



Foundation of Faith



PRAYING FOR THE HOLY SPIRIT
HOW CAN WE BE SANCTIFIED?
THE INFLUENCE OF A MOTHER
LETTER: DEAR MOTHER

The Fulfilled Promise

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FOUNDATION OF FAITH

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Editorial

Dear Reader,

As we celebrate Pentecost this month, we thank God that His promises are Yes and Amen and that they still hold true today. Whenever the gospel is preached, and people open their hearts and accept the Word in faith, they experience what the Scriptures promise us all.

In John 7:37-38, the Son of God made a promise that ties in with Pentecost, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the scriptures have said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."

Rivers of blessing!

Long before John recorded these words, the prophet Joel had already proclaimed that God would pour out His Holy Spirit on His servants in the time of grace (see Joel 3). The prophet Isaiah used an example from nature to show that our world without Christ is like farmland without rain: a desert wasteland. Speaking from God's perspective, he wrote, "For I will pour water on him who is thirsty, and floods on the dry ground; I will pour My Spirit on your descendants, and My blessing on your offspring" (Isaiah 44:3).

Anyone who accepts Jesus' offer and receives forgiveness of guilt and sin can say, "I belong to the Lord!" and all who have received assurance of salvation can fully dedicate themselves to the Lord. Then, rivers of mercy and blessing can flow.

Dear Reader, these words are meant for all of us: "Oh, that you had heeded My commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea" (Isaiah 48:18).

All these wonderful promises are open to everyone, so believe them, claim them, and receive what the Lord is offering. Mired in misery and sin, the world needs those who are consecrated to God and through whom rivers of blessing flow.

H. D. Nimz



The Blind Musician

“**O** what a happy soul am I! Although I cannot see, I am resolved that in this world contented I will be. How many blessings I enjoy, that other people don’t. To weep and sigh because I’m blind, I cannot, and I won’t.”

These words, written by Fanny Crosby at the age of eight, are the key to her monumental success as a comforter of hurting hearts, a benefactress of humanity, and a poet of touching songs. She was a person so unique that few others would equal.

Fanny Crosby, born on March 24, 1820 in the southeastern part of New York, literally saw the light of day for a very short time. When she was six months old, she was stricken with a debilitating eye disease. Due to ignorance and her caregivers’ lack of skill, she completely lost her eyesight.

When Fanny was old enough to comprehend it, her mother told her that two of the greatest songwriters had been blind. There have often been people deprived of their physical sight, who had a very

clear spiritual vision. Nevertheless, it was a bitter disappointment to Fanny when she learned of other children chosen and preferred over her because they could see. Nonetheless, she was determined to keep a little jewel in her heart called “contentment.” This jewel proved to be her happiness and glory.

Fanny’s darkness was first brightened by her grandmother, who loved her tenderly, and often came to visit. Her grandmother had a gift of creating beautiful descriptions for the little blind girl. She told her about the sun, the moon, the stars, the clouds, the rainbow, and other wonders of nature. She taught her many fascinating things about the birds. Fanny soon learned to recognize their songs and would then imagine their colors and shapes. Grandmother described the flowers to her, which always held a special charm for Fanny. And on their long walks together, she acquainted her granddaughter with the flowers so she could easily recognize them both by her sense of touch and by their emanating fragrance.

Of all the abundance of brightness her grandmother was able to offer Fanny’s dark world, the most glorious and lasting was the Gospel of Jesus. Whenever the evening shadows approached, Fanny would sit on her grandmother’s lap in the family’s big rocking chair. She would listen to her tell the marvelous Bible stories and then teach her to pray while kneeling. In her old age, Fanny once said to a friend, “You know that to one like myself shut in from much that those blessed with the sense of seeing enjoy, God’s Holy Word has been, and is,

doubly precious. On it I have rested right through the years. On it I rest now; and whether my years on earth be few or many, I shall rest on it to the end.”¹

When Fanny was fifteen years old, she entered the Institute for the Blind in New York, where she remained for twelve years. Her favorite subject was literature. She avidly studied poetry and began writing many religious as well as secular poems.

When she began to set music to her lyrics, the song “Pass Me Not, O Gentle Savior” soon gained the attention of the whole world. Ira Sankey, the gospel singer and songwriter, once said that this song was sung most often during the meetings held in 1874 by Evangelist Dwight L. Moody in London. It was later translated into many foreign languages and is still sung to this day.

Another of her widely known songs is “Safe in the Arms of Jesus.” Mr. William Doane brought Fanny Crosby a tune he had composed and asked her to write lyrics to go with it. He played the melody for her, and Fanny exclaimed, “That says, Safe in the Arms of Jesus.”¹ In just thirty minutes, she wrote down the words of the song that, over the course of many years, has given peace and comfort to the abandoned and afflicted like no other.

Another well-known song by Fanny Crosby, “Rescue the Perishing,” was written in 1869, resulting from an experience in her mission work in New York. She had been addressing a large crowd of workers on a hot summer evening when the thought was impressed upon her that “some mother’s boy must

be rescued that night or not at all.”¹ In her closing words, she remarked that if perhaps there was a son present who had left his mother and ignored her admonitions and wandered out into the world, let him come. Indeed, a young man came up and asked, “Did you mean me? I promised my mother to meet her in heaven, but as I am now living that will be impossible.”¹ That night, the song “Rescue the Perishing, Care for the Dying” was penned. When she came home, she immediately began to work on it and finished it even before she went to rest that night.

The song “Blessed Assurance” also has an interesting origin. Mrs. J. F. Knapp composed a melody and played it several times for Fanny. “She then asked what it said,” to which Fanny replied, “Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!”¹ This song was written in 1873.

The following year, she wrote another of her well-known songs. She was sitting in her room one evening, enjoying the nearness of Christ, her constant Companion on her pilgrimage, when the following words sprang from her heart:

“Thou, my everlasting Portion,
More than friend or life to me,
All along my pilgrim journey,
Savior, let me walk with Thee.”

Also in 1874, she wrote the song, “Savior, More Than Life to Me.” She often told of how it had brought her comfort in the darkest hours.

One of the traits that graced Fanny’s soul was her selflessness. From the first time she received payment for her poems, she

opened her hand to those in need. She could have been rich if she had wished, but she chose instead to make others happy. “During my ninety years,” she said just before she died, “I have never served for mere pay. I have always wanted to do a full day’s work regardless of what the financial result might be. He who only works for pay gets nothing more.”¹

Without a doubt, her greatest virtue was her inexhaustible compassion and empathy toward others. From her heart flowed a constant stream of comfort to those in distress and affliction. Over and over again, her doorbell would ring. While in a neighbor’s house, acquaintances were robbed of their father, and Fanny said, “I must go at once,”¹ as she carried out her mission. If a friend was in distress, she would not sleep without having brought comfort and encouragement to those who suffered.

On the 15th of February 1915, at about 3:00 a.m., Fanny quietly passed away. She had gone to bed that evening about 9:00 p.m. after dictating a letter of comfort to a friend whose daughter had recently died. At 3:00 a.m., Mrs. Booth, with whom she lived, thought she heard footsteps in her room. She quickly rushed over to Fanny and took her in her arms. Fanny had fallen unconscious. A doctor was immediately summoned, but Fanny’s spirit had already fled. In a way, she is not really dead but quite alive and still spreading comfort and encouragement through her more than 8000 songs.

¹Crosby, F., & Jackson, S. T. (1915). *Fanny Crosby’s story of ninety-four years*. F. H. Revell. ■

The Significance of the Ascension

“And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory” (1 Timothy 3:16).

“Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight” (Acts 1:9).

God’s creation was brought into existence according to a wise plan and divine will. The ascension of Christ is also part of the divine plan. Although we know the facts, this event remains a mystery to us.

God’s plan of redemption was realized when Jesus was born. His human body developed normally, serving Him during His years here on earth. Then, when Jesus fulfilled His mission, His time in this body ended as well when He was taken up to heaven.

Jesus’ Ascension Shows that Heaven is Open

The Fall of Man caused a great chasm between humanity and God. Centuries later, Abram found grace before God and became the patriarch of the people of Israel. God spoke to this nation and did many miracles. When the people were freed from Egypt, God gave them the laws at Sinai and the sanctuary with the tabernacle. Although God drew near to the people of Israel, the great separation between them and God remained. Only the high priest was allowed

to enter the presence of God with a sacrifice once a year.

Then Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came to earth. He revealed the will of God to mankind and opened the door to salvation. Through the sacrifice of His body, He reconciled God and man. Thus, everyone who believes in Him has access to salvation, to the Father, to the very heart of God. Jesus Christ, as High Priest, reunited humanity with heaven. Through His deed and entry into heaven, He also provided access to the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8).

The Ascension Confirms that Jesus Completed His Earthly Mission

Only after Jesus had fulfilled His mission could He ascend again into the Father’s glory. The Ascension is evidence and testifies that Jesus fulfilled the mandate.

With His work, Jesus laid the foundation of the Kingdom of God here on earth. He established the Church. But before He left the earth, He promised the Comforter to all the disciples (John 7:37–39). God fulfilled this promise at Pentecost. The Holy Spirit was ex-

trremely necessary, guaranteeing the church’s growth, strength, and protection.

Ascension and the Cloud

When Jesus left the disciples and was lifted up to heaven, suddenly a cloud came between Jesus and them. This tells us something. The cloud is an indication of the presence of God.

In the Old Testament, God repeatedly showed His nearness to people through the image of a cloud. When Moses dedicated the tabernacle with the sanctuary, a cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting (Exodus 40:34). Similarly, we read in 1 Kings 8:10–11 that a cloud filled the sanctuary at the dedication of the temple. We also encounter the cloud in the New Testament as an indication of God’s presence. Jesus was with the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration. Suddenly, a cloud overshadowed this small group. God spoke to the disciples from the cloud. God’s glory was in the cloud (Mark 9:7).

Then, when Jesus left the earth, the glory of God met Him in the



image of a cloud and hid Him from the eyes of the disciples.

The cloud is associated with a glorious promise for us. In 1 Thessalonians 4:14–18, we read that at Christ’s return, the saints will be caught up in the clouds borne up by the glory of God. Here we will immediately enter into the presence of God. This encounter means a great deal to us humans; it will be part of the greatest event in human history.

What Does the Ascension Mean for Us?

It means we have an Advocate in heaven (1 John 2:1). Jesus is now

seated at the right hand of the Father and is an advocate for us. But what does it mean to us to have an advocate, an intercessor, in heaven? Jesus, “exalted to the right hand of God,” can say to the Father, “I know their situation; I was there Myself. I know man, his state, and his motives.” He has experienced the ups and downs of life on earth Himself. He has experienced temptations. Now there is someone in heaven who understands us and intercedes for us.

We can come before God because Jesus has brought us salvation and redemption. Our righteousness and holiness is totally dependent

on the Son of God. It is He Himself Who cares for us and protects us.

The Ascension promises the return of the Bridegroom to the Church on earth. Just as He ascended into heaven, He will come again one day (Acts 1:11). Then that day will come when every person will meet Jesus face to face.

It was a great celebration when the Son of God returned to the Father’s glory. Likewise, a great celebration awaits in heaven when Jesus finally takes His Bride home to be eternally united with her in heaven’s glory.

*Waldemar Adler
Astana, Kazakhstan*

Jesus' Final Instructions to His Disciples

Forty days after His resurrection, Jesus stood in the circle of His disciples, instructing them about the Kingdom of God and their future mission in this world. These last special instructions definitely need to be heeded today as well, since the same missionary work is still at stake.

In Acts 1:2, we read that He gave commandments to His chosen apostles. It should be noted that their election is emphasized once again, since they were initially chosen (see Luke 6:13). The disciples had already been following Jesus for approximately three years. During that time, Jesus stood before them daily as an example. They were impressed by His profound interpretations of Scripture; they listened to His teachings and repeatedly asked for deeper explanations. They saw His actions and His daily interactions with people. They also paid attention to the respective reactions of His listeners. They learned about Jesus' supernatural power and also experienced His miraculous works. They marveled at His wisdom; indeed, they had the privilege of being in the greatest Master's school. With their election to serve as apostles, preparation for their later missionary service began at the same time. However, for forty more days Jesus spoke to them especially about the Kingdom of God and gave them His last commands, thereby completing their special training.

Clearly, Jesus valued the importance of gathering His disciples around Him again as before, to give them these final instructions. In verse 4, we read, "And being assembled with *them*, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father." This was a particularly vital command. The "promise" of which He had previously spoken clearly referred to the special Pentecost experience: "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you" (verse 8). That was the promise, which refers back

to Jesus' words in John 14:17: "But you know Him [the Spirit of truth], for He dwells with you and will be in you." And in Luke 24:49, the Lord said, "But tarry in the city of Jerusalem, until you are endued with power from on high."

Jesus was unequivocally equipping them for missionary service! Repetition must be of special importance. If this instruction was necessary for missionary service then, it is necessary today too. This refers to a special enabling power that comes from the Holy Spirit. It cannot be replaced by human enthusiasm, nor by education or eloquence. This must have been made clear to the disciples, because they also followed Jesus' instructions with precision.

Acts 1:8: "You shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem . . . and to the end of the earth." Obviously, this means the preparation the apostles urgently needed for missionary service is also essential for God's servants today. "You shall be My witnesses."—They were to testify of Him, the Son of God, and His glorious gospel; they were to continue proclaiming His truth and His complete teaching. Nothing was to be cut out, nor was anything to be added to it. They were to testify to His mission, to His life, to His nature, to His love, to His sufferings, to His death on the cross, to His saving power, to sanctification, to eternal life, and eternal blessedness.

For example, when Paul wrote in Galatians 3:1, "Before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified," this could never have been achieved by human powers and abilities. But He explicitly pointed to the work of the Holy Spirit by professing, "The [Holy] Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit" (Romans 8:16). To this day, the mystery is grounded in this truth: the Holy Spirit reveals divine truths to our spirit that remain hidden to the natural mind.

Following Jesus' instruction, the disciples persevered in prayer in Jerusalem for ten days. Finally, Pentecost came! "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:4). From this we can conclude that anyone who has not experienced Pentecost will not be able to be a truly useful witness of Jesus Christ.

The disciples now began to fulfill God's mission for them through the Holy Spirit. Later, it was said of Jesus' followers, "These who have turned the world upside down have come here too" (Acts 17:6). However,

it was not them but the Spirit of God Who could work mighty things through them.

Let us note how helpful Jesus' final instructions were to His followers and how good it was that they obeyed them. The wise Master had not let them go forth without equipping them with the Holy Spirit. They were witnesses who had a living testimony. We can learn how we too can become genuine and effective witnesses for Jesus.

Friedrich Krebs

A Faithful Confession of Faith

Among his generals, Frederick the Great had many faithful and joyful Christians who were not ashamed of their faith even before the king. They confessed it openly and courageously. Therefore, and not infrequently, they made a deep impression on the unbelieving king.

It is told that once during the Seven Years' War (1756–1763), the king tried to poke fun at the lieutenant general, Count Schmettau, whom the king knew to be a God-fearing man. He let a stream of jokes and taunts run their course. Schmettau initially listened calmly; but then he said, "Your Majesty has a greater sense of humor than I do and is also more highly educated. Besides, you are also my king! So the intellectual struggle between you and me is lopsided in every respect. Nevertheless, you cannot take away my faith. And even if you succeed, well, you will have harmed me immeasurably, but at the same time you will have harmed yourself."

The king stopped and, showing his displeasure, asked, "What is that supposed to mean, Monsieur Schmettau? I should harm myself if I rob you of your

faith? What do you mean?"

With unshakeable calmness, the general replied, "Your Majesty, you consider me a good officer now, and I hope you are not mistaken. But if you could take away my faith, you would find me a wretched thing, a reed in the wind, someone you could not rely upon, either in deliberations or in battle."

The king fell silent and continued on for a time in quiet contemplation. Then he asked Schmettau, "Tell me, then, what is your faith?"

"I believe," said Schmettau kindly, "in Divine Providence, which has numbered every hair on my head; in redemption from all my sins through Jesus Christ, my Lord; and in an eternal, blessed life after death."

"You are fully confident in your belief?"

"Yes, truly, Sire!"

The king, deeply moved, grasped Schmettau's hand, squeezed it tightly, and said, "You are a fortunate man!" Immersed in thought, he walked away. Never again from that very hour did he mock Schmettau's religious views. ■

How Can We Be Sanctified?

We do not see this question explicitly asked in scripture, and yet the necessity of sanctification is repeatedly emphasized. Paul clearly says, “For this is the will of God, your sanctification” (1 Thessalonians 4:3). Therefore, each Christian should ask themselves the question, “Lord, what do I need to do in order to be sanctified?” Although it is God alone Who can sanctify, we need to fulfill the conditions required. When we were saved, there were prerequisites present for God to do this work in our soul. Similarly, to be wholly sanctified, we need to take to heart the words in Romans 12:1, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.”

It is necessary to be sanctified completely in order to be better equipped for service in the Kingdom of God. Since we serve God and others by using the members of our body, sanctification is both for soul and body. Only once we are totally consecrated to God are we able to offer an acceptable and reasonable service to our Lord.

Romans 12:1 is an urgent plea or appeal addressed to believers. It cannot refer to those who “are dead in trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1) but only to those

who “have passed from death to life” (1 John 3:14), since the sacrifice must be “a living sacrifice” which is “holy.” This consecration, this sacrifice, includes dying to my ego, my selfish agenda. My life now belongs to God, as wonderfully expressed by the Apostle Paul when he says, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

In order for God to sanctify us fully, we must be willing to give up our own agenda. No longer are we seeking our plans, our thoughts, our wants, but God’s Kingdom. We subject our will and everything we do to His leading.

We Are Sanctified by the Truth

Jesus prayed to the Father and said, “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth” (John 17:17). Being in harmony with the truth of God’s Word is the only way we can attain this state of grace. We must have unconditional faith in the Word of God because “it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16) and also “because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification

by the Spirit and belief in the truth” (2 Thessalonians 2:13). Therefore, we must obey the truth.

Obedying the truth by completely living a sanctified life includes what Paul outlines in 1 Thessalonians 5:15–23, “See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil. Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The promise that Jesus gave His disciples—to ask the Father to send them the Holy Spirit—rests on the condition that they keep His commandments (John 14:15–18). Peter, too, verifies that God gives the Holy Spirit to those who obey Him (Acts 5:32).

**We need to seek, in all sincerity,
to be sanctified completely.**

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who

asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? . . . If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him” (Luke 11:9–13). When the disciples were staying in Jerusalem (since Jesus told them to do so until they were filled with the Holy Spirit), we read that they “continued with one accord in prayer and supplication” (Acts 1:14). This shows us that when Jesus has promised us something, this does not relieve us from the duty to earnestly pray to God for it. Repeatedly, Christians have experienced that when we pray earnestly, then we will receive.

We Must Exercise Faith

When we consecrate our lives completely to God for His service and offer ourselves to Him fully as a living sacrifice, then we have done our part. If we fulfill the Lord’s will in this way and believe His promise, then He sanctifies us through the blood of His Son. Through faith we can claim our promised “inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith” (Acts 26:18). ■



An Important Question

The apostle Paul traveled through the upper regions of Asia Minor and eventually came to Ephesus, where he found some disciples who had recently become believers in the Lord Jesus. He addressed them with this important question: “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” Quite astonished, they gave him the answer, “We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit” (Acts 19: 2). But they took it for granted that they would immediately claim for themselves this precious offer that Paul showed them. As Paul laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them. What a wonderful gift of the Holy Spirit without much insight or knowledge of Him!

We live today in a time when the Gospel is not scarce, but is preached everywhere, along with the truth about receiving the Holy Spirit or being baptized by Him. Thousands of copies of books and tracts have been written and circulated by God’s messengers about it. Nevertheless, there are relatively few who have received the Holy Spirit.

“Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” This is still the important question for you today, dear Soul, who has been following Jesus for many years. There is nothing more important in our time than for each and every child of God to be aware of having received the Holy Spirit. Do you possess the Holy Spirit, which is given to us by God and which the world cannot receive (John 14:17)?

Receiving the Holy Spirit does not depend on our great knowledge, nor on our great faith, but solely on our obedience and willing surrender to God.

Consider the disciples at Ephesus. They had not even known there was a Holy Spirit, and yet they received Him, as did those gathered in Jerusalem. Nor did they know as much about the Holy Spirit as we know from the Word of God today. But the one thing they knew for sure was that the Lord Jesus wanted them to stay in Jerusalem until they were clothed with power from on high. As they obediently awaited the day with supplication and entreaty, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.

Is it that necessary for us to receive the Holy Spirit? Certainly Paul saw the absolute necessity, hence his important question to the Ephesians, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?”

The Lord Jesus said, “I came to send fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!” (Luke 12: 49). Brothers and sisters, it cannot start burning in our hearts until we have the Holy Spirit. The fire of the Holy Spirit will banish all lukewarmness and sluggishness and will fill us with courage and zeal for the cause of God, so He can do His work through us and add souls to His church as He once did in Jerusalem. If we possess the Holy Spirit, we will be better able to overcome all difficulties and go from victory to victory. The gifts of the Spirit will then also be found among us.

In Jesus’ farewell discourse (John 14), we see that the Lord promised His disciples a Comforter, the Holy Spirit, Who would abide with them forever. In the same chapter we also find the tasks of this promised Comforter, or what He was to accomplish.

He Will Teach You

Who among us does not need the teaching of the Holy Spirit? In every field and for every work, He is needed so much, but especially in the work for the Lord. As preachers or helpers, we all need the Holy Spirit. Therefore, even Sunday school teachers, consider the question meant for you too: “Have you received the Holy Spirit?”

He Will Remind You

How important it is to remember to pray, to witness, and to read the Word of God! The Holy Spirit will remind us of all that the Lord tells us. Therefore, “Have you received the Holy Spirit?”

He Will Guide Us Into All Truth (John 16:13)

Who among us does not need the guidance of the Holy Spirit, whether in preaching the Word, in reading the Word of God, in every work in the church, in our everyday life as a family or in our workplaces? Therefore, “Have you received the Holy Spirit?”

He Will Be Our Strength (Acts 1:8)

We need a penetrating power that reaches not only our ears, but also the depths of the heart, a power that softens hardened hearts. Look at the Apostle Peter at Pen-

tecost. He is energized with power from on high, so in response to his preaching the great multitude asks, “What shall we do?” Therefore, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” ■

How Can We Lead a Holy Life?

To live holy, one must be holy, for a holy life springs from a holy and pure heart. To understand what holiness means, we must turn to the Bible. The “power” to live holy is only found in the biblical plan of redemption and grace.

When God gave Moses the Law, He impressed upon him the many usages of sacred objects, of ceremonies, and commandments, and the sacredness of the objects consecrated to the service of God at the altar and in the tabernacle. These objects were no different from those used in everyday activities, except that they had been consecrated, or set apart, for service to God. Through this consecration, it rendered them holy.

In the New Testament, it wasn't pots, censers, and lamps that were consecrated to God, but men and women. Their holiness cannot be separated from a deep, conscious consecration to service, just as the vessels of the altar and temple could not remain holy when used for other purposes. People brought the objects to the altar to be consecrated to God, and by sprinkling them with the blood of sacrificial animals, they were sanctified. In the new covenant, people consecrate themselves completely to God, and the blood of Jesus Christ makes them pure. Without this voluntary surrender and consecration to God and His cause, no holiness of heart or holy life could be achieved.

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you,” Jesus said to His disciples before He was taken up into heaven (Acts 1:8). The Holy Spirit Who was promised to them, would also be called the “Comforter.” He would serve as their Guide.

God's children need divine guidance today just as they did then. Living a holy life is impossible without the constant presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit. It requires us to humble our defiant hearts and place ourselves under the gentle guidance of the Spirit and Word of God in all things. Without the help and miraculous power of the Holy Spirit, no one can live a holy life. When one has completely consecrated himself to God and is always mindful of the guidance of the Holy Spirit, then he can live a holy life. He may still be a person who is influenced by circumstances and surroundings, who often lacks wisdom, who is often hindered by weakness, but he has the power to do what is right. By resolutely doing the will of God to the best of his ability, he can continually maintain peace in his heart.

Let's observe some simple guidelines for holy living:

- Guard your thoughts so your mind remains pure from unkind, impure, and selfish motives.
- Be careful of your words; always speak kindly, sincerely and purely.
- Do not engage in gossip, slander, or any evil talk.
- Live sensibly, enjoy the natural things of life, and do not look fearfully to the future.
- Look daily to God for grace and strength.

These simple guidelines will help you walk contentedly and confidently in God's ways all the days of your life. M. H.

Total Consecration

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service” (Romans 12:1).

While the apostle addresses the church in Rome as “brethren,” we may understand his admonition applies to the “sisters” as well. The epistles are addressed to the churches, to the believers and not to those of the world, not to sinners. So here the apostle writes to those in the Lord, “Present your bodies as a living sacrifice.”

There are some people who think they have already given themselves fully to the Lord at the time of conversion. But how can one who is “dead in trespasses and sins” make a complete surrender? After all, he is a rebel against God, for he has offended Him and sinned against Him. How can he consecrate himself to God?

When the sinner realizes his lost condition and comes to God in sincere repentance and contrition, he is pardoned. His sins are forgiven, and God accepts him as His child. He is born again. The person has now received spiritual life, life from God. Only now is he in the state where he can give himself to God as a living sacrifice.

What do we mean by a sacrifice? It is an illustration taken from the Old Testament. The God-fearing Israelite brought a prescribed unblemished sacrifice to the priest. Symbolically, the Israelite gave himself to God in the sacrifice. Hebrews 10:6 states, “In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin you [God] have no pleasure.” Only when the person offered himself in sacrifice could God accept the sacrifice.

Now, in the New Covenant, we know Jesus became the true sacrificial lamb. Since God gave His Son for us, He asks us to give ourselves to Him.

The sacrifice must be living, holy, and pleasing to God, set apart from all that is unclean. Being separate from the world, and fully consecrated to God, we get rid of all the things that still cling to us and are in the way. If we still want to cling to aspects off the world, or participate in worldly activities in addition to our religious practices, then our sacrifice is not holy or separated. This does not constitute a complete surrender to God.

“The One on the cross is my love and nothing else in this world,” sings a poet. It must come to that with us, too. We must be willing to leave everything for the sake of Jesus. Otherwise, we are not ready to be a holy sacrifice pleasing to God.

The Father in heaven had mercy on us. “He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all.” He gave His dearest to bitter death to redeem us. Then should it be too difficult for us to give ourselves to Him as a total sacrifice?

Many are satisfied with their experience and with their Christianity. But is God also satisfied? Many do not realize that the enemy of souls has a subtle plan. He gladly lets them perform their saintly discourses, even attend their reverent worship services, if only they do not completely surrender their lives to God. In this way, they do not notice the enemy gradually ensnaring them and their spiritual life slowly declining.

You may ask, How should I give myself to God as a sacrifice? Surrender your life and yourself completely to the Lord, with everything you are and have, and pray along with the poet:

*I will now surrender
To You, O Savior, now:
Spirit, soul, body, life,
I consecrate all to You!*

*I will separate from all,
From the dearest thing I have;
I'll keep away from sin,
Be faithful to the grave.*

*Nothing is too dear for You;
the sacrifice is ready.
O, send the holy fire,
Consecrate the sacrifice!*

“Offer to God thanksgiving, and pay your vows to the Most High. Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me” (Psalm 50:14–15).

This testimony is to the glory of God for the miraculous help I received from Him.

In May 2022, I had hip replacement surgery. I was able to feel God’s peace as I sat in the waiting room before the surgery. The surgery went well. The usual hip replacement most people get was not right for me, so I am very thankful the doctor recognized the difference and put the right hip in for me. I have no pain now, and everything has healed well.

One day when it was especially hard for me, I promised the Lord that I would write a testimony if He healed my hip.

I am glad that He has answered my prayers and those of others!

Your Sister in the Lord,
Tina Froese
Edmonton, Alberta

Announcements

Pentecost Conference 2023

May 27–29, 2023

Place: Herford, Germany
Zimmerstraße 3

Further information:
www.gghf.de

Camp Meeting in Blaubeuren, Germany

August 12–17, 2023

Church Conference in Edmonton, Alberta

September 2–3, 2023

Further information:
www.edmontonchurchofgod.com

Praying for the Holy Spirit

“So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened . . . If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!” (Luke 11: 9–13).

These Bible verses speak of praying for the Holy Spirit. Through parables, the Lord points out the Heavenly Father’s willingness to give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him. He knows how much we need Him. When a seeking soul realizes the need and asks God for it, He answers the prayer.

When Christ was about to give His life as a sacrifice for mankind, He especially spoke of the Holy Spirit. First He said, “And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive” (John 14:16–17a).

Later on, the Lord said, “But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me” (John 15:26). Shortly before His ascension, He commanded His disciples to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the promise of the Father, of which He had spoken to them. He said, “For John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now” (Acts 1: 4–5).

Three Truths Stated in these Scriptures:

1. Jesus will pray the Father to give the Spirit of truth.
2. Jesus points out that He will send the Holy Spirit from the Father, because with Jesus’ atoning work on Calvary, all obstacles to receiving the Holy Spirit would be removed.

3. He called this experience “the promise of My Father” and explained that this was the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Based on these and other scriptural passages, we can be assured that praying for the Holy Spirit will not go unanswered.

The disciples of Jesus and many others believed His words. They stayed in Jerusalem and prayed for the fulfillment of this promise for ten days. As they gathered together again on the day of Pentecost, the answer came from heaven. Scripture says: “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2: 4). The prayer for the Holy Spirit was answered. God is faithful, and what He promises, He certainly fulfills.

As it was true then, so it is true today. The Heavenly Father is willing to give the Holy Spirit to His children, provided they fulfill certain conditions. Whoever does not ask for the Holy Spirit cannot receive Him. Whoever does not surrender to the Holy Spirit cannot receive Him. And whoever is not obedient to God will not obtain the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Peter expressed this: “And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him” (Acts 5: 32).

This obedience is no different from the obedience of faith of which the apostle Paul wrote in the letter to

the Romans. Whoever stands in this obedience may ask the Heavenly Father to give him the Holy Spirit, and He will do so.

In certain circles, the belief has spread that speaking in tongues is proof of receiving the Holy Spirit. They claim that if one does not speak in tongues, then the baptism of the Holy Spirit has not occurred. To this it must be said that in the course of the past centuries, many spirit-anointed men of God preached the Word of God in the power of the Holy Spirit and never spoke in tongues. Without the Holy Spirit, they would have “become sounding brass.” But history proves that streams of living water flowed from them.

In 1 Corinthians 12:30, the Apostle Paul asks the question, “Do all speak with tongues?” The answer is clearly implied, “No.”

The best proof of receiving the Holy Spirit is the Holy Spirit Himself. His presence and action in us and through us, not speaking in tongues, is evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit. Some people speak in tongues and live in sin. The Holy Spirit works a holy life. Whoever completely consecrates himself to God, putting his life at His disposal without reserve and in faith asks the Father in heaven for the Holy Spirit, will receive Him. “For all the promises of God in Him *are* Yes” (2 Corinthians 1:20).

G. Sonnenberg



THE TWELVE APOSTLES— JOHN—SON OF ZEBEDEE

Family Relations:

- Younger brother of James, who grew up in the same family and in the same environment as his brother
- Jesus called the brothers Boanerges (“Sons of Thunder”)
- His father was Zebedee

Occupation:

- Professional fisherman in family business

Other features:

- He was a disciple of John the Baptist
- He wrote many books in the New Testament
- He had a special and close relationship with Jesus, so that he is called the disciple “whom Jesus loved” (John 13: 23)

Special Character Traits:

- Formerly he was by nature eager and impetuous
- Later he became the “beloved disciple”
- He loved and sought the truth
- He found a good balance between love and truth

Introduction

At first glance, there is not much difference between John and James, yet we know much more about John. He is more familiar to us because of the many books we have from him in the New Testament. He wrote a gospel, three epistles, and Revelation. Except for Paul, no one wrote more books in the New Testament than he did. His writings shed much light on his experiences, character, and way of thinking.

John is a very respected apostle who is a great role model. He is mostly known to us as an apostle of love. When we read or hear about John, we imagine a dear young man with a noble and beautiful character, leaning on the bosom of Jesus. But this image is deceptive. John became an apostle of love. He was not so from the beginning. His natural character looked quite different.

An Interesting Personality

John is a very interesting personality. He is called the “beloved disciple” of Jesus. He sometimes refers to himself as, “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” At the Last Supper, he was “leaning on Jesus’ bosom.” That is, he was closest to Him, and so the sentiment arose that he was Jesus’ “beloved disciple.”

We know with God there is no respecter of persons, and John probably called himself so because he understood and perceived the love of Jesus like no other. This fact is noteworthy and speaks of a very close relationship with Jesus.

Another assumption about John is that he was the youngest apostle. Incidentally, we do not find any information about this in the Bible. Church history simply says that he died at an old age, around the time of the emperor Trojan. The latter reigned between AD 98 and 115. However, there is no indication of how old John became.

Additionally, John probably outlived all the other apostles and was probably the only disciple who did not die a martyr’s death.

Becoming the Apostle of Love

With the first pair of brothers (Peter and Andrew), we saw they had very different characters. The second pair of brothers, James and John, were different. They had similar characters.

John wanted fire to fall from heaven just like his brother (Luke 9:51–56). Like James, he also wanted to occupy the best places in the kingdom of God (Matthew 20:20–21). When reading these stories, we easily overlook John. James—yes, he had such a fiery, zealous nature, but John? Surely he was an apostle of love . . . !

But in the beginning it was not so. John underscores these character traits in an incident: There was a man who cast out demons in Jesus' name. He probably believed in Jesus but could not follow Him as the disciples did. The disciples had observed this man and then summarily forbade him, with John first in line to do so. This was not very loving. Jesus did not agree with this at all and had to correct John (Mark 9:38–39).

John was a rough and edgy guy, just like the rest of the fishermen. He was very much like his older brother and was just as fiery and zealous.

John loved the truth. His mindset was black and white. His love of truth runs through all his writings, and he used the word “truth” more than forty times. “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in the truth.” In the beginning of his walk with Jesus, he sometimes lacked love and mercy for his fellow man. But he loved the truth till the end of his life.

Truth and love—both are fundamental and must go hand in hand. Someone once wrote, “Zeal for truth must be balanced with love for people. Truth without love lacks decency; it is nothing but brutal. Love without truth, on the other hand, demonstrates a lack of character; it is hypocrisy.”

It could be put this way: True, divine love always contains truth. There is no real love without truth, and real truth always possesses love as well (see 1 Corinthians 13).

Jesus taught this balance to His disciples by word and deed. How uncompromising Jesus was toward all falsehood and hypocrisy! How He loved the truth; indeed, He Himself is Truth (John 14:6)!

How Jesus loved people! Starting from the poorest and sickest, to His enemies who crucified Him, from little children to the aged, He loved people. His coming can only be explained by recognizing His supernatural love for people. Jesus lived out love and truth daily.

John saw love and truth in person. He felt this love, and he let himself be filled with Jesus' love. The closer he came to know Jesus, the stronger his love became. In fact, we see how the love John radiated was based on his intimate knowledge of God's love:

- “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son” (John 3:16).
- “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love” (1 John 4:7–8).
- “And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him” (1 John 4:16).

As a mature apostle, John wrote valuable, fundamental truths about love. Love became his element. At the same time, he held fast to the truth. He found the balance Jesus had modeled for him: “My children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:18).

Have we found this balance? Let's keep Jesus' love in mind and look at how unconditionally God loves us. The more we realize this, the more we will be filled with God's love. If we love God, we will love people and truth, because we love the One Who is truth Himself!

*Eduard Albrecht
Eppingen, Germany*

The Eyes of the Lord Are Everywhere

“My son, you are at the age when your parents are no longer able to keep constant watch over you. Remember, wherever you go, whatever you do, God sees everything.” With that pronouncement, repeated at appropriate times, my father led me from full parental control to independence with oversight. “The eyes of the LORD are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good” (Proverbs 15:3).

The theme “The eyes of the Lord” brings to mind an interesting study entitled “Artificial Eyespots on Cattle Reduce Predation by Large Carnivores.”* The four-year study took place in Botswana and involved hundreds of cattle. Farmers there suffer significant loss due to ambush predators such as lions and leopards. These big cats stalk their prey, retaining the element of surprise. Might a pair of eyes painted on the backside of cattle give these big cats the impression of having been detected? Might that dissuade them from continuing with the ambush? Of course, no one actually knows what goes through the minds of these big cats, but the outcome of this study is fascinating. Artificial pairs of eyes painted on the rump of cattle successfully deterred ambush carnivores (lions and leopards) from attacking cattle. So effective was this experimental study that none of the 683 cattle with painted eye-pairs were killed by ambush predators during the four-year study. Amazing, isn't it?

In our spiritual journey, we too contend with a stalking predator. “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith” (1 Peter 5: 8–9). A pair of eyes painted on the backside of cows offered protection from lions. Similarly, the eyes of the Lord “etched” into the conscious and the subconscious mind will offer protection in our spiritual journey.

To His disciples, Jesus said, “In the world you will have tribulation” (John 16:33). In this passage, Jesus makes it clear that tribulation is inevitable. We are vulnerable in tribulation. Our adversary, the devil, seeks an opening. Resist him steadfast in your faith, says the

apostle Peter. We are able to overcome when we live in constant awareness that the eyes of the Lord are in every place. His eyes are on our struggles, our sufferings, our tears. He knows our pain. He understands our anxieties, our fears, the burdens we carry. He sees our longings, our discouragements, our labors. Even a shared cup of water does not go unnoticed (Mark 9: 41). “The eyes of the LORD *are* in every place” Let us etch that into our mind.

More than the casual observer, God stretches out His mighty arm to make a way and to give safe passage. “For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of *those* whose heart *is* loyal to Him” (2 Chronicles 16: 9). In Psalm 34: 15, David writes, “The eyes of the LORD *are* on the righteous, and His ears *are open* to their cry.” As loyal followers, clothed in His righteousness, we have God's assurance that He sees, He hears, and He acts on our behalf. Be encouraged to stand on His promise. The eyes of the Lord are in every place.

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* <https://www.nature.com/articles/s42003-020-01156-0>



A Good Mother

"Mommy, this is for you," Sheila said as she held a beautiful red rose to her mother.

"Thank you, dear," Mother said with a smile.

"You are the best mother in the whole world," Sheila said as she hugged her mother tightly.

"I'm glad you think so, dear, but I'm sure there are lots of good mothers."

"No, I think you are the best mother there ever was," said Sheila. "Jesus would have liked you for His mother. Do you think Jesus had a good mother?"

"Yes, Jesus had a very good mother who loved Him very much," Mother said. "Jesus' mother stood nearby when He was hanging on the cross. She loved Him so much that she could not go away and leave Him to die alone, although it hurt her very much to see Him suffer so."

"If Jesus' mother loved Him, why didn't she try to stop the men from nailing Jesus to the cross?" asked Sheila.

"Jesus' mother knew from the time He was a baby that He was very special. She

knew He was the Son of God and that He had a special purpose in life. That purpose was to save people from their sins," Mother explained. "Perhaps Jesus had talked to His mother about what He must suffer. He didn't want His mother to be hurt."

"Do you think Jesus loved His mother as much as I love you?"

"Yes, Sheila, Jesus loved His mother very much. When He was hanging on the cross, Jesus looked down at His mother. He told John, one of his dearest friends, to take her as his own mother. Jesus wanted to make sure His mother was cared for after He died."

"I'm glad God gave us mothers," Sheila said as she hugged her mother again.

S. W.

The Beautiful Way



Modern Toy

She was grading her students' homework while her husband paced the room playing on his smartphone. Suddenly, he noticed a tear roll down her face as she read the final paper.

"What's wrong?" he asked her.

"Yesterday I gave my students the topic 'My Wish' as homework," was her answer.

"Okay, but why are you crying?"

"When I read the last paper, I couldn't help it."

Curious, her husband asked, "What does it say that made you cry?"

"Listen to this: My wish is to become a smartphone. My parents love their smartphone so much. They are constantly taking care of their smartphone, and sometimes they forget to take care of me. When Dad comes home tired from his office, he has time for his smartphone but not for me. When my parents are doing something important and the smartphone rings, they answer on the first ring. They don't hear me, sometimes even when I'm crying. They play on their smartphone but not with me. When they talk to someone on their smartphone, they don't listen to me at all, even if I want to tell them something important. That's why my wish is to become a smartphone."

After listening, the man was deeply moved and asked, "Who wrote that?"

After a long pause came the soft response, "Our son."

Pause for a moment while you read.

What is life like in your family, on any given day? How do your children and perhaps your grandchildren perceive you?

In recent decades, our mobile phone has become an indispensable companion. It seems as if this technology has taken root in our lives, perhaps even in our personalities, with secret powers like a sweet drug. These devices have caused us to change our behavior, to redefine our need for security.

If we take a critical look at the smartphone, a long list of established benefits will immediately come to mind. In fact, this genre of device has enriched and simplified our lives more than hundreds of other devices. We have permanent access to a sea of information. Instantly, we can reach almost anyone we want to interact with. It also serves us as an extraordinary memory bank. It's child's play to take good quality pictures—and anyone can easily film their experiences and send and share them around the world in a matter of seconds. Yes, this is only the beginning of an undeniable list of advantages.

But what magic emanates from these devices that changes us in such a way? The permanent media presence influences and changes our view of the world and our values. What has prompted us to grant unknown people access to a microphone and camera that are always ready to record us, while at the same time documenting our every whereabouts? Via the smartphone, they can accompany our thoughts as we travel through the vastness of the Internet and know all our searches and purchases. Unbelievably, billions of people behave the same way as us and make themselves vulnerable. Even if the data tracking us is not officially used, we do not know what secret malware and future authorities will do without our consent.

Yes, our smartphone is a double-edged thing. Why do we allow such unpredictable risks? It's probably because we are rewarded or bribed with great benefits in return. Our device provides us with knowledge in almost every field. The continuous access gives a sense of importance and power. And we always have the option of immersing ourselves in a virtual world and blocking out the problems of reality.

But why does the smartphone have such a big influence on our relationship with other people? The scene described at the beginning of this article is indeed conceivable in many families. Why does the device



so often take precedence over the requests of the little ones? Where is the polite and friendly interaction with others? Doesn't appreciation often have to give way to ignorance?

Perhaps in the modern family the solution is quite simple: the caring parents also give the child a smartphone so everyone can play. What a picture: the family sits around the table with Grandpa and Grandma—all with their heads bowed in silence—but not in prayer.

Paul's admonition in 1 Corinthians 7: 31 is more warranted today than ever: "those who use this world as not misusing *it*." Never have the dangers to our personality, our salvation, and our family been greater than in the present—and future. Yes, we take advantage of many offers that are made to us. Paul chose from the possibilities at that time: "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any" (1 Corinthians 6:12). Or further, he tells readers, "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify" (1 Corinthians 10:23).

Our children are entrusted to us. God has arranged it so we only have a formative influence on them for a few years, a time that imprints values and behavioral patterns on our children's lives that will continue to have an effect throughout their life. Words often play only a minor role. Your conduct and especially your character shape your child. Our personal relationship with God and our life of faith have a much more powerful effect than constant exhortations.

How do our children and grandchildren experience our use of the smartphone? How do you feel when you've left the house and shortly afterwards realize that your smartphone is still at home? What would you do? What happens in comparison when you are reminded that you forgot or neglected quiet time in prayer?

I have often spoken of "we" in these lines. Yes, it concerns me too. May God give us grace to protect our souls and our children from modern dangers!

Hermann Vogt



Wayward Children

Part 5

The Father's Tears

M. Schmelzle

As soon as his father gave in to his demands, the son walked out the door and headed down the road. Without a single backward glance, he strode ahead, whistling cheerfully and swinging a bundle now heavy with money. Had he thought this through and made a plan? Probably not; he just wanted to get away and finally be free.

As for the father, he was left behind with a heavy heart. Braced against the doorway to keep from collapsing, his chest heaving with sobbing breaths, he was not ashamed of the tears streaming down his face. He stood watching his son go until he disappeared on the horizon, a small dot fading to nothing. Would his son come back? Would he ever see him again?

As time went by, he could often be found sitting by the window watching the horizon. Again and again, he found himself running to the window when a passerby's whistled song floated through the air or when a trick of the ear made him hear his younger son's voice. He loved his son deeply and grieved for him.

What a comfort it is that we do not have to deal with our grief alone! We can bring everything to our Father in Heaven and tell Him all about our pain. We need not be ashamed to admit that our child broke our heart, that we cannot overcome this pain on our own, and that we need His help to leave the past behind and stop blaming ourselves. We can ask Him for strength each day, and we can even entrust our future to Him. Will our son or daughter turn back and find the way home again? There is little we can do to make that happen. They have to find their own way back,

but when will that be? Tomorrow? Next year? In two decades? After we're dead? Knowing the Lord loves our children, hears our prayers, and holds the future in His hands—this encourages us to persevere. My great-grandma always said, "God's mill grinds slowly, but surely."

We need to understand that God does not operate according to our schedule. He is not bound by the constraints of time. He works towards His goals and does everything according to His will. He works on every soul, without fail. Sometimes it takes less time, and sometimes more, because we all have our own free will. Sometimes many years pass before a heart has softened enough to open to God.

Despite all our pain, however, we cannot focus every thought on our beloved child. There are questions to ask ourselves. What is God's plan for me? Does He have something to teach me too? The father of the prodigal son must have had some hard lessons to learn. He had to learn to be patient, to hold on to hope, and to trust that God sees and counts our tears, and hears and answers all our cries and prayers. We may need to learn we cannot do anything in our own strength, but are fully dependent on God. He is the source of our strength, and if we remain near Him, we can draw on this source day after day. We can live in faith, knowing the Son of God loved us so much that He sacrificed Himself for us—including me and my child—and that He is therefore heavily invested in saving our lost children. We come to realize, as the prodigal son's father must have, that God loves our child much more than

“If you love someone, set them free.
If they love you, they'll return.”

we are able to here on Earth, even as parents. It was out of love that He gave His life for all of us, including our child.

“Thus says the LORD: ‘Refrain your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears; for your work shall be rewarded, says the LORD, and they shall come back from the land of the enemy’” (Jeremiah 31:16).

When a child turns away from his parents, we face challenges that are nearly impossible to meet without God's strength. One challenge is to accept our children as they are; another is to stop attempting to change them and instead to change ourselves by accepting what has happened. We are challenged not to judge our children and, beyond that, to extend to them respect, love, and acceptance. Rather than constantly criticizing our children, we can focus on speaking genuine praise for the good things they do. We can stop ourselves from trying to talk our children into changing because this will only push them farther away; instead, the key is to listen to what they are saying and to keep the lines of communication open. But what matters most of all is to forgive them.

“Bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must* do” (Colossians 3:13).

When the prodigal son cheerfully went his own way, the father displayed no bitterness. No curse crossed his lips; in fact, his heart was completely free of resentment. He did not try to persuade his son to change his mind, and he did not beg him to stay.

An old saying goes something like this: “If you love someone, set them free. If they love you, they'll return.”

What is done cannot be undone. It may seem like a bad dream that we can only hope to wake from, but it is still reality. The deep feeling of loss will remain and fill us with sorrow and worry, but we can never allow ourselves to forget that we have a God for whom nothing is impossible. From our human perspective, even if we think somebody is lost, it is up to God, the Good Shepherd, to find them, follow them, and to save His lost sheep. A few weeks ago, I spoke with an older mother who has been waiting for her lost son to return. Deeply mired in sin for many years now, he has completely ruined his own life and that of his family. Dealing with him is a living nightmare for everyone in his path, as he has no compunction about causing sorrow, worry, or pain to anyone and, in fact, often does so deliberately. But his mother is still looking out the window and waiting for him. Her prayers have not ceased to rise to the throne of God, and her tears continue to flow. She has hope where the human mind finds nothing to hope for, and she has faith where human eyes see nothing to have faith in. She knows this situation is impossible humanly speaking, but she also knows that all things are possible with God. And she knows, as Scripture tells us in Ecclesiastes 9:4, that “for him who is joined to all the living there is hope.”

- To be continued -

The Influence of a Mother

“Now the man Elkanah and all his house went up to offer to the Lord the yearly sacrifice and his vow. But Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, ‘Not until the child is weaned; then I will take him, that he may appear before the Lord and remain there forever.’ So Elkanah her husband said to her, ‘Do what seems best to you; wait until you have weaned him. Only let the Lord establish His word’” (1 Samuel 1: 21–23).

Mothers are commemorated this month throughout the country. It should be a recognition and honor for their effort and dedication to their children, family, and country. It happens once a year, but how much thanks and recognition is left to give them on the other days of the year?

In our scripture, Hannah, the mother of the prophet Samuel, is mentioned. She was a godly woman and had requested this son from the Lord. Scripture records her vow to the Lord that the child would be a servant of God (1 Samuel 1:11–13). Later, Hannah said to her husband, “I will take him, that he may appear before the LORD and remain there forever.” Then, a few years later, when Hannah brought her son to the temple to Eli, the priest, she said, “For this child I prayed, and the LORD has granted me my petition which I asked of Him. Therefore I also have lent him to the LORD; as long as he lives he shall be lent to the LORD” (verses 27–28). Thus, Samuel was given to God for service, and he became one of the great prophets among the prophets of the nation of Israel.

Samuel’s short time at home with his mother must have filled his heart and mind with a rich education. Foundational to his education was a deep fear of God, modeled by his godly mother, and daily contact with her influenced, formed, and shaped his character. Certainly this left a deep impression, later helping him become who he was. God was Hannah’s top priority—which is very important for mothers even today—so then God also had the first place in Samuel’s life.

Many mothers miss the opportunity to influence their children with an eternal perspective, that could help lead them to heaven. How often is a child left with strangers who are not a good influence, just because a family wants to earn money to be able to afford some-

thing more. In doing so, the child’s soul is neglected as the little heart cries out and longs for a mother’s love. The short moments of time left for the mother and child to spend together afterwards are not enough to replace the lost hours. Eventually, other duties arise for the parents, and the child’s soul suffers damage. Later, when everything goes wrong in the home, people ask where the cause of the estrangement between parents and child lies. The right spirit, the right attitude, and biblical education belong in the home, and for this the parents are to be held responsible.

Recently, I read, “Of all the goods we have to manage, nothing goes with us to eternity except the souls of our children. Everything else is work for the grave. What benefits the child’s soul reaches beyond the grave; it is highly valued in eternity.”

It is the soul that should be kept in mind and not only that which withers so quickly and leaves the heart so empty. T. L. Cuyler (1822–1909) said, “If the mother is a frivolous fashion-worshipper, or is utterly prayerless and irreligious, or even careless of the spiritual welfare of the children, the whole home atmosphere catches the taint. The downward pull of her home preaching is quite too strong for the upward pull of the best preaching in God’s house on the Sabbath. On the other hand, if she does her utmost to make the religion of Jesus attractive to her family, if she is watchful of every opportunity to lead them Christward, if she follows up the effect of Sabbath-gospel by the powerful influence of home-gospel, then there is almost a moral certainty that God will send his converting grace into that household.”

Blessed is the child whose mother is a good influence!

G. Sonnenberg

Dear Mother,

When God created you, He gave you everything you needed to be a wonderful mother. As a child, I recognized you were someone I could always come to for comfort and cuddles. I remember the time you took to play with me and the countless hours you spent on the couch reading to me. You used your time to cook delicious meals and keep our home tidy and welcoming and even spent hours sewing me beautiful dresses to wear to church. I'm sure there were many things I never noticed or thanked you for. One thing was clear: your selfless love for your family and your willingness to take care of us day after day.

Since becoming a mother myself, I now have a much better appreciation for all the sacrifices you made on our behalf, like the sleep you sacrificed when I called you for a drink of water at night, or when I cried with a nightmare and you came to comfort me. You gave your time when you could have been doing something for yourself and spent it with me. You gave up your career so we could have you home with us every day.

Living far away from you has been one of the most challenging parts of my adult life. Yet I'm so grateful for your continued influence in my life and in the lives of your grandchildren. You are always willing to offer advice and encouragement when I am struggling with the daily stresses of life.

Most of all, I thank God for the privilege I had to grow up with a mother who loves the Lord. Thank you for teaching me His word from childhood. Thank you for taking me to church and allowing me to learn about God and His ways. Thank you for the countless hours you prayed for me, first to find salvation, and then to remain victorious. I am grateful for your prayers for my future—that I would choose the right occupation and find a godly husband. Thank you for the prayers you pray for my children.

When I think of you, I am reminded of the words from Proverbs 31, “Her worth is far above rubies. . . . [She] willingly works with her hands. . . . She also rises while it is yet night, and provides food for her household She girds herself with strength, and strengthens her arms” (v. 10, 13, 15, 17).

I'm sure there were times when you wondered if your efforts were worth it. Perhaps you doubted anyone saw all the hard work you did or appreciated the sacrifices you made. It's possible you even wondered if God heard your prayers for your children. Let me assure you that your labor was not in vain. I did see your work, even if I neglected to thank you as often as I should have. Most certainly, God has answered your prayers, and I am blessed to be His child and to serve Him. Your selfless example and love for the Lord helped me to become the woman I am today.

You may have felt a little daunted when you read about the godly Proverbs 31 woman, but your to-do list could have looked a lot like hers! The encouraging truth in the final verses has been fulfilled in your life and in the lives of all faithful, godly mothers: “Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: ‘Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all.’ Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. Honor her for all that her hands have done, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate” (v. 28–31). I thank God whenever I think of you. My wish and prayer is that He would bless you for your faithful service to Him and to your family.

**With Much Love,
Your Daughter**

Ascension

Open, you gates of heaven; make room for Christ the King!
Greet Him with joy, and even the choirs of angels sing.
Proclaim the wondrous story that Christ returned to glory;
The Father greets the Son, His earthly mission done.

Brightly the sun is shining, the sun that hid its face,
When Christ the Lord was dying and suffering disgrace.
The grave could not contain Him, the rocks could not restrain Him;
Christ rose without delay on Resurrection Day.

The blood of atonement has force behind the veil,
And from that very moment, the seal is without fail.
He is our Mediator, our King and precious Savior;
This message is for you to come and follow too.

Come follow Christ the Savior, for time is fleeting fast;
He offers you His favor; He will return at last.
Tell the Ascension story, Christ will return in glory!
This earth will pass from view; all things will be made new.