

JOURNAL OF FAITH

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"Faith cometh by hearing, ... the word of God."

—Romans 10:17—

VOLUME I 1996

JOURNAL OF FAITH

A
SERIES OF SERMONS

BY
PREACHERS OF THE FAITH

"The churches of Christ salute you"
--Romans 16:16--

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**Journal
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Faith**

**Volume I
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I dedicate this volume to:

My dear wife, Sharla Kay, for her love and thoughtfulness for my work for our Master as we begin the second half of the game of life together;

Our daughters, Robin and Sonya, and their families;

Especially our grandchildren, Ryan, Joshua, Rachael, Kyle, and Kelsey, who are only in the early stages of the game.

Because of Him in whom I trust, I look forward with confidence and hope to His game plan for our second half.

I trust you and yours will benefit from the messages of truth and faith in this journal.

FOREWORD

Reflections of faith in this journal emanate from over 400 years experience preaching and teaching the Word of God by men who have devoted their lives to the Way. Approximately fifty years ago, some of the same authors were writing their first articles for publications that are still in many libraries.

These authors bring countless hours of Bible study and meditation to their lessons. Even so, many additional hours were spent especially to prepare each work in this book. One writer remarked, "In my research and study for this treatise I discovered additional evidence in the Old Testament that strengthened my lesson which had been undiscovered in my previous studies on the same subject." The point is that we should never assume that we have acquired all knowledge about any subject in the Word of God.

The reader is encouraged to imbibe deeply of the waters of life served from vessels of clay tempered by wisdom and reasoning. Your spirit will be refreshed and uplifted by the Spirit of truth articulated in each message.

Passionate entreaty is only one of the various styles that will appeal to different readers. Some will appreciate the plain to-the-point proclamation of truth, while others will be challenged by the didactical analysis of Biblical doctrines.

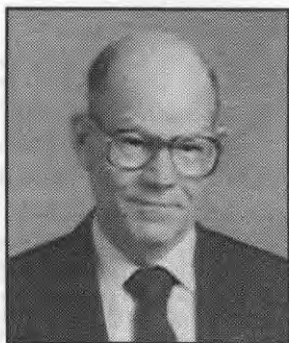
Deep gratitude is extended to the writers not only for this effort but for many years of faithful service in the Lord's Kingdom.

Special thanks to Amy Swearingin, Karen Spencer, Selinda Webb, Marjorie Gearhiser and Randy Bown for helping prepare, proofread and edit the manuscripts for publication.

The Journal of Faith is intended to provide a medium for Christians to share insights of faith and truth with one another and with souls searching for the higher meaning of life. If only one lost soul is influenced to seek the Lord or one weak saint is encouraged to renew his or her commitment and lay hold on eternal life, then all the countless hours of researching, organizing, writing, compiling and publishing this volume will be worth it all.

Thomas D. Dennis

Thomas D. Dennis



Thomas Duane Dennis was born November 14, 1928 in a farm house northeast of the little town of New Market in Taylor County, Iowa. His family lost possession of the farm in the Great Depression of the 1930's and moved to a rented farm near Mount Ayr in Ringgold County, Iowa in early 1937.

One room country schools in Taylor and Ringgold counties provided Toms' early schooling. He graduated from High School in Mount Ayr in the spring of 1947 and began traveling with evangelists in church work.

Tom married Ann Florea, his high school sweetheart, on April 11, 1948. In the early 1950's Suzanne, Stephen, and Sondra came to bless their family. The family home was in the Mount Ayr community as Tom continued preaching the Word and working for his father and other local farmers to provide income for his family. He operated farm machinery, cut fire wood and hedge post, hauled baled hay, sheared sheep, and did carpentry and mechanical work, as neighbors had need.

The Dennis family moved to the Des Moines area in 1967. The children married and provided Tom and Ann with ten grandchildren. Tom and Ann still live in Des Moines and are members of the Dean Avenue Church of Christ.

Brother Tom has traveled widely among the churches of Christ. He edited and published "THE GOSPEL MESSAGE" paper from September 1983 through December 1990. One of his most impressive works has been conducting study tours in the Bible Lands.



ASK FOR THE OLD PATHS

The highlight of the following treatise is the passionate style of the author appealing to each reader for individual action. For nearly half a century, this beloved servant has pleaded for sinners to turn to the Lord and saints to remain true to the faith.

In "Ask For The Old Paths", Brother Tom reaches out to touch us so that we will stay in touch with God. In his familiar "reverse" crescendo style—starting loud and high, ending soft and low—he says, "God's word is not out-dated and God is not out of touch with the modern world."

His message of plain truth warns us to remain on the path of purity, love, holiness, and scriptural soundness. His sincere desire is that we never forget that the eternal destiny of our soul depends on which path we choose to follow.

Christ made one sacrifice for sins forever, as it is written in Hebrews 10:12 in the Holy Scriptures. He died for men of all nations and of all generations who would believe in Him and obey His word.

On the first Pentecost after our Lord victoriously arose from the sealed stone tomb, the apostle Peter inspired by the Holy Spirit boldly proclaimed God's message of salvation through Christ the Lord to the multitude assembled in Jerusalem. He declared to them that God's promise of the remission of sins was not only for them

but for their children and for all who were "*afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.*"¹

The term "*afar off*" was used years later by the apostle Paul as he referred to the Gentiles in Ephesians 2:17. With that same application of the term in Acts 2:39, the promise was to both the Jews and to the Gentiles. If we consider the term "*afar off*" in reference to time, the promise was to those who were present, to their children, and to the generations yet far in the future.

¹ Acts 2:39

Therefore, the promise is for all nations of men and for all time, as many as the Lord will call. God is no respecter of persons. Let it be known assuredly that the Lord does still call to the souls of men by the gospel of Jesus Christ², and that the gospel is still the power of God unto salvation to believers of all nations.³

WORD SHALL ENDURE FOREVER

God's Word is not outdated and God is not out of touch with the modern world. The real problem is that most of the world is out of touch with God. God is still in control of the universe. His eyes are *"in every place beholding the evil and the good."*⁴ *"And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him to whom we must give account."*⁵

Atheists, agnostics, skeptics, and modernists may mock, jeer and scorn. They may even deny the very existence of God, ridicule the Genesis account of creation, the virgin birth of Christ, the miracles recorded in the Scriptures, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, but

God's Word still stands sure and will endure forever.

*"All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the Lord endures forever."*⁶

"The real problem is that most of the world is out of touch with God."

The Word of the Lord is altogether true and righteous and it shall endure forever! Jesus said, *"Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."*⁷ Again He said, *"... the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life."*⁸

NOT TO BE TAKEN LIGHTLY

Beloved, God has given us the Holy Scriptures to teach us the way of life and salvation. *"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good*

² 2 Thes. 2:14

³ Rom. 1:16

⁴ Prov. 15:3

⁵ Heb 4:13

⁶ 1 Pet 1:24-25

⁷ Matt 24:35

⁸ John 6:63

works."⁹ He has *"given us all things that pertain to life and godliness."*¹⁰ The Psalmist sang, *"Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."*¹¹ When we stand before God in judgment, we will be judged by our submission and obedience to His Word.

Realizing these great truths, it behooves us to give heed to the scriptures and to the commandments and pattern of life outlined therein for us. The things of the Lord ought not to be taken lightly.

We are made to realize the seriousness of life by the question that Jesus asked, *"What is a man profited if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul?"*¹²

HEED THE WARNINGS!

The Holy Scriptures not only instruct us in the way of holiness, but by the Word of God we are also "warned."¹³ We are warned about sin and its wages of death;¹⁴ warned about disrespect and rejection of Jesus;¹⁵ warned about rebellion and disobedience; warned about the subtlety of Satan; warned about adding

to or taking from the Word of God; and warned about those who will come in sheep's clothing, but in reality are ravenous wolves.¹⁶ John admonishes, *"Beloved, do not believe every*

*"The things of the Lord
ought not to be taken
lightly."*

*spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world."*¹⁷ Paul warns, *"Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ."*¹⁸ *"Let no one deceive you with empty words . . ."*¹⁹ *"Let no one deceive you by any means . . ."*²⁰ *"Even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than that what we have preached unto you, let him be accursed."*²¹ These are but a few warnings given us. There are others. Jude wrote that we should *"contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints."*²²

⁹ 2 Tim 3:16-17

¹⁰ 2 Pet. 1:3

¹¹ Psa. 119:105

¹² Matt. 16: 26

¹³ Psa. 19:11

¹⁴ Rom. 6:23

¹⁵ Jno. 5:23, 8:24

¹⁶ Matt. 7: 15

¹⁷ 1 Jno. 4: 1

¹⁸ Col. 2:8

¹⁹ Eph. 5:6

²⁰ 2 Th. 2:3

²¹ Gal. 1:8

²² Jude 1:3

WHERE IS THE GOOD WAY?

The point I am striving to emphasize is---that we need to be content to simply follow the Lord's instructions. We need to *"ask for the old paths where the good way is, and walk in it."*²³

Noah was given exact specifications for the ark. Moses was instructed to build the tabernacle and he was cautioned to build it according to the pattern shown him in the

"We need to be content to simply follow the Lord's instructions."

mount.²⁴ Israel of old was repeatedly cautioned concerning the law given to them, *"You shall observe to do as the LORD your God has commanded you. You shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. You shall walk in all the ways which the LORD your God has commanded you."*²⁵ *"Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it. You shall not add to it nor take away from it."*²⁶ Likewise, we must follow the pattern of things given us in the scriptures by *"obeying from the heart that form of doctrine"*

mentioned in Rom. 6:17, and *"holding fast the pattern of sound words."*²⁷

The early church continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine . . ." ²⁸ We ought to do the same. Jesus said whatever the apostles would bind on earth will be bound in heaven.²⁹

TEST ALL THINGS

Men have introduced many innovations and will continue to do so. They claim to have had visions and revelations, or to have been instructed by angels or by God Himself. But be not deceived, the "Bible" is the Word of God. And our faith must be based on the Holy Scriptures, because faith comes from our hearing the Word of God³⁰ and giving heed to those things that were written *"that we may believe."*³¹ Be cautious when men claim that God has given them some special revelation or that He has led them to do this or that. How can they be sure that it was the leading of God? Are they gifted with the miraculous power of discerning of spirits which was invested in men in the days of the apostles as mentioned in 1

²³ Jer. 6:16

²⁴ Ex. 25:40, 27:8, Heb. 8:5

²⁵ Deut. 5:32-33

²⁶ Deut 12:32

²⁷ 2 Tim. 1:13

²⁸ Acts 2:42

²⁹ Matt. 18:18

³⁰ Rom 10:17

³¹ Jno. 20:31

Cor. 12:10? It is written that Satan would disguise himself as an angel of light.³²

Beloved, let the Holy Scripture be your guide. The Holy Scriptures "...are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."³³ God's Word is truth. "Let God be true but every man a liar."³⁴ Be as noble as the ancient Bereans and search the Scriptures to see whether the things you hear are so. "Prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."³⁵ "Test all things; hold fast what is good."³⁶

WATERED DOWN RELIGION

Our nation has departed from the basic Bible principles which our forefathers sought to uphold and on which our government was established. This has resulted in nearly every form of vice and corruption. Consider this one point: I have read that George Washington strictly forbade any form of profanity in his army. What a far cry from standards today when profanity and vulgar filth are commonly used in our children's school classrooms and are channeled into our homes

via television. Gambling, once a hidden practice, now is a national past time.

Mortal men have attempted to make religion and church services more entertaining and attractive to peoples desire.

Churches across our land have followed the trends of our society. Mortal men have attempted to make religion and church services more entertaining and attractive to peoples desire. It was this very effort that years ago brought instrumental music into the worship and introduced fairs and carnivals to raise money for churches. As time has passed a host of other things not authorized by the Scriptures have crept in.

Preaching has been watered down with tolerance of sin. Women preachers fill some of the pulpits of our land. Some denominations reportedly have even endorsed homosexuality as an alternate life style and accept homosexuals into their membership. We recall Paul's plea to Timothy, "Preach the Word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will

³² 2 Cor. 11:14

³³ 2 Tim. 3:15

³⁴ Rom. 3:4

³⁵ Rom. 12:2

³⁶ 1 Thes. 5:21

not endure sound doctrine; but according to their own lusts, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers, and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables."³⁷

FOLLOW THE SAFE PATH

Some people will say, "What difference does it make? Why be so tediously strict that you think you have to have chapter and verse for everything you believe and for all your faith and practice?" The

"Live a life of purity, love and holiness, following the God given guidelines of the Holy Scriptures."

answer should be clear when we realize we shall be judged according to what is written in the Word of God. We simply want to obey the Lord and be acceptable in His sight. Jesus said, *"If you love Me, keep my commandments."*³⁸ *"If anyone love me, he will keep my words".*³⁹ *"You are my friends, if you do what I command*

you."⁴⁰ In Revelations we read, *"Blessed are they who do his commandments that they may have right to the tree of life and enter in through the gates into the city."*⁴¹ He is *"the author of eternal salvation to all who obey him."*⁴²

Men may argue that these are modern times and the Bible is out-dated, but beloved, do not equate the words of men with the Word of God. Sin is still sin. Murder is still murder. A lie is still a lie. Fornication is still wrong in the eyes of God regardless of how acceptable it becomes in society. Nudity and immodesty are still condemned by God. Homosexuality is an abomination. The Almighty God, our Creator, and the one before whom we will stand in judgment, has revealed His will for our lives and our salvation through the Holy Scriptures.

Follow the safe path, the way of salvation taught in the Bible. *"Make your calling and election sure."*⁴³ Believe in Christ. Repent of your sins. Confess your faith in Christ as the Son of God. Be baptized in His name for the remission of your sins. Live a life of purity, love and holiness, following the God given guidelines of the Holy Scriptures. Cling to the

³⁷ 2 Tim. 4:2-4

³⁸ John. 14:15

³⁹ John. 14:23

⁴⁰ John. 15:14

⁴¹ Rev. 22:14

⁴² Heb. 5:9

⁴³ 2 Pet. 1:10

old paths of life and godliness
taught in the Word. The eter-
nal destiny of your soul de-
pends on it!



*2322 East Sixteenth Street
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Winford Lee



Winford Lee

Winford Lee was born in Montevideo, Minnesota, April 25, 1918. The family moved to north Missouri in 1928. Winford obeyed the gospel September 3, 1939 and was baptized by Brother C. R. Turner. He delivered his first sermon almost five months later February 4, 1940 at Chillicothe, Missouri.

He attended 18 weeks of Bible study under Brother E. M. Zerr and 24 weeks under W. Carl Ketcherside, in 1941 and 1942.

Winford held his first Gospel Meeting at Lamine, Missouri August 3-17, 1941. Since then he has proclaimed the Gospel in 14 states.

On April 6, 1947, he united in marriage with Reba Owens of Martinsville, Indiana. They have two children, John of Greenwood, Missouri and Karen Armstrong of Connersville, Indiana; two grandsons, Brandon and Shane Lee and two granddaughters, Jessica and Samantha Armstrong.

At the present, Reba and Winford live in Nixa, Missouri.



GOD'S ELDEST SONS

The familiar analytic style of the writer offers intriguing insight into a unique concept of sonship that transcends gender boundaries and elevates all Christians to a special relationship with God.

As perplexing as being "born again", this concept teaches a biblical principle explaining the peculiarity of a Christian and a new awareness of authority and responsibility.

Brother Winford masterfully delineates the choices, evaluates the special benefits and weighs the responsibilities of this special kinship with God. The status as "Eldest Sons" should encourage all to be leaders in their own sphere of Christian endeavor.

The title for this treatise is taken from Hebrews 12:23; *"To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven . . ."*

In this passage the word "firstborn" does not refer to Christ. The Holy Spirit is not telling us this is the name of the church; neither is it referring to Christ as the head of the church. The Apostle Paul is talking about Christians whose names are recorded in heaven.

Berry's Greek Interlinear translates as follows: *"To the assembly of firstborn ones in the heavens registered."* The Twentieth Century Translation says: *"To the assemblage of God's eldest sons whose names are enrolled in heaven."* The Emphatic Diaglott, a Greek In-

terlinear translates it as follows: *"To a congregation of firstborns."* We can easily see that in the original Greek the word "firstborn" is plural.

*"To a congregation of
firstborns..."*

This terminology is based on the law of primogeniture, which gave a greater portion of the fathers' inheritance, titles and special privileges to the firstborn. This law was not repealed by Great Britain until 1925. It was practiced by the patriarchs and was included in the law of Moses, where it is mentioned as "the right of the

firstborn", who received a "double portion."¹

There were several advantages to which the first born were entitled. Jewish history, as well as the Bible, attest to the following:

1. He became head of the family or tribe.
2. His position was honorable.
3. He inherited a double portion of his fathers' property or holdings.
4. The first born was in line for Royal succession.²

"The privilege of the firstborn could be forfeited by misconduct; it was not necessarily permanent, it was not etched in stone."

These advantages were tempered, however, with responsibilities. Even in the New Testament we get a glimpse of the fact that the firstborn was responsible for the family. In Luke's record of the gospel, we have the following, *"And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father."*³ We know his father was not

dead, at that time, or this person would have been at home or at his father's house. The law of primogeniture will aid us in understanding this passage. This person, being Hebrew, was undoubtedly the firstborn (eldest) son. Hence, he was obligated to remain at home until his father died so he could attend to the burial. Christ's answer indicates that obligation was not going to continue under the new covenant.

One of the earliest characters in the Bible regarding the birthright is Esau. The Apostle Paul states, *"Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright."*⁴ The record of Esau selling his birthright is found in Genesis 25:29-34. Jacob was making pottage when Esau came in from the field. He was fatigued and hungry and asked for red pottage. Jacob said, *"Sell me this day thy birthright."* Esau replied, *"I'm at the point of death, I am going to die. What good is the birthright after I'm dead?"* And he sold it to Jacob. Isn't it amazing what people will do under somewhat difficult circumstances? I doubt that Esau was near death. He was able to come in from the field. He was able to talk, and he was not incoherent, so I judge he could have obtained

¹ Deut. 21:17

² II Chro. 21:3

³ Luke 9:59

⁴ Hebrews 12:16

food. However, he forfeited his future for a ready made meal.

The privilege of the first-born could be forfeited by misconduct; it was not necessarily permanent, it was not etched in stone. Reuben was the first-born of Jacob; however, because of his lack of good morals, he was deposed. Jacob said Reuben was as *"unstable as water."*⁵ Reuben's property rights were given to the descendants of Joseph.⁶

OUR CHOICE

When we were born into our fleshly family we had no choice of parents, nationality or wealth. I think the choice God put before us is marvelous. Only in Christianity can a person choose his family. We can choose God as our Father; we can choose Godly brothers and sisters. God is the creator of all things, but He is special to His people, "He is our Father." The word "father" is a parental expression. The Bible never speaks of God as being the father of a mountain, or father of an ocean. The word "father" is reserved for His people. What a beautiful ring the expression "Our Father which art in heaven" has in view of this. God has given us the choice of what we want to be. Even in

the Old Testament the great general Joshua pleaded with Israel, *"...Choose you this day whom ye will serve....but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."*⁷

*"Only in Christianity
can a person choose his
family."*

This choice offers us the opportunity to become a first-born. Under the gospel dispensation everyone who has the desire can be an "eldest son." When a person realizes he is a sinner and lost in God's sight, he can be freed from his transgressions. Only in Christ can this be accomplished. I read in the gospel of John, Chapter 3, *"There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."* That saying baffled Nicodemus and he questioned how a man could be born when he was old. The Master answered, *"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a*

⁵ Gen. 49:3,4

⁶ I Chro. 5:1

⁷ Joshua 24:15

man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." All through the New Testament the formula is the same for becoming a

"I think we can see that many birthrights have been sacrificed upon the altar of pride."

Christian. There must be hearing and believing testimony, repenting of sin, confessing the Christ, and being baptized. The Apostle Peter speaking to the multitude in Jerusalem said, "*Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.*"⁸ This makes us all firstborn ones. Under the Old Testament only one son per family could be a firstborn; but under Christ's law every true believer is an "eldest son." May I suggest this also includes women. Every girl, every woman who obeys the gospel is in the same class as men. Paul states, "*... there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.*"⁹

The idea that all can be "firstborn" goes against human reasoning. We all can be helped by how God used the term in the Old Testament.

The children of Israel were in bondage; Moses was sent to lead them out. God told Moses what to say to the Egyptian leader, "*And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD, Israel is my son, even my firstborn . . .*"¹⁰ The select nation was to receive a blessing. All Israel was to be led out of bondage; all Israel would cross the Red Sea. Also the promise of entering into the Canaan land was theirs. Now, because they had these great promises, God said, "*Israel is my firstborn.*" The book of Galatians speaks of the Lord's church as Israel. "*And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.*"¹¹ A congregation may be one hundred percent Gentile and still be the Israel of God in a figurative sense.

SELLING OUR BIRTHRIGHT

One of the greatest difficulties is continuing to be faithful after we have obeyed the gospel. The bulk of the New Testament addresses this problem. There are twenty-one epistles beginning with Romans and concluding with Jude and everyone of these volumes contain warnings, admonitions,

⁸ Acts 2:38

⁹ Gal. 3:28

¹⁰ Exo. 4:22

¹¹ Gal. 6:16

and instructions, lest we fall from grace or the favor of God.

When the Apostle Paul said, "*Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together . . .*"¹² we can see the importance the Lord places on church attendance. When we willfully absent ourselves from the Lord's Day services, we get dangerously close to the conduct of Esau. Since Jesus died to bring the church into existence, the least we can do is to honor and respect it. The elders at Ephesus were told to "*feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with His own blood.*"¹³ In the great sermon on the mount, Jesus said, "*But seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness . . .*" Putting first things first should be our highest priority.

Another attitude that can prove our downfall is pride. Solomon states, "*Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.*"¹⁴ We are not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think.¹⁵ Pride was one of the sins that toppled Eve in the garden of Eden. The Apostle John states, "*For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Fa-*

ther, but is of the world."¹⁶ To my knowledge the word "pride" is never used in a good sense in the Bible.

There is a church mentioned in the Bible that fell from God's favor because of pride. "*Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked . . .*"¹⁷ This statement was made to the Church at Laodicea. Pride has such a devastating effect on people. It makes us think we have everything, when in reality, we have nothing. The people of Laodicea sacrificed their birthright on the altar of pride.

*"It (pride) makes us think
we have everything,
when in reality we have
nothing."*

The book of Daniel reveals the life of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. He was a powerful and proud man and his speech betrayed him. Here is what he uttered, "*Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the*

¹² Heb. 10:25

¹³ Acts 20:28

¹⁴ Prov. 16:18

¹⁵ Rom. 12:3

¹⁶ I John 2:16

¹⁷ Rev. 3:17

*honour of my majesty?"*¹⁸ Isn't that passage dripping with pride? His kingdom collapsed and he met the fate of animals for seven years.

"Just imagine a man so adept at encouraging that the apostles changed his name to that word."

We must remember that it doesn't take large things to make people proud. We have seen men who were proud of their abilities. If we have talent and ability to do things in a skillful manner, let's be thankful, rather than displaying the "I am better than you" attitude. I think we can see that many birthrights have been sacrificed upon the altar of pride.

RESPONSIBILITY TO OUR "TRIBE"

As the firstborn of the Israelites had particular duties and responsibilities to their family, we too, have duties toward our spiritual family, the church. We are God's family here on earth. The Bible says, *"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness . . ."*¹⁹

This does not mean we will always be able to restore everyone that goes astray, but we should always try. Sometimes a little encouragement is all that an erring one needs. Sometimes he may need additional teaching and instruction. We are also told to *"Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."*²⁰ I judge we all need help along this line sometime in our lives. Some burdens in life are too heavy to be borne alone. Even the strongest Christians sometimes need help. I think we have a good example of this in the scriptures. When we study the eldership of the church, it is obvious that God knew the burden of the eldership was too heavy for one man to bear. This is one of the reasons the Bible teaches there is to be a plurality of elders. I am not saying if an elder is left alone, by reason of death or from other circumstances, that he should resign; however, a strong effort should be made to add to the eldership. The load is too much for one man to handle efficiently.

We must realize that one aspect of the church meeting together was to exhort one another. The teaching is quite clear, *"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but ex-*

¹⁸ Daniel 4:30

¹⁹ Gal. 6:1

²⁰ Gal. 6:2

horting one another . . ."²¹ As the firstborn ones of God, we are to aid one another.

"God has made so many promises to the faithful and these promises can be enjoyed while we are on earth."

When Cain killed Abel, and God asked Cain, *"Where is Abel thy brother?"* (a rhetorical question, because God knew the answer but asked for effect), Cain lamely answered, *"Am I my brother's keeper?"* Because of this attitude Cain met a woe-ful end. His name goes down in infamy! One of the greatest things we can do as God's "eldest sons" is to aid and serve others. This does not mean we are to meddle in the affairs of others; but, as Paul said, *"Be ready to every good work."*²² In other words be ready mentally and spiritually when the need for aid and encouragement presents itself. Some times we help and encourage people in unusual ways. Occasionally in the area of church work, I have asked people to assist in or do some task that I could have easily done by myself; but, they

were thrilled at the opportunity and felt the joy of being of service. We can do so much good by just helping fellow Christians do things.

We also have a classic example of a man being of great encouragement in the book of Acts. According to chapter four, we have Joses who was surnamed Barnabas by the apostles. The name Barnabas means "consolation or encourager." Just imagine a man so adept at encouraging that the apostles changed his name to that word. This gives rise to the idea that he exceeded all the apostles in the field of encouraging. When Saul of Tarsus was converted as recorded in Acts 9, the people had difficulty believing it was true, because he had persecuted the believers in the most savage way. Later, when Saul (Paul) came to Jerusalem and attempted to join himself to the disciples, they would not accept him. They didn't believe he had obeyed the gospel. In short, they were afraid of him, and thought he was still an enemy of Christ's way. The man Barnabas came to his aid and testified on his behalf. Notice what Barnabas did, *"But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached*

²¹ Heb. 10:25

²² Titus 3:1

boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus."²³ What encouragement this must have been to Paul!

The church at Antioch was a congregation of note. They had teachers and preachers that were outstanding according to Acts 13: 1-3. A great event occurred at Antioch. God said to that congregation, through the Spirit, "*Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.*" This was the beginning of the first missionary journey.

Paul was an outstanding apostle; he authored more books in the New Testament than any other writer. He also made three preaching journeys. Who would have dreamed that God would have sent Barnabas with him on that maiden journey. As I have mentioned before, all people regardless of their strength and knowledge, at some time, need encouragement. God knew that Paul would need a co-worker like Barnabas. It is possible that the lack of bolstering each others morale is the weakest link in the "firstborns" ministry. As "firstborn" ones let us help and aid our tribe.

OUR REWARD

Many times I hear people say our reward for being Christians is only after death. I beg to differ somewhat with that concept. God has made so many promises to the faithful and these promises can be enjoyed while we are on earth. We have God's promise that our names are written in Heaven. I think we can see that pledge being enjoyed right now. On one occasion Jesus sent out seventy people to proclaim the gospel in addition to the apostles. When the seventy returned they were ecstatic and joyful, saying, "*Even the devils are subject to us through thy name.*" Jesus tempered their elation by telling them not to rejoice in that, "*...but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.*"²⁴ This puts a "little bit" of heaven on earth. What a blessing we firstborn have. There is no doubt the "great reward" is given at the final day of judgment. "*Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.*"²⁵



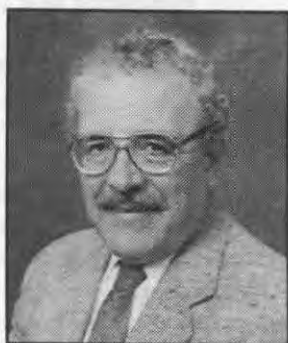
214 State Street
Nixa, Missouri 65714

²³ Acts 9:27

²⁴ Luke 10:17,20

²⁵ Rev. 22:14

Lee Wright



Lee Wright was born June 26, 1939 to Tennyson Clay & Ferne Grace Wright. His early years were spent on the West Coast. Later the family moved to Colorado where Lee's grandfather, a devout man, influenced him to become a Christian at 14 years of age.

Lee started early seriously studying God's Word and working with older evangelists. Under the guidance and encouragement of the congregation at Colorado Springs he worked with Paul Ketcherside, Roy Harris and Roy Loney. After high school four years in the Navy allowed Lee to meet church people in Japan, China and the Philippines. He spent two weeks with a missionary worker in the jungles of the Philippines. His service to his country completed, Lee married Jeanne. They made their home in California and became members of what is now the Long Beach congregation. Their oldest son was born in California.

To support his family Lee worked for a finance company. In 1964, as manager for the company, he was transferred to Oregon. They soon found a small church group meeting in a school house in Springfield, Oregon and began working with them. They have lived in Oregon ever since.

During that time, a decision was made with the help of his elders in Long Beach to begin full time evangelistic work. Over the years several congregations have been established in Oregon under the oversight of Brother Wright. He has helped train many young men now working in several areas across the United States. He gives credit for his training to his father, grandfather, men of the congregation in Colorado Springs and evangelist he worked with, but knows all glory goes to God whom Lee plans to serve the rest of his life.



FROM THE EAGLE' NEST

"From the eagle's nest" one gets a lofty glimpse of God's concern for His people. Created on the fifth day, the eagle has been used throughout the Bible to exemplify the characteristics God desires in His people.

Brother Lee brings to the written page a personal relationship with nature to explain a spiritual relationship with God. As the eagle is strong, swift, perceptive, majestic and graceful, likewise a Christian should develop comparable characteristics.

This personal message written especially for you will give valuable encouragement for living the Christian life here on earth.

*"Who satisfieth thy mouth (desires) with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's."*¹

Eagles have long symbolized power, courage, freedom and immortality. They have been used as national, military, and heraldic emblems and as symbols in various religions. David had this in mind when he wrote Psalms 103. This psalm along with several others is thought to have been composed by David during that traumatic time when David had been found out concerning his adultery with Bathsheba. In 2 Samuel 12 the story is told of the prophet Nathan exposing David's sin. In verse 14 Nathan says, ". . . *the child that is*

born . . . shall surely die." David was overcome with grief. Verse 16 tells us that he fasted, prayed and lay all night on the earth. He does not blame God

"Every sin affects more than the sinner."

but publicly proclaims, "I have sinned!" It is one thing to be harmed yourself because of your own sin. It is something else that another innocent person is harmed.

Sin is like that. There is not a sin committed that affects only one person. You cannot say, "Leave me alone...I am hurting no one but myself." Every sin affects more than the sinner. David was facing that fact the hard way. But just as David was humbled by being

¹ Psa. 103:5

exposed, he was also honest in his admission of guilt. That was a quality God appreciated in David.

*"God can renew you
with strength but it
must be your decision to
allow it to happen."*

In Psalms 103 David gives credit to God for his justice and judgment. Part of justice and judgment lies in purging sin from the sinner. In its place He gives strength and power. In Psa 103:5, the eagle is mentioned as a symbol of that strength and power. Rather than let sin weigh you down and drag you to a state of uselessness...why not repent and be renewed with the strength of youth. God can renew you with strength but it must be your decision to allow it to happen.

Sin is easy to cover up sometimes for years but it will eventually show its results to all. Do not waste the strength of your youth by being destroyed with the destructive power of sin. Come to terms with sin as David did. Admit sin and allow your youth to be renewed like the eagle's.

Other verses with a similar thought for your study include:

2 Sam. 1:23; Ezek. 1:10; Ezek. 10:14; Dan. 7:4; Rev. 4:7.

BE A SOARING EAGLE

"There be three things which are too wonderful for me, yea, four which I know not: The way of an eagle in the air; the way of a serpent upon a rock; the way of a ship in the midst of the sea; and the way of a man with a maid."²

Here the wisdom of Solomon mentions the way of an eagle in the air as one of three wonderful, even four unexplainable things. Any one who has seen a flying eagle up close, in all it's majesty, can relate to the experience. I have personally had that privilege. While fishing in Alaska a few years ago, I saw what I thought was a small bear on the other side of the river. My partner and I were cleaning salmon. Not that familiar with Alaska, I asked him about what I was seeing.

"It's an eagle," he told me, "watching us clean our salmon and he wants his share." Soon the eagle took off and sailed over our heads so close you could almost touch him. What a thing of beauty and grace. We both stopped what we were doing to watch him fly away.

Another time on a high mountain lake in Oregon, my youngest son and I were fishing. We were not having much

² Proverbs 30: 18-19

luck but did happen to catch a trout too small to keep. We threw him back but he had swallowed the hook and was obviously wounded. He began flopping in the water, struggling to survive. High in the sky we spotted an eagle. It was difficult to see with the human eye if it definitely was an eagle. But sooner than you can believe it that eagle swooped down, grabbed the wounded trout and was gone.

*"You might be that eagle soaring in the air.
What a thing of beauty!"*

Proverbs 30 contains many perplexing situations. Reading it and the local newspaper provides many similarities. We live in a society filled with all kinds of wickedness. This can get you down if you are not careful. Sometimes as a young person you may feel that life is so ugly you see no hope for your own future. When you get to feeling that way...take time to think again. You see, God does not make mistakes. He knows who you are just as He knew Isaiah, Jeremiah, Job, and David.

Consider Psalms 139:16; Isaiah 49:1-5; Isaiah 44: 2, 24; Jeremiah 1: 5; Job 10: 8, 9.

Yes indeed, God knows

each one of you reading this message. He also knows the time in which you are living. Take time to read the book of Esther and especially notice the following verse.

"For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"³ Personalize this verse! Understand that you might be the very person in your family, neighborhood, or school that will effect the changes that God wants made. You might be that eagle soaring in the air. What a thing of beauty! Remember, God is on your side as long as you are living for Him. *"What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?"⁴* Think about it and also consider Matthew 24:28 and Luke 17: 37.

ON EAGLES' WINGS

"Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself."⁵

Just before being given the Law, God reminds Moses of His

³ Esther 4:14

⁴ Romans 8:31

⁵ Exodus 19:14

care for His children. He mentions carrying them on eagle's wings. Moses would understand this to mean that God looks after and protects His own. He had freed them from the dangerous Egyptians. Through it seemed impossible, God was able to get the job done.

"God has never promised us to be without problems. Rather, He says He will help us through them."

Jesus reminded those around Him of God's care for them in Matthew 6: 25-34.

Life presents a lot of problems. Sometimes it might even seem there are too many to even try to go any farther. God has never promised us to be without problems. Rather, He says He will help us through them. However, we need to present our problems to Him.

The first step in our being helped by God is to admit that we are powerless in controlling our lives. Paul had this in mind in Romans 7:18. David mentioned something similar in Psalms 6:6,7. In 1 Corinthians 8:2, Paul again is saying man's wisdom will simply not accomplish much.

One of the best examples of

our Lord's concern for us is in Mark 10:46-52. Notice particularly here how Christ wanted blind Bartimaeus to tell Him what he needed. Do you suppose Christ didn't know? The point of the story here is that Christ wanted Bartimaeus to ask for the help. He wants the same from us. The help we need is there. We just need to ask for it.

The Eleventh chapter of Hebrews contains a gallery of men of faith. The importance of faith in overcoming great odds is emphasized in verses 32-34. *"And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens."* Read these words to increase your faith.

Paul's prayer for the Ephesians was that they be strengthened by the Spirit of the Lord.⁶ Yes, the Lord is real. He is ready to strengthen you. Will you look to Him and let Him carry you on eagle's

⁶ Ephesians 3:16

wings through your travels of life? He is ready if you are.

*"But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."*⁷

SURPRISED BY JUDGMENT?

*"The LORD shall bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flieth; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand;"*⁸

God speaking through Moses, instructs the children of Israel concerning their future. If they live for Him and are honest with Him, they will be blessed. Otherwise they will be cursed. Part of the curse will be punishment inflicted by another nation---a nation they might not ever suspect--from far away. The punishment inflicted by that nation will happen much quicker than they expect. It will arrive as swiftly as the eagle flies.

It is interesting to note that an eagle usually dives on its victims from high in the air. An eagle's eyes are always directed forward allowing good binocular depth perception. Most eagles hunt while they are soaring high in the air or while

perched on a high place. Eagles have powerfully developed breast muscles. They rely on surprise and strength when capturing their prey. They usually capture their prey on the ground and carry it off to eat it elsewhere. The chief weapons of an eagle are its powerful legs, feet and claws. They have been known to carry away prey weighing nearly as much as themselves. Eagles and hawks have the keenest sight of all the animal world.

The children of Israel knew these facts concerning the eagle. As God talks to them in this passage they can picture clearly in their minds their own fate based upon their own decisions. Should they follow God---He will protect them. Should they follow sin---they will surely become prey to it. They will be carried off as swiftly as the eagle carries off his victim. They will be caught swiftly and completely unawares. They will not be able to resist with enough force to help themselves.

Another interesting thing about the eagle and his hunting habits is that he only hunts in the daylight. This means that even though his victim is surprised the capture occurs in broad daylight. Sin works the same way. You may sin in secret and think no one knows. This gives you a sense of false security and if not handled

⁷ Isaiah 40:31

⁸ Deuteronomy 28:49

promptly it is only a matter of time that the results of that sin are known to all. You have become prey to sin in the daylight---captured in the sight of all and carried away to be consumed who knows where.

If you focus on material things you are bound for disappointment.

They will "fly away" as swiftly as an eagle flies.

Paul had this same thought in mind when he referred to "delivering one to Satan."⁹ Sooner or later if sin is not cleared from your life you completely lose the protection of the Lord. you then become the easy prey to the surprise attack of Satan and will find yourself helpless.

If you find yourself in a sinful condition, repent and turn your face to the Lord. Become a Christian. God's Word tells you how.

There are several other verses with a similar thought.¹⁰

RICHES AND EAGLES

"Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for

*riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven."*¹¹

In keeping with the thought of the tremendous speed of the eagle, the writer of Proverbs claims riches fly away just as rapidly. Jesus had some things to say about this in what we call the "Sermon on the Mount."

*"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."*¹²

It is so easy to become trapped by material things. They really bring no pleasure. Nor do they satisfy. You must focus on the right things. *"The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!"*¹³ If you focus on material things you are bound for disappointment. They will "fly away" as

⁹ 1 Cor 5:5

¹⁰ Job 9:26; Jer. 4:13; Jer. 48:40; Jer. 49:22; Lam. 4:19; Hos. 8:1; Hab. 1:8; Rev. 12:14

¹¹ Proverbs 23:5

¹² Matthew 6:19-21

¹³ Matthew 6:22-23

swiftly as an eagle flies.

Set your goal as early as possible to focus on God. If He blesses you materially in the process then give Him the glory. If you are not blessed as much as others materially, do not worry about it. Just keep your focus on God. He knows what is best for you.

Matthew 6: 24 tells us it is impossible to serve two masters. We must either focus on God or continually be disappointed by our material losses.

STIRRING THE NEST

*"As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings:"*¹⁴ Just prior to his death and a short while before they make their entrance into their promised land, Moses gathers the children of Israel together for a final review of forty years of activity. We call that review today the book of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy means "second law." At the end of that review Moses sings a song! This is chapter 32. In that song Moses reminds the children of Israel how they fared wandering in the desert. He mentions God's protection for them. Verse 11 mentions the eagle stirring it's nest.

The eagle usually builds

it's nest in a tall tree or on high cliffs. *"Doth the eagle mount up at thy command, and make her nest on high?"*¹⁵ The nest is a massive structure of sizable sticks lined with leaves and grass. It is usually used over and over year after year. The eagles add to their nest every year. A nest can be 6-10 feet across and 1½ to 15 feet in depth. A nest was found in the state of Ohio weighing almost a ton. It was thought to have been used by the same pair of eagles for 36 years.

Basic conditioning takes place to prepare the eaglets for their life of independence later. The Christian experience in growing up is similar.

Needless to say the nest of a young eaglet is a place of security. Among the eagles, both parents incubate the eggs and feed the young. The young stay in the nest for long as 130 days before beginning to learn to fly. When the eaglets are born their eyes are open. Their feathers do not start to grow for about 2 or 3 weeks. They cannot tear their own food until they are 6 or 8 weeks old.

¹⁴ Deuteronomy 32: 11

¹⁵ Job 39: 27

The little eaglets are nurtured by mom and dad through that time of infancy. Mom and dad eagle both know those early days are important. Basic conditioning takes place to prepare the eaglets for their life of independence later.

As a young person you owe a lot to your parents. They taught you to spread your wings.

The Christian experience in growing up is similar. Paul talks of the necessity of milk before meat. We all have needed that special attention as we grow up both physically and spiritually. Not a one of us arrived at our present position in life without a lot of help from someone else.

There comes a time when the nest must be "stirred." The eaglet must now learn to fly on his own. They cannot fly very well on their own at first. Moses mentions the eagle "hovering over it's young" and "spreading out it's wings, taking them up." As the eaglet struggles with it's flying it is probably unaware the mom and dad are hovering over and under it creating air currents to help the baby fly. Soon the eaglet realizes that all it has to do to keep from falling is to stretch out it's wings. The air rushing

over it's wings sets us a new force called the "principle of aerodynamics." That principle overcomes the law of gravity. If the eaglet folded it's wings it would fall and be killed. Mom and dad eagle encourage the little one to spread those wings and the learn to soar. All the while that is being learned they have been creating those air currents to protect baby eagle.

Parents serve the same purpose to their children. As the child grows and begins to take on more independence they are there to keep that young one from falling. As a young person you owe a lot to your parents. They taught you to spread your wings.

A WING AND A PRAYER

God designed the eagle to soar in the air. An eagle can glide for great distances without even flapping it's wings. But he does have to keep those wings stretched out.

God tells us today to pray without ceasing¹⁶; meditate on His truth day and night¹⁷; and to speak the truth in our hearts¹⁸. God promises us that as long as we meditate on His truth, we will soar above the power of temptation. *"But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall*

¹⁶ 1 Thess. 5: 17

¹⁷ Psalm 1

¹⁸ Psalm 15: 2

mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."¹⁹ Temptation is like gravity. It will pull you down to ultimate spiritual death unless you spread your wings and let God's aerodynamics overcome that temptation. Read Romans chapter 6 and personalize it in your own life. Just as the eagle has only a few moments to stretch out its wings before falling to the ground---so we have only a few moments to visualize the teaching contained in that chapter before we fall into temptation. Make a good understanding of Romans 6 a goal for your own life.

BEWARE OF NESTING AMONG THE STARS

*"Thy terribleness hath deceived thee, and the pride of thine heart, O thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock, that holdest the height of the hill: though thou shouldest make thy nest as high as the eagle, I will bring thee down from thence, saith the LORD."*²⁰ This verse is a portion of God's judgment on Edom. The Edomites were a fierce people who lived in the mountains. They were descendants of Esau, Jacob's twin brother. Because they were accustomed to mountain living,

they were able to defend their territory from invading enemy forces. They prided themselves with their guerrilla type warfare. No one bothered them. They gave the Jews lots of trouble, often siding with those who were enemies of Israel.

God says He will bring them down. *"Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall."*²¹ Paul said it also, *"Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."*²²

*There is simply no way
you can fight against
God and win.*

How often it happens that we hurt ourselves by thinking we are too big and powerful to be humbled.

The eagle builds his nest high in the air. No one can approach it to harm it. Edom thought she was as secure as a nation as an eagle was with it's nest---but she would be fooled.

More than once God has brought strong nations to their knees. There is simply no way you can fight against God and win. It might appear for awhile that you are very successful but one day it will all crumble. It has always been that way and it always will be.

¹⁹ Isaiah 40: 31

²⁰ Jeremiah 49: 16

²¹ Prov. 16: 18

²² 1 Corinthians 10: 12

The Japanese were critical of American construction during the San Francisco earthquake a few years back. They even convinced us to use their techniques as we rebuilt the damaged area. Now they must face their own inadequacies with the terrible Kobe earthquake. All the strength, knowledge, and technical know-how of man is nothing compared to God.

Temptation is like gravity.

*It will pull you down to
ultimate spiritual death
unless you spread your
wings and let God's aerodynamics
overcome that
temptation.*

When Paul was on the road to Damascus he came face to face with the Lord. Read the story in Acts chapters 9, 22, and 26. Notice, "*And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.*"²³ The Lord says to Paul, "You can't win in a fight against Me." Paul recognized that and changed his ways.

Consider your own life. You can't win in a fight with the Lord. You will only destroy yourself and maybe the lives of several others in the process. Believe in what He says. Change your life. Confess His name before men. Be baptized. Become a Christian.

For additional inspired teaching "From the eagles nest", consider the scriptures on the following page. They have similar thoughts for reflection:

²³ Acts 26: 14

*"Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down, saith the LORD."*²⁴

*"Make thee bald, and poll thee for thy delicate children; enlarge thy baldness as the eagle; for they are gone into captivity from thee."*²⁵

"And say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; A great eagle with great wings, longwinged, full of feathers, which had divers colours, came unto Lebanon, and took the highest branch of the cedar: He cropped off the top of his young twigs, and carried it into a land of traffick; he set it in a city of merchants.

"He took also of the seed of the land, and planted it in a fruitful field; he placed it by great waters, and set it as a willow tree. And it grew, and became a spreading vine of low stature, whose branches turned toward him, and the roots thereof were under him: so it became a vine, and brought forth branches, and shot forth sprigs.

"There was also another great eagle with great wings and many feathers: and, behold, this vine did bend her roots toward him, and shot forth her branches toward him, that he might water it by the

furrows of her plantation. It was planted in a good soil by great waters, that it might bring forth branches, and that it might bear fruit, that it might be a goodly vine.

*"Say thou, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Shall it prosper? shall he not pull up the roots thereof, and cut off the fruit thereof, that it wither? it shall wither in all the leaves of her spring, even without great power or many people to pluck it up by the roots thereof. Yea, behold, being planted, shall it prosper? shall it not utterly wither, when the east wind toucheth it? it shall wither in the furrows where it grew."*²⁶



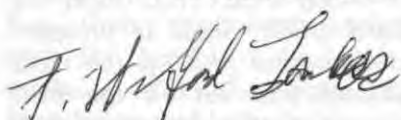
P.O. Box 219
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²⁴ Obad. 1: 4

²⁵ Micah 1: 16

²⁶ Ezek 17:3-10

F. Wilford Landes




Franklin Wilford Landes, son of Carl and Cora Landes, was born May 25, 1921 in Daviess County, near Jameson, Missouri, within one mile of the Old Scotland Church of Christ. In fact, he is a direct descendant of the founder of this congregation which banded together in 1856.

In 1927 the family moved to Kansas City, Missouri and became members of the 26th and Spruce congregation (now 25th and Oakley). Wilford's father, Carl, served as an elder over this flock for many years.

In January, February, and March of 1941 & 1942, Wilford attended a Bible Study in St. Louis, Missouri under the late W. Carl Ketcherside. He also studied with E. M. Zerr, C. R. Turner, and Lloyd Riggins. In 1942 he went to Oakland, California to work with the Shattuck Avenue congregation under the direction of George Robinson.

In the fall of 1943 Wilford met Mary B. Stillwell in Sacramento, CA. and they were married February 27, 1944 at Exeter, CA. As Wilford began his lifelong work as an evangelist of the Lord's church, the family moved to Kansas City, MO. in 1948. The next move was to Topeka, Kansas to work with the congregation on East 6th (now California Avenue). During the next few years the Landes family grew to five, one girl and two boys. They lived and worked at Lyons, Indiana, Farmington and Albuquerque, New Mexico, and in 1955 moved to Raytown, MO. to work with the Gregory Blvd. congregation. Then after a short stay at Lexington, Missouri, Wilford and Mary moved back to Topeka, KS. in the 1980's which is still their home today.

Wilford has preached from N. Carolina to California. For several years he was editor and publisher of the Gospel Message.



WALKING BY FAITH

Without a doubt "faith" in God is vital not only in conversion, but also in "walking worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called." Christians are called to follow Jesus and, like walking on the water, it requires faith.

"Walking by Faith" is a lesson from a faithful servant of God that reminds us of the importance of living by the impulse of faith while restraining the urges of the flesh. It warns against following the course of "modern" religion, which appeals to that which looks good, sounds good and feels good to our senses.

The major thoughts and scriptures for this discourse were penned by Brother Wilford with editorial assistance by Winford Lee and your editor.

Dear Reader, "Watch carefully your steps as you walk with God!" Remember the scripture, *"O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps."*¹

This truth is evident when we consider how man has misused this world--we have polluted the air, water and soil--by doing things our way, in our own sight. If we can not properly manage the physical world in which we live and observe, we certainly can not direct our steps in the spiritual realm which we can not see.

PLEASING GOD!

The basic ingredient for pleasing God is faith, because *"without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."*²

The basic ingredient for pleasing God is faith

This basic truth is common to all mankind. It is of interest to note the second child born into this world was a man of faith; *"By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacri-*

¹Jeremiah 10: 23

²Hebrews 11: 6

*fice than Cain, . . .*³ By faith Enoch walked with God and was taken to heaven without dying. *"For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God."*⁴ Noah was another patriarch that walked by faith, because the Bible states, *"By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house."*⁵

"It is by faith that we enter the family of God."

The same basic principle is true in the present age as the Apostle Paul states, *"For we walk by faith, not by sight."*⁶

FAITH LEADS TO OBEDIENCE

*"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."*⁷ Faith leads mankind to obey. It is by faith that we enter the family of God. *"For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ"*⁸

Without faith, we would have no reason to repent of our

sins. Without faith, we could not confess Him. Without faith, we could not become part of the Lord's church. Jesus said, *"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved."*⁹ On the day of Pentecost, 3,000 people believed and were baptized and became part of the Lord's church. We must remember that men do not add people to the church. When men and women obey the gospel, the Lord adds them to His Church. *"And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."*¹⁰

The result of walking by faith is that we receive the salvation of your souls.¹¹

LIGHT UNTO MY PATH

Now we know that *"Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."*¹²

The Bible is God's inspired word of revelation and we must be guided by it. We are told that Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit,¹³ and we know that *"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly fur-*

³ Hebrews 11: 4

⁴ Hebrews 11: 5

⁵ Hebrews 11: 7

⁶ 2 Corinthians 5: 7

⁷ Hebrews 11: 1

⁸ Galatians 3: 26, 27

⁹ Mark 16: 16

¹⁰ Acts 2: 47

¹¹ 1 Pet 1: 9

¹² Romans 10: 17

¹³ 2 Peter 1: 21

nished unto all good works."¹⁴

It is through faith that we receive God's saving grace, "*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.*"¹⁵

The Bible is God's inspired word of revelation and we must be guided by it.

We are told in 2 Corinthians 5: 7, "*For we walk by faith, not by sight.*" Sight is one of the senses and we don't walk directed by it, because it varies in individuals. Jeremiah said that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.¹⁶ David reveals, "*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.*"¹⁷ The Apostle Paul instructs, ". . . *for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.*"¹⁸ It is interesting to note that every person who pleases God, whether in the Old Testament or New Testament, was a person of faith.

KNOWN BY THE WALK

Walking by faith is living a faithful life for God in a way that pleases Him. Walking by faith is "*trusting in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe.*"¹⁹

When we meet together on the first day of the week and eat the Lord's Supper together, we are walking by faith, following the pattern of the apostles doctrine. "*And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them. . .*"²⁰ If we choose to only eat the Lord's Supper twice a year, we are walking by sight, following what our senses tell us is right. This is not pleasing to God.

The Lord's church is identified by it's walk in faith regarding it's name, government and worship.

Paul identified the Lord's church when he stated, "*The churches of Christ salute you.*"²¹

Paul also taught that the Lord's church is governed by elders and deacons. He instructed Titus that he should, "*set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in*

¹⁴ 2 Timothy 3: 16, 17

¹⁵ Ephesians 2: 8

¹⁶ Jeremiah 10: 23

¹⁷ Psalms 119: 105

¹⁸ Romans 14: 23

¹⁹ 1 Timothy 4: 10

²⁰ Acts 20: 7

²¹ Romans 16: 16

*every city, as I had appointed thee."*²²

To praise God with acapella singing is walking by faith because this is what pleases God. *"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."*²³

The Lord's church is identified by it's walk in faith regarding it's name, government and worship.

*"Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord."*²⁴ Remember we sing praises to honor God, not for our entertainment. Some will say, "I like instrumental music." But no place in the New Testament speaks of the church using instruments. Following man's likes and dislikes is walking by sight, or in the case of music in the church, walking by sound. Again, this is by man's senses not by faith.

WATCH YOUR STEP

Modern religions are the result of churches having left the "Word" centuries ago to walk by sight. Modern Protestantism has quit protesting against error and joined the parade of the senses.

The Lord's church must avoid following this broad path that leads to destruction. We can only do so if we continue to "walk by faith", and not by sight.

Dear Reader, remember to watch carefully your steps as you walk with God.



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²² Titus 1: 5 ; Philipians 1: 1

²³ Colossians 3: 16

²⁴ Ephesians 5: 19

Marvin Ingle




Marvin Ingle was born March 15, 1924 in Runnells, Iowa. His educational pursuits started in a one-room school at Camp #2 and continued in high school at Runnells and Pleasantville, IA. He received secretarial training at Capital City Commercial College and worked for the Rock Island Motor Transit Co. in Des Moines.

Marvin was among the first 18-year-olds to be drafted from Iowa. He served as Secretary to the Commanding Officer of the 343d Infantry Regiment in training at Camp Howze, Texas, and Camp Claiborne, Louisiana. He served in France and Belgium until V-day. After a 30 day furlough, he was sent to Manila, Philippine Islands as Secretary to the Adjutant General of Armed Forces Western Pacific. Marvin was discharged February 19, 1946.

On August 19, 1950, Marvin married Melda M. Daugherty. Four children blessed their family. Gregory Ingle is a family physician in Prairie City, IA. Lisa Maria Fiorentin is an Insurance Representative for Dr. Ingle. Lynnette Rae Dowdy is a registered nurse in the hospital at Mooresville, Indiana. And Charles Ingle is a Christian Counselor in the Medical Center in Newton, IA.

Brother Marvin began his Christian life at age 14, being baptized into Christ. After serving his country, he began his public service to the Church by attending a concentrated 4 month's Bible study with Brother Walter Lagle in New Sharon, Iowa. In 1962, he began serving as elder in the congregation at Vandalia, Iowa. In 1974 Marvin, Melda and family moved to Indianapolis, IN. to work with the Speedway-Chapel Glen congregation as an evangelist for 7 years. In 1981 Marvin and his family returned to Vandalia, IA. where he serves as an evangelist sent out by the Vandalia Church of Christ.



INSTANT IN SEASON AND OUT OF SEASON

It is obvious by reading this article that the writer has a sense of urgency to tell the lost about Jesus. But underlying this is a warning to members of the church who do not share the same urgent need to reach the lost and thereby endanger their own souls. It's not a lack of ability, but a lack of preparation, commitment and confidence. Often opportunities are missed while waiting for the right "season" to harvest the grain. Brother Ingle reminds us that our responsibility is to sow and water. God gives the increase.

This lesson is rich with nuggets of wisdom on being "instant" in our ministry to the lost, whether in season or out of season.

The greatest evangelist of all times, the Apostle Paul, wrote his son in the faith, *"Preach the word. Be instant in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine."*¹

Jesus, just before departure for His coronation as King of kings and Lord of lords, charged His apostles, *"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved."*

Since God is not willing that **any** should perish, neither are His children willing that any should perish--and so, upon

receiving Christ as their personal saviour, the thrill of having found the Messiah must be shared with those round about them. Every born again Christian is well aware of how pleased God is with his bearing **much** fruit--of sowing the seed in the hearts of **all** men that **by any means** some might be saved.

PLEDGED TO TELL THE STORY

The head of the Church has ruled that **"BY THE CHURCH** is made known the manifold wisdom of God". So whether individually or collectively, as the body of Christ, each member finds himself pledged to tell the story of His

¹ 2 Tim 4: 2

redeeming love and life. As Christ came to seek and save the lost, as His disciples, we share in His concern--and, like the early disciples, go everywhere preaching the word.

Because of the uncertainty of life, we, too, recognize the urgency of every person hearing our message of hope in Christ Jesus.

But evidences that we have not, individually or as a church, been impressed with the need to "*save ourselves and those who hear us*", we, unfortunately, are lackadaisical in our responsibility to those "who know not God and obey not the gospel"--knowing full well that the vengeance of God will rest upon them if they are found in their present condition when the Judgment of God begins. But are we aware that our **lack of concern** and **failure to try** and reach them will, likewise, **endanger our own salvation?**

"In order to bring a man to Christ, the evangelist must first know the Christ himself"

The first century Church grew by leaps and bounds--their numbers multiplied by thousands--while most congregations today are delighted with

one or two additions per year. There is a reason for the difference between the early Church and the Church today. "If we sow sparingly, we shall reap sparingly". We have, and still are, sowing sparingly--and so we need not expect a bountiful harvest. We are reaping what we planted--LITTLE.

EQUIPED FOR SUCCESS

The Lord's evangelist must, therefore, equip himself for success in reaching the lost by: (1) Taking heed to himself and unto the doctrine--continuing in it. (2) Knowing the Lord well, and being an example of the believer in work, in the life he lives, in love, in spirit, in faith and in purity.² In doing this he will both save himself and those who will hear him.³ No one with whom he comes in contact should be able to rightfully accuse him at the judgment seat of Christ by saying, "No man cared for my soul."

Any effective soul winner for Jesus (1) Takes the command to "Go" as an order from the King; and replies, "Where?" (2) Must set himself ready to do the work: as if it all depended on him; and pray as if it all depended on God. (3) He will first get his own house in order, so that he might be able

² 1 Timothy 4: 12

³ 1 Timothy 4: 16

to see clearly to get the mote from his brother's eye. (4) The disciples, sent out by the Church at Jerusalem and Antioch, all realized they were part of a volunteer army: They were careful to protect and appreciate what their fellow soldiers could and would do for them.

“Confidence is woefully lacking in our abilities and things we could do.”

In order to bring a man to Christ, the evangelist must first **know the Christ** himself, but equally important he must know men--and especially himself. His task demands skill, patience, honesty, and an enormous output of thought and energy if he is to convince another that he should be reconciled to God thru Christ.

The powers of persuasion must be coupled with (1) an abundant knowledge; (2) an overpowering commitment (he must determine to know nothing--comparatively speaking--except Christ and Him crucified). He will gladly spend and be spent for the souls of others--even when the more abundantly he loves, the less he be loved. (3) and, he must feel keenly an urgency about the message. Souls will be lost if

the man thinks “four months and then the harvest.” When, in the Master's view, the fields are “ripe unto harvest.” When, in fact, we're **behind** when we **start**--and there's no time to rest. An English author once said, “When men have the **will** to speak of their Lord, they find **no** shortage of ways to do it.” And yet a recent poll revealed that up to 90% of “Christians” in the church today have never led a soul to Christ. And to add salt to the wound, it is reported that 80% of active church members say they are Christians because of a **personal** contact made with a “concerned” Christian.

CRISIS OF CONFIDENCE

The Church, as we know it (in the late 20th century) has not enjoyed the successes the early Church experienced (in spite of our proliferation of affordable means of **mass communication** and innumerable opportunities to contact others DAILY because (1) We are contented with things as they are: (a) We are saved (b) Things are going smoothly (c) We are growing spiritually (d) We are “in need of nothing” (e) We have others who can do a better job--leave the evangelizing to the professional, to our spiritual giants, to our gifted speaker, to the intelligentsia--and let us support him with our pocket-books. (2) Our own experiences

with the Christian life leaves much to be desired, and "I doubt it would be much different in somebody else's life." (3) There aren't many **real** prospects out there. "People don't want to hear the truth." (4) Confidence is woefully lacking in our abilities and things we **could** do. And the Master's assurance that He will be with us has, by and large, not been unequivocally accepted and leaned upon. (5) We limit our successes by assuming that the majority of those about us really don't want or need what God has told us to offer them. (6) We have not come to accept the principle: one plants, another waters, but **God gives the increase**. Therefore, the servant of God, evangelists or others, are **not** responsible for **results**; we are responsible only for the sowing and the watering.

ALERT TO OPPORTUNITY

But in order to meet that responsibility head-on and to obtain the results God expects (i.e. "much fruit") we must be alert to **every** opportunity--not just the ones "in season." (1) the conditions of my will and energy are ready to go, (2) the prospect is in a receptive mode (as the eunuch was when Philip found him), (3) the place of encounter is "appropriate," (4) the time of encounter is a contributing factor to a "yes" decision,

(5) when we are confident God **will** help us to a victorious conclusion, (6) when we are bold in our presentation; when we're sure of the product, (7) when we've conquered our greatest fears: of failing to make the "sale," or of being rejected, (8) when we've sown bountifully we know God will give the increase--in His own time and (9) when we are fully aware that we are in full-fledged battle with evil--to gain the minds of men for Christ--and that the enemy has already been conquered (*greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world*).

Paul commands Timothy that he must not only preach the truth but that preparation is necessary if Timothy is to effectively reach people when opportunity presents itself; and he must be alert and "at the ready" **all** the time--whether it seems to be "in season, or out of season;" and he must have conditioned himself to be patient (longsuffering) and know the doctrine well. Only then will he, with any degree of confidence, be in a position to teach, reprove, rebuke, or exhort--whichever is required for the case at hand.

PROCLAIMER OR PROSPECT ?

When we talk about Christians being "instant"--it means ready to respond with-

out further preparation. By "in season" and "out of season" does Paul refer to the proclaimer's situation or the prospect's situation?

OPTIMUM CIRCUMSTANCE

Philip, the evangelist, encountered the Ethiopian eunuch under the most favorable of circumstances--"in season"--for both the teacher and the student. Philip, on a moment's notice was ready (and willing/anxious) to begin at the same Scripture and teach the eunuch about Jesus Christ, and to convince the eunuch he should immediately become a Christian. Philip was ready, willing and able (with God's help) to meet the eunuch's need of "a man to help (guide) me."

"Jonah was sure, in his own judgment, the souls of Nineveh were out of season"

As Philip was **instant** with his teaching (his reproving, rebuking, or exhorting), so the eunuch was **instant** in his desire for knowing; by realizing he did not know the meaning of the passage he was studying; by acknowledging his need for a man to help him; and his accepting Philip's offer. He demonstrated his desire to know by

asking Philip why he shouldn't immediately--once the proper conditions presented themselves--why he shouldn't obey. So the positive results obtained were a combination of a teacher who wanted to teach and a student who wanted to learn coming together--because they were both "in season."

"OUT OF SEASON" IS UNPREDICABLE

But if either the listener or speaker is "out of season" the results are not so predictable. Jonah, one of the greatest preachers of all time, was "out of season"--fearful, his heart was not going to Nineveh, tried running away from the ability and responsibility God had given **him**. Until he was convinced **by God**, he remained "out of season" for being sent to Nineveh. But once he had changed his thinking to conform with God's, he came "in season;" preached the word of warning; and saved a city filled with souls. Jonah was sure, in his own judgment, the souls of Nineveh were "out of season." And sometimes even today we blunder, as Jonah did, by letting **our** evaluation of the prospect keep us from approaching him--so we do not remain ready ("in season") or willing, but go the other way; instead of letting God decide who will preach, reprove, rebuke, exhort that by "**all**" means we might save

some."

The early disciples were, at times "out of season" and unable to use the power Christ had given them to be ready because of their own unbelief. Jesus said, "*If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say to the mountain Remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible (out of season) unto you.*" *Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer (dependency on God) and fasting (sacrifice on your part).*" Those disciples simply were not ready "in season" or "out of season," for giving attention to the things spoken of God.

DON'T WANT TO HEAR IT!

"Out of season", as one of my good brothers said, "is when they don't want to hear it." Many times in Paul's ministry, it was made abundantly clear that some people didn't want to hear what he was saying--but that did not deter Paul from his goal of becoming all things to all men, that by him, some might be saved. Paul was so schooled in human behavior and so inspired by the revelation of God in him, that he proceeded to present the gospel--and in the process brought them from "out of season" to "in season" consideration of his message from God.

The real skill of the evan-

gelist or preacher is tested to the fullest when he reaches the point in his presentation of the truth that it is time for him to decide whether the student or prospect is "in season" (meaning receptive to his message) or "out of season" (isn't listening, trying to divert attention to other matters, or simply says, "I will hear you again of this matter.")

WORKING A DRY WELL

If proper precaution has been exercised in the initial contact--is the candidate concerned about his spiritual condition? is he willing to converse about his soul? are arrangements congenial? is he, in your judgment, ready and willing to learn?--then time spent working a "dry well" should be minimal. If a prospect shows little or no interest in your first few lessons, then **he** should be led to decide whether or not he is finding the presentation satisfying? meeting his needs? and valuable enough to continue? A wise Christian will not force himself and his evangelistic efforts on an unwilling prospect.

SOWING WITHOUT REGARD

The parable of the sower indicates a true sower of the word makes no attempt to determine the quality of the ground in which he bestows

labour. He sows incessantly because he **CANNOT** know in whom God may work to give his words a fertile bed in which to grow.

Solomon suggests: "*Cast thy bread upon the waters* (all kinds of people--at all appropriate times--in all appropriate places) *for thou shalt find it after many days . . .*"⁴

"He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap . . . thou knowest not whether shall prosper."

By sowing constantly, consistently, everywhere, to everybody, by any means, you will have saved **yourself** and those who **hear you**.

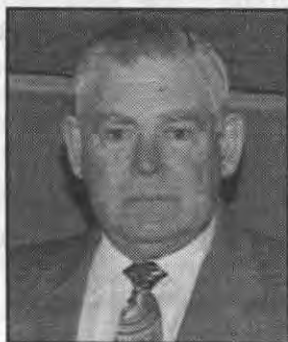


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⁴Eccles. 11: 1

James Baysinger

James Baysinger



James Baysinger became publicly active in the church at age sixteen at Etterville, MO. After high school he served his country as a medical corpsman in the U.S. Navy. At the end of W.W.II he began working with Fred Killebrew, an evangelist in Senath, MO. They worked together for two years with congregations at Senath, Advance, Bloomfield, and Canalow, all in southern Missouri.

Jim's first work on his own was with the church at Salem, MO. It soon became clear that working with the church would require a secular vocation to provide for most of his support. In 1951, Jim enrolled at Southwest Missouri State College and within three years was awarded a B.S. in Science degree. During his second year at SMS, Jim met LuAnna Aven at the congregation at Nixa, MO. Only a few days after they met, he baptized her into Christ. In May 1952 they were married and have lived in Nixa ever since. LuAnna has been very supportive of Jim's work in the church and this has meant a great deal to him.

Jim and LuAnna have two children, Lane and Lana. Lane is a field supervisor for City Utilities of Springfield and Lana is Head of Communication at Ozark Technical College in Springfield, MO. This has been a tightly knit family that supported Jim's church work, always understanding that Christ comes before family.

At this writing, Jim is 68 years of age and has a firm resolution to continue his public work for the Lord so long as strength and mind permit. He said, "The fifty plus years I have been working in the church have taught me how much there is to learn and know, and how little of that I really know."



A FORM OF GODLINESS

Modern-day religions can be very confusing to young formative minds seeking truth. The modern messages that flow from the "mega-mentality" of main stream religions are promoted to soothe the itching ear, but such "*shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.*"

Evangelism no longer begins in the Bible and builds a bridge to the world for the safe passage of contrite souls. Instead, modern preaching begins in the world, anchored on human wisdom, and attempts to build a bridge to the Bible using neologisms; new doctrines more palatable to the cultural taste buds of contemporary seekers.

What makes this "form" so appealing? Is it affecting the Lord's church? Is our bridge to the world anchored on the bastion of Truth? Find answers to these questions in this timely treatise by our brother who has observed "forms" of human reasoning and behavior.

When Paul warned Timothy concerning persons he should turn away from, he named those "*who have a form of godliness, but deny its power.*"¹ In this passage the word "form" suggests an organized procedure or an elaborate set of principles and rules. But these, according to Paul, deny the power of God.

Human thinking, as it so often appears in speeches and books, appeals because of the education activities, or achievements of the person

speaking or writing. So caught up in the process of human theorizing do people become, that they develop into admirers and promoters of their own thinking. Once this self-selling process is intellectualized, the person becomes a slavish adherent of form and may produce a plethora of rules, procedures, and postulates in advancement of a discipline, belief, or dogma.

The Greek thinkers of Christ's day were prime examples of persons converted to their own thinking. They sought after wisdom, but through that wisdom, their

¹ 2 Timothy 3: 5

own, they did not know God.² Human wisdom, no matter how extolled and promoted can never bring anyone to God. The great thinkers of the world have more commonly thought in opposition to God than in any form of concert with him.

SOCIAL RELIGION

The great majority of religions of the world put far more emphasis on form than on Godliness. As time passes into the 21st Century, most religious groups will become more and more secularized. That is, they will become more indifferent to Bible teaching and more deeply enmeshed in worldly and temporal concerns. They will spend their energy with social programs, believing that being people-oriented will bring them heavenly approval. The signs of such social commitment are all around us. The idea is that a social savior is the epitome of Godliness. This is only the form; there is no power there. Those who ignore God's will, the doctrine of Christ, the keeping of the Lord's commandments, are not recognized by God as his. The doing of social good is a **part** of God's will but this cannot stand for the whole.³

Most churches today have only a form of godliness. They

have articles of worship and practices devised by human committees and conferences. They have selected and sanctified activities that please the church hierarchy without regard to their scripturality. What the Bible has to say takes second place to what religious leaders say. What the church fathers want typically overrules what God wants.

The idea is that a social savior is the epitome of Godliness.

Members of such secular religions defer to their leaders because their own Bible knowledge is so scant or absent altogether that they could never mount a challenge to what the leaders advocate. Members of such religions are not remotely like the Bereans⁴ but are like the blind followers during the great apostasy. The Bible may as well be chained to the pulpit because it is not a factor in the lives of secular Christians.

HUMANIZED RELIGION

Humanists applaud the social orientation of church leaders and members. This set of mind is precisely what humanism advocates. Humans are their own saviors and do

² 1 Corinthians 1: 21, 22

³ James 1: 27

⁴ Acts 17: 11

not need God. The secular and humanized church of the 21st Century will give lip service to God but the heart of the church will be far from him.⁵

With the emphasis upon growth in membership at any cost, it is little wonder that only a form of religion will survive.

The theories of evolution, including the age of the world and man, the theories of beginnings, are being pushed by media programming of all kinds. This is the work of humanists who will spend and be spent to defeat all ideas of creation as advanced by Genesis Chapter 1. Science in being touted as the source for all answers; assumption is treated as if it were factual. Theories for which there is not a shred of proof are presented as if they were holy. Most churches find it awkward to wholly oppose evolutionary theory. They seek to find an accommodation that permits acceptance of evolution, even if this forces a garbled view of the Bible account. This is a case of the church adjusting to societal ideas in order to avoid antagonizing potential members whose secular views would not be compatible with

strict Bible teaching. With the emphasis upon growth in membership at any cost, it is little wonder that only a **form** of religion will survive.

BASTION OF TRUTH

What can true Christians do to counter these wayward movements from the truths? First, we must be fully informed about opposing views to Bible teaching. We must be able to meet scientific thinkers on their own ground with the competence to point out contradictions, inconsistencies, and poorly supported assumptions. We must be equally prepared with Bible reasoning that can directly refute scientific theory. Christians have one great advantage in such a confrontation. There is no scientific theory pertaining to the actual beginning of everything. The account in Genesis 1 is unique, because it is the record of creation from light to man. All scientific theories begin with the heavenly bodies in place or the earth already habitable, or the seas already in existence. While the scientific thinker may deny what the Bible says, he has nothing to offer as a viable alternative.

Second, we must take advantage of every opportunity to advance Bible teaching.⁶ This

⁵ Isaiah 29: 13; Matthew 15: 8; Mark 7: 6

⁶ 1 Peter 3: 15

might involve a letter to the editor of the local paper, an appeal to the local school system to include creation science as an alternative to evolution in the science curriculum, a speech to the local PTA or other parent groups, or being a participant in discussion groups at the library or the local college. In addition, the day to day opportunities to speak of Bible subjects with coworkers, friends, relative, and other acquaintances must be fully utilized.⁷

The Church is unfortunately affected by society and the culture that surrounds us.

Third, each family in the church must be certain that its younger members are fully apprised of the truth, and that they have the depth of conviction that will not allow them to be swayed by college professors, girl or boy friends, or writings by men and women with impressive degrees and other credentials. Young people may hear the truth maligned repeatedly. They may hear Christians called fanatics, dreamers, or followers of fantasy. Conservative Christians, those who believe the Bible, are

often called insane, and may be accused of creating God as a crutch or as a means of escaping reality. Young persons who are alone in their beliefs must have strong faith to persevere in the face of such criticism.⁸

Fourth, the church must be the bastion of truth.⁹ Its teaching should be pertinent to the problems faced by its members. Those who teach and edify must be unafraid of controversial issues and undismayed by the questions and doubts expressed by some members. Since various stages of growth are manifest in most congregational memberships¹⁰, the public leaders must be able to adapt lessons so that they are interesting and relevant at each level of learning. This requires study and flexibility, as well as patience and understanding.

AMALGAMATION OF GODLINESS

The Church is unfortunately affected by society and the culture that surrounds us. Our ideas about marriage, divorce, fornication, and adultery are an amalgam of Bible teaching and current social thinking. We also tend to mix God's laws and men's.

⁸ 1 Peter 4: 16

⁹ 1 Timothy 3: 15

¹⁰ 1 Corinthians 3: 1,2; Hebrews 5: 13, 14

⁷ Matthew 10: 32, 33

Some among us are unduly impressed by number, wealth, and prestige. We may be very good at embellishing our material homes and other possessions, but are "poor, blind and naked"¹¹ where spirituality is concerned.

*Is it safe to worship with
those who do not have
God?*

Do we realize that putting the Kingdom of Heaven first¹² applies to our earnings as well as to our life style? God's share should come off the top, not from what we have left after we have provided for all our needs and desires. To purpose¹³ in your heart is to plan each payday for your gift to support the church. While there should never be a maximum on what we give, there should be a minimum. Each of us should decide that we will never give less than a certain amount, barring emergencies, and will give as much over that as we can. When we have purposed, what we can give should be put aside and not touched for any other purpose. This is bountiful sowing which carries the promise that we will also reap bountifully.¹⁴

A CHOICE OF FORM?

A common secular idea is that one can attend the church of his choice. This erroneous philosophy is creeping into the church in some respects. People say, "There is nothing wrong with attending other churches." They mean by this that if they go on vacation and find a body called a Church of Christ, it is all right to attend even though that group has unscriptural leadership and questionable loyalties to unscriptural institutions. John tells us, "*Whatever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God.*"¹⁵ Is it safe to worship with those who do not have God? John further states, "*If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine (the doctrine of Christ) do not receive him into your house nor greet him, for he who greets him shares in his evils deeds.*"¹⁶ If we are not to bring doctrinal transgressors into our own houses by what logic do we think it all right to go into the transgressors house to worship? The Lord's intent is that we have no fellowship with those who do not abide in this doctrine.

¹¹ Revelation 3: 17

¹² Matthew 6: 33

¹³ 2 Corinthians 9: 7

¹⁴ 2 Corinthians 9: 6

¹⁵ 2 John 9

¹⁶ 2 John 10, 11

We also have problems with brothers, sisters, or children who have religious affiliations with churches other than the Lord's. Jesus said, "*He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.*"¹⁷ We do not have to stop loving those who are our physical family, but we must be

"We must see to ourselves and to the working out of our own salvation.

realistic pertaining to their opportunity for eternal salvation when they are not adhering to the New Covenant in Christ. We should never say, "I just cannot believe that he or she will be lost", when we know very well that unless there is a change to the Lord's way, this will be the inevitable result. We have to have the courage to see, know, and adhere to the truth.

FULLNESS AND FORCE OF TRUTH

We are caused to wonder how many in the church have only a form of godliness, when someone who seems to be strong in the church falls away. We are always dismayed and shocked when this happens. We are also caused to look inward, to do some serious self-examination. Sometimes we look at one another and wonder whether the commitment we see is feigned or real.

We must see to ourselves¹⁸ and to the working out of our own salvation.¹⁹ In the process, we must set the best example we can²⁰, and be so inspired by the power of the Word working in us, that "form" will be submerged by the fullness and the force of the Truth!



401 Bessie Street
Nixa, Missouri 65714

¹⁷ Matthew 10: 37

¹⁸ 2 Corinthians 13: 5; James 4: 7;

2 John 8; Jude 21; 1 Timothy 4: 16

¹⁹ Philippians 2: 12

²⁰ 1 Timothy 4: 12

*With all good wishes
Roy Harris*

Roy Harris



Roy Harris was born December 9, 1915 in the community of Brixey, Missouri. He grew up in a home with sincere Christian parents living on a 120 acre "rock pile" in Ozark County, north of Gainesville, Missouri, where work, honesty, and church attendance were a way of life. Roy attended a one-room country school and a country church. He was baptized at an early age.

While still a young man, Roy attended two 3-week sessions of Stamps-Baxter "singing schools." Throughout his life he taught a "good many" singing schools among congregations and with individuals, and led singing for evangelistic meetings. With his musical and poetic talent he composed many well known songs and continues to write poetry.

As a young man, Roy attended Bible studies conducted by Carl Ketcherside and E. M. Zerr. He began doing public work in the assembly during his mid to late teen years. He is not sure just when this developed into "preaching."

In time, he attended the University of Indiana and Southwest Missouri State College (now University). For 22 years he taught school in Kansas, at the same time preaching and teaching at mostly small congregations and spending the summers with Vacation Bible Schools, Singings, and Gospel Meetings.

Roy married Nell Anderson in 1958. They have no children, but once kept four children for two years. Nell often helped with VBS's and singing for nursing homes and shutins. They now live in Crane, Missouri.



HILLTOPS OF GLORY

Through the hills and valleys of life, saints have been encouraged by an echoing melody of glory. For the past 50 years spirits have been uplifted and the Father praised by the song "Hilltops of Glory."

The composer of the song has written an article by the same name. Song and article alike express a valuable lesson about being "upbeat" in life: when in the valley remember to look to the hilltops of glory and always rejoice in the Lord.

Oh! brother, won't you come go with me, high on the mountain to experience the grandeur of glory radiating from the pages of God's holy word. Focus your attention on nearly sixty scriptures referred to in this lesson.



"Onward rejoicing I tread life's way;
Higher I'm climbing each passing day.
Hilltops of glory now rise in view,
Where all will be made new."¹



*"Rejoice in the Lord."*² *"The eunuch . . . went on his way rejoicing."*³ *Grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*⁴ Christians should rejoice in the Lord, reaching and looking upward, as *"we set our affection on things above."*⁵

The opening words of the song, "Hilltops of Glory", were written in the early 1940's; a year or two before the copyright date. This song was written a few years after I attended a three week old-fashioned singing school in Dallas, Texas, in the winter of 1939. The school was conducted by Stamps-Baxter Company, the publisher of many religious song books.

The occasion that gave immediate impetus for composing this song was an afternoon meeting with a little country congregation of Dentonia, Kansas. They met in a small meeting house north of Cawker City, Kansas. In the exchange of ideas that Sunday afternoon a brother in Christ--Homer

¹ Verse 1, Hilltops of Glory,
by Roy Harris, 1944.

² Phil. 3:1

³ Acts 8:39

⁴ 2 Peter 3:18

⁵ Col. 3:1-4

Matson--spoke of his view of life: now that he had reached a certain vantage point. He was no longer in his early years, yet he was many years from what would be considered old age. He spoke of looking both forward and backward, sort of on the hilltops of life.

"I NOW CAN SEE"

Brother Matson's remarks caused me to start pondering life and its many changes and variations; its mountain tops and valleys; its triumphs and its losses; its joys and responsibilities. Of course scriptural scenes came to mind; one being Moses on Mount Pisgah in the land of Moab.⁶ He viewed the promised land; thought not permitted to go in. However, he was with Christ at the transfiguration.⁷ As I meditated upon these things, somehow the words "Hilltops of Glory" began to form in my mind. The words and music were composed together. I do not remember how much time elapsed between the beginning and the completion of the song. It was not the first song I had written, though there were not many previous ones. This song expresses pretty much my own outlook on life in the service of the Lord. If we fix our eyes on Jesus it seems to me that we

should have an "upbeat" attitude in spite of the many evils and upheavals in the world. When we "consider Him" it seems we should not grow weary to the point of losing heart or losing our song.⁸

*"Don't worry about
anything but pray about
everything."*

Remember the Apostle Paul tells us to rejoice in the Lord. He repeats for emphasis: "*Again I say, Rejoice!*" Then he tells us not to be filled with anxiety but with prayer and thanksgiving let our requests be made know to God. We might paraphrase and say, "*Don't worry about anything but pray about everything.*" If we do this--putting our trust in Him and rejoicing in the Lord constantly trusting Him and speaking to Him in prayer--then he says that the peace of God which goes beyond mere human understanding will guard--or rule--our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.⁹

HILLTOP EXPERIENCE

It was a far cry from the sands of Egypt to Canaan Land and there were many difficulties in between. When Moses received the call at the burning

⁶ Deut. 34:1-6

⁷ Matt. 17:1-5

⁸ Heb. 12:1-3

⁹ Phil. 4:4-7

bush he could not have known all the hardships he would be called upon to endure or the opposition he would encounter from his own people. Could it have been not only his sense of inadequacy--not being a good speaker--but other misgivings that made him hesitate a bit at first? Did he have an inkling of the disposition of his people that might make them difficult to lead? But when convinced of the seriousness of God's call he no longer hesitated. He chose to suffer affliction with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.¹⁰

What a "hilltop experience" it must truly have been to go up on Mount Sinai and commune with God and to be entrusted with the law of God.

No doubt there were hilltop experiences for him along the way: such as seeing the waters of the Red Sea part and the people pass through. They were "baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea."¹¹ It's a similar experience when we

are baptized into Christ.¹² On the other hand Moses had to listen to their grumbling when they came to the Desert of Sin and complained about their lack of food.

What a "hilltop experience" it must truly have been to go up on Mount Sinai and commune with God and to be entrusted with the law of God.¹³ Of course when he came down and saw the golden idol the people had made; it must have been extremely distressing. As today, so it was in Moses' life, there were mountain tops and valleys; sometimes intermingled and intertwined. Yet never once did Moses look back longingly toward the flesh-pots of Egypt. "Never turn backward, always ascend, on to the journey's end."

PRESSING TOWARD THE MARK

The Israelites did look back, at times, with a great desire to return. They seemed to completely forget their former pitiable plight; how they desired and needed deliverance. Do we sometimes look back with just a bit of longing; in spite of rejoicing for deliverance from sin and assurance of salvation in Him? Do we have a secret desire to do what we

¹⁰ Heb. 11:24-26

¹¹ 1 Cor. 10:1-2

¹² Gal. 3:27

Col. 2:12

¹³ Exo. 19

used to do and be what we used to be? Do we ever wish to "run with the crowd" again? Or do we cherish and encourage the kinds of experiences and associations that promote times of meditation that lift our spirits to the hilltops of glory and give us an uplifting glimpse of what awaits us there? Or are we content to grope in the lowlands of lust, drugs and drunkenness; lost and confused in discord and doubt? Do we let little things, annoyances, setbacks, ridicule and discouragement's get in our way, slow us down or stop us altogether?

"Whoever is not willing to forsake all else, cannot fully qualify as a disciple"

Paul, the apostle, is a good example; a model for us along this line. He said he was forgetting the things that were behind and reaching forth to the things--in Christ we might add--that were before him.¹⁴ He was constantly looking ahead and upward, pressing toward the mark in Christ Jesus. He had no thought of turning back or even looking back with longing for the things of the past. "Never turn backward, always ascend, on to the

journey's end."

STIR UP THE GIFT IN YOU

The Christian life is a challenge: denying self, taking up the cross and following Christ.¹⁵ Whoever is not willing to forsake all else, cannot fully qualify as a disciple. The Christian life is not for moral weaklings who are content to remain that way. We are all afflicted with human weaknesses. But when we realize our own shortcomings and seek the strength found in Him, then we have the Spirit of God helping us.¹⁶ And we have the assurance, as children of God, that when we confess our sins, repenting, He will forgive.¹⁷ Paul told Timothy that God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but of power, love and self-discipline.¹⁸ Just before that verse he urged Timothy to "stir up", or fan into a flame, the gift of God which had been given him. While this statement evidently refers to a special gift bestowed by the hands of the apostles and endorsed and encouraged by the hands of the elders¹⁹; the admonition surely applies to all of us in regard to whatever talent or gift we have from God.

¹⁵ Matt. 16:24

¹⁶ Romans 8:9, 26

¹⁷ 1 John 1:7-9

¹⁸ 2 Timothy 1:7

¹⁹ 1 Timothy 4:14

¹⁴ Phil. 3:12-14

In Rom. 12:3-8, Paul admonishes everyone to use whatever ability one has for God. Use it for the edification of fellow members of the body of Christ. Develop and exercise that talent or ability as one has the opportunity. Talent unused does not develop; does not produce fruit for the Lord.²⁰ If one's talent is ministering, or serving; be glad to do that. If one can teach; be a good teacher. If the ability is to admonish, exhort, or encourage; one may fill a very important mission by exercising that talent. The body of Christ has many members and there is a need for what each one can contribute. Let us remember that we are all part of the body of Christ, which is a great privilege and also a definite responsibility.²¹ We are all baptized into that body.²²

DOWN IN THE DUMPS?

Heeding the passages cited in the preceding paragraph will, I believe, help us to keep from getting "down in the dumps." For as we live a positive, active, optimistic life, we are likely to develop a positive outlook on life. It also helps us to have a sense of our own worth, as a creation of God,²³

as one endowed with a certain spiritual image and honor for the glory of God. At the same time, it should also help us avoid getting an exaggerated sense of our own importance; avoid thinking of self more highly than we ought to think. By meditating on our relation to God, we lift our eyes and hearts above the discouraging circumstances of earth. That is what "Hilltops of Glory" is about.

*Talent unused does not
develop; does not produce
fruit for the Lord.*

The apostle was always looking forward; reaching forth. "Forgetting the things that are behind," he said, "I press on toward the goal."²⁴ The things Paul left behind included: prestige, power, social position, political correctness (as we might say today), and many material advantages. Would you and I be willing to turn our backs on all of these in order to follow Christ and perhaps suffer hardships or even be persecuted like the Apostle Paul?

Other apostles and many of the early Christians had to make similar choices. When he spoke of "forgetting" these things, did that mean he could not even recall them in his

²⁰ Matt. 25:24-30

²¹ Romans 12:3-8

²² 1 Cor. 12:13

Romans 6:1-4

²³ Gen. 2:7

²⁴ Phil. 3:13-14

mind or remember that they existed? Certainly not, because he spoke of them. But he forgot them so far as even considering them important or ever thinking of returning to them. They were part of his past that he was determined to leave in the past. No backward looks with longing or regrets that they were gone. Apparently the only regret he might have was that he had once been in oppression to Jesus and a persecutor of His cause. He was "chief of sinners", yet he obtained mercy because he did it ignorantly.²⁵ He did not obtain forgiveness while he was persecuting Christ and opposing the church, but mercy was shown to him in that he was taught and given an opportunity to repent. It is by the mercy of God that we are given the opportunity to repent and be forgiven.²⁶

*"A man's reach should
exceed his grasp, or what's
a heaven for?"*

—Browning—

The apostles counted all those things that he once thought were important as just garbage or trash.²⁷ That is, compared with Christ and being in Him, they were less than nothing. Is Jesus our "all in

all?"²⁸ We receive completeness in Christ when we are circumcised with spiritual circumcision--cutting off the world--when we are "buried with him in baptism, wherein also you are risen with Him through faith in the operation, or power, of God."²⁹ Many things of life might be all right in and of themselves, but if they stand between us and Jesus, between us and God, they should be consigned to the garbage heap.

"I WILL LIFT UP MY EYES"

We can't get to the hilltop without climbing and looking and reaching up. We may not always grasp all the heights we strive for, but faith prompts us to look up and to reach for higher planes. Browning, a British poet, once wrote, "A man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's a heaven for?"

"I will lift up my eyes. . .", so said the Psalmist.³⁰ If we spend all our time looking around us, we are likely to become discouraged. We see disregard for spiritual and moral values. We often observe man's inhumanity to man. We see nations fighting with each other and warring within themselves. We hear of Mother's murdering their children; strife and trouble between

²⁵ 1 Timothy 1:13-15

²⁶ 1 John 1:7-10

²⁷ Phil. 3:7-9

²⁸ Col. 3:11

²⁹ Col. 2:10-12

³⁰ Psa. 121:1

ances; strife between members of the body of Christ. Moral standards are not what they once were, nor what the bible teaches. Disregard for truth³¹ results in broken marriages; broken homes; couples living together outside of marriage, and homosexuality.³² Are all these just "alternative life styles?" Does that make them acceptable? To an increasing segment of our society today, they are acceptable, but they are contrary to the standards taught in the Bible. How important is that to you? If we descent to the level of those who disregard God's law, how can we hope to reach the spiritual "Hilltops of Glory."

KEY TO POWER AND VICTORY

If we look only within ourselves for strength and guidance, how uplifting can that be? We might be content for a while to make a god of our own ego; but there will be times in life, inevitably, when self will feel the need of something to rely on above and beyond what self provides. When great problems arise, when our conscience becomes alive, when we realize that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God,³³ then

we may conclude with the apostle that by ourselves alone there is no good thing. When turbulent storms arise on the Galilee of life, then we need the voice of the Master to calm our souls and bring some order to our chaotic lives.³⁴

*"In me--apart from God--dwells no good thing."*³⁵ He exclaims, *"Who shall rescue me?"* or, *"Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"* At this point it becomes obvious that the answer is not in self, but the key is stated, *"I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord."* This is the key to our source of power and victory. This gives us victory over the world by lifting our hearts and eyes toward the hilltops, high above the lowlands of strife and the swamps of sin.³⁶

OPPORTUNITY TO DO GOOD

Of course, at times it is necessary to survey the area and circumstances around us for the purpose of seeing the needs we can supply and the service we can give. Look upon the harvest fields and search for opportunity to do good.³⁷ We may need to examine ourselves for the purpose of seeing whether we are as faithful as

³¹ Matt. 19:4-9

³² Lev. 18:22; Rom. 1:27

1 Cor. 6:9

³³ Rom. 3:23

³⁴ Matt. 14:22-32

³⁵ Rom. 7:14-20

³⁶ 1 John 5:4

³⁷ John 4:35; Gal. 6:10

we should be.³⁸ We are told to work out our own salvation, with fear and trembling.³⁹ The next verse holds the key as to how we can do this and I believe the only possible way that we can fulfill verse 12. It says, "For it is God who works in you, both to will and to do His good pleasure." We do not reach the heights of glory entirely on our own. We must let God work through us. Those who do not have within them that which comes from above, will be overcome by that which is around them.

We do not reach the heights of glory entirely on our own. We must let God work through us.

We work out our salvation by letting God work in us; His will being done in us, through us and by us. Whether we eat, drink or whatever we do; including work, play, school, or socializing, do all to the glory of God.⁴⁰ I believe this is the way to realize the exaltation of being on the "Hilltops of Glory", regardless of circumstances. Paul knew how to abound or to be in want, because he was led by the Spirit. He had an inner strength, an inner glory, sup-

plied from above so he could say, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."⁴¹

In the lowlands of life there is a need for service. Sometimes, unfortunately, there is much confusion, strife, contention and fighting. In the writing of James we have the question, "Whence comes the wars and fighting's among you?" Yes, this situation can be even among members of the body of Christ. The writer answers his own question when he indicates these attitudes originate in our own lustful and covetous nature.⁴²

MOUNT OF GLORY

It must have been a marvelous experience when Peter, James and John accompanied Jesus up the mountain where He was transformed before them. His appearance changed, his face shone and his clothes were bright. Certainly there must have been a radiant glory about his appearance, symbolic of the spiritual glory of God and perhaps a foretaste of the glory we will share as part of His resurrected family.

Luke reveals that while Jesus was praying He was transformed in glory, but the apostles were not fully awake.

³⁸ 2 Cor. 13:5

³⁹ Phil. 2:12

⁴⁰ 1 Cor. 10:31

⁴¹ Phil. 4:11-13

⁴² James 4:1-3

Many wonderful things may occur in our presents, but we are not always fully aware of them. This may happen because of indifference or it may be that the god of this world--materialism or what ever--has blinded our eyes.⁴³

When the apostles became fully awake they saw the glorious splendor. Peter, carried away by the moment, wanted to build tabernacles and stay there prolonging this glorious experience. But there was other work to be done down in the valley where the people were confused and hurting; where there was sin and a need for the good news of Jesus and His love. (See Matt. 17 & Luke 9:28-36)

*Many wonderful things
may occur in our presents,
but we are not always
fully aware of them.*

I have no doubt that the memory and effect of that mountain top experience helped sustain Peter in the future as he preached the gospel of Christ amid opposition and persecutions, and finally, according to history, suffered crucifixion for his convictions. The same must have been true of James and John also. There were

many fiery trials for Jesus and all the apostles, and there may be for us also.⁴⁴ For all who live a godly life will be tested.⁴⁵

THE HOPE OF GLORY

If our minds are dulled by materialism, worldism, egoism, or any other "ism"; if our hearts are hardened by the deceitfulness of sin or indifference; how can we be aware of the "Hilltops of Glory", even when in their presents. "*Christ in you (is) the hope of glory.*"⁴⁶ Jesus Christ illuminates, elucidates, and elevates. But constant contact by participating with evil companions will corrupt good morals.⁴⁷ We are to use the world but not abuse it.⁴⁸

How can we ever hope to soar with the eagles⁴⁹ if we roost with the buzzards and spend our time scavenging carrion as they do. When storms of life beat upon them and threaten to destroy their habitation, the eagles rise on their wings and soar above the storm. So may we with complete trust in the Lord, rise above circumstances of life even while being buffeted by them. In spirit we may have a sense of the view of the hilltops even while plodding in the valley.

⁴⁴ 1 Peter 4:12

⁴⁵ 2 Timothy 3:12

⁴⁶ Col. 1:27

⁴⁷ 1 Cor. 15:33

⁴⁸ 1 Cor 7:31

⁴⁹ Isa. 40:29-31

⁴³ 2 Cor. 4:4

The things that happen in life may be for good to those who love the Lord, who are called according to His purpose.⁵⁰

We are saved by the grace of God.⁵¹ But shall we continue in sin that grace may abound. God forbid.⁵² Unless you accept the invitation of Jesus to come to Him⁵³, you will never really know the "Hilltops of Glory." Unless you are buried with Him in baptism in likeness of His death to rise to walk in newness of life; unless you count yourself dead to sin and alive to God; unless you offer the members of your body as instruments of righteousness to do God's will; unless your life is dedicated as one that has obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine, surely you will never know the reality of the Hilltops of Glory. Though "*the wages of sin is death the gift of God is eternal life.*"⁵⁴

FORETASTE OF GLORY

Out of the depths of a stricken conscience certain ones cried, "What shall we do?" They had heard the great gospel sermon which told them they had crucified the Lord. Was there any hope?

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Peter replied, "*Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*"⁵⁵ What glorious and uplifting news to know that no matter how steeped in sin we are He will forgive and cleanse us when we sincerely and humbly obey. This assurance continues while we strive to walk in the light, confessing our sins⁵⁶ and abounding in the work of the Lord, being steadfast, unmoveable, knowing that our lives and labor will never be in vain so long as we are in the Lord.⁵⁷ Even in the valleys of life which come from time to time we can lift our eyes and heart to view the splendor, at least to get a good glimpse of the glory awaiting us where all things are made new.⁵⁸

And surely, we are given a foretaste of the "Hilltops of Glory" as we rejoice in the spiritual insights we gain from time to time while we as kings and priest before God⁵⁹ serve Him with reverence and godly fear.



⁵⁰ Phil 1: 12-14

Rom. 8:28

⁵¹ Eph. 2:8

⁵² Rom. 6:1

⁵³ Matt 11:28

⁵⁴ Rom. 6:23

⁵⁵ Acts 2:36-38

⁵⁶ 1 John 1:7-9

⁵⁷ 1 Cor. 15:58

⁵⁸ Rev. 21:5

2 Pet. 3:13

⁵⁹ 1 Pet. 2:9

WHAT IS YOUR LIFE?

James 4:14

Life has it's hilltops and it's plains,
It has it's losses and it's gains;
At times exalted on the peak,
Sometimes in valleys worn and weak.

Life has it's good times and it's bad,
With some days joyous and some days sad.
Some bring fulfillment to the heart
And some a sense of pain impart.

Hilltops of glory rise in view,
Where all is perfect, all is new.
They give a glimpse of things to be
Which can be ours eternally.

Down in life's valleys, day by day,
Life sometimes seems in disarray.
But there is need of service there,
Alleviating pain and care.

As on the road of life we go,
Defeats and triumphs we may know.
But faith looks up beyond them all
And hears the Savior's clarion call.

Upon hope's hilltops spirits rise
Like sunshine in the morning skies.

Faith's glimpse of glory gives, indeed,

The uplift which our spirits need.

Above the sordid scenes of life,
Above its strain, its stress and strife,

We glean the glory waiting there
Beyond this time of toil and care.

As we are pleased God's will to do,
Hilltops of Glory rise in view.

Faith, love and duty here combine
To sense a scene that is divine.



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Richard M. Riggins

Richard Riggins



Richard Riggins was born January 31, 1923 to Albert & Lillie Riggins near Charleston, IL. His early years were spent attending a country congregation, Wiley Brick, in Huston Township. In 1936, Richard was baptized by his Uncle Lloyd Riggins in a small creek near the church building.

Richard's uncles, W. G. Roberts and Lloyd Riggins, had a profound influence on his desire to follow Christ and if possible to become an evangelist. But undoubtedly, as is the case many times, the strongest Christian influence was the Bible instruction of his mother. Lillie Riggins made sure her four children were taught the Bible in the home.

After serving in the Armed Services in 1943-1945, Brother Richard was blessed to be able to attend Eastern Illinois University under the GI bill. He received a degree in Speech and Speech Correction.

Three summers traveling and studying with Evangelist Lloyd Riggins was especially helpful in understanding the work of the Lord's Kingdom. In 1951, Brother Richard received a letter from the congregation at Sullivan, IL., where Brother Noah Smith was an elder and C. R. Turner was a member.

Richard has 5 children; Grant, Bloomfield, IN.; Alan, San Diego, CA.; Sally, Eldon, MO.; Nancy, San Diego, CA.; and Rhamonda, Springfield, IL.

His brother Haden and sister Sally Moody attend church in Lebanon, OR. Haden holds a letter as an Evangelist from the Itsea congregation, in Chicago, IL. area.



IF WE SUFFER WITH HIM

(WE WILL ALSO BE GLORIFIED WITH HIM)

Ever wonder why there is so much suffering in the world? What is its purpose? As a Christian, "What should I expect suffering for Him?" "Am I prepared to suffer?" If glory comes with suffering, should I seek out persecution? Is there pity in suffering for Him?

Adept answers to these questions and others are offered by the writer in this treatise. Give careful consideration to Brother Richard's comments concerning "future suffering" for the people of the Lord.

This writing is not a dissertation of despair. Rather, it is a discourse of encouragement and strength to the unequivocal servant of the Lord and a sincere admonition to the ambivalent in heart.

Down the long corridors of time we hear the despairing wail of discouraged man: Why is life so filled with sorrow, suffering and futility? Sometimes man has cried out against God, as though God were unfair to mankind. Yet if we only spend a little time in order to understand, we are able to see the love and wisdom of an almighty God, who is able to use even the conditions that we have brought upon ourselves to make possible a way of repentance for all.

While this topic deals with the suffering for Christ rather

than the universal sufferings of all who live, yet because we are also surrounded by physical infirmities, it is essential that we understand the purpose of this; otherwise our faith may become weakened rather than strengthened as it should be.

First, we know that all of these things came upon man because man chose to break the law God gave.¹ God could not be just and not punish mankind for his deliberate transgression. Adam brought sin into the

¹Gen. 3

world and death by sin.² We surely have no cause for complaint that the consequence of that action is in the world today. Perhaps some might say; "But it was not we who sinned and if we had been given the choice, we would not have disobeyed." Please, be honest with yourself: Have any of you lived without sin? Have you always done as you should? This type of reasoning is like that of the Scribes and Pharisees.³ For anyone to deride Adam, is to utterly ignore our own weakness. We are all guilty of sin.

"... the very infirmities of the flesh and the sufferings are needed for us to realize that we cannot save ourselves"

Second, we realize that much of the sorrow and pain in this life are the result of the evils which men do against others. Theft, murder, assault, etc. Man's inhumanity to man is so blatant that no one would deny its effect. Do we seriously expect God to remove from man the ability to choose and to make it impossible for him to harm anyone else or even himself? To do so would make it impossible for man to choose to

do good and live a godly life. Man would be a robot; not a reasoning creature.

We need to remember that God made us for an eternal life, to be His children and joint heirs with Christ Jesus. *"In hope of eternal life, which God that cannot lie promised before the world began."*⁴ We know that God loved man and desires man's salvation.⁵ It comes as no surprise to learn that the very infirmities of the flesh and the sufferings are needed for us to realize that we cannot save ourselves; That there is a higher power and a higher purpose in life than the physical life. *"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope."*⁶ Without the fragility and futility of our earthly existence, man, almost surely, would not recognize his need of God nor be moved to live according to His commandments.

A small price indeed to pay for the great hope and glory

²Rom. 5:12

³Matthew 23:29-32

Luke 11:47-48

⁴Titus 1:2

⁵John 3:16

⁶Romans 8:18-20

held out before us. Is it possible for us to bewail and bemoan our burdens when the Almighty is holding out his hands to help and to gather us home?

BLESSINGS IN SUFFERING?

How terrible it would have been had man lived forever but had no hope of the glory of God and eternal blessings.

God did not leave man without hope and knowledge since the evidence of God was and is all around and evident to any discerning eye. *"The Heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament sheweth his handiwork."*⁷ The goodness of God is evident in the fruitful earth and seasons that amply provide for the needs of those who are diligent in their cultivation of the soil and wise in their use of the manifold riches of the created universe. It seems as if there is a remedy in nature for almost every disease if man is only wise enough to find it and correctly utilize it.

Even with all of the problems of this life, mankind has learned by them to help one another. By seeing their own frailty and needs, they learn compassion and sharing, cooperation and planning, forbearing and forgiving. They learned to work together in order to educate and to discipline

one another. Imagine how it would have been if everyone were completely independent of everyone else. Selfish and indifferent to others; there would be no love, no mercy, no wisdom or learning. The all wise God knows all things and has so planned and provided that even our frailties and futility's can be our greatest blessings if they lead us to know Him. *"So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."*⁸

Far from bewailing our mortality and futility, let us thank our God that He is willing to chastise us for our own good and to love us so much who have loved Him so little and truly deserve nothing from Him.

"Even with all of the problems of this life, mankind has learned by them to help one another."

We must not expect God to spare us all of the physical infirmities that the rest of mankind is heir to. *"All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked."*⁹ We can and must thank God for health and so many blessings that we can

⁷ Psalm 19:1

⁸ Psalms 90:12

⁹ Eccl. 9:2-3

never number them all, but it would not be right for us to complain when we and ours suffer sickness and death. Let these events only lead us to rest our hope and trust in the one who truly is our life and Joy. *"And as it is appointed unto man once to die, and after this the judgment. So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation."*¹⁰ Let us then leave the contemplation of the sufferings of this world and consider the suffering for, in, and with Christ our Lord and Savior.

PREPARED TO SUFFER FOR HIM?

When I think of the sufferings of Christ Jesus on our behalf, and remember that Jesus called us to follow in His steps carrying our cross, I am made ashamed of how often we feel unfairly treated by many so-called religious people. We feel as if we should escape the persecutions for the word of God. We need to be ashamed of ourselves and pray our Father for mercy on our souls. Let us never be ashamed of Jesus nor of his words though all of the world were to mock and deride us. We do not want Him to be ashamed of us when He ap-

pears on the Judgment Throne of God; but He gave us a very clear warning that if we are ashamed of Him, He will also be ashamed of us.¹¹

"Shall we complain of our light burdens when we consider what He suffered for us?"

We have been called to Eternal Life.¹² We have been called to be Sons of God.¹³ We have been called to be partakers of the inheritance of the Saints in Light.¹⁴ Is it at all strange that we should be called upon to suffer for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake? Shall we complain of our light burdens when we consider what He suffered for us? Jesus said: *"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me."*¹⁵

The warning has been very clear in the teachings of Jesus that all who follow Him must be prepared to suffer for Him.¹⁶

Jesus plainly taught that those who suffered for him, were to consider that they were blessed, not to pity themselves.

¹¹ Mark 8:38

¹² Titus 1:2

¹³ I John 3:1

¹⁴ Col. 1:12

¹⁵ Luke 9:23

¹⁶ Mt. 5:10-12, 44-48

¹⁰ Heb. 9:27-28

We are to pray for those who despitefully use us and persecute us. In the parable of the sower,¹⁷ is there not great shame for the stony ground on which the good seed sown--when persecution arose because of the word they were offended and fell away. Who would have a word of praise or sympathy for them? Who would think them a desirable example to follow? Called to life, they chose death rather than endure anything for the one who died for them. Then consider what Jesus said in regard to the attitude of the surrounding people to one who followed Christ. *"And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for my names sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved."*¹⁸ Yet with this warning of what they were to face He also gave them perspective: *"And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."*¹⁹ While much applied to the apostles, it was to be true of every disciple that he must be faithful even to death and count even that a blessing rather

than a curse: Just to be able to demonstrate his own faith and love for the God and Father who had chosen him to eternal glory and filled his life with all spiritual blessings.²⁰

While few were required to lay down their lives in a violent death for the sake of the Lord and their Father, everyone--because of their faith in Him--had to be willing to do so should it be required. God through Christ had and has removed the great fear of death from us. *"Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage."*²¹

God has given us the victory over death because we know that those who believe in Jesus only pass from life to life. Death must have no terror to the Children of the Living God who holds us in his hands here and hereafter.

SOLID FOUNDATION? OR ROCK OF OFFENSE?

Let us consider what the disciples faced after Jesus death, resurrection, and ascen-

¹⁷ Matthew 13

¹⁸ Mt. 10:21-22

¹⁹ Mt. 10:28

²⁰ Eph. 1:3

²¹ Heb. 2:14-15

sion. The warning in Matthew 10 was reality. The hatred of the Jew was not limited to Paul or the Apostles, even though they were recipients of the most virulent animosity of the Jewish leaders.

Many, when they obeyed Christ, were cut off from their own families which rejected them with deep hatred. To have your father and mother wish you dead, and your brothers and sisters try to deliver you to the authorities must have been a painful experience for these faithful Christians. Yet they did not falter, having known beforehand that this might be. They were the object of scorn, derision, and ostracism by the society in which they lived. Hebrews 10:33-34 indicates that mob action and individual malice may have resulted in the loss of their homes and possessions. The trial of their faith was immediate and of long duration; they knew whom they believed and looked with anticipation and joy to the promise held out to them.

Knowing the transitory nature of this life, they were able to rejoice in the secure promise of Jesus, *"I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."*²² And, *"The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me."* Not all Jewish Christians did suffer the most

extreme persecutions, but everyone knew that they might be called upon to suffer for the faith at any time and so they truly became strong in the faith. Those who were weak in faith soon became aware of their need for greater trust--they either grew or failed.

Christ Jesus was either the solid foundation on which their entire existence was built or He became to them a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.

CHRISTIAN ATHEIST?

In the gentile world things were different since their society did not have a fanatical adherence to any religion, they only demanded that everyone should respect or at least tolerate their gods and their religion.

While the concept of emperor worship was to be imposed as a means of unifying the empire, only lip service was required of the people. The emperor would only be an added god to the whole pantheon of gods and goddesses. Immorality and lust was so intermingled with pagan worship that true morality was almost unknown to the heathen.

When Christ Jesus was preached to the gentile world, the teaching was not a cause of immediate persecution. As we find in the accounts in the book of Acts, the gentiles received

²² Heb. 13:5

the word with gladness. How great must have been the appeal of God who loved and cared for man. A God who sent His Son that man might be saved. What a joy to the slave to realize that he was of great value in the sight of God: He who was looked upon as less than nothing by the freemen of his day. The initial persecutions arose from the Jews who stirred up opposition to the early teachers through mob action which they whipped up through lies and misrepresentations. I do not mean to imply that there was no opposition to and persecution of gentile Christians by their neighbors because there was ever present opposition to some aspects of the Christian life; but the fierce dangerous actions came somewhat later. I think that we can see why there was opposition. First, the fact that there is salvation through Christ alone set the Christian apart from his neighbors who resented the outright rejection of all the gods that he and his had worshipped for centuries. They could not and did not retain the Christian as a part of their social group. As Peter said, *"Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you."*²³ They came to call Christians; atheists because they denied

the existence of their gods and refused to have any part in the community worship at the temples. Then as now men bitterly resented being condemned by the Bible for their sins and the Christian by his godly life and rigid adherence to the truth of God made them see their wickedness. Jesus pointed out this characteristic of man, *"For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd."*²⁴

*"What a joy to the slave
to realize that he was of
great value in the sight of
God"*

It was the sudden change in the life of the converted gentile which shocked former friends and acquaintances of the new Christian. The one that they had known so well had become a stranger with different moral standards, a completely new purpose in life, and a life oriented to the spiritual rather than the carnal world. Since this sudden glare of light would fall most clearly on those who had been most closely associated with him, they would be the ones who were most affected by this sudden change; as they saw the righteousness in the Christian's

²³ I Pet. 4:4

²⁴ Jno. 3:20

life, they would be unable to hide their own iniquities from themselves. Add to this the fact that the newborn Child of God would desire earnestly that his family, his friends, and all of his acquaintances should share in the glorious hope that had been given him. The zeal of the new Christian is Proverbial. Faced with his fervent zeal and his great love for their souls, they had only two choices; To listen to and believe the gospel and then obey from the heart that form of doctrine which was taught them, and so make a complete change in their own lives; or to refuse to listen and then to sever his relationship with their company. Such an upheaval is not accomplished gently, but suddenly with hatred and anger. *"Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake."*²⁵

"Pagan culture, focused as it was around idolatry, would be almost inevitably destroyed by the leaven of Christian influence."

This isolation is inevitable, for the Presence of the Children

of Light in the company of the children of darkness is very uncomfortable to those who wish to hide from their darkness. *"Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them."*²⁶ The Christian gentile could not be satisfied without making every effort to save the souls of all that he knew or could contact. Jesus sent not Peace into the world but a sword.²⁷ Those who will not receive the Gospel, cannot bear its light for very long before they get away from it.

As the Pagan community began to realize the true nature of the Christian community, they had two very different reactions: They were filled with admiration at the righteous lives and the good works of the Christians: *"the fruits of the spirit--love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. Against such there is no law."*²⁸ These characteristics created wonder and respect in the hearts of the Pagans around them; But even as they were awed by the power of righteousness in their neighbors, they were filled with the realization that their own culture, focused as it was around idolatry would be almost inevitably destroyed by the leaven of

²⁶ Eph. 5:11

²⁷ Mt. 10:34

²⁸ Gal. 5:22-23

²⁵ Luke 6:22

Christian influence. Since all of art, music, poetry, drama, and events of their civic life was dedicated to idolatry, many crafts would be destroyed, many occupations disrupted, businesses altered, and society itself would undergo profound changes.

As the men of Sodom said concerning Lot: *"This fellow came in to sojourn, and he will needs be a Judge"*²⁹; so the Pagan community was often stirred to violent action and persecuted the Christians in their midst. As Peter said, *"Having your conversation honest among the gentiles whereas they speak evil of you as evil doers, that whereas they speak evil of you as evil doers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ Jesus."*³⁰

"The Bible does not even hint that we should pity those who suffered for Christ:"

Because they were separate from and different than the Pagan community, having an integrity which did not bend to the Pagan will, being meek and so posing no physical threat to their persecutors, and being

mainly of the poorer people, they were the object of scorn, lies, and accusations of many kinds which were based on here-say and false rumors of those who envied, hated, and feared their influence.

In times of natural disasters, floods, droughts, disease, and events of like nature, the more superstitious blamed the Christians, saying that these events were the gods' anger at the community because they suffered the Christians who refused to worship them. Some would say that the only way to appease the gods would be to destroy the Christians. The time came when the Christian among the gentiles suffered as much or more than his Jewish brethren.³¹ They were to suffer for the name of Christ Jesus The Lord. Burned as Nero's torches, thrown to wild beasts, crucified, beheaded, beaten, starved, thrown into prisons, they demonstrated their faith to a population who knew not God, but who learned of Him through their demonstrated faith. Those who suffered for Christ had the aid of the one who had suffered for them. He did not leave them alone. They were not left comfortless. They suffered with joy in their hearts, having the answer of death in themselves, *"that they should not trust in themselves*

²⁹ Gen. 19:9

³⁰ I Pet 2:12, 3:16

³¹ I Thess 2:14

but in the living God that raiseth the dead."³² The Bible does not even hint that we should pity those who suffered for Christ: rather they considered it a blessing. They suffered and by their patience and demonstrated faith, they broke the Power of the Pagan World.

TRIALS ARE DEVELOPMENTAL

The trials, temptations, tribulations which all must suffer who follow Jesus,³³ are necessary to the Christian's victory in life! But first let us remember the promise contained in I Cor. 10:13. "*There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man.*" All men suffer, righteous and unrighteous, so that the problems faced by the Christian really are no worse than many who do not know God suffer. As Peter said, "*It is better if the Will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, rather than evil doing.*"³⁴ Isn't it evident to us that if we must be tried, and all will be, that we have the infinite advantage of enduring this for Christ Jesus? We have something to hold out as an offering to God.

One area of the trials purpose is developmental. James said, "*My Brethren count it ALL JOY when ye fall into di-*

vers temptations, knowing that the trying of your faith worketh patience."³⁵ Be glad that opportunity is given to develop patience or endurance. Rejoice, James tells us. Unalloyed Joy. This may seem at first to be a little extreme until we think it through. Every occupation requires concentrated effort to master. Every sport requires strenuous exertion if the person is to excel, every soldier must undergo rigorous training if he is to survive on the battle field and to protect his country; and even so the Christian life requires strenuous effort if it is to be successful. Notice that you do not develop the endurance--patience--by complaining and grumbling.

*"Victory is ours if we
only trust in Him who
never failed."*

Paul develops an additional sequence in Romans 5:3, "*and not only so but we glory in tribulations also knowing that tribulation worketh patience and patience experience, and experience hope, and hope maketh not ashamed (does not disappoint) because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given us.*"

³² II Cor. 1:9

³³ II Tim. 3:12

³⁴ I Peter 3:17

³⁵ James 1:2

Since the only way we develop the requisite Christian attributes is through overcoming temptations, trials, etc., then these trials should be a cause for rejoicing and not of despair. Remember; Victory is ours if we only trust in Him who never failed.

Peter adds to this by teaching, *"That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, may be found unto praise, honor, and glory at the appearing of Christ."*³⁶ If gold is purified by fire, a most precious soul must be tried by the fires of persecution if it is to be a glory to God.

God's promise that we will not be tempted above that we are able, but will make a way of escape that we will be able to bear it;³⁷ should encourage us with the realization that if we put our trust and hope in Him, we cannot fail.

KNOWING SORROW PREPARES FOR COMFORT

Paul teaches us that our ability to comfort others comes only as a result of the comfort we receive from God as we endure tribulations for Him.³⁸ How much we all wish for the ability to comfort and console

others. Yet this ability is only gained through like experience. We can empathize with them, knowing how they feel and knowing the help that God has given us when we needed it. We need to know sorrow before we can receive the great comfort from God, and only when we have been so comforted are we able to comfort others.

Without the spiritual exercise that comes as a result of the trials and temptations of life, we would never be molded into the image of Christ Jesus our Lord. We would only be hearers and not doers, wishers and not hoppers, faithless and not faithful. They make us study, they make us pray for strength, they help us to be humble and meek. As Paul said, *"When I am weak, then am I strong,"* and *"I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me."*³⁹

*"Only when we have
been so comforted are we
able to comfort others."*

It is also these that produce self-examination so that we know the areas of need in our Christian character.⁴⁰ Trials and tribulations also enable us to demonstrate our faith to others.

³⁶ I Pet. 1:7

³⁷ I Cor. 10:13

³⁸ 2 Cor. 1:3-6

³⁹ Phil 4:13, II Cor. 12:10

⁴⁰ Phil. 3:15

OBEDIENCE: BORNE BY SUFFERING

How do we know that we believe in Christ and love God? Only when we keep his commandments faithfully. *"Though He were a son, yet learned he obedience by the things He suffered,"* and *"being made Perfect, He became the author on eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him."*⁴¹ *"Being found in fashion as a man, He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."*⁴²

*"For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments."*⁴³

*"Blessed is the man that endureth temptation for after he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life which God hath promised to them that love Him."*⁴⁴

When there is no opposition, when all seems rosy, the soul is not secure nor sure, like the seed on stony ground. Persecution and opposition are the test. When Paul said, *"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith;"*⁴⁵ he knew that he believed and he knew that he loved God because he had been

tested and had not been found wanting.

Even so you and I can only know that our faith is strong and that our love for God is sure when we follow in the footsteps of God while the storms of life seek to drive us astray and we follow him though the path of the Pleasure of The World and the deceitfulness of riches seek to bemuse our mind to lure us away. No one has ever felt so strong in faith that he does not need to rest upon the help of the Lord, not upon our own strength for that is little indeed. It is thus that we learn the true source of strength in our life.

*"Trials and tribulations
also enable us to demonstrate our faith to
others."*

It is interesting that God does not judge us by His own foreknowledge but on what we do. Our own actions, our own life will be facing us in the day of Judgment and so even as Abraham demonstrated to God his faith in obeying the command of God in offering Isaac, even so we must prove our faith and love to Him by obedience in the face of opposition and hindrances of all kinds. *"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will*

⁴¹ Heb. 5:8-9

⁴² Phil. 2:8

⁴³ I John 5:3

⁴⁴ James 1:12

⁴⁵ II Tim 4:7

give thee a crown of life."⁴⁶
*"But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved."*⁴⁷

*"Blessed is the man that endureth temptation for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him."*⁴⁸ Yes, God watches over our lives and helps us in times of need, but He expects us to show our faith in action--in deeds.⁴⁹ God had given to each of us the opportunity to show our love for Him by our whole life lived in and by Him who died for us. We also demonstrate our faith before others and show to them the sincerity of our faith.

"We must prove our faith and love to Him by obedience in the face of opposition and hindrances of all kinds"

Paul shows how that his suffering for Christ Jesus supplied to the Colossians a demonstration of faith in Christ whose sufferings for them they had heard about but yet were in the past.⁵⁰ Paul showed plainly

the living Christ in his own life. *"Fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the Church."*⁵¹ The faithful Christian in enduring the opposition of those who do not know Christ shows to others the truth of Christ in his life--Living Christ before others. *"Ye are the light of the world."*⁵² *"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."*⁵³ *"That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the World; Holding forth the words of life;"*⁵⁴ The Bible is filled with many scriptures showing our personal responsibility to show Christ in our life that others may see and can believe.

UNTESTED FAITH LEADS TO OVERCONFIDENT ACTION

The third category deals with the great blessings which come to us only when we face those persecuting us without flinching but with complete trust in the living God who has never failed those who follow Him.

⁴⁶ Rev. 2:10

⁴⁷ Mt. 24:13

⁴⁸ James 1:12

⁴⁹ James 2:26

⁵⁰ Colossians 1:24

⁵¹ Col. 1:24

⁵² Mt. 5:14

⁵³ Mt. 5:16

⁵⁴ Phil 2:15

One is the assurance that comes to us after we have been tried in the fire and have stood fast. Like the untried soldier who undergoing his first action with the enemy is able to say, "I didn't run! I didn't fail! I stood fast and fought!" So it is that we feel the joy of a faith that stands, with the Lord's help, the test. I know that I believe and am willing to pay the price. There is no arrogance, no egotism, in such an assessment because he knows it was with the Lord's help and not by his own strength alone. We know that the Lord's help will always be there and we feel the strength of tested faith.

"How shall we truly know Christ if we do not suffer with Christ?"

"I write unto you young men, because you have overcome the wicked one . . . I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one."⁵⁵ Peter said to Jesus, "Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee."⁵⁶ Peter denied him three times. But after the resurrection of Jesus and his ascension into heaven, Peter was

tested to the ultimate and denied him not. Untested he was overconfident. Tried in the fire, he was able to stand by the Power of the living God who sustained him through death. Untried we often lightly assert the firmness of our faith, learning our own frailty but also the Power which is there to aid us, we know that we can stand and we know what we must do to continue to stand.

PROCLAMATION BY SUFFERING

Another great blessing is that when we suffer for Christ and his Word, we know that our life is having an effect. We know that others are seeing His life in us and that we are effectively proclaiming Christ Jesus the Lord. That is what we are called to do. How it thrills the soul to see that it is being accomplished through you. We are carrying his cross. We know it and others see and resent it. They hate Christ in us. Can we do anything but thank God for His blessings?

As the apostles beaten for daring to preach in the name of Jesus, went forth rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name,⁵⁷ even so we should rejoice if we are counted as being worthy of representing Jesus by suffering

⁵⁵ I John 2:13-14

⁵⁶ Mt. 26:35

⁵⁷ Acts 5:41

for the truth. John truly said that he was not worthy of unloosing the shoe latches of Jesus shoes. We certainly are not worthy of standing out before man holding forth the Word of Life, but God has made us worthy! Shall we cringe in shame?? Shall we be afraid? God forbid.

How shall we truly know Christ if we do not suffer with Christ? *"That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death."*⁵⁸ The fellowship of His sufferings: Being able to feel the closeness, being able to experience the pain He bore for us. Being able to appreciate what He experienced for us. What a great blessing that truly would be. How can I love Him because He suffered pain for me if I do not know what pain is nor have I endured any for Him? How can I love Him for the bitter gall in the cup if I do not know what bitter is? How can I love Him who stood all alone enduring the hatred of a whole people who cried out for His blood, screaming "crucify Him, crucify Him," if I have never felt the rejection or scorn from men who hate Him and who persecute us for the Christ in our life?

To feel the closeness, the deep love, the great trust in Him, we must have the fellowship of His suffering. As Peter said; *"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you; but rejoice, in-as-much as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings, that when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding Joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part He is evil spoken of, but on your part He is glorified. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let*

*"A sign of victory is not
the sign of defeat"*

*him glorify God on this behalf. For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God; and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? Wherefore let them that suffer according to the Will of God commit the keeping of their soul to Him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator."*⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Phil. 3:10

⁵⁹ I Peter 4:12-19

Notice that our Judgment is in this life as God's children and if we stand the test, if we are faithful unto death, we will receive the crown of life. This is the time of testing, this is examination day; let us make sure to meet the test and victory is ours. If we fail it, then all is lost.

"But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, establish, strengthen, settle you."⁶⁰

"And if Children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together."⁶¹

"Don't force the unwilling to listen nor hold out the Christ in an un-Christ-like manner"

The New Testament is filled with examples of those who were faithful and the scriptures emphatically point out to us that suffering for Christ is a cause for rejoicing and not a cause for sorrow. A sign of victory is not the sign of defeat.⁶²

SEEK NOT PERSECUTION

One warning needs to be given. We should not seek opposition or persecution. It will inevitably come to the faithful, but to make efforts to do so is to pervert the scriptures and the Christian life. If we are persecuted because we become arrogant, self-righteous, scornful, shoving ourselves in others faces; we have no cause for rejoicing in the resulting persecution since it is not Christ in us, but an unchristian spirit which is persecuted. As a certain sect of people force themselves into hospital rooms and pray loudly against the will of the patients, when ejected from the room, talk of being persecuted for Christ when it is only their own obnoxious behavior. Don't seek persecution, Christ didn't; He went to another city and taught. Paul didn't, he went on to another city when faced with opposition, rejection and hatred.

If you suffer for Christ, rejoice and thank God, but don't force the unwilling to listen nor hold out the Christ in an un-Christ-like manner. There can be a perverted pleasure in being the object of persecution because it makes you the focus of attention, like a little child who would rather be spanked than not to be the center of attention.

⁶⁰ I Peter 5:10

⁶¹ Romans 8:17

⁶² Phil. 1:28

If you suffer as all will for "Christ in you, the hope of glory," be thankful and follow Jesus, carrying your cross.

COURAGE TO BE DIFFERENT

While suffering for Christ today may be involved with less of the prospect of torture or physical pain than in the days of the apostles, it is still present; but perhaps more subtle. We are surrounded with the pernicious influence of Satan from birth to death, and there are many means by which our Christian faith is constantly tested.

Our children in the school environment are under many pressures and influences which could twist their characters.

They are taught to be tolerant toward things which are shameful and evil in the extreme. Homosexuality is treated as if it were an alternate lifestyle, even though God has condemned it from the beginning; Sodom and Gomorrah suffered "the vengeance of eternal fire" because of it. Loose moral conduct between the sexes is dealt with as if chastity and decency were almost impossible to attain and unimportant. Sometimes teachers fear to ask a child concerning his parents lest the child can only answer his father or mother ran off with someone else or perhaps were never

married. Of course not all schools advocate and sanction loose moral conduct, yet the so-called sex education courses advocated by federal and state departments of education do not envision any moral improvement but rather to teach children how to sin without physical penalties. The spiritual and emotional results they disregard. Some schools find it difficult to select teachers who have some standard of moral conduct that would fit them to be a role model for the students entrusted to their care. While not all schools can be condemned for immoral influences, our society is so permeated with this that our schools cannot become champions of morality. A teacher could not teach the students to fear God or even to mention His name with reverence. Should a teacher use it in blasphemy, that would be acceptable!

"We must all learn to stand alone against the forces of evil and not to be ashamed to follow Christ Jesus our Lord."

The student who fears the Lord and loves Him is being faced with many choices. Does someone ask to copy their homework so that they themselves do not need to study but

get credit for work not done? Does someone want to cheat on a test by looking at your answers? Does someone seek to have you join a clique or gang? Do the other students want to tell you filthy stories? These influences have always been present, but they seem even more present today. Children

"We have no time to put off until tomorrow the help our children need today."

from Christian homes, or those who have been baptized into Christ, have an opportunity to stand out as examples to their classmates. If they have the courage to be different, if they question in a respectful manner the statement of a teacher or classmate that is blatantly contrary to what is right, they may be a strong moral influence on others. We must all learn to stand alone against the forces of evil and not to be ashamed to follow Christ Jesus our Lord. Young or old we have a great opportunity to be an example to others of what God would have them to be, but we must know right from wrong and be willing to take a stand and keep it. In dress, in speech, in conduct, we must be followers of Christ and not the world.

Our desire for friendship, our need for association with others must never cause us to lose our fellowship with God. James said, *"Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God."*⁶³

I do believe that today especially young people are being faced with a multitude of trials and temptations presented in various formats so that they appear innocent but are not. Young Christians must learn to stand alone and firmly refuse to participate in questionable and spiritually dangerous things. If at any time in the world's history there has been a need for the Church to guide those who are young, it is now. As parents we seem to have so little time to teach, to warn, to encourage, and to be an example to our children. Yet parents are the strongest influence of any child's life provided they themselves are strongly interested in the child's eternal welfare rather than just the physical. We have no time to put off until tomorrow the help our children need today. Pray for the Lord's help to enable you to do what you can to help the children to gain the Victory in life; to grow up in Christ Jesus, their Lord and ours.

⁶³ James 4:4

"ECONOMIC" SUFFERING FOR HIM

There are many economic circumstances in which the Christian will and must endure for the Lord's sake. We may lose a job because an employer asks us to lie or do something dishonest. Some occupations will be closed to a Christian because of the conditions under which they must work. Can a Christian who is a trained musician seek employment in a Night Club? Can a Christian work in a dance band? Can a Christian work in a music group which has in its repertoire indecent, obscene, or immoral lyrics? I am sure that there is a limited area of employment in the field of music in which the Christian who is a trained musician can succeed, especially in public schools, but the field is limited and even there one's conscience might be troubled by some things you are required to do.

In almost every occupation the Christian chooses there will be occasions where the Christian must take a stand and refuse to do something shady, dishonest, or questionable: the mechanic whose employer wishes him to replace parts which are not defective, the store where he is asked to re-package and re-date outdated produce, the secretary whose

boss asks her to tell callers that he is out when he isn't, the Policeman who is instructed to ignore a broken law because the person involved has political connections, the candidate for office who is told to promise things he knows he cannot deliver or which would not be in the best interests of the people. In every avenue of employment the Christian is required to be an example of Christ to others; to be a light in the world of darkness. We are not to be busybodies in other men's matters, but we must make sure

*"The Christian must take
a stand and refuse to do
something shady, dis-
honest, or questionable."*

that we do not partake of evil. The Christian must be different from the world. The Christian dare not let himself be involved in anything which would destroy his Christian influence. If others mock, reproach, persecute, and speak evil of us because we refuse to fit in with the course of this world, we should and must rejoice that Christ in us is visible to others. If we seek to be popular, if we seek to escape unpleasantness so much that we keep a low profile, then we are not following Jesus nor carrying our cross.

DEATH OR IMPRISONMENT?

There are areas in the world where even today a Christian is threatened with imprisonment or death for advocating and teaching Christ Jesus as Lord. In Somalia the U.N. Personnel were threatened with death if they distributed Bibles to the people of the area. In many fundamental Moslem nations, a Mohamaden, who is baptized into Christ is subject to the death penalty. But in most of the world our persecution will be scorn, separation, anger, and belittlement from those who are unwilling to do right. *"But ye are a chosen generation, a royal Priesthood, an holy nation, a Peculiar People; that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."*⁶⁴

ENTERTAINMENT BLITZ

The influence of the entertainment media are all pervasive in our society. The Christian must use care in the things he lets himself participate in or watch. The presence of corrupt and evil influences in the literature that we read, in the conversations that we hear all around us, warn us that we truly must *"Prove all things;*

*hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil."*⁶⁵

What the future holds only God knows for certain, but the prospect does not look bright.

It is probable that the entertainment means will so increase that mankind will be able to fill their whole life with such a multitude of different options that reflective thinking and meditation on spiritual things can be bypassed by many people. The soul hunger may be stultified by pandering to the carnal man. The opportunity for people to secretly engage in all manner of visual sensual stimuli may enable many to claim a conduct above reproach, but inwardly to be full of all manner of evil. Eventually, at times, the inner corruption will show up but then

"In most of the world our persecution will be scorn, separation, anger, and belittlement from those who are unwilling to do right"

almost everyone else will be doing the same. Usually, historically, whenever there has been a civilization grossly corrupt and immoral, the pendulum has swung back to a more decent, moral succeeding era;

⁶⁴ I Pet 2:9

⁶⁵ I Thess. 5:21-22

however, the multiplication of the entertainment media does not hold up much hope for a return to a calmer, more decent society. Could man become so sated with all of this frothy, filthy, pleasure mad society that he will become sick to his soul and vomit it out?

All this could collapse overnight if people no longer paid for it, no money, no show; however, man has never in the past proved himself so wise. A terrible, world wide, depression (economic) might topple it but in times of the depression, the movie industry flourished. People sought escape from reality into fantasy; man would probably do so even more.

FUTURE SUFFERING

The future presents, it seems to me, a two-fold prospect for the People of the Lord and Savior: First, there will be increased pressure against the Christian because the Will of God will be increasingly alien to the course of the world. The truth will become increasingly unpleasant to a world seeking pleasure above all. Since the Gospel is a sword which pierces the conscience of man, there probably will be increased persecution, economic, social, and physical. The Christian can expect to be hated because he dares to be different and testifies that their works are evil.

“. . . but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil.”⁶⁶ The persecution of the Children of God may become violent at times, those who give themselves over to pleasure seldom have restraint and self-control when their anger and malice are aroused.

The religious world may well seek greater and greater accommodation so that they become more centralized in thought and increasingly distant from the truth. (*Although one wonders how.*) Increasingly, there may be opposition for the Lord's Church by the mass of "religious" groups who resent bitterly the idea that there is only one way and the flat fact that they are not on it. One could expect increasing efforts to stamp out the light that infuriates them.

“What the future holds only God knows for certain, but the prospect does not look bright.”

As with society and the world's religions, Governments may also unite to try to eliminate The Truth. When Satan is unbound, he may be able to use national governments to try to stamp out the Truth. However,

⁶⁶ John 7:7

we see even today that the courts seem almost hostile to Christianity. Governments no longer encourage righteousness as they seem to have done in the immediate past; from the foundation of our own nation until recently. How far these three areas will go in opposition no one knows, of course, but we need to be ready.

*"When Satan is unbound,
he may be able to use national governments to try
to stamp out the Truth."*

The second point is that the influence of the Christian should be greater in the future as we stand in sharper contrast to the evil influences around us. The more that others leave the plain simple truth of the Gospel, the clearer the message should be. In counterfeit currency, the closer they are to the true currency, the more easily they are accepted by banks and businesses. The greater their differences from the true, the more easily they can be identified and rejected. As the religious world becomes more and more alienated from the truth, the more easily the sincere person will be able to identify the Truth.

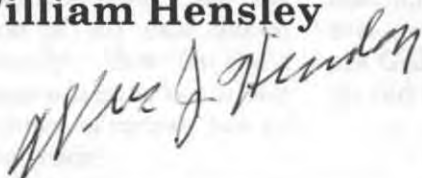
There is a great mission before us! We are God's Chosen People to hold out His Truth

and His Glory before man. We cannot afford the weakness of doubt or discouragement to cause that light to dim or flicker. We must hold the truth fast, and hold it up for the future generations of man. You are God's light bearer! Hold it up and keep it Pure.



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William Hensley




William James Hensley was born on March 30, 1918 in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. During the 21 years he lived in Cedar Rapids, he obeyed the gospel in 1935 at age 17. He attended several bible studies during his early Christian life, including three extended studies in St. Louis and Chillicothe, Missouri. On April 1, 1939, Brother Hensley began service in the Lord's kingdom as an Evangelist and proclaimer of truth that continues to this day, spanning 56 years of effort to save the sinner from his errant way.

The work began in Red Cloud, Nebraska and eventually extending into Iowa, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri and Kansas. For many years Brother "Bill's" clear baritone voice has been heard on radio waves across Mid-America every Sunday morning. In the brotherhood he has no equal in the medium of radio ministry. Souls have been lead to Jesus by this effort.

On October 15, 1941, Sister Verneta B. Clem became a valuable asset to the ministry by becoming Brother Bill's wife and life-long companion in service to the Lord. Three children came to bless this family of God. They resided in Fairbury, Nebraska, later living and working out of New Castle, Indiana, Chillicothe, Missouri. For the past several years Lawrence, Kansas has been home for the Hensley family.

Brother Bill has expressed how thankful he is to God and to the brethren for making the opportunity to serve possible.



EARNESTLY CONTENDING

It is easy to be overwhelmed by the increasing demands of our fast moving world to the point we let slip our duty to contend for the faith.

Brother Hensley's message is drawn from many years of personal experience in not only expounding, but also living the answer. The lesson is plain yet powerful in providing admonition to every Christian to be a contender in word and deed. Genuine conviction is a must as we prepare for the 21st Century.

Jude offers a teaching in his epistle which is dynamic and practical in its presentation and application. In Jude 3, he directs his remarks to the heart of Christian life and touches each facet of a Christian's activities when he says, "*earnestly contend for the faith.*"

The reader may ask, "WHAT IS THE FAITH?" The reply is clearly taught in the New Testament (and even in the Old Testament). We see that faith is the complete gospel in the New Testament. The verse in Jude speaks of that which came one time and only one time! A true quality of faith is found throughout the Bible, but here it refers to one great and golden happening.

At Pentecost, in Acts 2, the Holy Spirit delivered a godly

message of complete salvation. It came from the same base as the Law of Moses in the Old Testament. "*And he gave unto Moses, when he had made an end of communing with him upon mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God.*"¹ With the coming of this gospel, Peter wrote, "*According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness . . .*"²

The One Gospel is the one thing men and women are to believe and obey. Again Paul refers to the gospel as "one faith" in Ephesians 4:5. The one faith, which came at one time, is the teaching all Christians are asked to earnestly

¹ Exo. 31: 18

² 2 Peter 1: 3

contend for in everyday Christian living.

CONTEND: THE VITAL WORD

What does the word "contend" imply? To me it is a strong word with the idea of meeting the challenges with full vigor and strength, not holding back, but presenting the truth of the gospel in word and in living."

We see that faith is the complete gospel in the New Testament.

We will offer examples, from the Holy teaching of those who did contended earnestly in every act of life and purpose. "Earnestly" is an expression which seems to drive home the power and reality of a contending life. This may well be a greater effort than other issues of debate or human discussion. It becomes a very part of the actual life of the Christian. He or she becomes a strong example of the heartbeat of a dedicated life. I see this in both young and old in Christ as they live for Him. It is one factor which offers true hope for the days yet ahead in the work of the church.

Earnestly contending began at Pentecost with the apostles and later spread to the vast

numbers that were added to the Lord. Remember the first report of the lives of the saints in Jerusalem after Pentecost? They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine.³ As you read on, you will find example after example of contending for the faith once delivered to the saints. Notice that it was not delivered directly from heaven to the alien sinners, but first to the saints, and then on to many who filled Jerusalem with the doctrine. It could not have been as effective if only spoken; it had to be backed up by devoted living. The early days of Christianity left a print on the hearts and minds of the thousands that heard, believed, and finally obeyed from their hearts.

GENUINE CONVICTION

Deep conviction is a part of contending for this faith. Without genuine conviction, contending for the faith would never really "get off the ground". Consider the apostles in the beginning at Pentecost. Beginning with Peter in Acts 2:14, the first gospel sermon recorded by Luke is clearly a teaching of conviction. Peter begins by successfully proving that the apostles are not filled with new wine. He follows the teaching of the Spirit in a direct effort of contending for the

³ Acts 2:42

faith. By mention of both Joel and David, his presentation carries great weight on the minds of the Jews from throughout the Roman Empire who listened to the sermon.

Again let me mention that to contend earnestly for the faith requires more than what one can say. It must include a firm conviction in the lives of the ones preaching the gospel. How many times can a message from the words of a powerful speaker fall flat because of inappropriate conduct? The apostles proved their conviction not by their speech alone, but also through their conduct.

A good example of this is: *"We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."*⁴ Another example is: *"We ought to obey God rather than men."*⁵ Here are words supported by the conviction of righteous doings. *"Obey God rather than men."* And so it goes on, day after day, week after week, and year after year. The apostles offered the teaching received from heaven and then lived by the same teaching. We cannot miss the point of conviction as we contend for the faith.

STEPHEN'S STAND

Stephen is a classic example of contending for the one faith. In Acts chapter 7, Stephen's "to the point" historical review before the leading Jews is a lesson that every Christian man and woman should study and learn to love. It is this great record given by Luke which undoubtedly led to a full scale contending for the faith among untold numbers of saints in the early days. Stephen announced in full voice, *"I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God."*⁶ This is

Without genuine conviction, contending for the faith would never really "get off the ground".

one of the greatest announcements by inspiration that is found in the record of the New Testament. Brother Stephen died, but the spirit of the occasion still lives in the hearts of many Christians yet today. Like Abel, Stephen's stand for God and Christ still speaks to us today.⁷

⁴ Acts 4:20

⁵ Acts 5: 29

⁶ Acts 7:56

⁷ Hebrews 11:4

HONEST FAITHFULNESS IN WORD & DEED

The wall of persecution continued on, but in the face of all the power presented by the devil, the church continued to grow and to spread. This reminds me of brethren in earlier days stating that persecution can not destroy the church, but rather help it to grow. How can this be? It is true! My only answer is found in the fact that the brethren were devoted in contending for the faith. The historical record is there; it can never be proven to be wrong.

*Again let me mention
that to contend ear-
nestly for the faith re-
quires more than what
one can say.*

I think also of the Apostle Paul how he contended for that same faith as Brother Stephen. Many accounts in Paul's life as an apostle illustrate this point. Let me point to two of them, both well known. First, to the Ephesian elders at Miletus, in Acts chapter 20: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock." The elders knew that Paul meant for them to contend for the faith.

On the same occasion Paul said to the Ephesians,

"Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears."⁸

What an effort on the part of the apostle to teach and exhort the brethren as leaders of the congregation! He wanted them to contend for that faith, the same as he was doing. Brethren today should learn to take time in teaching to point out the need for honest faithfulness in word and in deed.

OLD TESTAMENT CONTENDERS

Contending for the faith is not a teaching alone for the New Testament. Its foundation can be found in the Old Testament. Think of the lives of godly people such as Joshua, Samuel, and Daniel and many others which come to mind. Each one believed in God and did honestly and earnestly contend for the faith in the Creator.

Joshua is outstanding in this matter. He wrote the will of Almighty God for Israel and to all of our present day, ". . . be strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all of the law. Turn not from it to the right hand or the left . . ."⁹ And in his life of 110 years, he followed

⁸ Acts 20:31

⁹ Joshua 1:7

up with the great statement: *"As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."*¹⁰ Let these words be bound upon our hearts as we daily contend for the faith.

Samuel is a kindred faithful man of God. It was he who, according to the will of God, confronted King Saul to relate to the monarch that he would be overthrown as king of Israel. Samuel reminded the king, *"To obey is better than sacrifice."*¹¹ Samuel's action is of added meaning, when we stop to think how close the ties of friendship bound Saul and Samuel. For Samuel, God and His Word rose above any human tie. The same must be said of the faithful as we contend for the faith once delivered unto the saints.

*For Samuel,
God and His Word rose
above any human tie.*

The story of Daniel is one of the great accounts of the Old Testament which depicts the strong faith one godly man had in his life, even as a captive. It has been said that people live differently when away from home and the family circle. Of course this is not always the case, but it is a point to remember when considering the ac-

tions of men and women of the scriptures. To Daniel, the fact that he was far away from home as a captive did not altar his faithful stand for God.

In Daniel chapter 5, we have a good account of Daniel's contending for God. While in the feast hall, with all the sins of the day steeped around him on every side, he stood for God. Like the song says, "Dare to be a Daniel." When called to tell the meaning of the famous handwriting on the wall, this great man of God (what a Christian he would be!) told the ruler and his court, *"Thou hast not humbled thine heart, but hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of his house before thee, and thou, and thy lords, thy wives, and thy concubines have drunk wine in them; and thou hast praised the gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know: and the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified."*¹² Right to the point, with full faith! Daniel was contending for faith in God.

THE GREAT CONTENDER

We dare not leave the point of contending for faith without including the example

¹⁰ *Joshua 24:15*

¹¹ *1 Samuel 15: 22*

¹² *Daniel 5:22-23*

of Jesus, God's Son. The strong faith, or belief, Jesus had while in this life is undoubtedly the greatest example of all. In the hour of deep depression, He prayed, ". . . *not my will, but thine, be done.*"¹³ How could we find a greater word picture of true conviction and devotion, in the face of death, than the Savior displayed?

Pleasure and entertainment may have taken over contending for the faith.

The question has been asked many times, "for what did Jesus pray?" when He prayed to His Father, as recorded throughout the gospels? We know He did not pray for forgiveness of sins, for He had no sin. What then did He pray for? I wonder if Christ ask for strength to meet the challenge of each new day; for help to remain true to God that He might always contend with that conviction which was so much a part of His earth life. Jesus wanted the aid of His Father to do the complete work required by Him. If this was Christ prayer, would it not be one of the keys to our contending for the faith in what we say and do daily?

PREPARE TO CONTEND

Again we consider the disciples of the first century. Let us look at the apostles as they went about daily contending for that faith which recently came with the Spirit at Pentecost.¹⁴

It has always been fascinating to my mind trying to relate how the apostles did continue steadfastly in that doctrine of Acts 2:42. The record tells us that before Jesus spent the 40 days with the apostles following His resurrection and prior to His ascension, they doubted. To the reader, the bible clearly proves that through the teaching in Acts chapter 1, the news of the kingdom removed the doubt of Jesus' resurrection and introduced the true concept of what the kingdom was to be. It was evident that the kingdom was not of this earth, but was from heaven and of heaven. From this point on, they did not doubt as Christ went back to heaven, but did as they were told, waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit. They knew Jesus arose from the dead. They saw Him ascend.¹⁵ With this knowledge, they knew that His body had not been stolen out of the tomb, as the leaders of the Jews claimed. Believing they were right and realizing they

¹⁴ Acts 2:4

¹⁵ Acts 1:11

¹³ Luke 22:42

must deal with false teaching and opposition, pushed them on with a deeper conviction to contend for this belief.

A few days later, when the Spirit came at Pentecost and filled the apostles with power and knowledge, they had no doubts about their feelings. They knew they were ready to stand for Jesus and even to die for Him as their true king. It is well to note that this Spirit provided them with everything that would be needed for life and godliness. They also knew that what had happened was not possible through "book learning", or due to human experience in life. They knew that it came from Jesus and that their course was charted as to what they were to say and how they were to live. If this had happened to any one of us, we would know the same. It is well to think of this when you read or listen to the message and life of these godly men. The coming of the Spirit and what it enabled them to do, removed all doubt and prepared them to earnestly contend for the faith.

GENUINE TO THE CORE

In our lives today, this same conviction is needed if we are to contend for the faith. I call it being "genuine to the core". With this confidence, we are able to make full proof of

our service as Christians. We will still have weak times and fall short, but in the main, we will stand for Him and live for Him come what may.

There is a decline of numbers and faith in many quarters. This causes faithful brethren to become alarmed.

What happens if one is not "genuine to the core", but has doubt and uncertainty in his or her mind? First, without exception, the devil knows how we feel. In fact, the evil one may know it better than we do. Remember that the devil will work on this weak spot. He will approach the individual, just as he did Jesus in His temptation. Read Matthew chapter 4 very carefully. Remember, Christ was hungry. The devil knew Jesus was divine, but he also knew the Son of God had a human side. That's the side the devil worked on, due to Jesus' hunger. No doubt the devil thought that food would do the trick in his temptation. It had worked on Adam and Eve in the garden, so surely it would also work to cause Jesus to fall. Glory to God, it did not work! Jesus answered, "It is written." The devil knows the power of

God's Word.¹⁶

It brings sorrow to the Christian's heart to see a brother or sister who appears to be strong in the faith tempted to forsake the faith. Many times we are overwhelmed to learn that people we have known for many years are leaving the congregation for one reason or another (maybe just an excuse). Forsaking the assembly for something easier or more enjoyable, it would seem. Pleasure and entertainment may have taken over contending for the faith. Our prayers go out and up for the return of the drifting brother or sister. Could this drifting soul have been one who was not "genuine to the core"? To avoid this condition, we think it would be well to pray that we walk closely with Jesus every day. If we do not walk closely, how can we really be genuine to our very heart?

WHAT DO WE SEE IN THE CHURCH TODAY?

We see several things. There is a decline of numbers and faith in many quarters. This causes faithful brethren to become alarmed. This situation may leave a door open for others to leave. For some congregations, it may be looked upon as the beginning of the end.

We must admit this is happening and learn to deal with it. One way to deal with this deplorable condition is to remember that in all cases, the matter is one between God and the individual. It is not a matter between brethren. Each soul must answer to God. I've known individuals who think things through and return to the congregation. Whether this happens or not, the day is not over. The tide can turn, and already has in some places. To the genuine Christian, this spurs the faithful on to work harder for the Lord. Prayer becomes a daily factor for the church and the brethren.

I recall that often in the lives of our young people, I see a deep and abiding faith.

I also see a brighter side. Even where only a few are left to "hold the fort," things are looking up. Many times, this can be found in the youth of the church. I recall that often in the lives of our young people, I see a deep and abiding faith. In fact, in the lives of some of our teens, I see a display of devotion and conviction. This is great! In this, there is cooperation between youth and age. Faith, and contending for it, is also found in the lives of older

¹⁶Hebrews 4:12

brethren. One dear sister asked me, "What can I do in my senior years?" I was happy to answer this dear soul. I offered with determination, "Live the best you can before the brethren, including the youth, and let all know that you are alive for the Lord." It is true, the young will be the church of tomorrow. But how can there be a church of tomorrow if there is not the great examples of age to the younger?

*"Be sold on the Lord
and His teaching will
live in your heart."*

I can see a great future for the church of today and into tomorrow. I see small groups with both youth and age, though little in number, they are strong in the faith. I see strong elderships. I see cooperation between youth and age. Besides this, I see one of the greatest crops of young men working as evangelists. The question has been honestly asked, "Do we have men entering the field as evangelists?" When I begin to name even just those that I know, it brings hope to the soul who may have wondered and let doubt take over.

It gets back to this individual matter again, dear readers. Think about it. We come into life one at a time. Even twins

are born one before the other. We obey the gospel one at a time. Our talents blend with those of other brethren in the work of the Master, but still we have an individual salvation to work out.¹⁷ Finally, we die one at a time and are judged as individuals. What does this have to do with contending for the faith once delivered to the saints? It brings us to the stark reality that a great deal of our ability to contend for the faith first begins within our own individual hearts, as we strive to live as Christians. As one man put it, "Be sold on the Lord and His teaching will live in your heart."

LOOK UP, LOOK DOWN, LOOK IN & AROUND

I am happy to put this sermon into print. I am glad to know that many today want to contend for the faith. The question is, Do they know how? Will they take the opportunity to learn how it may be done?" I do not have the answer, but God does, as He always has. He does not want one soul to perish. He wants every child to do the very best he or she can do. God stands ready to aid, day or night.

Our final word in this sermon is a personal challenge. Will you meet the challenge of

¹⁷ Phil. 2:12

each and every day with a determination for right? God and Christ are in control. The church will still be alive when Jesus comes in the air.¹⁸ The gates of evil can never destroy it. Certainly, the power of manmade doctrine will not prevail.

Let me suggest a little outline on the following page, not original with me, but effective, to say the least. Read it. Think about it. Sincerely try it. It will work. It will help each individual who tries it to prepare for a life of earnestly contending for the faith.

¹⁸ 1 Thes. 4:17

Pray Daily

(Look up)

"Pray without ceasing."¹⁹

Read & Study the Bible Daily

(Look down)

"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."²⁰

Look About You Daily

(Look around)

"As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."²¹

Rate Your Faith Daily

(Look inside)

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."²²



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¹⁹ 1 Thes. 5:17

²⁰ 2 Tim. 2:15

²¹ Gal 6:10

²² Rom. 12:1-2