

Loaves & Fishes

Volume 8 • Issue 2 • 2010

Yoga and Biblical Meditation

Poems From Prisoners

Pilgrim's Progress

*The power of God alone can multiply
these loaves and fishes in your hands
to more than you can contain.*

Only His Blood

Richard Smith
Hutchinson Correctional Facility
Hutchinson, Kansas

I used to fight and struggle within,
Not satisfied with sin after sin.
Chasing desires of the flesh,
Giving no thought to life after death.

I used to wonder what could stop my pain—
What made the sun shine after the rain.
I was hurting others around me,
All the time longing to be free.

I used to think I was better off alone.
God brought me to prison, made Himself known.
I came to Jesus with tons of questions;
By His grace, I'm willing to listen.

Only His blood covered my debt.
Now I'm living for Jesus—no more regrets.
I used to be lost,
But for my sins Jesus died on the cross.



Loaves & Fishes is published by Lighthouse Publishing as the Lord provides. Our goal is to point those in prison to Jesus Christ and help them experience the life, hope, and freedom of a daily walk with Him.

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Please pray for the grace and resources we need to continue publishing this magazine.



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In This Issue...

The Mind of Christ in

All My Pursuits	2
What You Think, You Will Become....	4
Science in Creation	
Your Marvelous Brain	9
Meditation: Truth or Confusion?	14
Prepared to Die.....	18
Pilgrim’s Progress (Part 17)	22

Free on the Inside (31–33)

A Child of the Risen King	31
Grateful.....	32
Songs of Praise.....	33

Putting off Anger

The Response of Faith	34
The Pursuit of Godly Seed	
Blessings: The Key to Obedience ...	49

Response Form	63
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Inside Cover:

Only His Blood
Pray, Watch, and Wait

**Your family and friends can help us send
Loaves & Fishes to prisoners!**

Learn how at www.lighthousepublishing.org.



The Mind of Christ in All My Pursuits

Lavern Gingerich

*“Let this mind be in you which
was also in Christ Jesus...”
Philippians 2:5a*

Jesus is our perfect example, and here Paul exhorts us to have the same *purpose* and *thought patterns* with which Jesus lived His life.

Because Jesus had an intimate relationship with His heavenly Father, He could live with clear direction. His whole life centered around the purpose of His Father’s will – the cause of the Kingdom. This purpose affected His rest, comfort, freedoms, relationships with His friends, meals, and entire lifestyle.

Jesus knew the night was coming when no one could work, and was committed to *finish* the work He was sent to do. He said, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work” (John 4:34). This purpose energized Jesus and brought a fulfillment far greater than any happiness the world can offer.

Does that sound like your life? Or are you living aimlessly, with no clearly defined goals to strive for? Are you always falling back into your old ways, unable to make progress or get established in your home, church, or community?

You can follow the example of Jesus! You can find your “sweet spot” and clearly understand what you’re here for. The same nourishment that Jesus found can be yours also if you follow the example of Jesus.

Our desire is to help you be like Jesus – find clear direction, diligently pursue the cause of the Kingdom while there is still time, and enjoy the fulfillment that only God can give.

This success depends on the thoughts you think each day. Your thoughts have a major influence on who you become and what you achieve.

This issue of *Loaves & Fishes* covers a lot of teaching on

thoughts. We hope it inspires you to develop positive thought patterns and to set your mind on eternal things. This will cause your life to be as a thriving, fruit-bearing tree planted beside a refreshing stream.

Your drive in life must be based upon the cause of the Kingdom of God. The only pursuits that really matter are those based on God's purposes. Daily meditate on Scripture and seek to know more clearly the cause of God's Kingdom and the purpose He has for your life.

Once you understand God's will and hear His call on your life, you can begin to set clear goals for your life. Here are some examples of goals you might set:

1. Overcome bitterness; learn to forgive those who wrong me.
2. Love my wife as Christ loves the church.
3. Put my whole heart into my family when I get back home.
4. Become a stable and faithful example in my local church.

These examples may not be specific to you, but write a list of goals that *you* can relate to. Review them often and try to think



Your pursuits must be based upon the cause of the Kingdom of God.

of ways you can make them more specific. Break each of your goals into small steps. Then focus on one step at a time, looking to God for grace to reach each one.

God desires to fill your life with clear direction. He has a plan for your life and wants to lead you forward in small steps of progress. Never let Satan or other people discourage you from running after the cause of God's Kingdom.

God will give you grace to reach those pursuits that are based on His purposes if you consistently allow the mind of Christ to be in you. And when that happens, you will have found your "sweet spot."

□

What You Think, You Will Become

Darold Gingerich

*You're not what you think you are,
but what you think, you are!*

The mind is a complex and amazing part of us. The human brain can outperform any computer humans ever designed. Without programming your brain and doing a restart, your eye can see an object flying toward you and blink shut to protect itself before you have time to think about it. It can change focus from a tiny object nearby to a majestic mountain miles away, all automatically and without conscious effort!

Our brain can love. As our love grows and shapes our thoughts, we find our actions changing. Without planning to change, we find ourselves buying flowers and chocolates, or doing other special favors for the one we love. Do we do

this because we have suddenly become more generous? If that was the case, we would be doing extra favors for everyone, wouldn't we? What has really happened is that our thoughts have turned toward one person, and those loving thoughts

change the way we treat that person. Our behavior and personality has changed to match our thoughts.

Many people allow their mind to just think whatever it wishes. When someone is unkind to them, they respond with unkind thoughts. If someone else treats them well

five minutes later, they are full of pleasant thoughts toward that person.

If we allow our thoughts to run their own course, we are



**As love shapes
our thoughts,
our actions
change.**

in for a wild roller coaster ride. Like the roller coaster, we'll hit a few high points, but we'll spend a lot of time down on the flat waiting for something or someone to pull us back to the top so we can feel good again.

It is amazing how few people today, Christian or non-Christian, maintain any real long-term relationships. For many people, one small episode can change the way they think about someone. Negative thoughts toward someone cause us to treat them differently, leading to negative reactions from them, until we can see only bad in that person. If we don't control these thoughts, we are eventually driven to escape the bad relationship. So we go looking for another job, another home, another life, another wife, another husband, another pastor, or whatever it is we think we need to make us happy again. We are willing to throw away a priceless relationship over the

smallest grievance, hoping for a better experience somewhere else. We've learned to think we deserve happiness, and that any person or thing which fails to make us happy is useless to us.

Our mind, left to its own natural ways of thinking, will soon become very selfish. A selfish mind is a slave to the lies of materialism, which are designed to make us dissatisfied with everything in our lives. TV, radio, billboards, and magazines are full of ads urging us to grab for more and more. These are tools our spiritual enemy uses to drag down our souls by distracting us from truth and causing us to seek pleasure and happiness somewhere else.

I am astounded by what people can accomplish when they make up their minds and say, "Yes, that is what I'm going to do!" Our world has changed greatly because of thinking people. Stop and think for a mo-

**A selfish mind is
a slave to the lies
of materialism.**



The world has changed because of thinking people.

ment about some things we take for granted, that did not exist 100 years ago: microwaves, everything instant, ballpoint pens, cell phones, and much, much more. Powerful people like Hitler and Stalin were examples of great thinkers who caused great evil in the world because they allowed their minds to be controlled by the Devil instead of God.

On the other hand, when someone chooses to live in God's will, yielding his mind and its thoughts to God, that person will go through fire and water to do what pleases God. Consider the Scripture examples of men such as Noah, Moses, Paul, Elijah, and Abraham. These men were great thinkers who thought about how to walk closer to God, pondered the wonder of God, and bowed before Him, not in costly cathedrals but throughout their everyday lives, in sincere devotion to their Creator.

So How Should We Think?

The only real answer is from God, so let's look at what the Scripture says.

⁴Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! ⁵Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. ⁶Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; ⁷and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

⁸Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy – meditate on these things. ⁹The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the

God of peace will be with you.” (Philippians 4:4-9).

An attitude of rejoicing and thankfulness gives us much greater strength to control our thoughts. Verse 8 gives some guidelines on what we can safely allow our minds to dwell on.

“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:2). A renewed mind transforms our life!

Many people like to play with the devil in their mind, but can't figure out why they don't have the power of God in their life. Do you expect God to stay near you if you allow bitter, hateful, lustful, angry, negative, unthankful, or wicked thoughts to control your mind?

³For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. ⁴For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, ⁵casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:3-5).

Verse 5 tells us to control our thoughts, throwing down any-



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A thankful attitude gives us strength to control our thoughts.

thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and only allowing those thoughts that honor Christ.

A truly humble attitude changes the way we see things, the thoughts we think, and the way we treat others.

¹Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, ²fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of

one mind. ³Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. ⁴Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. ⁵Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, ⁷but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. ⁸And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:1-8).

In verse 5 we see the humility of Christ, and we are urged to think as He does. Can we see how important it is to have a disciplined thought life that truly honors God each day?

2 Peter 1:5-13:

⁵...Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, ⁶to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, ⁷to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. ⁸For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the

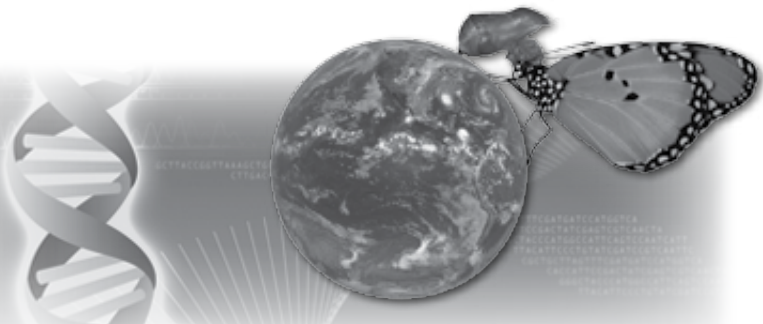
knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. ¹⁰Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; ¹¹for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

¹²For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth. ¹³Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by reminding you.”

This beautiful passage was written just before Peter was killed for his faith in Jesus Christ. Writing most likely from a dark prison, he gives the church some last instructions on righteous living. In verse 13, he says that as long as possible he will continue reminding his readers of the truth, since he knew that if these truths were theirs and were flowing from them, they would bear fruit for God!

If you find yourself barren and unfruitful today, there is a cure. Will you change your mind?





Science in Creation

Your Marvelous Brain

Andrew Zimmerman

"I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well" (Psalm 139:14).

The human brain is perhaps the most wonderful part of God's creation. That is, if we can say that some created things are more wonderful than others. The brain is a super-computer far surpassing anything man has devised or can ever hope to invent. It is the source of your thoughts, moods, and emotions. Consider your mind a gift from God, and use it accordingly.

Because of your brain, you have *consciousness*, you are aware of yourself and of your situation. You know that you exist. You can experience *emotions*, or feelings. You can feel compassion for

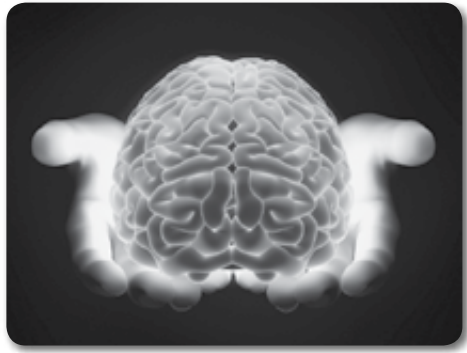
another human being. You can feel anger at an injustice done to you or someone else. Our Creator wants us to control our emotions, rather than letting our emotions control us and our actions.

"He who is slow to wrath has great understanding, but

continued on next page...

- Brother Andrew has had an avid
- interest in science since he
- started studying it in his early
- years of school. More recently,
- he has been blessed by studying
- the work of creation scientists
- such as Henry Morris and Ken
- Ham. Because of his interest in
- science and his belief in a literal
- six-day creation, he enjoys
- telling others about creation
- science. He lives in Central
- Pennsylvania with his wife and
- children.

Your mind is a gift from God.



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he who is impulsive exalts folly” (Proverbs 14:29).

Your brain has the unique ability to be creative. You can make a plan and put it into action. Animals can be trained to do some interesting things, and may appear to be smart, but they don’t come close to the human level of creativity.

How does the brain work? While scientists cannot fully explain all of the intricate electro-chemical workings of the brain, and cannot replicate a brain, some details are known about its internal structure.

Billions of *neurons* are connected to each other through innumerable paths and countless connections. A neuron is a special type of cell that can send and receive electro-chemical impulses to and from other neurons. The neurons are connected to each other by “wires” called *axons*. Axons can be microscopically

short or may be up to three or four feet long. They can reach from the middle of the spine to the bottom of the feet. An axon can branch out into thousands of connections. A connection is called a *synapse*. A single neuron can have as many as ten thousand connections to other neurons. Neurons receive signals via their *dendrites*, filaments protruding from the neuron’s cell body. Signals can also travel from axon to axon and from dendrite to dendrite.

Specialized neurons are used for the senses. Touch, sight, hearing, taste and smell are transmitted to the brain by *sensory neurons*. Other specialized neurons include *motor neurons* to activate muscles. A human brain contains 15 to 33 billion neurons. Many functions of the brain require the organized teamwork of thousands or millions of neurons. Little is known of how this organization is controlled.

Neurons are *amitotic*, which means they do not reproduce. At about one year old a human being typically has the maximum number of neurons he will ever have. From that point on he loses about 200,000 neurons per day. We could say that we're losing our minds every day.

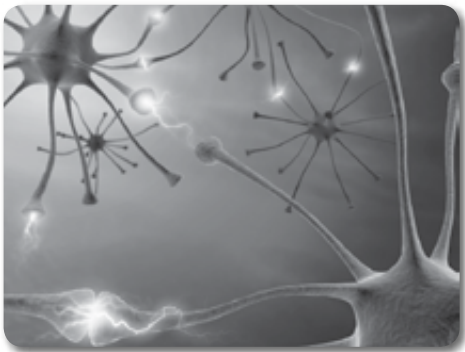
Neurons have a high metabolic rate, requiring large amounts of glucose and oxygen. About 20% of the oxygen in the bloodstream is used by the brain, even though the brain is only 3% of body weight. This oxygen use is even higher during increased mental activity, such as studying or learning new concepts.

There is another type of brain cell called *glial cells*, or simply *glia*, surrounding and protecting the neurons. The word *glia* comes from a Greek word meaning glue. They supply the neurons with oxygen and nutrients, and insulate the neurons from each

other. They destroy pathogens and remove dead neurons by engulfing and digesting them.

Different areas of the brain are used for different functions. Some parts of it work without our conscious thought. Tasks such as temperature control, breathing, and regulating your heart rate are done without conscious interaction. By observing the disabilities of persons with brain damage, doctors have been able to identify the functions of the main areas of the brain.

The *frontal lobe* is used in judging choices between good and bad. It has the ability to recognize future consequences of current actions. It suppresses socially unacceptable responses. Long term memories, especially related to the emotions, are in the frontal lobe. It is thought to reach full maturity during a person's twenties. This is one reason that adolescents lack the insight and judgment of older



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**A human brain
contains 15-30
billion neurons.**

people. Not only do they have less experience, but their brain is still developing. Studies show that they don't see errors in decision making like adults do. They tend to use the temporal lobes for decision making while adults use the frontal lobe.

The *occipital lobes* are at the back of the brain and are the primary vision processors, with connections to the retinal sensors. Each eye sends half of its image to each occipital lobe. The brain merges these images together so you can see.

The *parietal lobe* integrates vision and spatial perception and is used in the manipulation of objects.

The *temporal lobes* are the auditory processors, giving us the

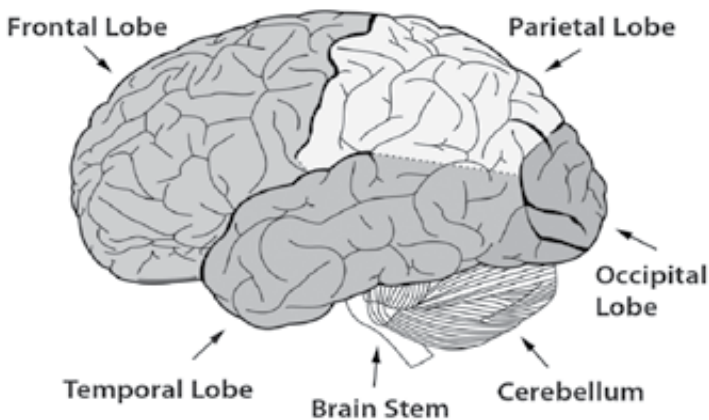
abilities of hearing and speech. They also have functions of categorization and recognizing people.

The *brain stem* is the connection between the sensory and motor systems to the main part of the brain. It is also responsible for regulating heart rate, blood pressure, breathing, temperature, digestion and other functions.

The *cerebellum* coordinates movement and is involved in balance and equilibrium. It is used for finer motor control. A person with a damaged cerebellum may be able to make only jerky, clumsy movements.

We've just scratched the surface of brain anatomy and function. Truly we are "fearfully and wonderfully made."

Parts of the Human Brain



Remember to thank your Creator for your sound mind.

“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7).

In contrast to the human brain, animal brains work mostly by instinct. Animals do what they’re programmed to do. They cannot be creative, make long term plans, and experience emotions like we can. We are aware of ourselves, can see our shortcomings, and make a choice to change. We can speak, plan, and imagine. We can understand that the things we do in this life determine our destiny in the next life.

You may have heard that most of us use only 10% of our brain. This assertion doesn’t hold up to scientific scrutiny. Through *MRI*, magnetic resonance imaging, doctors are able to see activity in the brain. The various parts of the brain are all used.

Are we responsible for what we think about? According to the Scriptures, we are.

“Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything



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The thoughts we dwell on determine our actions.

praiseworthy – meditate on these things” (Philippians 4:8).

The thoughts we dwell on determine our actions. We are responsible for our actions. By allowing God to control our thoughts we allow Him to control our actions and thus our entire life.

You are serving one of two masters in your use of your brain. Which one are you serving?

“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon” (Matthew 6:24).

□



Meditation: Truth or Confusion?

Anthony Hertzler

David, the king of Israel who wrote many of the Psalms, grew up herding sheep in the hills around Bethlehem. A shepherd had plenty of responsibility, but also lots of spare time—time many young men would have used to play foolish games or dream about girls. David had something better to do; he meditated on God.

David was not some pale-skinned weakling who dreamed of a better world because his own life was so dull. He was a dead shot with a sling, he killed a lion and a bear with his bare hands, and he became the greatest warrior in Jewish history. But he found God so wise, powerful, and lovely that nothing else excited him more.

In his father's house, David had heard the awesome his-

tory and laws of his people, God's chosen nation. What did it all mean, he wondered as he watched his flock. Repeating the great stories and laws by memory, he understood them better and better. He began to see truths about God in his relationship to his sheep, in the changing of the seasons, and in the wildlife that surrounded him. He saw God everywhere, and his heart overflowed in beautiful songs (many of the Psalms) which are still sung today. In these songs, David speaks again and again his joy in meditating on God's ways and God's laws.

Meditation—the secret of David's spirit. In a noisy, hectic world, Christians need this discipline more than ever. In fact, the practice of meditation is extremely popular today, not just

among Hebrew shepherds or Catholic monks. In mainstream magazines, on TV and radio, people tell how meditation helps them manage stress and realize their full potential. Is this a sign that our nation is turning back to the truth of God at last? To answer that question, let's talk about the practices and ideas associated with a popular type of meditation.

The type of meditation most popular today is associated with a discipline called *yoga*. While the term *yoga* is used in different ways, it typically refers to a system of practices including special poses, breathing techniques, and mental exercises. *Yogis*, people who practice *yoga*, often say that *yoga* is not a religion; it is simply a beneficial practice which helps people relax, let go of negative emotions, and connect with their real self. No matter what religion you belong to, they say, the regular practice of *yoga* will improve your life.

According to teachers of *yoga*, negative emotions such as anger, worry, and fear are able to control us because we have lost touch with our true selves and become attached to external things and circumstances. To find freedom, *yogis* learn to turn their thoughts inward, free their

In a noisy, hectic world, Christians need meditation more than ever.



minds from their surroundings, and reach “deeper” or “higher” states of consciousness. They use *yoga* poses, controlled breathing, concentration, and the chanting of certain syllables or “mantras” to help them accomplish this.

Much of what the *yogis* say is true. Our lives *are* too fast-paced. We *do* need to let go of bitterness, anger, worry, and fear. We *do* need to stop looking for happiness in material things. We *do* need more time in the quiet. But when it comes to the “cure” offered by *yoga*, nothing could be farther from the truth.

Yoga is a central part of eastern religions such as Hinduism,

Buddhism, and Jainism. According to these religions, we think we are individual beings, but that is an illusion; we are all part of one Universal Consciousness. True knowledge of ourselves, they say, is the same as knowing God. Believers in these religions see life as a painful cycle of birth, death, and rebirth which continues as long as we remain tied to the material world, and they seek to escape this cycle of suffering through self-realization, or enlightenment. Yoga is the path by which they hope to reach enlightenment and become one with the Universal Self.

Can these ideas be “blended” with Christianity as an “exercise”? Listen to what God, through the prophet Isaiah, says about our problems:

“Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. ⁸For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. ⁹For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:7–9 ESV).

According to the Bible, God is the Creator, and we are the work of His hands. He made us in His image, to be His friends, but our sin separated us from Him. Now our only hope is to forsake our own ways and seek Him, whose thoughts and ways are far different and higher than our own. Seeking salvation within ourselves drives us not toward God, but away from Him, deeper into our own lostness.

According to the Bible, our problem is not that we are disconnected from our inner reality. Our problem is that we are sinners; we have wicked ways and unrighteous thoughts. Trying to escape our sin through “self-realization” is like trying to get clean by jumping into a sewer. Sin is not like mud splattered on our skin; it is a disease that has polluted every fiber of our being. “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?”

Puzzle Answers for Last Issue

Missing names for the puzzle on page 13 by row:

1. Hanani, Hoshea, Butler, Baker, Micaiah
2. Simeon, Butler, Joseph, Baker, Hoshea
3. Samson, Simeon, Hanani, Joseph, Butler
4. Hanani, Samson, Butler, Daniel, Baker, Joseph
5. Joseph, Baker, Simeon, Daniel, Hoshea, Butler
6. Butler, Daniel, Hoshea, Baker, Joseph, Micaiah
7. Daniel, Micaiah, Samson, Butler, Hoshea
8. Hoshea, Simeon, Joseph, Samson, Micaiah
9. Micaiah, Hoshea, Samson, Hanani, Daniel

(Jeremiah 17:9 ESV). The more we get in touch with our hearts, the more lost and confused we become. On our own, we will always be hopeless slaves of our sinful nature.

Only one Guide can lead us out of this prison – Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth, and the Life. When we reach out to Him for salvation, He calls us to follow Him to the cross, where our old, broken selves die a painful death. Only then can God bring us to life, remade with new hearts and new minds that love truth and righteousness.

Once God has renewed our minds, we must meditate on Him as David the shepherd did. There are many ways to do this. Memorizing Scriptures enables us to take them with us everywhere, turning them over in our minds even when we are working. When a friend shares a new spiritual idea with us, we can remember that and take it to prayer, asking the Lord if it is true and what it means in our lives. We can personalize Scriptures, such as the Psalms, and pray them back to God from our own heart. What about writing and singing a song that shares a truth we have discovered in our Bible study? This is not a mystical exercise to connect with

Godly meditation protects us from Satan's snares.



our inner reality; rather, it is an active, thoughtful quest for truth and understanding from God our Father.

If you are reading this article behind bars, it's likely that you, like David, have an abundance of time. This can become an amazing opportunity for growth through meditation on God's truth. Godly meditation helps us build a spiritual strength and a love for the truth that protects us from the snares Satan sets for our souls. As you grow closer to God, the physical limitations of prison will matter less and less, because as Jesus promised in John 8:32 (ESV), "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."



Prepared to Die

Tommy Clayton

Every day people everywhere prepare for their future. Some prepare for future financial security with 401k retirement plans, savings accounts, and other investments. Others prepare for the future of their health through health insurance. Students prepare for tests by studying; fighters prepare for a fight by training. Receptionists prepare their employers' schedules by arranging appointments and meetings. All of us prepare for things in life, but I am concerned that too many of us are unprepared for the most inevitable part of life—death.

"It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). The statistics are staggering—10 out of 10 people die! Consider these figures: 55,000,000 people die each year! 151,000 die each day! 6,300 die each hour! More than 100 die each minute!

Death is an appointment we all have to keep, and no one will be late to that meeting.

"¹To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: ²a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted" (Ecclesiastes 3:1, 2).

Death has no regard for age, race, or religion, and we will all face it. Death is the end of your life and the beginning of your eternity. Are you prepared to die? Are you ready for Eternity?

Long ago three young Hebrew men, believers in the one true God, were captured and taken to another country to serve in the palace of a powerful and wicked king. Although surrounded by pagan wickedness and idolatry, they continued serving God faithfully. But they faced their biggest test when they were called to a great celebration in the king's honor.

The king had built a huge golden statue of himself, 90 feet tall, and had it set up on the plain of Dura. When it was finished, he ordered all his officials to attend its dedication

ceremony. That included the three young Hebrews, since they held positions at the palace.

When everyone was gathered around the huge statue, the king's herald announced that everyone would be expected to fall on their faces and worship the statue. A blast of music from the royal band would be their signal to bow. Bowing was not optional, the herald explained; anyone who refused to worship would be thrown into a blast furnace and burned alive!

The music blared across the plain and the whole gathering swayed and fell face-down—all but the three young Hebrews, who would worship nothing and no one except the one true God.

When the king heard the news, he was shocked and furious. How dare those Hebrews defy his orders? But since they were some of the finest men in his kingdom, he called them before him and gave them a second chance.

"We'll play the music again," the king growled, "and you better be ready to fall down and worship my statue. If you do, we can forget this whole thing. If you don't—you'll be thrown into that blast furnace over there, and what kind of god do you think will deliver you then?"



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We all have an appointment with death.

If the king expected to scare the three men, their answer must have made him doubt his hearing.

¹⁶Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. ¹⁷If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. ¹⁸But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up" (Daniel 3:16–18).

They believed God was able to deliver them from the furnace, but if He chose to allow them to die they were prepared to die and ready for eternity.

These three refused to sin, compromise, or turn aside from following God no matter what it cost. Knowing that they faced a death sentence made no difference. They understood that to die for God was better than living for themselves.

The king, nearly blinded by rage, ordered the furnace to be heated far hotter than ever before and the three Hebrews to be thrown in. No one who was there that day ever forgot what happened next. Read Daniel chapter 3 for the whole story.

Now I'd like to share with you three personal examples of people who were prepared to die.

In our local church during the past year there have been three funerals. The first was my friend, brother in Christ, and neighbor. He left this world on his 44th birthday. This is young by most standards, but we who knew him were not surprised. While doing mission work in Central America, he was disabled in a car accident. What left a lasting impression on me was his readiness to leave this world behind and step into eternity. His mind was often on the things of God, and he frequently pointed others to Jesus Christ and His love for sinners. He died the death of the righteous.

"We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8).

The second funeral was for a dear elderly sister we called Grandma. She was a bright spot in the lives of all who knew her and loved little children greatly. My family and I were with her the evening she died. The entire family was there around her bed singing hymns to comfort and cheer her heart. Her husband, affectionately known as Grandpap, sat patiently beside the bed in a chair, lovingly watching her. Though she was mostly unconscious and struggling for breath, I noticed the expression of peace on her face. As I looked around the room at the family, I could clearly see the love of each one present as we saw her take her last breath. There were some tears shed over her death, but all there knew she was now with her Lord for ever.

"Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints" (Psalm 116:15).

As the new year of 2010 began, Grandpap had been battling illness for some time and we knew he would soon go to be with his Savior. He is the father of two of our ministers here. His life and convictions have been a source of strength, direction, and stability

for the Church for over 30 years. Although I only knew him for 3 ½ years, I was encouraged and challenged by his consistent life and simple faith in God. When death came, he was ready for eternity; he had expressed his desire to depart and be with the Lord. He made it clear that he did not want anything done to keep him here any longer than necessary. He was survived by 3 brothers, 4 sisters, 12 children, 88 grandchildren, and 89 great-grandchildren.

“And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them” (Revelation 14:13).

These three were prepared to die, and when their time came to enter eternity, they went with confidence and assurance. I want to follow the examples of these who were redeemed by God – a life of faithfully serving the Lord Jesus and a death faced with hope and trust.

As Christians we are called to live our lives in such a way that

we are always prepared to die. Everything we do has an effect on our preparation for eternity. The Bible commands us to put on Christ, have the mind of Christ, follow Christ, and be like Christ! This is impossible if we are living

for ourselves, indulging our fleshly lusts, being bitter or unforgiving, or living in anger. The Christian must give ev-

erything to the Lord! God won't accept 2nd place in your life. Give Him all of your heart, mind, soul, and strength.

If you really want to be found ready at the end of your life, you must live for eternity every day! Remember that Hell is full of people with good intentions who planned to make things right with God someday. Their opportunity for salvation is past, but for you there is still hope. Today is the day of salvation! Don't put off until tomorrow what can be done today, for tomorrow may never come!

Are you prepared to die? Are you ready for eternity?

“For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

To be ready for death, live for eternity now.

□

Pilgrim's Progress

Part 17

Welcome to John Bunyan's classic story of Christian's journey from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City!

Pilgrim's Progress was written over 300 years ago by a faithful street preacher, who was confined 12 years in a loathsome British prison for preaching without a license. As you read this allegory, remember who wrote it – a man who was free on the inside. God could use him in a great way even while he was in prison!

Final
Installment

What Happened So Far...

In the last issue, we left Christian and Hopeful in the parks and gardens surrounding the Celestial City. They are in full sight of their goal at last, and the King has sent two glorious guides to help them on the final lap of their journey. The city of Destruction, where Christian was born, seems far behind and long ago, but they haven't arrived yet, and they are not out of danger. How will they survive the final, terrifying test that lies between them and their eternal reward?

The Last Difficulties

The two shining ones asked Christian and Hopeful where they were from, and the pilgrims told them. They also asked them where they had stayed, what difficulties and dangers, comforts and pleasures, they had encountered on the path. Then they said, "You have only two more difficulties to face, and then you'll be in the City."

Christian and Hopeful asked the men to go with them to the city, and they agreed. "But," they said, "you'll have to reach the goal by your own faith." So I saw in my dream that they walked together until they came within sight of the city gate.

Now I also saw that between them and the gate was a deep river, but there was no bridge to cross it. The Pilgrims were amazed at the sight, but the shining men said, "You must go

through it, or you cannot reach the gate.”

“Is there really no other way to the gate?” the pilgrims asked.

“There is,” the guides answered. “But since the foundation of the world, none have been permitted to walk that path but two— Enoch and Elijah. No more shall walk it until the last trumpet sounds” [1 Corinthians 15:51-52].

Then the pilgrims, especially Christian, became depressed. They looked all around, but they could find no way to escape the river. They asked their guides whether the water was the same depth everywhere.

“No,” replied the guides, “but it’s impossible for us to help you find shallow places, since you’ll find it deeper or shallower according to your faith in the King of the city.”

At last the pilgrims entered the water, and Christian immediately began to sink. “Hopeful,” he cried, “I have come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me” [Psalm 69:2].

“Cheer up, brother!” called Hopeful. “I can feel the bottom, and it’s solid.”

Christian continued shouting, “My friend, the sorrows of death have surrounded me. I’ll never see the land that flows with milk and honey!” Then a great darkness and horror fell on him, so he could no longer see ahead, and he nearly lost his senses. He couldn’t remem-

The river is deeper or shallower according to your faith in the King.

ber or talk about any of the refreshments he had enjoyed on the journey. Instead, he talked of his terror, and how he expected to die in the river and never reach the gate after all.

Those who watched him noticed also that he was greatly troubled by thoughts about the sins he had committed, both before and after he became a pilgrim. Worse yet, he kept saying he was tormented by visions of goblins and evil spirits.

Hopeful had all he could do to keep his brother’s head above water; in fact, Christian sometimes went completely under, only to rise to the surface again, half drowned. Hopeful tried to



comfort him with encouraging words. “Brother,” he said, “I can see the gate, and the people waiting to welcome us!”

But Christian said, “It’s you, brother, it’s you they’re waiting for, not me. You’ve always been hopeful as long as I knew you. Surely, if I was accepted, He’d come and help me. For all my sins, He’s led me into this trap and left me!”

“My brother,” said Hopeful, “You’ve forgotten the text where it says of the wicked, ‘For there are no pangs in their death, but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men, nor are they plagued like other men’

[Psalm 73:4, 5]. The trouble and distress you’re suffering in this river are not signs that God has forsaken you; rather, they’re sent to test you, to see if you’ll recall what you’ve already experienced of His goodness and nourish yourself on Him in your distress.”

Then I saw in my dream that Christian was lost in thought for awhile. Hopeful said to him, “Take heart; Jesus Christ makes you well.”

With that Christian shouted, “Oh, I see Him again! He tells me, ‘When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow

you” [Isaiah 43:2]. Then they both gained courage, and their enemy did not torment them any more during the rest of the crossing. Soon Christian’s feet felt solid ground, and they finished the crossing in shallow water.

As Christian and Hopeful approached the riverbank, they saw the two shining men waiting there for them. As they came out of the water, the shining ones saluted them and said, “We are ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation” (Hebrews 1:14). Then they all walked together toward the gate.

The city stood on a mighty hill, but the pilgrims climbed it easily. Their two shining companions led them by the arms, and besides, they had left their mortal garments behind in the river. So they hurried up the hill with great speed and agility, even though its foundation was higher than the clouds. They rose through the sky, talking pleasantly together, relieved to have made it through the river, and delighted to be with such glorious companions.

Welcome

As they approached the city, the shining ones told them about the place; its glory and beauty, they said, were inexpressible. “There is Mount Zion,” they said, “the heavenly Jerusalem, the innumerable company of angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect [Hebrews 12:22-23]. You are going to the Paradise of God, where you will see the tree of life and eat of its never-fading fruits. When you arrive, you will be given white robes, and you will walk and talk with the King every day, throughout eternity [Revelation 2:7, 3:4].

**You’ll never again see sorrow,
sickness, suffering, or death.**

“There you’ll never again see the things you saw in the lower region, on earth—sorrow, sickness, suffering, and death—for the former things have passed away [Isaiah 65:16]. You are going to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the prophets, men whom God has taken away from the coming evil and who are now resting, since they walked uprightly” [Isaiah 57:1, 2].

Then the pilgrims asked, “What will we do in this holy place?”

“You will receive comfort for all your work, and joy for your sorrow; you will reap what you have sown—the fruit of all your prayers and tears and suffering for the King on your journey [Galatians 6:7]. There you will wear gold crowns and enjoy a constant view of the Holy One, for there you will see Him as He is [1 John 3:2]. You will serve Him continually with praise, shouting, and thanksgiving, just as you desired to serve Him when you were in the world, although the weakness of the flesh made it difficult. Your eyes and your ears will be delighted with seeing and hearing the Mighty One.

“You will enjoy spending time with friends who arrived before you did, and those who arrive later, you will welcome with joy. You will be clothed with glory and majesty, and dressed well enough to ride with the King of glory. When He comes in the clouds with the sound of a trumpet, as on the wings of the wind, you will be with Him, and when He sentences those who did

evil, you will have a voice in the judgment, since they were your enemies as well as His. Then, when He returns to the city, you will go with Him, to the sound of a trumpet, and live with Him forever” [1 Thessalonians 4:13-16; Jude 14; Daniel 7:9-10; 1 Corinthians 6:2-3].

Now as they neared the gate a company of the heavenly host came out to meet the pilgrims.

These men loved our Lord and left everything for His name.

The two shining ones who were with them said to the others, “These are men who loved our Lord when they were in the world and left everything for His holy name. He sent us to fetch them, and we’ve brought them this far so that they may enter and have the joy of seeing their Redeemer face to face.”

Then the heavenly host shouted, “Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb” [Revelation 19:9].

Now several of the King’s trumpeters also came out to meet them, dressed in glowing white clothes and making the heavens echo with their powerful and melodious music. They

saluted Christian and Hopeful with ten thousand welcomes, with shouting and the sound of trumpets. Then they surrounded the two men, some ahead, some behind, and some on either side, as if to guide them through the upper regions. As they went, they kept making beautiful music on their trumpets, so that the scene looked to those who could see it as though heaven itself had come down to meet the pilgrims.

In this way they all walked on together, and as the musicians played, they mixed their music with expressions and gestures that showed Christian and Hopeful how welcome they were, and how glad everyone was to meet them. So it was as if they were in heaven itself even before they arrived, since they were swallowed up with the sight of angels and the sound of their beautiful music. The city itself was in plain view now,

and they thought they could hear all the bells inside ringing to welcome them. Greatest of all was the knowledge that they themselves would be living here among these awesome beings forever. What tongue or pen would be sufficient to express their joy? Thus they arrived at the gate.

Written above the gate in letters of gold were the words, “Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city” [Revelation 22:14].

Then I saw in my dream that the shining men told the pilgrims to call at the gate. When they called, several men looked over the gate—Enoch, Moses, and Elijah. The men with the pilgrims told them, “These pilgrims have come from the city of Destruction because of their love for the King of this place.”





Each pilgrim then handed over the certificate he had been given at the beginning of their journey. Someone delivered these to the King, Who read them and asked, “Where are the men?”

“Standing outside the gate,” the messengers answered.

“Open the gate,” commanded the King, “So that the righteous nation which keeps the truth may enter in” [Isaiah 26:2].

Now I saw in my dream that the two entered the city, and as they did, they were utterly changed, and clothing was placed on them that shone like

gold. People brought harps and crowns and gave them to the pilgrims—the harps for praise, and the crowns as a sign of honor. Then I heard all the bells of the city ringing again for joy, and the pilgrims were told, “Enter into the joy of your Lord.”

I also heard Christian and Hopeful themselves singing loudly, “Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever” [Revelation 5:13–14].

As the gates opened to let the pilgrims in, I looked into the city after them, and I saw that it shone like the sun. The streets were paved with gold, and walking on them were many people with crowns on

After what I saw, I longed to be among them.

their heads, palm branches in their hands, and golden harps for praising God. There were also winged beings who called to each other endlessly, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord!”

Then they shut the gates, and after what I saw, I longed to be among them.

Ignorance Comes to His End

As I was gazing at all this, I paused to look back and saw Ignorance arriving at the river. He crossed it quickly, without half the difficulty the others had, by catching a ride on a ferry service operated by a man named Vain Hope. Then he started up the hill toward the gate, but he came alone; no one met him or gave him any encouragement.

When he arrived at the gate, he read the inscription above it and began to knock, expecting to be admitted quickly, but the men who looked over the gate asked, "Where are you from, and what do you want?"

Ignorance answered, "I have dined in the King's presence, and He has taught in our streets."

The men asked him for his certificate, so they could show it to the King. Ignorance fumbled in his pockets for awhile, but came up empty. "Don't you

have one?" they asked, but Ignorance had nothing to say.

When the men took this news to the King, He would not come down to see Ignorance. Instead, He summoned the same two Shining Ones who had brought



Ignorance caught a ride with a ferry service operated by a man called Vain Hope.

Christian and Hopeful into the city, and ordered them to arrest Ignorance, bind his wrists and ankles, and carry him away. So they took him, carried him through the air to the door I had seen in the side of the hill, and pushed him



inside. Then I saw that there is a way to hell, not only from the city of Destruction, but also from the very gates of heaven.

So I awoke, and it was only a dream!

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The Conclusion

Now, reader, I have told my dream to you
Interpreting the dream is yours to do.
Explain it to your neighbor or yourself,
But do beware of risking your soul's health
By misinterpreting the things you've read,
For then you would not gain but lose instead.
Be careful also not to be extreme
In playing with the outside of my dream,
Nor let my figures and similitudes
Be cause for foolish laughter or for feuds.
Leave that for fools and children, rather, you
Be diligent to find the substance true.
Pull back the curtains, look within my veil,
Turn up my metaphors, and do not fail
To search them well until at last you find
Things that are helpful to an honest mind.
Wherever you find dross mixed in, be bold
To throw it out, but do preserve the gold.
What if my gold is mixed with useless ore?
No one discards the apple for the core.
But if you toss it all away as vain,
For all I know I may just dream again.

– The End

Free on the Inside

Prisoners encourage prisoners.



A Child of the Risen King

William Richard

CMC West > San Luis Obispo > CA

If you are like me, I can feel your pain
Because sin has left its horrible stain.
You feel like you've strayed too far away,
And it seems like God is gone today,
But our God is more loving than all of this;
He has saved our lives by giving His.
God walked a road that no man could bear;
To doubt His love, how do we dare?
I know that it's hard to face our shame,
But there is forgiveness in Jesus' name.
For He didn't come for those who are whole,
But He came for us with a troubled soul.
So if you feel that you've strayed too far,
Just remember who you are:
You are a child of the risen King,
And to Him, my friend, you're everything.

"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

Do you have a Bible?



If not, we would like to send you one! On a separate sheet of paper, clearly print your request for your free KJV Bible and send it to us, including your name, ID, and address.

Supplies may be limited. Offer for prisoners only.

Grateful

Christopher-Kenneth Cruz
Terminal Annex > Los Angeles > CA

I'm grateful for this day,
For I am a king who desperately needed to change his ways.
I was infected with something that was killing me inside,
Slowly, silently, and unseen, like AIDS.
But thanks to God, people, and this place,
I've seen the error of my ways,
And trust that I've changed in unique and profound ways.
Even now, as I fight tears from falling to the page,
I smile, knowing that soon I will see better days.
Content knowing I've experienced my fall from grace —
All my worst fears I've already faced,
And God chose to reunite with me in this place.
I refuse to let my life go to waste;
Never again will I return to this place;
I've learned that time and love are too precious to waste.
No more dragons, dreams, or dollars will I chase,
For I am confident that blessings
Will be bestowed on me by God's grace,
And I know that now that I have God,
Everything in my life will fall into place.





Songs of Praise

Justin Cox

Martin Correctional Institute > Indiantown > FL

Dear Lord, please forgive my many sins.
Help me be strong when I feel like giving in.
I ask that You help me and trust that You are.
For years I have strayed and traveled so far.
Even when I was lost in the world and getting high,
You kept me safe from harm and didn't let me die.
I couldn't stop on my own; I was way out of control,
So You brought me to a place where I could regain my soul.
I ask that You give me strength to succeed.
I ask that You let Your will take the lead.
I believe all things are possible to those who believe.
Help me to bless others, as well as receive.
Your many blessings throughout these last days.
That's why I come to you with songs of praise.

Would you like to share a testimony or poem with fellow-believers in prison?

Send us your poems, testimonies, articles, and stories, etc., and we will consider them for publication. Any material sent to us will be used at our discretion. (We have received a large number of writings.) Any material sent to us becomes the property of Lighthouse Publishing.

Putting off Anger

John Coblentz



The Response of Faith

Following our natural feelings during difficulty, we end up in emotional prisons. We are angry, resentful, bitter, self-pitying, or depressed, as the case may be. In those emotional prisons, we are cut off from the light and truth of God; and for that reason, Satan loves to have us there. “Whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them” (2 Corinthians 4:4).

While this verse describes Satan’s work specifically in unbelievers, his tactics are identical for believers. He would like nothing better than to blind Christians to the light of God. Hebrews gives this specific warning, “Beware, brethren,

lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God” (Hebrews 3:12). Faith opens our eyes to the unseeable realm; unbelief shuts our eyes to that realm. Nowhere does unbelief thrive so well as in the gloom of angry, bitter thoughts and feelings.

Christians do not deny God outright. But unfortunately, many Christians succumb to the blindness of unbelief in more subtle forms. In their anger, they may become oblivious to the power of God. They may misunderstand His purposes, even speaking bitterly against what God has allowed. They may come to doubt and deny God’s goodness, His interest in them, and His promised care. If

ever Christians need faith, and if ever they need the warning against unbelief, it is in those circumstances when naturally they feel angry and resentful.

What is faith?

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). Or as the New American Standard Bible puts it, “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

Faith, then, is the certainty (assurance or conviction) about a reality we cannot see.

We live in a realm of time and sense. We can confirm the certainty of things in this realm through our natural senses — touch, taste, hearing, seeing, and smelling. If someone tells us, “There is a rock in your front yard,” we can go to the front yard and confirm not only that it is there, but also its size, color, shape, and composition.

There is another realm, however, referred to in the Bible as spiritual. This realm is not perceived through our natural senses. God is at the center of this realm, but it includes angels and evil spirits, heaven and hell, along with all the spiritual laws and principles that operate in that realm. The Bible speaks,

for example, of the “law of sin and death” and the “law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:2). While these spiritual laws cannot be studied or demonstrated in the concrete sense that the laws of the natural realm can be (such as the law of gravity), they are nonetheless real.

The spiritual realm is distinct from the natural realm in its characteristics, but the two realms are inseparably inter-related. God, at the center of the spiritual realm, made the natural realm. And He governs it. Furthermore, there is spiritual warfare going on all the time, affecting the actions, decisions, and plans of everyday



**Unbelief thrives
among angry,
bitter thoughts.**



The unseen realm is as real as the natural world.

life on earth. The devil and his angels are bent on deception, destruction, and death. God is redeeming a host for His glory and offering grace for daily living to those who follow Him.

Many people are blind to the spiritual realm. Some are vaguely aware of it. Some dabble in forbidden spiritual territory and powers. And there are others who by faith believe the revelation of God about this spiritual realm.

Because the unseen realm cannot be verified by our natural senses, we have trouble with faith. But this unseen realm is just as real as the natural world. Faith is the certainty or conviction

believers have about this unseen realm.

How is faith an alternative to anger?

In situations where our natural response would be anger, God calls us to believe in Him, trust Him, and rest our lives in His care and purposes. In situations that stir our anger, certain truths become extremely important.

1. *God is.* "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6). As noted in the introduction to this chapter, most Christians will not deny God outright, even when they are angry. But in times of distress, they may lose sight of Him, or they may develop distorted thoughts about Him.

Neither faith nor unbelief establish reality. If a rock sits in my front yard, whether I believe or disbelieve it is there does not change its existence. I may shut my front curtains, declare it is not there, even write a thesis about its nonexistence; but my unbelief does not change the reality of that rock. Even so,

the reality of the spiritual realm is not established by faith nor disestablished by unbelief. God is, whether I believe in Him or not.

2. *God is sovereign.* “But our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases” (Psalm 115:3). “Whatever the LORD pleases He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deep places.” (Psalm 135:6). “All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, “What have You done?” (Daniel 4:35).

These verses clearly establish the sovereignty of God over the affairs of men. How do we understand such sovereignty in light of wickedness on the earth? If God is sovereign, why is there evil? How can people choose to live contrary to His will? Theologians have long struggled to try to reconcile the sovereignty of God with man’s free will. Consider the following truths:

a. *God can and does allow people to make personal choices.*

b. *God can and does place limitations on humans.* Power of choice, in other words, is limited by power of accomplishment –

no amount of free will gives man the power to visit other galaxies or annul the law of gravity.

c. *God can and does hold men and women accountable for their choices.*

d. *God can and does establish consequences and rewards for man’s choices.* This is so in this life and is absolute in eternity. Men and women can make choices in this life, but ultimately God alone will decide their destiny. (In Scriptural language, He already has, based on His foreknowledge, predestinated those in Christ to be with Him in eternal paradise and those outside of Christ to be severed from Him in eternal damnation.)

Let’s carry forward the truths about God that can save us from the bondage of anger and bitterness.

3. *God has eternal purposes for His people.* “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope” (Jeremiah 29:11). This promise is in the context of God’s prophecies to the Jewish people. He predicted that after 70 years of captivity in Babylon, they would be restored to the land of Palestine, and they would find Him.

We may make application from this to God's people today. God has plans for every one of His children. His plans are good. And His plans always extend beyond what we are able to see at any given time. As He puts it, "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:9).

4. *God is able to use the very circumstances we are facing to accomplish His good purposes in our lives.* "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28).

This verse assures us of the sovereignty of God over a sinful world. People can and do violate the will of God. They sin against His express commandments. They also sin against other people. But neither the sinner nor the situation he creates ever gets out from under the sovereign hand of God. In the lives of those who love God and trust in Him, God is at work in all situations to bring about His good purposes in spite of the choices others are making.

This sovereignty defies full understanding by any hu-

man being, much less a full explanation. We do not need to understand how God works all things together for our good. We need only to trust that He is able to do so.

5. *God's purposes for us include bringing out of our lives a message of His power and grace.* Paul told the Corinthian Christians their lives were like a letter "known and read by all men" (2 Corinthians 3:2). He told the young believers at Thessalonica that although they had "received the word in much affliction," their testimony was going out so powerfully "that we do not need to say anything." (1 Thessalonians 1:6, 8).

When people place their faith in God, He is able to turn their problems into life messages that testify of Him. Those looking on do not so much think about the difficulties as they think about the Deliverer. The Bible is filled with such examples, confirming these words of a prophet (actually given in rebuke to a man who didn't trust God): "For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him" (2 Chronicles 16:9).

6. *God's purposes for us are higher than we can see.* When God took the Israelites out of Egypt, He had much more in mind than simply getting them out of a difficult situation. When He predicted Joseph would rule over his brothers, He had much more in mind than simply giving Joseph a position. As a young man facing the test of forbidden meat, did Daniel know all God had in mind for him in Babylon? When Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown into jail, did they know about the coming earthquake and the jailer's conversion?

The answer to these questions is obvious. The sobering truth is that the mighty and far-reaching effects of these situations came about as God's children placed their faith in Him. And we may well wonder on the other hand how many good purposes of God have gone unfulfilled due to unbelief. The eyes of the Lord truly are searching the earth for those who will exercise faith in Him in times of difficulty.

These are hard truths for us to actually live by. To the natural man, they are foolishness. But to the person willing to live by faith, these truths are life-giving and liberating. On the basis of the above truths, though our situation may be out of our con-

trol, it is not out of God's control. Though presently miserable, its long-term effect on our life will be good.

Every child of God faces situations that test his faith, situations that seem to disprove the truths we just noted from the Word of God. Sometimes we face situations in which it seems God ISN'T—or at least that He has turned His back or diverted His attention. We will face situations that seem to disprove God is in control—our natural reasoning would want to shout, "What God would allow this!" At times we will not see any divine purpose in the circumstances we are in. They may seem so evil, so chaotic, and so overwhelming that the suggestion of working together for our good seems almost like blasphemy.

To see how these truths actually operate, let's consider in more detail the life of Joseph. He was given several dreams clearly indicating someday he would be lord over his brothers. The circumstances that followed, however, appeared to totally disprove God's word to Joseph. Joseph's steps did not ascend from younger brother to ruler over Egypt. They were down, down, and still further

Faith is a living, growing, dynamic quality.



down. His brothers' hatred increased. They threw him into a pit. They sold him as a slave. His social status went down, not up. Being in Egypt eliminated all contact with his family, let alone his ruling over them. He was falsely accused and thrown into prison. The likelihood of God's promises ever being fulfilled seemed less than zero.

At nearly any point along the downward way of Joseph's circumstances, his natural inclinations would have been against believing the truths we just considered.

1. God is.
2. God is sovereign.
3. God has eternal purposes for His people.
4. God is able to use bad circumstances to accomplish His good purposes in our lives.
5. God's purposes for us include producing from our lives a message of His power and grace.

6. God's purposes for us are higher than we can see. "Where is such a God?" Joseph might well have asked.

And yet, knowing the end of the story, we can come back to every one of these truths and affirm, "Yes, that is the truth, and Joseph's life confirms it."

How do we have faith?

Having looked at the importance of faith as an alternative to emotion-based responses of anger, we might ask, "But how do we have faith?" Knowing faith is important does not automatically bring a faith response.

The Scriptures indicate faith is not a static product one receives ready-made, finished, and forever settled; but rather, faith is a living, growing, dynamic quality. We have already seen from Hebrews 11:6 that faith is a MUST in coming to God. How much of a MUST it is, we may not fully appreciate until the reality of our salvation is complete.

In any case, the faith by which we receive Christ may be an undeveloped, immature little infant that squawks and whines and even makes messes. Jesus, in His infinite patience and love, wants to nurture that faith out of infancy, even beyond energetic childhood and impetuous youth, into a robust, healthy adult, able to work effectively in His kingdom.

So how does faith grow? Following are several ways given in the Bible:

1. *Faith grows out of exposure to the Word of God.* "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). God has chosen to reveal Himself through His written Word. "He made known His ways to Moses, his acts to the children of Israel" (Psalm 103:7).

In God's Word we are exposed to the character of God. The account of Creation reveals His power and majesty. His laws reveal His holiness and justice. Bible history reveals His sovereignty, His providence, His longsuffering and goodness. The Gospels reveal His compassion and love through His Son and His plan to redeem fallen and destitute humanity.

In God's Word we are also exposed to the works of God. This God can make a universe out of nothing. He can part the sea, cause the sun to stand still, produce a flowing well out of a rock, rain down fire and hail, shut up the heavens so there is no rain, send hornets or lions or whales to do His will, set up kings, pull down nations, still storms, heal the sick, open prison doors, and raise the dead. "With God NOTHING will be impossible" (Luke 1:37).

As we read in the Scripture about the works of God, our faith grows. We come to the assurance that God is able to intervene in any situation, and if He chooses not to, it is not due to lack of interest or ability on His part, but only because He has higher plans we cannot fully see. Instead of lashing out, growing frustrated, or allowing bitterness to set in, we can rest in the "everlasting arms" (Deuteronomy 33:27). We can plant our feet on the immovable Rock (Deuteronomy 32:4). We can "be still, and know" that He is God (Psalm 46:10). We can trust that "this is God, our God forever and ever; He will be our guide even to death" (Psalm 48:14).

If we want to grow in faith, we must make opportunities to



**Spiritual
fellowship is rich
soil for faith to
grow strong.**

expose our hearts to the Word of God.

a. *We must attend to the preaching of God's Word.* Those who would grow in faith need to be part of a church where God's Word is preached faithfully and clearly. Not only so, they should pray for their minister(s), pay attention during the sermon, and express encouragement to him afterwards. It helps to take notes. It helps even more to discuss the sermon afterwards with fellow believers.

b. *We must read and study God's Word ourselves.* Peter wrote, "As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby" (1 Peter 2:2). For devotional reading of the Bible to be meaningful it should be systematic. Projects such as reading through a book, doing topical studies (such as a study of *meekness*), or doing a character study help us to be systematic in coming to the Bible, rather than using a random approach. It helps to use pencil and paper, and record insights gained through reading and study. Systematic reading, however, should not lead to formality. Variation is helpful. The point is that faith needs regular exposure to God's Word to grow.

c. *We must have spiritual fellowship with other believers.* To grow in faith means actually to become increasingly God-conscious. As we learn to know God and His ways, His presence becomes central to what we think, how we decide, what we plan, how we face situations, and how we view people. God lives in us. His Word becomes the substance of our hearts. As we interact with others, then, God and His Word become a vital part of our interaction.

This is spiritual fellowship. It is not simply a Sunday activity or formal meetings with other Christians. Rather, it comes to characterize our interaction with fellow believers. Spiritual fellowship—talking to others about what the Lord is doing in our lives, praising His goodness, sharing insights from His Word, encouraging one another, confessing our sins and shortcomings, and praying together—this kind of interaction is rich soil for faith to grow mature and strong.

d. *We must read Christian literature.* Some Christian writers explain God's Word, helping us grow in our understanding of God's ways. Others write the story of their own spiritual journey or that of others. Christian biographies can be excellent windows into the goodness and grace of God, expanding our awareness of Him and increasing our faith in His ability to work in behalf of those who trust in Him.

2. *Faith grows as we express it.* "If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9). This verse gives us two essentials

for salvation: confession and faith. We will first explore what it means to confess with our mouths and then see how the two requirements are related.

The Greek word translated "confess" is made up of two word parts meaning "same" and "to speak or say." A literal rendering of the word parts would be "same say" or more understandably, "to say the same thing."

Jesus is Lord. That is truth no matter what men or women say. When we "same say," that Jesus is Lord, we are simply agreeing verbally with the truth, or as the Bible says, we are "confessing" that Jesus is Lord.

Confessing with the mouth that Jesus is Lord, when accompanied with faith in the heart, confirms the reality of salvation. The words of the mouth are stating the conviction of the heart. Apart from faith, the words would mean nothing and there is no salvation.

Looking at the Greek verbs more closely, we find they are in the form showing continuing action. God is calling for more than a one-time confession made upon receiving Christ as Saviour or at one's baptism. Rather, He is calling for ongoing verbal agreement with the

truth of Jesus' lordship along with ongoing inner conviction of who He was, who He is, what He did, and what He shall do. "If you continue confessing with your mouth the Lord Jesus and continue believing in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved..."

Salvation is not dependent on some prayer in our dim or recent past, or on our raised hand at an evangelistic campaign, or on some words we said at our baptism, or on a faith we once had. God's saving work is the result of an ongoing confession with our mouths of our ongoing response of faith in the heart to the ongoing reality of Jesus' lordship.

What does confession with the mouth have to do with faith in the heart? Though verbal confession without faith means nothing, verbal confession with the mouth has a strengthening effect on faith in the heart.

Let's look at this specifically in the context of anger. One of the first indications of anger is what we say. If we manage to bite off the actual words, the words are flying inside our minds. When the initial storm subsides, distant thunder can rumble for hours, in inner

mutterings, complainings, and accusations.

What is the effect of verbally expressing our anger and resentment? Verbal expression tends to confirm in our hearts the rightness of our resentful thoughts, deductions, and conclusions. The more we express it, the more we are convinced we are right, and the more settled we become in our view.

The same effect occurs in the Bible-based response of faith. Confessing with our mouths the lordship of Jesus confirms and strengthens and settles faith in our hearts. An ongoing and healthy faith, then, must regularly find verbal expression.

Difficult situations test our faith. We feel like lashing out or growing bitter. Instead of verbally venting our feelings, we need to be verbally expressing our faith. There are several ways we can do this.

a. *We can express our faith directly to God specifically about the situation we are struggling with.*

"O Lord. I am facing a situation I do not understand. It seems overwhelming to me, and I see no good in it. My natural feelings are resentment, bitterness, and self-pity. But Your Word says that You are good, that You work in behalf

of those who put their trust in You, and that You can work all things together for good to those who love You. I choose to believe Your Word. I do not know how You can do it, but I place my trust in You. I love You, Father, and I am willing to do whatever You ask me to do. You are over this situation. You are able to deliver me out of it, or You can give me grace to endure. I choose to trust You no matter what You allow in my life, for I know Your ways are right and Your character is totally trustworthy. I believe You are the same today as You were in the days of Moses, Daniel, and the Apostle Paul. You are good beyond description, powerful beyond measure, and wise beyond my comprehension. I am committed to You forever. Your child, _____."

It can help to actually write out an expression of faith describing the situation and one's specific feelings, and then, clearly and resolutely, expressing faith. It helps to read over this aloud on one's knees and to repeat it throughout the day. Ongoing confession with the mouth strengthens ongoing faith in the heart.

b. *We can express our faith by reading appropriate expressions*

of faith found in the Bible. The Psalms particularly are filled with expressions of faith in God. "Those who know Your name will put their trust in You; for You, LORD, have not forsaken those who seek You" (Psalm 9:10). "I will love You, O LORD, my strength. ²The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. ³I will call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised; so shall I be saved from my enemies." (Psalm 18:1-3).

Many are the righteous who have found themselves sustained in difficult situations by reading from the Psalms. It is helpful to collect favorite expressions of faith, write them down, and keep them for ready reference. It is also helpful to read them aloud back to the God Who inspired them. God's ear is especially sensitive to the sound of His own eternal Word.

c. *A third way we can express our faith is to fellow believers.* As we walk through difficulty in companionship with God, the Lord pulls back the curtain, allowing us to see more of Himself and of His ways. Some-



Taking steps of faith brings God into our situation.

times we see only glimpses, and sometimes we are given panoramic views. But it is wise to talk to fellow believers about those insights into God.

As you think about difficulties you are facing, what is God showing you? What has He talked to you about? What blessings has He shared in the middle of your grief? your loss? your trial? your pain? your burden?

Job voiced his confusion and grief, and beyond that, his complaint that God seemed distant and unresponsive, even unfair. But Job likewise glimpsed God's glory and expressed his faith, though it was to friends

who denied his sincerity. "For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God" (Job 19:25, 26).

Faith that is expressed grows. And a growing faith gives us a view totally different from the view based on our natural emotions. When our natural inclinations are anger, resentment, bitterness, and self-pity, how we need the eyes of faith in order to keep our focus on God! By faith we can come to view our problems through His wisdom, to view our needs in the light of His supply, and to view our hardships with an awareness of His strength.

Taking steps of faith does not mean denying reality. Faith does not make us immune to pain. It does not remove trial and difficulty. But taking steps of faith brings God into our situation. God not only gives us a different perspective, He also works in our behalf. Furthermore, the peace accompanying a response of faith is totally different from the emotional cauldron brought on by responses based on anger and bitterness.



Study Questions

1. Describe the two realms – the natural and the spiritual.

2. What is the place of faith in the spiritual realm?

3. List the six truths about God given in this chapter. These truths are important to focus on when we face situations that would naturally anger us. After listing each truth, tell how we are tempted to think when we become angry.

4. Different situations test our faith in different ways. Consider each of the following Bible characters and tell how he/she may have struggled with the above truths:

a. Noah (preaching to a corrupt society)

b. Moses (fleeing from Egypt as a young man)

c. David (fleeing from Saul)

d. Jeremiah (being persecuted for faithful prophecy)

e. Esther (seeing Haman's rise to power)

f. Mary (seeing her Son crucified)

5. Think of a difficult struggle you have experienced as a

Christian (or a struggle faced by someone close to you).

a. Describe the situation.

b. How did the experience make you feel?

c. In what ways did you act on your feelings?

d. Which of the six truths about God did you find especially difficult to reconcile with the experience?

e. Find several additional Scriptures that verify these truths.

6. Consider again each of the characters you looked at in Exercise #4. For each one, list several purposes God had in allowing the situation.

7. As you consider the experience you described in Exercise #5, what are some possible purposes God had in allowing it in your life?

8. Often God's purposes are beyond what we can see at the time. For each of the following situations, list God's immediate purpose(s), and then His higher purpose(s) that the people involved did not know at the time:

a. God told Abraham to leave Haran and go to Canaan.

b. God allowed Joseph to be taken to Egypt.

c. God delivered the Israelites from Egypt.

d. God caused the prince of the eunuchs to favor Daniel.

e. God warned Joseph to leave Bethlehem.

9. Having studied these Bible examples, what additional truths about God can you see that are important to keep in focus when we face situations that would naturally make us feel angry?

10. List four ways we can open our hearts to the Word of God, and try to list several insights you have received through each means.

11. Which of these has been especially meaningful to you in your personal growth in faith?

12. Which of the four ways of receiving God's Word has been most neglected in your experience?

13. If you have read about the lives of the following Christians, tell how each of these people demonstrated faith and how through faith they avoided bitterness. (If you are not familiar with their lives, discuss this with believers who are.)

a. Fanny Crosby (blinded through wrong medical treatment as a baby)

b. Elisabeth Elliot (husband martyred for his faith)

c. Susanna Wesley (17 children, financial difficulties)

d. George Blaurock (beaten and banished for his faith)

e. Conrad Grebel (persecuted, imprisoned, and chased from place to place for his faith)

f. John Bunyan (imprisoned for preaching)

g. William Tyndale (persecuted for translating the Bible)

h. Richard Wurmbrand (held in Communist prisons for preaching)

14. List three ways we can express our faith. Which of these have you personally found meaningful?

15. For each of the following Bible characters, find an expression of faith that is remarkable, considering his/her circumstances.

a. Joseph; b. David; c. Job; d. the three Hebrew boys; e. Ruth; f. Mary (mother of Jesus)

16. Think of an experience you have had that has caused you to struggle with anger or resentment. Using the example given in this chapter as a guide, write out your own expression of faith in God.

17. Using a concordance, find verses from the Psalms that express trust in the Lord. Write out several you particularly appreciate.



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The Pursuit of Godly Seed

Blessings: The Key to Obedience

Denny Kenaston

“We love Him because He first loved us.” 1 John 4:19

I have spent many chapters looking at the visionary aspect of our homes. I feel this is very necessary if we are going to consistently carry out the practical side of child training. As our hearts are inflamed with God’s vision for the family, we will be moved with desire and infused with the daily power to obtain that desire. Now that the vision has been well covered, we are going to turn the corner and move into the practical “how to raise children” aspects of this book.

The title of this chapter holds the most profound wisdom you will ever glean for child training. In a sense, this is the fountain from which everything else flows. I have chosen the word *blessings*. I could have easily used the word *love*, but it is so overused, I hesitate to do so. We all feel as though we love our children.

As we move into some of the more practical issues of training children, it is important to have these issues in the proper order of priority. Love and blessings come first. There is a danger of passing over the aspects of love, blessings, and relationships, and quickly going on to corrections, spanking, and standards of holiness. I don’t want you to do this. It is a grave mistake made by many.

Denny Kenaston and his wife, Jackie, were delivered by God from the drugs, drunkenness, and immorality of the hippie culture of the 1970’s. In his book, *The Pursuit of Godly Seed*, Denny shares the wisdom God has given him during many years of raising a godly family and serving as a pastor. We pray that this selection from the book will challenge you and change your heart and home.

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The needs in our homes go much deeper than spanking and obedience.



Years ago, I was intrigued by the pattern I saw in many people as they listened to my set of tapes on the home. They would draw out the tape on discipline and listen to it first. They had a whole set of twelve tapes in their hands, but they would reach into the center of the set and take the one on discipline. I thought to myself, "Why do they choose that one above the others?" I know the answer to my question now, and it saddens me to know it. They think that spanking their children will be a

cure-all for their family woes. It will not solve them. The needs in our homes go much deeper than spanking and obedience.

The Law Is Love

Our Lord Jesus Christ had a way of saying deep, far-reaching things in very simple statements. Because of this, His words often went over the heads of the Pharisees. They were always after Him about laws and traditions because that is how they viewed God. Jesus summed up the whole of the Christian life for them in two statements. They missed the depth of what He was saying, but we do not have to miss it. He told them that all the law and all the prophets hang on just two commandments: "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart," and "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37a, 39b). You can trace every precept back to these two basic commandments.

This applies to all that I say about the home also. It all can be traced back to love and should all flow out of love. Paul made it even stronger when he said, "though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing." (1 Corinthians 13:3b). This is what was wrong with the

Pharisees. They did all kinds of right things, but not out of love for God and love for their neighbor. Beloved, we can do the same thing with our children. We can neglect the “weightier matters of the Law” as they did and pass on a religion to our children but not “the faith.” I assure you, it doesn’t come out right. The law is love. The motivation is love. It is very important to keep this in mind as we look at many practical issues.

Years ago, when my tapes on the home first started to circulate among God’s people, I received many troubling phone calls. Parents called me to tell me that my teachings did not work. They

were referring to the tape on discipline, and many times they were parents who had listened to that tape first. They said to me, “My child doesn’t respond the way you said he would on your tape. We are not friends when I am done spanking.”

At first, I wasn’t sure where the problem was. I spent much time in prayer and personal meditation, with a question mark before the Lord. One day the answer came to me. The difference is love. That is the key. We spanked our children in the midst of a loving relationship and had beautiful results. Many parents are not close to their chil-

A Parent’s Love

Based on 1 Corinthians 13 • Brother Denny

Love does not lose patience with the children. Love looks for ways to be kind to the children. Love is not envious of the children. Love is not eager to impress the children. Love is not boastful to the children. Love has good manners with the children. Love doesn’t pursue selfish advantage over the children. Love is not easily provoked by the children. Love does not rejoice over evil that the children do. Love rejoices when truth prevails in the children. Love bears all things for the children. Love believes the best in the children. Love hopes for gain in the children. Love endures all that opposes it for the children. Love never fails for the children.

dren. If a parent begins to use the rod without a relationship, the results can be negative.

I wanted to test my answer with some of these parents who were calling to make sure I had the right revelation. As the calls came, I began to ask the question, "How is your relationship with your child? Is it a close one?" The answer was the same every time. They admitted that the child was not close to them. I realized then that there was a hole in my teaching. Jackie and I love our children deeply, and I didn't realize that others might spank theirs without that deep

This flow of love and blessing is the foundation of all your child training.



love. The law is love and blessings. We cannot get away from this. This is the key that opens a great big door of many opportunities in child training.

God's Burden for Relationships

"And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers" (Malachi 4:6).

We look at this verse in detail later, but I want to draw out the burden of the Lord for a moment. In this verse we have a revelation of God's concern about the flow of love between fathers and children. This flow of love and blessing is the foundation of all your child training. Remember the first love I mentioned in "The Eternal Value of a Child" [*Loaves & Fishes*, volume 2, issue 3]. In the first days after they are born, love flows from your heart to theirs. This first-love relationship should be the foundation stone of a lifelong flow of love between parents and child. Hearts connect and grow closer together as the days go by. If this connection of heart is lost through ignorance or neglect, problems arise very early in the development of the child. Many parents then try to use the rod to cure the problems.

It won't work. Blessings are the key to obedience.

This closeness is understood by many mothers. It is part of a mother's love, something God gives her instinctively. A mother builds on this as she cares for her baby. She talks to the baby while she is nursing, even though the baby cannot understand words. A mother knows that communication is taking place. I have always enjoyed watching Jackie nurse the children. She is an excellent communicator, and the words of love and affirmation flowed while she nursed. She was building a bond with the child, and I knew it.

But God is concerned about the fathers. I meet many fathers who are not close to their children. They complain to me that there is very little heart connection with them. They are confounded over the lack of respect and obedience they receive from their children, not realizing that the one breeds the other. Brethren, this is part of the desolation of past generations. It must be repaired, as Isaiah prophesied in Isaiah 61:4b. We need to join our wives and build a bond of love with our children when they are very small. I know that many of us are crippled in this area because our fathers were also.

They did not bond with us, and now we do not have a clue how to bond with our children. This must be broken! We can learn how to build relationships with our children. God will help us if we cry out to Him. I can testify to God's enabling in this area. I didn't know what I was doing, but God and my wife taught me how to build.

Many fathers live under a false assumption that we have no responsibility until the child gets older. This is a lie. We must build a foundation of love with our children from the beginning, and then we can build a structure on top of it all their days.

My children heard the gentle voice of their father continually from the moment of birth. When Jackie needed me to hold the baby while she attended to other household duties, I held the baby with purpose. It was an opportunity to communicate. I gave words of kindness, and the baby gave me back a smile and kicked its feet. Some undiscerning parents might think this is folly, but I disagree. I talked to the child about all kinds of things.

I got baby toys and dangled them before the child in play, talking all the while.

You see, there is more to words than sound. In words,

heart talks to heart, and the spirit of love or rejection is transferred to the child. Many of us do not understand the unseen dynamics of communicating with a child. We see a small baby's body, and forget that it is an



**In communication,
the spirit of love or
rejection is transferred
to the child.**

eternal being with a never-dying soul. I am using this big word, *communicate*, on purpose because of its meaning. The root word of *communicate* is *commune*, which means to have a two-way interchange, a two-way flow of conversation, and a two-way flow of hearts. This is what a parent should be doing with a small child.

As parents, we are the initiators of love to our children. This is very obvious, but often missed. It is the same way with our heavenly Father: "We love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). This verse can be applied to our homes. The children could easily say, "We love our parents because they first loved us." How sad it is for a child to grow up with an uninterested father, or an uninterested mother, for that matter. This is a plague in our land. We are reaping the fruit of two or three generations of disconnected fathers. Again, I say, God is greatly concerned about the relationships of fathers and their children.

I made it a priority to play with my children as they were growing up. I got down on the floor like a little boy, grabbed my son's toy tractor, and away we would go—Vroom, vroom, vroom! We plowed the fields and loaded the hay. We drove the truck over to the barn as I lived in his imaginary play world. What was I doing? I get no thrill out of playing tractor on the floor, besides the fact that it thrills the little boy. What was I doing?

Building a bond of love with my son. His face would light up when he saw me come into the house, and my face did too. We were buddies.

Have you ever gone into your little girl's makeshift playhouse and played dolls with her? Try it some time. Pick up her favorite doll, hold and rock it for awhile and see what happens. You will notice a look of endearment on your little girl's face as she watches you love her baby. Dear fathers, this is not simply child's play. We are laying the foundation stones of a lifelong love and respect for each other. Your child will think you are "the best daddy in the whole wide world."

Someone said to me, "How do you get your twelve-year-old to talk to you?" This is a good question. Let me tell you how I did it. You let him talk your ear off when he is five, and you talk his ear off while he is five. Be his buddy! Be her sweet daddy friend.

I will never forget the first time Elisabeth gave me this name. I think she was about four years old. I was carrying her up the stairs, and she stopped me halfway up, put her little hands on my face, and said, "Papa, do you know what? You are

my sweet daddy friend." I was smitten by love from that day forward.

As I reflected on those words, I thought, "there is a lot of meaning in these words. You're sweet, you're my daddy, and you're my friend." Amen? Build a relationship with your children. Get close to them, give them "horseyback" rides and wrestle around with them in the yard. Have fun with them, work with them, and hold their hand. Enjoy your children, and they will sense it and draw close to you. The closer your relationship is with your children, the more they will receive all the things you want to put into them.

The Power of Love

As parents manifest sincere love to a small child, the child begins to reciprocate the same back to them, and a mutual bond of respect and honor is formed. This bond is very important when it is time to teach, to train, to spank, and to correct them. This close relationship will encourage a natural flow of obedience and a desire to please in the child. If you try to raise your sons and daughters without it, you will have many more problems with practical training and obedience.



Our children will prosper under the shining faces of their parents.

Let us reason together for a moment. In your own experience with God, what motivates you to serve and obey Him? Is it the fear of chastisement or the love and blessings that God pours on you daily? For me, I feel so willing and free after a sweet time in His presence, as I am assured of His love. I believe it is the same with our children. They will prosper under the shining faces of their parents. This is the theology of the New Covenant and the foundation of

our service to God. God loves us and accepts us as His beloved children. Because of this, we are motivated to obedience.

Love is Spelled “T-I-M-E”

Some time ago, when Esther was a little girl, we started having a problem with her that concerned me. I felt as though she was not responding well when asked to do something. Her obedience was slow and half-hearted. This went on for a couple of weeks, and we started thinking that maybe we had a strong-willed child on our hands. Our natural response was to increase the discipline and bring her will into subjection. As I was praying over her one morning, the Lord spoke to me in the quiet of my heart. He seemed to say to me, “Maybe Esther just needs more loving attention from her Papa.” I received this word with a willing heart and set out to work on our relationship in many small ways.

For about three weeks, I took her along when I went to the store. I spent more time reading books to her and just talking about things she wanted to talk about. I turned my attention on my sweet little daughter, and many good things began to hap-

pen. The obedience problems disappeared in about two weeks. I noticed a new light in her eyes when she saw me come into the house, and she just wanted to be with me all the time.

I was preaching at a church in northern Pennsylvania a few years ago, and a friend of mine brought me his “hard” child-training questions. He said, “Brother Denny, what do I do with my strong-willed child?” He had a small boy about two years old. He asked me if I had any special secrets for the strong-willed child. I didn’t answer quickly, although I already knew what I was going to say. Then I said to him, “Yes, I do. I have a great secret for you, but I’m not sure you are ready to hear it.” I was leading him a bit, in hopes that I would really get his attention. It worked well because he was soon begging me for the advice. I said to him, “The secret is, t-i-m-e,” spelling out the word. Then I gave him a short explanation of the principle of building a relationship with his child.

T-i-m-e is something that we Americans don’t have a very great quantity of. This is ironic, to say the least, because we have more time-saving devices than anyone else in the world. We

also have more time freedom than any nation in the world. I’m sure my friend was expecting me to say something about spanking the child, but that is not always what is needed. We think that spanking is the answer to all our woes, but it is not. We American Christians want a quick fix for obedience, so we go for the rod. This will not come out right. A sweet flow of love and respect is more powerful than the rod. Take the t-i-m-e and draw close to your child.

The New Covenant Law of Blessing

All through the Old Testament, we see the principle of blessings being practiced. I have already described to you how a Jewish father blessed his children every Sabbath evening. The Lord God is the One who started the practice when He gave a blessing to Adam and Eve. Fathers blessed their children. Leaders blessed the men who were taking their place, and old men blessed their sons as they were preparing to die. I love the picture of a string of children all lined up waiting their turn to receive a spoken blessing from their father.

Some time ago, our family was standing in a line wait-

ing to ride the elevator in the Washington Monument in Washington, D.C. As we were waiting our turn, a Jewish man walked up and cut into the line where I was standing. I believe he thought I was a Jew. We had a nice conversation about many things, including the Messiah. During our visit, I asked him about his family. His face lit up with joy, and he told me all about his children. While I was listening, I thought to myself, "I'm going to see if he gives the Sabbath evening blessing to his children." I asked him, and sure enough, he said he does it every Friday evening.

One day, as I was meditating on this principle, it dawned on me that this is an Old Testament ritual, a law, something that often was done out of duty. I have learned in my study of the word that what God commands as a duty in the Old Testament becomes a beautiful way of life in the New Testament because of the power of the Holy Ghost. For example, they gave the tenth part of their increase in the Old, but we joyfully give everything in the New. We give our money, our time, our plans, yea, all of our life to God with joy.

If "the blessing" was a ritual and a duty under the Old Cov-

enant, then it should be a way of life in the New Covenant. What does this mean in practical everyday living? Your children need your blessing all day long. It is the will of God that they grow up in an atmosphere of affirming love. As much as I like the ritual of blessing the children, it is not enough. They need to be surrounded with a life of blessings that they receive from their parents. Oh, the power of such a life! The effect this has on your children cannot be measured.

Consider the example of the Jewish father blessing his son. Picture the sincere father, standing in his house, ready to bless his son. As the son approaches his father, the father's face shines out at his boy with a smile of love and affirmation. He reaches out to touch him, as he speaks words of value and love over his life. Any child would prosper under this kind of weekly blessing, but what if it happened in spirit many times in a day? What would the results be? Words of this nature spoken with true love behind them will influence a child into eternity. This should be happening many times in a day from your heart in your home.

Let's plant this picture into some everyday life experiences and see how it fits. It is much easier for us to grasp the principle if we have some real-life situations to ponder. By the way, this is for mothers also. However, there is something about a father's blessing that seems to have more effect. Maybe it is because he represents God to the children. Although this is true, with many dads away working, the mothers have more practical opportunities to bless the children. Here are some instances in which your children ought to hear words of affirming love.

Children ought to see and hear words of blessing...

- When you see them first thing in the morning
- When you check up on some of their schoolwork
- When they have done a good job with the chores
- As you sit down to have a meal together
- When the child comes to confess something he or she did that displeases you
- When they come into the house after their playtime
- After you have given them a spanking for a wrong they have done
- When you come home from work or from running an errand
- When your child comes out to see you while you are working in the shop
- After prayers at bedtime
- On the child's birthday or during other special events in his or her life
- When they are leaving home for a longer period of time.



The principle of blessings could change the atmosphere of your home.

Can you see how the principle and spirit of blessings can be incorporated into all of these

situations? Wow, that could change the atmosphere of your home! If you had any idea how much influence this could have on your home, you would start today. Children thrive under this kind of care. This is the oil that lubricates all the rest of the aspects of training. By the way, this kind of stuff is contagious. It spreads to everyone in the family. In time, you will have everyone blessing each other, and this is good training for the future.

Some time ago, when our youngest son David was two, the whole family was sitting together having our traditional Sunday evening snack. We were all enjoying little David as we talked and laughed. You know how a two-year-old is. His sweet young life was blessing all of us, and everyone was loving him and affirming him as we laughed together. As I sat there and watched, I thought to myself, "David, you have it made; you have no idea how blessed you are." There he was, surrounded with love and affection, not just from Mom and Dad, but from seven of his brothers and sisters also. What a life he has! What an influence we are having on him! He will never grow up thinking that he

is of no value. This is the way God planned it to be. You see, the children are very valuable to Him. We are to communicate that value by our love. There are so many hurting, rejected people everywhere. The wounds run very deep at times, and they often come by the neglect and rejection of parents in the home. This is a tragic situation. These hurts are often carried into adulthood and on into marriage. Our homes are turning out dysfunctional adults who have a hard time in a real world of cares and responsibilities. Marriages are on the rocks. Prisons are filling up, and even the health of many is affected by the confusion that this neglect brings.

I was in a meeting a few months ago in which a sermon was preached about fatherhood, and the destructive curse that has come by absentee fathers. The preacher asked the question, "How many of you in this meeting have never heard your father say, 'I love you?'" Because of my burden for the homes in our land, my eyes perked up to see the hands that were raised. I was shocked, hurt, and frankly devastated at what I saw. Ninety percent of the people raised their hands.

Then the preacher went on to say that he had been asking that question all over America, with the same results. I weep for the children who grow up in this environment of rejection. We are suffering from two generations of absentee fathers, and about a half generation of absentee mothers. The results are devastating. When will it all end? We are missing the mark with our precious children, and many of us do not even know how we are hurting them.

A Natural Desire to Please

God has placed in the heart of every child a natural desire to please his parents. All parents acknowledge this God-given desire. The children just love us and overlook many of our faults. We all have seen it in their faces when they have done something for us and they want us to know what they have done. They look expectantly at us for approval. They want to please. If this is so, we ought to take advantage of this desire and increase it by showering them with love and acceptance. If we will go after the heart of our child and be his friend, we will reap much more obedience from our labors. A close relationship is the key to obedience, not spanking. Many



**Have a family
revival meeting,
and be the first to
bow your heart.**

parents squelch this desire by neglect and nagging because they are too busy. I call them “not-now parents.” The child comes again and again looking for affirmation from his parents, and all he hears is, “Not now; I’m too busy. Later.”

I often hurt deeply for the children of busy parents. The zeal to please is slowly put out, yet the “Christian” parents demand obedience and respect from them. This is a gross perversion of truth. The Bible calls it iniquity. It is truth out of balance.

I am not saying that we should not require them to obey. We must. I am saying that we as parents need to do our homework. If there is a strained relationship with any of your children, I urge you to do whatever you need to do to clear the air. Sometimes parents need to get right with their children. If you are one of those “not-now parents,” I encourage you to have a family revival meeting where everyone

gets everything out on the table and makes things right. Be the example in this, and be the first one to bow your heart in humility and say, “I have sinned.” You will see. The children will quickly forgive and give you a chance to change. Go after the hearts of your children with zeal and purpose. This is a “must do” before we get into the practical issues that follow in this book.



Prayer...



Father in heaven, have mercy on me. I have sinned against You and my children. Please forgive me in Jesus Christ's name. I am too busy. I see it clearly, and my priorities are not right. I repent before You right now. I will make a change, I will get things right with the children, and I will turn this curse into a blessing. Give me Your grace. I cannot do this on my own. I will only fail again if You don't help me. Open my eyes in the days to come, that I might see my need more clearly, and never go back to my folly. I pray for my children. Renew their desire to want to please me, and give me their hearts. I pray in Jesus Christ's name. Amen.

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Questions or Comments

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Pray, Watch, and Wait

William Billington
CCI - Cheshire, Cheshire, CT

My eyes are always searching
Each cloud that passes by,
For Jesus said He'll come again,
Descending from the sky.

I pray that I'll be ready
The day the Lord returns.
I know that one day He will come,
For it's written in His Word.

No one knows the day He'll come,
Not the hour, not even the year;
But with all that's going on today,
I believe that day is near.

Until the day He comes again,
Each day I'll grow in faith;
I'll keep my eyes upon the sky,
And pray, and watch, and wait.

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**“Meditate
within your
heart on
your bed,
and be still.
Selah”
Psalm 4:4b**