

HOW TO HANDLE SUFFERING • THE BIBLE AND OUR PERSONAL WELL-BEING • LESSONS LEARNED FROM SUFFERING

FrontLine

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JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2001

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Contents

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2001

FRONTLINE MAGAZINE

VOLUME 11 • NUMBER 1

6 How to Handle Suffering

Scott Williquette & Steve Thomas

Some practical steps to handle, and help others handle, suffering in a God-honoring fashion.

11 Life Is More Than a Trough

Layton Talbert

Is there a difference between worry and concern?

13 God's Quiver Full

Diane Heeney

Miscarriages and stillbirths are common occurrences. How should a Christian respond when presented with this trial of faith?

21 Beyond Understanding But Not Without Peace

Cliff Gribick

When tragedy struck their son, the Gribicks determined that their circumstances would not dictate their response.

23 A Boy, a Motorcycle—and a Collision

Rick Barry

When the Lord permits a tragedy, we must cling ever tighter to our Heavenly Father.

38 The Providential Plymouth

Franklin S. Hall

God takes good care of His children, no matter how simple or complicated the problem might be.

9 The Bible and Our Personal Well-Being

Stephen Caesar

God's commands are not grievous, but are given to us for our own good.

15 Lessons Learned from Suffering

Marty Goggins

Through his own illness and suffering, a pastor learns some hard lessons about himself.

Departments

4 Mail Bag

5 Behind the Lines

The Precious Blood of Christ (Part 3)

Rod Bell

19 On the Home Front

25 Wit & Wisdom

26 Ladies' Circle

Never Alone

Cynthia Blake Simmons

29 The Evangelist's Corner

Men Ought Always to Pray

Phil Shuler

30 At a Glance

The Book of Job: Finding God Beyond the Suffering (Part 1)

Layton Talbert

33 Newsworthy

36 Biblical Viewpoint

Thy Deepest Distress

John C. Vaughn

37 What's on the Web

Bob Whitmore

Visit us on the Web at
www.f-b-f.org

Mail Bag

Thank your good office for sending me the *Frontline* magazine. . . . It was an encouragement to me personally and the other pastors I am sharing the magazine with. We reached a decision to share the magazine with 12 other churches. There is a lack of good, sound, Biblical magazines and books here. I am going to share some of the materials written in the 10 years celebration issue (July/August 2000) with our church leaders, especially "Sound Words: Inspiration for the Pastor's Study."

*Pastor Gideon Njovu
Kadoma, ZIMBABWE*

Thank you for the fine work in *Frontline*. I heartily endorse and promote it. We will continue to send a support check twice a year.

*Pastor Doug Wright
Berryville, VA*

Note: Such support helps enable us to continue to send Frontline to national pastors, such as Pastor Njovu, who cannot afford to pay for a subscription.

Thank you for your work with *Frontline*. It is very encouraging and one of my "must reads." I enjoyed reading the articles on music in the September/October 2000 issue. . . . Thank you again. I appreciate your stand on the Word and on our position as Baptists.

*Pastor Alan Beaulieu
Londonderry, NH*

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You may request that your letter not be published or that your name be withheld, but anonymous letters will not be accepted.



I have been a subscriber to *Frontline* for several years and have thoroughly enjoyed each issue. Although I have been blessed many times, I have never taken time to write and thank you for the great job you are doing. It is one magazine that I normally read cover to cover. After reading the article, "What Is at Stake in the Music Debate?" by Dr. Vaughn ("Biblical Viewpoint," Sept./Oct. 2000), however, I felt compelled to write and congratulate you on the best piece I have read on this debate yet. He really got to the heart of the issue, where the rubber meets the road, so to speak. Keep up the good work and God bless you all.

*Paul E. McMillan
Carmel, IN*

A special thanks for your "music" edition (Sept./Oct. 2000) of *Frontline*. I just called today to order 30 extra

copies for our choir. . . . I'm a converted rock and jazz drummer. If someone would have told me 25 years ago when I was saved that evangelical and even some so-called fundamental churches would have their own rock bands for Sunday morning worship to reach the youth and draw in more people, I would have denied the prophecy. It's still hard for me to believe.

*Pastor Jim Burns
Van Wert, OH*

I am greatly blessed by *Frontline* magazine. Thank you for your articles on music in the Sept./Oct. 2000 issue. The power of music both for good and evil cannot be overemphasized. I have come to the conclusion in my own life that backsliding almost always began with poor music choices. Thank you for printing an outstanding magazine.

*Mrs. Vernon Smith
Windsor, CO*

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The Precious Blood of Christ

Part 3 of a sermon preached at the 1989 FBF national meeting at Bethel Baptist Church in Schaumburg, Illinois.

My Lord Jesus said, “I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Matt. 9:13). Christ has no word of salvation to say to a man who does not see himself as a vile, guilty sinner. So the truth of man’s natural corruption and depravity must be seen first of all before salvation can be received.

But there is another reason we must see the corruption of fallen man. Only when we see man’s corruption will we begin to appreciate the glorious sinlessness of the Lord Jesus Christ and the wonderful, holy person that He is.

Let’s notice, then, not only corruption and sin, but Christ, the sinless One. The Bible testimony to this is crystal clear. Friends and foes alike testified to His sinless perfection, but it is from the inspired testimony of the God-breathed Scriptures that we have the completely authoritative proof of His absolute sinlessness. Please consider carefully what the Bible says about Christ.

- He “did no sin” (1 Pet. 2:22).
- He “knew no sin” (2 Cor. 5:21).
- “In him is no sin” (1 John 3:5).
- He “is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners” (Heb. 7:26).

The Lord Jesus Christ never sinned in thought. He never sinned in deed or motive. He never sinned in word. He never sinned a sin of commission or of

omission. But not only is it true to say that He did not sin, the Bible makes it absolutely clear that He could not sin, because He was God manifested in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:16), and God cannot be personally guilty of sin. He was not merely sinless, He was impeccably sinless; i.e., the God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ, was not merely able to overcome temptation and sin, but was incapable of being overcome by temptation and sin. His own testimony was, “The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me” (John 14:30).

When Satan tempts us there is something within us which naturally responds to his temptations. But in Christ there was nothing upon which Satan could take hold, nothing which could respond to his allurements. This is the difference between the temptations of Christ and those of every other person on earth. “[Christ] was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15). “Yet without sin” in the Greek text means “apart from sin” or “sinlessly.”

By virtue of His virgin birth, the Lord Jesus Christ was born without sin. By virtue of His impeccable Person, He lived without sin. And when he died, it was for no sin of His own. He died with the sins of the world upon Him. But, thank God, *no sin was within Him!*

He “needeth not daily as those [Old Testament] priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people’s” (Heb. 7:27). “He had done no violence, neither was

any deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief” (Isa. 53:9, 10).

With good reason, then, is the Lord Jesus Christ called the the “lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Pet. 1:19). His blood was untainted with Adam’s sin. No guilt or corruption was transmitted to Him, in stark contrast to every other person ever born.

Therefore, His blood is incorruptible, emphasizing its purity. But as we shall now see, “incorruptible blood” emphasizes much more than that. Not only was it precious blood, but it is indestructible blood. Clearly, Christ’s blood was incapable of corrupting or decaying. What does this mean?

The meaning of “incorruptible” is clearly inferred by the reference to Christ’s body not seeing corruption. In Psalm 16:10 we have a prophecy which was fulfilled in the resurrection of Christ. “For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.” This text was quoted by Peter on the day of Pentecost of Acts 2:27, 31. He told his audience that David had not spoken of himself.

Which leaves us with a question. Where is the blood of Christ today? Has it been destroyed? Has it been corrupted? Has it been soaked up in the sand? Many would like you to believe that the answer to these questions is “yes.” The scholars would like to explain it away. But the Word of God says otherwise. It has been raised to heaven. That is the simple answer, the only answer warranted by this infallible Book, our authoritative voice of faith and practice.

His blood is incorruptible, emphasizing its purity.



DR. ROD BELL



How to Handle Suffering

Scott Williquette & Steve Thomas

Christianity promises no immunity from adversity. Believers experience pain and suffering like anyone else. The Bible is filled with suffering saints. Hardship takes many forms: physical, financial, social, emotional. The question that naturally arises in such circumstances is, “Why am I hurting and suffering?” The larger question is “Why does God allow and send suffering into the world?” The Bible answer to this question is multifaceted.

Why Is There Suffering?

Non-Christians and Christians alike suffer because we all live in a sin-cursed world, and sin always has consequences. Toil, pain, and death are the results of sin (Romans 8:22; Genesis 3). To compound the problem, non-Christians and Christians alike possess an internal desire to sin called the flesh (Romans 7:7-25). That desire breeds sin which inevitably produces earthly and, for the unsaved, eternal suffering (James 1:14-15). Faith itself adds yet another dimension to suffering, since Christians suffer because they are identified with Christ and are thus hated by Satan and by the world (John 15:18-19; 1 Peter 5:8; Colossians 1:24). Similarly, Christians may suffer because they are identified with others in the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:26). Finally, Christians suffer because suffering engenders trust in God and encourages Christian growth and Christlikeness (John 13:33, 36-37, 14:1; Psalm 119:67,71; James 2-4; 1 Peter 1:6-7).

Not All Suffering Is Alike

The general reasons for suffering noted above are rarely satisfying to the believer who is being crushed in the crucible of personal tragedy. When faced with personal pain, the believer longs to know why specific circumstances have been brought into his life. The Bible provides answers concerning the specific reasons God might allow and/or initiate trials in the Christian's life. Suffering in the life of a believer falls into two categories: disciplinary and non-disciplinary.

Disciplinary Suffering

"Discipline" can be used broadly to denote "instruction," "teaching," or "training." In that sense, all suffering is certainly disciplinary. Here, however, the term is employed in its narrower sense of "chastisement." Sometimes God finds it necessary to discipline (chasten) His child because of sin (1 Corinthians 11:28-34; Hebrews 12:4-11). What is the believer's responsibility when faced with disciplinary suffering? First, when you think you may be experiencing disciplinary suffering, examine your life in order to make a Biblical determination. Take a spiritual inventory to determine whether or not there is unchecked or unconfessed sin in your life: sinful habits, sinful relationships, sinful priorities?

The sowing-and-reaping principle delineates an inviolable cause-and-effect relationship between sin and its consequences. All sin produces consequences (Galatians 6:7-8), and these consequences are part of God's chastisement. Even when sin is confessed and corrected there will often be negative and sometimes far-reaching consequences. Moreover, the greater the sin, the greater the chastisement may be. The longer you allow sin to go unchecked, the more severely God will deal with you in order to correct you (1 Corinthians 11:29-30; 1 John 5:16). God may use a variety of instruments to bring about His correction, including the authority of government, home, school, church, or workplace (1 Peter 3:17; 4:18; Ephesians 6:1-4; 1 Corinthians 5:1-8). In disciplinary suffering, repentance is the key to relief. God requires repentance from the errant believer (James 5:15-16; 1 John 1:9). The

pain of discipline, whether physical or mental, cannot be dealt with properly until sin is confessed and forsaken (Psalm 32:1, 5).

Even though God does not continue to chasten you for sins that you have dealt with Biblically (1 John 1:9), the consequences triggered by some sins may continue to produce suffering long after you have asked the Lord's forgiveness. That has more to do with the nature of sin than with the nature of God. But always remember that God disciplines because He loves you. God's disciplinary dealings flow out of, not in spite of, the love of God. God is not a bully who delights in making your life miserable. On the contrary, His discipline is an expression of His fatherly love toward you (Hebrews 12:5-6). Divine discipline always has a divine purpose. When God applies the rod of discipline, He desires to make you holy (Hebrews 12:10), obedient (Hebrews 12:9), and righteous (Hebrews 12:11). If your goals are the same as God's goals—and they should be—then disciplinary suffering will ultimately be a blessing (Psalm 119:67, 71).

Non-Disciplinary Suffering

The Bible, however, makes it clear that not all suffering is disciplinary, nor is it necessarily the direct consequence of personal sin. The Bible presents a variety of reasons God allows suffering in the life of a believer. These may be divided into three distinct categories.

First, sometimes God sends or allows suffering as a means of personal development. Suffering plays a role in developing spiritual maturity, patience and endurance (James 1:2-4), wisdom (James 1:5-8) and humility (James 1:10-11). Suffering opens opportunities for rewards (James 1:12), to prove the genuineness of your faith (1 Peter 1:6-8), and to cultivate contentment (Philippians 4:11). Suffering can produce a fresh desire to obey the will of God (Hebrews 5:8). Suffering can produce a desire to know and obey God's Word (Psalm 119:67, 71).

Second, sometimes God sends or allows suffering as a means of public influence. In addition to your own personal development, God desires to influence others through your response to suffering. Suffering can demonstrate spiritual fruit (Galatians 5:22-23; 2 Corinthians 4:8-11), create unique opportunities to witness for Christ (1 Peter 3:14-15; Philippians 1:12), open opportunities to help others who suffer (2 Corinthians 1:3-4), and even rebuke believers who are guilty of pride and spiritual cowardice (1 Corinthians 4:9-16).

Third, sometimes God sends or allows suffering so that He can be glorified in a very specific fashion. There is a sense in which all of the factors above serve to bring glory to God. Yet there are times when God allows suffering exclusively for the uplifting of His name. Suffering can demonstrate God's might (John 9:1-3; 11:1-44), vindicate God's character (Job 1:6-12), and highlight God's holiness (Job 42:5-6).

How To Suffer

Not only do we face suffering throughout life; people all around us are suffering trials and hardships as well. We are called upon as believers to minister to others who

suffer and to attempt to meet their needs and point them to Christ. What are some practical steps that will enable us to handle, and help others handle, suffering in a God-honoring fashion? Scripture offers some specific guidance.

Do not assume that God is obligated to remove suffering just because you ask Him to. Paul prayed three times that his physical affliction might be removed, but suffering was the will of God for his life (2 Corinthians 12:7–8). God does not promise escape *from* suffering, but escape through suffering (1 Corinthians 10:13). You may think that God's great love for you obligates Him to minimize suffering in your life. The very opposite is true. God's great love for you, coupled with the spiritually beneficial effects of suffering, obligate God to allow and send suffering, not minimize it.

Do not mistake pain as something alien to the Christian life (1 Peter 4:12). Our culture has wrongly influenced many Christians to believe that freedom from pain is the greatest good. It is not. The greatest good is the development of Christ-likeness, and God often uses pain to drive us to it. Because pain drives us to Christ and to personal holiness, it is a good and necessary part of every believer's life.

Seek God's grace to cultivate Christ's attitude toward suffering (1 Peter 4:1; Phil. 2:5–8). Christ accepted His suffering as the purposeful will of God (Matthew 26:39), and He displayed forgiveness to those who caused His suffering (Luke 23:34). You and I should do likewise when we are suffering. This is part of God's purpose in conforming us to the image of Christ.

Train yourself to think Biblically (1 Peter 4:7). The command to be "sober" indicates that you must cultivate a clear-minded evaluation of your experiences and your trials in the light of God's truth. We must train ourselves to think Biblically and righteously when we face suffering.

Utilize the privilege of prayer (1 Peter 4:7). Verse 7 presents sober thinking as the foundation of prayer in times of suffering. Prayer is not designed to entice God to change our circumstances nor to beg God unendingly for relief from our suffering. Prayer should frankly communicate to God not only our desires but our acceptance of His will and our willingness to submit to the outworking of His purposes in our lives.

Demonstrate love to others in the midst of suffering (1 Peter 4:8). Biblical love is non-reciprocating self-sacrifice for the benefit of another. Focusing on meeting the needs of others prevents one from indulging in the sins of self-absorption (such as self-pity or bitterness).

Practice hospitality toward others in the midst of trials (1 Peter 4:9). Hospitality is an evidence of love at work. In times of suffering, we tend to become preoccupied with

self. Instead, we should become more involved with others. Likewise, exercise your abilities for the Lord's work (1 Peter 4:10–11). When you focus on the work of the Lord, it is exciting to see how often He visibly turns your afflictions into opportunities.

Simply put by the Holy Spirit, rejoice (1 Peter 4:12–13). Suffering is not an intrusion into your life; it is God's gracious design to accomplish His purposes. Rejoice, therefore, in what He is doing. Rejoicing is not an emotional high that is happy with suffering, but a state of mind that focuses on God and is pleased that He is working. With this focus, sorrow and joy are compatible. Only sin can disturb that harmony.

As developed above, attempt to determine if your suffering is the result of sin (1 Peter 4:15–16). Suffering should elicit from the believer a time of serious reflection in which he asks himself, "Is there sin in my life? Do I deserve the trials I am facing because of my own wickedness?"

Seek to glorify God (1 Peter 4:16). God is glorified when His perfections and attributes are recognized by those around you. Do you complain in suffering or do you acknowledge the Lord's goodness because of His work in your life? Trials are opportunities for the believer to "sing God's praises."

Entrust your life to God for safekeeping (1 Peter 4:19). God promises to watch over you and keep you during trials. You must bank on that promise.

Finally, avail yourself of the shepherding ministry of the local church (1 Peter 5:1–3). Peter assumed that the suffering saints to whom he was writing were under the care of a local church. It is the responsibility of pastors to care for their flock and to teach

the Word in a way that prepares them for future adversity. If you consistently place yourself under the faithful preaching and teaching of God's Word, you will be able to handle life's hardships in a God-honoring fashion.

Conclusion

No one is exempt from trials and suffering. Sometimes God sends or allows suffering to discipline us so that we repent of sin and grow in personal holiness. Other times God sends or allows suffering so that we will grow in our Christian maturity, influence others for Christ, or simply bring glory to His name. The bottom line for us as God's children is simply this: we need to take our eyes off ourselves and focus our attention on the Lord. When we suffer we need to remember that there are good reasons for it. Suffering is a tool God uses for our growth and His glory. Only when we adopt God's viewpoint will we be able to "consider it all joy" (James 1:2) when we face suffering.

Scott Williquette is pastor of First Baptist Church in Rockford, Illinois. Steve Thomas is pastor of Huron Baptist Church in Flat Rock, Michigan.

*Do not
mistake
pain as
something
alien to the
Christian
life.*



The Bible and Our Personal Well-Being

Stephen Caesar

The Bible tells us that God's commands are not grievous (1 John 5:3). Rather, obeying God and living a godly life are of enormous benefit (Prov. 2:1–8). Modern research has shown that obedience to the commands found in the Bible has a beneficial effect on the physical and psychological well-being of those who obey them, with an equally negative effect on those who do not.

Forgiveness

An example of this is forgiveness. One of Christ's central teachings is that we ought to forgive those who have wronged us (Matt. 6:14, 15). Medical science has confirmed the truth of this command, discovering that a lack of forgiveness for previous wrongs can be personally and psychologically damaging. This realization began when Michael McCullough, research director at the National Institute for Healthcare Research, was working on his master's degree at Virginia Commonwealth University. At that time, he conducted an experiment to determine the effects of forgiveness on students who had been wronged by others. He found that 40 percent of the offended students could be taught to forgive their transgressors after undergoing a one-hour group training session on forgiveness. Encouraged by these results, McCullough continued his testing on forgiveness when he entered the professional world. After three more tests on the physical and emotional results of forgiveness, McCullough found that those who forgave their offenders experienced less

depression and anxiety, had better sleep, and were free of obsessive thoughts and fantasies of revenge.¹

More recently, McCullough surveyed people who had been "tremendously hurt" by a friend, co-worker, or spouse. He discovered that forgiving the transgressor was much more important than previous closeness in determining whether the two people remained close. "If you don't forgive," McCullough concluded, "you can kiss closeness goodbye." He also found that nurturing fantasies of revenge against the wrongdoer creates physiological arousal and increases one's heart rate and blood pressure—"all the risk factors for heart disease, essentially."² Confirming this was a recent study by Ichiro Kawachi at the Harvard School of Public Health which showed that men who scored highest on an "anger scale" were three times more likely to develop heart disease over a seven-year period than those who had low scores.³

Anxiety

Another command in the Bible is to refrain from worrying (Matt. 6:25–34; Phil. 4:6). Robert Sapolsky, professor of neuroscience at Stanford University, has discovered that worrying has an adverse effect on the memory. According to his research, long-term worrying over things like a mortgage—what he calls "everyday stressors"—negatively

affects the portion of the brain that controls memory. Writing in the March 1999 issue of *Discover* magazine, Prof. Sapolsky stated that constant worrying will adversely "alter accuracy, intensity, persistence, and ease of retrieval" of memories we have stored in our brains.⁴

Long-term worrying does more than erode the memory—it wears down one's health as well. Prof. Sapolsky found that, since extended worrying results in extended stress, "the unrelenting nature of the stress response sets you up for disease." Sapolsky's research demonstrated that long-term stress causes the brain to produce chemicals called glucocorticoids, which have a generally negative influence on a person's physiology. "So if you are going to get stressed by that final exam," he concludes, "make sure the nervousness begins just as you settle into your seat rather than the evening before."⁵

Faith and Worship

Scripture admonishes us against neglecting regular worship services (Heb. 10:25). Researchers are now discovering the positive effects of this command. Noting in the November 1998 issue of *Health Education and Behavior* that professional interest in the health benefits of religion "has



mushroomed," Christopher G. Ellison and Jeffrey S. Levin stated, "On average, high levels of religious involvement are associated with better health status."⁶ This fact, they noted, holds true for all ages, classes, and racial and ethnic groups. The *Boston Globe Magazine* reported on other studies that have demonstrated the health benefits of church attendance:

One study found that mortality rates within six months of open-heart surgery were lower among patients with strong religious faith. In another study, the 28-year mortality risk among people in Alameda County, California, was found to be lower among those who often attended religious services. . . . [R]esearchers at the University of Michigan suggest that religion can help protect young people against their biggest health threats, which are not diseases but behaviors: carrying weapons, fighting, sexual promiscuity, drinking and driving, drug use, poor diet, and lack of exercise. . . . [T]he Michigan study found that the youths deemed the most religious—rated by self-reported church attendance and attitude—were significantly less likely to engage in dangerous behavior, less likely to binge-drink or smoke cigarettes or marijuana, and were more likely to eat a healthy diet, exercise, and get adequate sleep.⁷

One scholar who has made similar findings is Harold Koenig, associate professor of psychiatry at the Duke University School of Medicine. Dr. Koenig has been studying thousands of American hospital patients since 1984; one of his studies showed that, out of 455 elderly patients, those who never or rarely attended church spent almost three times as many days in the hospital as those who attended church more than once a week.⁸ He also found that regular churchgoers had lower levels of interleukin-6, an inflammatory agent associated with chronic infections, cancer, and diabetes. In addition, the religious patients had measurably stronger immune systems.⁹

Self-Esteem

The Bible also commands us to avoid having an inflated sense of self-esteem. Paul stated, "In lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves" (Phil. 2:3). In 1967, this rule was abandoned when a psychologist began claiming that instilling self-esteem in children should be of paramount importance in child-rearing and education. Parents and teachers accepted this claim, hoping that giving unearned praise to children would be a defense against drug abuse, teen pregnancy, and bad grades. However, the self-esteem movement has proven to be a failure, as *Newsweek* reported.

A new study examined inflated self-esteem, the kind that can come not from actual achievement but from teachers and parents drumming into kids how great they are. The researchers find that this sort of unjustified self-esteem can trigger hostility and aggression, and may even underlie violence like the recent school shootings. "If kids develop unrealistic opinions of themselves and those views are rejected by others," warns psychologist Brad Bushman of Iowa State University, the kids are "potentially dangerous."¹⁰

The central factor in the failure of the self-esteem move-

ment is that it breeds narcissistic children, and narcissists are notoriously sensitive to criticism. Dr. Bushman, along with Roy Baumeister of Case Western Reserve University, reported in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* that a study they conducted of 540 college students demonstrated that those who had been raised in the self-esteem movement were "exceptionally aggressive" when they received negative criticism from their peers. According to Dr. Baumeister, this aggression stems from the fact that the self-esteem movement creates false hopes for narcissistic children, and when reality fails to deliver, the youngsters explode in violence and anger. Baumeister summed up the fundamental error of the self-esteem movement: "The idea that you can solve problems simply by telling kids they're great is so seductive. No one wants to admit it doesn't do any good."¹¹

Bushman and Baumeister are not alone in their findings. Martin Seligman, president of the American Psychological Association, has rebuked the public school system for teaching that self-esteem is the *cause* of success, rather than its result. James Gailigan, a psychiatrist at the Harvard Medical School and a leading violence researcher, pointed out that when teachers unjustifiably inflate a child's self-image, the resulting letdown can lead to an eruption of violent behavior. Clinical psychologist Robert Brooks, also of Harvard, noted that the same problem is caused by the parents, who have "raise[d] a generation of kids who cannot tolerate frustration."¹²

Conclusion

These findings, made by completely secular institutions, demonstrate that God's commands are indeed "not grievous," but actually contribute to our personal well-being. It is not without good reason that the psalmist wrote the following verse: "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God" (Ps. 42:11). In other words, godliness and obedience have healthy results. When God gives us a command through the divinely inspired authors of His Bible, He is not being a cosmic killjoy or a burdensome dictator. Rather, He is clearly demonstrating His love and concern for us.

Stephen Caesar is currently pursuing his master's degree in anthropology at Harvard University.

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Life is More Than a Trough

Layton Talbert

Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?—Matthew 6:25, 26

The empty soul of an unbeliever lives an endlessly circular life: work, buy, eat, play, sleep, work, buy, eat, play, sleep. Feverishly rushing from one trough to another in his illusory quest for security and satisfaction, the spiritual orphan scours every alley of life under the sun: food, fashion, entertainment, wealth, pleasure, power, prestige, possessions, projects. Christians are not supposed to live that way. “After all these things,” Christ says by way of contrast, “do the Gentiles seek” (Matt. 6:32). We are not orphans.

The truth of this passage has roots in Ecclesiastes and Job. The Preacher spent a considerable amount of time trying to assure the reader, from his personal experience, that even if you *could* acquire all you wanted in any—or every—area of life, it would bring neither fulfillment nor satisfaction. Man is designed by God to be deeper than that, to require much more than that. God has put a capacity for eternity in man’s heart (Eccles. 3:11). Christ makes essentially the same point in Matthew 6:25 when He reasons, “Is not life more than the trough?” I have taken a little liberty with the translation, since the Greek word translated “meat” is *trophes*. But the wordplay fits the point. There is more to life than the food that sustains it, and the body is more than a mannequin for modeling stylish clothes.

Christ proceeds (Matt. 6:26) to emphasize by direct statement what Job 38–41 poetically portrays. God “answers” Job’s questions about his loss and suffering by directing his attention to the animal creation in which He delights and for which He compassionately cares. If God takes such providential care of and intimate delight in the birds and beasts of the earth, how much more certainly will He take care of the *one* creature He has fashioned in His own image?

The “birds of heaven” do not sow, reap, or store up food. All these activities are focused on ensuring future security by procuring future needs. Birds make no such provision for the future, “yet your heavenly Father” (the tender touch of this title gently reminds us that we are not orphans) feeds them faithfully and sufficiently. Christ underscores the certainty of God’s care for us by forcing us to reflect on an absurdly obvious truth: “Are ye not much better [of greater worth, of much more value to God] than they?” The question is not only rhetorical but purposefully humorous in its gentle absurdity. Even my six-year-old daughter understood the innate humor of this question when she replied to it, “I should hope so!” Paul similarly ties our value to God to the certainty of God’s care for us when he queries, “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?” (Rom. 8:32).

“Therefore,” Christ continues, “. . . take no thought for your life.” The entire exhortation is predicated on a previous point. The “therefore” of Matthew 6:25 builds on what was said in verse 24. Since every man has but one master, either God or mammon—and we must consciously choose which will run our life and dictate our decisions—“therefore, take no thought for your life.” Christ is helping us toward the right choice, the assumed choice,

the only choice.

"Take no thought" translates a fascinating and paradoxical word that dominates this passage beginning here and running down through the end of the chapter (see Matt. 6:25, 27, 28, 31, 34). This is not about daily indecision over what we should eat or wear on any given date. Christ uses this term exclusively in the negative sense of anxiety over the mundane details of life (Matt. 6:25), the personal cares of this world that distract us (Luke 8:14), and the agitating details of our preoccupation even with things so noble as our service to the Lord (Luke 10:41). The Lord is not here endorsing indolence, thoughtlessness, carelessness, or recklessness; nor is He forbidding wise and responsible planning. He is prohibiting *anxiety* over whether you will have what you need or want in the future, *worrying* over whether your plans will pay off sufficiently, *fretting* about the future ramifications of choosing to serve God in the present, rather than mammon.

Interestingly, though Paul also uses the same word to exhort believers to be anxious for nothing (Phil. 4:6), he primarily uses this same term in a *positive* sense. In the same book, Paul *commends* Timothy for his earnest "care" for the welfare of the Philippian church (2:20). Elsewhere, he commends both the "care" of a married person for the needs of his or her spouse as well as a single person's "care" for "the things of the Lord" (1 Cor. 7:32-34), and the mutual care of Christians for one another (1 Cor. 12:25). In 2 Corinthians 11:28 he even describes his own "care of all the churches."

So there really is a difference between anxiety and concern. Every time this word is used in the positive, commended sense of "concern," the object is always *someone else* and his needs or welfare. It becomes negative, prohibited "anxiety" when it is directed toward ourselves, our needs, and the mundane details of our personal lives. Notice again the Lord's words: "Therefore, *do not be anxious* about *your* life, what *you* shall eat, or what *you* shall drink; nor yet for *your* body, what *you* shall put on."

What kinds of questions confront us when we know we have a significant decision to make? "If God leads me there, how will I make ends meet?" "If I make this decision that God is impressing on

me, will it leave me enough to live on?" "If I follow God's leading into that ministry, will it provide enough to meet my family's needs?"

Christ prohibits us from worrying about our future temporal needs by reminding us that (1) there is much more to your life and your body than feeding and clothing it; (2) the birds we see every day make no provision for their future, yet they are faithfully fed by God; and (3) our future needs are even more secure and certain to be met because of our immeasurably greater value to God. Christ's pledge to us frees each of us to choose to serve God exclusively, fearlessly, and without anxiety about the future.

Dr. Layton Talbert is a *Frontline* Contributing Editor who lives in Travelers Rest, South Carolina.

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God's Quiver Full

Diane Heeney

As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them. Psalm 127:4, 5a

Miscarriages and stillbirths are common occurrences in this world of ours. After you have “entered the arena,” you soon discover just how many others have shared the experience. But however “common” it is, it is never common when it happens to you. How should a Christian respond when presented with this trial of faith?

I was about 12 weeks along when we were given the news that our baby had no heartbeat. On the heels of this, the doctor began to present options for “how to get rid of it” . . . even while I was still able to see the picture of our tiny baby on the ultrasound monitor. At that point, I was not ready to consider options—I did not want to choose any of them. I wanted to keep my baby. I needed a chance to grieve.

Is It Okay to Grieve?

Grief is a normal (not ungodly) and an expected response when a child precedes his parents in death. The end of that child's life, whether he was three months or 30 years of age, always seems to be untimely. Jesus' mother grieved at the foot of His cross. Jesus looked upon her heart's need at this time when she must have felt bewildered and overwhelmed, in spite of her faith. He showed tenderness toward this woman who had cradled Him—God come in the flesh—years ago, and made certain that she would be cared for (John 19:25–27). The Lord Jesus understands the grief and heartache a mother can experience in the loss of her child. We can take our sorrow and pain to Him.

Why Don't Others Understand My Grief?

It is important to understand a few things before evaluating the reactions (or lack thereof) of others. Some individuals simply do not know what to say. I used to be in this category. Now that I know what it is like to go through this trial, I wish I'd at least had the courage to pay a visit and offer a hug, even if I had no words of wisdom. Giving counsel is a good thing, but just a simple embrace

and shared tears are precious to grieving parents.

There are others who do not acknowledge the need to grieve because “it wasn't a baby anyway,” especially if you were not very far along, or if yours was not “technically” a pregnancy. It is hard for them to understand that in your mind a future had already been attached to

your child. You may have just begun picking names or choosing a theme for your nursery.

Your baby had begun to take a tiny foothold in your life very soon after you discovered him or her. It may be hard for others to understand, if you have other children, why this does not seem to lessen your disappointment. Some think that if you are young and in good health, the prospect of having other children should take your grief away. It is hard to be gracious sometimes in our responses. But try—and learn.

Your Post-partum Experience

Generally it does not seem to be the wise thing to do a massive “housecleaning” upon receiving your news. By this I mean returning all the new maternity clothes, putting away all the baby things—getting rid of everything that reminds you of your baby. You have spent time growing into a mother's mindset (and body). It is not a healthful thing to withdraw yourself abruptly from it.

Try not to resent your post-partum experience, however limited it may be. This is God's way of allowing you time to get used to your new set of circumstances. Your mind and emotions as well as your body need time to return to their pre-pregnancy state.

Guarding Your Mind

A mother's heart and mind are particularly susceptible to temptation in the weeks following the loss of a child. It is very important to remember that our minds are just as fallen as our flesh is. Satan may try to attack you on this battlefield with questions: “Was this my fault?” “Does God love me?” “Is this a judgment from God?” “What if I had only . . . ?” Our adversary is ruthless and cunning. He knows our weaknesses and how to target them when we are most vulnerable. Solomon said in Proverbs, “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own

One thing we can be assured of is that God has a plan in what He does. Nothing happens by chance in our lives.

understanding" (3:5). Why?

The Bible has much to say regarding the natural state of man's mind (Eph. 2:3; Titus 1:15; Matt. 15:19; Mark 7:21; 1 Cor. 3:20; Col.1:21). Because our minds are tainted by our sin nature, we must constantly be on guard. The way we think is like a car that is out of alignment. In order to keep the vehicle on its course, we must use our physical energy to keep the wheel turned to compensate for the error. Release the wheel, and the car takes its natural course—into the nearest ditch, or worse! In the same way, we must work to keep our minds going God's way by consciously submitting our thinking to the perspective of God's Word. If we let up, our thoughts will stray in an ungodly direction—depression, bitterness, anger. The Bible provides ample direction for those wanting to stay on course (Phil. 2:5; Eph. 4:23; 2 Tim. 1:7; 1 Pet. 1:13; Rom.12:2; Heb. 4:12).

Fire Drills

When I was in college, we had periodic fire drills. They were often at a most inconvenient hour of the day (or night). What was their purpose? Primarily to ingrain a plan of action into our minds, so that in the event of an emergency (when we are given over to emotional responses) we could act upon what we had practiced. Those practices were designed to give us a rational course of action, ready-made. Rarely, if ever, is a purely emotional response a Biblically correct one, and God has given us His Word so that when we find ourselves in such a situation we can lean upon what we know of Him instead of relying upon our feelings.

One thing we can be assured of is that God has a plan in what He does. Nothing happens by chance in our lives. Also, God is omniscient—nothing surprises Him. Joseph realized this, in spite of his humanly puzzling set of circumstances (Gen. 50:20). Joseph had the unusual experience of having revealed to him, at least in part, God's ultimate design in the series of trials with which he was presented. This is very much the exception. To be sure, beyond the tangible option of some physical complication, we can surmise many things about God's purposes in the termination of a pregnancy. We cannot and do not dare to demand an explanation from our trustworthy and loving heavenly Father. It may be difficult for you to see how your situation could be "good."

The believing mother may also know that God has a purpose, an ultimate goal in what He does. Romans 8:28 is often misused. People interpret it to say that the "for good" in the verse means whatever it is they want in their lives. The following verse is often omitted. The "good" that God wishes to accomplish in us is that we might be "conformed to the image of his Son," and He promises the grace to make it through (2 Cor. 12:9). We may doubt this at times, but it is important to remember that Scriptural truths are not dependent on our feelings. God keeps His promises.

Homework for the Heart

Know that God is mindful of your heart's needs at this time. Allow Him to reach out to you through His Word in private study as well as in the public preaching services you attend. Permit yourself to need the other members of the body of Christ. They are designed to complete you in your weakness. Look for an opportunity to use your experience "for good"—there may be someone very nearby who can benefit from what you have been learning.

Look for the jewels that have been tried by the fire. This can be wonderfully therapeutic and help you to realize a portion of God's purpose in your life. One of the treasures from my experience was the realization that although our baby was born a sinner like the rest of us, his first conscious efforts to bring praise to God have had no contamination from the flesh upon them. His first acts, words, thoughts of devotion have been unsullied by the selfish motives, insincerity, and complacency that often typify ours.

Finally, encourage yourself with the fact that your little one is part of God's quiver, is in the very best of care, and is looking forward a very precious reunion one day.

Diane Heeney is a freelance writer living in Pinedale, Wyoming, where she and her husband are assisting in the ministry of a growing church. After having taught the freshman ladies' Personal Evangelism course at Bob Jones University for several years, she now exercises her teaching gift through various ladies' Bible studies, church and camp speaking engagements, and most importantly, in her home ministry with her two children.

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Being an associate pastor, I am often called upon to visit the sick, a portion of my ministry that I enjoy immensely. It affords me the opportunity to give words of encouragement to the suffering, and more importantly, it is an excellent time to give people the gospel.

Our Lord had tremendous compassion for the sick. It takes little reading in the New Testament to come across example after example of Jesus healing someone. Jesus also showed a great deal of compassion for the emotional needs of people. When Lazarus died, the Bible tells us in John 11 that Jesus wept. Why? Not for Lazarus—He knew He was going to raise him. I believe it was because the people who surrounded Him were hurting emotionally.

Over the years, I felt I had developed a compassion for hurting people. I knew what Scriptures to give people to encourage them. I knew all of the standard verses preachers use to try to help people make some sense of why they are suffering. I knew the feeling of leaving someone's hospital room with the self-assurance that I had just comforted that person. However, due to my own recent illness and subsequent surgery, I now know that I had done more for my own self-esteem than I had for the suffering person.

As soon as surgery was scheduled, people began to comfort me. Many of my pastor friends called me to express their concern and to let me know they were praying for me. I was told to place my trust in God and that everything would turn out fine. I had told people the exact thing many times before. I believed what they said, and I knew God would take care of me. However, none of this really comforted me. I could not understand why this was happening, and I was afraid.

I had always considered my faith to be strong, and I had often wondered about Christians who seemed to worry so much instead of placing their trust in God. I did not realize it at the time, but God was about to put me in school and teach me some sorely needed lessons about compassion and my faith.

Lesson number one: When people are in pain, they appreciate the fact that someone cares. Job's friends were a comfort to him until they started talking. Sometimes just the mere presence of someone is a tremendous comfort in itself. Taking the time to spend a few minutes with a man or woman when someone he or she loves is in surgery shows compassion—as opposed to the pastor who breezes in, has prayer and breezes out. We are all busy, but

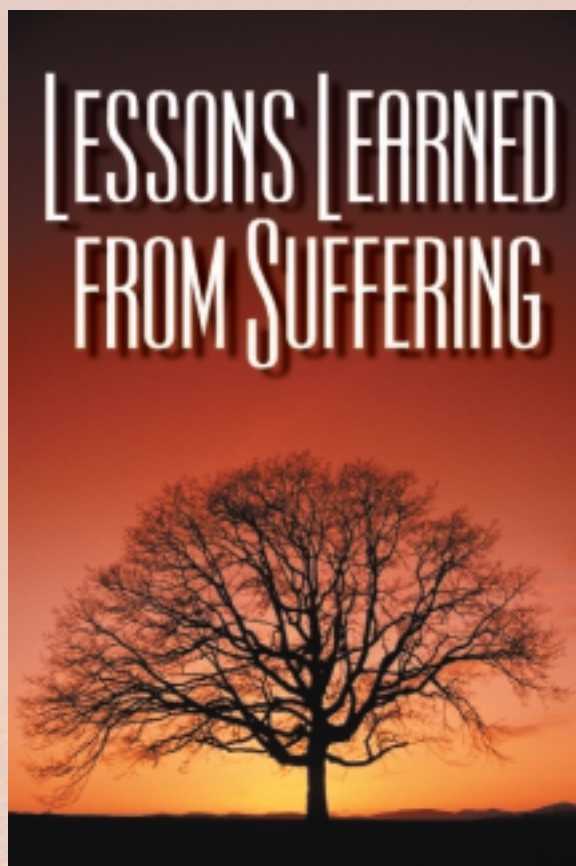
we should not be too busy to show our people we care. Some people need more pastoral care than others do. It is up to us to know our congregation well enough to distinguish between the two. Sometimes just being there is what is most important. When words are spoken and Scripture given, we should be careful to listen to what we say. Nothing is less comforting than someone who sounds as if he is giving a rehearsed speech.

Lesson number two: You cannot necessarily be saved whenever you decide you are ready. For four days while I was in the hospital, I was on morphine. When I was conscious, my mind was racing from the drug, and I could barely think clearly long enough to put together a sentence, let alone pray for salvation had I needed to. For this reason, if for no other, we need to stress to people the urgency of accepting Christ while there is opportunity, and not waiting until they are, what they consider, ready.

Lesson number three: A member of my church came for a visit and prayed for me. He told me just to have faith. Have faith? I was a preacher of the gospel! Have faith? Of course I had faith! Then the Lord spoke to my heart and I realized that I did not have as much faith as I thought. I believe that Christians take their faith too much for granted at times. I know I did. I had always considered my faith strong and unshakable. It is amazing how easy it is to have unshakable faith when nothing is shaking it. In fact, I had even found myself comparing my faith to other people's. On a Sunday afternoon, lying in a hospital bed, God showed me that even faith could be a source of pride. We can get arrogant in it and wonder why other people's faith is not as strong as ours. But pride is pride, no matter what the area, and God tells

us several times in Proverbs alone how He feels about pride.

Lesson number four: On the Sunday morning after my surgery, I awoke with pneumonia. For the first time in my life, I felt I was going to die. My chest was heavy and my breathing labored. I was afraid and in a great deal of pain. The doctor mentioned ICU and a ventilator. People kept telling me to trust God. Lying in that bed, struggling to breathe, I realized I did not really trust God. I had always thought that I did, but when it came down to the wire, I was mistaken. I had trusted Christ as my Savior many years earlier. I knew that if He did take me home, I was heaven bound. However, I discovered that it is easier to trust Jesus as Lord of your soul than it is to trust Him as



Marty Goggins

Lord of your life. When the fear of dying threatened to consume me, I saw that I had put my trust in the hands of my very capable surgeon instead of the Master Physician. For the first time in my life, I saw that there were areas in

I am also thankful that He loves me enough to take the time to teach me some very valuable lessons in order to make me more Christlike and a better preacher of His gospel.

my life in which I had trusted man instead of Jesus. I am thankful for the lesson.

Lesson number five: After a week in the hospital I was released. However, due to a complication, I was placed under the care of a home health nurse. For three weeks after coming home, I was unable to do even the simplest of things. I had to be bathed, dressed, and helped with things I had always done for myself. I had to depend on others in a way I never thought possible. Depending on someone other than me was a trial for me, and for those unfortunate enough to be the ones taking care of me . . . namely my wife. Once again, God showed me an area of pride in my life that I did not realize existed. Not being able to put on your own socks is a humbling experience. This was a bitter lesson for a man who thought of himself as self-sufficient. Now this man knows just how God-sufficient we all are.

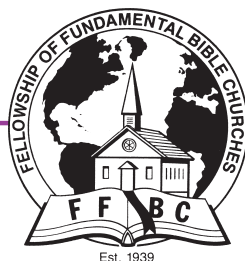
Lesson number six: Five weeks after surgery I was feeling good and healing well. On a Monday evening I called my pastor, Glenn Hill, and told him that I was ready to come back to work on the following Monday. The next day by lunch I was back in the hospital with an extremely high fever. Despite the best efforts of the doctors and nurses, the fever climbed higher, and the doctors did not know why. It stayed at 104 and above for three days. Again I thought I was dying, and the medical staff did little to alleviate this fear. This time however, I believe I handled it better and trusted God to heal me. Five days later I was released with the doctors never knowing what had caused the fever.

Still, I was depressed because it was another setback. I had been ready to return to work and was extremely disappointed that now I was looking at several additional weeks before I could. This time I believe God was teaching me the most difficult of all lessons for me to learn . . . patience. I understand now better than ever that our timetable is not always the same as God's. It is something we are still working on, God and I. I still do not have patience down completely yet, but with God's help . . . I will.

It may seem to many of you reading this that I was too untrusting and proud to be a preacher. You may be right. God had to use something to teach me how to be a better one. I have noticed that God uses the most unlikely people in His ministry. I am thankful that He called me, flawed as I am. I am also thankful that He loves me enough to take the time to teach me some very valuable lessons in order to make me more Christlike and a better preacher of His gospel.

Search your life for areas that are a source of pride or areas in which you do not fully trust God. I imagine that if you look deep, you will see a few similarities between your life and mine. Prior to getting sick I thought I was strong in my faith, compassionate, humble, and patient. It took God allowing me to suffer to see the true picture. It was worth it.

Marty Goggins is associate pastor of Shenandoah Baptist Church in Rocky Mount, North Carolina.



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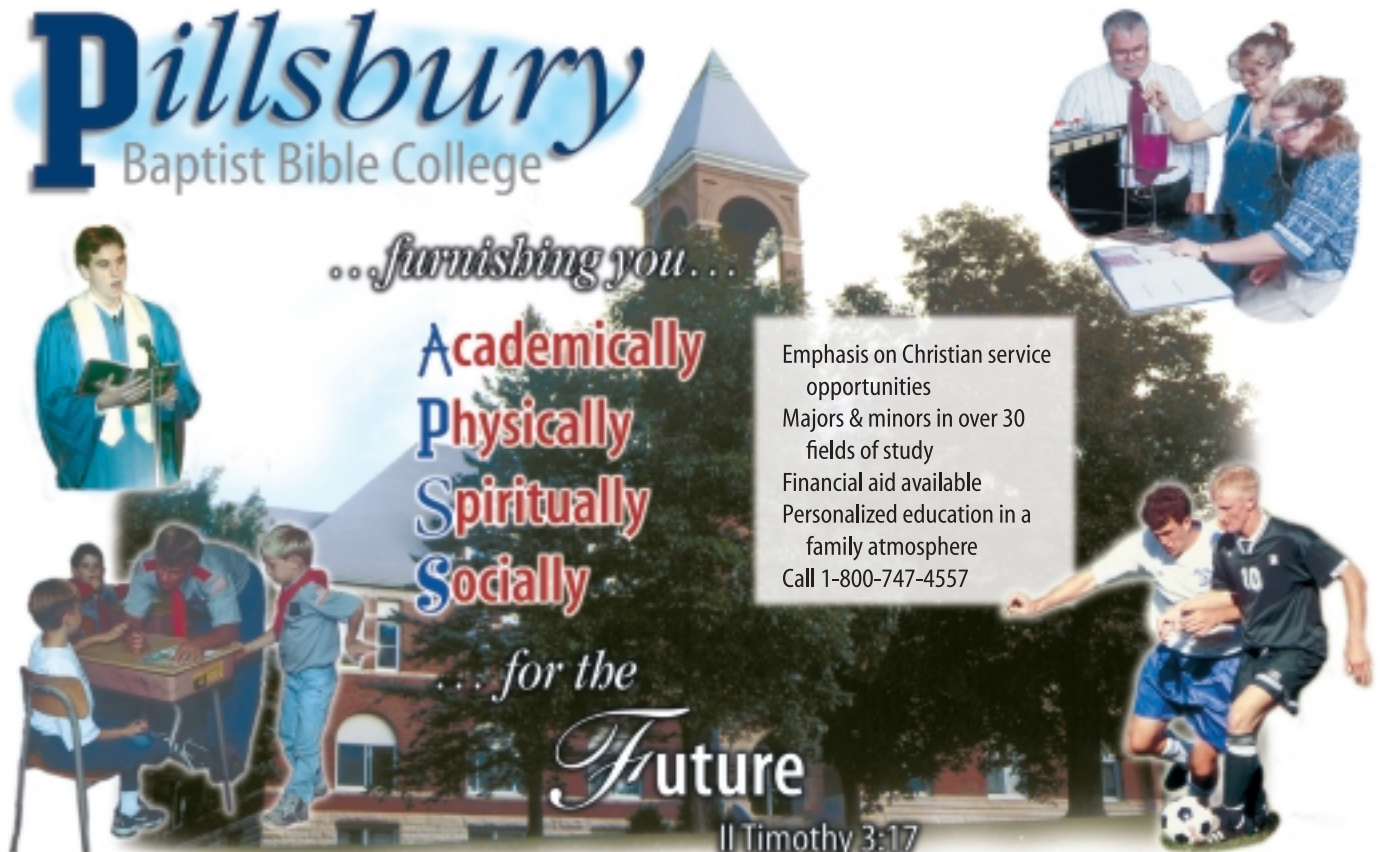
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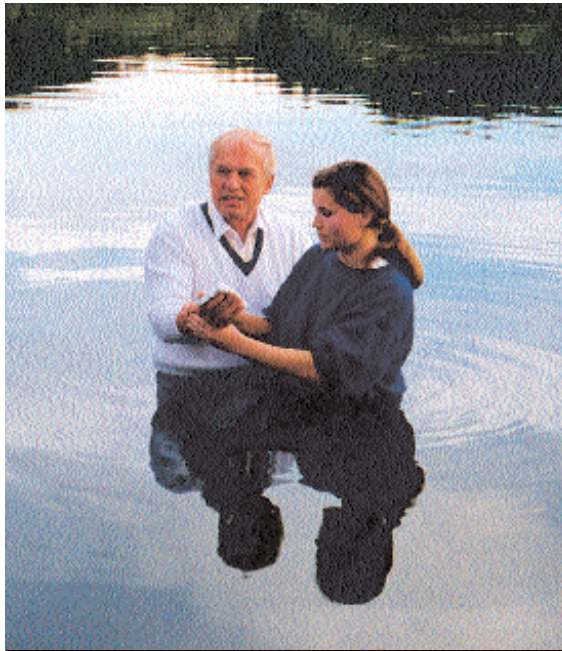
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SOUND WORDS

HOLD FAST THE FORM OF SOUND WORDS—2 TIMOTHY 1:13

First Partaker

The Secret of Power

Lying here beside me is a small volume entitled *The Crisis of Missions* by A. T. Pierson. My copy was personally autographed by Pierson and presented to Dr. Alexander Maclaren during the World Missionary Conference held in London in May of 1888. I enjoy having it in my hands and thinking of these esteemed preachers holding it in theirs. But I also enjoy it because of its mute testimony to Maclaren's interest in missions.

Maclaren rarely accepted invitations to preach away from his own church. He made exceptions, however, for gatherings of Christian workers—particularly pastors and foreign missionaries. In the early 1870s he agreed to speak in Surrey Chapel to the directors and friends of the London Missionary Society. His sister-in-law related, "Every inch of room was occupied, and as the service went on there was the tense feeling of which one is conscious when hundreds are fixedly listening. . . . Though fifty years and more have passed, some who were present can recall the awed attention of the great congregation."

The preacher's choice of texts that evening was Matthew 18:19, 20—"Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out? And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief." The effect of the message can only be imagined. One testimony lingers, however, from Dr. Thomas Binney, one of Maclaren's former teachers and mentors. Dr. Binney told a friend that he went home from the service and wept. He felt he himself had fallen so far short of what had been placed before him that it was as if he had never even seen it as an ideal.

This message to ministers remains one of the classics in the history of preaching. Although regrettably edited in order to fit this column, it is hoped nevertheless that the sermon's stirring analysis of powerlessness will serve as a probing

preparation for the new year of ministry into which we have just entered. Here then, is Alexander Maclaren's sermon, "The Secret of Power."

"The husbandman that laboreth must be first partaker of the fruits" (2 Tim. 2:6)

What has become of [the disciples'] supernatural might? Has it ebbed away as suddenly as it flowed? Is their Lord's endowment a shadow—His assurances delusion? Has He taken back what He gave? Not so. And yet His servants are ignominiously beaten. One poor devil-ridden boy brings all their resources to nothing.

No wonder that, as soon as Christ and they are alone, they want to know how their mortifying defeat has come about. And they get an answer which they little expected, for the last place where men look for their explanation of their failures is within; and they will ascend into the heavens, and descend into the deeps for remote reasons, before they listen to the voice which says, "The fault is nigh thee—in thy heart."

They little expected to be told that they had failed because they had not been sure they would succeed. They had thought they believed in their ability to cast out the demon. They had tried with some kind of anticipation that they could. They had been surprised when they found they could not. They had wondrously asked why. And now Christ tells them that all along they had had no real faith in Him and in the reality of His gift. So subtly may unbelief steal into the heart, even while we fancy that we are working in faith.

The principles which the text suggests touch the perpetual possession of the power which conquers; the condition of its victorious exercise by us, as being our faith, the subtle danger of unsuspected unbelief to which we are exposed; and the great means of preserving our faith pure and strong. I ask your attention to a few considerations on these points in their order.

Inside

Bring . . . the Books—Key books for the pastor's study	5
Straight Cuts—An exegetical study	6
Windows—Themed sermon illustrations	7

I. We have an unvarying power.

No doubt the explanation of their defeat which most naturally suggested itself to these disciples would be that somehow or other—perhaps because of Christ's absence—they had lost the gift which they knew they once had. And the same way of accounting for later want of success lingers among Christian people still. You will sometimes hear it said, "God sends forth His Spirit in special fullness at special times, according to His own sovereign will; and till then we can only wait and pray." Or "The miraculous powers which dwelt in the early Church have been withdrawn and therefore the progress is slow."

We fancy that because apostles were its teachers, and the Cross within its memory, the infant society was stronger, wiser, better than any age since, and had gifts which we have lost. What had it which we do not possess? The power of working miracles. What have we which it did not possess? A completed Bible, and the experience of eighteen centuries to teach us to understand it, and to confirm by facts our confidence that Christ's gospel is for all time and every land. What have we in common with it? The same

and therefore had lost your confidence in your own derived power, or had forgotten that it was derived, and assayed to wield it as if it were your own. You did not trust Me, so you did not believe that you could cast him out; or you believed that you could by your own might, therefore you failed. He throws them back decisively on themselves as solely responsible. Nowhere else, in heaven or in earth or in hell, but only in us, does the reason lie for our breakdown, if we have broken down.

And what in us is to blame? Some of us will answer—Our modes of working; they have not been free enough, or not orderly enough, or in some way or other not wisely adapted to our ends. Some will answer—Our forms of presenting the truth; they have not been flexible enough, or not fixed enough; they have been too much a reproduction of the old; they have been too licentious a departure from the old. Some will answer—Our intellectual culture; it has been too great, obscuring the simplicity that is in Christ; it has been too small, sending poorly furnished men into the field to fight with ordered systems of idolatry which rest upon a philosophical basis, and can only be overturned by undermining that.

No doubt there is room for improvement in all the fields which they indicate. I do not undervalue the worth of wise methods of action, but the history of the Church tells us that pretty nearly any methods of action are fruitful in the right hands, and that without living faith the best of them become like the heavy armor which half-smothered the feeble man. Is it not a truth plainly spoken in Scripture and confirmed by experience, that we have the awful prerogative of limiting the Holy One of Israel, and quenching the Spirit? Was there not a time in Christ's life on earth when He could do not mighty works because of their unbelief? We receive all spiritual gifts in proportion to our capacity, and the chief factor in settling the measure of our capacity is our faith. In itself the gift is boundless. But in reference to our possession it is bounded by our capacity.

Consider, too, how the same faith has a natural operation on ourselves which tends to fit us for casting out the evil spirits. Given a man full of faith, you will have a man tenacious in purpose, absorbed in one grand object, simple in his motives, in whom selfishness has been driven out by the power of a mightier love, and indolence stirred into unwearied energy. Such a man will be made wise to devise, gentle to attract, bold to rebuke, fertile in expedients, and ready to be anything that may help the aim of his life.

There have been men of all sorts who have been honored to do much in this world for Christ. Wise and foolish, learned and ignorant, differing in tone, temper, creed, forms of thought, and manner of working, in every conceivable degree; but one thing, and perhaps one thing only, they have all had—a

How many of us know what it is to talk and toil away our early devotion; and all at once to discover that for years perhaps we have been preaching and laboring from mere habit and routine, like corpses galvanized into some ghastly and transient caricature of life.

mission to fulfill, the same wants in our brethren to meet, the same gospel, the same spirit, the same immortal Lord.

The Church has in it a power which is ever adequate to the conquest of the world; and that power is constant through all time, whether we consider it as recorded in an unvarying gospel, or as energized by an abiding spirit, or as flowing from and centered in an unchangeable Lord.

II. The condition of exercising this power is faith.

With such a force at our command—a force that could shake the mountains and break the rocks—how come we ever to fail? So the disciples asked, and Christ's answer cuts to the very heart of the matter. Why could you not cast him out? For one reason only, because you had lost your hold of My strength,

passion of enthusiastic personal devotion to their Lord, a profound and living faith in Him and in His salvation. All in which they differed is but the gilding on the soldier's coat. That which they were alike is as the strong arm which grasps the sword, and has its muscles braced by the very clutch. Faith is itself a source of strength, as well as the condition of drawing might from heaven.

III. Our faith is ever threatened by subtle unbelief.

It would appear that the disciples were ignorant of the fact that unbelief had made them weak. They fancied that they had confidence in their Christ-given power, and they certainly had in some dull kind of fashion expected to succeed in their attempt. But He who sees the heart knew that there was no real living confidence in their souls; and His words are a solemn warning to us all, of how possible it is for us to have our faith all honeycombed by gnawing doubt while we suspect it not, like some piece of wood apparently sound, the whole substance of which has been eaten away by hidden worms.

Our time, and the object in view, preclude my speaking of the general sources of danger to our faith. But I may very briefly particularize two of the enemies of that faith which have a special bearing on our work, and may be illustrated from the narrative before us.

First, all our activity in spreading the gospel, whether by personal effort or by our gifts, like every form of outward action, tends to become mechanical, and to lose its connection with the motive which originated it. We may very easily become so occupied with the mere external occupation as to be quite unconscious that it has ceased to be faithful work, and has become routine, dull mechanism, or the result of confidence, not in Christ, whose power once flowed through us, but in ourselves the doers. So these disciples may have thought, "We can cast out this devil, for we have done the like already," and have forgotten that it was not they, but Christ in them, who had done it.

How widely this foe to our faith operates amid the multiplied activities of this busy age one trembles to think. We see all around us a Church toiling with unexampled expenditure of wealth, and effort, and time. It is difficult to repress the suspicion that the work is out of proportion to the life. Brethren and fathers in the ministry! How many of us know what it is to talk and toil away our early devotion; and all at once to discover that for years perhaps we have been preaching and laboring from mere habit and routine, like corpses galvanized into some ghastly and transient caricature of life. Christian men and women, beware lest this great enterprise of missions, which our fathers began from the holiest motives and in the simplest faith, should in our hand, be

wrenched away from its only true basis, and be done with languid expectation and more languid desires of success, from no higher motive than that we found it in existence, and have become accustomed to carry it on. If that be our reason, then we harm ourselves, and mask from our own sight our own unbelief. If that be the case the work may go on for a while, like a clock ticking with fainter and fainter beats for a minute after it has run down; but it will soon cease, and neither heaven nor earth will be much the poorer for its ending.

[Second], the atmosphere of scornful disbelief which surrounded the disciples made their faith falter. It was too weak to sustain itself in the face of the consciousness that not a man in all that crowd believed in their power; and it melted away before the contempt of the scribes and the incredulous curiosity of the bystanders.

And, brethren, are not we in danger today of losing the firmness of our grasp on Christ, as our Savior and the world's from a precisely similar cause? We live in an atmosphere of hesitancy and doubt, of scornful rejection of His claims, of contemptuous disbelief in anything which a scalpel cannot cut. And for every man who is led by the sheer force of reason to yield to the intellectual ground of sin on which modern unbelief reposes, there are twenty who simply catch the infection in the atmosphere. They find that their early convictions have evaporated, they know not how; only that once the fleece was wet with dew and now it is dry. For unbelief has a contagious energy wholly independent of reason, no less than has faith, and affects multitudes who know nothing of its grounds, as the iceberg chills the summer air for leagues, and makes the sailors shiver long before they see its barren peaks.

The Church has in it a power which is ever adequate to the conquest of the world; and that power is constant through all time, whether we consider it as recorded in an unvarying gospel, or as energized by an abiding spirit, or as flowing from and centered in an unchangeable Lord.

We cannot help seeing that the creeping paralysis of hesitancy and doubt about even the power of Christ's name is stealing over portions of the Church, and stiffening the arm of its activity. Lips that once spoke with full confidence the words that cast out devils, mutter them now languidly with half

belief. This icy breath, dear brethren, is blowing over our Churches and over our hearts. And wherever it reaches, there labor for Jesus and for men languishes, and we recoil baffled with unavailing exorcisms dying in our throats and the rod of our power broken in our hands. "Why could not we cast him out?" "Because of your unbelief."

IV. Our faith can only be maintained by constant devotion and rigid self-denial.


Our Lord sets forth the condition of our faith, and therefore of our power. "This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting." The discipline then which nurtures faith is mainly moral and spiritual.

The first condition of the freshness and energy of faith is constant devotion. The attrition of the world wears it thin, the distractions of life draw it from its clinging hold on Christ, the very toil for Him is apt to entice our thoughts from out of the secret place of the Most High into the busy arena of our strife. If our work is to be worthy, it must ever be freshened anew by our gaze into His face; if our communion with Him is to be deep, it must never be parted from outward service. Our Master has left us the example, in that, when the night

order that the life of the spirit may be strengthened. As to the outward fact, it is nothing—it may be practiced or not. But in the recoil from the false asceticism of Roman Catholicism and Puritanism, has not this generation of the Church gone too far in the opposite direction? And in the true belief that Christianity can sanctify all joys, and ensure the harmonious development of all our powers, have we not been forgetting that hand and foot may cause us to stumble, and that we had better live maimed than die with all our limbs? There is a true asceticism, a discipline—a "gymnastic unto godliness," as Paul calls it. And if our faith is to grow high and bear rich clusters on the topmost boughs that look up to the sky, we must keep the wild lower shoots close-nipped. Without rigid self-control and self-limitation, no vigorous faith.

And without them no effectual work! It is no holiday task to cast out devils. Self-indulgent men will never do it. Loose-braced, easy souls, that lie open to all the pleasurable influences of ordinary life, are no more fit for God's weapons than a reed for a lance, or a bit of flexible lead for a spear-point. The wood must be tough and compact, the metal hard and close-grained, out of which God makes His shafts. The brand that is to guide men through the darkness to their Father's home must glow with a pallor of consuming flame that purges its whole substance into light. This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.

Dear brethren, what a solemn rebuke these words have for us all today! How they winnow these works of Christian activity which bring us here this morning! How they show us the hollowness of our services, the self-indulgence of our lives, the coldness of our devotion, the cowardice of our faith! How marvelous they make the fruits which God's great goodness has permitted us to see even from our doubting service!

Let us cast ourselves before Him with penitent confession, and say, "O Lord, our strength! We have not wrought any deliverance on earth; we have been weak when all Thy power was at our command; we have spoken Thy word as if it were an experiment and a peradventure whether it had might; we have let go Thy hand and lost Thy garment's hem from our slack grasp; we have been prayerless and self-indulgent. Therefore Thou hast put us to shame before our foes, and our enemies laugh among themselves. Thou that dwellest between the cherubim shine forth; stir up Thy strength and come and save us!" Then will the last words that He spoke on earth ring out again from the throne: "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore and teach all nations; and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." 

Our Lord sets forth the condition of our faith, and therefore of our power. "This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting." The discipline then which nurtures faith is mainly moral and spiritual.

fell and every man went to his own home, Jesus went to the Mount of Olives; and thence, after His night of prayer, came very early in the morning, to the temple, and taught. The man that would work for God must live with God. It was from the height of transfiguration that He came, before whom the demon that baffled the disciples quailed and slunk away like a whipped hound. This kind goeth not out but by prayer.

The second condition is rigid self-denial. Fasting is the expression of the purpose to control the lower life, and to abstain from its delights in



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Bring . . . the Books

Witness to Christ: A Commentary on Acts

Scholarly commentaries which are also theologically sound and helpfully substantive are a precious commodity to the preacher and teacher. Such commentaries which also breathe a practical and devotional air are scarcer still. But one crafted over long years by a man known among his colleagues and students to be a genuinely Christlike gentleman from within contemporary Fundamentalism is a rarity indeed.

Many of Dr. Stewart Custer's former students will recollect his occasional wistful references in class to an ongoing effort to complete a commentary on Acts. The labor of those many years has finally come to fruition in his *Witness to Christ* (a 465-page hardcover from BJU Press, 2000), and the resulting work makes a noteworthy contribution to the commentary literature.

The organization and arrangement of material is both attractive and user-friendly. The top of each page features the text in the AV. Underneath, the commentary includes the author's original Greek translation of each verse, followed by his succinct remarks on the text. His comments are generously sprinkled with quotations from other writers, as well as references to fuller treatments of specific themes elsewhere. Technical or peripheral information is delegated to the footnotes at the bottom of the page. The commentary's design makes it admirably suited for varying levels of proficiency. Its treatment of any given verse is not an academic nor exhaustive discussion of all the details, but a substantive running commentary on the leading thoughts of the text. Its very conciseness and layout make it easy to consult.


The introductory material is brief but helpful. The purpose of Acts is to provide the reader with a firm historical "foundation for his belief." Acts is a crucial hinge between the Gospels and the Epistles, chronicling "the historical background necessary to understand the teachings of the Epistles that will follow." The title encapsulates the major theme of Acts, "witness to Christ the Lord," and woven throughout the fabric of the narrative is "an evangelistic theme: the gospel message has the power to save all those who believe. Jew or Gentile, from slave or beggar to governor or king, the gospel is mighty to save." In this respect, Acts functions as "an obvious and logical sequel" to Luke's Gospel (and, indeed, to all the Gospels); it fleshes out Christ's final commission to His followers.

Here is a brief sampling of the commentary content. Custer notes a pattern that commences in 1:14 and "runs all through Acts: Prayer, Power, Proclamation, Persecution, more Prayer." The author defends the appropriateness of the disciples' casting lots and choosing Matthias in Acts 1, given their historical context. He holds that the tongues in Acts 2 were foreign languages. He succinctly sketches the contrapuntal interplay between man's responsibility and God's providence

in the crucifixion (Acts 2:23): "God's purpose was redemption; man's purpose was murder. The two purposes intersect in the cross" (cf. also on Acts 4:27–28). The footnote on 8:38 features an interesting outline of "the influence of blacks in the NT." The note at 17:28 cites Paul's (and, in 26:14, the ascended Christ's!) references to classical Greek literature—inspired examples of the validity of "using the literature and culture of [one's] own people to find a bridge to their hearts for Christ." Concerning the reference to the blood of God in Acts 20:28, he remarks that "Paul is so sure of the deity of Christ that he does not explain his language." Frequently the author's attention to and knowledge of historical detail effectively recreate the vividness of various scenes (e.g., at 21:31ff., and in Acts 27 on Paul's voyage and shipwreck). With a nice and subtle touch, the commentary proper ends with precisely the same word as the Greek text of Acts ("unhindered").

Custer's genius for summation and synopsis is evident in one of the uniquely helpful features of this commentary. It is the author's conviction that the student of the Bible "should know the outline of Acts; he should have a theme to characterize each chapter; he should know each person, place and major doctrine that is found in each chapter" (p. ix). Consequently, a summary page prefaces the commentary on each chapter, citing that chapter's major theme or subject and listing all the named actors, all the persons referenced, the places mentioned, and the doctrines taught (directly or inferentially). The end of each chapter includes another distinctive departure from the average commentary—a list of "Practical Applications" drawn directly from the statements or implications of the text, followed by a brief prayer that seeks to personalize the leading lessons of that chapter.

Another one of the treasures that makes this book unique in the commentary genre, and demonstrates the author's thorough familiarity with the literature, is its 43-page bibliography. Anyone can generate a sterile list of available resources, but the author provides an annotated bibliography featuring summaries and assessments of over 100 books on Acts and over 140 additional works cited.

This long-awaited work unquestionably enhances one's understanding and spiritual appreciation for the book of Acts, and its unique features guarantee it an accessible niche on the bookshelf of any serious student of God's Word. "Here," writes Ernest Pickering in his Foreword, "is an excellent commentary on the Book of Acts." 

*"... when
thou comest,
bring with thee
... the books"
(2 Tim. 4:13)*

Dr. Layton Talbert is a Contributing Editor of *Frontline Magazine*.

This famous theological battleground invites, deserves and rewards close and independent exegetical scrutiny.

Interpretational Options

The first option, perhaps the most popular view among non-Romanists, is that the “rock” is Christ Himself. This view is defended by the *New Scofield Reference Bible*, Barbieri (*Bible Knowledge Commentary*), and somewhat tentatively by Matthew Henry.

The second option, that the “rock” is Peter, has a number of variations: (a) Peter personally; (b) Peter positionally (as a chief apostle); (c) Peter representatively (as representative of all the apostles); and (d) Peter as confessor (as the mouthpiece of the apostolic faith). A surprising variety of men take this view. For example, the renowned Baptist Greek scholar John Broadus, arguing that the rock is Peter, insists: “No other explanation would probably at the present day be attempted, but for the fact that the obvious meaning has been abused by Papists to the support of their theory. But we must not allow the abuse of the truth to turn us away from its use; nor must the convenience of religious controversy determine our interpretation of Scripture teaching.” Hendrickson and Carson agree with Broadus here; Bengel, Meyer, and Alford also argue for Peter.

A third option views the “rock” as neither Christ nor Peter himself, but Peter’s words, his confession of the Christ. *The MacArthur Study Bible*, A. B. Bruce, and Alfred Edersheim all defend this view. Ryrie combines Peter and his confession as the rock. A few revert to the convenient but exegetically dubious assertion that the “rock” refers simultaneously to Christ and Peter and Peter’s confession (Pentecost, *Words and Works of Jesus Christ*).

Other Passages?

Though 1 Corinthians 3:11 is often adduced to identify Christ as the foundation and, therefore, the “rock” in Matthew 16, the parallels between the two passages collapse under examination. The builder in Matthew 16 is Christ. The builder(s) in 1 Corinthians 3 are *Paul and individual believers* (v. 10, 12). This passage does not address laying the foundation of the Church, but laying the foundation of a *life*. The only foundation for any life is Christ; then *we* build on that foundation either positively or negatively. So this passage really has no bearing on the discussion—similar terminology but different subject.

Ephesians 2:20 is different: “You (the church) are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.”

Grammatically the genitive (“the foundation of the apostles and prophets”) could mean either (1) the foundation *which* is the apostles and prophets, or (2) the foundation laid *by* the apostles and prophets. Interestingly, Jesus Christ Himself is here depicted not as the foundation, *per se*, but as the chief cornerstone—the keystone from which the rest of the building took its angles. Let’s carry that with us back to Matthew 16.

“Rightly dividing the Word of Truth”
(2 Tim. 2:15)

Matthew 16—The Context

Verse 13 begins the context and sets the stage with a key question: “Whom do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?” Verse 14 records all favorable and flattering opinions, but all clearly inadequate ones. In verse 15, Christ turns the key question back to them. Predictably, in verse 16 Peter pipes up, “Thou art the Christ (*su ei ho Christos*), the Son of the Living God.” Verse 17 identifies the divine nature and source of that revelation to Peter—proof that Peter has, despite all his faults, been the recipient of God the Father’s special working and revelation. In that connection, Christ proceeds in verse 18, “And I also say to you that thou art Peter (*su ei Petros*, clearly parallel and in answer to Peter’s confession of Him), and on this rock (*petra*) I will build My Church.”


If Christ had meant Himself as the rock in *contrast* to Peter, a “but” would have been most helpful and appropriate here; instead, He uses *kai* which, while it *can* be used as an adversative (“but”), most commonly bears the continuative sense of “and.” It is true that *petra* (“rock”) means a massive slab or shelf of rock, as opposed to *petros* (“Peter”), which means a stone. But *petra* is also feminine; arguably, then, Christ could not very well have given Simon the feminine name *Petra*, even if He had wanted to. Neither would it have been appropriate to say, “Thou art a stone, and on this stone I will build my church”—not a very impressive or substantial foundation for so monumental a superstructure. That is why some argue that Christ named Simon *Petros* (“Rocky”) in the first place—the only appropriate form of the name He could give him, specifically in anticipation of this day. Moreover, when Christ says, “I will build my church,” Broadus argues that it nonsensically confuses the imagery to think of Christ as both the builder *and* the foundation. And if Christ had meant that Peter himself would be the foundation, the most unambiguous way to say that would have been, “upon you I will build my church.” The carefully chosen terminology, then, seems to suggest something else. Does the continuing context give any further clues?

Christ continues to focus on Peter in verse 19, “And I will give thee (singular, Peter) the keys of the kingdom of heaven. And whatsoever thou (singular, Peter) shalt bind on earth . . . and whatsoever thou (singular, Peter) shalt loose on earth. . . .” This is a significant part of the context of this disputed passage. This is no small privilege and responsibility that Christ directs explicitly to *Peter*. Peter obviously figures quite prominently in these plans.

What is the significance of keys? Keys *symbolize* access and authority (Luke 11:52; Rev. 1:18, 3:7, 9:1, 20:1). The *possessor* of these keys is Peter and, through him, the Church (cf. Matt. 16:19 and 18:18; note context of 18:15 and the plural “ye”). The *authority* of the keys does not reside in the Church itself. Note the terminology carefully—heaven does not ratify what we say or proclaim, but vice versa. The construction in 16:19 and 18:18 is a future perfect passive periphrastic (“will have been bound” and “will have been loosed”). It is the Church on earth carrying out and declaring heaven’s decisions, *not* heaven ratifying the Church’s decisions. The *use* of the keys involves our defining for people, on the authority of God’s words, the conditions of entrance to and exclusion from the kingdom, warning of consequences for failing to meet the conditions, and excommunication from fellowship (Matt. 18). Finally, the actual initial *employment* of the keys was, in fact, exercised by *Peter*—opening the kingdom to the Jews (Acts 2:38) and to the Gentiles (Acts 10:42–43).

Verse 20 is a strange command. Christ commends Peter for his *confession*, then commands them not to publicize that confession. Why? Because He is not going to build a kingdom on earth in the Jewish conception, but a kingdom of heaven, a church. So He pulls the disciples back from publicizing His identity as the Christ, but only until His work is accomplished. What, then, does Peter begin publicizing after the resurrection at Pentecost? His confession that Jesus is Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36)! Then out come the keys—*repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus the Christ and your sins will be remitted* (2:38)! And suddenly, we are confronted again with Peter’s confession and its practical ramifications.

So What Is “The Rock”?

Of the interpretative alternatives for identifying the “rock,” the most popular view (Christ) is probably the least likely option—grammatically and contextually. While none of the above views is inherently heretical, Peter’s confession seems to have the best exegetical and contextual support. The identity of Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ, the promised Messiah, is the heart of the gospel and the bedrock truth of the Church. To reverse the metaphor, the Church is itself the “pillar and ground” of this truth of the identity and work of Christ (1 Tim. 3:15–16). It does not get any more basic than that. The Person of Jesus Christ is *the* cardinal doctrine and glory of the Church and the hope of mankind. 

Windows

In a cemetery in England stands a grave marker with this epitaph: “She died for want of things.” Alongside that headstone is another, which reads: “He died trying to give them to her.”

Though we chuckle at the message behind the headstones, they accurately reflect a tone in our society that should alert us to its dangers. How sad to admit that America worships at the shrine of materialism and calls it contentment. The Scriptures have a completely opposite view, with vivid illustrations, that being content has nothing to do with excessive having, being, doing, or amassing.

Boice writes,

Unfortunately, much proper Christian giving is hindered by the deep conviction in some believers’ minds that security is really dependent on having things or money. Some girls think that security consists in being able to capture a husband. And many husbands think that their security consists in amassing a fortune. If they are able to save a thousand dollars, they feel that they would be a bit more secure if they had two. If they earn two thousand, they think of ten. Ten leads to twenty, and pretty soon they have their eyes on even more. Against this misplaced desire, God says that if the

believer does not trust Him, he is no more secure with a million dollars than with just one. And if he trusts God, he is secure without any.

The English word “content” is found six times in the New Testament under two Greek words (*arkeo* and *antarkes*). The same Greek word is also translated in our King James text “sufficiency.” The idea behind these words is to raise a barrier (Strong) that will be enough or sufficient (Thayer) for you.

While the practical meanings may relate to everyday living, God raises up a parenthesis for our daily needs to be enough—wages (Luke 3:14), food and raiment (1 Tim. 6:8), and things (Heb. 13:5). The Bible illustrates this matter of contentment in ways that make one appreciate not only when God does provide, but also when He does not provide what we thought He should have provided. Of these eight word pictures, five positive ones encourage application and three negative ones identify the enemies that keep us from being content. Second Corinthians 9:6–8 contain three of the five positive word pictures.

Characteristics of Contentment

“To every preacher of righteousness as well as to Noah, wisdom gives the command, ‘A window shalt thou make in the ark.’”

Charles Spurgeon

Contentment Is Giving Enjoyed

"But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver" (2 Cor 9:6-7).

In today's economy, the world's idea is that to be content one must receive, get, make, attain, save, and hoard; but this passage teaches the opposite. The following story illustrates two types of people—givers and takers. Coming downstairs one morning, Lord Congelton heard the cook exclaim, "Oh, if I only had five pounds, wouldn't I be content!" Thinking the matter over, and anxious to see the woman satisfied, he shortly after handed her a five-pound note, then worth about twenty-five dollars. She thanked him profusely. He paused outside the door to hear if she would express her satisfaction and thank God. As soon as his shadow was invisible, she cried out, "Why didn't I say ten?"

Contentment Is Grace Enough

"And God is able to make all grace abound toward you" (2 Cor 9:8a).

The apostle Paul was a man who received abounding grace. Others include Joseph's brothers, Rahab, and Esther. On and on the list could go. Abounding grace allows us to live in the will of God regardless of our circumstances.

Contentment Is Good Work Exercised in Our Actions and Attitudes

"...that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work" (2 Cor 9:8b).

There is a story told of a king suffering from a painful ailment whose astrologer told him that the only cure for him was to find a contented man, get his shirt, and wear it night and day. So messengers were sent through the king's realm in search of such a man, with orders to bring back his shirt. Months passed, and after a thorough search of the country the messengers returned, but without the shirt. "Did you not find a contented man in all my realm?" the king asked.

"Yes, O king, we found one—just one in thy entire realm," they replied.

"Then why did you not bring back his shirt?" the king demanded.

"Master," they answered, "the man had no shirt."

Contentment Is Godliness Ensued

"But godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Tim 6:6).

A content person not only yields to the holiness of God but also enjoys a satisfied life. This yielding to God's holiness means changing and conforming to His image. This includes changing our thinking, living, dressing, going, doing, saying, looking, hearing, and handling.

Recently, my wife and I were waiting in the lobby of a

local restaurant with another family from our church. Their 5-year old grandson was with them. A lady came in who was dressed immodestly and stood right next to us. The little fellow quickly retorted, "Look, Pastor, that lady's clothes don't fit her anymore, do they?" As I thought, "Out of the mouth of babes!" the lady quickly left the lobby. This seems to be a sacred cow to a lot of Christians who are either unwilling to change or who are untaught. You will note that people who are not biblically content are usually not separated believers.

Contentment Is Great Gain Explored

Looking again at 1 Tim. 6:6, we see this obvious truth. Great gain is not measured by things but rather by godliness. Some think that living holy lives will cause them to miss out, but the reality of this verse is that godly living is great gain!

The last three-word pictures are negative. These three sins are constantly seeking to disrupt and destroy our contentment.

Contentment Does Not Include a Famishing for Things (Greed)

In Hebrews 13:5 we are exhorted to live our lives without covetousness. Our nature is bent toward greed, which is often found early in our lives. A small boy was given two apples and told to divide them with his sister, and in doing so to be generous in giving her the larger one. He said finally, "Look, Ma, you give her the apples and ask her to be generous."

Contentment Does Not Include a Fixation on Self

Diotrophes made much of himself with great pleasure (3 John 9-10). He became so engrossed with himself that he demanded his friends to reject those whom he rejected and to speak evil of whom he spoke evil. When we make ourselves an exception to Bible principle, we lose our contentment.

Contentment Does Not Include Fawning

This is seen so clearly in the political life of Pilate in Mark 15:15. He was looking for contentment, but was willing to content his constituents in order to gain favor. This is not contentment, but rather, compromise that will reap calamity.

Recently, I was returning from Dayton, Ohio, with some of our missionaries. As we drove up a country road, we passed a farm which had a lush green field where several goats were grazing on the grass. One had found a little hole in the fence and had worked his body through it (all but his back legs) stretching with all his might so he could eat the grass close to the ditch line. When I saw all that green grass in the field and compared it to the slim pickings in the ditch line, I put a one-word caption under that picture—*discontent!* For some, the Christian life is that way, but it does not have to be.

The apostle Paul learned a principle that every Christian should learn: "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content" (Phil. 4:11). ☞



Dr. Rick Arrowood pastors Troy Baptist Temple in Troy, Ohio.

Cliff and Carol Gribick and their children, Jason, Meredith, and Luke, live in South Carolina. On February 2, 2000, at 2 p.m. this family was thrust into a maelstrom that tested their faith in God—yet they found that His peace and love were abundantly sufficient to carry them through a challenge that they could not understand.

Luke, 12 years old and the Gribicks' youngest son, was coming out of the shower when Carol heard a thump coming from the bathroom. She went to investigate, thinking her son was involved in some type of horseplay. As she opened the bathroom door, Luke was attempting to dress himself—but something was very wrong. With a faint voice Luke said, "Mom, I think I'm dying!" and collapsed into her arms.

Frantically, Carol carried Luke's limp body into the master bedroom. He wasn't breathing. Carol, a registered nurse, immediately administered CPR. Jason was home from college on this particular afternoon and had already called 911. The paramedics arrived within five minutes and worked on Luke for nearly an hour before taking him to the Greenville Hospital Emergency Trauma Room.

Cliff arrived at the hospital shortly after the EMS team. As nurses and doctors ministered to Luke, he and Carol stood off to one side praying that the medical team would have the wisdom to stabilize their son.

During the ensuing hours the Gribicks and a number of friends from Luke's school and the family's church, Faith Baptist of Taylors, South Carolina, quietly exchanged conversation in the waiting area.

Eventually a nurse invited the family to a private room where one of the doctors would report on Luke's condition. A small gathering of friends accompanied the Gribicks to the designated area and patiently waited for the doctor's arrival.

Within a few minutes the Gribicks were greeted by two doctors who began explaining what had happened to Luke. It didn't take long for Cliff and Carol to realize that Luke's condition was serious, with severe complications that would be life-changing for their entire family.

During the time that Luke's heart had not been beating properly his brain had been deprived of oxygen. One doctor went on to explain that Luke would have severe defi-

ciencies the rest of his life. Though the cardiologist assured Carol that she had done everything correctly to save Luke's life, Cliff and Carol knew that the Lord was the one who had truly sustained their son.

But the Gribicks determined that circumstances would not dictate their reaction, nor would their hope and faith in Jesus Christ falter. The peace of Philippians 4:7 calmed the moment: "And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

The days and nights that followed were filled with a seemingly endless flow of nurses and doctors, monitors that continuously calibrated Luke's vital signs, and many, many medical tests.

On February 14, 12 days after his arrival, Luke's ventilator was removed and he once again was breathing on his own.

As Luke's condition stabilized, he was transferred to a step-down unit called the Closed Observation Unit. There the Gribicks awaited the next phase of recovery—the surgical implantation of a pacemaker.

Throughout all of this God made it evident to Cliff, Carol, Jason, and Meredith that this was not a time to diminish their light of hope in Jesus Christ; instead it was a time for them to be a reflection of the mercy and comfort that God provides during times of trials and testing. "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God" (2 Cor. 1:3, 4).

On March 3 Luke was flown by jet to the Medical University of South Carolina in Charleston for further evaluation and the implantation of a pacemaker. Afterwards, the Gribicks returned to Greenville where

Luke began rehabilitation for traumatic brain injury. The lack of oxygen to Luke's brain had greatly affected his cognitive, physical, and emotional functions.

Luke's arrival at Roger C. Peace Hospital brought him one step closer to home but also introduced Luke and his

Beyond Understanding But Not Without Peace

Cliff Gribick

family to the daily therapy required as part of his recovery. Luke, who had once enjoyed playing trumpet and piano, playing tennis with his sister, or letting his older brother win at video games, was now dependent for every need and had to relearn many of the things formerly taken for granted.

Luke was released from Roger C. Peace on May 3. He is currently home with his family, continuing the task of recovery. Thus there is no real closing to the Gribick family testimony because it is a daily walk, one which must continually reflect the peace and comfort of God no matter what circumstances may occur.

Perhaps Carol phrased it best when someone asked her, "What is carrying your family through this trial?" She replied, "Prayer has taken us this far, and prayer will be with us to the journey's end."

Cliff Gribick is a banking and finance professional in Greenville, South Carolina. He and his son Jason have established a web site, www.notearsinheaven.com, as a place of encouragement and hope for others who are going through trials.

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A Boy, a Motorcycle—and a Collision

Rick Barry

The weather had been perfect: warm enough not to need extra layers of clothing, but with just enough rain to keep our motorcycle tires from kicking up the usual clouds of sandy dust. Even the mosquitoes stayed away that week.

It was June of 2000, and I had joined several families from my church for a couple of days of camping and dirt-biking in Michigan's Manistee State Forest. Well-known to dirt-biking enthusiasts throughout the state, these woods feature miles of trails that stretch across meadows and snake their way up and down countless green-clad hills. Of course, not everyone in our group enjoyed riding motorcycles, but while some stayed in camp to relax and chat around the campfire, the rest of us had fun playing "follow-the-leader" through the woods. Riders and non-riders alike enjoyed the beauty of God's Creation.

Because my wife doesn't care much for camping (and even less for motorcycles), she had decided to stay home for these two days. Eager to get back to her, I packed up my gear and headed home earlier than the others, who planned to spend one more day at the campsite.

The following evening I was just uncoiling a hose to wash the car when my wife dashed out of the house. "Rick!" she called in a tone I'd never heard before. The look on her face stopped me cold: her eyes were wide, and her whole expression was one of horror. She could hardly get the words out: "They've started the prayer chain. This morning at about 11:00 Ryan Davidson crashed into a tree on his motorcycle. They say it crack-

ed his helmet, and he's still unconscious. He had to be air-lifted to a hospital in Grand Rapids."

I was stunned. The Davidsons, with whom I'd been dirt-biking just the day before, are fellow church members, good friends, and

neighbors. We had carpooled our kids to and from school for years, and to me 12-year-old Ryan is more like an honorary family member than just a neighbor. He'd often come over to play video games or go bike riding, and my Bible still contains some special bookmarks: little drawings he had made for me at church in his younger days.

I couldn't understand the accident. Despite his youth, Ryan was a better motorcyclist than I. He'd been riding since the day he'd been tall enough to operate one. Could his throttle have gotten stuck open? But the cause didn't matter now. I knew such accidents could be fatal. Permanent brain damage was another grim possibility.

"I have to get up there," I told Pam. She quickly agreed and stuffed some food in a bag for the two-hour drive. We gathered our own children, prayed, hugged each other, then I took to the road.

Of course, I realized that there was little I could accomplish by going. But when a loved one is hurt, you feel the need to do something, even if it's just driving, praying, and getting closer. Also, you want to help bear the family's pain however you can. At the hospital, I was relieved when Ryan's father clarified that it was only the helmet's visor that was broken, and not the protective helmet itself. That night, however, Ryan remained unconscious, and the hospital staff was still unsure of how serious his injuries might be.

Throughout the following days, our church members continued in fervent prayer. Then, unexpectedly, a new thought took shape in my mind: "A lot of people are praying, but what if Ryan's outcome depended 100 percent on my personal prayers? Is there anything in my life—no matter how small—that might hinder my prayers for this little guy?" I recalled the words of Psalm 66:18, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me."

As I sat back to ponder this question, the Holy Spirit went to work, shining a spotlight on some "little" sins that I had allowed to grow in my life. In the back of my mind, I had known they shouldn't be there, but like a lazy gardener who permits some weeds to grow among the tomatoes, I had tolerated certain "harmless" transgressions in my Christian walk. I chose to ignore them before, but now God brought me



face-to-face with them. Sure, others were praying for Ryan, but I wanted my prayers to count too! Not wanting even the tiniest burden of sin to weigh down my prayers, I confessed them to God and let Him sweep my heart clean.

Ryan's progress wasn't immediate. Before long, though, we heard that he was starting to open his eyes briefly. Once, drifting into consciousness, Ryan was frightened to realize that he had tubes going down his throat. The doctors removed them, but he still wasn't talking, which was considered a bad sign.

Soon afterward, however, we heard that Ryan did start to speak. He was pronouncing his words much more slowly than usual, but we rejoiced that he could talk at all! Brain scans revealed nothing abnormal, and within a week Ryan had progressed sufficiently to be discharged. He walked with a painful limp and still spoke slowly, but his doctors explained that this was normal for concussion victims and prescribed lots of bed rest. Today he has fully recovered, except that most of his memories of that camping trip, the collision, and his stay in the hospital have been totally erased.

When I heard that my little buddy was coming home, Satan came along and whispered into my thoughts,

"See? He's going to be okay. You don't need to clean up anything in your life after all." But I told the Devil to get lost. God had answered our prayers, and it would be an insult to Him to intentionally backslide after He had graciously responded to our earnest pleas.

I recalled the words of Psalm 66:18, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me."

Do I think that God permitted that motorcycle crash just to get my attention? Not at all! But if I had hardened my heart and refused to let Him use that event to work in me, I would have been throwing

away the one shred of good that I personally could draw out of that terrible experience. Sometimes God's children simply can't know why the Lord permits a tragedy. But when such moments try our faith, we must cling ever tighter to our Heavenly Father, trusting that He who loved us enough to let His Son die for us must have His reasons.

My own lesson from all of this? Don't wait until a tragedy forces you to examine your Christian walk. Pray every day, yes, but don't just go through the motions. Above all, make sure you're daily living your life in such a way that God will hear your prayers.

Rick Barry is Administrative Vice President of Russian Gospel Ministries in Elkhart, Indiana.

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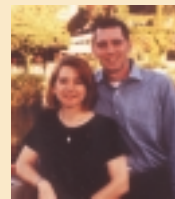
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If we will not be governed by God, we must be governed by tyrants. —William Penn

Such sweet compulsion doth in music lie. —John Milton

Continual eloquence is tedious. —Blaise Pascal

Let them recognize virtue and not for having lost it. —Persius

Hope is never ill when faith is well. —John Bunyan

To argue from mercy to sin is the devil's logic. —James Janeway

Judas heard all Christ's sermons. —Thomas Goodwin

O liberty! what crimes are committed in thy name! —Madame Roland

Democracy is the name we give the people whenever we need them. —Arman de Caillavet

I don't make jokes. I just watch government and report the facts. —Will Rogers

A fanatic is a person who redoubles his energies when he has forgotten his aim. —Unknown

You do not test the resources of God until you try the impossible. —F. B. Meyer

Praise does wonders for our sense of hearing. —Arnold Glasgow

Endurance is the queen of all virtues. —Chrysostom

The hottest places in hell are reserved for those who, in a period of moral crisis, maintain their neutrality. —Dante

Reprove a friend in secret but praise him before others. —Leonardo da Vinci

I used to say civilization is going to the dogs. But I quit saying that out of respect for dogs. —Vance Havner

The man who remembers what he was taught at his mother's knee was probably bent over it at the time. —Bill Ireland

It is because people live in the things they possess instead of in their relationship to God, that God at times seems cruel. —Oswald Chambers

God gave us memories that we might have roses in December. —James M. Barrie

What will a child learn sooner than a song? —Alexander Pope

Marriage may be an institution, but it is not a reform school. —Unknown

To marry a woman for her beauty is like buying a house for its paint. —Unknown

A holy life will produce the deepest impression. Lighthouses blow no horns; they only shine. —Dwight L. Moody

Grace grows best in winter. —Samuel Rutherford

Materialism is organized emptiness of the spirit. —Franz Werfel



When I said I was concerned about my personal growth, . . . I was referring to spiritual . . .

Compiled by Dr. David Atkinson, pastor of Dyer Baptist Church, Dyer, Indiana.

Never Alone

Cynthia Blake Simmons

In May 1998, I had the opportunity to accompany my daughter, Joanna, on her senior trip to Europe. As we rode through the dense Paris traffic on our way to the airport, I was working on my Scripture memorization and review. Today's passage was Psalm 91, which I had memorized as a teen.

At the airport we all retrieved our luggage and were waiting to enter the door. As I stood near the bus and chatted with one of the sponsors from an accompanying school, I looked up and discovered that the entire group was gone. I assumed the group could not be too far away.

A quick search told a different story. We had no clue as to which direction the group had gone or how to get around the Charles DeGaulle Airport. We asked directions to the US Air ticket counter and were told it was on the opposite side of the airport. I did not understand why our bus driver would drop us off at one end of the airport when we needed to be at the other, but my lost partner and I grabbed our luggage and began to move as quickly as we could around the exterior of the building.

As we raced desperately, I began to ask the Lord to quiet my heart and to guide us. I was just asking forgiveness for the beginnings of a bad attitude over my abandonment when "by chance" I glimpsed the familiar face of our bus driver, Jean Marie, through the glass door. I ran inside as I called his name.

This was an amazing miracle that I spotted him, since he was some distance from the group and was actually headed to another part of the airport. Relief flooded over us as he led us to where the group was waiting.

After making our way through French security, checking baggage, and clearing passport control, we were on our way to our concourse ("satellite") when two girls from the other school needed to find the tax desk to get the tax on some purchases refunded.

I was worried about their going alone, so I offered to accompany them. As we went up the escalator, we began to realize we could not find our way back to the level we were seeking. Each time we followed the directions provided by airport personnel, we ended up hopelessly lost.

Finally we took an elevator and found ourselves close to the parking lot. At this point the airport was getting very crowded, and French security guards were preventing crowds from entering the corridor we needed. The air of confusion and the large number of people made it impossible to move quickly.

As I prayed for help, I was directed to a lady in an official-looking blue dress. I explained that we were looking for the tax desk, but our plane was to begin boarding in 20 minutes at Satellite One, and we were lost! The look of horror on her face did not reassure me. "You must follow me," she said. "I do not know if you have enough time."

She led us to some back stairs, and I thanked her

profusely as we raced behind her. Suddenly we were on the right level at the right place, and she was pointing out the tax desk to us.

At this moment, security guards began speaking to her in rapid French as they roped off that part of the concourse. She explained that there had been an unattended bag which could contain a bomb, and they were closing that portion of the airport.

I thanked her again for her unusual concern and handed her a French tract which contained several pages of Scripture. Although she claimed to be Buddhist, she received the tract graciously. As we made our way to Satellite One, I noticed that she was standing and reading the tract. Perhaps this was the reason for our adventure, and a well-worthwhile reason at that! At least we were safely on our way.

Suddenly the entrances to Satellite One and then Satellite Two were closed, and people were alarmed as the security guards denied them access to their destinations. Once again we were very far from reaching our plane, and we felt very alone because no one we questioned spoke English.

Then one by one, we began running into members from our group until we had counted more than 25. I was very joyful to discover that Joanna was in this group. I was reassured in thinking that certainly our plane could not leave until this crisis was resolved.

Joanna and I pooled our remaining French francs and had a nice lunch together as we waited for security to blow up the suspicious luggage. Finally the Satellite was reopened, and we arrived at our gate as the last of the lines were boarding.

I sank into my seat—finally relaxing—as the airplane began to depart. And suddenly the words from Psalm 91 began to flood into my mind. "For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. . . . He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him." Surely the Lord had watched over me this entire time.

The amazing "coincidences" that had guided me to the right places were no mistakes. Then I felt ashamed as I recalled the feelings of panic and uncertainty that had ruled my heart in the desperate moments. God had been in control each time. Here I was, safe and secure and on my way home. The Lord had used the morning as an object lesson to instruct me in the principles of Psalm 91.

No matter how difficult and uncertain the road that we are running in the race of life may be—we are not running alone. The vast resources of heaven go with us, and no obstacle is too great to overcome.

Cynthia Blake Simmons is a freelance writer living in Bolingbrook, Illinois.

outreach

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2000

Still Preaching

This ministry believes in the power of the gospel message. Preaching the gospel still works, but people must be exposed to the gospel to be affected by it's message. OutReach 2000 is effectively gathering hundreds of unsaved people to attend evangelistic area-wide crusades where Spirit-filled men of God powerfully preach that Jesus saves! Lives are being changed!

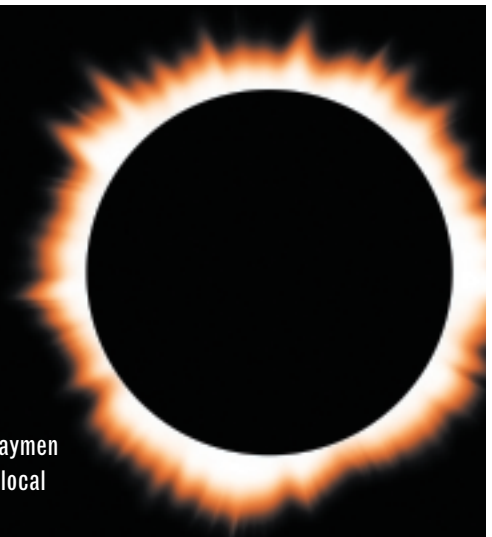
Still Praying

The Evangelistic Prayer Band (EPB) is the motor behind OutReach 2000 and is comprised of laymen from the churches involved in each crusade. They pray each day for personal holiness, their local church, the unsaved, and the glory of God.

Still Reaching

The first OutReach 2000 area-wide crusade was held in April 2000 in Ohio. God richly blessed with over 800 people attending! Many were saved. The potential is for hundreds more! God has lead to continue the effort with crusades being scheduled from now until 2003. If you would like to see an OutReach 2000 crusade in your area, it's not too late. Contact the OutReach 2000 home office at **888-823-1774** for information.

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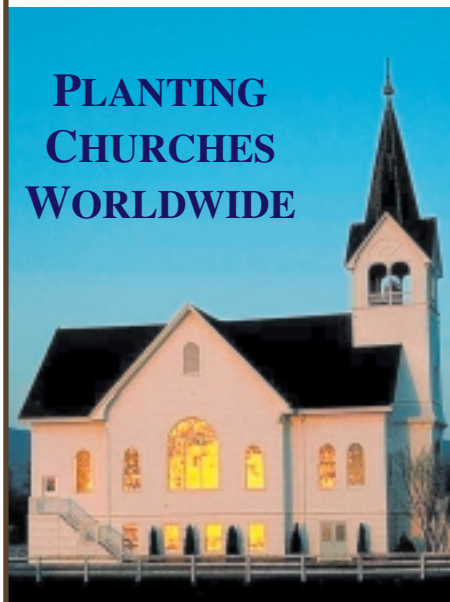
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BONDS?

Luke 18:1 “Men ought always to pray.”

Phil Shuler

In my first year at Bob Jones College in Cleveland, Tennessee, I remember Dr. Bob Jones Sr. coming into our Preacher Boys class before flying out for an evangelistic meeting. He said, “Boys, you cannot find out God’s will for your life if you do not ask God what it is. You pray and ask Him what you are to do. Then, as God lays before you options, ask Him to remove false options until only one remains. Then go for it.” He reminded us young, eager souls that the key to discerning God’s will is prayer.

In later life I remember this same man, in his last year on this earth, say to me, “Phil, I wish I had prayed more.” I can’t recall a man who prayed more than Dr. Bob.

“Men ought always to pray.” This is a powerful declaration from our Lord, but one that should not be misunderstood.

My father, Bob Shuler, was a man of prayer. I would hear him praying while he put on his clothes in the morning. We had a small farm in El Monte, and dad would plow the corn acreage with a 12-inch walking plow, in preparation to irrigate. I can still remember my brother Bob shouting, “Dad’s praying again!” And sure enough, there he went, his head tilted up, plowing over an entire row of new corn! One of us would run to Dad, shouting, while the rest of us carefully tilted the corn back to its original position.

To me, to pray without ceasing means that we should *always* be in a situation where God can get to us quickly. At school we always had some students who bragged about the lengthy prayer hours they had, and then asked us how long we prayed that day. (Of course, back then I was mean enough to tell them that I prayed last week!) And that “men ought always to pray” tells me that no decision, spiritual or secular, should be made without running it by God first. There is no such thing as a minor decision to the Christian. God is interested in each and every thing we do.

Note that our Lord ends Luke 18:1 with “. . . and not faint.” This is truth and wisdom. If we attempt to do as we please and not as God pleases for us, we will, in short order, faint.

We used to play tug-of-war on the farm. We scooped out a swimming hole in the back acreage and would invite our friends from other farms over on Saturday for a contest. My brother, Bill, was one of the strongest men I have ever met, and the delight of the game was to have Bill on our team! I would puff and grunt as I held to the rope, but rest now and then, knowing that Bill would be the difference. Each Christian should have God in the mix of every decision. If not, he will find himself fatigued in the battle of life.

When I think of the “old timers” who served God throughout a long life, I find one thing consistent among them. They were men of prayer! Dr. H. C. Morrison, who founded and built Asbury College and Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky, would stay on our farm when he visited California. One morning Dad told me to go upstairs and wake Dr. Morrison, but when I got to his door, I could hear him laughing. I knocked on the door and opened it to find this man of God on his knees, Bible open on the bed before him, tears streaming down his face. He turned to me and said; “O, son, God and I were having such a good time!” That little six-year-old boy never forgot that!

One of my father’s closest friends was “Uncle Bud” Robinson. They were born just a few miles apart in Grayson County, Virginia. Uncle Bud was the one who picked me up when I was five and told me that God had told him that I was going to preach! I loved Uncle Bud so much that I just figured he and God had gotten together on that decision, and Bud was just the informer. Bud Robinson was a man of prayer. He and my father would spend much time praying in our front room. It has been my heritage to know such men all my life.

Men ought always to pray. O God, throw us on our knees during these trying times of confusion in our country. May we wrestle with God until He allows America another chance to see revival and repent of her many sins.

Dr. Phil Shuler is an evangelist based in Rocky Mount, North Carolina. You can contact him by sending e-mail to philshuler@juno.com.

THE BOOK OF JOB: FINDING

The story of Job is one of the most popular and well-known in all of literature. The 19th-century English essayist and historian Thomas Carlyle said, "There is nothing in the Bible or out of it, of equal literary merit." Alfred Tennyson called Job "the greatest poem of ancient or modern times." Paradoxically, it is probably one of the least *entirely* read books in Scripture, and one of the most contextually misquoted.

Outline

The Book of Job divides naturally into four "logues": Prologue [Challenge & Testing] (1–2); Dialogue [Human Discourse] (3–37); Monologue [Divine Discourse] (38–41); Epilogue [Reward & Consummation] (42). A more detailed analysis reflects the systematic structure of the book.

I. Prologue (1–2)

1. Introduction of Job (1)
2. Testing of Job (1–2)
 - i. Possessional Testing and Job's Response (1)
 - ii. Personal Testing and Job's Response (2)

II. Dialogue [Human Discourse] (3–37)

1. First Cycle (3–14)
 - i. Job's initial lament (3)
 - ii. Eliphaz replies, Job responds (4–7)
 - iii. Bildad replies, Job responds (8–10)
 - iv. Zophar replies, Job responds (11–14)
2. Second Cycle (15–21)
 - i. Eliphaz replies, Job responds (15–17)
 - ii. Bildad replies, Job responds (18–19)
 - iii. Zophar replies, Job responds (20–21)
3. Third Cycle (22–31)
 - i. Eliphaz replies, Job responds (22–24)
 - ii. Bildad replies, Job responds (25–31)
4. Elihu's Discourse (32–37)

III. Monologue [Divine Discourse] (38–42)

1. God's first interrogation; Job responds (38–40)
2. God's second interrogation; Job responds (40–42)

IV. Epilogue (42)

1. God's rebuke to Job's companions (42)
2. God's reward to Job (42)

Authorship & Setting

The book contains no clear indication of authorship, and no consistent tradition or agreement as to authorship exists. Several internal factors indicate that the historical setting of the story is the patriarchal period, around or before the time of Abraham (ca. 2000 B.C.):

- No reference to Jews or Mosaic institutions
- Wealth measured in cattle (1:3)
- Family priest structure (1:5)

- Raids by nomadic Sabaeans and Chaldeans fits 2nd millennium (1:15, 17)
- Hebrew word for "piece of silver" only in Job 42:11, Gen. 33:19, Josh. 24:32
- Job's long age (42:16)
- The divine name Shaddai, appearing 30 times in Job, is a characteristically early title found only 17 times elsewhere—11 in Pentateuch and Ruth, four in prophets but traceable to Job, one in Moses' Psalm 91, and one in David's Psalm 68.

Gleason Archer (*Survey of Old Testament Introduction*) observes that "Job was a native of North Arabia, and the whole setting of the story is Arabic rather than Hebrew." As such, Job is a member of that category of people to whom God graciously and mysteriously revealed Himself prior to and outside the channel of Israel, along with Melchizedek (Gen. 14), the Pharaoh in Genesis 12, and the Abimelechs in Gen. 20 and 26—all of whom were roughly contemporary with Job.

A North Arabian setting, Archer adds, "would also account for the comparative rarity of the name Yahweh in most chapters of the book." Apart from one use by Job in chapter 12, Yahweh is used exclusively by the narrator (in chapters 1–2, 38, 40, 42). "If, moreover, the work was composed in the pre-Mosaic period prior to the Hebrew conquest, it gives rise to the possibility that it was originally composed in some language other than Hebrew," presumably a North Arabian dialect. That would also help explain the unusual difficulty of much of the language in Job. All these factors suggest the patriarchal period (2nd millennium B.C.) for the historical setting of the actual events in Job.

The Characters

The story of Job contains seven major actors, and one additional voice that is easily overlooked.

- *Job*. His thrice-repeated characterization as a thoroughly righteous man (1:1, 1:8, 2:3; note two occurrences of this assessment are from God's own mouth) is designed to assure the reader from the outset that the accusations of the three friends, as logical as they may sound, are dead wrong.
- *God*. He is the one who raises the subject of Job in the first place—not Satan. That is significant for the whole point and purpose of the story.
- *Satan* gloms the proffered bait, charging that the only reason Job was so "good" was because God was so biased in His blessing. Satan's accusation impugns not only the integrity of Job's faith but, more importantly, the integrity of God's character. Though Satan assumes a key role at the beginning of the story, he silently slinks away after chapter

GOD BEYOND THE SUFFERING (PART ONE)

two and is neither heard from nor referred to again.

- *The Three Friends*—Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar—are much abused. They certainly earn our ire and frustration as the story progresses, but we cannot ignore their genuine empathy and profound compassion for Job (2:11–13). They originally come not to accuse but to grieve with him. It is only Job's initial denial of (to them) the obvious (Job 3) that provokes them to voice their accusations.
- *Elihu* is in a category by himself discussed separately below.
- *The Narrator* is the often overlooked voice of the story of Job who consistently provides the Spirit-inspired proper perspective on all the events. What does he have to say then, for example, about Elihu?

What About Elihu?

Elihu is frequently represented as a cocky, egotistical, upstart know-it-all. This unfortunate misunderstanding of Elihu results from a careless consideration of the text, and is the product of speculation where the text does not speak and disregard for plain inferences where the text does speak.

Textual factors commending Elihu:

- No condemnation of Elihu on the part of the narrator (commentators would do well to follow his example).
- Elihu's right perception of the real problem, as pointed out by narrator (32:2; cf. 40:8).
- Elihu's legitimate dissatisfaction with the failure of others (32:3; cf. 42:7).
- Four times the narrator describes Elihu's "wrath" being "kindled" (32:2, 3, 5); he uses this expression only one other time—to describe God (42:7).
- Elihu's boldness is tempered by genuine respect for his elders (32:4–12); given the narrator's description of him, Elihu's words can be interpreted otherwise only by importing a sarcastic inflection into the text.
- Elihu is exempted from God's displeasure (42:7). To extrapolate from this, as some do, that God ignores him as not worth the trouble of a response is eisegetical, begs the question, and ignores the narrator's candid presentation of him.

Textual distinctions between Elihu and the other three:

- Elihu is less censorious and harsh, and more sensitive to Job's difficulties (33:1, 5, 32).
- Elihu focuses on Job's words in response to what has happened to him, rather than on accusations

about his presumed sins that supposedly caused what happened to him (33:8ff; 34:5ff; 35:2ff). That becomes the thematic crux of the whole book, especially once God takes the stage—not why suffering happens, but how to respond to it properly.

Textual similarities between Elihu's speech and God's speech:

- Elihu is the first to focus on Job's defense of his own righteousness at the expense of God's righteousness (33:8–13; 34:5–12, 17–19, 31–37; 35:2–7); so does God (40:6–14).
- Elihu is the first to call into question Job's knowledge of and control over creation (36:26–37:24); this is also a major focus of God's discourse (38–41).
- Elihu is the first to stress the incomprehensibility and sovereignty of God's ways (36:26ff.; 37:5ff); this, too, is a major thrust of God's discourse (38–41).

Elihu's speech forms a transitional bridge between the erroneous conclusions and accusations of Job's friends and the final response of God. Elihu comes closest to the target of the real problem that God focuses on—not on what Job has supposedly done, but on how he has responded to what has happened. Though not perfect, Elihu is finally on the right track and deserves to be treated with as much dignity as the Biblical text itself presents him. Incidentally, Job 38:2 is not a condemnation of Elihu's speech, but is actually God's echo of Elihu's own previous criticism of Job (see 34:35). Even Job himself understands this reprimand as applying to him personally (see 42:3).

Hints for Profitable Reading of the Book of Job

Phillips Brooks advised, "Never put a biography down until the person becomes a living, breathing, acting man." Many have favorite passages or verses in the Book of Job (often quoted out of context, unfortunately). Few enjoy reading through the *whole* book, primarily because of the lengthy discourses. They seem to go in circles, repeat the same points, and get nowhere. Yet the Holy Spirit does not waste space. Here is a simple suggestion. Look for one or two or three verses that encapsulate the main point of the speaker of each discourse. Mark those kernel verse(s) and summarize their point accurately in your own words. Do that for each speech and you can reconstruct the entire discourse in synopsis form, follow its logical progression back and forth from speaker to speaker, and actually feel the emotion and follow the flow of thought through the entire book at a glance. One final recommendation: read aloud and verbalize the emotions behind the written words, and these ancient "men of like passions with us" will become "living, breathing, acting" men.



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2000 Election Round-Up

- Maine voters narrowly rejected an assisted suicide measure and defeated a referendum banning discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.
- Colorado voters refused an effort to require a 24-hour waiting period for women seeking an abortion.
- Voters in Nebraska and Nevada took a stand for traditional family values and overwhelmingly passed legislation banning same-sex unions.
- By a slim majority, Oregon voters refused to prohibit the promotion of homosexuality in the state's public schools.
- Alaska voters resoundingly rejected legalization of marijuana.
- Arkansas voters soundly defeated a constitutional amendment to establish a state lottery and allow casinos in six Arkansas counties.
- State lottery and pari-mutuel betting proponents prevailed in South Carolina, South Dakota, Colorado, and Massachusetts.
- Colorado and Nevada approved medicinal use of marijuana, while California residents approved treatment for nonviolent offenders instead of jailing them for low-level drug offenses. (Baptist Press, 11/8/2000)

Religious Liberty Bill Becomes Law

On September 21, 2000,

President Clinton signed into law the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act. The law, which both the Senate and House of Representatives approved without dissent in late July, is designed to protect the religious-freedom rights of churches and other religious bodies against discriminatory land-use regulations and of individuals in institutions such as prisons and mental hospitals. (Baptist Press, 9/25/2000)

Seventh-day Adventist Leads Navy Chaplains

Rear Adm. Barry C. Black was installed August 18, 2000, as the first Seventh-day Adventist to serve as Chief of Navy Chaplains. Black said he views his selection as a sign of the diversity within the military. (*Christian News*, 10/30/2000)

Judge Sides with ACLU Against Local Ordinance

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) has prevailed in a federal lawsuit challenging a Wichita Falls, Texas, ordinance allowing 300 library patrons to petition for the removal of any children's book in the public library. U.S. District Chief Judge Jerry Buchmeyer ruled the ordinance unconstitutional. The ACLU lawsuit defended in particular two children's books with homosexual themes. (Baptist Press, 9/25/2000)

Battle over Nation's Slogan in Kansas

The national slogan appears on all U.S. currency, but the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) argues it should not be displayed in the Shawnee County (Kansas) Treasurer's office. A lawsuit, filed in Topeka, contends that the words "In God We Trust" violate the separation of church and state. (*World*, 7/22/2000)

CBF Leader Affirms Clinton's Faith

Daniel Vestal of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship commended Bill Clinton's faith after the White House breakfast for religious leaders last September, despite an accumulation of policies and behavior that appear to conflict with that profession. Vestal, coordinator of the liberal shadow denomination at odds with the more conservative Southern Baptist Convention, described Clinton as "obviously a person of faith and a committed Christian." Vestal sat at the same table with Clinton, a Southern Baptist church member. (Baptist Press, 10/25/2000)

Baptist University Student Directory Adorned with Pornography

Samford University's student directory has generated national attention after sharp-eyed students discovered the front cover was a mosaic of hundreds

of tiny pornographic images. The Southern Baptist-affiliated school distributed thousands of the 100-page directories to students and faculty. Richard Franklin, vice president and dean of students, told the Associated Press the book would not be recalled. (*Maranatha Newswatch*, 10/13/2000)

New York Times Targets Conservative Worldview

"The *Times* is pursuing a highly potent, largely clandestine, and unnoticed strategy to promote a particular worldview—not only in editorials, op-ed columns or other opinion pieces, but also in news stories," William Proctor writes in his new book, *The Gospel According to the New York Times*. Proctor, a Harvard Law School graduate, longtime journalist, and author, contends that the *Times* uses its power to crusade against conservative stands in such areas as abortion, religion, capital punishment, and gun control. He spent several years studying how the *Times* exerts power not only toward its readers, but also in its wide influence through articles syndicated to other media—from your local TV news to your hometown newspaper. (Baptist Press, 10/30/2000)

Children Pay for Divorce

The conventional wisdom that followed the rapid spread of divorce in

the 1970s and 1980s—that children are resilient and usually overcome the shock of divorce—has been overturned by evidence. Children of divorce are more depressed and aggressive toward parents and teachers than are youngsters from intact families. They are much more likely to develop mental and emotional disorders later in life. They start sexual activity earlier, have more children out of wedlock, are less likely to marry, and if they do marry, are more likely to divorce. They are more likely to abuse drugs, turn to crime, and commit suicide. (*U.S. News & World Report*, 10/2/2000)

New Eastern Religion Comes to America

Feng shui (pronounced “fung shway”) is a Chinese philosophy that the placement of objects releases a magic force called *chi* that brings health, success, and prosperity. Upscale consumers pay feng shui consultants to help them rearrange furniture to bring spiritual peace. According to CBS News, over 300 such consultants work in Southern California alone. (*What In The World!*, Vol. 28, No. 10)

Pastors Support Marijuana Use

A study of 518 Protestant pastors by Phoenix-based Ellison Research found that 44 percent support the use of marijuana for medicinal purposes. Among pastors affiliated with the National Council of Churches, the level of support rose to 66 percent. (*Christian News*, 10/16/2000)

AU Sponsor of Homosexual Film Festival

Americans United for Separation of Church and

NOTABLE QUOTES

There was a procession and service of the mass in the cathedral [in Loanda]; and, wishing to show my [African] men a place of worship, I took them to the church, which now serves as the chief one of the [Roman Catholic] see of Angola and Congo. There is an impression on some minds that a gorgeous ritual is better calculated to inspire devotional feelings than the simple form of the Protestant worship. But here the frequent genuflexions, changing of positions, burning of incense, with the priest's back turned to the people . . . and manifest irreverence of the singers . . . did not convey to the minds of my men the idea of adoration. I overheard them, in talking to each other, remark that “they had seen the white men charming their demons,” a phrase identical with one they had used when seeing the Balonda beating drums before their idols.—David Livingstone, *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa*, 1858

Political and religious fundamentalism is gaining new strength these days and is one of the most serious threats to democracy and human development.—Bishop Gunnar Staalsett, former general secretary of the Lutheran World Federation

If [a homosexual] was demonstrating the essence of Christianity, I would not object to the individual being ordained.—Former president Jimmy Carter, who recently left the Southern Baptist Convention

We regret that certain words and images long employed [by the church] have increasingly caused offense to the very people with whom we are seeking to share the Good News. Some of these words and images are biblical. . . . Many are military in nature: “target,” “conquer,” “army,” “crusade,” “mobilize,” “beachhead,” “advance,” “enemy,” “battle.”—statement from “Consultation on Mission Language and Metaphors” held at Fuller Theological Seminary June 1–3, 2000

I don't know if you know this or not, but on television you don't use the name “Jesus.” “God” you can use. If you notice [on] *Touched by an Angel*, they never refer to Jesus, only God. . . . It's sad that you can talk about Satan, you can talk about Hitler, but when you start talking about our Lord and Savior, it's taboo.—actor and producer Chuck Norris, speaking during the Salvation Army's 110th annual meeting on resistance to an episode of *Walker, Texas Ranger* he wrote that included a gang member who converts to Christianity and becomes a youth pastor

State, a church-state organization that is a leading critic of religious conservatives, was a sponsor of the 10th annual “Reel Affirmations Film Festival” held in mid-October in Washington, D.C. Americans United was cited as a sponsor on the festival's Internet site and in Reel Affirmations' advertisements in the *Washington Blade*, a weekly newspaper for the homosexual community. (Baptist Press, 11/16/2000)

Poll: Americans Support School Vouchers

According to a Zogby/Reuters Poll last September, most Americans support using government vouchers at private schools operated by religious organizations or churches. The nationwide survey of 1,028 likely voters indicated that 51.9 percent did not feel that this kind of government support breached separation of church and state principles. (*Maranatha Newswatch*, 9/26/2000)

Supreme Court to Decide on Policy Banning Christian Club

The U.S. Supreme Court has agreed to review a lower-court decision preventing a Christian club for children from meeting after hours at a New York public school. The justices accepted the case, *Good News Club v. Milford Central School*, upon appeal from the Second U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, which upheld a policy by the school district banning the use of its facilities for religious purposes. The Eighth Circuit, however, ruled for a Good News Club in Missouri, saying the school violated the organization's free-speech rights, according to Conservative News Service. (Baptist Press, 10/12/2000)

Homosexuals Target Elementary School Children

"Ending the Hate Beginning in School" was the theme of last year's conference of the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Network, which met in Chicago October 6-8. Workshops focused on how to incorporate pro-homosexual content into family studies for grades K-3 and into history for grades 4-6. Other sessions gave instruction about how to include homosexual symbols in geometry classes, ways in which teachers can "come out" to students, and how to start "killer" Gay-Straight Alliance clubs. (*Christian News*, 11/6/2000)

NEA Chief Endorses Gay Activism in Schools

Homosexual activists should be allowed to present their case in public schools. This is the stand of Bob Chase, director of the National Education Association (NEA), who was speaking before the Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network, *Family News in Focus* reports. (*Maranatha Newswatch*, 10/13/2000)

Home Schoolers Excel

Home-schooled students have scored higher than their traditionally educated peers on the ACT, one of the nation's two major college-entrance exams, for the third straight year. (*Christian News*, 10/16/2000)

Christians Persecuted in Uzbekistan

Uzbek police have jailed another Christian leader, accusing him of possessing 0.2 grams of opium. Nikolai Rudinsky was arrested just a few hours after police had closed down a church youth camp he helped organize. The official claimed that the local church had "no right to operate a religious camp." One of Nikolai's friends said he was beaten many times. In a similar incident, Keston News Service reported earlier in the summer that Uzbek authorities near the capital of Tashkent had refused permission in May for the Evangelical Christian/Baptist Union of Churches to sponsor a children's summer camp. (*Compass Direct*, 9/22/00)

Pace of Bible Translations Accelerates

With the rate of Bible translation work picking up speed during the last decade, more than 93 percent of the world's population can potentially access at least a portion of Scripture in its own language. Nearly 2,233 language groups have at least one book of the Bible in their native tongue, but that still leaves hundreds of small language groups yet to be embarked upon. (*Maranatha Newswatch*, 10/17/2000)

U.N. Religious Summit Opposes Conversion

The Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders evidenced widespread opposition to efforts at religious conversion.

Pronouncements were voiced by speakers from different religious traditions against attempts to convert people to other religions. "Some of the most rousing applause" during the summit came when CNN founder Ted Turner denied the "need for a blood sacrifice," said Ken Welborn of the Southern Baptist North American Mission Board. A document on peace, circulated among religious leaders, promoted "the equitable distribution of wealth within nations and among nations," and called for the "universal abolition of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction" and the development of a "global reforestation campaign." (Baptist Press, 9/6/2000)

Hindu Leader Urges Expulsion of Missionaries

India's government should tell all foreign churches and missionaries to pack up and leave, according to a message delivered to a meeting of Hindu nationalists. According to an article in the *Guardian*, K. S. Sudarshan told members of his Hindu nationalist group, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, that the Indian government should expel foreign churches and set up a state church similar to the government-controlled church of China. (*Maranatha Newswatch*, 10/13/2000)

Turkmenistan Baptist Convert Threatened with Death

A recent convert to the Baptist faith in the Caspian port of Khazar (formerly

Cheleken) has been threatened and beaten by the former KGB after refusing to answer questions about whether he had been baptized and by whom. Baptists in the town have reported that Viktor Portnov's life was threatened by an officer of the National Security Ministry (KNB). Portnov was eventually freed, but was warned not to attend church again or to preach. (*Maranatha Newswatch*, 11/22/2000)

Teaching Opportunities

Tabernacle Baptist Church Ministries in Virginia Beach, VA, has openings for teachers in early childhood education, elementary education, and seminary Hebrew professor. Send resume and testimonial to Pastor Rod Bell Jr., 717 Whitehurst Landing Road, Virginia Beach, VA 23464 or pastorrod@tabernacle-vb.org.

Maintenance Position Opening

Eden Manor, Denver, CO, an independent living facility for senior citizens owned and operated by the Beth Eden Baptist Church, is seeking to fill a maintenance/custodial position for a Christian couple who enjoy working with the elderly. Housing and utilities are provided, plus other benefits. Contact Ron Smith, Eden Manor, 3405 West 32nd Avenue, Denver, CO 80211, or FAX 303-455-6533.

This news is presented to inform believers. The people or sources mentioned do not necessarily carry the endorsement of the Fundamental Baptist Fellowship.

Thy Deepest Distress

One of the best sources of comfort for the suffering saint is the treasure of great hymns penned by those who have suffered in the past. The texts of some of these hymns illustrate well the truth of 2 Corinthians 1:3-5, where we learn that the "God of all comfort . . . comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God."

The traditional American hymn, "How Firm a Foundation," is a wonderful example. Although the writer presented New Testament truth throughout the hymn, whoever it was that penned these words certainly had drunk deeply from the well of Isaiah 43. Two of the stanzas are drawn from its sweet waters, although one is often omitted in recent hymnbooks. Throughout this issue of *Frontline* you find words of comfort from those who have been comforted by God. Listen to the words of comfort in this old hymn:

How firm a foundation,
ye saints of the Lord,
is laid for your faith
in His excellent word!
What more can He say
than to you He hath said,
To you who for refuge
to Jesus have fled?

And what more needs to be said? The sufficiency of Scripture is a great source of help and hope. The Bible has the answers to every problem, but those who believe that and think to seek them there are the ones who have hope. As Paul stated in Romans 15:4, "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures

might have hope." If you have come to Christ for salvation, your life is being built on the right foundation. Hope for daily life is found in the same Bible where you found hope for eternal life. The songwriter quoted it well:

Fear not, I am with thee;
O be not dismayed,
for I am thy God,
I will still give thee aid;
I'll strengthen thee, help thee,
and cause thee to stand,
upheld by My righteous,
omnipotent hand.

To prove that claim, he included in the hymn these promises from Isaiah 43:

When through the deep waters
I call thee to go,
the rivers of sorrow
shall not overflow;
For I will be with thee
thy trials to bless,
and sanctify to thee
thy deepest distress.

When through fiery trials
thy pathway shall lie,
My grace, all sufficient,
shall be thy supply:
The flame shall not hurt thee;
I only design
thy dross to consume
and thy gold to refine.

The oft-omitted stanza is the key to the hymn: God uses our deepest distress to do a work in our lives that turns suffering to blessing. By consuming the dross and refining the gold in the crucible of Christian suffering, God teaches us to say with Job, "But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as

gold." God has a purpose! He sets our suffering apart for a special work of grace in our lives.

When I was a lad, my father was driving to the school where he taught English when he was run off the road, down a steep embankment, and into a swollen river. A non-swimmer, he praised the Lord for his survival. As the car was pulled out of the water and drained, Dad found his Bible on the front seat open to Isaiah 43. Verse two was underlined from his days in college. The first part of that verse was God's assurance to him, "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee. . . ."

Twenty years later, when I was a young father, Dad brought that old water-damaged Bible to the hospital the night my wife and daughter were nearly killed in a house fire. Without comment, perfectly making the point of the hymn, Dad handed me the open Bible while I read those words and the rest of the verse, "when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." The promise was clear; for those "who for refuge to Jesus have fled" there is no eternal threat of suffering.

No doubt there are *Frontline* readers who have been or will be called to go through deep waters where it seems the rivers of sorrow shall surely overflow. Others have or will find their pathway lies through the fiery trial. If you are among them, remember the truth of the old hymn. His "grace all sufficient, shall be thy supply." He "will be with thee thy trials to bless, and sanctify to thee thy deepest distress."



DR. JOHN C. VAUGHN

What's on the Web

Bob Whitmore

One of the weekly e-mail newsletters I receive is from *Christian History* (www.christianhistory.com) magazine. About this time last year one of the newsletters highlighted the life of Phillis Wheatley. According to Elesha Coffman, assistant editor of *Christian History* and the newsletter's author, she wrote about Phillis Wheatley because February is Black History month, and last year CBS chose to produce a TV series about a supposed illicit relationship between Thomas Jefferson and one of his female slaves. Coffman said that CBS would have done better if they had produced a program about Phillis Wheatley. I agree.

Phillis was only about seven years old, Coffman says, when she was brought to America, where Bostonian John Wheatley bought her in 1760 to serve his wife. The Wheatleys saw to Phillis's secular and religious education. She proved to be a good student and began writing poetry at age 13. One of her poems was published in 1767, and later a British publisher produced a collection of her work. Many of her poems celebrated Christian themes.

Although she was a slave, Phillis found some good in her situation. In her poem "On Being Brought from Africa to America" she wrote:

"Twas mercy brought me
from my pagan land,
Taught my beknighted soul
to understand
That there's a God,
that there's a Savior too:
Once I redemption
neither sought nor knew.
Some view our sable race
with scornful eye,
"Their color is a diabolic dye."
Remember Christians:
Negroes, black as Cain,
May be refin'd,
and join th' angelic train.

The Wheatleys eventually gave Phillis her freedom, but from all outward appearances her adult life was not a happy one. Coffman says that Phillis had an unhappy marriage, and both of her children died young. Phillis herself died penniless at the age of 31.

You can read more about this remarkable Christian lady, as well as the text of her poems, at <http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~rbear/Wheatley.html>. If this doesn't work—and it usually doesn't—go to <http://darkwing.uoregon.edu> and search on "Wheatley."

In the September/October 2000 column I briefly mentioned The Baptist Board web site (www.baptistboard.com). On October 21 I received an e-mail from *Frontline* reader Keith Robertsson, a moderator for a couple of The Baptist Board's discussion forums, informing me that my information was outdated and that what I had reviewed was only a beta version. The site went live on July 1, 2000, Robertsson says, and he thinks our readers should take another look.

The last issue of *Frontline* contained an article about Seventh-day Adventism ("Adventists at 33,000 Feet" by Doug Kutilek). For more information about the SDAs, see "Seventh-day Adventism—What You Should Know" at www.sdaoutreach.org. The site examines many of the SDA beliefs, and among "materials & resources" listed are books, articles, and even a videocassette. You can also listen to RealAudio messages and read testimonies from former Adventists.

If you have a favorite web site you would like to share with other *Frontline* readers, e-mail us at fbfline@aol.com. Perhaps we can discuss it in a future column.

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The Providential Plymouth

Franklin S. Hall

Twice that week “Old Betsy,” my station wagon, had failed to start when I turned the key in the switch. It had started promptly when my car pool riders gave me a push, but I couldn’t keep imposing on them. So, Saturday morning I had jacked up Old Betsy, intending to remove the starter and put on a new one. Surprise, surprise! A previous owner had welded the starter housing to the crankcase. With my tools and skills I couldn’t remove or repair it.

Keeping Old Betsy running was very important to me because five people paid to ride to and from work with me, and that helped me to tithe. Being able to tithe was very important to me because I had become a Christian just a month prior. Bob, the fellow who led me to the Lord, had stressed to me how important tithing was. For ten years my finances had been in a perpetual state of disaster. Now God was helping me to get my finances straightened out, and tithing was the best way I knew to tell Him, with more than mere words, how grateful I was that He had saved me and that He was helping me to get financially solvent.

Lord, I silently prayed, what am I going to do now? You know my financial situation. I can’t afford to buy a new car, and I can’t take the risk of buying a used car. People usually get rid of a car that isn’t giving them problems. I can’t afford to buy a used car and repair big problems, too. Oh, Lord, what should I do? What can I do?

“Frank, is that you under there?”

I rolled my creeper out from under Old Betsy and looked in the direction of the sounds. “Jerry! What are you doing here? I thought you’d be in San Diego today at the boat races.” Jerry, Bill, and I had been a three-man inspection team at Douglas Aircraft Company a few months previously, and although we had gone separate ways, we still tried to stay in touch.

“Naw, my engine blew up.” He seemed apologetic. Then his face brightened. “Hey, guess who I ran into last night?” He didn’t wait for me to answer. “Bill! And guess what he’s doing now? He’s bought a car lot! He said to tell you if you ever want a good deal on a car, new or used, to come and see him.”

We exchanged a few pleasantries, and then Jerry had to go. He had to overhaul the engine in his boat, but he wanted to deliver Bill’s message before it slipped his mind.

I thanked him, but I doubt that he noticed how pleased I was. *Lord, is this the answer to my prayer? You answered so quickly! Before I prayed the answer was on the way. The door is open, so I will go through it, but please help me to know for sure if this is what You think is the best thing for me to do.*

Old Betsy started on the first try, and I drove south to

the address Jerry had given me in Long Beach. One of the salesmen told me that Bill was not there today. He was attending an auction, but he would be calling in shortly. Would I like to talk to him?

Bill was as overjoyed to talk to me as I was to him. I told him Jerry had delivered his message, and I had come down to take him up on it. He asked if I wanted a new car or a used one. I said things were tight; it would have to be a used one. “Take the gray Plymouth, Frank. That’s the best car on my lot. It’s even better than my new ones.”

I told him about the starter problems with my station wagon. “No problem. I’ve got a mechanic who can fix anything.” He gave me a very generous trade-in and set me up with car payments of only \$100 per month for fifteen months. All the problems I had thought were insurmountable had evaporated. Correction: all but one. How in the world was I going to make those \$100-per-month car payments? For some reason I wasn’t uptight about it. God had taken care of all the other very complicated problems, and it seemed reasonable that He would take care of this one, too. Was I being foolish? Was I tempting God? What exactly was happening?

On the way home I stopped at my favorite Texaco station to gas up. “Is that a new car, Frank?” Tony asked. “Jack” Jackson owned the station, and managed it through the week, but Tony was his manager on weekends.

“No, it’s two years old, Tony,” I replied, “but less than twenty thousand miles.”

“Nice!”

“Yeah, it’s nice . . . if I can get it paid for.”

Tony drew me aside. “Mr. Jackson is looking for some part-time help, Monday through Friday, six to nine P.M. He’ll be here Monday evening when you get off from work, if you’re interested.”

I shook Tony’s hand as warmly as I could. “Thanks, Tony, you’re an answer to my prayers.” The rest of the way home I silently thanked the Lord. *You are wonderful, Lord. You have taken care of everything down to the last complicated detail. I can’t believe how wonderful You are! Thank You, thank You, thank You.* I had no idea yet that God had better plans than I could even imagine.

Sunday morning my pastor stopped me. “I see you have a new car, Frank.”

“Well,” I hedged, “it isn’t exactly new. Two years old and almost 20,000 miles. But it’s in very good shape.”

“Great. I’ll get straight to the point. Would you be willing to teach a Sunday school class? I almost asked you last week, but with you driving that old station wagon. . . .

Well, I just wasn't sure you could be reliable."

Without a second's hesitation I told him I'd love to teach a Sunday school class. It wasn't until later that I began to feel uneasy. Could I handle two jobs and teach Sunday school too? My wife had some health problems and needed a lot of help from me. Could I handle all that load? Would my family suffer, my marriage deteriorate, my kids grow up resenting their dad's neglect and acting out their resentment? I tried to pray, but I don't remember what I said. All I had were unanswerable questions and vague fears that I couldn't put into intelligent words.

Monday morning when I arrived at work my heart almost stopped. There was a pink slip on my desk. My company used green slips to notify us of promotions and raises; they used a pink slip to notify us of layoffs and terminations. At least that's the way it had been as long as I had worked there. I could see myself pounding the pavement looking for work, and unpaid bills stacking up again like they had two previous times. I think I even groaned, but softly, as I realized Bill would be forced to repossess my Plymouth. How humiliating!

I picked up the pink slip as gingerly as I would a live

*I picked up
the pink slip
as gingerly
as I would a
live bomb.*

bomb. I had to read it three times before I could believe what I was seeing: it was a \$100-a-month raise! Later my boss explained that the previous week *Aviation Week* magazine had run an article comparing the pay scales of all the major aircraft companies, and my company was near the bottom of the list. The board of directors had held an emergency meeting and decided to give a raise to key people in each department to bring them up to the industry average.

"But why tell us with a pink slip?" I asked my boss. "You scared the jabbers

out of me!"

"We always use pink slips to notify people of personnel actions that are not scheduled and not explained in the employee handbook."

I loved that Plymouth. I drove it for almost two years and never had to spend a penny on it other than for gas, oil, filters, polish, and one set of windshield wiper blades. What a car! But that's the way it is. When God does things, He does them right! He takes good care of His children, no matter how complicated that might be.

Franklin S. Hall is a freelance writer living in Greenville, South Carolina.



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