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FrontLine

BRINGING THE TRUTH HOME

Be Anxious for Nothing

Be Anxious for Nothing



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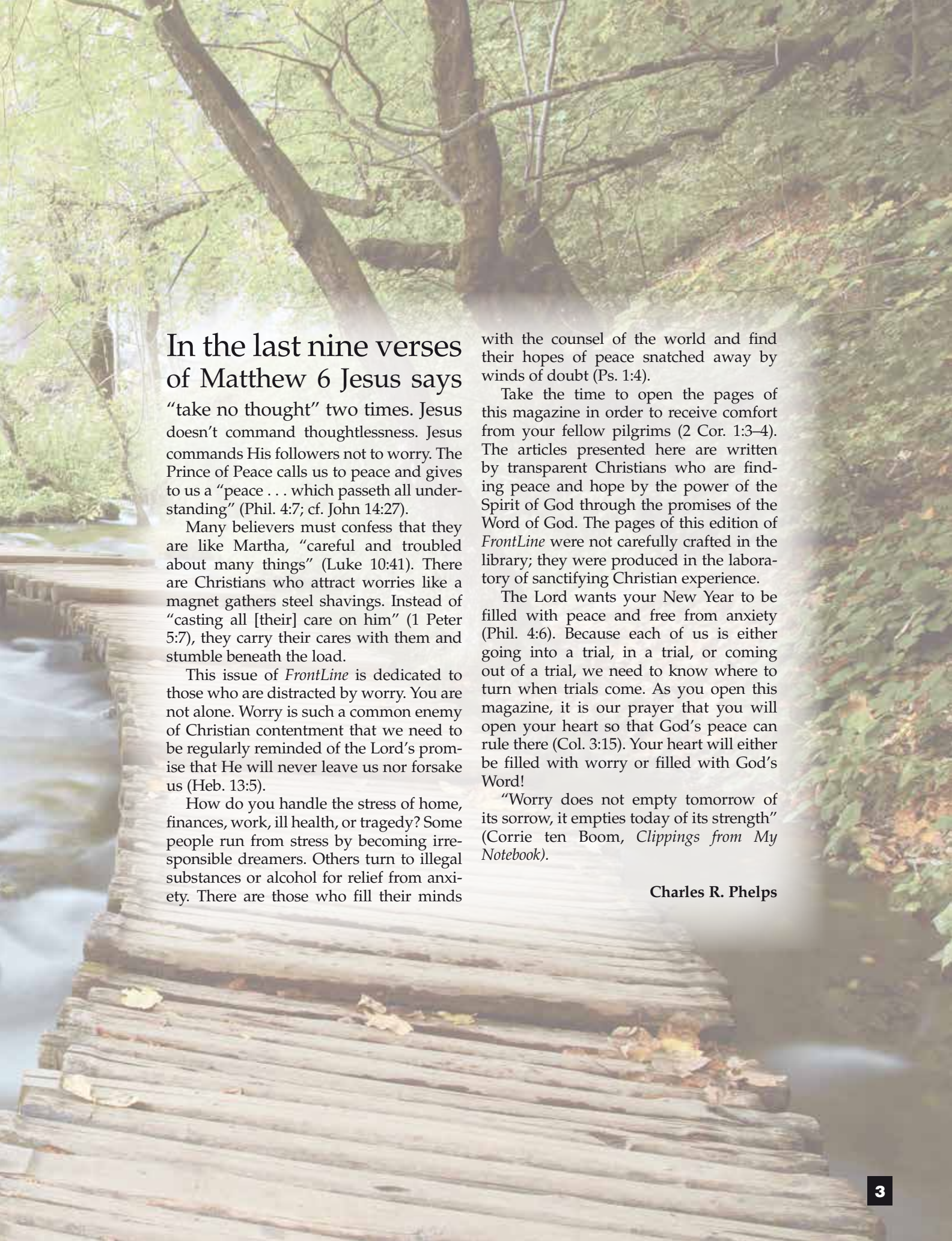
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Our sincere thanks to Dr. Chucks Phelps for coordinating this issue of *FrontLine* magazine.

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In the last nine verses of Matthew 6 Jesus says

“take no thought” two times. Jesus doesn’t command thoughtlessness. Jesus commands His followers not to worry. The Prince of Peace calls us to peace and gives to us a “peace . . . which passeth all understanding” (Phil. 4:7; cf. John 14:27).

Many believers must confess that they are like Martha, “careful and troubled about many things” (Luke 10:41). There are Christians who attract worries like a magnet gathers steel shavings. Instead of “casting all [their] care on him” (1 Peter 5:7), they carry their cares with them and stumble beneath the load.

This issue of *FrontLine* is dedicated to those who are distracted by worry. You are not alone. Worry is such a common enemy of Christian contentment that we need to be regularly reminded of the Lord’s promise that He will never leave us nor forsake us (Heb. 13:5).

How do you handle the stress of home, finances, work, ill health, or tragedy? Some people run from stress by becoming irresponsible dreamers. Others turn to illegal substances or alcohol for relief from anxiety. There are those who fill their minds

with the counsel of the world and find their hopes of peace snatched away by winds of doubt (Ps. 1:4).

Take the time to open the pages of this magazine in order to receive comfort from your fellow pilgrims (2 Cor. 1:3–4). The articles presented here are written by transparent Christians who are finding peace and hope by the power of the Spirit of God through the promises of the Word of God. The pages of this edition of *FrontLine* were not carefully crafted in the library; they were produced in the laboratory of sanctifying Christian experience.

The Lord wants your New Year to be filled with peace and free from anxiety (Phil. 4:6). Because each of us is either going into a trial, in a trial, or coming out of a trial, we need to know where to turn when trials come. As you open this magazine, it is our prayer that you will open your heart so that God’s peace can rule there (Col. 3:15). Your heart will either be filled with worry or filled with God’s Word!

“Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow, it empties today of its strength” (Corrie ten Boom, *Clippings from My Notebook*).

Charles R. Phelps



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I greatly appreciated the November/December 2017 issue of *FrontLine* magazine—*New World, Old Lies: Echoes from 1918*. The articles were fascinating and scholarly yet readable for a general Christian audience. I was witnessing to a man at the University of Maine at Machias the other day; during our conversation we discussed who had the right to the Land of Israel, the Jews or the Arabs. Dr. Craig Hartman's article, "The Balfour Declaration and the Obstacles to Implementation," was precisely what I needed to refute this man's error. In addition, the article by Malinda Duvall, "Terror Attacks," is a challenge to all of us to trust God to protect our children as they bear witness for Him. Oh, that God would raise up a new generation of spiritual young adults with the courage to "get the gospel out"! Thanks again for the great issue. I would love for you to dedicate a future issue of *FrontLine* magazine to the historical tenets of neo-evangelicalism and its application to our current church culture.

Pastor Antonio M. Muniz
Chaplain, Lubec Fire Department
Ridge Baptist Church
Lubec, Maine

On September 15 Dr. John Vaughn and Carol Graham were married in a small ceremony in Marietta, Georgia. Dr. Vaughn is currently in a one-year residency in Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) at Greenville Memorial Hospital, Greenville, South Carolina, completing full certification in CPE and working as a chaplain. His many years of service as the chaplain of the Greenville Police Department, his dissertation studies in chaplaincy, and his role in FBFI as the chaplain endorser are culminating in this ministry extension of the John C. Vaughn Evangelistic Association.



Pastor Thomas Overmiller (Faith Baptist Church, Corona, NY) has just released a Bible-study devotional book entitled *Think on These Things* featuring daily expository entries, some from FBFI friends such as Jim Bickel, Andrew Hudson, Bruce McAllister, Fred Moritz, and Matthew Recker. The book, both ebook and paperback, is available at Amazon (<http://a.co/8de8mpG>).



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Finding God's Grace When Your World Turns Upside Down

Saturday, July 27, 2013. I don't remember dates very well, but I will always remember July 27, 2013. On that day our church bus rolled over, killing my son Chad, my daughter-in-law Courtney, my unborn granddaughter, and Mrs. Tonya Weindorf.

On Saturday, July 27, 2013, a bus rolled over, and my world turned upside down.

I was just leaving my office when our church's big yellow school bus rolled into the church parking lot. It was full of fourth-through-sixth-grade campers returning home, so I was not shocked by their screams. During my nine years in youth work (early in my ministry), I had become accustomed to noisy children. But this noise was different. It was so different that I sent a text to my son Chad, the youth pastor of our church. The text is still on my phone: "Is all ok w/ junior bus?"

As I walked out of the church building, a man ran to speak to me. "Pastor, the other bus has been in an accident at Keystone and 465."

I jumped into my Jeep and headed to the scene of the accident. I had no idea that my life would never be the same.

Chris, a US Marshal and a member of the youth staff, had travelled with our group to camp. When I arrived at the scene, he put his arm around me and led me to a private place—away from the ambulances, away from the rescue-copters, away from the fire trucks, away from the noise and the gruesome scene. Then he said it: "Pastor, Chad didn't make it." While I was trying to absorb what I had just heard, he added, "Courtney didn't make it either."

I asked if the rescue workers were aware that Courtney was seven months along (hoping that the baby could be saved). Chris assured me that they knew about the baby.

Then my son Caleb came to me, carrying my grandson Chase. Chase had been on the bus when it had rolled over. Courtney somehow had been able to push him to safety. Chase's little face was bruised, and his eyes were filled with uncertainty. Caleb had witnessed the accident, had stopped the vehicle he was driving, had run across the busy parkway, and had scooped Chase up in his arms. Chase had no idea his parents had been taken from him. He was only twenty-one months old.

Soon my wife, daughter, and youngest son arrived at the scene. My mouth was dry; my mind was scrambled; my heart was filled with anxiety.

How does a Christian move from trauma to tranquility? Here are a few Scripture-based thoughts that helped bring calm to my crisis.

Be willing to accept the help that others offer. God knows how to dispatch His angels (Heb. 1:13–14). He will send His servants to support you when your world is falling apart (Exod. 17:10–12). Our family was helped by first responders, health-care professionals, and counselors who seemed to drop from the sky. There were phone calls, e-mails, text messages, and cards from friends and strangers. Fast-food-restaurant workers offered meals; hotel managers offered rooms; members of churches in our area volunteered to provide a funeral dinner; and lifelong friends from far away found ways to be near. Then-governor Mike Pence even came to speak to our church.

I've been in pastoral ministry for over thirty years. I have often been comfortable giving assistance and seldom comfortable receiving it, but I have learned that there are some trials I cannot handle alone.

Remember to count your blessings. David reminded his soul to, "Bless the LORD" and not to "forget . . . all his benefits" (Ps. 103:2)! It's easy to count your blessings in the good times. It is essential to count your blessings in the rough times. My wife, Linda, and I reminded each other that even David risked great loss when he cried after the death of his son, Absalom, forgetting those who were faithful to him (2 Sam. 18:33–19:7). Make a conscious effort to remember the goodness of the Lord.

Be responsible to do the work that God has called you to do. When I assessed how much I had lost and began to grieve that I would never see my loved ones again on this earth, I wanted to dig a pit and crawl into it. Then I remembered how God had met with Elijah when the prophet had been on the run and had asked him, "What doest thou here?" (1 Kings 19:9, 13). God had restored Elijah's spirit by giving Elijah an assignment (1 Kings 19:16–18).

It is tempting to hide your head under a pillow when the storms come crashing down, but your troubles will be waiting for you when you come out from hid-



ing, and your responsibilities will have compounded. Irresponsibility leads to greater anxiety.

Be still and listen for God to speak. The Spirit of God takes the Word of God that is hidden in our hearts during times of peace and brings it to our memory during times of pain. On Sunday, July 14, 2013, I prepared to go to church. As I stepped across the room, the Spirit of God reminded me of 1 Corinthians 15:19–20: “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.” At that time that passage touched my trembling heart.

“Be still, and know that I am God” (Ps. 46:10) is good counsel for every day, but it is critical counsel when your world is turned upside down.

Gather with God’s people and anticipate God’s grace. It’s often hard to see people when your heart is filled with pain. Some people find it hard to go to church. I am no exception.

During the months that followed the deaths of our children, it seemed that every hymn our congregation sang was filled with truth that touched my heart. I found myself weeping when the choir sang and feeling overcome when we bowed to pray. Yet God’s grace was present in unusual ways during church services. For weeks Linda and I would say, “The only time we really feel normal is when we are at church.”

Psalms 122:1 states, “I was glad when they said unto me; Let us go into the house of the LORD.” I wasn’t always glad to go, but I was always glad that I went. I learned what Asaph meant when he said, “I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I” (Ps. 73:17). God uses “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” (Eph. 5:19) to strengthen us in

our sorrows and to teach us through our trials. Those who gather on the Lord’s Day have stories of survival to share with us when we are struggling. There are times when the few words shared by a fellow believer in the foyer bolster faith enough for us to survive until the next Sunday (Heb. 10:25).

Be honest about your hurts. When your world is turned upside-down, you can play the hero and pretend that everything is fine, but such play-acting is not helpful. The Spirit of God does not say that we cannot sorrow, but rather that our sorrow is not like the sorrow of those who have no hope (1 Thess. 4:13). Our Great High Priest carried our burdens willingly to the cross and was honest enough to ask the Father to let the cup pass from Him (Matt. 26:39). To be honest, when I think about what happened when our church bus flipped, it is still very painful. It’s so good to know the One who “hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows” (Isa. 53:4).

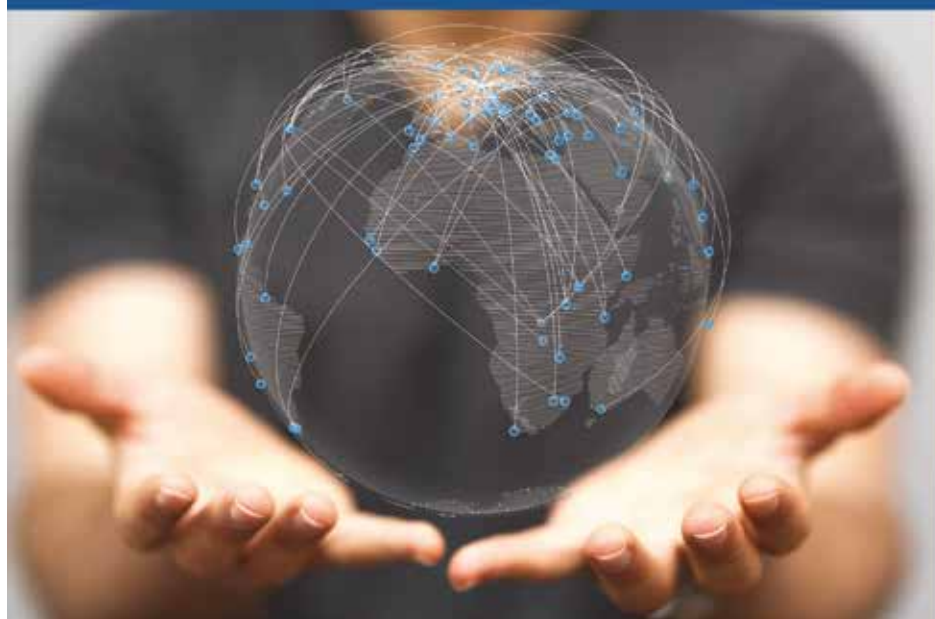
Let your tragedy become an opportunity. My son Chad loved to put words together in new and meaningful ways. For example, our youth group has an annual “Intro-Nally” (a word Chad coined) to celebrate graduation and to welcome seventh graders. After the bus accident, our church minted a new word—“Tragi-tunity.”

The comfort that God supplies for our struggles is sufficient for us to be servants to others when they struggle (2 Cor. 1:4). As God shows you how to get through your trial, He will train you to lead others through theirs.

Dr. Chuck Phelps serves as pastor of Colonial Hills Baptist Church, Indianapolis, Indiana, and as vice president of BFI.



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Equipping Teens to Fight Anxiety

Every January I preach a series of messages titled “Ask the Youth Pastor” on Wednesday nights. During this series the teens can ask me any question they want by submitting their questions to me ahead of time using an anonymous online portal. When I started the series, I was surprised by the number-one topic: numerous questions about anxiety and depression. Here are just a handful of the related questions I have received:

- “I’m afraid of my thoughts right now. Sometimes taking my own life doesn’t feel like such a bad idea. I don’t want to think like this. What do I do?”
- “Sometimes I don’t feel like coming to church, because when I do nobody will talk to me. What do I do?”
- “I feel so lonely right now. I just want a friend to talk to. Does God care about me?”
- “My friend often talks about how much she hates her life. How can I help her?”

Does it surprise you when the teenagers in your church struggle with anxiety and depression? I hope not. Many great men and women battled this same issue. Henry Longfellow said, “Some must lead, and some must follow, but all have feet of clay.”

A Common Problem

It would be nice to think that we as Christians would never live in the valley of depression, anxiety, or discouragement, but as we look through the pages of Scripture, we see that many of the great saints had times of despair.

- **David.** “Save me, O God; for the waters are come in unto my soul” (Ps. 69:1).
- **Job.** “When I lie down, I say, When shall I arise, and the night be gone? and I am full of tossings to and fro unto the dawning of the day” (Job 7:4).
- **Jeremiah.** “Woe is me for my hurt! my wound is grievous” (Jer. 10:19).

- **Paul.** “And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling” (1 Cor. 2:3).

Unfortunately, there appears to be a stigma associated with anxiety and depression in our churches. Many teenagers who struggle with anxiety and depression keep it to themselves due to embarrassment—or worse, because they assume their church can’t help them. In fact, a Barna study revealed that nearly one-fifth of young adults leave the church because their faith “does not help with depression or other emotional problems” they experience. This is a tragedy!

The National Institute of Mental Health indicates that more than sixteen million people experienced depression in 2012, and most of those were people between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five. If the church can’t provide answers and help for this group, then who can? Though many in the church may stigmatize depression and anxiety in teenagers, we must commit ourselves to taking a serious look at this.

So, what does anxiety look like? It looks different in every teen. It may look like the junior-high girl who fights with her parents at home simply because she is overwhelmed, fearful, and still unable to express her emotions. It may look like the senior-high boy who worries constantly about being accepted by his peers. Teenagers may wash their hands constantly or obsess over college and all the grades that lead to that decision. They may stress over excellence, fearing that what they do will never measure up. In a teenager, anxiety, from an emotional standpoint, can look like withdrawal, sadness, depression, obsessive fear, or even anger.

In most cases anxiety is caused by an immature thought life. In our fallen state we are all prone to negative thoughts that run through our minds almost continually: a disparaging play-by-play commentary that ridicules not only our actions but the very thoughts we have. This is especially true in the minds of teenagers. Objectively, a teenager may have fewer stressors, but he or she has a harder time dealing with them because of emotional immaturity.

A teenager who has been cut from a ball team or left on the bench may think, “Coach just doesn’t like me.” A teenager who is left alone at the lunch table may think, “I have no real friends; everyone thinks I’m a loser.” A teenager who struggles in a class may think, “How am I supposed to choose a career when I’m not good at anything?”

When these immature, negative thoughts are permitted to continue unchecked, anxious teenagers are at risk of reaching harmful and irrational conclusions about themselves. Little by little, the truth they are learning at home or church can be whittled away by false assumptions they may never voice out loud. A teen who hasn’t learned to beat back self-deprecating falsehoods might find his or her thoughts spiraling downward to some dark places.

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Talking Back

To confront anxiety head on, teenagers need to learn to “talk back” to these negative thoughts with truth. Paul urged the Corinthians: “[Cast] down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and [bring] into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5). Through this and other passages, God urges them (and us) to safeguard the quality of their (and our) thought life. All teenagers need to be reminded daily that even when they are in the lowest state and the youngest station in life, God cares for His children. Knowing this, we can cast all our cares on Him (1 Pet. 5:6–7).

For teenagers to learn to talk back to negative thoughts with truth, they must learn to talk to you. This can be difficult. One of the worst effects of a depressed spirit is the desire to separate from others. Many teenagers who become discouraged tend to develop an “I’m all done” or a “nobody understands” mentality. Teenagers can be excellent in covering up their anxiety. Yet the fellowship of the church is vitally important. Hebrews 10:25 tells us why we are to be at church: “Exhorting one another”! If you are working with teens, you are not there to be a game-show host; you are there to exhort them to righteous living. Those who work with them must work hard to maintain open lines of communication.

Someone wisely said, “Teenagers don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” Reassure your teenager, through your willingness to listen, that he or she can be open and honest with you. Even when God first appeared to a depressed Elijah in 1 Kings 19, He didn’t start by telling him, “Stop it.” Instead, He let Elijah rest and gave him refreshment (1 Kings 19:5–8). When we are depressed, God will often deal with the symptoms and the source before He deals with the problem. Why? So that we may be in a position to listen more clearly. Those who work with teenagers need to remember to stop talking and start listening.

Philippians 4:8 must become the litmus test for all our thoughts. When your teen is in despair, encourage him or her to look at this verse from Paul and see whether his or her thoughts pass his test. When I consider what I am telling myself right now: Is it true? Is it honorable? Is it right? What is a pure, unbiased way of looking at this? What would be an excellent or praiseworthy way of dealing with this?

Healthy, lasting trust in God flows from the life of one who knows God’s truth. If you are going to work with teens, you must be willing to deal with truth. Teach truth to the teenagers in your youth group so that when anxiety comes, they can confront that lie with God’s Word.

Caleb Phelps (BA, MA) serves as youth pastor at Crosspointe Baptist Church in Indianapolis, Indiana. He is a frequent speaker for junior and teen camps. You can follow his writings at pursuingthepursuer.org.



Change. The very word evokes excitement, dread, anticipation, fear, grief, joy. Regardless of our age, marital status, or social setting, regardless of our penchant for adventure or our comfort level with routines, the same is true for all of us—change happens.

Sadly, many of us treat change with a passive approach. We feel that the change was “inflicted upon us.” We say, “Change happens. There’s nothing I can do about it.” But there *is* something we can do! When change happens, we can choose to allow the change to change us for the better. I

likely find them similar to our own possible reactions when changes come our way.

Objection 1: “Who am I?” (Exod. 3:11).

Answer 1: “Certainly I will be with thee” (Exod. 3:12).

One thing to remember here is that Moses, undoubtedly trained and taught during his time in the palace by some of Egypt’s most scholarly educators, now tended sheep—and they weren’t even his! They belonged to his father-in law. (See Exod. 3:1.) This was *not* a step *up* on the social ladder. He had moved in the wrong direction, and his opinion of himself was most likely pretty low at this point.

Oh, friend, just because you’ve fallen doesn’t mean

that you can’t get back up. Just because you’ve made wrong—and perhaps sinful—choices doesn’t mean that you are now discarded. It’s called grace. And it’s both sufficient and amazing! (See 2 Cor. 12:9.) It is because of this grace that you can keep moving forward in your Christian walk. (See Phil. 3:13–14.)

God’s reply was confident: “Certainly I will be with thee.” Are you ready for this? In Deuteronomy 31:6, 8, and 23, in his final address to the children of Israel before his death, Moses reminded them that God would never leave them nor forsake them. He had seen it firsthand. He knew it to be true. And it’s still true today! When God entrusts us with the task of moving forward, He promises to walk with us through the changes.

Objection 2: “When . . . they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them?” (Exod. 3:13).

Answer 2: “I AM THAT I AM. . . . This is my name for ever” (Exod. 3:14–15).

God wanted Moses (and us!)

to know that He *does not* change, and that He *will not* change! This knowledge should change how we respond to the unexpected. In the midst of life’s changes, there is great comfort in the fact that God doesn’t change!

Objection 3: “But, behold, they will not believe me” (Exod. 4:1).

Answer 3: “What is that in thine hand?” (Exod. 4:2).

God then used the inanimate staff/rod that was in Moses’ hand as a visual display of His power. When change is entrusted to us—and really, on any given day, at any given time—people should see the outward display of a changed life. This isn’t about just doing or saying “the



Choosing to Change When Change Happens

Brenda Strohbehn Henderson

believe that this choice begins with right thoughts.

Philippians 4:8 tells us to think on “whatsoever things are true.” What is true is that this thing—this change—happened. God didn’t withhold something or someone from you because He is mean. God didn’t stop loving you. God entrusted this change (trial, blessing, disappointment, gift, heartache, loss) to you. View it as an honor, a privilege—an assignment, even. God’s compassionate, loving, caring, wisdom-filled heart caused Him to choose *you* as the recipient of this change.

When Moses first talked with God at the burning bush, Moses objected five times and questioned God regarding the task that God was entrusting to him. Let’s look at those objections (and God’s answers), because we will most

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Caring until Death Parts Us

The Ministry of Caregiving
for Loved Ones

As you begin a new year and review an old one, what significant events touched your life? In 2017 God brought to fulfillment a childhood calling when He called my mother home on September 28. Caregiving was an example that my mother had lived before me. It was natural for me to care for both my husband and my mom after watching her care for my grandmother when I was a child, her mother when I was in college, and her father when I was teaching in a Christian school.

God's Promises Do Not Change

Each time death touched our family, it was different, yet God's promises were always the same. Death was not something I had learned to fear because my parents did "not hide [God's law] from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done . . . That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments" (Ps. 78:4, 7). As I review my caregiving for my husband, who died from brain cancer, and my mother, who died from dementia, I can testify that you do not need to be anxious when you care for someone facing death. Caring for Mom was a privilege as I sought to obey God and honor my mother (Exod. 20:12) by His grace. *God's grace is a custom-fitted gift that is always sufficient*, producing peace beyond your understanding that keeps "your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:7).

"A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps" (Prov. 16:9). God's ways are not always our ways. I learned this critical principle during my first role as a caregiver. My husband and I thought we would care for our parents together. Finding Steve unconscious with repeating seizures and being informed that he had a brain tumor made

me do some deep soul-searching. Facing death forces you to evaluate life's priorities. As he and I discussed the battle that we would ultimately lose, I knew that I would have to live without the love of my life. I had to acknowledge that my life was not about me; it was about what God wanted to do with our lives and what Steve needed for his remaining life. People asked us, "Why?" when they saw the sacrifices we were forced to make. We had no answers to their questions other than that God felt our journey of grace could be used to touch lives and glorify Him. We learned to focus on trusting God, depending on His grace and strength. We came to this conclusion: *our mission was to use our daily lives to the best of our abilities for God's honor and glory.* We didn't know how much time we had, but what time we had needed to be redeemed as we sought to continue to serve our Lord and others.

Your Relationship with the Lord

It is vital that caregivers have a personal relationship with the Lord, and there is a definite advantage in caring for someone who also has a personal relationship with the Lord. Caregivers will be called to watch a loved one fight, fail, hurt, cry, and sometimes even want to give in and give up, but because you are his caregiver, the Spirit's power helps you to never give in nor give up. God's Spirit cares for you and the one for whom you care.

It was not easy for my husband to face the aftermath of his awake craniotomy. Initially he wasn't able to read simple get-well cards, find the right answers on assessment tests, nor make his computer "dance," as he was known to do throughout his ministry. He had to give up his left hand, which meant he couldn't neatly write his name, and he no longer was able to play his violin. It was not easy for Mom to know that her brain was shrinking, making it gradually more difficult to remember things or accomplish the simplest tasks. In addition, Mom could *think* nouns, but not *say* nouns!

My loved ones depended on me when their strength was shaken to its core. I had to lean on God's promises, and I found that His promises are new and afresh "every morning: great is [His] faithfulness" (Lam. 3:23). Caregivers are cheerleaders. Encouragement is difficult to provide when you are tired and feeling inadequate and full of questions with no answers, but when I cried out to God or my prayer warriors prayed with me regarding specific needs, God answered, provided resources, and uplifted me to keep keeping on. When I felt ignorant, He opened my mind. When I was exhausted, He

allowed me the rest I needed, giving volunteers or family members to share caregiving, quieting my soul to be still so I could look to Him alone and "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of [my] Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18a). I learned to "take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself" (Matt. 6:34).

Never Alone

During both journeys of grace, people told me they could never care for a loved one as I did. Though Mom had lived a godly example of caregiving before me, I felt sorely inadequate to care for my husband all alone, but God reminded me that He would never leave me nor forsake me (Heb. 13:5). I wouldn't care for Steve alone; God and I would do this together. God gave me all the necessary resources to care for Steve in a way that glorified Him. Christians who have the hope that the world lacks should not consider the role of caregiver beyond their ability. *God's grace enables His children to accomplish what seems impossible.* He delights when His children trust and obey. If your family plans to care for one another, God will provide the finances, allow you to endure sacrifices, teach you what you need to know, give you physical strength, make you a blessing, and draw you closer to Him.

Caregiving is an experience that will enrich your life with incredible blessings. During any journey of grace, you make memories that you'll cherish the rest of your lifetime.

Death stings when it separates, but *that which we cherish can never be lost.* You'll have the satisfaction of knowing that you gave all that you could to your loved one. The sigh of satisfaction from your loving touch, the sparkle in their eyes, their smile or laughter when you do something that brings them pleasure, the tears shared concerning life's pressures as you pray together, trusting and depending on the Lord and then seeing the victories and blessings that He gives will make you want to burst forth with praise to God, from whom all blessings flow!

If God opens an opportunity for you to be a caregiver, be willing to consider accepting the role as a God-given blessing. No institution can duplicate your love, your insight, your relationship with those closest to your heart. Caregiving is more than caring for a person's body; it's caring for a whole person—physically, emotionally, mentally, socially, and spiritually. Caregiving puts you through daily experiences testing your patience, revealing your weaknesses, driving you to your

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Facing the Crises and Trials of Sickness

God's Sufficient Grace in Our Weakness

And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong (2 Cor. 12:9–10).

The Bible records several accounts of people who faced serious illness. God permitted Satan to attack Job's wealth, family, and, ultimately, his health (Job 1:13–2:6). Through that ordeal Job trusted the Lord (Job 1:20–22; 2:10), and he knew God's greater blessing in the end of the trial (Job 42:10–12).

We are told of Elisha's terminal illness (2 Kings 13:14, 20). Hezekiah prayed to the Lord, and God healed him and extended his life by fifteen years (2 Kings 20:1–11; Isa. 38).

Our Lord Jesus healed the sick (Matt. 8:14–15) and even raised some from death (John 11:39–44).

Paul testifies that God enabled him to live with a physical ailment of satanic origin and continue to serve (2 Cor. 12:9–10).

We learn how biblical personalities could trust God in physical crises. Scripture teaches us principles for facing

the serious illnesses that come into our lives. We must learn and apply those lessons as we face those trials.

Sickness and the Curse of Sin

We must begin with the understanding that sickness and death are the result of sin's curse.

God created a perfect world that was "very good" (Gen. 1:31). Death was not part of the original creation order. God forbade Adam to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, warning him "in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:17).

Adam sinned against God and "by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom. 5:12). Spiritual death (Eph. 2:1–3) and physical death entered the world because of sin. We know that the sickness that leads to death is part of that curse. We experience illnesses today because of sin.

Sickness and Satan's Attack

The Bible reveals that sometimes God permitted Satan to attack believers' bodies with sickness. God permitted Job to endure such an attack (Job 1:6–12; 2:6). Paul lived with

a physical ailment—"a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan" (2 Cor. 12:7). Paul testified that he found God's grace sufficient in his weakness (2 Cor. 12:9-10).

Sickness and Judgment for Sin—1 Corinthians 11

Scripture teaches that on occasion God allows believers to experience illness (and even death) because they tolerate sin in their lives. Paul remonstrated with the Corinthian church concerning their misuse of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:17-34). After warning them not to observe the ordinance in an unworthy manner, he said, "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep" (v. 30). John declares, "There is a sin unto death" (1 John 5:16).

Sickness and the Believer's Attitude

Scripture also describes a godly attitude when we face a health crisis.

Pray for healing. It seems that it is always proper to pray for healing. Hezekiah prayed, and God healed him (Isa. 38:1-22). Paul prayed for healing, and God chose to sustain him through his ailment instead of healing him (2 Cor. 12:9-10).

James teaches us to pray for healing. He describes a situation when it is proper to call for church elders to pray for one in a case of serious illness. In some cases, the afflicted person is sick because of personal sin. James says,

Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much (James 5:14-16).

Whatever other conclusions may be drawn from this passage, we certainly understand that it is proper to pray for healing and for fellow Christians when they face illnesses. His last admonition is, "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:16).

Trust the Lord. When Job was suffering physical illness and grieving over the loss of his children, he revealed a godly attitude with several statements. He could say, "The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21). He said again, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (Job 13:15). Again he expressed his confidence in God, saying, "But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold" (Job 23:10).

Paul could trust the Lord and say,

And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong (2 Cor. 12:9-10).

If you are aware of sin, confess it. We must remember that Paul told the Corinthians that some of them were afflicted because of sin (1 Cor. 11:30). James instructs us to confess our trespasses¹ and to pray for healing. He affirms that God will both forgive sin and heal (James 5:16).

The Removal of Sickness

Scripture gives us the glorious prospect that in eternity illness will be abolished. The entire creation awaits the new day when believers receive their glorified bodies. Paul states,

For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body (Rom. 8:22-23).

Scripture promises that in the new heaven and the new earth "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Rev. 21:4).

In heaven the entire curse will be lifted: "And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him" (Rev. 22:3).

We eagerly anticipate eternity with our Lord when tears, death, sorrow, crying, and pain will be eradicated.

Conclusion

These are some of the biblical principles to apply when facing illness. It is comforting to know that these illnesses are not a surprise to our God and that He has sovereign purposes for the events He allows into our lives. We can trust Him when we face sickness. We can see His gracious purposes in our lives.

Ann Hasseltine Judson reflected on this when death took her son. On May 7, 1816, she wrote,

Death, regardless of our lonely situation, has entered our dwelling and made one of the happiest families wretched. Our little Roger Williams, our only little darling boy, was three days ago laid in the silent grave. Eight months we enjoyed the precious little gift, in which he had so completely entwined himself around his parents' hearts, that his existence seemed necessary to their own. But God has taught us by afflictions, what we would not learn by mercies.²

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¹ The Greek word here is *παρὰπτώματα*—"transgression" or "sin."

² James D. Knowles, *Memoir of Ann H. Judson* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1835), 150. Quoted in E. Wayne Thompson and David L. Cummins, *This Day in Baptist History* (Greenville: Bob Jones University Press, 1993), 441.

God's Grace for "Adulthood"

I'm not struggling with a terminal illness, mourning the death of a loved one, or dealing with a lifelong handicap. I'm not unemployed or about to lose my home. I'm not estranged from my mother or father, suffering through an abusive situation, or struggling with a rebellious child. In His sovereignty, God hasn't allowed me to experience any of these difficult trials at this time in my life.

Instead, as a twenty-seven-year-old who is recently married, a first-time father, an employee, and a seminary student, I'm struggling to suppress my frustration while rocking my baby to sleep at two AM. I'm attempting to find time to finish homework without neglecting my wife and child. I'm bumbling through the process of budgeting our finances each month.

In other words, I'm dealing with normal life, or as people my age sometimes put it, I'm "adulthood." Although my life isn't as crazy or stressful as that of others, the combination of new responsibilities with minimal experience is bound to invoke thoughts of anxiety and worry: *How will I*

provide for my family? How do I effectively manage my finances? What if I fail as a parent?

Perhaps you are in this season of life. Do God's sovereignty and grace extend to these normal, daily anxieties? Do they extend to "adulthood"?

Psalms 94:19 says, "In the multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul." Since I'm still in the thick of it, I can't tell you how to master your early adult years, but I hope by God's grace, I can encourage you with three scriptural "comforts" that have delighted my soul during the normal anxieties of life.

Embrace the Season

Anxiety during this season of life can have multiple sources. Discontentment is a big one. Perhaps life isn't as thrilling as you were expecting it to be. Perhaps the monotony of paying bills, working in a cubicle, or staying home with a screaming infant has sapped you of that youthful vigor you're supposed to have. Social media displays the exciting lives of other young couples as they explore foreign countries or drive around in their expensive cars. *Why don't I get paid as much as Dave when he's three years younger*

than I am? Why can't I be the perfect mom like Stephanie? In a world of "shareable" moments, your life just doesn't seem that "shareable." Comparison breeds discontentment; discontentment breeds anxiety.

Consider the passage from which this issue draws its title. In Philippians 4:6–7, Paul exhorts us to "be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." It's that "thanksgiving" part that is particularly difficult, but it is the key to embracing this season of your life. What if the things that produce anxiety in your heart become the subject of your thanksgiving?

Are you anxious about it? Try thanking God for it. Thank God for your marriage that reveals your selfishness. Thank God for the child that you have no clue how to raise. Thank God for the job that constantly exposes your inadequacy and inexperience. Thank God for your ratty apartment with the noisy neighbors.

This isn't a grit-your-teeth-and-stick-it-out contentment. This isn't a contentment that simply "deals with it" until more exciting seasons of life come. True contentment springs from two truths: first, God is working *all* things for your good, namely, your conformity into the image of His Son. Yes, even these day-to-day responsibilities are for your Christlikeness: otherwise, God wouldn't have allowed them into your life. Second, Scripture elevates these daily responsibilities (marriage, employment, parenthood, ministry) to a place of great import—far greater than traveling the world or driving nice cars. This season is not a gloomy hiatus before your ideal life begins. In fact, it is within the tedious, daily responsibilities and relationships of life that you will "adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour" (Titus 2:1–10).

A contentment that recognizes God's sanctifying purpose and gospel-adorning design will squelch anxiety. Thank God for what you worry about. The more you thank Him, the more your perspective begins to change. Soon you will be able to say with Paul, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content" (Phil. 4:11).

Don't worry; give thanks.

Remember the Father

The anxieties of this season can tend to drown out joy in Christ. Being newly married brings new anxieties, as Paul admits that the one who is married "careth for the things that are of the world" (1 Cor. 7:33). The need for food and clothing can bring great anxiety (Matt. 6:25–34). In fact, Jesus said that it's the "cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches" that can "choke the word" (Mark 4:19). One of the greatest dangers to your Christian joy is the overabundance of earthly responsibilities.

When you're failing at "adulting," it's consoling to know that you're still a child, and your heavenly Father is providing for you. In Matthew 6:25–34, Jesus gently tells us not worry about food and clothing because your Father knows that you need them all (v. 32). He is a Father who gives "good things to them that ask him" (Matt. 7:11). "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and

cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17).

The long and short of it is this: it's illogical for a child of God to worry. Unlike the lost who don't have God as their Father, we have a heavenly Father who knows our every need and loves to provide for us. Yes, anxiety is natural, but Jesus doesn't accept that excuse. His response is simple: *don't do it*—it makes no sense. To worry is to live as if you were Fatherless. As an adult, you may think that it's all up to you now, but no matter how old you get or how many responsibilities you have, you will never cease being a child of a very generous and loving Father.

Don't worry; trust your Father.

Access the Storehouse

Contentment in this season and childlike faith in your Father do not remove responsibility from your plate. I don't want to advocate a "let go and let God" approach to life. I am still called to manage my money wisely, parent my child lovingly, and work at my job dependably. It is this reality that often brings anxious fear into our hearts. Add to this the reality that we are incapable of accomplishing these responsibilities on our own, and it just might be enough for you to be paralyzed with anxiety or seek escape from responsibility. Solomon himself, the wisest man who ever lived, started his reign by helplessly crying out to God, "I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in" (1 Kings 3:7). Is that how you feel right now? Then remember that the God who gifted Solomon with incredible wisdom is your God too.

God generously offers a storehouse of wisdom for His children, and all we need to do is ask in faith (James 1:5). Our loving Father "giveth wisdom" and "layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous" (Prov. 2:6–7). He provides His Word, through which I can "have more understanding than all my teachers" and "understand more than the ancients" (Ps. 119:99–100). He surrounds us with fellow Christians, many of whom have greater experience and wisdom, in the body of Christ who instruct us (Titus 2:4; 2 Tim. 2:2).

This is how God gives grace, not just for "adulting" but for all of life. Do you need heavenly wisdom to know how to prioritize the responsibilities of your life, portray Christ in your marriage, or be a good steward of your finances? Find it in prayer, the Word, and the Body of Christ. Access the storehouse.

Don't Worry; Ask for Wisdom.

When faced with the normal anxieties of life, I have found that spending time thanking God, acknowledging His trustworthiness, and asking for wisdom calms the anxiety of my heart. I'm still learning, I still fail constantly, and I still find myself worrying about life, but God has given me everything I need to live this season of life for His glory.

God's grace does extend to "adulting."

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The Biblical Solution for an

A full inbox. Political news. Cell phone bills. Ever since sin came into the world, humans have had problems and been anxious over them. The Anxiety and Depression Association of America states, “Anxiety disorders are the most common mental illness in the U.S., affecting 40 million adults . . . or 18.1% of the population every year.”¹ Our lives may look much different today than they did several thousand years ago, but lest we think anxiety is a modern problem, Scripture reminds us there is “nothing new under the sun.”

Proverbs 12:25 says “Heaviness [anxiety] in the heart of man maketh it stoop,” burdening people both physically and spiritually. Physically, anxiety has the potential to cause fatigue, headaches, digestive disorders, depression, and even heart attacks.² Spiritually, anxiety saps our joy and leaves us feeling overwhelmed and discouraged in the service of our King. Fortunately for us, God has spoken to this issue in His Word, seeking to help and rebuke twenty-first-century believers just as He did first-century believers.

The Definition of Anxiety

The word “anxiety” does not appear in the King James Version of the Bible, but the concept is clearly taught. Most often the Greek word *merimnao*, meaning “anxiety,” shows up as “fear,” “care/careful,” or “take thought.” Anxiety is fear, but not just any fear. Anxiety is fear that results from the wrong kind of thinking about our problems, and most often from dwelling on the uncertainty of the future. Anxiety focuses on what might happen or will happen. For example, when a car cuts into your lane and you slam on the brakes, you’re probably afraid but not anxious. If that car hits you and you begin fearing you’ll be at fault and your insurance will go up, or you lie awake at night trying to figure out how you’re going to have time to get the vehicle in the shop, or you spend the next month afraid to drive because someone else could hit you, you are anxious.

God’s Word uses *merimnao* to describe several things that have the potential to make us anxious. In the Sermon on the Mount Christ points out that seeking to meet the basic needs of food and clothing was enough to cause some of His followers to lose sleep (Matt. 6:25–32). Not only that, physical and spiritual care for other people can cause anxiety. Paul said of Epaphroditus that he knew no one like him “who will naturally care for [the Philippians] state” (Phil. 2:20). One of the reasons Paul preferred singleness over marriage was because “he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife” (1 Cor. 7:33–34). However, often the things that make us anxious are less noble, such as the desire to get rich or striving to enjoy the pleasures of life (Luke 8:14). Even ministry has the potential to cause anxiety. Paul acknowledged that one of the burdens weighing him down was “the care of all the churches” (2 Cor. 11:28). Martha became frustrated with her sister for not helping her serve, to which Christ responded “Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things.”

Reading this list, we’re confronted with the fact that a certain degree of concern not only is appropriate for some of those items, it’s mandatory! Paul was not rebuking husbands and wives when he said marriage distracted them with the things of the world; he was simply stating reality. Epaphroditus’ concern for the Philippian believers was commendable, as was Paul’s concern for the church. So when does concern for others and the future become sinful? At what point have we crossed the line from planning to worrying? *Legitimate concern becomes sinful anxiety when we dwell on our problems or potential problems while giving little if any thought to God’s role in the problem.* Anxiety is meditation gone wrong: thinking over and over our problems but forgetting God.

The Cure for Anxiety

At its core, anxiety is unbelief. Anxiety looks at the problems of life and fails to believe Scripture’s promises of

Anxious Heart

God's provision and His care. Anxiety sees only the lost job, not the God who has promised to meet all our needs (Matt. 6:30). Anxiety is very aware of one's shortcomings while forgetting that "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13). Anxiety is overwhelmed by the weight of ministry that needs to be done, not remembering that God has told overwhelmed servants, "My grace is sufficient for thee" (2 Cor. 12:9). When our pulses quicken and our throats go dry as we dwell on our problems but forget our sovereign Provider, we are simply demonstrating that we don't really believe what God has said.

So what should we do about our anxiety? *If the heart of anxiety is unbelief, then our first step in overcoming anxiety must be faith in God.* But what are we to believe about Him? Scripture calls on us to remember in the anxious seasons of life this crucial truth: God cares for you. Christ emphasizes this point in the longest discussion on anxiety in our Bibles: the Sermon on the Mount. Here He reminds His listeners that God is concerned even for the fowls of the air and the grass of the field. If God takes care of animals and plants, won't He take care of His children? He also uses the precious word "Father" to remind His audience of the nature of God's relationship with them. Peter exhorts his readers to cast their cares on God "for he careth for you" (1 Pet. 5:7). Overcoming anxiety starts with believing God when He says in His Word that He cares for you.

This trust in God ought to naturally flow into prayer to God. Meditating on God's care should practically result in bringing our worried and anxious thoughts before the One who is concerned for us (1 Pet. 5:7). Paul told the Philippians believers to "be careful for nothing" (Phil. 4:6). His antidote for anxiety? "In every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." Paul uses three synonyms for prayer (prayer, supplication, requests) to burn home the point that addressing our anxieties means going to our God. But he also points out that doing so ought to be done with thanksgiving, confidently expecting God to act based on His

character and rejoicing by faith in the victory even before we see it. This final point is often overlooked. *Praying isn't good enough if we don't thank God for the difficulties He sends our way.* Our faith in the goodness, sovereignty, and care of God is never more obvious than when we thank Him in the midst of anxious times.

Finally, we must seek to make God's priorities our priorities. Part of the problem with anxiety is that it can often obsess over the temporal matters of life. When we find ourselves becoming anxious over things, money, or people, we know what we have our heart set on. Christ began His discussion of anxiety in the Sermon on the Mount by warning against serving money (Matt. 6:24) and concluded it by pressing His listeners to "seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33). A focus on Christ and the eternal will do much to alleviate the pressure we feel when we live as if this world is all there is.

Our study of anxiety has taken us to some of the best-known and most-loved passages of Scripture, but perhaps you find the solution given here surprisingly unspectacular. No deep secrets have been unearthed, nothing totally new has been revealed. The solution is a simple one: *trust God, pray to Him, and seek His kingdom first.* But the simplest solutions are not always easy. God calls on us in His Word to believe Him in the major battles of life as well as in the small ones, to trust His character when we don't see how things could work out, and to joyfully live our lives trusting in His good care.

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¹ <https://adaa.org/about-adaa/press-room/facts-statistics>

² <https://www.webmd.com/balance/guide/how-worrying-affects-your-body#2>

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SOUND WORDS

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

First Partaker

A Leader's Failure to Sanctify the Lord

Because ye trespassed against me among the children of Israel at the waters of Meribah-Kadesh, in the wilderness of Zin; because ye sanctified me not in the midst of the children of Israel. Deuteronomy 32:51

It is truly a fearful awakening when a spiritual leader grasps the enormity of his having failed to represent God rightly. Nadab and Abihu died by fire, and the LORD's explanation was, *I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified* (Lev. 10:3). God condemned Eli for having honored his sons above the LORD. His punishment was that not only he, but his entire line would be cut off from serving in the priesthood. *They that despise me shall be lightly esteemed*, God explained (1 Sam. 2:30). When David sinned with Bathsheba, God's chief concern seems to have been, *By this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme* (2 Sam. 12:14). And here, in his final message to Israel, Moses relates that his being excluded from entering Canaan was due mostly to his failure to sanctify the LORD when he wrongly responded to just a single people problem during the forty years in the wilderness.

These examples are recorded for our learning, not primarily as ordinary Christians, but as leaders tempted both to sin ourselves and to withhold correction from our people when they do. We may fail in the latter even more than in the former. Spurgeon once said to his congregation,

I sometimes tremble myself lest I deal too gently with some here present; and I would pray to be forgiven

when, in tenderness of heart, I have not liked to speak sharply upon evil things which I know must grieve the Spirit of God in some that are the Lord's people. I would to God you would take more care of yourselves, and watch yourselves, and do not grieve the spirit of your minister by things that are not consistent with the will of God, and the holiness of Christ. Do see to it, beloved members of this church, that you do not dishonor my Lord. Do not bring me under this great temptation to speak timidly about these things.*

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

The Puritan preacher Thomas Manton explored the nature and consequences of failing in this regard in a message on Moses' and Aaron's sin at Meribah-Kadesh. It's regrettable that the sermon lies largely undiscovered in a volume of Manton's works that doesn't appear to have been reprinted since the late nineteenth century. Entitled unremarkably, "Sermon on Deuteronomy XXXII. 51," it is a sobering assessment of what may happen to any Christian who fails to honor the Lord before others. But it is especially applicable to preachers. Limited space has required a considerable condensing of its text. The most applicable parts of it, however, are reprinted here for our prayerful consideration.

The words contain a reason why Moses and Aaron were shut out of Canaan; because of their sin at Meribah-Kadesh, or the waters of strife. Their sin is doubly expressed here; (1) *Ye trespassed against me*, (2) *Ye sanctified me not*.

The one expression seems to imply a sin of commission, *Ye trespassed against me*, that is, you disobeyed God. The other a sin of omission, *Ye sanctified me not in the eyes of the children of Israel*.

To sanctify God is to carry ourselves to him as to a God of glory and power, to fear him above all, and to love him and trust him above all. In short, to do that

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which God commands, depending upon his word and promise, by which we ascribe to him the glory of his truth, goodness, and power, as counting him worthy to be feared and trusted, whatever temptations we have to the contrary.

But they publicly dishonored God before all the people; *among the children of Israel, and in the midst of the children of Israel*. Both Moses and Aaron are charged with this sin. And being both partners in the transgression, they are both concerned in the chastisement; both are shut out of Canaan. They died, the one at Mount Hor, the other at Mount Nebo.

Doctrine: The sins of God's children may cost them dear here in this world.

I. I shall reflect on the instance in the text.

The question now is, *Wherein was Moses' sin in all this?* Some think [that it was] that Moses smote the rock, and spoke to the people. It is not said that he spoke to the rock as he is commanded to by God. He should only have spoken to the rock, not have smitten it. Others think his error was in smiting twice, when once had been enough to declare their faith and reliance on God's promise. But the scripture seems to refer us to another cause, their disobedience and unbelief, not manifested in his smiting so much as in his speaking: *They angered him also at the waters of strife, so that it went ill with Moses for their sakes; because they provoked his spirit, so that he spake unadvisedly with his lips* (Ps. 106:32, 33). Therefore the sin was impatience mingled with diffidence, and this in the sight of all the people.

1. He was in a great passion, more than was usual with him at other times, as appears by the manner of his speaking, *Ye rebels*. And also the doubling of his stroke shows the heat of his anger. Now, *the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God* (James 1:20). The passion was in itself a fault. It disturbed him so that he could not discharge that duty which was incumbent upon him in the manner that he ought to do it, with faith in God so as to display his goodness, power, and truth. He spoke in a provocation, not as became a meek and faithful servant of the Lord who desired to glorify him in the eyes of the people.

2. There was unbelief and distrust in what he said. *Must we fetch you water out of this rock?* Therefore God said, *Because ye believed me not* (Num. 20:12). They spoke as if it were impossible to fetch water out of the rock, when God had assured them of the contrary. Or if their faith in God's power was clear, perhaps they doubted of his mercy, that God would do such a thing for a murmuring and unthankful people.

3. There was scandal in what they did. In this they did not endeavor as they ought to set forth God's

glory and power in the eyes of all the people. They should have charged the rock to yield forth water, and have given the people a good example of believing and obeying God's words in their greatest straits. But, *Ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel*. That is, they did not publicly before the people show confidence in God, as became them.

This is the history. Now observe it in three things—First, The state and quality of the persons.

1. Moses was an eminent servant of the Lord, faithful in all his house. Though men be holy for the main, yet it doth not justify their failings or excuse their evil actions, as if they were not sins, nor hinder God's wrath from breaking out upon them temporally, though they be exempted from eternal condemnation; for God is no respecter of persons.

2. He was a very meek man. *Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men that were upon the face of the earth* (Num. 12:3). Now meekness is a virtue which keeps a balance in anger and avenging ourselves when we are offended, wronged, and condemned. Yet this meek man could be thus angry, *They angered him also at the waters of strife* (Ps. 106:32), and *They provoked his spirit* (v 33). In the holiest men there are relics of sin unmortified, and such weakness as they may readily fall into sin in the hour of temptation, and such sin as may cost them dear. Who would have thought his spirit should be so grieved and embittered? It is a dangerous sin to mingle our passions with God's public service.

3. He was a man greatly provoked, yet this did not exempt him from blame and correction. Though men are to be pitied who are provoked to sin, yet the provocation excuses not the sinner.

4. Both Aaron and Moses were in public offices, the magistracy and the ministry, and the highest and most eminent of their rank. The one was chief governor of Israel, the other high priest. God will spare none; yea, the higher they are, the greater are their offences, because of the influence of their example. Therefore their lot will be the harder. God will reckon with them when he passes by others.

Secondly, observe the nature of the crime.

1. It was a spiritual one. They did not sanctify God in obeying and depending upon his word before the eyes of the people. We only look to outward gross sins. But there are other sins of a more spiritual nature, such as lack of love for God and faith in Christ; or such necessary degrees of either as may enable us to honor him in the world. Few take notice of these, but God judges not as man judges. Few think distrustful thoughts, or distracting cares, or sinful fears, or immoderate sorrow are such

grievous distempers as they afterwards prove to be, till they cherish them so long that they find the grievousness of the sin in the greatness of the punishment.

2. It was a sudden occasional passion or fit of impatience. But by that we may give place to Satan and grieve the Spirit of God. Therefore we should watch against the sudden disorders of our passions and affections, otherwise we may do that in a moment, the effects of which will not be altogether blotted out by a long repentance. If we give way to excessive anger, we open a door to Satan, and give him an advantage to excite us to more evil. The work of grace may be so darkened in us that we may long miss of comfort. If we once let the fire be kindled, it will presently send up a black smoke, whereby we dishonor our profession and provoke God. And whatever just cause of provocation we have, we are to overcome and bridle our passions. For though we be provoked, we must not provoke God.

3. The sin consisted in this, that the example of their faith and obedience was somewhat obscured. We should look to this, to have a faith that will not only save ourselves, but tend to the glory of God. We may not be guilty of other men's sins. But we must have grace, not only for our own private benefit, that we may be saved, but for a more public good, that God may be glorified and others edified by our example. Now it is a great fault, especially in the eminent, if they neglect the glorifying of God in the eyes of others. Moses and Aaron should have condemned the Israelites by their own faith and ready obedience.

II. The general reasons for the chastisement

The sins of the professing or really godly are the most provoking.

1. They sin against a nearer relation, which is more than if a stranger did these things. Just as David heightens the injuries done to him: *It was not an enemy that reproached me, then I could have borne it; neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me, then I could have hid myself from him: but it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide and mine acquaintance* (Ps. 55:12, 13).

2. They sin against greater helps and advantages than others do. Such as have more knowledge of their duty: *To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin* (Jam. 4:17).

3. They sin against greater obligations. Partly from the mercies of God, and so there is more unkindness and ingratitude in their sins. The more proofs of God's love we have received, he takes it the worse at our hands. God has distinguished them

from others, and therefore they should distinguish themselves by eminence of holiness and obedience. There is a special obligation from their covenant vow. Now a people in covenant with God are faster bound to him than others, therefore their transgressions are the more heinous; as adultery is a greater crime than single fornication, because of the marriage-covenant.

4. Because of the effects of their sins.

[1.] Partly as they dishonor God more than others: *Howbeit because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die* (II Sam. 12:14), though God hath pardoned his sin. The scandalous sins of professors give great advantage to the enemies of the truth, who will be sure to make a wicked and evil use thereof. Therefore we should walk the more circumspectly and holily, lest, through our sins our profession itself be wounded as well as our souls, and the Lord's holy name be blasphemed. The honor of God is not so much concerned in the actions of the ungodly as it is in the example of great men, or of those that are eminently godly.

[2.] As they harden and justify the wicked: *Neither hath Samaria committed half of thy sins, but thou hast multiplied thine abominations more than they, and hast justified thy sisters in all thine abominations which thou hast done* (Ezek. 16:51). They do with the more pretense live in their sins, when they see the lapses and falls of the godly themselves.

5. There are special reasons why God should correct them for their sins here in the world.

[1.] To keep up the honor of his government, lest he should by forbearance seem to approve their sin, who are so near to him and dignified with so many privileges. God is the impartial judge of the world, therefore he will do right. The disorders of his people are not passed by without some mark of his displeasure for a warning to others, and that he may be known to be an holy and righteous God.

[2.] The other special reason is to show his love to his people. Because they are his people, he will reclaim them, and will not altogether lose them, whereas he lets others walk in their own ways. That sharp afflictions may proceed from love appears from that of the apostle: *Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth* (Heb. 12:6). And that it is to reclaim them appears: *But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world* (I Cor. 11:32). Being amended by our stripes we may be kept from those punishments which shall light on the wicked to all eter-

nity. So that it is an argument of his paternal love to his children and servants, when, to promote their repentance, he deals thus sharply with them.

The question now is, Wherein was Moses' sin in all this? Some think [that it was] that Moses smote the rock, and spoke to the people. It is not said that he spoke to the rock as he is commanded to by God. He should only have spoken to the rock, not have smitten it. Others think his error was in smiting twice, when once had been enough to declare their faith and reliance on God's promise. But the scripture seems to refer us to another cause, their disobedience and unbelief, not manifested in his smiting so much as in his speaking: They angered him also at the waters of strife, so that it went ill with Moses for their sakes; because they provoked his spirit, so that he spake unadvisedly with his lips (Ps. 106:32, 33). Therefore the sin was impatience mingled with diffidence, and this in the sight of all the people.

Applications


1. It informs us that God may be angry with his people. He was so with Moses: *The Lord was angry with me for your sakes* (Deut. 4:1). He was so with David. *The Lord was displeased with David for numbering the people* (I Chron. 21:7). *But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord* (II Sam. 11:27). God's anger is the offence taken, and his will to punish. Their sins are a great offence to him, a greater in some respects than the sins of others. If the ignorant world, who know him not, and are strangers to him and his grace, dishonor his name and transgress his laws, they do but according to their kind. He expects better things from you, whom he hath owned and adopted into his family, and embraced with his tenderest mercies. Others run blindfold against God; you with open eyes strike at him, therefore it is a greater offence to him, and grief to his Spirit.
2. It teaches us a lesson of circumspection and watchfulness, that we fall not into God's displeasure.

Good men may profane and pollute their best engagements for God with such excesses of passion as may be very provoking to him. Therefore Christians had need always to live with the yoke of Christ upon their necks and his bridle in their mouths. Such a strict course may be tedious at first, but use and the pleasure of holiness makes it easy. You are in danger, not only of obvious temptations, but sins that we little think of. Therefore we need always to stand upon our guard, lest the faults of an hour may cost you many days' mourning.

3. It teaches us a lesson of self-reflection. When God denies you many privileges and favors which are useful to your service, is it not because of some sin of yours which hath brought this evil upon you? Have you borne the name of God up and down in the world with honor, and sanctified him in the eyes of the people, as you ought to do? *Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins? let us search and try our ways, and turn again unto the Lord* (Lam. 3:39, 40). Surely we have no cause to complain of God.

4. It teaches us a lesson of patience and humble submission. We should look up to the hand of God in all punishments, corrections, and trials, as David did on Shimei's cursing: *Let him alone, and let him curse, for the Lord hath bidden him* (II Sam. 16:11). He looked upon God as the supreme cause, correcting him for his sins, against whom he was not to repine; not that Shimei had any command from God so to do, but was only permitted by his providence. We must not look to the stone, but to the hand that casts it; and this should breed humility and patience in us.

5. It teaches us a lesson of prayer. We must not give over the cause as hopeless, for we have to do with a good God, who aims not at our ruin, but the righting of his own glory. Moses prayed to reverse the sentence, but in this case God would not do that, to preserve the harmony of his providence; for Moses was only to lead them to the borders, but Joshua to bring them into Canaan, who was therein a type of Jesus Christ, who leads his people into the land of rest. But yet God gave him a sight, though not leave to enter; there is a mitigation.

6. It teaches us a lesson of thankfulness, because eternal mercies are sure. Whatever liberty God takes in the disposal of our temporal interests, we may still bless God for Christ and heaven. Where God gives a penitent and submissive spirit, it is a sign we shall not be condemned with the world. 

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* "The Road to Honour," *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, XXX, 645.

Bring . . . the Books

Hugh Latimer

God has no shortage of options when it comes to accomplishing His purposes upon the Earth (Isa. 46:9–11). Sixteenth-century English history shows God's use of two very different men named Hugh and Henry.

Because of his position and notoriety, Henry VIII figures prominently in any account of the times. Two volumes which, in addition to noting Henry's role, tell of the part played by Hugh Latimer are *The Life of Hugh Latimer, Bishop of Worcester* by William Gilpin (London: Charles Rivington, 1755) and *Hugh Latimer* by R. M. Carlyle and A. J. Carlyle (London: Methuen & Co., 1899). Electronic copies can be found from a number of sources on the Internet.

Gilpin's introduction of Latimer reminds us that where one starts in life is not necessarily where one ends:

We meet with nothing about Mr. Latimer worth relating, till we find him a master of the arts, in priest's orders, at Cambridge. Here his youth had been wholly employed on the divinity of the times. He read the schoolmen and the Scriptures with the same reverence, and held Thomas à Becket and the apostles in equal honour; in a word, he was a zealous papist (Gilpin, 2).

By God's grace, this was to change. "New learning" was afoot in the land, heavily influenced by the seemingly unending flow of ink from Martin Luther's pen in Germany. Among those in Cambridge reading Luther's writings was Thomas Bilney. Latimer testified of Bilney's influence on him:

He came to me afterward in my study, and desired me for God's sake to hear his confession. I did so, and to say the truth, by his confession I learned more than before in many years. So from that time forward I began to smell the word of God and forsook the school doctors and such fooleries (quoted in Carlyle, 12).

Latimer not only "smelled" the Word of God; he fed his soul on it, and over the next three decades it led him increasingly to see the doctrinal and moral errors of the Church of Rome and England and those of many of its clergy.

The monarchs above him greatly affected Hugh Latimer's circumstances. The first, Henry VIII, was an unlikely tool to do any good for heaven's kingdom.

The truth is, the king had personally no very great sympathy with the spirit of the reformers. The Roman Church had interfered with the accomplishment of his private and personal wishes, and he had thrown off its rule. . . . But in all this the keynote of Henry's actions was self-interest; his own supremacy, not the honour of God, was the idea ever before

him (Carlyle, 98–99).

As one who was passionately self-absorbed, Henry VIII was predictably unpredictable! In 1535 he appointed Hugh Latimer to the bishopric of Worcester. By 1539, however, Henry forced Latimer's resignation and imprisoned him in the Tower, where he remained until Henry's death in 1547.

Edward VI, the boy-king, succeeded Henry. He and his advisors were more in sympathy with the Reformers, and they released Hugh Latimer and many of his fellow prisoners. Latimer declined restoration to his bishopric, but he enjoyed many opportunities to preach, including at court. Latimer was a courageous preacher—whether preaching before kings or bishops or laboring men.

Gilpin, who provides numerous citations from Latimer's preaching, gives the following example against covetousness from a sermon before the king:

Great complaints there are of it, and much crying out, and much preaching; but little amendment, that I can see. Covetousness is the root of all evil. Then have at the root: out with your swords, ye preachers, and strike at the root. Stand not ticking and toying at the branches, for new branches will spring out again, but strike at the root, and fear not these great men; these men of power; these oppressors of the needy; fear them not, but strike at the root (124–25).

Edward's reign was cut short by an early death, and "Bloody" Mary soon took the throne. She attempted to undo all that the Reformers had done during the reigns of her father and her brother. Such undoing necessitated cutting off the principal promoters and participants, including Latimer; Thomas Cranmer, the former archbishop of Canterbury; and Nicholas Ridley, the former bishop of London. After languishing for months in prison, Latimer and Ridley were to be burnt as heretics on October 16, 1555. As the end neared, Latimer spoke his famous words to Ridley: "Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man. We shall this day light such a candle, by God's grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out!" (Carlyle, 173).

Both biographies give considerable detail of the proceedings at the Oxford trials of the three martyrs. Their encouragement of each other, their constancy, their looking to God in faith, their reliance on the Word of God and prayer, and their victory are a blessing to see. I have had the privilege of standing on the marker in the pavement in Oxford where they burned. They loved not their lives unto the death; neither should we! ☞

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

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The Context of the Passage

The commissioning of the twelve apostles in Matthew 10 forms a bridge between the great Galilean ministry of Christ and His ministry *around* Galilee which followed (Thomas and Gundry, *The NIV Harmony of the Gospels*, 98–100). This took place in the second year of Christ’s ministry (Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*, 60–61). This story begins at the end of Matthew 9 when Christ is moved with compassion at the spiritual needs of the crowds following Him and asks His disciples to pray for laborers to be sent out into the spiritual harvest of needy souls (Matt. 9:35–38). In Matthew 10:1–5 the disciples are instructed. Verses 6–15 contain general instructions. The rest of the chapter (vv. 16–42) contains three-part instructions concerning persecution: its danger (16–25), the need for fearlessness (26–33), and what to expect during persecution: heartbreaking division (34–36), total commitment (37–39), and eternal reward (40–42). The context concludes in Matthew 11:1 (parallels Mark 6:12–13 and Luke 9:6) when the apostles are actually sent. There is no indication how long the apostles’ preaching tour took, though Hoehner places it between November and December AD 31 with only two other events. We might estimate, then, that the tour of the apostles occupied some 4–6 weeks.


The Problem of the Passage

In Jesus’ instruction concerning the danger of persecution, He warns them how to respond: *when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another*. Then Jesus states the reason for this response: *for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over* [“have finished”] *the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come* (Matt. 10:23). First, was Jesus intending for the disciples to cover all Israel on this trip? Second, if Jesus was already with them, what did He mean by His coming? The correct interpretation hinges on the meaning of “finished” and “coming.” Leon Morris lays out the problems of the passage by saying that “it is not clear exactly what we should understand by ‘finishing the towns of Israel’ and by the coming of the Son of man” (*The Gospel According to Matthew*, 257). The difficulty is hinted at in S. K. Weber’s comment: “There are innumerable numbers of variations among the proposed solutions” (*Matthew*, 1:146).

The Interpretation of the Passage

Most English translations of the verb “finish” (*teleō*) supply a phrase similar to the NKJV, “you will not have gone through [gone over, covered] the cities of Israel” (cf. KJV, ESV, NASB, HCSB, NIV). In other words, the disciples will not have evangelized all the cities and towns of the nation Israel before Jesus comes. However, did Jesus intend for them to evangelize all Israel on this trip, or was His focus only on Galilee? Two matters suggest the latter is His intention. First, the time allotted for this enterprise (see above) was not nearly long enough to evangelize the entire nation. Second, the ministry of Jesus and His disciples following this tour resumes in Galilee. It seems most likely, then, that this tour was intended to focus on Galilee and not the whole nation, since “there is no indication that Jesus intended his disciples at this stage to go down to Judea” (R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 396).

Why, then, this reason for fleeing to another town? Jesus intended fleeing as a permanent alternative to persecution, not just to be followed on this particular venture in Galilee, but as a rule for all evangelistic service. There are plenty of places to evangelize. If you face persecution in one town, move on to the next one.

If this is a correct apprehension of that first phrase, then understanding the second phrase becomes simpler. However, the term for “comes” (*erchomai*) has a broad variety of meanings. Therefore, some suggest the “coming” of Jesus to His Father (as in Dan 7:13), while others (Tasker, Mounce) see Jesus’ “coming” as His commissioning of disciples after the resurrection. Chrysostom and Calvin see the “coming” as Jesus sending the Spirit (John 14:23). Carson and Weber believe the “coming” refers to Jesus’ sending judgment upon the Jewish nation through the Roman general Titus in AD 70. But if we accept the meaning of Jesus’ “coming” as His return at the end of the Church Age, the sense is this: Israel will not become thoroughly evangelized until Jesus returns in His second advent. Carson admits that “the language of the Son of Man’s coming most easily fits that interpretation [the return of Christ at the end of the present age]” (“Matthew” in *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 8:251). Hagner agrees that it “has the advantage of being the most natural understanding of the clause” (*Matthew 1–13*, 33A:279). 

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

The theme of a recent FBF meeting I attended in the central United States reminded the assembled pastors of the admonition of Galatians 6:9: “Let us not be weary in well doing.” The words “be weary” mean “lose heart, faint, be discouraged” and refer to giving in to something that is evil. Pastors who grow weary in well doing lose their heart and faint in the work. The “evil” may not necessarily be something sinful or demonic. What causes this collapse into discouragement?

It’s estimated that over 1500 ministers a month leave their churches. Perhaps some of these are not truly regenerated. Undoubtedly others were never Spirit-called or qualified in the first place. Nevertheless, their stated “evils” for leaving are illuminating.¹

1. Discouragement. “Complaints speak louder than compliments.” One criticism can nullify fifteen compliments.
2. Failure. “The key is not to compare.” See 2 Corinthians 10:12.
3. Loneliness. “It is important for pastors to find people they can open up and share their struggles with, instead of absorbing and isolating.”
4. Moral failure. “The key to avoiding moral failure is creating a system of risk prevention.”
5. Financial pressure. Don’t envy; make a budget and live it.
6. Anger. “When things aren’t going well, pastors become angry—with others, themselves, or God.”
7. Burnout. “Pastors are put on a treadmill.”
8. Physical health. Insufficient rest, improper diet, inadequate exercise. . . .
9. Marriage/Family Problems. “You have to nurture your family relationships.”
10. Too busy/driven. “A lot of pastors simply are not working efficiently.”

Scriptures

Over my years in ministry, I’ve found certain passages of Scripture to be particularly encouraging for battling the “evils.” They start with the famous *proto-evangelium*, “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15). Romans 16:20 adds this encouraging prospect: “And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.”

When it comes to the malicious acts of people, I like to recall Joseph’s spiritual understanding of his sufferings at the hands of his brothers: “Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good” (Gen. 50:20).

Immense tasks can be so daunting that their anticipation saps the strength out of our spirits before we even begin. “Have not I commanded thee,” God said to Joshua. “Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.” This certainly was the case in Elijah’s ministry, even when he fled from fear of Jezebel. See 1 Kings 19 for the account of the needs-supplying, accompanying presence of God in the prophet’s lowest hour. Psalm 34:17–19 is a good commentary on this kind of a time. And Nehemiah’s bracing but simple words to the people are remarkably helpful when even the reading of Scripture has added to our sense of failure (see the context, Neh. 8:10), “Neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the LORD is your strength.”

Many other passages come to mind: Jeremiah 33:3; Zechariah 4:6 (“Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts”); Luke 1:37 (“For with God nothing shall be impossible”); Galatians 6:7–9; Philippians 4:6–9; Hebrews 5:8 (“Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered”); 1 Peter 5:5–7; and many, many more.

Quotations

In addition to Scripture passages, I’ve also been bolstered in times of discouragement by insightful sayings from other brothers in the ministry. Many of my favorites are from Dr. Bob Jones Sr.

- We ought to work like it all depends on us and trust like it all depends on God.
- The people who succeed are the people who make stepping stones out of stumbling stones.
- No man ever succeeds in life who does not learn to finish every job he undertakes.
- If you learn how to live, you can make a living.
- Duties never conflict.
- The door to the room of success always swings on the hinges of opposition.
- When gratitude dies on the altar of a man’s heart, that man is well nigh hopeless.
- It is a sin for a man to do less than his best.
- Do right until the stars fall.
- The greatest ability is dependability.
- There is only one thing to do about anything, and that is to do the right thing.
- Back of God’s commands He put omnipotence.
- It is a man’s duty to go as far as he can on the right road.

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

Charles Spurgeon

Other wise men have added to my store of stimulants when I find myself baffled or battered.

- We should learn to work smarter, not harder (Jim Berg).
- What is life about? It is learning to surrender to our limitations. Those who don't surrender to their limitations frustrate others and themselves (Randy Pike).
- Faith must always pass the test of discouragement (Fritz Chery).
- Don't give up. Normally it is the last key on the ring which opens the door (Fritz Chery).
- As I look back on my life, I realize that every time I thought I was being rejected from something good, I was actually being redirected to something better (Fritz Chery).
- A minor setback for a major comeback (Fritz Chery).
- The man who is intimate with God is not intimidated by man (Leonard Ravenhill).
- Entertainment is the Devil's substitute for joy (Leonard Ravenhill).
- A leader is successful not when he does the work of ten men, but when he gets ten men to work.
- Are we trying to find satisfaction in the work of the Lord or in the Lord of the work?

Stories

Discouragement isn't endemic to Baptists, I know, but we Baptists have had our share of reasons to be cast down and give up. Some of our forefathers' stories fortify our faith and challenge us to persevere.

In the seventeenth century a Church of England pastor, John Tombes, began to study the issue of baptism. He had held positions as a layman and a pastor in the Church of England his entire life. But in his study, he found only one passage that might support infant baptism (1 Cor. 7:14). Yet many passages pointed to believers baptized by immersion after receiving Christ. David Cummins points out that "several times he held public disputes upon baptism, even once with Richard Baxter," the famous Presbyterian pastor and writer.

Apparently, Tombes felt that he won the debate. He at least was emboldened enough to send an essay which he had written ("Examen of Mr. Marshall's Sermon") to Church of England pastors in New England, challenging them to read it and to reconsider their position. Interestingly, although he himself never left the Church of England, his defense of baptism by immersion for adult believers helped gain some religious liberty for Baptists in New England.²

Another encouraging story from Baptist history concerns a clergy tax imposed upon ministers in Vermont in 1797. Although the intent was good (raising money to construct churches and to support teachers), some

conservative Baptists objected to being forced to support ministers and denominations which they regarded as unbelieving or unorthodox.

Two Baptists, Aaron Leland and Ezra Butler, worked diligently to get this law repealed. They were not pastors but laymen serving in the Vermont state legislature. Eventually they succeeded and freed the citizenry from funding religious views with which they disagreed.³

And I like the story behind the Missionary Baptists. Have you ever wondered what the difference is between them and Primitive, Regular, and Old School Baptists?

Before 1814 there was no Baptist missionary organization in America for sending missionaries to evangelize foreign lands. Finally, in 1814 a small agency was formed, but it created "no small stir." Baptist churches divided, and Baptist church fellowships debated over whether they should participate in foreign missions, just as Peter in Acts 10 debated with God about eating the unclean animals. Those who said "no" to foreign missions became known as Primitive, Old School, and Regular Baptists. Those who said "yes" were called Missionary Baptists. The battle continued from 1834 to 1842. But in the end, some eighty percent of the Baptist churches approved of sending missionaries.⁴

To bring this to a conclusion, what cluster of stories to encourage our not being weary in well doing would be complete without drawing on the life of C. H. Spurgeon? Known as the Prince of Preachers, Spurgeon pastored the largest Christian congregation of his day. But a controversy in the later years of his ministry threatened to break his spirit.

Spurgeon belonged to what was called the Baptist Union. But in the late 1880s he became aware that among its members there were ministers who were not entirely orthodox. Spurgeon sounded the alarm in his monthly paper, *The Sword and Trowel*. When the officers of the Union refused to take action, Spurgeon felt that he must withdraw his membership and absent himself from the annual meetings at which he was often a featured speaker. So confusing did the issue become that when a long-anticipated vote was finally taken regarding the possibility of the Union's drafting an orthodox creed, even Spurgeon's brother and pastoral assistant, James, voted the wrong way.

Susannah, Spurgeon's wife, said later that her husband's "fight for the faith . . . led him to an early death" (in 1892). The Prince of Preachers paid dearly for continuing in well-doing. But he didn't give in to the evil of unbelief that would damn souls and destroy Christians' beliefs.⁵ ☞

¹ Tim Peters, "10 Real Reasons Pastors Quit Too Soon," churchleaders.com, accessed October 30, 2016.

² David L. Cummins, *This Day in Baptist History*, Vol. III, 609–11.

³ Ibid., 621–23.

⁴ Ibid., 627.

⁵ Mark Hopkins, "The Down-Grade Controversy," christian-historyinstitute.org (originally published in *Christian History*, Issue 29, 1991).

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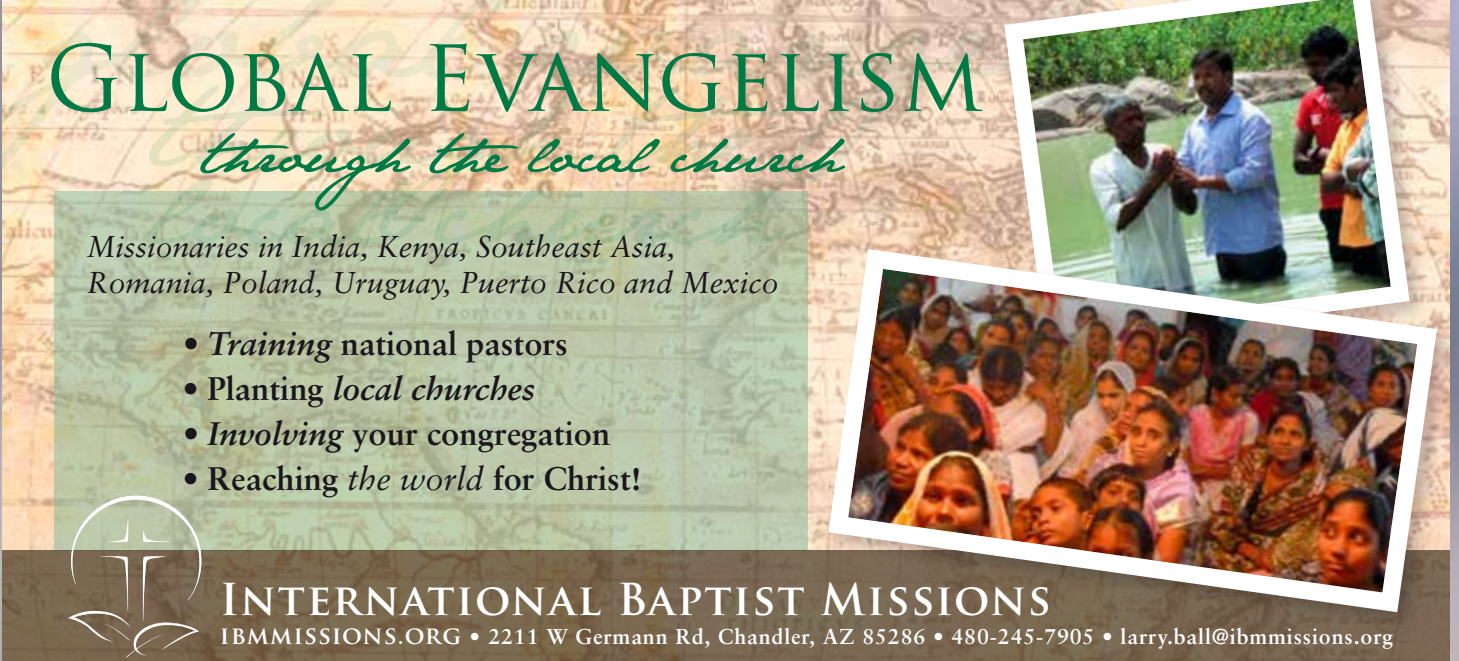
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"Neurotic" means he is not as sensible as I am, and "psychotic" means he's even worse than my brother-in-law.
—Karl Menninger

Where everything is bad, it must be good to know the worst.
—Francis H. Bradley

Fear is the foundation of most governments.
—John Adams

Face your anxiety; count it as reality. You will find it is not as intimidating as when you keep trying to escape it.
—David Atkinson

In politics, what begins in fear usually ends in folly.
—Table Talk (1835)

In grief we know the worst of what we feel, But who can tell the end of what we fear?
—Hannah More

Anxiety is not only a pain which we must ask God to assuage, but also a weakness we must ask Him to pardon.
—C. S. Lewis

The misfortunes hardest to bear are those which never happen.
—James Russell Lowell

Borrow trouble for yourself, if that's your nature, but don't lend it to your neighbors.
—Rudyard Kipling

Worry is the interest paid by those who borrow trouble.
—George Lyons

When you see the lilies spinning in distress,
Taking thought to manufacture loveliness;
When you see the little birds build barns for store,
That's the time for you to worry, not before.
—Unknown

We have a lot of anxieties, and one cancels out another very often.
—Winston Churchill

Let them hate, so long as they fear.
—Accius

Anxiety springs from the desire that things should happen as we wish rather than as God wills.
—Unknown

What worries you masters you.
—Haddon W. Robinson

Worry is the sin we're not afraid to commit.
—Unknown

All worry is atheism, because it is a want of trust in God.
—Fulton Sheen

It does not matter how heavy troubles are if you can cast them on the Lord. The heavier they are, so much the better, for the more you have gotten rid of, the more there is laid on the rock.
—Charles H. Spurgeon

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

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Pray about Your Praying

Have you ever found yourself in this awkward position? Someone comes up to you and says, “Thank you so much for praying about . . .,” when the reality is that you meant to pray but forgot?

Then there’s the awareness of needed spiritual growth in your life and in the lives of those whom you love, coupled with the realization that you can’t make that spiritual growth happen.

God used those events and others to bring me to the conclusion that I needed help in my prayer life, which led me to see the need to *pray about my praying*. The Lord is so gracious to hear the cry of our hearts! As I continued to pray, God opened an opportunity to do a workshop on prayer at a retreat. I developed a prayer sheet based on that workshop that would revolutionize my prayer life, and in turn, the lives of those with whom I shared this tool.

The Lord answered the prayer of my heart by bringing me to think more clearly about two things:

The Glory of God. I learned from God’s Word that the glory of God is His ultimate goal for my prayers.

The Value of Order. I discovered the importance of an organized method that encourages consistency and focus.

Praying about my praying caused me to look for a way to order my praying so that my focus was on His glory. Here’s an example of what I mean:

As an employee: “Lord, please let them pass over me when the layoffs come.” Seeking God’s glory as my ultimate goal I would *pray a little further*, “Lord, empower me to have a good work ethic. Build me up in my holy faith; help me to maintain a testimony so others know that I really believe You are in control.”

That can be written out or broken down on a prayer list and might look something like this: *person’s name: layoffs / work ethic / testimony of faith.*

Sounds good, but how do you remember to pray that way? And what about the overwhelming list of prayer requests? A practical way I have found to overcome these challenges involves using a 5½" x 8½" three-ring binder and page protectors, in which I set up categories and lists. The page protectors allow me to easily change and update my lists. And I’ve found that making lists is helpful! They provide a tool by which the Holy Spirit can train me to pray with my focus on God’s glory until it becomes a habit.

In response to that overwhelming list of prayer requests, I pray for some things on a weekly and monthly basis; with others I work down a list using a small Post-it® note, praying daily as time permits and the next day picking up where I left off. I keep up on short-term requests by using business cards, which I make from cardstock. There are business-card page protectors designed to hold eight different cards—or, in my case, eight requests. I date the corner of each card for reference.

Yes, praying this way takes thought and time. It challenges you to think through your praying. That’s why you begin with praying about your praying. In doing that, you are acknowledging your dependency on the Holy Spirit to guide and teach you. The process of breaking down your ever-growing prayer list to manageable daily, weekly, and monthly lists allows you to concentrate and be consistent.

I am still learning to pray based on God’s Word with my focus on God’s glory and eternal purpose—and so it should be.

Ruth Bumgardner is a wife, mother, and grandmother. She trusted Jesus Christ as her Savior at age twenty-nine. She is a member of Grace Baptist Church, Paxton Illinois. An overview of her prayer notebook can be found at ruthbumgardner.com.



Ruth has developed a prayer notebook system that incorporates the ideas she presents in this article. For more information go to ruthbumgardner.com.



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Central Regional Fellowship

The 2017 **Central Regional Fellowship** was held at Faith Baptist Church in Manhattan, Kansas, on October 16–17. Our speakers were Dr. Tony and Jeanette Miller, Dr. Mark Minnick, and Chaplain Joe Willis. Our theme this year was “Let Us Not Be Weary in Well Doing.”

Tony Miller reminded us that we should not be weary in suffering, in leading our families, and in waiting for the Second Coming of Christ. His emphasis on suffering reminded us that we must avoid bitterness in our lives. Jeanette Miller spoke to our ladies about not being weary in ministering to our families. Mark Minnick preached on not being weary in the discipleship of family worship, in defending the faith, and in fighting the flesh. Chaplain Willis preached strong messages on not being weary in soulwinning and in maintaining standards. We also had a panel discussion focusing on not being weary as Fundamentalists. The main sessions were recorded and can be accessed on the Faith Baptist Church website (faithbaptistmanhattan.org) on the sermons tab.

This was a wonderful time of fellowship. We had men and women who came from Kansas, Minnesota, Nebraska, and Texas. One pastor commented that this fellowship truly equipped and encouraged those attending to serve in their own ministries when they return. May God get the glory for this great meeting.



Southern California Regional Fellowship

The gathering in **Southern California** on November 13–14, 2017, at Victory Baptist Church in California City was a refreshing time of fellowship and strengthening. Dr. David Doran encouraged us, guiding us through biblical texts dealing with conflict, rebuke, and wisdom in our relationships. This practical time in the Word was profound and insightful—it was very timely for pastors.

Caring until Death Parts Us

Continued from page 13

knees as you realize how weak you are and how great God is. It strengthens your faith and gives you many answers to prayers, Ebenezer treasures for future times of trials. Caregiving expands your life with new relationships, even when you think your world is isolated from others. It builds a network of support relationships as you face death and let go of your dearest earthly relationships. It prepares you to face death one day, reminding you of the godly examples from your caregiving that taught you to “esteem others better than [yourself]” (Phil. 2:3) and the joys that come when trusting and obeying God’s ways.

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58). Live with eternity’s values in view, and your life can be a legacy that proves “what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Rom. 12:2). Caregiving shines forth the sufficiency of God’s grace (2 Cor. 12:9) to a watching world.

Mrs. Cynthia Stratford has served as an elementary teacher and church, seminary, and executive secretary. She has self-published *Caring until Death Do Us Part: Shared Experiences of Caregiving and Estate Planning* through Lulu.com.



Studies in Isaiah 7:14

Continued from page 33

anger”) to discipline His people. Judah would feel the hot breath of the king of Assyria down her neck and suffer under his incursions for the next thirty years. Then the instrument of divine discipline will change from Assyria to Babylon (because God has also determined to humble Assyria).

Bottom Line

The major objection raised against interpreting 7:14 as an exclusive reference to the virgin birth of Messiah is the loss of relevance to Ahaz and his historical situation. Many commentators labor diligently to eat their cake (finding an immediate fulfillment) and have it too (finding in the passage a reference to the birth of Christ as well). This cannot be convincingly achieved with any consistent method of interpretation. Once you locate any *fulfillment* of 7:14 in Isaiah’s day, the text is automatically deflated of any meaningful reference to an actual future virgin conception of Messiah (by virtue of how the lexical data must be handled to accommodate the earlier fulfillment). If 7:14 is a divinely intended prophetic *prediction* of the *virgin* birth of Jesus, then it cannot be in any sense “fulfilled” (double, provisional, or otherwise) in any event other than the birth of Jesus; foreshadowed in some limited sense, perhaps, but not fulfilled.



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NOTABLE QUOTES

As long as waiting on God is chiefly regarded as an end toward more effectual prayer, and the obtaining of our petitions, this spirit of perfect quietness will not be obtained. But when it is seen that waiting on God is itself an unspeakable blessedness—one of the highest forms of fellowship with the Holy One—the adoration of Him in His glory will of necessity humble the soul into a holy stillness, making way for God to speak and reveal Himself.—Andrew Murray

At our first entrance into the school of waiting upon God, the heart is mainly set upon the blessings which we wait for. God graciously uses our needs and desires for help to educate us for something higher than we were thinking of. We were seeking gifts; He, the Giver, longs to give Himself and satisfy the soul with His goodness.—Andrew Murray

We take our stand at the cross and consent to be nailed to it, voluntarily, actually; to submit to the pain whereby the flesh dies; the hands are pierced that carnal work may no longer be done in the energy of the flesh; the feet are pierced that no longer we may be able to walk according to the flesh; the brow is pierced with the thorn crown that our head may not be held up any longer for human diadems and fading laurel wreaths; the side is pierced that the heart may relinquish its fleshly energy and preference, and be occupied with God.—A. T. Pierson

Iwant deliberately to encourage this mighty longing after God. The lack of it has brought us to our present low estate. The stiff and wooden quality about our religious lives is a result of our lack of holy desire. Complacency is a deadly foe of all spiritual growth. Acute desire must be present or there will be no manifestation of Christ to His people. He waits to be wanted. Too bad that with many of us He waits so long, so very long, in vain.—A. W. Tozer

God finds pleasure in us when we find pleasure in Him.—Augustine

Compiled by Robert Conduct, FBFI Executive Board member and pastor of Upper Cross Roads Baptist Church, Baldwin, Maryland.

Beyond Separation

The “Accursed” Principles—Part 3

“Let him be accursed!” This instruction in Galatians 1:6–9 gives a mandate that goes beyond separation and requires a posture of total agreement with God toward those who deliberately attempt to alter the gospel, regarding such individuals as “accursed”—devoted by God Himself to His own divine judgment.

I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed [present imperative]. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed [present imperative].

The above text is one of the clearest in the New Testament concerning ecclesiastical and doctrinal separation. The only proper response to any such clearly stated divine command is obedience.

The life and experience of King Saul in 1 Samuel 15 give a clear illustration of the seriousness of either ignoring or failing to fully carry out the will of God in such matters. God, as a very personal matter, had previously declared war on Amalek because of their attack on His people in the wilderness. In Moses’ final discourses, God enjoined Israel to remember this affront to Him and His people: “Thou shalt blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven; thou shalt not forget it” (Deut. 25:19).

Years later, King Saul was given the responsibility of carrying out this full destruction of the Amalekites, accompanied with specific instructions. They were to be wiped out—obliterated. “Spare them not” was the command in 1 Samuel 15:3. Men, women, infants, and all the animals were to be slain, leaving no survivors.

In this tragic saga, the issue between Saul and God was not obedience in the general sense of the word. The issue was selective, or partial, obedience. The mission was largely carried out as commanded, but Saul carved out exceptions: the best of the sheep, oxen, cattle and lambs were deliberately spared, along with the king of the Amalekites.

When confronted with his disobedience, Saul, like many in our day and age, began to rationalize (give a good reason for doing a bad thing). He had spared these animals for a spiritual sacrifice to God. He had spared that which was “good” and killed the rest.

But that was not what God had commanded him to do. The prophetic rebuke came swiftly and powerfully. The essence of Saul’s disobedience can be summed up in the following:

- Selective or partial obedience—which was patent disobedience.
- Renouncing God’s wisdom (regarding what was good and what was bad) and replacing it with his own.
- A major disagreement with God—what God had devoted to destruction, Saul declared to be good enough (“the best”) for a holy sacrifice.
- Offering a corrupted sacrifice to God.
- Other charges leveled in verse 19:
 1. Unwillingness to obey.
 2. Covetousness—personal gain vs. God’s will and pleasure.
 3. Wicked conduct.

In all of this Saul was blind and insensitive to his responsibility to carry out God’s judgments in His behalf, and he then began engaging in blame shifting—in essence, “the people made me do it.”

- This is followed by another list of fearful, terrifying charges against Saul in verse 23. He is charged with the sins of
 1. Witchcraft—divination (complicity with Satan and evil spirits, ultimately a rejection of the true God).
 2. Stubbornness—insubordination.
 3. Rejecting the Word of the Lord.

How serious really is the matter of selective or partial obedience? Saul was charged with rejecting God’s wisdom, God’s purpose, God’s authority, God’s power, and God’s Word. Verse 29 reminds us that God is not fickle: “the Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for he is not a man, that he should repent.” His commands are firm and final!

Here is the summary of the true nature of Saul’s response to God’s commands in the matter of the destruction of the Amalekites: “Because thou obeyedst not the voice of the LORD, nor executedst his fierce wrath upon Amalek, therefore hath the LORD done this thing unto thee this day” (1 Sam. 28:18). Ultimately, Saul’s selective, partial obedience resulted in the end of his reign as king of Israel.

There is only one appropriate response to the clear commands of Scripture—genuine and full obedience. This includes the commands to separate from those who teach and advocate gospels that are not biblically correct and true. The clearly revealed and stated commands of God are firm and final and should simply be obeyed!

Dr. David C. Innes has served the congregation of the Hamilton Square Baptist Church (San Francisco, California) as its senior pastor since January of 1977.



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ON LANGUAGE & SCRIPTURE

All languages change all the time. You can't stop them. But don't worry: they change so slowly and, generally, along such logical lines that communication never breaks down. And no one person has the power to change his or her language. So you don't have to worry about some nefarious mountebank ruining your mother tongue. (You just have to worry about him or her being elected to major political office.)

Sometimes it's not so much the language that changes but the world around it. For example, the word "ship" has stayed the same in English for a thousand years; in every variety of English I'm aware of throughout the world it has always meant "a large, sea-going vessel" (*Oxford English Dictionary*)—as opposed to a "boat," which is a smaller vessel. But the largest *ship* a thousand years ago is something of a *boat* compared to our modern cruise and container ships. And a powerful tug of today is a *tugboat* not a *tugship*—even though a tugboat is larger than some of the *ships* of centuries ago. Language is interesting that way.

This phenomenon is called "semantic conservatism." Basically, the language "conserves" the *word* ("ship") even as the things to which it refers (actual, real-life ships in the water) change. The phenomenon is also called "substitution," because while English speakers were looking the other way, *ships* were substituted by something far different than they used to be (though with obvious overlap).

I think something like substitution is going on with the word "slave," such as in Romans 1:1, in which Paul calls himself a "slave of Christ"—or "servant of Christ." The major English translations are divided.

Some of them call Paul a "servant" precisely because "slave" today, for most English speakers, points to a much bigger and more hellish "ship" than existed in Paul's day. Slavery has never been preferable to freedom (1 Cor. 7:21)—or, well, rarely (Exod. 21:5-6). But the slavery most of us think of today, the one practiced in America up till President Lincoln, was cruel in specific and unique ways. It began with kidnapping (and lasted basically for generations within a family), focused on only one race, and treated people like animals.

Did Paul care to bring up all those associations when he called himself a "slave/servant of Christ"?

Yes and no. I actually favor the translation "slave" (though "servant" is also fine), because I think Paul is calling up a paradox: true freedom is found only when one is chained to Christ. But we have to be alert to "semantic conservatism."

Dr. Mark L. Ward Jr. is the author of *Authorized: The Use and Misuse of the King James Bible*.



Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

Therefore

The Hebrew signifies “since this is so” (as the logical conclusion to an antecedent). Ahaz had just refused a sign from Yahweh (7:10–13) that would certify His promise to protect Ahaz’s throne and deal with the threat against him from Israel and Syria (7:1–9). Why would he refuse such a gracious sign? Because it would obligate his faith, his submission, and his reliance on Yahweh’s promise—and he’d rather be free to make his own plans and go his own way. “Therefore,” since that’s the way Ahaz wanted it, Yahweh turned to “the house of David.”

The Lord Himself Shall Give You

The “you” here is plural—not “you” as in Ahaz but “you” as in the “house of David” (7:13). God is no longer addressing merely Ahaz; the target audience is larger now. This sign is for the entire Davidic dynasty. Any interpretation anchored in the assumption that this sign targets Ahaz and his immediate situation completely misconstrues the scope and aim of the sign.

A Sign

The Hebrew term does not necessarily mean a miraculous sign. However, since God originally invited Ahaz to ask for a miraculous sign (7:11), it seems logical to assume that God is offering His own miraculous sign. A sign of what? The issue at stake in the context is the continuity of the Davidic line and God’s loyalty to the Davidic covenant. God offered Ahaz a sign of God’s promise to protect the Davidic throne. Ahaz refused the invitation, so God will give one anyway, of His own choosing, to the Davidic dynasty. The sign is an indication of the eternal continuity of the line of David in fulfillment of God’s loyalty to the Davidic covenant. What is the sign?

Behold, a Virgin

The Hebrew word for “virgin” here means exactly what it sounds like. This column does not afford the space for a full-fledged study of the Hebrew word’s usage throughout the OT. Instead, here are the conclusions of two OT scholars.

I will say unequivocally that the word for virgin that Isaiah uses (*‘almah*) is the only word in the OT that

without further definition or qualification refers to a virgin in the strictest sense of that term. . . . The word he used, while it may refer to a young girl of marriageable age, always assumes the sexual purity of the girl. Granted, the sexual morality of the girl is not always the focus of a given context, but in no text is the purity ever suspect (Michael P. V. Barrett, *Beginning at Moses*, 229).

Thus, wherever the context allows a judgment, *‘almah* is not a general term meaning “young woman” but a specific one meaning “virgin.” . . . There is no ground for the common assertion that had Isaiah intended *virgo intacta* he would have used *bethulah*. *‘Almah* lies closer to this meaning than the other word. In fact, this is its meaning in every explicit context. Isaiah thus used the word which, among those available to him, came nearest to expressing “virgin birth” and which, without linguistic impropriety, opens the door to such a meaning (J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 85).

Shall Conceive and Bear a Son, and Shall Call His Name Immanuel

Literally this reads that this virgin “is pregnant and about to bear a son.” “Shall conceive” is not a verb but a feminine adjective meaning “pregnant” (cf. Gen. 16:12). This construction does not refer, then, to a virgin who marries and then becomes pregnant; it refers to a *pregnant virgin*—a virgin who, *as a virgin*, is *pregnant*.

God, through Isaiah, employs the language of imminence typical of prophecy, which does not require a soon fulfillment. The language of imminence leaves room for the implication that in the time it would take the sign-child (whenever he is born) to grow to the age of discernment, the threat to Ahaz’s throne would be effectively neutered (7:16). Imminent language underscores the *certainty* of the event, not the *timing*. Many commentators fail to distinguish these concepts.

These conditions have been met only once in the history of the world; according to the testimony of the NT, this was precisely the case with Mary. The name “Immanuel” surfaces later in the context (8:8), where the name designates the *owner* of the land: Assyria “shall fill the breadth of thy land, O Immanuel.” Again, space does not permit exploring this in detail, but this is consistent with the argument of Galatians 3:16 that expressly links Christ to the Abrahamic covenant as the Heir to the land promise folded into the Abrahamic covenant.

Isaiah 7:14

Questions and Answers

Q: How is this a sign to Ahaz, if Ahaz dies long before the fulfillment?

A: It's not a sign to Ahaz; that's the whole point. Ahaz forfeited his opportunity for a sign. The sign is to the "house of David." Barrett offers some clarity regarding the nature and function of the "sign":

The problem is that if this prophecy refers uniquely to Jesus Christ how could it be a sign to Ahaz? . . . Remember, that the virgin birth sign was not directed to Ahaz personally; he rejected the sign offer [i.e., the invitation to name his own sign]. Remember that Isaiah did not say the virgin would conceive in seven hundred plus years. . . . He used the typical prophetic language of imminency. The issue was the certain *fact* of the virgin conception, not the *when* of it. We need to understand as well that the word "sign" is used in essentially two ways: as a present persuader or as an after-the-fact confirmation.

Q: Don't vv. 15–16 indicate that there must be some kind of double reference or provisional fulfillment? Blomberg thinks Maher-shalal-hashbaz is the fulfillment of 7:14, and argues,

Although a handful of very conservative scholars insist on seeing solely a messianic prophecy here (Motyer; Reymond), most recognize that there is at least a provisional fulfillment in Isaiah's day, given the explicit statements of 7:15–16 (*Commentary on the NT Use of the OT*, 4).

A: If Maher-shalal-hashbaz fulfills the terms of the prophecy, then 7:14 cannot refer to a virgin birth in any strict sense. If that is the case, then its application to the birth of Jesus can be—at most—an indirect, secondary, pattern fulfillment. In other words, you cannot say that the same passage refers to a non-virgin conception in Isaiah's day and a virgin conception in the messianic future. Again, the language of imminence in 7:14 preserves both the *certainly of the event* and the *ambiguity of the timing*, and therefore *facilitates* the ability in 7:16 to define the timing of God's promised deliverance to Ahaz in terms of the childhood development of Immanuel.

Q: How, then, are we to interpret 7:15–16? Is it part of the messianic prophecy or not?

A: It is part of the messianic prophecy. However, vv. 15–16 are not giving the timing of the birth of the promised sign; they are giving the *timeframe*—in terms of the growth of that child were it born immediately (which the imminent language of the text suggests is a possibility)—in which the protection and deliverance God has already promised to Ahaz will be effected.

Q: What about the similarities between 7:14–16 and the birth of Maher-shalal-hashbaz in 8:1–4?

A: The description in 8:1–4 cannot be the fulfillment of 7:14 for several reasons. (1) Remember, there is no sign to Ahaz required by the text. (2) The details of 8:3 do not match the conditions of the sign. The "prophetess" is not a "virgin" but Isaiah's wife who already had a son (7:3). Motyer writes,

Weightier is the possibility that 7:14ff. was fulfilled in the birth of Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz (8:1–4). . . . But there is a fatal difficulty. Not only does 8:1ff. fail to explain that Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz is Immanuel but, even more seriously, the giving to this child of his own distinctive name is the whole point of the incident. Isaiah's wife, at the time was no '*almah*' and she did not call her son Immanuel.

Q: So, what is the point of the account of 8:1–4?

A: There is, in the gracious providence of God, an almost immediate birth of a child whose growth actually signifies and parallels and marks the timeframe already designated for God's deliverance to Ahaz. Motyer explains,

The identical words *Before the boy knows* . . . link this child back to Immanuel (7:16) from whom he took over the task of being an immediate time-indicator. . . . Thus Isaiah released Immanuel from the then present and pointed on to his birth in the "the afterwards" (9:1).

Q: What is going on in the rest of ch. 7 after the Immanuel prophecy?

A: In consequence of Ahaz's unbelief, his refusal to trust Yahweh alone, and his appeal to Assyria for help instead, God—though He will preserve Ahaz in honor of the Davidic covenant—is going to let Assyria humble Ahaz and Judah (7:17, 20; 8:7). He will use Assyria ("the rod of mine

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Taking That Next Right Step

"In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Prov. 3:6). This very familiar verse probably is also one that the Holy Spirit has used in your life at various times. For me, it has been one of the most personal and practical verses in my life and ministry, especially in my calling to military chaplaincy. If you have been considering chaplaincy, perhaps my story will encourage you to take that next right step.

Back in 2003 a few of my friends joined the military as soon as they graduated from high school. When they came back from boot camp, they shared that the services at the base chapel were very different from anything they had experienced in their church while growing up. They felt, for one thing, that the chaplains used very little Scripture and that their "sermons" were more motivational speeches than messages from God's Word. Rather than writing off all chaplains based on one experience, they tried another chapel the following week, but that service, they said, was more like a Pentecostal or charismatic service. My friends and I had all grown up together in a conservative, independent Baptist church. Because these two chapel services had such an adverse impact upon them, they saw the need for Bible-based preaching and teaching, and they asked me to consider being a chaplain.

Until then, I had never even thought about the chaplaincy. I had never heard of a chaplain and really didn't understand what chaplains did. Seeking counsel from several pastors about this ministry provided some mixed ideas: some of them had a basic understanding of what a chaplain was, but unfortunately their knowledge was based on misinformation. I was encouraged to try a different ministry that wasn't so "littered with red tape." Later on, I found from talking to other chaplains that misunderstandings about what chaplains are and what they do are common.

A Call in the Night

Eleven years later God began showing me, through a series of events, that chaplaincy was the path He had for my family and me. My wife and I had moved from North Carolina, where I had served as an assistant pastor for about ten years, to Ohio, where I was also to serve as an assistant pastor.

We had been there only thirteen months, and I was still getting to know many of the people in the church and learning how to help my pastor, when, on Thursday, February 9, 2013, my ringing cell phone woke me out of a deep sleep. It was 1:45 AM. I answered the phone, and with a trembling voice, my pastor's wife said that she couldn't remember how to get to the hospital and wondered if I could drive her. Her husband, Pastor Fox, who was only fifty-nine years old, had passed out and had possibly had a massive stroke. Shortly after we arrived at the hospital, my pastor went to heaven. The following Sunday, the church looked to me as the interim pastor. I was only twenty-seven years old. To be honest, I was frightened and confused, and everything that I had learned in college and ministry seemed lacking at this point. What do you do, and what do you say? The pain was so real to all of us.

I didn't understand it at the time, but this was another Proverbs 3:6 moment. Just like a giant puzzle, God was placing the next piece in our lives to start another section of the picture. Throughout the next months, many guest speakers came to our church, one of whom was a chaplain endorser named Robbie Morrison. Through him God began to direct my heart again to the chaplaincy. He was the perfect person to ask every question I could possibly think of about the chaplaincy. It was through this meeting that God clarified to me what the military chaplaincy ministry was and the need for chaplains who loved God, His Word, and our soldiers. My heart was ignited again with a burning



passion to help men and women serving in the military.

The Department of Defense (DoD) requires anyone seeking military chaplaincy to be endorsed by a DoD-approved endorsing agency, and I knew that my next step would be to find an endorser. An endorser operates similar to a mission board but is recognized by the DoD to represent a person's faith group: "endorsement is a professional credential that affirms to an agency or employer that a chaplain or pastoral counselor has met the requirements of the denomination to provide ministry in a specialized setting."

My wife and I really prayed about the endorser that would be best for us. We really didn't know many endorsers, so through a Google search for "Baptist endorsers" we came across FBFI. Although FBFI has been an approved endorsing agency since 1993, we had never heard of them before, and, to be honest, I didn't realize that there was a conservative endorser that had the resources and experience that FBFI had.

Why FBFI?

There were two key areas that made the greatest impact upon our decision to go with FBFI. First, we liked FBFI's strong emphasis upon chaplains' being connected to their sending church. Second, FBFI really focused upon the importance of the Bible in all areas of the chaplaincy. I believe with all my heart that finding and joining with FBFI was another Proverbs 3:6 moment.

Fast forward to September 20, 2017. I was sworn in as a chaplain (1LT) into the United States Army. This was the culmination of God's directing hand and gracious provision in my life. When my wife and I had decided to take this step, it was the biggest ministry decision of our life. At that point, my wife and I had a three-month-old daughter, and we knew that I would have to go back to college again to earn my master's degree, which would consume much of my time. (For anyone considering the

chaplaincy, one of the requirements is that you must possess a bachelor's degree from an accredited college and master's degree of no less than seventy-two hours from an accredited college.) I also worked a full-time job to pay for my education, and I helped in ministries in our church. To God's glory, I graduated with my Master's of Biblical Studies in May of 2017. This was another confirming step to me from Proverbs 3:6.

I encourage you, if you are considering the chaplaincy (whether community or military), talk with FBFI Endorser Chaplain Joe Willis (813.767.2734) or call the FBFI Home Office (864.268.0777). Opportunities for godly chaplains are everywhere, and the mission field is great. Whether it's military chaplaincy or community chaplaincy, a chaplain has a mission field that often regular pastor can't go to. Obey God, and take that next right step.



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Spiritual Potholes in the Ministry

We have a dear friend in Pennsylvania who once told me that she must pay a certain fee every year to have the road on which they live maintained and repaired. However, potholes continually appear on their road and have done much damage to their car. As she shared this story with me, I thought of how this relates to the ministry of the Lord's servants. There are many potholes that can create havoc in the spiritual realm.

The first one I want to address is the pothole of discouragement. So many of the Lord's servants who were greatly used of Him have succumbed to this dangerous pothole.

In the Old Testament, we read about the great man of God Elijah. He was a powerhouse for the Lord! He challenged the 450 prophets of Baal to pray to their false god and ask him to send fire to consume their sacrifice. He told them in 1 Kings 18:24, "And call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD: and the god that answereth by fire, let him be God." The prophets of Baal prayed for six hours, to no avail. Elijah prayed just 63 words, and 1 Kings 18:38-39 tells us what happened next: "Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, The LORD, he is the God; the LORD, he is the God."

After this incredible mountaintop experience, Elijah heard that the wicked queen Jezebel was determined to find him and kill him. Elijah was discouraged by this news; we read in 1 Kings 19:3-4, "And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongeth to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I am not better than my

fathers." What a pathetic sight for such a man of God. But that is what discouragement can do to a person.

In the New Testament we find a man of God named Peter who also faced the damaging pothole of discouragement. Peter, along with the other apostles, believed that Christ was the Messiah. However, when Jesus was crucified, we read what happened when Mary Magdalene went to the sepulchre where His body was sealed. John 20:2 says, "Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him." Apparently they were all discouraged because the Bible says in John 20:9, "For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead." Peter was so discouraged that we read in John 21:3, "Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing."

Oh the monstrosity of this culprit, discouragement! It robs a believer of joy, strips him of peace, and clothes him with the rags of hopelessness and the shoes of despair. It is a perilous pothole that many Christians in the Bible have experienced, but we can learn from their lives and avoid it in our lives today. Discouragement will cause great spiritual damage in a person's life. I have personally known men who once were on fire for the Lord, full of zeal in their service for Him and vibrant in their passion for Him, who are now, sadly, no longer serving Him. They hit the pothole of discouragement, and it blew out the spiritual air in their tires of service. They lost control of their spiritual steering wheel and crashed. This is what discouragement can do to any believer if he is not careful and observant on the spiritual road of life.

There are other potholes that I will address in the next article.

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Choosing to Change When Change Happens

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godly thing.” It is about being a godly person—a person whose life reflects the God he or she claims to serve.

In Matthew 7:15–20, Christ speaks of those who are teaching false doctrines. He warns believers to identify false teachers not only by what they are saying but by what they are doing.

The fruit that is evident in *our* lives is indicative of the changes taking place in our hearts. As we learn more about our great God and trust Him more, the fruit of His Spirit will be in us and will impact our choices—and our changes. (See Gal. 5:22–23.)

Objection 4: “I am not eloquent” (Exod. 4:10).

Answer 4: “Who hath made man’s mouth?” (Exod. 4:11).

It was easy to roll my eyes and get a little miffed at Moses’ fourth objection. *Seriously, Moses? God made you. So if He says you can speak, you can speak.*

In his *Exposition of the Bible*, John Gill writes regarding this verse, “He that made it, and made it capable of speaking, could remove any impediments in it, and cause it to speak freely and fluently.”

Oh how patient God was with Moses—and how patient He is with me! How often has God entrusted a change to me, and I’ve replied with, “I can’t handle this; I’m not capable of this”? Or how many times, in contrast to the teaching of Romans 9:20, have I said, “I can’t do it as well as she can, so give me something else to do”?

When change happens and we fear what may or may not lie ahead, we must choose to properly view that change. Questioning what God has entrusted to us from the perspective of implying that He has made a mistake is not an option. Questioning Him by asking, “Why did You entrust this to me? How may I know You more or serve You more fully by going through this?” will allow us to know Him better. And that is a choice—the right choice.

Objection 5: “Send, I pray thee, by the hand of him whom thou wilt send” (Exod. 4:13).

Answer 5, part 1: “And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses” (Exod. 4:14).

The remainder of God’s answer is filled with God’s mercy, grace, compassion, love, and patience—which He did not have to give to Moses and which He did not have to give to us.

Answer 5, part 2: “Is not Aaron the Levite thy brother? I know that he can speak well. And also, behold, he cometh forth to meet thee: and when he seeth thee, he will be glad in his heart. And thou shalt speak unto him, and put words in his mouth: and I will be with thy mouth, and with his mouth, and will teach you what ye shall do. And he shall be thy spokesman unto the people: and he shall be, even he shall be to thee instead of a mouth, and thou shalt be to him instead of God. And thou shalt take this rod in thine hand, wherewith thou shalt do signs” (Exod. 4:14–17).

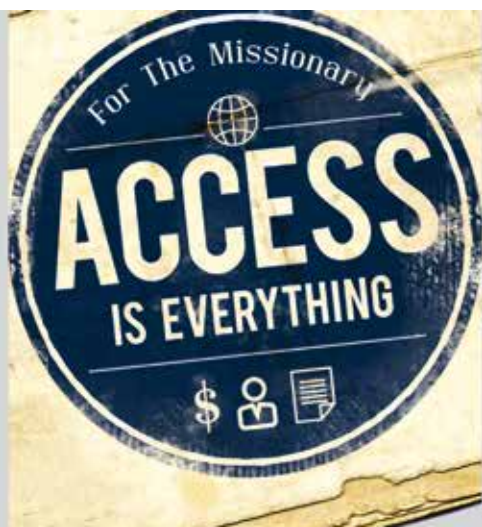
Even though Moses begged God to choose someone else for the task, God wanted Moses to do it! God graciously forbade Moses to miss out on the lessons, responsibilities, joys, sorrows, and blessings that were intended for him. But in an act of unmerited favor, He gave Moses someone to help carry the load—Moses’ brother, Aaron.

As an all-too-independent person sometimes, I find it difficult to accept help. Yet Scripture tells us in Galatians 6:2, “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.” I believe that verse is speaking both to the person needing help and to the person who has the time, ability, resources, and talent to give help.

Just as Aaron had the courage and ability to speak well and Moses apparently thought that *he* did *not*, we each have strengths and weaknesses that we bring with us to the table. In fact, Romans 12:4–8 reminds us that we each have different gifts and abilities, and each gift from God serves a purpose within the body of Christ.

Friend, God has entrusted you with the changes you have faced, are facing, or will face. You get to choose whether you will view those changes as something to avoid because they make you uncomfortable or as something that will create in you a person who knows more about God for having walked through the changes that faced you. Your choice will make all the difference in the outcome of the change that God has entrusted to you.

Brenda Strohbehn Henderson’s seven-lesson Bible study for women, *Choosing to Change When Change Happens*, is available on Amazon. Brenda and her husband, retired airline pilot Captain Joe Henderson, blog at PetalsfromtheBasket.com from their home in Indianapolis, where they are active members at Colonial Hills Baptist Church.



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