

Founded in 1929 by Geo. R. Brunk I

Vol. LXXVII APRIL 2009 No. 4

THE SWORD AND TRUMPET GUIDELINES monthly magazine is a faith ministry directed by a Board representing various constituencies of the Mennonite Church. It is committed to defending, proclaiming, and promoting the whole Gospel of our Saviour and Lord, Jesus Christ, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures. It emphasizes neglected truth and contends for "the faith which was once delivered to the saints." This publication exposes and opposes doctrinal error which compromises that faith and leads to apostasy.

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THE SWORD AND TRUMPET (USPS 615-540) is published monthly by *The Sword and Trumpet, Inc.*, P. O. Box 575, Harrisonburg, Va. 22803-0575. Periodicals postage paid at Harrisonburg, Va. SUBSCRIPTION RATES: 1 year US \$15.00, 2 years US \$25.00. Bulk rates on the basis of US \$12.00 per year. Add US \$3.00 per year for countries outside USA and Canada. Telephone (540) 867-9419 or 867-9444. FAX (540) 867-9419. E-mail address: swandtrump@verizon.net.

it as their duty in the home. As they mature, they should contribute financially to the home. This helps the young person to feel part of the home and curbs the independence that is a snare to youth. It should be the youth's desire to serve the Lord and the church with his family rather than to seek his own advancement.

Teaching our children to consider work as a privilege, rather than as a necessary evil, is one of the goals of disciplined home life. Work did not come because of sin; God already commanded man at Creation to dress and keep the Garden (Genesis 2:15). Thus, work should be viewed as God's will for man and not something to avoid. Children should learn to apply themselves to manual labor and to persevere at their work till they are done.

Our children also need to be taught the discipline of studying. Study is hard work, but it is necessary for learning the things that will help children to grow up to be productive and to communicate the Gospel. We should help our children put their best into schoolwork. However, we must be careful that they do not develop the concept that if they study hard, they can avoid hard manual labor. We do our children a favor when we help them learn to follow the command, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might" (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

Requiring neatness and thriftiness are important aspects of disciplined home life. These virtues contribute to a sense of fulfillment for all. A child never learns the satisfaction of a job well done if the work is left unfinished or is done carelessly. Thriftiness helps the child appreciate the things he has as well as the joy that goes with sharing with others. Our horizons are lifted beyond the temporal as we practice these virtues.

Lastly, the discipline of thankfulness is promoted in disciplined home life. We are not thankful by nature but learn thankfulness by humbling our hearts and realizing the truth, "What hast thou that thou didst not receive?" (1 Corinthians 4:7). Thankfulness should permeate our homes—for God and His gifts to us, for our fellow family members, and for our brethren and all

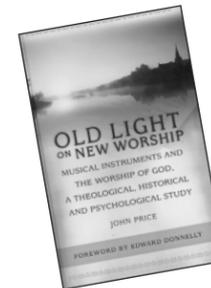
that they do for us. We need to teach our children to express their thankfulness to both God and man. This begins by teaching our children to give thanks to God before we eat and to say thank you when they receive a gift. As we do so, thankfulness will issue into the grace of generosity.

As parents, we want to produce happy homes for our families as those before us provided for us. We must love and discipline our children in a godly way so they, too, can have pleasant memories of a happy, disciplined home. ■

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Person of the Month:

Isaac Stoltzfus Mast (1874-1955)



Isaac Stoltzfus Mast was born near Morgantown, Pennsylvania, July 13, 1874.

As a young man of 21 "I. S. Mast" wanted to travel west so he left Lancaster County but only got as far as Ohio before he returned to his Pennsylvania home. He settled down to work in his brother's feed mill.

At this time in his life Isaac was neither a believer nor a church attendee. During this period M. S. Steiner came to the area for special meetings. Two of Isaac's aunts, a cousin, and Steiner himself prayed daily for Mast's salvation during the days of the crusade. Someone invited him to attend one of the meetings, which he did. As a result, he was under much conviction. He went to work at the mill and spent some time alone in a corner praying for peace and forgiveness. In his prayer Isaac told the Lord that if He was real, then he would follow Him wherever He would lead if only he could find peace. He surrendered his life to the Lord, was baptized, and received into the membership of the Old Road Church at White Horse, Pennsylvania. Later, he moved to Belleville in Mifflin County and became active in the Sunday school and church work there.

Isaac Mast met Fannie R. Yoder and eventually they were married on January 13, 1901. Isaac was 26 years of age at the time. God blessed their union with the birth of two sons and three daughters. During this time Brother Mast was working for the railroad as a trackman and later as a fireman. He desired to become a railroad engineer but that was not to be.

A year later he was working in the Hertzler-Zook foundry at Belleville. At the same time some families from the church were planning to migrate to North Dakota and invited Isaac and his family to go along. D. D. Miller was holding meetings in the valley at this time and he advised the ministry to organize the group and ordain a minister to accompany them. When Brother Mast's employer heard of Isaac's possible move, he offered Mast the position of foreman and a salary raise if he would stay with the company. This was a disturbing dilemma for "I. S. Mast" and caused him loss of sleep, so he told the group to go ahead and try it for a year, then if it was all right he would follow the next year.

On March 15, 1903, a joint meeting was held with the Allensville and Maple Grove churches where a vote was taken to choose a minister for the migrating group. Isaac Mast was chosen and ordained to move to North Dakota to pastor the flock. Mast was not happy about the decision. God was putting him to the test of his commitment of full surrender.

In North Dakota Brother Mast not only experienced the burdens and responsibilities of a minister but he had no education and his knowledge of the Word of God was very limited. There was also the matter of making a living in this new and untried frontier. He was a shop man, not a farmer, but farming seemed to be the only way to make a living. Therefore, he studied the Word diligently and spent much time in prayer. *(continued on page 8)*

The Truth About Heaven and Hell

by Harold S. Martin

A Bible Helps Booklet No. 378

One time there was a preacher preaching the doctrine of universalism in a small village church in one of the New England states. He maintained that there is no Hell, no punishment after death, and that all human beings will be universally saved. He said that “Hell” is the cruel invention of the human imagination, and that it is contrary to the principle of the love of God. When he had finished his address, he informed the people of the small church that he could preach for them again within a few weeks.

One of the men on the church board said: “If your doctrine *is true* (if it’s true that there is no Hell and we’re all going to Heaven anyhow), we don’t *need* you.” And he said, “If your doctrine *is false* (if there is a Hell, when you say there isn’t any), we don’t *want* you”—and he was not invited back to preach at that church.

It is the purpose of this message to tell the truth about Heaven and Hell—the truth as given in the Holy Scriptures. In Luke 16 we find Jesus describing the death of two men. The one died and was carried by the angels into the presence of God. When a child of God dies, there is a Heavenly escort of angels, waiting to carry that soul in triumph into the Father’s house (Luke 16:22a). And then Jesus says, “The rich man also died, and was buried; and in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments” (Luke 16:22b, 23a).

The account in Luke 16 is a record of

two men who lived and walked on the earth as we are doing today, and when they died, they found themselves in eternity. On the one hand, in a place of torment, and on the other hand, in a place of comfort by the side of Abraham. There are two places for the departed dead. The Bible says it over and over again. There is the broad way that leads to destruction, and the narrow way that leads to life. There are the tares cast into fire to be burned, and the wheat gathered into barns. There is the unprofitable servant who is cast into outer darkness, and the faithful servant who enters the joys of his lord.

1. The Truth About Heaven

Heaven will be the future dwelling place of God’s people; it will be the eternal presence of everything that can make the believer happy, and the eternal absence of everything that can cause sorrow. There is much that we don’t know about Heaven—its location, its geography, its temperature—but there are some things we do know.

a) *Heaven will be a perfect place.*

Heaven is a real place, as real and as material and as literal as the cities of Detroit and Chicago and London. Heaven is not merely some “blissful state of being”; it is not a cloudy, hazy mixture of nothing; it is a prepared place for a prepared people.

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SWORD AND TRUMPET

It is true that many sneer at Heaven and say that it's only a land of make-believe; some scoff at Heaven and say it's merely "pie in the sky"; still others say that the only Heaven which humans will experience is the Heaven on earth that they are able to achieve. But Jesus set the record straight, when He said to His disciples, "If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2). Jesus says that Heaven is a real place, and His word should be good enough for every one of us.

But not only is Heaven a real place—Heaven is a perfect place. It is perfect in the sense that nothing will ever come to mar its beauty. Revelation 21:27 says in essence, "And nothing unclean shall enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood." There will never be a cloud in Heaven; there won't be any tears to choke back; there won't be any good-byes in Heaven. In fact, nothing will ever mar the splendor of that glorious land.

There is a place called Heaven. There is a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God—and Christians can triumphantly sing, "*There is a land that is fairer than day, and by faith we can see it afar; for the Father waits over the way to prepare us a dwelling place there.*" Heaven is a real place with real people and a real Saviour and a real God! It is being prepared by a peerless Contractor, the Carpenter of Nazareth—even Christ Himself. Jesus says, "I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2).

b) Heaven will be a habitation with God.

Revelation 21:3 says, "*I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, . . . and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.*" The greatest thing about Heaven *will not* be the rewards, the crowns, the white robes, the walls of jasper, or the streets of gold. The greatest joy about Heaven will be our eternal fellowship with God the Father, and with Jesus our Saviour forever.

It will be an added joy to be with our friends and saved loved ones who have gone on before. The question is sometimes asked, "Will we know our loved ones in Heaven?" The obvious answer is this: "If we know them in this life, where we have only a partial and incomplete knowledge, surely we will know them in Heaven, where our knowledge will be perfect and complete."

Most of us have taken a loved one out to "the silent city of the dead." Perhaps it was a father who departed from this life, or a mother who slipped on to the eternal world, or a child that was laid away in infancy, or a daughter who fell in the prime of young womanhood, or a husband or wife who was so dearly loved. In 2 Samuel 12:15 we begin reading about David's sick child. The Bible says that for seven days and seven nights David fasted and wept and prayed that God would spare his child, but finally he received notice that the child was dead. Two little eyelids had been gently closed; two little hands were folded over the silent bosom; one little heart was forever still. The child was dead. When David received notice that the child had died, he wiped the tears from his eyes, ate food, and found comfort in these words: "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me" (2 Samuel 12:23).

David found comfort in the words, "I shall go to him," because he looked forward to seeing the child in Heaven. In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul speaks about those who have died in former generations (when he mentions the second coming of Christ). He says, "*The dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds*" (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17). Those words speak of reunion. We shall be caught up *together with them*—that is, with those who had previously died.

c) Heaven will be a haven of rest.

We are told in Hebrews 4:9 that "there

remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.” Heaven is a place of *rest from labor*. There will be work to do in Heaven. The Bible says that His servants shall serve Him. Heaven will not be a great big holiday! We’ll not sit down and do nothing. There’ll be work to do. Jesus speaks about “ruling cities” and “judging angels.” But the element of toil will be gone. We learn in Revelation 14:13 that those who die in the Lord will “rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.”

We are told also that Heaven will be a place of *rest from suffering*. Revelation 21:4 says, “*And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.*” Anyone who is familiar with suffering and physical affliction in this life, and has walked up and down the corridors of our hospitals—and has seen the tremendous pain and anguish that human beings are sometimes called upon to pass through, must marvel exceedingly at the extent of this glorious promise. There shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, nor shall there be any more pain. Tears, pain, sorrow, and crying will be *former things!*

2. The Truth About Hell

In our day many people consider Hell a mere joke. Charlie Chaplin has often been praised as one of the world’s greatest comedians. He died a number of years ago at age 88. One of his typical jokes was this: “It seems like I’m always cold; I hope to go to Hell when I die so that I can keep warm.” For all we know he may have been granted his wish.

The “Lake of Fire” is the theme for more jokes than any other single subject, except for stories about illicit sexual activity. Usually the devil is pictured in a long flannel outfit; he has horns and a tail; sometimes he wears an asbestos suit, and he gives orders about how fast

to shovel coal. And then after the story is told, the crowd sits back and bursts into gales of laughter. They think the matter of Hell is just a great big joke.

One man said, “The nearest I’ll ever get to Heaven is when I’m riding in an airplane; I’m going to Hell, and when I get there, I’m going to help the devil shovel coal so that it will be all the hotter.” Another person said, “I don’t care whether I go to Heaven or to Hell; I’ve got friends in both places.” Another says, “I’m going to Hell, and when I get there I’m going to laugh at all the church members coming in.” The fact is, those who reject Jesus Christ will go there; some church members will likely go there too; but there won’t be any laughing. Instead, seven times over, Jesus says there will be “weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 22:13).

A lady from Canada wrote to the Michigan state highway department and told of a visit she was planning to make to the Detroit area. She asked for directions to the small community in Michigan named “Hell.” She said in her letter, “We thought it would be fun to go back home and be able to say to our friends that we had been in Hell.” The man who replied in behalf of the State Department sent her a small map showing the location of the tiny unincorporated community, and then added, “To complete your trip you may also want to visit the town of Paradise in the upper part of Michigan.” We don’t know whether the one who inquired will spend eternity in Hell or in Paradise, but one thing certain—she will spend eternity in one place or the other.

The attitude of the lady from Montreal is typical of the attitude of people almost everywhere. They speak lightly of Heaven, and joke about Hell, seemingly supposing that if they ridicule enough, and joke enough, they can laugh Hell right out of existence. But life is not a joke on this side of the grave, and it is not a joke on the other side either. The

kindest Man who ever lived says that we ought to “*fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell*” (Matthew 10:28). Jesus said it! It is a remarkable fact that the most fearful accounts of Hell to be found anywhere in the Bible come from the lips of Jesus Himself. The word *Hell* is used twenty-four times in the New Testament, and twenty-two of those times the word was used by Jesus.

There is much about the subject of Hell that we don’t know, but there are three things that we do know for sure.

a) *Hell is a real place.*

Hell is not merely some spirit-state of being. The rich man in Luke 16 knew that he was not merely in some hazy, spirit-state of existence, because he wanted his five brothers warned “lest they also come into this place of torment.” Just as Heaven is a real place (Jesus said, “I go to prepare a place for you” – John 14:2), so Hell is a real, literal place. The Bible says so. The man in Luke 16:28 said, “For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.”

The final testimonies of those who have died unsaved, especially before the days of sedatives, confirm our belief that these words of the Bible are true. It is not a pleasant thing to see the ungodly die. Voltaire, the skeptic, died a horrible death; his condition became so frightful in the closing moments of his life that the nurse who was standing by later said, “For all the wealth of Europe, I never want to see another infidel die.”

Charteres (a wealthy man), on his deathbed, said, “I would gladly give \$150,000 to have it proved that there is no Hell.”

M. F. Rich (a poor man), a few moments before death, pointed to an almost red-hot stove, and said, “I would sooner lie on the stove and boil for a hundred years, than to go into eternity with

the awful torments that are hanging over my soul.”

Friends—if it’s reasonable to hold up the hope of Heaven as the home of the saved, it is just as reasonable to hold out the fear of Hell as a penalty for rejecting God’s salvation.

If you are still not sure that Hell exists as a real place—why would you even needlessly take a chance? A skeptic was teasing his Christian friend who talked often about Heaven: “George, what would you say, if when you died, you found that there wasn’t such a place as Heaven after all?”

George smiled and said, “Well, I’d say that I had a fine time getting there anyway.” (He enjoyed his Christian experience.) And then George responded with a more difficult question: he said, “Fred, what would you say, if when you die, you found that *there was such a place* as Hell after all?” That is the real question to consider if you are a person who scoffs at the idea of eternal damnation in Hell. “What if there was such a place as Hell after all?”

b) *Hell is a place of torment.*

Make no mistake about it—Hell is a horrible place; it is a land of unspeakable torments. The Bible describes Hell with a number of words.

One of the words is *darkness*. Jude calls it “the blackness of darkness” (Jude 13). Jesus calls it “outer darkness” (Matthew 8:12). Peter describes it as “chains of darkness” (2 Peter 2:4). Hell will be a land of darkness—a land where the sun never shines; a land where the day never comes; a land where there is blackness, darkness, and nighttime forever.

The Bible also uses the word *fire* to describe Hell. In Matthew 5:22 Jesus speaks of “hell fire.” In Matthew 13:42 He speaks of a “furnace of fire.” In Matthew 25:41 He says “everlasting fire.” In Mark 9 He says “unquenchable fire.” In Revelation 20 we read about the “lake of fire.” Someone says, “*But this is*

only figurative language.” Perhaps it is. I believe it is literal language, but if these are only *figurative* words, we must remember that *the real thing* is always worse than the symbol is.

Another responds by saying, “*But you said that Hell is a place of darkness; now you say it is a place where there is fire. How can that be?*” It is God who said these things—but it is not hard to believe that God can create a fire that doesn’t give light.

Still another says, “*But surely God is too good and too loving to permit a person to burn in Hell.*” By way of response, I challenge you to put your finger on a red-hot stove and see if God is too good to keep you from getting burned! If God permitted His only begotten Son to be whipped and spit upon and then nailed to a cross—don’t fool yourself into thinking that God won’t permit human beings to burn in Hell—if they ignore Him and refuse to accept His offer of salvation. God’s love was revealed at Calvary, and if you reject that love, there’ll be nothing left but the wrath of God (Hebrews 10:28-31).

Jesus also uses the theme of *extreme thirst* to describe the torments of Hell. The rich man in Luke 16 cried for water—only a drop of water to cool his tongue. He called for Lazarus to dip his finger in water, and said, “Cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame” (Luke 16:24).

During the Battle of the Dardanelles in World War I, a company of marines was stranded on an island. They had only meager supplies; their canteens one by one went dry; some tried to quench their thirst by drinking ocean water, but the salt added to their misery. Others put their parched tongues against the damp ground, but it did not satisfy. Some tried to quench their thirst by chewing on the soles of their shoes just to find a little moisture. They were so thirsty that their tongues literally hung out of their mouths.

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A news correspondent—who later came on the scene and saw the sight, and heard the groans and cries of those thirsty men—said in his report the next day in newspapers all across America: “If Hell can be worse than that, O God, save me from Hell!”

Hell is a real place of torment. If there is no fire in Hell; if there is no real torment there; if souls don’t beg for water in Hell—then why are these passages in the Bible?

c) Hell is eternal punishment.

Hell is a miserable land of weeping and bitterness, but perhaps most tragic of all—those who go there will be there for eternity. Jesus says, “These shall go away into everlasting punishment” (Matthew 25:46). Daniel says, “Some [shall awake] to shame and everlasting contempt” (Daniel 12:2). Jesus describes Hell as, “the fire that never shall be quenched” (Mark 9:43). The Scriptures teach that the torments of Hell will never end. If men and women die in their sins, the Bible indicates that they will suffer consciously under the judgment of God for all eternity.

Each human being can either open the door of his heart to Jesus, and respond to God’s love, and live with Him forever—or, each can continue on in the path of rejection, and suffer conscious torment in the place of outer darkness. If you have never committed your life to the Lord Jesus Christ, why not turn your life over to Him today? Weep your way to God before the door of opportunity for salvation closes. ■

—Reprinted with permission from *Bible Helps*, September 2008.

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SWORD AND TRUMPET

From the Editor's Desk



Paul M. Emerson

GUEST EDITORIAL

Let's Do Something

by P. Daniel Stetler

He was young and eager, but his words were a bit shocking! "Let's do **SOME-THING**," he said, "even if we have to repent for it later." The setting was a gathering of religious leaders who were trying to plan a community outreach program, and unfortunately, they were making little progress. The young pastor was frustrated by the lack of progress and while his statement was undoubtedly "tongue in cheek," it did reveal something about his system of priorities. For him, "doing something" ranked near the top of the list of important things in life.

Where does God rank "doing something" on the scale of important things? According to the New Testament, it ranks very high! On several occasions, Jesus specifically said He came to "do something," the will of His Father (John 4:34; 6:38; 9:4). He warned us that it is not the person who says, Lord, Lord, but the one who "does something," that will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 7:21). He reminded us that if we love Him and hope to be His friends, we must do what He commands (John 14). James instructs us not to just be hearers of the Word, but doers (James 1:22), and he crystallizes the entire concept of "true religion" into visiting the fatherless and wid-

ows and keeping oneself unspotted from the world (James 1:27).

Of course there are those who immediately rise up in holy horror and denounce the whole idea of "doing something" as "works salvation." They would strongly contend that justification is by faith alone and that our works have absolutely nothing to do with our ultimate salvation. For them salvation is a forensic transaction which takes place in Heaven. You can never lose this salvation whether you live a holy life or not, so practical holiness is not terribly important to them.

The Apostle Paul certainly left no doubt that salvation comes only by grace through faith and not by our works, but that same Paul filled a significant portion of every one of his epistles with practical commands of all kinds. Paul knew nothing of salvation by grace alone that did not issue in a holy life characterized by works which are pleasing to God. He knew nothing of a salvation that could never be lost. He lived constantly with the realization that after he had preached to others, he himself could ultimately end up being a castaway (1 Corinthians 9:27).

For others who are a part of today's church world, "doing something" seems to be the entire basis of their relationship with

God. They delight to list their successes, tell of stellar numbers, pointing to magnificent facilities, ticking off long lists of programs, activities, and people they have helped. For them, spiritual transformation and practical holiness are not terribly important and the multiplication of numbers, facilities, and programs are irrefutable evidences of God's blessing on their ministry.

The difficulty with this approach is that Paul clearly warned that gain is not godliness (1 Timothy 6:5). The earthly standards by which the world measures success are never a safe guide for determining the quality of our spiritual success. Remember, it was the road to destruction rather than the path to eternal life that was filled with the teeming crowds. Jesus clearly warned that in the day of final judgment, many will base their hope of eternal life on the fact that they have done many wonderful works, but His response will be that He never knew them (Matthew 7:23).

Unfortunately, there is one other small but troubling group which is very interested in "doing something." These individuals are very concerned about practical holy living. In fact, they base the evaluation of their relationship with God entirely on their personal performance. Their relationship with God is all about the things they don't do, the places they don't go, the tithe they pay, the days they fast, and they feel all these

do's and don'ts prove the veracity of their Christian testimony.

The sad spectacle this form of living brings to mind is the Pharisee in the parable found in Luke 18. Jesus said this pathetic man "prayed with himself." Oh, he had quite an impressive list of do's and don'ts, but God did not hear his prayer and he had no vital relationship with God.

Actually, it is God's purpose that we guard against all these dangers. We must never, never forget that salvation is not by ANY works that we do but by the grace of God through faith in Jesus! We must follow the example of Jesus who felt compelled to be about His Father's business, but we must remember that He was faithfully doing His Father's business both when the crowds were huge, and when they all went away. He was doing His Father's specific will when He was shocking multitudes with His miracles and when He was dying alone in shame and agony deserted by His closest followers. We must EVER contend for a practical holy life, but we must NEVER allow holy living to become an end in itself! If we do, our "holy living" will become cold, dead, empty, harsh, Pharisaism!

May the Lord help us to "DO SOMETHING" of eternal significance for the glory of God! ■

—Reprinted with permission from *The Torch*, Fall 2007

— Isaac Stoltzfus Mast . . . cont'd. —

In order to fulfill the task set before him as a pastor, Isaac had to travel to some families that were scattered or isolated who had called upon him for spiritual help. He also helped small groups of believers who needed to be organized and fed from God's Word. As a result of following the Lord's leading, churches were established in North Dakota, Montana, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. Isaac was also called upon to hold evangelistic meetings in churches across the country.

In June 1908, at the age of 33, Brother Mast received added responsibility when he was ordained as bishop. As a result he was often away on weekends visiting the churches. Often traveling by train, he would leave Saturday night, then preach twice on Sunday, boarding the train on Sunday evening and arriving back home Monday morning in time to work on the farm. Money was tight but God proved Himself faithful by meeting Brother Mast's needs, even sometimes using strangers who approached him and gave him the needed money! Isaac Mast experienced many such instances of God's faithfulness and again had additional opportunities to have his commitment tested. Each time he passed the test with "flying colors." (continued on page 24)

THE SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS



A Devotional Commentary



by David L. Burkholder

APRIL 5, 2009

Jesus Is Crucified

Luke 23:32-46

Last month's lessons from Ezekiel projected hope—both for Israel and for all mankind through the coming of the prophesied Messiah. This month's lessons from Luke and Acts depict the fulfillment of that prophecy, the completed work of Christ on earth, and the empowering of His followers to carry on His mission. As background for today's lesson on Jesus' crucifixion it will be important to read at least all of Chapter 23. Also, to bridge the gap between Ezekiel's prophecies and the events in these lessons, review the coming and ministry of Jesus as God's promised Messiah.

After the travesty of a trial, Jesus was led away for crucifixion. This was a public event and drew a crowd of curious onlookers. Along with Jesus, two criminals were crucified, the one admittedly so, the other protesting with his last breath. Crucifixion was a cruel death and the one criminal justifiably sought to be released from its pain and ignominy. The other humbly recognized the justice of their situation.

Jesus, ever the master of the situation, spoke a prayer of forgiveness for those who both perpetrated and committed this deed. Truly they did not know what they were doing in the real sense of the word. However, unwittingly, they were carrying out God's plan to provide redemption for mankind. And, interest-

ingly, this redemption was right there on the cross accepted by one of Jesus' fellow sufferers. That very hour he found peace of heart.

On top of the intense physical suffering endured by Jesus, there was also the emotional suffering from verbal abuse heaped on Him by the crowd, the rulers, soldiers, common people, and one of the criminals. As He hung there exposed to their taunts, the physical pain and sense of abandonment by His Father, He nevertheless spoke His heart in offering forgiveness, a supreme act under the circumstances, a gesture that released them, on His part, from their dastardly deed. Who else but the Son of God would be capable of such an attitude?

To identify the offense of the individual being put to death it was common to place a banner over them signifying their crime. The statement above Jesus was not an admission of crime but a statement of reality—one contested by the religious leaders but upheld by Pilate, perhaps as a slap in the face to those who forced him into condemning one whom he considered innocent.

Many unusual things happened that day. For three hours, from high noon till three o'clock in the afternoon, the sun refused to shine. Matthew records that there was a rock-breaking earthquake. Nature itself could not be silent at the injustice done to her creator.

Another outstanding occurrence, the significance of which was no doubt missed by those who should have noticed, was the rending of the veil in the temple,

separating the most holy place from the holy place. We understand the meaning to be that Christ's sacrificial death had now opened the way for all men to approach God directly.

Then Jesus, having accomplished His mission, commended His spirit to the Father and gave up His life. For me. For you. Glorious thought!

For thought and discussion

1. Struggle, as I did while writing this, with the physical agony Jesus suffered in being nailed to the cross for my sins and yours. The pain was intense, brutal, unrelenting.
2. There are a number of references to fulfilled prophecy in today's text. Look them up to bolster your faith in the promises of God.
3. There are a number of lessons Jesus gave us through this experience: non-retaliation when accused, the offer of forgiveness to those who wrong us, submission to God's will, humility, etc. Reflect on these and determine to integrate them into your life and responses.
4. Someone has said, "There is none so blind as he who will not see." Why did the Jewish religious leaders so badly miss the signs that Jesus was indeed the long-awaited Messiah? Discuss.
5. Allow this lesson to touch your heart with a new sense of gratitude for Jesus' work in providing your redemption.

APRIL 12, 2009 (Easter)

He Is Risen!

Luke 24:1-12

In last Sunday's lesson we studied the most despicable act ever carried out by man—the crucifixion of the Son of God. But death couldn't hold Him. Its power paled in contrast to His superior power. So in today's lesson we study the most

glorious and unimaginable act this world has ever seen—the resurrection to life of the One placed in the tomb as dead. Jesus is alive and in that life all mankind can find new life and eternal life. As the IBL Commentary states: "By defeating death, Christ also broke death's power to hold us captive to sin." Hallelujah!

The setting for today's lesson we find in last Sunday's text and the intervening verses. Those coming to the tomb in verse 1 are identified in 23:55 and 56 as well as in verse 10 of our text. These women were faithful followers and helpers of Jesus during His ministry. Their last act of kindness would be to prepare His body for proper burial.

As soon as the Sabbath restrictions were lifted, they hurried to the garden tomb where Joseph and Nicodemus had placed Jesus' body the evening of His crucifixion. They were in for a surprise. The heavy stone was rolled back from the entrance to the tomb, and upon entering the tomb, they discovered it to be empty. Jesus was not there. Now they were perplexed. Where was He?

Again, as He had so many times before, God sent heavenly messengers with words of comfort and direction: "Fear not. He is not here, He is risen. Go and tell the good news." He also called them to remember Jesus' words concerning His suffering, death, and subsequent resurrection. For some reason these facts had not registered with Jesus' followers when spoken. But now, with the angel's prodding, the women remembered.

Filled with joy and thrilled by good news these women hurried to tell the disciples and friends what they had heard and observed. The news was so startling that it was simply not believed by those to whom it was told. Absurd. Unbelievable. Beyond human comprehension or understanding. Yet true, as they were soon to discover for themselves. (Read to the end of the chapter.)

In spite of apparent disbelief, Peter at least had enough curiosity to see for

himself what had been reported by the women. We note from John's account that he, too, accompanied Peter to the tomb. And there they beheld the truth for themselves. The tomb was empty. The graveclothes were lying there unoccupied. Luke tells us that Peter departed "wondering in himself at that which was come to pass."

Remember, these were fallible human beings, like ourselves. Do we wonder at their amazement? their disbelief? They had just a few days before been traumatized by Jesus' arrest, trial, and crucifixion. And now, against all hope, they discovered that He was alive.

Do not we also stand in amazement with them at the realization of the power which accomplished this feat? And yet those of us who have embraced that power understand its transforming work in our own lives. Through His resurrection we, too, have been resurrected to new life. Unending life.

Praise God today for resurrection power and its effect on your life.

Jesus is risen! Hallelujah!

For thought and discussion

1. Be sure to note the various responses to the news of Jesus' resurrection recorded in today's lesson. How do they parallel people's responses today?
2. Why do you suppose Jesus' followers did not register His predictions concerning His pending death and resurrection?
3. Eyewitnesses are usually reliable. Why was not the report of the women believed by the gathered disciples?
4. We note from subsequent passages that this resurrection power empowered and emboldened Jesus' followers to go out and preach the message of salvation. That power is not diminished today. Why do there seem to be such sparse results? Discuss.
5. Why was it women who so faithfully stood by Jesus at the crucifixion, His burial, and were first to the tomb?

APRIL 19, 2009

You Shall Be Witnesses

Luke 24:44-53

Today's lesson flows right out of last Sunday's. Jesus had been raised to life, had appeared to two disciples on the road to Emmaus, to Peter in a private setting, and now (verses 33-43), to "the eleven" and others as they waited behind closed doors "for fear of the Jews" (John 20:19). He appeared just as the two from Emmaus were recounting their experience with the risen Lord. He calmed their fears and identified Himself by calling attention to the wounds in His hands and feet. He also verified His physical being by asking for food. He was more than a spirit. He appeared to them in a glorified physical body.

Then Jesus turned His attention to instruction and verification of prophecy concerning Himself and His mission to earth. He had told them before of His coming suffering and death, but it didn't register until after His resurrection. His instruction here indicated that the entire Old Testament scriptures pointed to this series of events. The books of history, the prophets, and the psalms all spoke of the coming Redeemer first promised to Adam and Eve in the garden.

Jesus took pains to connect these various references from the Scriptures to Himself. He also gave them special insight by opening their minds to understand. He pointed out how all scripture presaged His mission to provide repentance and remission of sins to all people of all time. It was now their responsibility as witnesses of these events to advance His mission, beginning at home and branching out (see Acts 1:8).

They were to wait, however, for the empowering of His Spirit, which took place on the day of Pentecost. That power and the instruction they had received would equip them for the ministry He was transferring into their hands. His work on earth was now finished as He had indicated in His dying cry

from the cross. Theirs was just beginning.

Having completed His mission and given instruction to His followers, Jesus was now ready to return to His Father in Heaven. We understand from Acts 1:3 and other scriptures that Jesus' ascension did not take place as immediately as this passage from Luke would indicate. For 40 days He interacted with His followers, no doubt giving further instruction, encouragement, and reassurance.

Then it was time to go. He led His disciples out to a mountaintop near Bethany and there blessed them. As He blessed them He began moving away from them, upward into Heaven (see Acts 1:9-11). The disciples' first act was to worship. Then they returned to Jerusalem "with great joy: and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God."

What was the source of their joy? No doubt Jesus' promise of empowerment, presence (Matthew 28:20), and return. They had also lost their fear of man and were now boldly praising and blessing God in the public setting of the temple.

Something had already happened to these men and they were expressing that and living in anticipation of God's further blessing. They had been prepared to be witnesses. They were waiting for the go-ahead signal.

For thought and discussion

1. Why was it important for the resurrected Jesus to document that His was a real, physical body?
2. It would be interesting, and helpful, to trace the prophetic stream concerning Messiah through the Old Testament.
3. Has God ever "opened" the scripture for you? How does He do that today? Discuss.
4. Why didn't Jesus just slip away and disappear? What was the significance of allowing His disciples to see Him ascend into Heaven in bodily form? Discuss.
5. What was the purpose of the waiting period between Jesus' resurrection and His ascension? What happened in that interval?

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APRIL 26, 2009

Empowered to Serve

Acts 9:32-43

The risen Lord promised power to His disciples and commissioned them to proclaim the message of salvation in Jerusalem and beyond. Much had already taken place in the few short years since Jesus' ascension. The empowering Spirit had come on Pentecost, the church grew, suffered persecution, experienced the martyrdom of Stephen, and saw the spread of the gospel beyond Jerusalem—to Judea, Samaria, and Ethiopia. And that great former persecutor, Paul, had experienced a change of heart and direction on the road to Damascus, as we note in the first part of Chapter 9.

We note from the middle portion of Acts 8 the beginning of itinerant administrative work by the apostles. There Peter and John went to affirm believers in Samaria. As our lesson text from Chapter 9 opens, we see Peter again on the move, this time visiting saints (holy ones) at Lydda, some 20 miles northwest of Jerusalem.

Here at Lydda Peter encountered the lame man, Aeneas, bedridden for eight years as a paralytic. One would assume that he was a believer, although the text does not specifically so state. At any rate, Peter addressed him, assuring him that Jesus Christ had power to heal him, and as proof he was to get up and take up his bed. He did and this so impressed the onlookers that many "turned to the Lord." One act of physical healing resulted in the spiritual healing of many. And so the benefit spread beyond Aeneas.

While at Lydda Peter was summoned to Joppa, a port city about 10 miles northwest of Lydda. Here was a disciple by the name of Tabitha (gazelle) who was "full of good works and almsdeeds." She had busied herself making garments for the poor. But she became sick and died. They prepared her body and laid it in an

SWORD AND TRUMPET

upper room awaiting burial.

However, word had reached Joppa of Peter's miraculous healing of Aeneas, so they sent for him to come at once. Perhaps she had not yet died when they sent word for Peter to come, or perhaps they had faith that even after her death this miracle-worker could do something for their beloved friend. Peter responded and immediately went with the men to Joppa, to the house where friends were mourning the death of Tabitha, their benefactor. These widows impressed upon Peter the good deeds she had done by displaying the garments she had made for them.

Peter put everyone else out of the room and knelt to pray, invoking God's power and blessing in this experience. Then, boldly, he faced the body and commanded, "Tabitha, arise." An extreme act of faith. She awoke and, observing Peter, sat up. He assisted her to her feet, called "the saints and widows [and] presented her alive."

This miraculous act brought many in Joppa to belief in Christ. Again, the benefit of the act reached far beyond the primary recipient. God was at work, confirming His disciples, strengthening

and growing the church.

It is interesting to note that here at Joppa the stage was set for Peter to open the word of God to the Gentiles (Chapter 10), thus further expanding the reach of the gospel.

For thought and discussion

1. Note how God was using various events and circumstances to expand the reach of the gospel message.
2. Why do you suppose God gave this special power of healing and raising the dead to some of these early apostles?
3. Note that Peter didn't claim any power of himself (verses 34, 40) to heal or bring life. What lesson does that teach us about our work for the Lord?
4. One of the questions of the ages is why God allows talented and useful people to seemingly die before their time. Ponder this. Do you have suggestions as to why? Perhaps discuss with your class.
5. What do you suppose Aeneas did after he was healed? And Tabitha, after she was raised to life? What bearing did these experiences have on their lives? And how does that instruct us? ■

"Faithful to the Word"



A biography of Dr. J. Otis Yoder
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Newslines . . .

by Hans Mast

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Atheist Says Africa Needs God

The following is an excerpt from a column in The Times of London written by atheist Matthew Parris.

“Before Christmas I returned, after 45 years, to the country that as a boy I knew as Nyasaland. Today it’s Malawi . . .

“It inspired me, renewing my flagging faith in development charities. But traveling in Malawi refreshed another belief, too: one I’ve been trying to banish all my life, but an observation I’ve been unable to avoid since my African childhood. It confounds my ideological beliefs, stubbornly refuses to fit my worldview, and has embarrassed my growing belief that there is no God.

“Now a confirmed atheist, I’ve become convinced of the enormous contribution that Christian evangelism makes in Africa, sharply distinct from the work of secular NGOs, government projects and international aid efforts. These alone will not do. Education and training alone will not do. In Africa, Christianity changes people’s hearts. It brings a spiritual transformation. The rebirth is real. The change is good.

“I used to avoid this truth by applauding—as you can—the practical work of mission churches in Africa. It’s a pity, I would say, that salvation is part of the package, but Christians black and white, working in Africa, do heal the sick, do teach people to read and write; and only

the severest kind of secularist could see a mission hospital or school and say the world would be better without it. I would allow that if faith was needed to motivate missionaries to help, then, fine: but what counted was the help, not the faith.

“But this doesn’t fit the facts. Faith does more than support the missionary; it is also transferred to his flock. This is the effect that matters so immensely, and which I cannot help observing.

“First, then, the observation. We had friends who were missionaries, and as a child I stayed often with them; I also stayed, alone with my little brother, in a traditional rural African village. In the city we had working for us Africans who had converted and were strong believers. The Christians were always different. Far from having cowed or confined its converts, their faith appeared to have liberated and relaxed them. There was a liveliness, a curiosity, an engagement with the world—a directness in their dealings with others—that seemed to be missing in traditional African life. They stood tall.”

—You can read the whole thing online:
<http://cli.gs/zVhEYâ>

* * * * *

Jesus and Witchcraft in Burundi

At Mukabira [in Burundi, Central Africa], a powerful witch doctor was converted. On the spot he became an

evangelist, and invited the team to join him in addressing six other witch doctors. Those six duly gave their lives to Christ. They brought out all their charms, idols, and spells, and had a public burning session, at which point the local craftsmen who had made the idols were in uproar. They complained: "How dare these people come from outside and introduce strange ideas which take away our business?" They complained to the local authorities.

Three of the team members were arrested and beaten, and held overnight. In the morning, when it was established that they'd done nothing wrong, they were released. As they sat outside the police station still talking to several policemen, a tornado flared up. It is generally believed in Burundi that a tornado is actually an angry python underground sent by witch doctors.

The policemen fled as the tornado approached, but the three believers stood their ground, at which point the tornado split in two, went around them, and demolished two houses on either side of them. The policemen then returned, totally awestruck, asking: "Who are you people? What is your secret?"

They replied: "The One who is in us is greater than the one who is in the world." As a result, more people were converted.

—Excerpt from *Joel News International* 671, 20 January 2009. www.joelnews.org

* * * * *

Fast and Pray for President Obama

"Why do Christian girls wear such skimpy clothes revealing their bodies?"

The man asking was a Nigerian Muslim worker at a Chick-fil-a restaurant in Virginia. Thankfully my friend replied, "Not all Americans are Christians. . . ." But to the Nigerian, all Americans are Christians because to the rest of the world, we are a Christian nation.

We know the difference. The rest of the world doesn't. And so what comes

from America (90210, Bay Watch, Sex in the City, Desperate Housewives, CSI) portrays to the rest of the world who Christians are and what they do. And what happens to and through the President of the United States also reflects Christ to the world.

Therefore we need to pray, and fast, for our president and our nation.

We here at UnveilinGLORY believe in the power of prayer and fasting. For eight years we have led a bipartisan effort mobilizing thousands of Republicans, Democrats, Libertarians, and Independents in the body of Christ to lift up our president before the throne of God and we will continue to do so, especially now.

We are called, The United States of America, but philosophically, we are "The Divided States of America." We are fairly split on issues such as abortion, a means to economic growth, the war on terrorism, supreme court decisions, the gay rights issue, the role God plays in our society, and who should be our president.

And because our nation is deeply divided, we at UnveilinGLORY believe President Obama needs not only our prayers, but fasting as well. Fasting takes it to the next level with God. "And he said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting" (Mark 9:29).

President Obama is walking into some of the most challenging times in America's history and the decisions he makes and how he lives his life will impact the world for Christ.

We do this because at UnveilinGLORY, we've trained ourselves to ask the question, "What does God get out of this?" rather than simply, "What do I get out of this?" Hence our primary motivation for this is for God's reputation. We seek to make God famous!

—Excerpt from a message from Bob Sjogren, author of "Unveiled at Last" and "Cat & Dog Theology" and President of UnveilinGLORY. (via *Kuepfer Kronicle*)

* * * * *

Iraq: Court Releases Professing Christian Girl Sentenced for Murder

The following is an excerpt from *Compass Direct News* about a family that I went to church with in Dohuk, Iraq, when I visited: “In prison at the age of 14 for having fatally stabbed her uncle in northern Iraq, Asya Ahmad Muhammad’s early release on Nov. 10, thanks to a juvenile court decision, was overshadowed by fear of retaliation from her extended Muslim family.

“Also known as Maria, the now 16-year-old Muhammad was sentenced to five years in prison for killing her paternal uncle in self-defense on July 9, 2006, when he attacked her, her mother, and little brother [trying to kill them] at their family kitchen utensil store in the outskirts of Dohuk. The uncle had cut her mother with a knife and was fiercely beating them for converting to Christianity and for “shaming” the family by working in public, when Muhammad stabbed him.

“Clearing her of an original conviction for premeditated murder, the Erbil high court last year had reduced Muhammad’s sentence from five to three-and-a-half years, upholding an earlier decision that she was guilty of killing her uncle though she acted in defense of herself and others.

“Muhammad’s father, Ahmad Muhammad Abdurahman, who converted in 1998 while working in Beirut, said that in the last week family members have called him twice telling him his days of joy are numbered.

“My sisters called me, and my brother’s wife called me also [and said], “You are a shame. Don’t be happy in your family; we will never let you be happy in your family,” Abdurahman told *Compass*.

“He explained that his change in faith was grounds for an ‘honor’ crime in his Kurdish family, and even more so now that blood had been shed. His father, a Muslim cleric, was enraged by Abdurahman’s conversion. Abdurahman’s deceased brother, Sayeed, on five occasions had tried to kill

him and had also burned down his house. Abdurahman has seven brothers.

“Abdurahman said that since the release of his only daughter, he has left his old home but remains in the town of Dohuk, unsure of what the next step is for his family. He said his only hope now is to come up with the ‘blood money’ necessary to buy peace with his family for his brother’s death. The court has set this amount at 10 million Iraqi dinars (US \$8,670).

“Despite the recent waves of violence in Mosul, south of Dohuk in northern Iraq, Abdurahman said that the Kurdish part of the country is still considered a safe haven for Christians, where many Christian families from Mosul have also fled in recent weeks.

“ ‘Many Christians come here from Mosul and Baghdad, and the Kurdish government does a good job to protect Christians,’ he said.

“He noted, however, that according to Iraqi law it is still not possible for Iraqis to change their religion on their national identification cards.

“ ‘It is my dream that one day I will be free to change my ID card,’ he said. ‘My card now writes *Muslim*. But my faith is Christian.’

“Abdurahman asked for prayer as he looks for a job or a way to get out of Iraq.

“ ‘I don’t know what will come from God,’ he said. ‘I’m not worried about that, but my family needs help, they need food and things . . . I’m just thanking God that he brought my sheep, my daughter, into the family again.’ ”

—Excerpt from “IRAQ: Court Releases Christian Girl Sentenced for Murder” in *Compass Direct News* (<http://cli.gs/UqQDMn>)

Note to readers: *The S&T publishing cycle makes it so that this column was written some time before you read it. This can be especially confusing during time-sensitive events like the election.*

Feedback: hansmast@hansmast.com

Protecting the Pearl of Purity

by David Lamar Hurst

The value of a perfect pearl is equal to that of the most precious stones. Did not the merchant of Matthew 13:45 sell all that he had when he found a pearl of great price? Pearls are soft and need to be treated with great care. Something so seemingly harmless as perspiration can sometimes mar their beauty.

Thinking of purity as a pearl helps us to understand its need for careful protection. Carelessness causes damage that can never be totally restored. Pearl blemishes can be removed if the flaw is not too deep. But after repair, the pearl is smaller and never quite the same as before. Immorality, if repented of, can be forgiven through the blood of Christ, but the stain of the loss of a pure relationship remains.

Preserving purity in courtship requires the commitment and firm resolve of both individuals. Both must take personal accountability for keeping their thought life centered on "what-soever things are pure." Choosing appropriate activities, environments, and discussions is very helpful in maintaining a pure thought life.

The room where a couple visits should be properly lighted. Soft lamplight or only candlelight fosters a romantic atmosphere and brings on unnecessary temptations. It is not wise to draw the curtains or to keep all doors tightly shut. Be careful also how closely you sit on the sofa. A pillow's width between you is not too far apart to converse easily. Check yourself with this question: "If my parents would walk into the room right now, would I feel comfortable?"

Choose courtship activities that center around church and family life. Attending church services when possible should take priority. Spending time with the family can

also be beneficial. Traveling to distant places for weddings needs to be done with caution. Couples should not consider driving for a long distance without a chaperone. Being together alone for long periods of time will erode the reserve that is needed to preserve purity.

It is very important to guard the conversation when together. Sharing in a time of Bible reading and prayer is vital in consciously keeping a God-centered relationship. This in turn helps greatly in reducing temptations for impure thoughts and actions. It is best to refrain from discussing the more intimate subjects until after marriage.

Be careful how and to what extent you express your affection for each other. It is not wrong as time goes on to acknowledge your appreciation for each other, but the common use of cheap expressions of affection hinders the growth of pure, true love. Letter writing should be free of suggestive terms and open for parents to monitor occasionally. The content of friendship letters (including the greeting and closing) can indicate how highly we value the pearl of purity.

Preserving purity also involves the way we conduct ourselves. The brother should be careful to respect his friend as the weaker vessel. He does this by exercising the courtesies of a gentleman toward her and by taking responsibility for her well-being when in her presence.

The young sister plays an important role in preserving purity by maintaining proper reserve around her special friend. Indiscreet conduct makes it difficult for the young brother to hold to his ideals. How she dresses and handles herself should draw attention to the "hidden man of the heart, . . . the ornament of a meek and quiet

**Preserving
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individuals.**

spirit” (1 Peter 3:4). As the sister conducts herself in a chaste, modest manner, the brother will be inspired to respect her noble chastity and must determine to exercise no forbidden privileges toward her.

The hands-off policy in courtship is an accepted ideal among us. Purposefully sitting shoulder to shoulder or intentionally touching each other is not consistent with maintaining purity. Dropping this reserve before marriage deeply mars the beauty and satisfying pleasure that belongs exclusively to a marriage relationship.

How sad to see so many youth in the world ruined by the pitfalls of impure courtship. While Christian youth are spared

many of these pitfalls, let us never forget that if we are not mature enough to resist those first temptations, we are headed in the same direction as the world. The first breakdown in purity, however harmless it may seem, never brings the satisfaction it is imagined to bring. If one yields, there is no convenient stopping place.

God’s grace is sufficient to be faithful and pure. His rewards are worth every effort. As a godly couple approaches the marriage altar pure and clear, their new home has a solid foundation. ■

—Reprinted with permission from *Home Horizons*, December 2007; Eastern Mennonite Publications.

Our Contribution in Public Worship

by Curtis Witmer

“Give unto the LORD the glory due unto His name: bring an offering, and come before him: worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness” (1 Chronicles 16:29). “I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD” (Psalm 122:1). Are we glad when we can attend public worship services? Do we bring an offering? Do we come to give the glory due to His Name? A positive answer to these questions will prepare us to give a positive contribution in public worship.

In our time of religious freedom and easy methods of travel, we have many opportunities to worship with others. We need to be careful that collective worship does not become commonplace to us, but that we understand the value and purpose of public worship and are ready to do our part in making it meaningful.

The purpose of worship is to adore and glorify our God. Our worship services should strengthen our faith and keep us in the fear of God. We need to encourage our brethren, and we need to receive encouragement. “Then they that feared the LORD spake often

one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name” (Malachi 3:16). Hebrews 10:25 warns us not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, but to exhort one another.

When we consider our contribution, we are thinking of participating in the worship service. This giving and receiving is not just for preachers, Sunday school teachers, or song leaders, but it is for all the brethren and sisters. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul describes the church as a body with many members and shows how the contribution of each member is needed.

The children of Israel had to prepare and sanctify themselves two days in advance of the worship experience at Mount Sinai. When the Lord descended on the mount, it caused the whole camp to tremble. It was a worship experience not soon to be forgotten.

Preparation is a prerequisite for making a meaningful contribution. We should spend time in prayer for the service and also for our

brethren and sisters. We should cultivate an appreciation and a love for all the brethren and sisters and develop an interest in the struggles that our fellow believers face. Can we, as Paul, thank the Lord for every remembrance of our brethren? (See Phil. 1:3.) We must feel at rest in the church and be unified with the believers in doctrine and in practice.

The Apostle John was “in the Spirit on the Lord’s day” (Revelation 1:10). To be “in the Spirit” is a must if we will make a meaningful contribution. “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). Our contribution to worshipping in the spirit begins with coming to the service on time and erasing thoughts from our minds that distract us from meaningful worship. This includes leaving behind our earthly cares, material pursuits, and dreams for the future. Even self can be such a hindrance to our worship. Our attitude of humility contributes to the atmosphere of reverence and respect. As our faces radiate God’s love, peace, and joy, they add a hue of blessing to the service.

Do we find it easy to join in the spirit of praise and thanksgiving as we sing together? This includes singing with meaning and enthusiasm, as unto the Lord. Our singing should inspire not only us, but also our fellow worshippers (Ephesians 5:19).

Some individuals will lead out in the service and direct the thoughts of others. If we are called to contribute in this way, we should accept this responsibility seriously and prayerfully. We should take ample time for preparation, realizing we are only vessels for the Lord. We must be inspired first before God can use us to inspire others. We should fulfill this responsibility as unto the Lord and not unto men.

Times of Bible study with open discussion can be a real blessing to all involved. All the brethren, including the youth, should feel responsible to contribute in the discussion. Thoughts should be shared in constructive ways “which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another” (Romans 14:19). Often in a discussion, the more effort that is put forth,

the more blessing everyone receives.

We contribute little to worship services if we habitually sit on the back bench by ourselves or find worship services a time to sleep. These practices are far too casual for our holy God. We should be awake and alert, having our hearts prepared to receive a blessing from the Word and also from our brethren.

Do the brethren have a greater calling to contribute to worship than the sisters do? The brethren have a different calling—for some a special calling—but not a greater calling (1 Cor. 11:11, 12). The Bible says that the sisters should be silent, or not teach, in public worship when the brethren are present (1 Tim. 2:10-12). Sisters should be willing to teach classes for the young children, planting principles in their minds that hopefully will blossom and bear fruit someday. Sisters can contribute much to the service from their private prayer closets. They may share a word of encouragement or help in other small ways, often unnoticed by many. The Apostle Paul commended Phebe as a servant of the church because she had succored many (Romans 16:1, 2).

The time of fellowship before and after the service is a time to cultivate an openness and an expression of confidence with all the brotherhood. Our fellowship is a time to “lift up the hands which hang down” (Hebrews 12:12-14) of those who are going through difficult times, trials, or adjustments, or are bearing burdens that cause them to be discouraged. As we contribute to the fellowship, we should be careful that our conversation does not subtract from the reverence and respect of the worship service.

In conclusion, let us keep in mind that we gather with others to worship a just God. “Holy and reverend is his name” (Psalm 111:9). He is a jealous God and hates all forms of pride. Our contribution to public worship should be God-honoring, not a performance of talent, amusement, or entertainment. The goal should be that everyone receives a blessing. ■

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Counseling From the Word

Ten Critical Questions for Marriages

One of the greatest honors as a counselor is to work with couples so that they begin to reflect the very image of Jesus Christ in their relationship. Following are ten questions to consider as you begin to assess the significant issues that may be hindering marital unity for counselees.

1. Does the couple read the Bible together on a regular basis?

“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12, ESV).

2. Does the couple believe they both place the marriage as a priority?

“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. . . . Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word . . .” (Ephesians 5:22, 25, 26 ESV).

3. Does the husband seek to put the interests of his wife above his own, and does the wife seek to do likewise as it regards her husband’s interests?

“Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests,

but also to the interests of others” (Phil. 2:3, 4, ESV).

4. Do they use their speech to build up one another?

“Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person” (Colossians 4:6, ESV).

5. Are they honest in their communication?

“Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue is but for a moment” (Proverbs 12:19, ESV).

6. Does the couple have a mutually satisfying sexual relationship?

“For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control” (1 Corinthians 7:4, 5, ESV).

7. Is the couple sexually faithful to one another?

“You shall not commit adultery” (Exodus 20:14, ESV).

8. Do either of them use or view pornography?

“But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent

Who Keeps Your Heart?

by Carl L. Sensenig

The story is told about two boys who were playing together. They had been reading about the animal sacrifices in the Old Testament. In their game, they built a small altar of stones and placed the wood upon it. When the altar was finished, one boy turned to the other and said, "Now we must find a sacrifice." The other little boy looked at his toys. His eyes fell on a wooden camel. One of the legs was broken off. Picking it up, he said, "Here, let's sacrifice this! It's no good anyhow."

God created man with a perfect heart and desired that man would give Him glory as they enjoyed fellowship with each other. When sin came into the world, man was driven out of the garden; and the open relationship between God and man was lost. Jesus came to earth to die for the sins of mankind so the relationship between God and man could be restored.

Man's part in the plan of salvation is to confess our past sins and lay down our carnal desires. Those whose heart's desire is to do what is right find that God has provided many helps for our journey to Heaven. He gave us His Word to lead us in the ways of holiness. We can come directly to God through prayer, and He will give us power to live above our carnal will and sinful desires. More than this, God also knows how much adversity we need to keep our heart fixed on heavenly things.

As Christians today, we may have the desire to do what is right; but we also need to be aware that the devil is still alive today and vying for our heart! If God is not the keeper of our heart, we will eventually look to earthly things for our inner fulfillment. In the story above, the boys did everything right in building the altar, but put something less than the best on the altar. We can also fall prey to this attitude today. We can allow peer pressure to keep us looking right on the outside, but inside, our heart desires riches, fame, and ease. How easy would it be to do a bad business deal so we can fill our pockets a little fuller? Do we speak or think bad of others to make ourselves look good? Are we willing to compromise the stranger and pilgrim principle so we can "enjoy" life a little more?

Our whole heart must be on the altar so God can receive glory to Himself from our life. If the world and its allurements have our heart, we will be giving Him something that is "no good" so we can live the way we wish. "*Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life*" (Proverbs 4:23). ■

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Marriage Questions . . . cont'd.

has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:28, ESV).

9. Does either the husband or the wife abuse alcohol or drugs (illegal or prescription)?

"Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?" (Romans 6:16, ESV).

10. Is the couple dealing with any significant financial debt?

"One who is wise is cautious and turns away from evil, but a fool is reckless and careless" (Proverbs 14:16, ESV).

—Taken from the Association of Biblical Counselors

Honest Men Must Warn

by J. C. Ryle (1816-1900)

“The wicked shall be turned into hell” – Psalm 9:17.

Let others hold their peace about Hell if they will; I dare not do so. I see it plainly in Scripture, and I must speak of it. I fear that thousands are on that broad road that leads to it, and I would fain arouse them to a sense of the peril before them.

What would you say of the man who saw his neighbor’s house in danger of being burned down and never raised the cry of “fire”? Call it bad taste if you like to speak of Hell. Call it charity to make things pleasant and speak smoothly and soothe the men with a constant lullaby of peace.

From such notions of taste and charity may I ever be delivered! My notion of charity is to warn men plainly of their danger. My notion of taste is to declare all the counsel of God. If I never spoke of Hell, I should think I had kept back something that was profitable and should look on myself as an accomplice of the Devil.

Beware of new and strange doctrines about Hell and the eternity of punishment. Beware of manufacturing a god of your own—a god who is all love but not holy, a god who has a heaven for everybody but a hell for none, a god who can allow good and bad to be side by side in time and will make no distinction between good and bad in eternity.

Such a god is an idol of your own, as really as Jupiter or the monstrous image of Juggernaut—as true an idol as was ever molded out of brass or clay.

The hands of your own fancy and sentimentality have made him. He is not the God of the Bible, and besides the God of the Bible there is no God at all.

Your “heaven” would be no Heaven at all. A heaven containing all sorts of characters mixed together indiscriminately would be

miserable discord indeed. Alas for the eternity of such a heaven! There would be little difference between it and Hell.

Ah, reader, there is a Hell! Take heed lest you find it out too late.

Beware of being wise above that which is written. Beware of forming fanciful theories of your own and then trying to make the Bible square with them. Beware of making selections from your Bible to suit your taste—refusing, like a spoiled child, whatever you think is bitter; seizing, like a spoiled child, whatever you think sweet.

What is all this but taking Jehoiakim’s penknife and cutting God’s Word to pieces? What does it amount to but telling God that you, a poor, short-lived worm, know what is good for you better than He? It will not do; it will not do. You must take the Bible as it is. You must read it all and believe it all. You must come to the reading of it in the spirit of a little child.

Dare not to say, “I believe this verse, for I like it; I receive this, for I can understand it; I refuse that, for I cannot reconcile it with my views.”

“Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?” (Romans 9:20). By what right do you talk in this way? Surely it were better to say over every chapter in the Word, “Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth” (1 Samuel 3:9).

Ah, reader, if men were to do this, they would never try to throw overboard the doctrine of the eternal punishment of the wicked. “And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal” (Matthew 25:46). ■

—Reprinted with permission from *The Sword of the Lord*, Sept. 2008

Offended

by Timothy J. Myers

Why is it that some people can be so easily offended, while others seem to be able to take almost anything and respond with a smile? How can some individuals seem to be unfailingly gracious, while with others you find yourself automatically bracing for something unpleasant?

One of the greatest challenges of life is to be able to ride on top of a wave of maliciousness or unfair criticism without being tumbled underneath it, battered and bruised, fighting off a vengeful spirit.

I'm sure you have experienced it. I'm not talking about someone committing a definable sin against you, but the little things that smart and irritate. Someone criticizes your children or the way you raise them. There is a disparaging remark about your housekeeping (you might be too sloppy or too fastidious). A brother says that you do a poor job of farming or building or whatever your occupation might be. You overhear a friend tell another that you have a bad attitude. You have been assigned a responsibility and then are completely bypassed, or someone else steps in and fulfills it. You share a concern with someone about his lifestyle and are told that you are being unloving and critical.

As a peaceful, nonresistant person, you probably have fairly strong control: you know that outright revenge is not an option. But even when you exercise self-restraint you can still harbor some pretty unsanctified attitudes.

You can repeatedly mull over what happened, analyzing the motives behind it, feeling the hurt again and again, making it more offensive each time. Or you can minimize the incident, giving the benefit of the doubt, applying the grace that God has shown to you to others. You

have a choice: will you make it into a mountain, or consider it a molehill?

Much of the struggle involved in that decision comes from self. Self is that part of us which gives us a natural tendency to sin and to be selfish, the "old man" Paul writes about in Romans. While self may at times act unselfishly for the selfish motive of satisfying the ego, when it comes down to a real sacrifice, self shows its true colors.

Offenses between individuals are usually rooted in self. Both want it their way. What the other wants is inconvenient, or his criticism makes you look bad, or his viewpoint calls into question your judgment, or what he does is just different than what you would do. You have lost control, and control is something that self craves.

If self is on the throne of our lives, it expects and demands that others serve it. It is always right, and knows what is best for everyone else. If there is a problem, it comes from someone else. A good illustration of self at work is the child who said, "It all started when he hit me back."

Unfortunately, being ruled by self is not limited to children. It is ugly in anyone, but it is especially destructive when expressed by one in authority, like a parent or leader, or others who are to be examples.

Self is not only offensive; it also instigates an improper response to offense. The natural response to hurt is retaliation. When hurtful words hit you, the easiest thing to do is to hurl them back, and erect a barrier between you and the other thrower. That barrier is intended to be a defensive wall against further emotional damage, but it ends up being

an impediment to a good relationship. The other person senses what is happening and may build his own wall. Future contacts between you are shaded by what has happened.

As God's children, we are responsible to break this cycle of injury and mistrust. But how do we do that? How can we emulate our gentle Saviour, who accepted the hatred and mistreatment of His fellowman and still responded with love?

I would like to make a few suggestions:

Do your best to maintain an even-handed fairness in how you look at the situation. If you were in his shoes and he were in yours, might your response have been the same as his? The Golden Rule has never been worn out—in fact, sometimes I think it collects a little too much dust.

Consider that God may be using this person to reveal a blind spot in your life. Even if the method were imperfect, the message may be true, a reality that your friends are loath to point out. You might be wrong, or foolish, or maybe you do have a bad attitude. How would it appear in someone else?

But even if you can see no good reason for the offender to have done or said what he did, you must forgive. To forgive is to wish no evil—only good—on the one who has hurt us. Forgiveness will make you the channel of that good.

Pray. Cultivate the habit of praying when you feel distressed, and pray every time it comes back to your mind. Tell God about it, and ask His grace to simply respond with love to one who has hurt you. Leave it in God's hands. He has, no

doubt, opened your eyes to wrongs which you have committed, and He can do the same for your brother.

Bury offenses, and bury them well. It is absolutely counterproductive to deliberately, repeatedly relive the wrongs that you have suffered. Don't keep a running tally of all your injuries. That would be a little like the boy who buried his dead cat, but left its tail sticking out. Every few days he would pull it up by the tail to check on it. It wasn't long until the tail pulled off, and the rest of the cat wasn't in very good shape either. There may be some things you can never forget, but when you bury them and turn them over to God, they come to your mind more infrequently, and with a diminished sting.

There may be some offenses which should be addressed with the one who caused them, not for our good, but for the good of the other. You must be careful, though, that the truth is always spoken in love, and with the humble acknowledgement of your own faults. Go only after you have God's blessing to go.

You must love. God intends for His children to be so filled with His love that it flows from every wound. We all appreciate people who are always kind and gracious. They likely developed that habit by many deliberate choices to love in the face of offenses. Love is the crowning grace that enables us to overlook the faults of others, and when we allow it to reign in our lives, we find fewer and fewer chances to be offended. ■

—Reprinted with permission from *Life Lines*, September-October 2008.

— Isaac Stoltzfus Mast . . . cont'd. —

In 1942, at the age of 68, Brother Mast retired from his field of service but not from the *Lord's service*. He became the supervisor of the Johnstown Mission for a while. Later while living in Embreeville, Pa., he served the Mennonite group at Greenwood, Del.

Although confined to his home during his later years as a result of a heart condition Isaac's mind remained alert. He also never lost his concern for the unsaved who had not heard the Good News of salvation.

Isaac Stoltzfus Mast went home to be with his Lord on August 24, 1955, at the age of 81. His body was laid to rest in Pine Grove Cemetery near Elverson, Pa. —*Gail L. Emerson*



Sermon of the Month



Each month we will feature a Biblical sermon in this column. We would like to emphasize expository preaching and ask our readers to submit good expository sermons for consideration. Please send typewritten copies by "snail mail" or email to: Editor, Sword and Trumpet, Box 575, Harrisonburg, VA 22803; swandtrump@verizon.net.

The Transiency of Tears

by Clovis G. Chappell

"Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (Psalm 30:5).

What is the faith of this psalmist? He is daring to tell us that in this world of change and decay, in this world where our hearts are so often broken and our faces so often wet with tears, that joy may be a more abiding guest than sorrow. He does not promise exemption from sorrow. He makes no claim to the discovery of an ideal world. But what he does say is that while weeping may come in as a wayfarer and spend the night, that the unwelcome guest need not abide, that he need not establish himself upon our shoulders like an old-man-of-the-sea. He may remain for the night, but he cannot abide the dawning of the day. Tears may come, but they will be transient. With the rising of the sun they will vanish like the dew or be kissed into jewels by its splendor. "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."

What a beautiful reading of things, and how refreshingly unique! It is just the opposite of the commonly accepted view. Are we not constantly reminding ourselves of the transiency of our joys? How often, for instance, we look upon the innocent and carefree play of children with a mingling of envy and pity.

How joyful they are, and how soon they must leave it all behind, pass out of their Eden of morning gladness into a harsh and rugged world where the stones will bruise their feet and where the thorns will pierce not their bodies only, but their hearts as well. How fleeting is the springtime of life! And the springtime of the heart is often more fleeting still. Byron found it so:

'Tis not on youth's smooth cheek alone
The blush that fades so fast,
But the tender bloom of heart is gone
Ere youth itself is past.
Oh, could I feel as once I felt
And be what I have been
And weep as I could once have wept
O'er many a vanished scene.
As springs in deserts found seem sweet
All brackish though they be,
So midst the withered waste of life
Those tears would flow to me.

Then there is the joy of courtship between a man and a maiden, the thrill of a growing love, the romance of marriage, the gladsome glamour of the honeymoon, the sweet climax of the making of a home. But we are told that these joys are also fleeting. Too often the romance does not outlast the honeymoon. The radiance

soon dies and wedded life sinks down into the dull, drab commonplace.

The other day we were to have a wedding at the church of which I am pastor. As I was going in to perform the ceremony I noticed the car in which the bride and groom were to go to the station to begin their honeymoon. Somebody had decorated it with a flaring placard which pictured a man and a woman glaring angrily and disgustedly at each other. Under the picture were these words: "When you get what you want, you don't want it." Of course it was only a joke, but it is too often the tragic truth to be amusing. And even where love lives and our dreams come true, sorrow soon calls. How lovely was the home of your childhood, but today that home is only a memory. There is no road that leads to it, for it is a part of a buried yesterday.

This note of the transiency of our joys is one that sobs its way through much of our literature. Everyone knows that—

Pleasures are like poppies spread,
You seize the flower, the bloom is shed;
Or, like the snowfall in the river,
A moment white, then melts forever.

—Robert Burns, ca. 1780

Again we say urgently:

Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,
Old Time is still a-flying,
And this same flower that smiles today
Tomorrow will be dying.

—Robert Herrick, 1648

And so they go on endlessly with their songs of the transiency of joy. But here is a glad voice raised to tell us that it is weeping that is soon gone. It may tarry for a night, but joy will surely come with the morning.

How Did Our Poet Come by This Conviction?

It is heartening to realize that his faith is not born of a stubborn refusal to face the ugly facts of life. He does not believe that weeping will abide only for a night

because he has shut his eyes to the grim tragedies that are the fountain source of our tears. How fruitful in tears, for instance, is the horrid fact of sin. But this poet does not deny the reality of sin. No more does he deny the reality of pain. Nor does he deny that final calamity called death. He faces all the terrifying foes that encompass us and still clings to his buoyant faith.

Then we may be further heartened by the fact that this bracing text is not the easy optimism of one who has lived on the sunny side of the street and has had everything come to him right side up. There is something positively provoking in the cocksure preaching of one who has never put the efficacy of his gospel to the test. This was what made old battle-scarred Carlyle rage at times against the complacent optimism of Emerson. He felt that this man whose voyage had been so largely over smooth seas had no right to speak with such assurance to those who had encountered little else than seas that had been whipped into rage by fierce tempests.

But this poet is speaking out of his own experience. That is the glory of these psalms. They were lived before they were written. When, therefore, this singer tells us that, though weeping may tarry for a night, joy will come with the morning, he is telling us a truth to which he has come by the painful path of experience. He is bringing us a conviction that, at great cost, he has hammered out upon the anvil of his own soul.

He even traces for us the road along which he traveled to his sunny faith. For years life dealt most kindly and gently with him. Sickness and sorrow came to others, but not to him. He knew that suffering and tears were a part of the human lot, but he did not experience it. Reports of the tragedies that were taking place day by day in the lives of men and women all about him seemed somehow strangely remote. The stories of their sorrows seemed to come to him from a distant world.

So long did his prosperity continue that it intoxicated him. He began to look upon himself as made of superior clay to those about him. At last he said complacently: "I shall never be moved." Then, like a bolt from the blue, the blow fell. Before he could realize what was happening, the light had gone out of his sky, and life for him had toppled into ruins.

What had happened? Well, he who had gone for years without an ache or a pain suddenly found himself the prey of some disease. He went for the first time to consult a physician. The doctor looked him over, and his face went grave. "What's wrong?" the patient asked anxiously. But the doctor only shook his head. "But I demand to know," he persisted. Then the doctor told him. He passed death sentence upon him, telling him frankly that he must suffer and that there was no remedy but death. Then followed dreary days and nights of hopeless suffering during which he tried to be brave. But his efforts became more and more futile.

At last, in his bewilderment at God's perplexing ordering of things, he lost his faith. With physical and spiritual health gone, a strange guest came into his home. That guest was weeping. He was not welcome, but he tarried nonetheless. He sat with him at every meal and by so doing, stole the taste from the most palatable of dishes. He even insisted upon sharing his bed with him. Therefore his nights were long and full of agony. And what made his situation utterly desperate was the dismal conviction that his unbidden guest must stay with him always.

But when all earthly hope was gone, he decided to make one last effort. Maybe the God who seemed to have forsaken him would help him even yet. Certainly, he felt, there ought to be one in a world like ours who could help when all human help had failed. So this sorely troubled man, this man whose physical tortures were almost forgotten in the presence of his tortures of soul, gave himself to prayer. He threw himself in his weakness into the

Everlasting Arms (Deut. 33:27), and God did not fail him.

"*He has turned for me my mourning into dancing,*" he sings proudly. "*He came,*" he declares, "*like a wise and tender nurse and removed my galling garment of sackcloth and decked me in a garment of gladness.*" And when he looked round for that unwelcome guest that he thought would never leave, lo, he found that he had gone, and that a new guest, songful joy, had come in his place. "*And what God has done for me,*" he declares with assurance, "He will do for you. *Sing unto the Lord, O you saints of his, . . . weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning*" (vv. 4, 5).

What Is the Good of This Faith?

1. It keeps alive our hope. Keeping alive our hope, it also enables us to carry on with patient courage. It is hard to see things through with honor if hope is gone. Some manage it, but while some can carry on when hope is dead, many cannot.

Sometime ago I looked into the face of one who had committed suicide. It was a pathetic face. Why did he fling out of life? He lost hope. Today was full of trouble and perplexity. Out ahead he saw a troop of tomorrows coming that looked as hopeless as today. Therefore he lost heart and gave over the fight. The night of weeping may be long and lonely, but we shall not turn coward and give up the battle if we are sure that joy is coming in the morning.

2. Not only will this faith give us hope and thereby minister to our courage and patient endurance, but it will be light to us during the night of our weeping. Such a faith will pluck sorrow's bitterest sting. What is it that makes our sorrow so bitter? It is our conviction of its finality. But how different it would be if we only believed that weeping is but temporary, that joy cometh in the morning.

Here, for instance, is a mother whose only laddie is gone from home. How still the house is and how desperately lonely!

Then there is a knock at the door, a telegram is put into her hand. "Will be home tomorrow," it reads, and the name signed to it is that of her boy. A moment later the house is just as still and empty as it was before the message came. But in spite of that, the loneliness is gone from the mother's heart and a great joy has come in its place.

And to you who are passing through a long night of weeping, I bring you a message. Hear it, and your heart will sing. A guest is coming to you. He is on his way. Soon he will turn the knob of your door and enter. Joy is coming in the morning. Nobody can be utterly cast down who believes that.

Is Such a Faith for Us Today?

But is such a faith possible for us who live in these perplexing days? This psalmist had been suffering from some deadly disease. He had been so close upon the gates of death that he was almost reckoned among the dead. In his desperate plight he had cried to God, and God had heard and healed.

Can we, too, then believe that God will always heal the sick and suffering that cry to him? We cannot. There are those who pray just as earnestly as this poet, who, in spite of all their prayers, in spite of the prayers of those who love them, go quickly down to death. Then there are others who go on suffering for long, torturing years. Paul was such a one. He pleaded earnestly and insistently for the removal of his thorn, but his request was not granted.

But while God does not always see fit to give physical healing in answer to our prayers, He does something that is vastly better. He gives to him who really prays an inner strength, a calm courage that enables him to bear whatever load is laid upon him. He gives in answer to prayer a quiet heart, an abiding peace, a fullness of life that makes mere physical healing seem small and trifling. For it is possible to have the most vigorous of bodies and yet be a very weak and sickly soul. But our

very bodily weakness that drives us to Christ becomes a source of spiritual strength. We learn with Paul that His grace is sufficient, and we shout with him, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (2 Cor. 12:9).

Then this text may have a richness of meaning for us to which even this psalmist himself was a stranger. Since his distant day Christ has come, bringing life and immortality to light through the gospel. We have heard Him say: "*Ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy.*" We believe that this is true in the here and now. We believe that it is going to be true in a finer and fuller sense in the dawning of that eternal morning to which He has encouraged us to look forward. "*Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you*" (John 14:1, 2).

These are the words of Christ. Since they are true we are safe in cherishing the wildest dreams for the future. In the presence of pain and change, in the presence of death itself we sing with calm confidence: "Joy cometh. It is coming now. It will come in its fullness, in the morning." ■

Adapted from *Sermons From the Psalms* by Clovis G. Chappell, preached in 1931.

—Reprinted from *Pulpit Helps*, published by AMG Publishers, Chattanooga, TN 37421

PREPARING LEADERS . . . cont'd.

I believe in this next generation of leaders.

God is raising up a generation of Christ followers that will move into leadership positions within the church at higher levels of maturity than we have ever seen. Let's make sure that we run the race well and pass the baton off as smoothly as possible so we can finish strong. ■

—Reprinted with permission from *Brotherhood Beacon*, August 2007.

Preparing Next-Generation Leaders

by Mel Shetler

God is raising up a generation of young believers that need to be mentored to move into leadership. The Scripture demonstrates that the church will largely succeed on the basis of skilled mature leadership. Recently I sat down with our leadership team and looked at ten-year goals for our church. We have had a great run. God has been gracious to us. I shared these goals after a lot of prayer and discernment. They included appointing a new pastor for this church. I believe our pattern of transferring leadership in the past has not been a great success story. These are some of my goals in preparing our church for this important step in calling the next pastor.

Find persons that have the heart and spiritual DNA that embodies your church.

A wise elder said, "Don't start with 'where' but 'whom.' This can seem basic but I have invested time in the past trying to mentor persons who didn't really want to connect with the heart, passion, and vision of the church. Sometimes they saw it as a stepping-stone to future ministry but were not likeminded enough to be in it for the long term. If you do not connect at a heart level, accepting discipline or correction will be difficult and they will not stay long.

Find persons that consider you a spiritual parent or desire such a relationship.

God desires to move us away from corporate models and revive the biblical examples offered by Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, Paul and Timothy and others. These relationships involved fathers and sons, not just mentors and students (1 Cor. 4:15). Knowledge can always be passed on by most teachers, but identity, worth, security, character, and values are best passed on by godly

parents. There is no greater joy than to parent leaders who are hungry to impact their generation to become Christ followers.

Heart and character issues are more important to work on than performance.

There are pitfalls when someone is allowed to get a position based on their gifts and innovative abilities without considering their character. They will be susceptible to pride. Their vision will be controlled by ambition. An independent spirit or personal ambition can make it difficult and reveal that something important is lacking. Such character deficiencies in a leader can promote strife and bring the downfall of a good team.

Impart your life into them but not necessarily in the same mold.

Spiritual children will resemble the parents in many ways but their uniqueness needs to be released. We can impart all that is important and still leave room for diversity and their own unique gifts and strengths.

Developing wisdom is a greater priority than acquiring knowledge.

It is important when someone steps into a senior leadership position that they have more than a lot of head knowledge and how-to's. Knowledge is the gaining of information; wisdom is the proper application. Wisdom will bring the correct interpretation of the facts and know how to apply them.

Encourage questions about your methods, ideas, and reasons for doing things a certain way.

Blind obedience is never healthy. Questions are powerful tools. Each situation becomes a learning time as long as one feels free to ask. *(continued on page 28)*



Song of the Month

Douglas A. Byler, Music Editor

This column welcomes the submission of original hymns. Please send hymns, as well as applicable information about the author and/or composer to: Douglas A. Byler, Sword and Trumpet, Box 575, Harrisonburg, VA 22803.

Lift Your Glad Voices



by Ware/Gould

Lyrics: The death of Jesus on the cross made adequate atonement for our sins, but had He not risen again from the dead our predicament would still be quite dire. The words of the Apostle Paul nicely summarize our hypothetical dilemma: “And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain” (1 Cor. 15:14). Since He has proven by His own example that He has the power to break death’s chains, we have good reason to believe His promise that those who believe in Him will live eternally. “Lift Your Glad Voices” celebrates this great truth of Christianity and calls us to rejoice in our assurance of eternal life.

The first publication of this hymn was in 1817 in the periodical *Christian Disciple*, of which the hymn’s author was the editor.¹ Henry Ware, Jr. was a Unitarian minister for a period of about thirteen years (beginning the year this hymn was published), before moving on to Harvard Divinity School.² His pastorate was taken over by Ralph Waldo Emerson, whom he had mentored while Emerson was in seminary. Although Ware was a confirmed Unitarian, he maintained belief in a personal (although not Triune) God, and never espoused the radical Transcendental views of his former pupil. In fact, Ware published *The Personality of the Deity* in response to Emerson’s famous “Divinity School Address,” which presented the basic tenets of Transcendentalism.

The words of this hymn were originally organized into just two verses. When Gould wrote this tune, he simply split each verse in half to make a total of four. This accounts for the slightly different rhythm of the evenly numbered verses, which requires some minor adjustments to the music.

Music: This rousing tune is very appropriate for the joyful message of the text that it accompanies. Opening the tune with a bar and a half of unison makes it easy for a large group of people to get off to a very solid start. Often in congregational music, the song leader must strike off on his own for a measure or two before the congregation will join him. Since the first phrase is begun in unison, it saves everyone in the congregation the bother of finding his or her note, and the song gets underway much more quickly and confidently.

John Edgar Gould (1821-1875) made his living in the piano business, but also found time to compile hymnbooks and write a few hymns himself. Not many of his hymns are still widely used. Among his hymns still in common use are “Lord, Thou Hast Searched” and “Jesus, Saviour, Pilot Me.” ■

1. <http://www.cyberhymnal.org/>

2. <http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia>

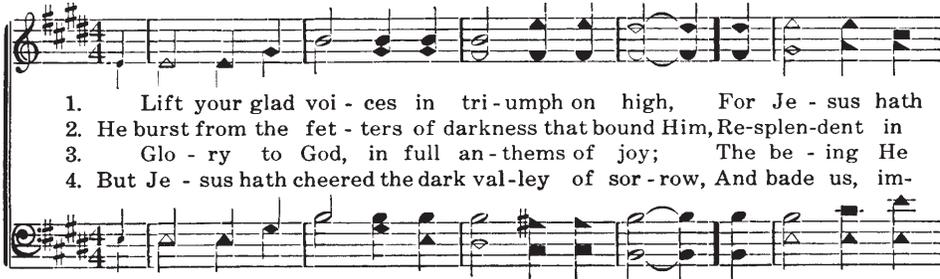
Lift Your Glad Voices

Whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die. —John 11:26

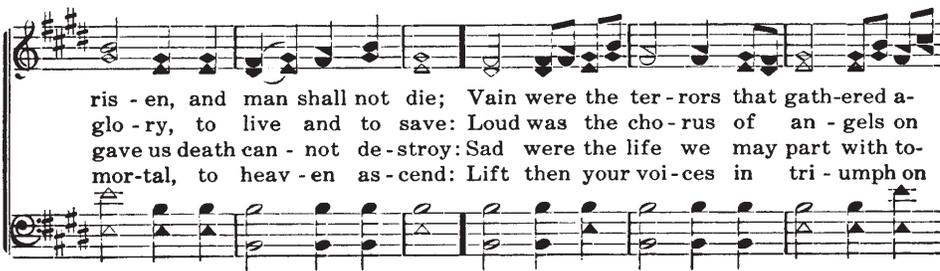
HENRY WARE

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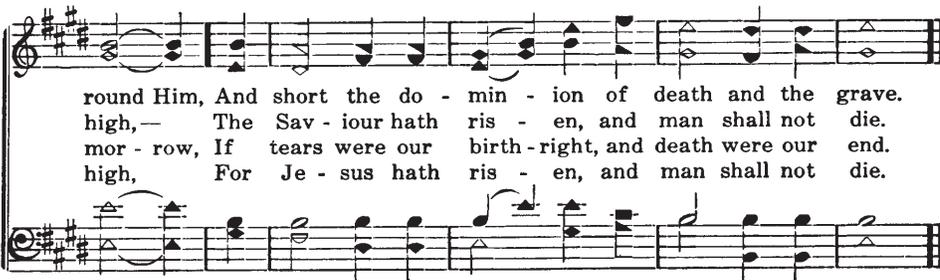
JOHN E. GOULD



1. Lift your glad voi - ces in tri - umph on high, For Je - sus hath
2. He burst from the fet - ters of darkness that bound Him, Re - splen - dent in
3. Glo - ry to God, in full an - thems of joy; The be - ing He
4. But Je - sus hath cheered the dark val - ley of sor - row, And bade us, im -



ris - en, and man shall not die; Vain were the ter - rors that gath - ered a -
glo - ry, to live and to save: Loud was the cho - rus of an - gels on
gave us death can - not de - stroy: Sad were the life we may part with to -
mor - tal, to heav - en as - cend: Lift then your voi - ces in tri - umph on



round Him, And short the do - min - ion of death and the grave.
high, — The Sav - iour hath ris - en, and man shall not die.
mor - row, If tears were our birth - right, and death were our end.
high, For Je - sus hath ris - en, and man shall not die.

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Coping With Culture Shock and Stress

by Floyd Stoltzfus

A missionary hospital in India opened a new department of mental health services. The staff expected long lines of Indian patients. Imagine their surprise when this mental health department was soon visited by missionary patients from all over the country. In fact, for some time the missionaries were the focal part of this department.

A missionary doctor wrote: "Most missionaries experience some stress, but it would be inaccurate to say that all missionaries feel stressed all the time. Many have few serious problems, adjusting quickly to the new pattern of life. Others, however, feel stressed by the newness of it all." Language learning, homesickness, climate changes, and lack of modern conveniences can all add to the culture shock. And oh, the agony of filling the shoes of former missionaries who had adapted to that land and were appreciated by the natives!

A brother who grew up in a mission setting writes, "We are all creatures of our own culture. As we grow up, we nail together a raft of familiarity that helps us ride the waves of change in our own society. Year after year, plank by plank, we have unconsciously hammered out a coping strategy for life. It may be a rough-hewn vessel, but we have each mastered the cultural cues for our own sea of life.

"Culture shock sums up all the complicated emotions that we feel when the planks of our raft begin to separate. Up until this time, the planks of the familiar were so firmly fastened together that we were unconscious of them. Now, as they float away, we look longingly for each splinter of wood. Culture shock can make the most committed missionary feel like quitting, but it can also be a positive learning experience."

There are often four progressive stages that people face in fields of service whether in their own land or abroad. To understand these stages of adjustment may help in coping with the stress of dealing with our feelings and the new world that confronts us. The following account is fictitious, although true to life, as one might experience in the exotic tropics of Belize.

Stage 1: Fascination. Imagine yourself being sent as a missionary pastor with your wife and family. You have left the shores of America. You are awed by the deep, blue Caribbean Sea far below the airplane. Finally, after several hours of flying, you see the Belize River winding its way through the lush green forests. You land, get off the plane, and are faced with the warmth of the afternoon sun. After claiming your baggage and going through customs, you meet missionary personnel and are taken to missionary headquarters.

After several days of orientation, you take the 180-mile trip south to a seaport city. There you load your belongings on a large dory propelled by a two-cycle engine powerful enough to push a ton of luggage and passengers on the 50-mile trip to your assigned service destination.

As you travel on the sea, you are fascinated by the lonely, winding river, and the farther inland you travel, the more lush and dense the jungle becomes. You see various kinds of tropical birds, iguanas, and even monkeys. The thatched roofs, the exotic palm trees, grapefruits, and bananas in abundance add to the romantic euphoria. Your family is absorbing all these strange sights, sounds, and even smells, with enjoyment and flexibility. You meet the native brethren and note their quiet and peaceful manner. It brings

you a sense of rest and welcome.

Stage 2: Frustration. By and by, you face one embarrassing situation too many. Everybody in the little community finds out about it. It is the last straw. The honeymoon is over.

The realities of mission service have set in. Language learning can be frustrating. Door callers interrupt family life. The gasoline engine operating the washing machine does not start. The propane supply is getting low. An animal gets in the chicken coop. Rain and more rain falls; high humidity and fatigue all add to the frustration. The miles between you and home seem so distant. Letters from home are more scarce.

At this crucial point, do not react.

Stage 3: Fellowship. The first sign of recovery from the second stage of culture shock is when your sense of humor returns. You can chuckle at your mistakes. You enjoy a day working with the natives on their plantations.

To help the adjustment process: visit their homes, eat their foods, and learn a word or sentence in their language every day. Learn what you can about their arts, skills, beliefs, and behavior patterns. Take your family on a picnic in a secluded spot down the river. Write a diary. Keep a journal.

Stage 4: Fruitfulness. The fourth stage

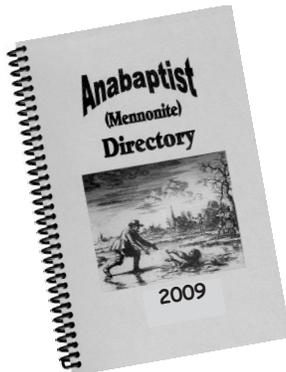
of adjustment speaks of a deep, growing love for Christ and His church. To bear good fruit you need good root stock. In other words, teach sound biblical doctrine. It takes skillful pruning methods, care, cultivation, and patience. It will not come overnight.

God will give the increase. We are to bear fruit, not produce it. Jesus said, "I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18b). This relieves the stress and frustration of Kingdom building. There is joy in allowing the Holy Spirit to work. However, fruit-bearing is not automatic. Take time in the Word, meditate, and pray. Preach the Gospel. Edify the believers.

One of the secrets of coping with culture shock and stress is to prepare your mind for it. Stress can be very useful in helping us to depend more fully on the Lord. Stress teaches us to be thankful in difficult times for it is when we are weak that God will show Himself strong. The Lord told Paul when he was facing distresses, buffetings, and weakness: "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." Paul echoed a tremendous response: "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (2 Cor. 12:9). ■

—Reprinted with permission from *The Calvary Messenger*; October 2008.

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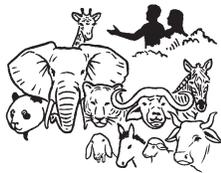


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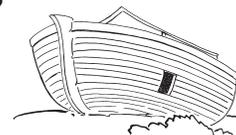
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Beginning Issues



Can God Be a Loving God in a World of Suffering?

by John Mullett

In almost any given hospital lies someone dying, perhaps to the ravages of a horrible disease such as cancer. Others may find themselves living in a constant struggle as they slowly wither away before finally succumbing to a deteriorating disease such as Muscular Dystrophy (MD) or Parkinson's. In a moment and the screeching of tires a child in pursuit of his ball is snatched away, or perhaps a family is left fatherless. In a number of countries in a given moment thousands are dying from starvation while thousands more live with pangs of hunger, crying, and wondering if they will even find enough to eat from day to day to survive, much less ever again know what it's like to feel the satisfaction of a full stomach. From time to time a natural disaster takes its vengeance neither respecting nor sparing anyone in its path regardless of their status in life, whether it be the wealthy or the destitute, the strong or the helpless, it destroys them all.

Even nature, specifically in the animal kingdom, is as Tennyson put it, "Red [blood] in tooth and claw." Perhaps if this bloodshed were in some accidental fashion we would view it differently, but there are too many species that are nothing more than highly specialized killing

machines with instincts too sharp, or venom too specific in its attack on the nervous system, to simply be an accident.

Death and suffering are horrible masters, indiscriminate in their choosing, sometimes bringing their pain to situations that nearly take our breath away. Perhaps if they were more discriminating, if good always won and evil always lost, if the ruthless were denied and the merciful rewarded, then perhaps it would at least make sense to us. So from our throats rise the cries of anguish, despair, or anger voiced in that small but complex word, "Why?" Why does evil sometimes win? Why do bad things happen to good people? Why did the tsunami of 2004, with almost no warning, kill approximately 230,000 people and destroy the few possessions and the very livelihood of so many people who had so little to start with?

Out of the "whys" emerges the real question: If God is love how can He allow these things to happen? For some it's masked behind the "whys" in subtle ways while others may ask it much more belligerently, but we all ask and desperately *need an answer* to that question.

The primary focus of the next two to three articles (including this one) is not to argue the existence of God; however,

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SWORD AND TRUMPET

the universality of this question, and the whys of people of all beliefs in the face of tragedy, provides what I believe is a compelling argument for the existence of God. The goal here is to answer the question invoked by the title—an apparent disparity we are often confronted with in the world where we live.

Many are quick to point to death and suffering as evidence that a loving personal god cannot exist. They say if God is omnipotent then He cannot be a god of love because of the bad things He's allowed to happen. Is this true? Or is it possible for bad things to happen while an omnipotent and loving personal god

exists? Our responses are revealing in what we believe. When we respond with emotions such as anger and despair when faced with tragedy, it's usually because we are assuming a god who *could* have acted on our behalf and *chose* not to. At least in the face of tragedy we seem willing to believe in the omnipotence of God—but His goodness, not so much. I want to show that God is omnipotent *and good*; that God can be trusted. “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end” (Jeremiah 29:11). ■

To be continued . . .

Drug-Addicted Babies: Who Is Responsible?

by Haven Bradford Gow

As University of Rochester Medical School ethicist Jane Greenlaw points out in *Biomedical Ethics* (University Press of New England), “In the late 1980s, nurses and doctors providing prenatal and obstetrical clinic at the Medical University of South Carolina noticed a high number of babies born with medical problems due to maternal cocaine abuse. To address the problem, a task force was formed, which included a prosecuting attorney who advised that since a viable fetus is considered a person under South Carolina law, a woman who ingested cocaine after the 24th week of pregnancy was guilty of the crime of distributing a controlled substance to a minor.” Should mothers be held morally and legally accountable for causing damage to their babies—born and unborn—through using and abusing drugs or alcohol or cigarettes during pregnancy? It all depends upon whether we understand that—scientifically speaking—the fetus is a human being from the time of conception.

Concerning the beginning of human life,

Dr. Eugene Diamond, past chairman of the pediatrics department of Loyola University Medical School, Maywood, Ill., observes: “We no longer need to belabor the question of when human life begins; it begins incontrovertibly at the union of sperm and ovum. Surely the recent in vitro fertilization experiments have proved this beyond a doubt.”

Dr. Hymie Gordon, medical scholar, Mayo Medical Clinic, states: “A human being exists at conception.” Dr. Jerome Lejuene, a prominent European geneticist, declares: “The fetus is a human being. Genetically, he is complete. If the fetus were not a full human being, then something would have to be added to it, and we know that does not happen.”

Scientifically speaking, the fetus indeed is a human being from the moment of conception. Since this is so, then mothers should be held morally and legally responsible for causing harm to their babies (born and unborn) by using and abusing drugs or alcohol or cigarettes while pregnant. ■

Parents Providing a Disciplined Home Life

by Joel Martin

Many of us have fond memories of home. Even those who did not know the blessing of stable home life in their childhood often have fond memories of homes they have come to appreciate. As we reflect on these fond memories, we recognize that a happy home does not just happen. A happy home is rather the product of much love and order. This needed order can be effected only if discipline is revealed in all of home life.

Respect for authority is one of the basics on which disciplined home life is built. This respect begins in the home as parents recognize God as the final authority and as His Word is given first place. The church is then held in high regard, and her teaching and standards are obeyed out of appreciation for the church and what the standards represent. The parents each take seriously their roles as taught in the Scriptures. Children are taught that obedience and respect are necessary and required.

Rules are necessary for disciplined home life. Children need to learn that relating properly to these rules brings rest and contentment and that rules are for the good of all. Children are taught to fit in with the rules rather than expect the rules to be fit to them. Rules help the child to recognize his responsibility to his parents and family.

Rules often form the framework that brings conflict with the child's selfish nature. This gives opportunity for the will of the child to be broken. Parents fulfill their responsibility by chastening for willful disobedience. Corporal punishment is not merely an option for Christian parents but a Scriptural imperative (Proverbs 23:13, 14). As a child's will is brought into subjection to the home, he is prepared to relate to other

areas of authority in society and the church.

Having a family schedule is also an important part of disciplined home life. A set time needs to be established for rising in the morning, for eating meals, and for retiring in the evening. These disciplines help us to learn self-control and to be considerate of others. As the family grows, the need for a family schedule intensifies, yet maintaining a schedule can also become more challenging. As we blend our family schedule with church and school schedules, our children receive an example of how they should blend as well. Being scheduled is important, but the schedule should serve the family and not the family the schedule. Deviation from the schedule can be made when it benefits the family but not just to satisfy the selfish whims of one individual.

Teaching our children responsibility for their actions is an important part of disciplined home life. We are responsible not only for wrongdoing but also for neglect and for accidents. The socialistic and insurance mentality of our society may be weakening this principle among us. Do we take responsibility for our actions and help our children to do likewise? If our child accidentally breaks a window at school, do we help him take responsibility to fix it or to pay to have it fixed? The discipline of being responsible for one's actions or for negligence helps to teach carefulness and respect for others.

Our homes should teach our children their responsibility toward the family unit. As children grow, they increasingly are able to contribute to the family. Even when they are small, they should help with family chores such as washing dishes and working in the garden. Small children should not be paid for doing these chores but should see