

SOUNDING FORTH THE SEVENTH AND LAST TRUMPET

Vol. 44 June 2014 No. 6



Church of God Tabernacle in Newark, Ohio

*"I was glad when they said unto me,
Let us go into the house of the Lord."*

Psalm 122:1

For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?"

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This monthly religious journal is published for the benefit of the Church of God universally. It is our supreme purpose to reach the world for Christ through the printed page. Our burden is to reveal the truth of God's Word to all mankind, to expose sin and error, war against apostasy, and to eradicate the longstanding traditions of men that have no biblical foundations.

Brother Roger L. Decker Editor
Workers Too Numerous to Mention

THE CHURCH OF GOD BELIEVES IN:

- A personal God (John 4:24)
- A divine Christ (John 1:1, 14)
- An infallibly inspired Bible (2 Tim. 3:16-17)
- Salvation from sin (Matt. 1:21)
- The new birth (John 3:3, 5-7)
- A holy life (Luke 1:73-75; Titus 2:12)
- Sanctification (1 Thess. 5:23)
- Unity of God's people (John 17:21, Eph. 4)
- Divine, physical healing (James 5:14-16)
- The ordinances (Matt. 28:19-20; John 13; 1 Cor. 11:23, 34)
- Eternal life (Matt. 25:46; Mark 9:43)
- The Trinity (1 John 5:7, 8)

**SOME SPIRITUAL FACTS
PERTAINING TO THE CHURCH**

- Jesus organized it (Matt. 16:18)
- On a good foundation (Eph. 2:20; 1 Cor. 3:11)
- Christ governs it (Eph. 1:22-23; Isa. 9:6)
- God admits members (1 Cor. 12:13-18)
- Sin puts you out of it (Rom. 11:22; Ex. 32:33)
- The saved only are members (John 15:2-6)
- Membership is offered to all (Rev. 22:17)
- Final rewards (Rev. 20:12-15; 21:3-4; 22:14)
- Bible name of the Church (Acts 20:28; Gal. 1:13; John 17:11)

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We reserve the right to edit and/or decline any material for any reason. Not responsible for unsolicited articles or items.

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Guest Editorial

"A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: And sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready."

Luke 14:16-17

In just a few weeks God's people will be gathering in from many places to worship the Lord. The saints here at Newark have been working diligently to get everything ready for those who will be coming in. Getting ready for camp meeting is always a long and tedious process. Some sisters have been busying themselves at cleaning the tabernacle, the dormitories, and the restrooms. Others have been working hard to prepare the dining hall facility. Much effort is being put forth in caring for the grass, the flowers, and the shrubs. It is a joy to get God's Acres ready for you so that your time here will be memorable.

The external appearance of God's Acres is important, but the most vital part of the meeting is having the presence of God's Spirit in our midst. We want the preaching of the Word of God to be anointed and to bring help and strength to every child of God. Our desire is for the saints to be built up in the most holy faith and to be encouraged, challenged, and spiritually enriched by hearing and obeying the Truth. It is through the sound teaching of the Gospel that souls can be loosed from sin and set free.

Ministers will be coming to bring us the wonderful Words of Life that will benefit our souls. When the Holy Ghost has His way, every need will be supplied, regardless if it is for salvation for the soul, encouragement to the heart, or healing of the physical body. God is interested in the

whole man, and He is ready to send help to all who will turn to Him in surrender and faith.

As always, we look forward to experiencing a wonderful time in the Lord. We know that God has many good things to share with all who make it to the camp meeting. Oh, what joy it is to be together with other saints who love the Lord, to feast on the blessings of God's Word, and to hear of the victories that others have experienced through His grace. You can rest assured that the meeting will not be a disappointment to you.

Our pastor, Brother Roger L. Decker extends a warm welcome to each of you to come and join him and the Newark congregation for a great time of feasting on the good things of God. All things have been made ready, and with anticipation we look forward to a time of refreshing. As the world becomes more evil every day, we need these times of spiritual enrichment. It will be a precious blessing to sit in an atmosphere that is not polluted with ungodliness, a place where God's Holy Spirit can dwell and move about freely. When conditions like this are allowed to prevail, the souls of men are fed on heavenly manna and fellowship. Great things are in store in just a few weeks.

If you have not already done so, now would be a good time to begin praying for the camp meeting. God knows all about each of us, and He knows just what each one stands in need of. We need His divine direction for the services and for those whom He would choose to bring forth the messages. The local congregation has set aside time for prayer and fasting to seek His leadership. We know that He is ready to supply every need, but He wants us to call upon Him for guidance so the services will please Him. Allowing the Lord to be the overseer of everything guarantees that good things are in store.

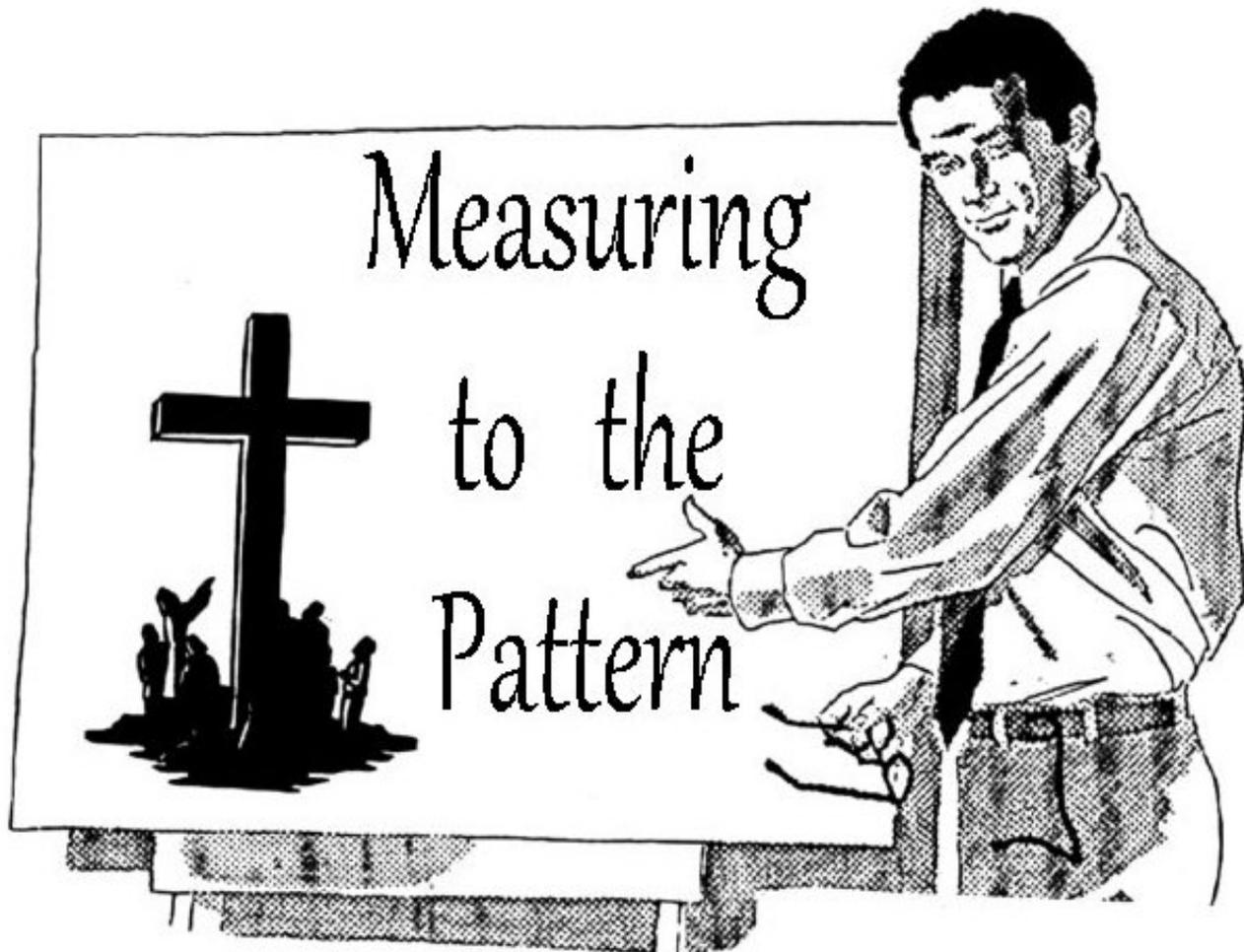
Ezekiel 43:10 Thou son of man, show the house to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities: and let them measure the pattern.

11 And if they be ashamed of all that they have done, show them the form

of the house, and the fashion thereof, and the goings out thereof, and the comings in thereof, and all the forms thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and all the laws thereof: and write it in their sight, that they may

keep the whole form thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and do them.

12 This is the law of the house; Upon the top of the mountain the whole limit thereof round about shall be most holy. Behold, this is the law of the house.



Brother Roger L. Decker

Building According to the Plan

God, speaking to the Prophet Ezekiel, told him to show the house to the house of Israel that they may have sorrow and then measure to the pattern. Israel had gotten so far removed from true worship that God told Ezekiel to show them the house so that there would be shame for their sins.

God has always had a pattern, in the Old Testament as well as the New Testament. Moses was given a pattern to build by, and anything

that was not built according to the pattern was unacceptable to God. In the Old Testament Books of Genesis, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Exodus, and so on, you can read that every detail was plainly laid out to those priests when it came to offerings, what the priests wore, the curtain that separated the two rooms of the tabernacle, and so on. Everything was done according to the pattern. Speaking of the tabernacle instructions, Exodus 40:16 states, "Thus did Moses: according to all that the LORD commanded him, so did he."

Noah was given a pattern for building the ark, and he built it according to the pattern, and it meant the salvation of his household. We read in Genesis 6:15, "And this is the fashion which thou shalt make it of: The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, the breadth of it fifty cubits, and the height of it thirty cubits."

Noah could have said: "I think this needs to be changed. I don't think we need to go this far." He could have paid no attention to the Lord, but he would have lost his

soul along with the souls of his family. Genesis 6:22 says, "Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he." Genesis 7:5 reads, "And Noah did according unto all that the LORD commanded him." Noah was mentioned in the faith chapter. Hebrews 11:7 says, "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; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith."

God gave man the pattern to build the Christian life. Like the saints of old, if we build according to the plan, we will be successful. Today it seems as though everyone has his own idea, his own pattern, his own way, or his own standard. What does the Bible say? We read in 2 Corinthians 10:12, "For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise."

God's Plan in Speaking to His People

Verse 10 of our Scripture text states, "Thou son of man, show the house to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities: and let them measure the pattern." It still takes God's man to show the house to the house. People who claim they are isolated and have no pastor need to be careful. God knows the truth of that situation. Everyone needs a pastor. That is not a popular subject, especially in places where the people are rising against that. Everyone needs a man of God to show him the pattern.

In Romans 10:13-14 Paul wrote: "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a

preacher?" This is still God's plan in speaking to His people.

You can read in Acts, Chapter 8, that the Lord called Philip out of a great revival and told him to go south. Verse 26 reads, "And the angel of the Lord spake to Philip, saying, Arise and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert." Philip did not know why he was to go there. God did not tell him what he was going to do. Nevertheless, he obeyed, and there he found a eunuch, a man of great authority under Candace, the queen of the Ethiopians, and he was returning from Jerusalem where he was worshipping. He was sitting in his chariot and reading from the Book of Isaiah. The Spirit told Philip to go near and join himself to him. When Philip heard the eunuch reading from the writings of the Prophet Isaiah, he said in verse 30, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" Verse 31a continues, "And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me?"

Going back to our Scripture lesson, God wanted the Prophet Ezekiel to show the house to the house and let them know that God still had a pattern. He is still requiring men and women to measure to His pattern. Revelation 11:1 says, "And there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and the angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein."

Dear church, there is still measuring going on today under the light of the seventh seal. We do not have it made. We have not attained yet. Thank God, we are still receiving light and understanding. We are still receiving truth given to walk in. If we had all the truth that God has, God would have wrapped this thing up a long time ago, but God is still revealing truth, light, and knowledge to His people. If you are going to be a part of the Church of God, you are going to have to take *all* the message, all the Word of God.

John was told to "Rise, and measure." The measuring has to

come from the pulpit, and that is the reason there is such a let down going on in the church world today. There is only one thing we can use in the pulpit to measure with, and that is God's Word; God's Word is the rod.

Blowing the Trumpet in Zion

The rod and the staff are the only things that will bring comfort to a fearful soul. Psalm 23:4 reads, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." This is still God's means of comfort today: His Word and His Spirit.

If you are going through depression or discouragement, you need to get into God's Word. What do you see in God's Word? Victory after victory after victory. The man of God in the pulpit has to blow the trumpet and sound the alarm. Joel 2:1 says, "Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the LORD cometh, for it is nigh at hand." I want you to notice that he was told to blow the trumpet in Zion. Zion is a type of the Church of God, and that is right where the trumpet needs to be blown. God's people are the ones who are going to heed the trumpet.

Revelation 10:9-10 says: "And I went unto the angel, and said unto him, Give me the little book. And he said unto me, Take it, and eat it up; and it shall make thy belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey. And I took the little book out of the angel's hand, and ate it up; and it was in my mouth sweet as honey: and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter." Psalm 119:103 reads, "How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" Truth is sweet.

When I first came to the Church of God, it was a sweet sound to me. I was so thankful for the Truth, and I am still thankful for it today. When

I hear the Truth, it brings a sweetness to my soul, yet there is a part of Truth that becomes bitter. Truth becomes bitter when you take it in and let it become a part of you; then you stand for it. Persecution does not come when you hear the Truth, but when you stand for the Truth. That is the bitter part, and that is the part that people dislike. Oh, they love the sweetness of it. They will say, "That preacher sure laid it out!" However, when Truth actually becomes a part of you, the bitterness comes when you stand for it.

There is still measuring going on, church, right under the light of the seventh seal. It takes a seventh-seal minister to show the mysteries of God. If you are going to be a part of the Church of God, you are going to have to take all the message, and part of the message includes the dress standard. That is part of the measuring. That is part of the pattern, and some people rebel against it. They will take some of the sweetness of the other part, but they just do not like the bitterness of having to measure to the standard. Nevertheless, we have to eat all the Book, even the part that brings persecution.

You may ask, "What happens to a congregation when the people will not take the rod and will not measure?" They apostatize. They defect from Truth. When people fall away from Truth, they rarely recover. Many people will not take the pattern, and the let down starts in the pulpit. They feel that they can win more people if they let down that which offends people, but it does not work that way. You have to preach the bitter right along with the sweet. We have to eat *all* the Book. No one can force you to measure. It is your choice.

The Law of the House

Under the Old Testament, God's house had laws, ordinances, forms, and fashions. Why was that? God wanted His people to be holy, and He still does. God wants His people

to be different from the world. God does *not* want His people to be like the world or sectism. We are a peculiar people. God is concerned about our worship. If there were not any laws, commandments, or ordinances, then His house would be a free for all, with people acting any way they want to, dressing as they want to, worshipping as they want to, and there would be no shame.

Judges 17:6 says, "In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes." That was trouble. That is what is called the people's church when people do what is right in their own eyes. God wants His dwelling place to be a place where He is worshiped supremely.

Look at the temple in Jesus' day. Matthew 21:13 reads, "And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves." Without a law people would not be ashamed of their iniquities. What is the law of the house? It is holiness. Hebrews 12:14 states, "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." This is not talking about the consummation, but it is speaking of seeing God in people's lives. You can see God in people's lives through holiness. Why? Because God is holy.

God has never changed His law. His law is the same yet today: holiness. Psalm 93:5 reads, "Thy testimonies are very sure: holiness becometh thine house, O LORD, for ever." God commands holiness. There is no true worship without holiness. You cannot offer up true worship without holiness. Psalm 96:9 says, "O worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness: fear before him, all the earth." In verse 11 of our Scripture text, Ezekiel mentioned "the goings out thereof, and the comings in thereof." God is concerned about your worship in the church services, but He is also concerned about you when you leave the services. He is concerned about your conduct in the world as well as in the house of

God. We are to measure not only to the pattern within but also to the pattern without.

Are You Measuring to the Pattern?

Now, let us do a little measuring. How are your business dealings? Are they shady? Have you walked away from an unpaid debt? If you have, that will ruin your witness for the Truth. If you owe a debt, you are responsible to pay it. If you incurred the debt, then you ought to be the one to step forward and pay it.

Some people are too lazy to work. Many people in some states are on either disability or welfare, and the people who are working are paying for that. Some people would rather have someone else support them. The wife is not supposed to be the breadwinner in the house. Second Thessalonians 3:10 says, "For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat." There would be a lot of hungry people around if our society went according to that Scripture. If they will not work, they should not eat. The Scripture does not say, "could not work," but it says, "would not work." We know there are exceptions, but I am not preaching the exception; I am preaching the rule.

We are talking about the pattern that needs to be measured to. God is expecting His people to live holy in all phases of their lives. First Corinthians 6:19-20 reads: "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."

Holiness involves not only your spirit but also your body. Holiness honors God. There is no way we can leave out holiness and please the Lord. If you are not living a holy life, God is not pleased with you. God is displeased with your life.

You must measure to the pattern. What is the pattern? The pattern is Jesus Christ, not another brother or sister. I thank God for those who are role models to the church; nevertheless, we must measure according to God's Word. We must measure according to Jesus Christ. First John 2:6 states: "He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked." Who is the "he"? He is Jesus Christ. We are to walk even as He walked.

If your life does not display holiness, Ezekiel said you need to be ashamed, and then after you are ashamed, measure to the law of the house. If you are living in sin, the first thing you need to do is repent. Now, that seems like such a simple thing to do to get out of sin, but it is amazing how many people do not want to do that. They will join a church, be baptized, partake of the Lord's supper, be catechized, or do anything else but repent. Neverthe-

less, the Bible says you must confess, repent, and forsake all sin.

People do not have trouble with getting down by their beds at night and confessing. They do that on a regular basis. The reason they have to do it over and over again is, there is no forsaking going along with the repentance. God wants people to repent of their sin *and* to forsake all sin. That is the law of the house. God is able to save you from all sin, and He is able to deliver you. Away with this teaching that we have to sin more or less every day. That may be your testimony, but that is not the children of God's testimony.

When you are delivered from sin, you are delivered from all sin. When you go to an altar of prayer and pray, repent, confess, and forsake, you just do not go away from that altar of prayer the same way you came. You get up from that altar of prayer with a new heart, a new

spirit, and God's Holy Spirit. God is certainly able to keep you, if you want to be kept.

I ask you, are you measuring to the pattern? God knows your heart; He knows your whole life. Can He see that you are measuring to the pattern? God told Ezekiel to show the house to the house. Why? So that they would be ashamed and measure to the pattern. Are you measuring to the law of the house? The law of the house in the New Testament is Jesus Christ. He is your example, and He is the One you need to measure to. If you are not where you need to be, God will help you. God does not send a message like this to condemn you, but He wants to help you. If you are needy, we have a great God who will supply your every need.

(Compact Disc TR-1207M)

"Oh, I Have Missed It at Last!"

Some time ago a physician called upon a young man who was ill. He sat for a little while by the bedside examining his patient, and then he honestly told the young man that he had but a very short time to live. The young man was astonished. He did not expect it would come to that so soon. He forgot that death comes "in such an hour as ye think not." At length he looked up into the face of the doctor and, with a most despairing countenance, repeated the expression, "I have missed it—at last."

"What have you missed?" inquired the tender-hearted doctor.

"I have missed it—at last," again he repeated.

"Missed what?"

"Doctor, I have missed the salvation of my soul."

"Oh, say not so—it is not so. Do you remember the thief on the cross?"

"Yes, I remember the thief on

the cross. I remember that he never said to the Holy Ghost, 'Go Thy way,' but I did. Now He is saying to me, 'Go your way.'" He lay gasping awhile, and looking up with a vacant, starting eye, he said, "I was awakened and was anxious about my soul a little time ago, but I did not want to be saved then. Something seemed to say to me, 'Don't put it off; make sure of salvation.' I said to myself, 'I will postpone it.' I knew I ought not to do it. I knew I was a great sinner and needed a Savior. I resolved, however, to dismiss the subject for the present. Yet I could not get my own consent to do it until I had promised to take it up again, at a time not remote and more favorable. I bargained away, resisted, and insulted the Holy Spirit. I never thought of coming to this. I meant to have made my salvation sure, and now I have missed it—at last."

"You remember," said the doctor, "that there were some who

came at the eleventh hour."

"My eleventh hour," he rejoined, "was when I had that call of the Spirit. I have had none since—shall not have. I am given over to be lost. Oh! I have missed it! I have sold my soul for nothing—a feather—a straw—undone forever!" This was said with such indescribable despondency that nothing was said in reply. After lying there a few moments, he raised his head, and looking all around the room as if for some desired object, he buried his face in the pillow and again explained in agony and horror, "Oh, I have missed it at last!" and died.

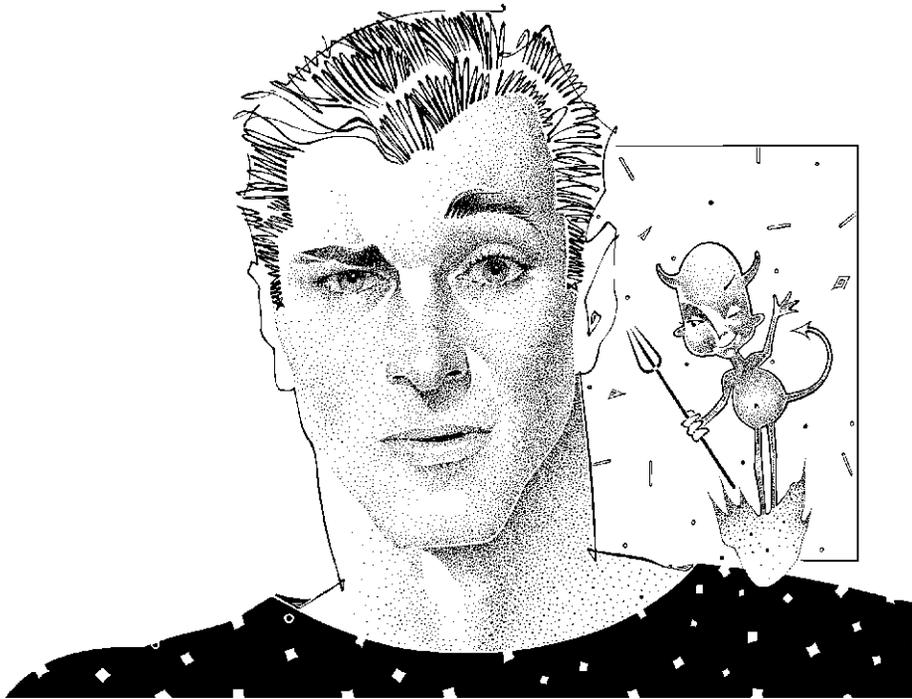
Reader, you need not miss your salvation, for you may have it now. What you have read is a true story. How earnestly it says to you, "NOW is the accepted time!"

"To day if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your hearts" (Hebrews 3:7-8).

S. B. Shaw

1 Peter 5:8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.

Our Enemy~the Devil



Brother Paul Prinkey

Evil Tests Our Love for God

Peter was telling us that the devil is our adversary. He is not God's adversary or Jesus' adversary. Jesus conquered death, hell, and the grave. He overcame the devil on the third day when He rose from the tomb. He made an open showing that He had conquered Satan. We are the ones who have to fight against Satan.

Second Timothy 2:24-26 reads: "And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose

themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will."

Two things stand out to me in these Scriptures: First, there are those who oppose themselves. Second, those who oppose themselves are the ones who are snared by the devil and taken captive by him at his will. Why is it that they are snared by the devil? They are opposing themselves, and they will not accept the Truth of God's Word. The devil is in control of their lives, and he

will have his will and purpose in their lives.

I thought about how God came to Cain and, in essence, said: "If you do well, you will be blessed. If you do not, sin lies at the door." That is what is taking place in many people's lives. The devil would like to snare every one of us. That is his purpose. That is what he works to do. Jesus said in John 10:10, "The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy." That is what the devil is endeavoring to do today. He is doing everything he can to snare us. We need to know who our enemy is. We need to study about

him, because saint or sinner, we all have a close relationship with him. We have to deal with him every day in our lives. We need to know what to expect from the devil and what he is trying to do.

We read in Isaiah 45:5-7: "I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me: That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the LORD, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things." Why would God create evil? He said, "I make peace, and create evil."

God made us all free, moral agents. We make the choice of whom we want to love and serve. If we are professing to be Christians and profess to love God, evil is there to test us. If there was no evil to contend with, there would be no choice, and our love would be untested. True love is love that is tested and still remains and grows stronger. That is the kind of love that God wants us to have. God allows evil to test our love to see if we will remain true and grow stronger.

God created the devil, and God made hell. Many times people of the world get a skewed view of God. They think that God is just a God of love and that everything about Him is good. However, Paul said in Romans 11:22, "Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God." There is another side of God that many times people do not consider. God did not create the devil so that we would be his companions. God did not make hell so that some day we would take up residence there.

The Devil and His Works

The Bible teaches us in Matthew 25:41, "Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." Hell was not prepared for us. It was prepared for the devil and his

angels.

Jesus had a good deal to say about the devil. In Matthew 13:39 Jesus called him the enemy. In Matthew 13:38 He called him the wicked one. In John 12:31 He called him the prince of this world. In John 8:44 He called him a liar and a murderer. In Matthew 12:26 Jesus said that Satan has a kingdom. In Matthew 13:38-39 Jesus talked about how the devil sowed tares among the wheat. In Matthew 13:19 the devil snatched the Word from hearers. In Luke 13:16 we read that he had bound a woman for eighteen years. Luke 22:31 says that Satan desired to have Peter. Matthew 25:41 says that he has angels and that eternal fire was prepared for him and his angels.

The Bible has much to say about the devil. Matthew 4:3 says he was a tempter. In Matthew 12:24 it says he is the prince of the devils. Matthew 12:22-29 lets us know that he is the source of demon possession. In John 13:27 we read that he put betrayal into the heart of Judas. In Matthew 4:4 we read that he perverts the Scripture. Second Corinthians 4:4 says that he is the god of this world. In Ephesians 2:2 he is called the prince of the power of the air. Second Corinthians 11:14 says he fashioned himself into an angel of light. In 1 Peter 5:8 he is called the adversary, and he is as a roaring lion, seeking to devour Christians. In 1 Peter 5:9 he is overcome by faith. Thank God for that! In Revelation 12:9 he is called the deceiver of the whole world. In Genesis 3:1-20 we read that he was the seducer of Adam and Eve. James 4:7 tells us that he will flee if we resist him.

We read in 2 Corinthians 12:7 that Satan was the one that caused Paul's thorn in the flesh. First Thessalonians 2:18 states that he hindered Paul's missionary plans. Acts 5:3 says he caused Ananias to lie. We read in Acts 26:18 that the Gentiles were under his power. In 2 Corinthians 4:4 we find that Satan blinded the minds of the unbelievers. In Revelation 2:9 we learn that false teachers are a synagogue of

Satan. We read in 2 Thessalonians 2:9 that Satan produced false miracles and was the moving spirit of the apostasy.

We read in Ephesians 6:11 that Satan is wily; he has cunning devices and crafty tricks that he uses. Ephesians 2:2 tells us he is the spirit that works in the disobedient. In 1 Chronicles 21:1 he was the one who moved David to sin. Job 1:7 lets us know that he caused Job's troubles. In Zechariah 3:1-9 he was the adversary of Joshua. Second Corinthians 2:11 tells us that he can get the advantage of Christians. The Bible has much to say about the devil. Do you believe that he exists? According to the language of Jesus and the Word of God, there is a devil.

The Adversary at Work

As we consider how the devil works, I want to focus on how he had to work on Job in Job, Chapter 1. A great lesson can be learned from Job's life. The devil is still our adversary; he is the one against whom we have to war. He is the one whom we need the victory over.

Job 1:1 says, "There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil." Then in verses 6-12 we read: "Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them. And the LORD said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the LORD and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?"

"Then Satan answered the LORD and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance

is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face. And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD."

Job lost everything that he owned in a few moments of time. In the few minutes that it takes to read the Scriptures down through this first chapter, we see that Job lost everything that he had as far as his worldly goods. We also know that the devil is a liar. One brother used to ask, "How do you know when the devil is lying?" and he replied, "Every time he opens his mouth." The devil was lying to God when he told Him, "Take away everything that Job has and touch everything that he owns, and Job will curse You to Your face." Then he told God, in essence: "He serves You because of all Your blessings, because You have put Your hand upon his house and his goods. You have blessed the work of his hands and caused him to prosper." God does that for us today. God blesses us. He puts His hand on our families, over our homes, and over the things we have. God blesses the work of our hands.

Many times we experience a few problems, and as soon as that happens, we think that our whole world has fallen apart. When adversities happen, we can become discouraged. One thing may happen, and in a couple of weeks something else happens. However, sometimes they all happen consecutively. Suppose your vehicle breaks down and something goes wrong at the house, and then you start having troubles at work. It seems that it has all happened in a couple of days.

You may start losing the feeling that God loves you. You may start wondering if things are ever going to go right. You may think: "I've been having problems for three days now. I've been praying, but God has not come to my rescue yet." Some-

times we forget about all those times that God blessed and prospered everything that we did. He gave us blessings, one upon another.

Job's Trust in God

In Psalm 68:19 David said, "Blessed be the LORD, who daily loadeth us with benefits." God gives to us one blessing after another. Many times when we have needs, we breathe a prayer to God and forget about it. We go on, but God takes care of our needs even though we forgot we even prayed. After a while, we realize that God took care of everything.

God blesses us and keeps His hand upon our lives. He takes care of us. However, the devil told God: "If you just touch everything Job has, he won't love you anymore. He will curse you to your face. He will quit serving you." So, in essence, God told him, "You can touch everything he has, but you cannot touch his life." Then the devil proceeded to take away everything Job had.

The time came when everything Job had was gone. In Job 1:20-22 we read: "Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly."

What an experience Job had with God! He was not disappointed because God took everything away. He felt blessed to have it for the time that he had it. In essence, he said, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Why did Job shave his head? Why did he sit down in sackcloth and ashes? He thought that surely he was next. He saw everything that happened to his flocks, his herds, and his children. His servant came to tell him everyone had been killed and that he was the only one left alive to come and bear that

report. When Job saw all that had happened and that it just kept getting closer and closer to home, finally he thought, "I am the next one." In all of this, Job did not sin or charge God foolishly.

Who was at the root of Job's problems? Who was his adversary? It was not God; it was the devil. I want you to notice something. Job had no knowledge of the conversation that had taken place between God and the devil. You may ask, "Didn't he know it was the devil?" He did not know, because God did not let him know. The devil came before the Lord, and God said, "Where have you been?" Satan replied, "I have been walking to and fro in the earth and up and down in it." God said, "Have you considered my servant Job?" Job did not know that any of this conversation had taken place. The first inkling he had that something was going wrong was when the servant came rushing into his house to tell him that all his other servants had been killed, that the flocks had been taken, and that he was the only one left alive to bear the report to him.

Having Faith in the Lord

Sometimes we feel that God ought to let us know everything that is going on, but God is not obligated to do so. We have to keep trusting Him. What does the Scriptures say? "The just shall live by faith." We must continue to have faith in the Lord and keep trusting Him. Whenever the hard times come, we have to bear down a little harder and stay with it. Sometimes it may seem as though Satan is not only going to touch everything that you own and everybody you love, but He is going to come after you next. Well, are you ready? Is everything clear between you and God? If it is, then what do you have to fear? Paul said, "If I tarry, I will be here with you, but if I die, I will go on to be with Christ, which is better."

Job was having a rough time in his life. Job 2:1-7 reads: "Again there

was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them to present himself before the LORD. And the LORD said unto Satan, From whence comest thou? And Satan answered the LORD and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? and still he holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause.

"And Satan answered the LORD and said, Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life. But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face. And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life. So went Satan forth from the presence of the LORD and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown." Job was going through a rough place. He was enduring it on his own and holding his integrity with God.

The devil was challenging God. God was putting Job on display before the whole world and everyone who knew him at that time. God also saw fit to have it recorded so that the whole world could know about Job's experience.

Job's disease is thought to have been a form of leprosy complicated with elephantiasis, one of the most loathsome and painful diseases known in the oriental world. We find Job was being tested not only regarding his material possessions and his family but also in his physical body. James 5:13 says, "Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray." We can look through the Book of Job and find that he began to seek the Lord. In essence, he said, "I sought after Him, and if I could find Him, I would bring my complaint to Him."

Sometimes I tease people that I am going to take my complaint to

the Lord. I am going to complain to Him a little. They say, "Well, you can't do that." I reply: "Oh, yes, I can. If Job could, I can."

I remember going through some surgeries. I was sitting at home having a pity party for myself. The phone rang, and I heard my wife out in the kitchen talking. I was sitting in the living room groaning, griping, and complaining. I was feeling awfully rough. I did not know who she was talking to, but I heard her say, "He is having a rough time in there." It was Brother Decker on the phone, and he said, "Put him on." So I got on the phone, and he said, "What's wrong, brother?" I just unloaded on him. I told him all my problems. I brought all my complaints to him, and I did not hold back. He just patiently listened.

When I was done, he did not argue or fuss with me. He said, "Let's pray." When he got done praying, the Lord moved and gave me encouragement and help, and I was able to go on. We need that, because sometimes we can feel very low. We feel like we just need to complain to someone and tell them everything that is going wrong with us because the devil is giving us such a rough time. Does he ever give you a rough time? Do you ever feel like complaining? Have you ever complained? I have.

False Blame

I thought about the three friends that came and sat down with Job. That reminds me of what took place in John, Chapter 9, when Jesus saw the man who was blind from his birth. The disciples looked on that man and said in verse 2, "Who did sin?" Those three words in the form of a question have always stood out to me. "Who did sin?" Jesus responded, "Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents." The disciples thought someone had to have sinned for him to have such a hard time. People thought that either he or his parents must have done something wrong, and their sins were

being visited upon him.

Job's three friends seemed to think that all the suffering that came upon Job and the suffering that came upon men as a whole was a punishment for their sins. In other words, if they were great sufferers, they were great sinners. If their sins were in secret, then their suffering was evidence of their hypocrisy. That is what they believed. Today some people think that suffering is sent upon men, not so much as a punishment for sin, but rather to keep men from sinning. These are false beliefs. The disciples said, "Who did sin? This man or his parents?" Jesus answered, "Neither."

In the Book of Job, Job's accusers were supposed to be his friends. They were supposed to be there to comfort him, but they sat for seven days just looking at him. For seven days they did not say anything. Can you imagine that? The sun came up, and there Job was sitting with ashes on his head and sackcloth covering his body. He was scraping himself with a piece of potsherd, which was pottery that was broken, in order to find some form of relief. The sun came up, noon passed, evening time came, then the sun went down, and they were just looking at him.

One morning I woke up in the hospital after I had a procedure done. They had been giving me pain medication, but I was still in much pain. I must have fallen into such a deep sleep that when the male nurse walked in, he could not see me breathing. So he leaned over and put his ear over my mouth. I woke up and saw the side of a head, and I said, "What are you doing?" He jumped back and replied, "I thought you had died on me!" I can imagine Job's friends leaning over and thinking, "Is he sleeping or is he dead?" After seven days, they decided they would start to talk.

Job 4:1-8 reads: "Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered and said, If we assay to commune with thee, wilt thou be grieved? but who can withhold himself from speaking? [Have you ever been around people

who could not stop themselves from talking? They should not have been talking, but they were talking anyway. It seems that some people only take their foot out of their mouth when they are changing feet. They ought to know when it comes time to hush up, but they do not. They just keep talking. This fellow could hardly wait to say something to Job.] Behold, thou hast instructed many, and thou hast strengthened the weak hands. Thy words have upholden him that was falling, and thou hast strengthened the feeble knees.

"But now it is come upon thee, and thou faintest; [His friend said, in so many words: 'Look at you. When other people were down and out, you encouraged them. You came along and strengthened their hands and their feeble knees. Now look, you have run into a hard place, and you are fainting.' Look at the attitude that he had?] it toucheth thee, and thou art troubled. Is not this thy fear, thy confidence, thy hope, and the uprightness of thy ways? Remember, I pray thee, who ever perished, being innocent? or where were the righteous cut off? [He was saying to Job, 'When was the last time you knew that an innocent man perished? You had to have done something wrong, because if you had not done anything wrong, you would not be in this kind of shape.'] Even as I have seen, they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same."

What kind of words were those coming from a friend? After seven days of looking at Job, knowing that he had just lost everything he had, his friend started telling him: "You were the one who was close to God. Whenever people were going through hard places, you were right there to be with them, to pray for them, and to offer a sacrifice for them. If they had a need, you met their need. Now here you are in trouble, and you are fainting."

This experience serves as a lesson. We can be strong and on the mountain that we sing about, but

there are going to be some valley experiences. Maybe at one time you were the one who prayed with people, encouraged them, put your arm around their shoulders, and said: "I'm praying for you; stay with the Lord. We are right with you. If there is anything I can do to help you, I will be glad to stand with you." Then the time came when you had to face something on your own.

Job's Pretentious Friends

Let us see what the second fellow had to say. In Job 8:1-8 we read: "Then answered Bildad the Shuhite, and said, How long wilt thou speak these things? and how long shall the words of thy mouth be like a strong wind? Doth God pervert judgment? or doth the Almighty pervert justice? If thy children have sinned against him, and he have cast them away for their transgression; If thou wouldest seek unto God betimes, and make thy supplication to the Almighty; If thou wert pure and upright; surely now he would awake for thee, and make the habitation of thy righteousness prosperous. Though thy beginning was small, yet thy latter end should greatly increase. For enquire, I pray thee, of the former age, and prepare thyself to the search of their fathers."

What do we hear here? Job's friend said, "If your children were in trouble, and you would seek the Lord for them, would not God come on the scene?" The Bible says that Job offered sacrifices every day for his children. The devil does not always fight you in your mind. He does not always come against you through the circumstances of life. There are times that the devil attacks you right through the words that others speak. Sometimes it can happen even though it is unintentional.

Someone may ask, "Were any of your children in church?" You might respond: "Well, I still have a couple who are out of the ark of safety. We are still praying for them every day." Then that person might say, "You

know, that is a shame. You raised them right all those years. You would think that God would honor your prayers and honor your life, and they would be saved and in church with you." Sometimes that kind of talk can just beat you down; that is not uplifting. Again, the fellow talking to Job said in verses 5-6: "If thou wouldest seek unto God betimes [or as many times as it takes], and make thy supplication to the Almighty; If thou wert pure and upright; surely now he would awake for thee, and make the habitation of thy righteousness prosperous." Here was something else for Job to deal with on top of what he was already dealing with. Somebody who should have comforted him used words that were discomfoting.

Let us go on to Job's third friend. By this time, I am beginning to doubt their friendship. As the saying goes, "With friends like that who needs enemies?" Job 11:1-6 states: "Then answered Zophar the Naamathite, and said, Should not the multitude of words be answered [you will have to read the whole Book to see what Job had to say in between what these friends were talking to him about]? and should a man full of talk be justified? Should thy lies make men hold their peace? and when thou mockest, shall no man make thee ashamed? For thou hast said, My doctrine is pure, and I am clean in thine eyes. But oh that God would speak, and open his lips against thee; And that he would shew thee the secrets of wisdom, that they are double to that which is! Know therefore that God exacteth of thee less than thine iniquity deserveth."

In other words, his friend was saying: "You are not getting nearly what you deserve. God ought to be punishing you worse than what you are already being punished, because you have been sinning, and you have been telling lies. God is upset with you. What else do you expect?"

Verses 7-8 continue: "Canst thou by searching find out God? canst

thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know?"

This fellow was laying it on Job. Sometimes the devil works just this way. When you are already down and out, here comes someone to lay something a little heavier on you. How are you going to handle it? What are you going to do about it? Job kept his integrity with God. Job 1:22 tells us, "In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly."

Job's Response to His "Friends"

I like what Job had to say in Job, Chapter 13. It is a wonderful revelation to me. In verses 1-4 he said: "Lo, mine eye hath seen all this, mine ear hath heard and understood it. [They were not getting anything past Job. Maybe they thought they were being a little discrete, but Job understood it all.] What ye know, the same do I know also: I am not inferior unto you. [Job was not letting them brow beat him or talk down to him. He said, 'The same things you know about God and about truth, I know and understand.'] Surely I would speak to the Almighty, and I desire to reason with God. But ye are forgers of lies, ye are all physicians of no value."

They were not doctors that had come to fix the disease that had been put upon Job's body. They should have been physicians who came to put salve on the wounds.

In Job 16:2-3 Job picked up from this thought and went on to say: "I have heard many such things: miserable comforters are ye all. [Job put them in their place. Sometimes we need to put the devil in his place. Sometimes he comes around to harass us and to give us a hard time. We need to rebuke him in Jesus' name. We read the Scripture in James 4:7b: 'Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.' It does not say he *might* or he *may* after a while. No, he *will* flee from you.] Shall vain words have an end? or what emboldeneth thee that thou an-

swerest?" These fellows were very bold. The devil is very bold. He does not have what we call tact. He does not come around at an opportune time and say fitting words. He finds the worst time of all to come and pay you a visit. Let us not forget that he is our enemy; he is our adversary. He is there to beat you down, not to lift you up. Lifting up comes through the Lord. He said, "I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness" (Isaiah 40:10). God will lift us up, not the devil.

Job said, "Shall vain words have an end? or what emboldeneth thee that thou answerest?" His friends would not have talked to him this way if he still had all his possessions and his health. They took advantage of him when he was in his worst situation of life. That is exactly the way the devil works. When you are at your lowest, the devil will take advantage of you.

I talked to my father-in-law when I was going through some of my surgeries and health problems. I told him I was going through such a hard place physically that I thought the devil would just leave me alone, but he did not. He was still there to tempt, to entice, and to discourage me. He did not quit.

Sometimes we think that nothing more can go wrong. Well, let me tell you, things can get worse. Just when you think you have hit rock bottom, somebody will toss you a shovel. You can get lower. My wife bought me a shirt that says, "Yesterday I hit rock bottom; today I started to dig." Sometimes that is the way it feels. You may wonder, "How can anything else go wrong?" and then something else does.

Job spoke in Job 16:4, "I also could speak as ye do." He was saying that he could do the same thing to them when they were in bad shape. Whenever things are going terrible for you and it looks as if God has deserted you, you begin to think that you had to have done something wrong for all these things to go bad. Believe it or not, those ideas still hang around. There are

still people who think that the only reason people go through bad times is because they have done something wrong, and God is punishing them. They think: "They must have sinned. God would not do this to one whom He loves." The idea is still around today. Job said, "I also could speak as ye do: if your soul were in my soul's stead, I could heap up words against you, and shake mine head at you."

God's Faithfulness to Job

In Job 16:5-6 Job said: "But I would strengthen you with my mouth, and the moving of my lips should assuage your grief. Though I speak, my grief is not assuaged: and though I forbear, what am I eased?" Job was telling them that they were miserable comforters. In essence, he said: "Though I speak, my grief is not assuaged; and though I forbear, what am I eased? If you were in my stead, my words would be comforting words. I would have assuaged your grief. I would come to you and let you know that I am sorry that you were going through trials and ask what I could do to help. My words would be right there to encourage you."

God works to assuage your grief. There might be sorrow for a while, but the Bible says that joy comes in the morning. God will come and assuage your grief. What does He do? He comes with His arms of love, puts them around you, and lets you know, "I care." What did God do for Job? The time came when He healed Job; He made his body whole again. Moreover, He restored everything that Job had lost, twice over. Then God told those miserable comforters to go visit Job.

God told them, in so many words, "I am not going to accept one of your prayers until you go to Job and have him offer a sacrifice for you." Job did what he said he would do if he was in their stead; he proved it. The sincerity of Job's love for his friends showed itself. He offered sacrifices for them so that

they would be accepted before God.

What was God doing through Job's life? He was proving Job. God was using Job as a living witness and a testimony before the world. When we read the story, we gain encouragement from it. Why? Because God was faithful. That is the way God still works today. All promises are yea and amen to those who are in Christ Jesus. Praise God!

You can win the battle over the devil. Do not let the devil get you down. He will work on you as hard as he can. When you are at your lowest, he will come along and hit you again. He does not care for your soul, but God does. The Bible says the righteous man may fall six times, yea seven, yet the Lord will raise him up. The devil could not care less about your soul when you are down and out, but God will be there to pick you up. The Lord is uplifting.

God is faithful. He has proved himself to me over and over. God has answered every one of my prayers. It was not always what I wanted, but He always answers my prayers. I was in the hospital waiting on the Lord to move, and the saints were praying that God would heal me so that I would not have to go through another surgery. Then sure enough, I would have to go through surgery again. You may say, "Well, God did not answer your prayer." He surely did; He said no! No is still an answer. I learned that when I was growing up. I was told no more than I was told yes. I think it was because of what I was asking for. Sometimes we ask the Lord for things that are not in the divine will of God. God knows when our request would not be best for us or that He can get good out of the problem that we are going through. So what does God do? He answers no.

The devil is a liar. God is still the One who reigns omnipotent; He is all powerful. No one is bigger than God is. In essence, He said: "I am God, and I am God all by Myself. I do not need any help to be God." I thank God for that! Is the devil try-

ing to beat you down? The Bible says he is an accuser of the brethren. He will come around and accuse you, saying, "There is a reason that God is not answering your prayers. It is because you have done something wrong." I always challenge the devil when that accusation comes. I say: "When did I do wrong? Prove it." Then I go to God and say, "Lord, You search my life. If something is wrong, I want to fix it right now, because I do not want to backslide. I do not want to be a hypocrite, and I do not want to be deceived. If there is something wrong, show me, and

I will make it right." You can put the devil on the spot. You can demand that he proves it to you. He cannot because he is a liar, and the father of them. If the devil is giving you a rough time and you are discouraged, you can start praising God. If there is something hindering you from praising the Lord, you need to humble yourself and ask God to remove it. Let God have His way in your life. God can defeat anything in your life that is giving you a problem. Nothing is too big for Him.

(Compact Disc TR-1215M)

BUTTON UP YOUR LIPS

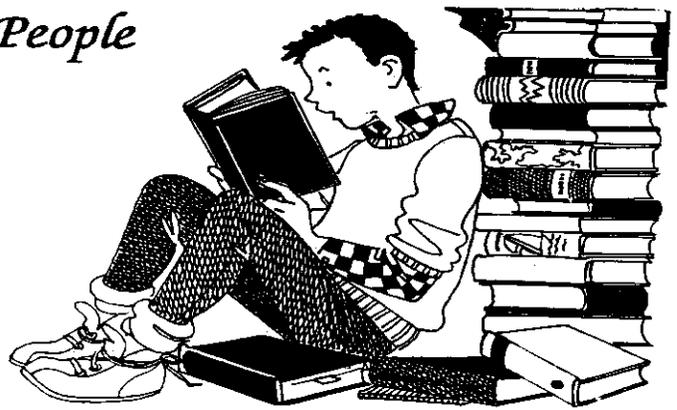
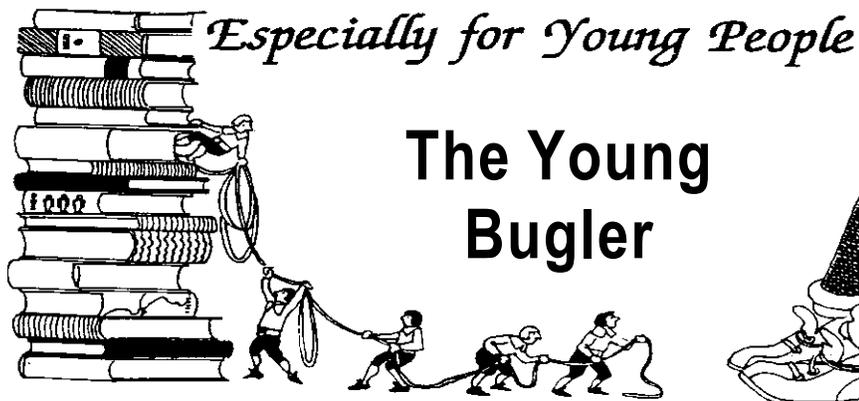
If you heard a bit of gossip,
Whether false or whether true,
Be it of a friend, or stranger,
Let me tell you what to do.
Button up your lips securely,
Lest the tale you should repeat,
And bring sorrow unto someone
Whose life is now not too sweet.

If you know of one who yielded
To temptation long ago,
But whose life has since been blameless,
Let me tell you what to do.
Button up your lips securely,
His the secret: God alone
Has the right to sit in judgment,
Treat it as to you unknown.

Sometimes life is filled with troubles,
Oft its burdens are severe,
Do not make it any harder
By a careless word or sneer.
Button up your lips securely

'Gainst the words that bring a tear,
But be swift with words of comfort,
Words of praise and words of cheer.

Author Unknown



"There was a time," said General Hardress, a grand old hero of the Indian Mutiny, to a friend, "when there was neither love nor obedience (toward God) in me, till, by God's mercy, my frozen heart was melted and warmed into life by a child.

"It was during my Indian service—stirring times too—ripe with mutiny and murder.

"At that time I had in my regiment a little bugler. I had often noticed him as being too delicate for the life he had to lead; but he was born in the regiment, and we were bound to make the best of him. His father, as brave a man as ever lived, had been killed in action, and his mother had just drooped and died six months later.

"She had brought up the boy strictly according to her light. But as he liked better going to prayer meetings with her than joining in the horse play of the other boys, he was not popular and suffered from many a coarse taunt and mocking word in consequence.

"After his mother died, his life was made a misery by the scoffing sneers and ribald jokes of the men whose target he was.

"About two years later, when Willie Holt was fourteen years old, the regiment was camping some miles away for rifle practice. I had intended leaving the lad behind, thinking him too delicate for such work (the ground was swampy and unhealthy), but my sergeant-major begged hard to 'take him along.'

"There is mischief in the air,

Colonel,' he said, 'and rough as they treat the lad—and they do lead him a life—his pluck and his patience tells on 'em, for the boy is a saint, sir, he is indeed.'

"I don't believe in saints and their influence,' I answered shortly, 'but let him go.'

"I had a rough lot of recruits just then, and before we had been out a fortnight, several acts of disobedience had been brought to my notice—those were dangerous times—and I had determined to make an example of the very next offence by having the culprit flogged.

"One morning it was reported to me that during the night the targets had been thrown down and otherwise damaged; and the usual practice could not take place. This was serious, indeed; and on investigation the rascally act was traced to a man or men in the same tent with Willie Holt, two of them being the worst characters in the regiment. The whole lot were instantly put under arrest to be tried by court-martial when evidence was produced to prove that one or more of the prisoners were guilty of the crime. In vain were they appealed to to produce the men, and at last I spoke:

"We have all heard the evidence that proves the perpetrator of last night's wicked act to be one of the men before us.' Then, turning to the prisoners, I added, 'If any one of you who slept in No. 4 tent last night will come forward and take his punishment like a man, the rest will get

off free; but if not, there remains no alternative but to punish you all—each man in turn to receive ten strokes of the lash.'

"For the space of a couple of minutes dead silence followed; then from the midst of the prisoners, where his slight form had been completely hidden, Willie Holt came forward.

"He advanced to within a few feet from where I sat. His face was very pale, a fixed look of purpose stamped on every line of it, and his steadfast shining eye met mine clear and full.

"Colonel,' he said, 'you have passed your word that if any one of those who slept in No. 4 tent last night comes forward to take his punishment, the rest shall get off scot-free. I am ready, sir; and please, may I take it now?'

"For a moment I was speechless, so utterly was I taken by surprise, then in a fury of anger and disgust turned upon the prisoners.

"Is there no man among you worthy of the name? Are you all cowards enough to let this lad suffer for your sins? For that he is innocent you know as well as I.' But sullen and silent they stood with never a word.

"Then I turned to the boy, whose patient, pleading eyes were fixed on my face, and never in all my life have I found myself so painfully situated. I knew my word must stand, and the lad knew it too, as he repeated once more, 'I am ready, sir.' Sick at heart I gave the order,

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Luke 15:11 And he said, A certain man had two sons:

12 And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living.

13 And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.

14 And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want.

15 And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.

16 And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him.

17 And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!

18 I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have

sinned against heaven, and before thee,

19 And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.

20 And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.

21 And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.

22 But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet:

23 And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry:

24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.

25 Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing.

26 And he called one of the

servants, and asked what these things meant.

27 And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound.

28 And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him.

29 And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends:

30 But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf.

31 And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine.

32 It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.

The Story of the Loving Father



Brother Larry Dishman

Remembering Our Fathers

As we celebrate Father's Day this month, I would like for us to remember our Heavenly Father,

because He is worthy of all the praise. He is worthy of all the glory that we can give Him. Our Heavenly Father is the absolute best Father there could ever be. He truly is a

father that every individual in the world can trust. Not all fathers are good fathers or can be looked to as godly examples.

I remember as a young preacher,

maybe not understanding these things, I preached a Father's Day message and talked about fathers and how they are examples. A young man had a strange look on his face all through the service. After the service, he made this statement to me, but not in a cruel way: "You know, that message didn't help me at all, because I don't know what you're talking about when you speak of the good relationship that a father and a son have. I never had that." Some children have never had a good relationship with their father. Some have no idea who their fathers are, and others do not know their own mothers. A good father is one of the most unsung, unpraised, unnoticed, unappreciated heroes in all humanity.

One time a little boy was asked to define Father's Day, and he said, "Well, it is just like Mother's Day, you just do not spend as much money on the present." They say the greatest number of long distant phone calls is made on Mother's Day, but the largest number of collect calls is made on Father's Day.

I once read that the average child, when he is four years old, says, "My daddy can do anything." When he is seven, he says, "My dad knows a lot, a whole lot," but when he turns eight, he says, "My father does not quite know everything." When he is twelve, he says, "Well, naturally father does not know everything." When he is fourteen, he says, "Father is hopelessly old-fashioned." When he is twenty-one, he says: "Oh! That man is out of date. What do you expect?" When he is twenty-five years old, he says, "He knows a little about it, but not much."

When he is thirty years old, he says, "I must find out what Dad thinks about it." When he is thirty-five years old, he says, "A little patience; let's get Dad's meaning first." When he is fifty years old, he says, "What would Dad have thought about it?" When he is sixty years old, he says, "My dad literally knew everything." When he is sixty-five

years old, he says, "I wish I could talk it over with Dad one more time." I am not sixty-five years old yet, but I have thought many times that I wish I could talk to my dad again. I heard Brother Emerson Wilson say one time what he would give just to be able to sit down and talk to his father for a little while.

The Model Father

We are a society that is searching for a model father. Of all the fathers we find mentioned in the Bible, the father of the prodigal son is spoken of more than all the other fathers combined. We do not know what his name was. We do not even know what his sons' names were. We know very little about this man other than the fact that he was one that Jesus chose to illustrate to us the relationship of a child of God to the Heavenly Father. He was the father of two sons, and one is called the prodigal son. As many times as I have heard this text preached and as many times as I have read it, I was not sure of the meaning of the word *prodigal*. Webster's Dictionary says it means "recklessly extravagant," or "characterized by wasteful expenditure." Often we are given the idea that there was one good son and one bad son, but that is not the way the parable goes. Both boys had some serious problems, and their father dealt with each one individually.

In this message I am going to focus more on the father rather than the sons. It is because of what this father was that his sons became what they were. This aspect of the grace of God probably receives the finest expression in the parable of the prodigal son. Some people have called this the greatest short story in the world. It seems to be a very simple story, but it is complex. It has a number of layers of meaning. It pays to return once again to draw meaning from this chapter in Luke.

I will not attempt to exhaust its meaning in this message, but I would like to point out a few important things that we find in this

chapter. First of all, it is probably misnamed "The Prodigal Son" because there are three important characters in this story: the father and two very different sons. The story has three parts: the story of the renegade son, the return of that son, and the reaction of the elder son. In all three sections, the father plays the crucial role, so this story might be better named: "The Story of the Loving Father."

The Younger Son

The character who began the action was the younger son. He was a rebellious son, a real wretch, and he asked for his share of the inheritance. In ancient culture, a very old man might divide his estate between his sons if he wanted to retire. Otherwise, the sons would receive their inheritance upon the death of their father. So the younger son demanded his inheritance while the father was still living. It was actually a sign of tremendous disrespect; in effect, he was wishing his father dead. Remarkably, the father did not argue with his son. He simply gave his son his portion. Maybe he felt that his son needed to learn something by experience, and this experience cost this young man almost everything.

Someone once said that experience is the best teacher, but I say no, because experience will cost you too much for tuition. One of the best things to do is to learn from other people's mistakes. We could look at the Word of God and find that many people made mistakes. One reason God allowed those things to be in the Word of God is so that you can learn from those mistakes. We can look around us and see lots of folks who have messed up their lives, and we ought to be able to look at them and say, "I do not want to go down that path." When you see someone make a wreck of his life, you ought to stop for a moment and think: "What happened to him? How did he arrive there?" Many people are heading down the

same road.

The younger son went off to a distant land and soon wasted everything. He wasted his substance with riotous living. Then the man had to hire himself out to the most demeaning job possible for a Jew, and in those days that was feeding the pigs. When he reached absolute bottom, when he actually longed to eat the pigs' feed, he finally came to his senses. He recognized that he had been a fool. He had wasted his inheritance, and he had ruined his relationship with his father. So he prepared a little speech to give to his father, begging his father for forgiveness and asking only to be as a hired servant.

A hired servant might have actually been considered to be a lower position than a slave, because a slave could be considered nearly a family member. All his needs would be met year round. A hired man, on the other hand, worked from day to day. If hard times struck, he would be out on his own, but that was not so with a slave. He still had a place to live. The prodigal son aimed to be taken back at the lowest possible position in his father's household.

The Forgiving Father

The story then shifts to the father. He sees his son a long way off, so he forgets his own dignity and runs to meet his son. Older men in that society did not run. Then he threw his arms around him and kissed him. Both of these were signs of his total acceptance. The prodigal son then gave his rehearsed speech of repentance. The father allowed him to give the apology, but he did not allow him to go on and ask to be as a hired servant.

The father interrupted the son to show him that he had been fully accepted. He called for a robe to be put on him. Then he called for the ring to be put on his hand, and he called for new shoes to be put on his feet. All these are symbols that he was being accepted back, not as a hired servant but as a son. Next, the

father called for a feast and killed the fatted calf. This father was truly happy and overjoyed, so he threw a lavish party so there could be music and dancing for this son who had been dead, but he was alive again.

Certainly, the Heavenly Father longs for every wayward child to come home. If you are a wayward son or daughter, it is God's will to save you; it is God's will that you come home. I believe Jesus told the story to make several points, but surely one of them was to say something about the nature of God. Some people ask the question, "What is God like?" I believe the simplest and the clearest answer is given in the story of the prodigal son, or better, the story of the loving father.

Do you want to know what God is like? Just read Luke, Chapter 15, beginning at verse 11, and you will see what God is like. You will find that God is love, and He rejoices when a sinner repents and turns to Him. The word *repent* has within it the idea of turning or returning. In this case, returning home to reestablish a relationship with his father.

Genuine Repentance

If someone were to ask the question, "What must I do to be saved?" many people would say, "Well, just be good." However, this is not what Jesus said in this story. His answer was not just to be good, but to cry for help. If you are lost without God, it is not just being good that you need to do. What you need to do is what the prodigal son did. Do you know what he did? He cried for help. I remember when I cried for help. I am glad that He heard my prayer.

People often feel that they must first clean up their act and then go to church, but Jesus reversed this. He is saying that you should first come home, and then reestablish or establish your relationship with the Heavenly Father. Friend, when that really happens, everything else will follow. Now, you need to be careful.

I am not talking about cheap grace. A lot of people in the religious world are preaching cheap grace, the idea that there is acceptance without repentance or that there are no standards on which God insists.

You must understand the way this young man came home. He did not come home with his arm around a harlot, staggering down the road. He did not come home with a cup of wine, wanting to be accepted in his sins. He left the harlot and the wine back in the far country. He meant business. That is still what it takes to gain a real experience with God. He came back that way, and the father accepted him. Friend, Jesus did not say that what the prodigal son had done did not matter or had no consequences.

The father clearly accepted the son back, giving him all the honors of a son, but he did not give the son another third of the estate. That was gone; the son wasted that. How do we know? The father told the elder son, "All that I have is yours." God is just, but do not ever forget that sin has consequences. If you are living in sin, your father may not be able to stop you from doing the things that you are doing, and your mother may not be able to stop you from doing the things that you are doing; but sin has consequences. You will reap for living in sin. You will not get by with sin.

Sin costs more than you are going to want to pay. There are consequences for living in sin. Sin will take you further than you want to go. When the prodigal son returned, the father accepted him back with joy and without reservations. I am glad that God did not hold any grudges against me when I came back. This father did not hold the prodigal's sin over his head. He fully and completely forgave him. Do you know what that is? That is the grace of God.

A Caring Father Is Approachable

Some people often have difficulty distinguishing between the

sin and the sinner. They have difficulty accepting at the same time God's free grace to sinners and His high demand for faithfulness. On one hand we are told not to judge others, and on the other we are told to hold one another accountable in love. Some Christians can be like the elder son. They can become hypocrites by not accepting sinners when they come to God. By denying standards and refusing to be accountable, they can also do wrong. We have a loving and gracious Father who calls us to be loving and gracious too.

I noticed that this father was approachable. Read Luke 15:11-18. The family history is unknown, but it seems that perhaps the boys' mother had passed away, and the father was left alone to rear those two sons. There is also an indication that they were a wealthy family, because of the servants and the herds, and the younger son had dreams. He wanted to travel to see things that he had never seen before; he wanted to go to a far country, and he dreamed of a great task. However, he found a great temptation. He dreamed of adventure, but instead he found agony. He dreamed of prestige, but he found poverty. He dreamed of romance, but he wound up in rags. He dreamed of happiness, but he found himself in the hogpen. It appears that the older son had already assumed the management of the farm and the business. Some would have slipped away without talking with the father. Still others might have gotten someone else to intercede on their behalf. This father was approachable to his sons.

Fathers need to be approachable. The reason some sons will not go to their father is that their father will not hear them out. Before they can even say anything, they say: "I told you not to do it. If you had listened to me . . ." If your sons do not talk to you, friend, they are going to talk to somebody. Can your children come to you about anything? This is part of being a good father and a good

mother. Can your children talk to you about anything? Have you made yourself available to your sons and your daughters?

Our Heavenly Father is very approachable to those who need Him. No matter where you are, no matter what you have done, no matter where you have been, you can come to God. If you come with the right spirit, He will be just like this father in our Scripture text. He is going to receive you with open arms. I like the part of the story where the son could not even finish his rehearsed confession. You see, your Heavenly Father already knows your heart. He knows what your heart is saying. Thank God for the kiss of forgiveness. When you have been lost out in sin, thank God for the Father's love. He wants the lost to come to Him, He wants to save the lost. God loves you. He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. He desired it so much that He was willing to give His only Son to die on Calvary so that men might come to Him and be saved.

A Loving and Compassionate Father

Something else I noticed in the story was a spiritual father. Luke 15:18 says, "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee." When the younger son thought about what he had done, he realized that he had sinned. That means his dad had taught him right. Proverbs 22:6 states, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." The responsibility for child rearing rests upon the shoulders of the parents, not the public schools or the church. However, you should not let the devil beat you down. There are no guarantees. Your children have the freedom to choose the way they take in life. If your children are serving God, then you need to thank God for that and pray for them that they

will stay true and faithful. You need to be an encouragement to them. If they are not walking with the Lord, you ought to pray for them and do your best to influence them for Jesus Christ.

The son associated Heaven with his father. He could not be reminded of God without remembering his father. What an impact this father had on this son! He would not have left that far country and put forth all that effort if he thought it would not have done any good. He knew when he arrived home and made a confession that his father was going to receive him with open arms. Fathers, I wonder sometimes, are we making the proper impressions on our children? Have your children been taught how to pray by listening to you? Have they been taught how to love God's Word by your example? Have they been taught the importance of going to church by your example?

The prodigal son's father was affectionate. Luke 15:20 reads, "And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him." Real men are not afraid to show their emotions. Too many men think that it is not manly to weep, but Jesus wept often. There is nothing wrong with showing your emotions. I hope that my sons and my daughters are never afraid to tell me that they love me. I hope they are never ashamed to hear me tell them that I love them.

Even though the prodigal son's actions were impulsive, the father did not stand in the way. The father respected his son's independence enough to let him choose his own way. There comes a time when a father has to start respecting his children's decisions, and it is probably the hardest time in a father's life. It does not mean that he agrees with them, but he must realize and understand, "Now all I can do is pray." The father loved his son in spite of his loss, and God loves you even when you choose to reject Him.

When you choose to ignore Him, He still loves you.

Everything the son had had been given to him by his father. The son could not have left had it not been for the provisions of his father. Our lives, our families, and our health are given to us by God. Everything we have has been given to us by God. The father took nothing back in spite of the son's selfish behavior. God even blesses those who reject Him. God divides the riches of His kingdom among us. The circumstances of life bring about a need for a father.

When the son's life was at its lowest point, his need for his father was the greatest. Your need for God is most apparent at the low point in your life. The son was left with nothing but the memory of his father's generosity. God's grace and provisions are never far from us. The father made provision for his servants. God provides for those who faithfully serve Him. There is something about a child that needs and yearns for the love of his father. A broken sinner realizes his need for the love of the Creator. The son could not make it on his own. The ways of the son's life led him to ruin, but the father eagerly sought the return of his son. The father ran to his son when he saw him at a distance. God rushes to meet you where you are when you come with true sorrow and repentance. The father had compassion.

How about your life as a father? Do you have the compassion that a father needs? The father showed love in spite of his son's failures. The son was repentant; he manifested a true, heartfelt repentance. The father wiped the slate clean, thank God! That is a wonderful feeling when you are under guilt and under condemnation to have it all wiped clean and start over. Even though the son had squandered all that the father gave him, the father still gave him the very best. The redemption of the son was a time of joyous celebration. The angels rejoice for those who were lost

when they are found. The prodigal son was restored and placed back in a position of honor. Not even the accuser can waiver the Father's love. God's love is stronger than all the troubles you have. God always holds on to us even when we let go. God's love never fades.

We see this love in Luke 15:20, which says, "And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him." The father had been looking for his son to return, and when he saw him he ran, he hugged him, and he kissed him. What a beautiful picture! God longs for the sinner to come home, and He rejoices when he gets right with Him. When someone has been straying and realizes that he has drifted, God rejoices when he comes back.

Do you need to come to God? Have you been wasting your life in that far country of sin? If you have, God wants you to come to yourself like the prodigal son and come home. This father portrays the love and the compassion of the Heavenly Father. This father did not care how long his son had been away; he had come home. He did not care about the smell of the swine; he was home. He was not concerned about the rags, because his son was home.

What a challenge! Do you need to come home to God today? If you have never been saved, why not come home and accept God's love? If you have drifted away from God, whatever the reason, why not come home today? God is waiting to receive you if you will come. Maybe you feel that you have been a failure as a father. I have felt that way before. Perhaps you feel that you need help from God. Your Heavenly Father is ready to meet your need.

(Compact Disc TR-1174)

NO TIME FOR GOD

*No time for God?
What fools we are to clutter up
Our lives with common things
And leave without heart's gate
The Lord of life and life itself—
Our God.*

*No time for God?
As soon to say no time
To eat or sleep or love or die.
Take time for God
Or you shall dwarf your soul,
And when the angel Death
Comes knocking at your door,
A poor misshapen thing you'll be
To step into eternity.*

*No time for God?
Someday you'll lay aside
This mortal life and make your way
To worlds unknown,
And when you meet Him face to face,
Will He—should He
Have time for you?*

Author Unknown

Climbing on the Bumps

Holiness is the goal of life. So, when God molds man, He puts weight on him, gives him burdens to lift, crosses to carry, hardships to endure, and tribulations over which to triumph. All is a profound mystery, to be sure.

A little boy wanted to know why vitamins are always put into spinach and never into ice cream. Our sweetest songs come out of the saddest thoughts and experiences of life. The Negro spirituals are the sad songs of an enslaved race, and they are the loveliest in America. The historian, Arnold Toynbee, traced it through history in his monumental study, in a chapter entitled "The Stimulus of Blows." He shows how hardy civilization had come to birth in response to challenge. "The greater the challenge, the greater the stimulus."

Without weights even civilization cannot keep going. A little boy was leading his sister up a mountain path. "Why," she complained, "it's not a path at all; it's all rocks and bumps."

"Sure," he replied, "the bumps are what you climb on."

Selected

2 Kings 4:1 Now there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets unto Elisha, saying, Thy servant my husband is dead; and thou knowest that thy servant did fear the LORD: and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen.

2 And Elisha said unto her, What shall I do for thee? tell me, what hast thou in the house? And she said, Thine handmaid hath not any thing in the house, save a pot of oil.

3 Then he said, Go, borrow thee vessels abroad of all thy neighbours, even empty vessels; borrow not a few.

4 And when thou art come in, thou shalt shut the door upon thee and upon thy sons, and shalt pour out into all those vessels, and thou shalt set aside that which is full.

5 So she went from him, and shut the door upon her and upon her sons, who brought the vessels to her; and she poured out.

6 And it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said unto her son, Bring me yet a vessel. And he said unto her, There is not a vessel more. And the oil stayed.

7 Then she came and told the man of God. And he said, Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy children of the rest [or with what is left over].

The Power of a Filled Vessel



Brother Vernon Plyler

Becoming a Usable Vessel

This is one of the most beautiful stories in the Scriptures. It shows the power of God. In verse 1 the widow woman said, "Thou knowest that thy servant did fear the LORD." In verse

2 Elisha said to her, "What shall I do for thee? tell me, what hast thou in the house?" Those are some points that I want to focus on. I want you to consider the value of a full vessel versus the value of an empty vessel.

I thought about a glass of water.

If someone were to bring me a glass with nothing in it and say, "When you are thirsty, you may have a drink," the glass would be a vessel that could be used, but it will not be used, because it is empty. It cannot fulfill the purpose it is intended to

do because it is not filled. When it is filled, it becomes a usable vessel. My point is, there is power in a filled vessel.

We read in this story in our Scripture text that the woman was in debt. This was back when one could not file bankruptcy, and creditors took everything that a person had if he could not pay his debt. They were about to come and take the widow woman's sons and sell them as bondmen so that her debt could be paid. No doubt, she had heard about the Prophet Elisha and some of the great and wonderful things that he had done, so she went to him. Again, he asked her in verse 2 of our Scripture text, "What shall I do for thee? tell me, what hast thou in the house?"

If you are going to be a filled vessel working for the Lord, you must look at what you have to offer the Lord. Some people are never satisfied with what they can do for God. You need to consider what you have to give to God and work in that realm. You need to work where God places you. One old saying says, "Bloom where you are planted."

As I considered this story, I imagined the woman going from house to house. Elisha told her to borrow vessels from her neighbors. She was instructed to borrow many, not just a few, so she immediately began to borrow pots.

I think of those pots that she borrowed like a bus that is out of service. As a youth, I waited on a school bus to pick me up when school was in session, and it always stopped and picked me up. Suppose you were waiting out in the rain for a bus, and there was nowhere you could go to get out of the rain. Finally, after you were dripping wet, here comes the bus down the road. You would probably think: "Oh, wonderful! The bus is finally here!" It would be a horrible thing if you were standing out in the rain waiting on a bus and the bus that came just drove by without stopping because the placard read, "Out of

Service." Although it is a bus with seats in it, it would not have much worth as a vessel for you to get in out of the rain because it is not in service.

If you are not careful, as a Christian, you can be out of service. Some people still claim to be Christians who are trying to live for God, but they are out of service because they are not filled with the Spirit of God. Their vessels are filled with too many worldly things, such as the simple cares of life. The cares of life can beset you if you are not careful. Even pastors and ministers can get so caught up with helping others that, if they are not careful, they will let their own vessel get a little empty, especially as pastors get caught up in other people's problems. I hope that you will focus and fill your vessel with the Spirit of God in a new and a fresh way.

Reaching Out by Faith

Elisha told the widow woman to borrow many vessels of all her neighbors. God was about to do a great thing. She went out and began to borrow pots, and no doubt, that took her a long time. She and her sons probably had to carry them on their shoulders. It might have taken them days to gather up all those pots. I can just imagine that the word got around the community that she would be knocking on the neighbors' doors soon. No doubt, they whispered: "What is she doing with them? She told me, 'I do not know why I need all these pots, but a prophet told me to get them and take them to my house and shut the door.'"

When you reach out in faith toward God to see His power exemplified in your life, the world looks at you and says: "What in the world is wrong with that person? Why does he live as he does? Why does he trust a God that he cannot even see?" When the Prophet Elisha said, "What shall I do for thee? tell me, what hast thou in the house?" she said, "Thine handmaid hath not any

thing in the house, save a pot of oil."

In essence, Elisha told her: "Go and borrow pots from all your neighbors; do not get just a few, but get as many as you can. When you are finished, shut the door and pour oil into all those vessels." Finally, when she had filled the last vessel and asked her son for more, he said, "There is not a vessel more," and the oil stopped. Next, she went and told the man of God that she had done what he asked.

Elisha then instructed her to go and sell the oil and pay her debt. She had to act by faith and do exactly what Elisha said. Sometimes it may seem that we live in an age when people do not really want to hear what the man of God has to say. We live in a nominal religious world. It is absolutely astounding how much humanism is in the world around us, and it is trying to find its way into the Church of God. When your vessel starts to get a little empty, you will lose power with God, and you will start to rely on yourself. You will begin to rely on the systematic way in which things are done, and all the while, your pot will become emptier of the Spirit of God and the power of God, yet you will go right on living as though nothing has happened. Then when you really need God, you will find that you do not have any power with God because you are spiritually bankrupt.

The woman in our Scripture text did exactly what the man of God told her to do. One of the most frustrating things to a pastor is when someone comes and says: "I don't know what to do. Could you give me some advice?" The pastor gives advice, and that person does exactly the opposite. There is something really wrong with that picture. I am confident that when God calls a man to pastor people, He gives him spiritual insight. It comes from the power of God working in a man of God.

Sometimes people have called and said, "I want to talk to you about such and such." While I was waiting for them to arrive, the en-

emy of souls said, "Oh, that will be an easy one because you have dealt with that before," but the Lord quickly reminded me: "Remember, everyone is different. Every circumstance and every situation is different. This is not in your own strength. This is not in your own wisdom. You need Me." Sometimes as I walk to my office to meet with someone, I pray: "Lord, I need You today. I need You in a fresh and new way right now." The Lord comes through, because I give myself to Him to be used by Him. It is not in my own power or in my own might.

Wait on the Lord

God will work in your life if you wait on Him. If you get ahead of Him, He will just sit back and wait on you to come back to Him, whether you are newly saved or you have been saved for a long time. Some people think that because they are educated, they are ready to work for God, but it probably means they are not ready yet. You may think, "Well, I am Brother So-and-So's son or daughter, so I am ready to work for God." When you think it is because of a privilege that you have, you are probably not really ready to work for God yet. You may need to sit a little while and wait on God to work on you.

There is something about putting a blessing on the lives of others. In the Old Testament we can read about the blessings that the fathers put on the others. I believe there are people who have huge vessels to be used, but they are empty, so they cannot be used of God, yet they have so much potential.

There is power in a filled vessel. When the woman and her sons were gathered in the house, she filled one vessel after another, until her son said there were no more empty pots. That would be so wonderful if a man of God got up to preach and looked out at the audience and realized there were no empty vessels and they all were filled. What if you

came with your pot already filled up? What if you came with the power of God in your life? Instead of expecting your pastor to be your power, you need to get your power from Almighty God. Then you could bless your pastor on Sunday instead of being a burden to him.

After the woman and her sons got the vessels filled, I can imagine them trying to make their way through the house. Maybe they had to step over the pots to get to the front door, still having no clue what God was going to do. If you get your vessel filled, you still might not have a clue about how God is planning to use you. Some people act as if they do not even know what the Holy Spirit is.

When Christ was getting ready to leave His disciples, they were mournful. I want you to think about the amazing and wonderful things that Jesus had done. They got to witness those things with their own eyes. In essence, He told them: "Do not worry. I am going away, but I am going to send you a Comforter. He will be greater than I am. I can only be with you when I am with you, but He will be with you all the time, everywhere, every day, awake or asleep."

Some people do not live as though they have much of the Holy Spirit within. They do not act as though He is with them all the time. If you really want to get filled, you must turn your vessel upright. Some folks get so filled that they will start borrowing pots from other folks. They are so full of the power of God that they cannot contain it all. I do not want anyone else to borrow my vessel. I want to be a vessel that has the power of God working through it, to be used by Him instead of one that is out on the back porch full of cobwebs and critters, waiting for somebody else to come and use it, because God cannot use it.

The woman in our Scripture lesson went back to the prophet where she knew she could get help for her situation. The big lesson here is to go back to where you know you

can get help. When it looks as if things are back on the road instead of down in the ditch, you need to make sure that you go back where your help came from and say, "Ok, Lord, what now? I have all this commodity, so what would You like me to do with it?" At that point, the woman did not know what the Prophet Elisha was going to tell her to do. The pots and the oil still had no real value to her. Elisha told her to go and sell the oil and pay her debts and live on the rest. The Bible does not say whether it lasted her until she died. The indication is that whether it was a famine, the lack of a job, or whatever, the rest was for their use until the situation had passed.

Perseverance and Determination

How did the widow woman get the filled vessels to the market? I believe that she had to put some work into it. When you want to be used of God, there is going to be some work involved in it. You cannot just sit on a church pew and do absolutely nothing and expect God to use you. There are hospitals and nursing homes where people need visitation, yet people say: "Well, I don't know what I can do for God. There is nothing for me to do." What if God would have you go to the local hospital and sit with someone, just to be there for someone? James 1:27 says, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." You might get your vessel filled if you go visit someone. Many times I have gone to visit to help fill their vessel, but I came out with mine filled. I came out rejoicing. You can get hold of God and say, "Lord, You have filled me, now what do You want me to do with this power that You have given me?"

Elijah was told to go and find Elisha, and he did. Elisha went with Elijah. When the time was near for Elijah's departure, Elijah told Elisha,

"You stay behind."

"Oh, no. If I am going to be your successor, I need to stay with you to see what is going on."

"Stay behind," Elijah told him a second time, but Elisha insisted on staying with Elijah.

One of the greatest miracles in that story was when Elijah walked up to the river and smote the water with the mantel, and the water parted. Elisha faithfully went across with him, and when Elijah was carried up to Heaven, what did Elisha do? He used exactly what was left behind for him. He walked over to the river and said, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" Then he took the same mantel that the Prophet Elijah used and smote the water, and it parted. He walked across just as Elijah had earlier. Every Christian should want to be filled with the Spirit of God, to be a full vessel for the Lord. When you get filled, you should be willing to step out on faith a little. Are you willing to step out into the water a little, first to your ankles, and then up to your knees? You might have to swim to see what God has for you.

Empty vessels have some value because as long as they are still a vessel, they can be filled. I believe that the empty vessels that the widow woman collected were of great significance, because without them she had nothing to pour the oil into. She had only one pot, and there was already some oil in it. To pay off the debt and to have some left required many pots, but to get the value out of the vessels, they needed to be filled.

The commodity of that day was oil. It is interesting that the Holy Spirit is signified by oil. Since Christ left, the commodity is the Holy Spirit. Why is it that some people have no concept that the Holy Spirit is with them, watching everything they do every minute of every day? Church services are great opportunities to come with your vessel turned up. The little children sing: "My cup is full and running over. Since the Lord saved me, I'm as happy as can

be. My cup is full and running over." Do you really go to the house of God with your vessel turned up, expecting it to run over?

Humanistic Values

The humanistic age in which we live is trying to work its way right into the Church of God. You should not speak against the pastor and leaders of the church and then expect to get your vessel filled with the Spirit of God. You are going to have to empty yourself before God so that He can fill you.

Going back to our Scripture lesson, suddenly those spare, empty vessels held enough value to help work a miracle. Just a while before that, those pots were sitting in people's houses, probably dirty from the lack of use.

Sometimes there is no more room for God in people's lives because their vessels are half full of self. A part of growing spiritually is emptying yourself out so that God can fill you with His Holy Spirit. You have no idea what God can do through you if you will get self out of the way. You need to turn your vessel upright and let God fill it with His ideas, His thoughts, and His mechanisms. You may say, "I do not know that God could ever work a miracle through me." If you are looking for a miracle through your touching somebody and that person being miraculously healed, you might be looking in the wrong place. However, when you bless one of His, Jesus said in Matthew 25:40, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

When you get your vessel filled, it is amazing what God can do. Those vessels in our Scripture lesson had enough value to free a burdened one from debt and to keep her sons from becoming slaves. She was able to keep the family united instead of being separated. We live in a world where families are dividing all the time, and not just through divorce. They are dividing due to all

kinds of issues. What if God would use you to help keep a family together? What if you got filled with the Holy Spirit and it kept your own family together?

Some people wonder why their families are on the rocks. Well, it is sometimes because they do not have enough of God in their lives. The first marriage divorce rate in this country is at approximately 50 percent. The interesting fact about this is, when you poll worldly people, it is 50 percent, and when you poll evangelical church people, it is also 50 percent. There is something wrong with this picture. If a husband and a wife are full of the Spirit of God, divorce or division will never enter the scene. You must keep the family united.

Serving the Lord With Gladness

I want to talk about the vessels. I talked about the prophet, the widow, her sons, and the commodity. Imagine that these vessels were in an animated world and they could talk. If those pots could talk and tell their story, they would tell you of the joy that each one brought. They were empty and useless. They were not being used for anything, but somebody came along and took them, cleaned them up, and filled them.

If those vessels were animated, they could see the widow woman as the oil was poured and they were filled with oil. Soon she and her sons started to do a little calculating and realized they could get out of debt. Those pots would tell you of the joy that each one felt when the contents were emptied at the merchant's place and of their thrill of being used in such a manner. They saw the captives freed because of their usefulness.

Today it is time to grow up. Whatever your issue is, whatever your situation is, it is time to move on for God. Some people go to the house of God and just sit and wait on someone else to make something happen. They are worried about

what someone will think. Friend, if you want to clap your hands, clap them. The Psalmist David said in Psalm 47:1, "O clap your hands, all ye people; shout unto God with the voice of triumph." He said in Psalm 5:11, "But let all those that put their trust in thee rejoice: let them ever shout for joy, because thou defendest them: let them also that love thy name be joyful in thee."

Psalm 100:2 reads, "Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing." Do not be afraid to wave your "flag" for the Lord. Do not be afraid to let tears run for the Lord. If you have to shout, then do it! Some children have never seen anyone shout or get happy except at a ball game. They know Mom and Dad are capable because they have seen them at ball games, but they have never seen them really get happy in church.

I realize that everybody is not of the temperament or of the personality to shout, but if you are, you should not quench the Spirit because of what others might think of you. Some of the best testimonies I have ever heard were spontaneous, when somebody just stood up and said, "I have to tell what God has done for me." If you are not careful, you can get caught up in formality. Those vessels did not have emotion, but you do. Do not act like an empty pot. If you take all your cares of life, your issues, your burdens, your likes, and your dislikes with you to the services, you cannot worship God with any emotion because of all the things that you brought with you.

Do you look back at a time when your vessel was used for God, when

He filled your vessel and it ran over with joy? Why is it not that way today? Do not blame others if something has changed. When you go to church, you should bless God with your worship. Do not sit back and take no part in the service, and then say, "That service was dry."

A Fresh Infilling From the Holy Spirit

From time to time, you need a fresh infilling of the Spirit of God. You do not get it all when you get saved. As I have walked this journey, I have needed fresh infillings from the Holy Spirit. We go through stages of life. Each stage of life that we enter is different from the last one, and we are going to need more grace for each stage of life. If you have the idea that you received everything you needed when you got saved, you are in for a big surprise, because you are going to run around very empty. You need a fresh infilling of the Holy Spirit of God.

Maybe your vessel is empty and dirty and you need to clean it up before God can even fill it. There is no power in an empty vessel. The power is in a filled vessel. Will you allow yourself to be used by God and filled by the Holy Spirit of God? You need to ask Him to fill you all the way so there is no room for self. If you are not careful, you will become carnal, or fleshly. Being fleshly is insisting on having your own way in life, or just doing your own thing.

We live in a world where many people feel that they must have at least two vehicles in the driveway.

Then they want all the latest electronic gadgets that their children feel they just have to have. If you are not careful, you could get so caught up in trying to have stuff that you will come to church empty from going six days at full speed. You will have nothing to offer that one who needs their debt paid or that one who is burdened with sin and taken captive by the evil one. You can be full and useful in God's kingdom.

Elisha asked the widow woman, "What shall I do for thee?" In other words, he was asking her, "What is your need?" I wonder what the answer would be if you ask yourself, "What is *my* need?" Maybe it is to be a little freer or to be a little less burdened down. Maybe God wants to use you, but you have too much stuff going on in your life.

God is a master at rearranging. I believe that God will use an honest heart. God might start with rearranging your finances a little. God knows what He is doing. If He has spoken to you, you ought to listen. You ought to hear what He has to say. If you will do that, your vessel will be filled. If you feel empty and you need a fresh infilling of the Holy Spirit, there is no better time to allow God to fill your vessel than today. There is no better time to pray: "Lord, fill me with Your Spirit afresh. I want what I used to have. I want that feeling, that joy, and that emotion that I used to have serving You." Your fresh infilling could be what changes the lives of your neighbors or loved ones.

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MOTHER AND FATHER

Most of the good things in this life come to us in twos and threes, dozens and hundreds—plenty of roses, stars, sunsets, rainbows, brothers and sisters, aunts and cousins, acquaintances and friends—but only one Mother and one Father in all this wide, wide world!

[Esp. for Young Peo.—contin. from p. 14] and he was led away for punishment.

"Bravely he stood with back bared as one—two—three—strokes descended. At the fourth a faint moan escaped his white lips; and ere the fifth fell, a hoarse cry burst from the group of prisoners who had been forced to witness the scene; and with one bound, Jim Sykes, the black sheep of the regiment, seized the whip as with choking, gasping utterance, he shouted:

"Stop it, Colonel; stop it, and tie me up instead. He didn't do it; I did; and with convulsed and anguished face, he flung his arms round the boy.

"Fainting and almost speechless, Willie lifted his eyes to the man's face and smiled—such a smile—'No, Jim,' he whispered, 'you are safe now. The Colonel's word will stand.' His head fell forward—he had fainted.

"The next day as I was making for the hospital tent where the boy lay, I met the doctor.

"How is the lad?" I asked.

"Sinking, Colonel,' he said quietly.

"What!" I said, horrified beyond words.

"Yes, the shock of yesterday was too much for his feeble strength. I have known for some months it was only a question of time,' he added. 'This affair has only hastened matters.' Then, gruffly he said, 'He is more fit for Heaven than earth,' and with a suspicious moisture in his kind old eyes, he stood aside while I passed on into the tent.

"A subdued murmur came from the further corner of it, and the sight that met my eyes I shall never forget.

"The dying lad lay propped up on the pillows, and half-kneeling, half-crouching at his side was Jim Sykes. The change in the boy's face startled me; it was deathly white, but his great eyes were shining with a wonderful light, strangely sweet. He was talking earnestly, but nei-

ther of them saw me.

"At that moment, the kneeling man lifted his head, and I saw the drops of sweat standing on his brow as he muttered brokenly—

"Why did ye do it, lad? Why did ye do it?"

"Because I wanted to take it for you, Jim,' Willie's weak voice answered tenderly. 'I thought if I did, it might help you to understand a little why Christ died for you.'

"Why Christ died for me?' the man repeated slowly.

"Yes, He died for you because He loved you as I do, Jim; only Christ loves you much more. I only suffered for one sin, but Christ took the punishment of all the sins you have ever committed. The punishment of all your sins was death, Jim, and Christ died for you.'

"Christ has nothing to do with such as me, lad. I'm one of the bad'uns; you ought to know that.'

"But He died to save bad ones—just them. He says, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners" (Luke 5:32). "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." 'Dear Jim,' the earnest voice pleaded patiently, 'shall the Lord have died in vain? Listen! He is calling you. He has poured out His precious life-blood for you. He is knocking at the door of your heart. Won't you let Him in? Oh! You must, and then we shall meet again.'

"The lad's voice failed him, but he laid his hand gently on the man's bowed head.

"A choking sob was the only answer, and for a few minutes, there was silence.

"Standing there in the shadow, I felt my own heart strangely stirred. I had heard such things once—long, long, ago. Thoughts of the mother I had dearly loved came back out of the dead past, and the words seemed a faint echo of her own.

"How long I stood there, I know not, but I was roused by a hoarse cry from the man, and then I saw

Willie had fallen back on his pillow fainting. I thought he was gone, but a few drops from a bottle on the table at his side revived him.

"He opened his eyes, but they were dim and sightless. 'Sing to me, Mother,' he whispered, "'The Gates of Pearl"—I am so tired.'

"In a flash the words came back to me. I had heard them often in that shadowy past, and I found myself repeating them softly to the dying boy.

"Though the day be ever so long
It ringeth at length to evensong.
And the weary worker goes to his
rest,
With words of peace and pardon
blest.

Though the path be ever so steep
And rough to walk on and hard to
keep,
It will lead when the weary road is
trod
To the Gates of Pearl—The City of
God.'

"As the last words fell from my lips, his eyes brightened and met mine gratefully.

"Thank you, Colonel,' he whispered. 'I shall soon be there.'

"His tone of glad confidence seemed too strange to me. I said involuntarily, 'Where?'

"With a smile he answered: "Why, in Heaven, Colonel! The roll-call has sounded for me. The gates are open; the price is paid.' Then softly, dreamily he repeated:

"Just as I am without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidst me come to
Thee,
O Lamb of God—I come.'

"Then once more he lifted his eyes to mine. 'You will help him, Sir?' he breathed, laying his hand feebly on the man still crouching at his side. 'You will show him the way to—the—Gates—of Pearl.'

"As each word fell haltingly, fainter and yet fainter came the breath from between his parted lips.

Suddenly a glorious light flashed into his dying eyes, and with a radiant, happy cry he flung out his arms as if in welcome.

"Mother!—O Mother!"

"His voice rang out, thrilling the heart of every man who heard it. Then gradually the weak arms dropped, the light faded from the shining eyes; and the brave spirit of the dear boy was with the Lord."

"And Jim?" asked his friend.

"Jim and I helped each other. I made him my orderly, and I saw a great deal of him after that. He was mortally wounded in a brush with the natives eighteen months later and died in my arms.

"I shall see the little lad, Colonel," he whispered, as I tried to staunch the wound. "Isn't it wonderful to think that his Savior is mine, too, and the Gates of Pearl are open for me?"

The General, too, has joined the little bugler, through whom he was brought to God, on the heavenly shore; but this true and thrilling story survives him, and by it he,

being dead, yet speaketh.

It speaks to you, dear unconverted reader, whoever you are, but it especially appeals to comrades in arms.

The young bugler bore the punishment of another's crime in order that the love of Christ might be learned by the guilty one. We do not wonder that Jim did learn that love. May you also learn it—the love of Christ that passeth knowledge. For truly,

"He took the guilty culprit's place,
And suffered in his stead:
For man, O miracle of grace!
For man the Savior bled."

Yes, but now change the word "man" of our verse into "me," and see how it fits you. Do not rest till you can read it thus:

"For me, O miracle of grace!
For me the Savior bled."

With the blessed knowledge of that love thrilling your soul, turn to

the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the words of Toplady's hymn, exclaim:

"Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee;
Let the water and the blood,
From Thy wounded side which
flowed,
Be of sin the double cure;
Save from wrath and make me pure.

"Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to the Cross I cling;
Naked, come to Thee for dress;
Helpless, look to Thee for grace.
Foul, I to the fountain fly;
Wash me, Savior, or I die."

Do not delay. "To day if ye will hear his voice harden not your hearts" (Hebrews 3:15).

That voice bids you come to Him and that just now. "Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth" (Proverb 27:1). Trust Him now and be saved everlastingly.

Selected

A Cup of Cold Water

Big things are made up of little things. A torrent of rain comes in little drops. Little grains of sand form a long seacoast.

Jesus said that a cup of cold water given in His name would not lose its reward. Part of the reward of such an act of kindness is the result it brings in helping to form a habit of kindness. This is one of the most important habits you can form. Habits are the results of a number of little choices.

The cup of cold water may bless the one to whom it is given. If it is given in the name of Jesus, it will bless the one who gives it. The memory of the blessing Jesus gives our hearts makes it easier to do the next act of kindness.

The goal of life is to become Christlike. Christ notices the physical needs of men, even the little needs. If He had not, He would not have put His blessing on the giver of a cup of cold water in His name.

If we are to grow to spiritual maturity, to become Christlike, we need to try to see life whole. Man has spiritual and mental needs. Even here we need to be alert to the little things. Life is made up of a multitude of little things. Until we learn to notice and meet the little needs of others, we will never be able to do big things for God. We may start with a cup of cold water, but let us not stop there.

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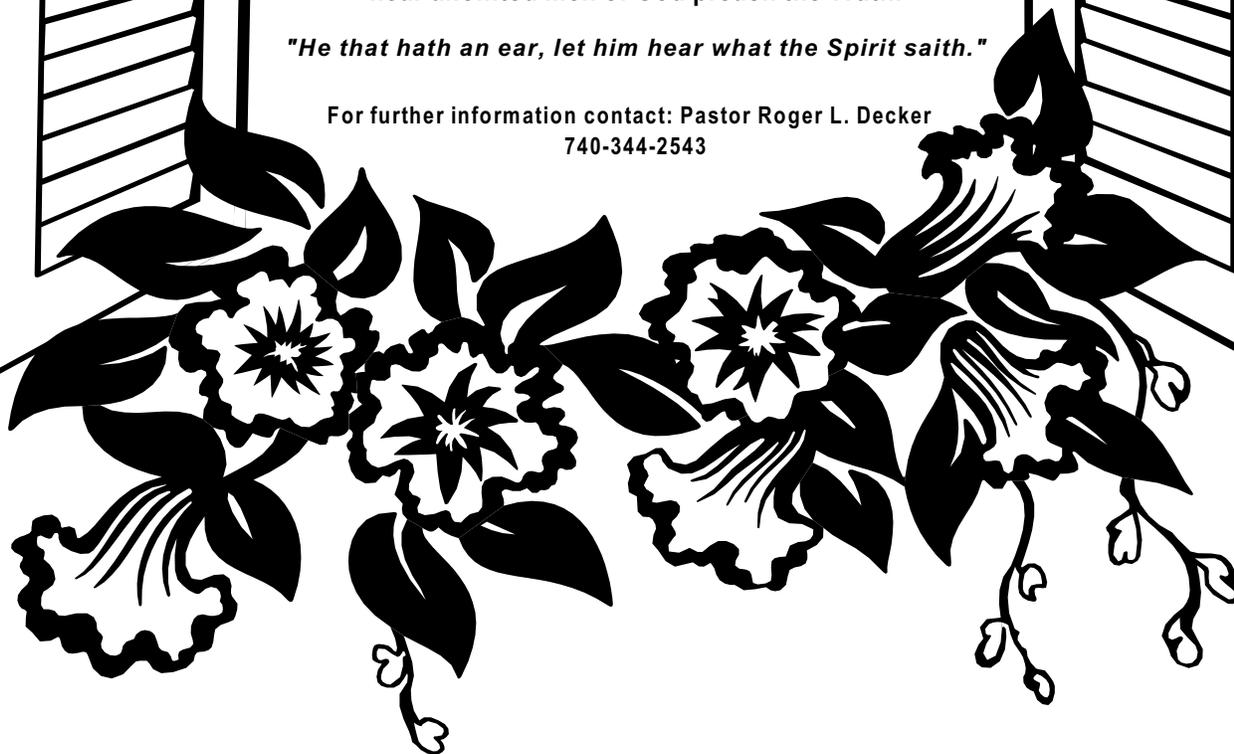
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