



Foundation of Faith

*Are you looking
forward to heaven?*

THE LIVING HOPE: ETERNAL LIFE

WHAT A CHRISTIAN SHOULD
KNOW ABOUT HEAVEN

MOMENTS OF REFLECTION

A HAPPY NEW YEAR

“I WILL GO BEFORE YOU”

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Editorial

Dear Reader,

We wish everyone God's support, comfort, grace, and help in the new year. With turbulent times on the horizon, we will all need Him in the coming weeks and months. Although hardship and difficulties have always been present, we must admit that the future does not look bright.

As we read in the Word of God, "There will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken" (Luke 21:25–26).

Yes, many are afraid and do not know where to go from here. Uncertainty and fear drive many to despair as godlessness grows, righteousness wanes, and love threatens to grow cold in many hearts.

But is this also the fate of God's children who pray to Him daily for grace and who desire to steadfastly serve Him? No, for we can share the Apostle Paul's conviction, saying, "We know that all things work together for good to those who love God" (Romans 8:28). We also know that if we are overcomers, nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Jesus Christ (see Romans 8:38–39).

No—we will not despair or sink into depression; instead, we will raise our heads and look up to Jesus Christ, our Lord, for He has promised, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

Dear Reader, that is still true in 2022. Let us therefore look away from the things of the world to Jesus Christ, the Author and Finisher of our faith!

H. D. Nimz

In God's Firm Grip

I sat on the edge of the bed and looked down at the man lying there, haggard and pale, on his deathbed.

F. R. Morgan was a great man, physically and spiritually. On fire for Christ, this ambassador led many to God. As a young minister, I had worked under his leadership. Now his days were numbered. I bent over him and asked, "How are you doing?"

He tried to gather all his strength and answered, "I'm in a lot of pain. Sometimes it's unbearable." His voice became weaker, and I feared he would not be able to say anything more.

Suddenly, a question rose in me. I had often said to my listeners that Christ helps us to triumph over death. Now here was a man who could tell me more about death—the death of a believer!

I hesitated. My thoughts went back to the time when I worked with him in the church, when he had already been sick. One day, I made the suggestion to go to my hometown to see a doctor, and he agreed. We both went for a check-up, and days later, we returned for our results. I was called in first. I

will never forget those moments. The doctor came around the table and took my hand. There was something in his gaze that worried me.

"We have run out of options," he said, as if to himself. "Any form of treatment would only delay . . ." He fell silent, studied my expression, and then quickly continued, "We can't help you anymore."

I stared at the doctor. "Are you saying I'm going to die?"

"I know this is painful. But look at the X-ray yourself." He pointed to the images and reported that there were two malignant tumors inside me. Human knowledge could no longer do anything.

I had cancer. In a single instant, everything had changed. I felt as if I was floating through air, and the globe disappeared from my field of vision. My not exactly small vocabulary, of which I was not a little proud, now seemed to consist of only one word: God! And I clung to this little word with all my strength. The doctor continued with his explanations. I no longer heard what he said. What could it mean to a person condemned to death if he knew more about his

illness? I was much too young to die!

But while the doctor was still talking, I noticed something—the name on the X-ray. I almost shouted it out, "Doctor, that's not my name!"

He looked at me for a moment, then reached for the X-ray and whispered, "The nurse switched the X-rays." Then he took my hand and said, "Can you forgive me for scaring you like that? You're perfectly healthy; there's nothing wrong with you." My gaze slid back to the X-ray. There was the name F. R. Morgan.

An indescribable pain flowed through me. I left the treatment room and walked past Morgan into the waiting room. There, I paced back and forth until he emerged, ashen-faced and with a pained expression in his eyes.

"How did it go?" I asked, because I couldn't think of anything else at the moment.

"Didn't he tell you?"

I reached for his hand. "Yes, I know. They switched our X-rays."

The words were so meaningless. F. R. Morgan looked at me for a while, and then he groaned,

I Will Give Them Everlasting Life

“I can do nothing but cling to God.”

The next day, we drove back. Now, a year and a half later, I was with him again. His voice, which had once been so strong, was hoarse and whispery, and he spoke of severe pain. But I wanted to know more. I had to get an answer to a burning question. “Can you tell me a little more?” I asked.

“The worst is already over. I am already at the gate. When I have passed through it, death will be no more, and God will wipe away all my tears.” He fell silent to rest.

“I clung to God,” he said. As if he had forgotten something important, he continued, “But He held me much tighter.”

I left the dying servant of God with the firm assurance that God not only helps us in our lives but sustains and strengthens us even as the great unknown approaches.

F. R. Morgan died a few weeks later. But I am sure God had him in a firm grip so he could overcome the iron grip of death. Now he has everlasting life with God.

L. Woodrum

A young man suffered a severe mishap as he tried to climb onto a heavily loaded wagon. His foot missed the rung stepping up, and he fell underneath the wheels as the heavy wagon rolled over him. The dying youth was taken on a stretcher to the hospital, where the doctors soon determined that his death was imminent.

One of the nurses bent over the fading man and kindly asked him, “Do you believe you are going to the Lord Jesus?”

“I not only believe that,” the mortally wounded man answered with difficulty, “I know it!”

Then he placed his healthy left hand caressingly on the head of his father kneeling at his bedside and whispered, “Don’t cry, Father. Dying isn’t terrible when you have Jesus. I’m heading now into the valley of the shadow of death; but I’m not afraid, for the Lord is with me. Tell Mom not to grieve; it’ll be alright. But comfort her, Dad. I know I will see you both again in heaven.”

His voice grew fainter and fainter; his eyelids drooped heavily, and the solemn silence of death reigned in the room. After lying still for a while, the young man suddenly opened his eyes. A joyful glow flashed across his face. Triumphant, he raised his left hand and cried out in a loud voice, “Jesus, my precious Jesus!” With that, the triumphant soul of the young witness left to be with the Lord forever.

Today’s world has become so deceived, falsely assuming that the Lord, His resurrection, God’s grace, and the hope of glory are only an empty facade of pious make-believe. It is difficult to convince people that our Savior, Jesus Christ, is truly alive and has prepared a place for us where we will be eternally gratified. No person genuinely sincere will call upon His holy Name in vain. Won’t you call upon Him? Bow your heart and knees before Him, and bring your sins to Him. He is near to all who call upon Him in truth, even to you. In Him, you shall find the gift He purchased on the cross for all: everlasting life!

G. v. Viebahn

The Last Testimony of the Apostle Paul

“For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:6-7).

In the year A.D. 64, in the month of July, there was a terrible fire in the city of Rome that raged for seven days and seven nights. Public buildings were destroyed, and many homes of both the rich and poor were burnt down. People sought refuge in the vaults of the dead. Cries of agony could be heard coming from the injured and the dying. The whole city was in turmoil and despair.

Historians tell us that Nero started the fire and then blamed the Christians for it. Then one of the worst persecutions against Christians began. Followers of Christ were nailed to crosses. They were encased in pelts covered with tar and then lit on fire and used as torches. Hungry dogs were let loose to attack and tear them apart. Devoid of any sympathy, Nero rode in his carriage amid the horror of these suffering victims, heartlessly enjoying the morbid sight.

Around this time, the Apostle Paul was a prisoner in Rome. At first, he lived in rented quarters, but during the time of the persecution by Nero, he was in one of oldest buildings in Rome, in a prison cell that had only an opening at the top through which the prisoners were let down into the dungeon. He could expect his life to end here, since he was one of the leaders among the Christians. He had only a few friends with him. Many who had been his friends had distanced themselves in fear that they too would be killed. But Paul had no fear. Death did not fill him with horror; he was ready to die.

When our own life on earth comes to an end, will we also be ready to depart and leave behind a joyful testimony of victory? It is good to contemplate this

question and to think about it. The last testimony of the Apostle Paul can be divided into four parts.

“For I am Already Being Poured out as a Drink Offering” (2 Timothy 4:6)

Paul was not really an old man yet, but his persecutors demanded his death. In fact, his martyrdom would be a sacrificial offering for the cause of Christ and the gospel. He was ready and willing to die for this cause.

What is important is not how long we live but how we live and what we do with our life. Paul knew that his life was not in vain. He could say that he had become “a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given . . . by the effective working of His power” (Ephesians 3:7). Paul had not lived for himself but for others, and for Christ.

“I Have Fought the Good Fight” (2 Timothy 4:7)

This was Paul’s testimony. He had fought with valor and determination for a good cause. He had chosen to surrender himself fully to Christ and to spread and defend the gospel of Christ. All earthly advantages had been pushed into the background, and completely lost sight of, in order to win souls for Christ. Throughout history, we find men and women who have burned all the bridges behind them to follow the call of Christ. Human glory and honor, wealth, personal advantages, and even loved ones were left behind to fulfill their calling. Peter and John left their fishing nets, and Matthew left his lucrative occupation as a tax collector.

Paul took up the battle against sin and the rampant evil during his time, and with the help of God, he was

able gain great victories for righteousness and the gospel. He carried the gospel to places where only dark heathen practices had the upper hand, and through him Christ was victorious. In every instance, Paul's victory was through the power of Jesus Christ, his mighty Savior. So why should he now fear losing his head to the executioner? He was victorious and is still considered a hero, not only by the church, but also in world history.

“I Have Finished the Race” (2 Timothy 4:7)

Paul could say this with confidence. He was like an athlete who has crossed the finish line and won; that is how Paul pictured his situation. He ran the race with the goal in mind. Nothing could deter him from reaching that goal. He was determined to “press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:14). That is how he successfully ran the race.

No doubt the question of slowing down or giving up was also a temptation the Apostle Paul had to face. We know of the great opposition and the physical hardships and suffering he had to face. But in the greatest temptation, he remembered the words of Christ on the cross, “It is finished” (John 19:20). Paul was determined to be able to say the same at the end of his race.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us be patient in the battles we face. We read that David Livingstone, after he had exhausted most of his energy in Africa's mission field, could nonetheless say on his birthday in 1872 that he would still dedicate the rest of his life to the Lord. He closed his prayer with the words, “My Jesus, my

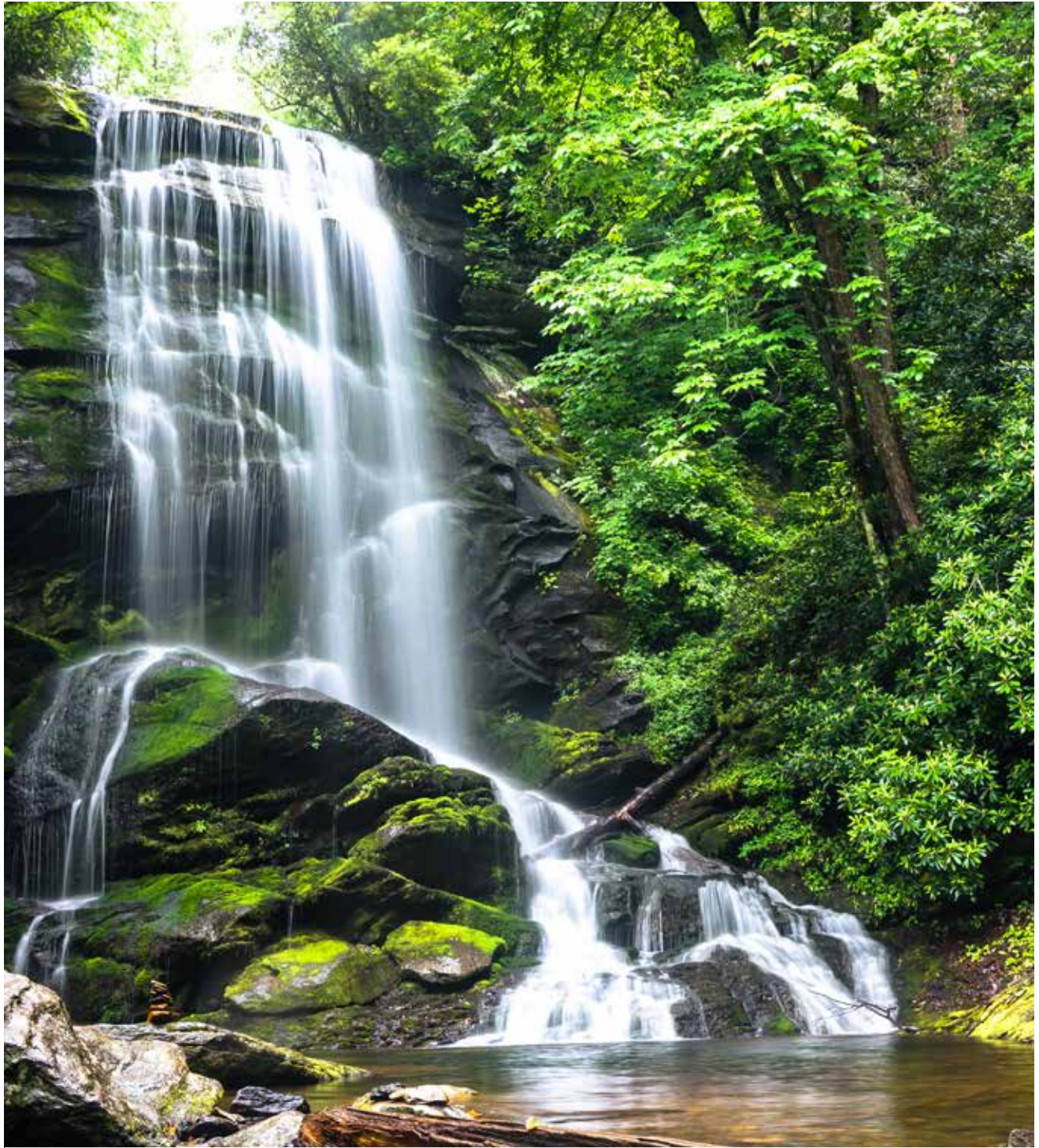
King, my life, my all, I again dedicate my whole self to You. Accept me, and grant, O gracious Father, that ere this year is gone I may finish my task. In Jesus' name I ask it. Amen. So let it be.” A year later, Livingstone had finished his race. He kept on working for Christ and for precious souls right to his end. How about us? Are we determined to fight the good fight right to the end and keep going on undeterred with our eyes fixed on the precious goal?

“I Have Kept the Faith” (2 Timothy 4:7)

With these words, Paul ends his testimony. Not once did he have a desire to go back to his old life before his conversion, to the old life under the law. He now lived by faith. He was not ashamed of the gospel of Christ because he had experienced that it was the power of God to save, to keep, and to persevere. Paul was determined never to go back to his old life. The new life was precious to him, and he loved it. Although he had to suffer much opposition and persecution for the sake of Christ, he counted this as nothing in comparison to what had been given to him by the Lord. Paul is a shining example for God's people. He could encourage people to follow his example because he followed Christ.

When the time of Paul's departure came, he knew with certainty, “There is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the LORD, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing” (2 Timothy 4:8). What will our testimony and our hope be when we must depart from this world?

H. G. Neal



The Living Hope: Eternal Life

Life eternal. Who wouldn't want to have it? Many hope to attain it once they die, and don't spend their time here worrying about it. They say, "Everybody has to die some day, but nobody knows what will happen afterwards." Others console themselves with the fact that the good Lord will sort everything out, yet they fail to seek salvation for their souls. Many don't believe in eternal life at all and believe all ends with death. Their guiding principle is to live a good and full life now, because there is no afterlife, and no reunion with loved ones.

People don't like to think about death; yet there is an anxiety about what might follow. Perhaps, they have either a secret fear or hidden desire that not everything will be finished at death. Taking a stroll through the cemetery and reading the inscriptions on the grave-stones will reveal how many people speak of a painfully deep, suppressed desire for life. Most value life. Some may say, "But if only there weren't this terrible uncertainty about it; if only we knew."

Dear Reader, today the thought of death may not bother you too much, but the hour will come when the horror of darkness will frighten you, and there will be no escape. Perhaps you have already stood by the casket of one of your loved ones. Do you still remember the feelings that went through your heart, when your soul urgently begged for life and cried out in deep sorrow, "Goodbye! Goodbye!?"

Rejoice, Loved One, if you yearn for life. Your life will never end, so God wants you to live it well (see Ezekiel 33:11). Jesus says, "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). This is for you too. But if you hope to obtain it in death, you will be deeply disappointed, because the life that lasts forever does not begin after death, rather in this lifetime. It is given to us through faith in the Savior, Jesus Christ, Who has taken away the power of death and has illuminated life and immortality (see 2 Timothy 1:10). "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life" (John 3:36). Without a living faith in Jesus, the soul is in a state of death that will last for all eternity. It is the opposite of eternal life; it is eternal death or eternal damnation.

The word "death" means separation. Eternal death is therefore an eternal separation; the soul is eternally separated from God. Jesus is the life, and whoever does not have Him does not have life.

When God created the first person, he was completely one with God. He had life from God and lived in complete, intimate fellowship and harmony with the Creator. Therefore, life is the heart's blissful fellowship with God. However, sin separated man from God. It is also what separates you from Him, if you do not yet possess life from God. If you are still living in sin, then you are spiritually dead, still living in the lusts of the flesh; you are a child of wrath, without life.

Loved One, have you already taken hold of this life in God? Are you living in blessed fellowship with God? If so, then there is no more condemnation or judgment for you, because the Spirit of God has made you free from sin and death.

Just as your physical life has needs that must be met, so does your spiritual life. Without proper nourishment, life cannot be sustained. Therefore the Lord admonishes us in His Word, "Desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby" (1 Peter 2:2). If you pretend to possess life from God and you have no desire for spiritual food, then it is questionable whether you possess life at all. If you have spiritual life, then it will be a need, not a compulsion, for you to read God's Word and have fellowship with Him in prayer. Life can only exist if it is nourished with the "Bread of Life." Jesus says, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever" (John 6:51). This means accepting Jesus into your heart and life.

True life is revealed in our daily walk. We no longer live for ourselves but for the One Who gave us life. Through the power of God, we can then live a life pleasing to Him, a life without end. With vigilance, it becomes more and more beautiful and one day reaches its completion in glory.

If you already have this life, then you need not fear death, because it becomes your gateway to glory, through which you pass from faith to sight. Paul said, "For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ" (Philippians 1:23). If you live such a life, then your death is a gain. But without this life, dying is the greatest loss. Dear Friend, what will your death be to you? There is still a good opportunity for you to gain eternal life, not through good works and various penitential exercises but through Jesus Christ alone. He wants to give the wonderful gift of eternal life to every one who comes to Him.

Wilhelm Berle

What a Christian Should Know About Heaven

Before he died, Stephen exclaimed, “Look! I see the heavens opened . . . !” (Acts 7:56).

Yes, heaven is a reality. Our salvation and God’s presence, which we can already enjoy here, are only a small foretaste of what our eternal home will be like.

The concept of heaven, the home of the blessed, is described to us using different images. In God’s Word, it is depicted as a city with twelve gates, not built with hands, streets of pure gold, a river of living water, and many dwellings. A white-robed multitude walks the streets, and Christ, the Light of the city, sits on the great white throne. All the blessed praise Him forever. No pain, no sorrow, no sin, no death, no tears are there. It is impossible to truly paint a picture of heaven because the reality will be far more beautiful and glorious!

Heaven is a place for which we have to prepare now. “I hope your master is in heaven,” someone said to an old slave, when slavery still prevailed in the southern United States. “I fear he is not there,” Ben replied, “for I never heard him speak of it. My master went where

he pleased and made preparations for his journeys weeks in advance, but I never saw him prepare for the journey to heaven.” How true those words were!

In the Word of God, heaven is referred to as a specific place. In John 14:2–3, Jesus said, “I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”

Where He is! That is what makes heaven heaven. Where Jesus is, there is heaven. And what a glorious thought: “We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2).

We do not know precisely where heaven is to be found, yet it is spoken of as a specific place.

As Jesus ascended into heaven, “He was taken up and a cloud received Him out of their sight” (Acts 1:9).

Heaven is a holy place and therefore a place of happiness. “But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life” (Revelation 21:27). No sinner can enter there.

*Heaven is a holy place,
Filled with glory and with grace,
Sin can never enter there;
All within its gates are pure,
From defilement kept secure,
Sin can never enter there.*

*If you hope to dwell at last,
When your life on earth is past,
In that home so bright and fair,
You must here be cleansed from sin,
Have the life of Christ within,
Sin can never enter there.*

The God of heaven is holy, all the inhabitants of heaven are holy, and we must also be holy if we want to go there.

Heaven is real. The Apostle Paul says: “For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (2 Corinthians 5:1). If I lose heaven, then everything is lost to me.

Heaven will be our eternal home. Home—what a wonderful sound! There we will be together with all the saints, having fellowship with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the prophets, Peter, James, John, and Paul, and with an innumerable multitude throughout history. We

will see our loved ones who have gone before and who will follow us. And the most glorious of all, we will see our Savior!

The Apostle Paul tells us that “the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18). Therefore, in days of temptation and various difficulties, let us not despair, but remember that our home is above, in the light, and sing with the poet:

*Look up, my heart, to heaven,
Look up to heaven high,
For this poor earth can never
Give peace or satisfy.
In God's own verdant pastures
There's joy forever after.
True peace is there, that's why
I look to heaven high.*

*O Lamb on Calvry's hilltop,
Your presence is so dear.
Had I the wings of eagles,
I'd fly away from here.
I'd fly to heaven's glory,
Where saints relay Your story,
True peace is there, that's why,
I look to heaven high.*

E. M.



In the Lazaret

The military hospital—for many soldiers it was a death camp. Here a disciple of Jesus had the opportunity to tell the seriously wounded and dying about the hope of eternal life through Jesus Christ. She certainly had no idea how far-reaching the seeds would be sown; but she would learn about it, if only in eternity alone. Perhaps this report can also impact you for eternal life.

It was during the war. Having gained access to the wounded soldiers in military hospitals, a woman was led on her usual morning tour to a patient who urgently desired to speak to her. What she experienced there, she related herself:

“I found a pale young man on the narrow cot who, to my astonishment, knew my name.

“He said, ‘When I was admitted to the military hospital, I was pleased to learn that I was placed in this very hospital to recover. I had hopes of seeing you, because I’ve heard a great deal about you. Some time ago, as you were reading to a wounded man here, several of his comrades came to his bedside to visit him. You interrupted your reading, addressed the visitors with a few kind words, and then asked them if they were also true soldiers of Christ prepared to die. This account has often been told to me, so I know it very well.’

“The sick man drew breath for a moment and then continued. ‘You also distributed the tracts that you carried in your bag. It turned out that one of the soldiers did not receive one because your supply ran out. Instead, you pulled a notepad out of your pocket, wrote some words on it, and told the soldier who had stopped by, ‘Take this note instead of a tract. If I don’t see you again here on earth, I hope to see you up there.’”

“As the wounded man was telling me this, he pulled a folded paper from his pocket, and I immediately recognized my handwriting. Written on it were the first five verses of 2 Corinthians 5, including this poem:

*The name of Jesus has been engraved
Upon my heart with gladness.
No word has sweeter sounded
Than Your name, O Son of God!
Hope of all the sin-sick sinners,
Comfort to the very sad;
The heart that seeks Thee must give thanks;
What joy abounds when You are found!*

“‘The man who carried this paper,’ he continued, ‘had served longer than I but now was with me in the same company. As often as we stopped during our last combative advance, my comrade would pull this paper out of his pocket and gather everyone he could around him. He would read the words aloud and at times even pray in a heartfelt manner. Then he related how he had come to obtain this piece of paper which was so precious to him. He mentioned your name, since you led him to Jesus. He then concluded these brief gatherings, usually by looking up with teary eyes and a happy expression on his face and saying with emotion, ‘The sweet name of Jesus!’”

“‘Then the raid and attack occurred that tore my dear comrade and my guide to Jesus from my side. He had suspected it and spoke openly to me about it. How great a loss in losing him! But I must not keep grieving. He is now experiencing what your paper (which had become so dear to both of us) has so often spoken of. I was an orphan from my youth, so I felt privileged to call him my friend and brother, especially since he introduced me to Jesus. Jesus

has now replaced all my loss and given me everything!

“It is almost impossible for me to describe the pain I felt, seeing the only person on earth whom I loved, lying in his blood. I knelt down beside him and stayed with him.

““Dear Willy,” he whispered, “I’m going home now. Don’t worry about me. I am happy. How glorious the name of Jesus sounds! Read me the poem again!”

“I pulled the blood-spattered paper—see the stains here—out of his pocket and read the verses to him. “Yes, Jesus’ name, O, the glorious sound! Good night, Willy.” With these words he closed his eyes forever.”

“The soldier’s countenance was even paler than usual, and his voice faltered. “The doctor gave me hope that I would soon be able to return to duty. I know better. I will soon follow my friend, Walter. Yes, soon we will be reunited. Please forgive me that I have kept you so long.”

“His voice failed again. I also could not speak. I knelt down at his bedside with a silent prayer. When I rose, the countenance of my young friend showed the expression of deep peace and great joy.

“I do not long for this life here on earth. Thank God, I have a sure, joyful hope! How many a man have I seen pass away in the most dreadful fear.

“I left his bedside, deeply moved, never to see him again. The guards told me that he continued to talk about the Lord Jesus until the end. By the evening, he was already buried.”

Dear Reader, if you desire to depart this earth joyfully, the Word of God must be your source of redemp-

tion. God often uses a few verses of His Word to move a person’s conscience. The words on that soldier’s note began with the verse, “For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (2 Corinthians 5:1).

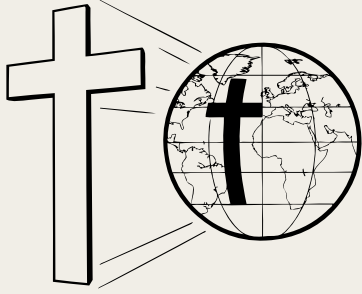
These lines were probably intended to present this question to the two young soldiers: “Do you know this with certainty for yourself?”

Many people hope to go to heaven. However, God’s Word always speaks of certainty. It clearly shows the way of salvation and does not leave any sincere person in anxious doubt.

This loving question is now directed to you. Do you have assurance of salvation? Can you lay down your head in peace? And, in the face of death, can you express with joy that your path leads to Jesus?

Yes, the name of the Lord Jesus is exceedingly precious to the believer. He is the Rock upon which your salvation must be founded. If you know Him as your personal Savior, death can no longer frighten you.

You will get to know the Lord personally when you come to Him as a lost sinner, confessing your sins. Have you already knelt before Him in true repentance? This is the way God gives you faith in what took place at Calvary. In the wretchedness of our sin, if we claim the Crucified One for ourselves and believe with all our heart that His blood has made atonement and washes us clean from all sin, then this peace enters our heart. “The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). ■



Radio Program Message of Salvation

Friedrich Krebs
Kitchener, ON

Keep Jesus Christ in Remembrance

A neuroscientist once said, “When you think, you change the structure of your brain.”—We decide what we think. And our thoughts influence our mood, our actions, and much more. Therefore, take this advice to heart: direct your thoughts completely to Jesus Christ.

On the first day of the new year, the familiar song “Jesus, lead the way, lead us every day” is sung in many a worship service. This is what every congregation and every child of God wishes for. But then the lyrics continue, “In You, constantly abiding, trusting in Your faithful guiding.” Do we really want His guidance? That’s what matters, and only then can we truly say, “Lead us with Your hand to the Promised Land.” We need His guidance; nothing could be better for us. Therefore, “Remember . . . Jesus Christ” (2 Timothy 2:8).

What goes through our minds on the first day of the new year? King David penned these meaningful words: “They looked to Him and were radiant, and their faces were not ashamed” (Psalm 34:5). We all experience the burden of negative thoughts, and the effects of looking at something we shouldn’t. But those who look to *Him* will be refreshed.

At the beginning of the year, everyone looks questioningly into the future. We would like to see a lot of what might happen, but in reality, we see very little. The future is hidden from us, and the Apostle James

says, “Whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow” (James 4:14a). Even the promising predictions of great people do not often come to fruition. Yet they leave us not completely unaffected. When faced with worrisome questions, some like to look back and think of better times. Others, however, look ahead courageously and hopefully even in the face of suffered losses.

But in both views, most do not lift their eyes above the earthly realm. The author of Psalm 121 praises God when he says, “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.”

This man’s gaze went upward beyond the mountains to God Almighty. He had a personal relationship with his Creator and had experienced Him as a gracious guardian in life. This same God watches over you and will not let your foot slip. He also guards your soul, as well as your coming in and going out, all the way to eternity.

Included in that Psalm is the faithfulness of God’s guidance at the beginning and end of each year. What



a joyful and blessed certainty! Dear Friends, our Lord wants to guide us, provided that our eyes look to Him and our heart seeks Him. A poet wrote, “We can feast from His goodness in all quietness. You can always have Him if you want Him.” And that is exactly what our Lord is watching and waiting for.

From the beginning, the New Testament leads us to the name “Jesus.” His name is Jesus; He is the Savior and Redeemer of the world! He came into the world, a world full of misery, fear, and destruction, a world full of selfishness, enmity, suffering, and struggle. This world needs a Savior and Redeemer today.

Jesus Christ is the main theme of the Bible, and since He is the light of the world, He also provides the best direction in the increasing chaos of this world. He alone can give our lives meaning, orientation, and purpose. This is what the message of Jesus is meant for.

If we want to get through this year safely, we need God’s Word, the Bible. It is in this spirit that the 119th Psalm begins, “Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD!” Then the author

prays, “Direct my steps by Your word, and let no iniquity have dominion over me” (v.133). A faithful pilgrim once said, “I leaned on God’s Word all my life, and it was always a good and reliable support for me.”

After the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, they encountered severe trials of faith to test them. Distressed by the burdens of the day, the people looked to yesterday and to tomorrow but failed to look up to God in the moment. Let’s be careful to look to Jesus today and every new day. If you are tempted and struggle, know that you can win with Jesus. If you suffer injustice, remember that Jesus endured far greater injustice. If you are shunned and despised, know that He was “despised and rejected by men.” If the burden of your life seems too heavy for you, know that “He, [bore] His cross,” and He also knows your cross and your burden and wants to help you carry it. Oh, how profitable it is to look to Jesus!

Therefore, “Remember . . . Jesus Christ” and that those who look to *Him* will be refreshed (Psalm 34:5). With these words, we wish everyone a joyful and blessed year’s journey! ■

From the Working World (3)

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts’” (Isaiah 55:8-9).

During my continuing education, I rented a room in Frankfurt. On the day of my move, I packed only the most necessary things into my small car, so it was fully packed. The weather on that day was gloomy and rainy. On my way, I kept thinking of how I would unload all my things in the constant rain if I couldn't get a parking spot close by. The parking spots in front of the student housing were limited and were mostly occupied during the day. As I got closer to Frankfurt and it was still raining, I prayed quietly for God to pause the rain so I could unload my things. But then I asked myself if God really needed to pause the rain? God certainly could, but maybe there were other possibilities. I put everything in God's hands and trusted that He would have a good solution.

When I got to the student housing, every parking spot close by was taken. The next parking opportunity was the next street (around 700-800 meters away). I ran to the student housing in the rain, still trusting that God would not leave my prayer unanswered and that He would have a solution.

After I had registered with the housing management and the organizational things were done, the property manager told me, “I will open the gate to the driveway. You can drive directly to the entrance to unload.” A few steps from the main entrance, there was a parking spot specifically designed for moving in, and for ambulances or fire trucks. The gate could only be opened by the manager and was usually closed. I had thought of several scenarios earlier, but this option hadn't come to mind.

Happy and thankful for the answered prayer, I unloaded my things. The rain didn't bother me now as I was parked very close to the entrance. It seemed to

Never venture
out or dare
to leave your
home
without
God's Word and
prayer!

be a “small thing,” but for me in that moment, God's faithfulness had been proven. I want to give thanks and honor to Him for that!

God showed me through this encounter that He answers our prayers, sometimes differently than we think, but He hears and helps us.

Had I only focused on the rain stopping, I would have been disappointed by an unanswered prayer. It's more important to tell God our problems and to wait for His solution and to trust in His help. He often has means and ways we don't even consider.

Dina Grötzinger, Eppingen (DE)



Bible Reading and Prayer— More Than a Good Resolution

It is a widespread tradition to make New Year’s resolutions. You set yourself a goal to accomplish a certain task or to improve in a certain area. I think you know the typical resolutions—be more active, reduce stress, or lose weight. These resolutions are usually only fulfilled in a few cases.

We want to turn our attention to two things today that have such importance and impact on our lives that they should be far more than just a good New Year’s resolution. When we recognize their importance, we will make them a habit that we constantly hold on to. It revolves around the main foundation of the Christian life: daily prayer and Bible reading.

What makes reading the Bible and prayer so important that we should take time daily? I don’t think it will be hard for you to list a few things.

In Joshua 1:8, God shows us the value of reading the Bible: “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.”

You will notice in the Gospels that Jesus often prayed. Jesus’ prayer must have had an impact on His disciples, because they asked Him, “LORD, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1). From this conversation alone, we see the value of prayer. The disciples didn’t ask Jesus to teach them how to preach, how to heal the sick, or how to walk on water. It was His prayer life that made a great impact on them.

There are so many reasons to not have time for prayer or Bible reading. As soon as the day begins, we have a lot to do. We run from one seemingly important appointment to the next. There often doesn’t seem to

be enough time for Bible reading or enough time in our minds for thoughts about God.

That is why Bible reading and praying need to be anchored in your daily routine, like brushing your teeth.

Here are some tips for quiet time:

1. Put your phone away. It really is one of the biggest distractions. So turn it off or lay it aside so you’re not tempted to check it.

2. Set yourself a specific goal for reading your Bible. It could be a certain amount of time you take or a specific passage (e.g. a chapter a day).

3. I find it helpful to do my devotions at the same time and in the same place. Since I have personally learned how hard it is to find quiet time during the day, I set time aside right after getting up. And no, you’re not too tired. The opposite is true. Your head is the most clear in the morning. Try it.

4. Sometimes it takes effort. Just start. “Appetite develops while eating.”

5. Don’t let yourself be discouraged if you don’t understand something. Pray about it and keep reading. God will explain it to you when you’re supposed to understand it.

You haven’t yet found a routine for your personal devotions? Then now is the time. It is worth it.

Stefan Schmelzle

Two Ways

Somewhere on a lonely country road in the Taunus mountain range in Germany, a bright spring day was coming to an end. The birds were singing their evening song. Over meadows and fields, the joy of spring's arrival was resonating.

I sat down on a stone and enjoyed the peaceful evening. Then a very old man came along the path, his back hunched, his hair and beard gray. "Good evening!" I called to him cheerfully. There was no answer. I called louder, "Good evening!"

Then he spun around for a moment and growled, "You'll get the sniffles if you sit there much longer!"

I had to laugh. But then I got up and went after him. "Nice evening," I said.

"Cool," he growled.

"Spring is here!" I said.

"About time," he grumbled.

This continued for a while, while I tried to improve his mood. He just grumbled and scolded. Then my patience broke. "Tell me, dear man, do you not have anything to be happy about?"

Then he looked at me with unspeakable bitterness and sadness and said harshly, "No!" As if a dam had been torn away, a stream tumbled out of accusations against the world, against his existence, against the current conditions and against his children.

The poor old man! He had once been young and had certainly sought joy and had embraced hope. Now, at the edge of the grave, he was left with nothing but great disappointment and boundless bitterness. Now he had become old, and the outcome of his life was nothing but a heart without peace.

"Do you not have anything to be happy about?" I had asked him.

"No," was the answer. He stood there empty-handed at the end of his life, a hurting soul.

Then I ventured a final question: "Have you no hope of the life to come?"

Energetically and angrily he waved me away, saying, "That's all nonsense!" And with that he went off onto a side path.

For a long time, my eyes followed the miserable, bent figure. His last words had revealed to me the secret of his misery. He had a life without peace with God, destitute and lost. There was nothing left to rejoice in. Only dread.

While I watched him, another image appeared in my memory: Not long ago, I was standing at the bedside of a strong man in his prime who was preparing to die. His wife sat next to the bed, and around him stood a number of crying children, who would be left unprovided for.

Then the dying man asked, "Children, sing me another song!"

"What was that, Daddy?"

"Sing to me," he said in a weak voice. "Sing the verse, 'O That I Had a Thousand Voices.'" And then all distress and the dread of dying was dispelled by their praise of God:

*O that I had a thousand voices!
A mouth to speak with thousand tongues!
Then, with a heart His praise rejoices,
Would I proclaim in grateful songs
To all, wherever I might be,
What things the Lord has done for me.*

This revealed the contents of a life reconciled with God through Jesus Christ. In view of the past and in view of the future of dying, there was only the praise of God.

How will you stand at the end of your life? Both ways are still open to you. Choose well! ■

How Beautiful Heaven Must Be!

When we look at the beauty of God's earth, we are compelled to exclaim. The flowers, the trees, the clouds and the stars—everything is a miracle in our eyes.

How great and marvelous is God, the Creator of all things, and His heavenly home! We have a longing to see heaven. But how do we get there?

When our beloved Lord Jesus was on earth, He spoke of the way to heaven. He once told people who wanted to get to heaven that there is a great, wide door, leading to a comfortable and broad road, but it leads further and further away from heaven. The longer you walk on this road, the darker it gets, until you end up in utter darkness.

Many walk through this door and on this path, even children. They argue and fight, lie and deceive. Each person carries a burden of sins with them.

But then there's a smaller, narrower door. Whoever wishes to walk through this door has to leave their sinful heart, hatred, anger, disobedience, de-

fiance, and stubbornness, their whole burden of sin outside. The door is so narrow that only a clean heart can enter. From this door, there is a very narrow path that leads directly to heaven. Each child can find. It's very close to the heart of Jesus, because it's marked by His own drops of blood that flowed from His nail-pierced hands and His head as He hung on the cross.

How wonderful it would be if many children walked this narrow, smooth path to heaven! The Lord leads the way right at the front, and everyone follows Him. We simply have to follow, because all the sinful and difficult things, things that often cost us tears, are left outside of the narrow door.

Who wants to enter through this door with us?

One door and only one, and yet its sides are two.

Inside and outside, on which side are you?

One door and only one, and yet its sides are two.

I'm on the inside; on which side are you?



A Blessing in the Evening

Concerning the righteous, the Word of God says, “They shall still bear fruit in old age; they shall be fresh and flourishing, to declare that the LORD is upright; He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him” (Psalm 92:15–16).

Fruitful and fresh—this testifies to vitality and joy, to shining eyes and grateful hearts. How beautiful when older people are perceived in this way, especially by young people, perhaps by their children and grandchildren. It is like a light that draws us toward it in the darkness. Time spent with such people is extremely valuable and encouraging, giving strength and courage to face the current storms of life. Their sympathy comforts, and their experiences give hope. Again and again they pause to thank their Savior from the depths of their souls for His grace in their lives.

Yet we have all historically encountered older people with an entirely different radiance. As a young person, I can remember encountering elderly people who were only concerned about themselves. As soon as the conversation started, they steered it to their own interests or exploits. Or they complained about how terrible other people were and how badly they were doing right now. Others had the commanding tone of a general, tolerating no contradiction and demanding immediate obedience. Then I met those who seemed worried, and therefore struggled to sleep. Everything is already so terribly bad today—but in the future it will be unimaginably worse. Some old people love very much, but unfortunately, they love only themselves and their money. Towards others they can be hurtful, unloving, and selfish, even their neighbors. Their countenance is usually unfriendly; they constantly criticize and blame; nobody can please them. Even if you make the greatest effort, they are dissatisfied and quickly offended.

It is a fact: age does not make us holy. In old age, it is precisely the qualities and character of a person that become more apparent. Spiritual and unspiritual characteristics stand out more because they are no longer hidden by the occupations, tasks, and positions of active life. Children of God who have their place in the house of God and draw their strength daily from the holy place bear the rich fruits of the Holy Spirit, even

in old age. They are spiritually healthy in faith, firmly grounded on the rock of Jesus Christ, and are at home in the promises of Scripture. Through their experiences in following Jesus, their lives are rich with miracles of God’s grace. They have become amazingly small in their own eyes, because the Lord and Savior is the sole cause of all their blessings and joy.

Unfortunately, old age is not a safe haven from temptations, selfish diversions, and hardships. Only in eternity with God are we safe from our temporal lives. Here on earth, the enemy of the soul will visit us, regardless of the time of day or the degree of our physical strength. Therefore, even in old age, we need something that is hidden and mysterious to most people. We need something far more expensive and valuable than the riches of the wealthiest people on this earth. We need this special something like daily medicine. If we don’t have this mysterious formula, we become weak and vulnerable to problems and hardships. We need the grace of God in our lives every day anew. Without grace, we become a burden to ourselves and to others. But the grace of God brings the glow, lightness, and thankfulness of heaven into our lives. Isn’t it wonderful that John had already discovered that “of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace” (John 1:16)? Even in old age this grace makes us live with the mind of Christ and makes us more and more like Him.

Have you already found a way for more of God’s grace to come into your life? When it’s too dark in your room, it often helps to clear the windows, open the blinds, and allow the sun’s rays an unobstructed path into the room. Grace comes from God, and it is His definite will to make our lives rich in grace as well. God is not the cause for its scarcity, because He has an unimaginable abundance, and wants to share it with us.

A simple approach to grace is demonstrated in 1 Peter 5:5: “Be submissive to one another, and be clothed

with humility, for God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” Is it easy to be submissive and humble? Try to imagine whether the people I told you about (above, in my second paragraph) were submissive and humble. No, they certainly were not. Rather, I perceived just the opposite, which is why their presence was so uncomfortable. It is impossibly difficult on our own to have a disposition of submission and humility toward others and God without effort. For grace comes to us only when we sincerely and openly come to God, acknowledging His majesty and wisdom, and embracing the knowledge that everything positive in our lives is received only through God’s mercy and goodness. By His grace alone we have our physical strength, intellect, and talents, the courage to make right decisions, and protection from danger. Even our daily health of body and spirit is grace from His hand. We need only look to many in your age group whose strength has decayed and who have lost the key to their memory.

When we see ourselves in this way, in perfect dependence and indebtedness to God, then grace can flood into our lives daily without hindrance. God’s grace is so abundant that many others can still be immersed in this flood and be richly blessed.

Along with God’s gift of grace in our lives, He generously gives us two more gifts that make us exceedingly attractive to others: love and gratitude. Love for God and love for people. Your children and grandchildren will feel this gift in you. Love opens our eyes to perceive the shadow of worry in the young. Love makes us ask gently and wisely so that hearts are opened. How comforting it is when young people can talk to you about their worries at school and perhaps about heartbreak and fears because they realize that you love them from the bottom of your heart and because they know you will listen, and not criticize them or rebuke them, but will remember your own experiences with understanding.

Your adult children, too, may give voice to their daily struggles in life and be grateful to receive your kind words of encouragement. When their problems stand before us like insurmountable mountains, like an abyss that seems to have no bottom, gratitude gives you wings. Then, when you can tell your children about the wonderful gifts of God in your life, the help in hopeless need, when your eye fills again with tears of gratitude, many a young heart finds the star of hope, of divine wisdom and grace.

Do not grumble and complain, even if you feel like it. Now you need a special measure, a special dose, of divine grace. Lock the door and go in silence to your Father. In your private sanctuary with God, your grace tank will be refilled to overflowing, and God will be glorified anew in your life.

Hermann Vogt

Prayer of an Elderly Person

Many of those who were once young with me are no longer alive. You let me grow old, Lord. My feet are tired; my eyes have become weak; my diminishing strength reminds me increasingly of the end. Oh Lord, let it be a blessed end! For the last stretch of this journey, please give me a grateful and patient heart, that I may willingly endure the toil and discomforts of old age and not grumble about them. You know about the gap between my generation and the next one and the lack of understanding between us. Lord, fill me with goodness and let my being reflect Your peace! Amen.

Marie Hüsing

Moments of Reflection

Another year has passed. Like a stream, it has flowed into the sea of eternity—a year full of toil and work, joy and sorrow, misfortune and blessings, and many privileges and opportunities that can never be captured again. As this new year begins, let us pause and reflect on the past.

The Past

Some serious questions should arise for us all: How have I spent the past years of my life and especially the days of the past year? Did I live as I should have lived? Did I talk and act as I should have? Did I take full advantage of the precious time God gave me, by His grace? Did I apply the opportunities, health, strength, and talents God gave me? Did I waste them on myself, for self-interest, or even in the service of sin and Satan?

Or did I live and work for God, for eternity, and for others? What efforts did I make to further the cause of our Lord Who suffered for us? Did I pray urgently enough for the salvation of the lost? How much time and effort did I expend reaching out to the lost, bound by their sins, and leading them to the cross of Jesus?

Can we look back on the past with a clear conscience because we have faithfully served the Lord, or have barriers come up that stand between us and God—things that accuse us, words we should not have spoken, words that have inflicted wounds and destroyed the reputation of others? Let's spend some time in self-examination.

The Present

Ephesians 5:16 encourages us to “[redeem] the time, because the days are evil.” Now is the time to reach out. Today belongs to us. We have no guarantee for tomorrow. Let's live today like we'll one day wish we would have lived, as if this day will be our last. Let's ask ourselves: Am I fulfilling the purpose and mission of my life? Am I an obstacle to the cause of God, or a stumbling block to others? Is there a danger that I will hinder the truth through unrighteousness living? Am I exerting an influence on others that will draw them to ruin, or am I a blessing to them?

The Future

Everything is rushing towards eternity. The future will show us which preparations hit the mark, and whether we have used our time wisely. As the seed, so will be the harvest. One day, we will realize the value of time, the meaning of a word, and the great importance of an action. In eternity, we will finally realize the extent to which every thought, every word spoken, and every deed done has determined our eternal destiny. Our entire life will pass before our eyes. There, in the light of eternity, we will recognize how life was in reality.

Therefore, the prophet says, “Prepare to meet your God” (Amos 4:12)—the God who will come with all of His angels to hold judgment. All nations will stand before Him, and all hidden things will be revealed. Look into the future and test yourself.

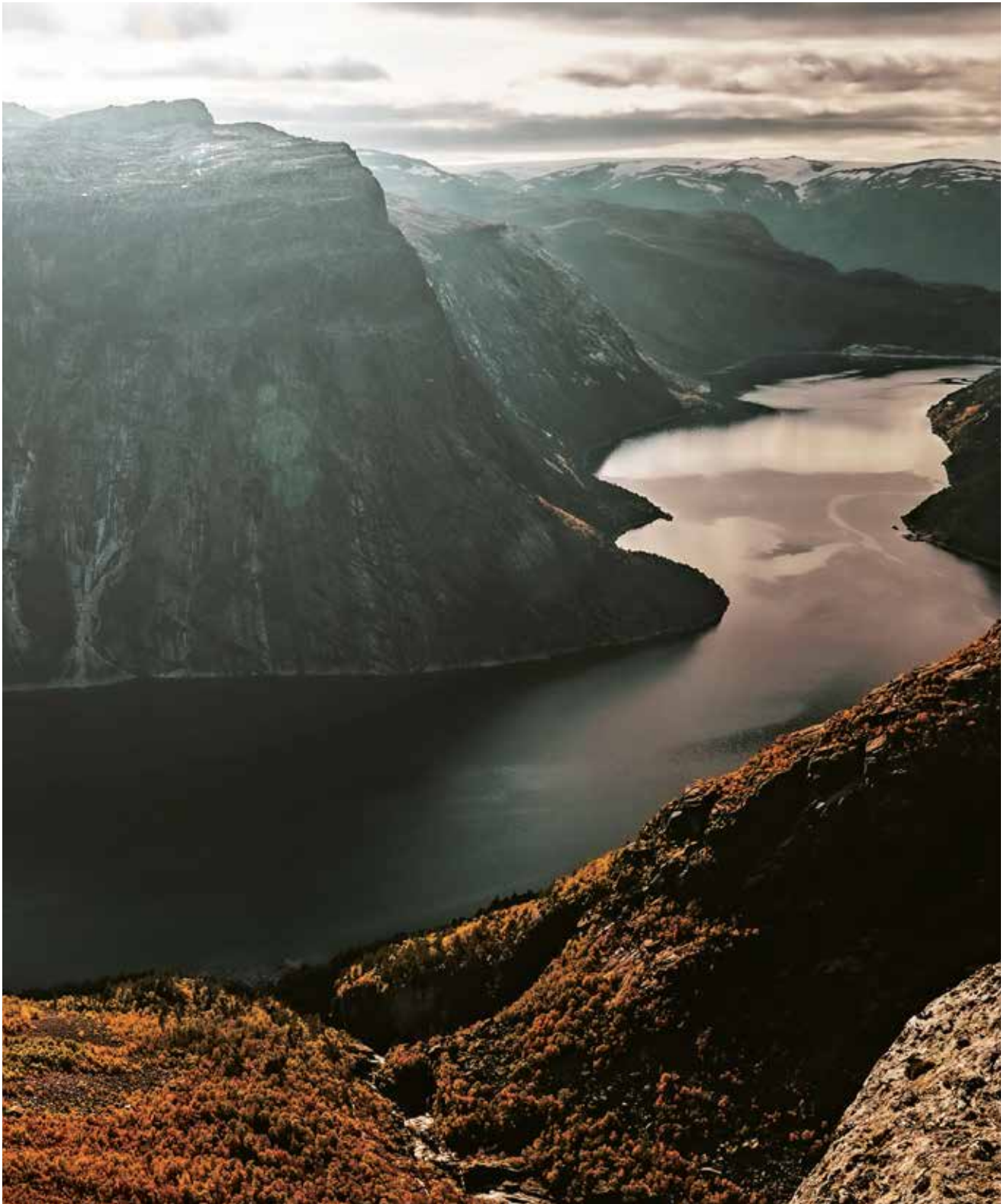
The World

The world is in disarray, say the Scriptures. It is a world full of injustice, unrest, burden, sin, guilt, crimes, and murders. Immoralities of all kinds, such as adultery, etc., are the order of the day. Like madmen, the masses are in wild pursuit of wealth, honor, and pleasure, the end of which is eternal ruin. The longer time goes on, the worse it gets. Truly, this world is ripe for judgment. In the distance, the dull roll of thunder of approaching judgment can already be heard. Whoever is a citizen of this world will also perish with the world. The admonishing call resounds from the world of eternity, “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever” (1 John 2:15–17).

As the old year rushes away and the new one makes its entrance, let us once again look into the past, the present and also the future. Let us also take a look into our heart and ask ourselves: Does God and His justice and peace dwell in it? Or is our heart as empty

and barren as the cold world around us? Is it cleansed of all sins by the blood of Jesus, or is there a hidden enemy deep within who wants to make us miserable and destroy us for time and eternity? Let us pray like

the Psalmist, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139:23–24). ■



A Happy New Year

At the start of a new year, most people resolve to make the coming year better than the previous one. Twelve months later, most find that their expectations remain unfulfilled, and their best hopes did not bear fruit. We might ask ourselves: How can they be fulfilled, and what do we need in order to have a happy new year?

First, we need to know that we have a Savior and that, through His work and our faith in His sacrifice, our sins are forgiven. Sin is the ruin of humanity, and sin is what makes people unhappy. Some people dream of joy and count themselves lucky because they are doing well financially. But true peace and joy can only be found when sin has been banished from our hearts through God's grace and the power of the blood of Christ. Sin brings darkness, weakness, and death.

Some people try to hide or excuse their sins, but this does not soothe a guilty conscience. Trying to overlook sin does not fix anything because, deep in our hearts, we still hear a voice that cannot so easily be silenced.

Some people seek peace in the world, in scientific studies, or in the company of like-minded people. This peace is shallow and ephemeral and cannot hold up to the quiet hours in which our souls are filled with the fervent conviction that we are not reconciled with God. Therefore, we have no claim to eternal salvation after the end of our short lives here. In the midst of all the hustle and bustle, we hear a voice saying, "Repent and believe in the LORD Jesus Christ so your sins may be forgiven." Whoever hears and obeys can then join with the psalmist and say, "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases" (Psalm 103:2-3).

If we have become children of God, we should be willing and ready to serve the Lord. As long as we allow others to do what we ourselves should be doing, we cannot be happy. Some people seem to have trouble learning that giving is better than receiving. They only ever want to take. If we truly love God, it a joy to serve Him! Because we are not yet in heaven, where we will be able to rest from our labors, the word of the Master still applies, "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you

did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me" (Matthew 25:40). He was an example to us in service. Wherever He traveled, He did good.

The new year will offer us many opportunities as long as we are open to them. If we have consistently served the Lord and those He places in our path according to His Word, then the blessing and approval of God will rest upon us, and peace and joy in the Lord will fill our hearts.

We should also not torture ourselves with unnecessary worrying. The Lord and the Apostle Paul often said, "Do not worry." Many of the worries we entertained in recent years were unnecessary. Perhaps we were afraid of things that never happened. Christ urges us not to worry about tomorrow because each day has enough troubles of its own. There area also God's promises to give us the strength and grace we need for all the various times and needs we encounter.

One reason why we should not worry unnecessarily is that God, in His wisdom, has hidden the future from our eyes. Many of us carry a burden borrowed from the future. Today's troubles would be bearable on their own, but adding tomorrow's overloads our strength. It is not wise to pile tomorrow's troubles on top of today's.

Finally, we should not forget that our trials and tribulations turn into blessings under God's guidance. "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience" (James 1:2-3). "We know that all things work together for good to those who love God" (Romans 8:28).

Whatever the new year may bring will turn out to be for the best for those who love God. We cannot even predict what is best for us: profit or loss, joy or pain. Let us therefore leave it all in our Heavenly Father's hands. However He leads us is the right path. Our only worry should be to follow Him faithfully and conscientiously. As we enter the new year, let us live in joyful service to the Lord, maintaining a childlike, firm faith in God at all times and steadfastly following Jesus. Then the new year will be a good one, from beginning to end. A difficult year can still be a happy one! ■

One More Year

It was New Year's Day. The people came out of the worship service. The theme of the sermon had been the parable of the barren fig tree that was to be cut down but was spared because of the intercession of the gardener.

Two people had been sitting together on a bench, and now walked together down the village street: an old man and a young man. The old man used to be a blacksmith, but he could no longer stand at the anvil and swing the heavy hammer. He now helped his son and successor as best he could. He lived across the street from the blacksmith's shop.

The old man walked slowly, bent over, leaning on his cane. He sighed deeply and wiped some wetness from his eyes. The young, carefully dressed man with whom he walked, looked at his neighbor in amazement, as if he could not explain this emotion.

"Did you find the sermon moving?" he asked. The old man nodded. And as they parted, he invited the young man to visit him soon after work, so he could tell him what had touched him so deeply.

So one evening, the young man walked across the street and knocked on the door where the old man was sitting in his room with the open Bible laying before him.

"Last year, when it was January 1," the old man began, "I was lying seriously ill there in bed. The high fever took my mind, and my

thoughts became confused. Then my sins fell like boulders on my conscience. I was seventy years old and still a slave to sin. And then it thundered in my ears with every beat of my pulse, 'Now it is set for you to die, and after that the judgment!' And then it was as if I stood before an iron gate, on which was inscribed the word, 'Eternity!'

"I knocked on the gate until my hand bled, but it didn't open until at last a voice from within, which shattered through my marrow and bone, shouted, 'Cut him down! Seventy years and no fruit! Seventy years, and still a slave to his passions; cut him down!' Then all strength escaped my body. My last sigh of anguish escaped: 'Have mercy, have mercy!' When I finally came to, I heard a voice again. It sounded in my ears like unearthly music and said, 'One more year! One more year!'

"After that, Jesus Christ forgave me, and I am now redeemed from my sin. Now it has become the New Year again, and I am still alive. But now I am ready. If my end comes today or tomorrow, I know I'll be happy with Jesus."

The young man had listened attentively to the old man's experience and took it to heart. As he reached out his hand to the old man, the old man spoke to him one more time, "Old people must die, young people may die. Therefore, everyone should heed the voice from the gate of eternity, 'One more year!'" ■

At Your Word

Several fishermen sit by the Sea of Galilee. After a long night of hard work, they just want to rest a little and then ready the boat for the next sailing.

Our little ship of life has also entered the quiet bay only to set sail again in a few hours. Aren't we also quite fatigued and drowsy? And not only tired and weary, but like those Galilean sailors we are likely a little dejected and despondent, because the strenuous work has not brought the hoped-for results.

The great Master's words apply to us as well as to them: "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." They are actually logic-defying words counter to all fishing practices. But Peter gives Jesus this splendid answer: "Nevertheless, at Your word I will let down the net!"

At this threshold of the new year, what if each of us inspects our "boat": Is it heavier than last year? Will the catch be so profitable that we almost can't fathom the haul? How about it, Fisherman? After you tally the profits, tell us how you did!

How many sigh, "I caught nothing" For many, it's not only "Nothing gained!" but also "Much lost!" However, we are focusing less on financial matters. Maybe your health has suffered a serious decline, or some other misfortune has struck you. Perhaps you faced all kinds of adversities in your circle. Maybe you were lonely and misunderstood as you journeyed life's road. And if you were to count your loved ones on New Year's Eve, perhaps the dearest and most treasured one is missing. Great is the number of those who lament, "Much work and effort. Much service and sacrifice and yet no catch, no reward. All in vain!"

But let us not overlook what those fishermen did. They washed and mended the nets. This should be a hint for us to scrape the mud off the oars and clean the nets. How has your walk with the Lord been this past year? Have you directed your efforts to working for the Lord while prayerfully trusting in Him? Have the joyful experiences brought you closer to God? Did the difficult experiences root you all the more deeply in fellowship with Him? It is important that we ask these questions of conscience, because if the gaps in the net are too wide and the tears are not mended, we

will not catch a single fish in the new year. If we don't want the blessing to slip through our fingers like sand again, everything must first be put in order. Of course, we cannot wash away the worst mud and filth, the sin, from our hearts by ourselves. Only the blameless and sinless One, Who rules from eternity to eternity, can do that. He alone can truly declare your dark past as history and grant you a new beginning. He can and wants to do it, if you ask Him.

At that time, the wistful New Year's Eve lament will turn into the bold New Year's commitment: But "at Your word I will let down the net"! With this, the Lord gave Peter a tough test, and a mighty struggle arose in Peter's soul. Would he become the laughing stock of his co-workers? Would it be better to toss the net at Jesus' feet? No, Peter realized he was dealing with an extraordinary Man. The word of the Lord had already taken root in him so deeply, and he was too closely embraced in the power of His love to be able to disobey. "At Your word," we hear him say, "I will let down the net."

At Your word! What wonderful, tremendous power lies in this answer! Such a harrowing truth: without God and His Word, without total sincerity in serving the Lord with our lives and loving our neighbor, our actions are in vain. All our striving and racing lack eternal value. We could not confidently continue our journey into the new year if we do not say with Peter, "At Your word I will let down the net." God's words will by no means pass away. Heaven and earth will pass away. Your Word will not return void. Though the world speaks ever more loudly "no," Your Word will be all the more indisputable! Luther testifies, "It is marvelous to claim God's Word and say to the Lord, You have said it. It is Your good pleasure. What does it matter if the whole world doesn't like it or mocks us?"

Let us not be discouraged and pull our little ship to shore, laying aside our oars in disappointment while hanging our nets in the sun. No, just rest a little and get at it again. Then untie the boat and "put out into the deep water" (Luke 5:4) with the New Year's resolution, "I cast my net at His command and say in the heat of the labor, Your will be done!" ■

“I Will Go Before You”

We find these words in Isaiah 45:2. It is a glorious promise that should accompany us through the new year. The future looks dark, and some may fearfully ask, “What will the new year bring?” To all who are afraid, I encourage you with this word from the Lord, “I will go before you”! When the Light of the world, goes before us, we will experience what the children of Israel did, for whom the pillar of fire was a guide in the night. It is a wonderful comfort knowing He is the Light on our path.

Two pictures of our Savior that I have seen many times come to mind. One scene shows the Lord Jesus lifting the lost sheep out of the thorny bushes. It is the image of the seeking shepherd who spares no effort to seek and find the one that is lost. The other image shows the Lord leading the flock, lovingly carrying the smallest and weakest one on His shoulders. We see how the sheep crowd Him in order to get as close to Him as possible to be near Him, where they feel safe and secure. The Good Shepherd, leads them. He is the Shepherd Who is described to us in John 10: The Shepherd who leads them in and out so they may find pasture; the Shepherd Who, according to Psalm 23, leads them through the valley of shadows and darkness but also to sunny heights. It is the Shepherd Who promises His sheep, “I will go before you”! But this promise is only for those who let themselves be found by the Good Shepherd. My dear Reader, if you want to claim the comfort and guidance of the Savior in the year ahead, then you must also allow Him to find you. You must become His follower.

When we read the entire chapter of Isaiah 45, we see that this passage is addressed to Cyrus. As long as Cyrus considered himself an instrument of the Almighty, he, too, was allowed to claim the Lord’s guidance. God wanted to use him to deliver His people from captivity. To enable him to do this, God Himself wanted to go before him and empower him to carry out his assigned mission.

When the Lord goes before us, we walk safely with the guidance, the protection, and the comfort we need. We know we are safe with Him because He is with us and already knows the problems we will encounter. We only need to walk on the path He has prepared for us. The Lord Himself shows us how to overcome all difficulties and adversities. Every moment, we can rest assured that He knows everything that will come our way. He is our great High Priest and has been tempted in all things just as we are. Therefore, He can also have compassion on us when we are tempted. When our friends disappoint us and we feel lonely and abandoned, He understands. Even better, He can and wants to help us.

He wants to lead us. The only question is, Do we want to follow Him? Jesus also said, “In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:2–3). If we have walked with Jesus through this life, He will also one day await us at the gates of eternity, where He has gone before us. O what a glorious and wonderful comfort to know in all circumstances and at all times, “I will go before you”! ■

By Your Hand

*Lord, take us by the hand and let us enter
With confidence the year ahead.
Into the darkness, with Your light as center
We'll face the world and have no dread.
You grant us victory, so we are cheerful;
With heart and soul we trust in You.
Your love surrounds us, so we are not fearful;
You were and always will be true.*

*The change in time brings with it many hardships,
And joy and pain will both appear.
You reign triumphantly, we humbly worship
And sense eternity draw near.
Each act and deed of ours will be remembered;
We know this world is not our home.
Our path goes heavenwards and though encumbered,
It ends in joy before Your throne.*

*Your faithfulness, o Lord, we truly cherish;
So many years You brought us through.
We made mistakes, and yet we did not perish;
Amazing grace was shown anew.
Many seeds were sown, and some of them sprouted;
With thankfulness we give You praise.
You gave increase, and even if we doubted,
You gave significance to our days.*

*And now, together, Lord, we do implore Thee,
Help us be true and serve in love.
Let Your deep peace and loving faithfulness be
With us, a blessing from above.
And though the world be full of war and striving,
Your Spirit fills our hearts with peace;
And though the enemy lurks with conniving,
The love of God will never cease.*

*Today and yesterday and each tomorrow,
All time lies in the hands of God.
We trust in Christ our Lord in joy and sorrow;
He freed us through His precious blood.
And so with confidence and faith we enter
Into the darkness of the year.
Whatever comes, God is our guide and mentor,
And to the end He will be near.*