



Foundation of Faith

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The Gate is Open

How to Overcome Fear

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The FOUNDATION OF FAITH is a journal of vital Christianity, published in the interest of the Church of God, that takes a clear and decisive stand for full salvation in Christ, the unity of all true believers, and the truths of the Bible.

The editors reserve the right to abridge and edit all materials and information submitted for publication. Research sources are listed for information only and should not necessarily be construed as an endorsement or recommendation.

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www.christianunitypress.com

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FOUNDATION OF FAITH (USPS 9008) is published monthly by Christian Unity Press, 5195 Exchange Dr., Flint, MI 48507, USA. Periodicals postage paid at Flint, MI, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Christian Unity Press, 5195 Exchange Dr., Flint, MI 48507, USA Volume 21 Issue 1

FOUNDATION OF FAITH is a trademark owned by Christian Unity Press in the United States and foreign countries.

Printed in USA.

FOUNDATION OF FAITH is published free of charge. All expenses are covered by freewill donations.

Editorial

Dear Reader,

Things look dark in the world. Riots, revolutions, uprisings, wars, and bloodshed are everywhere, along with much misery, hunger, and disease. Many live in fear.

The Savior knew this would come: “And there will be signs . . . 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” (Luke 21: 25–26).

Is this picture too dark? Is everything hopeless? No, we don’t need to focus on the godlessness of our time, the injustice, the hatred, and the increasing unkindness, because above all darkness in this world stands Jesus, the Sun of Life, the Sun of Justice. Yes, our victorious Conqueror, Jesus Christ, is there. He promised, “I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28: 20).

The sun’s rays and its wonderful warmth melt ice and snow after winter. Without this sun, our planet would be frozen and dead, without life. How much greater is the Son of God Who gives us light and life! In His love and mercy, in this coming year, He wants to be a living hope, a light, and a guide for searching and despairing people.

Oh, dear Reader, do you know the scripture, “Truly the light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to behold the sun”? (Ecclesiastes 11: 7). I have experienced this, as I was able to come out of an unbelieving, guilt-ridden life to see and know Jesus, and to rush to Him, the Light and the Sun of life. In all these years, His Word and His will have become sweet and precious to me. Yes, Christ is there for you as well; the Son of God will also be sweet and beautiful in your eyes. With Him we may confidently and courageously begin this new year, as we let Him firmly hold our hand.

H. D. Nimz

Strong Hands



The artist Ursula Kükenthal painted a remarkable picture towards the end of the war: A blond child's head with a scared, shy expression peeks out of the sheltering coat of a figure standing behind it. Neither face nor feet of this figure are visible but only the large, firm, compassionate hands wrapping the coat around the child.

Whose hands are they? The hands of the mother, or the father? No, their graves are visible in the background. They are the hands of God.

We can feel God's hands even if we do not see His face. They are hands of which the poet Hugo Specht writes:

*God's hands hold
the whole world,
God's hands carry
the canopy of stars,
God's hands lead
the littlest child,
God's hands defy destiny.
God's hands are
my safe place;
They will lead
through all darkness to light.
Sheltered in peace,
surrounded by struggles,*

*In Your hands,
Lord, I am safe.*

God's hands reach out to us through the hands of Jesus. These hands embrace us like the child in the picture. They are the hands that were pierced for us at the crucifixion, the hands that paid the ransom for our guilt.

*With Your pierced
hand stretched out to us,
With so much faithfulness
bestowed on us,
We stand ashamed
to think and know;
Our eyes with tears
must overflow
With thankfulness
and praise.*

Of those who have clasped His hands, the words of Jesus Christ are true: "Neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of My Father's hand" (John 10: 28–29).

Walter Parisius

Seeing the Future Through Faith

The nation of Israel stood at the border of the Promised Land. They had come a long way, and now they were very close to their journey's goal. The hearts of the people may have beat faster, because not much longer and the laborious desert wandering would come to an end. Then Moses, the servant of the Lord, said to the people, "Look, the LORD your God has set the land before you" (Deuteronomy 1:21). Surely they would have looked out, and in faith would have seen as their own, the inheritance of their fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Moreover, many other longings and dreams would have been included in this look of faith, and the desire for them would have influenced their thinking. It's likely they also felt deep gratitude because God had so graciously guided them. On the other hand, anxiety and fear may also have arisen. But Moses encouraged them, saying, "Do not fear or be discouraged."

Much like Israel faced the Promised Land, we too face uncharted territory. Yet, the strong right arm of God has brought us this far, after leading us down unknown paths. Dangers and hardships came upon us, but in all of them He helped us through, causing us to realize how faithful the Lord is. Our faith was strengthened, and we gained confidence in our God. In this way, we were able to pass through the days of the last year.

Now the new year is coming. Will it be different? Will we be preserved in body and soul in the days ahead? These are questions that can occupy us at the beginning of the new year.

"Look, the LORD your God has set the land before you." This is also said to us for encouragement. Our faith must be active; then we will become strong inwardly and win victories. We will have many opportunities to do so. Let us not become complacent. The psalmist said, "Through God we will do valiantly" (Psalm 60:12). Those who act in such faith will learn how to conquer the land they have seen in faith.

Faith-filled vision is necessary for the Christian life. It does not merely focus on current events, but rather looks further ahead at those with eternal value. Paul said, "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding *and*

eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen *are* eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:17–18). This means whatever obstacles we may encounter in our lives, we will persevere because our gaze is turned beyond time to eternity, to the fulfillment of all desires, to eternal rest and undisturbed peace, where the sun is never obscured by the clouds. Its radiance illuminates every path, and no night can ever exist again. Such a vision of faith strengthens the weary traveler. New hope fills the heart, and we can confidently take the unknown way into the new year, perhaps also into the last year of life. God alone knows that.

Not all who enter the land of the new year have this vision of faith. The uncertainty of life grips the hearts of many. They have no promised land before them and are left to their own devices. They live without God in the world and do not know where they are going. The future is dark before them, and in a moment of quiet reflection, the question stands before them, "What will happen to me one day?"

What is needed here? Our gaze must be fixed on Jesus. He shows us the way in His Word. God does not want us to remain stuck in hopelessness. In His love, He gave His only begotten Son so through Him we might be reconciled to God. Through the blood shed on Golgotha, He opened the way for us, and in faith we can receive salvation and look beyond to blessed eternity. There we will be released from all the hardships of earthly life and be with Him forever.

Whatever the new year will bring us—and it may contain many surprises—we know one thing: Everything we encounter must first pass by our faithful God. Some things will serve as a test, and others will strengthen us for the struggle of faith so we can be overcomers before God. Even heavy burdens will do us good and be a blessing. So let's look confidently, courageously, and faithfully into the future, for the Lord has said, "Look, the LORD your God has set the land before you."

G. Sonnenberg

Entering the New Year

In a New Year's sermon, Karl Gerok said: When the bold and pious Christopher Columbus discovered the "New World," he stepped onto North American soil early in the morning after a long, perilous voyage, and the first thing he did was plant a flag with the cross in the still untrodden ground. It symbolized that he wanted to take possession of this new part of the world, this still uncharted land, not only for his earthly monarch, the King of Spain, but also for his Heavenly King, the Lord Jesus Christ, under Whose scepter even the distant islands were to bow.

We are entering a new year, an "unknown land." It lies before us in a gloomy "dawn," and only indistinct-

ly do the outlines of its mountains emerge from the haze and the fog. What it may hold for us in its valleys and mountains, we do not know: whether lush, blessed meadows or barren deserts, whether peaceful and friendly shelters, or bloody battlegrounds and killing fields, whether rich gold mines of happiness or perhaps only graves.

But what Columbus did there in the newly discovered land should be an example for us. The first thing we want to do when we enter the new year is raise the banner for our Lord and King. Let us put up the banner of Christ as a sign: "He is Lord and King in the new year as in the old!" ■

Wait on the Lord and Trust in Him

A God-fearing preacher contracted an illness, possibly caused by his tireless zeal in his profession of comforting and strengthening the sick and dying. Sadly, an ulcer had now formed on his lungs, and more recently, he had been confined to bed rest.

His faithful wife was crying at his bedside with a number of their little children. However, even then the sufferer did not stop admonishing, instructing, and comforting the flock entrusted to him. If someone asked him to rest and save his remaining strength for his family, he answered, "I wait for the Lord; He will do everything well. My life is not mine; it belongs to the Lord."

The doctor foresaw the sudden rupture of the ulcer and the resulting rapid and imminent death. The entire congregation, but most of all his family, were filled with deep sorrow; yet the dying preacher remained cheerful, and waited on the Lord.

One day, his wife, exhausted from crying and lack of sleep, sat by his bedside and thought this night would be his last. However, after a while, the husband calmed down and fell fast asleep. And right then, the hour came for him that all had feared.

The man of God dreamed vividly that the choir was singing the beautiful hymn outside his door, "Wait on the Lord and Trust in Him." These words had been a favorite verse of his throughout his life and such a comfort during his illness. As he heard this song, while still asleep and unconscious of his physical condition, he joyfully joined in with his deep bass voice: "Wait on the Lord, wait on the Lord!" As a result of this vibration, his ulcer ruptured. At that moment, however, the singing had so dilated the windpipe that the danger of suffocation, which would otherwise have been unavoidable in such a case, surprisingly passed. The Lord had restored his health while he slept, for even before the sick man awakened to full consciousness, the suffering had ceased.

After this dangerous and decisive night, the preacher recovered more quickly than was expected. He lived many more years for the edification and blessing of his congregation and for the comfort of his own family. His motto, however, remained the same throughout his remaining life in all his concerns and sufferings: "Wait on the Lord and trust in Him."

J. Hübner

“Put Your Name Down”

There is a story of an inventor who brought his invention to a businessman, who immediately saw its value and offered the young man \$20,000. This was a huge sum at the time, and the inventor was quick to accept.

The inventor had been expecting the buyer to pay out the sum in gold, so when all he got was a small piece of paper to take to the bank, he was unsettled. Despite his unease, he went to the bank and presented his note. Looking at the shabbily-dressed young man, the teller returned the note and said, “I can’t give you any money for this!”

Going pale with shock, the young man stumbled out of the bank without hearing another word. He sank to the ground near the bank in despair and was still there when a friend happened to pass by.

“You look terrible,” he observed. “What’s wrong?”

“I have been horribly cheated,” he replied before recounting the whole story.

As a man of business, the friend knew more about how things worked. He asked to see the check and briefly inspected it before saying, “Everything is in order. You only have to put your name down on the check, and then you’ll get the money immediately!”

The young man wrote down his name, went back into the bank, and soon walked out with the \$20,000 that would form the start of his fortune.

“You have to put your name down!”—This principle also applies to the thousands of promises God makes in His Word. In essence, they are checks written by God. God keeps His promises like a solvent company backs its checks. To cash these promises, we need to put our name down by claiming them in faith. God backs

His checks.

The Bible is God’s checkbook, and you can use it in every aspect of your life. If you do, you will find that the solution to many difficulties in life is the same one recommended to this young man. You will receive eternal riches, earthly blessings, and relief from fear, guilt, sin, and pangs of conscience.

You just need to put your name down. This means claiming the promises of the eternal Savior. If you count on Him the way you count on the bank to cash your checks, you will join the ranks of the many who have experienced the hope expressed in this poem:

*They that wait on the Lord
Shall not be shamed;
Should I be the first?
No, impossible,
O faithful refuge!
The heavens shall fall
Ere Your Word fails.* ■



The Gate Is Open

| *“Pursue . . . holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.” (Hebrews 12:14)*

The new year is before us like an unlocked gate standing wide open. We can only see a short distance beyond the gate, not knowing what’s on the path beyond it.

Once we go through the gate, it will close. With the old year behind us, there is no return. We cannot bring back one week, one day, one hour, or one minute of the old year again. Yet when we enter eternity, it will be there with its opportunities and hours displayed before us, praising, thanking, or perhaps accusing us. Therefore, we should not pass through this gate without allowing the Holy Spirit to bring to light all the moments in the past year that need to be made right, and then if possible, doing so.

Every year, we all go through an open gate into the new year. How many gates will we still pass through? When will the gate to eternity open? It’s a good thing we don’t know. But since we don’t know, we should make the most of the short time we still have here on earth to live for the Lord. We should do what the Bible admonishes us to do: “Pursue . . . holiness, without which no one will see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14).

At the stroke of midnight on New Year’s Eve, a new path for all of us began. Typically, we wonder what the coming year will bring. How will we make it through?

J. R. Hiller notes that “if we walk along a dark country road at night with a lantern, we only see one step ahead of us. As soon as we take that step, the light of our lantern lights up the next step. We finally arrive at our destination without ever having walked in darkness. The way was always clearly seen, but only one step at a time.”

We often wish our path would be better illuminated for us, and we would be thankful if there were fewer obstacles on it. However, there will be obstacles, and they are necessary. Maria Feesche writes about this in her poem,

The Stone on the Way

*Do you think that on the path of life,
Even a single stone lies there just by chance,
A hinderance for naught?
It may be great or small;
Yet it’s exactly there, where it should lay.
Not to block you from going farther
Or to discourage you or vex you either.
It was placed there by a gracious hand,
Motionless to lay there in the sand,
So you should contemplate and see the stone.
Commit your way to God, trusting Him alone;
Call on Him, speak to Him, ask for the reason
Why the stone should be there right in this season.
Oh, to meet God at ev’ry stone is best;
Then with ev’ry encounter you are blessed.*

Let’s avoid praying there will be no big or small stones lying on our path in the new year. But let’s pray we don’t end up being a “stone of offense” or a stumbling block in someone’s way. We want to patiently bear the load we’ve been given to carry, while not unnecessarily placing burdens upon others.

Psalm 23 suggests that God leading us “in the paths of righteousness” may also include the “dark valleys.” We may wish to end the psalm at “He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake” (Psalm 23:3). We love the first three verses of this psalm. But why does it continue with “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death?” Because dark valleys are inherent to our paths of righteousness. Therefore, let’s not become discouraged; instead, let’s faithfully look to God and proclaim with David, “I will fear no evil; for You are with me.”

So, let’s enter the new year with confidence, rejoicing that we have a Good Shepherd Who will guide us, and that no one is able to snatch us out of His hand. He is greater than any obstacles we may encounter, and He is there to help us. ■

Looking Back with Gratitude

“Blessed be the Lord, who daily loads us with benefits, the God of our salvation!” (Psalm 68:19)

I often read to my mother when I was younger, since she never had the opportunity to learn to read. When I picked up [the German version of] this publication, I would ask her what I should read. She would tell me, “Oh, read a testimony.” She loved to hear about others’ personal experiences with God. I, too, want to testify how wonderfully the good Lord has brought me through since my salvation in my youth. For this I want to daily praise Him, as indicated in the opening verse.

It reminds me of a question a preacher once put to his congregation. He wanted to know which of two people had been shown the greater degree of grace. The first person had fallen deeply into sin, yet she still experienced saving grace at the end of life. The other person experienced salvation at a young age and remained faithful to God his entire life. Now, which of the two needed more grace?

The second one, of course. He had to ask for grace daily to live a life of victory. I am aware: “For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required” (Luke 12:48).

Looking back on my life, I think I can say that the greater part of my life has been very smooth. The Lord has been good to me and given success to everything, so much so, the thought came to me that I might have been disadvantaged, since difficulties in life serve a good purpose. I recall being at what was probably the first pastors’ conference I attended as a young pastor. The chairman brought up the subject of difficulties in the local church and asked those who had no difficul-

ties to raise their hand. I briefly reviewed my ministry in the church where I served and raised my hand to indicate I was not aware of any problems. Later, a brother told me how surprised I seemed to be when I looked around and saw that I was the only one among the pastors who had raised his hand.

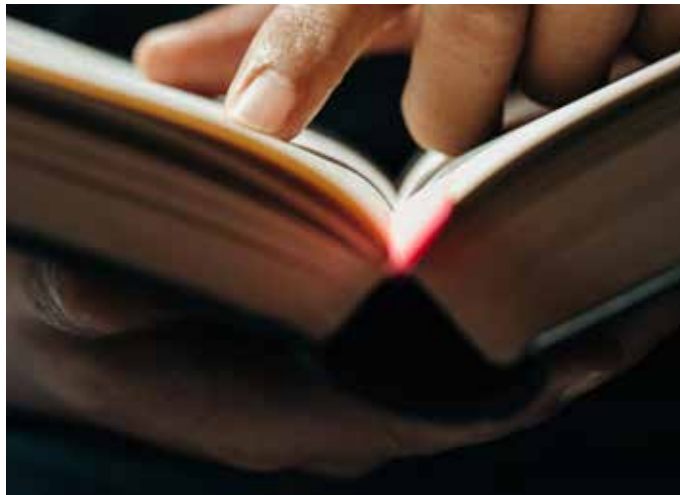
A word from the book of Job comes to mind that has often spoken to me. It is the accusation of Eliphaz to Job. Among other things, he says: “Surely you have instructed many” (Job 4:3). “But now it comes upon you, and you are weary; it touches you, and you are troubled” (verse 5). My prayer is that I would not have

preached to others and have become condemnable myself.

The Bible verse places a personal obligation on us to praise God daily. Burdens from God give life some depth, so that, like a laden cargo ship, man does not get tossed about by the waves. I also know the burden I have been carrying for almost ten

years due to the progression of my Parkinson’s disease serves me for the best. In addition to God Himself, Who stands helpfully by my side, the good Lord has provided me with a very cherished wife who knows how to fulfill the words of Galatians 6:2, “Bear one another’s burdens.” I also have loving children and grandchildren who willingly place themselves under my burden. Yes, the Lord knows how to help us through little or through much. I also continue to ask for prayer on my behalf.

*Reinhard Roesler
Toronto, ON*



The Almighty's Protection

"I will both lie down in peace, and sleep; for You alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety," (Psalm 4: 9).

As true Christians who dwell in the secret place of the Most High and abide in the shadow of the Almighty, we are safe and secure in our Savior's arms. Nevertheless, all kinds of dangers threaten us as we walk the narrow path. Sometimes, all things seem to turn against us. All kinds of weather and roaring waves surge over us. Remarkably though, nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. Although the stress of such trials rests heavily on us, the loving arms of the Heavenly Father will always still reach us.

Though the ship of life might often be seized and

tossed about by the roaring storms, Almighty God will save us from being shattered on the rocky reefs. Temptations may come from all sides, and these fiery arrows may be aimed at us. However, if we place ourselves under the protection of the Almighty and do not let go of the Savior's hand under any circumstances, we will not be put to shame. Yes, the earth may tremble, and its foundations may shake under our feet, but our God does not change. His faithfulness is unchanging. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Blessed and secure for time and eternity is he who places his trust completely in Him. ■

Only Today

What is it that makes your heart tremble with fear? What intensifies your worries to the point where the peace of your soul is disturbed? For many, it is undoubtedly the fear of the unknown "tomorrow."

"Today" is never so gloomy that it cannot be penetrated by a ray of sunshine. Having hope can produce a smile and bring a spark of joy. But "tomorrow" lies dark and mysterious before us. Who can lift the veil that separates the present from the future? It can fill us with trepidation to see "tomorrow" approaching, not knowing what it will bring. This uncertainty makes "tomorrow" seem so difficult.

Jesus knew the apprehension of the human heart. He knew the hardships and burdens of life. Knowing that each day has enough of its own troubles, He commanded, "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for

tomorrow will worry about its own things" (Matthew 6: 34). Oh, how content is the one who obeys this command of their Lord! They possess the secret of a truly happy life. Just as a child enjoys their piece of bread today and does not worry whether there will be any more tomorrow, a child of God can confidently leave all worries to their Heavenly Father. Even if the burden for others weighs down your heart, you may still know that our faithful God will not let us be tempted beyond our ability to cope. God will also give the necessary strength for each day's troubles.

As Christians, when we fully trust the Lord, the approaching day does not cast a dark shadow into the anxious heart. No, God's eternal grace reigns over the gray dawn. Therefore, hold fast to Him and do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself! ■

Cast Your Burdens on the Lord

Jesus Himself has given us the privilege to cast all our burdens on Him. He knows our human weaknesses. He remembers that we are dust. As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on us. He knew we would encounter various trials and temptations in the Christian life. Therefore, the Word of God says, “Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:6–7).

In order to overcome all trials and temptations, humility is vital, and makes it easier to cast our cares on Him. However, if we continue to hold onto our worries and fears, we will give the enemy of our souls reason to tempt us.

Dear Friend, if you are burdened with worry, disappointments, and discouragement, then go to the Throne of Grace. The Lord Jesus understands us, has compassion on us, and is always willing to help. “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as *we are*, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find

grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:15–16). This should encourage us to come confidently to our great High Priest with all our worries.

We need not fear that He will fault us for seeking to draw near to the Lord. Let us learn from little children. A little child at play does not worry about the future. He doesn’t think, “What if Mom or Dad should leave me here alone?” He trusts completely in the care of his parents, a faith principle we can apply to our daily lives.

Even if the Lord disciplines us, He still keeps us in His loving embrace, as long as we receive His discipline with humility and learn the precious lessons He wishes to teach us. In the end, we are blessed with God’s best for us. “Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (Hebrews 12:11).

The enemy of our souls wants us to be burdened with all sorts of worries, in order to keep us from making spiritual progress. However, Jesus is here to free us from these burdens. Let us be courageous in this battle and persevere, for if we remain true until the end, we will inherit the crown of life. ■



HE

Held Me Fast

I would like to share how God helped and carried me through this past year.

Last spring was when I first noticed something wrong with my voice. It seemed to be gradually losing strength and clarity. My family doctor referred me to a specialist who was able to see that my left vocal cord was not moving normally. It was, in fact, paralyzed. A CT scan showed nodules on my thyroid gland; a biopsy would need to be performed to find out if these were cancerous.

Within days of the biopsy, I was told I had papillary thyroid cancer. The good part of this news was that thyroid cancer is apparently the easiest cancer to treat. The thyroid gland would need to be removed, and only during that surgery could doctors see what was happening regarding the vocal cord. The surgeon gave me no guarantee that my voice could be saved; in fact, he gently indicated that the laryngeal nerve, which controls the movement of the vocal cord, might have permanent damage. The quality of my voice indicated that possibility. It was a raspy whisper at this point but thankfully not painful. I signed the consent form and waited for the surgery date.

Of course, my first reaction to the diagnosis was surprise and fear. I had never heard of this combination of trouble, and had enjoyed good general health all my life. But realistically, I also knew that someday I might get bad news. As a follower of Christ since my youth, I've been trained and have learned that we need to accept the bad as well as the good in life, because we live in a broken world. Why should I be spared? I've been blessed through many testimonies in my lifetime from others who experienced God's help in times of trouble. It somehow felt natural that it was now my turn to face a storm.

Although I am very grateful for the science in modern medicine, I felt I needed a healing touch that only God can give. I called on the elders with Pastor Tribiger and Pastor Elke to anoint me and ask God for healing. This special anointing and prayer time was done on Sunday, September 26, 2021. What a beautiful thing it is to be supported by fellow believers when we are facing a struggle.

The surgery was performed in early November. During the hospitalization, I was armed with God's promises from His Word, the prayers of my fellow believers, and many songs that I could sing in my mind for comfort, since I love music. There was one song that especially helped me entitled "He Will Hold Me Fast." I would read the lyrics and sing it in my mind to draw strength. It refers to Psalm 139:9-10: "If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast" (NIV).

After the surgery, I was told the cancer was more invasive than first expected. It had spread from the thyroid to some lymph nodes and adhered itself to the left laryngeal nerve in such a way that it had to be cut to remove the cancer. This left the vocal cord permanently paralyzed and explains why I already lost my voice before the surgery. Many lymph nodes also had to be removed, placing me in a stage three cancer category. I admit I was sad that my voice was reduced to a whisper, especially when the Christmas season came.



It felt horribly strange not to be able to make a sound of praise; however, I knew that God accepts the praise in my heart, even though I can't convey it with a normal voice.

Three months later, I underwent the doctor-recommended radioactive iodine treatment (RAI). This involved following a strict low iodine diet for two weeks in preparation for ingesting a radioactive pill that would destroy any remaining cancerous thyroid cells it found. I'm thankful that this treatment didn't make me very sick, but after swallowing that pill, I had to stay in isolation or remain ten-foot distance from others for about six days to avoid exposing anyone else to radiation. Once that was over with, I happily started eating all regular foods again, only to realize that my sense of taste had disappeared. Thankfully, it was just a side effect of the treatment, and about a month later it came back. I should also say that before and after the RAI, I was given CT scans so doctors could compare the before-and-after results. I praise God the post-treatment scan showed no obvious spread of cancer to other organs.

Easter had a double meaning for me this year—celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and celebrating my gradual healing. It had been a long, dreary winter. My extended family had lost a loved one

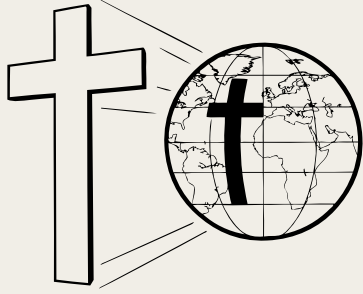
to COVID-19, and my husband also needed to have a surgery to remove a benign lump from the side of his head.

In May, I received a referral to a doctor who is to help me recover as much of my voice as possible. She performed a liquid implant on the paralyzed vocal cord so it could give me some voice. This implant is temporary (it will dissolve within five months), but it will give the throat area more time for healing before a permanent implant can be performed.

What have I learned in all this? Patience. I thought I was a patient person, but it's clear that God wanted me to learn even more of it. Thankfully, I haven't had to walk this journey alone. My husband and extended family have stood by me and advocated for me as necessary. My church family and many of you readers encouraged me and stormed the gates of heaven on my behalf. Thank you for your prayers. I know it's only God's compassion that has brought me through, and I know whatever He still decides to do with me is good because He is sovereign and knows what's best. My job is to trust and be faithful. Most of all, I want to be closely in tune to what God wants me to do and to use whatever time I have wisely.

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Radio Program Message of Salvation

Friedrich Krebs
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The Lord is My Shepherd

“*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.*” (Psalm 23:1)

What great confidence emanates from these words! David kept God before his eyes as the Good Shepherd into whose confident guidance he completely entrusted himself. Should we not do the same? Don't these simple words awaken new confidence and give us courage for the new year's journey?

In earlier times, shepherds were strong men who even took on wild animals. They knew their herd and led them to the best pastures and resting places.

David had also been a shepherd in his youth. He was intimately familiar with a shepherd's life with its multi-faceted tasks and responsibilities. But here he looked back on the leading of his own life and testified, “The Lord is my shepherd.” Leadership experienced through all the circumstances and storms of his life could only be from the Lord. Reflecting on the guidance he had experienced, he changes the form of his song by suddenly beginning to speak to his good shepherd in grateful prayer: “Lord, you have been noticeably close to me. Even in the dark valleys and depths of life I have been able to experience You. Your rod and staff comforted me and showed me You

were there. You have always laid a table for me, even in the face of my enemies, and You have shown me care and fellowship. I have experienced only goodness and mercy from You, and You have given me the joy of faith and hope that I may remain united with You forever.”

Shouldn't we have such a deep, intimate conversation with the Good Shepherd right now, at the beginning of the year? He wants to be the same for us and allow us to experience how wonderfully He can lead.

Anyone standing fearfully and timidly on the threshold of the new year should delve into the New-Testament shepherd's message from John 10. Here, Jesus explicitly says, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep” (verse 11). He will even go to the point of death for them. Further, He says, “I have come that they may have life and that they may have *it* more abundantly” (v. 10), and in verse 28: “I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.” Isn't this a glorious promise and a truly comforting assurance?



A poet wrote, “Walking hand in hand with Jesus is so glorious, for He leads secure. He hears our open and silent pleas, so take courage.” In reference to this poem, someone said, “Yes, all is well when we hold His hand, but we must continue faithfully holding His hand and never let go.” This is exactly what the Good Shepherd admonishes us to do when He says, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me” (verse 27). When someone walks ahead of us to show us the way, following is not difficult at all.

Anyone who has driven in the dark or in a snowstorm knows the feeling of relief when the vehicle ahead shows the way or direction with its taillights.

The path into the new year lies veiled and dark before us. None of us know what we may encounter with our next steps. But we are all offered the best guidance. Blessed is he who can confidently say with David, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. . . . my cup runs over” (Psalm 23:1, 5).

Empty boats are easily driven by crosswinds into shallow waters where they become stranded, but well-laden ships stay in deep waters and on the right

course. Similarly, those who are empty inside and have no spiritual resources are easily marooned and cannot withstand the storms and waves of life. But a human heart equipped with the heavenly gifts of divine peace, justice, love, and assurance of salvation will be able to move forward through the waves of temptations and tribulations, stay in the deep waters of faith, and keep the right course in the storms of time.

Dear Soul, the Good Shepherd longs to give you these essential resources. Kindness and grace accompany the child of God like two angels through our perilous life on earth until we arrive in the Father’s house.

Go confidently and with courage into this new year; God, the Father, is with you at the beginning and the end.

Whatever you may encounter, wherever you are, rest in God’s constant love.

We wish everyone a blessed new year, a year with the Good Shepherd, before Whom we can stand one day, filled with thanksgiving, and say, “Lord, you have led us well. We have lacked nothing, for You have always been for us and with us.” ■

HOW TO OVERCOME FEAR

“Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14: 27).

Young people are often described as being brave, adventurous, and strong, though this may not always be the case. Teenagers and young adults are faced with so many decisions about their future. In school, they’re required to learn about the uncertain current events in the world. They hear about wars, inflation, diseases, and possible recessions, all of which they can do little about. When a new year arrives, they’re faced with limitless unknowns that the new year could bring them. How are the youth of today to overcome these anxieties and fears?

Fear often comes from uncertainty about the unknown in our future. I’m reminded of Joshua standing at the Jordan River, looking over to the other side. God wanted him to lead His people into battle against the nations of Canaan. Can we imagine the thoughts and feelings of uncertainty Joshua might have had looking over that river? God knew his thoughts and feelings as well, and that’s why He says to him in Joshua 1:5-6a, “No man shall *be able* to stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and of good courage.” God promised to be with Joshua and help him accomplish the task he was dreading.

Some people are concerned about finding or keeping a job. We want to find steady employment or make a career for ourselves.

In the media, we’re told that many people around the world are dealing with recessions, inflation, and unemployment. Job uncertainty can make us fearful. Satan rejoices when we’re concerned about our everyday needs. But we should never forget that it is God Who provides for us. Jesus says in Matthew 6:30, “Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, *will He* not much more *clothe* you, O you of little faith?” God is asking us to bring our worries to Him, to place Him and His work first in our lives, and to trust in His perfect provision for each day.

Some say we live in uncertain times. Satan wants to rob our hearts of the peace and love of God by sowing fear. We cannot allow him to do this. The Lord is with us, and He promises to remain with us, no matter what comes our way.

David Knelsen
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THE TWELVE APOSTLES

INTRODUCTION

“Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, He called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles: Simon, whom He also named Peter, and Andrew his brother; James and John; Philip and Bartholomew; Matthew and Thomas; James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon called the Zealot; Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot who also became a traitor” (Luke 6: 12-16).

The Twelve

Twelve special, extraordinary, and chosen people. And yet twelve ordinary people like you and me, who pursued their careers, had homes and families somewhere, had to eat and drink, sleep and work, who laughed and cried.

Twelve People . . .

. . . who all had their strengths and weaknesses.
. . . whom Jesus was able to educate and shape so they would become like Him.
. . . who did something great and became pillars in the first church.
. . . whom Jesus could use to evangelize the whole world.

These were the twelve apostles.

What is an Apostle?

The New Testament refers to an apostle as one sent and commissioned to preach the gospel of the kingdom of God and the resurrection from the dead. In addition, an apostle was given a special ministry, an office, by the Lord. Every apostle was a disciple. But not every disciple was an apostle. In a narrower sense, apostles were visible eyewitnesses of the risen Lord (Acts 1: 21ff).

In the New Testament, however, not only the twelve apostles were called “apostles.” In many places, other people were also called “apostles;” for example, the disciples in Rome (Romans 16:7). Jesus was also called an apostle (Hebrews 3:1), and there were also false apostles (2 Corinthians 11:13).

To sum it up: An apostle is a messenger or ambassador who has also received a special ministry or office from the Lord.

The Calling of the Twelve Apostles

On earth, Jesus was also human. Just as we humans always have certain decisions to make, He also had to make decisions. He had to decide what to do, where to go, how to deal with people, and much more. The calling of the twelve apostles was one of the most important decisions He made.

We are tempted to think, “But He was also God. So that couldn’t have been so hard to choose the right people for the mission.” But remember, Jesus also became fully human in His earthly life. Before deciding who would become the twelve apostles, He spent an entire night in prayer (Luke 6:12). He prayed at great length with His Father. Only after this prayer did He choose the twelve. Jesus never violated the will of the Father (John 5:30).

Jesus is a glorious example for us. If you are faced with decisions, discuss them with the heavenly Father. Take time for prayer and search the Scriptures. God will speak to you and guide you.

The calling of the twelve apostles was so important! They were to take the gospel to the whole world. All the responsibility would rest on them. Whether those of the following generations would come to know the salvation of God or not depended on them.

I imagine that in His prayer, Jesus brought each one to God by name and asked, “Father, shall I also call this one to be an apostle? Shall I add the overzealous Peter, shall I take the quiet Andrew, shall I take Judas Is- ▶

cariot?” Jesus likely wrestled in prayer before making the final decision.

When “God the Father” and “God the Son” and “God the Holy Spirit” decree a matter, it is one hundred percent correct. It was not a mistake to choose these people. They brought the gospel to the whole world—even into our time.

The Twelve Apostles—Twelve Ordinary People

The admirable thing about the twelve’s election was that Jesus chose twelve completely normal people. They were yet mortals, not flawless. Each had his own character with strengths and weaknesses. Each of them led a life like others of their time. They were not nobles, nor were they children of nobility. Most of them had no special education at all.

They were really nothing special—just people like you and me. But they were people with a deep desire to serve God, people who sought the truth and wanted to please God. God could use these people. They let themselves be changed by God, and God changed them until they were the way He wanted them to be.

God still wants to form and change His children today. He has a goal with each one. It is up to us whether He can use us or not. Do we want to be educated, changed, and used by God? God grant it and bless you through it!

To Be Continued

*Eduard Albrecht
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Don’t Despair

In the battle against the enemy’s powers, it is of great importance that we enter the fight with faith and confidence. Despair is the cause of many defeats in spiritual life. In contrast, courage and confidence are the secret to success. A soul is easily overwhelmed by his foe when it is full of fear and expects defeat. Fear and despondency cause weakness, whereas courage and confidence allow you to be brave and strong.

God often speaks courage and comfort to His people. When the Lord sent Gideon against the Midianites, He said to him, “If you are afraid to go down, go down to the camp with Purah your servant, and you shall hear what they say; and afterward your hands shall be strengthened to go down against the camp.’ Then he went down with Purah his servant to the outpost of the armed men who *were* in the camp” (Judges 7:10–11). God’s purpose in this was to remove all fear and trepidation from the heart of Gideon and to fill it with courage and confidence before he went against the Midianites. With a heart full of fear and despair, he could not have overcome this great army.

When the Israelites went to war, the priests were obliged to go and speak to the people: “Hear, O Israel: Today you are on the verge of battle with your enemies. Do not let your heart faint, do not be afraid, and do not tremble or be terrified because of them; for the Lord your God *is* He who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you” (Deuteronomy 20:3–4). Those who were afraid and had a fearful heart were told to stay at home, lest they also make their brothers’ hearts cowardly and fearful (verse 8).

God cannot use us in a battle against Satan’s bulwark if we are discouraged. Not only is it a dangerous condition for ourselves, but our own weakness could rub off on others. A despondent heart influences those around it. The ten intimidated spies made the whole nation of Israel dejected and rebellious.

Our goal should always be to cheer one another up. The best service we can offer others, according to God’s Word, is to “comfort the fainthearted” (1 Thessalonians 5:14). We should seek to divert their attention from the hardships and point them to the Almighty

“Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are fearful-hearted, ‘Be strong, do not fear! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God; He will come and save you.’” (Isaiah 35: 3-4)



God Who can help. Despair and despondency come from focusing on obstacles and losing sight of the mighty Helper. When the ten spies saw the strong cities, the great walls, the giants, and the strong nations, they became disheartened because they forgot the One Who would help them conquer the land. They forgot that God, Who promised it to them, had also said that He would go with them.

God’s description of the promised land was true. The milk and honey flowed, and the fruits were lavish and bountiful. However, there were whole nations of experienced warriors, and Israel was helpless against these strong nations. The two faithful spies, Caleb and Joshua, also saw the giants and the great nations, but did not fear their might. They believed God’s promise to give them the land and knew that He would fight for them and give them victory. That’s precisely the secret: in spite of our own powerlessness, we need to trust in the Almighty God. If He is for us, who may be against us? If we go at His command, He goes with us and gives us the necessary strength for the duties He

enjoins on us. We can go in complete confidence. If He is on our side, victory is certain.

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13). The enemies may be great and mighty, the obstacles heavy and numerous, but God is greater and mightier than all who are against us. If we but faithfully cling to Him, all His promises are on our side, and we have nothing to fear.

The Word of God is full of encouragements. “Though an army may encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war may rise against me, in this I *will be* confident” (Psalm 27:3). God does not make us feel dejected but constantly speaks courage to us. Discouragement and desolation come from another source. If we do not resist them and turn our eyes of faith to Jesus, they will take us away from God. And the terrible end of the cowards is the same as that of unbelievers, the abominable, and murderers (Revelation 21:8). May God save us from such a terrible fate and help us to save others from it by our example and words of encouragement. ■

His Steps

It was a foggy winter morning. Snow was in the air, but inside the parlor of a small country house in Sweden, a cozy fire was burning. Klas had already eaten breakfast and was about to leave for school, but his mother customarily shared from God's Word to take with him for the day. She got up fifteen minutes early every morning so she could be nourished by "food for soul and body" without hurry nor worry. Then she read a passage from God's Word and added a few explanatory words as they came from her heart in her simple, clear understanding.

Today it was the verse, "Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps" (1 Peter 2: 21).

"What are these steps?" asked Klas.

"Well," his mother answered, "outside in the snow, you can clearly see what direction a person has gone so you could easily follow him. In the same way, we find in God's Word which way the Savior went, so we can now easily follow Him too."

"But," Klas objected, "with my short legs, I could not follow in the footsteps of a grown man, I couldn't follow very well in the footsteps of the Savior."

The mother explained, "Even though you can't follow in the big footsteps of a man because you take small steps, you can follow their direction and reach the destination. So, if you really love the Savior, you will listen to His words and follow Him. By doing this even with smaller steps, you follow in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus. For example, truth is His way, and mercy, and kindness . . ." And speaking to herself, as it were, Mom added softly, "His way and His footsteps are followed by His sheep, whether they lead to life or to death."

Now Klas set off with his backpack. He had a long walk ahead of him, but he didn't mind. The snowflakes fell so thickly and evenly today, and Klas was already looking forward to sledding in the afternoon.

When he arrived at school, he saw a group of his classmates in the corner of the schoolyard, jostling and whispering to each other. They called him over. "What's going on?" asked Klas.

"It's about the window that broke yesterday."

"Oh yeah, when Mattes was looking for the cat . . ."

"Hush up, man! None of us saw it, okay?"

"What if Mr. Lindstrom asks?"

"The window was broken by a vagrant who was passing by, understand? Anyone who says otherwise will get thrashed by the entire class."

After the first period was over, the interrogation began. Every single boy had to come forward and testify to the matter. They all said the same thing, that they had all seen the vagrant who threw the stone.

Now it was Klas's turn. As he walked forward to the teacher's desk, he thought of his Savior's footprints.

"Did you see the vagrant, too?" asked Mr. Lindstrom.

"No."

"Do you know who threw the stone?"

"Y-e-s." Klas turned beet red.

"Who was it?" Klas was silent.

"Didn't you hear what I asked you?"

"Yes, I did," Klas answered in a strangled voice. Then he suddenly straightened up and said, "Whoever broke the window should answer for himself."

Mr. Lindstrom was silent for a moment. "You are right, Klas; go back to your seat. I will wait until tomorrow. Until then, the one who threw the stone may consider whether he wants to stick to his lie or not."

After school on the way home, Klas received the promised thrashing. He was dragged behind an old garage and thoroughly beaten there. But he swallowed his anger and tears. "A thorough flogging in the footsteps of my Savior," he said to himself, "I can get over that." Despite everything, he felt happy and lighthearted.

The last part of the way, Mattes caught up to him, but Klas wanted to do without his company and intentionally lagged behind. A while later, his way led between Lake Hammar and Backa Hill. Quite a number of children on their sleds were there, sledging down the hill from the edge of the forest to the frozen lake. One of the most daring of them was Mattes.

At that moment, he raced down the slope and glided over the bare ice surface of the lake with a loud shriek. Then suddenly there was a crack, water foamed up, a scream rang out, and then there was nothing more to be seen of Mattes.

Klas stared in horror at the breach in the ice. He threw his backpack to the side of the path and ran across the bare ice. But he remembered something, and ran once again to the shore where a frozen boat was lying, grabbed a paddle, and ran back to the site of the accident.

After the last several yards, he dropped down, extended the paddle in front of him, and army-crawled towards the victim. Suddenly, he clearly remembered his mother's words: "to life or to death." Involuntarily, he prayed half aloud, "O my Savior, help me!" He had just reached the spot where the ice had caved in. At the edge of the ice, he saw Mattes' hands looking for a handhold, and then his head emerged from the water.

"Here, grab on tight, Mattes!" Klas shouted and pushed the paddle in front of the victim's face. At the

same time, he himself shouted for help, because he noticed how the ice cracked underneath him. And then it broke into several large pieces and slid away from under him.

Fortunately, several adults had observed the incident, and two men courageously jumped from the embankment onto the ice and managed to fish the two boys out. A little while later, both were warmly wrapped in thick blankets in their beds.

Although Mattes had been in the icy water longer than Klas, he was all right again the next morning. He went to Mr. Lindstrom before class started, told him how he had broken the window, and didn't embellish anything. He openly and honestly confessed his wrongdoing, including the lie.

When Mr. Lindstrom asked him what had prompted him to tell the truth, Mattes replied, "I was so close to death yesterday." Yes, Mattes had looked death in the eye. God had made him feel how terrible it is to go into eternity with sins on his conscience, unreconciled to God. He repentantly confessed his guilt and found forgiveness.

But Klas lay at home, delirious from a high fever. His mother sat by his bed day and night, crying and pleading to God for her boy. God heard her plea. One day, when he had slept for several hours, he opened his eyes, and they were clear again as before.

"Who gave you the courage, my boy," the happy mother asked later, stroking her son's head with her hand. "Who gave you the courage to dare to risk your life?" Her voice trembled with emotion.

"But, Mother, you yourself said that Jesus' way is the best, whether it leads to death or to life. And I felt as if I could clearly see His steps in the snow, and I just had to follow!"

E. Kunz



Wayward Children

Part 1

Suffering Parents

Markus Schmelzle

Introduction

The parable of the Prodigal Son describes the response of a father who witnessed his younger son go his own way in defiance of his upbringing. Although it must have been difficult, this father let his son leave. He left the decision to him, without giving up hope that his son would return. Only when you get to the point where you unreservedly surrender your child into the loving hands of the Lord will He have unrestricted freedom to work in your child's life.

The parable of the Prodigal Son can give us a new perspective and help us see these lost children through God's eyes. This story is about God's wonderful grace. With the help of this grace, we can alleviate our fear, overcome our worries, and strengthen our trust and hope. The parable does not offer instructions or tips on how we should deal with children, but it does direct us to trust God. Just as many psalms teach us, our fundamental attitude should be one of trust, even in times of sorrow. We can trust that God—the Creator of all, the Redeemer, the Rock of His people, and the safe haven in the midst of the storm—is trustworthy and deserving of our confidence.

Suffering Parents

We all know and love children who have rebelled against God and their parents and have chosen a path leading to destruction. Were you, or perhaps are you such a lost child yourself?

Parents who serve God wholeheartedly often suffer greatly when their children choose a different path, or state that they will no longer attend worship services, are not interested in God, do not believe in God, or they want to enjoy life in the world.

My children are still young, yet I know of the anguish and pain of many brothers and sisters of faith

with whom I have suffered. It always drives me to my knees in prayer: “Lord, help my children!” I am aware of my responsibility before God. I understand the mission of teaching the souls God entrusted to us about Him: morning and evening family devotions, regular singing together, and guidance pointing them toward God at every available opportunity. When I am on a nature walk with the children, I point out how perfectly God created everything. I tell them about the miracles God has performed in my personal life and in the lives of other brothers and sisters. We pray with our children, and together we have already experienced

answers to prayer. The children regularly attend worship services and children's programs. We raise them with much love. But can I be certain that our growing children will accept Christ as their Savior and walk the way He has planned for them? No, there is no guarantee.

Doubts and Accusations

When children choose a life without God, parents examine themselves and find they could and should have acted differently at times. They often blame themselves greatly and are almost crushed by self-accusations. But God knows when we have done our best. It's a foregone conclusion that we all make mistakes. God has taken all of this into consideration. We cannot be perfect. None of us are. We are human. All parents make mistakes. Even if we made no errors, there would still be no guarantee that our children will serve God one day.

How gladly we would make decisions for our children! Oh, how we would like to choose for them and to walk the path to Golgotha and eternal bliss for them. But we cannot. Each person must decide for himself.

Why Such Great Pain?

Why do parents suffer so deeply when their children go the way of the world? They know Christ is the only narrow way to salvation. To see their beloved child taking the broad path that leads to eternal damnation seems almost unbearable for a loving parent's heart. How deep is their desire for their children to be with the Lord one day!

When children rebel and go their own way, Christian parents are hurt, firstly, because of the rebellion itself and its immediate repercussions; then also because of the possible future consequences. Will the child engage in greater sins? Even if the child does find his way back, what will be the long-term aftermath of those sins? We think of drugs, acts of violence, or illegitimate relationships. But above all, we think of the eternal destiny without God.

The Agonizing Question: Why?

Why did my daughter, my son make this decision? How could it have come to this?

Our children are indeed exposed to many influences. On the one hand, there are the parents who do everything possible to win their child for the Savior. On the other hand, there are people with whom our child spends time at school or during leisure activities. It is not always possible to control that. During leisure time, perhaps we can. But at school? The school curriculum introduces children to a so-called "life of reason" as an alternative to the life of faith and influences the children to prepare for life in such a manner.

Children are affected by the laughter and ridicule of those who have learned they attend Sunday School or go to worship services.

Sometimes children take offense at brothers and sisters in the congregation for rebuking or reprimanding them. Then there are children with a very strong sense of justice. They recognize exactly when the lives of some congregants do not match their testimony.

Additionally, we must not overlook puberty. This is a period in the lives of young people when they often experience a crisis of identity and faith where questions inadvertently arise: "Do I believe only because my parents want me to? Do I believe only because it is required of me? Or do I really want it? Is this the life I desire? What do I actually want?" This is a dangerous time when great harm can occur by acting unwisely and making thoughtless statements that lack sensitivity and understanding. Neglecting or leaving the child alone can also be harmful.

What was the crucial factor in the son or daughter choosing the wrong path? Would it have been better to "give in" in a certain situation? Or was consistency of greater consequence? We don't know. We asked God for wisdom and sincerely tried our best, but the child has chosen his own way. Though God has called our child with His gentle voice, the devil has certainly done everything possible to distract from that voice. He has shown the child all the riches of this world: "And he said to Him, 'All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me'" (Matthew 4: 9). This world is evil. Some children listen to this voice and choose the broad path that leads to destruction.

The "lost children" in our lives raise serious questions about our own faith as well.

- *To be continued* -



We Should Have Time

When I got on the streetcar to go to work one Monday morning, people rudely shoved their way to the doors, giving no evidence of their day of rest on Sunday, just the day before. The scrambling ceased as everyone got on and found at least a place to stand.

Just as the streetcar began moving, a man came sprinting after us and tried to jump up. Time seemed to slow, but only a few seconds passed between the man slipping, the brakes squealing, and his fall. By a slim margin, the conductor managed to stop before the man was run over.

Suddenly, nobody was in such a hurry anymore. The police came, as did an ambulance someone had called, and a crowd of curious bystanders accumulated but quickly dispersed. It was just an accident, after all.

It turned out the man who had been in such a hurry lived near my apartment and had no relatives. When the doctors had fixed him up as best they could, I went to visit him in the hospital. He was visibly injured, but he had escaped with his life. Since he had an injury to his jaw, it was difficult for him to speak.

“It’s weird,” he said softly, “how strangers are suddenly concerned about me. The pastor was already here, and now you?”

“Yes,” I answered. “We don’t know each other, but I was on the tram too. After the accident, I found out what your name was and that we live near each other. I brought something you might need now: time.”

“I can’t talk very well, but I seem to have survived the worst of it. Since you’re here, you could tell me a story, maybe a few things about time, as you mentioned. You must have a different relationship with time than I did. I was in such a big hurry!”

I started, “I have a job like everyone else and a family, too, but I still find time for others once in a while. It was actually my young daughter who showed me what a great gift time can be. On her birthday, when I asked what she wished for, she listed a few small things before adding, ‘But the most important thing, Daddy, is for you to always have lots of time for me.’”

“On vacation, I visited an elderly aunt. She lived in a small seniors’ home near a city I often vacation in. I took some time to encourage her but did not say much. Instead, I let her reminisce and talk over some of her worries. She had two sons who lived in the same city but were always so busy that they rarely found time for their mother.

“When I got up to go after three hours, the lady exclaimed with a happy smile, ‘Finally, someone who has time for me!’ I said nothing, ashamed to admit that I still planned to go for a walk this afternoon and actually did not have time either.

“Now something a little different. A young coworker of mine suffered a death in the family and had to ask for a little time off. His request came in the midst of

several urgent projects. I did not have the power to authorize his leave, so I had to refer him to the boss.

“‘I don’t have time!’ was the boss’s reply. That brought me to the end of my otherwise even temper, and I shot back, ‘Your employees have eight hours of time for you every day, Sir; that’s a third of their day. Surely you can give five minutes for one of them!’”

“The discussion between my young colleague and the boss was scheduled, and he got his time off.

“One last thing. One evening, I visited our pastor. He was just sitting down to eat and invited me to share a cup of tea, but barely five minutes had passed before the telephone rang. The call came from the hospital with a request to visit a gravely ill person. The pastor jumped up to leave without even finishing his meal. He had time.”

The patient said nothing but nodded thoughtfully.

“I brought something for you to read,” I added. “It is the most widely-read book in the world.”

He looked up with interest as I handed him the book. It was the Bible. I said, “We should have time for this too—especially for this.”

A few weeks later, when he had recovered, he visited my family and me. He thanked me for the times I visited him in the hospital and returned the book to me, saying, “I have now bought my own copy of the world’s bestseller, and you were right, we should make time.”

We must take time for our souls. Our society’s state of constant hurry and anxiety is a great danger because God can only speak to us when it is quiet. If we do not take time for God and our souls, we cannot enter heaven.

R. Welter

Confusion

“After all, we are all sinners!”

“Then wouldn’t you like to become a child of God?”

“Sir, I’m already a child of God.”

Turning to the man next to him, the evangelist said, “There’s something wrong. Either our friend is a sinner, or he’s a child of God.”

“Yes, you know, there may be confusion in this area. Sinners think they are God’s children, and God’s children think they are sinners. God alone knows what each person is.”

“Well then, I must clarify this once for all: A sinner is disobedient to the will of God and has unforgiven sin. A child of God, on the other hand, is walking in a pattern of obedience to the will of God and is truly forgiven of all sins.”

“Our preacher says we are pardoned sinners, and we also sin as children of God.”

“Dear Friend, there are children of God who sin. But may I tell you what happens to them when they sin? Something similar to what happens to ice when it melts. Is there such a thing as melted ice? Is it still ice? Are sinning children of God still children of God? Is consenting to sin still following Jesus? Isn’t it following the devil? The devil wants us to sin. God wants us not to sin.”

“I think you are presenting a false doctrine there.”

“Dear Friend, this is the Bible’s teaching from Eve’s fall into sin right from the beginning. Sin prevents us from having fellowship with God.”

“Eve was in the Old Testament. But in the meantime, Jesus came and crushed the serpent’s head. I hold fast to the word that Jesus Himself said: ‘I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.’”

“That’s a fine word, and it’s written in John 10:28, so may I show you how the verse you mentioned begins?” He then opened a Bible handed to him. Please read John 10:27–28 in context.”

He read, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them; and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life; and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.”

“Thank you! So, who will never perish, and who will no one snatch out of His hand? Those who hear His voice and follow Him. We shouldn’t ever take a scriptural word out of context and build a confusing doctrine on it. Jesus is not speaking of those who sin, who follow the devil by doing His will; He is speaking of those who follow Him. So, the beautiful promise you cited applies only to those who follow Him. Surely we don’t want to counterfeit God’s Word, nor read into it something it doesn’t even contain.”

“I cannot disagree with you on this. However, I will talk to our pastor sometime.”

“Yes, you should do that. But I’ll give you some good advice: Search the Scriptures for yourself to see

if this is not the case. Follow the words of your pastor if they agree with what God’s Word says.”

Just as the evangelist was about to say goodbye, a silent listener who was thinking about what he had heard said, “Excuse me, I have opened the Bible. It says here, ‘I give them eternal life.’ If it can be lost again, it’s not eternal life after all.”

“It’s good to touch on that thought too. You are trying to be logical. God’s Word is logical. Spiritual life, given to everyone who turns to God with all his heart, is something incredibly special. This isn’t bodily life, nor life of our human spirit, but rather divine life called eternal life because it is the life of the eternal, holy God Himself. We aren’t dealing with physical life on earth that ends after death.

“You mean eternal life can be lost again by the person who’s received it?”

“Any kind of life can be lost. A deer that’s been shot loses its animal life. A severed plant loses its plant life; a poisoned man loses his human life. And a man fallen into sin loses his eternal life. Was it not a cunning lie of the devil that ‘you will not surely die?’ (Genesis 3:4). The wages of sin is death. Paul says, ‘But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives’ (1 Timothy 5:6). Jesus Himself speaks of this loss of life: ‘If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they

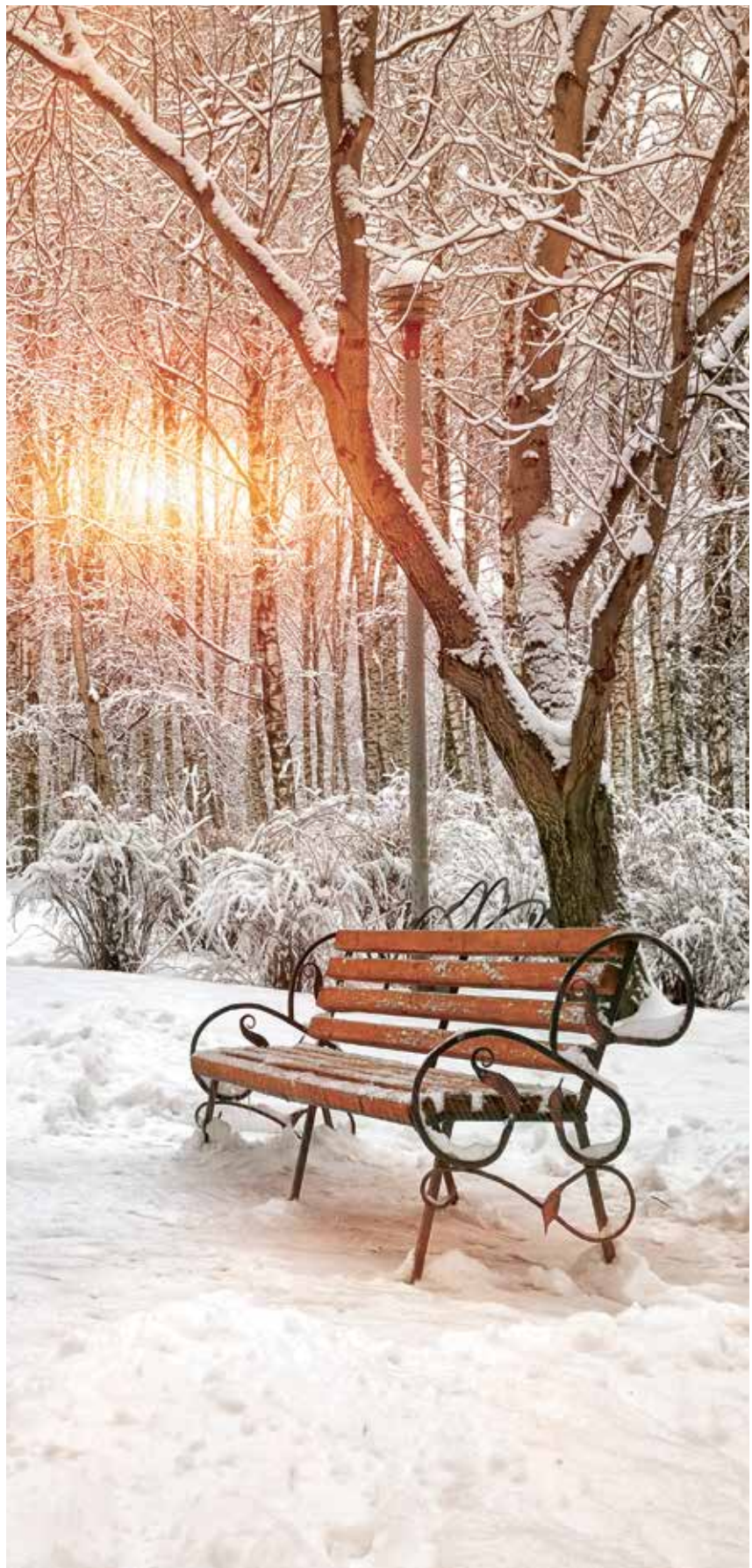
gather *them* and throw them into the fire, and they are burned’ (John 15: 6).”

“But our preacher keeps saying, ‘Whoever has once become a child of God remains so.’ God does not cast us off when we sin. After all, we don’t push our children out of the house when they do something wrong and make a mistake. God is certainly more merciful.”

“This argument has the appearance of being correct, and yet it’s not at all applicable to sin. Sin is something much, much worse than just something wrong or a mistake; it is no less than spiritual suicide, for it leads to death. Those who have died in our family we carry to their final resting place and bury them there. It is not permissible to leave them in the community of the living. Additionally, the Bible says sinners do not remain ‘in the congregation of the righteous’ (Psalm 1: 5b). But of those who are called Christ’s sheep, we are told, ‘They follow Me; and I give them eternal life.’ Obedience and eternal life absolutely belong together. If one falls away, the other falls away also. The Bible often teaches this truth in a variety of illustrations.”

“I’ve never heard it explained this way, though. However, what you say is important to me. I would like to talk to you more about it. Since you’re staying here for a few more days, may I visit you tomorrow to discuss this further?”

“*With pleasure. See you tomorrow, then. Goodbye!*” ■



Though Mountains Shake and Hillsides Crumble

*A new year with an unknown future
Is dawning as we journey on,
And if it brings success or failure,
All things are known to You, o God.
We know, o Lord, that come what may,
In all You have the final say.*

*We know You love us with compassion
And welcome us to come and pray.
How often we have seen You fashion
An answer for us on our way.
That's why we kneel and seek Your face
As we draw near to the throne of grace.*

*A veil obscures the way before us;
What time will bring we cannot see;
But through Your Word You will restore us
And lead us heavenward to Thee.
Give us Your Word, our guiding light,
And lead us safely through the night.*

*The world is dark, and growing darker;
You are the light that conquers night,
A beacon that remains our marker.
Your truth is ever shining bright.
Until we see You as You are,
Remain our bright and morning star.*

*Though mountains shake and hillsides crumble,
You stay the same, steadfast and sure.
Though lightning flashes with the thunder,
In You our Lord we are secure.
Your grace and love are always near,
And they will guide us through this year.*