

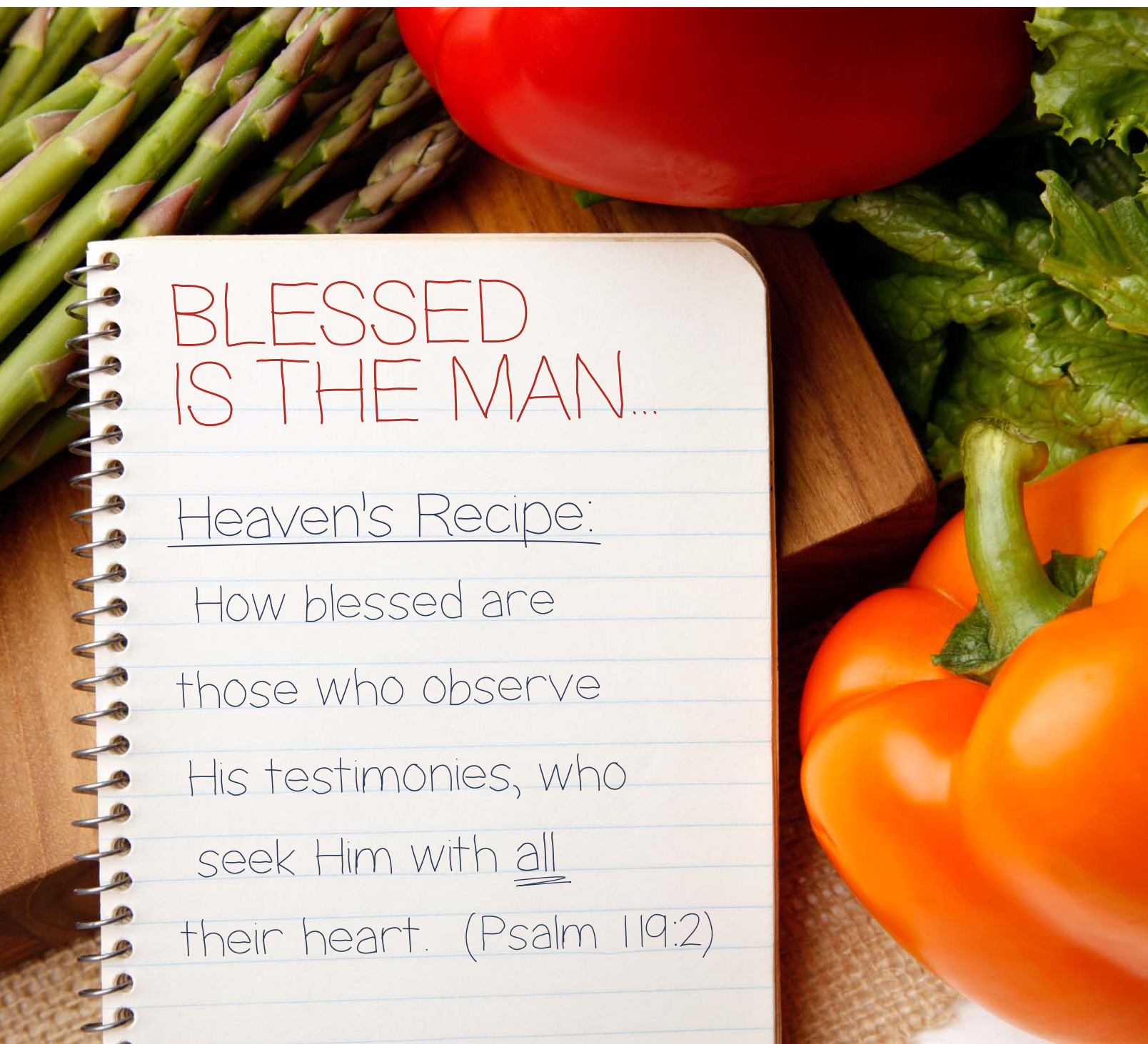
**Delighting in  
discipline**  
Keith Keyser

**Grace to  
the guilty**  
Sam Oommen

**Announcing:  
Why We Web**  
The Conference

# UPLOOK

January-February 2012 [www.uplook.org](http://www.uplook.org)



BLESSED  
IS THE MAN...

Heaven's Recipe:

How blessed are  
those who observe  
His testimonies, who  
seek Him with all  
their heart. (Psalm 119:2)

## Heaven's Recipe



We've all had this experience: at a friend's house, they have fed us something so delicious that we begged for the recipe. Assuming our friend is willing to part with his or her (okay, her) top secret recipe, imagine the following scenario.

You take the recipe home, eager to reproduce the experience you so enjoyed. But during the process, you do a curious thing: you deviate from the recipe repeatedly, sometimes drastically. "Two eggs? I'll put in these grapes instead. I like grapes." "Two cups of sugar? Why don't I just use salt? They both look the same." When it's done, you take a bite, and, horrified at the disaster you've created, you exclaim, "What a terrible recipe!"

Ludicrous, you say? Of course it is. Yet isn't that what passes for a clever argument among those who object to Christianity? (Actually, they go farther and deny the friend even exists!) The Lord designed a world for the delight of His creatures and gave clear instructions as to the path of blessing. But instead of obeying the Lord's directions, "Each of us has turned to his own way" (Isa. 53:6). No wonder there is pain and suffering in the world! Far from being an argument to reject God and the Bible, suffering is an argument to embrace the Lord and His Word. We've tried our way and it has failed miserably. Why not repent and follow the divine recipe?

On a smaller scale, others fear that the Lord is out to make us miserable. Someone once quipped that Puritanism was the sneaking suspicion that someone, somewhere, was having fun. Many unbelievers have the same impression of Christianity: they view it as a set of rules outlawing

many of the activities they enjoy most and mandating onerous responsibilities. Needless to say, such a misconception can be a hindrance to the gospel in their lives.

Sadly, this problem isn't limited to unbelievers. Isn't it true that even believers—perhaps all of us at one time or another—have thought that we would miss out if we did things God's way? Even if we don't think it for ourselves, don't we sometimes think it for others? Are there not times when we as parents are tempted to relax what we know to be God's desire because we fear it will be too hard on our children? As if we love them more than the Lord does? Or do we not live in a day when churches are increasingly departing from the truth in order to appease the misplaced priorities of believers and unbelievers alike, a time when more and more of the Bible is ignored as it is viewed as too hard and unenjoyable for the masses?

Such thinking is utterly misguided. The fact is that all the suffering this world has ever known has come as a result of sin, a consequence of rejecting the Lord's way in favor of our own. There is no more blessed life than one lived according to the directions of the One who loved us so much that He died for us.

Perhaps this is why our Lord began that most famous of sermons—the Sermon on the Mount—with a nine-fold description of the blessed man. He was describing heaven's standard: a life of careful (and sometimes costly) obedience, but a life that enjoyed all the blessings of heaven both now and in eternity. In short, a life like His, heaven's blessed Man.

—James Martin editor@uplook.org

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# Bless you!

## 10 Trust and Obey

**Thomas Paul** demonstrates that knowing God's Word and doing it is the key to discovering God, knowing His will and becoming like God's Son.

## The Misery of Sin

King David provides a detailed post-mortem on the anatomy of the soul, writes **Steven Batts**, and shows the ravages of sin in the life of the believer.

## 16 Precious Arrows

**Shawn Abigail** takes a balanced look at a subject often deemed to be controversial. Are we really blessed with a "quiver full" of children? Culture doesn't always square with God's view on things.

## Delighting in Discipline 18

Is chastening really well-disguised blessing? **Keith Keyser** shows from the Word that fruit increases when the Father uses His pruning knife on our lives.

## 20 Grace to the Guilty

With insight into the penitential Psalms, **Sam Oommen** describes the link between the supreme sacrifice of Christ and the message of forgiveness we all need.

## Blessed be the Lord 24

A gripping account of the spiritual struggles and conversion of Professor **J. Budziszewski**; how an atheist lost his faith and found the Lord.

## 26 The Precious Preface

Psalm 1 is more than an exhortation to follow the path of righteousness and turn from the way of sinners. It is an exquisite portrait of the truly Blessed Man from heaven, says **Rex Trogdon**.

## Blessed Busyness 28

**Mark Anderson** gets right to the point and then stays there. He explains there are excellent reasons to be busy for the Lord, both now and when He appears.

## 2 Editorial

Heaven's recipe

## 4 Front Lines

Calling all young men:  
Cross Canada Cruisers



## 9 Science & You

Landscape war

## 14 Evidences for Faith

A sophisticated prophecy

## 23 Why We Web

Web Evangelism

## 30 For your own study

Blessed is the man...  
The beatitudes

## 31 Mega-Truth

Better than handmade



# Genesis Academy



Attention math and science students:

## A great creation resource

David Penny, a graduate of M.I.T. in engineering, and Michael Windheuser, who holds a Ph.D. in microbiology (and writes a regular column in UPLook on the Bible and science) fellowship at Lawrence Bible Chapel, in Lawrence KS. They are providing a great service to the Lord's people, especially those looking for help in the area of the Bible and science. Check out the excellent resources they have made available on their website [www.genesisacademy.net](http://www.genesisacademy.net)

Also see the notice of their very helpful "Are We Alone?" DVD series filmed at the Von Braun Center during the Good News Huntsville, AL outreach, page 8.

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### CONFERENCES, CAMPS & RETREATS

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#### SOUTHEASTERN WORKERS CONF.

The 61st annual conference will be hosted by Bethany Bible Chapel, Conway, SC beginning at 6:30 PM Monday, Feb 20 and concluding at noon on Wednesday, Feb 22. More information regarding the conference as well as registration info, schedules and past conference messages can be found at [www.sewc.info](http://www.sewc.info)

**Contact:** Greg Hylton  
email: [gregshylton@gmail.com](mailto:gregshylton@gmail.com)

#### ISRAEL 2012

In the will of the Lord, a tour organized by Turkey Hill Ranch Bible Camp will depart from Chicago on Feb 23 and return on Mar 4. This trip is designed to give biblical history and insight to the geography of the Bible. It aims to provide a healthy backdrop to the narrative portions of the Scriptures, which assist in explaining biblical events. Steve Price (KS) and John Heller (AR) will share the

teaching responsibilities. Space is limited.

**Contact:** Steve Allan ph: 573-744-5871  
email: [thrbcsteve@yahoo.com](mailto:thrbcsteve@yahoo.com)  
Jimmy Allan ph: 573-619-2895  
email: [jimmythrbc@yahoo.com](mailto:jimmythrbc@yahoo.com)

#### MEN'S RETREAT IN NORTHEAST PA

Camp Iroquoia will host a retreat Mar 2-3. Mike Attwood (MO) is the speaker. Fine food, spiritual and physical. Bring a hungry friend! The cost is \$45 for Friday and Saturday or \$35 for just Saturday.

The camp is just 3 to 3.5 hours from NJ, Philly, Harrisburg, and Rochester.

**Contact:** Mark Thomas  
email: [campiroquoia@epix.net](mailto:campiroquoia@epix.net)  
web: [www.iroquoia.org](http://www.iroquoia.org)

#### TENNESSEE SPRING TEEN RETREAT

Teens ages 13-18 are invited to a retreat Mar 2-4 at Horton Haven Christian Camp. It begins Friday at 6:30 PM and concludes Sunday after lunch. The cost is \$55.

Register online: [www.hortonhaven.org](http://www.hortonhaven.org)  
**Contact:** Wendy Phelan  
email: [wendy@hortonhaven.org](mailto:wendy@hortonhaven.org)

#### WOMEN'S WEEKEND AWAY IN TN

This annual retreat at Horton Haven Christian Camp will take place Mar 9-10 for ages 13 and up. This year's speaker is Tammy Hollingsworth (GA). The conference begins with registration at 5:30 PM and concludes Saturday at 4:00 PM. The cost is \$50. Out of town attendees may arrange to stay through Sunday at no additional cost. Please register online at [www.hortonhaven.org](http://www.hortonhaven.org) or email Wendy Phelan at [wendy@hortonhaven.org](mailto:wendy@hortonhaven.org)

#### BROOKINGS, SD PRAYER CONFERENCE

The conference will be held over the weekend of Mar 23-25. It will be geared towards believers ages 15-25 (but all ages are welcome). Housing and meals will be provided free of charge. This year one of the topics will be fasting in prayer. Come prepared to spend a day fasting (if you are unable to fast, note that in your registration, and food will be provided). Register: [www.brookingschristianassembly.com](http://www.brookingschristianassembly.com)  
Larry Sax: [larrysax@gmail.com](mailto:larrysax@gmail.com)  
Nathanael Pena: [goserveurking@gmail.com](mailto:goserveurking@gmail.com)

# front lines praise around the clock

## CONFERENCE IN CONNECTICUT

The annual Spring Bible Conference at Wellspring Bible Fellowship, Welles Road, Old Mystic, CT will be held Mar. 23-25 with Randy Amos (NY) as the expected speaker. The conference begins Friday at 7:00 PM and continues with four sessions on Saturday. Lunch provided. Brother Randy will also speak at the Sunday morning meeting. **Contact:** John Clifford ph: 860-445-0622 email: [clifford.j@att.net](mailto:clifford.j@att.net)

## SPRING TEEN RETREAT IN GEORGIA

Camp Hope will host their Spring Teen Retreat Mar 30-Apr 1 with speaker Glenn Barinowski (SC). The retreat begins Friday with registration at 6 PM and ends Sunday at 11:30 AM (no lunch provided). Cost: \$60/person. **Contact:** Ed Myers ph: 706-863-0875 email: [myersed@yahoo.com](mailto:myersed@yahoo.com) Registration form is available at [www.camphopega.org](http://www.camphopega.org)

## SPRING CONFERENCE IN BC

Heather Bible Chapel, 277 West 68th Ave., Vancouver and 16th Ave Gospel Chapel, 2756 W. 16th Ave, Vancouver will co-host their annual conference Apr 6-8. The scheduled speakers are Randy Amos (NY) and Nathan Bramsen (NC). Sessions on Friday and Saturday are at Heather Bible Chapel beginning at 3:30 PM with a youth fellowship Saturday after the evening session. The final session will be Sunday at 7:00 PM at 16th Ave. Gospel Chapel. There will be a children's program each day. **Contact:** Norman Chandler ph: 604-271-1093 email: [ejeannormr@yahoo.ca](mailto:ejeannormr@yahoo.ca)

## FATHER/SON RETREAT AT CAMP HOPE

Camp Hope will host their Father/Son

Retreat Apr 20-22. The speaker will be Jesse Gentile (FL). The conference begins Friday with registration at 6:00 PM and ends Sunday with lunch. Cost: \$60/family. **Contact:** Steve Roys, 7011 Pony Lake Rd., Dahlonga, GA 30533 ph: 770-536-4787 email: [camphopega@arilion.com](mailto:camphopega@arilion.com). Registration form is available on the camp website at [www.camphopega.org](http://www.camphopega.org)

## YOUNG ADULT RETREAT IN INDIANA

The 10th annual Believers' Challenge Young Adult Retreat will be held at the Country Lake Christian Retreat Center (20 miles North of Louisville) in Underwood, IN Apr 20-22. Lord willing, the speaker will be Tim McNeal (MO). Please register by Apr 6th. **Contact:** Seth McNeal ph: 636-667-9992 email: [stlsinguy@gmail.com](mailto:stlsinguy@gmail.com)

## CHICAGO AREA CONFERENCE

The Palos Hills Christian Assembly plans to host its annual conference Apr 27-29. Further information to follow at [www.paloshillsassembly.org](http://www.paloshillsassembly.org)

## ANNUAL SPRING CONFERENCE IN AL

The Christians meeting at Hope Bible Chapel in Birmingham, AL announce their annual spring conference will be held Apr 27-29. The invited speaker is Joe Reese (ON). **Contact:** Buddy Hughes ph: 205-467-2601 Alton Sizemore ph: 205-988-9931 web: [www.hopebiblechapel.org](http://www.hopebiblechapel.org)

## ANNUAL LOUISIANA CONFERENCE

Lake Park Chapel, at 201 Schlieff Drive, Belle Chasse, LA will hold its 68th annual Bible conference May 5-6, beginning Saturday at 3:30 PM. Enjoy a spiritually refreshing weekend in God's Word with

Keith Trevolt (KS) speaking. **Contact:** Ray Cummings, 103 Dickson Dr., Belle Chasse, LA 70037 ph: 504-239-7068 or 504-393-7083 email: [lakeparkchapel@cmaaccess.com](mailto:lakeparkchapel@cmaaccess.com)

## CAMP HOPE IN GEORGIA

The camp will have their Homeschool Camp May 21-26. The speaker for junior campers is Nate Thomas (SC) and Ken Miller (OK) for teen campers. This camp is for ages 7-19. The week begins Monday with registration at 3:00 PM and ends Saturday morning after breakfast. **Contact:** Steve Roys, 7011 Pony Lake Rd., Dahlonga, GA 30533 ph: 770-536-4787 email: [camphopega@gmail.com](mailto:camphopega@gmail.com) Registration form is available on the camp website at [www.camphopega.org](http://www.camphopega.org)

## 2012 BIBLE BOOK CHALLENGE

ECS Ministries invites your assembly to fellowship with other assemblies across the country in studying the Gospel of Mark, all at the same time using the 12-lesson ECS course on the gospel. For more details visit [www.ecsministries.org](http://www.ecsministries.org) or email [rvolgarino@ecsministries.org](mailto:rvolgarino@ecsministries.org)

## RECORDED SPIRITUAL SONGS

To help saints sing spiritual songs together, mp3 files for more than 140 spiritual songs (and growing) are available for free download at [www.SaintsServing.net](http://www.SaintsServing.net) The recordings are four-part vocal and/or piano for each song, and some songs also have separate alto/tenor/bass recordings to help in singing harmony parts.

## TORONTO CONFERENCE RECORDINGS

Audio resources of the 2011 Toronto Easter Bible Conference are available



on CD, DVD or MP3. A charge of \$20 covers all costs of seven messages and postage. The speakers are Alan Gamble from Scotland ministering on *"The Life and Times of Elijah"* and Dr. Steve Price (KS) on *"The Priesthood of Believers."* Orders can be sent to Bill Allison, 3199 Sovereign Road, Burlington ON, L7M 2W1 email: [hw.allison@sympatico.ca](mailto:hw.allison@sympatico.ca) ph: 905-336-8101

## ASSEMBLY REQUESTS PRAYER

Mount Albert Bible Fellowship, in Mount Albert, ON, recently celebrated the Lord's goodness over our first three years of meeting as a local assembly. We are presently renting the facilities of the Community Centre for our Sunday morning services. The mid-week meeting is held in various homes of believers. Our numbers have almost doubled since we started, and we find that we need to look for other premises which would better accommodate us, and allow for other ministries to the community. Not much is available in the town at present, so building is one option we will have to consider. We would appreciate the prayer's of the Lord's people that the Lord will continue to lead and direct at MABF. *"Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it"* (Ps. 127:1) **Contact:** Matt Dent ph: 905-473-1098 email: [matt@leadertv.ca](mailto:matt@leadertv.ca)

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## MINISTRY OPPORTUNITIES

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### MANAGING DIRECTOR POSITION IN BC

This is a full-time position to oversee the camp operation and its facility. This is a ministry for a person or couple with a

passionate desire to reach children and adults with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Morning Star Bible Camp is located about 30 minutes from Kelowna on the slopes of the Okanagan Valley of BC. This is an ideal position for someone with the energy and a vision to see a camp work grow to a year round ministry. On site housing and utilities are available. Financial remuneration to be discussed. For a more detailed job description, go to the MSBC website: [www.morningstarbiblecamp.com](http://www.morningstarbiblecamp.com)

**Contact:** Ken Spohr  
email: [kenspohr@hotmail.com](mailto:kenspohr@hotmail.com)  
ph: 250-832-2652 or Norm Spohr  
email: [npspohr@hotmail.com](mailto:npspohr@hotmail.com)  
ph: 250-828-0723

### GOOD NEWS ON THE MOVE

Prayer is requested for the Lord's blessing and guidance on GNOM's field training ministry. Leaders and team members are continuing on a revised vision of this program, spending longer periods in fewer regions to facilitate better follow-up. **Contact:** Jerry Denny  
email: [jerrydenny@bellsouth.net](mailto:jerrydenny@bellsouth.net)  
ph: 336-432-3284

### CWF FUND

The purpose of Christian Workers' Fellowship Fund, Inc. is to "receive gifts and donations of money from the Lord's people and distribute the same to workers sound in doctrine and associated with assemblies of believers and who are devoting their time to the Lord's work." Founded in 1957, it is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) corporation, so contributions made to it by U.S. residents are tax-deductable. All funds received are distributed every month. Only funds designated for expenses are used for this

purpose. The directors serve without remuneration. Funds received in the second quarter totaled \$507,909.30. Of this, \$19,753.32 was designated for general expenses, and the rest for distribution. Funds received in the third quarter totaled \$357,318.81. Of this, \$2,264.22 was designated for general expenses, and the rest for distribution. A financial report may be requested from: The Treasurer, Christian Workers' Fellowship Fund, Inc., Box 1117, Lawrence, KS 66044

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## COMMENDATIONS

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### KAREN CARTER

Those meeting at High Point Bible Chapel commend Karen to the work of the Lord as a teacher at El Camino Academy in Bogotá, Colombia. She completed a semester of practice teaching at El Camino and was asked by the school administration to return as a full-time teacher. Karen has been involved at High Point teaching children, a short term missions trip and with Sunday School.

### DUANE AND LORI DELZER

After over 23 years of active service in Bolivia, Duane and Lori are returning to the U.S. for an extended time. Those at Grace Bible Chapel, Fullerton, CA have commended the Delzers to missionary work in Southern California in conjunction with Latino Evangelistic Ministries ([www.latinoministries.org](http://www.latinoministries.org)). They will be taking over the Spanish Emmaus Bible course ministry as well as working with the existing Spanish speaking assemblies and new start ups with the focus on strengthening leadership and outreach.

## JESSE AND ELLA GENTILE

The believers at Carrollwood Bible Chapel in Tampa, Florida are happy to announce the commendation of Jesse and Ella Gentile to the work of the Lord. While Jesse and Ella have been active and faithfully involved in personal evangelism, discipleship and youth work at the assembly, Jesse has been active in Bible teaching and preaching throughout Florida and other parts of the USA. He has also been serving the Lord's people through Assembly Care Ministries and a writing ministry as well.

## REBECCA MOFFITT

After faithfully serving the Lord in France for the past 30 plus years, Rebecca has moved back to Tulsa, OK. Seeing her desire to continue to serve the Lord as He directs in the United States, those at East Tulsa Bible Chapel redirect Rebecca's commendation from serving full-time in the foreign field to serving full-time as a commended home worker.

## LUCAS RICHARD

The leadership at Southside Bible Chapel in Lafayette, LA have announced the assembly's commendation of Lucas Richard to the work of the Lord in Ireland. They write: "We commit our brother to the Chief Shepherd, our Lord Jesus Christ, for his safety and care." Needham Bible Chapel, Needham, AL have also added their commendation.

## DOUG AND KATHRYN RICKERT

Those meeting in the name of the Lord at Bethany Bible Chapel, Conway, SC joyfully commend Doug and Kathryn Rickert to the full time work of the Lord. Doug has served as an elder and faithfully used his gifts and abilities to shepherd and teach

in various ministries. Kathryn has served with Doug and has used her own gift of teaching and talents in music for the glory of God and both have demonstrated hearts of compassion. Doug, Kathryn and their children have been called to the ministry of Three Springs Ministries in Morris, PA.

## TIM AND YOLLY STAFFORD

Following the burden of the Lord placed on his heart, Tim has expressed his desire to go out into full-time ministry for the Lord. He has left secular employment and Tim and Yolly express a great desire to look only to the Lord for their financial needs. Those at Boulevard Bible Chapel, Pembroke Pines, FL "*commend them to the grace of God for the work*" (Acts 14:26) of full-time itinerant teaching and preaching as the Lord may lead them. Your prayers for them are appreciated.

## MICHAEL AND LAURA THOMAS

The Christians who gather at Bethany Bible Chapel, Salisbury, NC are pleased to commend Michael and Laura to the work of the Lord in the areas of camp/youth work, pastoral care and speaking ministry. They have been in happy fellowship at Bethany since 2003 and Michael has continued to minister full-time since 1996 when commended by Believers Bible Chapel in Painesville, OH. **Contact:** Michael and Laura Thomas, 308 Home Rd., Salisbury, NC 28147 ph: 704-636-4381 email: [mdtlat308@att.net](mailto:mdtlat308@att.net)

## TERRY AND SHIRLEY WILSON

The believers gathered at Grace Chapel, Jamestown, NY commend Terry and Shirley to full-time ministry in the Lord's work. Terry and Shirley have been a welcome addition to the assembly since their

move from Tracy, CA. Terry regularly ministers the Word and currently serves as Administrator at Camp Li-Lo-Li. He also serves on the board of ECS Ministries (Emmaus Correspondence School).

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## HOMECALLS

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### ROBERT (BOB) FIEBIG 1933-2011

Bob went Home to be with the Lord on Nov 4. Bob's wife Naomi (nee Latham) was called Home in 2008. They were blessed with two children, Alan (Arlene) Fiebig and Pam (Warren) Hagey. Bob loved studying God's Word and always enjoyed opportunities to minister it to others. He was an elder and the assembly correspondent for many years at the Palos Hills Christian Assembly, a Sunday school and DVBS teacher. Bob also enjoyed leading neighborhood Bible studies. Those who knew Bob are appreciative and grateful for all that he taught them about trusting the Lord and living for Him.

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## MISCELLANY

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### HEAD COVERINGS

A variety of head coverings are available to view and purchase from the web site: [www.headcoveringsonline.com](http://www.headcoveringsonline.com) **Contact:** Susan Crowe ph: 905-640-4218 email: [pandscrowe@gmail.com](mailto:pandscrowe@gmail.com)

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## NOTE: NEWS SUBMISSIONS

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The news editor reserves the right to determine those items best suited for the magazine. Editorial decisions are final. Photos accepted. News items are also posted online when time allows. Send news items to: [frontlines@uplook.org](mailto:frontlines@uplook.org)

# Calling all young men!

## Cross Canada Cruisers: Gearing up for 2012

ATTENTION young men, laboring assemblies, and fellow workers! *Cross Canada Cruisers* was blessed with another encouraging season in 2011, and, in the will of the Lord, plans are being set for 2012. C3 runs from June through August, 2012. Locations are being determined, but we need to know if you are interested! Eager to reach out with the gospel in Ontario? Are you a male over age 18, well reported of in your assembly? We are seeking young, committed, spiritual men, and evangelistically minded assemblies to work alongside each other for the gospel's sake. Visit [www.teamc3.info](http://www.teamc3.info) Contact Randy Hoffman: [randyhoffman@sympatico.ca](mailto:randyhoffman@sympatico.ca) or Fil Capuano: [fil@chatsworthproject.ca](mailto:fil@chatsworthproject.ca)

John Nicholson



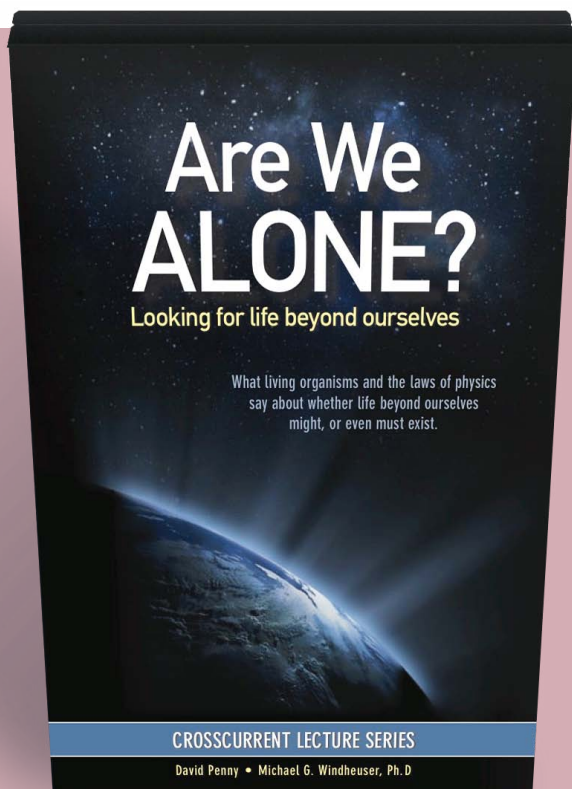
The 2011 C3 team in Guelph, ON, (from left): Perry Mills, JJ Ferrier, John Hodge, Tim Wichers, Kevin Armitage and Iain MacDougall.

**Dale Martin says:** I found that engaging in conversation on a daily basis about the gospel not only helped with explaining it to others, but cultivated a deeper appreciation for the Lord in my own heart. It changed my life forever.

**Jay Ball writes:** C3 taught me boldness and gave me confidence in understanding the gospel so I could share it with anyone. It greatly helped me grow as a Christian and showed me more clearly what biblical Christianity looks like.

**Mike Donahue:** C3 was a great opportunity for me to visit different assemblies and share in their work. I learned many valuable lessons from these Christians. I can't think of a better way for a young Christian man to spend his summer.

**Perry Mills asks:** Why join C3? Has the Lord asked you to speak for Him, to be bold as a witness? Ask Him if He would have you to join this endeavor. An opportunity to learn more from the Word and to effectively share the gospel.



Available on DVD

## ARE WE ALONE? THE CROSSCURRENT LECTURE SERIES

As of December 5, 2011, the Allen Telescope Array (ATA) at the Hat Creek Observatory in rural northern California is once again searching planetary systems for signals that would be evidence of extraterrestrial intelligence. The so-called SETI project is pseudoscience at its best.

On the other hand, there is clear evidence that vastly superior intelligent Life *has* visited our planet, not to build the pyramids but to die on a cross for the reconciling of sinners to their God. This Visitor was none other than the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe, the Savior of the world.

This 2-disk set features engineer Dave Penny and scientist Michael Winheuser exploring the key questions about life, origins, and the laws of science.

Contact: [streetlightilluminations@gmail.com](mailto:streetlightilluminations@gmail.com)  
Web: [www.streetlightilluminations.com](http://www.streetlightilluminations.com)



# Landscape War

It's not just a physical battle

**I** tell people we are grass farmers since we live on several acres of land that is mostly grass. As caretakers of the land God has given us, we wanted to improve our backyard with a landscape plan that included planting beds which did not allow grass and weeds in them. But, like a Christian in a fallen world full of spiritual “weeds,” we found creating a weed-free landscape would not be a one-time task of planting and then enjoying the result. Keeping the plantings healthy and free of weeds requires constant attention and action during the growing season, pulling out the invaders before they take over the beds. Our landscape plans placed us in an ongoing war against determined and opportunistic foes.

We removed the old deck and spent most of one spring and summer building a new, larger deck. In the spring, the patio was expanded using paving stones set on a sand and rock base. Next, planting beds were constructed using large rocks as visual anchors. The soil was covered with landscape fabric and mulch before the plants we chose were installed. With bed edges trimmed and everything in place, we could finally sit back and enjoy our new backyard space and landscaping. Or so we thought.

Soon, small plants eagerly began to grow in the sand lines between patio pavers. Grass and broadleaf weeds appeared in the mulch, putting down anchoring roots and punching holes in the landscape fabric. Other plants

bearing sharp thorns claimed the spaces between retaining-wall blocks and walkway stones as their own. All had to be pulled out by hand to keep the design pure. Also, in the patio drainage pond, cattails grew. At first, I thought they added a “natural” element to the small pond. However, their intent was not to complement but to conquer. Cattails are invasive, and, left to themselves, they nearly filled the shallow pond with their growth. With roots almost impossible to pull out, the cattails had to be cut off below the water level time and again until the roots finally died. That battle was won, but the war continues.

Actually, it is only a war from my perspective. It is a war of my will and plans

against the God-given drive of living things to survive and spread wherever they can. God has intentionally designed life to multiply and aggressively fill the Earth even if I have other plans for the same space. This is ultimately for my benefit. But my backyard landscape war is a vivid reminder to me that I am not really in charge; nature may bend, but does not bow, to my will. It also reminds me that there is a larger war against another living foe whose spiritual “weeds” seek to take root in my life. Against this foe, I need the strength and power of the God of the Garden because He has already won the war against the weeds of sin and death.

– Michael G. Windheuser, Ph.D.

*If we hope to become  
“like a watered garden”  
(Isa. 58:11),  
the One mistaken  
for the gardener  
on Resurrection Day  
will need to do  
His special work  
in our lives.*



Blessed are those that read *and* heed

# Trust & Obey

*The evidence that a truth is believed in the heart  
is only seen when it is lived out in our daily experience.*

by Thomas Paul

**T**he Bible tells us that we are blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus our Lord in the heavenly realms (Eph. 1:3). However, believers do not enter into the good of every blessing unless we “[lay] hold of that for which Christ also has laid hold of [us].” In other words, we all need to be diligent in appropriating all that God desires to make a reality in our lives through Christ. No doubt God pours out many blessings even while we may remain completely ignorant of His ways and purposes. In His grace, for example, He pours out rain and provides sunshine for all (Mt. 5:45). Furthermore, our Lord keeps a watchful eye, caring, protecting, and even praying for His own (Mt. 6:26-30; Heb. 7:25).

However, the Scriptures make it clear that many of the blessings God has laid up for believers become a reality in our lives only if we “trust and obey.” For example, in the book of Genesis, we read of God’s word concerning Abraham: “For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him” (Gen. 18:19). From these words, it is clear that although it

was the Lord who would ultimately bless Abraham and his descendents, they were responsible to continue to “keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice.” God never fails to keep His promises, but we have a role to play if we are to enjoy the blessings He has for us.

## God's Heart Revealed

One of the richest blessings believers may appropriate and enjoy this side of eternity is the blessing of God’s Word. Alas for many even among God’s people, the Bible is no more than a puzzle and a dry one at that! Many a saint who once enjoyed reading and meditating on God’s Word has been sidetracked. The reading of the Scriptures is no longer a priority; other literature has come in to take its place. If the eyes of any such fall upon these words, we would encourage you, beloved, to again take up God’s Word and begin anew to read, meditate, and assimilate it. The blessings of God’s Word cannot be overstated.

All of Scripture is a blessing to the child of God, but the book of Revelation promises a peculiar blessing to all who read it, hear it being read, and take to heart what it says (Rev. 1:3). This last criterion is especially important for,

towards its close, God pronounces a blessing specifically to those who “keep the words of this book” (Rev. 22:7). Sadly, many who read and hear go away without keeping (holding on to) the words of this Book.

Although this principle is true in a very special way of the book of Revelation, it is valid with regard to the whole Bible. If we desire the full blessing of the Scriptures, we must not only take in the Word of God but also obey it. True and full blessing comes when we actually keep those things that are written in the Bible. Isn’t this exactly what James tells us in his letter: “But be ye doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves” (Jas. 1:22). But how exactly does God’s Word bless us?

## Understanding God's Will

I remember walking into a Christian bookstore and noting the many books with titles similar to “Finding God’s Will.” For most Christians, finding the will of God seems to be the most important subject of discussion and rightly so. If there is that one thing we all wish, it is to know God’s will for our lives. And yet the will of God



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*"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and depart from evil."*  
Proverbs 3:5-7

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seems to elude or confuse many of us. No wonder many Christian authors feel the need to write on such a subject!

But however well-intentioned these authors may be, no Christian will ever truly understand God's will for his life without a clear understanding of God's Word. The Bible alone makes plain the will of God for each of us. And if we don't acquaint ourselves with the contents of the Bible and seek God through reading and meditating on His Word, every other book or means of arriving at God's will will be in vain. God's Word alone can shed the light necessary to illuminate our path (Ps. 119:105) and lead us to His dwelling (Ps. 43:3).

### Knowing God Himself

The only way to truly know God is to know His Word. This is because God has revealed Himself, His works, and His ways in His Word. Like the incarnate Word, the written Word *"has declared [explained] Him"* (Jn. 1:18). The Greek word here translated "declared" is a word from which we get our English word *exegesis*. Just as Christ has revealed God to us, so the Bible also explains God to us. Can we then neglect to read God's Word and claim to know Him well? The apostle Peter admonishes us to *"grow in the grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ"* (2 Pet. 3:18). He had previously admonished that we should *"as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the Word that [we] may grow by it"* (1 Pet. 2:2). Obviously in Peter's mind there was no way to grow in the grace and

knowledge of God Himself apart from the Scriptures. Grace and the knowledge of Christ are connected—we cannot have the one without the other.

### Growing in Christ-likeness

Finally, we conclude by saying that the more a believer knows God through reading and keeping His Word, the more he grows in Christ-likeness. Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 3:18: *"But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."* It is in the Word of God that we behold the glory of the Lord. Paul went on to say that *"God had granted us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ"* (2 Cor. 4:6). Since the written Word is the only authentic representation of the incarnate Word, surely one essential way to behold the glory of God is to prayerfully look into the Scriptures on a daily basis and allow the Spirit to transform us. We are washed, cleansed, sanctified, and transformed by the Word (Ps. 119:9; Jn. 17:17; Eph. 5:26) as the Holy Spirit reveals it to our hearts and then empowers us to live it.

What a wonderful blessing the Bible is to us! However, we cannot enter into and enjoy this blessing to the full unless we do our part in reading it and then rely on God for help to keep His Word (Lk. 11:28). May the Lord grant His daily strength as we pray: *"Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law"* (Ps. 119:18) and that we may live with increasing conformity to it. ■

## THE PRICE OF TRUTH

***"Buy the truth, and sell it not." Prov. 23:23***

Great truths are dearly bought. The common truth  
Such as men give and take from day to day  
Comes in the common walk of easy life,  
Blown by the careless wind across our way.

Great truths are greatly won. Not found by chance  
Nor wafted on the breath of summer dream,  
But grasped in the great struggle of the soul,  
Hard-buffeted with adverse wind and stream.

Bought in the day of conflict, fear and grief,  
When the strong hand of God, put forth in might,  
Plows up the subsoil of the stagnant heart,  
And brings the imprisoned truth-seed to the light.

Wrung from the troubled spirit, in hard hours  
Of weakness, solitude, perchance of pain,  
Truth springs, like harvest from the well-plowed field,  
And the soul feels it has not wept in vain.

—Horatius Bonar

**Horatius Bonar (1808–1889), a prolific writer of gospel tracts, devotional books and more than 600 hymns, said his objective was to fill his preaching and writing with the "love and light of Christ." He knew something of the "hard-buffeting" of life. He and his wife, Jane, saw five of their young children die in succession. Towards the end of their lives, one of their surviving daughters was left a widow with five small children. She returned to live with her parents. They felt it was the Lord's kindness in allowing them these five children to raise for Him.**



Blessed is the man who does not...

# The Misery of Sin by Steven Batts

**P**salm 1 starts off in an interesting way. Instead of saying what to *do* to be blessed, it tells you what *not* to do. “*Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the way of sinners nor sits in the seat of the scornful.*” As a parent, I understand the logic of this. We try to impart the same wisdom as the psalmist does to our children. We want them to understand the blessings of missing the heartaches that the “*way of sinners*” can cause.

Through the psalmist, our heavenly Father gives us three things about which to be wary. These warnings can be viewed as a description of a believer moving farther and farther away from God. Note the posture of such a man. First he is walking, then he is standing, and, finally, he is sitting. This succession of increasingly sedentary positions shows us the steps of someone becoming more and more at home with the world.

It is not that God is sitting in heaven eagerly waiting to punish those who step away from Him. It is actually the opposite. He longs to bless those who follow His ways. That is the point of this psalm: it is a description of the man whom the Lord blesses. However, part of that description includes what *not* to do.

## DEPARTURE BY DEGREES

As we examine this person, we notice that he starts with the simple, perhaps even innocent, mistake of heeding worldly advice rather than following God’s guidance. Just as incorrect driving directions result in the wrong destination, following the advice of the ungodly leads a person down the wrong path in life and brings about many painful ends.

One of the problems with taking advice from an unbeliever is that we are heading in opposite directions. A believer should have different priorities, goals, and desires from the unsaved. All the unbeliever sees is this world, so his vision is limited. He can’t help but lead us down the wrong path. He will guide us to a place we don’t want to be.

Once we succumb to worldly advice and follow worldly directions, the next step is to do things in a worldly way. Our spiritual life stagnates. Instead of moving forward—or even moving back to where we are supposed to be—we end up stalled in our Christian life. We stop and look at how the world does things. Slowly we begin to adopt its methods and habits.

At this stage, the man hasn’t fully given in to the world, but he is well on

his way. He does many of the things that the world does, but still tries to maintain Christian standards.

The final stage of departure is to sit right down and make our home in the world. We see things as the world sees them. The world’s advice has been followed; the world’s ways have been adopted; and now the world’s outlook has been accepted.

## THE EXAMPLE OF LOT

When considering this passage, I cannot help but think of the story of Lot. When we first meet him, he is tagging along with Uncle Abraham. But when they part ways, Lot’s backsliding begins. In Genesis 13:10-11, we read: “*And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere, before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar. Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other.*”

Abraham and Lot were coming out of the land of Egypt, a biblical picture of this world. Their two companies of people and livestock were too large to



A withered bush lies covered with salt in the waters of the Dead Sea, Israel.

keep together, so Abraham suggested they part company and gave Lot the first choice of direction. “*Lot...beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where.*” Verse 11 says it was “*like the land of Egypt.*” Conventional wisdom would say to go that direction—it was just like what he had seen in the world.

The world also says to look out for yourself first. Abraham shunned the world’s way and gave Lot first choice. Lot, following the counsel of the world, put himself first and chose the land that looked the best. The only problem was that it faced toward Sodom and Gomorrah. He chose to walk into a life of worldly influences. Then we see those fateful words, “*He pitched his tent toward Sodom.*”

The next time we see Lot, he has stopped journeying and is residing in Sodom (Gen. 14:12), a town that could be categorized as “*the way of sinners.*” Consequently, he is captured, along with the rest of the citizens of Sodom, and has to be rescued by Abraham.

Finally, we see Lot in Genesis 19. Not only is he living in Sodom, he is sitting in the gates of the city (Gen. 19:1). His presence at the gates indicates that Lot seems to have become completely acclimated to the world and its ways. During Old Testament times, people who sat at the gates of the city were considered to be leaders of the town, something like a city council. Some

have suggested he was there to warn naïve travelers of the dangers of the town, but, more likely than not, he was there in a governing capacity.

This downward progression is a cautionary tale. In the end, Lot lost his wife as well as his sons-in-law. His daughters that remained caused him heartache. This man who had so much potential for the Lord missed out on great blessings by following and living in the world.

### THE WAY OF THE RIGHTEOUS

It is interesting to note that each time Lot comes into view in Genesis, Abraham is being blessed in some way. After Lot chose Jordan, the Lord blessed Abraham. When Lot is rescued from Chedorlaomer, Melchizedek, priest of the Most High God, blessed Abraham. Just before the Lord sent His angels to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, He stopped and blessed Abraham.

In the end, Lot is left stripped of his possessions and living fearfully in a cave. Abraham, on the other hand, continues to grow in blessing. He fathers a child when he is one hundred years old. He becomes like the tree in Psalm 1:3: “*And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he does shall prosper.*”

Too often, believers view the “restrictions” of Christianity in a negative way. They fail to see that even the prohibitions are blessings—protection against needless pain and suffering. Christianity isn’t about what we don’t do; it is about what we have. James writes, “*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning*” (Jas. 1:17). O the blessings of avoiding the heartaches of sin! O the joy of walking daily with Him! ■

## THE FINAL TRAGEDY

In one last irony, Jerusalem, City of the Great King, is described by the apostle John as follows: “*the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified*” (Rev. 11:8). No wonder we are called to leave the city and join Him in the place outside. “*Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come*” (Heb. 13:12-14). —J.B.N.

# A Sophisticated Prophecy

**O**n October 5, Steve Jobs finally succumbed to his long bout with pancreatic cancer. As co-founder and former CEO of both Apple Inc. and Pixar Animation Studios, Jobs was a true visionary. Much of the technological and media world around us bears his imprint. If you have ever used an iPod, iPad, iPhone, Mac, or iTunes, you have benefited from his award-winning products. If you or your children have ever seen *Finding Nemo*, *Cars*, or *Toy Story*, you have been entertained by his animation company.

But Steve Jobs is just one of many who have radically changed our lives through developments in computers. And the changes have been far-reaching. Name just about any field of human endeavor,

and you'll find that computers are helping drive its advancement.

Perhaps even more amazing is just how quickly this impact has occurred. Gordon Moore, a legendary innovator in his own right, anticipated this

explosion of knowledge. As co-founder of Intel, it was his company that invented the first microprocessor. As far back as 1965, he foresaw a world dominated by mobile phones, home computers, and cars that would eventually drive themselves.<sup>1</sup>

He is perhaps most famous for coming up with the law that now bears his name: The number of transistors on a chip will double approximately every two years.<sup>2</sup> So what's the big deal? In short, Moore was basically saying that mankind's ability to produce data would double every two years for the foreseeable future. Consequently, mankind's knowledge would grow exponentially.

The last several decades have demonstrated this to be the case. Here is a brief timeline of some of the major advances in computer processing history:

**1943** – British Intelligence commissions the building of *Colossus*, the first electronic computer, to break the Enigma ciphers used by the German Navy during WWII. It is estimated to have performed 5,000 calculations/second.

**1964** – Seymour Cray engineers the world's first supercomputer. It is able to perform 3 million calculations/second.

**1976** – The Cray I supercomputer goes online at Los Alamos National Laboratory. At 160 million calculations/second, it breaks all records.

**1990** – Supercomputers cross the billion calculations/second threshold.

**1997** – IBM develops a computer called *Deep Blue* which beats the world's reigning chess champion, Gary Kasparov, 3.5 to 2.5 in a set of six games. *Deep Blue* operates at 1 teraflop (1 trillion calculations/second).

**2004** – Named in honor of the Space Shuttle crew that had been lost the previ-

ous year, NASA rolls out *Columbia*. This supercomputer is a collaborative effort with Intel and Silicon Graphics International. It functions at 50 teraflops.

**2005** – Not to be outdone, IBM deploys *BlueGene/L* at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. This giant runs at a clip of 478.2 teraflops.

**2009** – A Japanese firm named Riken rolls out the *MD Grape-3*. This is the first machine publically known to have crossed the petaflop threshold: one quadrillion calculations/second.

Furthermore, we'll probably never hear of the world's fastest computer. It is theorized that the US military and intelligence communities have generally been a step ahead of everyone in computer processing abilities.

## Technology and the Bible?

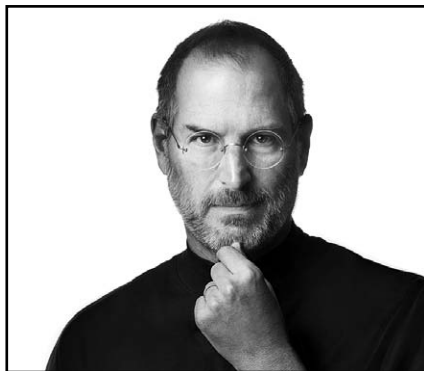
So what does all of this have to do with Bible prophecy? Over 2500 years ago, looking forward to the end times, Daniel recorded: "*But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase*" (Dan. 12:4).

The period of time described in this passage has to do with the end of this age—what Scripture refers to as the Great Tribulation. We see these interesting expressions associated with the time of the end: "*many shall run to and fro*" and "*knowledge shall increase.*" The Hebrew words at play here are fascinating. The expression "*shall run to and fro*"



The Enigma Machine





**Steve Jobs**, as pictured on the cover of his biography by Walter Isaacson (published by Simon & Schuster).

comes from Hebrew *shuwt* or טוּשׁ. It means “to go and rove about, and to do so quickly or eagerly.”<sup>3</sup>

Finally, and perhaps most interesting of all, the Hebrew word for “increase” is *rabah* or רָבַח. It means to “become many, to multiply, to greatly increase.”<sup>4</sup>

*Rabah* shows up in Genesis 7:17 and is used to describe the rise in the floodwaters as they covered the earth. Another enticing use of *rabah* is in Genesis 1:22. On the fifth day of creation, after making the birds and sea creatures, God blessed them saying, “*Be fruitful and multiply [rabah], and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply [rabah] on the earth.*” In both Genesis chapters 1 and 7, *rabah* is describing exponential growth!

In light of this, there is a tremendous amount of conjecture as to what Daniel 12:4 is really predicting. Two schools of thought have arisen in the commentaries:<sup>5</sup>

## VIEW 1 Knowledge of the Bible

Some believe that this verse is saying that at the time of the end, there will be a search as never before to understand Bible prophecy. People will go to and fro examining Scripture in an effort to increase knowledge of future events. As a result, they will have a grasp of eschatology like never before.

There can be no doubt that the body of Christ has available today clearer information for end time events than it has had since the time of the apostles. Much

of Christendom’s history has been erroneously amillennial, wrongly ascribing God’s promises for Israel to the Church.

In fact, those who have a Scriptural framework of dispensational theology and who grasp the hope of the imminent return of Christ, have contributed as much to understanding the end times as any group in Church history.

Some take this approach even further and say that what’s in view is not just prophecy, but Scripture as a whole. As we draw closer to the Lord’s return, the church will have a better grasp on the entirety of God’s Word.

This, too, is a valid argument. Hermeneutical studies are front and center today as never before in Church history. Scholarly understanding of the historical context and background has grown significantly in recent years. People have more tools at their disposal to get at the meaning of the Bible.

Again, this is in large part owing to the influence of those men who rediscovered the priesthood of all believers. Every believer is expected to understand the Bible for himself and not be dependent upon a few to study the Bible for them.

## VIEW 2 Knowledge in all spheres

Others believe these verses may also hint at the technological explosion we now see taking place in the world. In this view, it’s not just that understanding of the Bible will increase, but all of the world’s knowledge will grow in the end times—and it will do so exponentially!

Coupled with this would be the incredible advancement in the world’s modes of transport. The “going to and fro” is thought

to be a hint at the rapid expansion in the world’s transportation capabilities.

This brings us full circle back to Steve Jobs and those like Gordon Moore who have had such an impact on the computer sciences. The last 100 years have seen an exponential increase in knowledge, much of which would not have been possible prior to the computer age. And we all know what has happened in the transportation industry over the past century. The Wright brothers’ flight was a little over 100 years ago. Yet look where we are today!

Finally, do you realize how many prophecies in the Bible have a technological component to them? There are many that could not have seen their fulfillment prior to this generation and the technology that only now exists.

– Robert Sullivan

If you would like to learn more on this topic, please visit the Christian Evidences website at [www.christianevidences.org](http://www.christianevidences.org)



1. <http://bbc.in/man-behind-Moores-law>
2. <http://intel.ly/moores-law-embedded-tech>
3. <http://bit.ly/Strongsh7751>
4. <http://bit.ly/z1O4CK>
5. John F. Walvoord, *Daniel – The Key to Prophetic Revelation* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1971), pp. 291f.

**Note:** The technology and any other products, services or brands mentioned in this article are the property of their respective owners.

# Precious Arrows

by SHAWN ABIGAIL

*Articles in UPLOOK Magazine are usually written in a formal and somewhat impersonal style. But this article deals with very personal, and perhaps controversial, matters. As such, a more conversational style is used.*

*“Behold, children are a gift of the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one’s youth. How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them; they will not be ashamed when they speak with their enemies in the gate.”*

PSALM 127:3-5

**A** couple of years ago, I was preaching a sermon, and one of my points was that children are a blessing from the Lord. I’m sure I said a lot of other things in that sermon, but at the end, a young, visiting couple came to the front of the chapel to speak to me. They were very much convicted about the importance of children and told me that they had never heard a sermon where someone said in a forthright manner that children are a blessing from the Lord. Frankly, this shook me, for it is the clear teaching of the Bible that children are a gift and blessing from God.

When it comes to passages like Psalm 127, Christian couples are faced with a very practical and personal question:

How many children should we have?

This is not a question that couples in previous generations could even consider. But modern methods of birth control mean that it is a question our generation must confront.

On this matter, deep wisdom is called for. To run the risk of offending almost everyone, let me suggest that three unacceptable options are often presented.

### THREE ERRORS

The first unacceptable option is to feel it is our Christian duty to devote all of our efforts to simply having as many children as possible. Now please note that I am *absolutely not* saying it is wrong to have a large—or even a very large—family! I am saying we are mistaken if we believe that our main goal in life is to have as many children as possible. In some places, there is an unhealthy competition to have the biggest family, with bragging rights going to the parents with the most children. This is usually accompanied by absolute scorn and dismissal

of anyone who suggests that unrestricted fertility is sometimes unwise. But sometimes it *is* unwise. Perhaps the family is dealing with genuine poverty. Perhaps the parents are utterly overwhelmed. Perhaps some of the children have special health issues and require a large amount of extra time and attention. In these cases, the parents need to pray for wisdom (Jas. 1:5). It may also be appropriate for the parents to seek counsel from their local church elders.

That being said, it is much more common for Christians to desire to have fewer children. This can manifest itself in different ways. Occasionally, it is suggested that couples who are deeply involved in ministry should not have *any* children, so as to make more opportunity for them to use their time in Christian service. This is unacceptable because it puts Christian service in an artificial greenhouse, completely separated from real life and the ministry opportunities that family life can bring. Besides, for those contemplating ministry in places that children cannot be brought, God has already provided the answer in Matthew 19:12.

The final unacceptable option is to simply follow the practice of our society



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*"Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!" (Deut. 5:29)*

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and have 1.8 children because that is what is acceptable to an unsaved world. This is certainly the easiest option because it is always easy for Christians to blend into the world. Follow what is acceptable to the world, and you will never need a mini-van, never need to rent two hotel rooms, and never need to put more than one child in a bedroom. But the practices of this world are not to be the default option for the Christian (Rom. 12:2).

#### A BALANCED SUGGESTION

Each of these options is flawed. Indeed I would say that each of these options will make for weak churches and families because each represents an unbiblical extreme. So what is a biblical view of children? How do we understand the totality of Scripture, including passages like Psalm 127? I would suggest that without stating a particular number, acknowledging that different couples have different abilities and limitations, Christians should have as many children as they are able to. The "right" number of children will depend on the specific grace and role that God has given you.

Of course this sounds quite fine until I let the other shoe drop by asking, "Is God calling you to have more children?" To have as many children as you are able

does not mean to have as many children as you are comfortable with. It does not mean having as many children as you can afford while still maintaining your lifestyle. This could mean a frank re-evaluation of your life. Maybe you need to push the bounds of what you think you are able to do. Maybe this is a matter that you should put to earnest prayer.

That being said, we must be extremely sensitive to the fact that some Christians are not able to have children. This is a biological or medical reality. There are many believers who would desperately love to have children, but have so far been unable to, and this can cause them great pain. We should be particularly supportive of these dear saints.

#### THE BLESSINGS

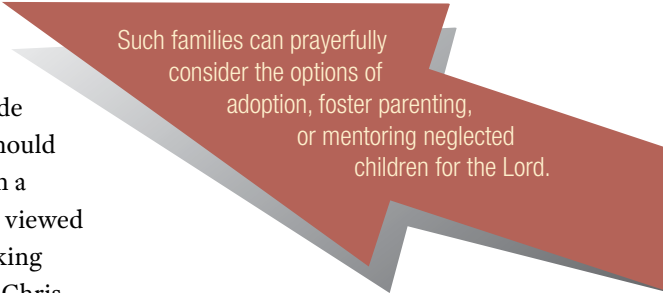
Psalm 127 tells us what our attitude towards children should be: we should view them as a blessing. We live in a world in which children are often viewed as a burden. Sometimes this thinking seeps into the minds of believers. Christians, above all others, ought to appreciate what a tremendous gift children are.

When engaging in spiritual warfare, Christian parents have a powerful weapon available in their children. True, when the children are very young, they need constant nurture and protection.

But as they get older, these children can be of great service to the church. They can share their faith, teach Sunday School, play the piano, visit the sick and elderly, work physically to meet the needs of the saints, babysit for parents who need a break, contribute financially to the Lord's work, and serve in a thousand other ways. Eventually they can have their own quiver full of arrows.

Furthermore, children teach us. We learn from their simple, profound faith (Mk. 10:14f); we learn from their wonder and joy in creation and life; we learn as they ask questions; and we learn as we turn to the Lord seeking His wisdom and strength to properly care for the precious stewardship He has entrusted to us.

Finally, consider the joy that comes from children themselves. Raising children is not easy. There will be many ups and downs. There may even be heartbreak.



Such families can prayerfully consider the options of adoption, foster parenting, or mentoring neglected children for the Lord.

But there is the joy of seeing their smiles, as they learn, as they first start to understand spiritual truth for themselves, when they are saved, and as we watch them grow in faith.

Children are a priceless gift. *"Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them."* ■



# DELIGHTING IN DISCIPLINE

by KEITH KEYSER

**W**ithout question, one would rather not endure some of life's hard experiences. This world is filled with pain, and suffering is the norm rather than the exception. Sickness and death are all too common, and economic hardship is widespread. Yet the living God is able to use these negative things for the spiritual formation of His children. As believers go through the trials and difficulties of life, an all-wise, sovereign God is employing such sufferings to teach us His ways, preserve us from sin and waywardness, and ultimately conform us to Christ's glorious image and likeness (see Rom. 8:28-39). The fires of affliction burn off the saints' spiritual dross.

The psalmist recognized the benefits of the Father's disciplining work in these words: *"Blessed is the man whom Thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of Thy Law"* (Ps. 94:12). On the first reading, it is an odd beatitude that challenges one's accustomed way of thinking. *Blessed* basically means "happy." In contrast, chastening carries the idea of discipline, rebuke, admonishment, and instruction. Most people think of discipline in negative terms (at least if they are on the receiving end of it). How then can this verse link happiness and

chastisement? The answer lies in knowing who the chastiser is, the manner of His discipline, and to what end He leads the recipient. Furthermore, discipline is not to be confused with penal judgment, which was dealt with by Christ on the cross (see Rom. 8:1).

### Faithful are the wounds of a friend

Psalm 94:1-2 begins with a call for the *"Lord God to whom vengeance belongeth"* and the *"judge of all the earth"* to deal with the wicked who are persecuting His people. Each of these titles harkens back to descriptions that the Lord used of Himself earlier in the Scriptures (Deut. 32:35; Gen. 18:25). Such a God cares about justice and will one day put down all evil.

In the meantime, however, He actually uses evil's effects to accomplish His will. Just as surgeons use leeches in certain procedures, so the Lord takes things which in other contexts are harmful to work out His purposes. Joseph understood this principle, as is seen in his description of the wicked conduct of

his brothers: *"...you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive"* (Gen. 50:20).

As a perfect Father, God desires what is best for His children. James 1:17 maintains that *"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."* This teaching of God's incomparable generosity follows another counterintuitive beatitude: *"Blessed is the man who endures temptation, for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him"* (v.12, NKJV). The blessing that



He wants for His saints stems from His loving heart and transcends mere human notions of happiness.

One writer defined this higher “blessedness” as becoming “wise and prosperous in life, as a result of the instruction of God” (cf. Ps. 84:5, 12). Even testing and discipline—negative as they are in man’s mind—are used for positive ends by the Almighty. He is committed to molding His children into the image of His altogether lovely Son. He is even adept at using their difficult circumstances to cut off the flesh and transform them into holy vessels for His service. The classic hymn depicts His providential chastisement:

*Deep in unfathomable mines  
Of never failing skill  
He treasures up His bright designs  
And works His sovereign will.*

*Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;  
The clouds ye so much dread  
Are big with mercy and shall break  
In blessings on your head.*

*Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,  
But trust Him for His grace;  
Behind a frowning providence  
He hides a smiling face.*

*His purposes will ripen fast,  
Unfolding every hour;  
The bud may have a bitter taste,  
But sweet will be the flower.*

As the author once heard brother William MacDonald say, “Nothing that comes to the child of God ever gets to him without first passing through a filter

of infinite love.” The Lord’s discipline establishes His paternal love and care for His children, while simultaneously guiding them to holiness of thought and life. Hebrews 12:9-10 expresses it like this: *“Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness.”*

### **The peaceable fruit of righteousness**

God’s discipline serves different purposes in Scripture. At times, it is corrective of sin, such as in dealing with those who were defiling the Lord’s Supper at Corinth (1 Cor. 11:29-31) or with Ananias and Sapphira’s lying to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:1-11). Chastisement is a vital component of the Lord’s sanctifying work. As a Father, He will neither permit His children to remain in patterns of behavior that mar His relationship with them, nor those that tarnish His glory in them. Repentance is not merely an activity for the lost to do when they receive Christ for salvation. In the New Testament, the Lord often calls upon His erring saints to repent and obey His will (Rev. 2:5). Self-examination must be followed by confession of one’s sin as well as the correction of one’s behavior (see 1 Jn. 1:5, 9).

At other times, divine discipline is preventative, such as when God gave Paul *“a thorn in the flesh”* to keep him

from becoming proud over the great truths that were revealed to him (2 Cor. 12:7). Joseph did not exact revenge against his brothers when it was in his power to harm them. Neither did his tremendous power as the prime minister of the mightiest nation on earth incite the former slave and prisoner to gratify himself with the spoils of his exalted office. Instead, he wielded his authority humanely to deliver multitudes of people, including his estranged siblings. Learning to patiently trust God in slavery and prison taught Joseph moderation and dependence on his Maker.

### **Turn your eyes upon Jesus**

Whether corrective or preventative, chastening is meant to focus the believer’s mind on his Lord. Afflictions turned Job’s eyes upon the Lord (Job 42:1-6). Likewise, when hard circumstances assail Christians, we must look to God for guidance. Let us ask: “Is there some sin that I have not dealt with before Him?” and then “How can I successfully navigate this trial for His glory?”

If one finds that his conscience is clear of offence before God, he should still look to the Lord for help in bearing the hardship. As Paul learned, the Almighty assures that: *“My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness”* (2 Cor. 12:9). Chastening is meant to deepen our trust in, and dependence on, our loving Father. His easy yoke and light burden are designed for the saint to walk and labor alongside of his God, all the while enjoying rest with Him (see Mt. 11:29-30). ■

# Grace to the Guilty

by Sam Oommen

I have known a few friends who have gone through the pain of personal bankruptcy. This decision was not reached easily. There was a great deal of angst and internal wrestling. Inevitably, there was a sense of personal failure. But if the reader can enter into the emotion of such a dilemma, they, too, will realize that when the creditors are knocking, the interest is piling up, and there seems no possible way out, all that is left is an overwhelming sense of hopelessness. Although the declaration of bankruptcy is not without consequence, that decision can be a huge weight lifted off one's shoulders. One awakens the next day as a new man with an opportunity for a fresh start.

It may be a pale comparison, but when David writes, *"Blessed is the man whose transgressions is forgiven, whose sin is covered"* (Ps. 32:1), he writes out of the painful experience of his own sinful decisions and their far-reaching consequences. He rejoices in the forgiveness that only God can offer and the relief that a crushing load has been removed.

The sad context of this psalm is recorded for us in 2 Samuel 10-11. David was guilty on three counts. He had committed adultery with Bathsheba, he was

complicit in the murder of her husband, Uriah, and then he actively attempted to conceal the matter. The Scriptures inform us that after Bathsheba had completed the customary period of mourning, David had her brought to his house and *"...she became his wife. Then she bore a son."* It might appear that David had gotten away with it, but God was not deceived. *"But the thing David had done was evil in the sight of God"* (11:27). For at least nine months, while the full extent of David's actions were known only to himself, his sin festered without confession or repentance.

## The burden of sin

In Psalm 32, we have the expression of David's aching heart. Sin had taken its toll. To the onlooker, everything seemed fine, but, inside, David was dying. *"When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away"* (v. 3). Spiritually, he recognized the hand of God upon him: *"For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me"* (v. 4). In Psalm 51, David shares that his sin had robbed him of the very *"joy of Your salvation"* (v. 12) even though God had not forgotten His precious servant. Finally, sin even wreaked its havoc emotionally: *"My vitality was*

*drained away as with the fever heat of summer"* (v. 4). Sin was leeching the very life from him.

I imagine all of us can relate to David's experience. It is a sobering reminder that unconfessed sin in our lives will bring pain, as do areas in which we have not been broken or yielded. In a believer's life, sin can never really be enjoyed. The psalmist speaks with candor of the road of repentance: acknowledgement, not cover-up; confession, not excuses. The glorious result is God's gracious forgiveness and the celebration of His deliverance.

How grateful we should be for the disciplining hand of the Lord in our lives. *"My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reprovved by Him; for those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives"* (Heb 12:5-6).

## The two-fold blessing of forgiveness

David wrote Psalm 32 out of the experience of having been restored to the Lord. He describes in it a two-fold blessing. First, David speaks of



the blessing of having our sins covered. Psalm 32 is referenced by Paul in Romans 4 in his argument that God's way of salvation has not changed. He still puts men and women in a right standing with Himself on the basis of faith. Vine, in his commentary, adds that the word used for *covered* in Romans 4:7 is similar to the Hebrew word *atone*, "...signifying not merely a covering but the removal of guilt under that covering...the removal of the divine wrath of God."<sup>1</sup> This is a forgiveness that mankind so desperately needs: sin removed, guilt purged, judgment lifted. As believers in Christ, you and I enter into the truth that our transgressions have been forgiven. Hallelujah!

Secondly, in recounting God's goodness, David speaks of the blessedness of the man "to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity and in whose spirit there is no deceit." Although not explicitly stated,

there is a hint in these words of the truth of justification. God not only offers us forgiveness but credits our accounts with His righteousness. He sees us as if our spirits are without deceit (v. 2).

### The precious offering of Christ

If David, under the dispensation of the Law, could celebrate the blessing of enjoying God's forgiveness, how much more can we, under grace and in Christ, speak of being blessed! "For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ... cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Heb. 9:13-14). The forgiveness we enjoy today is eternal and complete. To God, how much greater is the value of Christ's offering than that of the blood of bulls and goats?

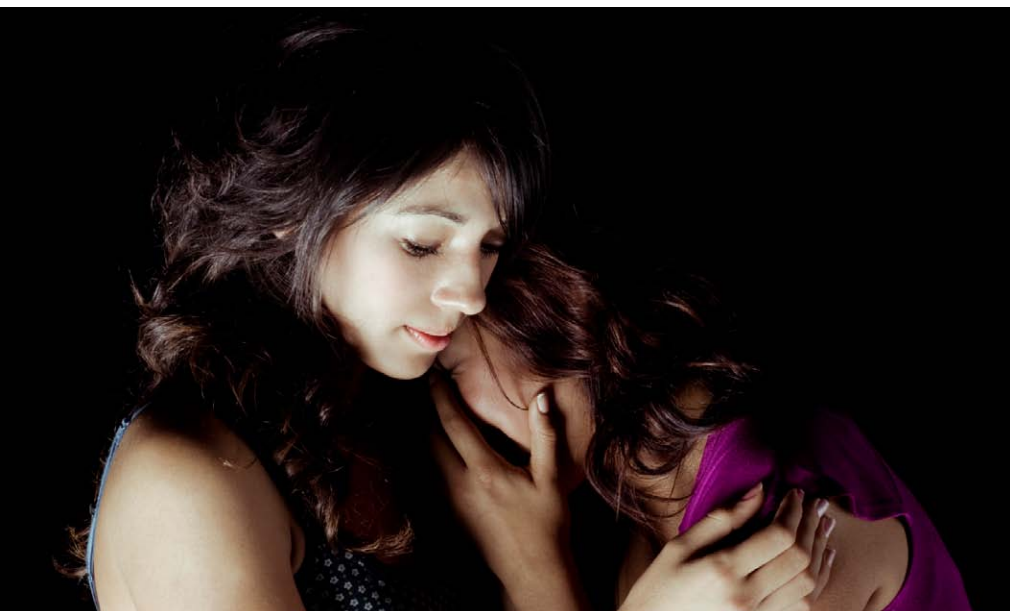
David uses a word that is almost always translated *blessed* in the Old Testament. In his expository dictionary, Vine suggests that it might be translated "prosperity or happiness."<sup>2</sup> He adds that it speaks of favor conferred by a superior. This world offers the believer many pursuits that bring a measure of happiness but always leave us wanting. Can there be any greater happiness to seek than that which only God can provide? As king of the nation of Israel, David considered himself blessed, not because of his riches or power or fame, but because he enjoyed divine forgiveness.

### A message of forgiveness for a needy world

In Psalm 51, David, having been restored, expresses his desire to "...teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners will be converted to You" (v. 13). Brothers and sisters in Christ, in the work of Christ on the cross, we have the message of forgiveness. Many have gotten up this morning, and will go to bed tonight, shouldering the great weight of the debt of their sin, unaware of, ignoring, or simply rejecting the desire of the Most High God to forgive them. They have no idea of the extreme to which He has gone to offer the forgiveness their hearts so desperately crave. May the divine blessing we enjoy (and possibly take for granted) grip us in such a way that we desire to share it with them! ■

1. W.E. Vine, *The Collected Writings of W.E. Vine – Volume I*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1996).

2. W.E. Vine et al., *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1985).





why we web

**Why We Web** is an organization focused on providing excellent resources to help Christians deal with aspects of life online through conferences and workshops that educate and encourage the use of the internet for evangelism and ministry.

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## <Web Evangelism>

**J**ust before the Twin Towers collapsed on September 11, 2001, a woman prayed for the very first time: “God, please save my son, and he doesn’t even have a baby yet, so please spare his life!” Her son, an NYPD police officer, was called to the World Trade Center that awful day. As he followed his crew into one of the buildings, his captain called him back to help get more equipment. In that short time, the tower collapsed, and he was spared while the rest of his crew was killed.

That started a three-year journey for Shoshy—after all, her prayer had been answered. But what now? She visited a church near her but saw no life in the Christians there: they were just going through the motions. She stopped attending. She then received notice that her estranged husband had passed away. He had written her several times before, telling her he had “gotten saved” and was praying for her. As an inheritance, Shoshy received a Bible from him. She started to read, but she had many questions.

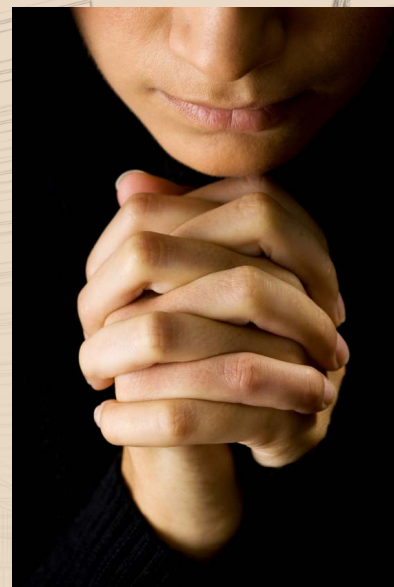
One night, she watched a history show on TV about famous executions. Near the end of the show, the host said, “Now for the most famous execution of all” and Shoshy heard for the first time the story of Jesus and His death. At that moment, the Lord convicted her of her sin. If Jesus really was God and had died for her sins, she had to find out more! A few weeks later, the movie “The Passion”

came out, and she went to see it—five times! She couldn’t stop thinking about what Jesus had done, but she still had many questions.

She turned to the internet and started searching for answers about Christ. She found an evangelistic website where she read articles and was directed to a chat room where she could talk to someone about her questions. A believer named Rosie became a major influence in Shoshy’s life and pointed her to Christ. After three years of questions, searching, and God’s leading, Shoshy placed her faith in Christ during one of the chat sessions with her mentor.

This is just one of many stories of how the Lord has used people, technology, and, of course, His Word to bring souls to Himself. An evangelistic website (or section of a local church website that focuses on the gospel) can be a powerful tool in the Lord’s hands. People are searching for answers online. Countless people are “Googling” Jesus, faith, truth, John 3:16 and other spiritually-relevant keywords. It’s our belief that there is a great harvest of souls ready to be reaped—people who might never set foot in a church building or who have been turned away from traditional churches for various reasons.

The next several *Why We Web* articles will look at the power of a website in reaching the lost. We will discuss some tips on presenting the gospel on a website, and also look at some things to



avoid. The Lord took great care in presenting the truth to the people around Him. He was sensitive to their needs, their environment, and their situation. We, too, need to be careful in the way we approach the multitudes online. Are we turning them away before they even get a chance to see who Jesus really is and what He has done for them?

If you have a desire to reach the lost online, please watch for these articles; and, in the meantime, don’t hesitate to contact us at **mySonlight** if you have any questions or comments. We are here to help and would love to get you started on or assist you in your ministry of fulfilling the Great Commission. – Crawford Paul

**These suggestions for getting started online have been compiled by our friends at mySonlight. If you need additional assistance, please contact them about their services.**

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# Blessed BE THE Lord

THE THRILLING TESTIMONY OF THE GLORIOUS RESCUE OF AN ATHEIST FROM HIS SELF-MADE PRISON BY THE GOD HE REFUSED TO BELIEVE IN. HIS PRAYER CONTAINED AS LITTLE FAITH AS A MAN COULD MUSTER, BUT THE LORD HEARD AND ANSWERED IT ANYWAY, BLESS HIS HOLY NAME!



*J. Budziszewski must feel that his last name is so challenging that he limits his first name to a single letter. A Yale Ph.D., he presently is an associate*

*professor of philosophy and government at the University of Texas at Austin. This is his story, excerpted from the book **Why I am a Christian**, edited by Norman Geisler and Paul Hoffman.*

**F**or some years after deserting the Christian faith of my youth, I was an atheist, so I know the matter from the inside. Of course, inside knowledge is not always superior to outside knowledge. Sometimes it is even inferior to it. A drug addict does not understand his addiction better than his doctor does, for he is in the grip of it. Nor do we recommend suicide for the better understanding of self-inflicted death; understanding and consciousness depart together. The self-understanding of the atheist has a drawback of much the same kind as the self-understanding of the addict or the person attempting suicide. Like the former, the atheist is self-deceived; like the latter, he cuts himself off from the means of understanding. This blindness has become visible to me only in retrospect. I am not an atheist simply but a repented

atheist. It is not from the experience of having been an atheist that I claim to understand something of atheism but from the experience of ceasing to be one....

## FOOLS JUST FOOLING THEMSELVES

Self-deception means playing dumb. It means pretending to ourselves that we don't know what we really do; it means playing at being ignorant though we are really in the know. I suggest that we human beings play dumb with God. We lie to ourselves, and one of the things we lie about is our knowledge of His reality. Psalm 14 opens with a remark that is often misunderstood: *"The fool says in his heart 'There is no God.'"* The psalmist is not calling the man a fool for *thinking* there is no God but for *telling* himself there is no God, though deep in his mind he knows better. Unbelievers do not disbelieve, they reject.

Paul expresses the same view in the first chapter of his letter to the Romans (vv. 18-21). I am not at present concerned to explore Paul's general claim that those who deny the Creator are wicked but only his more particular claim that they are intellectually dishonest. Notice that he does not criticize nonbelievers because they do not know about God but ought to. Rather, he criticizes them because they *do* know about God but pretend to themselves that

they don't. According to his account, we are not ignorant of God's reality at all. Rather, we "suppress" it; to translate differently, we "hold it down." With all our strength we try not to know it, even though we can't help knowing it; with one part of our minds we do know it, while with another we say, "I know no such thing." From the biblical point of view, then, the reason it is so difficult to argue with an atheist—as I once was—is that he is not being honest with himself. He knows there is a God, but he tells himself that he doesn't....

## NEVER COMPLETELY SUCCESSFUL

If the biblical account is true, then it would seem that no one really arrives at new first principles; a person only seems to arrive at them. The atheist does not lack true first principles; they are in his knowledge already, though suppressed. The convert from atheism did not acquire them; rather, things he knew all along were unearthed.... We might also expect that an atheist's effort to hold down what he "can't not know" would be only partially successful. Here and there, flotsam from the sunken knowledge would bob back up to the surface....The point is that everyone knows certain things to begin with, including the reality of God....

# losing faith in atheism

## THE IDOL OF SELF

Though a million idols are adored by the sons of men, in the end there is only one—the million idols are all masks for the idol of self. Finding that we are made in God's image, we worship the image in place of God...I did not consciously think "I shall adore myself"; nevertheless, the real significance of my idolatries was that they seemed to annihilate God so that I could be God. This explanation of their significance may seem unbelievable, for my road to deicide was through suicide—in order to annihilate God, I had to annihilate myself....God may have called everything into being, but the person who commits suicide imagines that he can make it all go away. My suicide was just like that, but more violent still. A conventional suicide can destroy the universe only once, but for me each day was suicide. There was no need to bother with the taking of poison or the slashing of wrists, because it was all going on in my mind. In one long, interminable prolongation of nightfall, the light went out and went out and went out, all without the inconvenience of physical death.

Besides, to commit suicide *was* to commit deicide, symbolically. I said above that self-adoration is the worship of the image of God in the place of God. So strong was my own wish to replace Him that I resented even His image in me. Visualize a man opening up the access panels of his mind and pulling out all the components that have God's initials on them. The problem is that they all have God's initials on them, so the man can never stop. No matter how much he pulls out, there is still more to remove. I was that man.

## FROM ATHEISM TO FAITH

How then did I become undeceived? Not because anyone called my bluff.

When I told the faculty of the University of Texas that there is no rationally knowable difference between good and evil and that we aren't responsible for our deeds anyway, they gave me a job teaching the young.

Nor was it through recognition of my own incoherence. I saw the holes in my arguments even at the time but covered them over with elaborate nonsense such as the need to take an ironic view of reality.

Nor through love. I loved my wife and children, but it is difficult to keep up a commitment to the true good of another person when one denies the reality of good, denies the reality of persons, and denies that commitments are in his control.

Nor through learning. When I taught my students the theology of law of Thomas Aquinas, I wanted to weep for the beauty of the appearance of the truth. But I told myself that the very poignancy of that beauty came only from the fact that it was an illusion....

I did pray to God one night. I told Him that I thought I was talking to the wall. I said that if He existed, He could have me, but He would have to show me because I couldn't tell. As the minutes ticked past, the wall looked more and more like a wall, and I felt a fool.

Yet He did hear my prayer. I came, months later, to feel a greater and greater horror about myself, not exactly a feeling of guilt, nor of shame, nor of inadequacy—just horror: an overpowering true intuition that my condition was objectively evil....Nothing like this had ever happened to me before, and I could not explain it. The intuition of the objective evil of my condition appeared as though from nowhere and contradicted everything I had been telling myself. I experienced it not as an inference but as direct knowledge. It had authority, command-

ing assent—and I assented. Though I did not know it at the time, it was what John's Gospel calls the conviction of sin. I believe that the Holy Spirit, in answer to my prayer, had been secretly cutting a door in the stone wall of my self-deception....

I began to realize not only that my errors had been total but that they had not been errors at all, merely lies. Years earlier, when I had deserted the faith of my youth, I thought I had done so for good reasons. Yet search my memory as I might, I could not remember any. Had I forgotten them? On the contrary, as the days went by, I was *un*-forgetting more and more of my past. I had never had good reasons to desert my faith. My desertion had taken place first; my reasons, as I called them, had been cooked up afterward. One after another, various pieces of repressed knowledge reasserted themselves: the good of this, the evil of that, the reality and goodness of God.

The final step of my recovery was the restoration of faith in Christ, for there is more to Christianity than mere theism, much more to faith in the Son than belief in the Father....

Did I then reason my way back to the Savior? No,...it had been through misuse of intellect that I had deserted him; therefore, in his mercy, God chose a means of restoration that humbled my intellectual pride.

I do not mean that my restoration was against reason. On the contrary, what happened was a reinstatement of the good reasons for faith that I had possessed before....

My story is extreme. Yet in the essentials, I think my atheism was like all atheism. Not every atheist deceives himself about the same things, or as many things, or to the same degree as I deceived myself, yet there is no atheism without self-deception. There is a way to honesty, but it leads through Jesus Christ. ■

# THE Precious PREFACE

by Rex Trogdon

**P**salms 1 has been called a preface to the hymnbook of God's people. It was not ascribed to a particular psalmist, yet we know that God, who inhabits the praises of His people, has placed it in Scripture for us to enjoy. Although it is written anonymously, the One portrayed therein is surely not a man of anonymity.

While we would strive to be the kind of person this psalm describes (walking with the Lord, staying true to His Word, and bearing fruit for His glory), there is no doubt that the true Blessed Man of Psalm 1 is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

Containing six verses, this psalm divides equally into two sections. The difference between the first three verses and the last three is that the first three have a singular reference to the blessed man, whereas the last three have a plural reference to the ungodly.

Why is the singular used to describe the blessedness of this man? Because there is only One who is altogether righteous, the Lord Jesus Christ! Why is the plural form used when describing the ungodly? Because *"all we like sheep have gone astray"* and have *"all turned aside"* (Isa. 53:6).

John 14:6 is a wonderful verse for an outline of this psalm. Jesus said, *"I am*

*the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."* Follow the first three phrases of John 14:6 as we consider the first three verses of Psalm 1, and this poetic portrait of the Blessed Man will become a symphony of praise.

## "I am the way"

Interestingly, the psalmist begins with a negative description of this Man, telling us three things that He does not do. He doesn't walk in the counsel of the ungodly, stand in the path of sinners, or sit in the seat of the scornful. This should not surprise us, for, in describing the righteous Son of God, Paul, Peter, and John also used negative expressions to point out His sinlessness. Paul writes, He *"knew no sin"* (2 Cor. 5:21); Peter declares, He *"did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth"* (1 Pet. 2:22); and John concludes stating, *"In Him is no sin"* (1 Jn. 3:5).

This threefold description of the Blessed Man's sinlessness also presents Him in three different postures: walking, standing, and sitting. All three postures speak generally of the way. He did not walk in their counsel, and, if you don't mind two useful expressions, He

would not stand for it, and it did not sit well with Him!

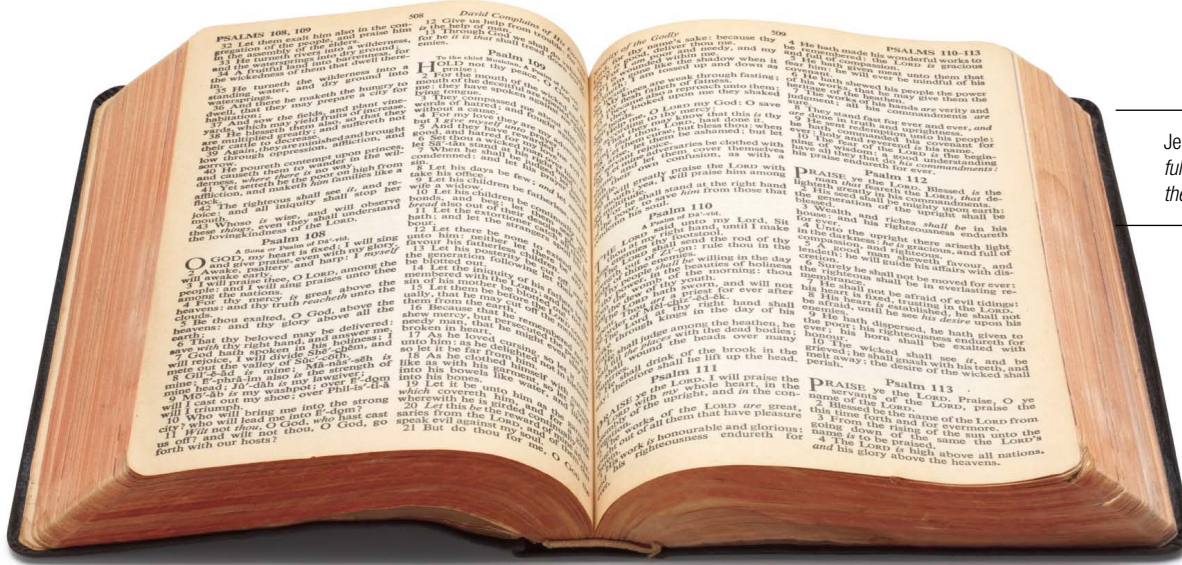
We can see in the life of the Lord Jesus that He separated Himself from the religious leaders of Israel. John writes that *"Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men, and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man"* (Jn. 2:24-25). The writer of Hebrews says that as a High Priest, He was *"holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens"* (Heb. 7:26). He not only followed the heavenly way, but He became the *"new and living way"* by whom we enter heaven (Heb. 10:19-20). He is the way.

## "I am...the truth"

*"His delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night."* There are two parts to this verse that refer to the law of the Lord, and they touch two areas of the Savior's life: His heart and His head.

Let's look first at His delight in the law. Psalm 40:7-8, which is quoted in the Book of Hebrews, gives us this insight: *"Then I said, 'Behold, I come; In the scroll of the book it is written of Me.*





Jesus said, "All things must be fulfilled which were written in... the Psalms concerning Me."

*"I delight to do Your will, O My God, and Your law is within My heart"* (Heb. 10:7). How wonderfully linked to the heart of the Blessed Man is the desire to do the will of the Father! He said, *"I always do those things which please Him"* (Jn. 8:29).

If to delight in the law of the Lord relates to the heart, then meditating on the Word of God relates to the head. The mind of Christ was filled with the Word of God day and night. It is no wonder that whenever the Savior was questioned by seekers, tested by Satan, or sought to be tricked by the scribes, He inevitably answered using the Word of God. On more than one occasion, they marveled at His understanding and asked, *"Where did this Man get these things?"* (Mk. 6:2). Christ was the embodiment of truth. John declares, *"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth"* (Jn. 1:14). Psalm 119:142 links the law with truth stating, *"Your law is truth."* He is the Truth.

### **"I am...the life"**

The overriding theme of verse 3 is life! We see it in the components: a tree planted, rivers of water, fruitfulness, the leaf that does not wither, and prospering.

Job also used a tree for a life-like illustration saying, *"For there is hope for a tree, if it is cut down, that it will sprout again"* (Job 14:7).

In the first book of our Bible, we see the tree of life. We find the same components of life come together again in the last chapter of the Bible where we see a river of life flowing and the tree of life growing. The tree has twelve kinds of fruit every month of the year, and its leaves are for the healing of the nations. When you consider whom the tree of life represents, is there not the overwhelming witness in your heart that it is *"Christ who is our life"* (Col. 3:4)? We look forward to the day when the statement *"whatever He does shall prosper"* will have its complete fulfillment.

Surely, the Blessed Man of Psalm 1 is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. But there is another portion that we must consider: *"No one comes to the Father except through Me."* It is a sad and solemn warning when we read: *"The ungodly are not so."* The second half of the psalm tells us what happens when people leave God out of their lives.

### **The ungodly are not so**

First, we read that the ungodly are *"like the chaff which the wind drives away."*

Chaff is the outer shell of a grain or a seed. It has no life but is blown away or burned. John writes, *"He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life"* (1 Jn. 5:12).

We are then reminded that the ungodly have no standing in the judgment or congregation of the righteous. Why? Because they have no truth. Romans 1:17 says they *"suppress the truth in unrighteousness."* One day, *"every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God"* (Rom. 3:19).

Lastly, in verse 6, the conclusion of it all is the sad state of the ungodly in contrast to the righteous: *"the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish."* They followed a way that seemed right, but it ended in destruction.

What better way is there to preface the hymnbook of God's people than to present the Blessed Man Himself? Without Him there is no life, no truth, and no way because He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. ■

That Man of Calvary  
Has won my heart from me,  
And died to set me free,  
Blest Man of Calvary!

—Manie Ferguson

*“Blessed is that servant,  
whom his lord when he comes  
shall find so doing.”*

MATTHEW 24:46

# Blessed

# Busyness

MARK ANDERSON

**A**nyone who has been charged with overseeing a group of employees has quickly discovered that there are three broad types of workers: those who are unwilling to work at all despite repeated request; those who will work when given specific, personal direction; and, lastly, those who—even unbidden and unobserved—are always to be found busy with work which needs to be done.

It's difficult to imagine which of your employees fit into each of these three categories at first glance; they all wear the same uniform, and they all appear in the payroll listings on equal footing. But the surest way to sort them out is terribly simple: return early or unexpectedly from an outing and quietly observe what has (or more often hasn't) occurred in your absence. Much can be discerned from the initial reaction of your employees to an unexpected arrival.

Now Christians are not employees in the strictest sense, I suppose. Nonetheless, the same three groups can be seen at work (or not at work!) within any local assembly you choose to visit. There is usually a large group of those who are content to sit, to be fed, and to leave when the services and programs are over. Then there are those who,

when directly requested, are willing to serve, and perhaps even to serve well, by opening their homes or in other ways contributing to the work of the assembly. But finally there is a much smaller group of those who simply see the needs of the local work and community, apply their gifts liberally at the direction of the Holy Spirit in keeping with God's Word, and in so doing not only please (and surprise) their elders but also, more importantly, please their true Master.

There will come a day when the Master will return. It will be unexpected. I trust that most current readers will see the Lord Jesus as the glorious Bridegroom who comes to claim His Bride in the rapture. Others will wait longer and see Him not as the Bridegroom but as a great Ruler and Judge, whom they will fear (Rev. 6:16). Still others will see Him as the promised Messiah, whom they will mourn (Rev. 1:7). Sooner or later, every eye will see Him.

## double revelation

In Christ's appearance in each life, there will be a twofold revelation. First, it will be in that moment, that Christ is revealed to those who know Him in an entirely new way. We will see the One whom,

having not seen, we love. We will finally see Him *as He is* and will know even as we have been fully known.

But second, as much as Christ's return reveals Him, it reveals us, too. We may have been fooling others or even ourselves about how devoted and hopeful for His return we were and how seriously we served Him. Perhaps our efforts, which were judged generously by our Christian brothers and sisters, have actually been driven by self-love and pride rather than devotion to the Lord Himself. How shocking for you and me are the words of 1 John 2:28: *“And now, little children, abide in Him; that, when He shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming”!*

Let us pause for a moment and realize that John is addressing believers here, not the unsaved. John sees the real possibility that some believers might become involved in activities that they would never have chosen had they really expected Christ's return was imminent. How terribly sad that a believer's first reaction to the sudden appearance of Christ could be to shrink back in dismay or that our



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*"He who is slothful in his work is a brother to him who is a great destroyer." (Prov. 18:9)*

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first thought at seeing His face could be, "Oh, no, not *now!*" What a regrettable revelation of us! There is no doubt that the shame we feel in His unexpected return will quickly be suffused by the joy of an eternity in His presence and an end of sin—there is no room for regret in heaven. But even momentary and passing distress at the return of our Greatest Hope is horribly sad to consider and unworthy of our calling.

Instead of dread, our lives as Christians are to be marked by the invigorating hope of Christ's return, and every choice of activity or indolence should be shaped by the gripping realization that perhaps He'll come *today*. John's desire is that we should all "*abide in Him*" and, as a result, confidently welcome the return of the Lord Jesus to call us home whenever it should occur.

Of course, if we wish to be confident and joyful at Christ's return and if we cannot know when He will return, it follows that we will need to consistently be doing only what will please Him, even in His prolonged absence. We will need to abide in our labors.

## **double reward**

We read Matthew 24:46 and several similar passages and conclude from them that there is a blessing that is not

immediate, that will eventually come to those who are busy for Christ when He returns. Paul confirms that idea in 2 Timothy 4:8: there is a "*crown of righteousness laid up*" that is promised to all those who "*have loved [Christ's] appearing.*"

Paul is correct, of course: there will be blessing for those who are busy working for Christ when He comes and who welcome His return. But if we carefully read the passage in Matthew again, we will note, perhaps for the first time, that it does not begin with the phrase "*blessed will be the man*" but rather "*blessed is the man.*"

Let us understand that working as if Christ might come today not only assures us a reward one far-off day in eternity, but also offers real and immediate blessings in this life too, not the least of which is a joy in the journey itself. As an unfortunate illustration of this, look around at your own home assembly: who are the unhappiest members most prone to complaints and creating strife? With a disturbing regularity, you will find that the unhappiest are the most inactive or self-involved. Those who are busiest and have most reason to complain seem to find little time to do so—there is too much rewarding work at hand to grumble.

Paul, after speaking of some who will turn aside to myths, forewarns his young charge this way:

*"But watch in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of your ministry. For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the Righteous Judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but to all those also who love His appearing"* (2 Tim. 4:5-8).

Paul is clear-eyed about the difficulty of the matter, and his language shows it: he has run a marathon that allowed no slackening of the pace; he has fought a fight that was to the death; he has clutched and held the faith firmly in the face of doubt and countless assaults. But in all this, and despite describing himself as being "*poured out,*" there is no hint of self-pity, regret, or complaint. Quite to the contrary, he's advocating the same course for Timothy. At the end of his days, Paul was convinced all the effort and struggle had been well worth it, and he was longing for the sight of his Lord.

May Paul's example inform and inspire us. May we bend our backs with gratitude, joy and humility. May we be daily encouraged at the thought that perhaps in a moment or two, we will be ushered into the presence of the Master who loved us and bought us at great price. May He find us busy for Him when He comes. ■



# Count your blessings

## FOR YOUR OWN STUDY: THE BLESSING OF THE LORD *IN YOU!*

BLESSED IS THE MAN...	REFERENCE
<i>"The blessing of the Lord makes one rich, and He adds no sorrow with it."</i>	<b>Pr. 10:22</b>
...whose sin is forgiven	Ps. 32:1f; Rom. 4:7f
...who trusts in the Lord	Ps. 40:4; 84:12; Pr. 16:20; Jer. 17:7
...who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers	Ps. 1:1
...who takes refuge in Him	Ps. 2:12
...whom You choose and bring close to You	Ps. 65:4
...who dwell in Your house	Ps. 84:4
...whose strength is in You	Ps. 84:5
...who knows the joyful sound	Ps. 89:15
...whom You chasten	Ps. 94:12
...who keeps justice, who practices righteousness at all times	Ps. 106:3
...who fears the Lord	Ps. 112:1; 128:1; Pr. 28:14
...whose way is blameless, who walks in the law of the Lord	Ps. 119:1
...who observes His testimonies, who seeks Him with all their heart	Ps. 119:2
...who has a quiver full of children	Ps. 127:5
...whose God is the Lord	Ps. 144:15
...who listens to wisdom	Pr. 3:13; 8:34
...who keeps [wisdom's] ways	Pr. 8:32
...who longs for Him	Isa. 30:18
...who preserves justice and does righteousness	Isa. 56:1f
...who doesn't stumble over Me	Mt. 11:6; Lk. 7:23
...who is serving when his master comes	Mt. 24:46; Lk. 12:37, 43; Rev. 16:15
...who hears the Word of God, and observes it	Lk. 11:28
...who has not seen, and yet has believed	Jn. 20:29
...who reads and heeds the Word of God	Rev. 1:3; 22:7
...who is invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb	Rev. 19:9
...who washes his robes, that he may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city	Rev. 22:14

## THE BEATITUDES – MT. 5:3-12

Blessed are **the poor in spirit**: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are **those that mourn**: for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are **the meek**: for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are **those who hunger and thirst after righteousness**: for they shall be filled.

Blessed are **the merciful**: for they shall obtain mercy.

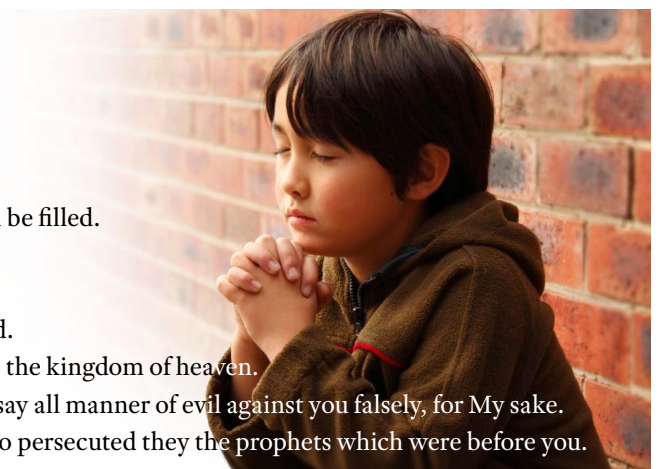
Blessed are **the pure in heart**: for they shall see God.

Blessed are **the peacemakers**: for they shall be called the children of God.

Blessed are **those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake**: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are **you, when men shall revile you**, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake.

Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.





# Better than handmade

**A**lthough it isn't always true in life, the term "handmade" is usually assumed to mean better than machine made, of superior quality. In the world of handmade custom suits, the word is "bespoke." Bespoke tailors like Caraceni in Milan or Anderson & Sheppard in London can throw some pre-dust rags together for upwards of \$3,000.

Scripture presents a different standard, as should be expected. They speak of precious realities made without hands. What are these blessings untouched by man's intervention?

## Christ the Builder

Petulant, aggrieved, envious, *"The chief priests and all the council sought testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, but found none...Then some rose up and bore false witness against Him, saying, We heard Him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands"* (Mk 14:55-58).

Their wicked hands would scourge, smite, slay Him. But when men had done their worst, and the Lord of Life lay in a sepulcher, the most amazing thing happened. There in the darkness of the tomb, the Cornerstone, elect, precious, laid in the lowest place, began in the raising of a holy temple, constructed of living stones *"built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit"* (Eph 2:22). Every stone is laid in place by Christ through the Holy Spirit, untouched by men's artifice. It is the only building that will survive the collapse of the universe.

## Christ the Victor

Not only did Christ redirect men's destructive forces to make way for His constructive triumph, but *"we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens"* (2 Cor. 5:1). Our bodies, with all the damage sin has done and the limitations we feel, are scheduled for replacement. These new bodies, not temporary tents for our pilgrim journey, but houses "not made with hands," will last as long as the eternal ages, never showing signs of wear, aging, failure or fatigue (Isa 40:31).

## Christ the Purifier

In the meantime, we carry on down here. Yet it is possible to already begin to take on the character of our heavenly home, to *"bear the image of the Heavenly"* (1 Cor 15:49). *"In whom also you are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ"* (Col 2:11). It will not be by human effort, that we will win the long war within, but by the circumcising surgery of the Great Physician who tenderly hurts to heal.

## Christ the Redeemer

It is also a remarkable fact that, while we are not yet "at Home" in heaven, we are welcome to visit there. How can it be? *"Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands,*

*that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption"* (Heb 9:11-12). His redemptive work opened heaven to us. We may now enter within the veil of the true tabernacle, of which the earthly tent was only a shadow.

## Christ the Ruler

In Daniel 2:34-35, the prophet describes, and then explains, the king's dream: *"You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth."*

Anyone familiar with Daniel understands the vision. World empires rise, flourish, and fall, the last being crushed by God's King, and "no trace of them" will be left. This transfer of power, when *"salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come"* (Rev 12:10), needs no help from man. God the Father will initiate this, sending forth His Son to rightfully and regally claim His everlasting kingdom. It was by Himself He bore our sins; it will be by Himself that He shall bear the glory (see 1 Pet 2:24; Zech 6:13).

—Jabe Nicholson



## Blessed are those who Mourn



Oh, deem not they are blest alone  
Whose lives a peaceful tenor keep;  
The Power who pities man, has shown  
A blessing for the eyes that weep.

The light of smiles shall fill again  
The lids that overflow with tears;  
And weary hours of woe and pain  
Are promises of happier years.

There is a day of sunny rest  
For every dark and troubled night;  
And grief may bide an evening guest,  
But joy shall come with early light.

Nor let the good man's trust depart,  
Tho' life its common gifts deny,—  
Tho' with a pierced and bleeding heart,  
And spurned of men, he goes to die.

For God hath marked each sorrowing day  
And numbered every secret tear,  
And heaven's long age of bliss shall pay  
For all His children suffer here.

*—William Cullen Bryant*