

Spiritual Care Visitation Guide

15 Feb 2001

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Introduction

Caring for the sick, the weak, those confined in care centers, is truly close to God's heart. He shows His compassion to those who are in need and as His servants we must push aside our busy schedules, step past our fears and bring the Love of Christ to those who are sick, who may be lost, who have such a great need.

In the book of Job, second chapter, we can see this Love being poured out upon Job. Three of Job's friends came to comfort him as he sat in a heap of ashes, covered with draining boils. To show their compassion they stayed with him for seven days and nights.

You may say the "Prayer is enough, I don't need to go and visit with them"; but prayers are answered in God's timing not ours. These people will some day be healed, but until that time we must pour our compassion upon them, bring them spiritual support, and the Love of Christ. If you noticed in Job chapter 2, his friends did not leave him and assume he would eventually be healed, but they comforted him for as long as it took.

In the care centers you will find the sick, the lost, the spiritually starving, the young along with the old, and a place in desperate need of your help. Matthew 18:14 tells us that "In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost" The fact is that many in the care centers are lost. They are sick, some terminal, are often confined to a bed or a wheel chair, and feel abandon. The problem is that spiritually they are; their brothers and sisters in Christ have forgotten them. In Luke 15:3-7 we hear "The Jesus told them a parable: "Suppose one of you have a hundred sheep and lose one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully outs it on his shoulder and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep'. I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent." This encourages us to go find and minister to the lost. Then in James 5:14-16 we are lead to the sick "Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other

so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. The need in the Care Centers can also be summed up in Matthew 25:34-40 "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

When you go into the Care Centers you will see almost all of this. People who are sick, imprisoned in their beds or wheel chairs, most are in need of clothing because they have no one to provide for them, and they are all hungry and thirsty for God's Word and to feel the Love of Christ from their fellow Christians.

Another responsibility of the Church and Christians that is overlooked is found in 1 Timothy 5 which tells us that the church will look after and provide for true widows, and also defines what a true widow is. I am here to tell you there are many true widows in the Care Centers and their church has forgot most.

God has put the care of those in the Care Centers on my heart for the past two years. He has lead me to volunteer as a Chaplain in three Care Centers, to start prayer and study groups, to start Sunday worship services, to spread the Love of Christ to those who are sick and in need, to survey the spiritual needs of the Care Centers then to inform the Christian Churches in Arizona of this tremendous need.

When you begin to look at the Care Centers in Arizona you will find that there are 1458 licensed facilities ranging from 2 to 408 beds. The break down is that there are 1069 facilities with 10 beds or less and 389 facilities with greater than 10 beds. The common reaction is to go to the larger facilities; however, those in the smaller facilities deserve the same spiritual

support. So I encourage you to pray about it, look at your schedule and see if visiting a few smaller facilities would be better than one large one.

I hope this has shown you the need and motivated you to get out into the Care Centers and share the Love of Christ and your Faith in God. You will truly be rewarded more than you could ever imagine.

Since time is usually in control of our lives and determines if our how much we are able to do for others, reflect on this story:

BUSY: Satan called a worldwide convention. In his opening address to his evil angels, he said, "We can't keep the Christians from going to church. We can't keep them from reading their Bibles and knowing the truth. We can't even keep them from forming an intimate, abiding relationship experience in Christ. If they gain that connection with Jesus, our power over them is broken. So let them go to church, let them have their conservative lifestyles, but steal their time, so they can't gain that experience in Jesus Christ. This is what I want you to do, angels. Distract them from gaining hold of their Savior and maintaining that vital connection throughout their day!" "How shall we do this?" shouted his angels. "Keep them busy in the nonessentials of life and invent innumerable schemes to occupy their minds," he answered. "Tempt them to spend, spend, spend, and borrow, borrow, borrow. Persuade the wives to go to work for long hours and the husbands to work 6 - 7 days a week, 10 - 12 hours a day, so they can afford their lifestyles. Keep them from spending time with their children. As their family fragments, soon, their home will offer no escape from the pressures of work." "Over stimulate their minds so that they cannot hear that still small voice. Entice them to play the radio or cassette player whenever they drive. Keep their TV, VCR, CDs and PCs going constantly in their homes. And see to it that every store and restaurant in the world plays non-biblical music constantly. This will jam their minds and break that union with Christ." "Fill the coffee table with magazines and newspapers. Pound their minds with the news 24 hours a day. Invade their driving moments with billboards. Flood their mailboxes with junk mail, sweepstakes, mail order catalogues, and every kind of newsletter and promotional offering free products, services, and false hopes." "Even in their recreation, let them be excessive. Have them return from their recreation exhausted, disquieted, and unprepared for the coming week. Don't let them go out in nature to reflect on God's wonders. Send them to amusement parks, sporting events, concerts and movies instead. And when they meet for spiritual fellowship, involve them in gossip and

small talk so that they leave with troubled consciences and unsettled emotion." "Let them be involved in soul-winning. But crowd their lives with so many good causes they have no time to seek power from Christ. Soon they will be working in their own strength, sacrificing their health and family for the good of the cause." It was quite a convention in the end. And the evil angels went eagerly to their assignments causing Christians everywhere to get busy, busy, busy and rush here and there. Has the devil been successful at his scheme? You be the JUDGE. How about this definition of busy:

B - Being

U - Under

S - Satan's

Y - Yoke

Let this remind us to always let God be in control. Reading His Word, Prayer, and Serving others should be a priority in our lives. Remember to be a true; everything we do is for the greater Glory of God. We should always ask God to guide us, to lead us to those in need, to give us His Words, to send and fill us with the Holy Spirit. Never except personal thanks for what you do because you are not doing it, it is God doing it through you. Wake up with this attitude each day and ask God to use you, and you will find a joy greater than you could ever imagine.

Why should we provide support to the Care Centers?

Care Centers contain people who are sick, imprisoned in their beds or wheel chairs, most are in need of clothing because they have no one to provide for them, and they are all hungry and thirsty for God's Word and to feel the Love of Christ from their fellow Christians. If Jesus were here today, I feel that he would spend so much time going into these places, providing comfort, compassion, and healing. As you and I can't bring healing, we can bring to them prayer for healing, anointing, compassion, comfort, a kind word, the Love of Christ, and Christian fellowship. We can let each of them know their brothers and sisters in Christ do not forget them. We can show them that they are important 365 days of the year, not just on holidays when we are feeling guilty.

God lead me to the Care Centers because of the lack of support and the fact, I believe, that I enjoy working with the elderly and dying. When I first went looking to do Chaplaincy, I went to one of the large hospitals to volunteer. There was one paid chaplain there and the rest were volunteers. They had 16 volunteer Chaplains and over 20 on a waiting list. Then God put on my heart to check some of the surrounding care centers. I found that all of them had no chaplain and very little spiritual support. I immediately started volunteering at three of the care centers. Why did the hospital have so much and the care centers have nothing? I feel that the answer is this; 1. Some feel it is more prestige's to work at a hospital and when you go somewhere else you will be able to say you were at a large medical center, 2. The most important is the fact that in hospitals the patients are there for a short time, you will probably only see them once and will not have to build any relationship; whereas in the care centers you will build nothing but relationships. Why is that an issue? Approximately three quarters of all of the people in care centers are either long term or permanent residents. This mean you will build long-term relationship, but you will also say bye to a lot of new friends. In one two week period I had 10 people pass on into glory. For most this is more than they want to handle; for me I feel it is a great honor to help people through the death process on their journey to eternity. What an incredible gift to give them as you say goodbye. This is one thing you will have to look at before you get involved to deep in the spiritual care of those in these types of facilities. Even though you may feel you might not be able to do it, if you want to serve the Lord in this fashion, remember, "With God all things are possible".

We can pray for Healing

Prayer is the most important thing we can bring to these people who are sick. When I went through a Chaplain's training course they emphasized that you should not ask people in hospitals and care centers if you can pray for them. I have also heard this from other Chaplains. I say WRONG. I have not met a person yet who was not eager for prayer. Even nonbelievers and atheist seem to change their tune when they are sick and in one of these facilities. They become eager to have prayer and even let you talk to them about Christ. What an excellent way to open the door and witness to people. I am also reminded of the saying A.S.A.P., which actually mean Always Say A Prayer. James 5:14-16 tells us "Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven". How important it is to take the time and pray for those who are sick. Also in Acts 28:8 we hear that "His father was sick in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery. Paul went in to see him and, after prayer, placed his hands on him and healed him". Pray without ceasing!

We can Anoint the sick

Anointing of the sick has been one of the ways we can help those who are sick. In Mark 6:13 we read "They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them". Allowing God to anoint the sick through you is but another great service you can provide to the Him.

We can show them Compassion

Jesus showed compassion to every sick person He met. This shows us what we must do if we are to try and live our lives like Christ. Not only would the sick seek Him out once they heard of the miracles of healing; but He would also find them so that He could comfort them and bring them healing. This is evident in Jesus' parable in Luke 16:19-28 "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by

his side. So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.' "But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.' "He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' To serve the Lord, to offer compassion and comfort to those who are sick and in need, to receive the rewards of our Father in Heaven.

"There is no wilderness so terrible, so beautiful, so arid, and so fruitful as the wilderness of compassion. It is the only desert that shall flourish like the lily."

-Thomas Merton

We can bring them Comfort

We have already taken a look at the comfort provided to Job from his three friends. (Job chapter 2) This was an incredible display of compassion and caring towards one of God's children. We also see how important it is to provide comfort to one another. In Isaiah 40:1 God tells us "Comfort, comfort my people". This is very direct and to the point. We also see the emphasis put on comforting one another in 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 where we hear "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God". This brings up a very important point, we are providing what God has given to us, what God is doing through us, not something directly from us. Therefore when you go out and comfort someone, do it for the right reasons, go as an instrument of God, bring His love and comfort to those in need, do it for the Glory of God. We hear this in Phil 2:1-4 which tell us "If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better

than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others”.

Bring them a Kind Word

Bringing a kind word and a cheerful attitude to those who are sick and alone can open the way for them to have a wonderful day. Proverbs 12:25 tells us “An anxious heart weighs a man down, but a kind word cheers him up.” This is so true in the care centers. Some of these people never have anyone come and visit, some even sit in their rooms alone all day. Bring some joy to their hearts. Sit down with them and listen; then share from your heart and with the Love of Christ. And remember “A cheerful look brings joy to the heart, and good news gives health to the bones”. (Proverbs 15:30)

One thing I have done which has been well received is to share Christian stories and jokes with the sick. You can find thousands of stories and jokes on the Internet.

We can show them the Love of Christ

Acts 20:35 sets the example for us to follow: “In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" When you remember this in all you do, you have taken the first step in showing the Love of Christ. If we try in every aspect, to live our lives, as Christ would have us, we can then become a servant of Christ. You need to show His love to each person you visit, being cheerful, full of love and concern for them. If it is not coming from your heart they will know it immediately and your visit will be worthless. Remember also that you are going as a servant of the Lord, and everything should be God working through you, thus all of the praise and thanks go to Him.

We can Listen

Often the most important thing we can do other than to pray with the sick is to listen. Sometimes they just want someone to listen to their concerns for their illness or share about their day; but many times they are worried about problems with other family members, how they are going to pay their bills, or even where they are going to live when they get out of the facility. So

listen, absorb what they have to say then help them if you can or offer to find someone who might be able to help. Proverbs 20:5 says, “The purposes of a man's heart are deep waters, but a man of understanding draws them out.” This tells us that to effectively listen to a persons concerns or problems we must be understanding and truly listen. When you listen, listen carefully to all of their needs and concerns. This is very important, so when you pray for them you can pray for all of their needs and concerns.

Many times you will find that they are more worried about another family member than themselves and if you can provide them the support they need, you can ease their concern and help them with the healing process. For example I had a person who was upset because her son was drifting away from Christ and this was directly affecting her recovery and physical therapy. So I called and spent time talking with the son and supporting him through this time of his life. This eased his mothers mind and allowed her to focus on her own healing.

We can help relieve the stress and anxiety

When you are sick and confined to a care center, your stress level can be unbelievable and the anxiety high. You can help this by Listening, Sharing, showing Christ Love, being compassionate to their condition and support of their needs. "When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought joy to my soul" (Psalms 94:19). So show them the compassion they need and console them so that they may have joy in their hearts.

Serving as a Lay Chaplain or Spiritual Support Volunteer

Filling one of these positions in the care centers is an incredible way to serve the Lord. The need is endless with over 95% of the care centers in Arizona needing this support. Visit a care center and see the need. Pray about it and see if God leads you to provide this kind of support. Remember to listen to God's answer and make sure that you are hearing Him right, and then get ready for an awesome ride.

Preparation

Preparation is a very important part of serving. First and most important is to arm yourself with the Bible, the Word of God. Next get the necessary training. Find a mentor who can help you throughout your ministry,

someone you can turn to for help, support, and strength. Finally, find a facility you can handle and set up a meeting with the staff.

Confidentiality

Something that can break your ministry and destroy the work you are doing is to break confidentiality. Each person you visit needs to be guaranteed that what they share with you, stays with you. It should not be shared with anyone. This includes what is told to you, observed by you, and even impressions you get. If they share something with you, asking for help you can't provide, and you need to divulge information in order to get the right help, get their permission first. Never assume that what they tell you is to be shared with anyone. This includes family, relatives, and friends.

Visitation

When you begin visiting the sick in the care centers it may seem awkward but give it time, it would take long to fall into place. One thing that I do each day before I begin my visit is to set down, read my devotion, then pray. Ask the Lord to give you the strength you need, the words to say, and to guide you to those who need the Love of Christ most this day. Remember, God is doing this through you, you are not doing it, and you are not alone.

Most care centers have a census sheet with each of the patients list with their room number, and possibly religious preference. Pick up one of these sheets so that you can know whom you are going to see and keep a record of your visitation.

On your first visit start off by introducing your self, where you are from, and the purpose for your visit. I will let you know that you may have a plan of what you may want to do, but that can change quickly. I am a believer that we should help the whole person. This may mean that when you walk in the room they are in need of water or need some other kind of help. They can't focus on your visit until their needs are met, so do what you can to help. I have visited some people five or six times before we actually get to spend much time talking; but that's OK.

You need to check with the nurse before giving the patients anything to eat or drink. They may be on no food or drink, or may be on a restricted diet. Never help a patient out of bed or their wheel chair. Never give them any medications or medical advice.

As you visit with the patients listen carefully to their concerns and needs. Share with them stories, scripture, and prayer. Use the things that they have shared with you when building a prayer for them. Remember to support them spiritual but also mental and physically if it is within your capabilities. I have read people their mail and newspaper, hunted up stuff for their room, wheeled them places throughout the facility, clean false teeth that feel on the ground, called family and friends, massaged hands and feet, brushed hair, cleaned up messes on the floor, hung pictures, etc.; whatever it takes!

As a volunteer at a facility you will receive a name badge. Always wear it so patients and family know who you are. Also try to do your visits in the morning if possible. That is usually the best time in the care centers. Here are some additional items to remember:

1. Pray before you start your visits. Remember God is in control – not you.
2. Pick up a census sheet.
3. Check with the nurse's station to make sure the patient can have visitors. It is also a good idea to ask them if there is anyone in need of a visit or actively dying. Also remember to follow all care center rules.
4. Knock, introduce yourself and ask them if this is a good time for a visit.
5. Listen, share, observe, and pray. You are a representative of God, so act like one. (If this is a first visit, let them know your policy on confidentiality)
6. Display and radiate the Love of Christ, cheer, joy, peace, and compassion.
7. There are many different denominations and religions in these facilities, so be sensitive to their beliefs. (It is a good idea to visit some of the other denomination churches to learn some about their beliefs).
8. If you notice a big change in the person's condition or something wrong, let the nurse know immediately.
9. Do not help the patient in and out of bed or the wheel chair or to the rest room.
10. Do not bring any food to the patients.
11. If the patient has a roommate acknowledge them and let them know you will visit with them later.

12. Do not condemn or be judgmental to the patient for their condition, habits, religion, or beliefs.
13. Avoid bible or religious disputes or long discussion sessions.
14. Do not give medical advice or medications.
15. Do not close the door or isolate yourself with the opposite sex.
16. Do not offer advice of any kind unless you are an expert in that area. (i.e. the person has an electrical problem at home and you are an electrician)
17. Do not set up another visit unless you will be able to be there.
18. When address a problem they may have, rely on God's Word for the solution.
19. If they need a Bible or a devotional, try to find them one. Most facilities do not provide them. (Check resource section as to where to get devotionals)
20. Always be honest

Prayer

Prayer is so important that we will talk about some of the same things over and over. As I said earlier, when I went through a Chaplain's training course they emphasized that you should not ask people in hospitals and care centers if you can pray for them. I have also heard this from other Chaplains. I say **WRONG**. I have not met a person yet who was not eager for prayer. Even nonbelievers and atheist seem to change their tune when they are sick and in one of these facilities. They become eager to have prayer and even let you talk to them about Christ. Jude 20-21 says "But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life". So to keep up a continuing prayer life is not only good for us, but also for them. Our example of continued prayer may help them to flourish in their prayer life.

One thing about prayer is the lack of understanding of how God would have us pray. I got to the point that before I pray for someone I explain why I am about to thank God for their situation; many times people just didn't understand. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 teaches us to "Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in **all circumstances**, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus".

When you are going to pray for someone, hold hands during the prayer. If other family and friends are there, join hands in a circle meeting together with the patient.

When most people pray they do not think about the process of building a pray. It is easy to pray when we are praying by ourselves or for ourselves; but praying with others is sometimes a different story. Here are three steps that may help you if this seems difficult:

1. Extend the invitation to pray, if they have not already asked you to pray for them.
2. Ask and discuss questions to find out what they would like you to pray for.
3. Ask them how they would like to pray; silent, they pray then you close, you pray for them; whichever way you pray make sure that they are comfortable with it.

One of the best things you can do is to collect information for the prayer during your conversation with them. Pick concerns, worries for family and friends, upcoming procedures they are going to have, or anything which seems important to them at the time. You may also ask some of these questions to learn more about what they may desire during the prayer:

1. What they would choose to call God; Heavenly Father, God Almighty, etc...
2. What would they like to tell God
3. What they may want to confess
4. What they would like to ask God for
5. What would they like to thank God for
6. Who else they would like to include in prayer

I know that the words, length, contents, and such of a prayer are not supposed to be the focus, but when these people are in the position that they are, the right words spoken to God can change their whole outlook for their day or even their stay, this is why we have focus so much on content.

Support Physical/Mental/Spiritual

When you provide support to those in the care center you must look at the whole person and all of their needs. This often will include support not only

to them, but also to their family. You may have a patient who is dying and is handling it better than their family in which case they may need you to help the family through this process. You will find quite often that when people are dying they will hang on for many reasons, enduring pain and suffering until they know their family is going to be alright, they have had a chance to talk to someone they needed to make things right with, the list is endless. It will be your job to help them through whatever you can.

Often the family will need more support than the patient. Be flexible to all of their needs. Working with the family will often open up opportunities to witness and share with them. Just remember to maintain the confidentiality of the patient, and that the patients needs come first then the family (unless they ask you otherwise).

Communion/Sacraments

Providing communion to those in the care center is another way you can minister to them. Whether it is one-on-one, or as a group, you can use it as a way of sharing God's word and the sacraments. It is a good idea to provide both wine and grape juice as many are on medication that will prevent them from having any alcohol at all. You can also break the wafers and give small pieces to those who have swallowing problems or are on a restricted intake. Check with the nurse to determine if anyone has these special considerations.

Remember that you are dealing with different denominations, and each like to have it in a special way. For example most Catholics like you do dip the wafer and put it in their mouth while some of the others prefer to receive the bread and dip it themselves. You will generally know their preference as you approach them.

For the words of institution use 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 "For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes".

Anointing

Anointing of the sick has been one of the ways we can help those who are sick. In Mark 6:13 we read “They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them”. We anoint in the name of Jesus Christ and most people were anointed when they were baptized and confirmed; but it is generally not something that many churches do on a regular basis. It is however something we can do regularly to the sick, in prayer groups, before surgery, or in remembrance of our baptism. It is also acceptable to anoint the dying and the dead as part of the “Last Rites”

Suffering and illness have always been among the greatest problems that trouble the human spirit. Christians feel and experience pain as do all other people; yet their faith helps them to grasp more deeply the mystery of suffering and to bear their pain with greater courage. From Christ's words they know that sickness has meaning and value for their own salvation and for the salvation of the world. They also know that Christ, who during his life often visited and healed the sick, loves them in their illness.

When you purchase the anoint oil or balm you will receive a card with instructions on how to consecrate the oil and ideas for anointing. A good practice is to place a small amount of oil on your thumb and make the sign of the cross on their forehead, from top to bottom, then left to right. Here are some examples of what to say during the anointing:

Lay hands and repeat: O God, the giver of health and salvation: As the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, at His Command, anoint many that were sick and healed them, send now Your Holy Spirit, that Your child, anointed with this oil, may repentance and faith be made whole; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Or

Lay hands and repeat: Heavenly Father, watch with us over your child (*Name*), and grant that he may be restored to that perfect health which is yours alone to give. You gather the lambs in your arms and carry them in your bosom. We commend to your loving care this child, (*Name*). Relieve his pain, guard him from all danger, restore him to your gifts of gladness and strength and raise him up to a life of service to you. In Christ's name. Amen.

Or

Lay hands and repeat: *(Name)*, I lay my hands upon you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, beseeching our Lord Jesus to sustain you with his presence, to drive away all sickness of spirit, freeing the body to heal in Your Service, and to give you that victory of life and peace which will enable you to serve him both now and forever more. I ask that He uphold you and fill you with His grace, that you may know the healing power of his Love. Amen

Or

Lay hands and repeat: O Lord, holy Father, giver of health and salvation; Send your Holy Spirit to sanctify this oil; that, as your holy apostles anointed many that were sick and healed them, so may those who in faith and love receive this holy blessing be made whole; through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Then anoint and repeat one of the following:

1. Anoint: *(Name)* child of God, you have been blessed with the Holy Spirit, anointed and sealed with the Cross of our Savior Jesus Christ.
2. Anoint: *(Name)*, I anoint you with oil in the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. You are outwardly anointed with this holy oil, so may our heavenly Father grant you the inward anointing of the Holy Spirit. Of his great mercy, may he release you from suffering, and restore you to wholeness and strength. May he deliver you from evil, preserve you in goodness and bring you to everlasting life.
3. Anoint: O Father of mercies and God of all comfort, our only help in time of need: We humbly beseech you to behold, visit, and relieve your sick servant, *(Name)*, for whom our prayers are desired. Look upon him with the eyes of your mercy, comfort him with a sense of your goodness; preserve him from the temptations of the enemy; and give him patience under his affliction. In your good time, restore him to health, and enable him to lead the residue of his life in your love, and to your glory. I anoint you in the name of Christ Jesus, Amen.

Death/Dying

Supporting the dying and consoling the family of someone who has just passed on is one of the most difficult things you will do. What do you say to someone who is dying? What support do you provide? What do you say to the family after someone passes on? How can you support the family? These are all questions that may be running through your mind. You should also add the word “Hospice” to your vocabulary, because you will hear it a lot.

Hospice provides supportive care for people in the final stages of terminal illness and emotional support for families. Hospice specializes in pain and symptom management, emotional and spiritual support for the dying patient, and follows up care to the family and caregiver. They enable terminally ill individuals to live comfortably and fully during their last days. The goal of hospice is to make patients as comfortable as possible and to provide emotional and spiritual support to them and their families.

To support them through this process you must first have some understanding of the process of dying and of death. There are five stages a person goes through or confronts with death (their own or a family member / friend), severe disability, or traumatic change (which can include being confined to a care center).

1. Denial/Disbelief: Whether confronting your own death or that of a loved one, most people will go through this stage. It is their way of dealing with the initial shock. They will tend not to talk about the prognosis. Denial is OK; however, if it continues for too long it can inhibit the individual from dealing with what is going to happen, making the right preparation (such as a will, power of attorney, etc...), saying what needs to be said to someone in particular, or even allow others to prepare as well.

2. Anger/Rage: “Why me”? “It isn’t Fair”. “What have I done to be punished by God like this”? These are all things you will hear during this stage. The individual can be very difficult to deal with and may never come out of this stage at all.

3. Bargaining: Even though they know that God does not bargain, they will still try. “If you heal me I will go to church every Sunday” and “If you do this for me I will do this for you” are some of the things you may hear. For a

person in this stage, share with them Psalms 51, which is a good prayer for repentance and forgiveness.

4. Depression: At this point the individual is grieving for themselves and the love ones they will leave behind. You will need to be very understanding during this time; usually the family is not able to give them the support they need because of their emotions.

5. Acceptance: This is when peace finally comes, when they are willing to admit that death is going to happen soon. They will usually want more quality time with family and friends and may turn to you looking for assurance that they have lead their life the way they should have; that there is nothing left undone.

Dealing with the dying will require the strength that only God can give. You will need to be a great listener, be patient, and allow them as much time as you can. Share with them. Read scripture on salvation (for example Romans 10:6-10). Talk with them and see where they are at in their walk with Christ. Provide as much support as possible.

Never tell them you know what they are going through or tell them they should not feel a certain way. When you are grieving it is OK to feel however you want. To often people will tell the individual that they should not feel that way or that they should cry. Always support how they are feeling, tell them it is all right to feel that way, and love them.

Here is a story of one of my experiences working with someone who was actively dying.

I have spent most of my time ministering to the sick and homebound of my church. God has been using me in many incredible ways; but the most incredible is ministering to the terminally ill. I have spent “last days” with a few, but one of the most uplifting came for me just this Friday. I was going to spend Friday with a youth, who I have been mentoring over the past few months. I had plans to make other visits afterwards, but later decided to make them Saturday, giving me more time to spend with the youth. When I headed out Friday, running late which is very uncharacteristic for me, I was compelled to take my visitation bag and see a friend who had a short time to live, after my time with the youth. Well my visit with the youth went very well, and after returning the youth home I went to visit my friend who has

been unresponsive for three days. As I entered her room she was surrounded by some of her adult children. I started off talking with her as I have always done then holding her arm and reading a few Christian stories. After the second story, one of her children told me that they had expected her to pass away three days earlier. My response was “I told her I was coming at the end of the week, and she was looking forward some more stories”. I then read a poem, which I had read to her many times, called “When tomorrow starts without me”. By the end of this poem her breathing had slowed to less than half of what it was. Next I read her some scriptures, John 14, Rev 21, and ended with Psalms 23. About half way through Psalms 23 her breathing slowed even more, about 3 times per minute. We prayed together and within five minutes she had passed away, continuing her journey to be with the Father. What an honor to be part of this incredible event; the beginning of a friend’s eternal life in heaven. After spending some time comforting the family with prayer and blessing my friend I returned home. I sat outside with my wife talking about this experience, as I was on an uplifting spiritual high. We then talked about how great it would be if we could see the entire event unfold with the angles descending and lifting the spirit up, heading to the waiting arms of our Savior. It was at this time we both looked up at the same instance, to watch the whitest dove we have ever seen flying over, heading in the direction of my friend’s home (it is a rare occasion to see a white dove). So many times that day I felt the presence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For God’s timing insured I was there when needed, Jesus lifted me up and gave me the strength to do what needed done, and the Holy Spirit had given me the words to say.

When we ask God to “use us”, then look through our eyes with our heart, God will guide us and we will see His hand in all we do.

Grief/Bereavement

Grief is often hard to understand, misunderstood, and most definitely mishandled. Grief is defined as the normal reaction to loss or change, loss of any kind. It is hard to imagine that there is grief when a child is born; but this is a change, with the new parent wondering if they will be able to properly provide, where they will get the money to send them through college, and so on. The same can be said about a wedding. Both individuals have gone from a life of being by themselves and answering to no one to now being responsible for each other. The list is endless.

While grief is a normal response to loss, it sometimes causes reactions, which can frighten or alarm those experiencing grief as well as those who witness such reactions. Every person will grieve in his or her own unique way. If you experience any of these behaviors, or someone you know who is going through the grief process, do not be concerned. These are typical of the grief process and are absolutely normal. Some of these reactions may need to be changed to healthier ways of adapting, but they do not indicate you are “insane” or “crazy”. Here are some things you may feel, do, observe, or experience:

- Angry at God, your faith is not able to sustain you.
- Angry at yourself for not properly interpreting the warning signs.
- Angry at the deceased for not taking better care of himself/herself.
- Angry that you have been left alone perhaps with financial concerns.
- Unable to sleep without medication or sleeping all the time.
- Change in eating habits with significant weight loss or gain.
- Unable to motivate yourself to do the things you need to do.
- Wanting to punish someone or something for your pain.
- Angry that no one seems to understand what you are going through.
- Angry that people expect you to “get on with your life”; and that you are not given the time you need to grieve.
- Feeling frustration that friends call too much, or not enough; don't invite you out anymore; seem to be pushing you into socializing before you are ready.
- Buying things you don't need and forgetting the things you do need.
- Much more irritable than usual.
- Feeling guilty over little relationship issues, which would not usually be a problem.
- Noticing an increase in the use of alcohol, prescription drugs or street drugs to help you cope.
- Wanting to talk about the deceased, but fearful of “burdening” friends or family.
- Tired of hearing people tell you that they know how you feel or what you are going through.

When a person is bereft by the death of a significant other, it is important that the grieving person expresses feelings freely. Suppression of feeling as a show of “strong faith” or perhaps out of fear of being considered “weak” is harmful to one's health. It is helpful to share feelings with a trusted friend, clergy person or professional counselor. Failure to acknowledge feelings or suppression of them sets the bereaved up for further problems. Remember

that when people grieve, you grieve at 100%, they can feel how they want and should not have to justify it to anyone. Never tell them how they should feel, tell them they how they are feeling is wrong, or put any expectations on them for how they should feel or act. Here are some "dos" and "don'ts" during the grieving process:

WHAT NOT TO DO IN GRIEF

1. Don't blame yourself
2. Don't use drugs or alcohol to assuage your pain
3. Don't feel sorry for yourself
4. Don't runaway from the pain
5. Don't isolate yourself
6. Don't put a lot of stock in what others say
7. Don't worry excessively about the future
8. Don't under estimate your strengths
9. Don't be afraid to be angry with God.
10. Don't force yourself to complete your grief in a specified time.

WHAT TO DO WHILE IN GRIEF

1. Accept the fact that the deceased person is no longer a part of your life.
2. Be honest about your feelings
3. Learn to adjust to your environment without the deceased.
4. Realize that time only passes; it is what you do with time that counts.
5. Re-invest your energy to help yourself by helping others

Getting through the Grief Process

Now that we have looked at the grief process, what do we do to help others deal with the grief they are experiencing. Since when know that grief is the reaction to loss, and we experience loss of some kind virtually everyday, then one could say we grieve every day, just a different levels. Also for each person the grief process can last different lengths of time. So what can be done to help a person healing who is grieving?

1. Telling oneself that she / he will come through the grief
2. Join a support group.
3. Find time each day for meditation.
4. Eat several times a day (small, nutritious snacks) vegetables and fruits.
5. Walk twenty minutes a day. Even better; walk with a friend.
6. Do one task a day that you have been avoiding.

7. Each month consider one change in your pattern of living
8. Remind yourself that your life is not over... just changing.
9. Make choices in your life rather than have others do it for you
10. Reward yourself each time you have completed a difficult task.

Learning to change your pace and do things differently brings growth and harmony. You will never forget your loved one. Your life will continue to expand by their presence. Helping someone cope with a significant emotional loss can be rewarding. Since grief is emotional and not intellectual, the griever is usually suffering from a broken heart. Grievers are not broken; therefore they do not need to be fixed. They do need to be loved. They do need to be listened to. Here are some suggestions to help you and the griever get to the heart of the issue:

Honest with yourself and others

Emotional responses (reactions) need to be O.K. with you

Allow others the right to make choices for themselves without any
insistence that they satisfy you

Realize your limitations

Truthful communications need to be rewarded, not punished

12 Things to Do When Someone You Know Suffers a Loss

1. Acknowledge what has happened.
2. Listen. Listen. Listen.
3. Respond in your own authentic way.
4. Accept the other as he or she is.
5. Offer to help, and make your offers specific.
6. Allow the griever his or her privacy.
7. Relate to the griever as a whole person.
8. Invite the griever to lead you, if she/he is capable.
9. Radiate hope. YOU are proof of triumph.
10. Carry the other in your heart and soul.
11. Open yourself to what this experience holds just for you.
12. Journey with the griever in the search for meaningfulness.

How Can I Help Ease the Pain of Grief?

1. Encourage your family to choose to heal. Making a decision from the beginning that the family member will not only recover from this loss, but lie/she will become a better person because of it. The way he/she receives his/her sorrow may affect, for good or bad, the rest of the individual's life. One can emerge from it stronger, deeper and more mature as their loved one would have hoped and wanted them to, or one can remain confused, weakened and embittered. The choice is theirs. They must choose to heal and remain healthy. The choice to be better, not bitter, is the healthier of the two.
2. Encourage your family to find caring people. Establishing a support network consisting of family, friends, neighbors, colleagues, and maybe strangers in the form of a self-help group is encouraged. Spending time with supportive people and talking about their feelings of loss with someone willing to listen can be enormously consoling, especially if that person has experienced a death similar to the one they are grieving.
3. Remind your family to "Give it time". Everyone reacts differently to a loss. It's hard to estimate a normal grieving period. They can expect that the recovery and adjustment to take longer than they may anticipate. Some people function well within a six-month period while others require two years before they can really begin to turn to the future and have some peace with the past.
4. Encourage your family to resume their daily routine. Although it is difficult, encourage them to return to their normal daily activities as soon as possible. Going back to work, maintaining their involvement in civic and religious organizations, and remaining socially active are all important links that will lessen their risk of social withdrawal and isolation.
5. Let your family know it's okay to reach out for help. Encourage it. It's important for them to be brave enough to accept the help of others and make the decision to not do it alone. For those that believe in the Lord, this may not be as difficult. It's important that they don't pretend that nothing is wrong. Assure them that it's okay to unload or share their sorrow with a friend. Friends usually welcome the opportunity to provide a listening ear or to run an errand. It makes them feel less helpless and comforts the grieving at the same time.
6. Encourage them to keep in touch with their physician. Their doctor can be most helpful in aiding them to deal with the physical side effects of grief. Sleep disturbances, eating problems, and exaggerated symptoms of existing ailments are probably the most common. Bereavement makes a person more

susceptible to physical illness. Keeping in touch with their physician can minimize these effects.

7. Encourage them to accept the inevitable. Eventually death comes to all of us. Remind them that every life is filled with highs and lows, joys and sorrows, defeats and triumphs. Viewing their loss with this kind of philosophical outlook can prevent much of the bitterness and emotional torment commonly associated with a loss of a loved one.

8. Encourage them to take advantage of a bereavement support group. Self-help groups, specifically designed for the grieving, can be found in most communities. Encourage them to take advantage of these healing groups. Self-help groups are helpful in many ways. Members provide vital emotional support and share practical information about grief recovery. Those who attend discover strong role models and others that are not only surviving but coping creatively. Emotional relief comes from sharing the loss.

9. Encourage them to be realistic and not to expect a miracle. Miracles happen. Bereavement is a process. They need to allow sufficient time for the grieving to run its course. The process is never the same for any two people so it shouldn't be compared with others in a similar position. Every individual has to heal in his or her own way and in his or her own time. Encourage them to be themselves. They don't need to pretend grief beyond it's time nor do they need to recover before they have really recovered.

10. Help them to cultivate seeds of hope. Encourage them to examine their own life and to cultivate seeds of hope. Remind them that they have overcome other crises and will overcome this one as well. Tell them that they have been created to heal and that they will; indeed, heal from the deep pain of grief.

11. Encourage them to talk regularly with a friend. Sharing the grief tends to diminish it. Finding a friend who has good listening skills and talking with them regularly is extremely beneficial. It is important that they share and speak honestly about their memories, pain, fear and concern.

12. Comfort any fears they may have of their own feelings. The loss of someone we love can generate intense feelings of anger, despair, guilt, regret, depression, panic, loneliness, vulnerability and many other emotions. Making them aware that some or all of these feelings will surface during the bereavement process will aid them in minimizing their fear of these feelings. Comfort them by letting them know the truth: these are all a natural part of the grieving process. The majority of those who lose a loved one to death experience such feelings. With time, the intensity of these feelings diminishes.

13. Encourage them to forget "normal" for a while. Death turns life upside down for surviving family members. Funeral arrangements must be made, condolence calls must be acknowledged, legal matters must be attended to, insurance forms filled out, etc... They may need to be reminded that daily life will not follow the same, familiar patterns. Encourage them to forget about "normal" and to look forward to when things will return to normal.

14. Encourage them to pamper themselves. It's okay for them to allow themselves to feel self-pity on occasion or to sleep in a little longer than normal. Their body and their mind are in the process of healing and need pampering periodically.

15. Remind them to listen to music. Music has been documented as playing an important role in the life of a healthy and happy individual. Whether it be religious, classical, contemporary, or pop, operatic, etc., it is "instrumental" in the healing process of grief.

16. Help them to feel okay with avoiding certain people when necessary. Some people don't understand grief. While no one wants to be unfriendly or wish to avoid people, some individuals will only frustrate the bereaved in their process of recovery. It's quite all right to keep a safe distance from people who do not listen to them and who exhibit a need to "run" the bereaved's life. Encourage them to avoid those who are judgmental about the way they are handling their grieving style as well as those who lecture, belittle, or antagonize the individual. It's healthier to stay away from those who minimize their loss with comments like "you'll get over this", "it was for the best", "you're strong", "you'll find a way to cope", or "be glad that it's over"

17. Remind them to be tolerant of their physical and emotional limits. Their feelings of loss and sadness will probably leave them fatigued. Their ability to think clearly and make decisions may be impaired. Their low energy level may naturally slow them down. Encourage them to listen and respect what their body and their mind may be telling them. Lightening up of the schedule, not the illumination of one, is usually a good step for those in the grieving process. Caring for, and maybe taking a little extra time to pamper themselves does not signify that they pity themselves. It means that they are making healthy decisions to survive this time of crisis.

18. Encourage them to put off making any major changes or decisions. Unless absolutely necessary, encourage them to not move, change or quit a job, make new investments, sell parts of the estate, etc. They should wait at

least six months. A year is even better as they will then have a better perspective of what needs to be changed.

Protecting Yourself from sickness and disease

When you make visitations to those in the care centers, remember that many of them are there because of illness and some who have a life threatening disease. You generally will not walk up to a room and know, because of posted information, if that person has a life threatening disease, a severe illness, or possibly something like Hepatitis or AIDS. You can't rely on the actions of the medical staff because many do not follow the proper protocol. I have seen nurses drawing blood with no protection, changing dressing on staff infected wounds without gloves, and even walking through blood spills on the floor. I can remember being in the emergency room of one of the major hospitals and a person came in bleeding all over the floor. I set there and was walked through by many people before someone cleaned it up with just a mop and water. All of these things are major violations of the Infection Control Policies and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (OSHA) Bloodborne Pathogens Standard.

So with this in mind you need to observe some personal safety practices to protect yourself. One of the easiest things you can do is to wash your hands when leaving each patient. You can purchase a small bottle of hand sanitizer to use if soap and water is not readily available. If you use these note that it kills germs by friction, so you should use it scrubbing hard for at least 30 seconds. You can also wear gloves and a mask if someone has something contagious. You not only need to be careful of physical contact with someone who has a contagious disease, but also be aware if it is in their body fluids and may even be airborne. If there are any questions check with the nursing station first, then use common sense. As I said earlier, DO NOT assume that if the staff is not wearing protection around a person, it is safe. Here is some information on Bloodborne Pathogens and how to protect yourself. Keep in mind that this standard was written to protect you in the workplace; however, the information can help you see how you can protect yourself in the care center environment.

On DEC 6, 1991 the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) published the "Bloodborne Pathogen" Standard. The purpose of this regulation is to eliminate or minimize occupational exposure to the

Hepatitis B Virus, Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), and other Bloodborne Pathogens.

OSHA requires that anyone who is trained in first aid, by their employer and may be required to use this training in the performance of their duties, will fall under the Bloodborne Pathogens regulation and receive the required training.

What is the purpose of the regulation? When administering first aid, your potential to come in contact with body fluid, mainly blood, is increased. In fact many times there are already body fluids present. If you start administering first aid or come in contact with these fluids without the proper knowledge and personal protective equipment (PPE) you run a risk of exposure to any diseases or viruses that person may have. This regulation will help with educating personnel in how to protect themselves and define the required PPE and decontamination procedures.

Unfortunately many people can be carriers of a virus and not even know themselves. People can carry the Hepatitis B Virus and never get sick, yet they can spread the virus. Once someone has had the virus, even though they no longer are sick, will carry the virus with them for life. HIV can be carried for many years before turning into AIDS, without the person suspecting they have the virus. This is one reason Hepatitis is heading toward becoming an epidemic in some areas.

Many of the individuals you will come in contact with in the care centers will have some type of open sore or wound. Though it may not show any evidence of bleeding or leaking fluid, there may be microscopic traces in the area. If the patient has touched that area, they can now spread anything they may be carrying. Bloodborne Pathogens is the spread of microorganisms or a virus, from one person to another, through the contact of blood or other body fluids. This exposure capability exists anytime two people come in contact; however, the risk increases when there are open sores or cuts. During your day-to-day visitations you may not come in contact with Bloodborne Pathogens; however, you need to be aware of the hazards and how to protect yourself. This is the purpose of the Bloodborne Pathogens Standard. It defines the hazards and directs the use of proper PPE along with giving guidance on how to clean up and dispose of body fluids.

HAZARDS:

When you are exposed to someone who is bleeding, you run a risk of exposure to any disease or virus they may have. Two of the most common are HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis B.

Hepatitis B is a liver disease, initially resulting in possible inflammation of the liver, and frequently leading to more serious conditions including liver cancer. Presently there are 300,000 new cases of Hepatitis B in the United States each year. Also, when providing first aid you become 20 times more likely to contract Hepatitis. After exposure to it, you can take two to six months to become ill and display symptoms of the virus, yet you can be a carrier. There is a vaccine for Hepatitis B, a series of three shots; however, it is estimated that one out of ever four people who receive the vaccine receive no benefits from it. After you become ill, and recover, you can still be a carrier for life and there are also people who never get ill or display the symptoms, yet will also be carriers. Symptoms of Hepatitis are “flu like”, fatigue, stomach pain, and loss of appetite, nausea, and jaundice. As you can see, with some of these symptoms it may be hard to determine if your illness is the flu or Hepatitis.

HIV is the “newest” of the major Bloodborne diseases. It is spreading rapidly and is not just a “gay” disease. It is more severe than Hepatitis, with most of its victims developing AIDS and eventually dying. There are cases when people have the HIV virus but never develop the AIDS virus, but this is extremely rare. Now who are carriers? The carriers can be anyone who has the HIV virus, not necessarily the AIDS virus, people who have the HIV virus and never develop AIDS, and those who have AIDS. Of these groups of people, very little know that they are carrying the HIV virus, usually only those with AIDS. So this puts the remaining population at a greater risk, especially those administering first aid. Symptoms are again much like those of Hepatitis with the addition of fevers and headaches.

Exposure:

You have been introduced to the hazards now how can you be exposed to them? Primarily through body fluids with the most significant being blood. When exposed to blood you can receive any viruses through any break in the skin, mucus membranes, and the quickest - the eyes. Now when you start to think of this you may think you have to have large amounts of blood splash

on you. Well you don't! You can have an exposure by coming in contact with small, micro size, blood particles and not even know it. So important items to think about are:

The HIV virus will live outside of the body as long as it has a blood source.

If the blood source has dried, the virus is supposed to die, but they have been unable to determine if it will rejuvenate if the blood source becomes wet or moist again.

Hepatitis can live outside the body, without a blood source, for an undetermined amount of time.

Keeping these items in mind, you should be aware that when you are exposed to body fluids you are at risk of contracting any virus those fluids may contain, and if proper steps are not taken to clean and decontaminate the area, the risk continues on for long periods of time.

Protection/Prevention:

How do you protect yourself? Hopefully the answer won't be "I will not help anyone". The first answer is education. You need to become educated on the hazards, how to protect yourself, proper decontamination procedures, etc. First stay away from any open sores or obvious blood/fluids a person may have. If you know for sure they have a contagious disease, wear your protection, gloves, mask, gown, or even eye protection. With Tuberculosis (TB) reaching epidemic proportions in some areas, and the fact that it is an airborne disease, protecting yourself from someone who may be coughing is a very good idea.

Another method of protection is general hygiene. Always wash up even though you had on gloves. If fluids were present you may want to change clothes to insure there are not micro particles on your clothing. If you notice blood or fluids on the floor avoid then and check your shoes or anything else that may be contaminated. You should always treat body fluids as contaminated, regardless if the person appears to be sick or not.

As with any type of contamination you must decontaminate everything possible, which has come in contact with the body fluids. To decontaminate you must use 5.25 sodium hypochlorite bleach and water solution, at

between 1:10 and 1:100. This is the only solution, which is known to kill all of the possible viruses. Because the sodium hypochlorite loses its potency within 48 hours, you will need to mix the solution right before you start the clean up process. If you get blood or fluids on your clothing, have then dry-cleaned. Bleach and dry cleaning solution are the only things that will kill the HIV virus.

Two Bloodborne Pathogens, which pose the greatest threat

- Hepatitis B
- HIV/AIDS

Human Immunodeficiency Virus

- The newest Bloodborne Pathogen
- Spreading Rapidly
- Has no vaccine
- Has no known cure
- Can show no apparent symptoms for years after infection

Hepatitis B

- Is the most prevalent form of Hepatitis
- Infects approximately 300,00 people each year
- Currently over One Million chronic carriers in the US
- Does have a vaccine, but is required almost immediately
- Is contracted by 18,000 health care workers per year
- Results in 200-300 deaths annually, among health care workers

Please take the time to protect yourself, other patients, and your family and friends. What you pick up from one person can rapidly spread to everyone you meet if you do not protect yourself from the start.

Provide Worship Services

You don't have to be ordained to conduct a worship service, so prayerfully consider offering it as a service to those in the care center. Even if they already have a service it would be very beneficial to have more.

Conduct the worship as a non-denominational/Protestant service. This will be an open invitation for everyone. When services are specific some do not come because they are not part of that denomination or feel it is designed to convert then over.

Have the service on Sunday if at all possible. If your church has a Saturday service or one during the week, try to have the service on Sunday if at all possible.

Have the service include scripture, hymns, prayer, communion, and either a sermon or reading of additional scripture. The service can be from ½ hour to an hour. If you go much longer than that, you will lose most everyone. Remember these people are on strong medications and sleep frequently.

Let God inspire you and the Holy Spirit guide you so that each worship service can be all that it can be.

Try to start both a Bible study and Prayer Groups. Try to make them available in the morning if possible.

Responding to difficult questions

Many times you will be asked questions that will be very difficult to answer, especially when they are looking for spiritual guidance. Take your time, even if you need to do some research then get back to them. Rely on the Holy Spirit to guide you and put your trust in God's word.

First we need to look at the question being asked and whether they are looking for an answer or just venting. It will take some special care on your part, but do your best to answer them with scripture - you can't go wrong. Here are some questions you may be asked and corresponding scripture. They can be copied/printed and given to the individual. This will allow them to see what God's Word has to say about the situation.

Does God want me well?

God's Word provides assurances and promotes a way of life that is conducive to physical and psychological wellness. It does so in at least nine ways:

1. It brings relief from the heavy burden of guilt (Psalms 32:1-2; Romans 5:1).
2. It provides the power to release inner bitterness caused by an unforgiving spirit (Matthews 6:12,14-15; Ephesians 4:32).
3. It promotes a positive view toward our body, assuring us that the Holy Spirit lives in it (1 Corinthians. 6:19), and that it is destined for resurrection (1 Corinthians. 15).
4. It teaches that sexual expression is both safe and satisfying within the bonds of marriage (1 Corinthians. 7:1-5; Hebrews. 13:4).
5. It provides grace for single believers, enabling them to live a happy and fulfilled life (1 Corinthians. 7:7-8,32,39-40).
6. It is marked by hope--a buoyant confidence about the future (Romans 8:31-39).
7. It assures us that we are members of a select community--the body of Christ in which each person fills a special role for the mutual benefit of all (Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians. 12:1-31).
8. It fosters a unique relationship with God so that we can come to Him as our Father in an attitude of expectancy and ask Him for healing when we are sick (Matthews 7:7-11; Romans 8:15; James 5:14-15).
9. It enables us to rejoice even when we suffer pain (Acts 5:41; 2 Corinthians. 4:16-18).

God wants you well. He allows illness and pain only when He can use them for your good. And He is going to see to it that you will be well for all eternity. Believing this will promote your good health.

How do I find peace and be a rest with my situation?

Romans 8:28-30 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

Psalms 37:5-7 Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun. Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes.

Isaiah 26:3 You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.

Isaiah 26:11-13 O LORD, your hand is lifted high, but they do not see it. Let them see your zeal for your people and be put to shame; let the fire reserved for your enemies consume them. LORD, you establish peace for us; all that we have accomplished you have done for us. O LORD, our God, other lords besides you have ruled over us, but your name alone do we honor.

Isaiah 26:19 But your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You, who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy. Your dew is like the dew of the morning; the earth will give birth to her dead.

Romans 8:28-29 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Hebrews 4:9-11 There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; 10 for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.

Matthew 6:33-34 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

What does the Bible say about strengthening my faith?

Romans 10:17-18 Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.

Jude 20 But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit.

1 Peter 1:7-9 These have come so that your faith-of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire-may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

James 1:5-8 If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

Romans 4:19-21 Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.

2 Corinthians 5:7 We live by faith, not by sight.

Mark 11:24 Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.

James 2:18 18 But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.

James 2:22 You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.

Hebrews 10:32-39 Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other

times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For in just a very little while, "He who is coming will come and will not delay. But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him." But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.

What does the Bible say about facing my serious illness?

James 5:14-15 Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven.

Psalms 103:2-3 Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases,

Isaiah 53:5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

Matthew 15:22-28 A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession." Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said. He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs." "Yes, Lord," she said, "but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed from that very hour.

Matthew 9:5-6 Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. . . ." Then he said to the paralytic, "Get up, take your mat and go home."

Matthew 9:20-22 Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak. She said to herself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed." Jesus turned and saw her. "Take heart, daughter," he said, "your faith has healed you." And the woman was healed from that moment.

Acts 3:2-8 Now a man crippled from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said,

"Look at us!" So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them. Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God.

2 Corinthians 5:1 Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.

What does the Bible say about dealing with the stress?

John 14:27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

Philippians 4:6-8 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable-if anything is excellent or praiseworthy-think about such things.

Isaiah 41:10 So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

1 Peter 5:7-11 Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalms 46:1-3 God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.

Isaiah 26:3-4 You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you. Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD, the LORD, is the Rock eternal.

2 Timothy 1:7 For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.

Matthew 11:28-30 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

What does the Bible say about becoming a Christian?

Romans 3:22-24 This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 10:9-10 That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

John 3:3 In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Ephesians 2:7-10 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

1 John 1:8-9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 1:2 The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.

2 Corinthians 5:17-19 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

What does the Bible say about watching what I say?

Proverbs 18:21 The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.

Proverbs 13:3 He who guards his lips guards his life, but he who speaks rashly will come to ruin.

Proverbs 18:7-8 A fool's mouth is his undoing, and his lips are a snare to his soul. The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to a man's inmost parts.

Ephesians 4:29 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

Luke 6:45 The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.

Matthew 12:36 But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken.

James 1:26 If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.

James 3:6 The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.

James 3:10-11 Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring?

1 Peter 3:10 For, "Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech.

Ps 50:23 He who sacrifices thank offerings honors me, and he prepares the way so that I may show him the salvation of God."

What does the Bible say about getting along with others?

Matthew 7:12 So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

Romans 12:10 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.

Romans 15:1-2 We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Ephesians 4:31-32 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Colossians 3:12-14 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

1 John 4:20-21 If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.

What does the Bible say about overcoming the effects of satan?

Ephesians 4:26-27 "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.

Ephesians 6:10-17 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

James 4:7-8 Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

1 Peter 5:8-10 Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.

Ephesians 4:26-27 "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.

2 Corinthians 2:10-11 If you forgive anyone, I also forgive him. And what I have forgiven-if there was anything to forgive I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.

2 Thessalonians 3:3 But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one.

2 Timothy 4:18 The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Hebrews 2:18 Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Psalms 91:3-7 Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday. A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you.

Psalms 121:7-8 The LORD will keep you from all harm he will watch over your life; the LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.

What does the Bible say about overcoming lust?

1 Corinthians 6:15-20 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, "The two will become one flesh." But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit. Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

1 Corinthians 10:13 No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

Galatians 5:16-17 So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.

Ephesians 4:22-24 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Ephesians 4:27 and do not give the devil a foothold.

Proverbs 6:25-26 Do not lust in your heart after her beauty or let her captivate you with her eyes, for the prostitute reduces you to a loaf of bread, and the adulteress preys upon your very life.

James 1:13-15 When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full grown, gives birth to death.

What does the Bible say about surviving financial problems?

Psalms 37:25-26 I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread. They are always generous and lend freely; their children will be blessed.

Psalms 107:4-8 Some wandered in desert wastelands, finding no way to a city where they could settle. They were hungry and thirsty, and their lives ebbed away. Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. He led them by a straight way to a city where they could settle. Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for men

Psalms 37:3-4 Trust in the LORD and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Philippians 4:19 And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:11-13 I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

Luke 12:28-31 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

Psalms 34:6-10 This poor man called, and the LORD heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them. Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him. Fear the LORD, you his saints, for those who fear him lack nothing. The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.

What does the Bible say about an effective prayer life?

Philippians 4:6-7 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Matthew 18:18-19 "I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. "Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.

Matthew 6:5-6 "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Hebrews 4:16 Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Hebrews 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

James 5:16-18 Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

Luke 11:9 "So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.

Luke 18:1 Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.

1 Peter 3:12 For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."

Psalms 55:17 Evening, morning and noon I cry out in distress, and he hears my voice.

Psalms 86:6-7 Hear my prayer, O LORD; listen to my cry for mercy. In the day of my trouble I will call to you, for you will answer me.

1 John 5:14-15 This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us-whatever we ask-we know that we have what we asked of him.

Romans 8:26 In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.

What does the Bible say about overcoming temptation?

1 Corinthians 10:13 No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

Mark 14:38 Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."

James 1:12 Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

James 1:13-14 When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.

Matthew 6:13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

Luke 4:13 When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.

Luke 8:13 Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away.

Luke 22:40 On reaching the place, he said to them, "Pray that you will not fall into temptation."

Luke 22:46 "Why are you sleeping?" he asked them. "Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation."

Galatians 5:16 So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

1 John 5:4 for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.

Ephesians 6:11-18 Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

1 Timothy 6:9 People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction.

What does the Bible say about overcoming discouragement?

Romans 8:28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Romans 8:35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

Matthew 11:28 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

Psalms 121:1 A song of ascents. I lift up my eyes to the hills where does my help come from?

Psalms 23 A psalm of David. The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

James 4:10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

Deuteronomy 1:21 See, the LORD your God has given you the land. Go up and take possession of it as the LORD, the God of your fathers, told you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged."

1 Samuel 30:6 David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him; each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters. But David found strength in the LORD his God.

Hebrews 12:3 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Hebrews 13:5 5 Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

What does the Bible say about alcoholism?

Proverbs 20:1 Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler; whoever is led astray by them is not wise.

Proverbs 23:20-21 Do not join those who drink too much wine or gorge themselves on meat, for drunkards and gluttons become poor, and drowsiness clothes them in rags.

Proverbs 23:29-32 Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaints? Who has needless bruises? Who has bloodshot eyes? Those who linger over wine, who go to sample bowls of mixed wine. Do not gaze at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly! In the end it bites like a snake and poisons like a viper.

Proverbs 31:4-6 "It is not for kings, O Lemuel not for kings to drink wine, not for rulers to crave beer, lest they drink and forget what the law decrees, and deprive all the oppressed of their rights. Give beer to those who are perishing, wine to those who are in anguish;

Isaiah 5:11 Woe to those who rise early in the morning to run after their drinks, who stay up late at night till they are inflamed with wine.

Luke 21:34 "Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap.

Romans 13:13 Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy.

Galatians 5:19-21 The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

What does the Bible say about dealing with anxiety?

Psalms 34:17 The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles.

Psalms 55:22 Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall.

Proverbs 16:3 Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and your plans will succeed.

Isaiah 26:3 You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.

Isaiah 43:2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.

Matthew 6:25-34 "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Luke 2:34 Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against,

Philippians 4:6-7 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Hebrews 13:15 Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise-the fruit of lips that confess his name.

1 Peter 5:6-7 Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

What does the Bible say about Death?

Psalms 23:4 4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me

Psalms 116:15 Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.

2 Samuel 12:23 But now that he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me."

Ecclesiastes 12:7and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.

Isaiah 57:1-2 The righteous perish, and no one ponders it in his heart; devout men are taken away, and no one understands that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil. 2 Those who walk uprightly enter into peace; they find rest as they lie in death.

Luke 16:19-31 "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.' "But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.' "He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' "Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.' "'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' "He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"

Acts 7:59 While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.

Revelation 14:13 Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them."

What does the Bible say about Depression?

Psalms 9:9-10 The LORD is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. Those who know your name will trust in you, for you, LORD, have never forsaken those who seek you.

Psalms 31:22-24 In my alarm I said, "I am cut off from your sight!" Yet you heard my cry for mercy when I called to you for help. Love the LORD, all his saints! The LORD preserves the faithful, but the proud he pays back in full. Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the LORD.

Psalms 42:5 Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and

Psalms 42:11 Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.

Psalms 146:8 the LORD gives sight to the blind, the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down, the LORD loves the righteous.

Isaiah 35:3-4 Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way;
4 say to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you."

Isaiah 50:10 Who among you fears the LORD and obeys the word of his servant? Let him who walks in the dark, who has no light, trust in the name of the LORD and rely on his God.

Jeremiah 29:11-13 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

Hebrews 12:12-13 Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. "Make level paths for your feet," so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.

What does the Bible say about Forgiveness?

Psalms 85:2 You forgave the iniquity of your people and covered all their sins.

Psalms 86:5 You are forgiving and good, O Lord, abounding in love to all who call to you.

Psalms 103:1-4 Of David. Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion,

Isaiah 1:18 "Come now, let us reason together," says the LORD. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.

Isaiah 43:2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.

Colossians 2:13 When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins,

Hebrews 8:12 For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

Hebrews 10:17 Then he adds: "Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more."

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

Matthew 6:14-15 For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Mark 11:25 And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins."

Luke 17:3-4 So watch yourselves. "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him."

Ephesians 4:32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Colossians 3:12-13 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

What does the Bible say about Healing?

Matthew 10:1 He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.

Matthew 10:7-8 As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.

Mark 4:13-14 Then Jesus said to them, "Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable? The farmer sows the word.

Mark 16:14-20 Later Jesus appeared to the Eleven as they were eating; he rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen. He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well." After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God. Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.

Luke 9:1-2 When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.

Luke 9:6 So they set out and went from village to village, preaching the gospel and healing people everywhere.

John 14:1 "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.

Isaiah 53:5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

Matthew 8:16-17 When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: "He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases."

1 Peter 2:24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.

Psalms 103:3 who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases,

Matthew 13:54-58 Coming to his hometown, he began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed. "Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?" they asked. "Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? Aren't all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?" And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, "Only in his hometown and in his own house is a prophet without honor." And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith.

Matthew 17:14-20 When they came to the crowd, a man approached Jesus and knelt before him. "Lord, have mercy on my son," he said. "He has seizures and is suffering greatly. He often falls into the fire or into the water. I brought him to your disciples, but they could not heal him." "O unbelieving and perverse generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy here to me." Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of the boy, and he was healed from that moment. Then the disciples came to Jesus in private and asked, "Why couldn't we drive it out?" He replied, "Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."

What does the Bible say about Salvation?

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 2:4 Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?

2 Timothy 1:9 who has saved us and called us to a holy life-not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time,

Matthew 3:1-2 In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."

Matthew 10:32 "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven.

Luke 15:10 In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Acts 2:38 Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 3:19 Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord,

Romans 10:9-10 That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 2:25 And this is what he promised us-even eternal life.

1 John 5:13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

Mark 13:13 All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

John 5:24 "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.

John 10:27-28 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.

1 Peter 1:3-5 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade-kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

Revelation 3:20-21 Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.

What does the Bible say about Suffering?

Romans 8:16-18 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs-heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

1 Corinthians 12:25-27 so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

2 Timothy 2:12 if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us;

2 Timothy 3:12 In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,

1 Peter 2:19-20 For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.

1 Peter 4:12-19 Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And, "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.

Education/Reference Material

The following are pamphlets supplied by RBC Ministries. They contain some very good information that will help you throughout your ministry. Each pamphlet is approximately 20 pages in length.



It's good to be emotionally stable, but it's more important to be in the hands of One who is greater than our problems. It's desirable to be born to non-abusive parents, but it's far better to be born into the family of God. It's beneficial to be employed in meaningful work, but it's eternally preferable to have a Provider who assures a security that exceeds all earthly benefits.

In the following pages, staff writer Kurt De Haan describes the kind of relationship that when understood and entered into can give meaning, security, and perspective to every area of life. It's the kind of family tie that can give faith to the fearful, hope to the disillusioned, and love to those who are lonely and unprotected.

Martin R. De Haan II, president of RBC Ministries.



Have you ever seen Scotland's Loch Ness monster? Caught a glimpse of the abominable snowman high in the Himalayas? Or spotted a perfect father anywhere on this planet?

No matter how thorough our search among the families on earth, and no matter how much we may love our own dad, we know all too well that every father has his flaws (which is putting it mildly). It is also true that what we know about human fathers and what we have experienced as children will affect how eagerly or how apprehensively we approach the subject of this booklet--knowing and enjoying God as our Father.

For some of us, it will be a fairly comfortable process. If we had a great and loving dad, we will gladly embrace the biblical picture of God as the ultimate parent. If we didn't have that kind of father, we may have a longing to find the kind of father we never knew. Still others of us, though, may struggle with even thinking of God in terms of a father. If our dad was abusive, emotionally distant, or physically absent, it may take a deliberate and perhaps even painful effort to sort through the misconceptions and learn to cling to the life-changing truths of the right kind of fathering modeled by God.

Only Jesus has the perfect Father (Mt. 5:48), and He alone can help us to experience the close relationship with His Father that our hearts desire. The Lord Jesus told His disciples, "No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also. . . . He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (Jn. 14:6-7,9). As the perfect Son of God, He revealed His Father perfectly, and He showed us how we could enjoy a closeness with the Father that we could never have dreamed possible.

No other relationship can be as fulfilling. For to know God as our Father is to know life as He intended it to be. Author and theologian J. I. Packer wrote, "If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God's child, and having God as his Father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all" (*Knowing God*, InterVarsity Press, p.182).

Do you believe that? Is that how you think and live each day? Do you enjoy a close relationship with the Father in heaven? Do you know how much He loves you and longs to care for you?

The purpose of this booklet is to help us to see the absolute perfection of our heavenly Father and to learn how to make the most of our relationship with Him.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE GOD'S CHILD?

"Once upon a time" Think back to a story you probably read as a child--*Cinderella*. In the popular English version that I remember, a poor peasant girl named Cinderella was living a slave like existence with her ugly stepsisters and a tyrant of a stepmother (both are bad stereotypes!).

While the stepmother and stepsisters went to a ball in the king's palace, Cinderella had to stay home. But when she was magically transformed into a dazzling beauty, she set off for the palace in a pumpkin-turned-coach.

During the evening the dashing young prince danced with Cinderella and fell in love. She had to rush home when the clock struck midnight, however, and accidentally left behind a glass slipper. The prince searched the kingdom to find the slipper's owner, and eventually found that it fit Cinderella. He swept her off her feet, married her, and she became a royal princess, part of the royal family.

It's a great story. I think part of the reason so many of us like the tale is that we all like to imagine we too could be a child of a king--living like a princess or prince--with all the privileges that come with such a position. We're often frustrated by the daily drudgery or even mistreatment. We long to be treated as someone special.

The Bible describes something far better than any mythical tale of a peasant-turned-princess, and something more real than imagining ourselves to be a child of a present-day world leader. The Bible states that common sinners can become children of the King of the universe.

In the pages that follow, we will examine six characteristics of what it means for a person to be a child of God.

[Family Status](#)

[Access Through Prayer](#)

[Training In Godliness](#)

[Help In Times of Need](#)

[Eternal Hope](#)

[Responsibilities To Fulfill](#)

When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son . . . to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ (Gal. 4:4-7).

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! (1 Jn. 3:1).

Those are powerful words! Ordinary people like you and me can be called children of the Creator of the universe. That's worth thinking about.

Why do we need to become part of another family?

An illustration from recent history will help us to realize the significance of this concept. The images are burned deeply into my memory--emaciated babies and young children sitting in cribs in a stark, ill-equipped Romanian orphanage. It was soon after the fall of the ruthless leader, Nicolae Ceausescu, in 1989. Conditions were awful. Malnutrition, disease, and death were frequent visitors.

The good news was that when Ceausescu fell, the plight of the orphans became worldwide news--and compassionate people from all over the world rushed to help. Food, medicine, and money poured in. But the most dramatic effort of love was made by those who struggled through the red tape to adopt the orphans. Instead of being children of a ruthless government, they became children of parents who longed to love them and provide for them a life with hope and a future.

God has done something similar for us. We live in a world that is dominated by a heartless tyrant. The Bible describes Satan as "the ruler of this world" (Jn. 12:31; 16:11) and "the god of this age," who has blinded the minds of people so they do not believe in Christ (2 Cor. 4:4). Those who reject Christ are called children of the devil (Jn. 8:44).

This directly contradicts the concept of what has been called the universal fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. To say that God is the loving Father of all people and that no one will ever be judged as worthy of hell is a statement contrary to what Jesus and the Bible say about who qualifies to be a child of God. In 1 John 3:15 we learn that humanity can be divided into two categories: the children of God and the children of the devil. And Jesus

told Paul that his mission in life would be to turn people "from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God" (Acts 26:18).

What has God done to bring us into His family?

The Bible uses two word pictures to explain this process. The first is what Jesus described as being "born again" (Jn. 3:3). The second is the concept we have already referred to--adoption (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5). Both analogies help us to understand the frequent biblical use of the expressions *sons of God* and *children of God*.

Jesus said that a person is outside the family of God, spiritually condemned, unless he is spiritually reborn (Jn. 3:1-21). This rebirth is accomplished by God's Spirit when a person expresses personal faith in Jesus as one's only hope of forgiveness of sin and life in heaven. The apostle John said that "as many as received [Jesus], to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name" (Jn. 1:11-12).

Adoption is the other key illustration used in the New Testament. In Romans 8:14-16, the apostle Paul wrote, "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God."

Whereas the term *born again* may be said to refer primarily to the giving of new spiritual life and bringing a person into God's family, the term *adoption* highlights the new relationship with the Father and the new legal rights and privileges.

We are not only saved from an eternity in hell, but we are also given a wonderful new status as children of God. Pastor and author Erwin Lutzer states, "Christ did not die on the cross just so our sins could be forgiven, though that itself would deserve our endless praise. Sin was a roadblock which God removed so that He could achieve some lofty goals in our lives. Specifically, we have been appointed to be sons of God" (*You're Richer Than You Think*, SP Publications, p.47).

In Galatians 3:22-4:7, Paul highlighted many of the truths we have addressed so far:

- Until we become a child of God, we are spiritually dead, enslaved to sin (3:22-23; 4:3).
- One becomes a child of God by a personal expression of faith in Christ (3:26).
- God's Spirit gives us new life and makes us children of God (4:6).
- To be a child of God means both freedom from sin's bondage and incredible privileges now and forever as a spiritual heir (vv.4-7).

How can being part of God's family change my life?

That's what the rest of this booklet is all about. We will explore the biblical truths that we have free access to the Father in prayer, training in how to be Christlike, help for every situation we face in life, a new perspective of hope for this life and eternity, and last but not least, we have responsibilities to fulfill to our Father and to our new brothers and sisters.

Through [Jesus] we both have access by one Spirit to the Father (Eph. 2:18).

When you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. . . . For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him. In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name (Mt. 6:7-9).

Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Heb. 4:16).

The statements above would be seen as blasphemous if you believed that because God is perfect and separated from evil, He cannot be approached so casually, if at all, by people like you and me. Yet Jesus and His disciples have made it clear that we indeed can come to God in prayer because we are family through faith in Christ.

If I wanted to meet with a high-ranking federal government official, I would have to make an appointment--days or months in advance. But when I want to talk with my dad, what do I do? I simply drop by his home or pick up the phone and call him. Why? Because we're family.

My four children know they can come and talk to me anytime at all. No appointments are necessary. They don't have to put on their best clothes or

even take a bath first. They don't have to use special language, kneel down, hold their hands a certain way, or follow an outline of what to say. Why? Because we're family.

We can call God "Abba."

Abba is the Aramaic term that Jewish children use to address their fathers. (Aramaic is a language closely related to Hebrew and was commonly spoken during the time of Christ's ministry.) The English equivalent of *Abba* would be the terms *Daddy* or *Dear Father*. Although the term was originally derived from babytalk, by the time of Christ it was a word used by young and old alike to speak in an intimate way to their fathers.

The New Testament was written in Greek (the trade language of the wider Mediterranean world), so the word we usually find for father is *pater*. But because the common language of the day in Palestine was Aramaic, we have good reason to believe that when Jesus taught His disciples to pray, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name" (Mt. 6:9), He told them to use the term *Abba*.

In Romans 8:15, the apostle Paul said that because we are God's adopted children, we can cry out "Abba, Father" (this phrase is also used in Mark 14:36 and Galatians 4:6). Concerning this verse, Bible commentator F. F. Bruce writes that the use of *Abba* is significant because "*Abba* was not, and is not the term used by Jews when addressing God as their Father. But the fact that the Aramaic word found its way into the worshiping vocabulary of the Gentile churches strongly suggests that it was used in this way by Jesus" (*The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, Eerdmans, p.166).

Why is this privilege so significant?

The Old Testament emphasizes God's awesome holiness to such a degree that He does not seem approachable. The tabernacle and temple reinforced this idea by both structure and ritual. God's special presence was not something that everyone could enter--only the high priest, and only once a year.

In his book *What Jesus Said About Successful Living*, Haddon W. Robinson writes, "In the Old Testament, the Israelites did not individually address God as Father. As far as we know, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David, or Daniel never fell to their knees in the solitude of their chambers and dared to address God that way. Yet in the New Testament, God is called Father at

least 275 times, and that is how we are instructed to speak to Him. All that a good father wants to be to his children, Jesus told us, God will be to Christians who approach Him in prayer. We can pray as children" (Discovery House Publishers, p.190).

In the New Testament, we have a clear picture of the believer's privilege to call God "Father." It is central to the gospel message and to the way we are to live as Christ's followers. God's holiness and greatness is not diminished by this in the least because in Christ we have a mediator who satisfies God's requirements for holiness and who makes us holy by His sacrifice for our sins (1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 8:6; 9:15; 12:24). We can now come before Him with a God-sanctioned boldness (Eph. 3:12; Heb. 4:16; 10:19).

Isn't there a danger of taking prayer too lightly?

There certainly is. As we embrace the refreshing truth that we have unhindered access to God through Jesus Christ, we must not forget that God is truly awesome. Haddon Robinson states, "The fact that we come to a throne should fill us with awe. But because it is a throne of *grace*, it is approachable. . . . We can intimately and confidently talk with our Father" (*What Jesus Said About Successful Living*, p.191).

What is your prayer-life like?

I don't know about you, but these truths from the Bible help me to see that heaven's door is always open to me as a member of God's family. The Father is eagerly anticipating my next visit, longing to hear my words of affection, to hear of my struggles, to hear my expressions of trust, and to hear the requests that show my realization that I depend on Him for everything in life. I hope you too are sensing the wonderful privilege and opportunity we have as God's children.

Whom the LORD loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom He delights (Prov. 3:12).

We have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness (Heb. 12:9-11).

Training is a topic that most of us would rather not discuss. That's because we don't enjoy the pain that is necessary for learning and maturing. Training

takes many forms. It may be physical: trying to get our body in shape by eating less and exercising more. It may be emotional and spiritual: learning how to depend on the Lord when tragedy strikes. Or it may take the form of suffering the consequences of sinful choices, and experiencing the Lord's rebuke: learning "the hard way."

As children, we didn't enjoy the "lessons" our parents tried to teach us. Cleaning our rooms, helping with household chores, and doing our homework were generally not what we would have chosen to do with our time. And when we violated the rules, we didn't enjoy being sent to our room, getting spanked, being forced to do extra chores, or getting punished in some other way. At the time we received the discipline, we didn't have much appreciation for what we learned.

My father had a way of reminding his four sons that he didn't enjoy having to discipline us. Just before spanking one of us, he would say, "This is going to hurt me more than it will you." Many times, I'm sure, we had a hard time believing that. But now, as a father of four children myself, I understand what he meant. And it seems I spend quite a bit of time thinking through the type of discipline to use and the goal I want to achieve with my children. All of this has helped me to understand a little more of what it means for God to discipline us.

How does God train His children?

As we have already illustrated, discipline can be either positive or negative. It can be training--instruction in how to live. Or it can take the form of correction--punishment for wrongdoing.

The author of Hebrews refers to both types of discipline. After a lengthy chapter in which he listed believers whose faith was severely tested by difficulties, persecution, and even martyrdom, he began chapter 12 by reminding his readers that we need to follow the examples of faithfulness of the past and to endure all difficulties as we follow Christ's example. Using athletic imagery, he told us to get in shape spiritually and not to allow anything to slow us down as we "run with endurance the race that is set before us" (v.1).

Then the writer pointed to Jesus Christ as the ultimate example to follow (vv.2-3). Hebrews 5:8 says this about Christ: "Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered." That is not to say that

Christ was in any way sinful. It does say, however, that through the suffering He endured, Christ experienced everything that the Father wanted Him to, and by that experience earned the qualifications to be the Savior of the world. Jesus Himself learned the high cost of obedience to the Father.

If Jesus Christ had to undergo such training, how could we ever question why God allows us to undergo training of a similar nature?

Hebrews 12 also speaks of discipline that is corrective, that which is a result of our sin. Verse 6 states that the Lord "scourges every son whom He receives." God sometimes has to take drastic measures in dealing with His children.

The New Testament church in Corinth, for example, had several members who needed correction (1 Cor. 11:17-34). They had lost touch with the reason for observing the Lord's Supper, and some were even getting drunk! As a result of God's discipline, several were suffering physically and some even died because of their callous attitude.

Why should we be glad that God disciplines His children?

It demonstrates His love. Hebrews 12:5 quotes Proverbs 3:12 and says that as a good human father corrects his children, God corrects those whom He loves.

Paul Dwight Moody, son of evangelist D. L. Moody (1837-1899), told how his dad reflected the love of the heavenly Father in discipline. The incident took place when Paul was 10 years old. His dad had told him to finish talking with a visiting friend and then go to bed. But, Paul wrote, "A little later he came into the room again and saw that I had not obeyed him. Speaking with that directness of which he was capable, he ordered me to bed at once. His brusque tone of voice was new to me, and I retreated, frightened and in tears. But before I had time to fall asleep, he was at my bedside. He explained that he had reprimanded me because I had disobeyed him, but this in no way indicated that he didn't love me. As he knelt to pray with me, I noticed that tears were falling down over his rugged, bearded face. . . . I'll never forget the scene. My father had unknowingly awakened within me the consciousness of the love of God."

What is the goal of discipline?

The Father's goal is to make us more like Christ. He doesn't want to hurt us; He wants to better us. Hebrews 12:10-11 tells us that God wants us to be

"partakers of His holiness" and to produce "the peaceable fruit of righteousness." And according to James 1:2-5, the "testing" of our faith "produces patience" with the goal of making us spiritually mature.

Pastor Jim Carpenter writes, "Your heavenly Father never makes a mistake in discipline. His timing is perfect, His motives are pure, and His methods are never destructive. They are always beneficial" (*Discipleship Journal*, Issue 51, p.52).

Do we believe it?

Are we convinced that everything God allows to happen in our lives is training of one sort or another--with the goal of making us more like Christ? It's true. It is that truth that puts all of the good and bad in life in perspective. With a goal so grand and noble, nothing in life is too bad to endure. And if we are willing to accept that, our attitude then must be, "Lord, whatever it takes, make me like Your Son Jesus Christ."

A father of the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His holy habitation (Ps. 68:5).

Do not worry, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" . . . For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things (Mt. 6:31-32).

What man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him! (Mt. 7:9-11).

As a dad, I am eager to come to my children's aid. It may be a skinned arm or leg that needs some cleaning up, a bandage, and most of all, a little sympathy. It may be some help in trying to understand a tough homework assignment. It could be help in handling a conflict with a fellow student or a neighbor. It could be protecting them from a large, mean-looking dog that suddenly showed up in our front yard. Sometimes it is simply a hug when they are feeling left out or lonely.

How do we know our Father in heaven will help us in our times of need?

What kind of Father would He be if He didn't? Jesus answered this question in Matthew 7. He said that it's unthinkable that a father would be so cruel

that he would give a stone to a hungry child who asks for some bread, or a snake to one who asks for fish (vv.9-10). Then He drew a comparison: If we, as imperfect and sinful as we are, know how to give what is good to our children, how much more will our absolutely perfect Father give good things to us (v.11).

Commenting on this passage, William Hendriksen writes, "The heavenly Father will not disappoint His children. This, however, does not mean that He will always give them whatever they ask. It means that He will not give them anything that is bad for them. He will give 'good things' to those who ask Him" (*The Gospel of Matthew*, Baker Book House, p.363).

The Bible assures us that we can cast all our cares on Him because He cares for us (1 Pet. 5:7). He knows our needs and He knows how to meet those needs with wisdom and compassion.

The Old Testament prophet Isaiah provides us with an interesting picture of God's care for His spiritual children. During a difficult time when Israel was being defeated by her enemies and God seemed to be far away, the people said, "The LORD has forsaken me, and my Lord has forgotten me." But God answered, "Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands" (Isa. 49:14-16).

We too can be certain that the One who gave us spiritual birth will never abandon us nor fail us.

What kinds of help do we need?

Here are some examples of the kind of help we need, and Bible verses (look them up) that indicate how God will supply those needs.

- receiving basic physical needs (Mt. 6:31-32)
- having wisdom to know what to say in tough witnessing situations (Mt. 10:18-20)
- knowing how to pray (Rom. 8:26)
- dealing with suffering (Rom. 8:18-30)
- coping with illness (2 Cor. 12:7-10; Jas. 5:16)
- resisting temptation (Rom. 6:1-23; 8:12-17; 1 Cor. 10:13)
- needing comfort (2 Cor. 1:3-7)
- facing intense pressures (2 Cor. 1:8-11)

- resisting Satan (Eph. 6:10-18; Jas. 4:7)
- coping with trials (Jas. 1:5)
- overcoming worry (1 Pet. 5:7)

How has God demonstrated His loving care in times past?

As we read the Bible, we find many examples of God's help in times of need. He has shown that He is the eager provider and protector of His children.

The nation of Israel, for example, experienced the love of the Father throughout their history. In thinking back to the time the Lord brought them out of Egypt, Moses said, "The LORD your God carried you, as a father carries his son, all the way you went until you reached this place" (Dt. 1:31 NIV).

The Bible contains many other examples too numerous to mention here. People like Abraham, Isaac, Ishmael, Joseph, Ruth, Daniel, Esther, Paul, and John could testify to God's provision and protection.

How has God demonstrated His loving care to you?

The truths we have been talking about may mean little to you if you don't recognize that God wants to care for you too. If you are His child through faith in Christ, He's already done a lot for you, and He longs to do more.

The evidence of His care may come through the people He sends into your life to meet your needs and encourage you. It may come through a deep peace in your heart as you express your trust in Him and cast all your cares on Him (1 Pet. 5:7). It may come through the supply of your physical needs or the grace and strength to endure great difficulty (2 Cor. 12:9; Phil. 4:11). You can be sure that your Father cares for you.

[I pray] that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation . . . ; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints (Eph. 1:17-18).

We know that all things work together for good to those who love God If God is for us, who can be against us? (Rom. 8:28,31).

In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself (Jn. 14:2-3).

Hope is what keeps you and me alive. People who lose hope of some sort or another usually become an enemy of society or a drain upon it. People without some glimmer of hope lash out or drop out. They become suicidal--by their reckless behavior in search of a temporary thrill or by blatant acts of despair that lead them to try to end it all by jumping, overdosing, or shooting.

What hope keeps people going from day to day?

The hope of a paycheck? The thought of what they're going to do tomorrow or on the weekend? A vacation? A six-pack in the refrigerator? A warm relationship? A promotion? A high school diploma? A college degree? A new baby? A new house? Retirement? Recognition and reward from family, co-workers, friends, fellow churchgoers? Religion and the thought of eventual reward from God?

At the core of all the religions of the world is a quest for hope--something that makes sense of the apparent chaos and injustices of life. Men and women long to know why they exist, where they are going, and what makes it all worthwhile. Tragically, so many people are clinging to false hope.

The apostle Paul, when speaking to a group of philosophers in first-century Athens, tried to help them see the futility of their thinking and to see that the only true hope is in Jesus Christ (Acts 17:16-34). Paul had observed idol after idol in the city (v.16)--idols that represented false hope. So he pointed to the Creator who could be known (v.27). There is hope in this life and beyond the grave (v.31). That hope is centered in knowing God as He has revealed Himself through His Son Jesus Christ, and trusting Him for forgiveness of sin.

In a letter to the believers in Ephesus, Paul described their condition before they had learned about Christ and put their trust in Him. He said, "At that time you were without Christ, . . . having no hope and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12).

Why do we have reason to hope?

We are part of a family that has a loving heavenly Father and a Son who has opened the door to hope.

Paul also told the Ephesians he was praying that they would realize just how great the believers' hope is through Christ (1:17-18). He prayed that they would get to know God the Father better and realize all that He offers His children. Let's examine a few of the reasons we have for hope in this life and beyond.

What is our basis for hope?

- We have been given spiritual life and are freed from Satan's death-grip (Eph. 2:1-7).
- We have been given the inner presence of the Holy Spirit, who confirms that we are God's children (Rom. 8:16) and guarantees that our adoption is forever (Eph. 1:13-14).
- We have God's power enabling us to live for Him (2 Cor. 12:9; Eph. 1:19).
- We have assurance that nothing can separate us from God's love (Rom. 8:35-39).
- We have confidence that all the events of life--good and bad--have a purpose (Rom. 8:28) and that God is in control (vv.29-39).
- We have the promise that we can be forgiven of sin and restored to a close relationship with the Father if we confess (1 Jn. 1:5-10).
- We have the guarantee of our Father's help as we live for Him (see section on help).
- We have a Father who hears and answers prayer (see previous section on prayer).
- We have the encouragement that comes from belonging to a family where each is spiritually gifted for the good of others (Rom. 12:1-8; Eph. 4:1-16; Heb. 10:25).
- We have the promise of an abundant, meaningful life (Jn. 10:10).
- We have God's Word to guide us and equip us for every task (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

What is our hope for eternity?

- We look forward to a coming resurrection (Acts 24:15; 1 Cor. 15).
- We have a heavenly home waiting for us, specially prepared by Christ (Jn. 14:1-6).

- We will be with Christ Himself (1 Jn. 3:2; 2 Cor. 5:6-9; Rev. 21-22).
- We will be like Christ (1 Jn. 3:2)--having a new body that is free from the ravages of sin (2 Cor. 5:1-5).
- We will be reunited with our believing loved ones (1 Th. 4:13-18).
- We will receive an inheritance far beyond our greatest dreams (Eph. 1:11,14,18; Col. 1:12; 1 Pet. 1:3-4).
- Our service for Christ and the sacrifices we made for Him will be richly rewarded (1 Cor. 3:9-15; 9:16-27; Col. 3:24).
- We will experience relief from every kind of sorrow we knew on earth (Rev. 21:4).

Do you have hope?

As we have just seen, we have plenty of reasons to be hopeful about this life and the life to come. It's easy to become preoccupied with troubles that confront us daily. Some of those difficulties may appear insurmountable. That's all the more reason we should purposefully and regularly set aside time to review these reasons for hope. No matter how hopeless life may seem at the moment, we have reason for hope on earth because we have a Father in heaven.

As obedient children, . . . be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy." And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear (1 Pet. 1:14-17).

You shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect (Mt. 5:48).

In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother (1 Jn. 3:10).

To be God's child is great, and it has many benefits that we can feel thrilled to be able to enjoy. We've spent the major part of this booklet detailing many of those privileges. But there's another important and inescapable side to this relationship: God's children have responsibilities to fulfill.

What do we expect from our own children?

It's heartbreaking to listen to a elderly parent talk about a son or daughter who finished school and got a job, then moved out of the house and hardly ever stops by to visit or even telephone Mom and Dad. We grieve with the parent of a rebellious 17-year-old who seems intent on playing the party scene and turning his back on God and the church. And we're sympathetic with the parents of a preschooler who runs away in a store when they say, "Come back here!"

I don't know how it was around your house, but when I was growing up one thing was clear: Being a child involved giving as well as taking. In spite of my stubborn tendency to do otherwise, I was expected to treat my parents with proper respect, to trust their judgment, to listen to them attentively, to do what they said to do (such as chores), and to treat my brothers well. I also learned that doing all those things was a lot more enjoyable if I was aware of my parents' love and their desire to help me, not hurt me.

Now that I am deep into parenthood, I have the perspective from the other side. And I realize how much it must have pleased my parents when I treated them right (which I didn't always do). And I also realize that the response I desire most from my children is not just obedience but an expression of love.

What does God want from us?

The New Testament contains many exhortations to exhibit the right conduct or develop the proper attitudes. And very often those commands are within the context of our relationship with God our Father and the family of believers. Let's look at several examples.

The Father desires our love most of all. What did Jesus say when a legal expert asked Him, "Which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" (Mt. 22:36 NIV). Jesus replied, "'Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment" (vv.37-38).

It's one thing to go through the motions of obeying out of duty, but it's quite another to serve God out of genuine devotion, telling Him often that we love Him. Have you told your heavenly Father recently that you love Him?

What this means to our heavenly Father was illustrated to me by one of my daughters when she was 2 years old. She had learned the mechanics of saying, "I love you," by mimicking Mom and Dad, but on one occasion her

words took on special meaning. One evening while we were playing together, she ran to me, put her little arms around my neck and said, "I love you, Daddy!" That moment was precious to me. Her words went straight to my heart because they were sincere, unrehearsed, and pure.

As we think about who our heavenly Father is, how much He loves us, and all He does for us, we too will find ourselves running to Him in prayer and saying, "I love You, Father!"

The Father deserves honor. At the end of the Old Testament, the Lord asked the leaders of His chosen people some soul-searching questions: "A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am the Father, where is My honor? And if I am a Master, where is My reverence?" (Mal. 1:6).

We learned earlier of the tremendous privilege we have to call the almighty Creator by the intimate term *Abba*. But we must never forget who He is--the sovereign Lord of all that exists.

To honor the Father also means to recognize that He is the provider of all that we have and enjoy. We are to be "always giving thanks to God the Father for everything" (Eph. 5:20 NIV).

The Father wants us to imitate Him. Pastor and author Erwin Lutzer writes, "If a man says, 'My father is Mr. Jones,' you look at his face to see if you can see any resemblance to his father. So when a believer says, 'I am a son of God,' we should expect that his life will have at least some trace of the character of God" (*You're Richer Than You Think*, Victor Books, p.55).

The apostle Paul wrote, "Be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us" (Eph. 5:1-2). We are imitators of God also when we are merciful as He is merciful (Lk. 6:36).

The family resemblance is seen in our clean break from a godless way of life. We are to be clearly different from people who are not members of God's family. In 1 John we read, "This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God" (3:10 NIV).

Although we are "born again" by faith (Jn. 3:3,16), we demonstrate the reality of that faith by acts of obedience to God. James said, "Faith by itself,

if it does not have works, is dead" (2:17). Jesus taught, "Whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother" (Mt. 12:50). He also said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven" (7:21).

Our pattern of behavior, therefore, whether acts of obedience or disobedience, reveals to whose family we belong.

What responsibilities do we have to other members of the family?

Romans 12:5 reminds us that we are closely linked to other children of God. We may not recognize it or consistently act like it, but all who come to God through faith in Christ are members of the same family: "We, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another."

It must hurt the Father to see His children at odds with each other. It hurts me deeply when my children fight and I hear a comment like, "She hates me!" It is painful to see them not wanting to help each other. How much more it must make our Father's heart ache to see the kind of "warfare" that goes on among believers.

As members of a spiritual family, we must put aside our self-centeredness and look out for the interests of one another. Our responsibilities include:

- We are to love one another. The all-encompassing obligation we have to other children of God, just as in our relationship with God, is love (Rom. 13:8; 1 Cor. 13; 1 Th. 3:12; 4:9; 1 Pet. 3:8; 4:8; 1 Jn. 3:11,23; 4:7,11-12; 2 Jn. 1:5).
- We are to honor one another through service (Rom. 12:10; Gal. 5:13; 1 Pet. 4:10).
- We are to be generous and hospitable (Rom. 12:13; 1 Pet. 4:9).
- We are to do all we can to build up one another spiritually, not tear each other down (Rom. 14:13).
- We are to teach each other (Rom. 15:14).
- We are to be truthful (Eph. 4:25; Col. 3:9).
- We are to be kind and forgiving (Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13).
- We are to comfort one another in times of need (1 Th. 5:11).
- We are to challenge each other to live holy lives (Heb. 3:13; 10:24-25).
- We are to pray for one another (Jas. 5:16).

Are we fulfilling our responsibilities joyfully?

We've listed many obligations that we have to our heavenly Father and to our brothers and sisters in Christ. As we read such a list, we may tend to feel like a child who just received a list of chores to do on Saturday morning before he can go play with his friends.

That's why we need to remind ourselves continually of what will motivate us to do all these things with the right attitude--a recognition that we are family. We are part of a spiritual family headed by a loving Father who out of love for us has gone to great lengths, even sacrificing His own Son Jesus Christ, to bring us into His family.

As we think of all He has done for us and how much He loves us, our hearts and lives cannot help but respond with the kind of loving words and actions that will please Him and create a closer family among those who also have been adopted by Him.

As we complete this study, the prayer of the apostle Paul for the children of God in Ephesus is also my prayer for you:

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better (Eph. 1:17 NIV).

ARE YOU A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY?

It's the most important issue of life: Can you say that God is your Father? Have you become a child of God by declaring your personal faith in Jesus as Savior? Your answer determines whether all the joys of knowing God as Father now and throughout eternity will be yours.

Perhaps you've read this booklet with an uneasy feeling that you are not a member of the family. Now is a good time to settle the issue.

The Father longs to adopt you, and the procedure is simple. Come to Him in childlike faith, accepting His offer of forgiveness from your sins, which have kept you out of the family. Jesus lived, died, and rose from the grave to show you the Father's love and to make it possible to become a member of God's family.

The Father is waiting to hear from you. He does not expect flowery words, just a simple expression of childlike faith. Tell Him that you believe Jesus died to pay the penalty for your sins. Accept His gift of forgiveness (Rom. 6:23) and the invitation to be part of His family forever.

If you've done that, welcome to the family!

THE COMPASSION OF JESUS

If we had the compassion of Jesus, it would change our families, churches, and neighborhoods for the better. It would allow us to give to others what all of us want for ourselves. It would enable us to fulfill the purpose for which we leave our footprints and fingerprints on this planet.

This life-changing grace is the passion of the author's life. Vernon Grounds is one of the present directors of RBC Ministries, a past president and current chancellor of Denver Seminary, and an ongoing mentor to the men and women whose lives he continues to influence. Dr. Grounds, who is in his ninth decade, models better than anyone else I have ever known the compassion he writes about in the following pages.

Martin R. De Haan II, President of RBC Ministries.

CAN WE AFFORD TO BE COMPASSIONATE?

German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche said that pity is a slave-morality fit only for weaklings. Lenin, the founding father of communism, insisted that his disciples be steel-like and ruthless. "You can't make an omelet," he told them, "without cracking a few eggs; neither can you have a successful revolution without cracking a few skulls."

According to ethicist Philip Hallie, the American author Henry David Thoreau, whose books are still read and applauded, scoffed at "sniveling compassion" and argued that "compassion is a very untenable ground" for a lifestyle, and that we forfeit our one chance for rich and vibrant experience if we spend our days "suffering with all sufferers, feeling compassionate for all victims in the world."

Experts wrangle about the precise meaning of terms like *pity*, *sympathy*, *mercy*, and *empathy*. For our purposes, though, we will ignore any hairsplitting distinctions. We will regard all of these emotional reactions as aspects of compassion. Furthermore, we will consider compassion to be neighbor-love in action.

Pity and *sympathy* are, of course, words that we use every day. They express how we feel when we observe another person undergoing affliction of body, mind, or heart. We recall what was taking place within ourselves as we underwent some similar experience. In our imagination we spontaneously project ourselves into that person's situation, maybe involuntarily tightening our muscles, clenching our fists, drawing in a deep breath, even getting tearful.

If the shared experience is intense enough, we call it *empathy*. It's as if we somehow crawl inside the sufferer's skin, and the two of us merge into a sort of emotional oneness. Physically, of course, we remain two separate organic entities; yet we may become psychologically unified. In some cases that sense of togetherness may be intense and prolonged as when day and night a mother indwells the anguish of a seriously ill child. When we empathize, we are so identified with the other person that it's as if we are hearing with her ears, seeing with her eyes, resonating with her heart, and thinking with her mind.

Aroused by an encounter with need and distress, an empathic reaction elicits a heartfelt sense of concern. It is that identifying emotion that arises from the innermost center of our being. In Colossians 3:12, the apostle Paul used a Greek term for internal organs to refer to a "heart of compassion." By the exercise of focused attention, we achieve an insight different from the knowledge provided by logic or science. In the biblical sense of the word *know*, we experience a profound perception. We know with a

sort of deep intimacy similar to that ultimate intimacy Adam had when he knew his wife Eve and they became one flesh (Gen. 4:1).

COMPASSION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The god of the philosophers is the Unmoved Mover that imparts motion to whatever exists. Untouched by our creaturely concerns, He (really It) is the inexhaustible source of energy for the throbbing dynamo of the cosmos. The god of human speculation is a god without heart. Absolutely perfect, that god exists in unruffled sameness for all eternity. That god has no emotions, since emotion involves a change from one state of feeling to another--from calmness to an upsurge of anger, for example. By definition, though, the god of the philosophers is like an icicle that never melts.

By contrast, Jehovah, the God of the Israelites, is not just a mind. He is not just thought--eternally thinking thought. The God of the Old Testament, and the New Testament too, while unchanging in His nature and purpose, is genuinely personal. Whenever the Bible talks about the true and loving God, it uses personal pronouns.

How, then, can we grasp what God is like? We take our own personhood as a clue to divine Personhood. We eliminate anything imperfect and magnify everything about God to an infinite degree. That helps us to try to understand the reality of God as He actually is in His flawless Personhood.

The Bible discloses that the one true and living God actually feels. He experiences a whole gamut of reactions that are similar to our own. But one of the emotions repeatedly attributed to Him is compassion. Scripture tells us that He is eternal, holy, just, all-good, wise, powerful, and loving. And because He is loving, He is compassionate. That adjective points to a divine attribute that is

like the trait we have in mind when we characterize a human as compassionate.

Eliminate God's compassion, and God is no longer God--the personal God who interacted with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Eliminate compassion, and God is no longer the God who has experiences akin to our own states of joy, regret, grief, and merciful kindness. Eliminate compassion from God's nature, and Scripture must be rewritten, our understanding of the divine nature must be radically revised, and theology must be turned inside out. But compassion can't be eliminated. It must, instead, be given a place of honor among God's attributes. He is the caring God.

It follows, therefore, that if Jesus is the self-revelation of the God of the Old Testament, then compassion will be embodied in Him. And it is. As Friedrich von Hügel, a British scholar with a German name, lay on his deathbed, he managed to say, "Caring is what matters most." With great difficulty he added, "Christianity taught us to care." Von Hügel's dying testimony, while movingly true, needs to be both clarified and qualified. Certainly Old Testament believers were taught to care by Jehovah's deeds and declarations. Yet Jesus, as compassion incarnate, made caring central in His ministry. He swept aside any legalistic distortions of, and any ethnic limitations on, the all-inclusive grace of the triune God. And caring is that compassionate neighbor-love that Paul in 1 Corinthians 13 declared to be the greatest of all virtues--one that our Savior and Master modeled perfectly.

A Jew by birth and a devout Jew by practice, Christ knew that His heavenly Father, the Jehovah of the Old Testament, is the God of compassion. A student of the First Covenant exhibiting a unique knowledge of its teaching, He was profoundly aware that His Father's compassion was highlighted by the inspired authors. Texts like these must have given Him an in-depth perception of Jehovah's heart.

- "You, O Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness" (Ps. 86:15).
- " 'For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with deep compassion I will bring you back. In a surge of anger I hid My face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you,' says the Lord your Redeemer. . . . 'Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet My unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor My covenant of peace be removed,' says the Lord, who has compassion on you" (Isa. 54:7-8,10).
- "You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea" (Mic. 7:19).

Had God's law of compassion been obeyed, life in Israel for both women and men would have been the happiest possible in our fallen world. Psalm 85:10 depicts a community in which righteousness and peace kiss each other. The Hebrew word for peace, *shalom*, is so rich in content that it's almost untranslatable. Thus the society envisioned by the psalmist, as a society of *shalom*, is an order of life characterized by joy and justice, piety and plenty, kindness and caring. But God's people failed to achieve God's loving ideal. Isaiah graphically depicted the moral and spiritual sickness of that disobedient nation.

Why should you be beaten anymore? Why do you persist in rebellion? Your whole head is injured, your whole heart afflicted. From the sole of your foot to the top of your head there is no soundness--only wounds and welts and open sores, not cleansed or bandaged or soothed with oil. Your country is desolate, your cities burned with fire; your fields are being stripped by foreigners right before you, laid waste as when overthrown by strangers (1:5-7).

Divine punishment, administered in sorrowful grace, again and again overwhelmed Israel. After Solomon's reign, the nation split into two rival kingdoms. Eventually pagan invaders ravaged that country and took into exile the survivors of war, famine, and disease. Jehovah in His mercy eventually allowed a remnant of Israelites to return from exile. They fiercely resolved to take whatever measures were necessary to prevent a repetition of their ancestors' sinful failure. So a long period of legalism began that extended from roughly 400 BC to AD 400. Under well-meaning rabbis, many of them devout and learned, a restrictive system of rules and regulations developed.

At first circulating orally, these teachings and their interpretations were gradually written down. Commentary was added to commentary until they eventually became the multi-volume Mishna and Talmud, a veritable library of precise, hairsplitting directives and prohibitions.

For example, the Fourth Commandment forbids Sabbath work. But what is work? It is defined under 39 different headings called "fathers of work." For instance, carrying a burden is work. But then the question arises, "What is a burden?" According to commentator William Barclay, the Mishna tells us that a burden is "milk enough for a gulp, honey enough to be put on a sore, oil enough to anoint the smallest member of the body . . . water enough to rub off an eye-plaster, leather enough to make an amulet, ink enough to write two letters of the alphabet, coarse sand enough to cover a plasterer's trowel, reed enough to make a pen, a pebble big enough to throw at a bird, anything which weighs as much as two dried figs."

Thus the hairsplitting went on endlessly. Life-giving laws were changed from being a delight and joy and the source of soul-enlightening guidance and blessing (as seen in Psalm 119) into a

yoke of bondage. It became a rigid system of religious ritualism, which Jesus denounced with justified wrath:

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to (Mt. 23:13-14).

To be sure, there were teachers of the law, rabbis, priests, and scribes who as spiritual servants of Jehovah proclaimed and practiced Micah 6:8, "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." Likewise, many ordinary Israelites were models of virtue and piety, loving God and doing good to their neighbors. But the Jewish people as a whole, oppressed by both their Roman conquerors and their own pharisaic hierarchy, found life a heavy burden. Economically impoverished and spiritually ignorant, they were "harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Mt. 9:36).

COMPASSION IN THE LIFE OF JESUS

Into this turbulent situation Jesus came with His revolutionary message of God's kingdom. It was entered by the simple exercise of repentant faith, and it called for loving obedience to the King and Father and loving service to brothers and sisters in the new divine kingdom and family. Indeed, such service was to be rendered to every member of the human family as well. Its one all-inclusive law was love--a love that Jesus spelled out in His Sermon on the Mount, a love that fulfilled the Ten Commandments (Rom. 13:10). Thus the controlling motive of attitude and behavior in this born-again society was to be compassion, love in action, the caring concern modeled by Jesus Himself.

As God incarnate (the Son of God and God the Son), Christ was a mirror of flesh flawlessly reflecting His Father's nature, not only the divine holiness but the divine heart. Himself sinless and most acutely sensitive to sin, Jesus sympathized with sinful people who were suffering the consequences of inherited depravity and personal transgression. He was aware that the multitudes He ministered to were made up of sinners, most of whom were spiritually like bruised reeds, splintered and emotionally ready to break.

He realized too that in the crowds pressing around Him were souls whose faith was not burning brightly but was at best like smoldering flax (Mt. 12:20). Gently, not with harsh judgment, He sought to strengthen the bruised reeds and bring the smoldering flax to a flame. One of His favorite Old Testament texts was Hosea 6:6, where Jehovah said, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings." Jesus, as recorded in Matthew 9:13 and 12:7, appropriated those significant words spoken by God Himself to defend His tradition-violating compassion.

COMPASSION IN THE LIFE OF JESUS

JESUS' COMPASSION FOR CHILDREN

The people of Israel were a society that prized children. Typical of the value placed on their offspring, especially males, is Psalm 127:3-5.

Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children a reward from Him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their enemies in the gate.

This same high evaluation is repeated in Psalm 128:3.

Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house;
your sons will be like olive shoots around your table.

Abortion and child exposure, which were practiced by the pagan nations surrounding the Holy Land, were sinfully abhorrent to God's elect people. They hailed every birth with joy and gratitude.

Growing up with brothers and sisters, Jesus no doubt had opportunity and responsibility to help care for His younger siblings. He thus acquired realistic insight into the characteristics and needs of children (Mk. 3:31-32; 6:3). While the Gospels give no specific information about family relationships in the home of Mary and Joseph, we have good reason to believe those parents were sensitive, caring, and God-fearing. Joseph, who may have died rather young, was evidently a pious man of prayer and a devout worshiper of Jehovah. In rearing his offspring we may assume that he followed the guidelines of Deuteronomy 6:6-7.

These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

Mary, a woman of trustful obedience (Lk. 1:38), had a rich knowledge of the Old Testament, as her Magnificat shows. It is an impressive collage of biblical texts and images (vv.46-55). So Jesus, His own attitudes influenced by the attitudes of His parents, became a lover of children. During His ministry, He took delight in welcoming them whenever they clustered around Him. He had an acute understanding of their need for warm acceptance and adult help. How different He was from that gifted servant of God, C. S. Lewis, who in all honesty confessed, "I myself do not enjoy the society of small children . . . I recognize this as a defect in myself--

just as a man may have to recognize that he is tone deaf or color blind."

In the multitudes that followed Jesus were children who were acutely hungry or at least malnourished. Some were sick with all-too-common ailments--and none of our modern medicines were available to alleviate their distress. Some of them were deformed and blind. Some were in the grip of demonic powers (Mk. 9:17-18).

The disciples of Jesus were annoyed by restless children so they tried to push the noisy irritants to the outskirts of the eager crowds that gathered to hear the Nazarene. Harshly they ordered them to be quiet or, better still, to go away.

Children, nevertheless, clustered about Jesus, longing to be picked up and held in His welcoming arms. Clearly, they must have sensed His love for them. He embraced them and even prayed God's blessing on their young lives, much to the surprise of His mistaken would-be protectors. Indeed, He rebuked those parent-rebuking disciples (Mk. 10:13-16). Not only that, He declared that children were to be welcomed in His name and that they--so dependent, so trustful, so teachable, so free from guile--serve as models of that faith in the heavenly Father that gains entrance into His kingdom (Mt. 18:1-5). He declared as well that anyone who causes a child to go astray will suffer severe punishment (Mk. 9:35-37,42). Objects of angelic care, children are to be objects of human care, not viewed merely as packages of protoplasm to be disdained and even destroyed at adult discretion (Mt. 19:13-14).

It should be mentioned that infanticide was a frequent practice in the culture of the Greco-Roman world before and after the time of Christ. A revolting example of the cruel indifference to one's own offspring is a letter, dated AD 1, sent by a Roman husband, Hilarion, to his wife Alis. He expresses tender greetings yet instructs her, "If--good luck be with you--you bear a child, if it is a

boy, let it live, if it is a girl, throw it out." That utterly hardhearted attitude is manifested even by Seneca, a great first-century Stoic philosopher. He actually wrote, "We strangle a mad dog; we slaughter a fierce ox, we plunge the knife into sickly cattle lest they taint the herd; children who are born deformed or weakly we drown." Absolutely antithetical to this cruel callousness was the tenderheartedness of Jesus. Think of how the compassionate Lord would react to the practice of abortion in our own day.

Did Jesus foresee with inexpressible regret the destiny of the children clamoring for His attention? As they grew up, they would face hardship and exploitation in their oppressed country. For many, there would be nagging poverty, a struggle simply to subsist. Some would be afflicted with painful disease and die at an early age. Most would necessarily become adherents to a demanding religion that would fail to lift their emotional burdens and would leave them spiritually unsatisfied.

Their religion, which was the substance of their culture, would increase their hardship and blight their enjoyment of the simple pleasures of life (Mt. 23:1-4). And in the eternity beyond time, would they enter into God's presence and blessedness, or would they be wretched exiles forever? So while our Lord rejoiced when children came to Him, His heart must have ached for them as well.

COMPASSION IN THE LIFE OF JESUS

JESUS' COMPASSION FOR WOMEN

Not only was Jesus compassionate toward children, He was also uniquely compassionate toward women. Indeed, His attitude toward them and His relationship with them were revolutionary. Israel was a patriarchal society in which women occupied a

subordinate position and were in many ways treated as social and spiritual inferiors to men.

It's difficult, though, to generalize, because the rabbis differed among themselves on this issue. Fathers too differed in the upbringing of their daughters. And husbands differed in how controlling and restrictive they were with their wives. Love and personality differences made for great differences in the experiences of Hebrew women.

Yet it is undeniable that generally a woman's lot in that patriarchal society was hard. The prevalent belief in female inferiority found terse expression in the prayer offered by Jewish males: "God, I thank Thee that I was not born a dog. I thank Thee that I was not born a Gentile. I thank Thee that I was not born a woman."

In their younger years, daughters were often treated with suspicion. They were closely supervised in order to prevent anything that might be viewed as unchastity.

When she began her menstrual cycle, a woman was unclean and needed purification (Lev. 15:19-30). To touch a menstruating woman was to undergo defilement that required ritual purification. Incidentally, a man was not to touch any woman except his wife, not even if she was his cousin and the touch accidental.

When a girl reached a marriageable age, she was bartered by her father. After marriage she could be bartered by her husband.

The female role was that of housekeeper, with none of the conveniences we take for granted today. Her other role was that of childbearing with frequent pregnancies--the more she bore, the higher a wife was held in esteem. After childbirth, a woman was regarded as unclean and in need of purification (Lev. 12).

If a wife displeased her husband, he could divorce her, but a wife was not granted the same right (Dt. 24:1-4). If she was suspected of adultery, a wife could be subjected to the frightful water ordeal (Num. 5:11-31), but no such provision was made for testing a suspected husband.

A woman had no property rights. She could not serve as a witness. She could not share equally in worship. Singing and chanting were done by men exclusively while women listened in their own synagogue compartments. As a rule they were not taught the Torah as boys were. Some rabbis went so far as to declare, "Let the words of the law be burned rather than committed to women. . . . If a man teaches his daughter the Law, it is as though he taught her lechery." Ten men had to be present for a service to be held. Nine men plus one woman would not do!

Jesus, however, was sensitive to the needs of all people whether male or female. He exhibited an all-inclusive compassion that broke through the traditional gender restrictions and taboos. In order to heal, He allowed Himself to be touched by a woman without a shuddering reaction and without following the prescribed routine for cleansing.

Luke told about a woman who for 12 years had an issue of blood (evidently some menstrual dysfunction). She stretched out her fingers and brushed the fringe of Jesus' garment. Instead of condemning her for such a male-contaminating act, Jesus gently led her to understand the difference between a belief in a kind of magical contact and a saving faith in divine grace (Lk. 8:42-48).

Another woman, in this case a defiled prostitute, poured precious ointment on the Savior's feet and washed them with her tears while Jesus was eating in a Pharisee's house. Compassionately, our Lord, who knew her penitence and faith, defended that bold, extravagant action and sent her away with a benediction of peace (Lk. 7:36-50).

Jesus again disclosed His compassionate attitude toward women, and particularly those who were marginalized by their own sin, when He refused to engage in the stoning of an adulteress caught in the very act. Leaving aside the question of why her accusers didn't drag the male offender as well to the feet of Jesus, we watch our Lord, who with pitying tactfulness handled this sordid situation righteously yet forgivingly. He absolved this transgressor of her guilt, warned her against future temptation, and sent her away to live a changed life (Jn. 8:1-11). He didn't condone sin. Not in the least! Yet lovingly He offered pardon and hope to those women whom society pushed aside as moral refuse.

Widows especially elicited our Savior's compassionate help. The Old Testament laid down specific commands that widows were to be treated with kindness and respect (Dt. 14:28-29; 24:19-21; 26:12-13; Isa. 1:17; Zech. 7:10). In all likelihood, then as now, some families may have nevertheless neglected to provide sufficient companionship and care for these second-class women. Often, then as now, they may have moved to the outskirts of the family orbit.

A typical example of our Lord's attitude toward these marginalized women was His encounter with a funeral procession outside the city of Nain. A young man had died. He was the only child of his grief-stricken mother. She was facing loneliness and in all probability destitution. When Jesus saw the funeral procession and heard the mother sobbing, He was moved with compassion. "His heart went out to her" (Lk. 7:13). He didn't wait for any appeal. He acted. He touched the coffin, risking ritual contamination, and He commanded the corpse to arise. Miraculously, the son obeyed as life returned to his body. Imagine the mother's gratitude as uncontrollable joy replaced inconsolable sorrow! (vv.11-17).

In Jesus' sermon in Nazareth as He inaugurated His public ministry, He referred to a widow (an alien from pagan Sidon) as an

object of God's saving grace. That reference, made intentionally not casually, contradicted the prejudices of His audience (Lk. 4:25-26). The Sidon widow was not the only bereft widow whom Jesus used as an example to challenge His contemporaries and present-day readers of the Gospels.

In Jesus' day, men had only a meager knowledge of God and a superficial fellowship with Him. The plight of women was far worse. Therefore Jesus, in defiance of tradition, allowed them to be among His followers and actually engage in the service and support of His itinerant mission (Lk. 8:1-3). Women together with men were being taught about God's grace that rules out gender distinction. With compassion, our Lord told women, individually as well as collectively, the truth about God and His kingdom. He took time to instruct Mary of Bethany (Lk. 10:39). Significantly, He gently rebuked Martha the sister of Mary, counseling her that it was better for a woman to learn about God than to be preoccupied with household chores like preparing a meal. In so saying, He was turning the traditional role of women upside down.

Once again, at Jacob's well, He gave a brief course in basic theology to a Samaritan woman. No wonder His tradition-bound companions were astonished. He was talking to a woman in public! He was talking to her alone! He was talking to a despised Samaritan woman, someone of a race that pious Jews viewed as heretics! (Jn. 4:1-30).

What motivated such behavior by Christ? Compassion. He saw people in the whole gamut of their need. He saw people not in abstract categories such as males and females, Jews and Gentiles, aliens and citizens, adults and children. Jesus saw people as individuals, each made in God's image, each a member of God's human family and a potential member of God's spiritual family.

COMPASSION IN THE LIFE OF JESUS

JESUS' COMPASSION FOR OTHER MARGINALIZED MEMBERS OF SOCIETY

As Jesus was compassionate toward women and children, so He was toward other fringe groups on the edges of society. He was a liberating radical who had come, according to His own assertion, in order that any and all sinful humans might have abundant life in this world, and beyond this world might have life everlasting (Jn. 3:16; 10:10).

In first-century Israel, tax collectors and publicans were understandably despised and hated. They were Jews who acted as agents of the Roman government. Their task was that of gathering a specified amount of money from their own fellow-Israelites no matter how much hardship that might cause. If they could extort anything beyond what was due to the imperial officials, they could pocket that for themselves. So when Jesus wanted to bring out the seriousness of excluding an unrepentant person from the Christian in-group, He taught His disciples to treat that transgressor as if he were a tax collector (Mt. 18:17).

How scandalized, then, people must have been when our Lord had table fellowship with those quislings, as they might be called today. And He even invited one of them to become an inner-circle disciple! (Mk. 2:13-17).

How Jesus must have upset His fellow Jews when He invited a notorious publican named Zacchaeus, who was wealthy because of his ruthless exploitation, to enter into the orbit of God's redeeming, forgiving mercy! (Lk. 19:1-10).

How Jesus must have perplexed and angered good Jews when, in one of His parables, He made a tax collector rather than a Pharisee the recipient of God's justifying grace! (Lk. 18:9-14).

Worse still, how infuriating it must have been for this friend of tax collectors and sinners (Lk. 7:34) to declare that the tax collectors and prostitutes who had responded repentantly to the preaching of John the Baptist would enter into God's kingdom in advance of the self-righteous religious leaders! (Mt. 21:31-32).

According to Jesus, divine compassion could and would change members of the ostracized out-group into welcomed members of God's in-group.

In His saving pity, Jesus also broke through the barriers erected by separatistic traditions. He had no hesitancy in touching lepers who had been compelled to avoid all human contact (Mt. 8:1-4; Mk. 1:40-44). Think of what His touch must have meant to these pathetic untouchables. He exercised His power on behalf of needy individuals regardless of their race. He healed the son of a centurion, an officer in Rome's oppressive army (Mt. 8:5-13). He likewise healed the daughter of a pagan, a Canaanite woman (Mt. 15:21-24). He didn't hesitate to talk with a Samaritan woman and share with her the liberating truth about God and the worship pleasing to God (Jn. 4). The prevailing attitude toward that race by Jews is starkly disclosed in the criticism leveled against Jesus Himself, "You are a Samaritan and demon-possessed" (Jn. 8:48).

Yet when Jesus challenged the mercy-stifling behavior of the religious hierarchy of His day, He chose a Samaritan as a model of God's own compassion--a Samaritan who had compassion on a victim of theft and violence (Lk. 10). Could He have more dramatically revealed that His own heart was beating as one with the heart of His Father?

Jesus never spurned the common people who gladly listened to Him (Mk. 12:37). The Jewish hierarchy looked down on the people contemptuously because they were religiously illiterate. They said, "This mob that knows nothing of the law--there is a curse on them" (Jn. 7:49). But instead Jesus, who was moved with compassion,

taught the mob. He fed its members repeatedly. He healed their sick, and He freed those who were possessed by demons (Mk. 5:1-17; 8:1-10).

Jesus' pity toward the poor in their sickness, in their hunger, and in their suffering emerges strikingly in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk. 16:19-31). It emerges again in His awe-inspiring vision of judgment that highlights His concern for the most needy members of society (Mt. 25:31-46). His heart and His arms were open wide, as they still are, to the lowest, the least, and the lost (Lk. 15).

COMPASSION IN THE LIFE OF JESUS

JESUS' COMPASSION FOR THE SPIRITUALLY NEEDY

Concerned as He was about hunger, disease, and injustice, our Lord was concerned immeasurably more about people's relationship to God and their destiny in the world to come. When He laid down the manifesto of His kingdom in the sermon preached in the synagogue at Nazareth, He quoted this passage from Isaiah 61:

The Spirit of the Lord is on Me, because He has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor (Lk. 4:18-19).

By quoting this passage from Isaiah, Jesus was announcing a twofold mission. On the one hand, He would literally help restore sight, give comfort, and liberate those in bondage to destructive habits and addictive behavior. On the other hand, His ministry would be a spiritual one, enlightening the spiritually blind (Jn. 6),

liberating the spiritually shackled, comforting the spiritually guilt-ridden and distressed. Indeed, the miracles He was going to perform, His supernatural acts of power and compassion, would be dramatic vignettes of the very nature of the kingdom He had come to inaugurate.

While His pity took in the whole gamut of human affliction, His primary concern was spiritual. His society was permeated with religion, but the religion established by God for the blessing of His people had degenerated into a legalistic straightjacket. So He denounced, with fiercest vehemence, the Pharisaic traditionalism that took away the "key to knowledge" (Lk. 11:52) and left its soul-empty adherents in ignorance of God. Wrathfully He castigated proselytizing zealots who traveled far and wide to win a single convert and in doing so made that individual "twice as much a son of hell" (Mt. 23:15). Aliens themselves from the abundant life of heaven's kingdom, those watchdogs of tradition prevented God-hungry seekers from entering into its "righteousness, peace, and joy" (Rom. 14:17). How the hardheartedness of those "blind leaders of the blind" troubled Jesus' own loving heart!

The Gospels tell us that Jesus wept (Lk. 19:41; Jn. 11:35). Once as He approached Jerusalem just prior to His arrest and crucifixion, He gazed at that doomed city and could not keep from sobbing. He foresaw the terrible destruction awaiting the sacred footstool of Jehovah (Ps. 99:5), and He broke down emotionally. Earlier in His ministry He had been unable to restrain His sorrow as He foresaw the savage sacking of Israel's capital.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! (Lk. 13:34).

Even on His way to Calvary, bearing the burden of His cross, Jesus forgot His own misery. Grief-stricken, He predicted the misery that women especially would endure (Lk. 23:27-31).

But the deepest cause of His grief was not the travail His own people would suffer in this world. He was shaken to the center of His being by His vision of their fate in eternity--exiled from the light, the love, and the life of God in darkness and despair forever. Again and again He had entreated the crowds around Him to flee from the wrath to come. He had spoken with a heart-melting eloquence, using the most vivid imagery to jolt the complacent, the indifferent, and the unrepentant out of their apathy.

- Don't stumble zombie-like into a destiny worse than the judgment poured out on Sodom and Gomorrah (Mt. 11:24).
- Don't refuse the grace of the pardon-offering God who can destroy both body and soul in hell (Mt. 10:28).

Such a terrifying prospect harrowed Jesus emotionally, filling His compassionate heart with grief.

Even though Jesus ate and drank with sinners, and even though He shared in the happiness of wedding feasts, He never lost sight of "the dark line on God's face." He had entered our world as the embodiment of mercy, willing to die in order that lost sinners might not perish but have everlasting life. *Perish*--that was and is the dark line on God's face. *Perish*--that word expresses the hopelessness and horror, the despair from which He had come to save sinners. In His compassion He stooped from glory to Golgotha. Motivated by infinite pity, He had taken on our flesh and blood, exchanging heaven's throne to be impaled on Calvary's tree. He had humbled Himself, abandoning heaven's highest height and descending to earth's lowest depths, dying by crucifixion in agony and ignominy on a Roman cross, the death reserved for the worst of criminals. Why had He done this? He said very simply that it was to save the lost (Lk. 19:10).

Lost! All of humanity's horrific peril and fathomless need scream out in that word that re-echoes another terrifying word--*perish*. Those two dreadful words clang out a terrible antiphony. The perishing are the lost, the lost are the perishing.

Lost! The sobbing, heartbreaking, bewildering distress of a child who has strayed from the safety and warmth of the ski resort and is freezing alone at night in the snow-covered forest.

Lost! The passengers on the Titanic are plunged from opulence and gaiety into the icy waters of the Atlantic Ocean, sinking down under the merciless waves.

Lost! The grief of a wife as the weary surgeon emerges from the operating room to report that the medical team has lost the patient, her husband.

Lost! Souls wandering "for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever" (Jude 13).

Lost! Souls tormented by the pangs of regret for the self-inflicted forfeiture of hope and joy and peace.

Lost! Souls bewailing the memory of opportunities for a glorious fulfillment gone eternally.

The spiritual plight of lost and perishing souls is what stirred Jesus' compassionate heart to its deepest depths.

EXAMPLES OF CHRISTLIKE COMPASSION

During His years here on earth, our Lord went about doing good (Acts 10:38). His compassion was not inactive sentimentalism which, as Samuel Taylor Coleridge bitingly wrote, "Sighs for wretchedness but shuns the wretched." As our study of Jesus'

ministry has shown, whenever He encountered a need in individuals or multitudes, His emotional reaction of intense concern motivated immediate action. He fed, healed, taught, calmed turbulent seas, cast out demons, and even raised the dead. In all He did and said, He set an example for His disciples to follow through the ages (1 Pet. 2:21). They, like Jesus, were to be agents of compassion communicating by word and deed the message of God's redemptive grace. They were to serve as conduits for the outflow of Spirit-empowered helpfulness.

Consider, for example, the centuries immediately following our Savior's sojourn on earth. Christian compassion, operating through His disciples, challenged and changed the cruel, calloused society of the Caesars. Infant killing, often by heartless exposure to the elements and even animals; the blood baths of the gladiatorial spectacles; the crucifixion of criminals; the brutal treatment of slaves; the degradation of women--such practices Christians bravely opposed in the name of the compassionate Jesus.

But the best way to appreciate how the example of our Lord's compassion has impacted history is to consider the lives of individuals who have served as conduits of His caring love. They have been salt in the otherwise tasteless dough of civilization. They have been light in the gross darkness of depraved culture. They have been voices pleading for mercy and kindness wherever there have been eruptions of barbarism, even in advanced nations. Here are just two illustrations of Christ like compassion.

Jackie Polinger, who was born and reared in Great Britain, was a musician by vocation and a Christian by conviction. From the age of 5 she felt that God was directing her into missionary service. But where and under what agency? She consulted her pastor who advised her to start out in faith and let God providentially lead. Jackie followed his advice and eventually found herself in Hong Kong.

All alone, she began a compassionate work of witness in the notorious Walled City, where more than 50,000 people were crowded into a mere six and half acres. It was a refuge for criminals of every kind--thieves, drug dealers, murderers, and prostitutes. Its streets were lined with heroin dens and opium dives, to say nothing of the pornographic theaters. The Walled City was a rat-infested horror of filth, ruled by ruthless gangs. Every morning the bodies of pathetic wretches who had overdosed and died during the night were simply dragged outside its walls and left unburied.

Jackie was only 20 years old, untrained and unprotected, when she moved into that nightmare and started as a conduit of Christ's compassion to share the good news of His forgiveness and love. She met with violent hostility. Windows and furniture were smashed in the Youth Club she opened, and it was smeared with excrement by the followers of a drug lord. But he was so impressed by Jackie and her message of God's forgiveness that he ordered his guilty gang members to go and apologize to her. They did and, true to her message, Jackie forgave them.

Slowly a change took place through Jackie's unfaltering compassion, dauntless bravery, and Christ-centered preaching. Hundreds of men and women--drug-enslaved, vice-fettered, lifelong addicts and drunkards--were liberated. Jackie's compassion was not an impotent sentimentalism. Motivated by Calvary, her ministry was dynamic and transforming. Indeed it was the very power of God unto salvation. Jesus through Jackie continued His work of compassion.

Mary Reed, born in Ohio in 1858, was another conduit of Christ like compassion. Hearing about the plight of lepers in India, she decided to do what she could to alleviate their distressful lot and share with them the good news of God's love. How apparently futile it was for one Christian woman to expect that she could bring

about any significant change in the lives of such sorely afflicted people in an alien society.

Resolutely and prayerfully, Mary volunteered for service in India. The city of Cawnpore with its overwhelming needs was the site of her ministry. Conditions were indescribably difficult. Little wonder, then, that after 8 years of compassionate labor, she suffered a physical breakdown. So she returned home to recuperate. But did she stay home? Did she abandon the impossible task of making a really helpful impact on so desperate a situation?

No, instead of yielding to any temptation like that, Mary returned and went to Pithoraterth in the Himalayas. On one journey she came across a tragic group of 500 lepers, subsisting by themselves, with no human agency concerned about their misery. Burdened for their piteous helplessness, Mary could not forget those neglected sufferers.

After another year of intense ministry, she collapsed and was sent back to her American home. Doctors were perplexed by her illness. What caused the tingling pain in her forefinger and that spot on her face? Mary knew before she had received a definitive diagnosis. She had contracted leprosy. Yet, rather than being horrified, she thanked God for a disease that ordinarily would have aroused reactions of dread and self-pity. She saw it as God's gift, an answer to her pleas that somehow she might be permitted to work among those lepers in the Himalayas.

Only her doctors and a sister knew the truth about her condition. When she left for India, she insisted that there be no sad farewell, though she realized she might never see her much-loved family again. Back in India, Mary went to that leper settlement where no missionary had gone before. "I have been called by God to come and help you," she told the astonished sufferers. And there she remained as God's agent of Christ like compassion. The difficulties

were indeed enormous, yet gradually in Chanbag under Mary's sacrificial leadership a new order of things developed. Even a hospital was built providing healing, help, and hope to once utterly hopeless outcasts. For 53 years she lived and served at Chanbag, dying there in 1943.

These two servants of the Lord Jesus are representative of a great host of His disciples, the majority of them unknown and unapplauded. But their names are known in heaven, and they have received the only commendation they desired and deserved, their Lord's word of approval, "Well done, good and faithful servants."

If we have named Jesus as our Redeemer and Master, we are challenged to follow in Jackie's and Mary's footsteps, as they followed in the footsteps of Him who was compassion incarnate. As recipients of saving grace, we have the privilege of letting the costly love of Calvary flow through our lives and out into the needy world. Only as we do so can some of humanity's need be met.

Historian Huston Smith, renowned professor of religion at Syracuse University, visited with Aldous Huxley when he was a distinguished professor of the humanities at MIT. One day they were walking and talking together, and Huxley said, "You know, Huston, it's rather embarrassing to have spent one's entire lifetime pondering the human condition and to come toward its close and find that I really don't have anything more profound to pass on by way of advice than, 'Try to be a little kinder.' "

While that's true, Jesus models and motivates more than a little kindness. He models and motivates sacrificial compassion. How, though, can we become conduits of His compassionate kindness? Let Henri Nouwen instruct us:

When I pray for the endless needs of the millions, my soul expands and wants to embrace them all and bring

them into the presence of God. But in the midst of that experience I realize that compassion is not mine but God's gift to me. I cannot embrace the world, but God can. I cannot pray, but God can pray in me. When God became as we are . . . He allowed us to enter into the intimacy of the divine life. He made it possible for us to share in God's infinite compassion.

And by grace we not only share the experience of God's compassion. By His enabling grace we can become the conduits of that compassion, following in Christ's footsteps as did a host of our spiritual forbears. But if we indeed are copying Christ, as Paul urged in 1 Corinthians 11:1, our compassion will not be limited to bodily needs. It will have soul needs as its supreme priority.

WHEN HOPE IS LOST

Captain Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin participated in one of the greatest technological feats of the 20th century--he was one of the first two men to walk on the moon. Then something very unexpected happened. In just a few short years after his historic voyage, his life had turned from success to the brink of disaster. Instead of basking in the glow of his heroic achievement, he sagged into a state of such severe depression that it nearly ruined him and his family.

Buzz slid from the mountaintop of achievement into a valley of despair. "I had been immersed in just one project--going to the moon," Aldrin reflected.¹ "I had gone to the moon. . . . What possible goal could I add now. There simply wasn't one."² And when the emptiness set in with no hope of ever finding purpose in life again, he became depressed.

Some, like Buzz Aldrin, become depressed after they reach their goals and find that there is nothing left to live for. Others slip into a state of depression when hope for what has *not* been reached seems lost--hope for a caring companion, hope for a successful career, hope for enough money to pay the bills, hope for a reconciled relationship, hope for relief from a stressful situation, or hope for the fulfillment of a long-cherished dream.

One young woman was struck down in the prime of life with a crippling disease. Not only did she lose hope of ever again experiencing activities she once enjoyed, but her hopes for a husband and a family came crashing down when her fiancé broke off their engagement. While some might have found the energy to continue, she felt stretched beyond what she could endure. Before long her grief turned to despair and eventually to depression.

Regardless of how it comes about, depression can afflict the soul as few other personal experiences can. Left unattended, it can develop into a severe struggle that drains life of its hope and energy.

The path is difficult for all who stagger through the darkness of depression. Gloom, confusion, and loneliness can hound the soul relentlessly. But no matter how painfully taxing the path becomes, one can find in the pages that follow good reason to "take heart" (Jn. 16:33) and to believe that the best is yet ahead.

Author Jeff Olson is a licensed counselor in Michigan and works for the RBC Ministries Biblical Correspondence Department.

AN OVERVIEW OF DEPRESSION

Depression is a common result of living in a fallen world. Some of the strongest and noblest among us have struggled in its grip. The patriarch Job, the great English preacher Charles Spurgeon, and the courageous leader Winston Churchill are just a few examples of those who have experienced and survived this nightmare of the soul.

Today, it's estimated that millions of people battle with various degrees of depression. Although research suggests that women typically struggle with a higher incidence of the problem, it is also a significant battle for men.

Depression is as complicated as it is common to the human experience. It can have its source in physical disease, unsuccessful personal choices, severe emotional trauma, chemical depletion, or even demonic oppression (1 Sam. 16:14-16).

Multiple causes suggest the need for multiple treatments. While either medication or counseling can be used, a combination of both can often show more favorable results than if one or the other is used exclusively. In such instances, it's apparent that more is going on than just a medical problem.

The purpose of this booklet is to consider the spectrum of factors that could be involved. In the following pages, we'll take a look at the nature of depression, its setup, the process of giving up, the reasons we give up, and the process of recovery. Although depression is a dreadful experience, we will see that there is hope even for those who feel that all hope is lost.

THE NATURE OF DEPRESSION

The experience of depression has been referred to as a heavy blackness. Others compare it to being buried alive. Charles Spurgeon likened it to "the horror of a soul forsaken by God." It is a hellish experience when people give up on life or feel that life has given up on them.

The Signs Of Depression. People who wrestle with depression generally display a number of unsettling and sometimes disabling symptoms. Several of the classic signs include a lack of energy, a loss of appetite or eating too much, difficulty sleeping or sleeping too much, and an inability to concentrate.

You can be alerted to a problem with depression by considering the following statements:

- I feel consistently sad or numb nearly every day.
- I have little or no interest in activities that I used to find enjoyable.
- I'm having difficulty sleeping.
- I'm sleeping too much.
- I've lost my appetite.
- I'm eating too much nearly every day.
- I feel tired most of the time.
- I find it hard to concentrate or stay focused.
- My interest in marital intimacy has lessened.
- I feel overwhelmed by the burdens of life.
- I don't hold out much hope that my life will improve in the future.
- I shift between feeling powerless and unworthy to feeling angry and victimized.
- I think about death or killing myself.

If you identify with five or more of these statements *and* at least one of the first two statements (feeling sad or a loss of interest), you should probably seek professional help. You may be struggling with major depression. Those who identify with two to four of the statements should, at the very least, consider seeing a physician for a complete medical checkup. Sometimes these are symptoms of a medical condition such as hypothyroidism, hypoglycemia, or Cushing's disease.

The Definition Of Depression. Depression is hard to define because it can be so elusive. There are components of depression that are simply impossible to describe.

Sometimes healthy grieving is confused with depression. Grieving and depression do share some similarities, but they are not one and the same. Depression is a departure from the grieving process. When we grieve, we feel the sorrow of loss. But in depression, the sorrow of loss is numbed.

Both may lead, at least temporarily, to sleepless nights or a loss of appetite, but the end results are quite different. Grieving leads to a renewal of hope and a longing for heaven (Rom. 8:23-25). Depression creates an additional set of problems that locks our souls in a dungeon of gloom.

Depression is also hard to define because it's a term that's used loosely in today's society. A friend recently told me that he was feeling depressed because he had to cancel a family vacation. There's no question that he felt a sense of sadness or even a hint of despair. He was looking forward to going on vacation with his family, and he was truly discouraged when he learned that it was not going to work out. This experience, however, is not the same as depression.

So what is the definition of depression? Depression is a troubled state or mood that consists of several ongoing disturbances in energy levels, sleep, appetite, and the ability to concentrate. In fact, depression can be understood as a group of symptoms that are influenced by biology and are the result of a self-destructive response to loss and unfairness.

It's often helpful to think of depression on a continuum that ranges from mild to major:



The more the various disturbances interfere with a person's ability to sleep, to eat, to work, to think, and to enjoy once-pleasurable activities, the greater the severity of depression. It can come as an unexplained loss of energy and enthusiasm, or as an overwhelming, disabling cloud of darkness that makes it impossible to carry on with normal routines or responsibilities. These bouts of depression can come in short or long seasons, lasting anywhere from a few weeks to a couple of years.

Depression has an uncanny ability to take on a life of its own. The ability to reason and reflect gets swallowed up as the physical and emotional disturbances take over. At some point, it becomes almost impossible to think through issues of personal choice until some emotional and physical stability can be reestablished.

Once some degree of stability is achieved, a reflective look at the roots of depression can become important to the recovery process. Although understanding alone may not relieve despair, having some insight into depression can help us avoid being completely overwhelmed by it. With that in mind, let's consider some of the major factors that can set us up for depression.

THE SETUP FOR DEPRESSION

Depression rarely comes out of nowhere. Although depressed people may feel utterly confused about their plight, there are multiple factors at work, both in and out of their control, that contribute to a condition that blankets their lives like a dark cloud. These factors generally fall into one of three areas:

1. Physical Factors. The complexity of the human body is one of the hallmarks of God's creation (Ps. 139:14). How the body works and interacts with the soul (our desires, thoughts, and feelings) is not fully understood. Nonetheless, there is an undeniably strong link between the body and soul that is frequently a part of the precondition to depression.

Disease. We especially notice a negative effect on our soul when disease afflicts our body. As mentioned earlier, various physical illnesses may cause the onset of or may aggravate the symptoms of depression. Again, this is why a medical checkup is recommended in most cases.

Diet And Exercise. What we eat and our level of exercise are two significant areas that affect the interaction between the body and soul and, in turn, the setup for depression. Without knowing it, we can develop eating patterns that are out of balance, or we can misuse certain food groups that can actually trigger or reinforce a state of depression. The same is true for a lack of regular exercise.

For instance, those who eat sweets such as chocolate to soothe pain or stress will experience a quick burst of energy. This is always followed by a drastic letdown, however, leaving a person feeling tired and weak. Similarly, those who are not involved in any kind of regular physical activity are more prone to fatigue. This is especially true of those who overextend themselves and

fail to give their bodies time to recover. With other factors going on, any or all of these could be precursors of depression.

Genetics. Another item worth noting is the relationship between genetics and depression. Some may inherit melancholic tendencies that make them more vulnerable to depression. But the influence of genetics must be kept in perspective. Research shows that "the environment has a strong influence on whether and how a gene gets 'expressed.'"³

In most cases, however, "biological vulnerability alone is not enough" to produce depression.⁴ In the majority of cases, there are also outside factors at work that set the stage for depression.

2. Outside Influences. Life in a fallen world is disappointing and sometimes brutal. Although we are not merely byproducts of our environment, external forces do influence the areas in which we struggle.

Family Background And Past Abuse. One of the more obvious factors that influences depression is family background. Every family carries the capacity to nurture or injure. Many who struggle with depression have had damaging levels of criticism, rejection, and even violence in their past as well as in their present family relationships.

Abuse is another factor that can lead to depression. Painful incidents of emotional, physical, or sexual abuse can often occur within the family, but there are also many times when the abuse takes place outside the family.

Family dysfunction and incidents of abuse deeply affect us. Many of us are out of touch with the level of harm we suffered growing up and how it continues to affect the way we live today. Sometimes the pain from family interactions or abusive events was so overwhelming that the thought of feeling anything other than guilt seemed unbearable. This is partly why we are inclined to blame ourselves for what was not our fault. We may also have been taught by example to feel our pain as little as possible. Or we may not have even been allowed to feel. We were insensitively told never to cry but simply to "get over it."

A general lack of empathy and an unwillingness to acknowledge how we have been harmed can be foundational to a struggle with depression. When these factors are combined with experiences of loss and unfairness, the conditions are set for a depressive storm to strike the soul.

Loss And Unfairness. The experience of loss is a major factor that contributes to the setup for depression. This could involve the loss of a spouse or a child, the loss of a job or position of status, the loss of an opportunity or personal freedom, or the loss of one's health or financial resources.

Job was a man who apparently went through a time of depression after experiencing a series of losses that few of us are able to comprehend. Listen to him describe what it was like for him to lose his family, his health, and his possessions:

Like a slave longing for the evening shadows, or a hired man waiting eagerly for his wages, so I have been allotted months of futility, and nights of misery have been assigned to me. When I lie down I think, "How long before I get up?" The night drags on, and I toss till dawn. My body is clothed with worms and scabs, my skin is broken and festering. My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and they come to an end without hope. Remember, O God, that my life is but a breath; my eyes will never see happiness again (Job 7:2-7).

The experience of loss is often tied to a sense of unfairness. Many Christians tend to struggle with feelings of injustice prior to and during their bouts with depression. At some level, they believed that if they worked hard enough, followed the rules, loved the Lord and served Him, then their lives would turn out okay. They knew, of course, that life would be difficult, but they didn't imagine it could be so unfair. They never dreamed they would get laid off from their job, be passed over for a promotion, be betrayed by a friend or a spouse, or lose their health to a crippling disease. They never thought they would end up feeling so lonely or meaningless.

3. Deferred Hope. We all naturally hope for an end to loss and unfairness. We long for better days. When they don't come, the unsettling pain of delayed or deferred hope sets in. The Bible reminds us of this common painful reality when it says, "Hope deferred makes the heart sick" (Prov. 13:12).

In other words, the pain of unfulfilled hope is the emotional equivalent to physical nausea. Few things are more miserable than feeling nauseated. When there seems to be no hope for gaining what is desired or for

recovering what's been lost or for ending injustice, the pain is emotionally gut-wrenching. Over time, this can create deep despair--that dreadful sense that life is not working out as we had hoped.

Some people deal with the pain of deferred hope by hoping in only what is easily attainable. This is the basis for much of society's materialism. Others tend to deal with the pain of deferred hope by making sure they don't hope at all. As we will see later, this is often a core element of depression.

Although loss and unfairness can result in the pain of deferred hope and a growing sense of despair, depression does not automatically follow. When external factors are involved, choices exist that can either thwart or accelerate the onset of depression.

For instance, some deeply grieve over what they've lost and the harm that has been done to them, while others get cynical and vindictive. Some resort to drinking or drugs, while others just give up and tumble into the pit of depression. Some even do both. It all depends on how they interact and respond.

It's important to remember that physical factors such as diet, exercise, and inherited tendencies are able to influence the context out of which depression emerges. Our purpose at this point, however, is to turn the focus primarily toward our beliefs about life and the self-destructive process of giving up, which can trigger the onset of depression.

THE PROCESS OF GIVING UP

Despair is a common human experience. We all go through it to one degree or another. We all know what it feels like when it seems the wheels are falling off and there's nothing we can do about it. In many cases, despair can deteriorate into a mild or major bout with depression when we internally give up and say to ourselves, "Why bother. Things aren't going to improve. So what's the use in trying."

Consider, for example, a time in the life of Elijah. He was a scrappy prophet of the nation of Israel during the reign of the evil King Ahab. Among other

things, he directly took on the problem of Baal worship, which was poisoning the Lord's chosen people.

On one occasion in particular, he courageously challenged and defeated 450 prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel in a most spectacular and somewhat humorous fashion (1 Ki. 18:16-40). It's difficult to imagine someone getting discouraged after such a successful showdown. But that's what happened. After hearing that King Ahab's wife was out to kill him, Elijah ran for his life. He fled for nearly 70 miles into the desert before he stopped. Exhausted and discouraged, he sat down under a tree and prayed that he would die:

"I have had enough, LORD," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors." Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep (I Ki. 19:4-5).

In other words, Elijah was saying, "I give up. Despite all that I've done, I'm no more successful at driving out Baal worship than my ancestors. I quit."

Elijah was discouraged, and he may have even been on his way to depression. Certainly, his circumstances were part of the setup. He was fatigued from traveling so far, and his situation looked grim. He was tempted to give up, if he hadn't already.

In her book *Why Am I Crying?* Martha Maughon describes the moment when she totally gave up inside. "I remember it very well," she recalls. "I was sitting at my dresser, staring but not seeing. By then, I was obsessed with my condition. So I did what I had said I would never do. I gave up After that it seemed that I was always miles away from everybody, everything was remote, and I was only a zombie."⁵

Giving up, whether consciously or unconsciously, is a self-destructive response that can trigger the onset of depression as well as reinforce it. It is often at the point of giving up that feelings of anxiety give way to a state of depression. In anxiety, we're afraid that something awful *might* happen. At the onset of depression, we feel that something awful *has* happened. We also feel that since nothing good will ever happen again, why bother.

When external factors are involved, the extent of our depression is often equal to the degree to which we give up. The process of giving up manifests itself in a variety of ways. These ways include blaming others, blaming ourselves, hating pleasure, and hating responsibility.

Blaming Others. When we are feeling down and hopeless, there's a tendency to blame others. We blame the people in our lives for not caring enough. We resent their unwillingness to see things our way or to come through for us on our terms.

Blaming others justifies giving up. For example, one woman stopped trying to work through her marital problems because of what she saw in her husband. She used his ongoing lack of interest in spiritual matters and in spending quality time with her as a reason to give up on her marriage. The more she pointed her finger at him, the more she gave up and plunged further down into the pit of depression.

Blaming Ourselves. People who experience personal loss or disappointment often turn their anger inward. It's not enough to blame others, they also feel they must blame themselves. They typically attack their own souls with a fierceness that seems, to those around them, out of proportion to their situation.

Many depressed people drift toward the idea that it's their fault that life has taken a turn for the worse. They believe they've either done something wrong or they simply feel unworthy. They also tend to believe that they are to blame for being disappointed because they were foolish enough to hope that life would work out in the first place.

One woman began to blame herself when she discovered that she was losing her husband to another woman. She thought, "If I could just keep the house cleaner, cook better meals, or lose some weight, then maybe my husband would want me again." But when she couldn't "fix" what she perceived to be the problem, her fear gave way to despair and she slowly began to give up.

Frequently there is a drastic swing between blaming themselves and blaming others. For example, one depressed man said, "If I had any backbone, I'd get even with my ex-wife. But then again, if I had any backbone, I wouldn't be in this mess. I am such a huge failure." In either extreme, it seems entirely reasonable to someone who's depressed to give up on the future and on life.

Hating Pleasure. Those who struggle with depression tend to find themselves in a state of enormous tension. Although a part of them wants to stay hopeful, they tend to back away from anything that arouses hope. The pain of deferred hope and the increased levels of despair are just too much for them to bear. This is often why many who get depressed hate the feeling

of pleasure or enjoyment of any kind. The experience of pleasure arouses hope, which only stimulates their hunger for what is not. This just causes more pain.

One single mother who was battling with depression wouldn't allow herself to enjoy receiving financial help from her friends. Although she accepted the money with a forced smile, she refused to let the gift touch her heart. Later, when I pointed out her struggle to enjoy the help, she said, "If I feel any pleasure, all it will do is raise my hopes and put me in touch with something that I deeply want but don't believe will ever happen. I'm always going to struggle alone to make ends meet, and I don't want to feel anything that will get my hopes up unnecessarily."

Hating Responsibility. Someone who's depressed may feel that because life is hopelessly unfair, there's no reason to be responsible. Many get to the place where they feel it doesn't matter if they pay the bills, take care of the house, go to work, or attend class. Since life is unfair and the rules don't seem to mean that much, they see no point in following the routine. In severe cases of depression, people struggle to find a reason to get out of bed.

Regardless of how we give up in the face of hopelessness and despair, the byproduct is the emotional and physical disturbances of depression. We have trouble sleeping, eating, and concentrating.

This raises an interesting question: If giving up can lead to depression, then why do we give up? Why don't we instead elect to hang in there and remain hopeful when confronted with despair? Before discussing a process of recovery that will help to lift the heavy weight that depression can have, let's take a look at *why* we tend to give up.

THE REASONS WE GIVE UP

There's no question that natural tendencies or biological realities may play a part in why we give up in the face of despair. Without dismissing the role these factors may have, let's consider reasons that are within our control--reasons that can even alter factors that are beyond our control.

A Refusal To Live With Deferred Hope. We noticed earlier that deferred (unfulfilled) hope is painful. It "makes the heart sick" (Prov. 13:12). So if we give up hope, we don't have to feel the pain when it's unfulfilled. In this way, giving up is an indication that we are refusing to live with the ache of hope that is unfulfilled.

It's difficult for most people to accept that the burden of depression is often easier to bear than the pain of deferred hope. After careful reflection, however, many admit that this is true. As one woman said, "I want to be happy and feel peace in my life. I have had enough unhappiness, yet it seems that one side of me actually thrives on it. I feel so confused within myself." Over time, she came to see that she would gravitate toward giving up on herself and the future because she was afraid to live with hope; namely, the fragile hope to be loved that she wasn't sure would ever be met.

In reality, it's not a matter of preference. It is a matter of control. While people who are depressed usually feel out of control in so many ways, they do have some control over how much pain they feel. More than anything else, people who give up and become depressed are committed to living with as little pain as possible on their terms, especially the pain of deferred hope. Giving up helps to avoid feeling the kind of pain and emptiness that only heaven will take away.

Misplaced Hopes. People give up to deaden the pain of deferred hope. But they also may give up because they believe that life is pointless without what they've lost or what may never be attained. They see little or no reason to love, to work, or to stay involved in life if they can't be with a particular person or be engaged in a specific activity or reach a specific goal. So they withdraw into a state of self-imposed numbness.

Many who struggle with depression feel despair because they put their primary hopes for meaning and joy in all the wrong places--such as a boyfriend or girlfriend, a job, a happier marriage, or a house. Essentially, they placed their hopes in a false god of their own making--one that could never satisfy their souls (Ps. 115:3-8). And when these false gods or illusions of fulfillment seem hopelessly lost, out of reach, or indifferent to their needs, the tendency is to give up on life.

As awful as the consequences of giving up might be, there is hope for those who battle with the darkness of depression. Unlike false gods that can't

provide us with guidance, the God of the Bible has provided us with a light of hope that will cut through the darkest of nights and guide us until the dawning of heaven.

THE PROCESS OF RECOVERY

Depression is a serious struggle, and there are usually no simple or quick solutions. In many ways, the road to recovery will be under construction until we get to heaven.

Recovery from depression is like a gradual resurrection from the dead. The Spirit of God working in us can bring what is dead back to life--and in a way that honors God and the dignity He has instilled in each of us.

It's encouraging to know that God is in control, that He can provide for our deepest needs, and that He is able to renew our hearts in the midst of great despair (2 Cor. 4:16). We must understand, however, that the One who works in us is the Spirit of truth (Jn. 14:16-17). So it's in the realm of truth that He is able to bring renewal and growth to our hearts.

The process of recovery is built on the foundation of facing the truth, no matter how much it hurts. Pain is not the enemy, it's a sign that life and feelings are returning to our deadened hearts. Only as we begin to face the truth will we be able to [recover hope through despair](#), [recover faith through doubt](#), and [recover joy through giving to others](#).

RECOVERING HOPE BY FACING DESPAIR

At first glance, it may seem foolish or cruel to invite people who are struggling with depression to face their despair. It would seem to make them feel all the more hopeless. What we often overlook, however, are the paradoxes involved in matters of the soul. As in childbirth, what can feel like the throes of death actually produces life. As strange as it may seem, facing despair is one of the best things a person battling with depression can do.

Many who struggle with or who are on the verge of depression have an especially difficult time facing the darkness of despair. They're too afraid that the darkness will devour them. But as they find the courage to begin facing the darkness, they are able to discover that "suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us" (Rom. 5:3-5).

Facing despair is not an exercise in self-pity. It is an honest, heartfelt cry of the soul that feels rather than numbs the agony and heaviness of one's situation. Consider the level of despair Jesus felt the night before He was crucified:

Jesus went with His disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and He said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with Him, and He began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then He said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with Me" (Mt. 26:36-38).

Notice that Jesus didn't minimize His situation. Nor did He face His despair all alone. He shared the anguish of His heart with a few close friends. Although we will carry much of the burden of despair alone, it is best when people who care are involved (Gal. 6:2).

Like Jesus, we should face our despair with others *and* with our heavenly Father. Listen to the words of the weeping prophet who, in the midst of incredible despair, wrote:

The hearts of the people cry out to the Lord. . . . Let your tears flow like a river day and night; . . . pour out your heart like water in the presence of the Lord (Lam. 2:18-19).

Instead of leading to deeper depression, facing our despair can increase a sense of true hope in the One who promises to comfort and take us through the sorrows of life (Ps. 23:4; 2 Cor. 1:8-10). For those who struggle with depression, facing despair involves at least two important components: the pain of loss and the failure of misplaced hopes.

Acknowledging The Pain Of Loss. Loss is often at the center of depression, especially when the loss is irretrievable. Healing can't take place unless we

start to feel the pain. In the long run, it doesn't do any good to deaden our pain. Severing our emotional nerves only hides our pain and allows it to become self-destructive. By contrast, facing our pain starts the process of grieving so that God can begin to draw near and renew us with His comforting presence (Ps. 119:49-50).

Many of the people who struggle with depression find it difficult to feel and to accept the pain of loss. Many were never given permission to feel. Some hide from feeling loss behind the claim that it's their fault or that they don't know how to feel pain or sorrow. In any event, most simply don't wish to feel deep disappointment because it only awakens a hunger for what is not. But if people who are depressed give themselves permission to feel the pain of loss instead of deadening it, it will actually promote healing and disrupt the tendency to numb the ache by blaming themselves.

We can begin to feel the pain of loss when we admit to ourselves what it is we deeply hungered for that has been lost--a particular relationship, for example, or the ability to achieve a dream. Identifying our unmet desires and the emptiness of loss and disappointment (past and present) will likely turn our world upside down at first. But it can put us on the path out of depression. In time, we will not only find that we can survive our pain, but we'll see that there is something worth living for that is bigger than ourselves.

Admitting The Failure Of Misplaced Hopes. Along with facing the despair of our losses and disappointments, there is an even deeper level of despair to be faced as we realize that our idols do not work. An idol is whatever we put our hope in more than in God--people, objects, activities. In this context we can begin to see that we've been placing our hopes in what *cannot* satisfy. Hope in what *does* satisfy can grow as we face this level of despair.

For example, the woman who normally gets depressed after being used and left by yet another man can begin to take an account of what she is truly living for. She can start to acknowledge that her excessive attempts to win and keep the love of men by fixing their problems isn't working out. When the men don't change, she's always left feeling angry, confused, and alone. As she begins to feel the desperation of being let down by her false hopes, the stage is set for her to face her sinful demand, "I must have a man to be okay." Instead of giving up, she can be drawn to a greater level of gratitude for God's forgiveness in ways that can revolutionize her life (Lk. 7:36-47).

Acknowledging the hopelessness of our idolatry can expose any demands we need to confess and repent of. Further, it can create a desperate hunger for our heavenly Father that no idol can ever fill. Admitting the failure of our misplaced hopes can stimulate our hunger for God so that He can feed us with His provision (Dt. 8:2-3) and help us realize more of the "living hope" He has given us through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 1:3).

RECOVERING FAITH BY FACING DOUBT

In most cases of depression, one's faith in God is dying a steady, slow death. Many feel that God no longer cares about them. They find it difficult to read their Bible, to pray, and to attend church.

People who experience loss and unfairness, and then depression, often feel they have a strong case against God. One woman who was struggling through her own doubts about God said, "If God can take away my husband and my health, why can't He take away my depression? I have a difficult time believing that He's on my side considering all that has happened to me."

It's important to realize that God invites us to struggle with (not deny) our doubts to recover faith in the same way that He wants us to face despair to recover and strengthen hope. Paradoxically, faith is able to grow as we wrestle with our doubts about God's protection and provision.

The Bible has many examples of people crying out to God with their doubts. David went through several occasions when he honestly questioned God:

My God, my God, why have You forsaken me? Why are You
so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning?
(Ps. 22:1).

Consider the words of Jeremiah as he poured out his doubts to God:

Why is my pain unending and my wound grievous and incurable? Will You be to me like a deceptive brook, like a spring that fails? (Jer. 15:18).

Later, Jeremiah took up his quarrel with God again, only in much stronger terms.

O LORD, You deceived me, and I was deceived; You overpowered me and prevailed. I am ridiculed all day long; everyone mocks me. Whenever I speak, I cry out proclaiming violence and destruction. So the word of the LORD has brought me insult and reproach all day long (Jer. 20:7-8).

Why such strong words? A brief analysis of Jeremiah's life reveals that God had persuaded him as a teenager to go and tell his fellow countrymen of God's impending judgment. He also promised Jeremiah that even though all of the people would oppose him, He would protect him. But think about what happened to Jeremiah. He was constantly mocked, the people chased him out of town, his family and friends hated him, and he underwent extreme torture. On one occasion, he was hung in a pit of mud and left to die (Jer. 38:6).

Jeremiah's experiences caused him to feel that God had not only let him down but that He had also set him up. As a result, Jeremiah seriously thought about putting God out of his mind and never speaking of Him again (Jer. 20:9). Ironically, he got more than he bargained for. He found that his attempts to push God away actually increased his passion for Him. Jeremiah likened God to a burning fire that he could neither contain nor put out. God had his heart and Jeremiah knew it. He saw that the best thing to do was to surrender and follow Him.

It's important to notice that Jeremiah's desire for and confidence in God increased *because* he struggled through his doubts. Jeremiah demonstrates by example that a growing faith is not completely devoid of doubt, and that there are moments when it is best to struggle. Although Jeremiah did not allow his doubts to completely unravel his faith, a part of what caused his weakened faith to regain strength and thrive was that he was realistic. He wrestled with his doubts when it seemed as if his world was turning upside down unnecessarily.

Struggling with God is no light matter. It exhausts all the energy we can muster. But it's in our exhaustion that we are more apt to be humble and quiet before Him. It's as if our soul runs out of breath and we have no more energy left to speak. This is when God shows Himself to us in ways that are life-changing.

Sometimes we're not ready to hear what God wants us to understand until we pour it all out before the throne of grace. And when there's nothing left to say (Job 40:4-5), the truth can sink in. God doesn't turn away from us. We are the ones who turn away from Him. But no matter how hard we try to put Him out of our minds, and no matter how many doubts remain, we just can't escape the growing conviction that there is no better place to turn than to our compassionate heavenly Father (Lam. 3:32).

Sadly, many who battle with depression tend to suppress or censor their doubts for fear of being irreverent. Rarely are they encouraged to take doubts to God with the level of honesty and energy we see in people like Jeremiah and David. Yet it's only as we honestly struggle with our doubts and face our despair that we become more deeply convinced of our love and passion for God--which will lift us out of our depression and on to an exciting life of giving. The pain of loss and deferred hope will still be present because we aren't home yet (Rom. 8:22-23), but it can be surrounded by the joy of giving ourselves to others instead of the misery found in numbing our hearts and withholding ourselves from others.

RECOVERING JOY BY GIVING TO OTHERS

When those who struggle with depression begin to recover faith and hope, a desire to give will gradually increase. Instead of giving up, which keeps them from being what God wants them to be, they can grow to be wrapped up in giving for the sake of others. As they begin to act on the desire to give, a deep sense of joy will begin to fill their hearts.

Nothing brings more satisfaction in this life than sacrificial giving. The principle that "it is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35) was stressed by Jesus in both His life and His words. It is one of the most radical

ironies of life that cuts against the grain of a culture that promotes the god of self-indulgence.

Giving can be as simple as allowing a car to enter the flow of traffic ahead of us. It can be helping a neighbor who is recovering from surgery. It can include listening to our children read a story at bedtime or going to work for no other reason than to provide for our family. At times, it may call for giving notice to the people who use and/or malign our dignity that there will be consequences if they continue to cross the boundaries of love. Giving never passively permits that which regularly compromises what is best for others and ourselves.

For example, one wife learned that it was loving to give her husband consequences for his involvement in pornography. She still felt despair, at times. But rather than getting depressed in order to hide from hope, her life began to sparkle with a joy that came from giving her husband the kind of honest ultimatums that would get his attention and help him deal with his sin.

Depending on the situation, giving involves offering people a mixture of gentleness and strength, which affords them an opportunity to encounter God's character. To give at this level requires nothing short of a miraculous work of God in our hearts. Only when we are amazed by and grateful for the ultimate example of giving--God giving His only Son as a sacrifice to redeem us from our sins (Jn. 3:16)--will we give others a sample of God's gentleness and strength despite the risks of attack or desertion.

It is in Jesus, God's Son, that we see the Provider of our souls. In Him we see God involving Himself in the ultimate act of self-sacrifice to meet our deepest need for forgiveness and life. By dying for our sin and rising from the dead to confirm the success of His mission, Jesus showed His power and right to give spiritual well-being and confident hope to all who receive Him (Jn. 1:12).

As God captures more and more of our appreciation and confidence, we will discover a rich sense of honor and value that comes from being used by Him in the battle against Satan. It has always been Satan's goal to smear and distort God's reputation. It's thrilling to know that we can play a vital role in setting the record straight by revealing to others the kind of being God really is, so that they can be drawn to Him as well (Ps. 73:28).

The process of recovering hope through despair, recovering faith through doubt, and recovering joy through giving should be taken as a biblical frame of reference and not as a rigidly followed blueprint. Life is rarely that straightforward or easy. The process is actually a way of life that one gradually learns to develop with the help of the Spirit of God.

The process doesn't eliminate pain or fear. It doesn't guarantee that our circumstances will improve. Only heaven offers us those options (Rev. 21:4). It does, however, offer the opportunity to live more in touch with our built-in hunger for our heavenly Father--a hunger He longs to satisfy--and to develop a thriving passion to give. It's often a peculiar process. Before it can get better it must often get worse. But those who learn to put their hope in God "will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint" (Isa. 40:31).

FURTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR RECOVERY

Depression is an extremely complicated struggle. There is so much going on in the body that affects the soul, and vice versa, that it requires us to take a holistic approach to the struggle of depression.

Eat Wisely And Exercise Regularly. Earlier we mentioned some of the disadvantages of poor nutrition and lack of exercise. Let's go further and consider some of the positive aspects of diet and exercise as it relates to depression.

Except for those who are physically disabled, exercising on a regular basis is something practical that most who struggle with depression can begin to do. It's important to begin slowly, keep it fun, and gradually work your way into whatever form you choose. Current research indicates that regular exercise reduces the symptoms of depression.⁶ Even the Bible recognizes that there is some profit in exercising (1 Tim. 4:8). Regular exercise raises and maintains energy levels and increases our capacity to concentrate.

Eating a balanced and nutritious diet is just as important as exercise. For example, the first thing that Elijah was instructed to do at his lowest point was to eat (1 Ki. 19:5). Many find that sleep patterns and energy levels

stabilize when they are eating sensibly. Researchers are just beginning to understand how much diet affects how we think and feel. Those who struggle with depression should consult an expert on nutrition and read up on the subject to find out what kind of diet is best for them.

Seek Professional Help. Depression is never to be taken lightly. Again, if several of the [signs of depression listed earlier](#) describe what your life has been like for at least the last few weeks, then you should seek professional assistance. You may need to be on medication to help restore a sense of balance to your system. Counseling is often needed as well (see RBC booklet [When Help Is Needed](#) CB931). Seeking help is not a sign of weakness or moral failure. On the contrary, it's a sign of courage and integrity.

Keep A Journal. Enough can't be said about how important it is to write about our losses and disappointments, the feelings and questions we are struggling with, and the exciting changes we notice taking place in our lives. Journaling is a powerful way to augment the process of recovery and keep us from falling into the trap of premature closure in issues where significant insights could easily be forgotten.

A WORD TO FAMILY AND FRIENDS

If you suspect that someone close to you is depressed, it's important for you to know the struggle you are up against. You will likely encounter self-destructive patterns that will take some time for the person to climb out of. For example, you may find that no matter how much support you offer, it will be deflected by your family member or friend's negative attitude toward life in general. You may feel as if you are being drawn into a no-win situation. If you offer support, it's rejected. If you don't, you're accused of not caring.

As a result, you may go through times when you will either feel helpless and want to withdraw or you will feel frustrated and be tempted to exert pressure ("Would you just get a grip and snap out of it!"). Either response is harmful and only aggravates the struggle of depression.

The desire to withdraw or apply pressure lies in all of us. But if we've been redeemed by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, there's a greater desire and capacity to offer something better.

We can give to those who are depressed in ways that will promote their recovery and growth. Instead of making them feel as if we've given up on them, we can let them know that we believe in who they could be as they learn to put their confidence in God. We can't force them to get help (unless they're a danger to themselves), but we can invite them to be honest and to grieve in a way that could renew a strong sense of faith and hope and a desire to follow their calling of love (Jn. 13:34).

DOES GOD WANT ME WELL?

Does God use sickness in the lives of His children to build character? Is this consistent with the actions of a loving God? Are we sick because we don't have the faith to be healed? Is God healing people today through the ministry of faith healers? When sickness or suffering attacks us or someone close to us, what should we think? What should we do?

These questions, and many others like them, are answered in this booklet by RBC senior research editor Herb Vander Lugt. He shows what the Bible teaches about healing. And he uncovers four positive, unassailable certainties that every child of God can count on in times of sickness and suffering.

Martin R. De Haan II, president of RBC Ministries.

THE PROBLEM OF PAIN

The man responded angrily to my attempts to help. He was dying of lung cancer and was full of bitterness. He told me he didn't want to hear about a God who lets people suffer the way they do. He said, "I turned against the Bible and the Christian faith when my mother was dying of the same disease I have. She was a devout Christian, but in spite of her prayers that God would either heal her or take her home, she lived with terrible pain month after month. I decided that either there isn't a God or that He isn't the kind of God you think He is."

My heart went out to him, but nothing I said made an impression on him. Finally I asked, "Did your mother turn away from God too?" He responded, "No, she kept talking about God's grace and about going to be with Jesus." Then he quickly added, "But I don't have the kind of faith she had."

Without question, many people turn away from God because of the problem of pain. They find it hard to believe that a loving and all-powerful God would permit good people to suffer the way they do. On the other hand, thousands have testified that it was during a time of deep sorrow or intense anguish that they found God more real and precious than ever before.

CHRISTIANS AGREE AND DISAGREE

As Christians, we agree that God is loving, wise, and all-powerful. We agree that this good God gave His moral creatures freedom to choose between good and evil, and that their wrong choice brought His curse upon the earth. We also agree that this infinitely wise and good God is working out a program for our ultimate good and His glory.

However, even among us who believe the Bible, there are a few areas of disagreement. We give different answers to two very important questions, one having to do with the purpose of pain and the other with the matter of supernatural healing.

Does God use sickness to make good people better? Ken Blue, an evangelical Christian with an effective ministry in Vancouver, says no. He writes:

What we would call abuse in a human family, some have labeled a blessing in the family of God. Francis McNutt explains, "What human father or mother would choose cancer for their daughter to tame her pride?" . . . One of the greatest hindrances to a vital healing ministry in the church today is the notion that sickness is essentially good for us, that it is sent to purify the soul and build character . . . (*Authority to Heal*, InterVarsity Press, pp.21-22).

On the other hand, Dr. M. R. De Haan, physician, minister, and founder of Radio Bible Class, said that God *does* use sickness in the lives of His children to make them better. He wrote:

The greatest sermons I have ever heard were not preached from pulpits, but from sickbeds. The greatest, deepest truths of God's Word have often been revealed . . . by humble souls who have gone through the seminary of affliction and have learned experientially the deep things of the ways of God.

Are you afflicted and suffering, precious child of God? Then remember--your Father still knows best. . . . Grapes must be crushed before wine can be made. Unless the violin is stretched until it cries out in pain, there is no music in it. Wheat must be broken to make bread. We may not know what God is doing now, but someday we shall understand and be like Him (*Broken Things*, Discovery House Publishers, 1988, pp.44,91).

Is God working obvious miracles of healing today? Dr. William Noland, after a period of diligent research, declared that he found no evidence that God is working miraculous healings or that He has given any person the gift to do so. He writes:

Two years ago I began looking for a healing miracle. When I started my search, I hoped to find some evidence that someone, somewhere, had supernatural powers that he or she would employ to cure those patients we doctors, with all our knowledge and training, must still label as "incurable." As I have said before, I have been unable to find any such miracle worker (*Healing: A Doctor in Search of a Miracle*, Fawcett, 1967, p.272).

Dr. J. Sidlow Baxter, a well-known Bible teacher, says yes. He writes:

The fact that many wonderful miracle healings are occurring today in great public healing rallies, who can deny? Only those deny who have not been and seen. With my own eyes almost jumping out of their sockets, I have seen the dumb from birth given speech, the stone-deaf given new hearing, the long blind suddenly given new vision, terminal cancer instantaneously cured (and later medically attested), crippled arthritics released and straightened on the spot, wheelchair victims of multiple sclerosis wheel their own chairs away, not to mention other such wonderful healings (*Divine Healing of the Body*, Zondervan, 1979, p.270).

We can answer both of these questions with a solid yes. God does use suffering as a means of our spiritual advancement. Moreover, He does heal miraculously--but not always. And when He doesn't, we need not blame ourselves or give in to despair.

BIBLICAL CERTAINTIES FOR SUFFERING SAINTS

She was a nurse and was quite sure she knew what she had. Yet her face blanched when the doctor came into the hospital room and said, "Sue, I hate to tell you what you already suspect is true. You have multiple sclerosis." She was aware of what she would be enduring--gradual paralysis, speech problems, impaired vision, jerking muscle tremors, and probably times of intense pain. It was not a pleasant prospect.

After the doctor left, Sue and her husband cried, but not for long. They prayed, talked to one another, and expressed their faith. As a result, they both sensed the presence of the Holy Spirit. They received strength to go on. Now, some 20 years later, they are doing quite well. The disease has progressed, but far more slowly than expected.

The essential elements of this scenario are occurring all the time. No family escapes completely unscathed. Not many, even among the most godly, enjoy excellent health until old age and slip quietly off into the next world. It just doesn't work out that way. That is why we need to know what the Bible teaches about sickness and healing.

The following study will uncover four positive, unassailable certainties that every child of God can count on in times of sickness and suffering:

1. [God will make you well.](#)
2. [God hurts when you hurt.](#)
3. [God knows why you're suffering.](#)
4. [God is in control.](#)

Biblical Certainties For Suffering Saints

GOD WILL MAKE YOU WELL

If you are a sick or suffering Christian, you can stand on the certainty that God will make you well--perhaps on earth, but surely in heaven.

That's His guarantee. As His children, we are destined to receive a new, glorified body and to live forever in heaven. The apostle Paul drew tremendous comfort from his expectation of resurrection and eternal glory. After reaffirming the fact of Christ's resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15, he proceeded to point out that we too will receive resurrection bodies like the one Christ has (vv.20-58). This truth sustained him as he suffered in his service for the Lord. In a spirit of joy and optimism he wrote:

Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal. For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens (2 Cor. 4:16-5:1) .

Maybe you don't react to these words with much enthusiasm. You want healing in the here and now. Your feelings are not unusual. Suffering is not pleasant. We instinctively want good health and freedom from pain. We want it now. But when we let ourselves think this way, we are looking at life from the vantage point of those who have no real hope of heaven, those who tell us to grab all the gusto we can because "we only go around once."

That's wrong! Believers in Christ should live above the merely human level. We are to face squarely the fact that this life is brief at best and that things down here are never perfect. We are called on to exercise our faith and to look beyond the immediate and earthly. We will live forever in a wonderful new world! When we really grasp this truth, we can share the victorious attitude expressed by Paul in 2 Corinthians 4. We will begin to anticipate joyously the unseen and eternal realities of heaven. Indeed, we will "rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Rom. 5:2).

Joel A. Freeman gives us an example of a person who learned to do this. He writes, "Brian understands this principle. He has learned it the hard way. His 18-year-old eyes communicate mischief as he tries to run over my toes with his souped-up electric wheelchair. (Remind me to wear my steel-toed boots next time I visit him.)"

"Four years ago Brian was riding his 10-speed bicycle when a drunken driver careened across the median strip and hit him broadside. Brian pitched head over heels for 30 yards. The next thing he remembered was the soft touch of a nurse's hand on his forehead--5 days later.

"As a paraplegic, Brian has battled the icy grip of self-pity. He's grappled with the seductive whisper of suicide. But you know what? He has won a tremendous victory--he has accepted God's sovereignty in the whole matter.

"Brian's physical condition has made marginal improvements. His attitude, however, has made a 180-degree turn, from cyclical bouts with rage and hopelessness to sparkling eyes filled with an eternal purpose for living. He has become a 'wounded healer' comforting others wherein he has been comforted" (*God Is Not Fair, Here's Life* Publishers, p.110).

No, Brian is not completely well physically. But he has experienced God's presence. He knows he is a member of that great body of suffering saints who have gone before (Heb. 11:30-12:4). This encourages him and makes him eager for the day when he will be completely well and with them.

Biblical Certainties For Suffering Saints

GOD HURTS WHEN YOU HURT

If you are a suffering believer, the second biblical certainty from which you can draw great strength is the knowledge that God is suffering with you. He is not the "unmoved Mover" of Greek philosophy. He is not an unfeeling Being oblivious to the pain of His

creatures. Nor is He a capricious Allah who carries out His will with no feeling for those who suffer. On the contrary, He is our loving heavenly Father. He hurts when we hurt. The psalmist declared, "As a father pities his children, so the LORD pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust" (Ps. 103:13-14).

In reviewing God's dealings with Israel, the prophet wrote, "In all their affliction He was afflicted . . . ; in His love and in His pity He redeemed them" (Isa. 63:9). The Old Testament prophets repeatedly pictured God as delighting in blessing His children and as grieving when they must suffer.

The truth that God hurts when we hurt did not find full expression, however, until it was revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. He is Immanuel, "God with us" (Isa. 7:14). He, the second person of the eternal Trinity, became a member of our humanity. He suffered everything we can suffer. He was born in a stable, a member of a poor family. He grew up in a humble home in a small village. He worked as a laboring man until He was 30. He didn't have a home during His 3 years of ministry. He was resented by His half brothers. He was rejected by the Jewish people to whom He came. He was misunderstood and misrepresented. He was mocked. He was falsely accused. He was betrayed by a close companion. He was forsaken by His closest friends. He was scourged. He was forced to carry a heavy wooden beam on His lacerated back. He was nailed to a cross. And even as He hung on it, He endured the taunts of mockers.

Why did He do all this? Couldn't He have paid the price for our sins without going through all of this humiliation and abuse? As far as we know, the answer is yes. His death on the cross, not his pre-Calvary suffering, atoned for our sin. It seems that He underwent all this added pain and humiliation for two reasons: to reveal God's heart (2 Cor. 4:6), and to become our sympathetic high priest (Heb. 4:15-16). God had always hurt when His people hurt. But He did so in a real, tangible manner through the incarnation--through the event that began in Bethlehem.

Are you suffering? Are you grieving? Are you disappointed because you are going to die before you can realize your plans and hopes? Be assured that God cares. He hurts with you. He doesn't like what you

are enduring any more than you do. He could intervene and heal you instantly. But if He were to do this for you and every other person who is suffering, no one would have a need for the kind of faith that builds Christian character. Therefore, He allows you to suffer. But all the while He, like you, is looking forward to the time when all human pain will be over.

J. I. Packer has stated this truth eloquently: God's love to sinners involves His identifying Himself with their needs. Such an identification is involved in all love: it is indeed the test of whether love is genuine or not It is not for nothing that the Bible habitually speaks of God as the loving Father and Husband of His people. It follows from the very nature of these relationships that God's happiness will not be complete till all His beloved ones are finally out of trouble He has in effect resolved that henceforth for all eternity His happiness shall be conditional upon ours. Thus God saves not only for His glory, but for His gladness (*Knowing God*, InterVarsity Press, 1973, p.113).

Just as a good husband suffers when he sees his wife in pain, and loving parents feel the distress of their children, so also the Lord hurts when you hurt. And He won't be completely happy until you hurt no more.

Biblical Certainties For Suffering Saints



This is the third comforting certainty. We want answers when we hurt, so we cry out, "Why?" God's special servants may even do this when grief or pain comes their way.

I know a minister who recently learned he had cancer. He was displeased with God's ways. He told a friend, "I can't understand why God let this happen to me. I've served Him faithfully. I'm not nurturing a secret sin. I've taken care of my body: I eat healthful

foods. I avoid sweets, coffee, and soda pop. I keep my weight under control. I don't think I deserve this."

His protests remind us of those raised by Job almost 4,000 years ago. He hurled out the word *why* a total of 16 times. He even listed 12 ways in which he had been a moral, honest, kind, and loving man (Job 31:1-14). But God never answered Job's why questions. Nor did He answer this query as it came from the lips of my minister friend. However, God did something better. He gave them the assurance that He knew why. He did so by reminding them of the great wisdom and power He displayed in His creation of the world. Moreover, He brought both of them to the place where they acknowledged His ways to be perfect in wisdom and goodness.

Sometimes we *can* answer the question why. It is always good to search our hearts to see if we bear some blame for our pain. We may be sick because we have not obeyed common-sense rules of health. Maybe the accident that hurt us is the result of our carelessness. It is also possible that our illness is the result of God's chastening because of sin in our lives (1 Cor. 11:29-30; Heb. 12:6). The Bible teaches us that some Christians die an untimely death (humanly speaking) because of sin (Acts 5:1-11; 1 Cor. 11:30). If we know we have been living disobediently, we must repent. God may give us healing when we do. And when we see the death of a believing loved one who has fallen into sinful ways, we can take comfort in the assurance that God sometimes takes one of His children home rather than see him continue on his destructive course.

However, we often can't find specific answers to our why questions. We can't always expect to know the reason why we are suffering. But even then, God does not leave us completely in the dark. In addition to assuring us that He knows why, He has shown us that even unexplained suffering has a valuable purpose.

In John 9, Jesus used an encounter with a blind man to teach His disciples this lesson. They asked Him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (v.2). They obviously saw this affliction as punishment for somebody's sin-- either that of his parents or himself while he was still in the womb. Jesus answered them, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God

should be revealed in him" (v.3). This man's affliction was not punishment for any special sin. But it had value. It was designed to make him the vehicle through which God's power could be put on display. After He had made this point, Jesus said, "I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work" (v.4). Then He gave the man his sight.

The application to us is obvious. Instead of wasting our energy in useless speculation about the why question, let's view suffering--our own or that which we encounter in others--as an opportunity to demonstrate God's power and bring glory to Him. Maybe He will answer our prayers by healing us. Perhaps He will use the suffering of someone we love to make us more compassionate, more kind, more helpful. Or He may let us suffer, but give us such supernatural grace that we will be a vibrant testimony to His glory. Actually, God has many good reasons for letting us suffer:

- Suffering silences Satan (Job 1-2).
- Suffering gives God an opportunity to be glorified (Jn. 11:4).
- Suffering makes us more like Christ (Heb. 2:10; Phil. 3:10).
- Suffering makes us appreciative (Rom. 8:28).
- Suffering teaches us to depend on God (Ex. 14:13-14; Isa. 40:28-31).
- Suffering enables us to exercise our faith (Job 23:10; Rom. 8:24-25).
- Suffering teaches us patience (Rom. 5:3; Jas. 1:2-4).
- Suffering makes us sympathetic (2 Cor. 1:3-6).
- Suffering makes and keeps us humble (2 Cor. 12:7-10).
- Suffering brings rewards (2 Tim. 2:12; 1 Pet. 4:12-13).

Many other reasons for suffering could be given. We may not know which one fits our situation, but God does. That's comforting.

Biblical Certainties For Suffering Saints

GOD IS IN CONTROL

This is the fourth biblical certainty for suffering believers. The fact that God is in control doesn't mean that He is the direct cause of every injury or disease. They sometimes come through Satan and usually through the outworking of natural laws that God has built into the universe.

Satan was the one who robbed Job of his possessions, children, and health. The woman Jesus healed from a crippling illness was "a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound . . . for eighteen years" (Lk. 13:16). Satan was also involved in the "destruction of the flesh" in a disciplined church member (1 Cor. 5:5). And Paul's "thorn in the flesh" was a "messenger of Satan to buffet" him (2 Cor. 12:7).

Most suffering, however, is the result of natural processes. Habitual drunkenness leads to hallucinations, slurred speech, and physical collapse (Prov. 23:29-35). The young man entering the house of a prostitute is like an ox going into the slaughterhouse (Prov. 7:22). Timothy's stomach problems were probably related to the water he drank (1 Tim. 5:23). Many illnesses are eliminated through inoculations, diet, and good health habits. It's obvious that we cannot make God the primary agent in a large percentage of the suffering that plagues mankind.

The fact that Satan and natural factors are the direct agents in much human suffering, however, should not be taken as evidence that God is not involved. These evils would not have occurred if He hadn't permitted them. God gave the devil permission to afflict Job, but He set the limits (Job 1-2). Even when accidents or illness can be traced to human carelessness or natural causes, they occur because God allows them. Jesus assured us that nothing can happen to us unless it passes God's permissive will. He said that even a seemingly insignificant event like the death of a sparrow does not occur "apart from your Father's will" (Mt. 10:29). Paul expressed God's control of everything by declaring that we who believe are "predestined

according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will" (Eph. 1:11).

God has everything under His control. He may allow the devil to test you by making you sick. He may permit you to suffer great pain through an accident caused by carelessness or through a vicious attack by an evil person. These unpleasant events try us and may even tempt us to sin, but we can rest in the following assurance:

No temptation [test] has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it (1 Cor. 10:13).

No matter what your trial, no matter how great your pain or grief, remember that it passed the permissive will of your heavenly Father before it reached you. He loves you. He may heal you miraculously. If not, He will be with you in all your pain and someday take you to heaven. No matter what He does, He has your ultimate welfare in view. The perfectly wise and good God you serve has everything under control.

SICK AND SUFFERING PEOPLE IN THE BIBLE

The Bible gives us many accounts of severe illness, intense suffering, deep sorrow, and untimely death. These things are either attributed to God or to Satan. And on some occasions the source is not given. Sometimes healing came through a miracle. At other times, it came through a natural cure. And on some occasions, temporal healing didn't come at all--the person died. Sometimes the reason is stated. At other times it is implied. And on some occasions it is not indicated in any way.

Job (Job 1-42)

- Identity--a godly and wealthy man who lived some 4,000 years ago (1:1-5).
- Affliction--loss of property, death of children, painful skin disease (1:13-19; 2:1-10).
- Source of Affliction--Satan with God's permission (1:12; 2:6).
- Reason for Affliction--testing and refining (1:6-12; 2:1-10; 23:10).
- Result of Affliction--greater knowledge of God and understanding of self (42:1-6).
- Lesson--God and Satan may both be involved in the sending of our afflictions (Job 1:12; 2:6).

Miriam (Ex. 15:20-21; Num. 12; 26:59)

- Identity--sister of Moses and Aaron.
- Affliction--leprosy.
- Source--God.
- Reason--chastening for rebellion.
- Result--repentance, healing, restoration.
- Lesson--God sometimes uses suffering to chasten His disobedient children.

Ezekiel's wife (Ezek. 24:15-27)

- Identity--wife of a major prophet.
- Affliction--her illness and death.
- Source--God.
- Reason--To illustrate God's dealings with the nation of Israel.
- Result--God was glorified (implied).
- Lesson--God sometimes uses suffering and even death to accomplish His purposes.

Mephibosheth (2 Sam. 4:4; 9)

- Identity--young grandson of King Saul.
- Affliction--crippled through a fall.
- Source--not given.
- Reason--not given.
- Result--lifetime affliction with no cure provided.
- Lesson--God doesn't always tell us the reason for our suffering.

Paul (2 Cor. 12:1-10)

- Identity--the great apostle to the Gentiles.
- Affliction--a thorn in the flesh (an unidentified physical malady).
- Source--a gift from God (implied) and a "messenger of Satan."

- Reason--to keep Paul from exalting himself because of his unique spiritual experiences.
 - Result--the thorn remained with Paul in spite of his prayers for deliverance but became a blessing because it increased his dependence on the Lord.
 - Lesson--God doesn't always bring temporal healing, even to His most devoted children.
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QUESTIONS ON HEALING

In the following pages we will attempt to answer some common questions about healing that are often raised concerning certain biblical passages.

What about our authority to heal? In an [*Our Daily Bread*](#) article, I said that though we don't have the authority to call people back from death we can do practical things to help those who are sorrowing. Much to my surprise, several people wrote me, accusing me of not believing Matthew 10:7-8, "As you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give."

Yes, the Lord gave His disciples authority to heal, perhaps even to raise the dead (although these words are not found in some of the early manuscript copies). But we err if we make these words our marching orders or view them as giving us authority to heal the sick and raise the dead. They were addressed to a small group of men who at that time, on the other side of Calvary, were preaching the "gospel of the kingdom" to Jews only. After referring to this passage, Dr. De Haan, in his inimitable way, wrote:

They were not to accept money for their services; they were not to take any provision, but to live on the kindness and charity and generosity of the people to whom they ministered No lolling around in luxury for those apostles; no expensive hotel suites; but theirs was to be a life of rigor and self-denial; a life of poverty as became the followers of Him who had "nowhere to lay His head," who was born in a stable, depended on the

charity of His friends, rode on a borrowed colt, and died on a sinner's cross. If, then, this commission in verse 8, "heal the sick," is to be taken for us today, it also should involve all of these other instructions which the Lord gave in this connection. This verse is constantly quoted as a reason for the same miracles today, but surely consistency alone demands that the rest of the passage be made to apply as well.

What about healing in the atonement? "You need not be sick. Christ died for our sicknesses as well as our sins. Through faith we must claim freedom from illness just as we claim freedom from the penalty of our sins. That's what Matthew 8:16-17 tells us." A godly man dying of cancer heard a radio preacher say this. He became troubled. He began to suffer from a feeling of guilt about his lack of faith just as much as from his illness. I assured him that he had not failed spiritually. He and his loved ones had prayed earnestly. Neither their prayers nor their faith were deficient. It apparently was not God's will to heal him. The man was then able to face his approaching death with faith and courage.

Let's examine Matthew 8:16-17 to see exactly what it says about the relationships between the atonement and healing. We read:

When evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed. And He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: "He Himself took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses."

The closing words are an accurate quotation from the Hebrew text of Isaiah 53:4. Jesus "took" our sicknesses by sympathetically and compassionately entering into the pains and sorrows of mankind. His miracles of healing were signs. They showed His compassion for us and pointed forward to His death by which He would pay the price for sin so that ultimately all suffering can end. His miracles of healing were signs of the complete healing that will be enjoyed ultimately by all who place their trust in Him.

Nothing in this passage even remotely suggests that we can claim physical healing through the atonement. D. A. Carson astutely observed, "The cross is the basis for all the benefits which accrue to believers; but this does not mean that all such benefits can be secured at the present time on demand, any more than we have the right and power to demand our resurrection bodies" (*The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 8, Zondervan, p.267).

What about anointing services? In some church services, sick and suffering people are invited to come forward to be anointed with oil and prayed for. This practice is based on James 5:13-16. But the sick person in James calls for the elders to come to him. Perhaps he is too ill to go to them. The combination of the Greek word *asthenia* (sick) in verse 14 and *kamno* (sick) in verse 15 is seen by some Bible students as portraying someone who is flat in bed, probably hopelessly ill. This anointing does not occur in a public service or on invitation from the platform!

The elders are to pray for the sick person and anoint him with oil. This anointing with oil was ceremonial, not medicinal. Oil had no healing value for a person with a severe, life-threatening illness. Besides, James said that it is the "prayer of faith," not the oil, that saves the sick from physical death.

What is this prayer of faith? It certainly isn't a state of mind a person acquires through a lot of agonized crying or shouting! That goes against what Jesus said about praying (Mt. 6:7-15). The "prayer of faith" is Spirit-led praying that is sensitive to God's will and submissive to it.

James 5:13-16 was addressed to saints in the church age. But some Bible students believe that it was intended only for people who lived during the apostolic era. They point out that James was written at a very early date while the apostles who possessed the gifts of healings and discernment (1 Cor. 12:1-11) were still living. They also call our attention to the fact that the text seems to imply that healing could always be expected.

Many other Bible students, however, are not comfortable with this interpretation. They can't find solid reasons to limit this instruction to

the apostolic era. They therefore say that we should honor requests for anointing and prayer from those who are ill. They also point out that confession of sin seems to be an important element in this anointing and prayer service.

Bible scholars do indeed differ as to the value of this practice in the church today. However, one thing is certain. No fair-minded person can make it the biblical basis for public anointing services.

What about the promise of John 14:12? Jesus told His disciples, "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father" (Jn. 14:12). The first question we must ask ourselves is, "To whom was Jesus speaking?" The answer is clear: His disciples. Were His promises fulfilled? Yes, they were. Their miracles, some of which are recorded in Acts, were indeed similar to Christ's. But what about the "greater works"? They certainly weren't physical. How do you top feeding 5,000 people with a boy's lunch, calming a tempest with a word of command, and calling people back from death? The "greater works" undoubtedly refer to the spiritual triumphs of the gospel. The apostles, empowered by the Holy Spirit, led a movement that turned the world of their day upside down (Acts 17:6). Millions of people, mostly Gentiles, believed the good news and were transformed. In a period of just 30 years! Our Lord's promises to the apostles have been fulfilled.

Remember, our Lord was addressing His inner circle of disciples, and He fulfilled the promises He made to them. We have no right to take these words as a mandate for us to work miracles. Even during the time of the apostles the supernatural gifts of miracles and healing were sovereignly dispensed by God as He saw fit. He did not give the same gifts to all (1 Cor. 12:1-11). After listing the gifts, Paul wrote, "But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills" (1 Cor. 12:11). Yes, God could choose to give us power to perform miracles like Jesus and the apostles. He is sovereign. But He didn't promise us miracle-working power. Not in John 14:12 or in any other Bible passage!

What about the gift of healing? Some Christian leaders are convinced that they possess the "gifts of healings" referred to in 1

Corinthians 12. Moreover, many sane, honest, and respectable people support this claim. They testify that they experienced or witnessed real healings through the laying on of hands in a healing service. And they challenge those who don't believe them to produce a New Testament verse that states explicitly that gifts of healings stopped with the apostles.

Now, it is true that the New Testament writers nowhere explicitly declare that the gifts of healings ceased. However, Hebrews 2:1-4 makes it clear that the miraculous sign gifts were not present in about AD 68 as they were at an earlier stage in the apostolic era. The writer of Hebrews declared that the message of salvation "was confirmed . . . both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will" (Heb. 2:3-4). He used the past tense. In addition, he lumped together "signs and wonders" and "gifts of the Spirit." It appears that the supernatural sign gifts were no longer present to the extent that they were at an earlier time.

Another matter of significance is the fact that in the Greek language, the supernatural sign gifts are written as double plurals--"gifts of healings," "gifts of tongues," "workings of miracles." This may indicate that the supernatural gifts did not reside in an individual like the gift of an office--apostle, prophet, evangelist, and pastor-teacher (Eph. 4:11). They apparently came upon a person for one event and had to be given again or renewed by the Holy Spirit according to His will. Perhaps that's why Paul, who on one occasion healed a host of people (Acts 19:11-12), couldn't heal Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25-30), Trophimus (2 Tim. 4:20), or Timothy (1 Tim. 5:23).

Since even the apostles didn't possess a resident gift of healing, we have good reason to deny that anyone has it today. Then too, the recorded instances of miraculous healings during subsequent eras of church history should not be seen as evidence that the signs and wonders and gifts of healings continued. A divine healing need not be a sign or wonder, even if it is quite clearly supernatural. Nor do present healings through prayer indicate that somebody exercised the "gifts of healings." God can heal in response to prayer whenever He chooses to do so.

What about the astounding contemporary reports of healing?

Wherever you go, you can find people who tell of being miraculously cured through prayer, through a visit to a shrine, or through the work of a healer. The tendency among non-Christians (and even many Christians) has been to disregard or deny these reports. Lately, however, many secularists are taking them more seriously without thinking of these unexplainable phenomena as divine miracles. They are quick to point out that spontaneous remissions and apparent healings occur among Christians and non-Christians. They find refuge in the mystery of the relationship between mind and matter and the unexplainable power of suggestion. They don't even attempt to refute testimonials of amazing healings by people who received treatment from quacks whose methods have no scientific validity.

Our approach as Christians is different. We believe in God and His power to heal. Many of us have had firsthand experiences of amazing healings in response to prayer. Therefore, we do not question the fact that God can and does heal. However, we should recognize that not all humanly unexplainable incidents are miracles of God. They occur even among Satan worshipers! Therefore, we test a religious leader's credibility by what he teaches, not by an analysis of the miracles ascribed to him or her.

What about Paul's "thorn in the flesh"? In 2 Corinthians 12:1-10, Paul spoke of his "thorn in the flesh." He said that it was "given" him to keep him from becoming conceited because of the amazing revelations he had received. He also declared it to be "a messenger from Satan to buffet me." The giver of the thorn was undoubtedly God; He, not the devil, would be concerned to keep Paul humble. But Satan could use the thorn to distress him.

We don't know what the "thorn" was. A number of guesses have been made. Some have mentioned bad eyes, epilepsy, malaria. Others, eager to maintain that obedient Christians are free from disease, have mentioned an indwelling demon or bitter enemies. These last suggestions, however, don't fit Paul's words, "Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (v.9). An indwelling demon or persistent enemies are not "weaknesses." The "thorn" was without question some kind of physical affliction. And God gave it to Paul for his spiritual good. God

didn't remove it even though Paul prayed earnestly for its removal. But He provided such wonderful grace and strength that Paul saw it as a blessing.

How much faith do I need? Many people have the idea that if we fulfill God's conditions by having enough faith, we will always be healed. Therefore they boldly "name and claim" complete healing when they pray. They even tell a person that he or she is well while the symptoms of the illness are still present.

Dr. Paul Brand in the November 25, 1983, issue of *Christianity Today* told the sad story about a family that took this approach. When their 15-month-old son came down with flu-like symptoms, they followed the advice of their church leaders and depended solely on prayer for his recovery. Their son kept getting more sick over the next several weeks, gradually losing his senses of hearing and sight. He finally died--and he remained dead in spite of fervent prayer that God would restore his life. The autopsy showed that the cause of death was a form of meningitis that could have been treated easily.

Now, these people had tremendous faith. But the strength of our faith does not determine whether or not healing will come. Some of our Lord's miracles were not in any way related to the faith of those who benefited from them (Mt. 12:9-13; Mk. 1:23-28; Lk. 7:11-15; 13:10-13; 14:1-6; 22:50,51; Jn. 9:1-38). Besides, are we going to say that Paul was not healed of his "thorn in the flesh" because he didn't have enough faith? Was Timothy's lack of faith the reason he had stomach problems? (1 Tim. 5:23).

DOES GOD WANT ME WELL?

We are now ready to answer directly the question that appears on the cover of this booklet. Yes, God wants you well--just as He "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4). But not everyone accepts His offer of salvation. God would like to see His children well, but many of them disobey good health rules. Some fall into sinful ways and need to be chastened (Heb. 12:6). All of us are spiritually benefited by some trials and pain. Both Paul and

James exhorted believers to be glad when they are tested by suffering (Rom. 5:3-5; Jas. 1:2-4). Their teachings assure us that it is an indispensable element in our spiritual development. God would like us well, but it would not be good for us to go through life without pain.

It does not follow, however, that we should take a dim view of physical health or pleasure. Nor should we stoically resign ourselves to the idea that we should expect a lot of suffering. On the contrary, we should look at life optimistically. God's Word provides assurances and promotes a way of life that is conducive to physical and psychological wellness. It does so in at least nine ways:

10. It brings relief from the heavy burden of guilt (Ps. 32:1-2; Rom. 5:1).
11. It provides the power to release inner bitterness caused by an unforgiving spirit (Mt. 6:12,14-15; Eph. 4:32).
12. It promotes a positive view toward our body, assuring us that the Holy Spirit lives in it (1 Cor. 6:19), and that it is destined for resurrection (1 Cor. 15).
13. It teaches that sexual expression is both safe and satisfying within the bonds of marriage (1 Cor. 7:1-5; Heb. 13:4).
14. It provides grace for single believers, enabling them to live a happy and fulfilled life (1 Cor. 7:7-8,32,39-40).
15. It is marked by hope--a buoyant confidence about the future (Rom. 8:31-39).
16. It assures us that we are members of a select community--the body of Christ in which each person fills a special role for the mutual benefit of all (Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12:1-31).
17. It fosters a unique relationship with God so that we can come to Him as our Father in an attitude of expectancy and ask Him for healing when we are sick (Mt. 7:7-11; Rom. 8:15; Jas. 5:14-15).
18. It enables us to rejoice even when we suffer pain (Acts 5:41; 2 Cor. 4:16-18).

God wants you well. He allows illness and pain only when He can use them for your good. And He is going to see to it that you will be well for all eternity. Believing this will promote your good health.

SICKNESS, HEALING, AND YOU

The young seldom have personal contact with pain and sorrow. Grandparents are still alive for some. And even when they see these grandparents get sick or die, they can reason that it will be a long time before this happens to anybody in their immediate family. But sooner or later, everybody comes into close contact with pain, sorrow, and death. Therefore we should ask ourselves, "How will I cope when a doctor says, 'I'm sorry, we did all we could,' or 'I hope you are prepared for bad news. I must tell you that you have cancer, and that we can't do much for you.' "

If you have placed your trust in Jesus Christ, you can face such news calmly and hopefully. If you are not living obediently, you can turn away from your sin and back to God. You can ask the Lord for healing. You can pray with the absolute assurance that God will heal you, if doing so will bring glory to Himself and further your eternal welfare. And if He doesn't make you well, He will give you His wonderful grace and use the affliction for good.

If you have never placed your trust in Jesus Christ, do it today. Acknowledge your sinfulness and your inability to save yourself. Believe that Jesus died on the cross for sinners and that He rose again. Then put your trust in Him. Believe that He did it for you. He will forgive you, make you a member of His family, and give you eternal life. He will take care of you through all time and eternity.

WHEN FORGIVENESS SEEMS IMPOSSIBLE

Recently, I received a disturbing letter. The writer said, "Satan keeps me agitated with evil, vengeful thoughts toward my family. I suffered emotional abuse for all the years I was growing up and into young adulthood until I was married. It was horrible at times. I carried the stigma of my parents' hate and jealousy. I was constantly criticized for everything I did. I was never encouraged. To this day, I wake up with nightmares of getting revenge. If I'm a good Christian, shouldn't I be able after all these years to forgive them and be free from this awful pain? How can I learn to forgive so that I don't feel this anger whenever I am around them? Please help me!"

The writer is not alone in her struggle with forgiveness. I know a man whose wife had an affair but who cannot find it within himself to forgive her for betraying his trust. He tries to save the ruptured relationship, but fear, distrust, and rage repeatedly undermine his efforts.

Then there is the person who gossips behind your back. A personal struggle you shared with him in confidence has now become a juicy morsel whispered across neighborhood telephone lines and office breakroom tables. First you feel hurt, then betrayed, and then angry. The wound is as painful as if you had been stabbed. Then you start to feel vengeful. A trusted person has hurt you, and now you will find some way to make him pay for the harm he has done to you. Forgiveness is the furthest thing from your mind.

So what does it mean to forgive?

What comes to your mind when you think of the word *forgiveness*? Forgetting? No more pain? No more anger? Letting bygones be bygones? Letting someone off the hook? Unfairness? Injustice?

Let me say at the start that I believe forgiveness is one of the most misunderstood doctrines of the Christian life. Many believe that forgiveness requires us to unconditionally release others from past wrongs. They assume that we have to forgive in order to love. Others have adopted the "I forgive you for my own sake" attitude that advocates forgiveness as a means of releasing ourselves from the cancer of bitterness and the fire of anger. In many different ways,

forgiveness is therefore seen as an unconditional offering of pardon that says, "No matter what you have done to me, I forgive you."

The results of unconditional forgiveness, however, are not as positive as many believe. One shudders to think of a wife offering forgiveness to an unrepentant alcoholic husband who has privately beaten her and publicly humiliated her with his sexual affairs. Is such forgiveness the kind of love her husband needs? Is it in his best interest for her to release him from accountability for vicious violations of their marital vows?

I believe the Scriptures teach that whether or not we should forgive depends on our answer to the question, "What does Christlike love require?" The answer, in turn, depends on the circumstances in which we are asking the question. Sometimes love requires us to say, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Lk. 23:34). Sometimes love requires us to forgive over and over (Mt. 18:21-22). And sometimes love requires us to withhold forgiveness for the sake of the one who has harmed us.

Tim Jackson, a licensed counselor in Michigan, is the senior counselor for the RBC biblical correspondence department.

FORGIVENESS--A DEFINITION

Throughout the Bible, forgiveness carries the idea of "release," "sending away," or "letting go." The Greek word often translated "forgiveness" was used to indicate release from an office, marriage, obligation, debt, or punishment. The idea of a debt or something owed is inherent to the concept of forgiveness.

In biblical terms, therefore, forgiveness is *the loving, voluntary cancellation of a debt*. It is the kind of release Jesus spoke of when, during a teaching moment at Simon the Pharisee's house, He likened forgiveness to the cancellation of a financial obligation (Lk. 7:36-47). While having dinner there, Jesus was visited by a broken, repentant prostitute. Her emotions were uninhibited. Expressing deep affection for the Lord, she washed His feet with her tears, dried them with her hair, kissed them, and poured an expensive perfume on them (vv.37-

38). Luke says that Simon was incensed and thought within himself that if Jesus were a prophet, He would know what kind of woman was touching Him.

In response to Simon's reaction, Jesus told the following story: "'There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii [1 1/2 year's wages], and the other fifty [2 month's wages]. And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?' Simon answered and said, 'I suppose the one whom he forgave more.' And He said to him, 'You have rightly judged'" (vv.41-43).

The point is that sin incurs a debt that must be canceled or forgiven. The more aware we are of how much we've been forgiven, the more love we will have toward the one who cancels the debt.

FORGIVENESS--THE PATTERN

In Luke 17:3-4, Jesus gave His disciples a pattern for forgiving those who sinned against them. He said, "If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him" (vv.3-4).

Let's look at the five parts of the pattern of forgiveness that Jesus outlined.

ONE: The Offense

TWO: The Confrontation

THREE: The Repentance

FOUR: The Forgiveness

FIVE: The Restoration

FORGIVENESS--THE PATTERN

ONE: The Offense

What is the offense or sin committed against us that Jesus told us to respond to? While He was not specific, we must remember that sin

can be defined as any failure to love. On another occasion, Jesus summed up our entire obligation to God and to one another as a debt of love (Mt. 22:37-40). Paul did the same when he said, "Owe no one anything except to love one another" (Rom. 13:8).

If we were to identify the sin of Luke 17:3-4 as *any* violation of love, however, that would raise questions. Was Jesus teaching us to confront one another for every failure to love? Or was He teaching us to deal with violations of love which, if not dealt with, would damage the relationship and cause us to become uncaring about the interests of the offending party?

If our understanding of patient, Christlike love tells us that Jesus was speaking of *significant offenses*, we need to be careful that we do not close our eyes to sins that are more serious than we want to believe. By nature, we all have an unlimited capacity for rationalization. We all are inclined to minimize the cancerous impact that everyday offenses have on ourselves and our relationships.

Denial of pain is a common form of self-deception. We pretend things really don't hurt that much, or we tell ourselves that we are just being too sensitive. A small crack begins in a relationship and steadily widens to the point that there is no real closeness. We then continue the charade by simply saying, "Oh well, people change." We miss an opportunity to experience the joy of honest love, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

Sin is an ongoing problem that erodes the trust and intimacy for which we were made. Forgiveness, therefore, is an ongoing necessity for dealing with our sins against one another. Not only do we need to forgive, but we ourselves need to be forgiven by those we have harmed.

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TWO: The Confrontation

After having felt the sting of an offense, a wounded person has a responsibility to act. Jesus said, "If your brother sins against you,

rebuke him" (Lk. 17:3). Since this word *rebuke* sounds harsh, we need to remember that everything Jesus taught must be understood according to the principle and motive of godly love. The rebuke He was calling for will therefore be in the best interest of the one who has harmed us.

One meaning of the Greek word Jesus used for *rebuke* was "to honor," or "to give due weight or value." Such usage shows why the same word could be used in the sense of "to reprove, rebuke, admonish, or sharply censure." To hold people accountable for their actions is a way of honoring them. It shows that they are important enough for us to take their actions seriously.

From the beginning, however, we should keep in mind that the deciding question must be, "What does Christlike love require?" At times, a direct rebuke is not called for. Sometimes we can pray as our Savior did on the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Lk. 23:34; see also Acts 7:60). Such love can "cover a multitude of sins" (1 Pet. 4:8) that are beyond the capacity of the offender to understand at the moment. This is often true of little children, of the spiritually immature, or of those who don't have the Spirit of Christ. Again, however, we must be careful that our mercy is in the best interest of the other party and not merely a self-deceiving effort to avoid confrontation.

If loving confrontation is called for, it can be gentle. The rebuke Jesus called for will sometimes require no more than a knowing look or a loving touch. On other occasions, a simple question like, "Do you know how that makes me feel?" or a statement like, "You mean too much to me to overlook what you did," may be the only necessary rebuke.

But sometimes the nature of the offense and the attitude of the offender require a more direct response like, "I need to let you know how much you have hurt me. You need to know what this has done to our relationship. I feel that you have betrayed my trust."

Sometimes the confrontation escalates to legal charges and even imprisonment. But nothing is worse for the offender than to be

allowed to go on in his sin unchallenged and uncared for until led into the judgment hall of God.

The Scriptures give examples of the many different kinds of rebukes that are needed. There is the example of Nathan who found a creative way of confronting King David with sins of adultery and murder (2 Sam. 12:1-14). There is also the example of Christ who, with a gentle word, let His friend Martha know that she was so obsessed with trying to be a good hostess that she had no time for Him. Who could doubt the tender love of the Teacher who said, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things" (Lk. 10:41-42).

The need for loving confrontation is apparent. Unresolved problems of relationship can result in unexplained distance and coolness. They break down mutual trust, breed fear and avoidance, and if not dealt with can leave the offending party free to go on without accountability. Letting an offender off the hook actually encourages him to repeat the same pattern of behavior again and again.

This is true whether we are talking about sexual offenders, thieves, liars, gossips, or promise-breakers. They will practice their habit until someone loves them enough to challenge them.

Whether the confrontation is tough or tender, we must always be careful. Loving rebukes should not be handed out easily nor quickly. Some people delight in "putting others in their place." That is not what Jesus advocated. A thoughtful rebuke must be well-timed and tailored to fit the needs of the individual. A wise person should be able to rightly interpret it as a gift of love that is intended to build up rather than to tear down (Eph. 4:29). Ideally, the correction should come from one with whom a level of relationship has already been established. Rebukes are more likely to be heard if they are from the lips of someone who is seen as a friend rather than an enemy (Prov. 27:6).

The purpose of giving a loving rebuke deserves careful thought. It should be offered with the desire to bring offenders to an awareness of their sin so that they have an opportunity to understand clearly what they have done, take responsibility for it, and change their course of

action by looking inside at the internal beliefs that have prompted their behavior.

A willingness to be lovingly honest with someone who has wronged us takes wisdom and courage. It takes wisdom to know when to speak up and when to keep quiet. It takes courage because there is no way to predict what the outcome will be. Sometimes all of the best efforts to show love are met with the worst expressions of anger, denial, and avoidance.

We therefore need to be ready to live with a worst-case, as well as a best-case outcome. Our goal is not merely to remove the pain that has come into a relationship, but to do whatever Christlike love requires.

Since there are no promises about how a confrontation will turn out, the need for courage can be a practical obstacle to our obedience to Christ. Yet in Luke 17 Jesus also spoke to our fears. He assured us that God Himself would enable us to be obedient if only we would give Him the smallest amount of faith.

Jesus assured His disciples of this God-given power in an unusual way. When they expressed wonder at what He was telling them about rebukes and forgiveness, He talked to them about "supernatural landscaping." Pointing to a mulberry tree, He told them that with faith the size of a mustard seed, they could speak the well-rooted tree out of the ground (17:6). Then He went on to tell them that the role of servants is to do what they are told to do (Lk. 17:7-10).

The interpretation of our Lord's words depends on an understanding of faith. Christlike faith isn't defined as believing whatever we want to believe. It is believing *what God has said*. If God says He wants a tree to uproot itself, only the smallest amount of faith on our part will be necessary to see it happen. God's power will do the job. But in Luke 17:1-10, Jesus was not telling us that God's power stands behind us to move trees. He was telling us that heaven stands behind us to enable us to walk through the difficult, frightening process of confronting and forgiving personal offenses.

But let's not get ahead of ourselves. While it is important to remind one another that God can enable us to do whatever it takes to confront

and forgive, it is just as important to see that Jesus made repentance a prior condition of forgiveness.

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THREE: The Repentance

Jesus didn't teach unconditional forgiveness in Luke 17. He said, "If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him" (vv.3-4).

To repent means "to change one's mind." In and of itself, repentance does not mean to overcome sin and make it history. Repentance refers specifically to the change of heart and mind that is necessary for a real change of behavior to take place.

Such repentance is essential to Christ's pattern of forgiveness. He makes it clear that those who sin against us must be brought to the place where their failure to love is admitted.

While offenders cannot unspill the milk, they can help clean up the mess they have made. They can admit their wrong and then offer evidence that their repentance is real. When we offend others, we can admit our wrong, and do what we can to make restitution. We can help those we've hurt by assuring them that we had no excuse for what we did.

While it is impossible at times to know whether repentance is real, we can look for evidence. We can expect a truly repentant person to confess the wrong, offer no excuses for his sin, humbly plead for mercy, and quietly accept the consequences. That was the response of King David, the man after God's own heart who received forgiveness from God but paid an awful price in the death of his son, family discord, and national turmoil (2 Sam. 12:13-23).

Sometimes repentance is impossible. The offender may have died. In such cases we can only prayerfully and mercifully "release" the offender into the hands of God.

FORGIVENESS--THE PATTERN

FOUR: The Forgiveness

Remember the definition: *Forgiveness is the loving, voluntary cancellation of a debt.* Forgiving one another removes obstacles to loving, honest, growing relationships. It removes reasons for avoidance, distance, and coolness.

When an offense is dealt with, a forgiving heart can rightly say, "I will no longer hold this against you. I can see that you know you have hurt me and that it was wrong for you to do so."

On the other hand, to lovingly withhold such forgiveness can be necessary if there is no evidence of repentance. In the worship service, the church might refuse to serve communion to such a person. In a marriage, forgiveness withheld might involve refusing to act as if nothing is wrong. In a friendship, a conscious, unresolved issue can result in lovingly withholding communication, or whatever is necessary to let the other person know that the offense is of such a nature that it has broken trust. In employment circumstances, unforgiven failures can result in withheld promotions or pay raises so as to let the employee know where he stands.

It's easy to wrongly assume that the one who withholds forgiveness is to blame for problems in a relationship. That is true only if the offender has already shown evidence of repentance. Until then, focus must be kept on the one who refuses to come to terms with his wrong.

At the same time, however, we must also remember that it is not right for offended persons to withhold forgiveness if they have not been willing to offer the loving, honest confrontation Christ calls for. Forgiveness can be rightly withheld only if motivated by Christlike love, the kind of love that cares enough to do the difficult work of serving notice that there is a relationship-threatening problem.

But forgiveness does not mean that we ignore the consequences of forgiven sin. Love for a repentant child abuser, thief, alcoholic, or drug abuser will mean exercising wise caution to avoid placing the person in circumstances that will play to his weakness or endanger others.

In forgiving us, God Himself does not suspend the natural law of "sowing and reaping." In Galatians 6, Paul wrote, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life"(vv.7-8).

God does not forgive so that all consequences of our sin can be removed. He forgives so that we can enjoy His loving acceptance of us. He forgives to offer a relationship in spite of the losses incurred by our sin. He removes eternal guilt and shame, but not all of the scars and consequences that we must live with.

FORGIVENESS--THE PATTERN

FIVE: The Restoration

When there has been a separation in a relationship and things are made right through repentance and forgiveness, there is a wonderful moment of release that words cannot describe.

Most of us have felt moments of tension in a relationship with a friend or family member. Moments that felt so thick the air could be cut with a knife. In many cases, the issue was not what we would think of as an unforgivable sin. Yet even in the daily pains and problems of relationships, confession, forgiveness, and restoration can be a wonderful source of renewal and joy.

I can vividly recall the tension I caused in my relationship with my wife one spring morning. I was finishing my senior year of graduate studies and was hard-pressed to complete one of my final research projects. My third-shift job had kept me working overtime for several

weeks so I felt pressured to try to finish it with the small amount of time I had left. I decided to stay at home on a Sunday morning.

That particular Sunday was my wife's first Mother's Day. We had waited 8 years for our first child. This was a big event for her. At church, mothers were honored, asked to stand, and given a flower. But I was not there to honor her. I was focused on my research project.

I will never forget the mixture of pain, shame, and anger I saw in her eyes as she returned home. In tears she tore up the flower and threw it away. I was stunned, silent. I had crushed her, not by being consciously abusive but by being insensitive and oblivious to her needs. I had missed an opportunity to honor her. Never again would there be a first Mother's Day. I couldn't change what I had done.

Tearfully, I went to her and apologized. I had no excuses. My failure was obvious. I asked her forgiveness. We talked, embraced, and wept. The paper didn't seem important anymore. She offered me the gracious gift of forgiveness that opened the door to rebuild the closeness we both craved.

Restoration in our human relationships gives us a finite taste of the joy God experiences when we in repentance come to Him admitting our sin. After all, God loves to forgive. Love fuels His longing to forgive, just as it also motivates His willingness to make an issue out of sin. It is that kind of love Nehemiah wrote about when he prayed:

They refused to obey, and they were not mindful of Your wonders that You did among them. But they hardened their necks, and in their rebellion they appointed a leader to return to their bondage. But You are God, ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abundant in kindness, and did not forsake them (Neh. 9:17).

The message of the gospel is forgiveness that leads to reconciliation--the restoration of the broken relationship between God and man. We who were at one time far from God and living in opposition to Him have been brought near to enjoy a restored relationship with Him (Rom. 5:8-11; Col. 2:12-19).

THE COST OF FORGIVENESS

A high price is required from both sides involved in the forgiving process. The prime example of the high cost of forgiveness was what God paid to extend forgiveness to each of us--He punished His Son for our offense. The Just One was executed for the unjust (1 Pet. 3:18).

For the offended, the cost is relinquishing the demand to seek revenge now (Rom. 12:17-21), canceling the debt owed, and seeking the restoration of the repentant person.

For the offender, the cost involves humble confession and repentance, refusal to hide what one did, taking ownership for what was done, accepting full responsibility for one's actions and the consequences of those actions, making restitution where possible, refusal to make excuses, and brokenness that pleads for mercy and receives grace with gratefulness.

While the cost of forgiveness is high for both the offended and the offender, the price is well worth the joy of restoration and the release that comes because of the renewed relationship.

PREREQUISITES FOR A FORGIVING LIFE

What do we have to do to make forgiveness a way of life? The following suggestions give a starting point as we pursue a forgiving spirit.

When facing forgiveness, think of it as the process of a lifetime. Forgiveness is not a once-for-all event. It is a continual process of canceling the debts of those who fail us again and again and again. Remember Luke 17? There Jesus told His disciples that if a brother sins against them seven times in a day, and seven times in a day repents, they were to forgive him.

Some might assume that what is important about this passage is that Jesus makes seven the greatest number of times we should have to forgive in a day. Ceiling numbers are not the issue. Jesus was teaching a principle of unlimited forgiveness. When Peter on another occasion asked, "'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?' Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven'" (Mt. 18:21-22). The process is unending.

When you are the offender, be careful not to demand forgiveness.

Be careful when you ask forgiveness. The problem is not so much in the words themselves but in the motives of the person doing the asking. Many requests for forgiveness are nothing more than thinly veiled demands to avoid the pain of wrongs and harm done.

The truth often comes out if forgiveness is temporarily denied. If the offender tries to turn the tables and shame the hurt person into letting him off the hook, then it's apparent that the request for forgiveness is not an honest request. True repentance claims no rights while asking mercy for wrongs done. Real repentance expresses a broken, undemanding heart (Ps. 51:17).

In anticipation of future hurts, begin developing a heart of forgiveness.

There are at least four qualities of character that can help us to develop a forgiving spirit toward those who harm us.

1. A passion for more than what the here-and-now can provide. The immediate pleasure of sweet revenge is only temporary. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught us to hunger for that which in time will prove more satisfying. He said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they will be filled" (Mt. 5:6). Here He approved of hungering for the ways of God who, in His time, will satisfy the longings of those who entrust their well-being to Him.

Some of the "rightness" that can be hungered for includes a Christlike love for those who are presently harming us (Mt. 5:39-42; Lk. 6:32-36). Such kindness might look mindless and even self-destructive to those who are living by the rules of this world. But this is the love that

can distinguish us as followers of Christ and as grateful subjects of the kingdom of heaven.

Living in a sin-cursed, enemy-filled world can drive us to our knees to pray, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev. 22:20). For the loving heart, this is not mere escapism. It is also reason to long for God's work in the lives of our enemies, to bring them to the kind of repentance that will prepare them for the any-moment return of Christ.

2. A brokenness through sorrow and grief. As we become more aware of how much we need the mercy and forgiveness of God, we will be more willing to extend forgiveness to those who confess and repent of their sins against us.

Paul spoke of a godly sorrow that leads to repentance (2 Cor. 7:10). To the extent that we ourselves have experienced this godly sorrow for our own sins, and to the extent that we have tasted the resulting forgiveness of God, we can coach and urge others through the repentance that can lead them to the relief of God's mercy.

3. A refusal to seek revenge. Imagine that you are given the choice to: (a) torment for all eternity those who have harmed you the most (the one who sexually abused you, your unfaithful spouse, the date rapist, the drunk driver who killed your child, your abusive parent), or (b) see them brought to brokenness and to their knees before the God who has been so kind to you. Which would you choose? Your answer will expose the direction of your heart.

Revenge is natural. Undeserved kindness is not. Those who live apart from grace live in various stages of bitterness, guilt, rage, fear, separation, and loneliness. The poison of an unforgiving heart is not merely offered to the enemy but is swallowed first by the one who is holding the bottle.

Leaving vengeance in the hands of God is not to deny justice against those who have harmed us. Turning our just complaint over to Him is not to say to our offender, "Hey, no problem; it's okay. I don't care what you do to me." It is saying, "I will not choose to seek revenge now. I am going to trust God to deal with you in His time and in His own way."

he refusal to pay back evil with evil can throw the person who knows he deserves judgment off balance. It is not what he expects. Our role is to stun our offenders with unexpected kindness that gives them an opportunity to repent and receive the forgiveness that God has already shown us.

It's God's role to mete out vengeance. Our challenge is to believe so much in the One who says, "Vengeance is Mine. I will repay" (Rom. 12:19) that we find ourselves pleading for mercy on behalf of our offenders.

4. A courageous desire to love others as God has loved us. Loving others with a passion to see them receive the same forgiveness God has shown us is a distinguishing mark of a person who knows God. There is no greater reason to love and forgive others than the realization of how kind and merciful God has been to us.

Jesus plainly taught that a person who has been forgiven much loves much (Lk. 7:40-48). And a person who refuses to forgive "pocket change" after being forgiven "millions" deserves severe punishment (Mt. 18:23-35).

It is not natural to love in this way. Our mission is not to do what comes easily, but rather to seek to love and forgive sacrificially out of the riches of the One who sacrificially loved and forgave us. Our actions are to mirror our heavenly Father's efforts to reconcile disrupted relationships. Our love is to fuel and shape our willingness to forgive, just as God's love caused Him to find a way to keep our sin from separating us from Him forever.

Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18-19).

MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT FORGIVENESS

1. Minimizing The Offense.

To deal with a painful situation that we are powerless to change, we often pretend as though it didn't happen, that it wasn't all that important, or that it wasn't as bad as it seemed at the time. We say, "It really wasn't a big deal, so there's nothing to forgive."

I sat with a woman who was brutally and methodically abused by her father. When asked about her life growing up, she responded, "It was a pretty normal childhood. Good times. Family vacations. The normal stuff." It wasn't until several months later that she began to release her stranglehold on the memories of abuse that continually terrorized her nights and paralyzed her relationships with men for 40 years.

Minimizing the offense only served to stifle her growth toward facing the full force of the horrid reality she had grown up in. But it wasn't until she began to face the truth of the damage done to her that she felt the concrete around her feet loosen. Only then was movement toward godliness and a restored beauty of her womanhood a possibility.

There are many ways of minimizing offenses: "That's just the way Uncle Bill is. He really didn't mean it. You don't need to forgive him for that. Just accept him for who he is." "Don't take things so seriously. You're just too sensitive." "Don't expect so much of people."

By such reduced expectations, forgiveness is viewed as an emergency tool taken out of the Christian's toolbox only on severe occasions, but certainly not on a regular basis.

Admittedly, some go too far in the other direction. They seem unable to let go of even the smallest offenses and feel they must always confront everything. That too is an obstacle to a healthy view of forgiveness. We must struggle to strike a balance between the destructive extremes of always or never confronting sin. Preoccupation with personal safety is the basis of both extremes.

2. Forgiving And Forgetting.

Many believe that to forgive means to forget. They are likely to quote Jeremiah 31:34, which quotes God as saying, "I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more." The resulting logic is, "When God forgives us He actually erases our sins from His memory." On that basis such persons reason, "We are to forgive one another the way God forgives us. Since He has forgotten our offenses against Him, we too will forget when we have truly forgiven."

God, however, does *not* forget sin when He forgives it. From eternity to eternity He is the allknowing One. He is the Author of Scripture, who breathed into the Bible a record of David's sin after he had been forgiven. The same is true of Adam, Abraham, Moses, Paul, Peter, and the rest of the forgiven people of the Bible.

God is not seen as loving because He chooses to forget forgiven sin but because He chooses not to hold it against us. That is what the psalmist desired when he said, "Oh, do not remember former iniquities against us! Let Your tender mercies come speedily to meet us, for we have been brought very low" (Ps. 79:8).

God remembers that Rahab was a harlot, that David was an adulterer, that Moses was a murderer, that Abraham was a liar, that Paul killed Christians, and that Peter denied his Savior and sometimes spoke words that were more demonic than godly. He remembers their sins--not to shame them but to tell us the truth about those whom He loves to forgive and restore to Himself.

The "forgive and forget" approach to forgiveness is an attempt to find a way to escape the hurt of the past. But it is based on a wrong assumption. God does not teach us to forget, but rather not to hold sins against one another. By His example, and by the help of His Spirit, He enables us to lovingly forgive even those wrongs we remember.

3. Forgiving For Your Own Sake.

This approach to forgiveness is a spin-off of the "love yourself first" teaching. In her recent book *Forgiveness: A Bold Choice for a Peaceful Heart*. Robin Casarjian, a secular psychotherapist, advocates forgiveness as a means of helping people let go of old anger and

resentment. It sounds good. But how is she defining forgiveness? In an interview she stated, "So often when people think about forgiveness they think about what it's going to do for someone else. . . . What they don't realize is that forgiveness is really an act of self-interest. We're doing ourselves a favor because we become free to have a more peaceful life--we free ourselves from being emotional victims of others" (*New Age Journal*, Sept/Oct 1993, p.78).

Many in our day have satisfied their legitimate longing for peace by adopting this unconditional approach to forgiveness. Forgiving for your own sake does relieve feelings of rage and bitterness. It does allow us to release ourselves from the bitter emotions of revenge. It does allow us to treat those who have harmed us in a manner that *seems* Christlike. But on closer inspection it is a Trojan horse that threatens to undermine the loving forgiveness taught in the Bible. The danger is that it changes forgiveness from an expression of love to a self-centered act of self-protection.

But doesn't God unconditionally forgive us? No. When He gives us the initial forgiveness in salvation, He does so on the basis of our repentance. He forgives us when we stop believing that we can take care of ourselves, and when we begin believing that Christ alone can save us by His own sacrifice and life.

The same is true of family forgiveness that comes into play once we become God's children. John makes it clear that God does not unconditionally release His sinning children from responsibility for their choices. He wrote, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn. 1:9).

While it is necessary for us to love in order to show Christlike forgiveness, it is not necessary to forgive in order to show Christlike love. The answer is not to forgive unconditionally, but to ask the question, "What does love require?"--love for God and love for those who have harmed us.

A CASE STUDY OF FORGIVENESS (Gen. 37-50)

Joseph was the child of his father's old age. He was raised with 10 older half-brothers, 1 younger brother, and several sisters. His early life was troubled. His older brothers despised him because their father made no secret of his special love for Joseph. When he was 17, they conspired to kill him. But they threw him into an empty cistern, instead, and ignored his desperate pleas for help. Later they sold him to a group of traders who were on their way to Egypt and then reported to their father that he had been killed by a wild animal.

Joseph was taken involuntarily across international borders and resold as a slave to the captain of the Egyptian Palace Guard. Then his life took a turn for the worse. He was falsely accused of sexually molesting his employer's wife, subjected to wrongful imprisonment, and forgotten in jail by someone who could have interceded with government officials on his behalf. If anyone ever had reason to be bitter, angry, and vengeful, it was Joseph.

What's amazing about Joseph's story is that in spite of all the tragedies that befell him, he became, by his 30th birthday, Pharaoh's appointed ruler over all of Egypt. What's even more amazing is that he is one of the Bible's best studies in forgiveness. He eventually forgave his brothers, and became with them one of the fathers of the 12 tribes of Israel.

Joseph also provides insight into the process of forgiveness. Most important, he shows us that we can forgive others when we realize that our well-being is not in the hands of those who have harmed us.

The process of Joseph's forgiveness is worth careful study. Genesis 42-50 describes the prolonged series of events by which both Joseph and his brothers came to terms with the sin against him. Forgiveness didn't occur overnight. The harm his brothers had done left deep feelings of guilt in them and bitter memories in Joseph.

The process of reconciliation was begun by God. A widespread famine caused Jacob to send his sons down to Egypt to find food. The unsuspecting brothers ended up standing face to face with the

governor of Egypt. What they didn't know was that they were looking at their own brother. He recognized them but did not disclose his identity. Instead, Joseph accused them of being spies, put them in jail, and then conceived a plot which, as it played out, brought a great deal of stress into his brothers' lives.

At one point, Joseph overheard his brothers speculate that they were being repaid by God for the sin they had committed many years before. When Joseph overheard their admission, he turned away from them and wept (42:21-24).

Coming to terms with the past did not happen quickly. Joseph himself tried to avoid the pain of the full truth. When he finally revealed himself to his frightened brothers, he attempted to minimize the harm they had done to him. He said, "Do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life" (45:5).

That incomplete reassurance, however, did not heal the wounds of the past. Some time later when their father died, his brothers worried that Joseph would use the occasion to get even. Once again they pled with him to forgive them. Finally, Joseph came to full terms with their wrong. He told them, "You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good" (50:20). Then the text says that Joseph comforted and encouraged his brothers.

The process of forgiveness was finally complete. Restoration of relationship was sweet. Joseph could forgive completely a wrong that was fully acknowledged. He could forgive because he had come to understand that his well-being and provisions were not in the hands of his brothers. He was in the hands of his provider God.

A PARABLE OF FORGIVENESS (Luke 15:11-31)

Another beautiful perspective on forgiveness is given to us in Jesus' well-known story of the prodigal son. Here we see evidence of:

A Repentant Heart.

The prodigal son demonstrated a repentant heart that was broken when he came to his senses and decided to return home to his father. Repentance is a brokenness and change of life-direction marked by:

- *Hunger for restoration.* He longed for something more than what he had available to him in his sin. He longed to go home (v.16).
- *Humble confession.* He willingly acknowledged his selfish violation of love first toward God and then toward others (vv.18-19).
- *Plea for mercy.* He recognized that he deserved nothing and pleaded for mercy, to serve as a slave, without a demand for restoration to his previous position in the family (v.21).

A Forgiving Heart.

It is the father in the story who represents the unexpected forgiving heart of God in response to genuine repentance that is marked by:

- *Hopeful anticipation.* The father never gave up hoping for his son's repentance and return home to be restored to him again. He was persevering in prayer and intently looking for the day he saw the familiar form of his son on the horizon (v.20). The hopeful yearning for restoration was never quenched in the heart of the father.
- *Courageous love.* The father was willing to humble himself and not conform to the cultural mandate of his day to make his son grovel in the dirt. Instead, in a spontaneous, jubilant act of love, he ran to embrace his son (v.20).
- *Gracious mercy.* Forgiveness was joyfully granted because he sensed the repentance in the heart of his son, and he restored him to a position of sonship that was unheard of (v.22).
- *Celebration of repentance.* The father planned a party to celebrate the return of his son. His son was heading in a direction that brought

separation and death to their relationship, but now he was alive and reconciled to his father (vv. 23-24).

An Unforgiving Heart.

The older son (representative of the Pharisees who were listening to the parable) is a study in the stubborn refusal to forgive that is characterized by:

- *Hardness.* There was an unwillingness on his part to consider restoration of his younger foolish brother. He felt justifiably cold toward his brother. And he was outraged that his father would still want a relationship with a son who had so deeply offended him (v.28).
- *Demanding of revenge.* His focus was only on immediately punishing his brother for what he had done rather than focusing on what had changed in his heart. He wanted to make his brother pay for what he had done. He had no mercy and no desire for reconciliation (v.28).
- *Arrogant refusal to celebrate.* The older son withheld relationship from both his brother and his father (v.28). He missed an opportunity for joy and celebration because he was preoccupied with himself. He missed the loving heart of the father that longs for restoration. Instead, he angrily withdrew in self-justified indignation and smugness over being right, and he refused to recognize that what he was doing was causing just as much pain and separation between himself and his father as was caused by his younger brother.

The refusal to forgive indicates a rebellious, stubborn heart that has not drunk deeply of the water of grace and mercy at the well of God's forgiveness (Lk. 7:47).

Our unwillingness to love those who have harmed us reflects our own failure to understand how much God has loved us. The apostle Peter reminded us of this in the first chapter of his second New Testament letter. After describing seven essential, progressive graces, which culminate in godliness, brotherly kindness, and love (2 Pet. 1:5-7), he added, "For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins" (vv.8-9).

THE PARADOX OF FORGIVING LOVE

God's concept of love is so radically different from our own. We tend to love what we like. He loves what is in our best interest. We are inclined to forgive when we think it is in our best interest to do so. He wants us to forgive when it is in the best interest of someone else to do so. We are inclined to embrace what is comfortable and to avoid what brings pain. He tells us, "Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good" (Rom. 12:9).

Loving others requires that we be willing to forgive. Forgiving others requires that we be willing to love. Both require an ever-deepening relationship with God to make us a reflection of His good heart to those with whom we have relationships. For then, and only then, is love "made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like Him" (1 Jn. 4:17 NIV).

This ability to love and forgive can begin only when we have first been forgiven by God. Have you taken that first step? Have you experienced the joy of a restored relationship with God through the forgiveness of your sins that He offers through faith in His Son? If not, humble yourself, acknowledge your inability to pay the debt of your sin, ask Him to forgive you, and accept His gift of forgiveness. The debt has been paid. The offer stands.

Accept Christ today and begin to experience the freedom to forgive others as God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven you.

WHY WOULD A GOOD GOD ALLOW SUFFERING?

It's an old question. Four thousand years ago, a victim of personal, family, and financial reversals spoke to the silent heavens and pleaded, "Show me why You contend with me. Does it seem good to You that You should oppress, that You should despise the work of Your hands?" (Job 10:2,3,8). The questions are still being asked. "Does God hate me? Is this why He is allowing me to suffer like this? Why me and not others?"

There *are* answers. Not exhaustive, but enough to keep our pain in perspective. Enough to show us how to put suffering to work for us. In the following pages, RBC staff writer Kurt De Haan shows us that while heaven may not be answering all our questions, it is giving us all the answers we need to trust and love the One who, in our pain, is calling us to Himself.

Martin R. De Haan II

ELUSIVE ANSWERS

Life can be hard to understand. In trying to come to grips with the cold realities of our existence, we can easily become frustrated. We long for answers to the immense problem of suffering. We may even wonder if we will ever fully comprehend why bad things happen to good people and why good things happen to bad people. The answers often seem to be elusive, hidden, out-of-reach.

Oh, it makes sense that a terrorist would be killed by his own bomb. It makes sense that a reckless driver would be in a serious accident. It makes sense that a person who plays with fire would get burned. It even makes sense that a chain-smoker would develop lung cancer.

But what about the innocent men, women, and children who are killed by a terrorist's bomb? What about the young driver who suffers severe brain damage because a drunk veered over the center line? What about the person whose home burns down due to no fault of his own? And what about the 2-year-old child with leukemia?

It is dangerous, even foolish, to pretend that we have a complete answer as to why God allows suffering. The reasons are many and complex. It's just as wrong to demand that we *should* understand. When the Old Testament sufferer Job realized that he had no right to demand an answer from God, he said, "Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know" (Job 42:3).

But God *has* given us some answers. Although we may not be able to know why one person gets singled out for a disease, we can know part of the reason why diseases exist. And even though we may not understand why we face a certain problem, we can know how to deal with the situation and respond in a way that pleases the Lord.

One more thing. I am not going to pretend that I fully understand the suffering that you personally may be experiencing. Although some aspects of human pain are common, the particulars are different. And what you may need most right now is not a four-point outline on why you are suffering or even what to do about it. What you may need most is a hug, a listening ear, or someone who will just sit with you in silence. Sometime along the way, however, you will want and need the truths of God's Word to comfort you and help you to see your plight from God's perspective.

You and I need more than untested theories. That's why in the pages that follow I have tried to include the insights of people who have suffered a variety of physical and emotional pains. My prayer for you is that your faith in God will stand firm even when your world seems to be falling apart.

WHY WOULD A GOOD GOD ALLOW SUFFERING?

In our world of pain, where is God? If He is good and compassionate, why is life often so tragic? Has He lost control? Or, if He is in control, what is He trying to do to me and to others?

Some people have chosen to deny God's existence because they cannot imagine a God who would allow such misery. Some believe that God exists, but they want nothing to do with Him because they

don't think He could be good. Others have settled for a belief in a kindly God who loves us but has lost control of a rebellious planet. Still others cling tenaciously to a belief in an all-wise, all-powerful, loving God who somehow uses evil for good.

As we search the Bible, we discover that it paints a picture of a God who can do anything He chooses to do. Sometimes He has acted in mercy and performed miracles in behalf of His people. At other times, though, He has chosen to do nothing to stop tragedy. He is supposed to be intimately involved in our lives, yet at times He seems deaf to our cries for help. In the Bible, He assures us that He controls all that happens, but He sometimes lets us be the targets of evil people, bad genes, dangerous viruses, or natural disasters.

If you're like me, you long for some way to put together an answer to this puzzling issue of suffering. I believe that God has given us enough pieces of the puzzle to help us trust Him even when we don't have all the information we would like. In this brief study we will see that the basic answers of the Bible are that our good God allows pain and suffering in our world to alert us to the problem of sin, to direct us to respond to Him in faith and hope, to shape us to be more like Christ, and to unite us so that we will help each other.

Why Would a Good God Allow Suffering?

TO ALERT US

Imagine a world without pain. What would it be like? At first the idea may sound appealing. No more headaches. No more backaches. No more upset stomachs. No more throbbing sensations when the hammer misses the mark and lands on your thumb. No more sore throats. But there would also be no more sensation to alert you of a broken bone or tearing ligaments. No alarm to let you know that an ulcer is eating a hole in your stomach. No discomfort to warn of a cancerous tumor that is gathering forces for a takeover of your body. No angina to let you know that the blood vessels to your heart are clogging up. No pain to signal a ruptured appendix.

As much as we may abhor pain, we have to admit that it often serves a good purpose. It warns us when something goes wrong. The *cause* of the misery, rather than the agony itself, is the real problem. Pain is merely a symptom, a siren or bell that sounds when a part of the body is endangered or under attack.

In this section we will see how pain could be God's way to alert us that:

- [1. Something's wrong with the world.](#)
- [2. Something's wrong with God's creatures.](#)
- [3. Something's wrong with me.](#)

Any one of these problems could be the reason for the pain in our lives. Let's look at each possible diagnosis.

1. SOMETHING'S WRONG WITH THE WORLD.

The sorry condition of our planet indicates that something has gone terribly wrong. The suffering we experience and the distress we sense in others indicate that suffering does not discriminate on the basis of race, social status, religion, or even morality. It can seem cruel, random, purposeless, grotesque, and wildly out of control. Bad things happen to people who try to be good, and good things happen to people who enjoy being bad.

The seeming unfairness of it all has struck close to each of us. I remember watching my grandmother as she was dying of cancer. Grandma and Grandpa Blohm moved in with our family. My mother, a registered nurse, took care of her during her final months. Mom administered the pain killer. Grandpa desperately wanted her to be healed. Then the day came when the hearse pulled up and took away her frail, wasted body. I knew she was in heaven, but it still hurt. I hated cancer--I still do.

As I sit here thinking of all the suffering that my friends, co-workers, family, neighbors, and church family have experienced, I can hardly believe the length of the list--and my list is incomplete. So often these people have suffered through no apparent fault of their own. An accident, a birth defect, a genetic disorder, a miscarriage, an abusive parent, chronic pain, a rebellious child, a severe illness, random

disease, the death of a spouse or a child, a broken relationship, a natural disaster. It just doesn't seem fair. From time to time I'm tempted to give in to frustration.

How do we resolve this? How do we live with the cold facts of life without denying reality or being overcome with despair? Couldn't God have created a world where nothing would ever go wrong? Couldn't He have made a world where people would never have the ability to make a bad choice or ever hurt another person? Couldn't He have made a world where mosquitos, weeds, and cancer would never exist. He could have--but He didn't.

The great gift of human freedom that He has given to us, the ability to choose, carries with it the risk of making wrong choices.

If you could choose between being a free thinking creature in a world where bad choices produce suffering, or being a robot in a world without pain, what would you decide? What kind of being would bring more honor to God? What kind of creature would love Him more?

We could have been created to be like the cute battery-operated dolls that say "I love you" when hugged. But God had other plans. He took a "risk" to create beings who could do the unthinkable-- rebel against their Creator.

What happened in paradise? Temptation, bad choices, and tragic consequences destroyed the tranquillity of Adam and Eve's existence. Genesis 2 and 3 detail how Satan tested their love for the Lord--and they failed. In biblical terms, that failure is called sin. And just as the AIDS virus infects a body, breaks down the body's immune system, and leads to death, so also sin spreads as a deadly infection that passes from one generation to the next. Each new generation inherits the effects of sin and the desire to sin (Rom. 1:18-32; 5:12,15, 18).

Not only did the entrance of sin into the world have devastating effects on the nature of human beings, but sin also brought about immediate and continual judgment from God. Genesis 3 relates how physical and spiritual death became a part of human existence (vv.3,19), childbirth became painful (v.16), the ground was cursed with weeds that would make man's work very difficult (vv.17-19), and

Adam and Eve were evicted from the special Garden where they had enjoyed intimate fellowship with God (vv.23,24).

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul described the whole creation of God as groaning and eagerly anticipating the time when it will be freed from the curse of decay and be remade, free from the effects of sin (Rom. 8:19-22).

Disease, disaster, and corruption are symptoms of a deeper problem--the human race has rebelled against the Creator. Every sorrow, grief, and agony are vivid reminders of our human predicament. Like a huge neon sign, the reality of suffering screams the message that the world is not the way God created it to be.

Therefore, the first and most basic answer to the problem of the existence of suffering is that it is the direct result of sin's entrance into the world. Pain alerts us that a spiritual disease is wracking our planet. Many times our troubles may be merely the side-effects of living in a fallen world, through no direct fault of our own.

2. SOMETHING'S WRONG WITH GOD'S CREATURES.

We can be targets of cruel acts from other people or from Satan's rebel army. Both fallen human beings and fallen spirit beings (angels who have rebelled) have the capacity to make decisions that damage themselves and others.

Suffering can be caused by people. As free (and sin-infected) creatures, people have made and will continue to make many bad choices in life. These bad choices often affect other people.

For example, one of Adam's sons, Cain, made a choice to kill his brother Abel (Gen. 4:7,8). Lamech boasted about his violence (vv.23,24). Sarai mistreated Hagar (Gen. 16:1-6). Laban swindled his nephew Jacob (Gen. 29:15-30). Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery (Gen. 37:12-36), and then Potiphar's wife falsely accused him of attempted rape and had him thrown into prison (Gen. 39). Pharaoh cruelly mistreated the Jewish slaves in Egypt (Ex. 1). King Herod slaughtered all the babies who lived in and around Bethlehem in an attempt to kill Jesus (Matt. 2:16-18).

The hurt that others inflict on us may be due to selfishness on their part. Or you may be the target of persecution because of your faith in Christ. Throughout history, people who have identified with the Lord have suffered at the hands of those who rebelled against God.

Before his conversion, Saul was a rabid anti-Christian who did all he could to make life miserable for believers--even working to have them put to death (Acts 7:54-8:3). But after his dramatic turn to the Lord Jesus, he bravely endured all types of persecution as he boldly proclaimed the gospel message (2 Cor. 4:7-12; 6:1-10). He could even say that the suffering he endured helped to make him more like Christ (Phil. 3:10).

Suffering can also be caused by Satan and demons. Job's life story is a vivid example of how a good person can suffer incredible tragedy because of satanic attack. God allowed Satan to take away Job's possessions, his family, and his health (Job 1,2).

I cringed even as I wrote the preceding sentence. Somehow, and for His reasons, God allowed Satan to devastate Job's life. We may tend to compare what God did to Job to a father who allows the neighborhood bully to beat up his children just to see if they would still love Dad afterward. But, as Job came to realize, that's not a fair assessment when speaking about our wise and loving God.

We know, though Job did not, that his life was a test case, a living testimonial to the trustworthiness of God. Job illustrated that a person can trust God and maintain integrity even when life falls apart (for whatever reason) because God is worth trusting. In the end, Job learned that even though he didn't understand what God was up to, he had plenty of reason to believe that God was not being unjust, cruel, sadistic, or unfair by allowing his life to be ripped apart (Job 42).

The apostle Paul experienced a physical problem that he attributed to Satan. He called it a "thorn in the flesh . . . , a messenger of Satan to buffet me" (2 Cor. 12:7). Paul prayed to be freed from the problem, but God didn't give him what he asked for. Instead, the Lord helped him to see how this difficulty could serve a good purpose. It made Paul humbly dependent on the Lord and put him in a position to experience His grace (vv.8-10).

Although most cases of sickness cannot be directly tied to Satan's work, the gospel accounts do record a few examples of suffering attributed to Satan, including a blind and mute man (Matt. 12:22) and a boy who suffered seizures (17:14-18).

3. SOMETHING'S WRONG WITH ME.

Too often when something goes wrong in our lives we immediately jump to the conclusion that God is whipping us because of some sin we've committed. That's not necessarily true. As we indicated in the previous points, much of the suffering that comes into our lives is because we live in a broken world inhabited by broken people and rebellious spirit beings.

Job's friends mistakenly thought that he was suffering because of sin in his life (Job 4:7,8; 8:1-6; 22:4,5; 36:17). Jesus' own disciples jumped to the wrong conclusion when they saw a blind man. They wondered if the man's eye problem was due to his personal sin or because of something his parents had done (John 9:1,2). Jesus told them that the man's physical problem was not related to his personal sin or the sin of his parents (v.3).

With these cautions in mind, we need to deal with the hard truth that some suffering *does* come as the direct consequence of sin--either as corrective discipline from God for those He loves, or punitive action by God upon rebels in His universe.

Correction. If you and I have placed our trust in Jesus Christ as our Savior, then we are children of God. As such, we are part of a family headed by a loving Father who trains and corrects us. He's not an abusive, sadistic parent who dishes out severe beatings because He gets some twisted pleasure out of it. Hebrews 12 states:

My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives. . . . Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened

us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness (Heb. 12:5,6,9,10).

And to the church in Laodicea, Jesus said, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent" (Rev. 3:19).

King David knew what it was like to experience the tough love of the Lord. After his adultery with Bathsheba and his conniving to ensure that her husband would be killed in battle, David did not repent until the prophet Nathan confronted him. Psalm 51 recounts David's struggle with guilt and his cry for forgiveness. In another psalm, David reflected on the effects of covering up and ignoring sin. He wrote, "When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me" (Ps. 32:3,4).

In 1 Corinthians 11:27-32, the apostle Paul warned believers that treating the things of the Lord lightly--partaking of the Lord's Supper without taking it seriously--will bring discipline. Paul explained that this discipline of the Lord was purposeful. He said, "But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world" (v.32).

Most of us can understand the principle that whom God loves He disciplines. We would expect a loving Father to correct us and call us to renew our obedience to Him.

Judgment. God also acts to deal with stubborn unbelievers who persist in doing evil. A person who has not received God's gift of salvation can expect to receive God's wrath at a future day of judgment and the danger of harsh judgment now if He so chooses.

The Lord brought the flood to destroy decadent humanity (Gen. 6). He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18,19). He sent plagues on the Egyptians (Ex. 7-12). He commanded Israel to completely destroy the pagans who inhabited the Promised Land (Deut. 7:1-3). He struck down the arrogant King Herod of New Testament times (Acts 12:19-23). And at the future day of judgment, God will deal out perfect justice to all those who reject His love and rule (2 Pet. 2:4-9).

In the here-and-now, however, we face inequities. For His all-wise reasons, God has chosen to delay His perfect justice. The psalm writer Asaph struggled with this apparent unfairness of life. He wrote about the wicked who were getting away with their evil deeds, even prospering, while many of the righteous were having troubles (Ps. 73). Concerning the prosperity of the wicked he said, "When I thought how to understand this, it was too painful for me--until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I understood their end" (vv.16,17). By thinking of the sovereign Lord of the universe, Asaph was able to get things back into perspective.

When we struggle with the reality that wicked people are literally "getting away with murder" and all sorts of immorality, we need to remember that "the Lord is . . . longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9).

The first part of the answer, then, to the problem of suffering is that God uses it to alert us to serious problems. Pain sounds the alarm that indicates something is wrong with the world, with humanity at large, and with you and me. But as we will see in the next section, God not only signals the problems, He also uses troubles to encourage us to find the solutions--in Him.

[Why Would a Good God Allow Suffering?](#)

TO DIRECT US

When a person turns away from God, suffering often gets the blame. But strangely, suffering also gets the credit when people describe what redirected their lives, helped them to see life more clearly, and caused their relationship with God to grow closer. How can similar circumstances have such radically different effects on people? The reasons lie deep within the people, not the events.

A well-known and outspoken media leader publicly denounced Christianity as "a religion for losers." But he has not always felt that way. As a young man he had Bible training, including a Christian prep school. When joking about the heavy indoctrination he received, he

said, "I think I was saved seven or eight times." But then a painful experience changed his outlook on life and God. His younger sister became very ill. He prayed for her healing, but after 5 years of suffering she died. He became disillusioned with a God who would allow that to happen. He said, "I began to lose my faith, and the more I lost it the better I felt."

What makes the difference between someone like him and a person like Joni Eareckson Tada? In *Where Is God When It Hurts?* Philip Yancey describes the gradual transformation that took place in Joni's attitude in the years after she was paralyzed in a diving accident.

"At first, Joni found it impossible to reconcile her condition with her belief in a loving God. . . . The turning to God was very gradual. A melting in her attitude from bitterness to trust dragged out over three years of tears and violent questioning" (pp.133,134).

A turning point came the evening that a close friend, Cindy, told her, "Joni, you aren't the only one. Jesus knows how you feel--why, He was paralyzed too." Cindy described how Jesus was fastened to the cross, paralyzed by the nails.

Yancey then observed, "The thought intrigued Joni and, for a moment, took her mind off her own pain. It had never occurred to her that God might have felt the same piercing sensations that now racked her body. The realization was profoundly comforting" (p.134).

Instead of continuing to search for why the devastating accident occurred, Joni has been forced to depend more heavily on the Lord and to look at life from a long-range perspective.

Yancey further says about Joni, "She wrestled with God, yes, but she did not turn away from Him. . . . Joni now calls her accident a 'glorious intruder,' and claims it was the best thing that ever happened to her. God used it to get her attention and direct her thoughts toward Him" (pp.137,138).

This principle that suffering can produce healthy dependence on God is taught by the apostle Paul in one of his letters to the church in Corinth. He wrote:

For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead (2 Cor. 1:8,9).

A similar idea can be found in Paul's comments about his physical troubles. The Lord told Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9). Then Paul added, "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (v.10).

Suffering has a way of showing how weak our own resources really are. It forces us to rethink priorities, values, goals, dreams, pleasures, the source of real strength, and our relationships with people and with God. It has a way of directing our attention to spiritual realities--if we don't turn from God instead.

Suffering forces us to evaluate the direction of our lives. We can choose to despair by focusing on our present problems, or we can choose to hope by recognizing God's long-range plan for us (Rom. 5:5; 8:18,28; Heb. 11).

Of all the passages in the Bible, Hebrews 11 most reassures me that whether life is grand or grotesque, my response needs to be one of faith in the wisdom, power, and control of God. No matter what, I have good reason to trust Him--just as the great men and women of old hoped in Him.

For example, Hebrews 11 reminds us about Noah, a man who spent 120 years waiting for God to fulfill His promise of a devastating flood (Gen. 6:3). Abraham waited many agonizing years before the child whom God had promised was finally born. Joseph was sold into slavery and wrongfully imprisoned, but he finally saw how God used all the apparent evil in his life for a good purpose (Gen. 50:20). Moses waited until he was 80 years old before God used him to help deliver the Jews from Egypt. And even then, leading those faith-deficient people was a struggle (see Exodus).

Hebrews 11 lists people like Gideon, Samson, David, and Samuel, who saw great victories as they lived for the Lord. But in the middle of verse 35 the mood changes. Suddenly we are face-to-face with people who had to endure incredible suffering--people who died without seeing why God allowed them to undergo such tragedies. These individuals were tortured, jeered, flogged, stoned, cut in half, stabbed, mistreated, and forced to live as outcasts (vv.35-38). God had planned that only in the long-range view of eternity would their faithfulness during hardship be rewarded (vv.39,40).

Pain forces us to look beyond our immediate circumstances. Suffering drives us to ask the big questions of "Why am I here?" and "What's the purpose of my life?" By pursuing those questions and finding the answers in the God of the Bible, we will find the stability we need to endure even the worst that life can inflict because we know that this present life is not all there is. If we know that a sovereign God is standing over all of human history and weaving it all together in a beautiful tapestry that will ultimately glorify Him, then we can see things in better perspective.

In Romans 8:18 the apostle Paul wrote, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." Paul was not making light of our troubles, but he was telling believers to see our present troubles in light of all eternity. Our problems may indeed be heavy, even crushing. But Paul says that when compared to the incredible glories that await those who love God, even the darkest and most burdensome circumstances of life will fade by comparison.

We need to take time to look at one more example, perhaps the most significant illustration we could consider. The day that Christ hung on the cross is now referred to as Good Friday. At the time, it was anything but a good day. It was a day of intense suffering, anguish, darkness, and gloom. It was a day when Jesus felt all alone. It was a day when God seemed absent and silent, when evil seemed to triumph, and hopes were dashed. But then came Sunday. Jesus rose from the grave. That awesome event put Friday in a different light. The resurrection gave a whole new meaning to what happened on the cross. Instead of being a time of defeat, it became a day of triumph.

We too can look ahead. We can endure our dark "Fridays" and be able to look on them as "good" because we serve the God of Sunday.

So when troubles strike, and they will, remember this: God uses such situations to direct us to Him and to the long-range view of life. He calls for us to trust, to hope, to wait.

Why Would a Good God Allow Suffering?

TO SHAPE US

Athletic coaches like to use the phrase "No pain, no gain." As a high school track star (Okay, maybe I wasn't that great, but I tried hard!), I heard coaches remind us again and again that the tough practice sessions would pay off when we began to compete. They were right. Oh, we didn't always win, but our hard work did produce obvious benefits.

I learned a lot about myself during those years. And now I'm learning even more as I discipline myself to jog daily. Many days I would just as soon forget it. I don't want to have to feel the pain of stretching exercises. I would rather not push my body's "radiator system" to the extreme. I would just as soon not have to battle fatigue as I go up the hills. So why do I do it? The gain is worth the pain. My blood pressure and pulse rate are kept low, my middle isn't expanding, and I feel more alert and healthy.

Exercise may have obvious benefits, but what about pain that we don't choose? What about illness, disease, accidents, and emotional agony? What kind of gain can come from those? Is the gain *really* worth the pain?

Let's consider what a fellow-sufferer had to say in Romans 5:3,4. The apostle Paul wrote, ". . . we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope."

Paul introduced his statement about the benefits of suffering by saying "we glory in tribulations." How could he say that we should rejoice or

be happy that we are having to endure some painful tragedy? He certainly was not telling us to celebrate our troubles; rather, he was telling us to rejoice about what God can and will do for us and for His glory *through* our trials. Paul's statement encourages us to celebrate the end product, not the painful process itself. He did not mean we are to get some sort of morbid joy out of death, cancer, deformity, financial reversals, a broken relationship, or a tragic accident. All these things are awful--a dark reminder that we live in a world that has been corrupted by the curse of sin's effects.

The apostle James also wrote about how we should rejoice in the end result of our troubles. He said, "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing" (1:2-4).

As we combine the truths of these two passages, we can see how the good and praiseworthy products of suffering are patient perseverance, maturity of character, and hope. God can use the hardships of life to shape us to be more mature in the faith, more godly, more Christlike.

When we trust Christ as our Savior, the Lord does not suddenly zap us so that we become perfect people. What He does is remove sin's penalty and set us on the road that leads to heaven. Life then becomes a time of character development as we learn more about God and how we are to please Him. Suffering has a way of dramatically forcing us to deal with the deeper issues of life. By doing so, we grow stronger and gain maturity.

My grandfather, Dr. M. R. De Haan, spoke about the shaping process of our lives in his book [Broken Things](#). He wrote:

The greatest sermons I have ever heard were not preached from pulpits but from sickbeds. The greatest, deepest truths of God's Word have often been revealed not by those who preached as a result of their seminary preparation and education, but by those humble souls who have gone through the seminary of affliction and have learned experientially the deep things of the ways of God.

The most cheerful people I have met, with few exceptions, have been those who had the least sunshine and the most pain and suffering in their lives. The most grateful people I have met were not those who traveled a pathway of roses all their lives through, but those who were confined, because of circumstances, to their homes, often to their beds, and had learned to depend upon God as only such Christians know how to do. The grippers are usually, I have observed, those who enjoy excellent health. The complainers are those who have the least to complain about, and those dear saints of God who have refreshed my heart again and again as they preached from sickbed-pulpits have been the men and women who have been the most cheerful and the most grateful for the blessings of almighty God (pp.43,44).

How have you responded to the difficulties of life? Have you become bitter or better? Have you grown in your faith or turned away from God? Have you become more Christlike in your character? Have you let it shape you and conform you to the image of God's Son?

How do all things work together for good?

Perhaps the most quoted part of the Bible during a time of pain and suffering is Romans 8:28. It reads, "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose." This verse has often been misunderstood and perhaps misused, but its truth can bring a great deal of comfort.

The context of Romans 8 emphasizes what God is doing for us. The indwelling Holy Spirit gives us spiritual life (v.9), reassures us that we are children of God (v.16), and helps us with our prayers during our times of weakness (vv.26,27). Romans 8 also puts our sufferings in the bigger picture of what God is doing--that God is working out His plan of redemption (vv.18-26). Verses 28 through 39 reassure us of God's love for us, that no one or no thing could ever keep God from accomplishing what He wants to do, and that nothing could ever separate us from His love.

Properly viewed in the context of Romans 8, then, verse 28 powerfully reassures us that God is working on behalf of all who have

trusted His Son as Savior. The verse does not promise that we will understand all the events of life or that after a time of testing we will be blessed with good things in this life. But it does reassure us that God is working out His good plan through our lives. He is shaping us and our circumstances to bring glory to Himself.

Author Ron Lee Davis writes in his book *Becoming a Whole Person in a Broken World*, "The good news is not that God will make our circumstances come out the way we like, but that God can weave even our disappointments and disasters into His eternal plan. The evil that happens to us can be transformed into God's good. Romans 8:28 is God's guarantee that if we love God, our lives can be used to achieve His purposes and further His kingdom" (p.122).

"But," you may ask, "how can God be in control when life seems so out of control? How can He be working things together for His glory and our ultimate good?" In his book *Why Us?* Warren Wiersbe states that God "proves His sovereignty, not by intervening constantly and preventing these events, but by ruling and overruling them so that even tragedies end up accomplishing His ultimate purposes" (p.136).

As the sovereign Lord of the universe, God is using all of life to develop our maturity and Christlikeness, and to further His eternal plan. In order to accomplish those purposes, however, God wants to use us to help others, and He wants other people to help us. That's what the next section is all about.

[Why Would a Good God Allow Suffering?](#)

TO UNITE US

Pain and suffering seem to have a special ability to show us how much we need each other. Our struggles remind us how fragile we really are. Even the weakness of others can bolster us when our own strength is sapped.

This truth becomes very real to me each time I meet with a small group of church friends for prayer and fellowship. During those regular times together, we have shared one another's burdens for a

sick child, the loss of a job, workplace tensions, a rebellious child, a miscarriage, hostility among family members, depression, everyday stresses, an unsaved family member, tough decisions, neighborhood crime, battles with sin, and much more. Many times at the end of those meetings I have praised the Lord for the encouragement that we have given to one another. We have been drawn closer and we have been strengthened as we have faced the struggles of life together.

These kinds of personal experiences in light of Scripture remind me of two key truths:

- [1. Suffering helps us to see our need of other believers.](#)
- [2. Suffering helps us to meet the needs of others as we allow Christ to live through us.](#)

Let's take a look at each of these ways God uses pain and suffering for the purpose of uniting us with other believers in Christ.

1. SUFFERING HELPS US TO SEE OUR NEED OF OTHER BELIEVERS.

In describing the unity of all believers in Christ, the apostle Paul used the analogy of a human body (1 Cor. 12). He said that we need each other to function properly. Paul described the situation this way: "And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually" (vv.26,27).

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul spoke of Christ, "from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love" (Eph. 4:16).

When we begin to recognize all that other believers have to offer us, then we will realize how much can be gained by reaching out to them when we are going through a time of struggle. When troubles seem to knock out our strength, we can lean on other believers to help us find new strength in the Lord's power.

2. SUFFERING HELPS US TO MEET THE NEEDS OF OTHERS AS WE ALLOW CHRIST TO LIVE THROUGH US.

In 2 Corinthians 1, the apostle Paul wrote, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God" (vv.3,4).

As we saw in the previous section, we need each other because we have something valuable to offer each other. We have spiritual insights and wisdom that we have learned as we have undergone trials of all sorts. We know the value of the personal presence of a loving person. When we experience the comfort of God during a troubling situation, we then have an ability to identify with those people who undergo similar situations.

While preparing to write this booklet, I read about the experiences of people who have suffered greatly, and I spoke with others who were familiar with pain. I searched to find out who helped them most in their time of trouble. The answer again and again has been this: another person who had undergone a similar experience. That person can empathize more fully, and his or her comments reflect understanding that comes by experience. To someone who is burdened down, it often sounds shallow and patronizing to hear another say, "I understand what you are going through," unless that person has gone through a similar situation.

Even though the best comforters are those who have undergone similar situations and have grown spiritually stronger through them, that does not mean that the rest of us are off the hook. All of us have a responsibility to do all we can to empathize, to try to understand, to try to comfort. Galatians 6:2 tells us, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." And Romans 12:15 states, "Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep."

Dr. Paul Brand, an expert on the disease of leprosy, wrote, "When suffering strikes, those of us standing close by are flattened by the shock. We fight back the lumps in our throats, march resolutely to the hospital for visits, mumble a few cheerful words, perhaps look up articles on what to say to the grieving.

"But when I ask patients and their families, 'Who helped you in your suffering?' I hear a strange, imprecise answer. The person described rarely has smooth answers and a winsome, effervescent personality. It is someone quiet, understanding, who listens more than talks, who does not judge or even offer much advice. 'A sense of presence.' 'Someone there when I needed him.' A hand to hold, an understanding, bewildered hug. A shared lump in the throat" (*Fearfully and Wonderfully Made*, pp.203,204).

It's clear--God made us to be dependent on one another. We have much to offer those in pain, and others have much to offer us as we endure troubles. As we develop that unity, we will experience greater comfort when we recognize that God uses suffering to alert us to the problems of sin, He uses difficulty to direct us to Him, and He can even use problems to make us more like Christ.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

Right now you may be overwhelmed by pain. The thought of trying to help someone else may seem impossible. At some point along the way, though, as you receive God's comfort, you will be ready to give comfort (2 Cor. 1). In fact, reaching out to help others may be an important part of the process of your own emotional healing.

Or maybe you have read this booklet with the hope that you will be better able to help a hurting friend or loved one. The suggestions in this section are designed for you as well.

Helping others is risky. Our help may not always be welcomed. We may sometimes say the wrong things. But try to help we must. Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) reminds us that we are responsible to help the hurting people we encounter. Here are some suggestions:

- Don't wait for someone else to act first.
- Be physically present with them if possible and touch their hand or give an appropriate hug.
- Focus on their needs and not on your own discomfort with not having adequate answers.

- Allow them to express their feelings. Don't condemn their emotions.
- Learn about their problem.
- Don't pretend that you never struggle.
- Keep your words brief.
- Avoid saying, "You shouldn't feel that way," or, "You know what you should do."
- Assure them of your prayers.
- Pray! Ask God to help you and them.
- Keep in touch.
- Help them dispel false guilt by assuring them that suffering and sin are not inseparable twins.
- Help them find forgiveness in Christ if they are suffering due to sin, or if they become aware of some sin as they reflect on their lives.
- Encourage them to recall God's faithfulness in times past.
- Focus on Christ's example and help.
- Remind them that God loves us and cares for us and that He is in control.
- Encourage them to take one day at a time.
- Encourage them to reach out for the help they need (friends, family, pastor).
- Help them to realize that coping with troubles takes time.
- Remind them of God's shepherding love (Ps. 23).
- Remind them of God's control over the universe, both the big and small events of life.
- Don't ignore their problem.
- Don't be artificial in trying to "cheer them up." Be genuine. Be the friend you were to them before trouble hit.
- Show them the love you would like other people to show you if you were in their situation.
- Be a good listener.
- Acknowledge how much they hurt.
- Give them time to heal. Don't rush the process.

BETTER THAN ANSWERS

We cry out for complete answers. God offers Himself instead. And that's enough. If we know that we can trust Him, we don't need full explanations. It's enough to know that our pain and suffering are not meaningless. It's enough to know that God still rules the universe and that He really does care about us as individuals.

The greatest evidence of God's concern for us can be found by looking at Jesus Christ. God loved our suffering world so much that He sent His Son to agonize and die for us, to free us from being sentenced to eternal sorrow (John 3:16-18). Because of Jesus, we can avoid the worst of all pain, the pain of separation from God-forever. And because of Christ, we can endure even the worst of tragedies now because of the strength He puts within us and the hope He sets before us.

The first step in coping realistically with the problem of suffering is to recognize its roots in the universal problem of sin. Have you recognized how much Jesus suffered on the cross for you to free you from the penalty of sin? Put your trust in Him. Receive His free gift of forgiveness. Only in Him will you find a lasting solution to the problem of pain in your life and in the world.

WHY WE BELIEVE--Evidences For Christian Faith

Money and credit cards are missing. Dresser drawers appear rifled. Family heirlooms are gone. A lock is broken. Footprints remain. What happened? Did we misplace the lost items? Could a neighbor child wearing his father's shoes have been playing in our bushes? Should we call police? What if investigators accuse us of trying to collect on insurance? How do we overcome doubt in ourselves and others? What is at stake? What will we do?

Similar questions need to be answered by those who consider the converging lines of evidence summarized in the following pages. While the issues are matters of faith, the evidence is real, and the choices are our own.

Martin R. De Haan II

10 REASONS TO BELIEVE CHRIST ROSE FROM THE DEAD

1. A public execution assured His death.

During the Jewish Feast of Passover, Jesus was swept away by an angry crowd into a Roman hall of justice. As He stood before Pilate, the governor of Judea, religious leaders accused Jesus of claiming to be the king of the Jews. The crowd demanded His death. Jesus was beaten, whipped, and sentenced to a public execution. On a hill outside of Jerusalem, He was crucified between two criminals. Brokenhearted friends and mocking enemies shared in His deathwatch. As the Sabbath neared, Roman soldiers were sent to finish the execution. To quicken death, they broke the legs of the two criminals. But when they came to Jesus they did not break His legs, because from experience they knew He was already dead. As a final precaution, however, they thrust a spear into His side. It would take more than resuscitation for Him to ever trouble them again.

2. A high official secured the gravesite.

The next day, religious leaders again met with Pilate. They said Jesus had predicted He would rise in 3 days. To assure that the disciples could not conspire in a resurrection hoax, Pilate ordered the official seal of Rome to be attached to the tomb to put grave robbers on notice. To enforce the order, soldiers stood guard. Any disciple who wanted to tamper with the body would have had to get by them, which wouldn't have been easy. The Roman

guards had good reason for staying alert--the penalty for falling asleep while on watch was death.

3. In spite of guards, the grave was found empty.

On the morning after the Sabbath, some of Jesus' followers went to the grave to anoint His body. But when they arrived, they were surprised at what they found. The huge stone that had been rolled into place over the entrance to the tomb had been moved, and Jesus' body was gone. As word got out, two disciples rushed to the burial site. The tomb was empty except for Jesus' burial wrappings, which were lying neatly in place. In the meantime, some of the guards had gone into Jerusalem to tell the Jewish officials that they had fainted in the presence of a supernatural being that rolled the stone away. And when they woke up, the tomb was empty. The officials paid the guards a large sum of money to lie and say that the disciples stole the body while the soldiers slept. They assured the guards that if the report of the missing body got back to the governor they would intercede on their behalf.

4. Many people claimed to have seen Him alive.

About AD 55, the apostle Paul wrote that the resurrected Christ had been seen by Peter, the 12 apostles, more than 500 people (many of whom were still alive at the time of his writing), James, and himself (1 Cor. 15:5-8). By making such a public statement, he gave critics a chance to check out his claims for themselves. In addition, the New Testament begins its history of the followers of Christ by saying that Jesus "presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by [the apostles] during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3).

5. His apostles were dramatically changed.

When one of Jesus' inner circle defected and betrayed Him, the other apostles ran for their lives. Even Peter, who earlier had insisted that he was ready to die for his teacher, lost heart and denied that he knew Jesus. But the apostles went through a dramatic change. Within a few weeks, they were standing face to face with the ones who had crucified their leader. Their spirit was like iron. They became unstoppable in their determination to sacrifice everything for the one they called Savior and Lord. Even after they were imprisoned, threatened, and forbidden to speak in the name of Jesus, the apostles said to the Jewish leaders, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). After they were beaten for disobeying the orders of the

Jewish council, these once-cowardly apostles "did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ" (Acts 5:42).

6. Witnesses were willing to die for their claims.

History is full of martyrs. Countless men and women have died for their beliefs. For that reason, it is not that significant to point out that the first disciples were willing to suffer and die for their faith. But it is significant that while many will die for what they believe to be the truth, few if any will die for what they know to be a lie. That psychological fact is important because the disciples of Christ did not die for deeply held beliefs about which they could have been honestly mistaken. They died for their claims to have seen Jesus alive and well after His resurrection. They died for their claim that Jesus Christ had not only died for their sins but that He had risen bodily from the dead to show that He was like no other spiritual leader who had ever lived.

7. Jewish believers changed their day of worship.

The Sabbath day of rest and worship was basic to the Jewish way of life. Any Jew who did not honor the Sabbath was guilty of breaking the law of Moses. Yet Jewish followers of Christ began worshiping with Gentile believers on a new day. The first day of the week, the day on which they believed Christ had risen from the dead, replaced the Sabbath. For a Jew, it reflected a major change of life. The new day, along with the Christian conversion rite of baptism, declared that those who believed Christ had risen from the dead were ready for more than a renewal of Judaism. They believed that the death and resurrection of Christ had cleared the way for a new relationship with God. The new way was based not on the law, but on the sin-bearing, life-giving help of a resurrected Savior.

8. Although it was unexpected, it was clearly predicted.

The disciples were caught off guard. They expected their Messiah to restore the kingdom to Israel. Their minds were so fixed on the coming of a messianic political kingdom that they didn't anticipate the events essential to the salvation of their souls. They must have thought Christ was speaking in symbolic language when He kept saying over and over that it was necessary for Him to go to Jerusalem to die and be resurrected from the dead. Coming from one who spoke in parables, they missed the obvious until after it was all over. In the process, they also overlooked the prophet Isaiah's prediction of a suffering servant who would bear the sins of Israel, being led like a lamb to the slaughter, before God "prolong[ed] His days" (Isa. 53:10).

9. It was a fitting climax to a miraculous life.

While Jesus hung on a Roman cross, crowds mocked Him. He helped others, but could He help Himself? Was the miracle suddenly coming to an end? It seemed like such an unexpected ending for someone who began His public life by turning water into wine. During His 3-year ministry, He walked on water; healed the sick; opened blind eyes, deaf ears, and tongue-tied mouths; restored crippled limbs; cast out demons; stilled a violent storm; and raised the dead. He asked questions wise men couldn't answer. He taught profound truths with the simplest of comparisons. And He confronted hypocrites with words that exposed their coverup. If all this was true, should we be surprised that His enemies didn't have the last word?

10. It fits the experience of those who trust Him.

The apostle Paul wrote, "If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you" (Rom. 8:11). This was the experience of Paul, whose heart was dramatically changed by the resurrected Christ. It is also the experience of people all over the world who have "died" to their old ways so that Christ can live His life through them. This spiritual power is not evident in those who try to add belief in Christ to their old life. It is seen only in those who are willing to "die" to their old life to make room for the rule of Christ. It is apparent only in those who respond to the overwhelming evidence for Christ's resurrection by acknowledging His lordship in their heart.

RBC booklets available on this topic:

Did Christ Really Rise From The Dead? (Q0203)

Who Is This Man Who Says He's God? (Q0205)

Is There Life After Death? (Q1205)

10 REASONS TO BELIEVE IN THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

1. The Credibility of its Founder.

Christ said He came from heaven to fulfill prophecy, to die for our sins, and to bring to His Father all who believe in Him. Logic says that He was either

a liar, a lunatic, a legend, or the Lord of heaven. His first-century followers drew their own conclusions. They said they saw Him walk on water, still a storm, heal crippled limbs, feed 5,000 with a few pieces of bread and fish, live a blameless life, die a terrible death, and alive again. During His ministry, when some of Jesus' followers took issue with His teachings and left, He asked those closest to Him if they too wanted to leave. Peter spoke for the others when he said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Jn. 6:68-69).

2. The reliability of its book.

Written over a period of about 1,600 years by 40 different authors, the book on which the Christian faith rests tells one story that begins with creation and concludes on the threshold of eternity. The integrity of its historical and geographical record is supported by archeology. The accuracy with which it has been copied and handed down to us has been confirmed by the Dead Sea Scrolls of Qumran. Originating neither in the East nor the West, but in the Middle East--the cradle of civilization--the Bible continues to speak not only with spiritual power but with convincing prophetic accuracy.

3. Its explanations for life.

All religious systems attempt to give meaning to our existence. All attempt to explain our thirst for significance, the problem of pain, and the inevitability of death. All religions attempt to apply the design of the cosmos to our individual lives. It is the Christian faith, however, that reflects the caring attention to detail so evident in the species and ecosystems of the natural world. It is Christ who speaks of a Father who takes note of every sparrow that falls, a Father who numbers even the hairs of our head (Mt. 10:29-31). It is Christ who reveals a God who shows how much He cares for all that He has created. It is Christ who clothed Himself in our humanity to feel what we feel, and then to suffer and die in our place. It is Christ who reveals a God who cares as much about His creation as the design and detail of the natural world indicates (Ps. 19:1-6; Rom. 1:16-25).

4. Its continuity with the past.

The Christian faith offers continuity with our deepest ancestral roots. Those who trust Christ are accepting the same Creator and Lord worshiped by Adam, Abraham, Sarah, and Solomon. Jesus didn't reject the past. He's the God of the past (Jn. 1:1-14). When He lived among us, He showed us how to live according to the original plan. When He died, He fulfilled the whole Old

Testament sacrificial system. And when He rose from the dead, the salvation He offered fulfilled God's promise to Abraham that through his descendant He would bring blessing to the whole world. The Christian faith is not new with Christ. From Genesis to Revelation it is one story. It is His story--and ours (Acts 2:22-39; 1 Cor. 15:1-8).

5. Its foundational claim.

The first Christians were not driven by political or religious dissent. Their primary issues were not moral or social. They were not well-credentialed theologians or social philosophers. They were witnesses. They risked their lives to tell the world that with their own eyes they had seen an innocent man die and then miraculously walk among them 3 days later (Acts 5:17-42). Their argument was very concrete. Jesus was crucified under the Roman governor Pontius Pilate. His body was buried and sealed in a borrowed tomb. Guards were posted to prevent grave tampering. Yet after 3 days the tomb was empty and witnesses were risking their lives to declare that He was alive.

6. Its power to change lives.

Not only were the first disciples dramatically changed, but so was one of their worst enemies. Paul was transformed from a Christian killer into one of their chief advocates (Gal. 1:11-24). Later he reflected the changes that had occurred in others as well when he wrote to the church in Corinth, "Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 6:9-11 NIV).

7. Its analysis of human nature.

The Bible says that society's real problems are problems of the heart. In an age of information and technology, failures of character have scandalized institutions of family, government, science, industry, religion, education, and the arts. In the most sophisticated society the world has ever known, our national reputation is marred by problems of racial prejudice, addiction, abuse, divorce, and sexually transmitted disease. Many want to believe that our problems are rooted in ignorance, diet, and government. But to our generation and all others, Jesus said, "For out of the heart proceed evil

thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man" (Mt. 15:19-20).

8. Its view of human achievement.

Generation after generation has hoped for the best. We fought wars that would end all wars. We developed educational theories that would produce enlightened, nonviolent children. We conceived technologies that would deliver us from the oppressive slavery of work. Yet we are as close as ever to what the New Testament describes as an endtime marked by wars and rumors of war, earthquakes, disease, loss of affection, and spiritual deception (Mt. 24:5-31; 2 Tim. 3:1-5).

9. Its impact on society.

A carpenter rabbi from Nazareth changed the world. Calendars and dated documents bear silent witness to His birth. From rooftops, necklaces, and earrings, the sign of the cross bears visual witness to His death. The Western world-view, which provided a basis for social morality, scientific methodology, and a work ethic that fueled industry, had roots in basic Christian values. Social relief agencies, whether in the West or East, are not fueled by the values of Hinduism, Buddhism, atheism, or secular agnosticism, but by the direct or residual values of the Bible.

10. Its offer of salvation.

Alternative religious views have saviors who remain in the grave. No other system offers everlasting life as a gift to those who trust One who has overcome death for them. No other system offers assurance of forgiveness, eternal life, and adoption into the family of God by calling on and trusting Someone in the same way a drowning person calls for and relies on the rescue of a lifeguard (Rom. 10:9-13). The salvation Christ offers does not depend on what we have done for Him, but on our acceptance of what He has done for us. Instead of moral and religious effort, this salvation requires a helpless admission of our sins. Instead of personal accomplishments of faith, it requires confession of failure. Unlike all other options of faith, Christ asks us to follow Him--not to merit salvation but as an expression of gratitude, love, and confidence in the One who has saved us (Eph. 2:8-10).

RBC booklets available on this topic:

Who Is This Man Who Says He's God? (Q0205)

What Is A Personal Relationship With God? (Q0103)

Do I Have The Right Kind Of Faith? (Q0603)

10 REASONS TO BELIEVE IN THE BIBLE

1. Its honesty.

The Bible is painfully honest. It shows Jacob, the father of its "chosen people," to be a deceiver. It describes Moses, the lawgiver, as an insecure, reluctant leader, who, in his first attempt to come to the aid of his own people, killed a man, and then ran for his life to the desert. It portrays David not only as Israel's most loved king, general, and spiritual leader, but as one who took another man's wife and then, to cover his own sin, conspired to have her husband killed. At one point, the Scriptures accuse the people of God, the nation of Israel, as being so bad that they made Sodom and Gomorrah look good by comparison (Ezek. 16:46-52). The Bible represents human nature as hostile to God. It predicts a future full of trouble. It teaches that the road to heaven is narrow and the way to hell is wide. Scripture was clearly not written for those who want simple answers or an easy, optimistic view of religion and human nature.

2. Its preservation.

Just as the modern state of Israel was emerging from thousands of years of dispersion, a bedouin shepherd discovered one of the most important archeological treasures of our time. In a cave of the northwest rim of the Dead Sea, a broken jar yielded documents that had been hidden for two millennia. Additional finds produced manuscripts that predated previous oldest copies by 1,000 years. One of the most important was a copy of Isaiah. It revealed a document that is essentially the same as the book of Isaiah that appears in our own Bibles. The Dead Sea scrolls emerged from the dust like a symbolic handshake to a nation coming home. They discredited the claims of those who believed that the original Bible had been lost to time and tampering.

3. Its claims for itself.

It's important to know what the Bible says about itself. If the authors of Scripture had not claimed to speak for God, it would be presumptuous for us to make that claim for them. We would also have a different kind of problem. We would have a collection of unsolved mysteries, embodied in historical and ethical literature. But we would not have a book that has inspired the building of countless churches and synagogues all over the world. A Bible that did not claim to speak in behalf of God would not have become foundational to the faith of hundreds of millions of Christians and Jews (2 Pet. 1:16-21). But with much supporting evidence and argument, the Bible's authors did claim to be inspired by God. Because millions have staked their present and eternal well-being on those claims, the Bible cannot be a good book if its authors consistently lied about their source of information.

4. Its miracles.

Israel's exodus from Egypt provided a historical basis for believing that God revealed Himself to Israel. If the Red Sea did not part as Moses said it did, the Old Testament loses its authority to speak in behalf of God. The New Testament is just as dependent upon miracles. If Jesus did not rise bodily from the dead, the apostle Paul admits that the Christian faith is built on a lie (1 Cor. 15:14-17). To show its credibility, the New Testament named its witnesses, and did so within a time-frame that enabled those claims to be tested (1 Cor. 15:1-8). Many of the witnesses ended up as martyrs, not for abstract moral or spiritual convictions but for their claim that Jesus had risen from the dead. While martyrdom is not unusual, the basis on which these people gave their lives is what's important. Many have died for what they believed to be the truth. But people do not die for what they know to be a lie.

5. Its unity.

Forty different authors writing over a period of 1,600 years penned the 66 books of the Bible. Four hundred silent years separated the 39 books of the Old Testament from the 27 of the New Testament. Yet, from Genesis to Revelation, they tell one unfolding story. Together they give consistent answers to the most important questions we can ask: Why are we here? How can we come to terms with our fears? How can we get along? How can we rise above our circumstances and keep hope alive? How can we make peace with our Maker? The Bible's consistent answers to these questions show that the Scriptures are not many books but one.

6. Its historical and geographical accuracy.

Down through the ages, many have doubted the historical and geographical accuracy of the Bible. Yet modern archeologists have repeatedly unearthed evidence of the people, places, and cultures described in the Scriptures. Time after time, the descriptions in the biblical record have been shown to be more reliable than the speculations of scholars. The modern visitor to the museums and lands of the Bible cannot help but come away impressed with the real geographical and historical backdrop of the biblical text.

7. Its endorsement by Christ.

Many have spoken well of the Bible, but no endorsement is as compelling as that of Jesus of Nazareth. He recommended the Bible not only by His words but by His life. In times of personal temptation, public teaching, and personal suffering, He made it clear that He believed the Old Testament Scriptures were more than a national tradition (Mt. 4:1-11; 5:17-19). He believed the Bible was a book about Himself. To His countrymen He said, "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life" (Jn. 5:39-40).

8. Its prophetic accuracy.

From the days of Moses, the Bible predicted events no one wanted to believe. Before Israel went into the Promised Land, Moses predicted that Israel would be unfaithful, that she would lose the land God was giving her, and that she would be dispersed throughout all the world, regathered, and then re-established (Dt. 28-31). Central to Old Testament prophecy was the promise of a Messiah who would save God's people from their sins and eventually bring judgment and peace to the whole world.

9. Its survival.

The books of Moses were written 500 years before the earliest Hindu Scriptures. Moses wrote Genesis 2,000 years before Muhammad penned the Koran. During that long history, no other book has been as loved or as hated as the Bible. No other book has been so consistently bought, studied, and quoted as this book. While millions of other titles come and go, the Bible is still the book by which all other books are measured. While often ignored by those who are uncomfortable with its teachings, it is still the central book of Western civilization.

10. Its power to change lives.

Unbelievers often point to those who claim to believe in the Bible without being changed by it. But history is also marked by those who have been bettered by this book. The Ten Commandments have been a source of moral direction to countless numbers of people. The Psalms of David have offered comfort in times of trouble and loss. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount has given millions an antidote for stubborn pride and proud legalism. Paul's description of love in 1 Corinthians 13 has softened angry hearts. The changed lives of people like the apostle Paul, Augustine, Martin Luther, John Newton, Leo Tolstoy, and C. S. Lewis illustrate the difference the Bible can make. Even entire nations or tribes, like the Celts of Ireland, the wild Vikings of Norway, or the Auca Indians of Ecuador, have been transformed by the Word of God and the unprecedented life and significance of Jesus Christ.

RBC booklets available on this topic:

Can I Really Trust The Bible? (Q0402)

Studies In Contrasts (Q0403)

How Can I Understand The Bible? (Q0401)

10 REASONS TO BELIEVE IN THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

1. The inevitability of faith.

Everyone believes in something. No one can endure the stress and cares of life without faith in something that cannot ultimately be proven. Atheists cannot prove there is no God. Pantheists cannot prove that everything is God. Pragmatists cannot prove that what will count for them in the future is what works for them now. Nor can agnostics prove that it is impossible to know one way or the other. Faith is unavoidable, even if we choose to believe only in ourselves. What is to be decided is what evidence we think is pertinent, how we are going to interpret that evidence, and who or what we are willing to believe in (Lk. 16:16).

2. The limitations of science.

Scientific method is limited to a process defined by that which is measurable and repeatable. By definition, it cannot speak to issues of ultimate origin, meaning, or morality. For such answers, science is dependent on the values and personal beliefs of those who use it. Science, therefore, has great potential for both good and evil. It can be used to make vaccines or poisons, nuclear power plants or nuclear weapons. It can be used to clean up the environment or to pollute it. It can be used to argue for God or against Him. Science by itself offers no moral guidance or values to govern our lives. All science can do is show us how natural law works, while telling us nothing about its origins.

3. The problems of evolution.

Some have assumed that an evolutionary explanation of life would make God unnecessary. This overlooks some problems. Even if we assume that scientists will someday find enough "missing links" to confirm that life appeared and developed gradually over great periods of time, laws of probability would still show the need for a Creator. As a result, many scientists who believe in evolution believe also that the universe in all of its immensity and complexity did not "just happen." Many feel compelled to acknowledge the possibility or even likelihood of an intelligent designer who provided the ingredients for life and set in motion the laws by which it developed.

4. The habits of the heart.

Mankind has been described as incurably religious. In unguarded moments of trouble or surprise, in prayer or in profanity, references to deity persist. Those who would dismiss such thoughts as bad habits or social vices are left with unanswerable questions. Denying the existence of God does not dispel the mysteries of life. Attempts to exclude God from the language of civil life does not eliminate the persistent longing for more than this life has to offer (Eccl. 3:11). There is something about truth, beauty, and love that makes our hearts ache. Even in our anger with a God who would permit injustice and pain, we draw upon a moral conscience to argue that life is not as it ought to be (Rom. 2:14-15). Even unwillingly, we are drawn to something that is more, rather than less, than ourselves.

5. The background of Genesis.

On first reading, the opening words of the Bible seem to assume the existence of God. Genesis, however, was written at a point of time in

history. Moses wrote, "In the beginning God" after Israel's exodus from Egypt. He wrote after miraculous events that were said to have been witnessed by millions of Jews and Egyptians. From the Exodus to the coming of Messiah, the God of the Bible rests His case on events witnessed in real time and locations. Anyone who doubted the claims could visit real places and people to check out the evidence for themselves.

6. The nation of Israel.

Israel is often used as an argument against God. Many find it difficult to believe in a God who would be partial to a "chosen people." Others find it even harder to believe in a God who would not protect His "chosen nation" from the boxcars, gas chambers, and ovens of Auschwitz and Dachau. Yet from the beginning of Old Testament history, Israel's future was prewritten. Together with other prophets, Moses predicted not only Israel's possession of the land but also her unparalleled suffering and dispersion throughout the whole earth, her eventual repentance, and then finally her last-days restoration (Dt. 28-34; Isa. 2:1-5; Ezek. 37-38).

7. The claims of Christ.

Many who doubt the existence of God have tried to reassure themselves with the thought, "If God wanted us to believe in Him, He would appear to us." According to the Bible, that is what God has done. Writing in the 7th century bc, the prophet Isaiah said that God would give His people a sign. A virgin would bear a son who would be called "God with us" (Isa. 7:14; Mt. 1:23). Isaiah said this Son would be called, "Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6). The prophet also said that this child would die for His people's sins before seeing His life prolonged and honored by God (Isa. 53). According to the New Testament, Jesus claimed to be that Messiah. Under the oversight of a Roman governor named Pontius Pilate, He was crucified on charges that He claimed to be the king of Israel and that He had represented Himself as being equal with God (Jn. 5:18).

8. The evidence of miracles.

The reports of the first followers of Jesus agree that He did more than just claim to be the long-awaited Messiah. These witnesses said He won their trust by healing paralytics, walking on water, and then voluntarily dying a painful, undeserved death, before rising from the dead (1 Cor. 15:1-8). Most compelling was their claim that many witnesses had seen and talked to Christ after finding His tomb empty and before watching Him ascend visibly into the clouds. These witnesses didn't have anything on earth to gain by

their claims. They had no hopes of material wealth or power. Many became martyrs, claiming to the end that the long-awaited Messiah of Israel had lived among them, that He had become a sacrifice for sin, and that He had risen from the dead to assure them of His ability to bring them to God.

9. The details of nature.

Some who believe in God do not take His existence seriously. They reason that a God great enough to create the universe would be too big to be concerned about us. Jesus, however, confirmed what the design and detail of the natural world suggest. He showed that God is great enough to care about the smallest details of our lives. He spoke of one who not only knows every move we make but also the motives and thoughts of our heart. Jesus taught that God knows the number of hairs on our head, the concerns of our heart, and even the condition of a fallen sparrow (Ps. 139; Mt. 6).

10. The voice of experience.

The Bible says that God designs the circumstances of our lives in a way that will prompt us to look for Him (Acts 17:26). For those who do reach out for Him, the Scriptures also say that He is close enough to be found (v.27). According to the apostle Paul, it is God in whom "we live and move and have our being" (v.28). The Bible makes it just as clear, however, that we must reach out for God on His terms rather than our own. He promises to be found, not by just anyone but by those who admit their own need and are willing to trust Him rather than themselves.

RBC booklets available on this topic:

How Can I Know There Is A God? (Q0101)

Do Christians Believe In Three Gods? (Q0107)

Who Is This Man Who Says He's God? (Q0205)

10 REASONS TO BELIEVE IN A GOD WHO ALLOWS SUFFERING

1. Suffering comes with the freedom to choose.

Loving parents long to protect their children from unnecessary pain. But wise parents know the danger of over-protection. They know that the freedom to choose is at the heart of what it means to be human, and that a

world without choice would be worse than a world without pain. Worse yet would be a world populated by people who could make wrong choices without feeling any pain. No one is more dangerous than the liar, thief, or killer who doesn't feel the harm he is doing to himself and to others (Gen. 2:15-17).

2. Pain can warn us of danger.

We hate pain, especially in those we love. Yet without discomfort, the sick wouldn't go to a doctor. Worn-out bodies would get no rest. Criminals wouldn't fear the law. Children would laugh at correction. Without pangs of conscience, the daily dissatisfaction of boredom, or the empty longing for significance, people who are made to find satisfaction in an eternal Father would settle for far less. The example of Solomon, lured by pleasure and taught by his pain, shows us that even the wisest among us tend to drift from good and from God until arrested by the resulting pain of our own shortsighted choices (Eccl. 1-12; Ps. 78:34-35; Rom. 3:10-18).

3. Suffering reveals what is in our hearts.

Suffering often occurs at the hand of others. But it has a way of revealing what is in our own hearts. Capacities for love, mercy, anger, envy, and pride can lie dormant until awakened by circumstances. Strength and weakness of heart is found not when everything is going our way but when flames of suffering and temptation test the mettle of our character. As gold and silver are refined by fire, and as coal needs time and pressure to become a diamond, the human heart is revealed and developed by enduring the pressure and heat of time and circumstance. Strength of character is shown not when all is well with our world but in the presence of human pain and suffering (Job 42:1-17; Rom. 5:3-5; Jas. 1:2-5; 1 Pet. 1:6-8).

4. Suffering takes us to the edge of eternity.

If death is the end of everything, then a life filled with suffering isn't fair. But if the end of this life brings us to the threshold of eternity, then the most fortunate people in the universe are those who discover, through suffering, that this life is not all we have to live for. Those who find themselves and their eternal God through suffering have not wasted their pain. They have let their poverty, grief, and hunger drive them to the Lord of eternity. They are the ones who will discover to their own unending joy why Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 5:1-12; Rom. 8:18-19).

5. Pain loosens our grip on this life.

In time, our work and our opinions are sought less and less. Our bodies become increasingly worse for the wear. Gradually they succumb to inevitable obsolescence. Joints stiffen and ache. Eyes grow dim. Digestion slows. Sleep becomes difficult. Problems loom larger and larger while options narrow. Yet, if death is not the end but the threshold of a new day, then the curse of old age is also a blessing. Each new pain makes this world less inviting and the next life more appealing. In its own way, pain paves the way for a graceful departure (Eccl. 12:1-14).

6. Suffering gives opportunity to trust God.

The most famous sufferer of all time was a man named Job. According to the Bible, Job lost his family to "a mighty wind," his wealth to war and fire, and his health to painful boils. Through it all, God never told Job why it was happening. As Job endured the accusations of his friends, heaven remained silent. When God finally did speak, He did not reveal that His archenemy Satan had challenged Job's motives for serving God. Neither did the Lord apologize for allowing Satan to test Job's devotion to God. Instead, God talked about mountain goats giving birth, young lions on the hunt, and ravens in the nest. He cited the behavior of the ostrich, the strength of the ox, and the stride of the horse. He cited the wonders of the heavens, the marvels of the sea, and the cycle of the seasons. Job was left to conclude that if God had the power and wisdom to create this physical universe, there was reason to trust that same God in times of suffering (Job 1-42).

7. God suffers with us in our suffering.

No one has suffered more than our Father in heaven. No one has paid more dearly for the allowance of sin into the world. No one has so continuously grieved over the pain of a race gone bad. No one has suffered like the One who paid for our sin in the crucified body of His own Son. No one has suffered more than the One who, when He stretched out His arms and died, showed us how much He loved us. It is this God who, in drawing us to Himself, asks us to trust Him when we are suffering and when our own loved ones cry out in our presence (1 Pet. 2:21; 3:18; 4:1).

8. God's comfort is greater than our suffering.

The apostle Paul pleaded with the Lord to take away an unidentified source of suffering. But the Lord declined, saying, "My grace is sufficient for you,

for My strength is made perfect in weakness." "Therefore," said Paul, "most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:9-10). Paul learned that he would rather be with Christ in suffering than without Christ in good health and pleasant circumstances.

9. In times of crisis, we find one another.

No one would choose pain and suffering. But when there is no choice, there remains some consolation. Natural disasters and times of crisis have a way of bringing us together. Hurricanes, fires, earthquakes, riots, illnesses, and accidents all have a way of bringing us to our senses. Suddenly we remember our own mortality and that people are more important than things. We remember that we do need one another and that, above all, we need God. Each time we discover God's comfort in our own suffering, our capacity to help others is increased. This is what the apostle Paul had in mind when he wrote, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God" (2 Cor. 1:3-4).

10. God can turn suffering around for our good.

This truth is best seen in the many examples of the Bible. Through Job's suffering we see a man who not only came to a deeper understanding of God but who also became a source of encouragement for people in every generation to follow. Through the rejection, betrayal, enslavement, and wrongful imprisonment of a man named Joseph, we see someone who eventually was able to say to those who had hurt him, "You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good" (Gen. 50:20). When everything in us screams at the heavens for allowing suffering, we have reason to look at the eternal outcome and joy of Jesus who in His own suffering on an executioner's cross cried, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Mt. 27:46).

RBC booklets available on this topic:

Why Would A Good God Allow Suffering? (Q0106)

How Does God Keep His Promises? (Q0105)

Does God Want Me Well? (Q0104)

10 REASONS TO BELIEVE IN LIFE AFTER DEATH

1. The injustices of life.

It would be difficult to believe that life is good if we knew there was nothing beyond the grave to compensate for problems of inequality and unfairness. While some people seem destined for happiness, others are born into terrible relationships and circumstances. If we could be sure there was nothing to offset unequal distribution of suffering, many would have reason to curse the day of their birth for the way life has treated them (Job 3:1-3). We could agree with King Solomon who at a low point in his life said, "I looked and saw all the oppression that was taking place under the sun: I saw the tears of the oppressed--and they have no comforter; power was on the side of their oppressors--and they have no comforter. And I declared that the dead, who had already died, are happier than the living, who are still alive. But better than both is he who has not yet been, who has not seen the evil that is done under the sun" (Eccl. 4:1-3 NIV).

2. Beauty and balance.

There is much about life that doesn't seem to correspond with personal problems of unfairness and hardship. For all that is hurtful and unequal, there is beauty and balance. For moments of horror and violence, there are times of harmony and peace. As age-worn bodies succumb to pain and weakness, children and young animals play with carefree joy. Each sunset and dawn provides an answer to nature's need for rest and renewal. Dark nights and cold winters come with the awareness that "this too shall pass." If there is nothing beyond the grave, the pattern of nature is stunningly incomplete.

3. Near-death experiences.

The clinical evidence for life after death is subjective and arguable. It's often hard to assess the significance of "out of the body experiences," encounters with bright lights, long tunnels, or angelic guides. It's difficult to know how to respond to those who speak of temporary near-death visions into heaven or hell. What we do know is that there are enough of these kinds of experiences to create a sizable library on the subject. Taken as a whole, this body of evidence shows that as people approach death, many sense they are coming not to the end of existence but to the beginning of another journey.

4. A place in the heart.

The human heart hungers for more than this life offers. Each of us experiences what King Solomon called "eternity in [our] hearts" (Eccl. 3:11). While it is difficult to know what Solomon meant, it is apparent that he was referring to an inescapable longing for something this world cannot satisfy. It was an emptiness of soul that Solomon could not escape. For a while, he tried to fill this inner void with work, alcohol, and laughter. He tried to satisfy his longings with philosophy, music, and sexual relationships. But his disillusionment grew. Only when he returned to his confidence in a final judgment and afterlife could he find something large enough to satisfy his longing for significance (Eccl. 12:14).

5. Universal beliefs.

While some believe it's impossible to know whether there is life after death, belief in immortality is a timeless phenomenon. From the pyramids of the Egyptians to the reincarnation of New Age thinking, people of all times and places in history have believed that the human soul survives death. If there is no consciousness or laughter or regret beyond the grave, then life has fooled almost everyone from the Pharaohs of Egypt to Jesus of Nazareth.

6. An eternal God.

The Bible names God as the source of immortality. It describes His nature as eternal. The same Scriptures tell us that God created us in His likeness, and that His plan is to welcome His children eventually into His eternal home. The Scriptures also teach that God introduced death into human experience when our first ancestors trespassed into the darkness of forbidden territory (Gen. 3:1-19). The implication is that if God allowed the human race to live forever in a rebellious condition, we would have unending opportunity to develop into proud, self-centered creatures. Instead, God began to unfold a plan that would ultimately result in the eternal homecoming of all who chose to be at peace with Him (Ps. 90:1; Jn. 14:1-3).

7. Old Testament predictions.

Some have argued that immortality is a New Testament idea. But the Old Testament prophet Daniel spoke of a day when those who sleep in the dust of the earth will be resurrected, some to life and some to everlasting shame (Dan. 12:1-3). An author of the Psalms also spoke of the afterlife. In the 73rd Psalm a man named Asaph described how he almost lost his faith in God when he considered how evil people prospered and the godly suffered.

But then he said he went into the sanctuary of God. From the perspective of worship, he suddenly saw evil men standing on the slippery ground of their mortality. With new insight he confessed, "You will guide me with Your counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You. My flesh and my heart fail; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (Ps. 73:24-26).

8. Quotes of Christ.

Few would accuse Jesus of being an evil man or a false teacher. Even atheists and people belonging to non-Christian religions usually refer to Jesus with deference and respect. But Jesus wasn't vague or indefinite about the reality of a continuing personal existence after death. He said, "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Mt. 10:28). Jesus promised Paradise to the repentant thief who was dying at His side, but He also used the Valley of Hinnom--a foul garbage dump outside of Jerusalem--as a symbol of what awaits those who insist on risking the judgment of God. According to Jesus, facing the reality of life after death is the most significant issue of life. He said, for example, that if an eye keeps you from God, you have reason to get rid of that eye. "It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell" (Mk. 9:47 NIV).

9. The resurrection of Christ.

There is no greater evidence for the existence of life after death than the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Old Testament predicted a Messiah who would overcome sin and death for His people (Isa. 53; Dan. 9:26). The testimony of Jesus' followers is that He did just that. He voluntarily died at the hands of executioners, was buried in a borrowed tomb, and then 3 days later left that tomb empty. Witnesses said that they had seen not only an empty tomb but a resurrected Christ who appeared to hundreds of people over a period of 40 days before ascending to heaven (Acts 1:1-11; 1 Cor. 15:1-8).

10. Practical effects.

Belief in life after death is a source of personal security, optimism, and spiritual betterment (1 Jn. 3:2). Nothing offers more courage than the confidence that there is a better life for those who use the present to prepare for eternity. Belief in the unlimited opportunities of eternity has enabled

many to make the ultimate sacrifice of their own life in behalf of those they love. It was His belief in life after death that enabled Jesus to say, "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" (Mt. 16:26). It is the same truth that prompted Christian martyr Jim Elliot, who was killed in 1956 by the Auca Indians, to say, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose."

RBC booklets available on this topic:

Is There Life After Death? (Q1205)

Where Do We Go From Here? (Q1202)

What Does The Bible Say About Hell? (Q1002)

YOU'RE NOT ALONE

If you still find yourself troubled by unanswered questions and lingering doubts, you're not alone. Many have considered the evidence summarized in the previous pages without seeing their way clear to accept Christ as their personal Savior and Lord.

People of every generation have found that it takes far more to believe in Christ than evidence, reason, and probability. Just as important is the factor of personal choice and autonomy.

The relationship between the mind and will, however, is not easy to understand. Being honest with ourselves is not inevitable.

So how can we sort out the relationship between facts, perceptions, and will? One answer is to be open to the possibility that God Himself can do what we cannot do. If Christ is who He claims to be, then we are not alone. If Christ really did rise from the dead, His Father stands ready to give assurance of understanding to anyone who wants to do the will of God (Jn. 7:17). It was Jesus who said to a group of skeptics in John 7:

My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me. If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority (vv.16-17).

WHY DOES IT MAKE SENSE TO BELIEVE IN CHRIST?

What if you don't come from a Christian culture? How could it make sense for you even to consider becoming a follower of Christ? On the other hand, what if the Christian influences in your life have given you reason to doubt Christian beliefs? Or what if you believe in Christ but don't think you could give good answers if challenged by a nonbeliever?

Does faith in Christ make sense only if you want it to? Or is the evidence so strong that it doesn't make sense only if you don't want it to?

RBC staff writer Kurt De Haan has spent many hours on college campuses listening to the questions of thoughtful skeptics. He has written the following pages to provide answers to those who are looking for evidence.

Martin R. De Haan II

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

The official-looking letter announced that I had been selected to serve as a juror. Several weeks later, I dutifully walked into the courtroom and listened as the accused and the accuser argued their cases. My job as a member of the jury was to weigh the evidence. What were the facts? Whom could I believe?

The lawyers used logic, presented physical evidence, offered eyewitnesses, and even made emotional appeals. Then it was up to the jurors. We filed out to a back room and discussed the case. Because the evidence was overwhelmingly one-sided, we quickly reached a unanimous decision. We walked into the courtroom and announced the final verdict. Case closed.

If Christianity were put on trial and you were appointed a juror, what would it take to convince you of its truthfulness? Would you look for convincing logic, thorough documentation, positive impact on society, stirring testimonials? Could a verdict be given?

Before you examine the case, however, you would need to define clearly what's on trial. Otherwise you might prejudge it as true or false based on personal impressions instead of facts.

When you think of Christianity, do you think of:

an irrational leap of faith?

an intellectual or emotional crutch?

something for "losers"?

superstition?

a bunch of do's and don'ts?

a lot of rituals?

fanatical, narrow-minded people?

the high moral teachings of Jesus?

one of many ways to know God?

the only way to know God?

Dictionaries simply define Christianity as the religion based on the teachings of Jesus Christ and the Bible. The New Encyclopedia Britannica states, "At the very least, Christianity is the faith tradition that focuses on the figure of Jesus Christ" (Vol.16, p.251). Concisely said. But what are the key elements of that "faith tradition"?

Stripped of cultural additions, the core of Christianity includes beliefs about who Jesus was and what He has done. Christianity holds that Jesus was and is more than a man; He is God in human flesh. As the second person of the triune God, He became a man, born of a virgin. He lived a perfect life, taught us how to please God, died on a cross to take on Himself the penalty for our sin against God, rose from the grave, appeared to hundreds of people, and then ascended to heaven. He did all this so that we might know God and live for Him now and with Him forever.

A prominent spokesman for Christianity in the first century put it this way: "I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, . . . that Christ died

for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day" (1 Cor. 15:1,3,4).

The Scriptures and Christ go hand-in-hand. And followers of Christ accept the statements of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. They believe it is more than just a compilation of men's lofty thoughts about God. They believe the Bible to be the record of God speaking through distinct human personalities in a way that resulted in a document that accurately speaks for God.

Christianity claims continuity with the faith of the first man and woman (Adam and Eve), with Abraham and the people of Israel who carried on his faith, with the disciples of Jesus who saw Him as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies and the sacrificial system, and with men and women of faith today who bow at the feet of Christ as their only Savior and only hope of forgiveness of sins, and the One through whom they can know God. What about you? Do you consider yourself to be a Christian? Do you agree with the above statements about the core ideas of Christianity? Or do you have serious doubts about whether it is all true? Perhaps you belong to another religious faith and you're curious about what Christians believe and why. Or maybe you have had a lot of Christian influence in your life but you now wonder if what you've been told is really true.

The following pages are for you, no matter how skeptical or how sure you are. I hope you will read these pages thoughtfully, search the Bible firsthand to see what it says, and examine your beliefs. You are the jury.

HOW CAN I KNOW CHRISTIANITY IS TRUE?

How do you know if anything is true? How do you know that water freezes at 32 degrees Fahrenheit? How do you know that woolly mammoths once trudged across our land? How do you know that cocaine is addictive? How do you know that Abraham Lincoln was born in a log cabin and died in a theater? How do you know that NASA astronauts walked on the moon and not on a back lot in Hollywood? How do you know that Japan's Emperor Hirohito died of cancer in 1989? How do you know that Julius Caesar ruled the Roman Empire?

In the above examples, the proofs and the methods of confirmation vary greatly. A scientific experiment in a lab could confirm through repeatable

experiments that water freezes at 32 degrees. Fossils and frozen remains are visible evidence that mammoths tramped around on earth. Physical and psychological testing confirms cocaine's addictive quality.

But when it comes to historical information such as Lincoln's birthplace and where he was shot, man walking on the moon, and Caesar's exploits, we cannot perform repeatable experiments. In those cases we have to rely on historical records, eyewitness accounts, and reputable historians who collected data.

Different types of situations require different types of proof. In some cases, scientific experiments are extremely valuable. In other cases, historical research must be used.

When it comes to testing the claims of competing religious views of life and God, several key areas need to be examined. The following pages take a close look at Christianity according to five criteria. We will see if it presents a reasonable explanation for life as we know it. We will examine the reliability of the key Christian book, the Bible. We will take a look at the leader, Jesus Christ. Then we will study the origin and influence of Christianity. Finally, we will look at the effect that faith in Christ has on individuals.

How Can I Know Christianity Is True?

A REASONABLE EXPLANATION

How did this booklet you are reading get in front of your eyes? Would you believe me if I said that Colby, my pet guinea pig, wrote it? Would you accept the explanation that the booklet simply appeared one day out of thin air and you happened to pick it up? Would you believe that a creature from Mars designed the cover, or that the book was printed by a tribe of aborigines in a hut on the outback of Australia?

Excuse me for getting ridiculous, but I think you get the point. Just as a simple 32-page booklet has a reasonable explanation for its existence, so do our lives, our world, and human history.

Many religions offer explanations for our human existence, the complexity and order of the universe, the problem of evil, our religious nature, the purpose of life, our eternal destiny, and much more. It is Christianity's

contention, however, that it offers an explanation that fits life as we know it, human nature as we know it, and God as He has revealed Himself.

Of course, it would take volumes to discuss these matters adequately. But at the risk of sounding simplistic, here's a brief summary of Christianity's answers to some of these issues.

Where Did We Come From?

The Bible tells us that an intelligent, powerful, personal Being was actively involved in creating the universe. Does that fit life as we know it? Does life show design and order? Does human personality reflect a higher Personality?

The naturalistic explanation declares that time plus chance produced the complexity of the universe. But does that provide adequate answers? Even generous estimates of the earth's age do not include enough time for life to evolve. Too many things had to happen in too precise a manner. Although many scientists propose naturalistic evolution, they do so because of their assumption that no supernatural being was involved.

Eastern religions lump people, animals, and plants into the same category-- created by an impersonal god-force that pervades the universe-- and minimize the great differences between them. Christianity, however, tells us that human beings are similar yet very different from the animals. People possess personality, self-consciousness, a spirit, and the ability to relate to God on a personal level. Human beings are qualitatively different from animals, plants, and rocks.

Where Did Evil Come From?

Some religious faiths describe a type of god who possesses both good and evil elements. Other explanations have good and evil gods pitted against each other--with the outcome in doubt. Still other religions deal with evil by denying its reality; they say that evil is only an illusion.

Christianity, however, sees evil as an intruder in a good God's good creation. Evil came into the world through Adam and Eve's willing choice to rebel against God. They had that option because God wanted them to freely love Him--not because they were forced to love Him (Gen. 3).

According to Christianity, the choice for evil had a far-reaching and devastating impact on our relationship with God, our relationship with each other, and our relationship with the world. Instead of close fellowship with God, there has been estrangement. Instead of harmony between people, there has been self-centeredness, conflict, and heartache. Instead of humanity working in harmony with nature, we have exploited our world. It's only by returning to a right relationship with God that our lives can reverse the effects of evil.

Christianity also offers an explanation for what God is doing about the problem of evil. Jesus Christ is central to the solution. The Bible tells us that Jesus came to bridge the gap between a perfect God and imperfect people stained by evil (2 Cor. 5:19). God has not been sitting idly by while humanity goes from bad to worse. Jesus came into a world of evil and suffering to suffer and die for us. He came to free us from our personal bondage to evil, and to ensure that one day all evil will face God's perfect justice.

Why Do People Seek Religious Answers?

Our heart has a void that cries to be filled. Christians believe that because mankind was created to know and relate to his Creator, people will never be complete without Him.

So why doesn't everyone turn to the God of the Bible? Why do people turn to other gods instead? Part of the answer is that ever since Adam and Eve chose to go their own way instead of obeying God, people have continued to choose to run their own lives (Rom. 1). People have created their own gods--deities that they can manipulate through magic or appease through rituals or self-sacrifice.

And Christianity includes one other reason for so many religions--a spirit-being named Satan who is more than happy to offer substitute religions. He is called the father of lies (John 8:44), the one who has blinded the minds of people to the truth (2 Cor. 4:4). He offers counterfeit spiritual experiences to those who choose false gods.

What Is The Purpose Of Life?

Christians believe that because man has lost his anchor in God, he has lost his sense of purpose. The author of the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes describes the different ways that people try to find happiness. He was an

expert on the topic because he had tried them all. That person was King Solomon, a man known for his wisdom, but who had tried many dead-end pursuits in life. He sought fulfillment through education, but all his learning left him empty. He sought pleasure through food, wine, sex, music, and things of beauty, but again he never got beyond superficial happiness. He tried finding the joy of life through hard work and materialism, but realized they could not fill the void in his heart. Solomon filled his palace with 700 wives and 300 concubines, but they could not replace the Lord. Solomon concluded that a life that does not center around a relationship with God is empty.

Does It Sound Logical To You?

Is Christianity a reasonable explanation for the realities of life? Faith in Christ offers relief from the universal problem of sin and guilt. Jesus Christ offers to fill the God-shaped void in our hearts with Himself. Christianity offers a basis for values and morality, and for knowing right from wrong. The biblical view of human history describes the moral deterioration of society (while allowing for much good), and the eventual return of Jesus to execute justice on the living and the dead.

But even the best-sounding and most reasonable human explanation is foolishness if it lacks a basis in spiritual reality. Christianity stands or falls on the credibility of its holy Book (the Bible), its leader (Jesus Christ), its community (the church), and its practicality (as seen in the lives of individual believers). The next several pages will explore these issues.

(For more information on the biblical description of life's origin and purpose, ask for the RBC booklets: *How Can I Know There's a God?* and *Why in the World Am I Here?*)

How Can I Know Christianity Is True?

A RELIABLE BOOK

Supermarket tabloids do not have a glowing reputation for being reliable sources of factual information. For example, I remember seeing the headline: **AMELIA EARHART FOUND ALIVE!** The truth, of course, is that Amelia attempted a solo plane crossing of the Pacific in 1937 but disappeared. She was lost at sea and presumed dead. The tabloid's story was probably interesting to read, but was it true? Highly unlikely.

What about the daily newspaper? Much more credible perhaps, but not infallible. What is printed one day may be (and sometimes is) corrected or retracted the next.

How Can We Test The Reliability Of The Bible?

What kinds of criteria can we use to evaluate whether it's true? After all, if the Bible is not reliable, then how do we know what to believe about what Christ said or did?

The science of archeology can give us a lot of valuable evidence, which will either confirm or contradict the biblical record. One hundred years ago, many Bible critics were trying to dismiss much of its history as the work of creative storytellers. But in this century, archeological finds have overwhelmingly supported the biblical data.

One case of archeological evidence is a recent study of ancient Jericho, which concluded that the walls did tumble down as the Bible indicates. Archeologist Bryant G. Wood of the University of Toronto said, "When we compare the archeological evidence at Jericho with the biblical narrative describing the Israelite destruction of Jericho, we find remarkable agreement" (Biblical Archeological Review, March/April 1990).

Sir William Ramsay, a noted archeologist, was once skeptical of the New Testament book of Acts. He set out to prove the inaccuracy of the book but instead came away as an ardent believer in its great historical value. Ramsay concluded, "Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy; he is possessed of the true historic sense In short, this author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians" (The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament, p.222).

This perception matches what Luke himself said about his methods. In the introduction to his record of the life of Jesus (Luke 1:1-4), the author mentions his reliance on eyewitness testimony and his concern to present "an orderly account."

When Were The Gospels Written?

It was once popular to assign the gospels to the second century and charge that they were later compilations of oral tradition. Thus they were

considered historically unreliable. But careful scholarship has pointed to early dates for the writing of the entire New Testament.

Because of archeological evidence and manuscript discoveries, we now have good reason to believe that most of the New Testament was completed between AD 47 and AD 70, and that all of it was completed by AD 95.

An example of a manuscript find that has affected dating of the New Testament is the Rylands Fragment. This portion of John 18 was found in Egypt and has been dated about AD 125. This find supports the view that the last gospel to be written had already been in circulation for many years.

Have Biblical Prophecies Come True?

Christians say yes! The RBC booklet *Can I Really Trust the Bible?* states, "Some of the most dramatic examples of fulfilled Bible prophecy are those concerning Jesus Christ. Isaiah 52:13 through 53:12 and Psalm 22, for instance, record specific details about death by crucifixion hundreds of years before this terrible form of execution was ever practiced. . . . Another example of fulfilled prophecy was the destruction of the city of Tyre. Hundreds of years before, Ezekiel had predicted that the city would be destroyed and the ruins scraped off and dumped into the sea, never to be rebuilt (Ezek. 26). It happened exactly as predicted. . . . The predictions of the judgment of God against Nineveh (Nah. 1-3), Ammon and Moab (Jer. 48,49), Babylon (Is. 13,14; Jer. 51), and Edom (Is. 34; Jer. 49; Ezek. 25,35) were all fulfilled" (pp.22-24).

Does The Bible Hold Together?

That is, does a collection of writings by 40 different authors from many different backgrounds and occupations, over about 1,600 years, in three different languages, and written on different continents, have a consistent message? Or is it a confusing jumble of ideas?

From start to finish, the Bible tells how God has been working out His plan to rescue people from the penalty and power of sin. He revealed Himself to the patriarchs, then to the nation of Israel. He worked out His plan in Christ, in His disciples, and in the early church. And the last book in the Bible, Revelation, tells how God will complete His plan. From the symbolic sacrificial system of the Old Testament to the reality of Christ's sacrifice of Himself on the cross, from the first chapters to the last, God is consistently described. This incredible unity points to the Bible's supernatural origin.

Why Is The Bible So Consistent And Reliable?

For the answer to that question, let's look at the Bible itself. Peter wrote, ". . . prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:21). And to Timothy, Paul said, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Tim. 3:16).

According to the Bible itself, therefore, it is not a compilation of men's ideas but God's. Even though He used men and their individual personalities to reveal His truth, the Bible professes to have but one author--God. That is why the Bible is so consistent and reliable from start to finish.

How Do We Know We Have The Bible As It Was Originally Written?

Can we be sure that the book we read today has been passed along without tampering by special-interest groups, or without serious mistakes in copying? Textual scholars say that we can be sure we have a reliable copy.

The 1947 discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls (dating back to before the time of Christ) gave dramatic evidence that the Old Testament has been meticulously and accurately copied for centuries. And regarding the New Testament, Sir Frederic Kenyon, an authority in the field of textual criticism, stated, "The number of manuscripts of the New Testament, of early translations from it, and of quotations from it in the oldest writers of the church, is so large that it is practically certain that the true reading of every doubtful passage is preserved in some one or other of these ancient authorities. This can be said of no other ancient book in the world" (Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts, p.23).

How Have People And Society Been Affected By The Bible?

No other book has come close to making the impact that the Scriptures have. This number one bestseller for years has been looked to for guidance, comfort, challenge, judicial equity, and wisdom. Its principles are timeless. Even those who don't want to believe its supernatural elements recognize it as great literature. The Bible's power has been recognized by tyrannical rulers, who banned it and sought to destroy every copy. And the Bible continues to pervade our world, in hundreds of languages, in nearly every society.

(For more on the Bible's reliability, ask for the RBC booklet Can I Really Trust the Bible?)

How Can I Know Christianity Is True?

A CREDIBLE LEADER

In 1977, a self-proclaimed messiah and leader of the People's Temple in San Francisco, led his loyal followers from California to a jungle settlement in Guyana, South America. On November 18, 1978, Jim Jones ordered all the people who lived on his commune to drink cyanide-laced punch. That day 913 people died, including 276 children.

Why do people follow leaders like Jones? How could they have known that their personable leader was mentally unstable--a wolf in sheep's clothing? For that matter, of all the world's religious leaders, how do we know whom to follow? Do Christians have any legitimate basis for saying that Jesus Christ has more to offer than Muhammad, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, or Sun Myung Moon? How can we know that Jesus told us the truth about God?

What Do People Say About Jesus?

Most people, even if they are not willing to acknowledge Him as the Son of God, would say that Jesus was a great moral teacher. Mohandas Gandhi (1869-1948), for example, a Hindu and the father of modern India, wrote, "I could accept Jesus as a martyr, an embodiment of sacrifice, and a divine teacher, but not as the most perfect man ever born. His death on the cross was a great example to the world, but that there was anything like a mysterious or miraculous virtue in it, my heart could not accept" (Gandhi: An Autobiography, p.113).

The heart of Jesus' message, however, was His claim to be the Son of God who took on human flesh to be our Savior. John Warwick Montgomery writes, "The earliest records we have of the life and ministry of Jesus give the overwhelming impression that this man went around not so much 'doing good' but making a decided nuisance of Himself. . . . Jesus alienated His contemporaries by continually forcing them to think through their attitude to Him personally. 'Who do men say that I the Son of man am? . . . Who do you say that I am?'" (History & Christianity, p.12).

When Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do the crowds say that I am?" they answered, "John the Baptist, but some say Elijah; and others say that one of the old prophets has risen again." When He then asked for their opinion, Peter spoke up and said, "The Christ of God." (See Luke 9:18-20.)

Peter's statement was remarkable in light of the Jews' prevailing hope for a Messiah who would throw off Roman rule and reestablish the greatness of Israel. The people were not expecting a meek and humble man who was more concerned with rescuing sinners than restoring a state.

Jesus, however, drew followers with what He said and did. Matthew said that "the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority" (7:28,29). The Bible also tells us that Jesus performed many miracles. These included healings, controlling nature, and raising people from the dead. Christ's followers point to these remarkable demonstrations of power as support of His claims to be the Son of God.

Why Did Jesus Die?

Was He simply a martyr? Was He misunderstood? Was it a case of mistaken identity? Was He suicidal? Did He orchestrate His own death? Could He have accomplished more if He had lived to a ripe old age and died naturally?

Jesus' biographers tell us the reasons behind His execution. Matthew records that Jesus said, ". . . the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (20:28). His life was given as a sacrifice for us. Such a sacrifice was needed because all people have sinned, broken God's moral laws in action and in thought (Rom. 3:23; 5:12). And because God is holy and just, He cannot ignore our sin. But God stepped into history to rescue us from certain judgment. Jesus, God's Son, became human so that He could, as the God-man, take the penalty for our sin (Heb. 10:10). He did for us what we could not do for ourselves (Rom. 5:6-11; Eph. 2:8,9). This may be hard to understand, but it's what Jesus and His followers claimed He was doing.

Some people respond to all this by saying, "Interesting claims--but how do you know it's true? How do you know that the death of Jesus on a Roman cross really made our rescue from sin possible?" For the answer, we must examine the resurrection of Christ.

Did Jesus Rise From The Dead?

The apostle Paul summed up the importance of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15. He said, "And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! . . . If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable" (vv.17,19).

Obviously, however, Paul believed that Jesus did rise from the dead. In fact, he mentioned that hundreds of people saw the risen Christ. He wrote, "He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time" (1 Cor. 15:5-8).

The gospel accounts tell us of the shocked response of Jesus' followers--even though He had told them ahead of time that He would die and be resurrected. The reaction of one disciple in particular is worth special mention. After Jesus rose from the tomb and appeared to the other disciples, they told Thomas, but he didn't believe it. He said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe" (John 20:25).

A week later, Thomas was with the disciples when Jesus came into the room. He turned to Thomas and encouraged him to touch Him. He said, "Do not be unbelieving, but believing." To that, Thomas replied, "My Lord and my God!" (20:27,28).

One very important evidence for the resurrection is the empty tomb. The enemies of Christ could not produce a body to silence the claims. And it wouldn't have made any sense for Christ's followers to steal the body and then devote their lives to proclaiming a risen Lord--even if they could have gotten past the Roman guards!

The dramatic change in the disciples from hiding to boldly proclaiming Christ as a risen Savior, even dying for their convictions, has no other reasonable explanation than that they had seen the risen Christ.

What Are Our Choices?

Who was Jesus? If you don't accept Him as the truth, you must conclude that He was a phony, a madman, or that His disciples started the greatest hoax on earth.

Could He have been a deceitful phony? Could He have been merely trying to gain a following for some unknown reason? Think about it. If He was, He certainly wasn't very successful--if you gauge success by power or financial gain. He turned many away by His high standards, and His unwillingness to overlook hypocrisy and halfheartedness. He didn't preach a popular message

or promise instant fame and fortune. And He certainly wasn't tricking people to get their money. The evidence does not support the possibility that He was a charlatan.

Could He have been a madman? Self-deceived? Sincere but deluded about His own identity? His words and actions do not reflect the behavior of a person who is mentally unstable. Such a charge against Him does not explain the miracles, the brilliance of His teaching, nor His resurrection.

Could the disciples have been guilty of painting a picture of Jesus that was far bigger than life? It doesn't make sense that all the disciples would conspire to create a monstrous lie that would contradict what they knew to be true. Would you die for what you knew was a lie? The disciples wouldn't have either, yet most of them died as martyrs.

We have good reason to believe that the Bible presents an accurate picture of Jesus Christ. His fulfillment of prophecy, His impact on history, His life and teachings, and the response of His disciples all point to a conclusion that He was and is all that He claimed to be--the Son of God.

How Can I Know Christianity Is True?

A POWERFUL MOVEMENT

The Berlin Wall came down in 1989. Its demolition was hailed as being symbolic of the failure of communism and the strength of a movement toward economic and social reforms. The movement against the repressive political system swept through Eastern Europe. In Romania, for example, the army joined the people in overthrowing a cruel dictatorship. Citizens spoke and acted powerfully.

Christianity is not a political or economic system, yet it has profoundly affected all segments of society. From its tiny beginnings in Jerusalem, it has swept throughout the world. Christianity continues to be a major movement today.

Why is that? Why did Christianity have such an explosive beginning and sweep like a tidal wave across the earth? Why were the first disciples so bold? Why were people willing to die for their beliefs? Why has this faith affected present-day life so much? Let's examine these issues.

Where Did Christianity Come From?

It was not a totally new movement. It didn't just pop up out of a vast void. Its roots penetrate deep into Old Testament history.

Christians see their beliefs extending as far back as the first man and woman, and continuing with the great men of faith in the early chapters of Genesis and with the Old Testament people of Israel. Jesus came to solve the problem created by Adam and Eve. He came to fulfill the prophetic symbolism of Old Testament sacrifices. He came to offer forgiveness for our failure to measure up to God's commandments. He came to fulfill the prophecies of a coming Messiah who would take care of mankind's sin and usher in the kingdom of God. Jesus Himself spoke of fulfilling the Old Testament law and prophets (Matt. 5:17).

The apostle Paul spoke eloquently of this continuity between Old Testament Israel and the New Testament church, as did the author of the letter to the Hebrews. But they also saw that with Christ came a dramatic shift. Jesus established the church, in which both Jew and non-Jew were united by their faith in Jesus the Savior-Messiah.

What Does The Church's Existence Tell Us About The Truth Of Christianity?

The church would not have begun if Christ were not credible. So much hinged on the resurrection that if He had not really risen, the disciples would have walked away from it all. Their leader would have been a major disappointment. If He could not keep His word on the matter of His resurrection, then nothing He said about God could be trusted.

The church began only because the first followers of Christ believed their Founder was all He claimed to be. His early disciples would not have died for what they knew to be a lie. And they were too fearful and skeptical before they saw the risen Christ to concoct some crazy story about a resurrection.

The church's continued existence down through the centuries serves to confirm Jesus' promise that nothing could destroy it (Matt. 16:18). The church's growth demonstrates reality, power, and believability. The church's indestructibility demonstrates the deep convictions of its followers and the power of God to preserve His church even when spiritual opposition attempts to overthrow it.

How Has The Church Fulfilled Its Purpose For Existing?

Has the world benefited from it? Admittedly, individuals and segments within the church have not always followed or sought to fulfill the ideals of Christ. Such phony and hypocritical Christians are an embarrassment to the cause of Christ. Yet even the existence of hypocrites and self-serving professing Christians stand in stark contrast to the real thing--believers with heartfelt devotion to Christ and His commands. Loyal followers of Christ have made a tremendous positive impact on our world.

Kenneth Scott Latourette, a historian at Yale University, wrote, ". . . across the centuries Christianity has been the means of reducing more languages to writing than have all other factors combined. It has created more schools, more theories of education, and more systems than has any other one force. More than any other power in history, it has impelled men to fight suffering . . . It has built thousands of hospitals, inspired the emergence of nursing and medical professions, and furthered movements for public health and the relief and prevention of famine. . . . Wars have often been waged in the name of Christianity. . . . Yet from no other source have there come as many and as strong movements to eliminate or regulate war and to ease the suffering brought by war. . . . The list might go on indefinitely. It includes many other humanitarian projects and movements, ideals in government, the reform of prisons and the emergence of criminology, great art and architecture, and outstanding literature" (A History of Christianity, Vol. II, pp.1470,1471).

Another author adds, "The obvious contributions of Christianity are only the tip of the iceberg. The real miracles are less visible but more widespread: the work of forgiveness and renewal that God does in hearts, families, and communities in countless unknown places and unremembered times. Renewal is possible because Christians believe God has started something in history that He will carry to conclusion, a mighty climax that will settle all debts and right all injustices" (William Dyrness, Christian Apologetics in a World Community, p.82).

The powerful movement that has been labeled Christianity has profoundly changed human history. Such a movement points to the credibility of the Christian message.

How Can I Know Christianity Is True?

A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Experience, all by itself, doesn't prove anything. A warm feeling in your heart, an ecstatic sensation, or a deep sense of peace and joy are not conclusive evidence. That is one reason this section is last. People from various religious groups claim to have significant experiences. Any experience, however, must be confirmed by other supporting data. But that is not to say that experience is unimportant. It's crucial when testing the truthfulness of the claims of any religious faith. What you believe should have confirmation in what you experience in life.

What good is a faith that doesn't make a difference in your life, a religion that doesn't work in everyday situations? What good are beliefs that sound right in theory but don't work in practice? What good are beliefs that leave you feeling empty, joyless, anxious, unchanged in thinking and action?

What Is The Basis Of Christian Experience?

Jesus spoke of being "born again," but what does that mean? Does a person who chooses to put his trust in Christ feel and act like a new person? Are all his problems solved? Does he become perfect?

In John 3, Jesus talked about this issue with a religious leader by the name of Nicodemus. This man knew his Old Testament, and he had heard a lot about what Jesus was saying and doing. Out of curiosity, he visited Jesus one night. Jesus told Nicodemus, ". . . unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (v.3).

Nicodemus was understandably puzzled by Christ's remark. He wondered aloud if being born again meant another physical birth, a sort of reincarnation. Jesus explained that He wasn't talking about a physical body but about being spiritually renewed by the Spirit of God. Man's problem is that he is spiritually dead, separated from God, because of sinful rebellion against God. A person who does not accept Christ's claims is on "death row" awaiting God's justice. (See John 3:4-21.)

What every person needs is the forgiveness and new spiritual life that Jesus made possible through His life and His death on the cross. Spiritual rebirth occurs when a person expresses heartfelt belief, trust, reliance on Christ as Savior and Lord (John 3:16-18).

What Changes Occur When A Person Believes In Christ?

According to 2 Corinthians 5:17, ". . . if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." A believer in Christ experiences a radical transformation at the very core of his being. This transformation of spirit does not mean that a Christian suddenly becomes perfect in everyday life, or that he will never have any more problems. What it does mean is that when God looks at him, He sees a forgiven child of God who will one day be like Christ.

The many books and letters of the New Testament contain challenges to Christians to live out their faith. Christianity was never intended to be merely a "fire escape" from hell. By reaching out to Christ, we are rescued from the coming judgment. But being born again is only the beginning of a whole new life. Children of God are to grow up into mature men and women of faith. That process is often difficult, costly, and unrewarding by this world's standards.

At the very least, then, Christian experience has at its foundation a life-changing, personal encounter with God through Christ. It involves a recognition that we need a Savior, acceptance of God's gift of forgiveness (Eph. 2:8,9), and active trust in Christ alone as our only hope of being right with God now and living with Him forever.

How Did The Early Believers Experience The Truth Of Christianity?

The New Testament tells about people whose lives were transformed by their relationship with Christ. Here are just a few of the more prominent examples:

Zaccheus, the tax collector (Luke 19:1-10)

Nicodemus, a religious leader (John 3; 19:39)

an immoral woman (John 4)

a blind man (John 9)

the 12 disciples

3,000 people in one day (Acts 2:41)

an Ethiopian official (Acts 8:26-40)

Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9)

Cornelius (Acts 10)

the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:25-35)

several citizens of Rome (Rom. 1:8)

idolaters, sexual perverts, thieves, drunks, slanderers, and swindlers (1 Cor. 6:9-11)

Onesimus, a runaway slave (Philemon)

Is Christ Still Changing Lives?

Since the time Christ walked on this earth, millions of people have testified to the life-changing reality of Christianity. As we saw earlier, such experiences do not prove truth, but they certainly are strong support.

For many years, Paul Little was a spokesman for Christianity on college campuses in the U.S. and in many other countries. He wrote about the place of experience in his own life. He said, "Occasionally I ask myself, as I walk down the street, 'Little, how do you know you haven't been taken in by a colossal propaganda program? After all, you can't see God, touch Him, taste Him, or feel Him.' And then I go on to ask myself how I know the gospel is true. I always come back to two basic factors: the objective, external, historical facts of the resurrection, and the subjective, internal, personal experience of Christ that I have known" (Know Why You Believe, p.29).

Christians like Paul Little speak of the peace and fulfillment they sense once they have put their trust in Christ. They talk of the inner witness of the Holy Spirit of God, a subjective sense of the presence of the Spirit within (Rom. 8:16; 2 Cor. 1:21; 5:5; 1 John 3:24; 5:10). The common testimony of believer after believer points to the reality of what they are talking about.

What Kind Of Christian Experience Speaks Most Powerfully To Nonbelievers?

In John 13:35, Jesus said, "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." And in John 17:21, He stated, "That they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me." These verses point to the importance of Christians showing love and unity.

If Christians are unloving, uncompassionate, selfish, argumentative, and divided, they contradict the Lord they say they serve. Nonbelievers won't be convinced of Christianity's claim to truth. Apologist Francis Schaeffer wrote, "In John 13, the point was that if an individual Christian does not show love toward other true Christians, the world has a right to judge that he is not a Christian. [In John 17] Jesus is stating something else which is much more cutting, much more profound: We cannot expect the world to believe that the Father sent the Son, that Jesus' claims are true, and that Christianity

is true, unless the world sees some reality of the oneness of true Christians" (The Church at the End of the Twentieth Century, pp.138,139).

Have you experienced what Christ can do for you? Read the next page for more on how you can know Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord.

(For more information on a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, ask for the RBC booklets: What Is a Personal Relationship With God? and Do I Have the Right Kind of Faith?)

IT'S YOUR CHOICE

No one can make you believe. The choice is yours and yours alone. Your parents can't decide for you, nor can your closest friends. A church leader or an evangelist is powerless to coerce a decision that must come from deep within your heart.

Belief in Jesus is more than just mentally acknowledging the truth that He is the Savior, the Son of God who was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, died as a sacrifice for our sins, and rose triumphantly from the grave. Belief involves entrusting our souls and lives to Jesus Christ. That happens when we accept God's free gift of salvation (Eph. 2:8,9). To receive it, we must tell Him we need and want His forgiveness and the new spiritual life He offers.

Take the step of faith--a step based on good reason--and tell God that you believe in His Son. Tell Him that you want the salvation He offers, and that you now acknowledge Him as Savior and Lord.

If you want to know more about the person named Jesus, find a Bible and read one of the New Testament gospel accounts of His life (such as the gospel of John). See for yourself what it says about Him--what people thought of Him, who He claimed to be, what He did on earth, and what He can do for you.

DEFINING OUR TERMS

Archeology: the study of ancient remains to learn about past history.

Bible: the collection of writings (from Genesis to Revelation) that is considered to be the words of God written down by men of His choosing.

Church: the sum of all believers in Christ, as well as a local group of believers.

Christians: people who recognize Jesus as the Son of God and Savior, who place their only hope of salvation on Christ's sacrificial death, and who trust Him to live His resurrected life through them.

Christianity: the system of beliefs based on the words and works of Jesus Christ.

Faith: an expression of trust in a person or object.

Gospel: the basic truths about Jesus and salvation.

Historical proof: testimonies and documents that give a basis for conclusion.

Israel: the descendants of Abraham; also, the nation which is made up of his descendants.

Jesus: the second person of the triune God who became human in order to reveal God to mankind and provide a basis for forgiveness of sin.

Resurrection: the act of returning to life after death; the rising of Jesus from the dead.

Salvation: rescue from God's judgment.

Scientific method: the process of studying the natural world and coming to conclusions based on repeatable experimentation.

Sin: disobedience, violation of God's moral laws.

Truth: that which corresponds to reality; facts.

Scripture References

To become a Christian -- Romans 3:23; Romans 6:23; Romans 5:8; Romans 10:9-13; John 3:3; John 3:16; Ephesians 2:8-9; 1 John 1:9; 2 Corinthians 5:17

To build up your faith-- Romans 10:17; Jude 1:20; 1 Peter 1:7-9; James 1:5-8; Romans 4:20-21; 2 Corinthians 5:7; Mark 11:24; James 2:18-22; Hebrews 10:32-39

To control your tongue-- Proverbs 18:21; Ephesians 4:29; 31-32; Proverbs 13:3; Luke 6:45; Matthew 12:36; James 1:26; 1 Peter 3:10; James 3:6, 10-11; Proverbs 18:7-8; Psalms 50:23

To deal with offenses -- Matthew 18:15; Matthew 5:23-24; Matthew 18:21-35; Matthew 6:14-15; 2 Corinthians 2:10-11; Psalms 119:165; John 13:35; 1 John 4:20-21

To get along with others -- Matthew 7:12; Romans 12:10; 1 John 4:20-21; 1 Corinthians 13:4-7; Ephesians 4:31-32; Romans 15:1-2; Colossians 3:12-14; Proverbs 18:24

To overcome the devil-- Ephesians 6:10-17; James 4:7-8; 1 Peter 5:8-10; Ephesians 4:26-27; 2 Thessalonians 3:3; 2 Corinthians 2:10-11; 2 Timothy 4:18; Hebrews 2:18; 1 John 3:8; Psalms 91:3-7; Psalms 121:7-8

To overcome lust--1 Corinthians 6:15-20; Galatians 5:16-17; 1 Corinthians 10:13; Ephesians 4:22-24, 27; Proverbs 6:25-26; James 1:13-15

To handle problems & trials-- 1 Peter 4:12-13, 16; Isaiah 43:2-3; Psalms 31:1-8; Psalms 69:14-18; Psalms 34:17-19; Psalms 55:22; 2 Corinthians 4:7-10; 1 Peter 5:7

To face serious illness --James 5:14-15; Psalms 103:2-3; Isaiah 53:5; Mark 16:18; Matthew 15:22-28; Matthew 9:5-6; Matthew 9:20-22; Acts 3:2-8; 2 Kings 20:1-7; 2 Corinthians 5:1; Psalms 23:4

To survive financial problems -- Psalms 37:25-26; Philippians 4:19; Luke 12:28-31; Psalms 107:4-8; Psalms 34:6-10; Matthew 6:31-34; Psalms 37:3-4; Philippians 4:11-13

To handle stress --John 14:27; Philippians 4:6-8; Isaiah 41:10; 1 Peter 5:7-11; Psalms 46:1-3; Isaiah 26:3-4; 2 Timothy 1:7; Matthew 11:28-30

To enter the Lord's peace & rest-- Psalms 37:5-7; Philippians 4:8; Isaiah 26:3, 11-13, 19; Romans 8:28; Matthew 11:28-30; Hebrews 4:9, 11-14;

Isaiah 30:15-18; Psalms 55:22; Exodus 33:14; Matthew 6:33-34

To have God's divine protection -- Psalms 91:1-16; Psalms 27:1-5; Isaiah 43:2; Psalms 5:11-12; Isaiah 54:17; Luke 10:19; Isaiah 59:19; Proverbs 29:25; Psalms 34:7

To have an effective prayer life--Philippians 4:6-7; Matthew 18:18-19; Hebrews 4:16; Hebrews 11:6; James 5:16-18; Luke 11:9; Matthew 6:5-6; Luke 18:1; 1 Peter 3:12; Psalms 55:17; 1 John 5:14-15; Romans 8:26; Psalms 86:6-7

To give to God's work -- Malachi 3:8-12; 1 Corinthians 16:2; 2 Corinthians 9:6-7; Matthew 6:19-21; 1 Chronicles 16:29; Matthew 6:1-4; Psalms 96:8; Proverbs 11:24-25; Proverbs 19:17

To draw closer to God -- James 4:8-10; Luke 11:9-13; Proverbs 8:17; Jeremiah 29:12-13; Psalms 42:1-2, 7-8; Psalms 130:5-6; Psalms 62:5; Revelations 22:17

To obtain God's promises -- 2 Peter 1:4-8; 1 John 5:14-15; 1 John 3:21-22; Romans 8:32; John 15:7; Matthew 6:33; James 5:16; Hebrews 10:23, 35-37; Joshua 1:7

To have the Lord's joy-- John 15:11-12; Psalms 5:11-12; Psalms 51:12-13; Matthew 11:28-30; Psalms 45:7-8; Psalms 118:24; Proverbs 15:13; Psalms 126:5-6; Nehemiah 8:10b

To overcome temptation-- 1 Corinthians 10:13; Mark 14:38; James 1:12; Matthew 6:13; Luke 4:13; Luke 8:13; James 1:13-14; Galatians 5:16; 1 John 5:4; Ephesians 6:11-18; Luke 22:40; Luke 22:46; 1 Timothy 6:9

To be an effective witness -- Matthew 5:14-16; Luke 11:33; 1 Peter 3:8-11, 15; Luke 12:8-9; Ephesians 6:18-20; Luke 21:14-15; John 13:35; Luke 15:4-7; James 5:19-20; Acts 1:8; Mark 16:15; 2 Timothy 4:2

To overcome discouragement-- Romans 8:28; Matthew 11:28; Psalms 121:1; James 4:10; Romans 8:35-37; Psalms 23:1-6; Deuteronomy 1:21; 1 Samuel 30:6; Hebrews 12:3; Hebrews 13:5; Isaiah 26:3

To learn more about the church -- Matthew 16:18; Matthew 18:17; Acts 2:47; Acts 5:11; Acts 8:1-3; Acts 11:22-26; Acts 12:1-5; Acts 13:1; Acts 14:23; Acts 14:27; Acts 15:3-4; Acts 15:22; Acts 18:22; Acts 20:17, 28; Romans 16:1, 5, 23; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 1 Corinthians 4:17; 1 Corinthians 6:4; 1 Corinthians 10:32; 1 Corinthians 11:18-22; 1 Corinthians 12:28; 1 Corinthians 14:4-5; 1 Corinthians 14:12, 19; 1 Corinthians 14:23, 28, 35; 1 Corinthians 15:9; 1 Corinthians 16:19; 2 Corinthians 1:1; Galatians 1:13;

Ephesians 1:22; Ephesians 3:10, 21; Ephesians 5:23; Ephesians 5:24-32;
Philippians 3:6; Philippians 4:15; Colossians 1:18; Colossians 1:24;
Colossians 4:15; Colossians 4:16; 1 Thessalonians. 1:1-2; 1 Timothy 3:5;
1 Timothy 3:15; 1 Timothy 5:16; Philippians 1:2 ;Hebrews 12:23;
James5:14; 3John 1:6-10; Revelations 2:1, 8-18; Revelations 3:1, 7, 14

ABORTION: Psalms 139:13-16; Isaiah 43:1; 44:2, 24, 49:1-5, 64:8;
Jeremiah 1:5

AFFLICTION: Psalms 34:19, 119:67, 71, 75, 145:14; Proverbs 24:10;
Isaiah 43:2 Romans 8:28; 2 Corinthians 1:4; 2 Corinthians 4:17-18; Hebrews
4:15-16; 1 Peter 5:6-9

ALCOHOLISM: Proverbs 20:1, 23:20-21, 29-32, 31:4-6; Isaiah 5:11; Luke
21:34; Romans 13:13; Galatians 5:19-21

ANXIETY: Psalms 34:17, 55:22; Proverbs 16:3; Isaiah 26:3, 43:2; Matthew
6:25-34; Luke 2:34; Philippians 4:6-7; Hebrews 13:15; 1 Peter 5:6-7

BAPTISM: (Water) Matthew 3:13-16, 28:19; John 3:5; Acts 2:38-41, 8:36-
41; Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:12

BIBLE: (Inspired by God) Galatians 1:11-12; 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21;
(Irrevocable) Isaiah 55:11; Matthew 5:18; Mark 13:31; Revelations 22:18-
19; (Exhortation to Read & Obey) Deuteronomy 12:28; Joshua 1:7-9;
Psalms 119:11, 18, 105; Proverbs 4:20-22; Matthew 4:4; John 5:39; Romans
15:42; Timothy 2:5; Revelations 1:3

BORN AGAIN: John 1:12-13, 3:3-7; 1 Peter 1:22-23; 1 John 5:4

CHASTENING: Job 5:17; Psalms 94:12-13, 119:67-71; Proverbs 3:11-12;
1 Corinthians 11:32; Hebrews 12:5-11; Revelations 3:19

CHILDREN: (Of Righteousness) Deuteronomy 12:28; Psalms 103:17-18;
Proverbs 11:21, 22:6; Isaiah 44:3, 54:13, 57:18; (Training Of) Deuteronomy
2:6-7; Proverbs 13:24, 19:18, 22:6, 15, 23:13-14; Ephesians 6:4; Colossians
3:21

DEATH: (Of Righteous) 2 Samuel 12:23; Psalms 23:4, 116:15; Ecclesiastes
12:7; Isaiah 57:1-2; Luke 16:19-31; Acts 7:59; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18;

Revelations 14:13

DEPRESSION: Psalms 9:9-10, 31:22-24, 42:5, 11, 146:8; Isaiah 35:3-4; 50:10; Jeremiah 29:11-13; Hebrews 12:12-13

DISCOURAGED: 2 Chronicles 15:7; Psalms 27:14, 37:23-24, 42:5-11, 138:8; Proverbs 24:16; Isaiah 40:31, 50:7; Matthew 11:28-30; 1 Corinthians 15:58; Galatians 6:9; 2 Thessalonians 3:13; Hebrews 4:15-16; James 4:8

DISEASE: (A Curse) Deuteronomy 28:15, 22, 27-28, 35, 45, 59-61; (Christ made Curse for us) Galatians 3:13

DIVORCE: Matthew 5:32, 19:3-9; 1 Corinthians 7:10-17, 20, 24

ENEMIES: (Attitude Toward) Proverbs 24:17-18; Matthew 5:44-46; Luke 6:27-37, 23:34; Acts 7:60; Romans 12:14, 19-21 (Protection Against) Exodus 14:14; Psalms 18:47-48, 44:5-7, 56:9, 60:12; Proverbs 16:7; Isaiah 41:10-13, 50:7-9

ETERNAL LIFE: (Promised) John 3:15-16, 36, 6:40-47, 10:27-37; 1 John 2:25; (We can Know) 1 John 5:11-13

FAITH: (Defined) Hebrews 11:1; (Source) Romans 10:17, 12:3; Hebrews 12:1-2; (to be exercised) Matthew 17:20; Romans 1:17; 2 Corinthians 5:7; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38, 11:6; James 1:2-3; (Tested) Matthew 8:23-26; Matthew 14:25-31; 1 Peter 1:7-8; 1 John 5:4; (Honored) Matthew 9:20-22, 27-30, 15:28; Mark 5:28-3, 9:23, 11:20-24; Luke 17:11-19, 18:35-43; Acts 14:8-10; Hebrews 11; James 5:15

FALSE DOCTRINES: Proverbs 16:25; Mark 13:21-23; Galatians 1:8; Colossians 2:8; I Timothy 4:1-3; II Peter 2:1-2; I John 4:1-3

FASTING: II Samuel 12:15-23; II Chronicles 20:1-3; Ezra 8:21-23; Jonah 3:1-10; Matthew 4:26, 4:16-18, 17:21

FEAR: Psalms 27:1-6, 34:4; Proverbs 1:33; Isaiah 35:3-4, 41:10; Romans 8:15; II Timothy 1:7; John 4:18; (of future) Deuteronomy 31:8; Psalms 23:6, 27:4-5, 112:1-7, 121:7-8; Isaiah 43:2, 45:2-3; Hebrews 13:6; I Peter 3:12-13

FORGIVENESS: (of God to Man) Psalms 85:2, 86:5, 103:3, 12; Isaiah 1:18, 43:2; 2 Colossians 2:13; Hebrews 8:12, 10:17; I John 1:9; (of Man to Fellowmen) Matthew 6:14-15, 18:21-22; Mark 11:25-26; Luke 17:3-4; Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:12-13

GIVING: Deuteronomy 15:11; Proverbs 3:9-10, 11:24-25, 19:17, 21:13, 28:27; Malachi 3:10; Matthew 6:1-4; Luke 6:38; Romans 12:8; I Corinthians 16:1-2; II Corinthians 9:6-12

GUIDANCE: Deuteronomy 31:8; Psalms 25:12, 32:8, 37:23, 48:1, 73:24; Isaiah 30:21, 42:16, 45:2, 58:11; Jeremiah 10:23; John 10:1-5, 16:3

GUILT: (of Righteous) Psalms 31:22, 138:8; Isaiah 44:22, 54:4-10; Romans 7:18-25, 8:1-2, 14:22; Philippians 1:6, 3:13-14; Hebrews 10:17; Jude 1:24;25

HEALING: (Christ's Commission) Matthew 10:1-8; Mark 4:13-14, 16:14-20; Luke 9:1-6; John 14:1; (Part of Atonement) Isaiah 53:5; Matthew 8:16-17; I Peter 2:24; (Promised) Psalms 103:3; (Hindered by Unbelief) Matthew 13:54-58- 17:14-20; (See FAITH-honored)

HOLY SPIRIT: (a Gift) Luke 11:13; Acts 2:38-39; (Accepted by Faith) Galatians 3:2; (Ministry of) Joel 2:28-29; John 14:26, 15:26, 16:7-14; Acts 1:8; Romans 5:5, 8:11, 16; 26; 1 Corinthians 2:10-14; 2 Corinthians 3:17; 2 Peter 1:21; (Fruits of) Galatians 5:22; 23; (Gifts of) Romans 12:5-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-1

HUMILITY: Proverbs 15:33, 18:12, 22:41, 57:15, 66:2; Matthew 20:26-28; Luke 14:11; James 4:6-10

JESUS: (Prophecy of) Isaiah 7:14, 9:6; Chap. 53; (Preexistence of) John 1:1-3, 8:58, 17:5; Colossians 1:15-17; (Divinity of) Matthew 1:18-25; John 1:14, Chap. 17; (Humanity of) Mark 6; Luke 22:44, 24:40-43; John 4:6, 11:35; Philippians 2:5-8; Hebrews 4:15 (Ministry of) Matthew 3:11, 5:17, 18:11, 20:28; Luke 4:18-19; John 3:16-17; Galatians 1:3-4; 1 Timothy 1:15; Hebrews 2:14; 1 John 3:5-8; (Second Coming) Matthew 24:30; Acts 1:11; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; Daniel 7:13; (Signs of) Matthew 24:3-13; Luke 17:26-37; II Timothy 3:1-5; II Thessalonians 2:1-4; II Peter 3:3-10

LOVE: (Defined) I Corinthians 13; (God's Love) John 3:16, 16:27; Romans 5:8; I John 4:8-19; (Our Love to God) Deuteronomy 10:12; Proverbs 8:17; Matthew 10:37, 22:36-40; John 14:21-24; I Corinthians 16:22; (to Fellowmen) Luke 6:31-34; John 13:34-35; Romans 13:8-10; I Timothy 2:24-25; Galatians 5:14; I Peter 3:8, 4:8; I John 3:11-23, 4:20-21 (See ENEMIES - Attitude towards.)

NEEDS: (Material) Deuteronomy 30:9-10; Psalms 23:1, 37:4-5, 25, 84:11; Isaiah 41:17-20; Jeremiah 32:17, 27; Matthew 6:25-34; Philippians 4:19; Hebrews 13:5-6; (Spiritual) Deuteronomy 4:29; Proverbs 10-24; Isaiah 44:3, 55:1; Jeremiah 29:11-13; Matthew 5:6; John 6:35; Hebrews 4:16; James 4:8

OBEDIENCE: (To God) Deuteronomy 11:26-28; 1 Samuel 15:22; Isaiah 48:18; Jeremiah 7:23; John 14:15-21; Acts 5:29; 1 John 2:3-6; Revelations 22:14; (to those in Authority) Matthew 2:17-21; Romans 13:1-7; Colossians 3:22-24; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13-20, 4:17 (to Parents) Ephesians 6:1; Colossians 3:20

OCCULT: Leviticus 19:31, 20:27; Deuteronomy 18:10-12; I Chronicles 10:13-14; 2 Chronicles 33:6; Isaiah 8:19; Jeremiah 27:9; I Timothy 4:1-4; Revelations 21:8

PATIENCE: Psalms 37:7, 40:1; Romans 5:3-5, 12:10-12; Philippians 4:11; Hebrews 6:12, 10:35-36; James 1:3-4; James 5:7-8; 11 Peter 1:5-9

PEACE: Psalms 119:165; Isaiah 26:3, 32:17, 48:18; John 14:27, 16:33; Romans 8:8; Phil 4:5-8

PERSECUTION: Isaiah 51:12-13, 21-23; Jeremiah 20:11; Matthew 5:10-12; Romans 8:35-39, 12:14; 2 Corinthians 12:10; II Timothy 3:12

PRAISE: Psalms 22:3, 34:1, 50:23, 100:4; Proverbs 27:21; Isaiah 42:8, 43:21; Hebrews 13:15; I Peter 2:9

PRAYER: (Admonished) Psalms 50:15; Isaiah 55:6-7; Jeremiah 29:12-13, 33:3; Matthew 6:5-8, 26:41; Luke 18:1; Luke 21:36; I Thessalonians 5:17; I Timothy 2:8; Philippians 4:6-7; (Answers - conditional) Matthew 18:19; Matthew 21:21-22; Mark 9:23, 11:21-24; John 9:31, 15:7; Hebrews 11:6; James 1:6-8; I John 3:21-22, 5:14-15; Job. 42:10; (Unanswered) Psalms

66:18; Proverbs 28:9; Isaiah 1:11-15; Isaiah 59:1-2; John 9:31; 1 Peter 4:12; (Answers delayed) Daniel 10:12-13; Psalms 42:5, 62:5; Isaiah 30:18, 40:31, 50:7; Lamentations 3:25-26; Habakkuk 2:3; Hebrews 10:36; (Hindered) 1 Peter 3:7

PRIDE: Deuteronomy 8:10-18; 1 Chronicles 29:11-12; Proverbs 6:16-19, 11:2, 16:18, 29:23; Jeremiah 9:23-24; Matthew 5:3-5, 6:1-4, 20:26-27; Luke 14:11; 1 Corinthians 4:7; James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5-6

PROSPERITY: (of Righteous) Deuteronomy 28:1-14; Joshua 1:7-9; I Samuel 2:7; I Chronicles 29:12; Psalms 112:1-3; III John 2; (of Wicked) Psalms 37:7, 73:3-2, 17; Proverbs 24:19-20, 28:13; Ecclesiastes 8:11; Malachi 3:13-18, 4:1-2; Romans 9:17-24; 1 Timothy 5:24

PROTECTION: Psalms chapters 91 & 121; Proverbs 3:24-26, 29:25; Isaiah 43:2, 59:19; Jeremiah 15:20-21; Psalms 7:10

REWARDS: (According to Works) II Chronicles 15:7; Psalms 58:11; Isaiah 40:10; Jeremiah 17:10; Matthew 16:27; Mark 9:41; Luke 6:35; I Corinthians 3:8, 13-15; Galatians 6:7-9; Colossians 3:24-25; Hebrews 10:36, 11:16; Revelations 20:12, 22:12

SALVATION: (a Gift) Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:8-9; II Timothy 1:9; (by Repentance & Confession) Matthew 3:1-2; Matthew 10:32-33; Luke 15:10; Acts 2:38-39, 3:19; Romans 2:4, 10:9-10; 2 Peter 3:91; John 1:9; (Assurance of) Mark 13:13; John 3:16, 5:24, 10:27-28; I Peter 1:3-5; I John 2:25, 5:13; Revelations 3:20-21

SATAN: (Origin) Isaiah 14:12-17; Ezekiel 28:13-19; Luke 10:18; (Afflicts Body - Mind) Job 1:6-12; Job 2:3-6; Matthew 17:14-16; Luke 13:16; 2 Corinthians 4:4, 11:3; (Interferes with Prayers and Plans) Daniel 10:12-13; 1 Thessalonians 2:18; (Murderer & Liar) John 8:44; Acts 5:3; (Deceiver & Accuser of Brethren) Revelations 12:9-10, 20:10; (Christ defeated) Colossians 1:13, 2:15; Hebrews 2:14; I John 3:8, 4:4; (His power controlled by God) Job 1:12, 2:6; Daniel 4:35; Matthew 28:18; Revelations 13:5-7, 14-15; (We resist) Ephesians 4:27, 6:11-18; James 4:7-8; I Peter 5:8-9; (Christ resisted by THE WORD) Luke 4:1-13; (His doom) Revelations 20:10

SEXUAL SINS: (Adultery-Fornication) Exodus 20:14; Proverbs 6:32-33; Malachi 3:5; Matthew 5:27-32; I Corinthians 6:15-18; Galatians 5:16-21;

James 4:4; (Prevision) Romans 1:24-32; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Ephesians 5:5; Revelations 21:8

SLEEP: Psalms 3:5, 4:8, 121:3, 127:2; Proverbs 3:24

SORROW: Psalms 30:5, 126:5-6, 127:2; Ecclesiastes 7:3; Isaiah 35:10; Matthew 5:4; Revelations 21:4

STRENGTH: Deuteronomy 33:25; Psalms 31:24, 105:4; Proverbs 24:10; Isaiah 40:28-31; 2 Corinthians 12:9-10; Philippians 4:13

SUFFERING: Romans 8:16-18; I Corinthians 12:25-27; II Timothy 2:12, 3:12; I Peter 2:19-20, 4:12-19

TEMPTATION: Mark 14:38; I Timothy 6:9-10; James 1:13-15; (Christ tempted) Matthew 4:1-11; Hebrews 2:18, 4:15; (Trials-Testings) I Corinthians 10:13; James 1:2-4, 12; 1 Peter 1:6-7, 4:12-13; 2 Peter 2:9

THANKFULNESS: Psalms 50:14, 100:4, 105:1; Ephesians 5:20; Philippians 4:6-7; Colossians 3:15-17; I Thessalonians 5:18; Hebrews 13:15

THOUGHTS: Psalms 1:1-2; Proverbs 16:3, 23:7; Isaiah 55:8-9; Malachi 3:16; Matthew 6:25-34; Philippians 4:8; Hebrews 4:12

TRUTH: John 8:31-32, 14:6, 16:13; II Timothy 2:15; I John 4:5-6

UNPARDONABLE SIN: (Attributing power of Holy Spirit to Satan) Mark 3:28-29

UNSELFISHNESS: Proverbs 21:13, 19:17; Ecclesiastes 11:1; Romans 15:1; Galatians 6:2; Philippians 2:3-4; I Thessalonians 5:14; Hebrews 13:2-3

VENGEANCE: Deuteronomy 32:35-43; Proverbs 20:22, 24:29; Luke 18:7-8; Romans 12:17-19; Hebrews 10:30

WISDOM: (Godly) II Chronicles 1:7-12; Psalms 111:10; Proverbs 2:6-11, 3:13-18, 4:5-9, 16:16; Daniel 2:20-23; Luke 21:15; 1 Corinthians 3:18-20; James 1:5-7

Grief Support

In Arizona, we are blessed to have a Grief Support group that is funded by a major funeral home chain. They hold grief support all over the valley and are willing to come into the care centers and provide on site support. I would recommend that you go through one of the grief support programs. They are loaded with information and will give you a better understanding of how to help those who are grieving. For information contact:

Judy Wineland
Grief Recovery/Outreach Program
623-245-0994

Devotions/Information

A very good source for devotionals and other information is RBC Ministries. All of their publications are free (donations). The devotion they distribute is called "Our Daily Bread". You may set up a quarterly delivery of this publication, just let them know how many you require. It is also available in large print. You may also view/print the daily devotion from their web site at <http://www.gospelcom.net/rbc/odb/>.

They also publish over 165 other publications that may help you in your ministry. You can reach RBC Ministries at:

Phone: 1-800-598-7221
Fax: 1-616-957-5741

Bible Software

One thing that will help is to have the Bible on computer, which will expedite the searching process. If you do not have the Bible on your computer, you can download a copy for free of "God's Word For Windows" from <http://www.islandcodeworks.com/>.

Stories/Jokes

Here is a small collection of Christian stories and jokes to get you started. I hope you find beneficial during your visitations. God Bless.

10 Inches

A boy was sitting on a park bench with one hand resting on an open Bible. He was loudly exclaiming his praise to God.

"Hallelujah! Hallelujah! God is great!" he yelled without worrying whether anyone heard him or not.

Shortly after, along came a man who had recently completed some studies at a local university. Feeling himself very enlightened in the ways of truth and very eager to show this enlightenment, he asked the boy about the source of his joy.

"Hey" asked the boy in return with a bright laugh, "Don't you have any idea what God is able to do? I just read that God opened up the waves of the Red Sea and led the whole nation of Israel right through the middle."

The enlightened man laughed lightly, sat down next to the boy and began to try to open his eyes to the "realities" of the miracles of the Bible.

"That can all be very easily explained. Modern scholarship has shown that the Red Sea in that area was only 10-inches deep at that time. It was no problem for the Israelites to wade across."

The boy was stumped. His eyes wandered from the man back to the Bible laying open in his lap. The man, content that he had enlightened a poor, naïve young person to the finer points of scientific insight, turned to go.

Scarcely had he taken two steps when the boy began to rejoice and praise louder than before. The man turned to ask the reason for this resumed jubilation.

"Wow!" exclaimed the boy happily, "God is greater than I thought! Not only did He lead the whole nation of Israel through the Red Sea, He topped it off by drowning the whole Egyptian army in 10-inches of water!"

An Angel Story

Two traveling angels stopped to spend the night in the home of a wealthy family. The family was rude and refused to let the Angels stay in the mansion's guestroom. Instead the angels were given a space in the cold basement. As they made their bed on the hard floor, the older angel saw a hole in the wall and repaired it. When the younger angel asked why, the older angel replied... "Things aren't always what they seem".

The next night the pair came to rest at the house of a very poor, but very hospitable farmer and his wife. After sharing what little food they had the couple let the angels sleep in their bed where they could have a good night's rest. When the sun came up the next morning the angels found the farmer and his wife in tears. Their only cow, whose milk had been their sole income, lay dead in the field. The younger angel was infuriated and asked the older angel "how could you have let this happen!? The first man had everything, yet you helped him," she accused. "The second family had little but was willing to share everything, and you let their cow die." "Things aren't always what they seem," the older angel replied.

"When we stayed in the basement of the mansion, I noticed there was gold stored in that hole in the wall. Since the owner was so obsessed with greed and unwilling to share his good fortune, I sealed the wall so he wouldn't find it. Then last night as we slept in the farmer's bed, the angel of death came for his wife. I told him to take the cow instead. Things aren't always what they seem."

Sometimes this is exactly what happens when things don't turn out the way we think they should. If you have faith in God, just trust that every outcome is always to your advantage. You might not realize it until much later.

Bad in Math

Little Tommy was doing very badly in math. His parents had tried everything; tutors, flash cards, special learning centers, in short, everything they could think of. Finally, in a last ditch effort, they took Tommy down & enrolled him in the local Catholic School.

After the first day, little Tommy came home with a very serious look on his face. He didn't kiss his mother hello. Instead, he went straight to his room & started studying. Books & papers were spread out all over the room and little Tommy was hard at work.

His mother was amazed. She called him down to dinner and to her shock, the minute he was done he marched back to his room without a word and in no time he was back hitting the books as hard as before.

This went on for sometime, day after day, while the mother tried to understand what had made the difference. Finally, little Tommy brought home his report card. He quietly laid it on the table and went up to his room and hit the books.

With great trepidation, his mom looked at it and to her surprise little Tommy got an A in math. She could no longer hold her curiosity. She went to his room and said, "Son, what was it? Was it the nuns?"

Little Tommy looked at her and shook his head no. "Well then," she replied, "was it the books, the discipline, the structure, the uniforms? What was it?"

Little Tommy looked at her and said, "Well, on the first day of school, when I saw the guy nailed to the plus sign, I knew they weren't fooling around."

Do All The Good

God has a way of allowing us to be in the right place at the right time.

I was walking down a dimly lit street late one evening when I heard muffled screams coming from behind a clump of bushes. Alarmed, I slowed down to listen and panicked when I realized that what I was hearing were the unmistakable sounds of a struggle: heavy grunting, frantic scuffling and tearing of fabric. Only yards from where I stood, a woman was being attacked.

Should I get involved? I was frightened for my own safety and cursed myself for having suddenly decided to take a new route home that night. What if I became another statistic? Shouldn't I just run to the nearest phone and call the police?

Although it seemed an eternity, the deliberations in my head had taken only seconds, but already the cries were growing weaker. I knew I had to act fast. How could I walk away from this? No, I finally resolved, I could not turn my back on the fate of this unknown woman, even if it meant risking my own life.

I am not a brave man, nor am I athletic. I don't know where I found the moral courage and physical strength-- but once I had finally resolved to help the girl, I became strangely transformed. I ran behind the bushes and pulled the assailant off the woman. Grappling, we fell to the ground, where we wrestled for a few minutes until the attacker jumped up and escaped.

Panting hard, I scrambled upright and approached the girl, who was crouched behind a tree, sobbing. In the darkness, I could barely see her outline, but I could certainly sense her trembling shock. Not wanting to frighten her further, I at first spoke to her from a distance.

"It's OK," I said soothingly. "The man ran away. You're safe now."

There was a long pause and then I heard the words, uttered in wonder, in amazement. "Dad, is that you?" And then, from behind the tree, stepped my youngest daughter, Katherine.

Do All the Good

Do all the good you can,
In all the ways you can,
In all the places you can,
At all times you can,
To all the people you can,
As long as you ever can.

---John Wesley---

There are times that we try to close our ears to the call. We try to ignore the appeal that comes asking for us to help someone else. We look around and suggest that we don't have the time, the energy, the knowledge, or the need to help someone else. We're short on whatever it takes to really do a good job and it's better if someone else does it. Are those the attitudes of a disciple of Christ? Well, they probably were the attitudes they had on Good Friday, but why not try adopting a Pentecost disciple attitude? After the Holy Spirit visited them at Pentecost, they were alive with the Holy Spirit, on fire for the Savior, and totally dedicated to spreading the message of God to the entire world. They were totally dedicated and fearless.

Hear the call. Heed the call. Listen to the words of the Lord. Share His love, compassion, concern with others. Remember that you are Christ's hands, arms, heart, and voice here on earth. To many who don't have a personal relationship with Jesus, you are their example of a Christian disciple. Does your life, your actions, your speech, your thoughts give them a good image of your Lord?

FAITH CAN MOVE MOUNTAINS

A small congregation in the foothills of the Great Smokies built a new sanctuary on a piece of land willed to them by a church member. Ten days before the new church was to open, the local building inspector informed the pastor that the parking lot was inadequate for the size of the building. Until the church doubled the size of the parking lot, they would not be able to use the new sanctuary. Unfortunately, the church with its undersized lot had used every inch of their land except for the mountain against which it had been built. In order to build more parking spaces, they would have to move the mountain out of the back yard. Undaunted, the pastor announced the next Sunday morning that he would meet that evening with all members who had "mountain moving faith."

They would hold a prayer session asking God to remove the mountain from the back yard and to somehow provide enough money to have it paved and painted before the scheduled opening dedication service the following week. At the appointed time, 24 of the congregation's 300 members assembled for prayer. They prayed for nearly three hours. At ten o'clock the pastor said the final "Amen". "We'll open next Sunday as scheduled," he assured everyone "God has never let us down before, and I believe He will be faithful this time too."

The next morning as he was working in his study there came a loud knock at his door. When he called "come in", a rough looking construction foreman appeared, removing his hard hat as he entered. "Excuse me, Reverend. I'm from Acme Construction Company over in the next county. We're building a huge shopping mall. We need some fill dirt. Would you be willing to sell us a chunk of that mountain behind the church? We'll pay you for the dirt we remove and pave all the exposed area free of charge, if we can have it right away. We can't do anything else until we get the dirt in and allow it to settle properly."

The little church was dedicated the next Sunday as originally planned and there were far more members with "mountain moving faith" on opening Sunday than there had been the previous week! Would you have shown up for that prayer meeting?

**Some people say faith comes from miracles.
But others know: MIRACLES COME FROM FAITH!**

Keep on believing!!! God IS in control and He DOES listen AND hear our prayers!!!! Love ya!

The Fork

There was a woman who had been diagnosed with a terminal illness and was given 3 months to live. As she began getting her things "in order", she called her pastor and asked for him to come to her house to discuss certain aspects of her final wishes.

She told him which songs she wanted sung at the service, what scriptures she wanted read, and what dress she wanted to be buried in. She also requested to be buried with her favorite Bible in her left hand.

Everything was in order and as the pastor was preparing to leave, the woman suddenly remembered one final request that was very important to her.

"Please Pastor, just one more thing", she said excitedly. "Sure, What is it" came the pastor's reply. "This is very important to me," the woman continued..... "I want to be buried holding a fork in my right hand." The pastor gazed at the woman, with a loss for words. "That surprises you, doesn't it ?" the woman asked. The pastor replied "Well to be quite honest, I'm puzzled by the request".

The woman explained. "You see, Pastor, in all my years of attending church socials and potluck dinners, I remember that when the dishes were being cleared after the main course, someone would inevitably lean over to me and say, 'Keep your Fork'... it was my favorite part because I knew that something better was coming, like velvety chocolate cake or deep dish apple pie. Something wonderful, and with substance to end the great meal".

The pastor listened intently and a smile came upon his face. The woman continued, "So, I just want people to see me there in the casket with a fork in my hand and I want them to wonder....'What's with the fork?'...then I want you to tell them: "Keep your Fork.....the best is yet to come".

The pastor's eyes welled up with tears of joy as he hugged the woman goodbye. He knew that this would be one of the last times that he would see her before her death. But he also knew that the woman had a better grasp of Heaven than he did. She KNEW and trusted that the best was yet to come.

At the funeral, everyone that walked by the woman's casket saw her wearing a beautiful dress with her favorite Bible held in her left hand and a fork held in her right hand.

Over and Over the pastor heard people ask the question, "Why is she holding a fork?" and his smile began to get larger and brighter each time. During his message, the pastor told the people about the conversation that he had with the woman shortly before she died. He explained the fork and what it symbolized to her.

The Pastor told everyone how he could not stop thinking about the fork and how he hoped that they would not be able to stop thinking about it either.

That fork and the meaning of it to the woman had quite the impact on everyone and they are still sharing the story with people they meet.

And now it has been shared with you.....so the next time you reach for your fork, let it remind you, oh so gently, that the best is yet to come...

His name was Fleming

His name was Fleming, and he was a poor Scottish farmer. One day, while trying to make out a living for his family, he heard a cry for help coming from a nearby bog. He dropped his tools and ran to the bog. There, mired to his waist in black muck, was a terrified boy, screaming and struggling to free himself. Farmer Fleming saved the lad from what could have been a slow and terrifying death.

The next day, a fancy carriage pulled up to the Scotsman's sparse surroundings. An elegantly dressed nobleman stepped out and introduced himself as the father of the boy Farmer Fleming had saved. "I want to repay you," said the nobleman. "You saved my son's life."

"No, I can't accept payment for what I did," the Scottish farmer replied, waving off the offer.

At that moment, the farmer's own son came to the door of the family hovel. "Is that your son?" the nobleman asked.

"Yes," the farmer replied proudly.

"I'll make you a deal. Let me take him and give him a good education. If the lad is anything like his father, he'll grow to a man you can be proud of." And that he did.

In time, Farmer Fleming's son graduated from St. Mary's Hospital Medical School in London, and went on to become known throughout the world as the noted Sir Alexander Fleming, the discoverer of Penicillin.

Years afterward, the nobleman's son was stricken with pneumonia. What saved him? Penicillin.

The name of the nobleman? Lord Randolph Churchill.

His son's name? Sir Winston Churchill.

Someone once said, "What goes around comes around." Bottom Line:
Work like you don't need the money. Love like you've never been hurt.
Dance like nobody's watching.

I Took Your Place

One day, a man went to visit a church. He arrived early, parked his car, and got out. Another car pulled up near him, and the driver told him, "I always park there. You took my place!"

The visitor went inside for Sunday School, found an empty seat, and sat down. A young lady from the church approached him and stated, "That's my seat! You took my place!" The visitor was somewhat distressed by this rude welcome but said nothing.

After Sunday School, the visitor went into the church sanctuary and sat down. Another member walked up to him and said, "That's where I always sit. You took my place!" The visitor was even more troubled by this treatment, but still said nothing.

Later, as the congregation was praying for Christ to dwell among them, the visitor stood, and his appearance began to change. Horrible scars became visible on his hands and on his sandaled feet.

Someone from the congregation noticed him and called out, "What happened to you?"

The visitor replied, "I took your place."

NASA Proves God's Word

For all you scientists out there and for all the students who have a hard time convincing these people regarding the truth of the Bible...here's something that shows God's awesome creation and shows that He is still in control.

Did you know that the space program is busy proving that what has been called "myth" in the Bible is true? Mr. Harold Hill, President of the Curtis Engine Company in Baltimore Maryland and a consultant in the space program, relates the following development. I think one of the most amazing things that God has for us today happened recently to our astronauts and space scientists at Green Belt, Maryland. They were checking the position of the sun, moon, and planets out in space where they would be 100 years and 1000 years from now. We have to know this so we won't send a satellite up and have it bump into something later on its orbits. We have to lay out the orbits in terms of the life of the satellite, and where the planets will be so the whole thing will not bog down.

They ran the computer measurement back and forth over the centuries and it came to a halt. The computer stopped and put up a red signal, which meant that there was something wrong either with the information fed into it or with the results as compared to the standards. They called in the service department to check it out and they said "what's wrong?" Well, they found there is a day missing in space in elapsed time. They scratched their heads and tore their hair. There was no answer.

Finally, a Christian man on the team said, "You know, one time I was in Sunday School and they talked about the sun standing still." While they didn't believe him, they didn't have an answer either, so they said, "Show us." He got a Bible and went back to the book of Joshua where they found a pretty ridiculous statement for any one with "common sense." There they found the Lord saying to Joshua, "Fear them not, I have delivered them into thy hand; there shall not a man of them stand before thee." Joshua was concerned because he was surrounded by the enemy and if darkness fell they would overpower them. So Joshua asked the Lord to make the sun stand still! That's right- "The sun stood still and the moon stayed--and hastened not to go down about a whole day!" The astronauts and scientists said, "There is the missing day!" They checked the computers going back into the time it was written and found it was close but not close enough. The elapsed time that was missing back in Joshua's day was 23 hours and 20 minutes-not

a whole day. They read the Bible and there it was "about (approximately) a day"

These little words in the Bible are important, but they were still in trouble because if you cannot account for 40 minutes you'll still be in trouble 1,000 years from now. Forty minutes had to be found because it can be multiplied many times over in orbits. As the Christian employee thought about it, he remembered somewhere in the Bible where it said the sun went BACKWARDS. The scientists told him he was out of his mind, but they got out the Book and read these words in 2 Kings: Hezekiah, on his death-bed, was visited by the prophet Isaiah who told him that he was not going to die. Hezekiah asked for a sign as proof. Isaiah said "Do you want the sun to go ahead 10 degrees?" Hezekiah said "It is nothing for the sun to go ahead 10 degrees, but let the shadow return backward 10 degrees.." Isaiah spoke to the Lord and the Lord brought the shadow ten degrees BACKWARD! Ten degrees is exactly 40 minutes! Twenty-three hours and 20 minutes in Joshua, plus 40 minutes in Second Kings make the missing day in the universe!

THE BUTTERFLY

One day a small opening appeared on a cocoon, a man sat and watched a butterfly for several hours as it struggled to force its body through that little hole. Then it seemed to stop making any progress. It appeared as if it had gotten as far as it could and it could go no further.

So the man decided to help the butterfly. He took a pair of scissors and snipped off the remaining bit of the cocoon. The butterfly then emerged easily. But it had a swollen body and small, shriveled wings.

The man continued to watch the butterfly because he expected that, at any moment, the wings would enlarge and expand to be able to support the body, which would contract in time.

Neither happened! In fact, the butterfly spent the rest of its life crawling around with a swollen body and shriveled wings. It never was able to fly.

What the man, in his kindness and haste, did not understand was that the restricting cocoon and the struggle required for the butterfly to get through the tiny opening was God's way of forcing fluid from the body of the butterfly into its wings so that it would be ready for flight once it achieved its freedom from the cocoon.

Sometimes struggles are exactly what we need in our life. If God allowed us to go through our life without any obstacles, it would cripple us. We would not be as strong as what we could have been. We could never fly.

THE EMPTY CHAIR

A man's daughter had asked the local pastor to come and pray with her father. When the pastor arrived, he found the man lying in bed with his head propped up on two pillows and an empty chair beside his bed. The pastor assumed that the old fellow had been informed of his visit. "I guess you were expecting me," he said. "No, who are you?" "I'm the new associate at your local church," the pastor replied. "When I saw the empty chair, I figured you knew I was going to show up." "Oh yeah, the chair," said the bedridden man. "Would you mind closing the door?" Puzzled, the pastor shut the door. "I've never told anyone this, not even my daughter," said the man. "But all of my life I have never known how to pray. At church I used to hear the pastor talk about prayer, but it always went right over my head."

"I abandoned any attempt at prayer," the old man continued, "until one day about four years ago my best friend said to me, 'Joe, prayer is just a simple matter of having a conversation with Jesus. Here's what I suggest. Sit down on a chair; place an empty chair in front of you, and in faith see Jesus on the chair. It's not spooky because he promised, 'I'll be with you always.' Then just speak to him and listen in the same way you're doing with me right now."

"So, I tried it and I've liked it so much that I do it a couple of hours every day. I'm careful, though. If my daughter saw me talking to an empty chair, she'd either have a nervous breakdown or send me off to the funny farm."

The pastor was deeply moved by the story and encouraged the old guy to continue on the journey. Then he prayed with him, and returned to the church. Two nights later the daughter called to tell the pastor that her daddy had died that afternoon. "Did he seem to die in peace?" he asked. "Yes, when I left the house around two o'clock, he called me over to his bedside, told me one of his corny jokes, and kissed me on the cheek."

"When I got back from the store an hour later, I found him dead. But there was something strange, in fact, beyond strange-kind of weird. Apparently, just before Daddy died, he leaned over and rested his head on a chair beside the bed."

THREE TREES

Once there were three trees on a hill in the woods. They were discussing their hopes and dreams when the first tree said, "Someday I hope to be a treasure chest. I could be filled with gold, silver and precious gems. I could be decorated with intricate carving and everyone would see the beauty."

Then the second tree said, "Someday I will be a mighty ship. I will take kings and queens across the waters and sail to the corners of the world. Everyone will feel safe in me because of the strength of my hull."

Finally the third tree said, "I want to grow to be the tallest and straightest tree in the forest. People will see me on top of the hill and look up to my branches, and think of the heavens and God and how close to them I am reaching. And I will be the greatest tree of all time and people will always remember me".

After a few years of praying that their dreams would come true, a group of woodsmen came upon the trees. When one came to the first tree he said, "This looks like a strong tree, think I should be able to sell the wood to a carpenter," and he began cutting it down. The tree was happy, because he knew that the carpenter would make him into a treasure chest.

At the second tree a woodsman said, "This looks like a strong tree, I should be able to sell it to the shipyard." The second tree was happy because he knew he was on his way to becoming a mighty ship.

When the woodsmen came upon the third tree, the tree was very frightened because he knew that if they cut him down his dreams would not come true. One of the woodsmen said, "This looks like a good sturdy tree. I don't have anything in mind for it, but it should serve someone well enough," and he cut it down.

When the first tree arrived at the carpenter's, he was made into a feed box for animals. He was then placed in a barn and filled with hay. This was not at all what he had prayed for.

The second tree was delivered to the shipyard and was cut and made into a small fishing boat. His dreams of being a mighty ship and carrying kings had come to an end.

The third tree was cut into large pieces and left alone in the dark.

The years went by, and the trees forgot about their dreams.

Then one day, a man and women came to the barn. That night the woman gave birth. There was no place to rest the tiny infant but the feed box that was made from the first tree. And so they placed the baby on the soft hay which the feed box held. The man, a carpenter himself, wished that he could have made a crib for the baby, but this manger would have to do. The tree could feel the importance of this event and knew that it had held the greatest treasure of all time.

Years later, a group of men got into the fishing boat made from the second tree. One of them was tired and went to sleep. While they were out on the water, a great storm arose and the tree didn't think it was strong enough to keep the men safe. The men woke the sleeping man, and he stood and said "peace" and the storm stopped. At that moment, the tree knew that it had carried the King of Kings.

Finally, someone came and got the third tree. It was carried through the streets as people mocked the man who carried it. When they came to a stop, the man was nailed to the tree and raised up into the air to die at the top of a hill. The tree came to realize that it had been as close to God as was ever possible because Jesus had been crucified on it.

The moral of this story is that when things don't seem to be going your way, always know that God has a plan for you. If you place your trust in Him, He will give you great gifts. Each of the trees got what they wanted, just not in the way they had imagined. We don't always know what God's plans are for us. We just know that His ways are not our ways, but His ways are always best.

You cannot teach a man anything; you can only help him find it within himself.

-- Galileo Galilei

Wanting God

A hermit was meditating by a river when a young man interrupted him. "Master, I wish to become your disciple," said the man. "Why?" replied the hermit. The young man thought for a moment. "Because I want to find God."

The master jumped up, grabbed him by the scruff of his neck, dragged him into the river, and plunged his head under water. After holding him there for a minute, with him kicking and struggling to free himself, the master finally pulled him up out of the river. The young man coughed up water and gasped to get his breath. When he eventually quieted down, the master spoke. "Tell me, what did you want most of all when you were under water."

"Air!" answered the man.

"Very well," said the master. "Go home and come back to me when you want God as much as you just wanted air."

GOODNESS

He was in the first third grade class I taught at Saint Mary's School in Morris, Minnesota. All 34 of my students were dear to me, but Mark Eklund was one in a million. Very neat in appearance, but had that happy-to-be-alive attitude that made even his occasional mischievousness delightful.

Mark talked incessantly. I had to remind him again and again that talking without permission was not acceptable. What impressed me so much, though, was his sincere response every time I had to correct him for misbehaving: "Thank you for correcting me, Sister" I didn't know what to make of it at first but before long I became accustomed to hearing it many times a day.

One morning my patience was growing thin when Mark talked once too often, and then I made a novice-teacher's mistake. I looked at him and said, "If you say one more word, I am going to tape your mouth shut!"

It wasn't ten seconds later when Chuck blurred out, "Mark's talking again." I hadn't asked any of the students to help me watch Mark, but since I had stated the punishment in front of the class, I had to act on it.

I remember the scene as if it had occurred this morning. I walked to my desk, very deliberately opened my drawer and took out a roll of masking tape. Without saying a word, I proceeded to Mark's desk, tore off two pieces of tape and made a big X with them over his mouth. I then returned to the front of the room. As I glanced at Mark to see how he was doing he winked at me. That did it! I started laughing. The class cheered as I walked back to Mark's desk, removed the tape and shrugged my shoulders. His first words were, "Thank you for correcting me, Sister.'",

At the end of the year I was asked to teach junior-high math. The years flew by, and before I knew it Mark was in my class room again. He was more handsome than ever and just as polite. Since he had to listen carefully to my instructions in the "new math" he did not talk as much in the ninth grade as he had in the third.

One Friday, things just didn't feel tight. We had worked hard on a new concept all week, and I sensed that the students were frowning, frustrated

with themselves) arid edgy with one another. I had to stop this crankiness before it got out of hand. So I asked them to list the names of the other students in the room on two sheets of paper, leaving a space between each name. Then I told them to think of the nicest thing they could say about each of their classmates and write it down.

It took the remainder of the class period to finish the assignment, and as the students left the room, each one handed me the papers. Charlie smiled. Mark said, "Thank you for teaching me, Sister. Have a good weekend". That Saturday, I wrote down the name of each student on a separate sheet of paper, and I listed what everyone else had said about that individual. On Monday I gave each student his or her list. Before long, the entire class was smiling. Really! I heard whispered. "I never knew that meant anything to anyone!" "I didn't know others liked me so much!"

No one ever mentioned those papers in class again. I never knew if they discussed them after class or with their parents, but it didn't matter. The exercise had accomplished its purpose. The students were happy with themselves and one another again.

That group of students moved on Several years later, after I returned from vacation, my parents met me at the airport As we were driving home, Mother asked me the usual questions about the trip, the weather, my experiences in general. There was a light lull in the conversation Mother gave Dad a sideways glance and simply says, "Dad?" My father cleared his throat as he usually did before something important "The Eklunds called last night," he began. "Really?" I said. "I haven't heard from them in years. I wonder how Mark is."

Dad responded quietly. "Mark was killed in Vietnam," he said. "The funeral is tomorrow, and his parents would like it if you could attend." To this day I can still point to the exact spot on I-494 where Dad told me about Mark. I had never seen a serviceman in a military coffin before. Mark looked so handsome, so mature. All I could think at that moment was, Mark, I would give all the masking tape in the world if only you would talk to me.

The church was packed with Mark's friends. Chuck's sister sang "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." Why did it have to rain on the day of the funeral? It was difficult enough at the graveside. The pastor said the usual prayers, and

the bugler played taps. One by one, those who loved Mark took a last walk by the coffin and sprinkled it with holy water.

I was the last one to bless the coffin. As I stood there, one of the soldiers who had acted as pallbearer came up to me. "Were you Mark's math teacher?" he asked. I nodded as I continued to stare at the coffin. "Mark talked about you a lot," he said.

After the funeral, most of Mark's former classmates headed to Chuck's farmhouse for lunch. Mark's mother and father were there, obviously waiting for me. "We want to show you something," his father said, taking a wallet out of his pocket. "They found this on Mark when he was killed. We thought you might recognize it"

Opening the billfold, he carefully removed two worn pieces of notebook paper that had obviously been taped, folded and refolded many times. I knew without looking that the papers were the ones on which I had listed all the good things each of Mark's classmates had said about him. "Thank you so much for doing that" Mark's mother said. "As you can see, Mark treasured it." Mark's classmates started to gather around us. Charlie smiled rather sheepishly and said, I still have my list. It's in the top drawer of my desk at home." Chuck's wife said, "Chuck asked me to put this in our wedding album." "I have mine too," Marilyn said. "It's in my diary." Then Vicki, another classmate, reached into her pocketbook, took out her wallet and showed her worn and frazzled list to the group. "I carry this with me at all times," Vicki said without batting an eyelash. "I think we all saved our lists".

That's when I finally sat down and cried. I cried for Mark and for all his friends who would never see him again.

The End

written by: Sister Helen P. Mrosia

The purpose of this letter, is to encourage everyone to compliment the people you love and care about. We often tend to forget the importance of showing our affections and love. Sometimes the smallest of things could mean the most to another.

Jokes

Atheist Holiday

An Atheist complained to a friend . . .

“Christians have their special holidays, such as Christmas and Easter.”

“And Jews celebrate their national holidays, such as Passover and Yom Kippur.”

“But we Atheists,” he said, “have no recognized national holidays.”

“It's unfair discrimination.”

His friend replied, “Why don't you celebrate April first?”

George Bush & Moses

George Bush was walking through the airport when he spotted an elderly man with white hair and a long beard.

He went up to the man and asked, "Aren't you Moses?"

The old man just looked straight down and did not say a word.

Mr. Bush asked one of his assistants if he knew why the old man did not answer. His assistant said, "Maybe he is a Democrat and doesn't like you."

Bush then asked the man, "I am not speaking to you just because I want your vote. I am really curious, because you look just like Moses."

The old man just looked down and again, did not say a word.

Feeling frustrated, Bush walked away. The assistant then went up to the man and asked him why he did not answer Mr. Bush. The man said, "To be honest, I AM Moses, but you remember the last time I spoke to a bush, I wandered around the desert for 40 years..."

Problems with Bats

Three Pastors were discussing the problems each had with bats in their steeples.

The first one said, "We had to call an exterminator; it was very expensive and still they came back."

The second one said, "We have been trapping them and releasing them miles away, but it is still a problem for us."

The third one said, "we haven't had a problem for almost two years." The others were astonished and said "What did you do?"

The third replied, "We gathered them together, baptized them, made them members of the church, and they haven't been back since."

THE PRIEST AND THE BUS DRIVER

A priest and a bus driver both go to Heaven at the same time. St. Peter shows the bus driver his house, which is three houses away from God.

During this time, the priest is thinking to himself, "Since I'm a priest I should be right next to God!"

Then St. Peter turns towards the priest and beckons him to follow. The priest follows for three miles when they finally come to a house. St. Peter tells the priest that this is his house.

The priest looks horrified and says to St. Peter, "I don't understand! The bus driver is really close to God and I'm a priest! That doesn't make sense!"

St. Peter replies, "Oh, that's easy to explain. When you preach, people sleep. When the bus driver drives, people pray."

CHOOSING HYMNS

One Sunday a pastor told his congregation that the church needed some extra money, and he asked the people to consider donating a little more than usual into the offering plate. He said that whoever gave the most would be able to pick out three hymns. After the offering plates were passed, the pastor glanced down and noticed that someone had placed a \$1,000 bill in offering.

He was so excited that he immediately shared his joy with his congregation and said he'd like to personally thank the person who placed the money in the plate. A very quiet, elderly, saintly lady all the way in the back shyly raised her hand. The pastor asked her to come to the front.

Slowly she made her way to the pastor. He told her how wonderful it was that she gave so much and in thanks asked her to pick out three hymns.

Her eyes brightened as she looked over the congregation, pointed to the three most handsome men in the building and said, "I'll take him and him and him."

POLITICIANS NEVER LIE

A busload of politicians were driving down a country road when, all of a sudden, the bus ran off the road and crashed into a tree in an old farmer's field. The old farmer, after seeing what had happened, went over to investigate. He then dug a hole and buried the politicians.

A few days later the local sheriff came out, saw the crashed bus, and asked the old farmer where all the politicians had gone.

The old farmer said he had buried them.

The sheriff asked the old farmer, "Were they all dead?"

The old farmer replied, "Well, some of them said they weren't, but you know how them politicians lie."

Sunday School Lessons

The Sunday school lesson for the day was about Noah's Ark, so the preschool teacher in our Kentucky church decided to get her small pupils involved by playing a game in which they identified animals.

"I'm going to describe something to you. Let's see if you can guess what it is. First: I'm furry with a bushy tail and I like to climb trees."

The children looked at her blankly.

"I also like to eat nuts, especially acorns."

No response. This wasn't going well at all!

"I'm usually brown or gray, but sometimes I can be black or red."

Desperate, the teacher turned to a perky four-year-old who was usually good about coming up with the answers. "Michelle, what do you think?"

Michelle looked hesitantly at her classmates and replied, "Well, I know the answer has to be Jesus - but it sure sounds like a squirrel to me!"

References

Holy Bible

RBC Ministries

United Christian Ministries International

Sister Teresa M. McIntier, MS, RN, CDE

Eloise Cole

This guide was inspired by God and written by Pastor Scott E. Jones, 15
February 2001