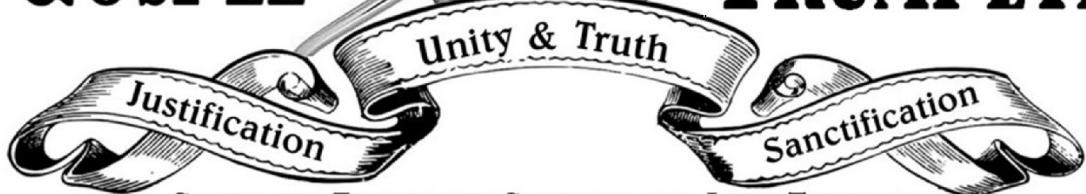


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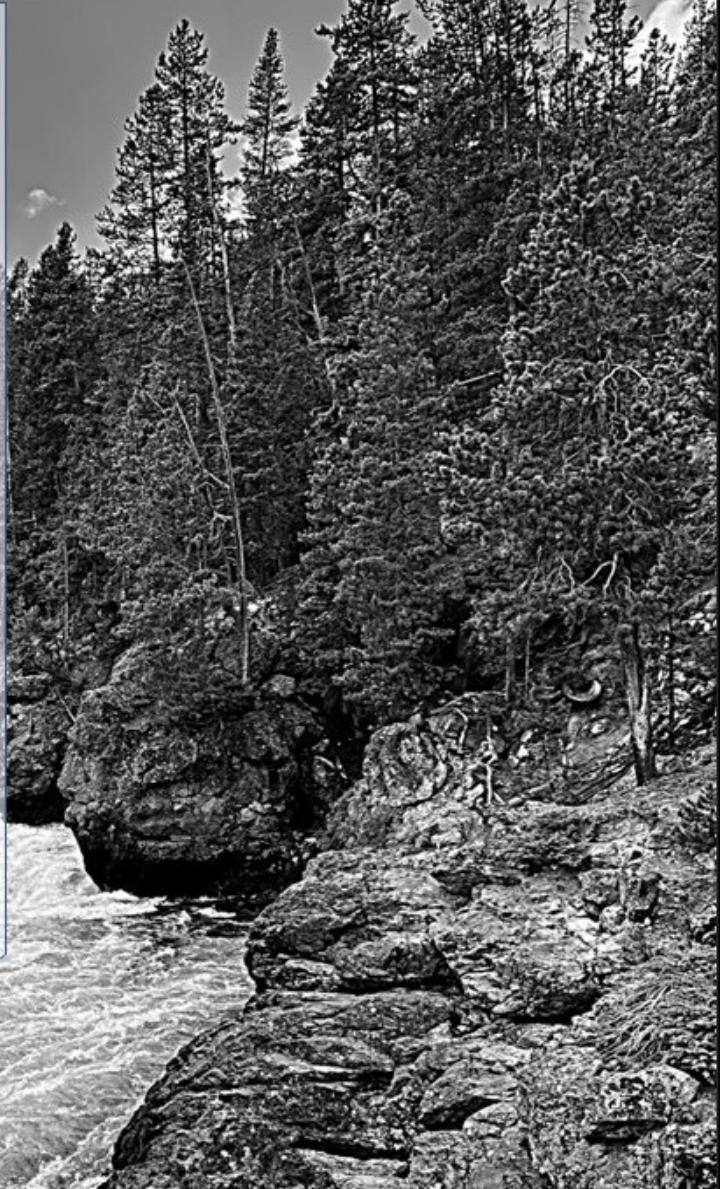


SOUNDING FORTH THE SEVENTH AND LAST TRUMPET

Vol. 53 February 2023 No. 2

**"Praise ye
the LORD.
Blessed is
the man that
feareth
the LORD,
that delighteth
greatly in his
commandments."**

Psalm 112:1



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

THE GOSPEL TRUMPETER

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PRAYER: If you need prayer, please phone or write:

Roger L. Decker, Pastor
83 Decrow Ave.
Newark, OH 43055
Email: pastor@godsacres.us
Phone: 740-344-2543

Print Shop Phone: 740-345-1312
Websites: GodsAcres.org & GospelTrumpeter.com
Email: subscribe@godsacres.us

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 Timothy 3:16-17)
Salvation from sin (Matthew 1:21)
The new birth (John 3:3, 5-7)
A holy life (Luke 1:73-75; Titus 2:12)
Sanctification (1 Thessalonians 5:23)
Unity of God's people (John 17:21; Ephesians 4:3)
Divine, physical healing (James 5:14-16)
The ordinances (Matthew 28:19-20; John 13:1-17;
1 Corinthians 11:23-34)
Eternal life (Matthew 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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BE CAREFUL OF MURMURING AND COMPLAINING

Numbers 21:4 And they journeyed from mount Hor by the way of the Red sea, to compass the land of Edom: and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way.

5 And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread.

6 And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died.

God had been graciously good to the Israelites. He had delivered them from the terrible bondage of slavery. Israel was freed from the servitude of unmerciful taskmasters. In addition, the Lord performed many miracles before their eyes. God proved Himself to them over and over again. However, on multiple occasions, they became disgruntled.

God's people were confronted with another impossible situation. They were faced with a wicked king who fought against them. Some of them were taken captive. The Lord allowed this to come upon them to show them their victory was not in themselves. He wanted Israel to see clearly their help

came only from the Father above. After some of the Israelites were taken prisoners, they called upon God and vowed a vow saying they would utterly destroy those cities if He would deliver the enemy into their hand. He graciously did this for His people.

After the Lord answered their cry, He led them onward. Israel now journeyed by the way of the Red Sea, going toward the land of Edom. The way was so difficult, the people became discouraged. Then the Israelites began to murmur and complain about the inconveniences they were suffering. In their frustration, they spoke against God and against Moses. They accused God and Moses of leading them into the wilderness to die. Their actions and lack of faith angered the Lord. It provoked Him to the place He sent fiery serpents to bite the people. This resulted in many deaths.

This horrible situation of fiery serpents caused the Israelites to see their sin. When they turned to God and asked for forgiveness, He granted them a pardon. The psalmist penned these words in Psalm 86:5, "For thou, Lord, art good, and ready

[continued on page 8]

Are You Walking Worthy in Your CHRISTIAN DATING?



Brother Roger L. Decker

1 Thessalonians 2:9 For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail: for labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God.

10 Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe:

11 As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children,

12 That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.

The Apostle Paul said in verse 12 of our Scripture text, "That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory." The *International Children's Bible* says, "To live good lives for God." Another translation reads, "To live in a way that would honor God." We need to walk according to our testimony. In Ephesians 4:1 Paul wrote, "I

therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called."

We read in Colossians 1:10, "That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God." The revelator said in Revelation 3:4, "Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy."

If you claim to be a sold-out Christian, then you should walk worthy as a Christian. The world is sick of religion. Many boast of Christ, but live contrary to the way Jesus walked. John wrote in 1 John 2:6, "He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked."

It is necessary to cover some issues regarding dating and marriage. As a pastor, I am concerned for ones who are dating. I want married couples to have a good home where God is exalted.

If you are dating, I want to start by asking these questions: Is your dating pleasing to the Lord? Are you walking worthy in your dating? If not, I would like to help you. I am afraid many are not walking in a way that pleases the Lord. If your dating is not pleasing the Lord, then there is a good chance your marriage will not be successful.

Two virtues stand out when it comes to dating: patience and perseverance. I never thought I would start dating again at seventy-six years old. It was different from the first time. I want to cover some guidelines for dating to help ones along these lines and to help you walk more worthy as a Christian.

Marrying in the Lord

You should date to marry. You should not want to date around. Also, you should confer with the pastor or the youth leaders for advice. The pastor is the watchman on the wall. Of course,

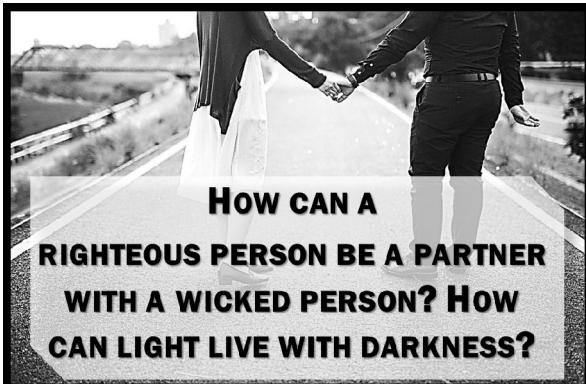
you do not have to go to the pastor for counsel. You have a free will, but it would be wise if you did. I have had young people come to me to talk about dating, and they had already made up their minds. They were not wanting advice; they thought they knew everything.

One reason many do not confer with the pastor is because they are afraid the pastor's counsel will not be what they want to hear. However, a true pastor wants to give you counsel, not to hurt or be harsh, but to help you live according to the principles of God's Word. He might see something in the relationship that would hinder your courtship. He may be working with an individual to help them mature in certain areas. A true pastor and good youth leaders are placed there to help you. They are not against you. There is an enemy who comes along in sheep's clothing to try to draw you away.

If you meet someone you are attracted to, but they are not saved, do not date them until they get a real experience with the Lord and prove themselves. They may go to an altar of prayer, but give them time to see if they will stick around when the messages get strong. Let them walk worthy for a while.

The Scripture in 1 Corinthians 7:39 reads, "The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord." When a wife loses her husband, she is free to marry whom she chooses, but it needs to be "in the Lord." The Apostle Paul gave good admonition. That Scripture fits everyone who is a Christian, not just a widow.

Make sure your experience with the Lord is up to date. This is necessary because you need to



get direction, guidance, and understanding as you enter the dating phase of life. When you put looks, popularity, personality, and finances above spirituality, you are more than likely going to leave spirituality completely out of the picture. You ought to really pray about one of the most important decisions you will make, deciding whom you will live with for the rest of your life.

Be Not Unequally Yoked With Unbelievers

Paul explained in 2 Corinthians 6:14, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?" The same verse from the *International Children's Bible* reads: "You are not the same as those who do not believe. So do not join yourselves to them. Good and bad do not belong together. Light and darkness cannot share together." This is good for those who are dating, but also for those who are socializing, going out to eat, or keeping company with others. Do not attempt to fellowship with those who are going away from truth. It is different if they are coming to the truth. Those who know the truth and walk away from it are rejecting light.

First Corinthians 5:9-11 says: "I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the forni-

cators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat." The Bible says not to eat with them.

Fornication is a vile sin, and so is spiritual fornication. Railers, or slanderers, are ones who are constantly running down the church and the leadership of the church. Do not keep company with them. This is not man-rule; this is what the Bible says. Jesus sat among sinners, but He did not partake of their sins. Do not team up with those who are unbelievers. How can a righteous person be a partner with a wicked person? How can light live with darkness?

Do you feel you are smarter, or wiser, than God? Do you feel you have greater understanding about dating, marrying, or fellowship than God does? Do you feel you can overstep the Scriptures and everything will work out fine? How many people have been drawn away who have not taken heed to what the Bible says? The Church of God is separate according to the Word of God.

If you are dating someone who does not have a personal relationship with Christ, you are playing with fire. I am concerned when spiritually weak brothers marry spiritually weak sisters. Is the one you are dating as spiritually minded as he or she ought to be? If you are dating someone who would rather be somewhere else besides the worship services, you need to get out of that relationship. The wise man said in Proverbs 6:28, "Can one go upon hot coals, and his feet not be

burned?" If you overstep the Word of God, you are knowingly asking for trouble. If you fall in love, and some have done it, what are you going to do then? Do not let the relationship progress to a physical point and then hope you can cut it off.

If you are dating someone who is in the world, are you willing to give up the truth to continue dating them? Ones feel they can change their spouse once they get married. Normally, the spiritual one becomes weak, both leave the church, and their home becomes an open prey to the devil.

The Scripture says in Proverbs 23:23, "Buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding." Samson sold the truth for a harlot, and it cost him dearly. Judas sold the truth for thirty pieces of silver and wound up committing suicide. You should not date someone who is in false religion or whose standard is subpar to what you believe.

Biblical Examples of Marriage

Consider some Old Testament Scriptures and see how the patriarchs believed. The patriarchs instructed their children to marry within the confines of their genealogy. Genesis 24:1-4 states: "And Abraham was old, and well stricken in age: and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things. [Abraham was getting older and thinking of his heritage. He wanted his inheritance to go to Isaac.] And Abraham said unto his eldest servant of his house, that ruled over all that he had, Put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh [Abraham wanted him to make a vow, or a pledge]: And I will make thee swear by the LORD, the God of heaven, and the God of the earth, that thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of

the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell: But thou shalt go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac."

You can read about Isaac in Genesis 28:1-7: "And Isaac called Jacob, and blessed him, and charged him, and said unto him, Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan. Arise, go to Padanaram, to the house of Bethuel thy mother's father; and take thee a wife from thence of the daughters of Laban thy mother's brother. And God Almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a multitude of people; And give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee, and to

If you overstep the Word of God, you are knowingly asking for trouble.

thy seed with thee; that thou mayest inherit the land wherein thou art a stranger, which God gave unto Abraham.

"And Isaac sent away Jacob: and he went to Padanaram unto Laban, son of Bethuel the Syrian, the brother of Rebekah, Jacob's and Esau's mother. When Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob, and sent him away to Padanaram, to take him a wife from thence; and that as he blessed him he gave him a charge, saying, Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan; And that Jacob obeyed his father and his mother, and was gone to Padanaram." Again, how can light and darkness dwell together?

Solomon married pagan wives who turned his heart away from God. It makes a difference whom you marry. No doubt, those pagan wives were the most beautiful women at that time.

The Scripture says he "loved" many beautiful women. However, it was a *lustful* spirit. God gave Solomon great wisdom, yet those women had the power to turn his heart because he was disobedient to God, and he was weak.

Ahab married Jezebel, and God marked him. God said this about Ahab in 1 Kings 16:30, "And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD above all that were before him." He was a real rascal, constantly opposing the children of Israel.

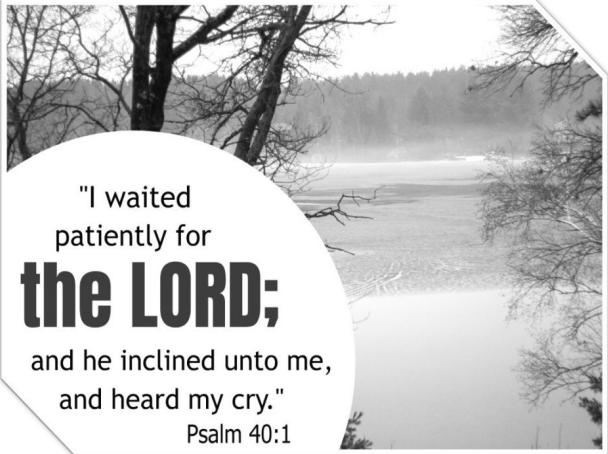
Waiting on the Lord

God has called the Church of God to holiness. If you marry someone in false religion, how will you deal with false teachings such as the millennium, rapture, speaking in tongues, and "once in grace, always in grace"? Someone may ask, "What difference does it make?" It is the difference between truth and error, Heaven and hell. We cannot lay down the Word of God as if it does not matter.

We are an accountable people. God has given His people great light and understanding, and He holds us responsible. Some people fall in love, and with the physical love, they wash the love of God out of their souls and make themselves a transgressor.

Some say, "There is no one to date in the congregation I attend." Do you need to turn to the world or to false religion to fill your need for a companion? You are going to have turmoil in the home if you do. God knows you need a companion. The Word of God says young women ought to marry (1 Timothy 5:14). However, there may be a need for some growing in your own life first before you are ready for marriage.

There are Scriptures that deal



"I waited patiently for
the LORD;

and he inclined unto me,
and heard my cry."

Psalm 40:1

with the subject of waiting. God encourages waiting, according to the Scriptures. Psalm 27:14 says, "Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD." Psalm 40:1, A Psalm of David, reads, "I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry." If you wait on the Lord, the Lord will send you the right one. Your eyesight is never as good as the Spirit of God.

There is always the question of when ones should start dating, and there is controversy on this subject. My opinion is ones should not start dating too young. For example, fourteen-year-olds are beginning to have feelings and emotions. Many are in school and have heard filthy talk. Those things will work on them, and they might not know how to control themselves at such a young age.

Parent, you need to be there to guide your children. They are young, and they hear all kinds of things in school. There has always been bad stuff going on in schools, but it has increased. There are more devices, such as cell phones and laptops, and bad things happening in our world today than when I went to school. Young people are becoming more knowledgeable about things, and that knowledge can excite their emotions. They need guidance and parental help to

keep them in control. They are not bad children. They are human, but their emotions can get worked up because of their knowledge. Even the best of parents miss some things once in a while.

I love young people, and that is why I tell them the truth. I want to help them have a good, prosperous life. Many young people are not getting the help they need in the home. It is obvious by the way they live, and it is grievous.

Having on the Whole Armor of God

Make sure you have on the whole armor of God while dating. It is necessary because you have desires and emotions. It makes no difference how spiritual you are. Those emotions and desires are going to visit you. You need the Spirit of God to keep them under. You need all the help you can get in today's world. Are you spending enough time with God? Do you depend on Him while you are dating?

Read the Apostle Paul's admonition to the church at Ephesus in Ephesians 6:10-18: "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. [You need spirituality on the inside to overcome spiritual wickedness. It is not something you can fight with a fist.] Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to

stand.

"Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints."

Never put yourself in a compromising situation, such as a parked car or a house when no one else is there while you are dating. The devil likes to excite your emotions and passions. Do not give him the opportunity. Do not be somewhere where you have to battle those emotions because you are more than likely going to give in.

Unmarried mothers give birth to four out of every ten babies born in the United States. These are older statistics, and the numbers are no doubt increasing rapidly. Fifty-nine percent of marriages involving women under the age of eighteen end in divorce within fifteen years. Research indicates people who live together prior to marriage are more likely to get a divorce. I want to see young people have happy homes, raise their families in the truth, and enjoy their lives together.

The Sin of Fornication

Living together outside of marriage is adultery. The Bible says adulterers are not in the Kingdom of God. Ones should be careful not to dress in a way that causes the opposite sex to desire, or lust, after them. Young people can have a wonderful courtship. You do not have to be promiscuous, or considered an easy catch.

Young lady, if you are not careful, your name can get around to all the boys if you are promiscuous.

You can have good, clean fun and enjoy your dating without having a physical relationship. You can attend youth services, camp meetings, and revivals. You can play games and go to gatherings with other young people. When the day comes to a close, you do not have to repent or worry you overstepped. You will not have to worry about being lost.

Sexual relationships outside of marriage are still called fornication and adultery, and it is sin. Today, ones do not use the word "sin." Instead, they use the word "affair," or call it a different "lifestyle." Nevertheless, it is still sin.

The Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10: "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God."

Fornication is a voluntary sexual relationship between a man and a woman who are not married. Is the one you are dating trying to get you to do things against your conscience? Are they trying to get you to overstep and do things you know you should not do? They may say, "God knows we love each other." Real love is pure. Someone may say, "Sex is the way you prove your love," but that is not true. It is a way to satisfy inordinate desires. Let us read the Bible definition of *love* in 1 John 4:7. It says, "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God."

In 2 Samuel, Chapter 13, you can read about Amnon and his

Dating right is important, so the marriage can also be right.

half-sister. There was no love involved in this relationship whatsoever. Verse 15 states: "Then Amnon hated her exceedingly [he hated his half-sister whom he forced]; so that the hatred wherewith he hated her was greater than the love wherewith he had loved her. And Amnon said unto her, Arise, be gone." He told her in so many words: "Get out! I am done with you now." Amnon forced his sister, and then he was stung by his conscience. Then he forced her to leave and go out into the public so her sin would be known.

Reasons to Flee a Relationship

There are some things that should cause you to flee a relationship or think about before you date. You should not date someone who is not saved. The Bible backs that up as well as common sense. You should not date someone in false religion. You need to flee a relationship if someone is abusive, physically or mentally. Avoid getting involved with someone who is controlling and never wrong. Stay away from those who lie or steal. If a person is lazy, is disobedient to their parents, has no respect for the law, or is on drugs, stay away from them. You could get drawn into those things too. Avoid dating someone who drinks alcoholic beverages or gambles. Some are always jealous, sneaky, and constantly fooling around. Some are on their cell phones during worship services, and they never follow along in the Bible. Some push the physical aspect and have a bad temper. You should not want to date any of these individuals.

Be careful of long-distance relationships. You need to see how the person acts throughout the week, not just during the worship services. Also, are their teachings different from what you have been taught? Do you have more light and understanding than they have? If you go back down to their understanding, more than likely, you will become a backslider. First John 1:6-7 says: "If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he [Christ] is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."

The goal of this message is to help, not condemn, young people or those who are dating or planning on getting married. I am fearful too many young sisters and brothers have the opposite sex on their minds too much, and it distracts them from worshiping God. I realize some of those thoughts are natural, but we need to get beyond the natural and stress the spiritual. There is a devil out to destroy our youth.

Dating right is important, so the marriage can also be right. Every dating young person wants a good marriage. They do not want a marriage filled with wrangling, fighting, separation, and divorce. God has laid out guidelines in His Word to help us. God gives admonition to help you get on the right path in dating. You do not want to enter a marriage with a whole lot of things to overcome before the marriage can work.

Sometimes, a marriage may fail. However, no two Christians

will get a divorce. Someone is wrong in the relationship. True Christians will stay in there and go the extra mile to make things work. They will not hire an attorney over the slightest thing. In some marriages, one spouse may get caught up in adultery. The Christian will pray for their spouse to be saved and do their best to get the marriage back on track if possible. There are times, according to the Bible, Christians may separate themselves to work things out, but they do not divorce and remarry someone else.

Keep God First in Your Dating

Entering worldly relationships is asking for trouble, especially when you know the truth. If you are in a dating mode, you need to talk continually to God and listen to God. Do not make it a one-way conversation. God wants you to talk to Him, but He wants to talk to you also. Remember, do not get into a relationship where you know there is something wrong. Do not put yourself in a compromising situation while dating. You are asking God to keep you in a place you should not be, and you know better. God expects you to take care of some things. Do not let

the enemy persuade you to do things that are improper and will sting your conscience. God is for you; He is not against you. As long as you keep God first, you will find Him very close to you in your dating.

Second Chronicles 15:1-2 tells the story of Azariah and Asa. It states: "And the Spirit of God came upon Azariah the son of Oded: And he went out to meet Asa, and said unto him, Hear ye me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin; The LORD is with you, while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but [that is a conjunction bringing the two phrases together] if ye forsake him, he will forsake you."

Christian young people should not get involved in a wrong relationship. If God shows you something, He shows you so you can do something about it while you can. Do not wait until you get too involved and it becomes difficult to walk away from the situation. I worked with someone at the altar one time who was in a relationship. I gave her some advice, and then I said, "But you need to talk to the pastor." Her answer was no. She knew he would say the same

thing I said. She got up from the altar, married the one she wanted, and the marriage ended in divorce. You cannot fool around with God's Word. God wants you to have a good home, so start it right. Do not knowingly overstep God's Word, or you will make yourself a transgressor.

There is nothing like having a good marriage. Perseverance and patience are well worth it! I have a good marriage because I waited on the Lord. God will direct you and be faithful. He knows all about you and your need for a companion. God knows who is the right one for you, and you can worship God and raise a family together in the house of God with minimal problems. Even the most spiritual people have problems. However, when you are spiritual, you have Someone to take your problems to. God will help you work them out. You do not have to battle it out in a divorce court or through a separation.

(Compact Disc TR-2779)

Brother Roger L. Decker is the pastor of the Church of God in Newark, OH.

[Guest Editorial continued from pg. 2]
to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee." The Lord in His loving kindness told Moses to erect a brass serpent and put it on a pole. Those who were bitten could look on the brazen serpent, and God forgave and restored their health.

We must all realize there are times in life when things go contrary to the way we desire. The Lord allows upsets to come our way for a purpose. He permits undesirables to be used as a tool to try, prove, and perfect our experience. Through hard places, He wants to examine our spirits and patience to see what our

reaction will be. Hebrews 10:36 reminds us we "have need of patience." It is extremely important for us to allow patience to do its perfect work. First Peter 5:10 tells us, "But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you."

Murmuring and complaining greatly displeases the Lord, and it must be avoided. People who become involved with this sinful condition can face very serious consequences if it is not soon corrected. In the Scripture lesson, great hurt came to the children of Israel. It is record-

ed there as a warning to us today. It lets us know what can happen if this sinful practice should take hold of us and continue to go unchecked.

Dear one, do not allow yourself to fall into the same condition as old Israel did. Many times, they murmured and complained against God and His plan. You will truly profit spiritually if you ask God to help you see good in the trying circumstances of life. He wants all His children to grow and mature in spiritual things. He is always ready to help each one in every phase of life.

Selected

Have You Left

YOUR FIRST LOVE?

Brother Larry Dishman

Revelation 2:1 Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks;

2 I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars:

3 And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.

4 Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.

5 Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.

6 But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate.

7 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.



These warnings and exhortations in our Scripture text certainly apply to the church today. Although each letter was written to a specific church, all seven letters closed with the words "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." Verse 4 reads, "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." Christ was speaking to the angel (or the minister) of the church at Ephesus. He was not speaking to believers who had left the church and gone out into the world to live in open sin. He was speaking to the core members of the church who no longer loved the Lord as they had when they first became Christians.

Can Christians be doctrinally pure, actively involved, and yet become cold in their love for the Lord? Apparently they can, because it happened to one of the greatest churches in the New Testament. How did the church

at Ephesus lose their first love? It did not happen overnight, but it happened gradually over time.

You ought to ask yourself, "Does God have something against me?" Speaking to the church at Ephesus, God said, "I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." In other words, they had fallen from their deep love for the Lord and the sweet fellowship they had with Him. They started out strong, but over time, things changed. Just as it changed with the church at Ephesus, it can change with you.

A generation had come and gone since the Apostle Paul preached to the church at Ephesus. While they had remained faithful along some lines, they had lost their passion and fervency for Christ. The passionate love that had once burned within their hearts and motivated them had given way to mechanical orthodoxy. They were going through a form, but they lacked

enthusiasm and zeal.

What is the first love? It is the love of a new convert that causes him to drop everything and follow Jesus Christ. Nothing the preacher preaches is too hard because he loves God so much, and he wants to please Him in every area of his life. This love captures the heart and colors every moment of every day. The first love of a Christian is what the church is all about. This kind of love defines the church. If this love did not exist, the church would not be a living church. One would be merely a pretender without this kind of love.

Jesus is saying: "This kind of love has to be in your DNA. This love is central to the church, and it shapes the church. You are missing the core component if you do not have this love." It is necessary to keep the first love. Jude said in verse 21, "Keep yourselves in the love of God."

Signs of a Lost Love

Years ago, the great evangelist, Dwight L. Moody, returned home for a brief rest before he went back out again. Seeing the tiredness on his face, his family encouraged him to cancel some of his meetings and take an extended period of rest. Moody replied, "I may grow weary in the work, but I never grow weary of the work."

Several things can indicate you are wandering away from your first love. You should examine yourself to see if you have left your first love. Be honest because that is the only way God can help you. Have you left your first love? Do you love God as you did when you first got saved?

What is some evidence you have lost your first love? One is lacking patience and endurance in suffering for Christ. Do you lack joy in your activity for Christ? Do you have a strong

desire to spend time with Jesus? If you crave the things of the world more than the things of God, you have left your first love. When you talk about everything else other than the things of God, you have left your first love. Does it make you uptight and uncomfortable to talk about spiritual things? Do you justify your disobedience? Are you judgmental and critical of other people? When you can go hours and days without having more than a passing thought about the things of God, you have left your first love.

Another sign you have left your first love is you do not have a strong desire to spend time with God. Do you have a strong hunger for Bible study? Is reading the Bible merely a chore, something you mark off your to-do list? Has spending time in prayer become a burden or a duty rather than a delight? Is your worship formal, dry, and lifeless? Are you merely going through the motions? If your private prayer and worship are almost nonexistent, you have left your first love.

Are you more concerned about your physical health and well-being than the condition of your soul? Do you crave physical food while having little appetite for spiritual food? The Bible says in Matthew 5:6, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." Peter wrote in 1 Peter 2:2, "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby."

Are You Cold and Indifferent?

Perhaps you crave companionship more than you crave an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. You spend more time and

"I may grow weary
IN the work,
but I never grow weary
OF the work."

—Dwight L. Moody

effort on your physical appearance than on cultivating inward spiritual beauty to please the Lord. Maybe your heart toward Christ is cold and indifferent. It is not as tender and easily moved by the Word and the Spirit of God as it once was. You do not talk about spiritual things as you once did. Your Christianity is no more than a checklist.

Do you measure spirituality by performance rather than the condition of your heart? Is your obedience motivated and fueled by the expectations of others, or a desire to impress others, more than for a passion for Jesus Christ? If this is your condition, Christ has somewhat against you, and you have left your first love.

Are you more concerned about pleasing others than you are about pleasing God? Is your service for Christ and others motivated by a sense of duty and obligation? Is it merely a routine for you to attend the church services? Has it become a burden for you to read your Bible? If you find yourself resentful over the hardships and demands of serving Christ and others, you have left your first love.

Do you find you can talk to others about your children, your marriage, the weather, news, politics, and sports, yet you struggle to talk about spiritual things? Do you have a hard time coming up with something fresh to testify about in a testimony service or when someone asks you what God has been doing for you? It may be you do not know

what God has been doing in your life because your love has waxed cold.

Perhaps you have become formal, rigid, and uptight about spiritual things rather than joyful. You have become critical and harsh toward those who are doctrinally off base or living in sin. Do you enjoy secular songs, movies, and books more than you enjoy reading the Bible and materials that point you to Jesus Christ? When you prefer the company of the people who do not love Christ more than the company and fellowship of true believers, you have left your first love.

The mission close to where I live tells the young men, "Show me your best four friends, and I will show you the direction in which you are heading." Who are your four best friends? Are they spiritual? When you keep company with them, do they have a positive affect on you, or do they pull you down spiritually? Are you more interested in recreation and entertainment than in cultivating intimacy with Jesus Christ through worship, prayer, the Word of God, and Christian fellowship? Do you display wrong attitudes? Are you involved in activities you know are contrary to the Scriptures?

Have You Compromised?

Do you justify small areas of disobedience or compromise? Have you gone back into things you formerly put off when you first got saved? Someone may say: "You do not understand. Now I have more light and understanding." Friend, if you have more light and understanding, it will cause you to be more like Jesus, not more like the world. Are the little things that used to disturb your conscience no lon-

ger bothering you? These things happen when you leave your first love. Also, you become slow to respond to conviction, or you ignore it altogether.

Years ago, at a camp meeting, a minister preached on divine healing. When he gave the invitation, the altars were lined with people who wanted to be anointed and prayed for, and God touched them. I was just a little boy at the time. Then that same night, a preacher got up and preached on the needs of the heart and soul, but hardly anyone moved. I remember my daddy going to the altar, and then he went to the microphone and said: "It is obvious we know what our physical needs are. We are so quick to move to the altar when we have physical needs. If only we would be so quick to

Are you consistently allured by sinful things? Are you more concerned about having the right position than having the right disposition? Do you tend to hold tightly to money and things rather than being quick to give to meet the needs of the church and others? Perhaps you rarely give sacrificially to the Lord's work. You rarely have a desire to give when you hear of legitimate financial needs within the body of Christ, yet you are accumulating and maintaining material things. If you are not careful, these things will consume you, and you will forget about cultivating spiritual riches.

Have You Lost Your Zeal for Souls?

Friend, if you lose your first love, you can have broken relationships and be unwilling to reconcile with your brothers and sisters in Christ. If you leave your first love, you will focus on form instead of the substance of your faith. You may become infatuated with knowledge instead of holiness because personal holiness is no longer your quest. You can become convinced knowledge makes you holy; thus, knowledge is something you attain for yourself. It replaces the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Lordship over your life.

When you lose your first love, you lose your evangelistic zeal. You see the world as your enemy instead of your mission field. Saint of God, you must realize your need to go out into the highways and hedges and compel people to come in so Father's house may be full. Friend, losing your first love causes you to become more concerned with your own comforts than with the salvation of the lost. This causes churches to become inwardly

If we would be as sensitive toward the SPIRITUAL problems in our lives as we are the PHYSICAL, we would have revival as never before.

move to an altar when we have spiritual needs, when we are not as close to Christ as we ought to be. If we would be as sensitive toward the spiritual problems in our lives as we are the physical, I believe we would have revival as never before."

Friend, how is it in your heart and life? Did little things disturb you at one time, but because you have gone on and on, they do not bother you any longer? Maybe you are enjoying certain things you know are wrong, and you are refusing to turn from them. At one time, you would have given up anything for Christ, but not anymore. Now you are no longer grieved by wrongdoing. It is no big deal to you when you leave your first love.

directed instead of outwardly directed. When a congregation grows cold, the people are more concerned with maintaining their traditions than seeing souls saved.

You grieve the Holy Spirit when you leave your first love. When you are passionately in love with Jesus Christ and have an intimate relationship with Him, you are very sensitive to the Holy Spirit. You do not want to do anything to grieve the blessed, sweet Holy Spirit of God. On the other hand, when your love waxes cold, you lose your sensitivity and fear of grieving the Holy Spirit. You become insensitive to displeasing God. You become content with what you are instead of being driven to become more like Jesus Christ.

Friend, the passion for becoming more like Christ is diminished when your love for Him waxes cold. Instead of comparing yourself to Jesus, you begin comparing yourself to others, making sure you are just as good as Brother So-and-So or Sister So-and-So. Those thoughts will only lead you to self-righteousness. Other things will sit on the throne of your heart, and Christ will be delegated to a lesser place of importance.

If you have lost your first love, you will still give a testimony from time to time, but the Lord does not really reign in your heart as He once did. It may be success, power, pride, prestige, or pleasure, but something else sits on the throne of your heart. You will begin to love something or someone else more than you love Christ. Dear one, you will become dispassionate and cool in your relationship with Jesus Christ.

Having a Passionate Love for Christ

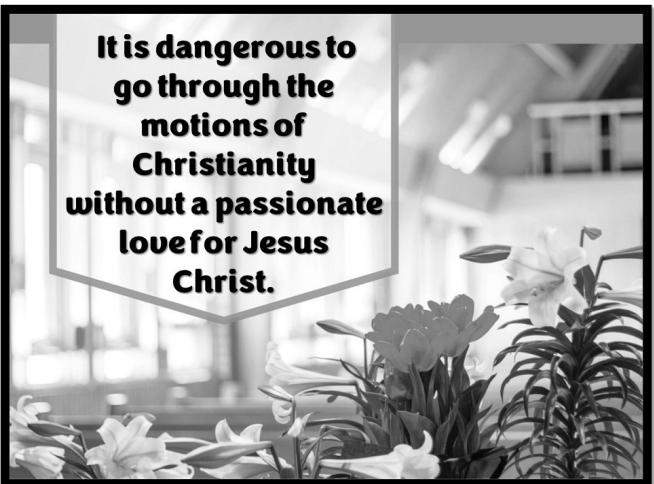
What kind of relationship do you think Stephen, the first mar-

tyr of the faith, had? Do you think Stephen merely had a formal relationship with Jesus Christ? Do you think Stephen was only going through the motions, lacking fervency and zeal? Friend, that kind of relationship does not cause someone to die for Jesus Christ. What kind of relationship do you think the Apostle Paul had with Jesus when he was beaten and left for dead or when he was thrown in prison and knew he was going to be executed? You should compare that with the relationship the average professing Christian has today.

Today, many find little or no time for God on a daily basis. Instead of being concerned about the things of God, they are more concerned about themselves and their own personal desires. They are unwilling to give their all to Jesus. They are unwilling to be inconvenienced for the things of God. They do not witness as they once did, because they think others will say they are fanatics. They are more willing to give their time, energy, and money to sporting events or some type of entertainment than to the things of God.

Life for them is more about self-advancement than the advancement of the Kingdom of God. They may wonder why they have so little spiritual power. The reason many have so little spiritual power is they have left their first love. Some wonder why they cannot sense the presence of God as they once did in their lives. They may not even realize they have not felt the strong presence of God for a long time. They are only willing to give as much of themselves to

It is dangerous to go through the motions of Christianity without a passionate love for Jesus Christ.



Christ as they absolutely have to in order to convince themselves they are still good Christians.

Friend, Christ never asks for part of your life; He asks for all of it. He never asks for a place in your heart; He asks for absolute rule and reign over your heart. He never asks to be one of your many passions; He asks to be the consuming passion of your life. It is dangerous to go through the motions of Christianity without a passionate love for Jesus Christ. It sets the wrong example for new Christians. It teaches your children a distorted lesson about what it means to be an old-time, genuine Christian. This coldness has a tendency to become perpetual. It causes you to become content with less than God's best. I am persuaded the devil has convinced many professing Christians to become content with much less than God's best, denying them of the riches of life in Christ Jesus.

God wants you to love Him as much as He loves you. He demonstrated His love for you when He was willing to give His Son. The Son demonstrated His love for you when He was willing to give His life. Jesus suffered and died for you, bearing your sins on Calvary's Cross, not because He was forced to, but because of His love for you and His desire to be in a relationship with you.

Regaining a Lost Love

How is your first love lost? Again, the church at Ephesus started out strong, but over time, something happened and things changed. As I mentioned earlier, a generation had come and gone since the Apostle Paul had preached to them. They remained faithful to God along some lines, but they lost their fervor and passion for Christ. The passionate love that had motivated them and burned in their hearts had given way to being mechanical. They neglected to maintain fellowship and communion with God through the reading of the Word of God, prayer, and obedience.

The question is, How can a person regain his lost love? Jesus said in Revelation 2:5, "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent." When Jesus said "remember," He was saying: "Think back to your past experience. Remember the atmosphere in which you once lived."

God is telling every Christian to do the same thing He asked the church at Ephesus to do. He is asking you to remember how things used to be, and He is counseling you to come back to the passion you once had when you first got saved. Do you remember the love and adoration you felt in your heart? You wanted everyone to know, and you were not ashamed of it. You wanted everyone to get saved. Do you remember how grateful you were for the forgiveness of your sins? At that moment, nothing else mattered but Jesus. God wants you to go back and remember those moments in time.

If you have left your first love, return to your first deeds when you were first called to live for Jesus Christ. This is critical. If

you remember the love you initially had for God, His Word, prayer, fellowship, and witnessing, you will be inspired to action. Jesus said to remember and repent. Repenting means to turn back, confess, regret, and to promise reformation. You need to repent of the things that have come between you and the Lord.

One song says, "*Nothing between my soul and my Savior.*" The Lord wants you to repent of the things you have allowed to slip in between you and Him. You need to renounce the sin of pride, self-sufficiency, and self-centeredness and put Christ back at the center of your life. Jesus also said to return to your first love, to the place and time in your life when He was everything to you. That is where He wants you to be.

The problem with Ephesus was not just what they were doing, but why they were doing it. They were not worshiping God with delight, but rather out of duty. God does not want you to do what you do out of drudgery. His commandments are not grievous to the true child of God. What does it mean to leave your first love? It means you depart, leave, forsake, or neglect it.

When you lose your car keys, sunglasses, or phone, where will you find them? You will find them exactly where you left them. When I lose something, I try to think: "Now where was I? Where did I leave it?" Jesus is saying, "Go back and find your first love." Wherever it was, it is still there because God has not moved. He is waiting for you to come back.

The Greatest Commandment

A couple was driving home from church, and the wife was sitting to the far right of the car over against the door. The husband was in his usual place behind the steering wheel. Seem-

ingly, a large gulf separated the husband and the wife. She looked at him with lonely eyes and said: "Honey, do you remember when we first met, how close we used to sit to each other? You used to put your arm around me. What happened to those days?" With one hand firmly gripping the steering wheel and the other hand on the seat where she used to sit, he said: "I haven't moved. I'm right where I always was." God has not moved. God still loves you, just as He always has. God is still the



same. The distance between that man and woman was the space where she had moved. A separation was caused because she moved away.

Have you left your first love? Have you become so busy and so preoccupied with life that Jesus is no longer as important to you as He once was? Has your relationship with the Lord become just another part of your routine? Sister, imagine your husband coming home and saying: "I am going to be honest with you. I do not love you anymore, but nothing is going to change. I will still earn a living and pay the bills.

We will still live together, and I will still be the father of your children. I just do not love you anymore." A wife would be devastated if her husband were to say such a thing.

Are you telling Jesus by your actions: "I do not love You as much as I used to, but I will still come to church and teach a Sunday school class; I will still perform the duties I am supposed to do"? By the way you live, you prove to God whether you love Him or not. It does not matter what you obey if you fail to keep His highest commandment. Leaving your first love is failing to keep the greatest commandment of all. Jesus said in Matthew 22:37-38: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and

with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment." The greatest commandment of all is to love the Lord with all your heart, mind, strength, and soul.

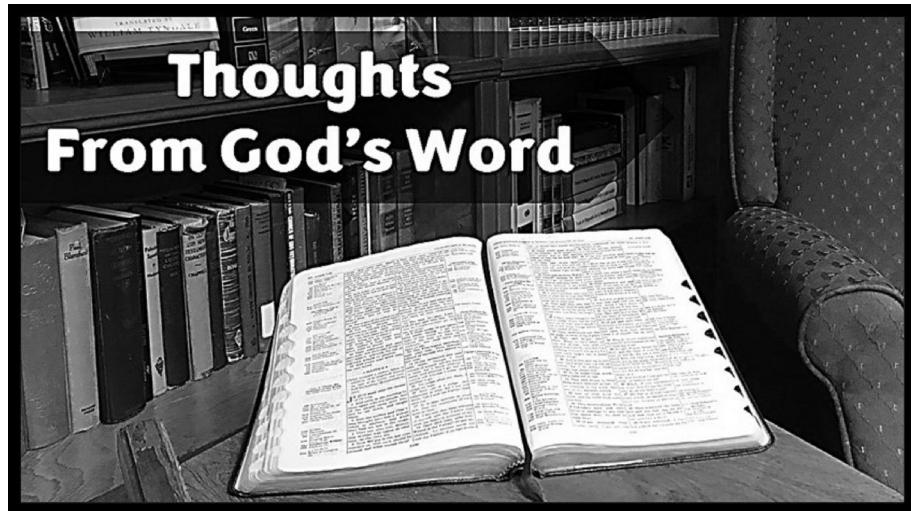
If your love waxes cold, it does not matter how faithfully you serve Him or how rightly you believe or how strongly you stand. If you miss first base, it does not matter how far you hit the ball; you are out. If you leave your first love, you are out of Christ's favor. The church that loses its first love will soon lose its light, no matter how doctrinally sound it may be. Jesus wants an intimate relationship with every one of us and not just a performance.

Every Christian should be aware of the danger of leaving his first love. Friend, if you have

left your first love, you have lost it all. Jesus said to the church at Ephesus, "If you do not repent and return to your first love, I will remove the fire of the Spirit from your midst." Whatever happened to the Church of God at Ephesus? Today the ruins of the ancient city lie under the muck and mire of a swamp. The church at Ephesus died, and the city around it died. I believe returning to our first love is what brings about revival.

(Compact Disc TR-1984)

*Brother Larry Dishman is a
Church of God evangelist from
Hurley, MS.*



"And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might."

—Deuteronomy 6:5

"Ye shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the people which are round about you."

—Deuteronomy 6:14

People today serve many, many gods. They serve the god of enter-

tainment, the god of lust, the god of pride, the god of time, the god of money, and even the god of nature.

We know God wants us to live among the world, so that we might win them to Him. But in light of that, we must be careful not to get caught up in the things of this world. It is easy to get involved in something that seems innocent until it slowly takes over our priorities and becomes our "god."

Verse 15 says, "(For the LORD

thy God is a jealous God among you) lest the anger of the LORD thy God be kindled against thee, and destroy thee from off the face of the earth."

God wants to be first in your life, first in your day, first in your thoughts, first in your desires, first in your decisions, and first in all you do. Has anything been slowly taking away from the time you spend with God in prayer and Bible study, making it harder to pay your tithes and give offerings, causing you to neglect church services, giving you reasons to put off visiting the shut-ins, or just stealing your joy out of the work you do for the Lord?

Consider your ways, and make God your priority. Twice in that chapter of Deuteronomy, it says to do right "that it may be well with thee." There are great blessings in living this life according to God's commandments!

Sister Rachel Fowler

*Sister Rachel Fowler attends the
Church of God in Newark, OH.*



I have learned the need of having confidence in God, and I wanted to share some struggles I have had in hopes it will help someone else. It is good to know you are not the only one struggling with certain things. I got to a place in my experience where I would pray, but only because I knew I needed to pray. I really did not have confidence in my prayers. I felt God would not answer me. I thought: "Why would He? I have a bad attitude."

I had quit praying for a companion. The devil convinced me no one would want me because of my past. Then I quit praying for a burden to be used and fill a position in the church. I did not feel God could use me because the devil continued to remind me of my past. I also lost my burden for souls. I got discouraged because people I loved were not moving.

I had lost confidence in my prayers to God. I would pray, but think: "God is not answering my prayers. Why am I even praying?" I continued to pray and read my Bible, because we are supposed to pray and read, but I felt I did not have the confidence I needed. God spoke to me during a message and said, "How could you lose confidence in Me when I have brought you this far?" I felt really condemned, so I prayed about it.

God told me He would grant all the desires of my heart if I would only trust Him. Proverbs

3:5-6 reads: "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."

What is confidence? It is "a belief or a feeling that you can rely on someone or something, having firm trust." Basically, I lost confidence and trust in God. During the time I lost confidence, did it cause me to miss an opportunity to be blessed by God or to help someone else be blessed by God?

I felt the people I was praying for were not moving, so why should I keep praying for them? I had lost my burden for souls. In that short amount of time I was discouraged, for pointless reasons, would God have saved souls if I had been confident and truly prayed for them? Perhaps by me not praying for them as I needed to, they became more hardened. Was I allowing the devil to take away my witness? In the times I was not confident, God could have told me to pray for someone, but I was not open to praying for anyone because I felt so undeserving.

I wanted God to show me something I could do for Him in the church. However, I was discouraged about being the oldest young person in the youth group. What if I missed the opportunity to be an example to the other young people? I came from the world. I was not raised in the church, but I chose to be saved

and stay saved. Losing my confidence in God was causing me to lose the opportunity to be a good example and have a role in the congregation.

Another missed opportunity I had when I lost confidence in my prayers was when I had a patient die of COVID. We did everything we could to save her. Eventually, I stood outside the room and prayed, "God, help her." I thought, What if she is not saved? I started praying, "God, You can save her even though everything is going wrong medically, and it does not seem as though she can survive."

The thought came to me: Was I really trusting God to actually save her from COVID? Or was I just praying because I knew I was supposed to pray? Looking back, I do not feel I wholeheartedly and confidently prayed for her to make it. I was wording a prayer because I knew I was supposed to pray, but it did not truly come from the heart.

When you pray, are you absolutely confident God can answer your prayers and He is listening? Or are you just saying a prayer because you know you should? Think about the opportunities you could miss due to a lack of confidence in God. You may go through something someone else is going through. God can use your testimony to help them. You need to be confident in what God gives you.

Are you approachable? Since

I grew up in the world, many people have asked me questions about why my life has changed. If you are not raised in the church, you may not know much about the Bible. You may be learning, but sometimes you may not have answers to all the questions you are asked. That affected my confidence because the devil would say to me, "You do not know the answer to that question." Someone once told me if you do not know the answer, go find the answer and come back to them.

Are people able to have confidence in you? Are you living all God has shown you? There are things I do not understand, and I know in God's time, He will show me. The devil has a way of turning it around and causing me to feel incapable of learning or understanding things. Those

thoughts are not from God.

Failing to reach out and pray for people with confidence could be a missed opportunity. How important that is! Do not give up on people you want to see saved. There are people who sit in service after service and never make a move. God is talking to them. Are you confident God can save them? Are you praying for God to keep talking to them instead of lacking confidence in God?

When I did not have confidence in God, I did not pray for the lost as I should have. God has helped me find peace through trusting God and confidently praying for the ones close to me who are lost. You can pray for others and not just for yourself. You can pray at an altar, give it all to God, and be confident in the fact God can save souls because He wants to save them.

Consider the people who prayed for you and did not lose confidence when you were not saved.

Colossians 4:5 says, "Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time." The *Amplified Bible* says, "Conduct yourself with wisdom in your interactions with outsiders (non-believers), make the most of each opportunity [treating it as something precious]." This challenges me to use the opportunities God gives me, whether it is in the youth group or with people I meet out in the world, to be an encouragement to them.

Sister Mackenzie Benton

Sister Mackenzie Benton attends the Church of God in Newark, OH.

Three Steps of Faith

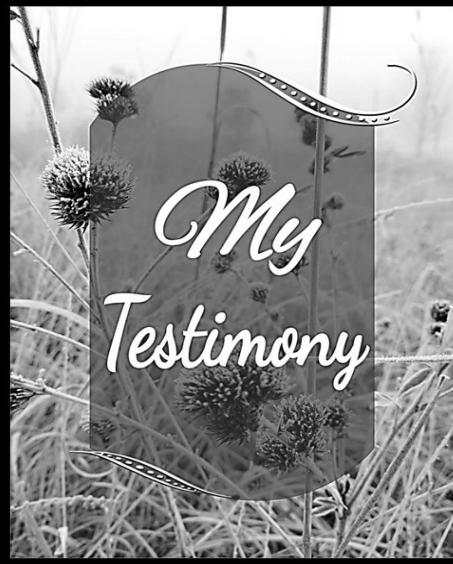
There are three steps of faith: then faith, when faith, and now faith. "Then faith" is seen when God's people testify of how God is with us, how He helped us in trials, how He saved us and protected us in different ways. "When faith" is when we say: "I am going to stand for the Lord. I am going to be true for the Lord. Whatever the cost, no matter what happens, I am going to be true! I am going to trust Him."

For example, when David faced Goliath, he said: "The Lord was with me when I was taking care of my father's sheep. When the lion and the bear came out, He took care of me then, and He will take care of me when I face this Philistine." That is "when faith."

"Now faith" is when David put that stone in the sling and ran towards the giant. We have different degrees of faith. I am thankful for the faith God has given us so we can stand for Him and trust Him in every way.

Brother William Miller

Brother William Miller attends the Church of God in Newark, OH.



A Personal God

Sister Jeri Lynn
Thilmony

Matthew 6:28 And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin:

29 And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

30 Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?

31 Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?

32 (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.

33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

These Scriptures have become my favorite verses in the Bible since I got saved. They let me know God had my back throughout my life. He took care of me, no matter what I needed or what I was going through. He is always there for me. My name is Jeri Lynn Thilmony, and my husband is Brother Josh Thilmony. I am a youth leader, and my husband is a pastor. We both have a lot of interaction with our youth.

I started going to church when I was about two years old. My mom

had become a Christian, but my dad was not a Christian. So we had a divided home in that sense, but we all loved each other and were close. My dad drank alcohol, but was never abusive. I grew up with a church influence from my mom, and a bar influence from my dad because he would go to the bar and drink. He would tell us stories about bar fighting and "glorify" the things that went on there.

I grew up with four of my brothers. My dad was married before, so two of my half-brothers and my half-sister lived away from us with their mother. There are eight of us all together, and I am number five of the eight. We are all close. I went to church with my mom and my brothers. I played underneath the pew and read books. Sometimes, I decided not to go to church because I wanted to stay home and watch TV. I also had cousins who went to church when I was growing up, and we were very close. One cousin would always say: "Hey, are you coming to church tonight? I want you to come, so I have someone to talk to." So I would go.

I was a tomboy growing up. I climbed trees and played with trucks. Whatever my brothers did was what I liked to do. I played with dolls some, but when my cousins started playing with Barbie dolls, I said no. I was a rough girl. My dad talked

about bar fights, and I was in a few fights myself.

One time my brothers and I were visiting our cousins, and I was probably ten or eleven years old, and we were out by the creek having a good time. I was the only girl there. It seemed to be that way most of the time. The neighbor boy, who was about my age, came out and told us we could not play in the creek. I was a tomboy girl, so I beat him up, and we played in the creek. I was not a soft girl. I had a rougher background than some girls I grew up with in the church.

When I became a teenager, my cousins would go to the altar. Sometimes they were saved, and sometimes they were not saved. Then my dad became a Christian, and that changed things in our home. After my dad got saved, my brothers got saved. I was the last one to get saved. I remember being in middle school and the devil telling me: "Just wait. Do not get saved right now. Do it after you get through high school so you do not have to face your friends." Then he would say, "After college and after you get married, then maybe you can get saved." He did not say, "Do not ever get saved," just "Do not do it right now." I remember thinking about that.

I watched my mom, and she was a dedicated Christian. She loved God, and she submitted to my dad. Some may think, "Submit?" Submit does not mean you are a floor mat, so to speak. It just means you allow yourself to go along with things, even though it may not be of your opinion. Many people think *submit* is a terrible word, but it does not have to be. My mom loved my dad. I watched her, and I knew what a Christian was supposed to do. I also knew if I got saved, I would have to give up my favorite soap opera, and it was fun to watch because it had younger people in it.

God started dealing with me during a revival meeting when I was thirteen years old. My heart was convicted, and I went down to the altar. I remember starting out in the

aisle, just barely putting my foot out, taking steps toward the altar, and I remember feeling like I was not really walking on the floor anymore. When I got saved, I meant it. I knew what it meant to be saved, and I really committed myself to the Lord then and there.

I wanted to learn about the Lord, and I read my Bible. My mom would pray and read the Bible with us. We were not always the perfect children. One time, we were supposed to be getting ready for school, and my mom was in the car waiting for us. I was taking my time, and my brother had gotten mad at me and kicked me in the leg. It dropped me to the floor. I was hollering, lying on the floor, and he got into the car. My mom asked, "What is holding up Jeri Lynn?"

He said: "Oh, she will be coming. She is all right." We were not an exceptionally "lovey-dovey" family, or a perfect family, something you may think of when you think of a Christian home.

I remember my first prayer. I began to pray because I could not find my favorite pair of socks. I asked the Lord to help me find them. I had looked and looked for them. After I had prayed, I found my socks! It was a stepping stone for me in my life that God answers prayer. It may seem silly, but I was a thirteen-year-old girl learning how to pray. Maybe you remember your first prayer. Mine was for my socks.

When I went to church after I got saved, I had to get used to the sisters hugging me. Our family loved each other, but we were not real touchy. We only hugged every once in a while. I love to hug the sisters, but I had to get used to it. Love looks different for different people. Maybe you come from a very affectionate home where you hug or kiss each other on the cheek, but I did not have that kind of home.

Sometimes, love defends. If someone would come to me talking badly about one of my brothers, who I would get into it with, I would stop them and say, "Do not talk about my

brother like that!" Love may look different to some. It does not have to be exactly the way you think it should be. Someone who is loyal shows love.

My grandpa and uncle had a family junkyard business, so I was a "junkyard dog" from the time I was about ten years old. I worked in the office, but eventually I went outside and lifted transmissions and got dirty. Actually, when I was doing some of those jobs, I started thinking, "I want to act like a lady." My cousins were in the office, and they were clean. They did not have to go home and scrub off all the grease like I did.



I was a rough girl, so I had to learn to be ladylike. In my mind, there were certain things I thought a lady would do, so I began reading books to learn how to act like a lady. I read Proverbs, Chapter 31, all the time. I would be so happy if someone complimented me and said I acted like a young, godly lady because I was trying so hard to be one. I looked at the older women, too, for an example.

We all have personality differences. In my mind, I thought I had to act a certain way to be a lady, but it does not have to be that way. You do not have to read books on etiquette, how to walk, and all of that stuff. Our personality differences make us all unique. My husband works with

me, trying to get me to be myself. I have asked him several times, "Are you sure?" and he says, "Yes." He wants me to be myself.

I love to laugh. Some people think that is too much silliness, but I love to laugh, and I love to see other people laugh. There will always be problems. Everyone has some problem they are dealing with. If you can forget that for a moment and laugh, think about something happy, it will make you feel better. I love to laugh, and I love to argue for fun. Some people do not like that, but I tell my kids there are more happy people than grumpy people. Most people like to laugh and have a good time.

Some other things about me are I like guns and knives, but I also like shopping and pretty things too. That is my personality and my uniqueness. I like to shoot guns, and I like to bake. You are unique too. We do not have to be the same. Sometimes we worry too much about what others think. "If I do this, what are they going to think of me?" All our uniqueness works together. Some are more serious, and some are not. The Lord likes variety. Look at the flowers. They are all different colors.

I became a Christian at the age of thirteen. I was learning about being kind and being a friend. I also started liking boys. I liked boys when I was younger, but they still had "cooties." I started praying about boys and asking God to give me a boyfriend. My mom told me I could not date anyone until I learned how to make pie crust. One day, I made fifteen pie crusts and put them in the freezer. When I was done, I walked to the door, opened it, and said, "Where are the boys?" That did not work, but my mom made me learn how to make a pie and cook at least one meal.

I was praying for a boyfriend, and I also wanted to be a preacher's wife. I thought that would be nice. I was still young when the thought came to me, "What if a boy kisses me?" God is a personal God. I had started praying about that from a young age. Some may laugh about that, but those little prayers make a

difference. I remember the first time a boy asked me to kiss him. He was quite a few years older than I was, and he said in front of his friends, "Hey Jeri Lynn, can I kiss you?"

I said, "No!" I was still learning about Christianity, but I thought if he kisses me, I am going to smack him right in the mouth and tell his mom. All those worries and fears you have, you cannot tell anyone else because they are embarrassing. You can take them to the Lord because He is real.

I remember liking a young Christian man who was dedicated to the Lord. I thought: "It has to be the Lord's will because he is saved and I am saved. They teach you to look for someone spiritual, and he is spiritual." He ended up with one of my friends, and that hurt for a while. I really liked him, and I could not understand.

Then, I was introduced to Josh by another sister. We were all sitting at the breakfast table together with another young man I did not know. I had heard from the young people this other young man was a bit strange. After this sister introduced us, she got up to get ready for the service. Next, Josh started to stand up, and I thought, "He is not going to leave me with this strange guy I do not know." I had listened to what other people had said about him. I kicked Josh under the table. He looked at me, stopped what he was doing, and sat back down. I got to know the other guy later, and he was fine. We need to be careful about making fun of other people who are different.

I had it in my head that I wanted a Christian cowboy for a companion. I loved cowboy boots (that is what I kicked Josh with—my cowgirl boots). Evidently, the Lord wanted to give me someone to calm me down. I actually felt the Lord told me in one service while I was watching Josh, "He is the one." So I stayed dedicated to that.

We got together, and then he broke up with me. He did not tell me why he broke up with me, but we ended up getting back together. I asked him why he broke up. He said

he thought I was too quiet. If I was quiet and he was quiet, then it would not work. I was very shy around him. I could not eat in front of him while we were dating. We went to a restaurant one time, and he bought me this really big sandwich. I barely ate it. I would take a little nibble, wipe my mouth, take a little nibble, and wipe my mouth. He went to the bathroom, and I gulped it down.

The Lord put us together and we mesh very well. We have been married for twenty-nine years, and the Lord has been with us. We were poor when we started off in our marriage. We did not have a glorious mansion, the best cars, and everything we wanted. Sometimes we would have to pray and ask the Lord for the things we needed, and He answered those prayers.

We have five children. We were young parents. We prayed, and I asked people the Lord had put in our lives: "How do I raise children? How am I supposed to be a wife?" I learned these things as we went.

Before you get married, God leads you, and He will continually lead you. He truly will! God may not talk audibly, but there are ways He will speak to you and you will know it is Him. You will know what He wants you to do by reading your Bible and praying. The Bible is talking to you. You talk to God when you pray, and you can ask Him for anything. He answers prayer.

God has brought us through so many things. We have five children, and we have lost two. I have lost my parents and my grandparents. Josh went through heart surgery. The Lord took us through all that and helped us. He gave me confidence before Josh's surgery that if He would take Josh, He would be with me, but He did not take Josh.

God has always been there. I am fifty-two years old now, and I got saved when I was thirteen. I am so glad I started serving the Lord when I was young. God has given me the best life. Some of my cousins I grew up with are no longer in church. Even though they did not get into

drugs, some of their kids did, and some of their grandchildren are gone because they overdosed. It is so sad.

Young person, keep your self-respect. As I said, if that guy had kissed me, I would have smacked his mouth. Some people might think that is wrong, but he needed to learn some respect. Again, my favorite Bible verse is Matthew 6:33, which reads, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." I have found that verse is so true.

If there is any advice I can give to Christian young people, it is to smile. Put yourself in the position inside so you can smile. I am not talking about being fake. Smile at people in the grocery stores, your school, or wherever you are. I always try to smile. Watch people when you smile. Wherever you are, it brightens them up! You can tell a difference in people when you smile. It is a ministry.

Sister Jeri Lynn Thilmoney is the pastor's wife at the Church of God in Findlay, OH.

TODAY

My gift was delivered at seven
Just as I woke where I lay;
A gift that was marked "From
Heaven"

My gift was this beautiful day.

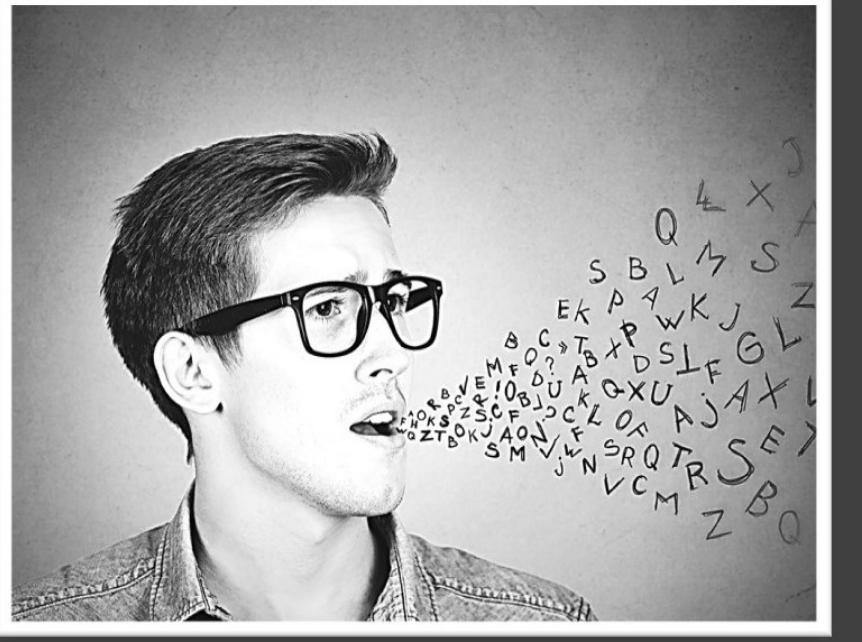
One wonderful, shining, good
morning

Entrusted by God to my care.
It came bearing this warning:
"Fragile – handle with prayer."



Author
Unknown

THE POWER OF WORDS



Brother Jeremy Hupp

John 6:63 It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.

1 Timothy 6:12 Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.

If you are living for God, you are definitely in a fight. If a true fighter is not fighting, he is training for a fight. A great fighter does not become a champion by showing up in the ring and fighting. He has to train.

Christians are in a battle, and one of the hardest things to train is the tongue. James 3:5 says: "Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!" Have you ever heard someone say, "I wish I had never said that"? Do you ever have the thought, "Why did I say that?" Bridling the tongue can sometimes be difficult.

Some say, "No one cares what I have to say," or "It is just

words." Words matter. We need to be careful of careless chatter. I like to talk, and I have been training myself to listen more and talk less. You cannot always say what you want. When I flew to Oregon and went through airport security, I did not say, "I have a bomb in my bag" just for fun. I did not get on the airplane and say, "I am not wearing this mask." They would have dragged me off the plane.

Sometimes we underestimate the effect our words have. There are twenty-six letters in the alphabet. Google says the English language has more than a million different words. People who speak English use roughly a hundred and seventy thousand different words on a regular basis. The average person speaks between twenty and thirty thousand words in their vocabulary. What have you spoken in your lifetime? How do you use your words?

Our Scripture text reads, "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they

are spirit, and they are life." Those are the words of Christ. His words mattered, and we are to be like Christ and pattern our lives after Him. The words we speak should be Spirit and life to the world.

We are engulfed in a world of social media communication. When I was growing up, there were three channels on the TV and about two radio stations, and they faded out in the evening. We had the six o'clock news, and now we have twenty-four-hour news. There are many communication channels and blogs. It seems everyone is a blogger, has a webpage, a TikTok, an Instagram, and a Facebook. I realize that is an unqualified generalization, but many people have some or all these avenues of communication. Think about the number of words spoken on all these platforms every moment of every day. It is staggering!

We, as the Church of God, have an opportunity to speak. In the midst of all the turmoil going on in the world, all the sinful and evil communications and

corruption, God has given us a voice. Christ wants our words to be Spirit and life. It is almost like a little grain of sand fighting against a sand castle because there is so much warring against good, but that should not weaken our desire to be a bright light. We need to realize the importance of doing our part to get the Word of God out to reach people and proclaim what God can do.

God's Word Created the World

God can certainly do amazing things. God has done miraculous things in my life. He gave me another opportunity. He was merciful to me. The love of God's people drew me back. The words you speak and the love you show as a Christian are Spirit and life.

Hebrews 11:3 says, "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear." Genesis 1:1-3 states: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light." Verse 6 reads, "And God said, Let there be a firmament," and God made a firmament. It says in verse 9, "And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place."

God spoke everything into existence. He did not have to do it that way. He is God. He could have snapped His fingers, and it would have all been done. However, He wanted to make it very clear that what He says matters. God said, "Let the waters part," and "Let there be light." It was not happenstance; it was worded that way. He wanted us to understand how important words are. God cares about the words we

speak. He used His Word for the creation of the world. It is an example of how powerful and important words are. God's Word formed everything we see today. It is amazing.

There have been cases in history where one word or one comment started a war between nations. One word has divided a congregation of people. One word has separated families. If one careless word is spoken, someone can take offence, and it could divide their families for years. I wonder how many have been driven away from the Church of God by something someone said?

Words can lead ones to God and build up the Kingdom of God, but they can also tear each other down. First Thessalonians 5:11 says, "Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do." One song the children sing says, "*Encourage one another, and build each other up.*" It is encouraging when someone says to you: "I really appreciated the song you sang or the prayer you prayed in prayer service. It lifted my spirit and helped me."

The Power of the Tongue

If our words are Spirit and life, they encourage people to go on. You may not realize the struggle someone is in and the battles they are facing in life. Many times, people think about giving up. They feel they have had all they can take. Life is hard. Perhaps their family has forsaken them, they have been persecuted, and they feel it is not worth the struggle. Have you ever felt that way? Honestly, I have felt that way. One person walking up to them and saying "Brother, I love and appreciate you" makes them feel better. They may be able to take one more step. A kind word, a morsel in Jesus' name, can encourage

The words
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heart.



ones to go on.

Proverbs 18:21 says, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof." The words we say can lead ones to life, or they can kill them. The words you say can kill someone, spiritually speaking. It could cause them to be lost forever. There is power in the tongue. That is why it is so important to control your thought life and the things you meditate on. There is not a single word that proceeds out of your mouth that does not originate in your thinking first.

Before you say, "Praise the Lord," you are thinking about what God has done for you. This happens in the worship services. Someone may testify or sing a song, and ones will raise their hands and say, "Thank You, Lord!" If you have been thinking about all God has done, the testimonies and songs will cause those thoughts in your mind to travel to your heart. Then you will explode with happiness, joy, and thanksgiving.

It matters what you think about. Some people say, "I did not mean to say that, it just came out." That is not entirely true. Whatever you have been thinking or meditating on, whatever has been bothering you, will

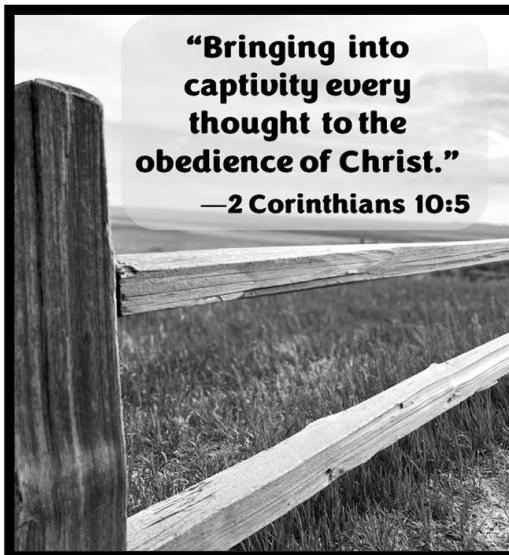
suddenly come out of your mouth. You may wish you had not said it, but to say you did not mean to say it is probably not true because you have been letting those thoughts control you to the place where it came out. The words you speak are a direct reflection of what is in your heart.

Jesus said in Matthew 12:34-37: "O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." What is in your heart will come out of your mouth.

Captivating Your Thoughts

Second Corinthians 10:5 says we need to bring "into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." Once you have a thought, you have to process that thought. Have you heard the phrase, "In one ear and out the other"? That is how most thoughts should go. A thought or a temptation may come in through your ear, your eyes, or your mind, and it lingers in your brain. What are you going to do with it? You should send it out the other side because if you leave it there and meditate on it, it will travel to your heart, and then you will have problems.

Once you have a thought, you must immediately identify whether that thought is good or evil. You must captivate that thought. You cannot help what thoughts come into your mind, but you can control what you do



with those thoughts. You can cast them out of your mind, or you can transfer them to the treasure of your heart. I remember the late Brother Gordon preached a message one time and used this illustration. If you are walking down the street and you see a beautiful woman who is half dressed, you cannot help but notice. You glance over and there she is. What are you going to do? There is nothing sinful in seeing a pretty woman, but if you drive around the block to get another look, you have crossed over from temptation to sin, and now you have a problem.

Every battle, won or lost, is fought between your ears, in your mind. No one can make you smoke a cigarette, shoot heroin in your arm, or tell a lie. It is a conscious decision you make when thoughts come into your mind. How are you handling your thoughts? When you let things come into your mind and you meditate on them, they flow down into your heart. The Scripture says, "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh."

If you find yourself saying things you should not say, then you have been meditating on things you should not be meditating on. You had a thought come in you should have cast out, but instead you let it linger.

A good depiction of your heart is a teapot filled with water. You can set it on the stove, and when the water boils, it blows off hot steam and whistles. It boils out what is already in there. Hopefully, it is Spirit and life.

You do not know what you will face tomorrow, but what you have been meditating on is what will take you through. If you have been meditating on how terrible life is, how rough everything is, when something does hit you, it is liable to take you down. Thank God, through the power of God, you can control what you think and meditate on. One song says, "*I was near to despair when He came to me there, And He told me that I could be free.*"

It is good to have a go-to Scripture or song to think about when you get discouraged. When the devil bombards your mind with things, you have a weapon to fight against him. You may not know how you can deal with all the problems of life, but you can think of the Scripture in Matthew 6:33, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." Storing Scriptures and songs in your heart will give you weapons to fight the battles of life.

The Treasure in Your Heart

Matthew 12:35 says, "A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things." A good man has good treasure. What is in your treasure chest? When I think of a treasure chest, I think of a place to store valuable things such as gold or silver. Today, many have a safe to store their valuables. You may also store important documents, such as birth certificates or social security cards, so you will not misplace them. Guns, coins, something your grandpa gave you, all could be considered

things you want to cherish forever, so you lock them in a safe. Those are your treasures, and they are important to you.

How do you know what you are treasuring in your heart? By what comes out of it. That is what the Scripture says. A good man who has a good treasure will bring forth good things out of his heart. You should not be worrying as much about storing up money and earthly possessions as you should be concerned about what you are storing in your heart. Again, Matthew 12:34 states, "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh."

Matthew 12:35 goes on to say, "An evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things." May God help you consider what you treasure in your heart. Are you storing up love, compassion, and gratitude? Or are you storing doubt, fear, bitterness, anger, and bad attitudes?

I want to have a good treasure and rejoice in my deliverance. God has delivered me from the bondage of sin. Thank God I am free from lying, cheating, smoking, drinking, hatred, and bitterness. Praise God, they are no longer in the treasure of my heart. It is not what I wanted. I wanted something better, something that would bring life, vic-



**What are you
treasuring in your
heart?**

tory, peace, and joy. What are you storing in your heart?

Brother David Stegmeier says, "I say what I mean, and I mean what I say." He also says, "I weigh my words." That is good advice. What does God think of how you are weighing your words? We should weigh our words because they reflect what we are allowing into the treasure of our heart.

One phrase says, "If you do not have anything good to say, do not say anything at all." You can take it a step further. If you have nothing good to say, or if you are saying something you should not, check the treasure of your heart. If you are talking evil or telling dirty jokes, you have evil treasure.

What Are You Allowing in Your Heart?

There was a brother in Oregon who gave a testimony during a camp meeting. He was at work, and someone had turned their video camera on him. Then they told a dirty joke to see how he would react. He hung his head and said, "I do not want to hear that stuff." The treasure he had in his heart came out. That did not happen by chance. It happened by training himself in what he would allow in his heart. Thank God, he passed the test. You may say, "I am glad people are not following me around with a camera trying to see how I would react to what is being said." The reality is God is following you, and He is watching how you react to everything. What God thinks matters far more than what anyone will catch on a camera.

Some can become too free in their talk and in their text messages. People will typically text things to someone they would not say to their face. You can be really bold and explicit in a text message. If you send something

through Snapchat, it is gone ten seconds later. However, someone can screenshot what you said and send it around the world. Young people need to be careful. If it is important that something you send out is gone in ten seconds, it must not be very good.

Parents, check your children's phones. If you find something inappropriate on your child's phone, do not get too upset. Our children are battling many things. We need to work with them, show them love and understanding. Nevertheless, parents also need to be decisive about what they are going to allow and not allow.

If you are talking about the pastor in a negative way, you ought to check your treasure. You are in trouble with God. I marvel at how David conducted himself. King Saul was backslidden away from God, yet David said in 1 Samuel 24:6, "The LORD forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the LORD'S anointed, to stretch forth mine hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the LORD." He had cut the hem of Saul's garment, and he was smitten in his heart. He refused to transgress against the leader God had ordained to be over him.

God is in control of His church. It is not up to man to decide who is the pastor. God cares way more about the Church of God than you or I ever thought about. If He wants to make a move, He will make a move. Where is your faith? Sometimes, those who claim to be the most spiritual are the ones who do not have enough faith to believe God can handle His church.

First Corinthians 12:5 says, "And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord." There are different ways pastors may handle things in their own congregations. Your pastor may not handle some

things the way you think he should, but you should not talk about him and run him down. A difference in administration is not sinful. You may not agree with every administrative decision your pastor makes, but if you run him down because of your disagreement, you are in trouble with God.

Giving an Account for Every Idle Word

Matthew 12:36 reads, "But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment." We are going to give an account on Judgment Day for every idle word. That Scripture goes hand in hand with bringing into captivity every thought.

We must consider every thought and every word because we will be judged accordingly. There is too much idle speaking going on today. Some people talk to have something to say. Some talk on the phone for hours. Have you ever checked your cell phone bill to see how many times you or your kids text in a month? It may surprise you how many times you text in a month. You will be judged for every idle word from every sentence from every minute of every day of every week of every month of every year. That is challenging. Does it make you fearful? It makes me think I need to be quiet more.

Matthew 5:37 says, "But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil." In other words, only say what you need to say. People are watching you. Ones will try to turn your words against the work of God. The co-workers who told a dirty joke and videotaped the brother were going to use his reaction against him. That was their intention. If he had

smirked or giggled a little bit, they would have used it against the work of God in his community. It was not just for fun.

Mark it down. People are watching what you say, where you go, what you do, and how you act, and they will use it against you and the congregation you attend if they can. Weigh your words at all times. Think seriously about the words you say.

Be careful not to get too close to ones. Couples can get together, hang out and play games, but it can easily turn into too much conversation. If you get too comfortable with other people, become too close as friends, you can become more at liberty to talk about things or people you should not be talking about. If you feast on other people's failures, you have a bad treasure. Some people cannot wait to hear how someone failed. They want to investigate to find out what happened.

Each one of us has a heart to guard. You cannot guard mine, and I cannot guard yours. Is there a secret room in your heart where you keep some things hidden you do not want anyone else to know about? Perhaps you

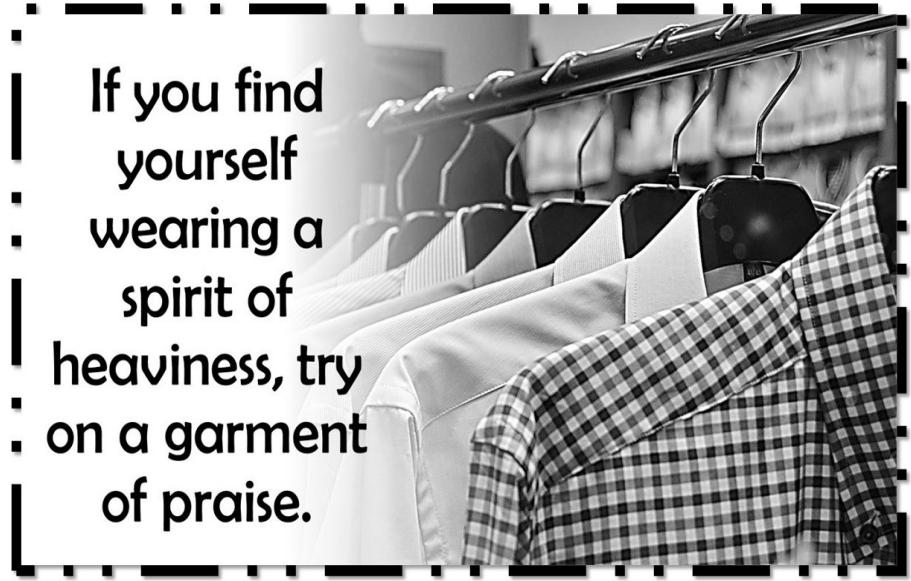
let something into your mind. You meditated on it. Nobody knew you were meditating on it, and you let it travel down into your heart. You may think you have it tucked away in your secret room. Mark it down, that thing is coming out. If it does not come out in this life, it will come out on the Judgment Day. May God help you take care of these things today while you still have time.

I started this message with the thought of training for a fight. Train hard. When bad thoughts come into your mind, ask God to help you drive them out. You may need to ask your pastor or a spiritual leader to pray with you to help you drive those things out. When the children of Israel crossed into the Promised Land, they must have thought: "This is it! We are good to go! We are in the Promised Land." However, they had to drive out the inhabitants of the land. May God help us drive out anything that is not like God.

(Compact Disc TR-2685)

Brother Jeremy Hupp attends the Church of God in Newark, OH.

If you find
yourself
wearing a
spirit of
heaviness, try
on a garment
of praise.



BIBLE STUDIES



BIBLE CHARACTER STUDY: ABIGAIL

SCRIPTURES: 1 Samuel, Chapters 25, 27, 30; 2 Samuel, Chapters 2, 3, 17; 1 Chronicles, Chapter 3

CONTEXT: The Prophet Samuel had died, and David was hiding from King Saul, who was jealous of David (1 Samuel 18:6-9). Many men, believed to have been six hundred, had joined David. "Had Saul's government been just and upright, David would have had no followers. The rate of usury (lending money at unreasonably high rates of interest) was so exorbitant that a loan was sure to end in not only the debtor, but his children might be made slaves to repay the debt" (commentary).

1 Samuel 25:2 And there was a man in Maon, whose possessions were in Carmel; and the man was very great, and he had three thousand sheep, and a thousand goats: and he was shearing his sheep in Carmel.

3 Now the name of the man was Nabal; and the name of his wife Abigail: and she was a woman of good understanding, and of a beautiful countenance: but the man was churlish and evil in his doings; and he was of the house of Caleb.

Abigail's husband, Nabal, was a wealthy man who lived "in Maon" (the mountains of Judah) and whose business was "in Carmel." The name *Nabal* means "fool." In ancient Israel, a man's character was often connected to his name. This account takes place at the time of sheep-shearing, which traditionally in Israel was a time of feasting and plenty due to the prosperous wool trade. It was a time of generous hospitality and to repay debts.

Notice the contrast between the descriptions of Abigail's and Nabal's characters: "good understanding" (Abigail) and "churlish and evil" (Nabal).

DAVID'S REQUEST

1 Samuel 25:6 And thus shall ye say to him that liveth in prosperity, Peace be both to thee, and

peace be to thine house, and peace be unto all that thou hast.

7 And now I have heard that thou hast shearers: now thy shepherds which were with us, we hurt them not, neither was there ought missing unto them, all the while they were in Carmel.

8 Ask thy young men, and they will shew thee. Wherefore let the young men find favour in thine eyes: for we come in a good day: give, I pray thee, whatsoever cometh to thine hand unto thy servants, and to thy son David.

David and his men provided a valuable service for Nabal, protecting his men and sheep from raids by the Philistines. It was not unreasonable to expect compensation for this. David waited to ask until the sheep shearing as this was when Nabal would have been most generous. David's words reminded Nabal his profit would not have been so great without the help of David and his men.

David sent ten men (not an intimidating number), who were to say, "We come in a good day" (feast day) and to ask, "Give, I pray thee, whatsoever cometh to thine hand" (whatever Nabal determined was appropriate).

NABAL'S ANSWER

1 Samuel 25:10 And Nabal answered David's servants, and said, Who is David? and who is the son of Jesse? there be many servants now a days that break away every man from his master.

11 Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men, whom I know not whence they be?

Nabal claimed to not know who David was; yet David was known throughout Israel (1 Samuel 18:5-7). If he did not know who David was, why did he call him "the son of Jesse"? Nabal was insulting David. It is possible that Nabal was a supporter of King Saul, for he described David as a rebellious servant ("many servants . . . break away . . . from his master"). Consider all the "I's" and "my's" in verse 11. What does this say about Nabal's character?

DAVID'S ANGER

1 Samuel 25:13 And David said unto his men, Gird ye on every man his sword. And they girded on every man his sword; and David also girded on his sword: and there went up after David about four hundred men; and two hundred abode by the stuff.

This was not David's finest moment. He failed to respond to Nabal's insult as God desired. Compare this response to David's long-suffering with

King Saul, who was doing more than insulting David. He was trying to kill him. Is it possible that David looked at Saul as his superior (king) and Nabal as his equal or inferior? Character can be determined not by how we treat people we consider our superiors, but by our treatment of those we consider equal or beneath us.

After eight years of being on the run and having lost his friend (the Prophet Samuel), David was no doubt weary and vulnerable when this took place. Yet, offenses are a part of life (Luke 17:1), and we must be careful to not be too consumed with ourselves lest we take a wrong attitude when offenses come.

David did not send ten men as before, but came with "four hundred men." They were armed, and the intention seemed to be to wipe out Nabal and his men. Was David thinking of the innocent people who were involved? Was David thinking of his high calling (to one day be Israel's king)? Proverbs 19:11 says, "The discretion of a man deferreth his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression." It could be said that David had lowered himself to Nabal's level. Anger has great power!

ABIGAIL INTERCEDES **(1 Samuel 25:14-17)**

One of Nabal's servants told Abigail what had happened, saying, Nabal "is such a son of Belial [reckless, uncontrollable], that a man cannot speak to him." Was she the voice of reason in that household? Could it be that the servants had asked for her intervention before? What does this say about Abigail's character?

Abigail had discernment and quickly ("made haste") put together a plan. She took a gift: 200 loaves of bread, 2 skins of wine, 5 dressed sheep, 5 seahs of grain (approximately 15 gallons of dry measure), 100 clusters of raisins, and 200 cakes of figs. "The fact that Abigail was able to gather so much food so quickly shows how wealthy Nabal was. If this much food was on hand, it makes Nabal's ungenerous reply to David all the worse" (commentary).

ABIGAIL'S PLEA **(1 Samuel 25:23-31)**

This large gift must have required a large procession of animals, servants, and perhaps carts. What an impact this must have had on David. Upon arrival, Abigail humbly "bowed herself to the ground." She took the blame for the "iniquity" and asked permission to speak. She wisely understood many more lives than Nabal's were in danger.

Abigail suggested David was going to do the

right thing: "seeing the LORD hath withholden thee from coming to shed blood" (verse 26). In verse 28, she asked for forgiveness and praised David, saying, "My lord fighteth the battles of the LORD, and evil hath not been found in thee all thy days."

When Abigail said, "The LORD will certainly make my lord a sure [enduring] house," she was gently reminding David of his life's greater purpose. It was a reminder to not do something he would later regret: shedding blood without cause (verse 31). Abigail was encouraging David to let God take care of Nabal's insult.

Abigail's actions and words to David are a beautiful example of how to resolve conflict in a manner pleasing to God. David was clearly in the wrong, but Abigail did not stress that in her words to David. She was not negative or finger-pointing in her approach. She reminded David of his integrity, calling, and destiny.

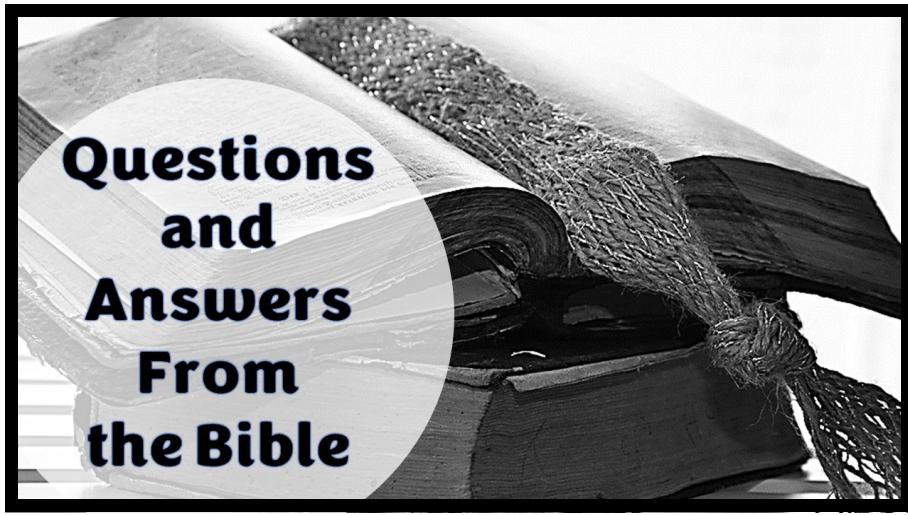
This lesson on the character of Abigail can provide several things to remember when working to resolve conflict:

- **A gift** (kind words, actions, or a literal gift); keep in mind, Abigail's gift was generous.
- **Understanding** (realize the conflict often affects others).
- **Humility** (Abigail called David "my lord" and referred to herself as "your servant").
- **Take blame** ("perhaps I misunderstood," or "I am sorry for not handling this as I should have").
- **A soft answer** (words and tone matter); "A soft answer turneth away wrath" (Proverbs 15:1).
- **Praise** (compliment this person on what he or she has done well).

Consider Abigail's part in God's plan. If David succeeded in killing Nabal and his men, King Saul might have seemingly been validated in his desire to find and kill David. Also, it would have followed David the rest of his life, perhaps hindering him from becoming king over all of Israel.

The result of Abigail's wisdom and actions is found in 1 Samuel 25:32-35. Verse 32 says, "And David said to Abigail, Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me." Verse 35 states, "So David received of her hand that which she had brought him, and said unto her, Go up in peace to thine house; see, I have hearkened to thy voice, and have accepted thy person."

This Bible Character Study is part of a series that can be downloaded at GodsAcres.org (click on "Youth" and "Bible Studies").



WHAT ARE THE SERIES IN THE REVELATION, AND HOW ARE THEY DIVIDED UP?

INTRODUCTION—Chapter 1 is an introduction to the Revelation and also an introduction to the first series.

SERIES 1—Chapters 2 and 3. *The Letter Series* takes us sequentially, by the seven letters, through the seven periods that comprise the Gospel Day.

INTRODUCTION TO THE SEAL

SERIES—Chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 4 takes us symbolically into eternity past. It speaks of "one sat on the throne" (verse 2), and then Chapter 5 shows "in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals" (verse 1). Chapter 5 proceeds to speak of John weeping concerning the sealed book (verse 4) and the introduction of the Lamb that prevailed to loose the seals (verses 5-7). It is clear from the repeated mentioning of the "seals" that these chapters are a precursor and introduction to the seal series that properly begins in Chapter 6.

SERIES 2—Chapter 6 through Chapter 8, verse 2. This is *The Opening of the Seven Seals*.

SERIES 3—This series begins formally in Chapter 8, verse 2 (there is a small overlap in Series 2 and Series 3) by introducing "the seven angels," which was not understood until the message of

the seventh seal. However, the sounding of their seven trumpets did not transpire during the seventh-seal period; they merely became understood during this period. Series 3 (*The Sounding of the Seven Trumpets*) runs from Chapter 8, verse 2, to the end of Chapter 10, but also includes Revelation 11:15-19.

SERIES 4—*The Witness Series* runs through Chapter 11, which is a series in itself.

SERIES 5—*The Beast Series* begins with Chapter 12. Some have taught that this chapter is a series in itself. I see how they could do that as 12:17 speaks of "the remnant of her seed." However, 12:16 describes how "the earth helped the woman." This is an allusion to the Roman Emperor Constantine. Therefore, 13:1, which describes the papal beast, is a natural chronological sequence to 12:16. Thus, Series 5 is Chapters 12-19. This brings us through the Gospel Day in sequence.

SERIES 6—*The Description and Defeat of Devilish Devices*, found in Chapter 20, is a series in itself.

SERIES 7—*The City Series* is Chapters 21 and 22. This series begins with a portrayal of the institution of the church in the morning time with the vision of it "coming down from God out of heaven" (verse 2) on the Day of

Pentecost. From there, it proceeds through the Gospel Day, but mostly emphasizes the evening-time portion.

WHAT DOES "SIGNIFIED" MEAN (REVELATION 1:1)?

The nature of the Revelation language is expressed in this verse, which says that "he sent and *signified* it." The Greek word for "signified" is *semaino*, which means "expressing by signs, to make known, to give a sign." *Webster's New World Dictionary* states that a *sign* is "a mark or a symbol having a specific meaning." The word *sign* comes from the Latin word *signum*, and the original Anglo-Saxon word means "token." A token is something serving as a symbol. Thus, the word "signified" means "made known by symbol and figure."

The Apostle John used the same word in his Gospel account in John 12:33, which says, "This he said, signifying what death he should die." Symbolic language is not novel to the Book of Revelation; it was used throughout the Scriptures. Remember that the Bible was designed to convey spiritual truth; therefore, spiritual language was used.

The Scriptures teach by association, taking something natural and understandable and paralleling it to a mystery to teach a spiritual truth. Jesus repeatedly employed this method of teaching. (See Matthew 5:13-14; 7:15, 17-19; Acts 20:28-29.)

For further study, read The Book of Revelation Explained, Volume 1. Available at GodsAcres.org (click on "Resources" and "Study Materials").

Brother Earl R. Borders

Brother Earl R. Borders is the pastor of the Church of God in Summersville, WV.

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