and lose heart” (Heb. 12:3). What is the purpose of fixing on Jesus? Because He went the whole way from start to finish. Because He was tempted in every point as we are—without sin. Because He is our elder Brother, and even now feels for us in our struggles, and if we are sincere, He will hear our prayer and

help. “Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (Heb. 4:16 NIV).

Do problems threaten to overwhelm us? Keep running, says Paul. And he gives us a precept, and right behind it a promise. Don't get weary, he says, “for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.” It's just another way of saying that we'll win the race—if we keep running.

Yes, *keep running*. If you forget all the rest, remember those bracing words of Paul: “One thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on.” It is a summons to young and old. A trained runner strikes the very fastest pace he can hold, and gives all he has, right to the last lap. And as he nears the end of the course he runs faster.

How does this running translate into everyday life? What is it to run the race?

It is to think faith, act faith, talk faith, keep building ourselves up in our most holy faith.

♦ It is to project our thoughts into the

Along time ago, Robert Bruce, the king of Scotland, was forced to hide from his enemies. He found refuge in a cave, deep in the forest. He was downhearted and discouraged. He had tried to save Scotland from her enemies. But he had lost every battle. His soldiers had been killed or hurt or forced to hide.

“It is of no use to fight anymore,” he said. “Our enemies are too strong for us.”

Just then he saw a spider weaving a web. She was trying to spin the web between two rocks. She had fastened one end of her thread to a rock and was trying to swing herself across. But each time she failed to reach the rock.

King Robert sat watching her for a long time. He wondered how long she would keep on trying. The spider tried and failed seven times. “You are a brave and patient spider,” thought the king. “If you try once more and succeed, I, too, will fight again.”

The spider swung herself once more on her thin thread. This time she reached the other rock and fastened her thread.

“Thanks for the lesson you have taught me, little spider,” said King Robert. “I will try once more to free Scotland from her enemies.”

So, as legend has it, King Robert went forth again at the head of his army. They fought as they had never fought before, and won.

Are you ever tempted to give in and give up? The fact is that we all feel that way many times as we deal with prob-

THE PERSISTENT WIN



by DR. NAT HARRISON LONG

lems at work, at home, wherever we go. That is why the Scriptures have a lot to say about keeping on.

The book of Hebrews was written in order to give Jewish Christians a word that would enable them to fight against the temptation to quit. Because they had become Christians, because they were naming the name of Jesus Christ. Because they were undergoing persecution, and, therefore, were tempted to retreat from the Christian faith. The book of Hebrews was written in order to prevent that.

The writer of Hebrews wrote to that early community of faith just this: “Don't ever forget those wonderful days when you first learned about Christ. Remember how you kept right on with the Lord even though it meant terrible suffering. Do not let this happy trust in the Lord die away, no matter what happens. Remember the Lord! You need to keep on patiently doing God's will if you want him to do for you all that he has promised.”

world to come and think about the character God will approve.

- ♦ It is to keep our mind and spirit and whole being under absolute control during every waking moment of our lives.
- ♦ It is to make sure that we are not saying or doing anything that will stand against us in the final day of account, to be sure that we are not violating any rules of the race.
- ♦ It is to keep our minds on that which is pure, clean, upright, and God-honoring.
- ♦ It is to think in every situation that arises, What would Jesus do? Then follow that course.

The Finish Line

We are on the home stretch. Never has the Day of the Lord been so near. Never has the finish line been so close.

Watch one of those crack milers, and you will see that when the pistol shot announces the last quarter, he quickens his pace. When he comes into the stretch with the finish line before him, he gets up on his

toes and sprints, putting his last ounce of energy into a drive for the tape.

So, as the days go by, as we grow older, we must run harder. It is then that our years of training and discipline ought to count.

It is thrilling to realize that Paul used this figure of the runner pressing on toward the goal not at the beginning of his career but at the end, when he was a prisoner in Rome, awaiting word from the executioner. These are the words he penned to his younger comrade: *"I have finished the course."* Yes, he had been running all the way, and now the race was behind him, and—blessed thought—he had *won* it! Already he could see himself standing at the Judgment, and Jesus handing him the eternal prize. Can we imagine the joy of that thought?

Oh, have we caught a glimpse of that prize? Let it not slip from view.

The race is on. The Judge is watching. Whatever might tempt you to lose heart, keep running. Focused. Determined. Steady. True.

There's a crown reserved for every winner. Will there be one for you? ■

Consider Hebrews 12:1–2. It goes like this: *"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings too closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."*

Now, what does this passage have to say to us as we are tempted to give in and give up? It says several things.

This passage says, first of all, that life is a demanding, costly, exacting race. The writer does not beat around the bush with his readers. They were probably wondering whether or not they ought to retreat into a safer, less dangerous position. What does the writer do to hearten these souls in the long ago? He tells them right off that life is like a race, a very exacting race. He likens the Christian to a spiritual athlete. "The Christian life," he says, "is a race to be run."

Then, the writer changes the figure: "It is a grim contest, like that of two gladiators contending for the mastery. You cannot hope to win except at the price of struggle."

Then he says it is a race that we must run with patience,—that is, patient endurance. The race of life is not a 100-yard dash. It is a cross-country run. The track stretches way into the sunset. For this reason we must guard against what is perhaps the greatest peril of all, the peril of fainting. In Galatians 6:9, St. Paul wrote: *"Let us not be weary in well*

doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."

Author Irving Stone has spent a lifetime studying greatness, writing novelized biographies of such men as Michelangelo, Vincent van Gogh, Sigmund Freud, and Charles Darwin. Stone was once asked if he had found a thread that runs through the lives of all these exceptional people.

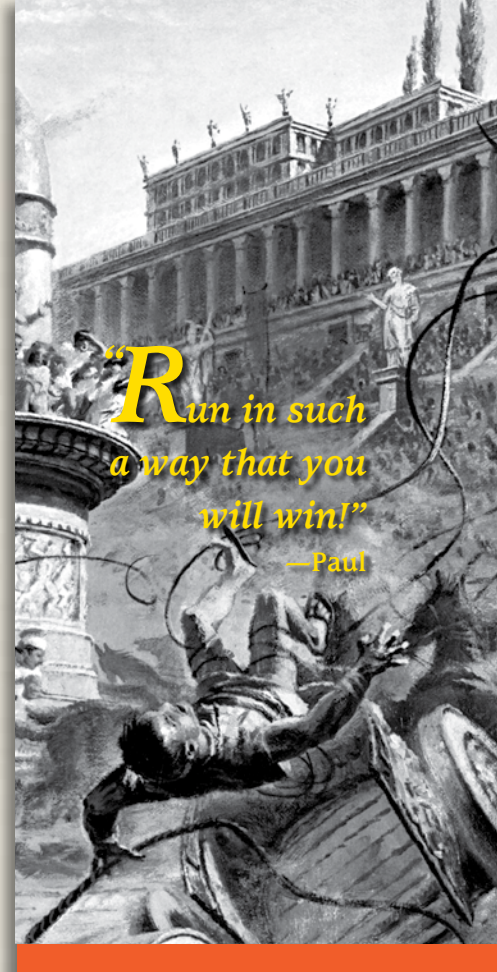
He said, "I write about people who sometime in their life have a vision or dream of something that should be accomplished and they go to work. They are beaten over the head, knocked down, vilified, and for years they get nowhere. But every time they're knocked down they stand up. You cannot destroy these people. And at the end of their lives they've accomplished some modest part of what they set out to do."

One who victoriously wins in the race of life is one who is doggedly persistent. After one has determined what the priorities are, the one who wins determines what particular thing to go after and then stays after that thing as long as there is breath in the body.

Now the question for us to ask is this: How shall we get patient, enduring persistence that spells victory? How can we do it?

The writer of Hebrews says, *"We are to look to Jesus as the author, the captain, the way sure, the example to be followed."*

We are to look to Jesus not only as our example, but as our perfecter of faith,...our companion, our comforter, our helper, our friend. ■



**"Run in such
a way that you
will win!"**

—Paul

Coming On Apace

*Sometimes we say
That the time seems long to us who watch and wait
For that "great Day."
As if the time loitered and the great Day came late.*

*Did you ever stay
A moment, to think how the time is hasting on
And we cannot hinder a moment as it flies?
But one week dies
And another comes straight, straight on,
And is partly gone
While we are pausing to think it has begun?*

*Time pauses never,
The day of grace is shortening ever, at one unfaltering pace;
And the Day of decision
Is traveling onward, with steady, unswerving precision
And suddenly,
Or ever we are aware—that Day will be!*

*Blessed are they
Who with good cause can say
With every rising sun,
"Amen, even so, Lord Jesus, come!"*

Yet We Believe!

Seeing is believing, at least most of the time. Is it possible to believe without seeing?

In everyday life, we do it all the time. We read in the newspaper about something that happened on the other side of the world. We do not go there to check out the details, yet, unless we have prior information to the contrary, we basically believe the report.

Most of us have never seen Tokyo, yet we believe that it exists. We cannot physically see the cold germ that makes us wheeze and sneeze, but to deny its existence would not make us feel any better.

None of us personally knew George Washington, or Thomas Jefferson, or John Adams, yet we believe that they were among the founders of our country.

What does all this say? That factors other than seeing cause us to believe. In everyday matters we are willing to trust the witness of other people, our own previous experience, the word of specialists in a field, or even generally circulated information. Other times, when something seems contrary to what we had previously thought, we demand bona fide evidence.

The effect of evidence is so great that almost never do we feel we have enough of it. In the courts of our nation, those who serve on juries quickly discover that decisions are never as simple as they seem from the outside. Invariably they wish for just one more piece of evidence to make it all clear. But if it were all that clear, the case probably would not have been brought to a jury.

Evidence demands evaluation and decision, and decisions are often difficult where clear evidence is missing. How does one deal with the missing bits and pieces, the “if only” issues where we think “if only” we had this or that additional fact, all would be clear?

This problem is even more critical in matters of religious faith. *If only* I could talk to an angel...*If only* I could hear one word from heaven...*If only* I could ask for a bolt out of the sky and see it immediately...*If only* I could ask for one broken bone to be instantly mended, or one deceased loved one to stand up and walk—anything dramatic to give me instant faith.

The fact is, God didn’t plan it that way. Long ago He planned that all open miracles would cease and only “faith, hope, and love” remain (1 Cor. 13:13).

But think about it: faith has been needed in every age. The author of the book of Hebrews recognized it. He even went so far as to say that “without faith it is impossible to please [God]” (Heb. 11:6). And how did he define faith? He said that faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things that are seen? No, “faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1). Faith is built not on what we see but on what we do not see. He then goes through a whole roster of heroic souls who ventured everything on faith. They made decisions, took heroic stands, and lived and died for God—not because the evidence was all in but because their faith was all out! If all had been perfectly clear, their life would not have been “by

*All that
I have seen
teaches me to
trust the Creator
for all I have
not seen.*



***“Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed”
—John 20:28–29.***

faith” then, and ours would not be “by faith” now. When they put all the pieces together that they could see; inevitably there were some missing. Yet they believed.

Here is the lesson for us. It is possible—essential—that we accept the knowledge God has revealed and believe, fully and really and wholeheartedly believe.

Are we obsessed with seeing and touching and feeling, as if only eyes and fingers and feelings could establish truth? The story of Thomas has a lesson for us; Thomas, whom Jesus reproved for his lack of faith. What was Jesus’ chiding reply? “*Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed*” (John 20:28–29).

It is an honorary company to belong to, these “yet” believers. Why? Because Jesus promised, “*Blessed are they that have not seen, and, yet have believed.*” Whatever it includes, we want that blessing!

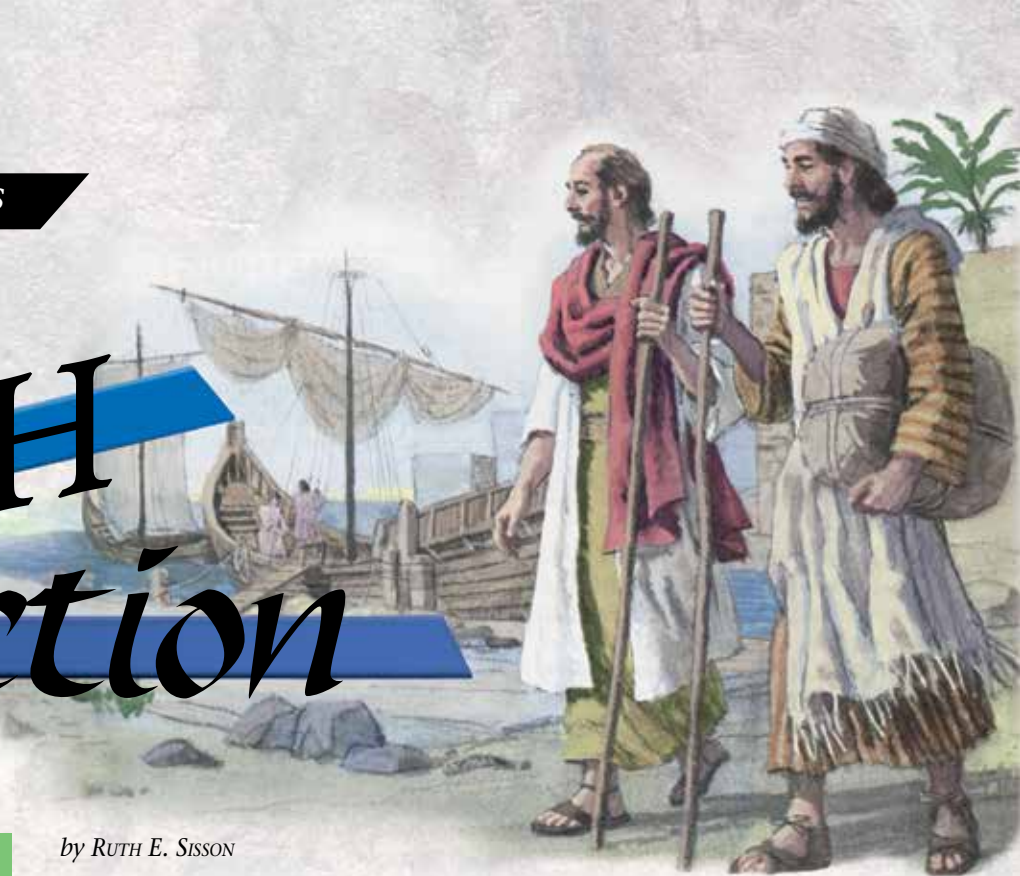
Why do we believe? Because we trust the Word of God, the wisdom of God, the love of God, the power

of God. We believe not because of all we have seen but because we are convinced of the reality and omnipotence of the God behind all we see. We believe, not because we can touch or feel or see all that we would like to, but because all that we do touch or feel or see is in harmony with what we expect, knowing what we do from the Word of God about the plan God is working out on planet Earth.

We believe because we see the hand of God working in our lives, in our Church, in our nation, in our world. We believe because God has spoken, and God will be true to His Word. We believe because history, science, and the Word of God all join to support the facts of our faith. All join to undergird our confidence in God, and tell us that just as God has been true in the past, just as His prophecies in the past have all been fulfilled as foretold, so the remainder will be fulfilled.

What is faith? It is being able to say, I have not seen all that I would like to see; I do not know all that I would like to know. **Yet I believe! ■**

FAITH *in Action*



by RUTH E. SISSON

Bible Text: Acts 5:1–11 NIV

1 Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property.

2 With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet.

3 Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land?

4 Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God."

5 When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened.

6 Then the young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him.

7 About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened.

8 Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?" "Yes," she said, "that is the price."

9 Peter said to her, "How could you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also."

10 At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband.

11 Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.

TROUBLE IN THE CHURCH



Read Acts 5:1–11

No one likes a hypocrite. We want people to be frank, honest, on a level with us. We want to live and work with people who are genuine. We want to do business with those we can trust.

This is especially true in the Church. There is something especially repelling about one who pretends to be a Christian but whose actions belie his profession.

Hypocrisy is repugnant to God, too. A God of truth, He hates all pretense and sham. And because He can read our minds and know what moves us to act, He will not be fooled by our hypocrisy.

How did hypocrisy work its way into the early Church? When so many new believers were joining during its earliest days, we can be sure that all were not 100% sincere. Time would sift their numbers. But at this point, the whole movement was fresh and new, and God, who was watching over His Church, saw that an impressive—unforgettable—lesson was needed.

Triumph, BUT...

Chapter 5 opens with the little word "but." This word tells us we have come to a decisive turn in the story. Chapter 4 ended on a strong, triumphant note, with a rapidly growing Church feeling concern and devotion to one another, even to the point of sacrificing for one another. Typical of the times, there was a very small group of people with adequate means, and a very large number of poor commoners. But within the Church community, those who had more were willing to share with those who had less. Perhaps it was a reflection of the character of Jesus among them.

No doubt Ananias and Sapphira had seen the recognition given to Barnabas, who had made a generous gift to the Church community, and wanted some of that recognition for themselves. They too had property, and they too could sell it. Why not? But then came that fateful family conference, when they decided to keep part of the proceeds for themselves. Perhaps they were thinking of their own security, and wanted some insurance against the future.

Or perhaps there were children, or elderly parents who needed to be thought of, or any one of a hundred different issues.

The real problem was not that they kept back part of the money, but they decided to do it *while appearing to give all*. They wanted the community to think they were giving all when they were not. They *planned* to deceive.

When Ananias came in and presented the money to the Apostles, he did not say anything untrue, but he acted a lie. He intended to give the impression that he had brought the total proceeds of the sale of the property. When Sapphira came in, she told a deliberate lie. Both were equally sinful.

THE HIGH PRICE OF DECEPTION

Sentence was executed swiftly because the Apostle Peter had power to know what was in Ananias' mind. Said Peter, "*Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God,*" (Acts 5:3-4). Ananias collapsed, and breathed his last. Three hours later, his wife came in and met the same fate, for the same sin.

1. How could Peter know that Ananias was not bringing the entire value of the sale, as he appeared to be doing? _____

Why was there no need of trial by jury? _____

2. Who else could read the thoughts of the people around him? (see John 2:25). _____

3. What is God's attitude toward deceit? (see Prov. 20:17; Psalm 101:6-7). _____

4. Who was the instigator of this transgression? Who owned the land?
Who received the proceeds of the sale? _____

5. How could Ananias and Sapphira have kept part of the money and not been guilty of sin? _____



A closer look

"He Kept Back Part"

The Greek word translated "kept back part" suggests that one selfishly appropriates something that is held in trust. Lake and Cadbury translate: "embezzled part of the price." The same word is used in Joshua 7:1 of Achan, who "*took of the accursed thing,*" or "*retained part of the consecrated spoil.*" As Luke wrote this account, he may have been comparing the sin of Ananias with that of Achan, a sin which affected the whole community, (see Joshua 7).

“THE LOVE OF
MONEY IS THE ROOT OF
ALL EVIL.”



Insight

Severity...as well as Goodness

Ananias and Sapphira were tempted by a sin which has tempted many people—the desire to live behind a deceptive facade. It was the sin of appearing to be something that they were not. This couple wanted to appear to be zealous supporters of the Church, when in reality they were only supporters of themselves. Their duplicity, was their undoing.

Luke does not add many details. There is no sentimental sympathy for them. They both dropped dead. It was a shocking lesson, and no further explanation was needed of their terrible ending.

Does such severity offend our modern sense of tolerance? Not if we stand by God's law. Does it violate the mercy and love of God? Not at all.

God is a God of love, but in order to be a God of love He must hate evil and evil doers. If He treats all alike, whatever their character, He has no character of His own.

Many a modern mind has been tempted to omit the severity of the Gospels. Have we lauded the sheep and forgotten the goats, and neglected to mention their fearful fate? Life is not like that, nor is Christianity like that. Facts are facts, and God in His holiness must be true to His Word. Whatever the modern day tolerance, God will punish wrong doing. Sooner or later, the wages of sin will be paid to every transgressor who persists in his sin.

There are some things that you cannot do and live. The penalties must be paid.



A closer look

Why did Ananias and Sapphira pay with their lives?

"You...lied...to God!" These are the last words Ananias heard. As Peter spoke them, Ananias dropped dead where he stood. Not one penny of the money he had kept back did he ever spend.

What a heart searching must have followed in that Christian community, what inner conviction, what deep self-examination. If God looks so seriously at sin, who can escape?

Why were Ananias and Sapphira singled out for their sin when any one of the believers in the community could recall numerous sins on their record? Why had Ananias and Sapphira been instantly struck down? It was a warning. It was one of those occasions when God chose to make an example in order to impress others.

For the same reason He brought fire on Sodom and Gomorrah.

For the same reason He smote Uzzah, when he had only touched the ark in disobedience. For the same reason He smote king Uzziah, and king Jeroboam, and David's young son.

We should thank God for His mercy, that He does not smite in every case, or none of us would survive. God is patient, longsuffering and gracious, but from time to time He makes a lesson, to remind us that He is holy, that He is just, and that He means what He says—it is His way of impressing us with the seriousness of His commands.

Even after they had made the sale, Ananias and Sapphira could have saved the situation. They could have come to Peter explaining, "Peter, this is just a percentage of the proceeds. We did not feel able to give it all." And there would have been no question, no judgment, and no wrong. By deception they tried to claim honor they did not deserve.

God accepts our gifts, not according to their size, but according to the spirit in which we give them and according to our ability to give. But He will not be party to any pretense. The ancient law in Israel was, "*Ye shall be holy; for I am holy*" (Lev. 11:44), and that standard of holiness does not allow for any deceit. It seems very possible that when Peter was writing His First Epistle and quoting these words from Leviticus, he could still see in his mind's eye the memory of Ananias and Sapphira.

What was the effect on the young Church of the judgment on Ananias and Sapphira? "*Great fear came upon all the Church and upon all who heard these things*" (Acts 5:11).

Every attentive believer heard the message that joining this Church was serious business. Being a Christian believer was not the same as belonging to a mystery cult, or any of the popular religions of the day. Behind this movement, keeping it straight, keeping it true, keeping it honorable, was the power of God, so that people would not join carelessly or insincerely.

6. Give a few examples of how we today might become guilty of the same sin Ananias and Sapphira committed. _____

7. What did the Apostle John say would not be allowed in the Holy City? (Rev. 21:27) _____

8. Why are we today not punished as were Ananias and Sapphira? _____

Now there was a new note of caution. The half believers, those who wanted only the fringe benefits of believing, would keep their distance. Those who did not care about making any real commitment would be frightened away.

The account of Ananias and Sapphira demonstrates the almost stubborn honesty of the Bible. We are grateful that Luke included the story of these two traitors to the cause. It increases our confidence in him as a historian. If his purpose had been to make the early Church look as good as possible, the story of Ananias and Sapphira should have been omitted. But the Bible presents the facts as they are, and the early Church was like the Church in every age, a mixture of good and bad.

And these facts help to give us faith today. They tell us that the Christian society is not perfect, that there have been and there are varying levels of devotion in the Church. Every society, even the Christian, has its black sheep.

In this particular case, the black sheep seem even blacker because they stand so close to the perfect record of Jesus and to His Apostles, whom people recognized as having been with Jesus.

And just ahead of this story is Barnabas, generous, holding back nothing, clear and clean all the way through. Beside him, the calculating Ananias and Sapphira look all the worse.



Take heed

Sin Is Deadly

The story of Ananias and Sapphira tells us how serious sin is. It tells us also that every sin is a sin against a holy God, every failure in virtue is an open assault on His standard. Also, every virtue that is practiced acknowledges His holiness.

Who Sinned—Ananias or Satan?

What moved Ananias and Sapphira to lie about the sale of their property and the amount of money they received? Did some super power of evil beyond their control corrupt their thinking and force them to deceive?

No, when the Apostle Peter was questioning Ananias, he said first, *“Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself?”* Then Peter went on to explain: *“While it remained was it not your own, and after it was sold, was it not in your own control?”*

Ananias himself—not Satan—was in control of the situation. Peter is very explicit: *“Why have you conceived this thing **in your heart?**”* This is exactly what Jesus said, that the human heart is the source of all evil. *“For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts,”* and all the other evils that beset humankind (Mark 7:21–23). Ananias and Sapphira were themselves the instigators and perpetrators of the lie, and they suffered the consequences.

Why then does it say that *“Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?”* Because the Bible uses the term *“Satan”* as a personification of the evil desires in our minds. As James said, *“Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived it bringeth forth sin: and sin when it is finished, bringeth forth death”* (James 1:14–15).

Ananias and Sapphira both designed and executed the plan of deception, and they paid with their lives.



Take heed

Beware...of the LOVE of Money

Money is useful. Everyone needs it to live. Money itself is not evil, but beware of the **love** of money.

The love of money inspired Simon Magus to make his wicked overture to Peter.

The love of money moved Elymas the sorcerer to resist the teaching of Paul and Barnabas.

The love of money stirred up the silver-smiths in Ephesus, that resulted in the persecuting of the missionaries.

The love of money kept Felix from doing justice to an innocent prisoner, the apostle Paul.

The love of money turned Judas into a traitor, and Gehazi into a leper, and Achan into a remembrance of death in Israel.

Let us beware, lest we be ruined by the love of money. After all, not a cent that we have is really ours. All belongs to God.

MIRACLES, MIRACLES



Read Acts 5:12–16

At this time there were more miracles, more healings, and more conviction. The work of the Apostles was spreading. The account reads that crowds gathered from the neighboring towns, all bringing their sick, and *“all of them were healed”* (5:16 NIV).

What modern self-proclaimed faith healer attests to a record like this? Who today heals everyone who comes? Doesn't it show that the Apostles had true power from God—which today's professing healers do not have?

And there was progress, abundant progress. The word of the Lord gained in power and influence. More believers were added to the Church, multitudes both of men and women. ■

TO BE CONTINUED

ANSWERS FROM PAGE 18

MISCHIEF MAKERS

1. Jesus (Matt. 12:36)
2. Proverbs (Prov. 26:20)
3. Paul (1 Tim. 5:13)
4. Secrets (Prov. 11:13)
5. Falsehood (Ps. 7:14)
6. Aaron (Ex. 32:22)
7. A busybody (1 Pet. 4:15)
8. God. (Lev. 19:16)

9. Paul (Acts 13:8–10)
10. David (2 Sam. 16:5–8)

KINGS

1. Ahab (1 Kings 21:25)
2. Solomon (2 Chron. 7:12)
3. Hezekiah (Isa. 39)
4. Josiah (2 Kings 22:1–10)
5. Uzziah (2 Chron. 26:8–10)

YOUNG BOYS OF THE BIBLE

1. Timothy (2 Tim. 3:15)
2. Isaac (Gen. 21:3)
3. Cain (Gen. 4:1–2)
4. Samuel (1 Sam. 2:18, 20)
5. Aaron (Ex. 6:20)
6. Samuel (1 Sam. 3:4)
7. Two fish and 3 loaves (John 6:8–13)

MINERALS

1. Elisha (2 Kings 6:1–6)
2. Tubal-cain (Gen. 4:22)
3. Moses (Deut. 5:1; 8:15)
4. Ahasuerus (Esther 1:1–6)
5. Lead (Ex. 15:10)
6. Brass (Ex. 38:8)
7. Demetrius (Acts 19:24)
8. Alexander (2 Tim. 4:14)
9. Tyre (1 Kings 7:13–14)
10. Jeremiah (Jer. 17:1)

BOLT That DOOR!

A Fantasy



As the twilight deepens casting weird shadows along the path, two strange appearing men are seen approaching a brightly lighted home. Each carries a satchel inscribed with his name. The elder of the two is **WORRY**, his younger brother is **FRET**.

Upon knocking at the door they are greeted by an elderly gentleman who asks them their business. With eloquence born of much experience, Worry pleads for a place to spend the night saying that they have journeyed a long distance and are too weary to go any farther. He also promises to leave with the morning light.

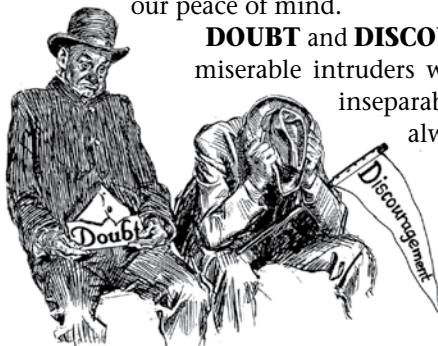
Morning comes bright and clear, and the host bids farewell to his guests. Much to his surprise and dismay, Worry and Fret decline to leave. Much does their unhappy host urge them to depart; but dead to entreaty and callous to threats, these rude guests persist in staying.

In a certain sense we are all the doorkeepers of our minds. Every waking moment of our lives it is our duty to guard that door.

If the thought that seeks entrance to your mind is one that will be to your spiritual good, allow it to enter. If not, **bolt that door!**

Meet a Few of These UNWANTED INTRUDERS

Throughout the day these vagabond thoughts beat a path to our mind's door. They come along the path of some memory, or some longing, and we must have strength and courage to bolt the door, and not allow them to enter to destroy our peace of mind.



DOUBT and **DISCOURAGEMENT** are two miserable intruders which knock. They are inseparable companions, and always work together.

Doubt, the more wily of the two, knocks first; and if allowed to enter, Discouragement follows on his heels, spreading

a blanket of gloom in his wake. Perchance we have stumbled over the same point again and again, and we begin to doubt our ability to conquer.

Looking ahead we see greater trials and temptations, and we quail before them. Discouragement seizes us, and we become despondent and helpless.

Instead of going forward, we slip swiftly back to the low and groveling. Oh, bolt that door, and pin it fast with prayer! Remember, Doubt will cower before the heart's door that is filled brimful with the evidence from the Living Word. A heart overflowing with Faith will never be tempted to unbolt the door to entertain such unwanted intruders.

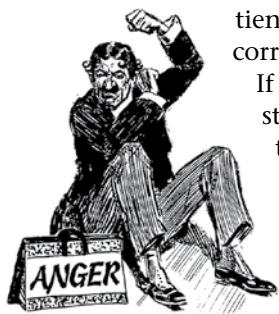


Another caller we are apt to entertain unless we exercise the utmost caution is **HURT FEELINGS**. This is a crafty old character, always calling things by another name. Perhaps someone calls to our attention something we have said or done that was not quite right; we should watch that door carefully lest Hurt Feelings crowd in and deceive us into thinking we were unjustly criticized.

Or an associate speaks sharply to us, or makes some remark which we do not fully understand. Almost immediately we begin to surmise, until a molehill becomes a mountain. Our peace of mind is ruined because we failed to bolt that door in time.

Do not think you can thwart Hurt Feelings' attempts to enter without keeping that door tightly bolted. Do not leave the door standing ajar; do not give him any opening; the smallest crack is sufficient to admit him. Bolt that door by putting the best conceivable construction on the incident which might arouse Hurt Feelings.

Then there is another caller who creates havoc in the mind: **ANGER**. True, there are days when it seems everything goes wrong, but that does not excuse us for unbolting the door and allowing Anger to sit as king. Anger may steal into the heart of a wise man, but is welcomed only into the heart of fools. Did we ever do or say one good thing when stirred in anger? Why, then, entertain impa-



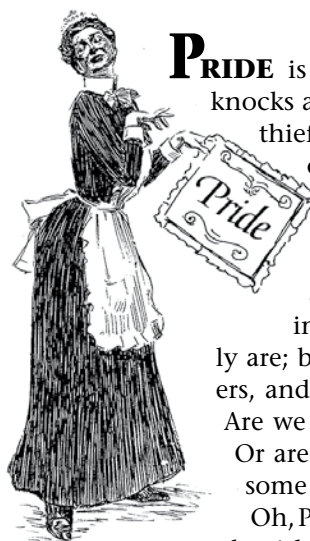
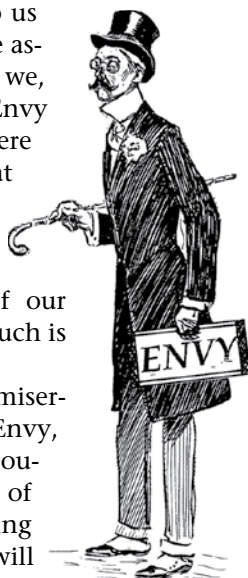
tient and angry thoughts? They only corrupt the mind and breed revenge.

If impatient or wrathful thoughts steal into our minds, we should force them out; allow Anger no quarter; bolt that door against him forever. Think, what will we be feeling about this thing a year from now?

What does God think about it now?

Another wily creature that comes to us in sheep's clothing is **ENVY**. Our close associates can do everything better than we, and we unbar the door and permit Envy to enter our mind. I wonder, if we were endowed with some of the talents that others have, would we use them properly? Would we be able to use them only to God's glory, or would we bask contentedly in the fleeting praise of our comrades? Remember that to whom much is given, of him will much be required.

Oh, bolt that door against such a miserable vagrant! Instead of harboring Envy, transfer the energy expended on jealousy of others' talents to the developing of your own. This will be such an absorbing work that the unwanted intruders will find no welcome.



PRIDE is another cunning visitor who knocks at our door again and again. No thief steals into the heart so imperceptibly and none covers itself under more disguises than does Pride. It is manifested in the heart of man by self-praise, adorning our persons, attempting to appear better than we really are; by contempt and slander of others, and hating to be told of our faults. Are we bolting the door against Pride? Or are we sheltering this vagabond in some secret corner of our heart?

Oh, Prideofface, and grace, and place—banish it from sight! Instead, welcome into your heart a tried and true companion by the name of **HUMILITY**, who alone has power to conquer the intruder. For when Humility enters and holds sway over our being, we shall see Pride disappear like dew before the rising sun.

There is another visitor who greatly loves to create mischief. His name is **FOOLISHNESS**. To bolt the door securely against this intruder requires unceasing vigilance, as he knocks at the least provocation. If we have to deal with the light and giddy, we must be careful lest in witnessing their foolishness we become contaminated by it. But what of our conduct before those of like precious

CONTINUED ON PAGE 18

OBITUARIES

"The dead in Christ shall rise" -1 Thessalonians 4:16



Marjorie Mansfield

We received word of the sudden passing of Sister Marjorie Mansfield on August 20, 2018. She was 86.

Sister Marjorie, of Chadron Nebraska, was a long-time friend, sister, and *Message* subscriber. She made several extended visits to the Megiddo Church in Rochester, New York, which she affectionately called "God's church," and her home was always open to traveling brethren. A regular correspondent with members of the Church family, she was one of the links in a correspondence chain sharing spiritual gems with those living at a distance.

Sister Marjorie took her faith seriously, applying the principles of the Bible in her life and witnessing to anyone who cared to discuss with her. Her letters would often end with a positive thought or Scripture verse that capsulized her hope.

She is survived by a son, Rick Meredith, and his wife Bonnie, of Chadron, Nebraska, who lived nearby; both he and his wife lovingly looked after Sister Marjorie's needs. She is also survived by two loving and caring daughters, Nancy Mansfield (ne Reisen) and her husband Clint, of Scotts Bluff, Nebraska; and Rhonda (ne Lange) and her husband Bill, of Lincoln, Nebraska; also a son Steve Meredith, of Douglas, Wyoming; and a number of grandchildren.

Interment was in Crawford, Nebraska, where she lived the greater part of her life.



Joyce E. Manktelow

Sister Joyce Manktelow, lifelong resident of Rochester and member of the Megiddo Church, passed on September 20, 2018. She took part in church dramas, and helped in the *Message* mailing department as she was able. Both her parents and her Brother Robert were also lifelong members. She is survived by Robert's wife Ellie. We are unaware of any other relatives.



KNOW YOUR BIBLE

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

MISCHIEF MAKERS

1. Who said, "Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment"?
2. In what book is the statement, "Where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth"?
3. Who wrote the following statement concerning young widows: "Wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not"?
4. Complete the following proverb: "A talebearer revealeth _____."
5. David says that he who conceives mischief brings forth what?
6. Who said, in defense of himself, "Thou knowest the people, that they are set on mischief"?
7. What does Peter call a person who interferes in other people's business?
8. Who introduced the law, "Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer"?
9. Who fixed his eyes on Elymas, the sorcerer, and denounced him, saying, "O full of all subtilty and all mischief"?
10. To whom did Shimei say, "Thou art taken in thy mischief because thou art a bloody man"?

KINGS

1. Who was the most wicked king of Israel?
2. To what king of Israel did the Lord appear in a dream by night?
3. What king showed to the messenger of another king all his silver and gold and treasures?
4. What king of Judah had not seen a copy of the law till he was twenty-six years old?
5. Name a king who was an extensive farmer and loved husbandry?

YOUNG BOYS OF THE BIBLE

1. One who as a child had known the Holy Scriptures
2. Son of Abraham and Sarah
3. Brother of Abel
4. A child who ministered to the Lord in the presence of Eli the priest
5. Brother of Moses
6. A child who said "Here am I"
7. The number of fish and the number of loaves of bread a little boy gave Jesus to feed the 5000

MINERALS

1. What prophet threw a stick into the Jordan River, causing an iron ax head to float?
2. Who was the ancestor or instructor of every artificer in brass and iron?
3. Who asked the question, "Who brought thee forth water out of the rock of flint"?
4. Who gave a great feast and put his guests on beds of gold and silver, upon pavements of red and blue and white and black marble?
5. In Moses' song of thanksgiving, he said the Egyptians sank in the mighty waters as what mineral?
6. Of what metal was the laver of the tabernacle made?
7. Who was the silversmith who made silver shrines for the goddess Diana?
8. Who was the coppersmith who wrought much evil upon Paul?
9. Hiram who was cunning to work with brass, was from what city?
10. Which prophet wrote, "The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond"?

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BOLT That DOOR!

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faith? Is our example aiding them along the narrow way to the prize? Or are we guilty of reciting foolish stories, of saying and doing foolish things just for a laugh, so to speak? Bolt the door against such folly. By leaving the door open we are not only soiling our own character but are putting a blot upon someone else's. May we cry with the Psalmist, "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of lips" (Ps. 141:3).

Though we have entertained these impudent guests until

some perhaps consider themselves permanent residents, it still lies within our power to banish them from our minds. Remember, a God-like character is not a matter of chance; it will never be attained by half-hearted effort. We cannot console ourselves with the idea that the next time we will do better; a next time may never come.

Consider the glorious triumphs of those who have gone before us. Many were the bitter struggles they encountered, but they succeeded because they bolted the door against the sin that beset them. They filled their minds so full of good that the unworthy callers could find no room to enter.

Act as they did. Bolt that door! and in their victory you will be able to see the certainty of your own. ■

HAVE A GOAL!

Having a goal is the first step toward success in any enterprise. Especially in our Christian effort, we must have goals—short-term goals which we can easily reach and satisfy. Long-term goals are good, but short-term goals are absolutely necessary if we are to reach our long-term goals.

Here are some keys to setting goals:

1. Identify the major purpose of your life.

As Christians, our purpose is to do what God has called us to do, so that we can live in His coming Kingdom.

2. List your short-term goals.

Think of the various areas in your life which need changing, and what steps you can take to change them. Look over your life to see what needs corrective action, what needs redirecting, what needs promoting.

3. Make your goals specific.

Goals in general terms are good, but specifics are much more useful. What do you want to achieve? Specific goals might be:

- ✓ To memorize a choice passage of Scripture every day.
- ✓ To encourage someone in your family each day.
- ✓ Are you inclined to complain? Resolve never to complain, even about the weather.
- ✓ Are you inclined to find fault with others? Resolve to look for something good in each person you are with, and make a point of encouraging that good.

4. Put a deadline on your goal.

An open-ended goal is not nearly as effective as one which has a “deadline.” Set a time when you hope to arrive at a certain point, then make it happen.

5. Make your goals manageable.

Be realistic. You could write down that you plan to break every bad habit in the next week. You know in advance that it will not happen. So be specific about a habit you can break, a step you can take, and see it in terms of a day, a week, even a month. Be sure to spell out the intermediate steps.

6. Identify the behavior necessary to accomplish each goal.

Don't just put down “patience” as your goal. Say, “I must be more patient with blank (supervisor, child, uncle, grandparent). Then act accordingly.

7. Periodically evaluate your progress.

It will do no good to set goals unless you check your progress toward them.

8. Identify problem areas in your life, then correct them.

- ✓ Self-correction is vital to achieving a goal.
- ✓ Perhaps you see that you waste time too easily. Take control of your schedule, and plan what you will do with your time.
- ✓ Perhaps you see that you spend money too easily. Check yourself. Ask: Was that purchase necessary? (Could I have spent that amount of money better?) Was my spending to the glory of God, or was it to satisfy a selfish desire?

Setting mini-goals greatly increases our chances for success. We cannot expect to develop a Christ-like character in a week, but if we expect to succeed we must be working at it this week and next. ■





DO YOU BELIEVE IN PERFECTION?

"Jesus told his disciples to be 'perfect even as your father in heaven is perfect'? Lots of churches do not believe in perfection. If the Bible teaches perfection, such as in Hebrews, how can Jesus tell us to do something that we are unable to do?" (CM)

Thank you for your interest in this most important subject. Your observations are correct, that lots of churches do not believe in perfection. As you also point out, Jesus did say that we must be perfect. Jesus, in one incisive statement made God's demands crystal clear. *"Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect"* (Matt. 5:48). James confirms Christ's command, *"But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."* Peter apparently understood Christ to mean perfection without even so much as one dark spot on our record, *"Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless"* (James 1:4; 2 Pet. 3:14).

The idea of perfection is not limited to the New Testament. For example, *"And when Abram [Abraham] was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect"* (Gen. 17:1).

Those who do not believe that God requires moral perfection of His human children claim that Christ did not mean

to be so exacting. But if this is not His meaning, then what did He mean? Will God approve if I lie as long as it is just a "little one"? Or can I cheat, or commit almost any sin, as long as I don't "really" hurt anyone? To define the words of Christ in such a way makes His statement the equivalent of *"just how much can I get away with?"* and the definition is different for every individual.

Some claim perfection is impossible. But this claim is not supported in the Scriptures. To the contrary, there are examples of those who did meet this high standard. Just a few include Abel (Matt. 23:35), Enoch (Gen. 5:24), Noah (Gen. 6:9), Job (Job 1:8), and just prior to Christ's birth, Zacharias and Elizabeth (Luke 1:5-6). The

144,000 accepted ones standing with Christ on Mt. Zion (after His return to earth) are described as having no "guile" [deceit or falsehood] in their mouths, *"for they are without fault before the throne of God"* (Rev. 14:5).

Isn't it looking back to the pleasures of sin to insist that Jesus would ask the impossible? Jesus makes the comparison to a plowman who begins to plow but keeps looking back. Anyone who has ever tried this will tell you that it is impossible to plow a straight row looking back. *"No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God"* (Luke 9:62). The Christian must maintain a forward look, keeping in sharp mental focus the glories that lie ahead and the goal of perfection, a complete separation from a life of sin to a life of perfect obedience to the commands of Christ.

Moral perfection through growth

But perfection does not mean that we must live a lifetime without one sin? God understands our human weaknesses and does not require perfect obedience without a slip. Jesus, our greatest example, learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him (Heb. 5:8-9). He had to learn to be obedient, and so must we. Only He did not slip once He knew God's requirements.

God only asks that we grow into perfection, that by *"speaking the truth in love, [we] may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ"* (Eph. 4:15).

All of us have had habits that stand in the way of perfection of character. But we have learned from experience that by diligent Bible study, meditation on God's words, prayer and obedience we can replace bad habits with good ones. The process is not automatic but it is possible. And we are given a wonderful promise in 1 Tim. 4:8: *"For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come."* Isn't it like a loving Father to allow us time to accomplish a task? If we are *"exercising unto godliness,"* consciously trying to live by God's higher law of holiness, He will indeed give us the time to perfect our characters.

If honest, we all have to admit that we fall far short of a sinless life. We have sinned many times, even after knowing better. But we can

Perfection = "Not my will but Yours be done"

change. Jesus Himself said: *"The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master"* (Luke 6:40). Young's literal translation is *"A disciple is not above his teacher, but every one perfected shall be as his teacher."*

John reiterates these words, *"And everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as He is pure"* (1 John 3:3). When the training is complete every pupil will be perfected like the Master, Christ.

God does not leave us alone. Those who enter into this training are not left to flounder. They become recipients of God's Divine love. The highest form of parental love is expressed in guidance and discipline. So, the love of our heavenly Father includes discipline. It is creative, perfecting and tailored to our needs. Jesus said, *"With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible"* (Mark 10:27). With God's help we can achieve the high standard of perfection. *"For whom the Lord loves He corrects, Just as a father the son in whom he delights"* (Prov. 3:12).

◆ Must one be born again?

I have looked at your website and I am wondering, do you all believe in the concept Jesus stated and Paul listed in Romans, that one must be born again in order to enter heaven? From your writings, it looks like you people plan on being here on earth during the tribulation period without being killed, and then being here for Christ's reign on earth. Personally, I would rather be with Jesus in heaven.

"Please respond. I am very curious."

Your question brings up several issues. Yes, we do believe that we must be born again before we can experience the immortal state, but we must be sure to read Jesus' words carefully to understand what He means by that birth. Jesus said this plainly to Nicodemus, *"Most assuredly, I say to you; unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God"* (John 3:5).

What did Jesus mean by this statement? We need to recognize first that

Jesus is talking about two distinct processes: first, *"born of water,"* and second, *"born of the Spirit."* Why did He say that one must be *"born of water"*? In the next chapter Jesus offers the woman from Samaria spiritual, life-giving water, and tells her it is His to give. This very special *"water"* is the lifeline of spiritual life, the vital knowledge of God, as Jesus revealed during His ministry. We must be *"born of"* this water of life, i.e., learn the teachings of Jesus and become *"new"* in them, letting them remake our lives morally into *"new creatures"* (2 Cor. 5:17), then when Jesus comes He will remake our bodies to be like His own resplendent body, no longer subject to pain, sorrow, sickness or disease.

This second birth or physical making new, being born of the spirit, is the ultimate change to the immortal state. In 1 Corinthians, Paul said that *"flesh and blood,"* the mortal state as we know it, *"cannot inherit the kingdom of God"* (1 Cor. 15:50). We have to be changed physically, and he explains this change in the next few verses: *"This corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality"* (v. 53). Jesus' own comment indicates that it is a physical change of state. He says, *"The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit"* (John 3:8). Those who are Spirit born will not be confined to the normal means of transportation that we know (walk, run) but will be able to move as freely as does the wind, because Jesus said: *"So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."*

We are aware that many people believe they *"are born again"* when they are converted, but we do not find support for this thought in the Bible. Nor do we find support for the idea of entering heaven. The Bible promises that the faithful will *"reign on the earth"* (Rev. 5:9-10). Six times in the 37th Psalm, it is stated that the righteous will inherit the earth (land), and dwell in it forever. Proverbs 10:30 tells us the righteous will *"never be removed"*—they would surely have to be *"removed"* if they were to be transported to heaven. Jesus said *"the meek will inherit the earth"*—a long-

term possession. Jesus is coming to *"be king over all the earth"* (Zech. 14:9). In the prayer He taught His disciples to pray, He said, *"Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven"* (Matt. 6:10).

You suggest that you would rather be with Jesus in heaven during the time which you picture as the tribulation period. We would not have any objection to being with Jesus in heaven, if such were the plan, but we do not find anywhere in Scripture that Jesus offers us that opportunity. Nor do we find reason to fear the time of tribulation, because the Bible indicates God will look out for the good of His own, and they will be *"delivered"* (Dan. 12:1-2), *"spared"* (Mal. 3:17), and safely kept from harm (Joel 2:32). He said He would be coming back, so that we could be where He is (John 14:3). He will come and dwell among men (Rev. 21:3-4) but the location is always specified as earth, not heaven.

God has promised to watch over His own and keep them safe. He will *"give His angels"* this charge (Ps. 91:11). The promise is, *"The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them"* (Ps. 34:7). His promise to His people is unconditional: *"I will never leave you nor forsake you"* (Heb. 13:5; see also Deut. 31:6, 8; Josh. 1:5). ■


Envy-Rot

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

away mounds of clothing. But...terror overwhelms them, and they are blown away in the storms of the night" (Job 27:16, 20 NLT).

When you see yourself losing focus, go to the sanctuary of God in prayer. Take Asaph's lesson to heart and realize where the big money, and big palatial estates, and big-screen entertainment centers, and big spending, and big parties, and big prestigious jobs without God all end—because in the end *"The Lord preserves all who love Him, but all the wicked He will destroy"* (Ps. 145:20).

Ponder the dismal end of self-indulgence, and the glorious end of doing right. ■



*Every time we turn
green with envy
we are ripe for
trouble.*

FAILURE MEANS...

Failure doesn't mean you're a failure;
It does mean you haven't yet succeeded.

*Failure doesn't mean you have accomplished nothing;
It does mean you have learned something.*

Failure doesn't mean that you have been a fool;
It does mean you need more determination.

*Failure doesn't mean you have been disgraced;
It does mean you were willing to try.*

Failure doesn't mean you are inferior;
It does mean you have more to learn..

*Failure doesn't mean you don't have it;
It does mean you need another chance.*

Failure doesn't mean you've wasted your life;
It does mean you have a reason to start afresh.

*Failure doesn't mean you should give up;
It does mean you must try harder.*

Failure doesn't mean you will never make it;
It does mean it will take a little longer.

*Failure doesn't mean God has abandoned you;
It does mean God has a better way.*

Improvement begins with "I".

You may depend on the Lord, but can He depend on you?

*When we make God's will our will,
duty becomes a privilege and the outcome—**eternal life.***

There are no detours along the strait and narrow path.

*The man who lives for himself operates
a very small business.*



A PSALM of THANKSGIVING

Psalm 100, New Living Translation

Shout with joy to the Lord, O earth!
Worship the Lord with gladness.
Come before him, singing with joy.
Acknowledge that the Lord is God!
He made us, and we are his.
We are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving;
go into his courts with praise.
Give thanks to him and bless his name.
For the Lord is good.
His unfailing love continues forever,
and his faithfulness continues to each generation.

A pound of loyalty is worth a ton of cleverness.

God will not look us over for medals or diplomas,
but for battle scars.

*Brightening up the life of someone else
will put a fresh shine on your own.*

No!" is a complete sentence. Use it often when you
come up against temptation to do wrong. A solid
"No!" repeated often enough and long enough will
cause your stubborn temptation to relent and in time
to move right out of your life.

To know God's will is man's greatest opportunity;
to do God's will his greatest achievement.

*My great concern is not whether God is on my side;
my great concern is to be on God's side.*

A wise man will make more opportunities than he finds.

One who travels thoughtfully and reverently
adds another dimension to life.

Train yourself to listen. You'll be amazed how much
you can learn when your mouth is shut.

Sin pays full wages.
There are no cuts in pay, and
many an unexpected bonus in misery.

The kind of music people should have in their
homes is domestic harmony.

A pint of example is worth a barrel-full of advice.

*My Father's care, His loving care,
Will lead me to His Kingdom fair,
If I but trust Him day by day,
And walk within this narrow way.*

*So I'll serve Him while I may,
With feet and hands and heart today.
Then I will know where'er I be,
His loving care is over me.*

Thank You Again!

*Dear Heavenly Father,
I know what You think
Of all my good intentions
Without action.*

*I know what You think
Of all my planning, and praying,
And feeling, and saying—
Without doing.*

*I know, too, what You think of me
When I try to look big,
And appear what I am not.*

*I know also what You think of me
When I act like a spoiled child
That could not have his way;
When I get “out of sorts”
And spunky.*

*You want—you must have
Better than I have given you.
Yet sometimes when I know better,
I do worse.*

*Thank You, Lord,
For another chance
To try again.*

Tomorrow.

No, Lord, TODAY!

