

The Gospel Trumpeter

JUSTIFICATION

UNITY & TRUTH

SANCTIFICATION

"So will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day." Eze. 34:12 Jer. 32:39

"But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished." Rev. 10:7 Matt. 24:31

SOUNDING FORTH THE SEVENTH AND LAST TRUMPET

Vol. 42 May 2012 No. 5



Church of God Tabernacle in Newark, Ohio

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

Psalm 122:1

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

Guest Editorial

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

Roger Decker, Pastor
83 Decrow Ave.
Newark, OH 43055

Email: pastor@godsacres.us
Phone: 740-344-2543 or 1-888-730-0461
Fax: 740-344-4737

Print Shop Phone: 740-345-1312

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

Brother Roger L. Decker Editor
Workers Too Numerous to Mention

THE CHURCH OF GOD BELIEVES IN:

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

SOME SPIRITUAL FACTS PERTAINING TO THE CHURCH

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

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

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"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

2 Peter 3:9

God Does Not Want You to Be Lost

As God looks upon the multitudes, He grieves over seeing those who are lost in sin. He sent His Son to be the sacrifice so every individual could turn to Him and be saved. He has no pleasure seeing men and women go through life being separated from Him and then dying lost. He has made the necessary preparation for all to be redeemed. What then would cause a soul to go on in sin, refusing the pardoning love He offers? The only conclusion is simply that the individual is not willing to seek the Lord. This is such a terrible mistake for a man or a woman. There is no need for anyone to be lost and to spend eternity in hell.

God's power is the same today as it has always been. He is able and willing to save the vilest sinner. He is able to break every chain that binds the soul. Regardless of the depth you might have gone in sin, God's arm is not too short that it cannot reach down and lift you out. There is a song that says, "His hand reached further down than I could reach up." Dear reader, God does not want you to be lost! There is hope for you, but you must turn to Him in true repentance. Can you not sense Him calling out to you to come to Him? You must forsake your way and your thoughts and accept His way. Jesus, speaking in John 6:37, tells us, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." You do not need to be lost!

Every Scripture in the Word of God that pertains to salvation is

in your favor and lets you know that God is able, willing, and ready to grant you full pardon for your sins. There is neither slackness nor weakness on God's part that would prevent Him from delivering you from sin's awful destruction. He can perform all that which He has promised. In Ephesians 3:20 we find that God "is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." With all His promises being yea and amen, please note that failure to find forgiveness is on the part of the individual. There is no reason for anyone to be lost.

The long-suffering and the mercy of God waits in anticipation for each wayward soul to make his surrender to serve Him. Beware, dear one, there is danger lingering in sin! Great calamity awaits those who put off their soul's salvation. Why? One never knows when death will come and cut him or her off from the privilege of being saved. You must remember that every day you remain under sin's dominion, eternal doom awaits you. Today is the accepted time. "Behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2). "To day if ye will hear His voice, Harden not your hearts." (Hebrews 3:7-8). The decision rests with you, friend. You have the right to choose how you want to live in this life. The choice you make will determine where you spend eternity. Choosing to continue to live your own way is a great

[continued on page 19]

Isaiah 38:1 In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came unto him, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live.

2 Then Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall, and prayed unto the LORD,

3 And said, Remember now, O LORD, I beseech thee, how I have walked

before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore.

4 Then came the word of the LORD to Isaiah, saying,

5 Go, and say to Hezekiah, Thus saith the LORD, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will add unto thy days fifteen years.

6 And I will deliver thee and this

city out of the hand of the king of Assyria: and I will defend this city.

7 And this shall be a sign unto thee from the LORD, that the LORD will do this thing that he hath spoken;

8 Behold, I will bring again the shadow of the degrees, which is gone down in the sun dial of Ahaz, ten degrees backward. So the sun returned ten degrees, by which degrees it was gone down.

The Need of Preparation



Brother Roger L. Decker

An Immediate Need

In this Scripture text we find a very sobering prophecy given to the king by the Prophet Isaiah. King Hezekiah was twenty-five years of age. In 2 Kings 18:1-2 we read: "Now it came to pass in the third year of Hoshea son of Elah king of Israel, that Hezekiah the son of Ahaz king of Judah began to reign. Twenty and five years old was he when he began to reign; and he reigned twenty and nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name also was Abi, the daughter of Zacha-

riah."

King Hezekiah reigned twenty-nine years at Jerusalem. He started on the right track. Verse 3 says, "And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that David his father did." He had a record of truly pleasing God. Hezekiah wasted no time in removing idolatrous worship. The Scripture says he trusted in the Lord and departed not from following Him. He kept the Lord's commandments, and the Lord was with him and prospered him wherever he went and in whatever he did. He fought

against the enemies of God's people. He fought against the Philistines and defeated them. He rebelled against the king of Assyria and would not serve him.

The Scripture text says in verse 1a, "In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death." If the sickness would have run its natural course, it would have been terminal. Isaiah 38:21 reads, "For Isaiah had said, Let them take a lump of figs, and lay it for a plaster upon the boil, and he shall recover." This boil, which commentators say was common, ended a person's life very quickly, within

three to four days. This could be the reason that Hezekiah was so urgent in his appeal to the Lord. It was quite a prophecy for a prophet to deliver to a king.

Isaiah had great boldness and courage, especially to deliver such a message to a king, and it was evident that before Isaiah came to him, the king did not realize the severity of his condition. The disease was deep-seated, making rapid progress, and it was incurable. God felt it of vast importance to tell Hezekiah because of his faithfulness. Therefore, the Lord sent the Prophet Isaiah to tell Hezekiah of his true condition and to tell him that what he had to do, he must do quickly. Before Isaiah told Hezekiah he was going to die, he told him to set his house in order. In other words, he was telling him to make the preparations necessary for him to leave this world.

Every man and woman in this world should make such preparations for leaving. This world is not your eternal home, regardless of your age. Young person, you have no guarantee that you will live three score years and ten, and if by reason of strength, eighty years. Too often people try to make preparations too late, and they sometimes forget that the devil is just as real as God is. He is going to fight those preparations. He will battle you right down to your last breath. Nevertheless, preparations ought to be made, and they should be made immediately.

"Prepare to Meet Thy God"

Amos 4:1-13 says: "Hear this word, ye kine of Bashan, that are in the mountain of Samaria, which oppress the poor, which crush the needy, which say to their masters, Bring, and let us drink. The Lord GOD hath sworn by his holiness, that, lo, the days shall come upon you, that he will take you away with hooks, and your posterity with fishhooks. And ye shall go out at the breaches, every cow at that which is before her; and ye shall cast them

into the palace, saith the LORD.

"Come to Bethel, and transgress; at Gilgal multiply transgression; and bring your sacrifices every morning, and your tithes after three years: And offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven, and proclaim and publish the free offerings: for this liketh you, O ye children of Israel, saith the Lord GOD. And I also have given you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and want of bread in all your places: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD. And also I have withholden the rain from you, when there were yet three months to the harvest: and I caused it to rain upon one city, and caused it not to rain upon another city: one piece was rained upon, and the piece whereupon it rained not withered.

"So two or three cities wandered unto one city, to drink water; but they were not satisfied: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD. I have smitten you with blasting and mildew: when your gardens and your vineyards and your fig trees and your olive trees increased, the palmerworm devoured them: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD. I have sent among you the pestilence after the manner of Egypt: your young men have I slain with the sword, and have taken away your horses; and I have made the stink of your camps to come up unto your nostrils: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD.

"I have overthrown some of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD. Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel. For, lo, he that formeth the mountains, and createth the wind, and declareth unto man what is his thought, that maketh the morning darkness, and treadeth upon the high places of the earth, The LORD, The God of hosts, is his name."

You can tell by this Scripture

reading that those people seemingly had the best of everything. They had many things happen to them, but still they had not returned to the Lord. The Scripture says they had suffered famine, afflictions, loss of crops, pestilence, and being overthrown; yet they were not moved. They still did not return to God, and then in verse 12 the Prophet Amos said, "Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel." Israel would not consider God through the hard places and the tragedies, so God visited them. However, before He visited them, He let them know that they needed to prepare to meet Him.

Dear one, if ever there was a time to prepare to meet God, it is now! You need to prepare to meet the Lord. Speaking through the Prophet Amos, God told Israel to prepare to meet Him, and speaking through the Prophet Isaiah, God told Hezekiah to "Set thine house in order."

Life's Most Important Responsibility

The language God used through the Prophet Amos and through the Prophet Isaiah was very serious. Before a man or a woman meets God, or dies, he or she needs to make sure that things are set in order. This is of vast importance. Many people are careful about taking care of their homes. Before they entertain company, there are certain things that they make sure they take care of, especially if the guest coming to their home is a dignitary. What do they do? They make certain that the house is swept and vacuumed, the beds are made, the bathrooms are extra clean, the dishes are clean and put away, and the furniture is arranged just the right way. Everything is made ready to receive an honored guest.

When Jesus went to the house of Mary and Martha, the Scripture says that Martha was cumbered about with much serving, but in Luke 10:42 we read that Jesus told her, "But one thing is needful: and Mary

hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her." Dying and meeting God takes preparation. It is more than the old statement, "Here today and gone tomorrow." I used to hear that saying as a boy.

We must prepare for many things in life. People prepare their vacation plans. Before people build a new home, they sit down and do some planning and ask themselves these questions: "Who is going to be the contractor? Who is going to do the electrical work? Who is going to do the foundation? Do we have enough money? How much will we have to borrow from the bank?" Also, there is preparation in marriage, or at least there should be.

You prepare before you get another job. Would it be to your advantage to change jobs? You prepare to purchase a new vehicle. Would it be an advantage to buy a new vehicle now? We prepare for retirement. Before you retire, you must evaluate whether or not you can make ends meet on retirement income or Social Security. Would you be able to live comfortably and pay the bills if you were to retire now? You prepare to remodel, to build, to buy, and to sell. There is not a thing wrong with any of those things, but if they cause you to neglect your soul, those things have become a snare to you. People make all kinds of preparations in the world. Many people never live to see retirement. Many of them never live to see their new home or their new car. Many of them do not live to go on vacation after all those preparations. One preparation is needful above all else, and that is to prepare to meet God. That is more sure than your vacation, your retirement, your new home, or your new car.

Jesus warned people in Luke 17:26-27: "And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark,

and the flood came, and destroyed them all." The flood came and destroyed them all. Those closest to the ark perished just as those who were the farthest away. Being close to the Kingdom of God is not the same as being in the kingdom.

The most precious thing you will ever be responsible for is your soul, yet that is what people neglect the most. Dear one, you need to guard your soul with all your heart. You must give God the best you have; give Him the best of your life. Young person, you need to give God the best you have while you are young and your heart is tender. Let Him fill your heart with His commandments, His Holy Spirit, His way, His comfort, His strength, His guidance, and His Truth. You will be so glad that you did. You will not get a chance to change things in eternity.

Do You Have the Peace of God?

We read in Luke 12:16-21: "And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods.

"And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

This man did not include God in his plans, and you do not read that the rich man even mentioned God's name. It was God who spoke to him, but when God spoke to him, it was too late for him to do anything about it. You see, it is God who puts people up and puts them down.

The spirit of this world wants to

do away with the name of God. Some people want to do away with the phrase "In God We Trust" from our money. Also, they want to remove the phrase "one nation under God" from the Pledge of Allegiance. No matter what they attempt to do, His name is still supreme above all other names.

You need to make preparations for your soul. The soul has to be at peace with God. The Prophet Isaiah said in Isaiah 57:21, "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." That which prohibits peace must be removed to have peace with God. You must make preparations to receive the things of God, and you must make preparations to meet God. You want God to be your friend, not your enemy. There is no peace to the wicked because of wickedness. When wickedness is removed, a person becomes a new man, and then he has peace with God.

The Apostle Paul, writing to the Gentiles, said in Ephesians 2:11-15: "Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace."

Paul was saying that before we heard of Christ we were in a deplorable condition. Next, he said we were aliens and strangers to the promises of God to His people. We were without hope and without God in the world. His creation is all around us, yet we were without

Him. That is about as deplorable as one can get, to be in God's world without Him.

We had no God. We did not worship Him, we did not love Him, we did not serve Him, we did not seek His favors, and we did not act with reverence to Him and His glory. Nothing could be of a better description of a sinner than to say that he is without God in the world. Then there is the blood. I thank God for the blood! The Scriptures say that we who were afar off were made nigh. We were brought close to God, His commandments, His worship, and His promises. Verse 17 says the Gospel preached was the message of peace. I thank God for the peace of God.

The Bible says in Philippians 4:7 that the peace of God passes all understanding. In other words, you can have all the understanding of the Bible there is, from one commentary to another, but if you do not have the peace of God, you do not have anything. Another individual may turn to God and repent, not knowing anything about the Bible except that he is wrong and needs to repent, and he gets a peace of God that will pass all understanding. If what you have in your soul does not bring you peace with God, then you are not prepared to meet God.

You must have peace between you and God if you are to follow peace with all men and be prepared to meet God. If there is sin in your heart, the Bible considers you to be wicked, and the Prophet said there is no peace with God for the wicked. One must get beyond false religion and get to God to be prepared to meet Him.

Have You Been Born Again?

Nothing in the Bible supports joining a church, but there are Scriptures against it. Psalm 87 is a prophecy concerning our day. Verses 1-7 read: "His foundation is in the holy mountains. The LORD loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. Glorious things

are spoken of thee, O city of God. Selah. I will make mention of Rahab and Babylon to them that know me: behold Philistia, and Tyre, with Ethiopia; this man was born there. And of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her: and the highest himself shall establish her. The LORD shall count, when he writeth up the people, that this man was born there. Selah. As well the singers as the players on instruments shall be there: all my springs are in thee."

When you get saved, you become a member of God's church. The Holy Spirit baptizes you into one body, one church. Psalm 87 says God keeps track of the members of His church. He does not write their names on a piece of paper, but they are written in Heaven.

Revelation 21:27 lets us know that neither the impure nor anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful will ever enter Heaven, but only those whose names "are written in the Lamb's book of life." The only ones whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life are those who have God life, or spiritual life. The Bible is not talking about physical life. It is the Lord who adds to His church. The early church continued in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and Acts 2:47b says, "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."

Dear one, you are not prepared to meet God if you have not been born again. All sin must be under the blood of Jesus Christ. A change has to take place in your life, and that change continues into eternity. Those who have been delivered from spiritual death love the brethren. There is a special love among the brethren, and it comes when you are saved.

When I got saved, I knew very few people in the congregation; but this I knew: I loved every one of them. You see, the change takes place on the inside. The old ugly, hatred spirits come out. The ugliness, the bitterness, and the unforgiveness were removed by the

blood of Jesus Christ.

First John 3:14-15 states: "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him." We know that those who are sitting in prison on death row and have never repented do not have eternal life in them. By the same token, neither does the person who hates his brother.

The Scripture text says, "Set thine house in order." God sent this message to King Hezekiah through the Prophet Isaiah. Then the minor Prophet Amos said, "Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel." Amos' words echoed throughout the ranks of Israel of old, and the same message rings out to us today.

"Set Thine House in Order"

You might meet God today or you might not meet Him for many years, but you *are* going to meet Him. The sooner you prepare, the more ready you will be. You should not try to get ready to meet Him like the thief on the cross, in life's final hour. You may say, "Well, I'll wait like the thief on the cross." I ask you, which one? There were two. Do not think the devil is going to give up on you if you wait and try to get saved right down at the end. Whatever needs to be set in order, you need to see that it gets done immediately. If your soul is not ready to meet God, then you need to be honest and repent.

When I thought of this text of Scripture, I thought of a neighbor who went into eternity suddenly. He was much younger than I was. He appeared to be in robust health. One day he was working on his roof, and I think he had some relatives with him. I am sure that when he began that day, eternity was the last thing on his mind. He was not a heavy set man, and he looked to be in good shape. As far as I knew, he

had never experienced any health problems, but he went into eternity that day. He was busy putting shingles on the roof, and suddenly he just slumped down. He had a young wife, a young daughter, a fairly new home, and he was in eternity, whether he was ready or not.

The Prophet Isaiah said, "Set thine house in order." The Prophet Amos said, "Prepare to meet thy God." Those prophets' statements were solemn. In God's mercy He is giving you time to take care of whatever needs to be set in order and to be ready to meet God. Some people need to do as the Bible says and "restore the pledge." If you have wronged anyone, do not take that

with you to eternity. Do not face God with that in your life. If you have slandered someone, if you have run someone down, you need to clear that up. You do not want to go before God with that in your heart. Of course, the first thing to do is to be saved and to be God's child.

When the Prophet Isaiah said, "Set thine house in order," he was speaking of your spiritual house. Everything you need to do to set your house in order needs to be taken care of now. Even if you live to be one hundred years of age, that is nothing compared to eternity. You need to prepare to meet God.

Have you made preparations to meet the Lord? Could the Lord say

to you: "Enter in to the kingdom! You have been faithful. Your name is in the Book of Life" or would He have to say, "Depart from me; I never knew you, you that work iniquity"? Have you made those preparations to meet God? If not, you need to.

Some people look down on those who are involved in sins such as adultery, homosexuality, thefts, robberies, and so on. However, if they are unsaved, they are going to the same hell. You need to prepare to meet God.

(Compact Disc TR-758M)

A Message for All Who Have Made Television Their God

The 23rd Channel

The TV set is my shepherd. My spiritual growth shall want. It maketh me to sit down and do nothing for His name's sake, because it requireth all my spare time. It keepeth me from doing my duty as a Christian, because it presenteth so many good shows that I must see.

It restoreth my knowledge of the things of the world and keepeth me from the study of God's Word. It leadeth me in the paths of failing to attend the evening worship services, and doing nothing in the kingdom of God.

Yea, though I live to be a hundred, I shall keep on viewing my TV as long as it will work, for it is my companion. Its sound and its pictures they comfort me. It presenteth entertainment before me and keepeth me from doing important things with my family. It fills my head with ideas which differ from those set forth in the Word of God.

Surely no good will come of my life, because my TV offereth me no good time to do the will of God; thus I will dwell in the place of the devil and his angels forever.

Selected

Luke 15:1 Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him.

2 And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.

3 And he spake this parable unto them, saying,

4 What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?

5 And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing.

6 And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.

7 I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.

8 Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it?

9 And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost.

10 Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

18 I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee,

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

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

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

22 But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and

put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet:

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

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

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

26 And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Prodigal Son

Winning Souls for Christ

Hebrews 4:1-2 is not part of my Scripture text, but I want you to read it. Paul wrote: "Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them." The Gospel has been preached to countless millions of people, but few heed its message and few believe the Truth.

I want to profit and grow in the things of God. As a pastor looks out on his congregation, he can tell which ones are eating and which ones do not have an appetite. It is very important that you feed on the Word to grow and to perfect yourself. The Bible speaks of perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

Our Scripture text reads in verse 1, "Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him." The publicans were tax collectors. People considered them to be the lowest of sinners, and they were despised. They came to hear Jesus, and others did not like it. They censured Jesus because of it, and they found fault with Him.

Verse 2 of our Scripture text states, "And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." I would rather be with people who need me. I like to go where people feel the need of the Gospel. I would rather go where there are hungry, needy sinners rather than self-righteous Pharisees. In fact, I would rather be with people who want the Gospel than any other people in the world. The greatest thrill that one can receive in this life is in helping a needy soul.

Jesus used three parables in our Scripture text to teach people about the love of God. He spoke this parable beginning with verses 4-5, saying: "What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, [This does not say they were safely in the fold, but rather it says they were in the

wilderness. No doubt, they did not see a need, just as many people do not see a need of God today. I need Jesus. I need Him every moment of my life!] and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing."

Dear one, your greatest joy in life ought to come from winning souls to Christ. Your greatest joy should not be from acquiring a new car, a new house, or a new suit of clothes. It should be from finding hungry souls. I love to go to the prisons and the jails because hungry souls are there.

Verses 6-7 read: "And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance." Churches are absolutely full of self-righteous people. They may say things such as, "You do not know what I have done" or "You do not know how long I have been saved and how much service I have done for the church." On and on people go with their self-righteous attitudes.

The second parable Jesus taught is found in verses 8-10, which reads: "Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost. Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

Manifesting Genuine Love and Concern for Sinners

The parable I want to dwell on is the parable of the prodigal son. There are three main characters in this parable, and you and I are like

one of these three. Verses 11-24 of our Scripture text read: "And he said, A certain man had two sons: And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him.

"And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.

"And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry."

The scene changes as we read the rest of the parable. Verses 25-32 read: "Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father

hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and entreated him.

"And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found."

In all things that you and I do as Christians, Christ is to be our ultimate example. Amidst the vilest of sinners, Jesus manifested a genuine, deep love and concern for their souls. He did not see the men that they were, but He saw the men and women that they could have become. While Jesus was showing great, compassionate, heartfelt interest for the ungodly, there were those hypocritical Pharisees and self-righteous men and women around who continually found fault. In this heated situation, they said, in so many words, "Why, He is a friend of sinners!" Is that not what God's people are to be? In these three parables, Christ was justifying the types and the ways in which God has dealt with you, me, and every sinner.

Jesus warned the Pharisees that the publicans, in their sorrow for sin and desire for mercy, were much more acceptable than their hypocritical, outward religious actions. Some people have said this parable of the prodigal son is the greatest story that was ever told. In this touching account, we can feel a blend of rebellion and loose living, but that is not the end. We can also feel remorse and forgiving love. In this narrative we have a message of repentance and forgiveness. We can see God in this account. I like to see

God in everything I do. I like to look for the hand of God.

Being Under a Strong Delusion

Let us look at this parable of the prodigal son in the natural sense. There are three characters that I want you to take note of to see where you are spiritually. First, we are told that the younger son made a very foolish request. We do not know why he did, but there are many foolish people today too. The prodigal son must have become discontented with his father's house. It could have been the atmosphere, the discipline, or the house of worship. He was dissatisfied with something, and he wanted his independence. He wanted to be free. However, sinners are not free. Only the saints of God are free.

It did not take the prodigal son long to realize that sin had taken him to the house of bondage. Misguided freedom, or a misuse of freedom, brings one to bondage. The actions and the request of the prodigal son were irresponsible. Every one of us needs to be accountable to someone. The wife is accountable to the husband, the husband is accountable to the wife and his family, husbands are accountable to the pastor, and the pastor is accountable to God. We are an accountable people.

Second, this young man was impulsive. He did not want to wait. Whatever he wanted, he wanted it right then. He felt that his need for gratification could not wait. We need to be very careful of being impulsive and acting on sudden desires.

Third, the prodigal son was ungrateful. Ungratefulness of God and His goodness will lead you down the broad way. The Bible says the prodigal son took his journey into a far country, a great distance from his father. No doubt, he entered an atmosphere of wine, women, and song. Proverbs 4:1 says, "Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father."

The prodigal son was in the grips of a strong delusion. He felt it was better out in the world than in father's house. He felt that real joy and happiness was found in sin, not in serving God. That is being under a strong delusion. Today many people are under a strong delusion. They are living under a false opinion, or a wrong conception.

When this young man's finances were gone, his friends forsook him, and he was reduced to feeding swine. You may ask, "What is wrong with feeding swine?" He was a Jewish young man, and to the Jew, that was a cursed occupation. In other words, he went to the very bottom. Through all of this, he came to himself.

Dear friend, I trust that if you are a prodigal son or daughter, you will come to yourself. What does it mean to come to yourself? It means that you come to the place where you begin to seriously reflect upon your life. You begin to see where you are, where you were, and where you are heading. You begin to think soberly and have strong and deep thoughts about your life and the situation that you are in, and then you begin to reminisce about Father's house.

When a sinner becomes aware of the truth of his selfish actions, he is coming to himself. Sin's attraction begins to lose its appeal, and there is hope for deliverance. When the prodigal son became disillusioned with sin, he began to think soberly, and he began to make plans to return to his father's house. When an individual realizes that the way of a transgressor is hard, he is beginning to come to himself. The prodigal son sought his father's forgiveness with a humble attitude. I am sure he had a great deal of shame for his sin. Undoubtedly, his body was emaciated, and his countenance was probably haggard. No doubt, he looked forlorn, rejected, and unkempt. I am sure the devil came to him with thoughts of despair, but he humbled himself and came down the road to his father's house once again.

The Loving Father

Let us consider the father of the prodigal son. Some people have said that this parable should have been named the "Parable of the Loving Father," because it tells more of the father's love than of a son's failure. Without a doubt, at the very onset of this parable, this is true. As I was studying for this message, I thought surely a tremendous amount of grief and sadness gripped the heart of that dear father when his son said, "Father, give me the portion of goods that befalls me." I am sure those words hit him like a heavy rock. I can hardly imagine the pain his father must have felt. As I thought about it, tears began to stream down my face.

I am sure that as he saw this young man leaving and strolling down that dusty lane, watching him until he could not see him anymore, his eyes were filled with tears. No doubt, as he turned and walked back to his house, he sobbed uncontrollably until he could weep no more. I would imagine that from time to time, as he walked through the house or around the farm, he was reminded of the times he had spent with that son. It would be hard to explain the grief of that dear man. I can imagine that sometimes he inquired of travelers who came by, "Have you heard of my son?"

When I was a young man, I knew of a pastor and his wife in Canada whose son disappeared, and they never saw him again. They went different places in search of him. Sometimes people called them and said, "I think I saw your son in Los Angeles. I'm sure it was him." They looked and looked, but they never saw him again. It was a sadness that they carried in their hearts until the day they died. I believe that tremendous gloom and sad thoughts overwhelmed that pastor in the darkness of the night. I can almost see him as he would get out of bed and pick up his Bible to look for a promise.

Have you ever looked in the

Word of God for a promise? Have you ever searched God's Word for some promise that you could stand on? I have many times, and I have cried out, "O God! I know there is a promise. I know there is something in Your Word that will help me in this situation." One Scripture that comes to mind is found in Mark 9:22-24. The father of the son with the dumb spirit came to Christ saying, "If thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us." Jesus said to him, "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth." Verse 24 says, "And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."

Possibly the prodigal's father remembered Jeremiah 32:27, which reads, "Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for me?" No! Nothing is too hard for God. I thought of another Scripture found in 1 John 5:14, which says, "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us." God's Word cannot be broken.

Another Scripture is found in John 14:13-14, where Jesus said: "And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it." What great promises! Church, we should not be discouraged. We sing a song entitled "*What a Friend We Have in Jesus*." One verse says, "*We should never be discouraged*." With these great promises we should never be discouraged.

Second Peter 3:9, speaking of the Lord, states, "... not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

Love and Forgiveness

As we look at the parable of the prodigal son, we see forgiveness shown when this young man finally came to himself and started toward his father's house. Jesus said in verse 20 of our Scripture text, "But when

he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him." Isn't that beautiful? This was the same father who had been sorely disappointed. His son had sinned against him and abandoned him. His son had disgraced his name. All that was gone like a mantle of forgiveness. He placed it on his precious son.

We see such deep love, tenderness, and patience manifested by the prodigal son's father. Proverbs 10:12 says, "Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins." Little problems grow into great contention where there is hatred. Mole hills become mountains where there is no love. Well-intended words and actions will be misrepresented and misunderstood where there is no love. Because of the deep love that the father had, mistakes, wrongs, problems, and sins were forgiven and forgotten.

I am so glad that when I was saved, I dealt with a Heavenly Father like that, not like many fathers today. My life was a mess when I came to the Lord, and He said, "I forgive you, and I love you! Come and be a part of the family of God." I am glad that I dealt with that kind of father. Thank the Lord! There will be no strife where there is love. There will be peace and harmony. We will make the best out of everything with this kind of love permeating our lives.

First Corinthians 13:4 says, "Charity [love] suffereth long, and is kind." Many times people forget the basic principles of God's Word. Paul said, in so many words, "You have need to be taught again." These are basic, elementary Christian principles. We can never graduate beyond these, dear one. Love suffers a long time. You may ask, "How long?" Love suffers long or until the Lord says it is enough. Love is kind and thinks no evil. It does not cause ones to say, "Oh! Did you see what I saw?" or "Look! Did you see that? I'm sure of it!" Love thinks no evil. It hopes all things. Charity never,

never fails!

The other evening as I was walking into a county jail, before they opened the door, I looked in and saw a prisoner come by. When he saw me, tears started streaming down his face. We sat there, and he grabbed my arm, my hands in his hands, and he continued to cry. He said, "Pastor, you came at the right time."

Let us consider the way in which the prodigal's father manifested this great love and forgiveness. I believe his hands were outstretched as he ran to meet his son. He granted him pardon. I do not see anywhere that the father accused his son of anything or was in any way reserved. He gave his son a complete pardon. He did not hold any sin over his head or remind him of a thing.

At the end of the Civil War, some people asked Abraham Lincoln, "Mr. President, what are you going to do with those rebels?" They were thinking he would say that he was going to treat them with vengeance, but he said, "I am going to treat them as though they were never gone." Is that not the way we should treat a prodigal son or daughter?

This father had such tremendous love for his son. He invested a lot in this young man. He supplied his temporal needs, schooled him in the things of God, no doubt made lots of plans, and did many things for him and with him. In essence, the first thing the father said when his son came home was, "Bring forth the very best robe. Let us treat him with honor, dignity, and respect."

Next, the father put the family ring (a signet ring) back on his son's hand, which gave him authority equal to anyone in the family. Today we would say that he gave him power-of-attorney so that he could act in the father's name. He was a full-fledged member of the family. The father did not say: "Let us see how he performs for a while. Let us watch him from a distance." He said: "Put shoes on his feet. He is my son.

He is no longer a slave [he was a slave to sin], but now he is a son." Slaves did not have shoes, but sons did. Slaves did not have rights, but a son has every right in his family. John 8:36 states, "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."

The Elder Son's Attitude

The story changes in verse 25 of our Scripture text. Let us look at another character. The third character is the elder son. As we read his comments, it looks as though he was actually sorry that his brother had returned. His countenance fell, and he was angered. He would have rather had his brother stay away. Maybe he thought his brother would get more of the inheritance some day. Perhaps he wanted all the glory. Who knows? I believe that Jesus brought out this third character to rebuke the self-righteous Pharisees. We need to have deep love and compassion for a soul to do our very best to lift him up, not kick him down. It looks as though the elder son wanted to kick his brother down a little deeper into the gutter. His remark to his father was not "my brother" but "your son." There was no forgiveness with him.

Let us consider the spiritual realm of this parable. Every one of us was once a prodigal son or a prodigal daughter. We should never think we are better than another. We all were down at the bottom. Not one of us has anything to glory in. The Prophet Isaiah said in Isaiah 53:6, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way."

In this parable of the prodigal son, all mankind is represented. At one time in our lives, we wanted to be independent. We did not want to be ruled by God's laws. We desired the world. We abused the blessings that God gave us when we were living in sin. We wasted time. Time is a God-given blessing. Our time here on this earth is precious; each day is beautiful. We should use our

time wisely.

Our health is also a God-given blessing, but sin is hard on the body. God gives us a conscience (an inner voice), but sin destroys the conscience. God has given everyone an inner voice called the conscience. It is the light that illuminates the way of every man. God has given you moral convictions. What does the sinner do? He joins himself with the devil, or that citizen in a far country where he is bound and put in a state of servitude. A sinner's family is disgraced. Walls and barricades are built in sin that only God can break down.

Jesus used the father in this parable to represent God and His enduring love for sinful men. The father did not condemn or criticize this truly repentant prodigal. He welcomed him home with open arms. I ask you to think about your own life in respect to this parable. Are you like the prodigal son, his father, or the elder son? I believe the elder son is a very good representation of the self-righteous hypocrites that sometimes assemble with God's people. When a repenting prodigal comes back, he might have a struggle rejoicing. He may even stir up critical attitudes or make critical comments rather than rejoicing with the saints of God. The rejoicing that we should have when one is saved ought to be equal to the love that the father had for the prodigal son and equal to the soul burden that he carried for him.

All Things Are Ready

If you are a prodigal son or daughter, all things are ready for your return. You will find that God's love is broader than the love of the best men. God forgives when men withhold forgiveness. Some individuals may withhold forgiveness, but God never does. He not only forgives but also forgets. The Bible says your sins are put in the very depths of the sea, never to be remembered against you again. Second Corinthians 5:17 says, "Old

things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." What I want to do in my ministry more than anything else is to find prodigal men and women who want to be saved. The greatest joy that I have in life is finding individuals who need Jesus Christ.

The Bible says that God has promised to put your sins in the depth of the sea, never to be remembered against you again. Psalm 103:12 tells us they are "as far as the east is from the west." Sinner friend, if you will come to God, He will place a robe on you called the robe of His righteousness. I have seen people who were saved, but they left Father's house, and today they are dead spiritually because of sin. Many people have ruined their health due to the effects of sin. Sin destroys precious families. Some people have sacrificed beautiful careers and have thrown everything to the wind. I have seen the regrets, the heartaches, the tears of shame,

the remorse, and the bitterness. Dear one, you need to stay in Father's house. It is a wonderful place to be!

Someone once said, "Unanchored ships always drift," and so do unanchored souls. One of my favorite songs says, "I've anchored my soul in the haven of rest, I'll sail the wild seas no more." I am in God's church to stay. You should not leave Father's house for any reason, dear one, lest God should call you to meet Him.

How many prodigal sons have come to a place where their lives are in shambles? That is the terrible price they have paid for leaving Father's house. I am asking you to think very seriously. Are you a prodigal? You know where you are. Are you in Father's house? You see, you can be sitting in a church building and yet be outside Father's house. Are you a child of God? Are you truly living for God? Is your life clean and holy? Do you have the love of God in your heart, the kind

of love that this father had toward this prodigal son?

In closing, the last Scripture that I want you to read is Revelation 22:17, which says, "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." I trust that you are not like the elder son. I trust that you do not have that kind of disposition or that kind of attitude. Which one are you? You need to be honest. We stand before God as individuals; we each must stand alone. At the Judgment you will not stand as husband and wife, but as an individual. I thank God for my wonderful wife, but I was raised in a home where my mother served God alone until my father was saved. You cannot lean on anyone else. Of the three people in our Scripture lesson, which one identifies you?

(Cassette C-3858E)

Healing May Be Instantaneous or Gradual

It does not matter so much whether a person is healed instantly or gradually, just so he is healed. Instances of both ways are recorded in the Bible.

"Now when the sun was setting, all they that had any sick with divers diseases brought them unto him; and he laid his hands on every one of them and healed them" (Luke 4:40).

"There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one" (Acts 5:16).

"And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple. . . . Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God" (Acts 3:2-9).

"And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. . . . And immediately his leprosy was cleansed" (Matthew 8:2-3)

"And there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked:

The same heard Paul speak: who stedfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed, Said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked" (Acts 14:8-10).

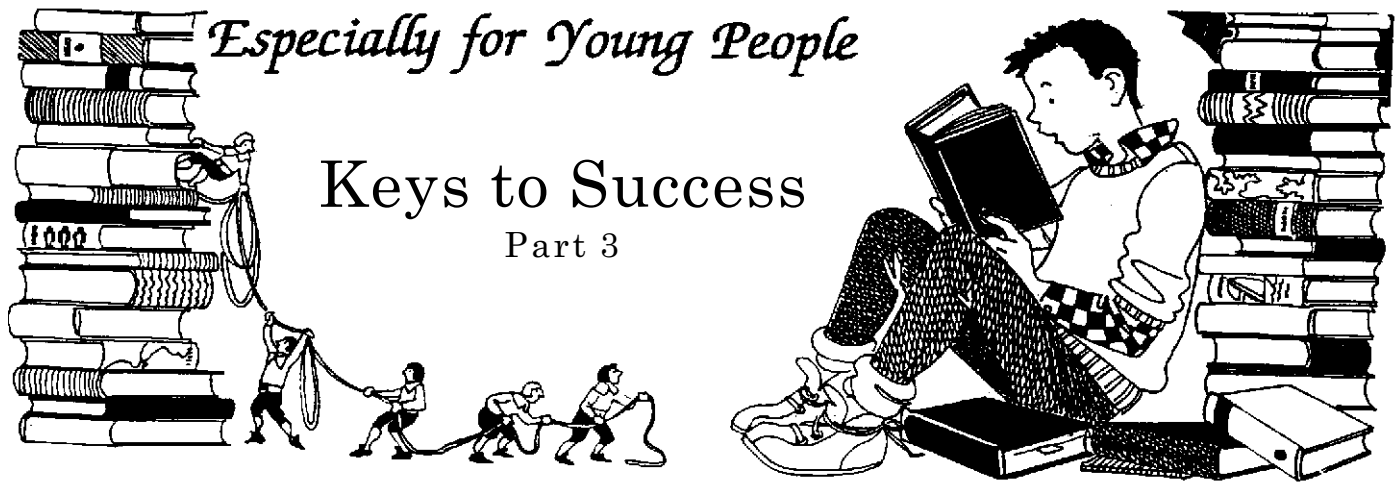
These miracles were of instantaneous healing.

Then we have those who were not healed instantly. The blind man was not completely healed at first: "And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town; and when he had spit on his eyes, and put his hands upon him, he asked him if he saw ought. And he looked up, and said, I see men as trees, walking. After that he put his hands again upon his eyes, and made him look up: and he was restored and saw every man clearly" (Mark 8:23-25).

The nobleman sought healing for his son who was not healed instantly, but began to amend (gradually get better) from that hour. "Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way; thy son liveth. And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way. And as he was now going down, his servants met him, and told him saying, Thy son liveth. Then inquired he of them the hour when he began to amend. And they said unto him, Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him" (John 4:50-52).

The Lord said the prayer of faith shall save the sick. This does not state whether it was to be gradual or instantaneous. "And the Lord shall raise him up" does not say how instantaneous or gradual it shall be.

Jesus said, They shall recover," but does not say "immediately." It likely will be "according to your faith so be it unto you."



In the last two issues I discussed the meaning of success. Also, I laid out the differences between true, godly success and the empty success of the world, clarifying success in the eyes of God and the reasons you should want to be successful in your spiritual life. Another important aspect is realizing that success without God is utter abject failure. You must remember Him with any sort of success in life, whether it is in your spiritual life or any amount of worldly success, when kept in the right light. In any success in life, you must give the glory to God, first and foremost. Handling success in any other way presents a real danger in your life and to your soul.

In the recipe for success, the three ingredients are desire (which was discussed in the last issue), determination, and dedication. Having a desire to be spiritual is a wonderful starting point toward a more successful Christian experience. Having a strong desire to do the will of God in your life is necessary if you are going to be successful. You cannot be successful if you do not have a desire to be. That is where you must start in realizing your true potential for Christian success.

As I try to encourage you to have a greater desire for spiritual success, I also want to reiterate that your desire should be to be the very best you can be in serving God and to be the very best worker in the Kingdom of God that you can possi-

bly be. I trust that you have kindled or rekindled a greater desire in your life. You need to let that grow and always keep a desire to move a little closer to God every day. A good place to start every day is by getting down on your knees and asking God to give you more of what He has in store for you.

Having your first foot forward on a path to greater spiritual success with a desire and a strong want for more of God is wonderful, and that is a starting point, or the first step. Every journey always begins with the first step; however, far too many people's journey ends with that first step. The first step is important, but I want to emphasize to you that it is the last step that will take you home to Glory. Although beginning is important, it will not insure lasting success.

Many people have a desire to be successful and to make something out of their lives. You may ask, "If everybody really wants to be successful and has a desire to be something, why do so many people fail?" Lots of people get that desire, but far too often they let that desire stay right at the beginning of their journey and do not take anything else.

The next ingredient for success requires a lot from you, and it is not easy. Success does not come easy. The Christian life is not the easiest life, but a well-lived Christian life is worth much. You have to work for anything worth having in life if you want something of lasting value.

The next ingredient is determination. I want you to read the definition of determination: "Firmness of purpose, will, or intention; full of ambition; a fixed purpose or resolution; being determined to succeed." It also can mean "a decision on a course of action, the process of deciding on or establishing a course of action."

I want to talk to you about having a real resolve, a firm determination so that you will serve God no matter what. It says that determination is having "firmness of purpose." Every one of us has a purpose. We were created by God for one thing, and that is to serve Him. God created man to please Him; therefore, our purpose is common between us. That is beautiful, and that bond keeps brothers and sisters in Christ together. Also, a firm purpose can be a bond that keeps husbands and wives together.

A resolve determination can be what propels you to a level of success that you never knew you could attain in your spiritual life. You need to be determined that no matter what, you will not let that desire sit by the wayside and be for nothing. You should be determined that you are going to live for God in this old world.

What should you be determined to do? First and foremost, that desire within you causes a change in your life as you give your heart to Christ and accept Him as your personal Savior. Then you become a new creature, different from before,

and you realize that you can have that resolve, that determination to live a life free from sin. If you are going to have determination in your life, you must be determined that you are going to live without sin.

When you give your heart and life to Christ, you leave the life of sin, and you should be determined that no matter what, the past of your life stays behind and you are going on in your journey with the ability to be successful in the eyes of God. Determination is so important in your Christian life. The best and the most important desires, left alone without determination, will ultimately be nothing more than a wish. The word desire means "to wish for something, to want something very strongly."

How many times have you heard a little child say, "I wish I could have that doll" or "I wish I could go with my friends." People wish for lots of things, but too often they never make anything of that desire. You should desire Christ and God and salvation more than anything in life. You should want to put that desire into practice, but to do that you have to be determined. You cannot assume that it will come easy, because it will not. It is not an easy road, but it is a road that pays.

This is a journey that will ultimately bring you to the most meaningful success ever, and that is making Heaven your eternal home. It could be a very long road. You do not know when the end may come. For some it is much sooner than others, but you must be determined that as long as you have breath, you will serve God. It is too easy to let a good start go to waste by not fostering a real determination in your heart. It is easy to let determination sit behind you.

If something is easy, it is probably not worth much. If you have to work hard to attain something (and what we are talking about is God and success in His eyes), it is worth working hard for. You have to be determined every day to have a firm purpose, a will, or an intention

to succeed. You must purpose in your heart that you will serve God. You may say, "God, give me a greater desire to serve You," but why stop at the beginning when God has so very much for you? God wants you to go on to greater understanding, greater service, greater Truth, greater fellowship, and greater love. To fully understand it and receive it, you have to be determined that you will do your very best for God every single day.

Letting your day get filled with life rather than to purposely fill your day with God is easy. We all are busy, but if you are determined to make Heaven your home, to be a success in the eyes of God and to do everything it takes to be a Christian, you must take time to push those things back and give God what is due Him. God is due your very best.

God gave us His only Son and Heaven's best in Jesus, so you ought to be determined on a daily basis to work hard to read the Bible, to pray, to attend the house of worship when it is time, and to meditate on the Word of God. Setting aside time to do those things is not easy, but it is essential. When your determination turns into real success, all those things become easier and become the joy of your life.

A successful Christian loves to get into the Word. He will not do a thing before he gets down on his knees and prays, and he gets excited when it is time for revival. When it is time to be at church, he is there, ready to put his all into it. He is reflective and introspective, and he can sit still and rest in God and meditate on His holy precepts. Those are things in the life of a successful Christian. Those are the things that a person talks about and wants to share with others.

Putting those things first in your life does not really compare to what Christ had to do. He gave Himself into the Father's will so that you and I might have salvation. It is only right that you give the very best of all you have and of

all you are to God and His kingdom. That kind of determination is beautiful, and it is the engine that drives your vehicle of success. You could say that desire is the key that gets it started. If you do not put it in gear and let the engine go, what are you going to do? You are going to sit still and burn all the gas in the tank.

If you do not engage determination, you are never going to get anywhere. You will sit still, and then what will you have? You will have a useless vehicle that will not go anywhere unless you get it filled up again. You can get that vehicle of success going. You can let determination drive you to the next point, and there is a filling station for you—in a service, in the Word of God, in a revival meeting, or in whatever it might be. It is going to be there to encourage you and to keep you going on to greater things.

I have used the phrase "recipe for success." When most of us hear the word recipe, we think of cooking. If I were going to compare determination to an ingredient that we use in cooking, I would compare it to salt. Salt is important in almost every recipe. If you leave salt out of a recipe, all those expensive ingredients that you put together will be ruined. It provides flavor, but it also reacts with other ingredients to fulfill their full potential in a recipe. If you leave out the salt, food becomes bland and sometimes inedible. Salt is like determination. You can have a whole lot of good intentions, but with no determination all the good intentions are going to be like the pieces of a puzzle without the corner pieces—you do not know where to start, and the good intentions are going to sit there. When you add determination into that mix, all of a sudden those good intentions find a life of their own because of your determination. Then you start to become something in the Kingdom of God that you did not realize that you could even be.

Determination is one of the

[continued on page 20]

*Matthew 6:22 The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.
23 But if thine eye be evil, thy*

*whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!
John 8:12 Then spake Jesus again*

unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

The Terrible Pathway of Darkness



Brother Irwin Seshier

The Pathway of Light

I am thankful that one day I stepped from the path of darkness into the path of marvelous light. When I was walking in the pathway of darkness, I had no one to reason with me, no one to guide or instruct me to go another way. When you are living in sin, you have your own thoughts. You are bent on doing things your own way. You do not want anybody else to tell you differently. The more I tried to assure myself that I could make it my way, the more a voice was telling me, "You cannot make it your way."

I am thankful for the voice of the Holy Spirit. That voice is still calling

sinner to repentance. I am thankful for God's way. It is the only way to Heaven. I am thankful that the Lord did not give up on me. Friend, when the Lord deals with you, you will recognize it. I am thankful that His voice was still talking to me.

Child of God, your mission in this life is to let the light of Christ reflect from your life so that others will be able to follow. Those who walk in darkness are separated from God with no spiritual guidance. They stumble through the temptations of this world in constant fear of eternal death.

First John 1:5-10 says: "This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that

God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."

God cleansed me from all unrighteousness. He forgave me of my

sins. That is the reason I love Christ. He is forgiving, and He wants us to have a spirit of forgiveness. Christ is our example. If He was willing to take persecution, why are you not willing to take some persecution? Christ was opposed and made fun of, and you will be too, saint of God. You are going to face hard places in your life. The world is looking at you as an example.

Friend, walking in a pathway of darkness is terrible. Sin puts you in a darkened condition. Jesus Christ can break that darkness. One day that miraculous light came down into my soul and dispelled the darkness. The devil wants to keep you in darkness. He wants to keep you away from the Light. Friend, if you are going to receive help, you have to get to the Light. Too many people want to dispel the light. Many people want to do away with certain things today.

Some individuals say, "I am going to give up on Jesus." Why would you want to give up on One who is going to be there to take care of you? That would be like refusing a life preserver when it is being thrown to you in the middle of the ocean. It would be a terrible mistake to refuse a life preserver if you were drowning, but look at what people are doing today. They are refusing Jesus, their only hope. This world's hope lies in Jesus.

Are You Walking in the Light or in Darkness?

The pathway of darkness is evil. What you do with this message is going to determine whether you walk in the light or walk in darkness. Also, you should not ask for more light if you are not walking in all the light that God has given you. Some people say they want more light, but are they keeping up with the light that God has already revealed to them?

Jesus Christ is the Light. Thinking back to Creation, what was created first? It was the light. Genesis 1:3 says, "And God said, Let

there be light: and there was light." If God wants it, He is going to get it. He is an awesome God. He can see further down the road than you can. He has been around much longer than you have, and He knows your need altogether. He knows what your hang-up is. He knows if you want to continue to walk in darkness, and He knows why. Genesis 1:2 says, "And the earth was without form." The sinner is void of the Spirit of God, without hope. We were full of darkness. I thank God that the Spirit of God moved upon my heart one day. Christian friend, are you glad that He moved into your heart one day? God did not have to do it, but He did. He moved because He could see a child that wanted to be with Jesus. He knew that you needed Him, and you still need Him today.

We all need the Spirit of God. As Christians, we must be careful that we do not fall into a form of worship. We must have the Spirit of God to direct us. Some churches think they must have a written program for their worship services. Also, they think they must have a marquee outside to announce the next sermon. What would happen if the Spirit of God were to move on the preacher to have him preach something different from what was on the marquee? Would someone have to run out and change the sign quickly?

If you are a true child of God, your desire is to be in the house of God. You may say, "I don't think I want to attend the church services regularly and serve God every day." What do you think Heaven is going to be like? We will be praising God forever, throughout the ceaseless age of eternity. In Heaven we will be praising the Lord for His wonderful glory and His matchless wonder. Saint of God, we are too quiet about this great salvation. Many people get all riled up about the car races or a ball game, but when it comes to the things of God, they put the brakes on. People are too quiet about Jesus, the One who saved

their souls and freed them from sin. Salvation is something to get excited about! Super Bowl championships and car races come and go, but Jesus Christ lives forever. Those other things are temporary. They are going to fade away one of these days. What I am talking about is going to last throughout eternity. We should get more excited about the things of God.

God created us in His own image, and He created us so that we could serve Him with our whole being. Everything about us ought to be used for the magnification of Jesus Christ. The reason too many people have chosen to walk in darkness is that they have become so disobedient to God and the man of God. They have become disobedient to the Word of God and the standard of God's Word. When that happens, they are walking in darkness. Friend, it is so easy to slip back into darkness. That is the reason you need to be alert to the devil's antics.

The devil wants to turn the lights off spiritually and destroy your communication with Jesus. If he can start shutting down the lines of communication, soon you will be in darkness. He knows how to do it. He wants to start shutting you down a little at a time so that you will not notice what is going on. Now, if he just came to you and said, "I want you to quit going to church altogether," you would be too wise to do that. Therefore, he starts working a little at a time. After a while, you will realize, "I am in darkness." Oftentimes people do not even realize they are in darkness, but the messages do not move them like they used to. Next, they do not want to be around the saints of God like they used to. There is an allurements to darkness. I appreciate what Jesus Christ has done.

Avoiding Ungodly Avenues

At certain times of the year when the weather is getting warm, many people start dressing more immodestly. What did Legion do

when he realized that he was in his right mind? He put clothes on. The saints of God do not want to take their clothes off. If you keep wearing immodest apparel, you are going to go to a place that is a lot warmer for all eternity. The saint of God is a representative of the true Church of God. People ought to be able to see a difference between the church and the world.

Darkness is all around us, but we do not have to be in darkness. You can have light in your soul. The world loves darkness. Look at the movie industry. Today people are not drawn to cute titles of movies. They are drawn to movie titles such as *Psycho*, *Aliens*, *Dawn of the Dead*, *The Cremator*, *I Saw the Devil*, and *Island of Lost Souls*. You see, the world is drawn to such darkness. There is a drawing to those movies. The majority of the youth is drawn to the movie industry.

I taught school for thirty-five years. I know what kids said when they came to the classroom. When I overheard them talking about what movies they had gone to see, sometimes I asked, "Why would you go and see that?" They would say, "As long as I have the money, they let me in." Where are the parents? It is a total shame to see how the movie industry is producing such ungodly movies. Ungodly books and other literature are drawing the youth today. Parents need to watch what their children are reading. It is a shame to see what some of the youth today are getting involved with. Many people wonder what is wrong with the young people. They are being affected by all these ungodly avenues.

I am thankful that we still have the privilege to bring the Bible to the house of God. There may come a time when we will not be able to bring it to the house of God.

Sometimes people are drawn to the wrong things, just like the Venus fly trap. The Venus fly trap plant has a sweet odor that it emits for insects, mostly flies. When a fly smells that sweet odor, it is drawn to

that trap. When it is drawn into that plant, it gets caught and it is killed. Next, there are juices that are emitted from that plant that take away all the juices of the fly so the plant can use it. The devil likes to trap some people just as a Venus fly trap entices flies. He lures them in, captures them, and drains all their spirituality from them. They no longer praise the Lord as they used to. They just go to church and take a seat.

First John 1:7 says, "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." Someone once penned these words: "Real fellowship is much more than just showing up for services. Fellowship is experiencing life together."

As children of God, we should share one another's burdens. We should pray for one another. If you are a true child of God, you want to pray for others. Part of living for God includes unselfish loving, honest sharing, practical serving, sacrificial giving, sympathetic comforting, and all the other commands found in the New Testament. Also, you cannot have fellowship without forgiveness. A true child of God wants to have fellowship with his or her brothers and sisters in the Lord.

Throughout the Bible, we are given examples of those who had a work to do, and they pleased Christ. For example, Noah had a job to do. Daniel had a job to do. The three Hebrew boys had jobs to do. They worked through the jobs, and they came out victoriously. Let us do our very best to accomplish that which God has given us to do.

Sin's Strong Pull

Sin emits a strong pull, and the billboards of this old world try to convince you to go its way, causing you to think that if you go its way, you will be a successful individual. Friend, sin is a destroyer of everything that is good. Sin wants to de-

stroy your mind and your physical being. Sin wants to destroy you financially. The devil wants to take down the whole man or woman. He does not care how he does it as long as he gets the job done.

James 1:15 says, "Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." That is not a pretty picture. It is very sad to see how sin can tear down a physically fit individual. That is the reason you need to stay away from the habits of life, young person. No matter what your friends want you to do, you need to stay away from sinful vices. All it takes is one cigarette for you to start smoking and later become a chain smoker. It only takes one drink for you to start down the road to becoming an alcoholic. It may only take one hit of a drug for you to start down the road to becoming a drug addict. You should never take that first step. You need to stay away from it. You should get yourself involved with the things of God. If you do, you will never go wrong. You can say to the devil, "By the grace of God, you are not going to get me, devil."

Being victorious takes the power of Jesus Christ in your life. You cannot do this in your own strength. If you could talk to those who have lost their health because of alcohol and tobacco in the cancer wards or in the Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, their message would be: "Do not even get involved with it." Also, these habits are expensive. A pack of cigarettes costs approximately five to eleven dollars a pack, depending on what state you live in. In this economy, how can people afford cigarettes and alcohol?

Once I asked a young lady who was standing outside smoking a cigarette, "How do you get back and forth to work?"

"I don't drive, because gas costs too much. I can always hitch a ride with somebody else."

Yet she had to have her habits of life. You see, the devil will let you do that, but he will stand back and

laugh at you. Being in the light is a joyous and happy life. Where there is light, no darkness exists. Darkness is the absence of light. When you enter a room that is pitch black and you turn on a light switch, the darkness is dispelled. Any time that you turn on a light switch, the darkness has to flee. As children of God, we have to keep the light on. When Jesus comes on the scene, the old enemy has to flee.

Walking in the Light

Isaiah 60:20 says, "Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended." Isaiah 2:5 says, "O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord." Jesus said in John 12:36, "While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light."

We have to believe in the Light. I want to be a true representation of Jesus Christ. I want to be in the true Church of God. Too many false things are going on in life. Someone may say, "We are almost like the Church of God." Do you believe in holiness? The true Church of God believes in holy living.

God is Light and Truth. Thank God, there is no darkness in Truth. There is no error in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Christ is the Good News. We have good news to tell the world. Are you telling the world? Are you telling people about the joy in going this way? What you need today is to have the Lord illuminate that giant spotlight in your soul and let Him point out whatever is causing you difficulty. He will definitely place His finger on the things in your life that you need to measure upon. He will point out problems and correct you. He will not slap you around or put you down, but He will tell you: "Stay away from that and come over this way. You do not need to go there. Come over here."

Jesus is a Gentleman. He will

lead you the right way and steer you away from the things that are bad for you, even though you may think they are good for you. Your walk will be straighter when you have the Light. Your talk will be cleaned up. Your general appearance will be better. You will smell better and look better. Brother, you will want to get a haircut. A godly man will look as a man should look and dress as a man should dress. A godly woman will look as a woman should look and dress as a woman should dress. When you are a child of God, you will want to dress according to the Bible standard.

You will not rebel and say, "I will wear what I want to wear." You will not have true Light if you go your own way; that is not God's way. Some individuals think they cannot live for the Lord, but that is not true. However, the devil will try to put up roadblocks. Your personality has much to do with your life. Your personality will affect how and where you use your spiritual gifts and abilities. Sometimes the best in people comes out when they are under pressure.

Sometimes you will get between a rock and a hard place, and the Lord puts you there just to see what your reaction will be. While you are getting squeezed, He will see exactly what will come out. Will it be a sweet spirit or a nasty attitude? If you are a true Child of God, a sweet spirit will come out. Do you know what happens when you crush a rose? You get a nice aroma. Sometimes when you work for the Lord, it might cause you tension or discomfort, but the Lord will give you grace.

Sometimes you can learn from others. I have learned a lot from other people, and the Lord has allowed me to see things in other people that can increase my spirituality. Now we do not want to measure ourselves by other people, but watching what spiritual people do can help you in your spiritual walk. When you do things for the Lord, it makes you feel good about

yourself. Why? You are obeying Him. Do you remember when you were growing up and your parents had you do something and you did it, and they would come back and say, "Good job"? That made you feel good about yourself, and that is exactly what the Lord wants to have happen to you. He wants you to feel good about yourself because you are obeying the Word of God and the Spirit of God.

I do not want to see anyone going down the pathway of darkness, and neither does the Lord. Saint of God, you need to stay on the pathway of Light. You should not even entertain the thought of going down the pathway of darkness. No matter how many other people are doing it, you need to dare to be different and be strong for the Lord. If you have a need, do not go down that pathway of darkness any longer. There is help in Jesus Christ. I have found it so, and many others have found it so. There is pleasure and joy in going this way.

(Compact Disc TR-803E)

[Guest Editorial—continued from page 2] mistake. This sad, deplorable end need not be. Your choice is the determining factor. God does not want you to be lost!

Dear one, it is to your advantage to seek God while He may be found and while you have the opportunity. God loves you, but He is angry at sin and rebellion. In Deuteronomy 30:19 these words are penned, "I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live." It is your choice. God does not want you to be lost!

Selected

If you want an increase of
Christ, there must first be
a decrease of self.

most important ingredients in the recipe for success. In Matthew, Chapter 5, Jesus let us know that if salt has lost its savor, it is useless. The saltiness cannot be put back into it. It is like that with determination. Verse 13 reads, "Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men." If you do not take that determination, that salt, and sprinkle that upon your desire, then you will be good for nothing. You can have great desires with nothing to get them done with. You must have determination.

When I think of determination and what it means for someone to be determined, my mind goes to the Book of Genesis and a young man named Joseph. From the very beginning, it seemed that Joseph was on the road to success. He was loved greatly by his father, and he had a God-given gift to interpret dreams. Joseph's obedience to God and his own father became a great source of contention with his own brothers. That contention grew to hatred, and that hatred grew into a desire to kill Joseph.

Reuben pleaded with his brothers not to slay Joseph, so instead they cast Joseph into a pit. Eventually they sold him for twenty pieces of silver to some Ishmaelite traders as they traveled along. He was taken to Egypt and sold as a slave to Potiphar, the captain of the guard to pharaoh. Genesis 39:2 says at the beginning of the verse, very simply and very beautifully, "And the LORD was with Joseph." This tells me that in the midst of everything that had already happened, Joseph had a desire and a determination that he was going to do what was right, because without that, God surely would not have been with him. Joseph stayed true to God even in those difficult times.

Joseph was made an overseer in the house of Potiphar. Genesis 39:5-9 reads: "And it came to pass from

the time that he had made him overseer in his house, and over all that he had, that the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of the LORD was upon all that he had in the house, and in the field. And he left all that he had in Joseph's hand; and he knew not ought he had, save the bread which he did eat. And Joseph was a goodly person, and well favoured.

"And it came to pass after these things, that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph: and she said, Lie with me. But he refused, and said unto his master's wife, Behold, my master wotteth not what is with me in the house, and he hath committed all that he hath to my hand; There is none greater in this house than I; neither hath he kept back any thing from me but thee, because thou art his wife: how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"

Joseph had a determination to do what was right. He could have had anything he wanted in that house, and the opportunity presented itself in a very tempting way, but Joseph said, in essence: "How can I do this? How can I commit such a wicked and evil act and sin against God?" Being able to stand up to a temptation that way does not happen because you are there: it happens because you have a determination down within your heart and soul that no matter what comes your way, you are going to stand and do what is right. You must have that kind of determination.

Joseph was just a young man, but he had determination, and he had purposed in his heart that he would not sin against God. That kind of determination leads to beautiful success. Joseph was just a man: he hurt, he bled, he cried, he laughed, and he dreamed. He was just like you and me. He refused to give in to temptation. He was determined to serve God and to do what was right because he knew that his success was contingent upon his obedience to God.

Joseph did not let success go to his head like Belshazzar, thinking he could do anything he wanted. Joseph knew that the only thing that he had in life that he could consider a success came from God. That came out of something that the majority of people today would have given up on. Think about it. He was thrown in a pit, his brothers wanted to kill him, he was sold into slavery, and he ended up in a foreign land. How many people would have given up right then and there? Joseph not only stayed true to God but also stayed determined to serve God in a foreign place. God gave him great success.

There are many other godly examples in the Bible where people showed great determination. Jacob found his true love in Rachel, and he was required to work for seven years for her hand in marriage. Seven years is a long time, but he was determined to make the love of his life his wife. What happened? Seven years came, but her father deceived him. On his wedding night he learned that it was not Rachel that he had married, but her older sister, Leah. What did he have to do? He had to work seven more years for Rachel's hand in marriage. Now, he could have taken his wife, Leah, and left, but he was determined to make Rachel his wife, so he had to work seven more years for her. That is real determination!

Consider the Patriarch Job. He was the most successful man in the east. He was the richest and undoubtedly the most powerful man. He was the epitome of success. Why do you think Job received that success? It was due to his obedience to God. The devil said to God: "The only reason Job serves You is that You gave him all of this. If You would take those things away from him, he would curse You." What did God allow to happen? Job lost everything: he lost his holdings, his property, his children, his health, his friends, and even the support of his wife. Short of his life, Job lost it all.

What does the Bible say? In all of this, Job never charged God foolishly. He was determined that even in the face of great loss, he was going to stay true to God. What did God do? He blessed him more in his latter end than in the beginning.

Think of the Apostle Paul. He suffered shipwrecked, and he was jailed, stoned, and beaten time and time again; yet he refused to stop proclaiming the Gospel. His writings are so prolific in the New Testament and such a help to all of us. He was determined that no matter what state he was in, he would do the will of God and the work of God.

Ultimately, I want to refer you to Jesus Christ, who left Heaven and all its glory and His Father. He came down and was determined to fulfill the perfect will of His Father, even though it required great travail, suffering, and then even His life. He as determined. When He met Satan in the wilderness, He was determined. When He was beaten, scourged, mocked, and hung upon the Cross, He was determined to do His part in order for you and me to have eternal life. That is the epitome of determination.

In this life as we strive to achieve the ultimate success of making Heaven our home, we must, individually and collectively, have a fierce determination that we will serve God and live for Him no matter what the cost, no matter where it takes us, no matter who goes with us, or even if we must go alone; but we must stay determined to the very end.

I have talked about desire being the first step of this great journey. I also mentioned briefly that it is not the first step that is the most important. Although it is important and it gets us going, too many times people give up.

In closing, I want you to read another story. It is titled "Worth the Wait."

Why do they come? Why do they hang around to watch the slowest high school cross-country runner in America? Why

do they want to see a kid finish the 3.1 miles in 51 minutes when the winner did it in 16?

Why do they cry? Why do they nearly break their wrists applauding for a junior who falls flat on his face almost every race? Why do they hug a teenager who could be beaten by any other kid running backward?

Why do they do it? Why do all of his teammates go back out on the course and run the last ten minutes of every race with him? Why do other teams do it too? And the girl's teams? Why run all the way back out there to pace a kid running around like a tortoise with bunions?

Why?

Because Ben Comen never quits.

See, Ben has a heart just slightly larger than the Chicago Hyatt. He also has cerebral palsy. The disease doesn't mess with his intellect -- he gets A's and B's -- but it seizes his muscles and contorts his body and gives him the balance of a Times Square drunk. Yet there he is, competing for the Hanna High cross-country team in Anderson, S. C., dragging that wracked body over rocks and fallen branches and ditches. And people ask, Why?

"Because I feel like I've been put here to set an example," says Ben, 16. "Anybody can find something they can do, and -- do it well. I like to show people that you can either stop trying or you can pick yourself up and keep going. It's just more fun to keep going."

It must be, because faced with what Ben faces, most of us would quit.

Imagine what it feels like for Ben to watch his perfectly healthy twin, Alex, or his younger brother, Chris, run like rabbits for Hanna High, while Ben runs like a man whacking through an Amazon thicket.

Imagine never beating anybody to the finish line. Imagine dragging that stubborn left side, pulling that unbending tire iron of a leg around to the front and pogo-sticking off it to get back to his right.

Worse, he lifts his feet so little that he trips on anything -- a Twinkie-sized rock, a licorice-thick branch, the cracks between linoleum tiles. But he won't let anybody help him up. "It messes up my flow," he says. He's not embarrassed, just mad.

Worse, he falls hard. His brain can't send signals fast enough for his arms to cushion his fall, so he often smacks his head or his face or his shoulder. Sometimes his mom, Joan, can't watch.

"I've been coaching cross-country for 31 years," says Hanna's Chuck Parker, "and I've never met anyone with the drive that Ben has. I don't think there's an inch of that kid I haven't had to bandage up." But never before Ben finishes the race. Like Rocky Marciano, Ben finishes bloody and bruised, but never beaten. Oh, he always loses -- Ben barely finishes ahead of sunset, forget other runners. But he hasn't quit once. Through rain, wind, or welt, he always crosses the finish line.

It's some sight when he gets there: Ben clunking his way home, shepherded by all those kids, while the cheerleaders screech and parents try to holler encouragement, only to find nothing coming out of their voice boxes.

The other day Ben was coming in with this huge army, Ben's Friends, his face spotlight red and tortured, that laborious gait eating up the earth inch by inch, when he fell not 10 yards from the line. There was a gasp from the parents and a second of silence from the kids. But then Ben went through the 15-second process of getting his bloody knees under him, his

balance back and getting his forward motion going again -- he finished. From the roar you'd have thought he just won Boston.

"Words can't describe that moment," says his mom. "I saw a grown man just stand there and cry." Ben can get you that way. This is a kid who builds wheelchair ramps for Easter Seals, spends nights helping at an assisted-living home, mans a drill for Habitat for Humanity, devotes hours to holding the hand of his disabled neighbor, Miss Jessie, and plans to run a marathon and become a doctor. The youth of today, huh?

Oh, one aside: Hanna High is also the home of a mentally challenged man know as Radio who has been the football team's assistant for more than 30 years. . . .

Feel like you could use a little dose of humanity? Get yourself to Hanna. And while you are there, go out and join Ben's Friends. You'll be amazed what a little jog can do for your heart.

That is determination! That is a never-quit attitude that you and I could learn from. This young man puts himself through paces that you and I would not think to do, and he does it for nothing other than the fact that he is running in a race, a race that starts in an afternoon and ends in an afternoon.

You and I are running in a far greater race. You and I have much more on the line, so to speak. What is your never-quit attitude like? If you trip over a Twinkie-sized rock or a licorice-thick branch or when a little thing causes you to stumble, do you stay down and say, "It's not worth it"? Do you have enough determination that you are going to do what is right and live for Christ in this dark world to get up and press right on toward the goal? Trials will come, stumbles will come, and valleys will come; but it is not the person who stays down

that wins the prize. It is the person who has enough determination to get up and finish the race.

Young person, life is not always easy, but you can have that same kind of determination. Ben Comen runs for nothing more than the sake of running. You are running literally for your spiritual life. You are in a race that you will either win or lose. There is no middle ground. You must be determined that you will finish the race.

This young man wins, not because he finishes ahead of anyone else, but because he crosses the finish line. That is what it is like for you. You will win this Christian race by living the right life and crossing the finish line. If you give up, if you have an "I quit" attitude, then you do not have a chance. I want you to understand that the determination to be everything God wants you to be will lead you to ultimate success, and that is making Heaven your home.

Quitting is easy. Throwing in the towel is the status quo today. That is what people want to do. No one wants to see things through. Do not be like everybody else, young person. Do not be as one of the masses; be what God intends you to be—a special, beautiful, successful Christian who has the determination that it will take to live above sin, to live for others, and to live for the service of God. You need to have

that kind of determination that nothing is going to keep you down. You need to be determined that you will go this way even if you have to give everything you have, and even if you have to go it alone. Do you have that kind of determination?

There is a man that many of us know by the name of Jim Valvano. He was a very successful basketball coach in the 1980's. He gave a speech at an awards banquet in 1993. As he gave his speech, his body was wrought with terminal cancer and full of tumors. As he stood up for ten minutes, he gave the prepared remarks about what life was to him, how to live each day with enthusiasm, and how to cherish each moment that you have. Also, he talked about an organization that he was starting for cancer research called "The V Foundation." He said, "I needed a motto for that foundation," and his motto is a phrase that has rang true to many ever since. It is simply this: "Don't Give Up . . . Don't Ever Give Up!" That is what I want to leave you with, young person. "Don't Give Up . . . Don't Ever Give Up!" There is too much to gain and too much to lose. Don't Give Up . . . Don't Ever Give Up! Determine in your heart that no matter what, you will live for Christ. That is a key ingredient for your spiritual success.

Brother Chris Wakefield

He Will Not Fail Thee

Come what may, come any kind of trial or difficulty, nothing can happen by chance. It is the Lord when anything befalls God's children. It comes by His permission or appointment, and He means to turn it into a blessing, come even the darkest moments and the most trying events. He whispers, "I will not fail thee!" He knows your every need. In persevering with the work He has given you to do, you have these all sufficing words, "He will not fail thee!" So with all, He will never forget you, not even for a single moment. Not a anxiety or a pain or even a faint moment, but He will be near. "He will not fail thee" implies and involves all that His heart can prompt, and His right hand do for you. You should not, and need not, have a single, dark misgiving or a doubting thought. On the contrary, remember His promise, "I will not fail thee." You need to go onward, rejoicing as He leads you step by step in the right way, and let Him see the response in your life, "I will trust and not be afraid."

Luke 8:22 Now it came to pass on a certain day, that he went into a ship with his disciples: and he said unto them, Let us go over unto the other side of the lake. And they launched forth.

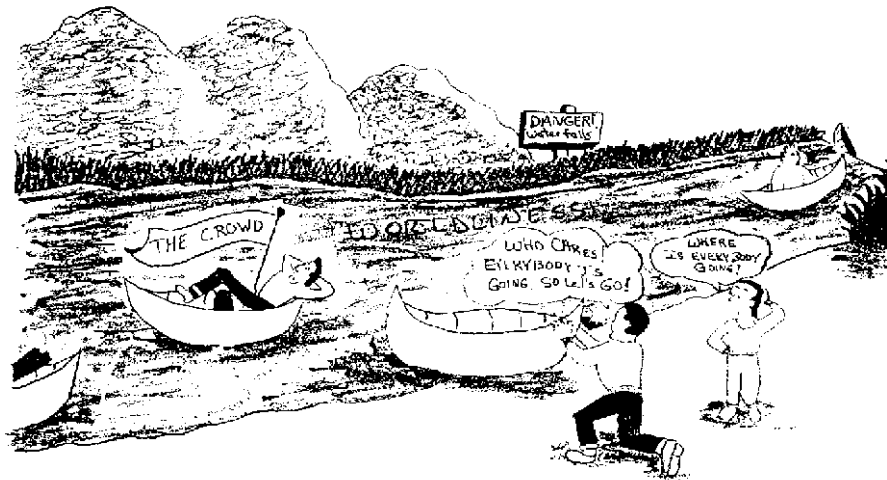
23 But as they sailed he fell asleep: and there came down a storm of wind

on the lake; and they were filled with water, and were in jeopardy.

24 And they came to him, and awoke him, saying, Master, master, we perish. Then he arose, and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water: and they ceased, and there was a calm.

25 And he said unto them, Where is your faith? And they being afraid wondered, saying one to another, What manner of man is this! for he commandeth even the winds and water, and they obey him.

Sailing on the Sea of Life



Brother Leamon Whitehead

Life's Journey

I want to praise the Lord for every mile of smooth sailing on still waters and for the many other blessings that He has given me. I also thank Him for the many battles that He has helped me to win. No doubt, you have faced hardships, stormy waters, and raging battles; but God has brought you through. One thing you need to keep in mind above everything else is that, regardless of what is going on, you must keep on sailing. Do not let your sails down, but keep them in the wind, and keep on sailing in the midst of trouble and hardship. You will make it

home one of these days.

The waters are wonderful when they are calm. However, the storm really kicks up sometimes and causes the sea to become a dangerous place. That is what the disciples encountered in our Scripture text.

In verse 22 of our Scripture text Jesus said to His disciples, "Let us go over unto the other side of the lake." When you got saved and became a part of the family of God, you started on a journey, and you are heading for the other side. You will encounter lots of dangers along the way. You will run into some rough waters and some storms, but do not let down. You must keep sailing. As

you travel life's journey, you can look at it as a sailing voyage upon the sea. The Bible sets forth various instructions for you so that you can hold on. Your Christian life is much like a voyage on a sea, and you are sailing to the other side.

In 1 Corinthians, Chapter 9, Paul talked about running a race. Life is not a playhouse or a recreation room, but it is a battlefield. It is a race that we are in, and we have to keep running. Your feet may hurt, but you have to keep running because you are not home yet. You will face opposition, but you have to keep running. You have to keep pressing on until you hear the

Master say "Well done."

I thought of the old song entitled *Life's Railway to Heaven*. It reads:

*Life is like a mountain railway,
With an engineer that's brave;
We must make the run successful,
From the cradle to the grave;
Watch the curves, the hills, the tunnels;
Never falter, never fail;
Keep your hands upon the throttle,
And your eyes upon the rails.*

Even though the locomotive is going to follow the rails, the engineer must not go to sleep. He has a job to do. He has a load behind him, and there are curves, hills, tunnels, and dangers along the way. So he has to keep his eyes upon the rails.

In life's journey you have to stay alert and keep your eyes open. Someone has said that you have to keep your eyes open and be watchful in prayer as you journey along life's way. The Bible tells us in Hebrews, Chapter 12, how to run this race. You must not run impatiently, but with patience. The Bible lets us know that the race is not to the swift, but it is in patiently running the race and finishing your course so that you can make Heaven your home.

Along the thought of a voyage at sea, I want to encourage you. In the midst of opposition, you need to sail on. If you do not get anything else from this message, I hope this will ring in your ears: Sail on. Sail on until you make Heaven your home; sail on until you hear the final "well done." God has been good, but some have been lost at sea from the winds and the storms of life. The battles of life have taken some away, so you need to keep sailing.

Keep Sailing

I thought of the old dragon back in the early morning church, spoken of in the Book of Revelation. The Bible says he cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman. It was a flood of persecution. Whether you are persecuted collectively or

individually, I want to encourage you to sail on. In the time of persecution, keep sailing, keep pressing the battle on, and keep going forward for God. You may battle accusations, but in the time of accusations, I want to encourage you to keep sailing. Have you ever felt like giving up when the problem gets great? I want to encourage you to sail on.

You need to stay encouraged in the things of God. The Bible lets you know there are times when you have to encourage yourself. Have you ever had to encourage yourself? You need to be encouraged in the Lord and know that He is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. He will never let you down. He will never fail you. Often the enemy will come in like a flood when the tests and the trials of life come. I want to say to you, sail on in those times and press your way.

You have a job to do. You have to keep your head held high, not to be proud, but to keep marching in the face of the enemy. When you are discouraged, you show it by dragging along, but by the help of God you can lift up your head. Even if you have to force a smile, force it, and sail on. You need to keep sailing until you reach the other side. You have not reached Heaven yet. The storms may get worse than ever before, but sail on. You should not give up or settle down and try to rest, but sail on in the midst of trials, persecutions, and troubles.

Sometimes you will be persecuted by being talked about. You can get into terrible shape over someone not shaking your hand if you allow it to work on you. You can develop a terrible attitude. The devil can take a little something and blow it out of proportion. Such things are going to happen, but you have to press right on and not look for a reason to quit. Do not allow yourself to get discouraged.

The disciples launched out on the sea that day. Those fellows were familiar with that lake. No doubt, they had crossed it many times.

They had fished in it. Being on a boat was nothing new to them, and no doubt, when they boarded the boat, the weather looked good. The day you got saved and got on board the old ship of Zion was a good day. The storms in your life were settled. God washed away all your sins, and you felt light in your soul. It was a good day, but since then you have encountered some storms. You have gone through some rough waters, but you have to keep sailing. Jesus had given the disciples an order to go over to the other side. That is where I am heading, and that is where you are heading.

The enemy of souls is doing everything he can to cause you to lose out and lose your soul; then you will be drowned in the midst of the sea. The storms are going to come, the wind is going to blow, and the rain is going to fall, but you must keep your eyes on Jesus and keep sailing, keep heading for the other side. Do not let anything distract you or attract your attention and cause you to get your mind off the things of God. Sometimes I think I have been through enough trouble to last two lifetimes. Nevertheless, I am still serving God even though the devil has given me plenty of opportunities to quit. Many times the devil has tried to get me to get off at this or that exit or to stop here or there along the highway of holiness. It is only by the grace of God that I still have victory in my soul.

Brighter Days Are Coming

I want to encourage you, because the storms are going to come and the clouds are going to get dark. Trouble is going to roll in, and sometimes you will think it is going to overwhelm you; but sail on. Do not give up; sail on. You need to keep sailing on the sea of life in the right direction, heading for the other side. Jesus will not let you down.

The old ship of Zion is not going to go down. If you will stay on board, she will land you safely on the other side. One old song says,

"Though the vessel is rocking, we are just a few waves from docking." The trouble you are facing may be just a few waves from docking on Heaven's shore. So even though your vessel may be rocking and a storm may be howling, keep sailing. As a child of God, I am sure that you have had some dark places in your life. Sometimes it is hard to hold your head up, but sail on.

I tell people that sometimes when I talk about getting really low, I feel about as low as a snake's belly in a wagon track. In those times I am in real danger.

When some people feel like staying home from church, they just stay home, but you should not do that if you hope to sail on to Glory. I am not talking about people being sick and not being in church. I am talking about just not feeling like going to church. You need to go to church and praise God. When some people feel like taking a vacation away from the things of God and coasting a little, they do it; but you need to keep sailing. Do not take the flag down. You need to hold it up high and press the battle on. Life is not all high times. There are times of refreshing that come from the presence of the Lord when He sends such an abundance of blessings that you cannot contain them all, but life is not always that way. Oh, we all wish it was, but it is not. You have to work to hold on.

Sometimes it takes more praying and agonizing before God and pressing on a little harder. It is in those trying times that you must keep sailing. Sometimes the flood that comes your way may be a flood of discouragement. Have you ever been there? You may become overwhelmed. In those times, keep sailing. When in times of terrible affliction, have you ever said, "Why me, Lord?" If you did not say it, did you think it? My friend, your test and trial may be an affliction, but I encourage you to sail on. Brighter days are coming.

You can become discouraged and not rejoice in the Lord, but in

the midst of it all, by the grace of God, you want to keep sailing. I want to go out fighting the good fight of faith, don't you? I want to go out praising God and giving Him glory and honor. Do not be cast down in discouragement. It is in the tough times of life, not in the sunny days, not when everything is going well, that you need to be very careful. You need to keep sailing in the battles. The enemy will throw you lots of curves in life. I have seen lots of discouraging things come and go; but I want to encourage you to keep sailing, to keep praising God, to keep a smile on your face, to be a good brother or sister, and to be what God would have you to be.

You should be ready to labor for God. You need to make yourself available in the work of God. It is the best paying job that you could ever have. You can work for Jesus, stay close to God, and avail yourself. It is wonderful to do the work of God. Most people do not have lots of money to lay up in the bank, but when you are working for God, regardless of what job it is, He will reward you.

The Battles of Life

Going back to our Scripture text, when the disciples started out that day, no doubt, the weather was fine, and the sea was calm. They might have said: "This will be a piece of cake. There will not be any trouble." However, it was not long until the elements began to change the course of things, just as it does with you and me sometimes. Who would think that you would have a flat tire on the way to church on Sunday morning? You may say, "Lord, why did you let a tire blow out when I am going to church?" Sometimes people get really distraught. Have you ever had similar battles?

Several years ago I had a terrible battle with my throat. I had worn it out singing and preaching for God. I never did go out and call hogs or run dogs or holler and carry on at ball games. I was using my voice for

God and found myself with some serious throat trouble. Finally, I went to a specialist and he found that I had a polyp on one vocal cord, and it wore a callus on the other one. They worked with me for quite a while, but I finally had laser surgery. I want to tell you, it is a hard job to keep your mouth shut and not talk. It was a really hard trial not knowing if I would ever be able to sing and preach again, and I love to do both. My surgery was on a Wednesday, and he wanted to see me a week from that coming Friday. He said, "I do not want you to say anything until you come to see me." That was tough.

On the way back to see the doctor, I had lots of thoughts in my mind. I thought when I got done with my doctor's appointment, I would call my dad and mom and talk to them and then call a friend. When I saw the doctor, he looked down in my throat with an instrument, and then he said: "Have you been talking? Say something." I tried to speak, but I could not. My vocal cords were still swollen. It was tough on me. My wife and I went up the road toward home, and I did not even try to talk. That was one of those times when I felt lower than a snake's belly down in the wagon track. It was a time of testing and trial, but I never once thought about giving up on God. He has been good to me. I have tried to give Him my best, so I decided that if this was the way God wanted me, that was okay with me, but God was good to me and turned that around.

Later the doctor told me, "Now you need to take some voice lessons before you go back to preaching and singing," so I did. I found an elderly lady who was a good voice teacher. I took thirty lessons from her on breathing and controlling my air, not just blowing it out all at one time. I am so thankful for her help, because if I had jumped right back into things, I probably would not have lasted long. What should you do in those times when the trials really wear on you? Just sail on.

Be Your Best for God

If Jesus tarries, old age is going to catch up with all of us. Oh, I know some do not think they are slowing down, but they are. Those can be tough times, but it is all a part of God's plan. You see, as you age, if you felt the same way you did at sixteen, you would hurt yourself. God knows just how to work it. I am talking about things that can discourage you. The enemy will work on you and say, "You can't do this or that like you used to." You may get disturbed about that, but sail on. You must keep pressing the battle on until you get home. Some young folks do not understand what I am talking about when I speak of this old age business. They do not know a thing about that. I used to hear elderly people talk and could not understand what they were talking about, but old age is coming my way too.

The enemy does not care what he uses to discourage you. When he finds something that works, he will wear it out on you. He will cause you to go to bed worrying about it, get up worrying about it, and go throughout the day worrying about it. If the devil can find something that will work on you, he will use that repeatedly. He does not want you to be happy and to enjoy life. He does not want you to enjoy the good things of God. He is going to try to throw stones in your way and bring hardship, but you need to sail on. You may not be able to jump as high as you used to, but do not quit jumping. You may not be able to see daylight under your feet, but keep praising God and keep testifying. Do not quit. You need to keep telling others about the good things that God has done for you.

When things are not going right at the shop, do not be pressed down about it; sail on. When people let you down, sail on. When they talk about you (and they will), sail on. There are times of trial and persecution and hardship along the way; but remember, we are holding up

the bloodstained banner of the Lord Jesus Christ. As a Christian, you have a job to do. You do not have time to take a week off or to get up a miff tree. You do not have time to have a pity party. Keep sailing. These things that I am talking about are real.

I am living in the same world in which you are living, and in the real world there is much opposition, many problems, lots of troubles, and sometimes persecution. The enemy would like to slow you down and eventually stop you from praising God. You must faithfully let your light shine. The devil does not want you to be your best. I want to be my best for God, don't you? If I have a little extra, I want to give it to God. When you work overtime at the shop and get extra money, it looks good; but it is not going to be long until it will be gone. What you lay up on the other side is what counts. I have been serving the Lord for more than fifty years, and everything that I have laid up on the other side has never lost its value. This economic crunch will not affect those treasures that you lay up on the other side.

I want to encourage you to work a little harder for God. You need to lay up more treasures on the other side and do your best to be all that God would have you to be. If you sing for Him, do your best and give Him all you can. Be all that God would have you to be. When Isaiah saw the Lord in the year when King Uzziah died, he said, "Here am I Lord, send me." You need to make yourself available to God and keep pressing on. I have dealt with many people who were discouraged and counseled them. Some people had just about come to the end of their rope. If you are not in hard times, you need to thank God for that.

Sail On

I want to encourage you to keep on going for God. When people get discouraged, one of the first things they do is quit going to church.

Have you ever noticed that? What do you do when your gas tank gets low? You do not look for a junkyard, but you look for a filling station. That is how it is when you feel that you are running low spiritually. You need to press your way to the house of God. You may need to press your way to an altar of prayer. King Jesus will fill your vessel. You might come dragging in, but you can go out rejoicing. This thing is real. It is not all feeling, even though there is a lot of feeling in it.

I have experienced times when there did not seem to be any feeling in my experience, and I got concerned. When I went to church and the songs did not change my countenance, I got concerned. When the message did not encourage me and I did not get some good from it, I got concerned. Friend, if you cannot feel the witness of the Holy Spirit down inside, do not go on that way. You need to find a place to pray and talk it over with Jesus.

When you are feeling low, do not think about not attending the church services; that is when you need to attend more than ever. Sometimes when trouble strikes and rough places come, the first thing some people begin to entertain is the thought of giving up on God. Many people have lost out with God during such times, but you need to sail on. Do not look for a reason to quit. No one invites trouble or discouragement. We do not invite trials, but trials will come. Therefore, we have to learn to press on through them. Nothing can get to you or me without it first being okayed by the Lord. God has a purpose in mind, and that is to strengthen you and me. He wants us to be better, stronger soldiers and to be able to go through rough places. Those hard times will mold us and get us into shape to stay true to God.

People who have worked hard physically realize that work is good for them. Strenuous work will build your muscles. Somebody who is a "couch potato," so to speak, does not have much muscle. There is a moral

to this. They do not have much muscle because they have not done anything to build muscle. What would you think about little junior with those little robin-egg sized muscles if when he becomes a grown man he were to still have those little muscles? His muscles need to grow strong in the physical man. Likewise, you need to grow strong spiritually.

In 1985 I had surgery under my right arm and almost lost my life. They were going to cut out about an inch of my top rib, and as they worked in that place under my arm, they cut my artery to that arm. I was losing my life as my blood was flowing out. They had to get in there and repair that damage. After the doctor did that, I was off work for six months because that arm was not getting enough blood. The best way

I can describe it to you is that it was like putting a grown man's arm on a little boy. It was like too much arm with too little strength to work.

That gets back to the story about muscles. If little junior still had little robin-egg sized muscles as an adult, he would not be able to function well. What I am saying is that you need some spiritual muscles. You get that by exercising yourself in the Lord. You see, God is not going to give you more faith until you exercise what He has already given you; then you can see it grow.

I encourage you to sail on. Some have given up and lost out in the race, and my heart is burdened and troubled about that. I want to encourage you to sail on. Do not let anything stop you, because you are sailing to the other side. In spite of all the setbacks, you can have a

wonderful voyage. Did you know that? God has not promised you smooth sailing, but He has promised you a safe landing. Praise God! I praise God for all He has brought me through! Church, sail on, help one another, encourage one another, and pray for one another. Let us all go to Heaven together. I want you to be encouraged. I like to see people who are happy. My friend, real happiness has to come from the inside. It is more than an expression on the face. Real joy changes your countenance. There is joy in the service of the Master. You need to sail on in the face of all opposition. Regardless of what the problem is, sail on. May God bless you.

(Compact Disc TR-749E)

Announcements

Summersville, WV
April 30-May 6

REVIVAL: Church of God, 74 Armstrong Rd., Summersville, West Virginia 26651
Evangelist: Brother Allen Polston, New Castle, Indiana
Service times: Monday-Friday 7:00 p.m.; Saturday 6:00 p.m.; Sunday 10:30 a.m. & 6:00 p.m.
Visit our website @ www.ChurchofGodSummersvilleWV.com
For further information contact: Pastor Earl R. Borders @ 304-872-4047

Newark, OH
June 17-24

CAMP MEETING: The Church of God, 675 N. Cedar St., Newark, OH 43055
Three services daily: 10:00 a.m., 3:00 p.m. & 7:00 p.m.
The first service begins Sunday morning. The afternoon service will be a teaching service.
For lodging reservation, please call Brother & Sister Dave Bush at 740-345-1213
For further information contact: Pastor Roger Decker, 87 Decrow Ave., Newark, OH 43055
Telephone: 740-344-2543

Important Notice

Date Change for Canby, Oregon, Camp Meeting

The new date will be July 9-15, 2012

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