



Foundation of Faith

Spiritual Growth



*The Christian Race
Each One in their Corner
Fear in Time of the Coronavirus
We Will Serve the Lord*

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Editorial

Today we are experiencing what our Lord and Savior prophesied to His disciples and to us: there will be hate, jealousy, wars, and also pestilences (see Matthew 24:7).

This coronavirus, COVID-19, struck suddenly and unexpectedly. Hundreds of thousands have been infected and have fallen ill, and many have died. We read daily about the hardships, dangers, and safety precautions of the pestilence we are in the midst of.

Millions have lost their jobs; many are afraid and lonely and need urgent help. Can we compare this time to that of the wanderers in the desert who went on uncharted paths and did not know what would become of them? Many in this world are without hope, in despair, without an anchor, without Christ.

Dear reader, people in our circles are living in fearful uncertainty, worried about their lives and health, and often scared of dying. Yes, they find themselves in the desert of life and thirst for help.

As children of God, do we not have a great task here? God's Word, yes, the Lord Himself, commands us, "O inhabitants of the land of Tema, bring water to him who is thirsty; with their bread they met him who fled" (Isaiah 21:14). Tema is an oasis, a place where water, food, and bread are in abundance. Here a person can draw water with joy, with plenty for everyone. Therefore, approach the one who is thirsty; hurry to bring the water of life.

People need water and bread for their bodies, for their physical beings; but of greater importance is food for the soul. Therefore, go to the thirsty and bring that precious living water which only the Son of God has, so that souls may be saved and made right with Him.

H. D. Nimz

Each One in their Corner

Georgina Willis, the little kitchen maid, was polishing knives. While polishing vigorously, she quietly hummed a little tune:

*In this world of darkness,
We must brightly shine.
You in your small corner,
And I in mine.*

“Why put so much effort into those knives?” asked Marie, the cook.

“Because they are in my corner,” Georgina happily answered. “You know, ‘you shine in your corner, I will shine in mine.’ I will do my best; that’s all I can do.”

“I wouldn’t waste my energy,” said Marie. “No one’s even going to notice it.”

“Jesus sees it,” said Georgina and continued singing. “You in your small corner, and I in mine.”

“In any case, this meat belongs in my corner,” Marie contemplated to herself. “If that girl will do her best, I should too. If the Lord takes notice of those knives, then He will certainly notice the meat.” And she prepared it masterfully.

“Marie, the meat was especially well prepared today,” said Miss Emma.

“Well, that’s because of Georgina,” Marie answered with a contentedly flushed face, and she told her the story of the knives.

Miss Emma was just ironing a dress for her sister, feeling tired and too warm. “I’m going to hurry through this; surely this will be good enough for Helen,” she said to herself. But having just heard the story of the knives, she pressed the dress as diligently as she could.

“How nicely you have ironed my dress!” Helen exclaimed. Emma laughed and replied, “Thanks to Georgina.”

A friend of Helen’s asked if she wanted to spend the evening with her, but Helen answered, “No, I really can’t come tonight. I have a church service to go to tonight, and that’s where my corner is.”

“Your corner? What do you mean?” Helen told her the story of Georgina’s knives, and Helen’s friend responded, “Well, if you can’t come with me, then I will just go with you!”

Both of the young girls attended the church service that night. As they were ready to go home, the pastor said to them, “You were a real support to us tonight with your singing. I was worried you might not come tonight.”

“Our Georgina caused us to come,” said Helen. “She believes she always has to do her best, even if it’s only regarding her knives.” The story was retold once again.

“I guess I will try to go inside once more,” the pastor said, standing in front of a small, run-down dwelling. “Yesterday I was convinced it would be of no use; however, I too want to do what I can.”

Inside the house was a sick man with whom he had tried to have a serious conversation. The man wanted nothing of the sort. This time, the visiting pastor said, “I have come to tell you a short story.” And he began to tell him the story of little Georgina and her knives, her little corner, and her heartfelt desire to do her best at all times.

The sick man dried his eyes and said softly, “I want to find my corner now too and try to be a light.”

The doorbell rang, and the lady of the house rose to welcome the guest. “Perhaps I could give a little extra,” she thought as she slowly pulled the envelope of money she had set aside for the mission. “If the little kitchen maid tries to do her best, then I should do my best too. I will donate a little extra.”

Without her knowledge, Georgina had done a lot of good on this day. And the next morning, she continued her usual work and happily sang:

*In this world of darkness,
We must brightly shine.
You in your small corner,
And I in mine.* ■

Traveling for Jesus

Anne belonged to an intellectual Chinese family, but surprisingly, she never learned to read. Throughout her whole life, she cared for her parents and for her brother who suffered from tuberculosis. When her brother passed away, he left her a great deal of money. However, by then she was already eighty years old.

As a faith-filled Christian woman, Anne considered how she might use her time and money for Christ. The thought came to her, “I’ve always wanted to travel, but I have spent my whole life caring for my sick loved ones. I’ve never even left Shanghai. Now I could actually travel and when I meet people, tell them about Christ.”

So Anne became a traveling messenger of the gospel. She used her inheritance to travel throughout China by train. Sometimes she traveled first class, where she could meet official dignitaries. She freely spoke to

them about Jesus. Some were annoyed at her, but others smiled and engaged in a conversation with her.

During the last five years of her life, Anne traveled hundreds of thousands of kilometers by train. She traveled from China’s northwest Xingjian deserts, to the highlands of Tibet, and also to the southern parts of the country. Wherever she went, she spread the gospel of Jesus Christ to all who would listen to her.

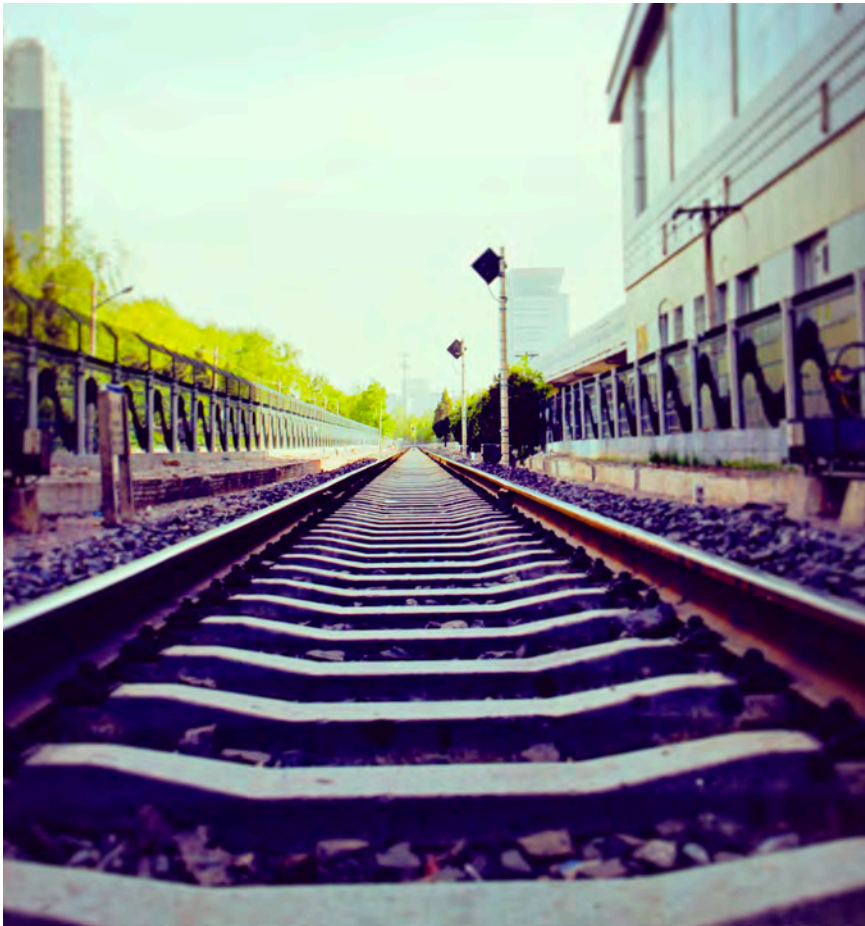
A few years after Anne’s death, a Christian man was visiting a Chinese politician and his wife. The host’s wife happened to be reading her Bible. Astonished, he asked her if she was a Christian. Here is the answer she gave him:

“Once when my husband came home from his trip, he told me how he had had an interesting encounter. As he traveled by train, an older lady started a conversation with him. She gave him a detailed account of Jesus Christ and explained that her reason for travel-

ing was to spread the good news about Him. My husband was very impressed, although he never became a Christian himself. Deeply touched by this story. I asked myself, ‘What can be so interesting about this Jesus that this elderly woman feels so compelled to devote her time traveling throughout China?’ That is why I obtained a Bible and soon afterwards found salvation in Jesus!”

Her husband was sympathetic towards Christians, despite being involved in a government position hostile toward Christians. He tried his best to fend off the nation’s harshest persecutions, as much as was within his control.

God often works in wonderful and mysterious ways. He was able to use the attempts of a frail, elderly lady to speak to the most powerful dignitaries of the land in a way no one else could have. ■



Spiritual Growth

Have you ever taken a nature walk when spring was arriving? Did your eye pause with satisfaction on the lush green and lavish colors in the forest and in the fields? Grass and blade and bush and field, everything breathes life, and above that we see the sun. It is what brings out all these glories, what sustains all life, what causes things to grow, bloom, and thrive. Again and again, it shines light and warmth on the dark earth. The sun is tireless in its work and creative energy. It does not rest until it has accomplished everything the Lord has commanded and until the last fruit is under a protective roof.

But how sad it is when growth is inhibited! How difficult it must be for a mother's heart when her only child, whom she cares for and nurtures, for whom she sacrifices everything, remains sickly and weak. She sees how other children grow and become strong, how they develop into strong young people. Her darling, however, remains far behind his friends. He is lagging in his growth and development.

If a person does not grow as he normally should, something in the body is not working correctly, preventing normal development and healthy growth.

What does a plant need for healthy growth? Above all, there has to be life, and then the nutrient-rich soil for the plant to grow. Wind, water, and sunshine are also important. If one of them is missing, healthy growth is impossible. All the effort and work we have put into it is in vain. The plant withers and dies.

Likewise, our soul also needs certain conditions to be able to live and grow spiritually. Without these, it cannot bear fruit. First of all, we have to have life from God. We have to be born of God.

Just as a branch cannot develop without the vine, so our striving for growth is in vain if we do not stay in the vine, in Christ. How wonderful and glorious it is for the branches on God's vine when the sunshine, the

face of Christ, smiles on them. How warm and invigorating is the bright glow of the sun of grace! We drink life from it, divine life.

But let us not forget the winds and the fertile rains. In the Song of Solomon 4:16, we read, "Awake, O north wind, and come, O south! Blow upon my garden, that its spices may flow out." Both the warm, gentle south winds and the cold north winds are needed. When the bitter north wind roars around your soul, when someone misjudges your love and intentions, when you must endure ridicule and mockery, yes, when the cold north wind blows, flee to the One who has life, strength, and comfort. Hurry in prayer to the throne of God in that hour. Pray as Jacob once pleaded and wrestled; the Lord heard and blessed him. So you, too, can become a crusader, a conqueror. Do you see what the winds are good for, the rough, north wind and the hot, south wind?

Why should we actually grow? It is the will of God. He is glorified when His children mature. God's holy being becomes more visible. Our fellow human beings will see how the grace, wisdom, love, and power of our mighty God have turned once-lost sinners into faithful followers of Christ who are a blessing to others.

The word of God also tells us, "But, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ" (Ephesians 4:15). Do you understand this correctly? We should grow in all aspects: in faith, in love, in knowledge, in faithfulness, in devotion to Christ, in zeal for the cause of the Lord, in meekness, in humility, in all things.

Dear child of God, you are planted by the waters; grow like a cedar of Lebanon, and the good will of Christ and the blessing of God will be with you. ■

Jakob Bechthold



The Christian's Daily Practice

Should we attempt to set up laws and rules for people's daily schedule? Shouldn't we leave this up to every individual? We must each decide for ourselves how we want to make use of our time. There are some principles, however, that we cannot afford to overlook. We find them in the Bible, an inexhaustible source of spiritual knowledge. As we study the Scriptures, we want to pay special attention to what should be included in the daily schedule of a Christian.

Daily Prayer

"Be merciful to me, O Lord, for I cry to You all day long"
(Psalm 86:3).

*Blessed is he who takes time to cease,
To look up toward the heavenly place,
Upward to God, the Father, who sees,
His window is open to hear his case.
Blessed is he who kneels down for prayers,
Sending his sighs home to heaven above,
In morning and evening his soul he bares,
He gazes toward Zion with hope and love.*

Daily prayer. Would you consider it a heavy burden? Do we need to push ourselves to pray? David says, "I cry out to You daily, merciful God!" Many have followed the example of this prayer warrior and testify,

"I also pray every day." Daily prayer is an indication of living faith. Perhaps you think praying that often is not necessary or even overrated. Jesus always deemed it as necessary to pray and not to become careless or unconcerned. He Himself always took time to pray. Could a child bear not to speak with his father for days, weeks, or perhaps months and years? It is not a difficult burden but rather a wonderful privilege to be able to speak to our heavenly Father every day. Wouldn't you like to begin today to draw near to God in prayer on a daily basis? He who speaks with God is never alone.

Daily Bible Reading

"These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the Word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11).

*Help me, Lord, that I might study
Your sweet Word and understand.
Teach me things that I don't yet see,
That my heart may know Your plan,
That with joy I may receive it
And obey Your will for me.
Work in me, yes, I believe it,
For the truth does set me free.*



Reading the news every day, listening to it, or watching it is a daily habit for many who consider it important, a part of life. But to read the Bible? Is that so important? Isn't it enough to attend weekly worship services and Bible studies to hear something from God's Word?

No, that is not enough. God speaks to us through His Word. He desires to give us direction and guidance for every day. Therefore, reach for your Bible every day and read it. Do you read your Bible? Or have you become tired and given up? Around you are people who have grown to love God's Word and would never want to be without it. The Word of God has become the bread from which they thrive, the rock on which they stand, the spring beside which they rest. Reading the Bible strengthens your trust in God, gives comfort in adversity, gives power to the weak, encouragement when afraid, and heals broken hearts. The Holy Scriptures are like an enormous land where riches and treasures can only be found through daily digging and searching. "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me" (John 5:39).

Daily Praise

"Blessed be the Lord, who daily loads us with benefits" (Psalm 68:19).

Should we praise God every day, or is that asking too much? Life brings so many disappointments; the daily grind is so difficult; the future looks so gray. How are we supposed to praise God? Is there anyone who can achieve this?

You may be surprised. Many have done this; they have praised God even in difficulties. Just open your

Bible and read. You will find people who praised God in all sorts of situations. It may have been in tremendous anxiety, through valleys of adversity, in the fiery furnace, or even in a den of lions. Even while in prison awaiting their sentence or overloaded with tiring work, not knowing which end was up, they glorified and praised God. It was in these turbulent times that God was the closest to them. When Job was hit so hard with adversity, he fell down before God and prayed, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). When Paul and Silas were shackled and sitting in jail, they did not despair. Instead, at midnight, they started praying and praising God, not allowing their afflictions to silence them. David, the writer of many Psalms, encourages us: "Let us exalt His name together" (Psalm 34:4). If you are awaiting with joy the great hallelujah that will be sung before the throne of God, then you will sing and praise God daily, even in times of affliction and fear.

Daily Willingness to Suffer

"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Luke 9:23).

*Take up your cross and follow Christ,
Nor think till death to lay it down;
Stand by in times of goodness and joy,
While suffering do not look around;
For only those who bear the cross
May hope to wear a golden crown.*

When Christ called the ferocious persecutor of His church, Saul from Tarsus, He showed him what his



prospect would be: “For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake” (Acts 9:16). Suffering is not something exceptional in following Christ. It is just part of it.

Being a follower of Christ requires a complete surrender to the Lord, Who gave Himself as a sacrifice for us and our sins. If you want to follow Jesus, you must say “no” to your personal desires. Let us serve Jesus, even if it entails suffering. Jesus Christ leads the way for us. He helps us in all adversities. Therefore, let us be prepared to suffer and work with joy for Christ. He is our Lord. If you follow Jesus, He will bring you to the goal. Even if it costs us tears and hardship, our reward will be indescribable joy and happiness.

Daily Faithfulness

“Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Revelation 2:10).

If you are a child of God, you should strive to keep this relationship forever. A life of following Christ is insignificant without faithfulness. If you have said “yes” to the Lord, you cannot take “some time off” for a few days to live without Him or even be against Him. God is true to His Word, and His promises are trustworthy. The love of Jesus surrounds us day and night. He thinks of us and blesses us. How can we possibly react to such faithfulness with unfaithfulness? God only looks for a faithful steward. His desire is to some day tell His servants and maidservants, “Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things” (Matthew 25:21).

Daily Testifying

“Proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day” (1 Chronicles 16:23).

*Awake! O Spirit, among Christians all,
Who faithfully watch upon the stone wall;
Day and night witnessing, Jesus to tell,
Fight against Satan his kingdom to quell.
Their messages peal throughout the whole earth
To bring all the nations to God through rebirth.*

Before Jesus ascended to Heaven, He spoke these words to His disciples: “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). God expects His disciples to tell others about His love and grace shown to all people. Even men in the Old Testament were aware of this mandate, causing King David to appoint Asaph and his brothers to sing songs of praise.

How much more should we, who have received forgiveness of sins through the blood of Jesus, share the message of salvation with those around us. Repeatedly, God’s enemies tried to stop the Christians from witnessing. But His messengers could not stop; they obeyed God more than men. Even if over time many Christians were persecuted, the message of Jesus Christ has never been destroyed. Is God’s business burning in our souls? Have we told others that Jesus is the salvation of the world? Are our words and our actions a constant, clear testimony for Christ? Do we express our thanks for Christ’s sacrifice on the cross? The world needs to hear of Jesus. Let us not neglect to share this message. ■

The Christian Race

“Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it.” (1 Corinthians 9:24)

In his letters, the apostle Paul frequently compares the Christian life to a race. At the time, the Isthmian Games were regularly held near Corinth, meaning that Paul’s audience would have had the reference points to understand the spiritual lessons he was drawing.

These races revolved around three essential elements: the runner, the race, and the victor’s reward. Not everyone was able to participate in those earthly races, but all are invited to the Christian race. God does not show favoritism. Regardless of wealth or social status, everyone has the same privileges and opportunities in Christ.

In the ancient Greek races, participants had to fulfill certain conditions, register their names, and commit to following the prescribed rules. If they failed to do so, all their efforts were in vain.

The same holds true for spiritual races. The first rule is “Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). Another rule reads, “If anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules” (2 Timothy 2:5). The conditions for entering the Christian race include leaving everything behind, taking our cross upon us, and following our Savior.

Anyone who wanted to succeed in the race mentioned by Paul had to prepare. The Christian race also requires preparation. The runners back then had to cast off anything that slowed them down, which applies to the spiritual race today. “Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1).

An earthly runner needs to be strong and healthy. This involves making healthy nutritional choices and avoiding food or drinks that harm the body. “But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly” (Luke 21:34).

This is also true of the spiritual race. We need a strong and healthy soul. In order to overcome, we must be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. To become strong, we need to choose our nutrition

carefully—we need good spiritual food. For example, we are sometimes strengthened in the Christian race through fasting or praying.

In contrast to the ancient Greek races, the spiritual race can be won by all participants at once. However, each person still needs to personally cross the finish line. Many are more interested in other people’s races than their own. Have you ever seen someone taking part in a race turn around to criticize another participant? No! There is simply no time for that; the only focus is the goal, and every effort goes into running the race.

The Christian race is not undertaken just for fun. It is about achieving something, about reaching the goal we have in our sights. Paul writes, “One thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13–14). Let us always remember, Satan is trying to stop us and prevent us from earning the crown. We cannot just sit back and relax. Instead, we need to keep going, equipped with God’s power and grace at all times.

It is important not to miss the goal but to emerge from the contest victorious. In the end, the outcome of a race here on earth does not really matter. But losing the spiritual race means losing eternal bliss and entering into eternal pain and suffering. It means unending night and darkness in the presence of Satan and his angels.

Let us therefore run the race and endure until the end. When we are tried and tempted or when we grow tired, let us look to the Lord and claim the promise, “But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint” (Isaiah 40:31). Through God’s grace, everyone who wants to can endure and overcome to win the crown.

The victors of the ancient Greek races were awarded a wreath that soon dried and withered, but our prize is an everlasting crown. “Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Revelation 2:10). ■

Protecting Hands

Mrs. Goodyer looked at the clock for the twentieth time that evening.

“Eleven-thirty, and such a stormy night, too. Where can the boy be? I hope he isn’t in trouble. He is getting so difficult and rebellious.”

Once more she knelt beside the kitchen table, and with her hands clasped on her Bible she prayed that God would protect her dear Tom, bring him home safely, and turn his heart to the Lord.

At last, well past midnight, there were sounds in the yard. Evidently Tom had returned and was putting his bicycle away.

A few minutes later Tom entered, looking very pale and weary.

“Hello, Mother,” he said. “Still up? I think I’ll go straight to bed. I’m a bit tired tonight.”

“You’re very late,” said Mother. “Has anything happened?”

“I’ll tell you all about it in the morning,” he said, and with that he went upstairs to bed.

Mother, rather worried and anxious, followed.

“Tom,” she said, “what happened?”

“Well,” said Tom. “Will and I had a strange experience about an hour ago. We were cycling home through the storm, when we felt ourselves moving rapidly downhill. It was very dark and we had no light to see where we were going. Suddenly I felt a hand on my shoulder, pulling me back. I thought it must be Will, and I called to him. He called back to me that he had just felt a hand on his shoulder, and thought it was mine. So we both stopped and got off our bikes. We

wondered what it all meant. Will said, ‘I think I’ll walk to the bottom of the hill.’ I agreed. When we got to the bottom of the hill we found a pile of stones right across the road. If we had run into it, we both would certainly have been killed.”

“Thank God,” murmured Mother, stroking Tom’s hair. “I am so thankful He cared for you.”

“But, Mother, how could God have had anything to do with it?”

“Tom, when was it you said you felt that hand on your shoulder?”

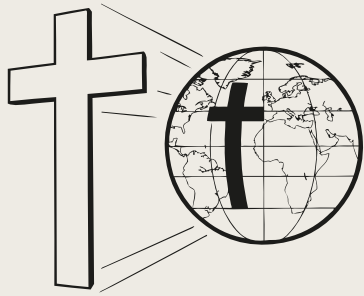
“About an hour ago. I suppose it must have been about eleven-thirty.” “I was praying for you then,” said Mother. “That’s why I am sure God had something to do with it. He sent His angel to protect you tonight, Tom.”

“Do you think so?” asked Tom.

“I’m sure He did,” said Mother, “because He wants you to give your life to Him. I hope you will some day.”

And so saying, Mother kissed him goodnight and tiptoed out of the room. When she had gone, Tom lay thinking for a little while. Somehow he still felt that hand on his shoulder. Was Mother right after all? If so, he was a most unthankful boy. At the very least, he could say “thank you” to God for looking after him. He got out of bed and knelt in prayer. Mother, listening, heard the movement, guessed what it meant, and rejoiced with exceeding joy. From that night on, Tom was a different boy. ■

Used with permission from *The Beautiful Way*



Radio Program Message of Salvation

Friedrich Krebs
Kitchener, ON

The Path of the Righteous

“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly . . . but his delight is in the law of the LORD . . . For the Lord knows the way of the righteous” (Psalm 1:1,2,6).

God’s Word shows us the way to righteousness. It is not about any norm of morality or religion but about the righteousness that comes from God’s will. It is God Who shows us the way to righteousness. He is righteous who willingly follows and remains on this path with a firm heart. The author of Psalm 119:30 testifies, “I have chosen the way of truth; Your judgments I have laid before me.” This means I have made Your righteousness the guiding principle of my life. And that’s exactly what God expects from us. The way of the righteous is not about doing what we want. It isn’t always an easy path, but it is a path of child-like innocence and leads to great gains. That’s exactly why God created this path for us.

We know many of the laws of our country, such as regulatory laws, tax laws, or traffic laws, etc. We have to submit to these laws, no matter which country we live in. Anyone who observes and fulfills the law will be seen as lawful, because they obey it. Experience tells us, however, that injustices can often be contained in human laws. Sometimes the demands of a law contradict God’s Word and deliberately complicate the life of believers. How many times has this led to bitter hardships, persecution, and suffering for innocent people!

These facts clearly show that the path of the righteous is not always easy. We also see this very clearly in the life of our beloved Lord Jesus. Even in Old-Testament prophecy, He was seen as “just” and as “a helper.” No sin, no injustice, no deceit was found in Him (see 1 Peter 2:22 and Isaiah 53:9). Even Pilate cried out during His interrogation, “I find no fault in Him” (John 18:38). However, He was rejected by His own people.

His hometown of Nazareth also rejected Him. The officials wanted to take His life, and finally He was mercilessly nailed to the cross. A poet wrote, “He carried His cross, the Holiest of all.” The Righteous One suffered for the unjust because He wanted to create a way of righteousness for everyone. In spite of being horribly misjudged and ridiculed, He firmly and decidedly remained on the path of righteousness, which eventually led to His victory and gain.

Jesus’ disciples were very familiar with the way of righteousness. He had told them of suffering but also of the high gains and advantages of this way. The way of righteousness is profitable for all who walk it. This truth is confirmed by the Bible:

King Solomon spoke of a crown of honor that can be found on the path of righteousness. He states, “But



the path of the just is like the shining sun, that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day” (Proverbs 4:18). “The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tents of the righteous” (Psalm 118:15). “Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart” (Psalm 97:11).

“Righteousness exalts a nation” (Proverbs 14:34), and it exalts us. Through righteousness, we gain the well-being of an innocent, clear, and unencumbered conscience. The truly righteous suffer no inner accusations or frightening thoughts. They are allowed to live in peaceful circumstances and quiet repose. Isn’t that a huge blessing and an amazing gain in a person’s life? Proverbs 14:32 tells us, “But the righteous has a refuge in his death.” Wouldn’t we all wish to end our lives with this assurance? This is the blessing of righteousness.

In 2 Corinthians 5:21, Paul speaks of the very important “righteousness that is valid before God.”

Choosing our own righteousness is not enough. Therefore, we must ask, “How do we obtain righteousness that is pleasing to God?” Paul explains, “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

No one but Jesus could fulfill the righteousness before God. Through His death, He acquired salvation for us and made us righteous. Paul writes in Romans 8:33-34, “Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died [for this purpose]” and “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1).

This is the path to true righteousness. Thank God this path is there for us and there is no other. Only through Christ can we become righteous and blessed. Dear soul, this path is open to you. ■

I Lift up my Eyes to the Hills (3)

*“I will lift up my eyes to the hills—
From whence comes my help?
My help comes from the Lord,
Who made heaven and earth.” (Psalm 121:1-2)*

3. Sinai—Mountain of the Commandments of God

The Israelites have now traveled three months since they left Egypt. The hard times of slavery belong to the past.

For many years, they worked in inhumane circumstances for Pharaoh. He controlled them, imposed hard labor on them, and punished them through the graceless hand of his overseers. As property of a power-obsessed regime, they were scraping by to stay alive.

“Then the children of Israel groaned because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry came up to God because of the bondage. So God heard their groaning” (Exodus 2:23b-24).

God led them out of Egypt through mighty wonders. They reached the Sinai desert and encamped across from Mount Sinai. As the leader of this great nation, Moses needed clear directions and guidance on the next steps to lead them to the Promised Land. The people were asking a lot of Moses. They came to him to ask for God’s will and to learn God’s law (Exodus 18:15-16). Moses didn’t want to make decisions on his own.

He climbed Mount Sinai to be with God (Exodus 19:3a). There, God spoke with him and shared His laws and commandments with Moses, which he was to pass on to the Israelites. God wanted to make this nation His own and care for and protect it in a special way (Deuteronomy 32:10-11), contrary to their experience under Pharaoh’s rule. In return, the people were to follow God’s commandments and listen to His voice.

Who is not familiar with the burden of excruciating memories of things done in the past, knowing how wrong they were? You were not able to do good in your own strength, but were like a puppet in the hands of Satan, whose only goal is to control people and to enslave them with sin for their entire lives.

But then you experienced the unbelievable wonder of God’s rescue in your life: God’s pledge to make you His own. You can belong to the kingly priesthood, with the purpose to tell others about the positive changes you have experienced and what quality of life you now have through your relationship with God (Exodus 19:6; 1 Peter 2:9-10). Don’t you think you too could inspire others for God?

We can belong to God when we follow His Word. With the coming of Christ to this earth, the way of the law on Mount Sinai had fulfilled its purpose (Romans 10:4). Everyone who believes in Christ is declared righteous. What incredible grace!

Your life not only consists of surprises but also of challenges and stressful situations. You need the commandments of God in your life to safely reach the goal of your journey. Look for God’s commandments like silver, and search for them like treasures (Proverbs 2:1-12). Make an effort and climb Mount Sinai in a figurative sense to experience God and to listen to His Word.

No power in this world will then be able to take you from His hand because you belong to Him. ■

*Andreas Schell
Hetzerath, Germany*



What if the answer is “wait”?

Nowadays, who enjoys waiting for something or someone? In our society, everything has to go as quickly as possible. The current ways of communication allow us to receive answers within seconds. Even the things we order can be delivered within days. Compared to how things used to be, waiting has become scarce. When waiting is necessary, for example at a train station when the train is running late or is canceled, I have seldom seen patient and contented people.

What if the answer to our prayers is “wait”? So often, especially in this day and age, we wish for instant answers to our prayers. Yet, in some situations, God does not immediately send us an answer to our prayers, but makes us wait for an answer. Especially in our younger years, there are many decisions to be made, like choosing a career, a marriage partner, a place to live, including location and type of housing, and much more. In many instances, the answer is “wait.” During times like these, one song has become very meaningful to me.

*“Lord, my soul abides, hopes patiently,
Trusts in You completely, You help willingly.
Be not dismayed, brightly dawns the day,
After winter’s coldness spring will come to stay.
In ev’ry trial, in darkest night,
Lord, protect and shield me, my Lord, my Light.”*

“To abide” means more than “to wait.” In the Bible lexicon, we find this definition:

“Abiding means to keep patient watch for the help of God that comes in the end.” In Psalm 43:5, we read, “Why are you cast down, o my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall yet

praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God.” In a different translation, the word “hope” is replaced with “I trust you, Lord.” This verse has often been a comfort to me in times of waiting. Here, giving thanks at the end is not questioned. It is a fact the psalmist constantly reminds himself of. The psalmist was certain God’s help would come in the end. As Christians, we can trustingly wait, knowing God will help us.

The enemy wants to attack us, especially in times of waiting. He wants to use the time of waiting to weaken our faith and shorten the time of waiting by encouraging us to move in our own strength and disregard God’s will. The Bible warns us about this in the story of King Saul in 1 Samuel 13. God would have confirmed his kingdom forever if he would have waited for God’s answer. But as he waited for Samuel, he became impatient and went against God’s commands.

Therefore, it is very important to turn to God in prayer and to ask Him for the necessary patience and strength in times of waiting. The Bible can also encourage us in times of waiting. In seasons like this, I would look up verses related to the topic of “abiding” and study those passages. During those times, the phrase “and I will thank Him” has stuck with me. What an immense blessing we can receive, not only if we thank God after our time of waiting, but also giving thanks during the season of waiting, knowing that He has a way for us and that it is the best way, even though we may not always understand it in the moment.

When I look back on those times of waiting, I can only thank God. Those times can bring us closer to God and can strengthen our relationship and trust in God. If you are in a time of waiting right now, I would like to encourage you to “wait upon the Lord.” ■

A. D.

Testimony

I was born into an amazing Christian family. I had the best parents I could ever ask for. I grew up going to church, going to Sunday school, and being told stories about Jesus. I never doubted anything as a child. I remember giving my heart to Jesus a few times, but it never felt sincere and therefore it never lasted long.

Fast forward a few years to the beginning of middle school; grade 7 was a really rough year for me. I didn't have many friends; I wasn't very popular or liked by my peers. I was very shy, quiet, and I always felt lonely. Grade 8 is where things started to change for me. I was 14, and I had finally made a friend. She sat next to me in science class. We started growing closer, hanging out outside of class, and eventually I got to know the rest of her friends' group.

I soon developed a huge crush on a boy in that group. We started spending lots of time together and soon, much to my excitement, he asked me out. I remember one day we had skipped class and were wandering the park. We started talking about religion. Kind of out of nowhere, he informed me that he was a Satanist.

This had taken me back a bit. But because I liked him so much, I kind of just shrugged it off, and told him I didn't believe in anything. It did stay on my mind though. I thought about it for the rest of the day and once I got home, I decided to do a bit of research. I found many pages, websites, and articles about satanism. Eventually, my searches went from, "What is satanism?" to, "How do I become a Satanist?" I found a web page that contained a pretty long

verse. On top it basically said that becoming a Satanist is easy, all you have to do is light a candle, recite these verses, and allow Satan into your heart. Without much consideration, I did exactly that and asked him into my heart.

It wasn't a very noticeable change at first, in fact I never admitted to myself that anything had changed at all. But deep down I knew exactly what I had done. I cleared my search history immediately and closed my laptop. I remember my mom coming into my room soon after and glancing at my laptop. She asked what I was doing, and I just said nothing. I could see it in her eyes that she knew.

Looking back, I see that that's where everything started going downhill. The months went by and it's almost as if every day Satan handed me another brick to carry. Depression, anxiety, fear, restlessness, sadness . . . just little by little so I'd never notice how much weight was being added. I started to change. I had no issues with lying, stealing, or cheating. I never felt guilty. It was like I didn't have a conscience anymore. I did nothing but lie. I started hating everything around me, especially God and anything to do with religion. I never knew what was happening to me though, not really. Every time that one day would pop into my head, I'd just shrug it off. "Nothing happened that day." I'd tell myself. "This is just who I've always been. I'm happy. I'm in control, I'm my own person, no one can tell me what to do." The years went on, I grew more and more miserable, more depressed than I ever had been. I woke up every morning wanting to end my own life. I was so tired, so sad. But still I re-

fused to even believe that I wanted to change. I promised myself I would never become a Christian and secretly loathed everyone who I knew was praying for me. The void in my life kept growing bigger and bigger. I moved out on my own so I could do whatever I wanted without what I thought was a “judgmental” eye from my parents. I threw everything I could into my ever-growing void to try to fill it up; drugs, alcohol, sex, cigarettes, money, tattoos, piercings, anything I could think of that would keep me feeling good. I never felt good.

Things just got worse, and worse and worse. The burden on my back kept getting heavier. Words can’t describe how hopeless and stuck I felt.

Looking back, I have no idea how I was even able to walk anymore, especially during these last few months.

[A] Saturday is when everything changed for me. It was a night like any other. I had smoked [marijuana] before bed just like every night because it was the only thing that could make me sleep anymore. I closed my eyes and almost dozed off.

Now, you know when you’re half sleeping, and sometimes you feel like you’re falling so you kind of jump and wake yourself up? That’s exactly what I felt, except when I opened my eyes it didn’t stop at all. I couldn’t stop falling, I was sweaty, hot, panicked. I knew exactly what was happening. That’s when pure fear took over. Never in my life have I ever felt fear as terrifying and intense as that before. I was completely hysterical at this point, “This can’t happen. This can’t happen.” All I could

do was reach for my phone, desperate to call my mom. I was so scared she wouldn’t pick up the phone and I’d keep falling. But she did. All I could say was, “Mom, I’m going to hell, I’m going to hell, I’m going to hell. Please come, I’m going to hell.” I knew that I was given one last chance. I didn’t stop crying until she and my dad came.

As they both prayed, I felt something leave my body, I immediately felt lighter. Then I prayed and asked Jesus to forgive my sins. I physically felt all of my heavy burden just roll off my shoulders; I’ve never felt anything like that before. I spent the rest of the night at my parents’ house. My mom and I talked almost all night and I must have told her I loved her about 50 times (it felt like I hadn’t talked to her in years).

I know for sure my life will never go back to the way it was during those 5 years. The way I felt no love, only hate, was completely exhausting.

It’s been about a week since that amazing night and I feel lighter than ever before. I can finally start fresh as a brand-new person. I’ve gotten rid of everything that defined who I was, anything that would tie me to my old life (clothes, music, friends, even my pet snake).

I’m so, so grateful for everyone who prayed for me and never gave up; please continue to pray for me. I’m so excited to start my brand-new life and see what God has in store for me. I know for sure He has everything under control. ■

Daisy Goertzen
Barrhead, AB

Alone

| *How can we help widows and widowers?*

First, I would like to direct your thoughts to God's Word: "Learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow" (Isaiah 1:17).

"The Lord watches over the foreigner and sustains the fatherless and the widow" (Psalm 146:9, NIV).

"Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world" (James 1:27).

Here we already find important guidelines from the Bible. In addition, we would like to share an excerpt from an article written by Dr. Irene Loewen. She drew her conclusions after not only seriously considering the plight of widows and widowers but after she visited and interviewed many.

"Being widowed is much worse than I ever thought." "There are no words to describe how sad and helpless I felt." "I desperately sought help from others and spiritual support. I felt like a leaf blown about by the wind, without finding hope."

These statements describe some of the feelings of widowed people in our churches. At times, they feel neglected. On the other hand, we would like to help but often don't know how to approach someone who is widowed.

But we can learn! If you don't yet have a friend who has experienced the loss of a spouse, you will someday.

Be There for the Widowed Friend

The widowed are vulnerable. They have the great need to talk with someone, but if they share too deeply, they are afraid they may scare away the friends they so desperately need. Therefore, many try to hide their pain. "When we suffer, we sometimes act in illogical ways,"

said a widow. "Attribute this to our pain and don't think we are declaring a wish to be left alone."

Speak with Them about their Questions of Faith

"As a Christian, I felt I had to give the impression that I had everything under control, or my faith would be questioned, especially when someone told me that a true Christian would be happy knowing their spouse was in heaven and there would be no need to grieve the loss." Many who have been widowed acknowledge that God was especially faithful during the loss of their spouse. The belief in a life after death helps a Christian to process the loss. But despite a strong faith, people who are widowed have doubts at times, even questions with respect to a reunion in eternity. This is an important time to consider questions about life, death, and faith. The church is vital in the process of working through these questions! We can study God's Word with them, pray together, and remind them that God wants to hear the cries of their hearts.

Don't Forget: Healing Is a Slow Process!

Many widows and widowers sometimes hear comments like these: "Your sorrow is rather excessive!" or "You should be over that by now!" or "Forget the past and look to the future!" Those responses don't help. God never said we won't experience pain in this life or that He expects us to enjoy mourning. But God promised He would faithfully carry us through.

In the time right after the funeral, others reach out to help the widowed spouse. Six weeks later, they often feel forgotten. Most say this is hardly enough time to really believe their beloved partner will never return. In most cases, it takes about two years to really begin to feel like a whole person again.

Expect Normal Reactions

Someone who is newly widowed will be shocked, confused, in turmoil, and absentminded. Health, nutrition, and sleep sometimes take a turn for the worse. Some get scared at times that they hear footsteps or a key in the door and think their partner to be there. But no one comes! They need our help to navigate the normal stages of grieving. “As painful as it may be, grieve now! The only thing worse than dealing with a new situation is doing nothing. We are allowed to grieve.”

Share the Grief

“The more that others were sorry about my loss, the greater was my strength to accept it. It was almost as if others were carrying some of my grief.” People often avoid sharing someone’s sorrow out of fear they will make the situation more difficult. We are more likely to be helpful when we admit we also can’t understand why just this person had to die, instead of trying to make it all better.

Avoid Thoughtless Comments

If we don’t know what to say, we sometimes stumble terribly in our effort to extend sympathy. The widowed often prefer we would say nothing and just cry with them or simply admit we don’t know what to say. It’s better than hearing, “At least you still have your mother.” (She would rather have her husband.)

Focus on Memories

“Most people who have lost a spouse want to talk about them. We want to hear something about them from others who knew them, but sadly, many don’t talk about the deceased at risk of causing pain. We actually wish for the exact opposite.” A widower added: “No one wants to talk about my late wife. After 30 years of marriage, I find this almost unbelievable!” It is certainly understood: If the deceased has ever touched your life, then share this with the grieving spouse—and not only during the first few weeks.

Keep up the Contact

Widows and widowers often feel excluded from previous friendships with other couples. Comments such as these: “We thought about you yesterday evening when we went out for dinner. If your husband were still alive, we would have called you.” The affected woman felt like screaming: “But I’m still alive!”

Groups that get together often use the widowed person as the babysitter instead of inviting them to go along. Often the widow or widower is just invited if the other person’s spouse isn’t going or only if it’s a group of widows. The widowed spouses assured us: “We will not steal your husband or your wife—we only want to speak with them and hear their opinion.” Those bereaved who were included in their circle of friends considered this one of the most important factors in their healing.

Seize Special Opportunities

Every season brings special memories the grieving person has to deal with and find healing. Cards, flowers, and words that show you remember their loss and are there for them will be so appreciated.

Offer Practical Help

Those who are widowed are confronted with all the responsibilities they once shared with their partner. They need to deal with car repairs, cooking, financial issues, shopping, household tasks, child rearing, and decisions regarding hundreds of questions. Because they don’t want to impose on anyone, it is more helpful to offer: “I would be happy to check your vehicle on Saturday morning” rather than saying: “Call me if you need help.”

Encourage the bereaved to make no major decisions for the next while—at least to avoid any decisions that can be postponed. Bear in mind that a change in lifestyle may be necessary due to decreased income. This could be problematic, creating anxiety about how they will cope. Financial advice is often appreciated.

Prepare for Your Time of Sorrow

Some in the churches have been exemplary in how they have included widows and widowers in their circle of friends. The greatest challenge remains to be aware of this great necessity. Their faithfulness will be rewarded by God. And, at a later date, they will profit from their experience.

To those who are widowed, we want to say: “We want to help you get through this time!”

To those who have shared their experiences with us, I would like to say: “Thank you for making us aware of many things!” ■

Dr. Irene Loewen



On the Road of Salvation

Part 18

We Will Serve the LORD

Ron Taron

God's Plan of Salvation in the Story of Israel

“But Joshua said to the people, ‘You cannot serve the LORD, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins. If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you, after He has done you good.’ And the people said to Joshua, ‘No, but we will serve the LORD!’” (Joshua 24:19-21)

Joshua was approaching the end of his life and knew he would soon die. One last time his love to his people drove him to exhort them to make a definite decision whether to serve God or not: “And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell” (Joshua 24:15). And then he utters the familiar words: “But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”

When the Israelites protested that they would follow and serve their God who had brought them out of Egypt, Joshua countered with the astounding words: “You cannot serve the LORD”! Why would he make such a negative assertion in his last words to his people?

You cannot serve the LORD

Joshua knew his people. He saw that many of them hadn't even cared enough to seek their own inheritance in Canaan. He thought back to their constant lack of faith, to their many disobediences and deviations from God's law. Repeatedly they had turned from God and troubled Him. And now, when they publicly promised to serve God, Joshua maintained that they wouldn't be able to!

Imagine that someone would have said to you before you became a Christian: “Don't even bother seeking salvation. I know you won't be able to serve God!” Would we have taken the step, or would we have just given up? “If a pastor already tells me that there is no hope for me, why even try?”

Why did Joshua make such a harsh statement? Did he want to discourage the Israelites? Was he a bitter old man who couldn't stand to see them succeed, or for whom the people could never do things well enough? No, he looked at their spiritual stance, at their desires and practices, and he knew that in this condition they would not be committed or faithful.

“If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you, after He has done you good” (Joshua 24:20). Joshua knew they weren't ready to serve such a holy God. “You cannot serve the LORD, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins” (Verse 19). “And the people said to Joshua, ‘No, but we will serve the LORD!’” (Verse 21).

Joshua wanted to bring them to the point where they would serve the Lord with all their heart, with total commitment, and with all their strength. There could be no carelessness or compromise. They needed to be consecrated and sold out to God once and for all. Only then would they succeed, and only then would the following generations be faithful to God.

Joshua was so concerned about his people! He would no longer be there to show them the way. He, who had so often been called into the presence of God with Moses and had even been commanded to keep watch in the Sanctuary when Moses returned to the people, now had to abandon his people to their fate.



And yet, God was there! What could he, as a man, even do to protect God's people? Again and again he had had to realize that all his efforts to turn the hearts of the people to God had been in vain! And therefore, with his last words to them, he sought to compel them to an irrevocable decision: "We will serve the LORD!" Joshua knew that God had to be among them. God needed to work on and in their hearts. They needed to have his own "As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" engraved in their hearts as their passion and watchword.

"We will serve the LORD"

What about us as church of God in the 21st century? Is that also our firm assertion? Is that our irrevocable commitment, come what may? "We will serve the Lord!"

What does that entail?

1. To serve God will all of our heart and all of our soul. In Israel's story, they often served God and idols! God and Baal! God and Moloch! God and the world! Sadly, that doesn't seem to be different in the lives of many "Christians" in our time. But it is not possible to serve God in this manner. Jesus proclaimed that no man can serve two masters, and we will not manage it either. Only if we, our young people, our children, all of us, serve the Lord with all our heart and with all our love will we continue as God's people!

2. As a result of the Israelites' commitment to serve the Lord, Joshua brought them into a covenant with God. They entered into it with a promise to remain in it forever: "The LORD, our God, we will serve and

Him we will obey." Then they set up a large stone under an oak tree next to the Tabernacle as a witness to their words. It was to always remind them of their commitment: "We belong to God! We are in a covenant with Him, to serve Him and be His alone." Dear Reader, won't you also covenant with God to be His completely and unconditionally forever?

3. Along with the covenant, Joshua included terms and laws for Israel to honor. If we want to serve God, His Word must be integrated into our daily lives. It must become as much a part of us as breathing and eating. We live in a time where great efforts are made to discount all rules and designate them as legalistic. But God gave His people laws in order that they could serve Him. In the New Testament it has become the law of Christ, which remains a law of holiness and love. If it is truly our desire: "We will serve the LORD," then our love to Him will drive us to find His holy will for our life. Only in holiness is it possible to truly serve God.

4. "We will serve the LORD" also means being faithful to Him. Faithful in great things and small things. Faithful unto death, come what may. Faithful, when all others forsake Him. Also faithful in prayer, faithful in church attendance, faithful in tithing, faithful in commitment and in our love to Him.

Many things could be added here, but if it is our heart's-desire: "As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD," God will surely help us succeed. And we will never regret having lived such a life, with such a commitment: "We will serve the LORD!" ■

Fear in Time of the Coronavirus

“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me.”
(John 14:1)

To have fear and troubled hearts is only human. There are many types of fear, depending on the situation. All of us encounter fear, whether it is in a mild or more acute form.

The situation surrounding COVID-19 provokes fear in many people. It seems not only individuals but whole societies have been riddled and driven by fear and panic. I spoke with two former colleagues, and when I noticed their great fear of getting this illness, I took the opportunity to talk to them about God, who is Lord of all.

In Argentina, where I live, doctors, nurses, and truck drivers have all been affected. A certain doctor here was infected with the coronavirus, and shortly thereafter, her car was set on fire. An anonymous note saying: “Away with infected rats” was left nearby. In another case, a nurse found a memo at her door asking her and her daughter to leave the neighborhood so that they would not infect others. One doctor commented that these cases clearly demonstrate both fear and ignorance.

Truck drivers have been forbidden to use the washrooms at gas stations or to buy anything at the mini-markets. There was a family who was marked and threatened after a member of the family was admitted to the hospital. This person had an illness unrelated to COVID-19. These are just a few cases that show the extreme fear and even panic associated with the coronavirus.

What does the Bible say about fear?

The Bible tells us that fear was something that people

have always had throughout history. Situations that brought fear and panic came up again and again. Not only sinners, but also godly men and women experienced fear. Yet fear is also a weapon that the enemy of our souls uses to influence and mislead us.

When Queen Jezebel swore that she would kill the prophet Elijah, “he arose and ran for his life” (1 Kings 19:3).

David, a man of God and a valiant hero, also experienced periods of fear in his life. In 1 Samuel 21:12, we read, “David took these words to heart, and was very much afraid of Achish the king of Gath.” David also fled from his son Absalom in great fear.

The disciples had great fear when they found themselves in a storm on the Sea of Galilee and Jesus was asleep in the boat. “Then His disciples came to Him and awoke Him, saying, ‘Lord, save us! We are perishing!’” (Matthew 8:25)

The Christian and COVID-19

How do we as God’s children react to this present situation? What kind of attitude are we to have? In His Word, God has given us direction, help, and promises for every situation. In difficult times such as these, we should make use of these. It is God who holds the whole world in His hands. “The earth is the Lord’s, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein” (Psalm 24:1). God knows of the situation we are living in. I want to share a few Bible verses with you that can help you in difficult situations. Jesus says, “In the world you will have tribulation; but be of



good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Difficult situations will arise, but Jesus has overcome the world!

His promise in Matthew 28:20 is: “I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” He says, “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me” (John 14:1).

You have the privilege of bringing everything to God in prayer, “casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7). These scripture passages and many like them encourage us to put our hope in God and not to fear, despite what may be going on in the world.

There are also positive things about this pandemic. Many people in their need have become mindful of God. Some who had neglected God are praying again. The false security of wealth and money loses significance in times when the threat of danger is so acutely felt. The world is put on hold—there is still no vaccine against this virus.

One more thing—as the people of God we know that nothing happens without the will of God. The following Bible verses are fitting for the present time. Romans 8:28 states, “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.” Isaiah says, “Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you. I will uphold you with My righteous right hand” (Isaiah 41:10). Let us focus on Jesus, who has all things in His power. “Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:1-2). ■

Manfredo Guenter
Oberá, Argentina

The Church During an Exceptional Time

| *Unique experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic*

Since the beginning of 2020, the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has taken hold of

led to unusual patterns of behavior. Existential fears have become very real; the future seems uncer-

we correctly assess the real situation? On one hand, information from public sources and “reliable” media coverage have painted an extremely dangerous and unsettling picture of the coronavirus. Then there have been increasingly serious remarks and questions from scientists and experts who have come to completely different conclusions. What is really the truth, and how do we come to that conclusion?

However, these weeks have also shown us some positive things. Everything has somehow become slower-paced. Many people have begun to think not only of themselves but also of others and to be open towards those who are weaker and older. It has often been expressed that everyone feels they are in the same situation and therefore, people turn towards each other. Virtues such as showing helpfulness, care, friendliness, and patience barely seemed to exist in the last few years. However, in this special time, they seem to have turned up again and allowed society to appear in a friendlier light.



Sermon in an empty church meeting house in Neustädt, Mexico

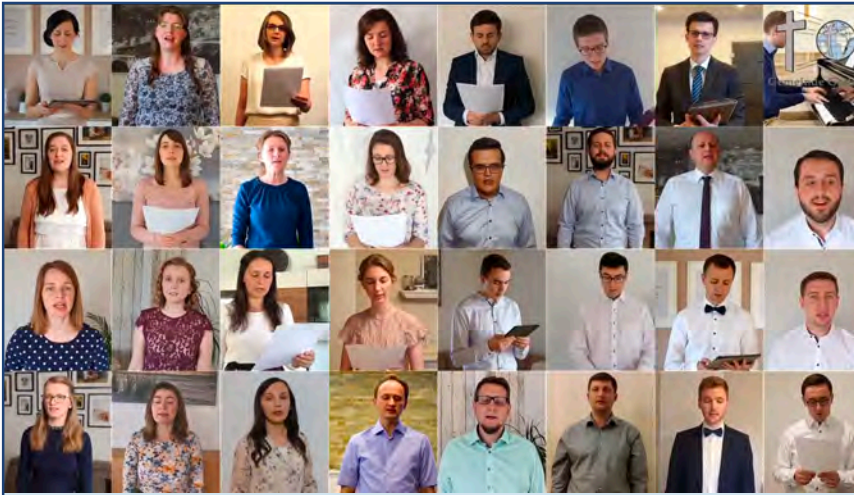
the world. Very few countries have been exempt from it. Public life has, for the most part, come to a standstill over the past weeks.

Observations of Society

The last few weeks have shown how easily people in our day are influenced. The inundation of information has overburdened many and

tain. People have been keeping an appropriate physical distance but have also outwardly and inwardly become estranged from one another. Some have been astonishingly quick to monitor people in their surroundings and inform on them.

Of note is the widespread uncertainty about the actual situation. What is really true? How can



Choir song in the church in Eppingen

Even the willingness to talk about serious issues has increased. Some people have understood this illness to be a word from God, and they have opened themselves to thoughts about eternity. Others have searched for quiet and comfort for their souls in prayer.

Our Church Life

A great awareness of the spread of the coronavirus led to many countries imposing stay-at-home orders or at least prohibiting contact with others. Events with over 10 people were prohibited nearly everywhere. This affected the corporate worship services of all faith groups in many countries, from Kazakhstan to Germany, North America to South America. The goal of these measures was to reduce the spread of the virus that may have occurred through close contact with others.

As a church, our view is that this particular case is not one in which our faith has been suppressed, but we have understood these directives to be a responsible action by the government. Therefore, many congregations have refrained from

holding corporate worship services (Romans 13:1 and Titus 3:1).

Worship Services in an Unprecedented Way

Although the usual corporate worship services are no longer possible for the majority of our congregations, all have tried to preach God's Word in various ways, for every soul requires nourishment and encouragement.

A number of congregations had begun transmitting worship services online over the last few years. Over livestream, Internet radio,

and via a phone connection, brothers and sisters and those who were interested in listening were given the opportunity to take part in the services indirectly. Due to our changed situation, livestreaming has suddenly taken on the leading role.

On Sundays and during the week, the doors of many of the houses of the Lord have remained locked. Only a small group, along with the pastor, has been able to hold a worship service in the church meeting house, which has then been transmitted over the Internet. At some locations, only the pastor and the necessary technical team have been present; at others, a few singers and prayer warriors have been there for support. Video recordings of songs and other presentations, which are then played during the worship services, have become important. In all locations, it has been a new undertaking to hold children's services and youth meetings online, but here too God has given grace and guidance. For the first time, the Easter Conference in Hamm, Germany, which has been held annually for over 60



Hymn singing in a service in Steinbach

years, and the Pentecost Conference in Herford, Germany were replaced by livestreaming at the usual worship service times, arranged by the various local congregations in Germany.

It has been difficult to fellowship with others in the congregation. Even though small home-based services have been held among families during livestreaming, the corporate prayer of believers has been missing. For this reason, one congregation has been holding prayer meetings over Zoom (similar to Skype) with congregants. Believers have had the opportunity to participate in prayer after the Bible study. In a few other locations, services have always been held over Skype/Zoom to facilitate discussion amongst congregation members and to pray together.

true fellowship, communal singing and prayer, loving greetings and hugs—especially because not all congregation members are able to use these technologies and therefore cannot take part in these online gatherings.

What We Have Learned through This

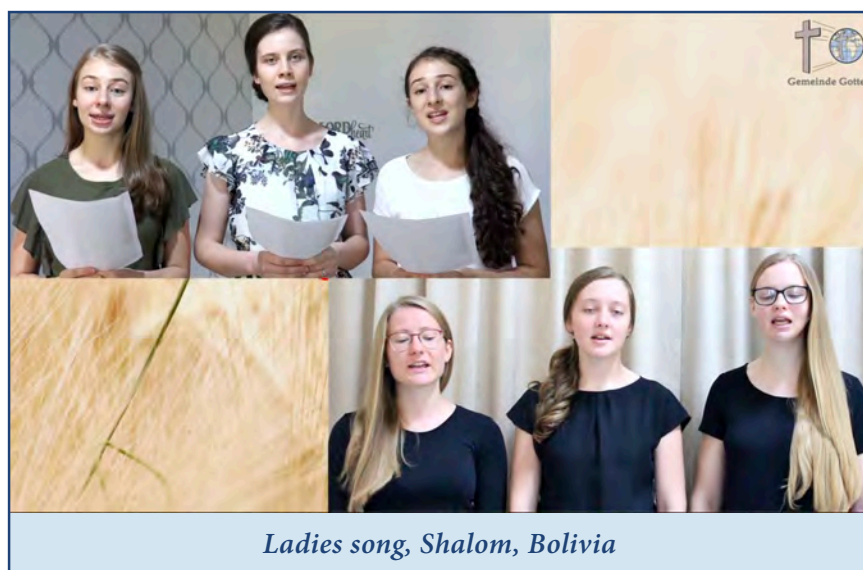
This time has taught us to be thankful. We took all of the gifts of “normal” life for granted: the blessed worship services, fellowship, being together as a family of God, freedom, and prosperity. We often didn’t treasure the worship services as much as we should have. The church of God is much more than a building, corporate worship services, or fellowship with children of God. It is the body of Christ, through which the Holy

congregations, God has closed the door to corporate worship services for now, but another door, which until now had only opened a crack, has been opened wide. Online transmission of the gospel truths in Word and song are an important way to reach people with the message of salvation in this time. Many congregations have taken huge steps forward in this regard over the past few weeks and have become more visible. In the future, we should continue to work intensely in order to bring people to godly light through this means.

We have also had to learn that each individual is responsible for the development of his or her soul. It is not the pastor and not the church that primarily cares for your soul. In all battles, temptations, and distractions, each child of God must personally carry his soul in his own hands and care for its health. So that we are not deceived, it is vital that we remain grounded in the biblical truth and live in it (Ephesians 4:13-16).

Crises come and go, but the Rock, Jesus Christ, on which the church is built, remains unchangeable. Whichever storms may confront the church, God holds and protects her with His omnipotence. We can all be at peace and entrust ourselves to His grace and godly wisdom. ■

The Editorial Team



Ladies song, Shalom, Bolivia

Further important channels of interaction, besides telephone, have been groups on WhatsApp, Telegram, and Facebook. Here, thoughts, greetings, encouragement, suggestions, and information are shared. But all of these things cannot completely replace

Spirit flows, the whole of all who are saved. This church is not dependent on outward circumstances, even when they influence her.

God has shown us the truth of His Word: that all things work together for good to those who love God (Romans 8:28). For many

Note:

The thoughts and experiences in this article were compiled from the input of leaders of various Church of God congregations in Germany and North and South America.

Endurance

Nothing is more important than endurance when it comes to achieving a goal or winning a prize. Athletes train and whoever receives the award is celebrated.

Endurance of every kind requires strength. It is very important for the child of God to have the spiritual power, the grace of God. Only through them can it fight the spiritual battle, win and achieve the eternal goal. Jesus said: “He who persists to the end will be saved” (Matthew 24:13).

There is no endurance without strength. If the Christian wants to have perseverance for God in his spiritual tasks, he must accept the power of God through faith. This will enable him to overcome the world, as John says: “Who is it that overcomes the world, if not the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:5).

The apostles were faithful to the end. Why? Because they could say: “We have all taken from his abundance, grace for grace” (John 1:16), that means strength for strength. That was the secret of their perseverance. We face many difficulties in life, and by nature people are more inclined to give up than to hold out. But what we cannot do, Christ can do through us. Paul could say: “I can do all things through the one who makes me mighty, Christ” (Philippians 4:13). Those who lack willpower will hardly be able to complete a difficult task.

One evening, discouraged and despondent by repeated defeats, Robert the Bruce, King of Scotland (1274-1329), reached a poor hut in which he wanted to rest until the following morning. There he lay on a little straw, his hands under his head and covered with his coat, until the following morning.

When the day broke, he looked at the roof structure covered with cobwebs. For a while he forgot what seemed to be a failed undertaking and watched a spider try to spin a thread from one rafter to another. She failed six times. She tried again for the seventh time,

and she finally did it! “The seventh time!” said Bruce, jumping to his feet. “I take this as a lesson for me to have persistence in my adversities. I will make another attempt for the freedom and independence of my beloved country!”

History reports the result, namely that Bruce never had to face major defeats again.

Many difficulties can only be overcome with perseverance. Therefore: “Be faithful to death, so I will give you the crown of life” (Revelation 2:10).

ANNOUNCEMENTS

(Please note that all events are subject to review and cancellation due to the current world crisis.)

Youth Retreat in Tuningen, Germany

July 31 - August 4, 2020

Camp Meeting in Blaubeuren, Germany

August 15 - 20, 2020

Fest in Seminole, Texas

September 26 - 27, 2020

Song of the Palm Tree

Out in the arid desert, where water springs are rare,
You'll find by the oasis the palm tree growing there.
The roots will still find water when days are hot and dry,
The leaves are green and healthy and stretched toward the sky.

And the righteous will flourish like a palm tree,
In the good and in the evil day;
Yes, the righteous will flourish like a palm tree
And do what's right and walk the narrow way.

While other plants may bend and break, when storm winds blow and rage,
The palm tree's roots are deep and strong and hold it firm in place.
Its shade is so refreshing, its fruit is good to eat,
How lovely is the palm tree, its beauty hard to beat.

And the righteous will flourish like a palm tree,
In the good and in the evil day;
Yes, the righteous will flourish like a palm tree
And do what's right and walk the narrow way.

Gerhard Mielke

