

UPLOOK

JAN-FEB 2007

Assess the Need • Catch the Vision • Take the Challenge

WHY PRAY... WHEN I CAN WORRY?

OVERHEARD IN AN ORCHARD

Said the Robin to the Sparrow
"I would really like to know
Why these anxious human beings
Rush about and worry so."

Said the Sparrow to the Robin
"Friend I think that it must be
That they have no Heavenly Father
Such as cares for you and me."

—Elizabeth Chaney (1859)

CONFESSION

Mike Kelly

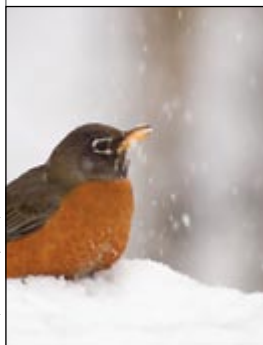
HOW DO WE PRAY FOR OUR CHILDREN?

Sam Thorpe

EFFECTIVE PRAYER

Steven Batts





If God knows everything before we ask, what is the point of praying? Surely He isn't waiting for us to inform Him of the need.

Why Pray When I Can Worry?

Worry is nothing other than the hopeless feeling that God left me in charge.

The title for this editorial is more clever than any I could come up with. It is actually the title of a message I heard as a young Christian. I've thought of it often over the years. We have an innate aversion (the Bible has a name for it: sin) to prayer. But prayer is to be a hallmark of Christians. We're likely familiar with Acts 2:42, which tells us that prayer was one of the four activities the early church devoted itself to. But over and over, the New Testament speaks of being devoted to prayer (Ac. 1:14; 2:42; 6:4; Rom. 12:12; 1 Cor. 7:5; Col. 4:2). The Bible exhorts us to "*pray without ceasing*" (1 Th. 5:17), which means something quite different from what some brothers seem to think it means, if their prayers at the prayer meeting are any indication.

In light of the importance of prayer and our reluctance to do so, I'd like to ask (and hopefully answer) another question even simpler than the first: Why pray?

Prayer reminds us of our dependence upon the Lord. When we take the time to earnestly pray, we are reminded that, in ourselves, we can do nothing. Self-confidence is the enemy of faith, and anything that undermines our self-confidence helps us to grow in faith.

Prayer seeks the intervention of heaven when situations are beyond us. Which is always, by the way. The real trouble isn't when things are out of our hands—as if a situation in the Lord's hands is a bad thing—but when we think ourselves sufficient to the task at hand. The Lord Jesus didn't say that apart from Him there were a few hard things we can't do, but that apart from Him we can do "nothing" (Jn. 15:5).

Those two reasons pertain to the petition aspect of prayer. But other purposes become clear when we ask ourselves yet another question: Why did the Lord Jesus pray?

Here we must be careful. It is sometimes asserted, for example, that during His night of prayer before selection of the Twelve (Lk. 6:12ff), the Lord was praying for wisdom and guidance. Surely this can't be the case! The One who is called "the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:24) lacked no wisdom. Indeed, and we say this reverently, the Father had no extra wisdom to impart, for in Christ "*are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*" (Col. 2:3). We certainly need to pray for wisdom (Jas. 1:5) but not the Lord Jesus. So, why did He pray?

Prayer benefits others. The Lord Jesus knew whom He was going to choose, but He also knew the difficult road that lay ahead of those men. So the gospels are filled with examples of His prayers on their behalf. And, to our delight, we are assured that He continues to intercede for us (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25).

Prayer is fellowship with God. Whatever other purposes our Lord had in prayer, He certainly savored the time of communion with His Father in the midst of this dark and sinful world. And isn't this the best reason to pray? Simply spending time enjoying the company of the One we love transcends any other motive for prayer.

Prayer reveals our hearts. If we want to know how we're doing spiritually, all we need to do is honestly evaluate our prayer lives—how often we pray, how we pray, and why we pray. The flesh will resist genuine prayer, but let us persevere, confident of the Spirit's help, for this is the desire of the Lord Jesus: "*Men ought always to pray, and not lose heart*" (Lk. 18:1).

A stylized red signature, likely of the author James Martin, written in a cursive script.

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UPLOOK magazine is intended to encourage the people of God in fidelity to His Word, fervency in intercessory prayer, labors more abundant, and love to the Lord. Believing in the practical Headship of Christ and the local autonomy of each assembly, this is not intended to be an official organ of any group or federation of local churches. The editor and authors take responsibility for materials published. For any blessing which accrues, to God be the glory.

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NEW LIFE IN HIM *From seed planting to fruit growing*

A Word About Church Membership

Do I need to sign up?

Years ago, a neighbor lady told me she was a “member” of the church down the street and that she “...hadn’t attended for nine years.” Her idea of membership seemed similar to a magazine subscription that could be renewed year after year without leaving the house! Later, while visiting a friend, I was invited to visit “his church.” There, the preacher solicited money from the congregation for the “land of Canaan”—his words for a proposed new building project in an adjacent lot. Immediately following his message, he extended an invitation to any “non-members” to “become members of the church.”

I was confused: a message that was basically a fundraising campaign ended in a plea for membership. Did his definition of “church membership” signify that I needed to sign up? Was it somehow tied in with money? Was this a biblical view of church membership?

Members of a body, not of an organization. The Bible never refers to the church as a building nor as an organizational hierarchy that employs religious professionals to conduct business. Rather, it refers to us as members (parts) of a body (Rom. 12:4f; 1 Cor 12:18ff). This speaks of the vital connection each believer has to Christ and to one another. It also emphasizes that our involvement in the church entails our entire lives—not a token appearance when it fits into our schedules. Who ever heard of a hand that was only occasionally part of a body?

Composed of genuine believers. When Scripture speaks of being a member of the body of Christ, it is in reference to whether a person has accepted Christ as his or her Saviour, not whether they have signed up with a religious organization. We read, “*The Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved*” (Ac. 2:47).

Fellowship with God. Immediately upon being saved, we possess fellowship with the triune God: God the Father (1 Jn. 1:3), God the Son (1 Cor. 1:9), and God

the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14). Both Thayer’s and Vine’s describe “fellowship” (in Greek, *koinonia*) as, “association, joint participation, sharing in common.” When we enter into a relationship with the Lord, we enter into all the blessings, privileges, and responsibilities


of being a child of God; we become part of this fellowship—part of this “association, joint participation, sharing in common.”

Fellowship with other believers.

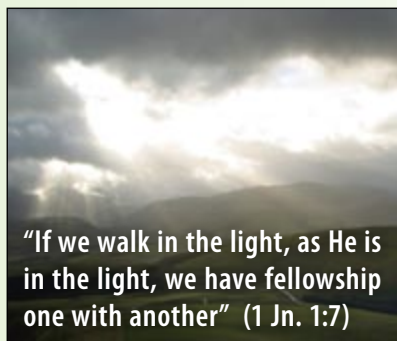
When a person is saved and becomes a member in the body of Christ, he or she also enjoys fellowship with other believers as members one of another, as stated in Romans 12:5, which the ISV translates as “indi-

vidual parts connected to each other.” Fellowship was a hallmark of the early church (Ac. 2:42).

So what’s the big deal? First of all, without becoming a genuine Christian, we are not part of the body of Christ and, therefore, are simply not a part of the church. Secondly, if we think that becoming a member of the church is associated with tithing, signing a pledge, or periodically showing up at the meetings with other believers, then we are in error according to Scripture. We have a fundamental misunderstanding of the church that will taint everything we do. Thirdly, choosing a place to obtain church membership based upon social needs (e.g. friendly people, programs, entertaining preachers, dazzling music, or extra-curricular activities) reduces the church to the level of a country club or a gym, but with a religious twist. People who hold such philosophies are prone to disappointment and spiritual destruction. Of the church in Sardis, the Lord Himself said, “*thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead*”—spiritually dead (Rev. 3:1)!

Being a member of the body of Christ and then enjoying fellowship with a local church are worth the effort required to understand them biblically. 

—RANDY HORN



“If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another” (1 Jn. 1:7)

Space & Rocket Center, Huntsville



U of A, Tuscaloosa

Good News Alabama!

By the time you read this, the gospel efforts collectively called “Good News, Alabama!” will be well underway. Believers will have travelled to this needy area to help. But it is not too late to invest through prayer.

Huntsville has more engineers per capita than any other American city. We have invited two brothers (one worked with the Apollo team) from Lawrence, KS to give presentations at the universities at noon and at the convention center in the evening.

Tuscaloosa is dominated by the University of Alabama. We have an auditorium in the student center for three noon talks. Pray that many students will respond. Also we'll be working in Northport, across the river from Tuscaloosa, where the assembly building is located. And we have been offered a free concert by a quartet from Branson, MO, so we can preach the gospel to the locals, to be held downtown Wednesday evening.

Please pray: that the literature will bear much fruit; that those who showed spiritual interest will not only be saved, but become functioning members of local assemblies; that those doing follow-up will have strength, open doors, and good success; that the Lord will be glorified, and that this will be only the beginning of united gospel effort in the Deep South. **Please visit:** www.GoodNewsAlabama.com and www.uplook.org for more on this outreach.

ANNUAL GRAND RAPIDS CONFERENCE

Christians at Northwest Gospel Hall, Grand Rapids, MI, extend an invitation to their conference Mar 16-18 with invited speakers Willie Burnett (ON) and Alan Parks (SC). Special meetings are planned for the children. Accommodations are available for out-of-town visitors.

Contact: Robert Snow 616-785-4096

IMPACT 2007

A conference for youth and college and career aged (13yrs and older) will be held from Friday Mar 30 to Sunday Apr 1 at Oakwood Bible Chapel, Windsor, ON. Theme is “Stand Firm in the Faith” (1 Pet. 5:9). Speakers scheduled are Jon Glock (IA), Brian Cretney (ON), Steve Yuille (ON), Jodi Greenstreet (ON). Cost: \$20 before Mar 11; \$30 after. **Register at** www.oakwoodbiblechapel.org

VANCOUVER EASTER CONFERENCE

Sponsored by seven local assemblies, the conference will be hosted by Granville Chapel on Apr 6-7. Speakers are Craig Shakarji (MD) and

three local men involved in different outreach ministries. Meetings are scheduled for 3:30 PM and 7:00 PM. There will be children's programs both days. **Contact:** N. Chandler 604-271-1083

DELAWARE EASTER CONFERENCE

The Christians at Dover Bible Chapel in Dover, Delaware announce their Easter Conference for the weekend of Apr. 6-8. Expected speakers: Kingsley Baehr (NJ), Ross Rainey (MI) and Harold Smith (NS).

Contact: Norman F. Wilkerson Sr. 302-492-8024 gwilkerson@dol.net

EASTER CONFERENCE IN SUDBURY

Sudbury Bible Fellowship is looking forward to their Easter Conference on Apr 7-10 with David Dunlap (FL) as the speaker. All are welcome.

Contact: Jamie Martin 705-560-5646

SPRING CONFERENCE IN INDIANA

The annual Spring Conference at the Gospel Chapel, 321 Cliff Dr., Logansport, IN, is to be held Apr 14, Lord willing. The expected speaker

is Scott Degroff (KS). Refreshments at 9:30 AM with sessions at 10 and 11 AM. Lunch provided. Brother Degroff will also speak Sunday morning. **Contact:** Ralph Garver 574-722-1012 email: leegar@verizon.net

KANSAS CONFERENCE

An Open Platform Conference is planned for Apr 14-15, beginning Saturday 2 PM at the Gospel Chapel, 3rd and Chapel St., Baldwin City, KS. Accommodations available.

Contact: Ray Jones 785-594-3374 Steve Hemphill 785-594-2348.

WOMEN'S CONFERENCE IN MICHIGAN

The Southern Michigan Women's Missionary Conference will be held Apr 21 at Carriage Hill Bible Chapel in East Lansing, MI. The conference begins at 9:30 AM with luncheon provided. The theme is “The Story of God's Wonderful Ways: Hearing, Living, Telling” with speakers Elizabeth Lowe, Nisa Crutchfield, Rebecca Logan and Sarah Logan.

Contact: Anne Khol 517-669-1164 Elizabeth Imeson 517-339-1338

FRONT LINES *continued*

Noel Bondt,
commended to the work at
Everyday Publications.
www.everyday.on.ca



SOUTHERN ON MISSIONS BREAKFAST

The 14th annual missionary breakfast is scheduled for Saturday, April 21 at 8:30 AM, at the Best Western Harbour-side Resort off the QEW (Jordan Exit). There is expected to be interviews with eight missionaries and a devotional message given by Paul Grieve (South Africa). Cost is \$12/person.

Contact: Ross McIntee 905-684-6772

DEARBORN, MI CONFERENCE

Dearborn Chapel will hold its Annual Conference on Saturday Apr 21-22. The speaker will be Jim McKendrick (MI) on the subject "Commitment." The conference begins Saturday at 4:00 PM. Dearborn Chapel is located at 4180 Monroe Blvd., Dearborn Heights, MI 48127. **Contact:** Ross Rainey 734-453-8585 David Donnelly 313-618-4791

CHICAGO SPRING CONFERENCE

The Chicago area Spring Conference will be held, Lord willing, Apr 27-29 at the Palos Hills Christian Assembly, 10600 S. 88th Ave., Palos Hills, IL. Speakers expected are Ken Fleming (IA), Rex Trogdon (NC) and Sandy McEachern (NS). Special sessions will be held for children. **Contact:** Rich Battaglin 708-599-9407

INDIA MISSION BANQUET

The annual India Medical Mission Assistance banquet will be held on Saturday Apr 28 at Dunning Park Chapel in Redford, MI. The program starts at 3 PM with supper at 5:30 PM. **Contact:** David Meinzinger, 3007 River Meadow Circle, Canton MI 48188. email: artmar3007@aol.com

LADIES MISSIONARY CONFERENCE

The 30th Annual Ladies Missionary

Conference will be held, Lord willing, on Saturday, May 5 at Turner Road Bible Chapel, 2100 Turner Road, Windsor, ON, commencing with registration and refreshments at 9:30 AM. Speakers expected are Karin Flock (Austria), Leisa Suarez (Bolivia) and Christina Harangozo (Ezekiel Project - MI). Child-care provided for children 2 years of age and younger. **Contact:** Jan Gillis 519-967-1075

C & C CONFERENCE IN ONTARIO

Guelph Bible Conference Grounds is hosting its first College and Career Conference Monday Apr. 30 to Friday May 4. Stephen Yuille will speak on "The Renewing of the Mind" Rom. 12:2. Cost is \$169/person. **Contact:** 519-824-2571 email: gbcg@golden.net

ANNUAL LOUISIANA CONFERENCE

Lake Park Chapel, 201 Schlieff Dr., Belle Chasse, LA will hold its 62nd Annual Bible Conference May 5-6, beginning on Saturday at 3:30 PM. Rex Trogdon (NC) and Peter Rosborough (AL) will be the speakers DV. Join with other believers for a spiritually refreshing weekend in God's Word. **Contact:** Ray Cummings 504-394-3087 or 504-393-7083 email: ibelievegodslove@juno.com

CONFERENCE IN TENNESSEE

The 50th anniversary of Mid-South Bible Conference will be held at Horton Haven Christian Camp Aug 31 thru Sep 3. Assistance is needed in obtaining names and address of those who attended in the earlier days. Please forward information to Matt@hortonhaven.org or mail to: Horton Haven, P. O. Box 276, Chapel Hill, TN 37034.

COMMENDATION

The assembly meeting in the Charlottetown Bible Chapel is pleased to commend our brother, Noel Bondt to share in the work of Everyday Publications Inc. located in Port Colborne, Ontario for the period of one year. Our brother Noel has shown a growing interest in missions and his desire to serve at EPI is an outgrowth of that interest. We share his conviction that this is a call of God in his life, and therefore commend him to the grace of God and the ministry of EPI.

MINISTRY OPPORTUNITIES

Middle Eastern Bible Fellowship in Hazel Park, MI is an Arabic speaking assembly and is in urgent need for a couple to help with their youth ministry. There are about 25 senior high school and college students from seven different Middle Eastern nationalities who speak fluent English, in addition to over 80 boys and girls in the Sunday school program. The assembly is willing to help out financially any commended worker who has the burden to serve these young men and women. **Contact:** Ata Mikhael 248-703-6565 (Cell) or 248-740-9057 ata6565@comcast.net

Believers Stewardship Services, Inc. is a ministry designed to glorify God by assisting Christians accomplish their financial and estate planning goals in fulfilling biblical stewardship. As it expands its nationwide ministries, *Believers Stewardship Services* is seeking additional Trust Officers. If you think that the Lord may call you to serve Him in this capacity, please review the position description and qualifications at www.believestewardship.org or call Dave Allison at 888-338-7810.

The Ministry of Worship

The Father is seeking worshippers—has He found them in us?

The highest form of worship is concerned not with what God has done for us, but with who He is in Himself.

The highest, the holiest, the most sublime ministry of the church is the ministry of worship. God has given us the unique privilege of being able to minister directly to Him and thus to glorify His Name; nothing can exceed this priority. The Lord has not only saved us, but He has made us “*kings and priests unto God and His Father*” (Rev. 1:6). The primary function of any priest is to worship, and, this being so, it is important that God’s expectations from His redeemed people should be realized.

Having said this, one feels that there is a great need for us to take a fresh look at this important ministry in our assemblies. For example, it would appear that many assemblies are losing their primary focus on worship and are becoming distracted by secondary things. Also, the number of functioning priests is becoming fewer by the day. The quality of worship appears to be deteriorating to the point where many worship meetings have become opportunities to share with each other, instead of ministering to God.

let us go, we beseech thee, three days journey into the wilderness, and that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God” (Ex. 3:18). God redeemed his people by the blood of the Passover lamb and then led them out to serve him as priests in the wilderness. God covets the worship of His people’s hearts.

The highest form of worship is concerned not with what God has done for us, but with who He is in Himself. The Levitical offerings help to illustrate what we have in mind. There were certain offerings that were offered because of sin and trespasses. But there were other sacrifices—the sweet savor sacrifices—which had nothing to do with sin but were the expression of the purest form of worship, unrelated to what the offerer received in the way of blessing. Indeed, we read in Leviticus 1 that the highest grade of sacrifice—the burnt offering—had nothing for the offerer or priest whatsoever. It was all burnt on the altar for God. As new believers we first understand that, “*Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.*” But when we mature spiritually, we come to understand things about Christ that have nothing to do with what we have received as sinners. The hymn writer captured this thought when he wrote, “Blessed Lord our hearts would treasure, All the Father’s thoughts of Thee.”

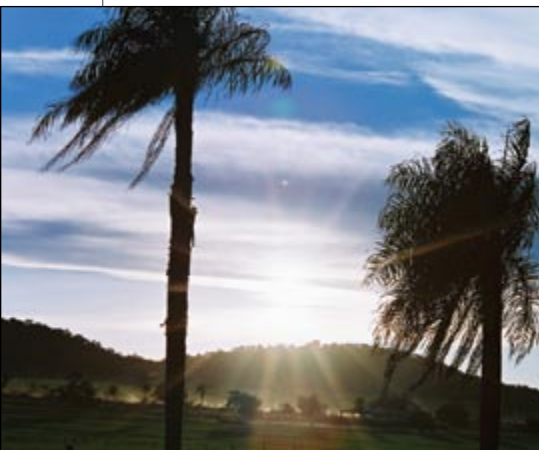
The importance of worship

Peter reminds us, “*Ye are a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ*” (1 Pet. 2:5). This tells us that God expects that His people will become worshippers. We see this illustrated when the children of Israel left Egypt. Moses’ message from God to Pharaoh had been, “*The Lord God of the Hebrews hath met with us; and now*

Hindrances to worship

There are many things which could come between our souls and God to prevent the expression of worship that He so much desires. Here are some of the prime candidates.

Idolatry – When God gave the Law to His people, the first and foremost was, “*Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.*” As they



THE MINISTRY OF WORSHIP *continued*

left Egypt, the children of Israel spoiled the Egyptians and came out with vast quantities of silver and gold. Sadly, the very things with which God blessed them became a snare to them and deflected their worship. We remember that sad day when Moses came down from the mountain with the tables of the Law and found the people dancing around a golden calf saying, *“These be thy gods, O Israel.”*

Sadly, in our day, the very things with which God has blessed His people can become a stumbling block to us, and a source of the lack of worship arising to God from our hearts. Idolatry is simply devoting our time, our talents, and our hearts to anything or anyone other than our God. If anything in our lives is given a higher place or priority than the Lord, it is idolatry.

Sin - Under the Levitical economy, every time a priest approached the tabernacle or functioned at the altar, he had to wash his hands and his feet at the laver, *“lest he die.”* So it is in our day. Before we come into the presence of God, it is important for us to avail ourselves of the laver of God’s Word, and to see to it that all sin that it reveals is confessed. This is what the apostle had in mind when he wrote to the Corinthians, *“wherefore, let a man examine himself, and so let him eat... For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep”* (1 Cor. 11:28-30). Unconfessed sin hinders worship and threatens our very lives if we persist in so coming to the worship.

Materialism - In a sense, this overlaps with the sin of idolatry, but it is deserving of special mention. We all remember well that beautiful scene in John 12 where the woman came in and broke her precious alabaster box of ointment and anointed the Lord Jesus in a supreme act of worship. John tells us that the odor filled the whole house. But there was one man present who was completely unmoved by this great expression of worship: Judas. He was a materialist. When the woman broke the box, the first thing he thought about was the price, and, then, to excuse his lack of spirituality, he hid behind the curtain of charity to the poor and to try to make the woman and the disciples feel guilty at what he called *“this waste.”* A materialistic spirit is completely insensitive to spiritual values and can only trade in the coin of the world. May the Lord preserve his people from the spirit of materialism and may many a fragrant box be broken as we gather together to worship Him.



Busy-ness in Service – This might seem a strange thing to put forward as a hindrance to worship, but indeed it can be. We have already mentioned the case of Judas, and, in that situation, one of the other things he said was, *“Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?”* (Jn. 12:5). Judas felt that time spent ministering to the Lord was wasted time and that it would be better to be out there dealing with the real problems in society. We remember the Lord’s rebuke, *“Leave her alone...the poor ye have always with you.”* Martha is also an example. She could not understand Mary’s sitting at Jesus’ feet when there was so much to do. But the Lord Jesus said, *“Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things, but one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her”* (Lk. 10:41f).

It is possible to be so busy doing things for the Lord that we neglect to direct our worship to the Lord Himself. Nothing—even legitimate service—must be allowed to interfere with that hallowed opportunity to gather to worship Him.

Restoring our worship

In order to worship as we ought, we must first make worship the highest priority in our spiritual lives and allow nothing to take the Lord’s place. He has said, *“I am the first and the last.”* May we give Him the place of pre-eminence.

Secondly, we need to recover the truth of the priesthood of all believers, and each practice our priesthood in the holy exercise of worship.

Thirdly, we must recognize that holy priesthood is vertical in its direction and not horizontal. When we come to worship, we do not come to minister to the house of God, but to the heart of God.

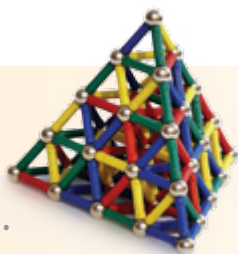
Fourthly, we must live every day in the spirit of worship and communion. We cannot live our lives in isolation from God and His presence during the week and then expect to be able to turn on the spiritual switch on Lord’s Day morning. It just doesn’t happen that way. Our lives must be lived daily in the presence of the Lord, and our days should be punctuated with personal worship.

Lastly, we must rid ourselves of things that hinder worship even if it involves sacrifice. Anything less is idolatry. 🕊



Unseen Reality

We're surrounded by the invisible.



Not everything that is real can be seen. My five-year-old son and I enjoy making geometric shapes using magnets molded into plastic rods which then cling to small steel balls. Bringing the magnet close to the ball causes the ball to be drawn toward, and held to, the magnet. The force that causes the ball to move is real, but invisible. Magnetic fields can occur naturally or be generated by electric currents. They can be measured and manipulated, but they are invisible to human eyes. Instead, what can be seen or felt are the effects of magnetic fields on objects like steel balls, iron filings, or even other magnets. The effect is called a “force” because one can feel the pulling together or the pushing apart of two magnets, depending on how they are oriented, when held close together.

Other examples of unseen reality and its effects abound. For centuries the causes of disease were not known, in part because viruses and bacteria could not be seen. Though invisible to the unaided eye, the effect of the plague bacterium was deadly. Called the Black Death, it killed 30 million peasants in 14th century Europe. In the 16th and 17th centuries, the all but invisible smallpox and influenza viruses swept through the New World with devastating effects, killing an estimated 100 million people in what one historian called “the Great Dying”¹. We cannot see moving air, or the nitrogen, oxygen, and carbon dioxide molecules that are part of air, but its effect is called wind. We see light of different wavelengths or colors, but most of the electromagnetic spectrum from gamma rays to x-rays, ultraviolet, infrared, radar and radio/TV waves are invisible to

humans. Even so, the effects of these energy waves are very real. For example, x-rays are used for medical diagnosis, ultraviolet light fuels the production of Vitamin D in human skin, and modern aircraft and ships navigate and communicate using radar and short-wave signals.

If we believe so often in things that are unseen because we see their effects, isn't it also reasonable to believe in a God who, though He cannot be seen, has shown us His reality by the effects He has in the universe, in history, and in the lives of real people? Some have come to believe that only what can be



“For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.” (Rom. 1:20)

measured by gauges, instruments, and detectors is real. But this is true poverty of the spirit because what then becomes of the reality of love, of beauty, and of faith?

Magnetic fields can be made visible by iron filings on a sheet of paper. Wind that takes up smoke or debris becomes visible. Special glasses detect infrared heat sources and television signals become images on a screen. Unseen reality can be made visible. Such is the miracle of the incarnation: the unseen, but real, God making Himself visible in the person of a baby. And the name of this “effect” is Jesus. ☪

—MICHAEL G. WINDHEUSER, PH.D.

1 A. Nikiforuk, *The Fourth Horseman. A short history of epidemics, plagues, famines and other scourges* (New York, NY: M. Evans & Co., 1991).

Thoughts at the Golden Altar

Who does not thrill to think that prayers cross the universe and reach the heart of God?

O my Saviour, I thank Thee from the depths of my being for Thy wondrous grace and love in bearing my sin in Thine own body on the tree.

May Thy cross be to me as the tree that sweetens bitter Marahs, as the rod that blossoms with life and beauty, as the brazen serpent that calls forth the look of faith.

By Thy cross crucify my every sin; use it to increase my intimacy with Thyself;

Make it the ground of all my comfort, the liveliness of all my duties, the sum of all Thy gospel promises, the comfort of all my afflictions, the vigor of my love, thankfulness, grace, the very essence of my religion;

And by it give me that rest without rest, the rest of ceaseless praise.

The Grace of the Cross, from The Valley of Vision

Someone may say, "Is it necessary I should bring a matter before God two, three, five, or even twenty times; is it not enough I tell Him once?" We might as well say there is no need to tell Him once, for He knows beforehand what our need is. He wants us to prove that we have confidence in Him, that we take our place as creatures towards the Creator. —George Müller

Our need of prayer is as frequent as the moments of the day; and as we grow in spirituality of mind, our continual need will be felt by us more and more. —Robert Chapman

Prayer does not fit us for the greater work, prayer is the greater work.

—Oswald Chambers



The best testimony that Stephen bore was his last: not when preaching or working miracles, but when he pleaded for his persecutors; for then he most resembled the Lord Jesus in patience, forgiveness, and love. —Robert Chapman

The word of God is the food by which prayer is nourished and made strong.

—E. M. Bounds

I have so much to do that I shall spend the first three hours in prayer. —Martin Luther

"O, let the place of secret prayer become to me the most beloved spot on earth." —Andrew Murray

Pray often, for prayer is a shield to the soul, a sacrifice to God, and a scourge for Satan —John Bunyan

O Christ, let me know Thee; let me catch glimpses of Thyself, seated and expectant in glory. Let me rest there despite all wrong surging round me. Lead me in the right path, I pray. —Jim Elliot

Confession

Do we keep short accounts with God?

When we refuse to agree with God that we have sinned, we experience the barrenness which David experienced until he confessed his sins to God.

Prayer must be listed as one of the key priorities in the believer's life. I vividly remember crying out to God in desperation as a lost sinner, and I also remember how He heard my cry and revealed His glorious Son and the saving work of Calvary. Prayer is simply talking with God our Father, enjoying a relationship created by Christ's redemptive work. We pray in Christ's name because we acknowledge that He is the One who restored us to fellowship with God. As believers, we are needy children; when we pray we are acknowledging our dependence on our Father for His wisdom, guidance, and resources.

In the beginning stages of our new life, prayer might be treated as a last resort after we have tried our best but failed. But as we mature,

our prayer lives become a daily time of seeking God in every circumstance of life. As we seek Him and receive answers to our petitions and requests, we are filled with praise and thanksgiving for who He is and for His personal intervention in our lives.

But there is another aspect of prayer: the need for confession. Vine's dictionary states that confession means, "to speak the same thing...to agree with." Therefore, when we confess, we are telling God about our sin and agreeing with His verdict on our conduct. Agreement with God implies a definite commitment to follow through with a practical response. Without a genuine

resolve to act, confession becomes merely childish prattle. *"He who covers his sins will not prosper: but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy"* (Pr. 28:13). It is confession of specific sins, not generalizations, that is evidence of true conviction and repentance.

The need for confession

The moment we receive Christ, we have joined the side of the Lord in the battle against darkness. Paul reminds us that the Father has delivered us from the power of darkness and placed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love. Not only that, but He has qualified us to share the portion or inheritance of the saints "in light" (Col. 1:12-13). John reminds us that *"God is light and in Him is no darkness at all"* (1 Jn. 1:5). Yet the Father has made us fit to enter His presence. This is the believer's realm now—we are citizens of the light and are to *"walk in the light as He is in the light"* (1 Jn. 1:7). Our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ (1 Jn. 1:3). But we don't always walk according to the light. Sin mars the enjoyment of our fellowship and grieves the very heart of the One who loves us so dearly.

For example, when David sinned with Bathsheba, there was a period of time afterwards where he tried to hide it from God. When we refuse to agree with God that we have sinned, we experience the barrenness which David experienced during that time. *"When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was turned into drought of summer."* But everything changed when David confessed his sin to the Lord. *"I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,' and You forgave the iniquity of my sin"* (Ps. 32:3-5).

A one-time work

In the upper room, the Lord illustrated the importance of confession in order to maintain fellowship with Him (Jn. 13:1-17). *"He*



CONFESSION *continued*

who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are completely clean..." The moment a sinner receives the Lamb of God as God's perfect sacrifice for his sin, he is completely forgiven (Jn. 1:29). Christ's blood cleanses our consciences from the guilt of sin and secures our legal justification before a holy God (Heb. 9:14). This is the bathing that the Lord referred to. In John 3, we're told that, at salvation, He implants within each believer the very life of the Holy Spirit of God Himself. This is the "*washing and regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit*" (Titus 3:5; Heb. 10:22). The believer then has within him the power to rise up and overcome the wrong desires and attitudes of his sinful heart. Peter tells us that, "*His divine power has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness*"—all the necessary resources that we need to live godly lives have been fully provided by Him. We have "*been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the Word of God which lives and abides forever*" (1 Pet. 1:22-23). The biggest part of the process of our being made holy has already taken place. It was forever accomplished when we trusted Christ.

An ongoing task

Once saved, the goal for the believer is to make progress and to grow and develop the fruit of the Spirit in his character. The Lord has provided us with all the resources that we need to accomplish this. But we need to avail ourselves of them. Being indifferent and careless won't do (2 Pet. 1:5,10; 3:14). Peter tells us, "*Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the Word, that you may grow thereby*" (1 Pet. 2:1-2).

This is equivalent to the foot-washing in our Lord's parable. Every day we inevitably become soiled with moral dirt, both from within and without. Then there are the daily trials of life, the worldly temptations that constantly bombard us, and the difficulties that arise in our personal relationships. All of these can stir up bad attitudes and habits that followed us from our old lives. These things can be very daunting and even discouraging. But John reminds us that when this defilement takes place, we can come to the Father as His children and seek His forgiveness. And confession plays a vital role in that practical, daily foot-washing. "*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive*



us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn. 1:8-9).

Of course, there are times when we sin but aren't aware of it. Reading God's Word regularly will cast light on areas in our lives that will also need to be

cleansed. The very Lord who loved us and gave Himself for us will lovingly show us where our attitudes and actions displease Him, making us aware of our pride, arrogance, and other hidden flaws. But we needn't be discouraged by this for, along with that knowledge, He provides us with the grace necessary to change. This is a lifelong process.

However, we are certain to be overcome with sin if we are full of foolish self-confidence instead of reliance on Christ. If we persist in self-righteousness rather than humble recognition and confession of our sins, our Christian growth will be stunted, our fellowship with the Lord will be hindered, and we will experience the same oppressive guilt that David did when he refused to confess His sins. Fellowship with Christ means that we see ourselves honestly, as He does. If we are to have a part with Christ in His work of evangelism, discipleship, etc., we must have His mind. If we don't allow Christ to constantly keep us clean from prejudices, anger, impatience, selfishness, and other spiritual uncleanness, we will not enjoy practical fellowship with Him or share in His mission to reach the lost. If we desire to walk humbly with the Saviour, we must examine ourselves and learn the discipline of immediately confessing any known sin to Him.

I have worked in industry for 24 years alongside some who profess the name of Christ but have neglected the constant daily rinsing of their feet that comes by confession of sin and application of the Word of God. As a result, they have made no progress in their Christian lives. Worse still is the dishonor brought to the very One they claim to know and love. Beloved, "*grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.*" (2 Pet. 3:18)

Thankfulness

Nothing brightens life like an attitude of gratitude.

Thanksgiving is the means by which blessings return to glorify God (see 2 Cor. 4:15)

It is a strange thing indeed that both the United States and Canada have official government declarations setting aside days for Thanksgiving to God. Canada's official proclamation states that it should be "...a day of general thanksgiving to almighty God for the bountiful harvest with which Canada has been blessed."

Strange because of the fact that many people are unsure who to express thanks to! Media announcers struggle with trying to encourage people to be thankful without actually saying to whom those prayers ought to be addressed. Is it our forefathers, our parents, our government, each other? In our politically correct society, we dare not suggest that God would be the appropriate recipient of such thanksgiving!

Thankfully, as Christians, we have no such uncertainty. The Bible makes it abundantly clear that the God of heaven is the giver of every good gift and is deserving of abundant thanksgiving from His people. Nevertheless, it is good to remind ourselves of just why we ought to be thankful.

Because all that we have comes from God

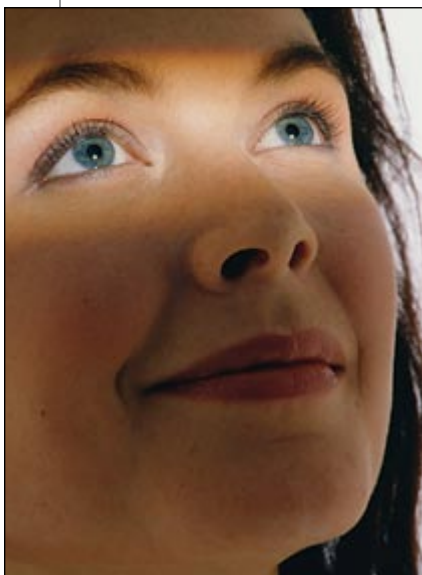
Paul asked the Christians in Corinth, "*What do you have that you did not receive...?*" (1 Cor. 4:7). We do well to ask ourselves that question. Most of the material blessings of this life we have obtained by virtue of where, and to whom, we were born. How very different our life would be had we been born and raised in a third-world shantytown.

Someone might argue, "I started out dirt-poor and so everything I have achieved is by virtue of my hard work!" That may be true at one level, but who gave you the health and stamina to be able to work hard? Where did you get the brain power to program the computer or the hand co-ordination to wield the scalpel or the ability to exercise your own special skills that have enabled you to enjoy a prosperous lifestyle? They have all been given by the grace of almighty God. It is not about us. Many who have enjoyed great success in business or in their jobs will admit that they happened to be "in the right place at the right time." Who arranged that?

While this fact is true of our material blessings, how much more is it the case in the spiritual realm! The greatest blessing we have received from God is our salvation through Christ. Paul describes Christ as "God's unspeakable gift,"—indescribable, too great for words. It is certainly "not of ourselves." God, as the ultimate benefactor, gives us what we could never obtain for ourselves.

Not only is this true regarding salvation, but also concerning the service we render to God. Paul reminds us that "... *it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure*" (Php. 2:13). Anything that we do for God is because of His Spirit working in us. We are but the earthen vessels or "clay pots" (2 Cor. 4:7 NIV).

When I was a young Christian, I read T. Ernest Wilson's autobiography, *Angola Beloved*. It is an amazing story of a life of faithful service for the Lord in the heart of Africa. A short time after finishing it, I met Mr. Wilson for the first time. Nervously, I approached this great man of God and gushed out words of praise and wonder as I rehearsed some of



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THANKFULNESS *continued*

the incidents I had read in his book. I will never forget his response. “We are very thankful.” I am not sure what I was expecting but, in my immaturity, the thought struck me, “God should be thankful to you!”

But Mr. Wilson had it exactly right. He knew a vital truth—it is *all* of God! Whatever we accomplish for God, it is really because of His working in us. So Mr. Wilson could look back over his life of service and be thankful. God had chosen to shine out of his earthen vessel.

All we have comes from God. All we are is because of God’s working in us, and, hence, we ought to be full of thanksgiving to Him.

Why thanksgiving can be difficult

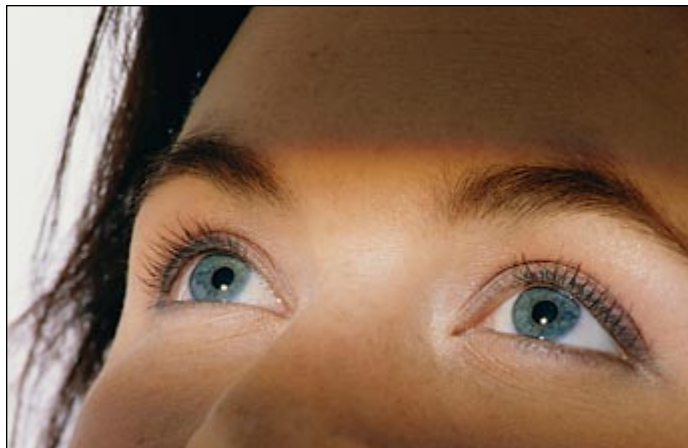
While it is indeed natural to be thankful for good things, how can we be thankful for the unpleasant things in life; for the very bad things that sometimes occur? “In every thing give thanks!?”

How can we be thankful for the cancer that strikes down a young mother in the prime of her life or for the drunk driver that causes havoc and death by his actions or countless other similar circumstances?

We can be thankful, if not for these situations, but in them because we know God is at work. In some way that we maybe can’t even glimpse or dream of, He is using the tragedy for His glory. “*All things work together for good to them that love God, who are the called according to his purpose*” (Rom. 8:28). Or as a recent song put it, “When you can’t see His hand, trust His heart.”

It would be wrong to trivialize what may well be intense suffering that some are presently experiencing. I can’t personally enter into your situation and know the pain and grief that you may be feeling. But the Lord Jesus can! What does it tell us about God, that He voluntarily identified with us and willingly allowed Himself to suffer? In fact He became “a man of sorrows” and “acquainted with grief.” And so it is that as our great high priest, He exhorts us to come to Him for help in our time of need. With that divine help, we are able to give thanks in the midst of trials.

We also need to remember that God has not promised us a life of bliss, rather just the opposite. And we dwell in a world scarred by sin, under the curse, and destined for destruction. It is only by God’s mercy that we are spared from far greater suffering. One of the lessons we learn from Church history is that persecution,



poverty, and suffering are the norm for God’s people, not the freedom and prosperity that we enjoy in 21st century North America.

1 Corinthians 10:13 reminds us that “*No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful...*” The context is the example of the people of Israel and their trials. In other words, you are not the first believer in history to suffer. You are not the first to lose a job or face health issues or whatever other trial. Others already have, and they, by God’s grace, have made it through!

The danger of an unthankful heart

It is significant to note that ingratitude is a mark of departure from God. Both in Romans 1 and 2 Timothy 3, it is listed among the sins of those who reject God, seemingly occurring early in the process of turning away from the Saviour. Certainly this ought to serve as a strong warning to any who find in themselves a lack of thanksgiving. By contrast, thankfulness is intimately linked with the Spirit-filled life in both Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3.

Thankfulness, while it is commanded, ought to come naturally. With Mr. Wilson there was no sense of “it is the right thing to say.” It came straight from his heart. We can go through life, complaining and bemoaning the fact that our lives are not as we would like them to be, or we can be content, accepting the lot that God has given us and giving Him thanks for it.

We have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ! We have been delivered from the power of darkness, granted new life, assured of an inheritance reserved for us in heaven, and given the prospect of being with Christ and transformed into his image. We have peace with God, the assurance of sins forgiven, freedom from condemnation, and a reason to live! How can we not be thankful?

“*Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name*” (Heb. 13:15).

Be Thankful!

Assembly Prayer Meetings

Are they a time for prayers or a time to pray?

On earth there is nothing better than a committed group of God's children, led by the Spirit, gathering to spend time with their Father in the name of their Redeemer.

What would you think if a young man in your assembly made the suggestion that there be a second prayer meeting weekly? Let's be honest—most churches have a significantly lower percentage of people attending the prayer meeting than any other meeting. It would seem from the turnout, and some of the comments that can be overheard, that there are many who have not grasped the value and importance of this special and vital opportunity.

A solution to the problem

May I suggest that the very language we use to describe the time is an indicator of the problem—and a key to the solution. We talk of “attending a meeting” or “going to meeting.”

Such wording puts the emphasis on the act of gathering in one place. What if we were to say—and mean—that we are “meeting together with God”? Is that how it is perceived in your assembly?

If we were to take hold of that concept, it could solve many of the concerns people have. On Earth there is nothing better than a committed group of God's children, led by the Spirit, gathering to spend time with their Father in the name of their Redeemer. If each individual present is keen to spend time communing with the Lord, then we are all blessed; and surely it would become something every genuine believer in the assembly would learn to cherish.

Barometric pressure

It has been said that the prayer meeting is “the barometer” of the spiritual life of the church. Barometers measure the pressure of the climate. When there is a greater mass of

atmospheric activity in the region, the barometer reading is higher than when there isn't much going on.

While living in this world, there are many pressures on each believer, most significantly in matters of the heart, the home, and the relationships within the assembly and workplace (cf. Col. 3:12-4:1). Add to these the demands of each day: tasks to perform, the need for proper stewardship of all we have, the challenges of health (including aging), involuntary and voluntary things that don't edify us. A church that looks realistically at the individuals in the assembly will sense the pressure and will want to seek the Lord's strength and wisdom (Ps. 27:14; Jas. 1:5).

God's agenda for our lives here as believers is, however, much bigger than our individual lives and circumstances. We are to strive together in seeing the gospel spread and disciples built up, in our towns and around the world (Mt. 28:18-19). In the process there will be much pressure from the responsibilities we bear and the opposition we encounter. But we have the assurance of the Lord that He is with us until the end (Mt. 28:20). A church that understands this will be moved to pray together, recognizing the Lord in their midst.

Examples from the Bible

What prayers occupied the time of the first century church? Consider the following sampling of passages that make it clear that we need to have a bigger picture than we often do when we pray together:

- Acts 12 – Christians prayed through the night for Peter
- Acts 21:5 – the entire families of the saints in Tyre had an intimate prayer time for Paul and his companions



ASSEMBLY PRAYER MEETINGS *continued*

- Phm. 22 – the encouragement Paul had because the church in Philemon’s house was praying for him
- Jn. 17 – the prayer meeting the Lord Jesus led on the outskirts of Jerusalem seeking the unity and effectiveness of all believers
- Heb. 13:3 – praying for persecuted believers is implied
- Rom. 12; Col. 1:9-12; etc. – spiritual standards for our character as those who presume to be called Christians

Do we sense the emphasis on godliness, service, perseverance, fellowship, unity, etc? If we have a clear picture of these weightier things, it will show itself in our prayer meetings. Can we honestly say we care about the lives and witness of fellow believers if we won’t meet for prayer when it is possible to do so?

Redeeming the time

Let us remember that it is not just a “prayer meeting”; rather, we are meeting to pray. Are we each showing up with a heart, mind, and will to talk with God? In the spirit of Psalm 133:1 and Philippians 2:1-5, we all—men, women, and children—should come with a oneness of purpose and desire, and with a commitment to spend the whole time fervently praying. If we know our Bibles, our fellow saints, and the needs in other parts of the world, we will have no problem filling a whole hour in communion with God. Even if there is a shortage of specific or appropriate prayer requests prayed for audibly, the Spirit is still stirring our hearts and wanting us to experience the truth of Psalm 16: *“In Your presence is fullness of joy.”*

As for audible prayer, here are some practical suggestions for the brothers who take the lead in prayer for the assembly. We rise to speak with God, not indirectly preach to the assembly; however, how we participate should bless all who listen:

Speak up – We are speaking on behalf of the gathered group. God hears us even without a word uttered, but all the saints gathered need to hear us in order to be able to say “Amen” (1 Cor. 14:16).

Be careful – Some personal details are not appropriate for broadcasting to the whole assembly. On the other hand, failing to be specific in requesting prayer can turn prayers into vague shopping lists. Saying, “God bless so-and-so” gives God nothing specific with which to work. Specific requests allow God to answer yes or no, to show us more clearly what He is doing.

Be understandable – Our prayer should have a clear enough purpose and focus that others can follow it and know if they agree or disagree. By the way, the congregation that clearly says “Amen” provides encouragement to the brother, stating that they agree with him. Silence suggests disagreement or apathy—or sleep.

Be genuine – We are children of God approaching our heavenly Father on behalf of our brothers and sisters in the Lord, so speak from the heart. Others can sense the genuineness.


Be fervent – Lifeless prayers lead to lifeless prayer meetings. Passionate prayers lead to vibrant prayer meetings. People in war zones pray much more passionately than those who live in relative peace. Christians are at war!

Be reverent – Treating God as holy and awe-inspiring is the key, and it is an attitude reflected in our tone and in our choice of words, though there are no special words in the Bible that in themselves imply reverence.

Seek God’s will and glory – James 4:1-3 is a good warning. Are we praying for something that God would approve of? Our prayers should be consistent with His priorities (e.g. Eph. 2:8-10; Rom. 8:28-29) rather than our conveniences. We are certainly invited by our Father to present our requests (Php. 4:6), but is it evident when we are leading in prayer that we are seeking God’s will and glory in each matter, even if we might find the answer hard to accept?

Be considerate – It is an assembly prayer time, not a private one. So we ought to share the time with other brothers by keeping our public portion to a reasonable length. Likewise, leave room for others to have some time to process what has been said by another (silence can be precious for meditation and reflection about each matter). Also remember that the sisters are voluntarily silent, in obedience to the plan of God for the church. The content and manner of our audible prayer should be such that these dear ladies aren’t distracted or frustrated.

If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit (Gal 5:25)

Believers with this desire will be eager to meet to pray over matters of salvation, sanctification, witnessing, and whatever is in keeping with the Lord’s heart and mind for the world and for each specific assembly. If *“the prayer of one righteous man availeth much”* (Jas. 5:16), what about that of a whole righteous assembly? 

Titus

The grace of God has appeared.

Titus is one of the so-called “Pastoral Epistles,” along with 1 & 2 Timothy. It was written around the same time as 1 Timothy (AD 63-65) and shares certain common ideas with it, including the qualifications for elders and an emphasis on behavior. Timothy emphasizes behavior in the house of God, whereas Titus emphasizes good behavior in a more general sense.

The man

Titus was a Gentile (Gal. 2:3), not part Jewish like Timothy. Titus accompanied Paul and Barnabas to the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 and was used as a test case: should Gentile converts be circumcised and placed under Mosaic Law? Paul and Barnabas resisted this legalistic tendency and the decision was reached not to place this burden on Gentile converts. Titus was a trouble-shooter for the apostle Paul, sent to difficult places to resolve difficulties in the young assemblies. It is a mark of the confidence Paul had in this man. Some of the tasks he was assigned were very difficult. He is mentioned frequently in 2 Corinthians, where he is to receive a collection for the poor saints at Jerusalem from a church that has been greatly damaged by division, carnality, and spiritual pride—not an easy task for anyone.

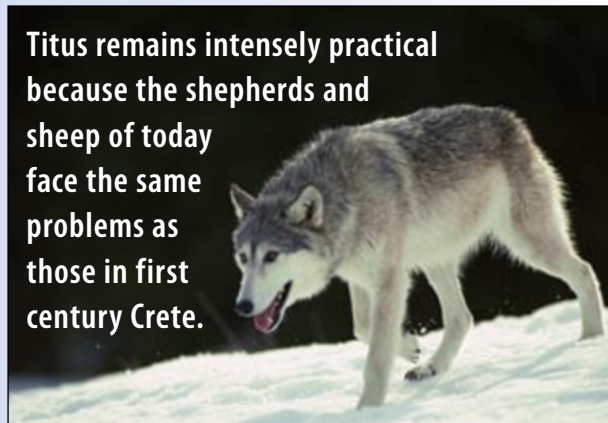
The mandate

Crete was not an easy assignment either. Paul describing the Cretian character in the words of one of their own as “*always liars, evil beasts and slow bellies* [or lazy gluttons]” (Titus 1:12-13). His tasks were simple: oversee the recognition of elders for the churches and set in order things that are wanting (1:5). Godly leadership and godly order are essential not to the being of an assembly but to the *well-being* of an assembly. This was the task assigned to Titus. Paul’s letter no doubt helped him, providing both credibility for Titus and guidance for the task.

The main problems

Titus is a superb choice for the task he is given because Crete, like many other places in the New Testament,

Titus remains intensely practical because the shepherds and sheep of today face the same problems as those in first century Crete.



was plagued by Judaizers (1:10). Titus’s experience at Jerusalem would have left the issues very clear-cut in his own mind. As well as dealing with the false teachers, his teaching was to promote “truth which is according to godliness”—absolutely essential when you are dealing with former evil beasts.

There are several things in the epistle designed to promote godly behavior amongst the saints. In chapter 1:6-9, there is the appointment of elders that would have the authority to silence the false teachers. In chapter 2:11-13, there is the grace of God, rightly understood and appreciated, which instructs us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts. Chapter 3:1 reminds us that the civil authorities are there to help promote good behavior and keep us as law-abiding citizens. And finally, the very gospel itself brings significant changes to our lifestyle (3:3-7). A man in Christ is a new creature.

The major themes

The key words of the epistle are: soberness, soundness, and good works. The elders, older men, older women, young women, and young men are all to be marked by sobriety. Everyone who has tasted the grace of God is to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world. Dealing with eternal issues is no joke. A certain seriousness should mark the child of God, in contrast to the foolishness and frivolous conduct of the unsaved world.


Sound doctrine ought to produce those that are sound in the faith and are known for sound speech. Sound is a word that means healthy or hygienic, as opposed to diseased and corrupted. What is our speech like? Serious and health-giving or frivolous and corrupting?

Finally, true salvation is not by good works, but it will produce a life of good works. Perhaps the church has, in her reaction to works-based religion, neglected the serious emphasis that the New Testament gives. Re-read Ephesians 2:8-9, but don't stop there as we usually do; go on to verse 10 and see the true biblical emphasis on good works. Such living leaves an impression on the world and paves the way for the gospel of grace!

The message for today's assemblies

Titus is immensely relevant today. It is sad that foolishness and comedy are such a part of our assemblies, especially children's work and camp work where soberness seems to have been com-

pletely forgotten. Although we ought not to be known as glum people, our message of Heaven or Hell demands a serious demeanor. Are our favorite preachers those

who make us laugh the most or those that cause us to get alone with God and examine our hearts? Do our elders have the courage and the moral authority to silence false teachers publicly if necessary? And finally, what part does good works have in our mind set in serving God? 

Pause to consider what part good works has in our mind set in serving God.



A seaside village in modern-day Crete

Pray for The Hutterites

The Hutterites have Anabaptist roots similar to Mennonites and Amish, but are unique in their belief that all material things should be held in common. As one Hutterite website (Hutterites.org) puts it, "This idea is gleaned from the teachings of Jesus, where he explained to the rich young ruler what he needed to do to receive eternal life (Matthew 19)." Hutterites have come to believe that community of goods is essential to salvation.

Hutterite colonies are found in North and South Dakota, Minnesota, Montana, Washington, and Oregon, and in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia. Close to 45,000 Hutterites live on about 460 colonies in North America today.

In various ways the gospel is coming to them, and many are having great searchings of heart. Because Hutterites receive only a few dollars per month for spending, when they are driven from the colony for rejecting works salvation and declaring personal faith in Christ, they have basically nothing of this world's goods. Fortu-

nately they know how to work, and soon are able to find manual jobs.

The Lord is doing a great work among the Hutterites. Within the last few months a group of 20 in Montana have been excommunicated for standing with Christ and His gospel (after a total of 13 hours of grilling in front of 100 Hutterite pastors). It is a hardship for them to find places to live, acquire vehicles, and have daily provision until they get settled off the colonies. For this reason, some ex-Hutterites now in fellowship in an assembly in Alberta have established a fund to help. You may have a part in this work by writing:

Barnabas Fund, c/o Mathew Entz,
Box 490, Coahurst, AB
T0L 0V0 Canada

Checks should be made payable to "Barnabas Fund." U.S. letters must include the word "CANADA" on the address.



How Do We Pray For Our Children?

The need is so great because these treasures are so precious.

Our children and grandchildren desperately need the praying support of committed parents.

The book of Job could very possibly be the first portion of Scripture written, long before Moses took on the job of editor/author of the Pentateuch under the direction of the Holy Spirit. Job opens with a view of a God-fearing father concerned and interceding for his grown children (Job 1:1-5). Could it be that this is the first scene presented by the Spirit on the parchments of Holy Scripture? What significance this lays before us to intercede as prayer warriors for our children continually!

The commitment to pray

Several years ago, a close friend shared with my wife and me that they had made it a practice to start each day in prayer for their children. It so stirred our hearts that we made the same commitment. I'm convinced that this is one of the greatest needs among believers today. But for the grace of God, the healthy growth

of our future homes, assemblies, and missionary endeavors, rests on the power of parental prayer. Our society and the world at large, under the supervision of Satan, are seeking to deceive and destroy the testimony of the next generation that would desire to live for God. Our children and grandchildren desperately need the praying support of committed parents.

The call to prayer

Scripture states clearly the responsibility of parents to teach and train their children in the ways of the Lord, by example and instruction. For the most part, God's Word seems to only infer that such a valued treasure as our children would occupy a prominent place in our prayer life. Little is found in terms of explicit commands to pray for our sons and daughters. God seems to use the trials of life to drive us naturally to our knees "*casting all our care upon Him*" in earshot of the "*roaring lion, walking about*" (1 Pet. 5:7-8). David, in Psalm 144:12, calls out to the Lord in prayer for his children. His desire is "*that our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth; that our daughters may be as corner stones, polished after the similitude of a palace.*"

This verse has touched the hearts of many saints of old. Julius Charles Hare said in 1851, "If a gentleman is to grow up he must grow like a tree: there must be nothing between him and heaven." Charles Haddon Spurgeon said, "Home becomes a palace when the daughters are maids of honor, and the sons are nobles in spirit; then the father is a king, and the mother a queen, and royal residences are more than outdone." This was the desired outcome of the heart of David as he called out to the Lord on behalf of his children.

The content of our prayers

The desire of our heart for our children is reflected in the words of our prayers. What do I desire most for my children? Often our thoughts turn toward success and achievement in areas of education, occupation, marriage, and financial stability. Are these



HOW DO WE PRAY FOR OUR CHILDREN? *continued*

things on the top of our prayer list or are there more important matters—matters of eternal significance—that should characterize our prayers? If what we desire most for our children is not something we feel comfortable asking God to provide, it just might not be God's best for them. Let me suggest 12 specific things every parent should prayer for when interceding with God for their children.

1. Pray that nothing hinders your child from accepting the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour early in life (Mt. 19:13-15).
2. Pray that your child develops a hunger for God and His Word and that they will desire to obey God (Ps. 119:33-40).
3. Pray that your child will mature spiritually early in life and dedicate their whole life to the Lord to do His will from the start (Eccl. 12:1; 1 Tim. 4:12).
4. Pray that your child learns early in life to respect and submit to all levels of authority, which God has placed in their lives for their benefit (Rom. 13:1-5; Heb. 13:17).
5. Pray that your child will develop a keen sense of right and wrong and form life-building convictions on the principles of Scripture (Ps. 139:19-24).
6. Pray that your child's full personality will be developed unto godliness within a healthy balance of a life pleasing unto God (Lk. 2:52).
7. Pray that your child will develop a thankful spirit and a positive mental attitude toward God and man (Col. 3:15).
8. Pray that God will put a hedge of protection around your child, protecting them from the enemy and the evil influences of this world (Ps. 121; Jn. 17:13-19).
9. Pray that your child will be filled with, and walk in, the Spirit, manifesting the fruit of the Spirit in their character and activities of life (Eph. 5:1-2, 8-11, 18-19).

10. Pray that your child develops their spiritual gifts fully and becomes successful first in the work of the Lord and the edification of the body of Christ (1 Tim. 4:12-16; 2 Tim. 1:6-8).
11. Pray that your child develops a love for the body of Christ and a love of the New Testament principles of gathering which will then govern their place of fellowship among the saints (1 Cor. 14:37; Heb. 10:24-25).
12. Pray that your child's entire life will become a testimony to the love of Christ and His truth worked out in their life, unto His glory (2 Jn. 4; 3 Jn. 4).

The consistency of our prayers

It should be noted, however, that to pray for the above things for our children without desiring and living out before them these same things

in our own lives, would be not only hypocritical, but would also make the prayers hollow and detrimental to the spiritual health and growth of the children as they observe our double standards. Note in Deuteronomy 6:6-7, the need of the heart

to be devoted in the parent first, *"And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children..."* James reminds us that effective prayers come from righteous hearts.

Let's take the example from Christ himself. He prayed for His own, the ones the Father had given Him (Lk. 22:31-32; Jn. 17:9, 15). How much more should we bathe in prayer these precious treasures entrusted to our care and stewardship, for a short time later they are to be given back to Him for His eternal purposes and glory. 🕊



Pray that God will put a hedge of protection around your child...

Effective Prayer

Have we become used to powerless praying?

No request is too great and no detail is too small for our Lord.

What weapon does a believer wield that is more powerful than prayer? Yet, somehow we tend to overlook prayer's potency. We treat it as our last option, when in reality it should be our first. We say, "There is nothing we can do now but pray." Maybe, if we started with prayer and prayed throughout any ordeal, it would not be so rough.

James gives us a concise set of conditions for effective individual prayer. He says, "*The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much*" (5:16). Let's take a look at three simple conditions he lays out in this verse that can aid us in our prayer lives.



Effective

Do you want to have an effective prayer life? First off, it has to be in line with God's will. God isn't some sort of machine where we put our prayer in and the blessing comes out. Prayer is relational. It is our communication

with God. Nobody likes one-sided conversations. So if our prayer consists solely of telling God what we want, we are like the people we meet who only talk about themselves. That is not much of a relationship. We must allow God to speak to us through His Word and by His Spirit. In this we align ourselves with His will and seek His blessing and His glory.

In chapter 4, James points out why the petitions of the believers were not being answered. He says, "...yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. Ye adulterers and adulteresses know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (vv. 4-5).

Why would God want to answer the request of someone who is seeking their own satisfaction and who is fraternizing with the enemy? Our fellowship with God is marred and so our prayers are hindered. But, as always, our Lord doesn't simply condemn them and leave them hopeless. He goes on to say, "*But He giveth more grace. Wherefore He saith, 'God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.' Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He shall lift you up*" (vv. 6-10).

He wants us to draw closer to Him. As we do, His desires become our desires. Our selfishness fades. We don't ask for things that are contrary to His plan. This is the key to effectiveness in prayer: seeking His will.

EFFECTIVE PRAYER *continued*

Fervent

This is the main focus of the phrase. Fervent prayer doesn't necessarily mean long prayer. The Greek word has the same root as the word energetic. This tells us that when we come to the Lord in prayer we should be passionate.

Once we have aligned our will with His, we become zealous about His desires. Has the Lord laid some burden on you, some desire? Maybe it is a neighbor or co-worker that needs to hear the Gospel. Maybe it is an outreach He wants you to start. Whatever it is, you should come to Him and energetically ask Him for His help.

No request is too great and no detail is too small for our Lord. He wants to see His children excited about doing His will. That is when we can pray with confidence: He has moved us to do His will and we know He will provide the means by which to carry it out. What can be more motivating than that?

Righteous

This should go without saying. The word righteous literally means innocent. Obviously it is not with our own righteousness that we can bring our prayers to God. Thankfully, we can *"come boldly to the throne of grace"* because of what Christ has done, because of

His righteousness. It is only through Christ that we can have a relationship with God. If there is no relationship, there is no righteousness, and there can be no effective prayer.

By the same token, sin in our life affects our relationship with God and hinders our prayers. *"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me"* (Ps. 66:18). It is not until we are back in fellowship with the Lord that we can once again be effective in our prayers.

Exhibit A: Elijah

Have you ever wondered, "What can I do? I'm just one person." If so, James goes on to show us what God can do through one person who prays. He could have picked any number of examples throughout Scripture, but he chose the example of Elijah to show what can happen when a man prays effectively.

James 5:17, 18 says, *"Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit."*

It is not until we are back in fellowship with the Lord that we can once again be effective in our prayers.



To me, the most significant thing about this verse is the first part of verse 17. The NIV renders it, *"Elijah was a man just like us."* What an encouragement! There was nothing extraordinary about Elijah other than that he had faith in God, wanted God's will, and prayed.

It shows us what God can do through us if we will align ourselves with His will, pray energetically, and keep our relationship right with Him.

Let's pray! 🙏

The Lord's Prayer

A devotional outline of John 17

We are on holy ground—the outpouring of the heart of the Son of God to His Father on His way to Calvary.

John chapter seventeen is one of the few prayers of our Lord that we have recorded in its entirety. It is indeed the true Lord's prayer, and, being intercessory in nature, it is often referred to as His high priestly prayer. We need to approach it with unshod feet for we are on holy ground—the outpouring of the heart of the Son of God to His Father on His way to Calvary. He chose to speak these words in the hearing of His disciples. Yet He did not pray only on their behalf, but on behalf of all those who would believe on Him through their word.

The Son and the Father (vv. 1-5)

In the first five verses, we have a beautiful example of holy communion as the Son lifts

up His eyes to heaven to address the Father. It is the end of His earthly journey of rejection, humiliation, and persecution. The hour of His suffering had come. But here we see Him looking beyond the cross to the joy that was set before Him (Heb. 12:2). And what greater joy could He have anticipated than to be back in

glory by the Father's side? In light of the truth that the Son had glorified the Father on earth in all His ways, His words, and His works, He asks to be glorified.

Power over all flesh had been given Him, for He had power to raise the dead (Jn. 5:21) and power to execute judgment (Jn. 5:22, 27). Indeed, *all* power was given unto Him in heaven and on earth (Mt. 28:18). But our text spe-

cifically speaks of power to give eternal life to those who believe on Him. Believers are often spoken of in John's gospel as being the gift of the Father to the Son (Jn. 6:39; 10:29; 17:2; etc.). This should bring great comfort to our hearts, for we see in that a guarantee of our eternal security. Could the faithful Son ever lose the Father's gift to Him (Jn. 10:27-28)?

Verse three contains one of the Bible's many definitions of eternal life: the saving knowledge of the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He had sent. Any faith system that claims to know the God without acknowledgement of Jesus Christ is a delusion that will ultimately lead its followers into the blackness of darkness.

The Son had finished the works which the Father had given Him to do, and the work of atonement would shortly be announced as "finished" as well (Jn. 19:30). In His incarnation, the Son, who never ceased to be God, added sinless humanity to His deity and veiled His divine glory with His flesh. Now, on His way back to heaven, He requested that that glory be restored to Him. Furthermore, as we carefully read His words, "*Glorify Thou Me with Thine own self,*" we can clearly see Christ's equality with the Father. These are not the words of a mere man, no matter how great. Thus, by faith, we look up and see a Man sitting on the right hand of the Majesty on high.

The Son and the disciples (vv. 6-19)

The eternal Son, who was in the bosom of the Father for all eternity, was the only One who could reveal Him (Jn. 1:18). Thus, He was able to declare the Father's name to His own (vv. 6-8). The Saviour then recommended His own to the Father because they had received and kept His word. They had believed that



Jerusalem as seen from the Mount of Olives

THE LORD'S PRAYER *continued*

Christ had received all things from the Father, and that Christ had surely come from the Father. By contrast, He had told the unbelieving Jews that they did not have the Word of the Father abiding in them, neither did they believe in the One the Father had sent (Jn. 5:37-38).

Now we come to the first intercessory prayer for His disciples (vv. 9-12). We see that there is a blessed combined ownership of them by both Father and Son, for the Lord doesn't pray for the world but for those whom the Father has given Him out of the world.

While He was physically with the disciples, He had kept them in the Father's name. Verses 13-19 introduce us to the means by which the Lord will keep His disciples safe after His departure:

- The joy of Christ, independent of circumstances, would be their strength in a hostile world.
- The Father's words would be their sustenance, even though the world would hate them for keeping those words.
- Separation from the world, as a principle for life, would also help to keep them safe, for *"they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world"* (vv.14, 16).
- Lastly, safety would flow from His prayer that they would be kept from evil in an wicked world.

The only exception to safe-keeping was the son of perdition, with the sole purpose of fulfilling the Scriptures.

The disciples were left to be His faithful witnesses where He was rejected and crucified. They were left in the world but they were not of it. They did not need to be conformed to it for they would be set apart from the world by the Word of God.

There are a number of applications that we can draw from the closing words of this section of Christ's prayer. To begin with, we see that our mission in this life ought to be patterned after His own mission to a lost world. In every way we must follow the perfect example which He has left us (v. 18). Secondly, what a stupendous thought it is that the Lover of our souls and the Great Shepherd of the sheep should consecrate Himself for His people's welfare (v. 19). Should not that be humbling to us? And lastly, here we learn that the occupation of our great High Priest, as He appears before God for us, is primarily to help our infirmities. Should that not capture our hearts and bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ? Blessed be His name, such care crowns all the other means of keeping of His people safe!




Olive trees in Gethsemane

The Son and the Church (vv. 20-26)

In these closing verses, the Lord has the entire church in mind, and He prays for its unity which is to be patterned after the essential oneness of the Godhead. *"That they all may be one, as Thou Father art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also might be one in Us"* (v. 21). The great blessing that would have accrued from this unity would have been a clear testimony to the Christ-rejecting world and an affirmation that the Father had indeed sent the Son. But, alas, the church has failed to reflect the light of her Master to a dark world and ended up fragmented and divided. Nevertheless, the gracious Lord, who received added glory from the Father as a result of Calvary, is willing to share that glory with His bride so that the world may know that the Father loves believers with that same love that He has for the Son (v. 23).

In verse 24, we see the deep desire in the heart of the Son to have those that are the Father's gift to Him be with Him where He is. Was not this His precious promise given to the disciples in the upper room, *"that where I am ye might be also"* (Jn. 14:3)? But now His desire is that they may behold His glory—the glory which was given to Him by the Father before the foundation of the world.

In contrast with the world, which has no knowledge of the Father, perfect knowledge of the Father has characterized the Son for all eternity (Jn. 10:15). He has imparted this knowledge to believers, for they have believed His mission, received His words, and had the Father's name continually declared to them.

This brings us to the close of this lovely prayer. The last request of the Saviour in this prayer for His people is that the Father's love may abide in them, as Christ Himself abides in them (see Jn. 15:9-10). 

*Yet it must be, Thy love had not its rest
Were Thy redeemed not with Thee fully blest;
That love that gives not as the world but shares
All it possesses with its loved co-heirs.*

—J. N. Darby

She Sang in the Airport

Not all delays are accidents. Maybe none of them.

When were you last sung to in an airport? I was so treated after missing a flight from O'Hare Airport, Chicago, on November 18, 2006. But I must not get ahead of my story.

For months I had been looking forward to meeting with the Kansas City part of our family for their Thanksgiving week. The first leg of my trip was completed on time and now, after a flight change, my anticipation was increased as I neared Kansas City.

However, when I reported to the departure gate, I learned my flight was rescheduled from another gate, some distance from where I was standing. "If you hurry," said the attendant, "you might just make it." I was neither in the mood, nor the condition, for a one-man marathon. So I arrived at the newly assigned gate just in time to see my plane being pushed onto the tarmac. It would soon be airborne without me.

In retrospect, I have thought I was like so many people today, spiritually speaking. They know the price of their sin has been paid for by the Lord Jesus Christ when He died for them on the cross of Calvary, but they have spent a lifetime standing at the wrong gate. They have never accepted the One who said, "*I am the door, by Me if any man enter in he shall be saved, and shall go in and out and find pasture*" (Jn. 10:9). The gospel writer also said, "*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life*" (Jn. 3:16). Many people know these truths, but have never realized they applied to them. They may think they are good enough to get to Heaven and do not need to place their faith for eternal salvation in the Lord Jesus.

When the fog of disappointment began to clear from my mind, I learned the next flight was to leave at 8:40 pm. That meant I would have spent more than eight hours in O'Hare. "Oh, by the way," the attendant added, "that flight is also full and you will have to go stand-by." At that point in the festive season, I was not thinking of "Sugar plums dancing in my head," but about the possibility of bunking down for the night in America's busiest airport.

So I arrived at the newly assigned gate just in time to see my plane being pushed onto the tarmac.

It would soon be airborne without me.



During the hours until flight time, I walked, read, ate, and held my own personal pity party. Eventually, however, more rational thinking prevailed, and I wondered what the Lord had for me in this experience. It was just about that time the gate attendant took her place behind the desk and turned on her computer. The list of stand-by passengers appeared on the public screen, and I was the first passenger named. Quickly, I told her my name was at the top of her standby list. "I can assign you a seat right now," she responded. "I have several vacancies."

With my boarding pass in my hot little hand, I returned to where I had been sitting to find a young woman in her early 30's now occupying it. Fortunately, there was an empty seat next to her, and I asked if I might sit beside her. She replied, "Please do so." In the light chatter of the next few minutes, she told me she was a grade school teacher, but was unhappy in her job. She did not tell me why.

Although in an unhappy situation, she wished to continue working with children and was thinking of training as a counselor for Hebrew children, maybe in Israel. Carefully and warmly, I asked if she was a Jew. "Yes, I am," she responded. "O, I love the Jewish people and have several close Jewish friends," I said. "We Gentiles owe the Jewish people a great debt. Jehovah-God, used unique men like David, Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Zechariah, and others to give us the Holy Scriptures. In my life, my greatest friend was a Jew." "He was?" she exclaimed.

SHE SANG IN THE AIRPORT *continued*

“Yes. With all due respect, His name is Jesus.” She showed no surprise, and I continued, recalling my friend John McKimm, who serves the Lord with Friends of Israel, once saying to me, “Arnot, you must always build a bridge to reach the Jewish people.” But, there was no time for bridge-building, as our flight was scheduled to leave in a few minutes. Continuing the discussion, I said, “One of my Jewish friends was a neighbor in St. Catharines until he moved to Toronto. For some time I had wanted to give him a copy of the *T’Nach*”, (and at the sound of the word her eyes widened), “but I didn’t know how I could do it.”

“My answer came one Friday morning, as I was sitting in the barber’s chair and in walked my Jewish friend, Jack. We greeted one another and in the conversation that followed, he said, ‘Today’s my 82nd birthday, Arnot.’ I congratulated him and breathed a silent prayer to Heaven, thanking God that He was making it possible for me to give Jack a copy of the Hebrew Scriptures. Later in our conversation, I asked him if he would be home in the afternoon. ‘I’ll be home all right. At my age, we are always home.’”

My new friend was listening intently and, as I continued, I sent another SOS to Heaven for God’s help.

“At two o’clock I rang Jack’s door bell, and both he and his wife answered. After a brief greeting and more birthday congratulations, I said, ‘Jack, I have a birthday gift for you from Helen and myself,’ and I handed him the Word of God in a plain brown paper bag, as my friend John had suggested. ‘It’s a *T’Nach*!’ he exclaimed. ‘I had one of these 30 years ago and loaned it to a guy who never returned it, and now to think, a Gentile has given me this one! I’m going to keep it in the family and pass it on to them when I die.’”

Now, the young lady’s interest turned to anticipation as she said, “I have my *T’Nach* in my bag. Would you like to see it?” “I would,” I replied. Reaching into her bag, she withdrew a very attractive copy of the Psalms of David in both Hebrew and English. She seemed surprised

when I turned the back cover to open it, and that I knew it read from back to front. “May I read a favorite Psalm?” I asked. She quickly agreed and I found the 23rd. I held it so we could both read it together. The English version was beautiful and slightly different than our KJV, and I expressed my delight.

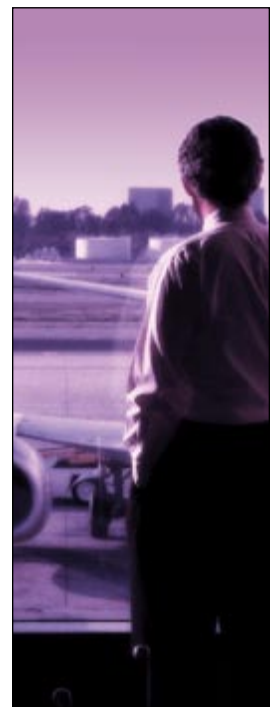
“We’ve read the 23rd,” I said, “Let’s look at the psalms on either side of it. Turning to Psalm 22 and verse 16, I read, “*They pierced my hands and my feet.*” “David could never say that of himself, could he? In his day the accepted method of execution was by stoning. Piercing was the Roman form of capital punishment in the first century, and so David must have been speaking prophetically of someone in his family tree who would be pierced, or crucified. I believe he was writing about Jesus.” With continuing interest, we turned to Psalm 24, verses 7 and 8 to read, “*Lift up your heads, O you gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this king of Glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle.*” “As a Christian,” I said to her, “I believe this psalm foretold of the day when Jesus, God’s Son, returned to Heaven as my Messiah, and that He is there tonight.”

Returning to Psalm 23, she told me the special paragraph at the bottom of the page in bold Hebrew type was a song a family might sing after this psalm had been read at their meal table. “Would you like me to sing it for you?” she asked. “Oh, I would!” I replied. So, softly and meaningfully, this dear Messiah-searching Jewess sang to me among the crowd of people at Gate K-6.

As she finished, I expressed my pleasure and told her I knew why I had missed my flight. Handing her my business card, I said I would be delighted to hear from her sometime. She said, “My name is Melissa.”

The gate attendant announced, “Those seated in Section 2 should now be boarding the aircraft for Kansas City.”

Together we walked down the jet way, a delightful young Jewess hoping to find her Messiah, and me, a forgiven Gentile, so thankful I had found Him. Please pray for Melissa. 🕊



I knew why I
had missed my
flight...



ELDER HELPS *To feed, to take heed, and to lead*

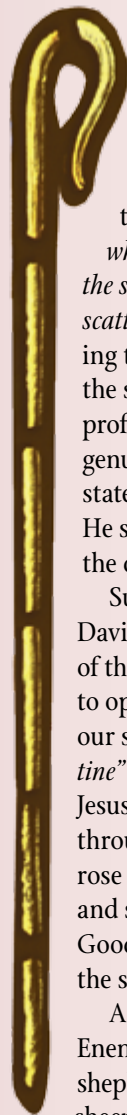
Shepherding from the Good Shepherd (part 1)

Principle Number One: The Good Shepherd loves the sheep (Jn. 10:11–12).

I am the Good Shepherd,” the Lord Jesus proclaimed in John 10:11. I have often pondered: what is the definition of a “good shepherd”? Since the Lord describes Himself with such a title, how would He define the concept of a good shepherd? What are the key features that identify this Shepherd with this title? It is clearly possible to be a shepherd, but how does one attain to the distinction of being called “good”? Thankfully, the Lord garnishes this appetizing passage regarding His role as the Good Shepherd with His perspective on shepherding God’s flocks. And the first lesson we learn is that the Good Shepherd loves the sheep.

The principle that the Lord loves His sheep is extracted directly from His statement, *“The Good Shepherd gives His life for the sheep”* (Jn. 10:11a). The Lord uses the adjective “good” for it expresses the idea of a genuine, spontaneous, voluntary, and internally driven benevolence. His first and foremost principle is embodied by the selflessness of the shepherd. He did not lay down His life for the protection of reputation; rather, He completely abandoned self out of love for the sheep. When God the Father described His love, He moved John to pen the universally recognized verse, *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son...”* (Jn. 3:16). He gave His most prized and adored possession. Divine love equals sacrifice of one’s self; sacrifice of one’s self equals love for the object. Thus, in John 10, we may safely interchange the meaning of *“...lays down His life for the sheep”* (i.e. self sacrifice) with *“...loves the sheep.”*

Based on His perfect sacrifice, the Lord lays down His foremost principle on shepherding: the Good Shepherd loves the sheep. While seeming to state the obvious, a danger still remains: elders performing the duties of the shepherd without possessing the heart of the shepherd. The Good Shepherd has known of this propensity all along and simply desires from under-shepherds what He desires from all men: confession and brokenness of an impaired heart that surrenders to His healing balm.



From His lips falls an additional corollary to His main principle of loving the sheep. The Lord immediately distinguishes Himself from the hired hand. The hireling does not have the adjective “good” attached to his rank. Instead, the Lord pointedly draws a contrast: *“But a hireling who is not the shepherd...sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them”* (Jn. 10:12). The greatest atrocity, according to any shepherd, occurs when the enemy “scatters” the sheep in an effort to isolate the weak for prey. This profoundly bothers the Lord Jesus, who reflects the genuine love of a shepherd for the sheep and directly states that He is nothing like the hired hand. When He sees the wolf coming, the Good Shepherd runs to the danger rather than in the opposite direction.

Such was the case with the prototypical shepherd, David. Early in his career, when a terrorizing enemy of the Israeli army heckled the troops, David raced out to oppose him. As Goliath then roared toward him, our shepherd boy *“hurried and ran...to meet the Philistine”* (1 Sam. 17:48). This is expressly like our Lord Jesus—when sin and death thundered upon mankind through the terrorizing chants of Satan, Christ then rose up and rushed toward the Enemy for our defense and secured victory over our “Goliath.” Glory be to our Good Shepherd for His triumph is hand-crafted out of the solid oak of His love.

As love motivates our Shepherd to engage the Enemy on our behalf, so must it be for the under-shepherds of today. We can no longer fail to love the sheep. With love as our foundation, we must lay our lives down on the battlefield opposing the “wolves” of our day. Today, the ravenous enemy comes in the form of longstanding bitterness, unending stubbornness, resistance to brokenness, and erroneous appetites for lustful wantonness. How long will these wolves decimate the under-shepherds and the flocks under their care? We must be a generation of elders who surrender to His precepts and thus turn the tide for generations to come. 🔔

The Sin of All Sins

"Against Thee, Thee only I have sinned..." (Ps. 51:4)

Why then would we see this cry of David's as anything other than a further attempt by his bad conscience to minimize his many sins by rolling them all into one?



A couple of years ago, I submitted an article to a secular philosophy journal. They returned the editor's copy to me with the happy news that they intended to publish the article in its entirety. They only wished me to accept one small change, involving the removal of two words: "from sin."

Now, we can assume that the offensive content was not the first word, for the editor himself uses it all the time; but the second word—well, that's a different matter. It's a word no one today likes. If you read very widely in secular ethics, you'll see words like "undesirable," "unproductive," "unethical," "immoral," and even occasionally "evil" applied to human actions; but you will very rarely, if ever, see the word "sin." "Sin" is a

word that draws our attention to more than the undesirability or impracticality of an action. It goes beyond the question of whether people in general approve or disapprove of that action. It even goes beyond what "decent folk" think. It goes straight to the matter of an action's significance in the eyes of God. No wonder no one likes it. It is human nature to do everything we can to avoid it, minimize it, or explain it away.

In light of this we might well ask, "What on earth is David talking about?" He had sinned against Bathsheba by taking her. He had sinned against his kingdom by abusing his power. He had sinned against his servants by making them complicit in his crimes. He had sinned against his army by depriving them of a commander. Finally, he had certainly sinned against poor Uriah, first by committing adultery with his wife, then by

attempting to deceive him about it, and finally by arranging his murder. Why then would we see this cry of David's as anything other than a further attempt by his bad conscience to minimize his many sins by rolling them all into one?

But then, the Word of God *does not* disown these words of David. In fact, they form the heart of a whole Psalm, which not only records them but expands upon them, builds doctrine from them, and even celebrates them. Moreover, these words have come to hold a cherished position in the theology of the church and in the hearts of ordinary Christians. What is there in them that deserves such high esteem? The answer is that they tell the simple, awful truth in a way so plain that no one can mistake it: "Against Thee, Thee only..."

Roy Clouser writes about this with superb clarity:

...it is important to notice that the biblical idea of sin is not primarily that of moral wrongdoing...sin (singular) is the name for the condition of human nature which causes people to fail to recognize the truth of God's revelation, and thus to fail to love and serve God with their whole being. This religious sense of "sin" is putting something into the place of God...on the biblical view...sin is only secondarily a matter of moral intentions and behavior. It is first of all a matter of not directing one's faith and love to the Creator...¹

Understanding this takes some thinking. If what Clouser is telling us is correct, then we can begin to understand why there are only two great commandments (Mk. 12:29-31): to love the Lord above all, with all your heart and soul and mind, and to love one's neighbor

as yourself. But of these two, the second is only a product of the first. It is a chief way of acting upon the first commandment (Mk. 12:33), but in cases wherein it comes into conflict with the first commandment, it is the second commandment which must give way (Mt. 10:37; Lk. 14:26). For this reason also, the commandment to love God by giving Him the preeminence is the first of the Ten Commandments. The worst thing that can ever be said about any sin is that it reveals an inner disposition towards self-love in the place of the unquestionable duty to love God.

We need to remember this when we assess sin. The big factor is the failure to love God. In this light, things start to look very different. For one thing, we have a natural tendency to think of sins as ranked, usually with depraved sexuality or mass murder near the bottom, and the more polite and socially acceptable sins such as pride, workaholicism, tale-bearing, or indifference to giving at the top. We concern ourselves little with the “lower” sins, since we don’t feel inclined to commit them; and we feel free to express principled disapproval while not bothering to take stock of ourselves (Mt. 7:1-5). But if what we have been saying is true, then the sins at the “top” of our traditional sin-list and those at the “bottom” are equally deplorable and wicked in this respect: that they are all “sin,” the betraying of one’s loyalty to God through a failure to love Him first.

However, the very “lightness” and social acceptability of our favorite sins make them seem less worrisome. The “great” sinner—the adulterer or drunkard—has a greater chance of being shocked by his or her own depravity and repenting. But the “polite” sinner, whose cherished and socially-approved sins (like selfishness, pride, sloth, arrogance, wastefulness, apathy, gossip, evil-speaking, or self-righteousness) hardly disturb his slumbering conscience, is deeply infected with indifference to God and cannot awaken. Indeed, there is more hope for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for the person whose favorite sins are coupled with worldly respectability. Yet, as David reminds us,

these things are all “Against Thee...”

All this is very sobering indeed. However, if we continue to think about David’s words, we come to some things that are much more encouraging. In some particular ways, they are marvelously liberating to the person of conscience; for in truth, we must acknowledge that it has sometimes been our habit to think of all the choices we face in life as being choices simply between good and evil. Thinking in this way, we can become “evil-hunters,” always looking out for the things that are wrong or bad. Not only is this a fairly depressing way to look at the world, but it’s utterly exhausting to our spirits as well. Sooner or later, we begin to lower our attention. Then perhaps we find ourselves failing again, and this is even more depressing. In the end, this creates a strong motivation for simply giving up.

Not only that, but this focus on evil has shown a tendency to warp our moral perspective on ourselves and on the morality of our personal choices. In regard to ourselves, it has sometimes helped us to imagine that we are *already* on the side of good, so long as we are not clearly involved in evil; and this allows spiritual pride and self-righteousness to creep into our thinking. Moreover, in regard to our personal choices, it gives birth to a third category of things located between good and evil—the neutral things. The “neutral” category has a tendency to continually get bigger in our thinking, and it readily includes things that don’t seem “really bad.” Eventually, it makes most of our living habits seem morally neutral to us, and we stop thinking morally about them at all.

But if what we have seen is right, then we can have a more positive, helpful perspective.



In what way can a situation be used to be an exercise of love for God?

THE SIN OF ALL SINS *continued*

Instead of continually asking ourselves questions like “Is this good?” or “Is this evil?” or even “Is this okay?”, we can start asking ourselves a single new question: “In what way can this situation be used to be an exercise of love for God?” If it can’t be used that way, then whether it is “evil” or simply “neutral” becomes uninteresting; it is a waste of time in achieving the goal we really value—loving God.

This gets us away from condemning others. For if “good” and “evil” are the main categories in our thinking, it’s all too easy to think of ourselves as being in the good position and others as being less good if they differ from us. But if we focus instead on the root objective, putting our actions into loving God, then we are less judgmental of the sacrifices brought by others. Not only that, but we remember that we too, on many occasions, have been guilty of failing to actualize our love for God, and of missing many opportunities to choose God over ourselves; and this recognition makes us humble.

None of this makes the categories “good” and “evil” less important, or justifies moral laxity. It simply reminds us that the Christian life, unlike life under the Law, is not a ceaseless, restless hunt for evil conducted by the self-righteous, but a humble, positive, personal commitment to choosing those things which are expressions of love to God.


Failure to love God is the true sin-of-sins. There is no good for mankind but to love God and do all in the light of that love. There is no evil that does not have at its root a choice to sever one’s affections from God. And after such a severing has been done, it matters very little what the *means* of the severing was, whether it was something an overt “evil,” something apparently “neutral,” or even something somewhat “good” that was allowed to replace the ultimate good of loving God. Additionally, it does not matter which tool we choose—the obviously wicked ones or the subtly wicked ones; all are simply ways of supplanting God from His rightful place in control of our lives, and of choosing one thing or another as His rival. To choose a



subtle idol is not better than to choose a grotesque one. All are, in David’s words, “Against Thee, Thee only...”

What then? Imperious self-righteousness is shown for exactly what it is, and if we think rightly, we fall on our faces and cry out, “God be merciful *to me*, the sinner.” We return to God, we tear down our idols, we reconstruct our lives so to reflect that in all things our love for God dictates our choices in every practical way, and we remain forever humble and mindful of our own “feet of clay.” Then also we truly know how much we owe, and we cease to look down at our fellows. Instead, we look for ways to lift them up; and no sin is so black that we feel too good to reach down to it. And our worship to God, rather than being the routine duty of uninspired congregants, becomes a passionate returning to the Source of our salvation—for he who has been forgiven much loves much.

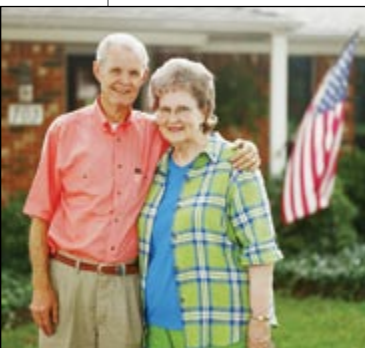
Our lives then become a single-minded search for a greater closeness with God, as we joyfully lay aside every weight that entangles us in order to lay greater hold on Christ. Sin no longer has dominion over us because it does not occupy our thoughts. Instead, love for God reigns in our hearts and teaches us to shape our daily lives not simply to avoid sin but to contribute to the consummate goal of life—that we may know Him.

Many of us in the church have lost this understanding of sin. Because of this, we have lost our love for God as well, and with it our love of mankind. Thus our modern refusal to consider the true character of sin has caused us to lose our moral way and to fail to realize that we have left our first love. What David saw, we must rediscover. The sin of all sins, and the thing that makes them all sins, is the failure to love God first. 

Many of us in the church have lost this understanding of sin. Because of this, we have lost our love for God as well, and with it our love of mankind.

Endnote

1 Roy Clouser, *The Myth of Religious Neutrality* (2nd ed.) (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame, 2005), p.54.



It is commonly thought by many believers that the Deep South is chock full of Christians. Thank the Lord for every one who is truly saved, but many of those professing Christianity in states like Alabama sadly are not possessors of eternal life. They, too, imagine that they can “inherit” it.

Not a chance.

Why Did the Priest Cross the Road?

The question is not a joke. On its answer hangs the fate of billions.

The gentleman, an expert in Mosaic law, thought it was a clever question. He posed it, says Luke, to “tempt” the Lord Jesus. Whether there was any malice in his query, or whether it was asked to test what he had heard were Jesus’ unorthodox views, the lawyer did confront the Lord while He was surrounded by a crowd, no doubt to maximize the effect.

It seems the lawyer had heard that Rabbi Jesus was teaching a short route to heaven, not based on law-keeping but merely on believing. And so the question: “*Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?*” (Lk. 10:25). The answer was not what he expected. But did *you* expect it?


Is this the gospel you believe? Is the way to eternal life by truly loving God with all your heart, mind and will and your neighbor as yourself? Is this what they preach in your assembly? Was this the message of Paul and of the early church? Surely there must be some mistake.

There was a mistake, but not in the answer of the Lord Jesus, of course. It was in the way the lawyer had framed his question. He was not asking how a person could *receive* eternal life, but how he could *inherit* it. A person has a legal right to an inheritance. Now only a fool—or a Pharisee—would imagine he could legally lay claim to eternal life, but this was the question asked and so this was the question answered. Do you want a *right* to it? Then it is merely a matter of perfection—in devotedness to God and in unstinting, unselfish service to mankind.

The lawyer had asked for it, and he got it. Now what? The place was crowded with his neighbors, who would be eager to provide him with endless practical opportunities to prove such selfless love! The lawyer now looked to the Man he had come to trap for a way out of the snare he had set with his own lips. “*And who is my neighbor?*” (v. 29), he asks in desperation.

A way of escape was provided by the gracious Savior in a parable full of pathos. Immediately we sense how high the stakes really are for the lawyer, as they are for lost souls everywhere. No longer is he well-dressed and prosperous but, as Jesus wants us to see every sinner, lying stripped of his temporary riches, wounded and dying by the roadside. He cannot save himself.

But surely all is not lost, for see, here comes a priest out of the holy city! There is no doubt the priest sees the victim where he lies. In fact, says Jesus, it is for this reason that the priest crossed the road! Yes, it was to get to the other side: “*...and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side*” (v. 31). The dying man despairs of any help—but wait! Here comes a Levite! Surely he will come to his aid. Again there is no question that the wounded man was seen. In fact, says Jesus, the Levite “*came and looked on [inspected] him, and passed by on the other side*” (v. 32).

We must not assume that Jesus is belittling the priesthood or the law by His comments. Rather He is appealing to the lawyer, the other listeners that day, and to us, to realize that humanity’s condition is so dire that religious observance and law-keeping cannot help; only a Savior can. And He *has* come to help, not by crossing the road, but by crossing the universe and stooping to where we lay. Then applying His healing balm, beginning us on our new journey, paying for our care, and promising to return, He shows us the way in true love for God and our neighbor. For He is both Savior and Sanctifier to those who put their trust in Him. 

Spiritual Concentration

RETIRE FROM THE WORLD EACH DAY to some private spot, even if it be only the bedroom Stay in the secret place till the surrounding noises begin to fade out of your heart and a sense of God's presence envelops you. Deliberately tune out the unpleasant sounds and come out of your closet determined not to hear them. Listen for the inward Voice till you learn to recognize it. Stop trying to compete with others. Give yourself to God and then be what and who you are without regard to what others think. Reduce your interests to a few. Don't try to know what will be of no service to you. Avoid the digest type of mind—short bits of unrelated facts, cute stories, and bright sayings. Learn to pray inwardly every moment. After a while you can do this even while you work. Practice candor, childlike honesty, humility. Pray for a single eye. Read less, but read more of what is important to your inner life. Never let your mind remain scattered for very long. Call home your roving thoughts. Gaze on Christ with the eyes of your soul. Practice spiritual concentration.

—A. W. TOZER, *"Of God and Men"*

