

# LESSONS TO LIVE BY



*Spiritual Illustrations*  
Volume I



# *Lessons To Live By*

## *Volume I*

*This volume contains a collection of illustrations used in various sermons given over the years. We publish them that they might be used by God's people to further equip, edify, and inspire those who believe in, and strive to live God's way of life.*



# 1 Corinthians 4:2

*Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.*

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Elizabeth Dole made a now famous statement. She said: “Life is not just a few years to spend on self-indulgence and career advancement. It is a privilege, a responsibility, and a stewardship to be lived according to a much higher calling.”

Certainly, our spiritual lives would be far better if we understood and lived by this truth. Nothing in this physical life is more valuable than the Christian’s calling. For example, consider the things we have now. They are not really ours. Our jobs, homes, cars, furniture, food, pets, and electronic gadgets do not belong to us. Even our spouses, children and the invisible spiritual gifts we receive of God are not ours. Virtually everything that exists in the entire universe belongs to the Eternal. We are simply stewards of His belongings, and He has given them to us for our temporary use.

These things are on loan to us to serve His divine purpose. Moreover, the way in which we treat them shows the Almighty something of enormous importance. It is evidence of how we will take care of those things God will give His people in His Kingdom. Realizing this truth, we should take care of all we have, treating it as a heavenly gift that we are to give back to God in better condition than when given to us.

As we grow ever closer to the end of the age, many are forgetting this fact. As the Savior warned: “Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods. But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; And shall begin to smite *his* fellowservants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for *him*, and in an hour that he is not aware of, And shall cut him asunder, and appoint *him* his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 24:45-51).

We simply must learn to treat our family, friends, talents, physical possessions, and the bodies we have in a way that Christ would approve. We never want to take anything for granted, but rather strive to maintain and even improve the gifts God gives to us. As Paul wrote, "... he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again" (2 Cor. 5:15). Let's strive to live for Christ, and do so outwardly expressing care, concern, and love as faithful stewards of those gifts He has given us.

## 1 Corinthians 4:3-6

*But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God. And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another.*

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In the book *Unfinished Business*, David Simmons, a former quarterback for the Dallas Cowboys, explained that in his childhood home, his father was a military man and extremely demanding. He rarely said a kind word, but rather used harsh criticism to push his son to do better. David's father constantly reminded him that there were always new goals ahead and refused to allow David any satisfaction from his accomplishments.

Once, as a boy, David's dad gave him an unassembled bicycle. He commanded his son to put it together himself. After David struggled to the point of tears, with the many parts and difficult instructions, his father said to him, "I knew you couldn't do it" and then assembled it for him.

Later, when Dave played football in high school, his father was unrelenting in his criticisms. After each game he would go over every play and point out Dave's errors. In retrospect Dave said, "Most boys got butterflies in their stomach before the game; I got them afterwards. Facing my father was more stressful than any opposing team."

When it was time to go to college, Dave chose the University of Georgia. It was the farthest campus from the home where he had come to hate his father's constant disapproval.

After college, he became the second round draft pick of the St. Louis Cardinals after Joe Namath who was first. Excited, he telephoned his father to tell him the good news. His dad responded by saying, “How does it feel to be second?”

If you have ever felt rejected, welcome to the club. We have all felt it at sometime. Our emotions constantly confront us with a need for acceptance from a very early age. However, whether from a girlfriend, boyfriend, family member or neighbor; virtually everyone has suffered some form of rejection.

The lessons of rejection come to us from various places—family, friends, the media and peer pressure. As we move on to college, or in the work force, the opportunities for acceptance or rejection continue. Other’s respond to how we dress, the car we drive, what our position in the company is, how much money we make, where we live, the kind of home we live in, and the people we associate with.

In the Church, acceptance may depend on who we attend with, how big our church is, how many programs it has, or our level of leadership. Even within the congregation of faith, rejection can be based upon how we look, dress, and what personal views we have.

In this day and age, where everyone seems to be judging what is right and wrong for themselves, we need to remember that we do not have the ability to measure ourselves—or each other. The apostle Paul would not even judge himself. He knew mankind does not naturally make good judgments. Humanly, our values are flawed and seldom in sync with the standards of Almighty God.

Thus, Christ was also rejected of men, even forsaken by His own disciples as they fled in fear. He felt rejection, but was comforted in the fact that the Father was with Him. God the Father’s love and acceptance is what really mattered to Him and it is what should matter the most to us.

We should remember that what others think of us is not of much importance. Even what we think of ourselves does not count for much. It is what God thinks that is important, and He loves us, and will never reject us—if we do not reject Him.

## *1 Corinthians 6:19-20*

*Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body (ESV).*

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Mankind is widely driven by the lust of our eyes and flesh. Consequently, in our modern age, we have created a multitude of devices and methods to tantalize our carnal senses. For example, the entertainment industry has expanded widely over the last 60 years to include deviancy beyond measure. Portrayal of violence, sex, and ungodly behaviors dominate television, movies and even theatrical arts. In addition, extracurricular activities have moved further towards extremism and include more and more behaviors that can only be described as ungodly.

When Christians partake of weekly games, outings, watch movies, or television—we need to ask ourselves a very important question. Where is God in these things? In other words, would we include God in to some of our activities? Do we only participate in activities He would approve of, or do we temporarily leave Him out in order to enjoy ungodly entertainment?

There is an old story that illustrates this tendency. It seems a desert nomad awakened hungry in the middle of the night. He lit a candle and began eating dates from a bowl beside his bed. He took a bite from one and saw a worm in it; so he threw it out of the tent. He bit into the second date, found another worm, and discarded it also. Reasoning that he wouldn't have any dates left to eat if he continued, he blew out the candle and took from the bowl and ate.

Are we sometimes like this nomad? Do we find ourselves blinding our eyes to the perverse ways of this world so that we can partake of that which we want? Do we suspend our values to enjoy some form of entertainment? When we go to the movies, is it a film that we would take Jesus Christ to see? Or, do we sometimes seek darkness that our sin may be hidden?

In the most critical age in history, we need to ask ourselves—where is God in our lives outside of the Church? Is He there with us—always? Do we bring Him wherever we go? Do we question whether or not He would step into these types of arenas?

From this day forward, let's be critical in our entertainment choices. Let's evaluate the activities we enjoy and be sure they are ones that God would approve of. Consider that, through the Holy Spirit, Christ is with us wherever we go, and therefore we must be sure that we only participate in those activities He would approve.

# *1 Corinthians 9:24*

*Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.*

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Beth Anne DeCiantis loved to run. Her passion for running eventually led her to attempt competing in the Olympics. As a female runner, she would have to complete a grueling 26 mile race in less than 2 hours and 45 minutes in order to qualify for the Olympic trials.

She started out strong, but began to have trouble in the 23rd mile. Beth's determination brought her to the final straightaway with just 200 meters to go and only 2 minutes left to qualify. Then, suddenly she stumbled and fell.

Beth was dazed, and stayed down for a full twenty seconds. The crowd began to exhort her by yelling, "Get up!" The clock continued to tick and she now had less than a minute to go. She staggered to her feet and began walking. She was now only 5 yards short of the finish line with ten seconds left and suddenly Beth fell again.

She now began to crawl and the crowd continued to cheer her on. She would not stop. She crawled on her hands and knees across the finish line and completed the marathon in 2 hours 44 minutes, and 55 seconds. She had made it!

The amazing part of this story is that Beth Anne absolutely refused to let down. Falling did not stop her. It seemed that nothing would keep her from attaining her goal. She qualified by giving it all she had—that is what made her the winner she was.

It is this kind of attitude and behavior that Christians need to have in our race for the Kingdom. Only those who have a profound zeal will ultimately succeed.

If we truly love God, we will seek His Kingdom with all our heart, all our life, all our strength and let nothing stop us. Even those times when we might fall, and become dazed by what has happened, we will get back up and continue the race.

Those who have this kind of passion for God, who lovingly and earnestly give all of themselves to this transcendent quest—they are the ones who will cross the finish line and receive the incorruptible crown of life.

## *1 Chronicles 13:9-11*

*And when they came unto the threshing floor of Chidon, Uzza put forth his hand to hold the ark; for the oxen stumbled. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzza, and he smote him, because he put his hand to the ark: and there he died before God. And David was displeased, because the LORD had made a breach upon Uzza...*

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King David had not studied the priestly Scriptures to know how the Ark of the Covenant was to be transported. It was not to be carried on a cart, and no man was to touch it. As a result, when the ox pulling the cart stumbled, Uzzah, the son of Abinadab, in whose house the Ark rested, reached out attempting to stabilize the Ark. He died as a result of mishandling the holy things of God.

Tragically, today many take a similar approach with the written Word of God. Some simply assume their beliefs and practices are accepted by God. In their own way, they are trying to steady the holy things of God in order to balance them with their personal opinions or desires.

Are any of us adding our own twist to the Scriptures, making assumptions, or inferring what we want the Bible to say in order to continue doing something we enjoy? Do we take Scripture out of context in an attempt to make ourselves seem knowledgeable or righteous to others? The truth is that this is occurring to varying degrees in churches all across our land! By such behavior, we mishandle the truth of God and show more respect for what we desire than what God expects of us.

Consider an example. According to Peter Kendall of the Chicago Tribune, 61 year old Reuben Brown was known on the south and west sides of Chicago as the friendly neighborhood cockroach exterminator “with the Mississippi stuff.” The Mississippi stuff was a pesticide. Brown had purchased hundreds of gallons of it in the south, and it really did the trick on roaches. Brown went from door to door with his hand sprayer and his business grew as satisfied customers recommended this remarkably effective exterminator to others.

In the process however, Brown allegedly single-handedly created an environmental catastrophe. The can-do pesticide was—methyl parathion—a chemical outlawed by the EPA for use in homes.

Southern farmers use it on boll weevils in their cotton fields, and within days the pesticide chemically broke down into harmless elements. Not so in the home. There, the pesticide persisted as a toxic chemical that can harm the human neurological system with effects similar to lead poisoning.

The EPA was called into Chicago for the cleanup. Drywall, carpeting, and furniture that had been sprayed with the pesticide had to be torn out and hauled to a hazardous materials dump. The EPA estimated that the total cost of the cleanup amounted to approximately \$20 million.

Brown was charged with 2 misdemeanors. He apparently didn't know much about the pesticide he had sprayed so liberally. Brown's attorney pleaded, "It's a tragedy. It is one of those situations where he did a lot of harm, but his intention in no way matches the damage he has done."

Like the act of Uzzah, Reuben Brown caused enormous damage because he did not take the time to understand exactly what he was dealing with. Today the same kind approach is occurring in the Church. Many feel like they are righteous because they attend a church and believe what they are told. Too many are not studying what the Bible actually says. They do not fully understand how God would have them live. Ultimately this will bring great harm to many people.

We should learn the lesson of Uzzah, and his mishandling of the Ark! We must not justify personal beliefs or feelings that are unconfirmed by Scripture. Uzzah perished because neither he nor King David showed the proper respect for God or His Word. If we do not respect the things of God and implement Biblical principals as the Almighty sees fit—we could also suffer. We must sincerely seek to understand this truth. The Eternal expects us to live by His written Word and not our feelings.

## *Philippians 1:6*

*Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath  
begun a good work in you will perform it until the  
day of Jesus Christ: .*

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The Apostle Paul compared the Christian's quest for the Kingdom to the Greek games which later became the Olympics. In them, only one person could win. However, to those whom God has called, there can be many winners. Therefore, in the Christian race our challenge is to finish. A story of a race at a middle school on track and field day illustrates this point.

Parents had lined the stands as their children edged up to the starting line. The young boys were all trembling with excitement. Each was filled with the hope of being first to cross the finish line. Little Billy felt certain he had what it took to win.

As the starter's gun fired, the boys sprung forward with a burst of energy. Feeling even more confident, Billy bolted up to the front runners. The others began to bunch up at the first turn and somehow Billy's foot struck that of another runner, and he found himself tumbling to the ground as the rest of the contestants passed him. Undiscouraged, Billy quickly got back on his feet, still determined to win.

Utilizing all his strength and will, he ran with his might and began to catch up. However, his mind and heart were going faster than his legs. He lost his equilibrium and fell a second time sliding into the dirt. As the seconds ticked by, Billy laid there feeling devastated thinking that he should have quit the first time he fell and avoided this disgrace. He realized that winning was now hopeless. As he looked toward the stands, he caught a glimpse of his dad's face. The expression he saw was that of a hopeful father that seemed to say, you can do it—get up and finish this race.

Billy jumped back up and began to run again. In no time, he caught up to within ten feet of the last runner. He began to think that if he really pushed himself, there might still be a chance he could win. He reached down deep inside and pulled on every ounce of strength in his body.

However, distracted mentally by his failures, fatigue began to set in and then the worst possible thing happened—he fell a third time. He could hear the audience laughing as he laid on the ground. A tear dropped from his eye as one single thought entered his mind—defeat! What’s the use? He thought. Three strikes and you’re out. There seemed to be no sense in running anymore. Hope had fled. He decided that he would simply walk off the track and live with the shame.

Then he imagined facing his father. It was almost as if he could hear his dad’s voice in his head telling him—“get up!” “You were not meant to give up. Run and take your place.”

Somehow, this caused Billy to gather strength from inside, and he rose up. Now it had become an issue of finishing. This time he didn’t care if he won or lost. Winning no longer concerned him. He simply would not quit.

Billy was far behind the others, but he ran and gave it his all. As he got closer to the finish line, he could hear the audience cheering for the boys who had won. All of the other runners had already finished and eventually Billy crossed the line too—he was in last place.

With his head lowered, he began to walk back to the gym, but what happened next shocked him. The audience began to cheer for him and it was even louder than for the winners! When he talked to his dad later, he said, “I am sorry that I let you down dad. I didn’t do too well.” Then his father said, “You did not let me down. In fact, you have made me very happy. You got back up every time you fell. You did not quit. To me you won!”

This story is like the race Paul speaks of. Yes, there may be afflictions, and from time to time we may fall down and even suffer injury. However, God said that as long as we do our personal best, and remain committed to Him, He will not leave or forsake us (Heb. 13:5).

As Christians, our concern should not be who comes in first or who might be ahead of us. For us, to win means that we never quit. When difficult times come, when we make mistakes or seemingly fail in one way or another, consider the experience of Billy and the words of Paul. Never give up. Continue—finish our race to the Kingdom of God!

## *Luke 13:24*

*Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.*

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Admiral Hyman Rickover was the head of the United States Nuclear Navy. To many who knew him, he seemed stern and demanding—as if he asked too much from his crews. For many years, every officer aboard a nuclear submarine was personally interviewed and approved by the admiral. Jimmy Carter who would later become president of the United States wrote the following regarding his interview with this famous Admiral:

“I had applied for the nuclear submarine program, and Admiral Rickover was interviewing me for the job. It was the first time I met the Admiral, and we sat in a large room by ourselves for more than two hours. During the session, he let me choose any subjects I wished to discuss. Very carefully, I chose those about which I knew most at the time—current events, seamanship, music, literature, naval tactics, electronics, and gunnery. After I finished, he began to ask me a series of questions of increasing difficulty. In each instance, he soon proved that I knew relatively little about nuclear submarines.

He always looked right into my eyes, and he never smiled. I was saturated with cold sweat. Finally he asked a question and I thought I could redeem myself. He said, ‘How did you stand in your class at the Naval Academy?’ Since I had completed my sophomore year at Georgia Tech before entering Annapolis, I had done very well. My chest swelled with pride as I answered, ‘Sir, I stood 59<sup>th</sup> in a class of 820!’

Then, I sat back to wait for the congratulations which never came. Instead, his next question was: “did you always do your best?” I started to say, ‘Yes, sir,’ but I remembered who I was talking to, and recalled the many times at the Academy when I could have learned more about our allies, our enemies, weapons, strategy, and so forth. I was just human. I finally gulped and said, ‘No, sir, I didn’t always do my best.’

He looked at me for a long time, and then turned his chair around to end the interview. He asked one final question, which I have never been able to forget—or to answer. He said, ‘Why not?’ I sat there for a while, shaken, and then slowly left the room.”

Consider this story in the light of our Christian calling. God is assembling an elite group of people to become Kings and Priests in His future Kingdom. Of the many who are called, Christ stated that only a few will be chosen (Mat. 22:14). The faithful alone will succeed.

In that context, are we looking at God as the officers viewed Admiral Rickover? Do we feel the Almighty is asking too much of us by requiring that we do our very best striving to live His way? Or, do we make excuses for ourselves that we may later regret?

When we come before God, and He asked us, “Did you do your best?” What would be our response? Would we say that we thought that if we believed in Him and hoped to attain the Kingdom that it would be enough? Is it possible to believe in Christ and still fail? The Savior answers that question, stating, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the Kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven ...depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!” (Matthew 7:21-23).”

Not doing our best to keep God’s Commandments is lawlessness. Holding traditions or personal beliefs above Scripture is wrong. Claiming to believe in God and yet not obeying Him becomes nothing more than unfaithful lip service.

We must never become self-satisfied and think that we are righteous simply for believing. We cannot allow knowledge to puff us up. We must strive for the mastery of the understanding God has given us to succeed. Anything worthwhile in life requires tangible effort, and ours is the opportunity of a lifetime. Let’s give God’s calling our very best!

# *1 Corinthians 10:11*

*Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.*

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Every year Americans eat, drink, and shoot off fireworks on the 4th of July. Multiple millions of dollars are spent on this day across our nation as we gaze at the spectacle of fire, color and lights. If you ask participants what they are celebrating, they will likely tell you it is “liberty, it is freedom!”

What we seem to have forgotten is that freedom always requires responsibility. In fact, it was Victor Frankel, a European, who once said that “Americans need a Statue of Responsibility on the west coast to balance the Statue of Liberty on the east coast.”

The ancient Israelites were given liberty. They had freedom, but they did not continue to take responsibility in maintaining that liberty. They stopped obeying God. They worshipped other gods, created idols, and in the end, they lost the freedom God had given them.

Is it possible that Americans are following the same path as ancient Israel? Has our liberty been turned into license? Are we rejecting God in our country today? Has the “freedom” we so heartily endorsed, allowed us to go too far in self seeking and pleasure?

The news each day makes the answer clear. It is yes, and like ancient Israel, if we do not turn around, we will ultimately lose our liberty. We must take the responsibility to honor the God upon which this great nation was founded.

When the 4th of July comes around each year, let’s remember that our freedom comes with a price. That price is a gratitude inside us that engenders a responsibility to live the way of God who gave us so much!

## 1 Corinthians 10:13

*There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.*

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At one time, every year the farmers in Alabama planted one single crop—cotton. Year after year they lived off that cotton crop. Then one year the dreaded boll weevil devastated the whole area. The next year the farmers braced themselves and planted the cotton again. As soon as the crop began to grow, the insects attacked again, ruining the entire harvest.

A few farmers who survived those two years of the boll weevil decided to experiment the third year. They mortgaged their farms, took the money, but this time, they invested it by planting a different crop, one they had never planted before—peanuts. The new crop was so hardy, and the market for them so good, the farmers earned enough to pay off all their debts.

From that time forward they only planted peanuts and they prospered greatly. Out of gratitude the farmers took up a collection and built a monument to the boll weevil right in the town square. If it had not been for this insect, they would never have discovered peanuts.

Many of us can learn from these farmers. We sometimes find ourselves in a trial. We resent the trial, but often continue to apply the same solutions to our problem with no success. Have you ever thought that the trial we experience is a message from God telling us to plant the seeds of a different kind of behavior? Have we considered that the difficult times we experience may be a lesson preparing us for the future?

With every trial God allows us, He gives us a way out. But, this often means we are forced to make a change in life. However, with that change come blessings we never envisioned. More important the ultimate end will be one of great reward.

Consider the trials we face. Ask ourselves, what crop am I planting and what do I need to change? Instead of planting anger, replace it with joy. Instead of selfishness, plant caring and giving. Change the seeds of resentment to those of love, and replace pride with meekness.

## *Luke 16:10*

*He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.*

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Sprinter Michael Johnson was a great athlete who set records in the 1996 summer Olympics. To do so, he trained for years just to enable him to cut a mere second or two from his time. In his biography he writes:

"Success is found in much smaller portions than most people realize. A hundredth of a second here, sometimes a tenth there, this can determine the fastest man in the world. At times we live our lives on a paper thin edge that barely separates greatness from mediocrity and success from failure. Life is often compared to a marathon, but I think it is more like being a sprinter; long stretches of hard work punctuated by brief moments in which we are given the opportunity to perform at our best."

Sometimes the Christian life also resembles that of a sprinter. Long stretches of obedience and spiritual discipline; punctuated by tests in which we are given the opportunity to perform at our very best.

There may be times when many God-given tests in life seem of little significance. In fact, the majority are usually not colossal undertakings, but rather small tests of faith and devotion. But, everything counts in life no matter how inconsequential it may seem. Frequently, success can depend upon the seemingly small choices we make.

The little flaws in our character, the rash accusations of judgment, the loose words of anger, minute details we turn a blind eye to; these could be the determining factors between success or failure.

Let's always remember that whatever we do, whether it is work, play, conversation, personal projects, or helping each other—let's make everything we do count. Let's bring into subjection our entire life with a spirit of love, meekness and service. These are those little things that reflect our level of faithfulness to God.

# *1 Corinthians 11:1*

*Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.*

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There was a husband and wife who decided to rent a small plane for the afternoon. The husband had been a pilot for 13 years and they set off for a small town about 60 miles away for a lunch date and then to return afterward. At one point during the flight, the husband said that he felt a little faint, and in an instant, he collapsed in his seat.

His wife did not have the slightest idea how to fly an airplane. She pressed the transmitter button on the microphone and cried out, “Someone help me, help me, I can’t fly this airplane!”

The radio was tuned to a frequency used by many pilots and her frantic message was picked up by dozens of people. Suddenly there were voices offering advice. Some said “Follow a highway.” “Turn towards the sun.” “Switch on the landing light.”

Fortunately, a flight instructor was listening to this confusion on the airwaves. He ran to his small Cessna and took off to try the impossible; to find the voice in the sky asking for help. He waited for a lull in the transmission and then asked all the other transmitters to leave the frequency so he could make contact with the woman. “Madam, what is your name?” he asked as he began to establish a rapport all the while scanning the skies for the aircraft. Then he saw a plane with its landing light on. “Can you turn off your landing light?” the instructor asked. The light went off—it was her.

He flew his plane in front of her to let her know he was there and then he maneuvered his plane just a little behind and to the side of her. He explained that he was an experienced flight instructor. Calmly he taught her the basics of flying. As they came to the airfield, the instructor gave more detailed help. They flew over the airstrip first and then made the final approach. The woman was able to land the plane and walk away without a scratch.

In a world that is filled with examples of bad leadership, this flight instructor provides us with a wonderful example of how a leader should teach another. To lead by example with care and patience is an attribute essential to those whom God has called.

Like this distraught lady following the lead of the experienced pilot, we must remember that we have a perfect example to follow in Jesus Christ. He teaches us how to navigate through our life in this complicated world. He went to great lengths to instruct His people—ultimately giving His life as an example for us. He showed us that we are to imitate Him. As Christians, we should be walking proof that He is leading us.

Christ stated that of the many who have been called, only a few will be chosen to one day be leaders and teachers in the Kingdom of God (Mt. 20:16). In that context, if we hope to become a king and a priest in the very government of God, we are to start our leadership training right now!

That preparation begins with following the lead of Jesus Christ. As we follow Him, our friends, family members, neighbors and co-workers will have tangible evidence—direct examples—of how they too should live. By witnessing our conduct, others may also learn how to obtain eternal life in the Kingdom of God.

# 1 Corinthians 12:12

*For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ.*

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Over the years, the Reader's Digest produced many unique articles. One narrative was entitled, *What Good Is a Tree?* The article's story answered the title's question, and at the same time provided an illustration that Christians can all learn from.

The article explained that when the roots of trees touch one another, there is a fungus that grows over time. This growth tends to reduce competition between the different trees. In fact, this unusual fungus often even helps to link the roots of different trees—even those of dissimilar species.

As a result of this phenomenon, an entire forest can sometimes be linked together by their roots. Consider the value of this example to God's people.

By this unique fungus connection, if one tree has access to water, another to nutrients, and a third to sunlight, the trees have the means to share God's gifts of life with one another.

God designed the body of Christ, His Church, in such a way that it should function like such a forest. While there may be many different members, they are all to be connected to one another through the spirit of God. What one member lacks, another can supply by the gifts God has given each one of us.

Let's contemplate our unique place in the body of Christ and how we are to be connected to one another through God's Spirit. In that way, we can serve one another's needs in our local congregations.

## 1 Corinthians 12:21-22

*The eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. No, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary.*

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In March of 1981, President Ronald Reagan was shot by John Hinckley, Jr. The President was then hospitalized for several weeks. Although Mr. Reagan was the nation's chief executive, his hospitalization had little impact on the nation's activity. Government continued on.

On the other hand, suppose the garbage collectors in this country went on strike as they once did in Philadelphia. That city not only found itself in a literal mess, the pile of decaying trash quickly became a health hazard. From that historic experience, it is estimated that a three week nationwide strike of this country's waste collectors would completely paralyze the nation.

This scenario brings up an important question. Who was more important in these two circumstances? Was it the President or the garbage collectors? This comparison makes it clear. Each one of us has a part—a vital role to play in any organization. Each of us is important and this principle is even more apparent when it comes to the body of Christ.

Sometimes members of a Church think that they are unimportant because they are not an ordained deacon, elder, evangelist or pastor. But—each one of us is important to God, and each performs tasks that are vital to the health of the Church. The widow's prayers that support the work are just as important as the work itself. The two responsibilities are inseparable!

Lets not think what we do is trivial. Even the small things we do for God in this life show Him how faithful we will be with larger responsibilities in the Kingdom. Do our best, be our best, and live the best we can no matter what position we hold. Do so realizing that each one of us is of enormous value to God and that He put us in the body exactly where it pleases Him. Let's do our best wherever we are, and grow spiritually wherever we are planted!

## *1 John 2:1*

*My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye not sin. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.*

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The Grace of God is an amazing gift. It can be seen everywhere we look in life. From the air we breathe, to the beautiful flowers, the landscapes, and taste of food. Everything comes from God's abundant free gift of grace. Perhaps the most misunderstood gift from God is His influence upon the minds and hearts of true believers.

The greatest display of grace is seen in the sacrifice of God's beloved Son whom He gave for us, and the gift of His Holy Spirit. However, some have falsely been taught that grace is only the unmerited pardon of our sins, and therefore, there is no longer a need to strive to keep God's law. This is patently untrue! God's law and His grace go hand in hand. God's grace is actually defined as the Holy Spirit's influence upon the hearts of Christians to inspire both their thoughts and behavior toward doing what is right (John 16:7). Juan Ortiz explains this in the following way:

“Christians are a little bit like a trapeze show. It is breathtaking as we see the dexterity and timing. We gasp at near-misses even though in most cases, there is a net underneath. When they fall, they jump up, and bounce back to the trapeze.

It is as if Christians live on a similar trapeze. (God's grace prods us to live differently). The whole world should be able to watch and say, “Look how they live, how they love one another. Look how well the husbands treat their wives.” People watch and say, “Aren't they the best workers in the factories and offices? Aren't they the best neighbors, and the best students?” That is what it is like to live on our trapeze. We are a show to the world. What happens when we slip? The net is there for us. The blood of Jesus Christ has provided forgiveness for us. He provides the inspiration to gracefully keep our balance in living our life, and He is the net should we fall.

## 1 Peter 1:6-7

*Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.*

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On the prairies of the Midwest, a grass fire can actually be a good thing. Naturalist Cindy Schreuder writes, “To ask whether a prairie needs fire is to wonder whether it needs water.” The burning stimulates the growth of grasses and causes the wildflowers to return nutrients to the soil. This process exposes seed beds to the sun, and it suppress invading trees and shrubs. Schreuder described one such fire, saying:

“Pushed forward by the wind, the flames raced across the prairie. Thick dead grass stalks wavered for just a moment before buckling and falling into flames... A prairie burning is something like a great thunderstorm. You experience the raw power of nature. After you’ve burned it off, nothing is left. It’s so pure. Every leaf that emerges is new and shiny and wet. Every flower petal is perfect.”

According to the Scriptures, a portion of the end-time Church will be spewed into the fire of tribulation (Rev. 3:16-18). This tragic scenario will necessary for those that have not yet obtained the golden character needed to become a born again child of God.

Others may have already obtained these godly traits in the past but did so by first being tried in the fiery trials of life—a type of purification. Righteous character must be built by enduring and overcoming trials so that God will know whether we will follow Him in stressful, difficult, or even dire situations.

The heated trials of life are there to burn off the deadwood—to remove the fat. They are crucial to purify us and leave behind a fertile, soil bed in us—one in which spiritual growth can occur. Through these hardships, we are strengthened and even renewed as godly development takes place.

When these difficult times are upon us, let's remember the prairies of the Midwest realizing that these times are essential, and we are required to overcome if we are going to be changed—emerging as a new creation having eternal life.

## 2 Timothy 2:15

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

---

Albert Einstein had fled Nazi Germany and had taken up residence in America. He purchased an older two story home in a small neighborhood. In this home, he entertained some of the greatest minds in the world. These individuals visited him and discussed great thoughts regarding such topics as politics, mathematics, and human rights. However, there is one guest he entertained that few know about.

Emmy was a fifth grade student who lived in the neighborhood. She was struggling with her elementary school math and had heard that there was a very smart man who lived down the street. One day, she decided to knock on his door. She told him her plight and asked for his help. He said he would be glad to be of assistance. They sat together and he explained how to work the problems in a way that she understood. He also told her she could come and visit anytime.

Later, her mother was horrified to learn that her daughter had visited Einstein. She told her that Einstein was a very important man, and her daughter should never interrupt him again. Emmy's mother then went to Einstein's house and apologized for her daughter. The world-renown scientist explained that her daughter was not a bother. He told her, "When a child finds such joy in learning, then it is my joy to help her learn. Don't stop Emmy from coming to me with her school problems. She is welcome in this house anytime."

The humble and helpful attitude of this great scientist is a small example of how God feels about us. Sometimes we forget how much God cares for us—that we are far more important to Him than most realize (Lk. 12:7). We overlook just how much He desires that we seek Him in prayer and our study of His way of life in Scripture. As a loving Father, He wants us to come to His house with our difficulties and questions.

We all suffer difficulties in this life, but we must remember this vital truth. God is bigger than any of our problems and we are always welcome to come to him with any problem we might have no matter how big or small. He is always there for us to help us understand.

# *1 Thessalonians 5:19*

## *Quench Not the Spirit*

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One dark night outside a small town, a fire started inside a room in the local chemical plant. Before long the fire exploded into massive flames, and an alarm went out to the local fire department. After fighting the fire for over an hour, the fire company seemed to be getting nowhere. The fire was simply too intense for their single rig.

Seeing that the fire was blazing with such intensity, the fire chief called for back-up. Fire companies came in from all the surrounding counties. It took all night, but by the next morning the billowy flames and smoke had dwindled to a trickle. There were enough trucks, men, and water to finally extinguish the torrent of proud flames.

God has started a passionate fire in the hearts and minds of those He has called. However there are many forces in this life that work to extinguish that spiritual fire within us.

For example, Jesus explained that the cares of this life can choke out God's Word that has been sown in us. Jealousies, envy, pride, desire for status, lusts and trials of one kind or another assault us daily.

If we let enough of these things affect us, the carnal cares of this life, and the world we live in, can quench the flame of the Spirit that dwells in us. Therefore we must always be on alert, guarding against the many pulls, temptations, lusts and distractions that can quench the fire God's Spirit has started in us.

## *I Timothy 1:9*

*Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some  
having put away concerning faith have made  
shipwreck*

---

Harry bought a brand new car. It had all the latest innovations, including a microprocessor that sported a vocal warning system in it. At first Harry was amused to hear the soft female voice gently reminding him that his seat belt wasn't fastened. He could frequently be heard affectionately calling the voice, "the little woman."

It wasn't long until Harry learned that "the little woman" was programmed to warn him about his level of gasoline. "Your fuel level is low," she said to him one day—in the sweetest voice of course. Harry nodded his head begrudgingly, and thanked her. He could see the gage, and like many times in the past, he figured that he still had enough to go another fifty miles and kept on driving.

However, a few minutes later, her voice interrupted his reverie again. It was the same warning. And so it went—repeating, over and over. Although Harry knew it was probably the same recording, it seemed to him like her voices became harsher each time.

Finally, he could stand it no more. He stopped the car, and crawled under the dash board. After a quick search, he found the appropriate wire going to the speakers. Defiantly he gave it a good yank—so much for the little woman, he thought.

Latter Harry explained that he was still smiling to himself a few miles later when suddenly his car began to sputter and cough. He had run out of gas! Frustrated, he said that somewhere inside the dashboard, he could almost hear the little woman—laughing.

Every Christian has a little voice inside them called the conscience. It is programmed by the Holy Spirit to warn us—to tell us exactly what our morally right behavior should be. Sometimes, we disconnect from that still small voice within us, and when we do, we usually fail spiritually, and suffer some sort of undesirable consequence. Worse, we could ultimately run out of the spiritual fuel necessary to make it to the Kingdom.

Today, let's take a few moments to meditate on the importance of listening to the still small voice within us that we call the conscience. God created us to have this as a spiritual warning system, and we need to trust and follow its direction.

## *1Timothy 1:19*

*having faith and a good conscience, which some  
having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered  
shipwreck (NKJ).*

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There is a story of an old prospector who, exhausted from his work, fell asleep in his tent one evening with his faithful dog tied up outside. Suddenly the dog started barking. The man awoke and began to holler for his dog to be quiet. Shortly afterward, the dog started the same incessant barking again. This time, the man lumbered out of his tent, and in his foggy mind, yelled just inches away from the dog “be quiet—I can’t sleep!”

This seemed to work for awhile, however he was soon awakened by the same yelping and barking again! This time, in a furious rage, he staggered out of the tent and gave a slap to the dog yelling as loud as he could, “BE QUIET.” Eventually the dog quieted down.

“Finally,” he thought to himself as he drifted into slumber, “now I can get some sleep.” That night the prospector was murdered by a thief who broke into his tent unawares. The crime was committed by the very man that the dog was trying so hard to warn him of.

Today there is a story even more tragic than the one above. There are Christians whose conscience is warning them, telling them “No—Stop!” However, rather than listening to their inner voice and taking heed, they are shutting down their conscience, much like the old prospector did to his dog. As a result the alarm that God placed inside of us becomes weaker, causing the lives of some to end in tragedy.

As a wise man once said “Our conscience is the custodian of our destiny.” Christians live in a world in which integrity and good moral values are constantly under attack. We are tempted in numerous of ways every day. Therefore, in order to stay clean and pure, we need to continually protect the conscience God gave us. We must be cautious regarding what we let come into our minds.

We must guard our conscience concerning our choice of friends, what movies we watch, web sites we browse, books and magazines we read, and the music we listen to. This is a major part of our Christian walk. We must continue to pay attention when our hearts and minds are pricked and not dull our senses to its guidance. If we don't, we may find ourselves drifting farther and farther away from God's straight and narrow path until we reach the point where we won't notice when it speaks to us.

# *1Timothy 6:6*

*... godliness with contentment is great gain.*

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It is the Xmas season again—a time for full blown materialism. The parking lots at most shopping centers are full. The local mall is like an adult Disneyland. Despite a volatile economy, and nearly 13 million people out of work, Americans have already set new records in spending this season.

The apparent thinking of this holiday spirit leads people to believe that not giving a gift is equated to not caring. Parents are made to feel that it would be absurd to not fulfill a child's wish list, and so purchasing those "just right" items for friends and family becomes the focal point of millions during this time.

Ironically, one enterprising group has developed a unique alternative. It is the buy nothing Christmas. The information kit lists important reasons to avoid the spending frenzy and how people can deal with not spending money on this holiday. It gives examples of wonderful things to do for people and asks them to consider all of the things we should already have like love, friendship, appreciation, health, beauty, happiness and good times.

This organization has a legitimate idea. They have focused on a vital truth that we should already know, and it is this. Most of us already have our important needs taken care of. Yet the advertizing industry works to make us feel as though we never have enough. Far too many have become influenced by the materialism this holiday spreads. We must not allow the spirit of this season to influence our perspective of what truly brings happiness and prosperity. The Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, and his words apply to us. "... Having food and raiment let us be therewith content (1Tim. 6:8)."

As the world becomes more and more materialistic, we should remember that we have been given something far more valuable than anything money could buy. We have been called to be a part of God's people and look to Eternal life! We need to keep this perspective as we live and work in a world filled with materialism.

## *ITimothy 6:10*

*For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.*

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With all of the recent corporate scandals, excessive CEO bonuses and salaries, with over 1 trillion dollars in outstanding subprime mortgages, and now massive government bailouts, it is clear that America has become a nation captivated by covetousness. What most fail to realize is that, by pursuing this course of greed, we will ultimately lose everything!

A short story illustrates this truth. Dee was a beautiful dog whose proud owner once gave her an entire rib eye steak to eat. As most canines do, she took the steak and ran off with it to find a safe place to consume it. On her way, Dee crossed over a bridge on a small lake. Looking down at the glassy water, she saw another dog.

This other dog seemed smaller but the steak she was carrying looked bigger. She was certain she could take the steak from the other dog, so she lunged at the dog she saw in the water in an attempt to snatch what it was carrying in her mouth. As she opened her mouth to grab the other dog's steak, hers dropped to the bottom of the lake—she lost it all for what was only an illusion.

This is the way life ends up when we are coveting. Riches, wealth, and material possessions only provide an illusion of happiness. They won't satisfy anyone for very long, and by seeking those things, we can be distracted and let go of the precious thing we already have in God's calling.

For this reason, Jesus warns the last Church: "Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and *that* the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see" (Revelation 3:17-22).

Let us strive to keep our perspective on target. Let's always seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness first in our lives. If we do, all that we truly need to complete our divine quest will be given to us (Mt. 6:33).

## *1Timothy 6:17-19*

*Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.*

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While excavating the ancient city of Pompeii, archeologists came upon a body of a woman that had been embalmed by the fire caused by the eruption of Mt Vesuvius. What excavators found was that this woman's feet were turned toward the city gate and safety. However, her face was turned toward something else lying just beyond her grasp.

She was attempting to reach for a bag filled with pearls. Perhaps they were hers or those left by another, but as the mountain was virtually exploding, and lava was running down its sides, the gates of the city were beckoning her to flee towards the sea and live.

However, the spell cast by those pearls captivated her thoughts. In a vain attempt to hold on to them, she was engulfed in flames. The fire of Vesuvius had locked her into a charred statue of death.

There is a great lesson in this story. Our world is about to erupt in flames. As this is occurring, many are cleaving to riches and carnal pleasures. Let's not let the standards of this world affect us so that we are molded in its image. We must not focus on the things of this world. Instead, let's remain focused on the true riches—an open door to God's Kingdom. The values and principles of the Kingdom of God and the pleasures Christ are of greater value than any jewels or monetary values of this age (Psa. 16:11).

## 2Timothy 2:15

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

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Those who work in any part of the construction industry realize the need to carefully follow the blueprints. In fact, on every job, there is always a construction shack located on the property, and inside this trailer is a complete set of blue prints. During the day the workmen are constantly going into the shack and checking these prints for measurements, materials, and technical specifications. They carefully compare the prints with their work. Does it match up? Is the job being done right?

These workers realize that if the blueprints are not meticulously adhered to, there can be massive penalties. In fact, some companies have been forced out of business by making the mistake of compromising these plans and not completely following their instructions.

Because the entire building project hangs on the scrupulous obedience to these plans, the documents are reviewed and consulted daily as the project moves forward. After some time, these sets of blueprints become worn from the constant handling they receive. They get marked up and written on. They get dirty and dog eared from the diligent hands of the workers checking and rechecking their work.

What about us? Every true Christian is involved in a spiritual construction project. We are working to build holy and righteous character. Building construction prints are a lot like our Bibles. Of all people, we should show this same respect toward God's Word as our blueprint for the character we desire to build. It is our set of directions—a guide book of instructions—the moral code that must be followed to enter the kingdom of God. We should be spending a great deal of time comparing ourselves against the standards of that magnificent book. We should constantly consult it, and as we do, our bibles will also begin to appear weathered, worn, marked up and dog eared.

As Paul said of the Bereans, “these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so” (Acts 17:11).

Let’s study our Bible daily for its doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction as we pursue our quest for the character of Jesus Christ and the glorious Kingdom of God.

## 2Timothy 3:1-2

*This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves...*

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Shirley MacLaine's philosophy articulates the view of one's self in relation to others. She writes: "The most pleasurable journey you ever will take is through yourself. The only real sustaining love involvement is with yourself... When you look back on your life and try to figure out where you've been, and where you're going, when you look at your work, your love affairs, your marriages, your children, your pain, your happiness, when you examine all that closely, what you really find out is that the only person you really go to bed with is yourself... the only thing you have is working to the consummation of your own identity. And that's what I've been trying to do all my life."

Many moderns intimately relate to, and follow, her philosophy. In fact, the self esteem movement has grown to outrageous proportions, spilling over into nearly every aspect of life. In fact, the vast majority of people today feel that all that matters is me and my life. However, true Christians must not let this trend affect us. As the apostle Paul writes:

"Fulfill ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind. *Let nothing be done* through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others" (Philippians 2:2-4).

In seeking Christ's righteousness, we learn to live as He lived. In so doing we are to be self sacrificing—not self serving. As the Savior of mankind commanded us, we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. This is the Christian goal. We are here to learn how to become a family of servants who give to others rather than strive for what we can get for ourselves. We must never forget this magnificent truth as long as we live.

## 2Timothy 3:16

*All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:*

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A former Marine tells a story of docking in a harbor at the northeastern corner of Formosa Taipei. He wrote, “We stopped at the mouth of the harbor and awaited the arrival of the harbor pilot. He came out to us, took the wheel of the ship and began to weave us through the pathless waters that led to the dock. At first glance, it seemed unnecessary. We could see the dock less than a mile ahead. But the closer we looked and the longer we looked into the crystal clear waters, we could tell why. There were mines located randomly beneath the surface of the water. If the hull of our ship nudged one of those mines just enough, disaster would have occurred. But the pilot knew where every mine was located.”

Every Christian faces a similar circumstance. Our destination is the Kingdom of God and as we navigate through the waters of life, there are many dangers. We cannot do this on our own. We need our Harbor Pilot, Jesus Christ to guide us along the way. He has gone before us and knows the way.

We also have a map—the Bible. Hundreds of thousands of copies are printed every year, and millions are in circulation. However, many take this book for granted not realizing the truth that lies inside is a perfect guide. The Bible can literally channel us around disasters. It is the word of God in print and is essential if we are to safely steer our course in life.

As we near the end of the age, do we see the dock ahead? Do we envision the Kingdom to come and are we following the map showing us how to get there? Today, let's make a commitment to open the Book and ask God to be our pilot and lead us through the perils of life. And if we get off course, and accidentally bump into a mine, remember, all things are ultimately working for good to those who love God and are called for His purpose. So, let's confidently look to Him and His Word for guidance through any troubled waters we might face.

## *Acts 14:22*

*... we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.*

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Often when an individual does a heroic deed, it is contagious. When we do a good works, it can encourage others to do likewise. When we show faith, it spurs others to exhibit conviction. When we prevail over persecution, others gain courage. When it is evident we have overcome a sin, others tend to work harder to defeat their own. This is an enormously important truth. Each of us can be an example that can encourage others.

We all get knocked around some in this world, and a true story about a man named Rudy illustrates this vital point. As a young man, Rudy wanted to play football for Notre Dame. But, he was too small to make their “A” team. However they did allow him to play on their practice team.

During practice, the larger stronger players overwhelmed the smaller, less skilled, junior team on which Rudy played. However, in time, Rudy earned a reputation. Every time he was knocked down, he would jump back up and go back for more. Every single practice he would take a beating. Finally one of the seniors told him, “Just get off the team.” He no longer wanted to see Rudy get mauled so badly. Rudy looked the huge man in the eyes and said “that is my job—to get beat up.” It was his job to make certain the “A” team became the best they could be. He ended by challenging the huge man, “You better hit me with all you’ve got.”

Over time, Rudy’s tenacity became an inspiration to the other players. They began to fully give of themselves on the field like Rudy did. Yet, in all this time Rudy never got to play in a single game. Finally, during the last game of his senior year, Rudy’s teammates forced the coach to let him dress for the game. Then, at game’s end, they allowed Rudy to make one play. In that one play, he tackled the opposing team’s quarterback, and ended the game. Notre Dame won, and the entire team carried Rudy off the field in glory—something that was never done again in 17 years.

Many of us have faced a variety of trials in our Christian lives. However, the apostle Paul encouraged us not to fret over such things. James even went so far as to suggest that we rejoice over tough times (Jam. 1:2-4). There are legitimate reasons for this, perhaps some that many of us have not considered.

We all get beat up in some way, physically, emotionally, or spiritually by our trials in life. However, it is those very trials and our enduring of them that makes us people of character. It actually works for our good to shape our destiny.

Therefore, we should take Paul's advice. Expect trials to come, but when we experience them remember this important truth. It is not that we are hit that matters. It is not the fact we are knocked down that is important. What is of value is that we get back up and continue to move toward our transcendent goal. Remember, trials are what give us the patience, endurance, and the character we need to one day be carried off the field of this earth in the resurrection as the very Sons and Daughters of God.

## *Colossians 3:15*

*And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.*

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A young man tells a story from his college days. One day, an old man showed up at the back door of the house that the young man and other students were renting. Opening the door a few inches, they saw these glassy eyes and a furrowed face glistening with silver stubble. The man was clutching a wicker basket containing a few unappealing vegetables. He bid them good morning, and offered some of his produce for sale. The students were uneasy with this man's presence and quickly purchased a couple vegetables to alleviate both their pity and fear.

To their disappointment, the old man returned the next week, this time introducing himself as Mr. Roth, the man who lived in the shack down the road. As their fears subsided, they got close enough to realize it wasn't alcohol but cataracts that marbled his eyes.

From that time, in subsequent visits, Mr. Roth would shuffle in, with raggedy clothes wearing two mismatched right shoes, and sometimes he would pull out a harmonica. With glazed eyes set on a future glory, he'd puff out some old church songs between his conversation about vegetables and Jesus.

The young men all agreed to help the old man. They purchased some clothes and shoes and took them to the shack. They place them at his door and left. On his next visit it was during the week of Thanksgiving. When the young men opened the door, they expected him to proclaim his appreciation for the clothes. Instead, he exclaimed "God is so good! I came out of my shack this morning and found a bag full of shoes and clothing on my porch." He continued. "That's wonderful, Mr. Roth!" replied the students. "We are so happy for you." To this, he said. "You know what is even more wonderful? "Just yesterday I met some people that could really use them." It is truly better to give than receive.

## *Colossians 3:18-21*

*Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them. Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord. Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged.*

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It is sometimes seemingly simple little things that can do great damage. For example, the space shuttle Discovery was grounded—not by technical difficulties, or lack of government funding, but by woodpeckers. Yellow-shafted flicker woodpeckers found the insulation foam on the shuttle's external fuel tank irresistible material for pecking.

The foam is critical to the shuttle's performance. Without it, ice forms on the tank when it's filled with the super-cooled fuel, ice that can break free during liftoff and damage the giant spacecraft resulting in disaster. The shuttle was grounded until the damage could be repaired.

Family relationships are also frequently damaged not only by big things like abuse or abandonment—but by the little things. Continual criticism, lack of respect and taking each other for granted can peck away at the relationship. A lack of outward demonstrations of love, words of kindness, and unselfish acts can also damage our relationships.

The reverse is also true. We can build our family relationships with repeated "little" acts of kindness. We should never forget to tell our loved ones how much we care and appreciate them. In addition, we should take every opportunity to show them our love by doing things for them. No matter how small the act may be, kind words and acts can make a world of difference. Let's be aware of how we treat the ones we love and strive to do the things that will make our relationship soar. Likewise, let's refrain from that which will keep us from reaching the heights of love that God intended.

## *Colossians 3:21*

*Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged.*

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Before his son was to be born, a young father decided to seek out some good child rearing advice. He looked for a successful church family, and finally decided his minister was his best bet. He saw that the pastor's children as very happy and well behaved. They were a wonderful model of how respectable children should be. So, he sought their father, the pastor, for counsel.

After some small talk, the new father asked, "What is your secret to parental success? What did you do to produce such happy and well behaved kids?" The minister answered, "Well, it was not rocket science, but there is one thing that I believe I did right. I taught my children the meaning of four simple words."

The expectant father was amazed and eagerly asked, "What were those words?" The preacher said, "The first one is the word 'no.' I taught my children that the word 'no' had one, and only one, meaning. It is the opposite of 'yes.' It does not mean maybe, it does not mean perhaps, or possibly. It means no, and it always means no. In fact sometimes I had to emphasize the meaning of this word with discipline." The conversation then developed into a short sermonette on the meaning of this seemingly simple word "no."

After several minutes had passed, and the lesson about this first important word came to a close, the soon to be father was jokingly hesitant in asking about the next three words. "Surely I'm in store for a sermon explaining the final three words."

"Okay." the soon to be father said as they both chuckled, "I'm ready. What are the other three?" To this the minister paused for a moment, and said "The other three words are 'I love you.' I not only told my children these three words again and again, but I tried my best to show their meaning in the way that I treated each one. I then taught them the relationship between the words 'no' and 'I love you,' and in this, they learned that when I said no, it was for a very important reason. It was because I loved them too much to say yes."

The advice of this experienced father is something all of us parents could use. Too many people today do not understand the true meaning of “no” because their parents did not rightly teach it to them as children. The result is often a lack of self discipline which can lead to a lack of success in life, and with it, dissatisfaction and discouragement.

On another level, some children have only experienced the word “no,” without the love they need to support the purpose of that vital word. As a result, they become angry and hostile as they get older.

Everyone needs to understand the concept and relationship, of these four words. We should show our children, as well as those we love, that when we say “no,” it is done out of love and concern for others. Whether we are new parents or old, let’s remember these four words, and use them properly to bring up our children in the nurturing love, the admonition and discipline of the Eternal God.

## *Daniel 3:16-18*

*...O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.*

---

Filled with pride, king Nebuchadnezzar set up a golden image to be worshipped. At the sound of music, all the leaders of the various provinces, as well as every citizen of the land, were required to bow down and worship this image.

After this decree was made, and the officials of Babylon were gathered, musicians played and the dignitaries bowed in reverence to the idol—all except for three men who must have stuck out like a sore thumb.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego clearly understood the blasphemy of such an act and would not allow themselves to be defiled in such a way. Their seeming insolence infuriated the king; however, because Nebuchadnezzar valued the wisdom and integrity of these men, he gave them one last chance to comply. However, the king's forceful persuasion was futile. Their response was premeditated, direct, and without hesitation.

These three, Mishael, Azariah and Hananiah were not much different than you and I in many respects. Like most of God's people today, they were forced to live in a society where pagan practice and evil doings were common and their experience provides a vital and important lesson for us.

When it comes to temptation and sin, we should know ahead of time how we are going to respond. We should not hesitate in our commitment to God and second guess a Spirit led decision. For if we are not prepared, and we pause to consider, doubt can lead us to rationalization, compromise, and ultimately spiritual failure. We need to be ready for such trials and then, when the question comes, we already know the answer. We will not disobey God!

These men believed that God could save them. They were certain of His ability to do so. However, they did not know if He would actually save them this moment. Nevertheless, they were willing to put their lives on the line because they loved God more than themselves.

How many of us would respond in this way? When faced with being burned alive, how many would not even have to think about it? Would we have the courage of these men or would we cave in just to save our skin?

The fearful might believe that they can avoid discomfort, pain, and suffering by giving in to peer pressure, pulls of the flesh and the ways of this crooked world. However by allowing such concessions, they are only setting themselves up for failure that will ultimately consume them (Mt. 13:41-42).

Let's remember the admirable and inspiring example of Mishael, Azariah, and Hananiah. They could not be swayed. They were fully committed to God, strong in their faith, and devoted. Their hearts were set and their minds were fixed. They knew how to respond to the temptations of sin.

Even when their lives were on the line, they understood the Power of God. We too understand today. There is no other way to choose which can truly preserve our life than to choose the way of God.

## *Deuteronomy 5:29*

*O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!*

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In her novel, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, Sara Jewett tells the story of a woman writer who was walking the path leading to the home of retired sea captain Elijah Tilley. As she approached his property, she noticed that in the neatly plowed fields leading up to the house, there appeared to be a number of wooden stakes driven into the ground. They were all painted white with the tops trimmed in yellow. As she approached the captain's house, she noted that they were the same color as his house. She thought, "how unusual. All of these stakes were random, seemingly having no distinct pattern or function."

Still curious about the stakes, as she interviewed the captain, she asked, "What was their purpose?" He explained that when he first attempted to plow the ground, he damaged his plow several times when it snagged on large rocks beneath the surface. Many of the rocks were too big to be dug out, so he set out the stakes where the rocks were. In this way he could avoid them in the future, and protect his equipment.

In one sense, this is what God has done in the field of our lives. He has given us His commandments. These commandments are markers for us. They define where the trouble spots are in life so that we can avoid them. Those in the world are constantly snagged by sins. They are seemingly hurt and damaged over and over again.

We should learn the lesson of this elderly sea captain. Let's consider and meditate on how God has given us the markers of His commandments so that we can avoid becoming snagged by these sins and suffering the harsh consequences.

## *Deuteronomy 6:5*

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

---

In early 1974, there was a huge portion of undeveloped land that lay in the northern part of Australia. This land belonged to a tribe of aborigines, and the terrain was covered with extraordinary green ants. The natives believed these ants were the sacred descendants of their ancient gods.

During this same year a mining company discovered uranium deposits in the area of the sacred ants. They approached the aborigines with a desire to purchase the land for mining. However, the natives would not sell. They said, “By mining our land you will destroy it, and with it, our sacred green ants. Our gods will then pronounce a curse upon us.”

By the end of 1974, the native tribe caved in. They compromised their beliefs, and sold the land to the mining company. What was it that changed their minds? It was 8.3 million dollars! Those special ants may have been revered by generations past, but the natives finally concluded that their gods could find another place to live.

We might laugh as we see raw human nature at work in these indigenous people, but the truth is there are many Christians who have sold out in like manner. And—they do so for a lot less than 8.3 million dollars. What about us? Are our convictions for sale? Will we compromise when it’s to our advantage? Or, do we hold God in such esteem that nothing can buy us off?

Consider the example of Saul. God’s command was clear. It was not subject to interpretation. The Almighty said to destroy the Amalekites and all that they had. The newly ordained king only partially obeyed God. Why? He sold out for the booty—the best of the animals and goods and by that lost his crown (1 Sam. 15:7-9).

In our walk with God, we cannot compromise for personal gain. The consequences for such concession could cost us our crown. Instead, let’s honor our commitment to God and strive to obey His Word in every way.

## *Ecclesiastes 4:9-10*

*Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up.*

---

CBS newsman Charles Osgood once told the story of Margaret and Ruth, two ladies who lived in a convalescent center. Each of these two ladies had suffered an incapacitating stroke. Margaret's stroke caused her left side to be greatly restricted in use. On the other hand, Ruth's stroke damaged the function of her right side. Both ladies were accomplished pianists, but since they had suffered strokes, both were convinced that they must give up hope of ever playing again.

The director of the convalescent home felt great anguish over their plight. Finally, she had a great idea. She sat the two ladies down at a piano side by side. Then she encouraged them to each play either the right hand or the left as the piano piece required. They agreed to attempt the feat, and found that they were both able to play again if they could work together. From that day on, they made beautiful music together and moreover, a beautiful friendship developed.

Their example is an enormous lesson for us. This is how the Church of God is to work together—in unity! What one member cannot do alone, perhaps two or more can do together.

Let's learn the lesson of these two ladies and make a commitment to use our talents in ways that are helpful to others. No matter how little our talents might seem to be, let's be more cooperative with one another, working to combine our abilities with those of other Christians. In so doing, there is often an enormous synergy that can develop. The whole becomes more than the sum of the parts, and we can be more effective in our service to Christ.

## *Ecclesiastes 10:1*

*Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour: so doth a little folly (in) him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour.*

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Apothecary is a compound of ointment or perfume. If left uncovered, flies will land in it and die. This can ruin the entire mixture and instead of a pleasant aroma, the tainted concoction will emit an unpleasant odor.

This fact serves as a pointed example. President William J. Clinton was the first democratic president to win a second term since Franklin D. Roosevelt. He accomplished much that is well worth remembering.

During his administration, the U.S. enjoyed more peace and economic well being than at any time in its history. He could point to the lowest unemployment rate in modern times, the lowest inflation in 30 years, the highest home ownership in the country's history, lower crime rates in many places, and reduced welfare rolls. He proposed the first balanced budget in decades and achieved a budget surplus.

However, this is generally not what most people remember about Bill Clinton. No! What they tend to remember? It is the lewd conduct with Monica Lewinsky. This became the flies in his ointment that produced a stench for the entire world to smell.

This allegory has happened to many great men and women, even to some of God's people. The truth is that it can happen to any of us! Foolish, selfish behavior effects how well we are perceived, received, and remembered. Not only by those around us, but by God.

The sweet savor of a Christian can be polluted if we behave foolishly. If we act with contempt, disrespect, crudeness, spite, maliciousness, self righteousness, rudeness, dishonesty, covetousness, or selfishness. These behaviors are like putting dead flies into sweet perfume. These shameful behaviors overshadow any positive contributions we have previously made. We should strive to be consistent in following God's way of life.

## *Ecclesiastes 12:13*

*Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear  
God, and keep his commandments: for this is the  
whole duty of man.*

---

"The end game" is a unique term that originated in the competition to win at the sport of chess. It refers to the time when most of the pieces on the board have been played and the game is coming to its conclusion. Before this moment occurs, each player develops an "all out" strategy to successfully end the game and win.

However, today the concept of an end game has reached far beyond the game of chess. In fact, every sport we play and virtually every activity in life should have an "end game" in which the players give it their all to win.

As Christians, we need a strategy for our end game. We cannot simply skate through life without an idea of what to do when difficult times arrive. We must have a plan that includes the Word of God in order to deal with tests and trials. If we are not prepared, we will end up fulfilling the proverb that states: "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the ends thereof *are* the ways of death" (Proverbs 16:25).

God's people have a real reason to consider this truth. There is an effect for every cause. Any endeavor we undertake always concludes in a unique way depending on what we do to attain that end. Therefore, we must keep the conclusion of our lives in mind. It is —our final end game. As the Scriptures warn us, "For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether *it be* good, or whether *it be* evil" (Ecc. 12:14).

In that context, it is also interesting to consider that all of us are literally living in the end game—the end time. The modern nations are forgetting God and seemingly abandoning concern for the future. In America we now produce very little. We buy most of our goods from China. We have literally outsourced our future, and we have become the largest debtor nation in the world. With our currency no longer backed by any precious metals, it is becoming more and more worthless by the moment.

As a nation we are heading for difficult times. If America weakens, it is likely that the nations will tear at each other like beasts. In that context, if not us, others will witness the world's end game, and all must be aware of this vital truth, "...the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer" (1Pt. 4:7).

Today, we should deeply and sincerely consider how we are going to play the end game of our lives. In this age, many seem to continue to let themselves self slip into being lukewarm toward the precious things of God. We must not allow this to happen to us.

Let's step up our end game. Let's stop deciding for ourselves what is right and wrong and allow God's word to define that for us. Let's pay close attention to the small still voice of the Holy Spirit that is prompting us to stop making wrong choices in entertainment or activities. Let's study more, pray more, and diligently practice obedience to the great God who will judge us at the end of our game.

## *Ephesians 3:16-18*

*that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith--that you, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.*

---

God tells us that we are to be filled with His Spirit, His values, and His virtues. We are to exhibit the fruits of the Spirit He has given us. But how do we know if we are filled with that spirit of goodness, kindness, meekness, or love? There is one sure way to know—simply apply pressure.

For a moment, consider a sponge that is saturated with water. How could anyone know that the sponge was filled with water? All they have to do is push on it with a finger ever so slightly and they would quickly see water oozing out.

All would immediately know what the sponge is filled with. In a similar way, we can know what we are filled with when we come under pressure.

Certainly every day is filled with pressures that come on us. When they do, what comes out of us? Is it love, patience, kindness, generosity, or joy? Or is it anger, resentment, envy, or lust?

It is time for us to be more watchful of what comes out of us when we are under pressure, and ardently seek for it to be the fruits of God's Spirit and not our human carnal reactions. Let's strive to walk in the Spirit and not fulfill the lusts of the flesh.

## *Ephesians 4:1-2*

*I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;*

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From 1986 to 1990, Frank Reed was held hostage in a Lebanon prison cell. For months at a time he was blindfolded and lived in complete darkness. Other times he was chained to a wall for weeks at a time. During the entire ordeal he was ordered to keep absolutely silent.

After his ordeal, Reed told of one occasion in which he was moved to another room, and although blindfolded he could sense others in that room. It was three weeks before he dared attempt to peek out of his blindfold. When he did, he discovered he was chained next to Terry Anderson and Tom Sutherland.

Throughout all this time Reed was beaten, made ill and tormented, but the thing that Reed felt hurt the most was the lack of anyone caring. In an interview with Time magazine he said, "Nothing I did mattered to anyone. I began to realize how withering it is to exist without a single expression of caring around me... (During this time) I learned one overriding fact: caring is a powerful force. If no one cares, you are truly alone."

Thankfully, as Christians, we are never alone. Christ is always with us and will never forsake us. However, in this world there are times when many people feel isolated, alone, and alienated from others.

As we go about our lives let's remember how powerful a force caring can be. Let's show others the love of Christ and how we care for our fellow man. Demonstrate kindness, thoughtfulness and love to others. Let those at work, those we live with, and those we attend church with know that we appreciate them. Acknowledge the good things people do. Show them that they matter to us and remind them that they matter in life.

## *Ephesians 4:31-32*

*Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.*

---

After the Civil War, General Robert E. Lee visited a Kentucky lady who showed him the remains of a grand old tree in front of her house. There she bitterly cried that its limbs and trunk had been destroyed by Federal artillery fire. She looked to Lee expecting him to condemn the North. She thought at least he should sympathize with her loss. However, after a brief silence, Lee said, “Cut it down, my dear Madam, and forget it.”

Everyone has had some kind of wrong done to them. How do we handle such times? Do we forgive in the hope of receiving this same kind of forgiveness in return? (Luke 6:37) Do we go to our brother personally and seek reconciliation? (Matthew 18) Or, do we allow our hurt to become bitterness?

Do we then go about watering and feeding our bitterness; bearing fruits of anger, resentment, hatred, gossip, slander and revenge. Do we intentionally try to bring harm to those whom we believe have hurt us?

We see this kind of hostility displayed widely in the world today. Sadly it is occurring on an ever increasing scale within the Church—between those people who are to be brethren! We must consider that bitterness is something that we cannot allow take place if we seek the Kingdom of God. Instead of trying to get back at others, or get even, we should be working to reconcile, forgive and move forward. We should be kind and loving towards each other, even if we do not receive this kind of treatment in return. We should even be willing to take the wrong if necessary (I Cor. 6:7).

Consider this important truth. It is better to forgive the injustices of the past than to allow them to remain in our minds. If we let bitterness take root, it will poison the rest of our lives—and will keep us from obtaining the Kingdom of God.

If we desire kindness, mercy and forgiveness—even from God—we must display this kind of behavior to our brethren, family, friends, neighbors and even our enemies. As Christ forewarned us: “For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you” (Luke 6).

## *Ephesians 6:11*

*Put on the whole armour of God that ye may be able  
to stand against the wiles of the devil.*

---

The Portia spider is a master predator whose chief weapon is deception. When it sets out to attack another of its specie, it uses a variety of methods to lure its victims into striking range. One cunning technique is that it appears to be a dried leaf or foliage that has blown into its victim's newly spun web. It will also crawl onto another's web and tap its silken threads imitating the vibrations of a trapped insect. The owner of the web then marches out thinking that it has trapped its dinner, only to find that it has actually become dinner.

The Portia is so versatile that it can adjust its deception, tailoring it specifically for a certain victim. For example, some spiders maintain their home inside a rolled up leaf. In these cases, the Portia will dance on the outside of the leaf, imitating a mating ritual in order to draw out its prey. In fact, it is said that the Portia can find the signal of nearly any other spider by a method of trial and error. It will continue to make different beckoning motions until it finds the right one and the victim finally responds only to suffer utter destruction.

Like the Portia, Satan's weapon of choice is also deception. The devil uses tactics very similar to those of this unique spider. He has misled the world by tricking mankind into believing that evil ideals and wicked behavior are normal. For those who seem less easily deceived, he will keep changing his approach. He will consistently try again and again, using differing temptations, in an effort to finally lure us into being his next victim.

When it comes to God's chosen people, if we are honest, we can see that Satan has even infiltrated the ranks of the Church. For that reason, Christ warned that "... there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if *it were* possible, they shall deceive the very elect" (Mt. 24:24).

Christ's words remind us that it is possible for false prophets to deceive God's people. The circumstance that can make our deception achievable is not knowing the Bible and lacking God's spirit. We have to be able to distinguish between the real article and deception. This is the only way we can be certain to recognize the myriad signals, false appearances, and deceptions of the devil.

As we move closer to the end of the age, we need to keep up our vigil. We all have flaws, and we need to be aware of those weaknesses. We can't even trust our own human reasoning. We must not allow this fact to cause us to be fooled by the wiles of Satan.

Now, more than ever, we must be on guard. Satan's deception is everywhere. It has infected nearly every fabric of society. It flourishes in the world around us! We must study God's Word, Seek His Spirit that we may be consistently aware of Satan's devices.

## *Ephesians 6:12*

*For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.*

---

Satan is a formidable being, great and powerful. We seldom reflect on the fact that we are in a daily war with the devil and his demons. While these wicked angels might be limited in the power they can use against us, we must consider the battle as being dead serious.

Because of the intense opposition, there are many who have tapped out during the fight. They find it too difficult and have given up. This is absolutely not an option for those whose focus is the Kingdom of God.

There is a scene from the Star Trek series that demonstrates this point. The powerful Klingon, called Worf, is captured by the evil Dominion. They intend to use him as a dummy for their lethal ground troops to practice their hand to hand combat. They bring out soldier after soldier to take him on. Each one goes at it with the Klingon warrior, but none of them last very long. They become tired of being beaten up so terribly by Worf that one after another—they tap out. By the end of the day, Worf has taken on all comers and lost to none.

In exasperation, the emperor orders their biggest, toughest warrior to engage the Klingon. Worf is now exhausted from fighting other troops throughout the entire day. He becomes little more than a punching bag for the enemy combatant to work on. However, Worf refuses to tap out. No matter how many times he is knocked down, he keeps getting back up.

Worf is kicked, beaten and battered, but no matter how injured he becomes he simply will not quit. By this time, his endurance has won the admiration and respect of the Dominion troops. He even gains the esteem of the huge warrior now beating him. So impressed is the entire audience that they begin to beg Worf to tap out. However, he still refuses to do so.

Practically beaten to a pulp, Worf keeps dragging himself to his feet to take more punishment. He will not quit—giving up is simply not an option. Finally, out of sheer frustration, the evil warrior does the unthinkable. He taps himself out! His enraged commander demands of him, “Why have you done this?” In resigned admission the powerful combatant says, “I had no choice. I cannot defeat this man. I can only kill him!”

Satan and his demons are like the evil dominion. We must fight against them day after day and sometimes even Satan himself will step into the ring.

In order for us to prevail, we must not tap out. God has given us a promise that we can win if we stay in the battle and do not give up. He will not allow us to endure more than we can bear (I Cor. 10:13), and He has even supplied battle gear for us to use in our defense.

As the Apostle Paul writes: “Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints” (Ephesians 6:13-18).

Let us continue our battle against evil to the very end, trusting in God’s promise, and using the weapons He has given us. No matter how many times we are knocked down, no matter how much we may hurt, or how many times we might lose, let’s make a commitment to never tap out! Those who do not give up will ultimately be victorious and attain their Glorious crown in the Kingdom of God.

## *Exodus 20:8*

*Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.*

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The Creator gave mankind the Sabbath as His gift of freedom from our every day toil. Speaking of this time, Tim Keller wrote: Rest, ironically, is an activity that must be prepared for, and then pursued. The purpose of Sabbath, however, is not simply to rejuvenate ourselves in order to produce more during the rest of the week. Nor, is Sabbath the simple pursuit of sleep and pleasure.

In our modern age, society seems to be moving at a frenetic pace, constantly pushing us to accomplish all that we can. And, while our modern digital world promised to provide us more free time, the truth is that it has filled our lives with even more things to do.

However, our bodies were not meant to work every day. Biological studies have proven our need for a periodic interruption of our work week. So, as Christians we are to be good stewards of the body and mind God gave us by preparing to regularly celebrate and enjoy God's day of rest.

Consider that the Sabbath gives Christians the opportunity to come out of the world once a week and have fellowship with other Christians of like mind. This is profoundly refreshing for each individual.

At the same time, it is an occasion to reconnect with family members. In our world today, the classroom and other students can tend to have more influence on our children than their parents. The Sabbath provides the needed link between children and parents, husbands and wives.

Perhaps most important, the church is to marry Christ. In that sense we are espoused to Him. The Sabbath is our time to be alone with Him. It is a date with our beloved. We should all be grateful for this time to be with Him. As God teaches us:

Six days shall work be done: but the seventh day *is* the sabbath of rest, an holy convocation; ye shall do no work *therein*: it *is* the sabbath of the LORD in all your dwellings (Lev 23:3).

## *Ezekiel 18:30*

*Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord GOD.*

*Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin.*

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For years, the “Wide World of Sports” television program showed a clip illustrating the agony of defeat. The clip showed a painful ending to an attempted ski jump. The skier appeared to be in good form as he headed down the ramp, but for no apparent reason, he suddenly tumbled head over heels off the side of the jump, finally coming to a stop by bouncing off a nearby supporting structure.

The entire scene looked like an unavoidable accident. However, what viewers didn’t know was that the skier chose to fall this way rather than finish the jump the way it was going, but why choose this path?

The skier later explained that the jump surface had become too fast, and midway down the ramp, he came to the stark realization. If he continued to complete the jump, he would end up landing far past the safe end of the run. He would end up on the flat snow below the landing area, and that could have been fatal. As it was, the skier suffered no more than a headache from his self executed tumble.

This athlete learned a great lesson—one that we too can understand and apply to our lives. To change one’s course in life can be a dramatic and sometimes painful undertaking. But, change is better than a fall that ends in tragic calamity.

Let’s consider if there is something that we need to change. Is there a different direction we need to take? Is there a life-course change that, while it may appear difficult, might ultimately save us? If so, let’s make that necessary change before calamity strikes.

## *Hebrews 2:3*

*How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him.*

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Few people fear wind or water. However, author of Soil Erosion Control, Austin Earle Burges, writes the following: “Erosion has modified the surface of the earth more than the combined activities of all the earthquakes, volcanoes, tornadoes, and tidal waves since the beginning of history, yet its processes are so gradual that we have been prone to ignore it” (p. 5).

We seldom think of the power of erosion, but it is working on the earth every day. The rain drops on the land creating rivers and the rivers grind up the dirt and rock and take it out to the sea. There it becomes sand that is washed away by the waves and wind. The cycle is repeated day after day with little notice.

This process bears an interesting parallel in our spiritual lives. Each day, the pull of the world, our human nature, and Satan the devil work on us to erode our spiritual commitment and dedication to seeking the kingdom of God. Just like the rivers create sand to replace that which is continually claimed by the sea, we must obtain more of God’s Spirit from Christ each day to continue to grow in God’s nature.

We need to begin each day with the realization that there are forces at work to erode God’s Spirit in us. The biggest mistake we could make is to neglect our salvation. We do that by believing that erosion is a benign process and neglecting the duty that comes with our calling. If we do not work to continue our growth in Christ, these forces that move upon us each day will eventually wear us down

Those who live near the ocean realize that they must do something to protect their homes from the eroding forces of nature. They place large rocks out in the water. It is called rip-rap, and its purpose is to act as a block against the continual erosion process of the sea. Christ is our rock, and we must build our life on His words.

As He admonished us: “Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house and it fell: and great was the fall of it” (Matthew 7:24-27).

## *Hebrews 6:18-19*

*By two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil;*

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The majestic Niagara River plummets some 180 feet at the American and Horseshoe Falls. Before the falls, there are violent and turbulent rapids. However, further upstream, where the river's current flows more gently, boats are easily able to navigate the calmer waters. Even further upstream, just before the Welland River empties into the Niagara, a pedestrian walkway spans the river. Clearly posted on this bridge's pylons is an enormous warning sign for all boaters to read. It states: "DO YOU HAVE AN ANCHOR?" Those words are followed by, "DO YOU KNOW HOW TO USE IT?"

Park rangers put this sign out as a warning. If the river begins moving too fast, a boat owner can toss out their anchor and it will stop their drift into dangerous waters. The truth is that this famous warning sign applies to all of us. Because we live in an age of enormous corruption, our lives are often affected turbulently in one way or another.

As our Christian walk moves forward, the waters of our life may appear to be calm and flowing gently. Other times, life may become rapid and turbulent. Along our journey, there are also helpful warning signs available. These are given to us in the pages of the Bible. We are not only warned about the coming troubled waters, but are instructed regarding how we can avoid dangerous areas. We too must have an anchor and know how to use it.

Jesus Christ is the anchor of our soul. He has given us warnings to keep us from plummeting off the deep end, and possibly falling to our spiritual death. We need to be continually tied to Jesus Christ—anchored to Him by our hope in His Kingdom!

## Hebrews 11:32-39

*What else can I say? There isn't enough time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets. Their faith helped them conquer kingdoms, and because they did right, God made promises to them. They closed the jaws of lions and put out raging fires and escaped from the swords of their enemies. Although they were weak, they were given the strength and power to chase foreign armies away. Some women received their loved ones back from death. Many of these people were tortured, but they refused to be released. They were sure that they would get a better reward when the dead are raised to life. Others were made fun of and beaten with whips, and some were chained in jail. Still others were stoned to death or sawed in two or killed with swords. Some had nothing but sheep skins or goat skins to wear. They were poor, mistreated, and tortured. The world did not deserve these good people, who had to wander in deserts and on mountains and had to live in caves and holes in the ground. All of them pleased God because of their faith! (CEV)*

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Many of the great men and women of faith endured hardships that are sometimes hard for us to imagine. They suffered terribly and yet held fast to the truth and the vision that God had revealed to them.

What about us? Do we begin to doubt, or lose faith, when hard times come upon us? Does our motivation wane when we are suffering? Do we begin questioning, wondering, if God has somehow left us? Do we slack off in our duties as a Christian when things are not going the way we would like them too, or do we use these rough times as a catalyst to spiritual growth?

World famous cyclist Lance Armstrong overcame seemingly terminal cancer. Then, he not only raced again, but he went on to win the Tour de France 5 times! He wrote this in his autobiography titled *Every Second Counts*:

“I was 25 when cancer nearly killed me; advanced choriocarcinoma spread to my abdomen lungs and brain and required two surgeries and four cycles of chemotherapy to get rid of... Every time I win another Tour, I prove that I’m alive and therefore that others can survive, too. I’ve survived cancer again and again and again. But the fact is that I wouldn’t have won even a single Tour de France without the lesson of illness. What it teaches is this: pain is temporary—quitting lasts forever.”

These words of Lance Armstrong are an inspiration to thousands. For Christians, they have implications that go even further—beyond this world. We have been given a chance for something that is far greater than our minds can understand at this time. Because of this transcendent opportunity, we must go beyond simply professing to believe, and take the action necessary to make this opportunity a reality.

As we go through tests and trials, what is our attitude like—what kinds of behavior do we display? Do we cast off restraint and give in to anger or resentment? Do we relax on practicing our faith and give in to idle activities? Do we make excuses for not living up to commitments to God and others? Or, do we press towards the mark and the high calling of the Eternal? Will we learn the lessons we were placed here to learn. Will we overcome the trials of life, or will we allow hardship to cloud our vision of the Kingdom of God and blur the efforts we must make to obtain it?

We must understand that we are going to have to suffer on occasion, but we must not let our tests and trials affect our faith in God. The pain we suffer in this life is temporary, but if we let down—such a failure is something that will haunt us till the end of time.

## Hebrews 13:8

*Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever*

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Lloyd C. Douglas, author of *The Robe*, tells a story of when he was a university student living in a boarding house during meager years. “In the same house there was an elderly retired music teacher who had become infirmed and unable to leave the apartment. Seeing that the old teacher was lonely, before heading out to class, Douglas would stop by the man's apartment each morning and the two of them would share the same ritual.

Douglas would come down the steps, knock on the old man's door, open it, and ask, well, what's the good news? The elderly man would pick up his tuning fork, tap it on the side of his wheelchair and say, that is middle C! It was middle C yesterday; it will be middle C tomorrow; it will be middle C a thousand years from now. On the other hand, I can hear the tenor upstairs. He sings flat. The piano across the hall is out of tune, but my friend, this tuning fork will always be middle C!"

The elderly pianist had discovered something in his life upon which he could always depend. That tuning fork with which he had spent so much of his life was a constant—a reality in life. To him it was one solid unmoving truth in a convulsing world. He held on to that dearly.

In our life, things all around us are in a state of constant flux. We live in a technological age that is unparalleled in all of human history. At our current rate, our fund of scientific knowledge doubles every two to five years. The computer we bought a couple of years ago has been quickly surpassed by much more sophisticated modern machines. We can hardly imagine the future anymore because our environment and society continues to change at such a phenomenal rate. In addition, friendships and loyalties change too. Friends and family can move away and circumstances can differ from week to week and sometimes change daily.

Yet, there is one thing we can always rely on to never change. Let's consider our vital constant in an ever changing world. It is not a tuning fork, it is Jesus Christ. His love never fails. His mercy never stops. His goodness is consistent. He can always be trusted, and His perfect laws will never change. Let's reflect on that magnificent truth and be thankful and confident as we go about our daily lives. In this ever shifting world, let's hold fast to our unchanging Savior.

## *Hosea 5:10*

*The princes of Judah were like them that remove the bound: therefore I will pour out my wrath upon them like water.*

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A young boy was playing baseball. When his turn came to bat, the coach signaled him to bunt. The boy believed that he was the best player on the team, and thought, "I know what I am doing." So, he hit the ball with all he had, but the center fielder caught it.

The team lost the game that day, and afterward the coach called the boy over to talk to him alone. "I want to tell you a story," the coach said. "There was a man who wanted to go to brawls with another man. He faced his opponent and each talked trash to the other. Finally, the man reached down in the dirt and drew a line. He told his enemy—you cross that line and I will tear you up. His enemy stared at him for a moment and then he stepped across the line. At that, the man drew another line, saying with great braggadocio, like I said—just step over that line and you have had it. I will mangle you so that you are unrecognizable" At this, his opponent stepped over the line again, and the man drew another new line.

After his talk, the coach took a piece of chalk and drew a line on the sidewalk, and he told the young boy—"this is my line. You get to do what you did today, one time, and only one time only. If you ever do it again you are out of here."

Then the coach did something interesting. He threw the chalk as far as he would with all his might. He then, turned to the boy and said, "I did that just so you would know—I will never draw another line."

King David drew a mental line in the sand when he faced Goliath. He would draw no other line that day. He faced the giant, and with enormous faith and courage, killed the enemy of God's people.

However, David had another line, one he was certain he should never cross. David knew adultery was wrong, but he drew another new line when he saw Bathsheba.

David knew he had done wrong, but he thought he would never murder an innocent man. However, when his cover up of the adultery did not work, the once courageous king re-drew another line in order to accommodate his fear of being found out. He devised a plan to kill Uriah, Bathsheba's husband.

After this evil, God punished him. He learned his lesson, and never did such a thing again. What about us? Will we learn the lesson of holding our line? We made a commitment to follow God when we were baptized. Do we ever redraw that line when it appears to be to our advantage?

The ancient Israelites kept moving their line with God until they were so far out of bounds; He was forced to punish them. The people thought it a terrible crime to move a neighbor's property marker, but they never realized that it was a greater crime to move the line established by God's law. God told them that they were like those who move the boundary marker.

Do we also move God's line when it is convenient for us? With God there is no shadow of turning. He is like the coach that never draws another line. We proclaim to seek His Kingdom, and we are now in the process of striving to be like Him. In order to follow His example, we must throw away the chalk when it comes to sin. We must never move our line when it comes to God's holy law.

## Isaiah 55:8

*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD.*

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Sometimes life seems hard to deal with. We might feel weak and ineffectual or face overwhelming obstacles. We may fear circumstances. When such times come upon us, consider that God's thoughts are not like ours. He sees a bigger, unlimited, and positive picture. Why not focus on the positive thoughts of God.

We say: "It's impossible"  
God says: All things are possible  
(Luke 18:27)

We say: "I'm too tired"  
God says: I will give thee rest  
(Matthew 11:28-30)

We say: "No one really loves me"  
God says: I love you  
(John 3:16 & John 3:34)

We say: "I can't go on"  
God says: My grace is sufficient  
(II Corinthians 12:9)

We say: "I can't figure it out"  
God says: I will direct your steps  
(Proverbs 3:5-6)

We say: "I can't do it"  
God says: We can do all things  
(Philippians 4:13)

We say: "I'm not able"  
God says: You are able  
(II Corinthians 9:8)

We say: "It's not worth it"  
God says: It will be worth it  
(Roman 8:18)

We say: "I can't forgive myself"  
God says: I forgive you  
(I John 1:9 & Romans 8:1)

We say: "I can't manage"  
God says: I will supply all your needs  
(Philippians 4:19)

We say: "I'm afraid"  
God says: Fear not  
(Hebrews 13:6, 1 John 4:18)

We say: "I'm always worried and frustrated"  
God says: Cast your cares on Me (I Peter 5:7)

We say: "I'm not smart enough"  
God says: I give you wisdom  
(I Corinthians 1:30)

We say: "I feel all alone"  
God says: I'll never leave you or forsake you (Hebrews 13:5)

## *James 1:2-4*

*My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.*

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A young lady named Sandra, feeling as low as could be, somberly walked into a florist shop. Her life had been turned upside down because of a minor automobile accident that stole the life of her unborn child. It was Thanksgiving week, and at this time of year she should have delivered their infant son. She deeply grieved over the loss.

Other troubles began to arise. Her husband's company "threatened" to transfer his job to a new location. Her sister had called to say that she could not come for her long awaited holiday visit. And, to top it off, Sandra's best friend suggested that her grief was God-given so that she could empathize with others who suffer. "Thanksgiving She thought—Thankful for what?"

Just then the shop clerk came over and said "Good afternoon, can I help you?" Sandra was a bit startled by the cheerful approach of the shop clerk. Finally, she said, "I-I need a floral arrangement" she stammered. "Are you looking for something that conveys 'gratitude' this Thanksgiving?" asked the clerk. "Not exactly," She blurted out. "In the last five months, everything that could go wrong has gone wrong." She regretted her outburst, and was surprised when the clerk said, "I have the perfect arrangement for you."

The clerk stepped in the back and reappeared with a dozen freshly cut thorny rose stems. That's right, not a single flower attached. "Do you want these in a box?" asked the clerk. Sandra was shocked. "Are you kidding?" She asked. "Is this some kind of joke?" But the clerk did not laugh.

"The flowers have been cut clean off." Sandra said. "That's right," said the clerk. "I cut off the flowers. I call this the "special. It is the Thanksgiving thorns bouquet."

The clerk explained, "You see, three years ago a lady, feeling much as you do today, came into my shop. She thought she had very little to be thankful for. She had lost her father to cancer; the family business was failing; her son had gotten into drugs; and she was facing major surgery. That same year I had also lost my husband" continued the clerk. "For the first time in my life, I had to spend Thanksgiving alone. I had no children, no family nearby, and too much debt to travel."

"So what did you do?" asked Sandra. "I learned to be thankful for the thorns," answered the clerk. "You see, I've always thanked God for the good things in my life and I never questioned Him why those good things happened to me, but when the bad stuff hit, I cried out, Why—Why me?! It took time to learn that the seemingly dark times are important as well as the good! I have always enjoyed the 'flowers' of my life, but it took the thorns to show me the meaning of life."

Just then someone else walked in the shop. "Hi, Phil!" the clerk greeted the balding, elderly gentleman. "My wife sent me in to get our usual Thanksgiving arrangement . . . twelve thorny, long-stemmed stems!" laughed Phil as the clerk handed him a tissue wrapped arrangement from the refrigerator.

"Those are for your wife?" asked Sandra. "Do you mind telling me why she wants a bouquet that looks like that?" "I would love to" replied Phil. "Four years ago, my wife and I nearly divorced. After forty years, we were in a real mess, but with God's grace and guidance, we trudged through problem after problem, and our marriage was saved. I stopped in here to get some flowers for her and the clerk told me how she kept a vase of rose stems to remind her of what she had learned from "thorny" times. That was good enough for me. I took home some of those stems. My wife and I decided to label each one for a specific "problem" and give thanks for what that problem taught us."

As Phil paid the clerk, he said to Sandra, "I highly recommend the Special." "I don't know if I can be thankful for the thorns in my life" Sandra said to the clerk. "Well," the clerk replied carefully, "my experience has shown me that the thorns make the roses more precious. Remember that Jesus wore a crown of thorns so we might realize His love and devotion to us. Don't resent the thorns."

Tears rolled down Sandra's cheeks. For the first time since the accident, she loosened her grip on her resentment. "I'll take those twelve long-stemmed thorns, please," she managed to say. "I hoped you would," said the clerk gently. "I'll have them ready in a minute."

Then the clerk smiled and handed Sandra an arrangement of thorny stems and a card that read. "Praise God for the roses; thank Him for the thorns."

As Thanksgiving Day comes and goes, let's not forget to continue being grateful for ALL that God has given to us—even the thorns. To those who are truly thankful, God bestows gifts. These gifts are not always ones that are so welcomed. They are not always the sweet smelling roses of calm waters as we sail the seas of life. In fact, they are many times the opposite. But, we must understand that these gifts are of far greater value. They teach us invaluable lessons of family, love, integrity, Godly character. They teach us the concepts of perfection, maturity and the very purpose of life.

In so doing God allows us to experience hardship, to learn how to overcome, to mature in a way that is beneficial, not to us only, but to those around us and for those we will one day work with in the Kingdom. Because, contrary to what we sometimes think, God's plan is not about us! It is about helping others, and our hardships in life enable us to have the patience, experience and hope in bringing all of mankind to the knowledge of Jesus Christ and His way of life.

## James 1:2-4

*My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing (NKJ).*

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As a spectator at a college basketball game, one man noticed something peculiar about one of the teams. After every game, win or lose, the players would always leave the court wearing the same expression on their faces. Whether they were up or down on the scoreboard made no difference in their attitude, performance, or motivation. They always worked to the best of their ability no matter what the score. Therefore, as each game ended, even if they did not win, they were never discouraged or disappointed. It was the fight and how to overcome the odds that mattered to them.

This passionate basketball team reflects a great lesson that the apostle James expressed in the verse above. James did not write this to mean that we should be giddy, bubbling with happiness because we are going through rough times. Instead, he reminds that we should be in good spirits no matter what we may be experiencing in life. Even when we experience trials, count it joy!

The word “joy” is *chara* in the Greek and is a word that means: cheerful, calm, glad, that is, not being discouraged or having a bad attitude. Instead of getting depressed, angry, or upset, we should be calm, and even glad, knowing that these trials are allowed by God so that we may build faith, become mature, and not lack godly character when Christ returns.

Because difficult moments of life are necessary exercises in our training for God’s Kingdom, it should be of no surprise when we experience hardships and struggles. There will be times when we will have to fight to remain faithful. In our battle to overcome Satan, the world, and even the pride and lust of our nature, we may face many trials. We should not lose heart, but count it as joy—knowing that all of God’s people must go through such experiences on their journey to the Kingdom of God.

## James 5:12

*But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation.*

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“Every New Year’s Day people make resolutions of one kind or another. However, there are few times they ever keep them. Notice some of the famous quotes about New Year’s Day and resolutions:”

“Now is the accepted time to make your regular annual good resolutions. Next week you can begin paving hell with them as usual.”

“Yesterday, everybody smoked his last cigar, took his last drink, and swore his last oath... Thirty days from now, we shall have cast our reformation to the winds and gone to cutting our ancient short comings considerably shorter than ever...”

“New Year's is a harmless annual institution, of no particular use to anybody save as a scapegoat for promiscuous drunks, and friendly calls, and humbug resolutions, and we wish you to enjoy it with a looseness suited to the greatness of the occasion” (*The Works of Mark Twain; Early Tales & Sketches*, Vol. 1 1851-1864, p. 180).

“Making resolutions is a cleansing ritual of self assessment and repentance that demands personal honesty and, ultimately, reinforces humility. BUT—breaking them is part of the WONDERFUL cycle” (Eric Zorn).

“Many people look forward to the New Year for a new start on old habits. A New Year’s resolution is something that goes in one year and out the other (anonymous).”

This is the way it is with all of us to some degree. We have good intentions, and resolve to really repent and change regarding our sins. But, many times we compromise. We have excuses for doing so, and try to justify our shortcomings. From the time of Adam and Eve, mankind has continued to excuse ourselves and blame others or circumstances for our failures.

As a people called by God to make a difference in our lives now in preparation for a future life, let's make a commitment to God not to present Him with excuses. If we tell Him we are going to change a certain behavior, let's make certain we do it. Let our yes be yes so that we don't fall into condemnation.

## *John 1:10*

*He was in the world, and the world was made by him,  
and the world knew him not.*

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Actor Cary Grant tells the story of an incident that once happened to him. He explained that while out walking along a street one day, he was passing by a fellow. The other man's eyes locked onto him with excitement. While staring at him the man said, "Wait a minute, you're . . . I know who you are! Don't tell me—uh, Rock Hud. . . No, you're. . . "

Grant thought he'd help him out a bit, so he finished the man's sentence, saying, "Cary Grant." At this, the fellow went right on, as if Grant had said nothing and responded with, "No, that's not it! You're . . . uh. . . "

There was Cary Grant identifying himself, but the fellow had someone else in mind. He just could not accept the actor's own words. Tragically, this phenomenon takes place with Jesus Christ every day. We are to imitate the Savior, yet, the world does not recognize Him for who He really is.

Some portray Him as a weak-scrawny Jesus, a feminine Jesus or a Jesus with long hair. They sometimes envision him as a Jesus who rejects the laws of His father. They portray Him as a Jesus who so desperately wants everyone to accept Him that He offers eternal life to anyone willing to simply accept Him.

The truth is that while the Scriptures describe Him as glorious in majesty and power, many think He is someone else other than the King and Creator of the Universe. In fact, the world at large does not study His words with awe, and as a result, don't believe His clear statements.

As we live, work, and play in this world, let's not allow other's view of Jesus to cloud our minds. Let's keep our eyes on Him, meditating on exactly who He really is.

## *John 6:27*

*Labour not for the meat which perisheth,  
but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting  
life, which the Son of man shall give unto you...*

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In a play on words Peter Maurin states: “The world would be better off if people tried to become better. And people would become better if they stopped trying to become better off. For when everybody tries to become better off, nobody becomes better off. But when everybody tries to become better, everybody is better off.”

Today we live in a world that is extremely materialistic. It seems that there is no end to the products that the market generates. Further, there seems to be no end to the vast numbers of people who are convinced they actually need the “STUFF” the markets advertize. Too many people are persuaded that buying things will make them happy. It is a paradox in which the more people acquire to make them feel satisfied, the more they seem to want, and ironically, the more unsatisfied they feel.

Christians are to be different and should always remember that God will provide the things that are good for us if we whole-heartedly seek Him. Let us not forget that we will be better off if we seek to better ourselves. The treasures we should seek are fruits of the spirit; kindness, love, patience and meekness. We are to be servants of the true God—growing in the grace, knowledge and faith of Jesus Christ.

Seeking the things of this world will ultimately leave us empty handed and wanting so let's instead seek Him! In this we can posses something that is invaluable—eternal life!

## *John 7:24*

*Judge not according to the appearance, but judge  
righteous judgment*

---

The young girl was waiting between flights at the airport. Feeling the need for a little snack, she visited the lounge and bought a small package of cookies. She then found her way to the waiting area where she located two vacant seats. She took one, leaving a space between her and a nicely dressed man. She then began reading her newspaper. Gradually she became aware of a rustling noise. She looked from behind the pages of her paper, and was flabbergasted! The man was helping himself to her cookies on the seat next to her. Not wanting to make a scene, she reached for the bag and took a cookie to let him know those cookies were hers.

A minute or two passed and then there came more rustling. He was helping himself to another cookie! By this time, they had come to the end of the package, but she was so angry, but again dared not let herself say anything for fear of making a scene. Then, as if to add insult to injury, the man actually broke the last cookie in half and pushed one half over toward her, and he ate the other half!

Still fuming some time later, her flight was announced. She opened her hand bag to get her ticket. To her shock and embarrassment, there she found her package of unopened cookies. It was she who had been eating his cookies!

How many times do we misjudge others because we don't see the entire picture? We assume things—often the worst—and for fear of our own embarrassment, we frequently don't confront the other person in order to clarify the issue.

Today, let's make an attempt to change that. Let's believe the best of others, and if we think there is an occasion to question a person's motive or action, why not simply ask them for a clarification? In this way we won't judge by appearances, but will judge righteous judgment.

## John 14:2-3

*In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.*

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In 1889, while a unique structure was being built for an international exposition, the edifice was called monstrous by the citizens of the city. The public even demanded that it be torn down as soon as the exposition was over.

However, from the moment its architect first conceived it, he personally took enormous pride in the building. He loyally defended it from those who wished to destroy it. He knew that His creation was destined for greatness and fame. In the midst of the gainsaying, only a few worked to support this brave architect. Those few were intensely loyal. Believing wholeheartedly in the project, they worked tirelessly to make the building of it a reality and success.

Today this amazing structure still stands. In fact, it is considered one of the architectural wonders of the modern world. It has become the primary landmark of Paris, France. The architect was Alenxandre Gustave Eiffel, creator of the Eiffel tower.

This story helps us understand a portion of what Jesus Christ is doing in our lives. He is the master architect, and He is building an enormous edifice for His people. It is so magnificent in both size and scope that few would believe it even possible. Christ's structure measures nearly 1400 miles high, deep and wide. Its base would cover an area from Los Angeles to Dallas Texas, and up to Calgary Canada. It is made of gold, with jeweled foundations and 12 gates made of pearl. Only an elite few will be able to live and work in this edifice—the glorious headquarters for the Kingdom of God.

As Christ builds New Jerusalem for us to inhabit, remember that we are His workers. We are His loyal supporters and under His guidance.

We have been called to be a part of the greatest project the universe has ever, or will ever, witness. With the help of Christ, we strive to work tirelessly to build the character that will enable us to be a part of the New Jerusalem. Yes, others will scoff at our work. They will ridicule our sacrifices. They will think that there is no way that we could ever be a part of such a magnificent project, but our faith tells us—we will. It is this very vision that motivated Abraham and thousands of prophets, ministers and others who have already contributed to what God is constructing.

Today, consider those who helped Eiffel build his tower. Consider those who work to become a part of Christ's building project, and reflect on the opportunity we have been given. Let's keep the vision of God's Kingdom and the New Jerusalem always in our minds.

## John 15:12-13

*This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.*

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The love we commonly find in this world is nearly always a type of selfish attraction in which the actions taken by people are based on the pleasure, opinion, or benefit of themselves. Such love is a facade of real love, and many times it is portrayed as though it were in the best interest of others. We should avoid these self driven motives. They always lead to sin, therefore, we should consider the biblical precepts for love instead (Exo. 20, 1 Cor. 13).

Author Robert Coleman tells a story that demonstrates the biblical form of love. The story is of a little boy whose sister needed a blood transfusion. The doctor explained that she had become infected with the same disease the boy had recovered from suffering two years earlier. Her only chance for recovery was a transfusion from someone who had previously conquered the disease. Since the two children had the same rare blood type, the boy was the ideal donor.

“Would you give your blood to Mary?” the doctor asked. Johnny hesitated. His lower lip started to tremble. Then he smiled and said, “Sure, for my sister.”

Soon the two children were wheeled into the hospital room—Mary, pale and thin; Johnny, robust and healthy. Neither spoke, but when their eyes met, Johnny grinned. As the nurse inserted the needle into his arm, Johnny’s smile faded. He watched the blood flow through the tube.

With the ordeal almost over, his voice, slightly shaky, broke the silence. “Doctor, when do I die?” Only then did the doctor realize why Johnny had hesitated, why his lip had trembled when he had agreed to give his blood. He had thought that giving his blood to his sister meant giving all his blood—giving her his life. In that brief moment, Johnny made the decision to give his life for his sister.

From the mouth of Jesus Christ, and from the selflessness of this young child, we see the instructions of our God, and a touching example of true love—the kind of love that we should have. It is the caring, unselfish, giving love that Christ expressed. It is the love of self sacrifice for the benefit of others and for the greater good, even if it is to our own hurt.

Let's strive to express only that which is truly related to the love of God and our neighbors—even if it is seemingly not in our best interest. And always remember that the lessons and rewards of unselfish love are truly in the best interest of those who seek God's Kingdom.