



# Foundation of Faith

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LOVE WINS!

A MESSAGE OF JOY

WHY ARE YOU HAPPY?

CHRISTMAS—JOY OR STRESS?

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## Editorial

*Dear Reader!*

*We are all familiar with the word “joy.” There is a joy that the world knows about, but there is another joy that comes from God Himself.*

*People have always sought honor, recognition, and happiness, and considered the pursuit of these as the meaning of life. In the Word of God, the Son of God shows us a rich man who clothed himself in purple and fine linen and lived all his days in pleasure and happiness. However, at the end of his life, he ended up in hell and eternal torment (see Luke 16: 19-31).*

*Worldly pleasures produce an ungodly nature, and worldly lusts are the result of unbelief. And who is behind it, seducing and deceiving? It is Satan with his evil spirits!*

*But godly joy!—The shepherds in Bethlehem experienced something wonderful. Not only did the brilliance of the Lord and the light of heavenly glory shine about them at night, but they heard the message through the angel: “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2: 10-11).*

*Great joy! For thousands of years, the world waited for the divine Redeemer, and after 700 years, the promise of the prophet Isaiah was fulfilled: “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9: 6).*

*Now, finally, the prophecy is fulfilled: “Therefore with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation” (Isaiah 12: 3).*

*Yes, Jesus Christ came for all people of all times and nations. Whoever approaches Him in faith and reverence finds grace and forgiveness, and may share in this great joy. God’s gift of grace is not only for the Christmas season, but endures forever!*

*We wish all our readers a blessed Christmas and this joy from above!*

H. D. Nimz

# Open The Door!

**Y**ears ago, a man recounted a story from his time in the military:

“As a sentry, I stood at the gate of the barracks. It was night, and it was quiet all around. Suddenly, I heard a rider approaching. It was my captain. I did everything dutifully, following the protocol for greeting a superior.

“I stood at attention and presented my rifle. However, he did not proceed past me. So, I continued standing there like a statue for even longer. Suddenly, he yelled at

me with a booming voice, ‘What good are your salutes to me? Rather, open the gate so I can get in!’

“Right, I hadn’t thought of that. Immediately, I leaned my rifle against the wall, yanked the gate open, and let my captain ride in.”

Someone who heard this story from the former soldier retold it during the Christmas season with the following addendum:

At Christmas, don’t we often act like the soldier at the gate? We sing beautiful Christmas songs, recite Christmas poems, celebrate

in honor of the Christ Child, and exchange gifts because it’s Jesus Christ’s birthday. We certainly don’t skimp on paying our respects.

Does the Lord Jesus in heaven find much joy in this? I believe that sometimes He might feel somewhat like the captain at the gate of the barracks. He might want to say to us, “Sing and talk and celebrate less, and instead, open the door of your heart to Me! Do what I ask of you! Accept the gifts I give you! That brings me the most joy.” ■

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## Give Yourself a Gift for Christmas!

**“W**hat do you want for Christmas?” Willy raised his voice in frustration. “You know how I feel. I don’t want others to fulfill my wishes!”

“Then give yourself a gift, Willy.”

“Me—to myself?”

“Yes, exactly. Too bad not everyone does that.”

“Do you?”

“Sure! Look, there are good books. At Christmas I carefully choose a good book. And because I choose it myself, I won’t be disappointed.”

“That would almost be an idea.”

“Or you can find a special celebration for the holiday—just the way you like it. A Christmas cel-

ebration in church or something like that. All you must do is look; you’re sure to find something beautiful. And because you are going there to please yourself, you will certainly find joy.”

“Possibly, but . . .”

“Not a but, rather a yes. Try it. Above all, give yourself a quiet hour!”

“A quiet hour?”

“We all live in haste and rush. It is delightful to set aside a quiet hour for ourselves. I use my New Testament for this. It’s really a great gift, and I always look forward to it. I don’t celebrate Christmas without this quiet hour. I tell you, it’s wonderful! This time, I’m going to read the whole letter to the Philippians.”

“That’s not a Christmas text.”

“That’s not what matters. ‘Rejoice in the Lord.’ I read that the other day, and it gripped me. I seek joy in the Lord, and I’m sure the letter to the Philippians will give me a lot.”

“I could read it with you if you don’t mind.”

“You can, but not with me—that doesn’t give you the quiet hour of your own that you need. You, by yourself, with the Word—any book of the Bible—that gives you more than you can imagine. Let God show you a text that speaks to you! Do it, Willy, give yourself that quiet hour, all alone, and you will experience something!”

*K. O. Horch*



## Love Wins

**F**or many years, the messengers of a missionary society preached the gospel to the people of Papua New Guinea without seeing the fruit of their sacrificial work of patience. The people heard God's Word, but they did not want to be saved. The brothers not only believed that God's Word and His Spirit were working on the hearts of the hearers, but now and then they also heard the natives openly admit it.

One of these men once said to a missionary: "You must wait a little longer and be patient with me. You are right: there is also a voice inside me that tells me that your Jesus talk is true, but I am still indecisive. I would still like to keep what I inherited from the fathers." Again, years passed. Everything remained the same. No one made a move to become a Christian.

Then a child was born to the missionary family, the Bergmann's. The natives took an intimate part in the joy of the parents. "Nothing

of all that the Papuans had come to know through the Europeans aroused such wonder as this white child," Bergmann recounts. One day, unknown visitors had arrived at the mission station, men from one of the mountain tribes. They were primitive men, who seemed to fully deserve the fearsome reputation they had among the tribes of the coast.

Bergmann used the opportunity to preach the Gospel to these otherwise unreachable people. They had heard it, but did not understand it. All of a sudden the missionary was inspired with an idea to make the gospel of God's love clear and understandable to these indifferent souls.

He went into his house and returned with his child in his arms. He placed the tender little white baby in the arms of one of the men. "Look at it," he said. "This is my only child. How sweet it looks! You wouldn't do anything to harm this child, would you?"

The man's arms, which held the child, trembled. Bergmann continued, "See, God has also placed His only Son, His holy child Jesus, in the arms of the world. And the world killed the Son of God. But what did God do then? He forgave the world this sin, and His love was so great that He gave them His Son as Savior and Redeemer. If you, dear man, were to kill my child, do you know what I would do? I would forgive you, pray for you, and still love you."

Then tears ran down the man's cheeks. He did not speak a word. With trembling arms, he handed the baby to the father and silently walked away into the wild forest. A few days later, he came to the mission station again, this time alone. "If this is true," he declared, "that there is such a God, and if He sends us such messengers, then I cannot resist any longer. I must become all new!"

He had understood the sermon. ■



## *Christmas— A Celebration of Joy or Stress?*

**N**ot too long ago, I had a conversation with a businessman. I asked him if he was swamped with a lot of work. He replied that he had his hands full, but that the worst was yet to come. At first, I didn't understand what he meant, but he quickly explained. He stated that the Christmas season generated the most stressful days of the year for him.

An observant person will notice that many people's actions and behaviors in today's world are no longer natural. It seems as though everyone is trying to increase their pace on a daily basis. It's a hustle and bustle from early morning until late at night. The start of a new year seems to be an opportunity to begin the great race towards a climax, where we convince ourselves we have accomplished something great. The Christmas season, in particular, is such a climax.

As we walk through cities today, we can observe an unusual flurry of activity among people around Christmas time. They are so entangled in the "Christ-

mas frenzy" that they have completely overlooked the actual meaning of this special time. Few want to acknowledge what Christmas is truly about. For many, these are just days of interruption in their pursuit of something uncertain. They are so occupied with Christmas plans, wishes, and gifts that they just don't think what it's all about. Suddenly, on Christmas morning, it occurs to someone in the family that today is a day when at least one member of the family should attend a worship service. Why, and for what reason, few even know. Most people simply adhere to a custom or a tradition. Not many think about the profound significance of this particular day.

Is this Christmas? Is this a day to look forward to? Under such circumstances? Never! People who celebrate Christmas this way do not experience a true Christmas. They have merely used this day to outdo each other in exchanging gifts and "celebrating" with food and drink. When they look back at the end of

the “festive days,” they regret and lament the wasted time and the fact that it all required so much effort. In the end, they are disappointed when they realize how much money they have spent. Oh yes, they may have even heard a sermon about a Jesus who was born over two thousand years ago. That’s all that remains.

Was it the same in the times of our forefathers? “Oh,” someone might say, “back then, it was already hectic enough.” But truly we must acknowledge that in the past decades, humanity has become so carried away that they are no longer aware of how they are being driven. All these things point to the future of the Son of Man. “As it was in the days of Noah.” We could add: “As it was in the times of the birth of Jesus, so it will be in the future of the Son of Man.”

When Jesus was to be born in the stable in Bethlehem, the entire known world of that time was in turmoil and unrest. People were ordered to do something unprecedented. Every citizen was compelled to go to their ancestral city to register and participate in the census. The travel, the circumstances, the fatigue put people in a state where there was absolutely no room for Jesus. Every Jew had heard that the Messiah was to come. Most were aware that the time could not be far off. However, no one thought that it would happen at that time and under those circumstances.

Is it not the same in our lives today, in our rushing and busyness, that Jesus finds no place in the hearts of people? Is it not the case that even religious people are so influenced by worldly matters that they often no longer distinguish between what is normal and what is excessive, what is spiritual and what is worldly? What is Christmas without Christ? What is life without a living Savior? Many have heard that Jesus is supposed to come again someday. Few are aware that He will return. But the possibility that He could come at this very time is hardly on anyone’s mind.

Satan has managed to maneuver people into a position where they do things they don’t actually desire

to do. Everyone you ask says they don’t want to be so driven, but claim they are forced to be. Most often it’s about the fact that they are under pressure to keep up with others.

Thankfully, there is a way to be free from this pressure and compulsion. It happens through the living Christ, who comes into our lives through salvation. Where this Savior resides, the joyful message of Christmas is not an unwanted interruption but a continuous inner experience. The angels announced to the shepherds in the field, “Peace on earth, and goodwill toward men.” This peace is more profound and extensive than the “peace” created by a verse of “Silent Night, Holy Night” and the gentle covering of millions of snowflakes on the earth. This peace is not external peace. It’s like a flowing river, continuous, constant, and infinite. It is tranquility, assurance, and security. It is well-being despite illness, joy despite sorrow, fullness despite insufficiency, richness despite poverty. This peace is life from God, eternal happiness.

For such people, Christmas is a highlight but not a peak of hustle and bustle. It’s a highlight of their inner experience, because Christ was not only born in the stable in Bethlehem but still dwells as a living Savior in their hearts. To celebrate Christmas in this way is indescribable and glorious! External things are of secondary importance to them. For such people, Christ is a reality, a source of life, and a source of joy. Oh, what a richness of grace, what an inexhaustible source of joy!

If you are outwardly religious but inwardly sad, let this Christmas season lead you to the fact that Christ wants to be born in you. Let your discontented heart find the true, eternal, deep peace. Make room for Him today in your life, in your home, in your family. May great joy come to your home as you experience this, so that you can say: The Savior is born for me! Christmas will no longer mean restlessness, toil, and stress, but will truly be a God-given day of joy in your life. ■

# The Joy of Christmas

Throughout Christianity, Christmas is a celebration of joy. The real reason for this Christmas joy is Jesus Christ coming to us in human form. The angel proclaimed this Christmas message saying: “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:10-11).

The birth of Jesus has also been highlighted over and over again by music composers in their beautiful Christmas carols for this special occasion of joy. We gladly join in the following Christmas carol and sing:

Oh, how joyfully, oh, how merrily,  
Christmas comes with its grace divine!  
Grace again is beaming,  
Christ the world redeeming,  
Hail, ye Christians,  
hail the joyous Christmas time!

Oh, how joyfully, oh, how merrily,  
Christmas comes with its peace divine!  
Peace on earth is reigning,  
Christ our peace regaining,  
Hail, ye Christians,  
hail the joyous Christmas time!

Oh, how joyfully, oh, how merrily,  
Christmas comes with its life divine!  
Angels tell the story of this day of glory,  
Hail, ye Christians,  
hail the joyous Christmas time!

In many situations, we can only rejoice as outsiders in a joyful event, without being personally involved.

Unfortunately, many also face the Christmas experience without being personally involved, although God has prepared this joy for all people. It can be experienced by everyone. What a pity that so little of this joy can be seen in our present world! It has become so woefully cold and dark in and around so many today.

This is exactly how it was before Jesus came into the world, for Isaiah states: “For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people” (Isaiah 60:2). In the midst of this darkness, the angel of the Lord entered, surrounded by pure light and heavenly clarity, and announced the birth of Jesus, with a meaning so deep that all the world could rejoice in it.

The Lord Jesus is the true light that has come into the world. Where this light floods a human heart, it is filled with deep joy.

We can hardly imagine how fearfully and silently the shepherds stood beside the manger in this light of joy. This silence around Christ soon ceased, however, for a controversy arose around Him that has not died down to this very day. Soon after His birth, disputes arose as to who He was, and these disputes came from unbelief. There were—and still are today—many opinions about Christ. The angel told it best who He really was. His simple and clear answer was: He is the Savior! It is this Savior we really need.

The world is full of enmity, wickedness, and suffering, but the most frightening misery is in the heart of people alienated from God. There is impenitence, bitterness, disappointments, burdens and guilt, restlessness, and accusations of conscience! What a hidden misery!

Can a heart be joyful in such a state? Can the Christmas candlelight, the bright colors, the children’s singing make such a heart happy? No! All the gifts and resources in the world are not enough, and that is why God gave us His Son as Savior to fill our hearts with joy. We must be healed from all brokenness and from the wounds of a guilty conscience through His wonderful forgiveness of all guilt. And therein lies the secret of deep and true joy. This joy should be for all: “For unto you is born this day [the] Savior, who is Christ the Lord!”

Therefore, come, you poor, despondent heart; the Savior is here for you! Let yourself be saved, healed, and filled with the divine light of Christmas! Then the great joy of Christmas will rise in your soul!

Friedrich Krebs



# Can You Still Find Joy?

What a great day of joy dawned when the Savior of the world was born! The prophecy in Numbers 24: 17 has been gloriously fulfilled: “I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near; a Star shall come out of Jacob; a Scepter shall rise out of Israel.”

Jesus is the bright morning star. His name is Wonderful. How splendidly this star has risen. He is the Redeemer of the world and Savior. Dear reader, direct your gaze toward Jerusalem and Bethlehem, as the wise men did. They sought the newborn King of the Jews, whose star they had seen in the East. And they found Him. Whoever seeks Him sincerely and with all their heart will find Him too. Oh, how great was the joy of these men when they found the baby Jesus!

Was it not the same for you, dear brother, dear sister? Wasn't your joy great when you came to the Lord and found rest and peace in Him? How you could rejoice and say, “Old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Corinthians 5: 17)! Is this joy still as great today as it was then? Do you love your Savior as deeply now as you did when you first found Him? Or perhaps the Lord might need to say to you that you have left your first love.

Especially during this Christmas season, we are reminded of the great love of the Father who gave us His only Son. This time is particularly appropriate for us to earnestly examine whether our love for the Lord is still as sincere as it was when we first came to Him. If we find

that it has waned, we can give our Lord and Savior no better or more pleasing Christmas gift than to renew our complete commitment to Him, allowing Him to ignite the spark of love within us into a bright flame.

If we truly want to celebrate a joyful Christmas, we must have open hearts for the Lord, who has given us the greatest Christmas joy. Let us, like the wise men, present our treasures to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh! If He has blessed us with earthly goods, let us consider His mission and remember the poor and the needy. He Himself tells us, “Inasmuch as you did *it* to one of the least of these My brethren, you did *it* to Me” (Matthew 25: 40).

Let us offer incense, that is, holy hands of prayer lifted up to Him, praising and thanking Him from grateful hearts. Above all, let us make sure to give ourselves to Him. This is a sweet aroma to the Lord Jesus, like the myrrh brought by the wise men. And then, let us walk in love, “as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma” (Ephesians 5: 2). Then we will be able to rejoice and truly celebrate Christmas. ■



# A Message of Joy

*“I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”  
(Luke 2: 10-11)*

**A**n angel from heaven brought this message of joy. He brought it to the shepherds in the fields of Bethlehem, but it is for all the world—all people.

Darkness covered the earth. The people were enslaved by sin, their consciences were stained, and they were burdened with guilt. So they continued to journey, helpless and hopeless. They sought rest and did not find it. All of their efforts for deliverance were futile; the teachings of men, acts of penance and the like to find freedom from guilt and reconciliation with God were in vain. The enemy, who had overcome humanity, was too powerful and the power of sin too mighty. Sin, which stains the conscience and paralyzes the will, had made man a slave.

All hope for man’s salvation was gone. No power could free him. No law could bring him salvation. The blood of sacrificial animals could not wash away sin. Oh what a terrible evil sin is! It drags people down into temporal and eternal ruin.

Salvation had to come from above, from God. The prophets looked through the centuries with prophetic vision. In the spirit, the prophet Isaiah saw the great deliverer, and driven by the Spirit of God, he exclaimed: “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9: 6).

**“Wonderful”**—He was to bring salvation to the world! Wonderful was His coming into the world, His life, His work, His death, and His resurrection. Wonderful is Christ, who has been with the Father from eternity.

The world needed a wonderful Savior to save them from their sins and lead them back to their God. Wonderful is the love of this Savior. On the cross of Gol-

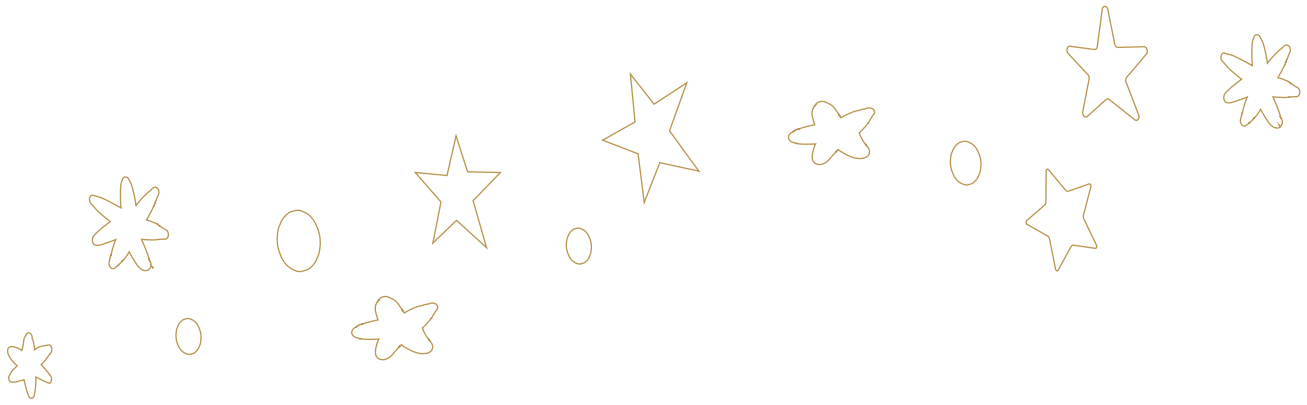
gotha, He embraced the whole world with His arms of love. Wonderful is the power of His blood to save from all sins. Wonderful is His power to break all bonds and destroy the works of Satan. Wonderful is this Savior who came to put away sin and bring salvation and life, peace and joy in its place.

**“Counselor”**—He knows counsel when man’s wisdom runs out. In His wisdom, He can make ways where there are no ways. He knows counsel for the sinner for whom, humanly speaking, there is no more hope. He knows counsel to direct their steps on the way of peace. He can free the lost from Satan’s snares and make them children of God who walk in the ways of God.

**“Mighty God”**—He is the power of God to save and make righteous those who are lost. He has the power to heal the sick, raise the dead, cast out evil spirits and free people from their power. He is a mighty king to whom everything must bow. He can break hearts hard as stone with the hammer of His truth, and He can rescue the soul from the clutches of Satan and make it a child of God. He Himself says: “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28: 18).

**“Everlasting Father”**—What a thought! His glory and dominion are from eternity past. He is God from eternity to eternity. He is not only eternal but also a Father, the source of all good, a Father over all who are called His children. He is fatherly in His guidance, in His care, and in His mercy.

**“Prince of Peace”**—So it sounds into the world full of unrest, sin, and suffering. He came to bring peace and to abolish the enmity between God and man through His sacrificial death. He brings peace to our hearts and lives. He says, “My peace I give to you” (John 14: 27). All who submit to Him may obtain His peace.



Let the message resound throughout the world: “I bring you good tidings of great joy . . . For there is born to you . . . a Savior.” He is a Savior who saves from all sin. Behold the great wonder of God! He, whom the heavens

of all heavens cannot contain, lies poor in the manger. Only the great love of a fatherly God could give this great gift. He gave it for you and for me. Who can keep their heart closed against the love of such a Savior! ■

## Christmas Joy

*“For behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people.” (Luke 2: 10)*

Do we know this joy, this great joy? Joy that Jesus, the Son of God, was given to us as Savior and Redeemer, as our very personal Savior? Oh, how very small and insignificant the material gifts at Christmas become!

Of course, gifts can also bring much joy, but it is fleeting joy.

The great gift of Christmas is Jesus Himself. When He dwells in our hearts and governs us, there is complete joy in our hearts that never fades away! Then we also carry this joy among the people. God wants all people and the entire world to be blessed by Jesus Christ.

For this, He needs those who are guided by His Spirit and whose hearts burn for Jesus. These are people who have a living and present Savior. Christmas is then not a traditional custom but a true celebration of joy, where the whole house and the people around us feel something of this eternal light.

This great joy will find its culmination one day when we see Him as He is, in His glory. Without this living hope, all the joy of the earth would be powerless. We would be heading towards a dark future. But in this way, our future becomes light and bright. The present dark clouds cannot darken the eternal sun for us.

Therefore, let us rejoice heartily that this Christmas season is given to us every year to secure eternal joy in the sight of our glorious Savior!

# Undiminished Cheerfulness

“Rejoice always.” (1 Thessalonians 5:16)

“Rejoice,” that sounds wonderful. But “rejoice always?” If we take a look at our world and see all the difficulties and hardships, how can we still be joyful at all times? It seems that the apostle Paul never thought about these things or even experienced them himself. But in God’s Word, we read about the apostle suffering persecutions, dangers, hardships, and disappointments in his life.

The word “rejoice always” was given to the apostle by the Holy Spirit. It was written to believers, and only they can understand it. They are the ones who have found the source of eternal joy. Christ, who was once sorrowful unto death, through the cross, made a way for believers to be free of anxiety and fear.

Jesus says in John 16:33, “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation: but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” Here we have the comparison of “in Me” and “in the world.” In the world you are afraid; in Me you are not. Here we see that the great privilege of being joyful at all times is for believers.

It is not only a privilege but also a commandment. Unfortunately, many believers do not obey it—but not because they are not true believers. Jesus told His disciples several times that their joy should be full. But joy is only perfected when it endures through difficulties, hardships, sorrows, and sicknesses. True believers know that all things work for the good to those who love God.

They can say, “If God *is* for us, who *can be* against us? . . . Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *Shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:31-39).

Paul writes to the Philippians: “Rejoice in the Lord always” (Philippians 4:4). Here as well, we can apply the comparison “in the Lord” and “in the world.” What is not possible in the world is possible in the Lord! The source of this joy is still available. Christ is the source of eternal joy. Nehemiah, the man of God in the Old Testament, knew this when he said: “The joy of the LORD is your strength” (Nehemiah 8:10).

Godly joy is so strong that it can boast even in tribulations. The believer sees the blessing that is hidden in tribulations. He considers it pure joy when he falls into many trials and knows that his faith, if it is righteous, works patience (see James 1:2-3). The believer who does not doubt the Father’s love does not despair when he is disciplined by Him (Hebrews 12:5). Although discipline, when it is there, does not seem to be joy, it will later produce a peaceable fruit of righteousness. The many promises we are given confirm that the believer can always be joyful.

The three men in the fiery furnace praised and glorified God. Paul and Silas praised God while in prison. During the great persecutions of Christians, those who were led to the stake could not be stopped from praising the Lord.

When Jesus says to us, “Behold, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20), do we still have cause to be sad? Some say that Christians are hypocrites or low-spirited. This is certainly not true! Children of God are allowed to rejoice, and this joy makes them strong so they can master life to the praise of God and be a blessing for others.

“Rejoice always.” This word applies to you who may be misunderstood by your family. It is for you who are grieving the loss of a loved one. If you are in pain, this is also for you. Yes, it is for all of us, young or old, rich or poor, educated or uneducated. Jesus, the Sun of Righteousness, wants to give us this joy!

R. Stefan

# Why Are You Unhappy?

“Cast your burden on the Lord.” (Psalm 55:22a)

**T**wo short addresses to two sorts of people; and then we shall have done. To you, ye followers of Jesus, let me speak. I have one thing to ask of you. With such a Father who loveth you—with such a savior who hath given himself for you, and doth give himself to you—with such a good Spirit to abide with you, and comfort you—with such a gospel—what now doth bow you down?

What mean those wrinkled brows? What mean those flowing tears? What mean those aching hearts? What means that melancholy carriage? “What mean they?” say you; “Why, I have troubles.” But, brother, hast thou forgotten the exhortation of the Lord? “Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved” (KJV). Do, brethren, do try to be as glad as you can. Rejoice evermore. A cheerful Christian recommends religion. We usually look in the window of a tradesman’s shop

to see what he sells; and persons very frequently look into our faces to ascertain what are the thoughts of our heart. Alas! that they should see any of us looking habitually sad. Some persons think that sour faces and somber garments are fitting emblems of sanctity. They would count it wicked to laugh, or if they were to do such a thing as smile in chapel, they would think that they had committed an unpardonable sin, though I never saw any law against that yet. All that is in us should bless His holy name, from the most playful fancy to the sublimest reverie. Ye need not emulate

those who, to appear righteous, disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Let me beg of you, Christian, when you fast, to be of a cheerful countenance, that you appear not unto men to fast. Be you never so sad, try and keep your sadness to yourself. Do not let people hear you murmur, lest they

should say, “Look at that Christian, he is weak as we are.” You have heard the old fiction, that Jesus Christ never laughed or smiled. It was brought forward at a friend’s, where I was once staying. There was a little child in the room, who when she heard it, ran up to her father, and said, “Papa, that gentleman did not tell the truth.” Of course every one looked at her, and waited for her explanation. “I know that Jesus did, papa,” she added, “for the little children loved him; and I don’t think they would have loved him if he had never smiled. Did not he say, ‘Suffer little

children, and forbid them not, to come unto me’ (KJV), and he took them up in his arms and gave them his blessing?” Do you think any good Christian could take up a little child without smiling; and if he did not smile, do you think the child would go to him? Jesus Christ did smile. A cheerful face wins honour to religion; a cheerful deportment glorifies God, for he has said, “Let the saints be joyful in glory: let them sing aloud upon their beds, [and] let the children of Zion be joyful in their King” (KJV). Be joyful, Christians! Be joyful!

Charles H. Spurgeon



## Do Not Rejoice . . . Yet Rejoice!

*“Then the seventy returned with joy, saying, ‘Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name.’ . . . ‘Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.’” (Luke 10:17-20)*

**W**hy did the Lord rebuke their rejoicing? Is it wrong to rejoice? Can we rejoice when we personally have victory over sin and all the power of Satan? May we not rejoice when the Lord equips us with the power to help others, that they too may be delivered from all the power of the enemy? Yes, we may rejoice. In Acts 8:5-8, we read of Philip’s work in a similar way to the seventy, that the unclean spirits came out of those possessed. Also, many paralyzed and lame people were healed, and there was great joy in the city. The same is written in Acts 15:3, when Paul and Barnabas told of the conversion of the Gentiles in the churches. This brought joy to all the brethren.

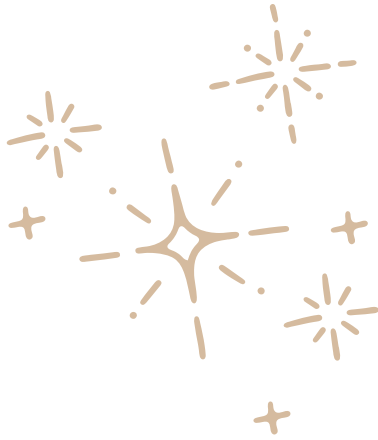
Is not the gospel good news for both the messenger and those who accept it from the heart? Why did the Lord admonish the seventy that they should not rejoice that the spirits were subject to them? Did not the Lord Himself rejoice in the success of the seventy? Yes, He Himself rejoiced in that hour (Luke 10:21-22) because his life’s work was beginning to bear visible fruit. He had received co-workers and His prayers began to be heard: first twelve, then seventy. Satan’s power and dominion broke; he was driven out of hearts. Satan, although powerful, had to give way to the Almighty. Yes, this was reason to rejoice and thank God.

But why did He disagree with the joy of the seventy? It may be that the Lord, who sees all things and is the Searcher of hearts, saw something selfish in their joy. This, unfortunately, He observed at times in the 12 disciples. They said, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name.” And Jesus’ answer was,

“Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you.” Next to the Lord and His name, they saw “themselves,” their own person. Their joy would be pure if they gave glory to the Lord, but impure if they saw themselves in a selfish way. There was danger that this selfish joy would turn into pride. The Lord continually called the attention of His disciples to these selfish tendencies and by His own example and word showed them complete, pure love. He saw what was lacking in the hearts of His disciples and prayed for their sanctification, as we find in John 17:17. And He still prays for His followers today, that is, for you and for me. Also, the Lord gave His life so that all who are born again might be sanctified in the truth.

This truth makes us free not only from sinful deeds, but also from a corrupt, selfish inclination. Then, although greatly blessed, we can have a completely pure joy which gives glory to God. This is what the Lord meant when He said we should rejoice that our names are written in heaven. He wanted the seventy to turn their eyes from themselves and to the grace of God.

Now, dear Brother, dear Sister, I would like to ask you: If, like the seventy, you are doing well in the Lord’s work, in preaching, in answers to prayer, in healings of the sick, in casting out demons, in the conversion of sinners, and as a choir director, singer, musician, Sunday School teacher, etc., is your joy pure? Or does something selfish get mixed in? When God blesses you materially, what is going on inside of you? In the essence of your joy, you can recognize yourself as you stand before your God. Give God all



the glory for your success! Earnestly seek the experience of sanctification!

Are sanctified people no longer tempted to give room to selfish motives? Yes, certainly they can be! We are still human and are dealing with our great self. The Lord was also tempted in this way. Before He began His spiritual work, the enemy wanted to defile Him with selfish desires and actions. He was to do miracles for selfish motives. But Jesus knew His enemy and the danger and resisted him. He waited for God's time and then did great miracles on God's behalf. However, He

did them from the purest motives, that is, in the love of God.

Paul, who was greatly blessed by God, was also prevented from falling into such false joy by being given "a thorn in the flesh" (see 2 Corinthians 12:7). This kept him sober. Let us also remain humbly prayerful so that no impure motives may be mixed with our joy, and so that we can always rejoice in our hearts, for the greatest thing is that our names are written in heaven.

S. Weissburger

## Joy in Affliction and Death

In the year 1550, a resident of Amelia, Italy was captured and condemned to be burned at the stake by Pope Julius III because he professed Jesus Christ as his only Savior.

When he appeared cheerful on the night before his death, he was asked how he could be so joyful, as Christ had lamented before His death that His soul was troubled unto death.

He replied, "Christ had taken upon Himself the great burden of the sins of the whole world and the punishment deserved by all people. They weighed heavily upon Him and distressed Him greatly. But I, who have embraced Christ's gift in faith and am thereby free from guilt and suffering, rejoice and am joyful. For I am absolutely certain that, even though I must die here, by death, I will enter into heaven and eternal blessed life. Therefore, the joy of my heart comes from knowing that, with Paul, 'I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, *which is far better*. For to me, to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain' (Philippians 1:23, 21)."

*Blessed is the one who knows such joy! Do you know it?*

# The Mission of Christmas

Mrs. Cole held her hand over the telephone. “Quiet, please,” she mouthed to her children, before she continued talking to her friend on the phone.

“No, Jana, do not worry about it. I am so sorry that you have to go through this. We will be happy to have the children here for as long as you need to be away. Please pass our sympathy on to your husband. You will be in our prayers.”

Sally and Todd looked at their mom with horror as she hung up the phone. They knew enough not to interrupt her, but the moment she turned around, they ran up to her, both shouting at the same time, “Mom, you can’t mean it! Damian and Kayla are going to be here for longer? Are they going to be with us for Christmas? Mom, how could you!”

Mom put up her hand and motioned for her two children to sit down and be still. She looked at them sternly and then explained: “Their parents had planned to come back from their business trip tomorrow, but Kayla’s father has had an accident, and they are unable to travel. In fact, he is seriously ill, and Mrs. Ray does not feel she can leave him alone. Therefore, Damian and Kayla will be staying with us over the Christmas holidays, and perhaps longer.”

“But Mom! They have a different religion! They don’t celebrate Christmas! This is going to ruin everything! How are we going to exchange gifts in front of them and have our normal Christmas carol singing and our turkey dinner and everything? It’s going to be awkward and it’s going to be the worst Christmas ever!” Just thinking about it made Sally cry.

Todd agreed. “Can we even get presents? Kayla told me they don’t do anything for Christmas because they don’t believe in it. They aren’t allowed to get presents! I don’t want other people here. I just want our family! That’s what Christmas is all about.”

Mom was quiet. Her children knew she was praying, as she often did when she did not have an immediate answer to their questions. When she looked up, her eyes were shining. “If Mary and Joseph were standing at our door right now, asking if we had room for them, would you tell them this was not a convenient time, and they should come back after Christmas?”

“Of course not! We’d be shutting Jesus out!” Todd was quick with the answer, but as soon as he said it,

he knew what his mother meant. “Oh, you mean we would be shutting Jesus out if we didn’t welcome Kayla and Damian too—don’t you?”

“Yes, that’s exactly what I mean,” replied Mother. “Children, Jesus left His home in heaven to bring us God’s love. Don’t you think we can open our home to someone in need? God has given us an opportunity to share Christmas with people who do not know Him.” “But what if they aren’t allowed to exchange presents? Does that mean we don’t get any either?”





“Exchanging gifts is our culture. It is a tradition we have that we can easily put aside for one Christmas if it will offend our guests. We’ll talk about that later. However, the birth of Jesus is not our culture, it is the Truth. Jesus’ love reached down to us, and it is our purpose to reflect and distribute His love to others. That is what we are doing when we extend kindness to friends. Jesus’ love is for the whole world, and He wants everyone to know why He came to earth as a baby. If Kayla and Damian were not guests in our home, they may not be

willing to hear about Jesus from us, but if they see us living out Christmas, perhaps they will.”

“You’re right, Mom,” said Sally quietly. “Christmas is not really about presents, or any of our traditions. I think Jesus will be happy if we open our doors to someone who doesn’t know about Him and share His love. Maybe when they hear the story of why God sent His Son, they will believe that He loves them too.”

*Benita Tovstiga  
Hamilton, Ontario*



# Report EDMONTON BIBLE COURSE

I had the privilege of attending the Bible Course in Edmonton this year. I only planned on going for the first week but ended up requesting time off on the second day so I could attend for both weeks. Each teacher presented engaging topics, but there are some I found most informative and inspiring.

Pastor Taron taught the first session and went into great depth on the nature of God and man. For each attribute, we went into Scripture to back up the claims made. Going over the nature of God was a great reminder of how awesome and powerful He is, beyond what we can even imagine.

Gerry Mielke led the next session, and I found his presentation on the history of the Church of God very informative. Hearing about the hardships D. S. Warner endured when starting out was very inspiring. We also worshipped in song with Brother Mielke, which really helped energize us! After his session, we had lunch and got to enjoy the great food provided by the amazing kitchen staff. We also enjoyed time for fellowship.



After lunch, Pastor Klinger led his session on apologetics. We learned the evidence behind our beliefs and how to effectively witness to others in different situations.

On one of our last days, several people performed “skits,” demonstrating scenarios and how to witness in them.

Pastor Krebs taught the final session on discipleship. I found his presentation on prayer very useful. He went over different types of prayers such as intercession, praise and adoration, and praying God’s Word.

The last day was dedicated as a question-and-answer session, and the teachers went over questions submitted throughout the two

weeks of the Bible Course. This was very helpful as it provided an opportunity for them to address specific questions and show us the answers in Scripture.

Throughout the week, there was one Bible verse that kept coming up and that I find very encouraging: 1 Corinthians 10: 13.

I’m not going to write it out here because one of the main activities during the Bible Course was looking up Scripture references, and I think this is a great way to encourage people to read the Bible (even if it’s just to satisfy their curiosity as to what exactly a verse says).

*Stefan Makus  
Edmonton, Alberta*

I had the privilege of attending the Bible Course this year, and it was a really big blessing and an eye opener for me. From technically not having that much vacation time to be able to go, to my bosses being very willing to let me take the time off, everything that happened was an answer to prayer!

We started each day with a short devotional led by one of us students. After that, Pastor Taron shared on Systematic Theology—God’s plan of salvation, where we talked about who God is, where the idea of a God comes from, and how we know that we actually serve the one, true God.

After that was Brother Mielke’s session, where we usually began with singing some songs, which was a very enjoyable and blessed time. The topics he covered were Church of God history and prophecy. During one of his sessions, we looked at the biography of D. S. Warner, and I found it really interesting.

ing to see how God worked in his life and also used him to start the *Gospel Trumpet* publication. Even though he faced many hard things in his life, he always strove to do what God wanted him to do.

After Brother Mielke’s session, we had lunch, and then came Pastor Klinger’s session. We looked at the topic of apologetics and sharing your faith. During this session, we considered some of the “hard” questions that others may ask us at least once in our life, such as “Would a loving God eternally judge and condemn people?” “If God really exists, why is

there so much evil in the world?” “Is there an absolute moral truth?” And “Does God exist?” Pastor Klinger showed us how we can lovingly and in a kind way show people the way to God through those questions.

The next session was taught by Pastor Krebs, and we studied what it means to be a disciple of Christ, and growing as a disciple of Christ. We talked about the fact that our identity is in Christ, and only He can tell us our identity. We also discussed that a disciple doesn’t try to be the master; he tries to be like his master, and if you want

to know what the master is like, you need to spend time with Him and follow Him very closely. We also looked at the fruit of spiritual disciplines, and one thing that really stood out to me was that whatever is on the inside will come out. That means that we really need to be saturated in God if we want to show Him to the world.

I am very thankful that I was able to be a part of the Bible Course and am thankful to everyone who prayed for it.

*Corinna Schulz  
Steinbach, Manitoba*



# Mary and Joseph— An Extraordinary Engagement Story

**T**he Christmas story of Mary and Joseph is often romantically exaggerated today. But the reality of these young people had little room for romanticism. Although they played an important role in the life of Jesus during childhood and adolescence, the biblical account of them is quite brief. Yet it speaks of characters and choices that can be a blessing to us.

The Bible reveals to us a very special engagement story. Two young people of good origin with noble, God-fearing characters experienced God's guidance in a unique way. These previously unknown and insignificant people became part of God's salvation plan.

## Mary

The story of Mary, the mother of our Savior, remains largely in the dark. Nothing is to distract from Him, the Son of God. No one but God Himself is to receive our adoration and divine worship. But the Word of God points us to a virgin in the small town of Nazareth in Galilee who was characterized by faith, humility, and love for God. She had a close and affectionate relationship with the old priestly family of Zacharias and Elizabeth.

Mary was still living in her parental home but was engaged to Joseph, a carpenter from Nazareth. He was a quiet, noble, and God-fearing man from the tribe of Judah. Their betrothal was the beginning of their marriage, by the standards of that time, and Mary was already his wife according to the law and society.

When the angel visited Mary (Luke 1:26), she was a pure, unblemished virgin (verse 27). She was startled by the angel's unusual greeting, "Rejoice, highly favored *one*, the Lord *is* with you." Her reaction is understandable in context of the historical background. Women had so little prestige at that time that Jewish men usually refrained from greeting them. Moreover, the angel told her that she had found special favor with God.

But the message that followed left her stunned. "You will conceive in your womb and bring forth a

Son." At that moment, she would certainly not have grasped the enormous implications of this news, because she stood shocked and completely perplexed before the angel. No one knew better than herself that she had remained pure and had never been with any man. How was she supposed to become pregnant?

Two special characteristics of Mary appear here: her faith and her willingness to sacrifice. She believed the word of God through the angel, even though it logically made no sense to her. She was certain that God's way is always a holy way.

Then she consecrated herself and her whole life to God's will, for a pregnancy at that time made her appear dishonorable before her fiancé and the world, deserving death by stoning. Moreover, she could not assume that God Himself would explain these events to Joseph. She let herself fall completely into the hand of God: "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word."

All this can be treated and read lightly from today's point of view. But at that time, Mary did not yet have this realization about the way of salvation, about the miracle that the Son of God was to become man. On the other hand, the position of a mother with an illegitimate child was completely different from what we experience today in our godless, liberal society. She was threatened with ostracism and a humiliating death. The only protection for her was the word of God through the angel. God worked in her the deep conviction of the truthfulness and reliability of His plan.

## Joseph

The carpenter Joseph from Nazareth, a young man from the tribe of Judah, had been chosen by God to be Jesus' father before the world. He was suited to Mary and was to provide the newborn with protection from gossip and ensure legitimacy in Jewish society.

Suddenly, Joseph realized with great dismay that the noble, God-fearing, and exemplary Mary was pregnant. What anguish of soul this realization must have



caused the law-abiding, upright Israelite. How sorely he had been deceived! Did this God-fearing young woman, through whom he had often been blessed and encouraged, not even exist? Had she faked it all? With each day, his distress grew, the pain deep.

As a law-abiding Jew, he now could not bring Mary home as his wife. According to the custom of the time, he himself would have committed adultery if she had become his wife. His only option was to hand her over to the public court to face the full penalty of the law. Or he could separate with her amicably by giving her a letter of divorce, and then she could have married the child's father without much fuss.

In their greatest need, God Himself came to the aid of the young couple. The angel's word restored Mary's full honor and at the same time instructed Joseph how to act wisely and rightly (Matthew 1: 18-25).

Have you sometimes wondered, "How can I tell if a word really comes from God or if it originated from my own thoughts?" But from Joseph's experience, we can learn that God works in us a deep, unshakable conviction of His divine will. We know what He wants to convey to us. At the same time, we are also convinced of the unshakable truth of this message. This is precisely the experience Joseph had that night.

However, it was not only through the message that certainty was established. God Himself had already given a reliable testimony through the prophets in the

Holy Scriptures. The angel was able to point Joseph to the scriptures in which this event had already been prophesied. Joseph believed this message. Thus, for Mary, the word of God became at once promise, legitimization, and protection.

The next morning, Joseph did everything necessary to follow God's instruction. Surely the young people would have talked to each other about these encounters with the heavenly messengers. They would have told each other of their fears, worries, and courageous decisions of faith. So began what was for them a new, unfamiliar journey together.

The example of Joseph and Mary shows that God knows us. He knows about our thoughts, desires, worries, and fears. But He has a way of blessing for us. He has the power to guide our lives wonderfully and make them a blessing for us and those around us.

It is good to trust completely in the Lord, even if we do not know the reasons and the outcome. The all-knowing God has the power to lead everything gloriously and to glorify Himself in our lives as well. Even if the way sometimes feels like a dead end, the future dark, even like a heavy burden—the way of the Lord is always the best. Believing God and trusting Him completely is the safest and most rewarding thing we can do.

Hermann Vogt



Part 12

# Wayward Children

M. Schmelzle

## Children Always Need Their Parents

Children need their parents. They need them when they are 1 year old and when they are 4, and 9, and 15. But it does not stop there. At age 20, and 30, and 45, children need their parents too. When this need is most urgent, the children themselves are often not aware of it. “Prodigal” children need loving and praying parents.

Show your lost children that you love them. Love them like our Father loves His children, even the ones who do not serve Him. Just as He lets the sun rise for both the righteous and unrighteous, do not let your love be affected by whether your child serves God or not. Pray for your children, regardless of whether they serve God. Never give one of your children cause to feel that you value them less than any of their siblings.

Unfortunately, when we are hurt and angry, we can react in ways that surprise even ourselves. If we allow our pain to dominate our thoughts and emotions, we can end up destroying relationships or even people. When dealing with lost children, we open ourselves up to a deep and cutting pain. If we are not careful, this can lead to reactions on our part that are extremely damaging and may be very difficult to repair. We have much reason to pray for ourselves as well: a hurtful word can cross our lips so quickly, and an unwise action can be so easy to undertake. Children are a big responsibility, but it is one that God saw fit for us to take on. This responsibility also helps us, as parents, to grow, refining our character as we learn to better understand the thoughts and the working of our heavenly Father.

Luke 15: 4–6. “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the nine-

ty-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? And when he has found *it*, he lays *it* on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together *his* friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!’”

When I think of the prodigal son, my mind immediately goes to the shepherd who had lost one of his 100 sheep. Just as he went after that single lost sheep until he found it, God went after the prodigal son, even if His pursuit was not visible to the naked eye. He worked in the background, leading, permitting, and speaking, all with the goal of saving the prodigal son. The father’s intense prayer at home played a big role as well. If one of our children leaves us, turns away from God, and heads off into the world, this affects our heavenly Father’s heart even more than it affects ours, as the parents. God does not want anyone to be lost, and that includes our children. He has enough love for all lost children! Let Him go after those who are lost. He knows how to proceed and how far to push. He will do His best. He will do everything possible to save your child! You can be sure of that. Your job is to support this spiritual work with sincere, earnest, trusting, and persistent prayer. Proverbs 15: 29 says, “The Lord *is* far from the wicked, but He hears the prayer of the righteous.” God hears your prayers and will give you the strength you need during this time. He will comfort you. Put all your trust in Him, and do not doubt His love for your child.

God suffers alongside us. He will answer our prayers, even if years may pass before the results be-

# Put all your trust in Him, and do not doubt His love for your child.

come apparent. We sometimes read of mothers and fathers who die, still thinking their children lost—but then see them again in eternity after all! Our prayers can be answered after our death; many daughters and sons have found the Lord only at their parents' graveside or even later. What seems hopeless to human eyes is not hopeless from God's perspective. In fact, there remains hope as long as the person you are praying for is alive. Ecclesiastes 9:4 says, "But for him who is joined to all the living there is hope."

There is great joy in heaven when a sinner repents. The Shepherd rejoices when He finds a lost sheep and brings it back home. If your son or daughter, your sister or brother, comes home, share your heavenly Father's joy! Accept them just as they are. Open your arms and extend a loving and forgiving heart.

Even if your prodigal child has already returned, do not forget all the other lost children of your brothers and sisters in faith. Whether their children have left the faith or never been part of it at all, so many mothers and fathers are waiting to welcome them home. Offer these parents empathy and compassion. Share their burden in prayer. Let their concerns become yours. Encourage them to trust in God and His leading. Trusting in God can take a lot of effort. We live in a world full of hurt and broken words, but God is trustworthy. We can be certain that our trust is in good hands and that He will use our vulnerability for our benefit rather than against us. If we pray from this place of trust, we can be confident that He will do everything in His power to save our children.

*Dear Father in Heaven,*

*We are grateful that You know our thoughts and feelings. We ourselves were once rebellious children who rejected Your guidance, chose bad paths, and caused You much sorrow. We were prodigal children, but in Your great love, You came after us to save us. You did not give up until we saw ourselves through Your eyes and had to recognize that we were wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. We did not know how to stand before You, but You came running towards us to embrace us against Your loving, fatherly heart. You forgave us everything and never held it against us. You showed such grace and mercy towards us.*

*Now You see our wounded, bleeding hearts. Our children, too, have turned away from us and from You. Please keep our hearts from becoming angry, bitter, and self-pitying. Help us forgive those who have hurt us, and help us accept them the way they are. Give us Your vision, compassion, love, and comfort.*

*We also pray for our loved ones, who are rebelling against You and against us. Protect them from the evil in the world. Keep them from great harm. Let them feel that we are praying for them. Protect their hearts from hurting themselves or others and let them know that You are near and hear their cries.*

*When the time comes, we ask You to bring them back. Grant us the wisdom to understand your timing. Strengthen our trust and faith. And when it is finally time, help us run towards them, accept them without reservations, and hold them in our arms.*

*As we ask these things, we trust in Your grace, knowing that You are a good and merciful God. And we know we can ask all this because You have already demonstrated Your great love by sending Your own Son, Jesus Christ. In His name, we pray to You. Amen.*

*- The End -*

# My Time is a Gift from God's Hand

Once again, we have journeyed through another year—and we are still on this earth. Time is passing rapidly. It has taken us with it. It has left its mark on us and in our being. We have experienced all the great upheavals in the life of nations, for the world has become small, and what takes place on one side of the earth has an effect on the other.

Hope, expectation, concern, and sorrow have moved our hearts—sometimes in rapid alternation—to the point where we have to wonder how a heart can endure all the tensions and burdens at all.

Not all have endured. Many hearts have stopped beating, perhaps even in our closest circle of life, and we have not yet overcome the pain of loss. Tangible gaps have remained.

Every day held a burden. We have had to carry them. But now, in retrospect, we are grateful. We were able to carry everything only because we ourselves were carried.

Nothing came upon us by chance. It was God Himself who laid the burden on us, and in doing so He tested our faith. It should grow!

This happens during the time that He gives us throughout the duration of our life. This time is God's time and, therefore, it is so precious. It is the gift of His hand, which He alone has at His disposal, for our benefit, that we would increase "in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men" (Luke 2:52).

It is in this perspective that all the shortfalls appear. Where fruits of faith ought to be, and from God's point of view could be, there is nothing in the way of fruit. How much failure, stagnation, or even decline there is! What will the Lord say to this? What will we answer when He says, "Look, for three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?" (Luke 13:7). Isn't the Lord right?

Our time is in God's hands, and the quiet hours of New Year's Eve are there for us to reflect on all this and listen to the Lord anew. He has not withdrawn His Word from us yet. He is still speaking. There is still time, His time, and therefore also our time. We must utilize it wisely!

In the parable of the barren fig tree we read: "Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it. And if it bears fruit, *well*" (Luke 13:8-9).

Another year, then, a year of grace. Newly-given life, newly-given time. The Lord wants to do what He can. We are to receive only what He gives, as the tree with its roots receives the water and the strength of the soil.

What a perspective! What a Lord! To Him be thanks and honor and praise that He provides us with His time for this purpose once again!

P. Ernst Senf





# As the Year Ends

Once again, we stand at the threshold of the new year. It seems as if time is going faster. It is literally as Moses, the man of God, states in Psalm 90: 10, “The days of our lives . . . are soon cut off, and we fly away.”

The passage of time repeatedly shows us that one day we will leave this earth. But for a child of God, this is not a sad situation. Our true home is not here. In this world, we are and will always be strangers and foreigners. In heaven, we will feel at home in a way we never can on Earth. God’s children are headed for a glorious future.

This earth seems to become increasingly darker. The world continues to move further away from God. As such, interpersonal relationships are becoming more difficult. This stresses our emotional well-being. Technology and science have achieved unimaginable advances, but this has not made humanity any happier. In fact, the opposite is true. Sin and injustice are on the rise. And yet, it could be so beautiful.

Let us draw closer to God lest we succumb to the nature of this world and are doomed along with it! Let us keep our garments pure so that they will not be defiled (Revelation 3:4-5). God will extend His grace! Let us not join those who say it doesn’t really matter, thinking God will not judge so harshly! We should keep our distance from all things that are defiling.



Callousness is also a danger. An unloving heart will not enter heaven. No so-called truth, no fervor, no zeal, no sacrifices, no efforts for the kingdom of God have value without love. This is the type of Christianity we often find today. Love has grown cold! This is a clear sign of the last times (see Matthew 24: 12).

May God protect us all from an unloving heart. What is the benefit of all knowledge and effort? Without love for our brother and neighbor, we are headed for damnation! That is why hell will be so terrible, because there will be no love between people. Every sin which binds an individual, and from which he was not unbound, because he did not earnestly seek forgiveness, will follow that person into eternity. Their works will follow them. It is a horrible fellowship amongst the lost, those without love! May God help us to realize that. May He keep our hearts in child-like faith and in Christ’s love!

At the close of the year, I’d like to call out to everyone: Strive to abide in love. Do not imitate anyone who thinks that’s not important. Do not follow their words or deeds! God’s Word is and remains true: “Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother” (1 John 3: 10). This is the Word of God. But how many who call themselves Christians are simply deceiving themselves? We cannot enter heaven if we do not live according to God’s Word. God is not mocked. He expects us to obey His will.

The greatest commandment in the kingdom of God is love. “Love is the fulfillment of the law” (Romans 13: 10). Where love is lacking, we deceive ourselves and also others. Something is wrong. But God sees and knows, and we cannot hide anything from His eyes. Therefore:

Let us ever love each other  
With a heart that’s warm and true,  
Ever doing to our brother  
As to us we’d have him do.  
Kind and loving to each other,  
Gentle words to all we meet,  
Thus we follow Christ, our Savior,  
Proving all His service sweet. ■



## For Quiet Contemplation

**A**s the old year closes and sinks into the infinite sea of eternity, and as we stand on the threshold of the new year that lies mysteriously veiled before us, strange feelings and serious thoughts of eternity come to us. How extremely important it is to stand still in this busy time of rushing and running and to mentally reflect on the past and look forward to the future! Yes, how necessary it is to look at matters in their proper light, in the light of eternity, and in the light of the Word of God!

The worldly person cannot perceive it, but he whose spiritual eyes are opened and whose aspiration is not to live in vain in this world will realize how short and void time is, how transient the things of this earth are. With the psalmist, he can agree: “Indeed, you have made my days *as* handbreadths” (Psalm 39:5). Yes, our life is like a vapor that lasts only a brief time but then disappears!

With such serious contemplation, who would not recognize the value of time and how necessary it is to make proper use of it and to heed the exhortation of Scripture: “Redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:16)! Time is only a tiny fragment of eternity, only a breath, only brief moments compared to eternity.

Do you know, oh soul, the meaning and value of time? It is a gift of God entrusted to you to be utilized for God’s glory, for the good of your fellow men, and for your preparation for eternity. Your eternal destination depends on the utilization of the short span of time. Depending on how you utilize this time, so will be your condition in eternity. Oh, how fateful a moment can become! How much responsibility is often associated with it!

An opportunity comes to everyone, and we must seize it. At a certain time in life, all come to a point where they must choose which way to go. At some point, everyone comes to the crossroad of two paths, one of which leads down to eternal perdition and the other to the bright heights of the eternal homeland. Each of us is confronted with a decision, an eternal decision. Oh, what a serious thought! How many have failed to make the correct choice at this point. They will regret it for time and eternity.

How many precious, immortal souls have gone into eternity since the last year’s end, and how many among them were not ready to meet their God! One’s heart should tremble at the thought of eternal condemnation. How many are taken away daily by drunkenness, addictions, and other sins! The world is falling deeper and deeper into sin. Further and further, it is drifting away from God. Closer and closer it comes to destruction!

What will the new year bring? Only God knows the future. However, His children can see the signs of the times, which tell them that all the events that have happened so far are only forerunners and that even greater and more serious things are in store for us, and the end of time is approaching. Oh, let us therefore be sober, let us watch and pray, for the Lord will come at an hour when we do not expect it.

Dear soul, hold silent contemplation! Stand still and look into the past and also into the future! Say with the psalmist: “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxieties; and see if *there is any* wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139:23, 24).

Also examine yourself to see if you are in the faith and how your soul is doing. Ask yourself: How have I



spent the time that has passed? For whom have I lived? What were the motives of my heart? Was it selfishness and self-interest, or was it love for God that animated my deeds? What fruits did I bear for eternity? What progress have I made? What is the state of my spiritual life anyway? Am I still on the right path, or have the little foxes managed to sneak into my vineyard and destroy the vines? Examine yourself seriously, dear soul, for self-deception is easy, oh so easy. Satan makes concerted efforts to deceive the children of God, to blind their spiritual eyes. How many souls would he like to persuade that all is well with them, when in fact everything is wrong, and that instead of the narrow path, they are on the broad one that leads to eternal damnation!

Oh, how serious we should be about time, about life, and especially now when there is so much sorrow, misery, and distress in the world. Therefore, let us make every effort in the new year to help our fellow human beings who are suffering in body and soul, so that God's name may be glorified and many more may be saved. Let us strive and earnestly pray that we may make the most of the new year for God and eternity as we have never done before. Let us live as if each day were our last, so that we may be ready at all times to meet our God and give an account of our lives with joy.

F. B.

## The Flight of Time

**L**ike the foaming, raging, unceasing waves of water, the years rush by and do not return. Moments pass like the grains of sand in an hourglass.—Minutes become hours, hours become days, days become weeks, weeks become months, and months become years, and then the end—eternity. O eternity, what a sober thought!

Looking into the past, the question arises: Where have they gone, the centuries, the millennia with their wars, with their uprisings, with their unrest, with their achievements, with their progress? What has become of them: of the flourishing cities, the mighty empires, the renowned nations? What has become of them: of the mighty, the high, the learned,

the leaders of the people, the generals and statesmen?

The ravages of time have gnawed everything; unrelenting time has struck them all down. Yes, it has put an end to all human splendor and all human glory. Time makes no exceptions; it is no respecter of persons. It builds up, it tears down. It acts, it hurries forward until it has reached its purpose, until it flows into eternity.

“Vanity of vanities . . . all is vanity and grasping for the wind” (Ecclesiastes 1:2, 14). In view of the futility of the things of this world, the brevity and seriousness of time, and never-ending eternity, let us exclaim with the Psalmist: “So teach *us* to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (Psalm 90:12). ■

# *Christmas Brings Love, Peace, Joy, and Hope*

Humanity was lost in sin and night  
And rather hopeless without peace, declining;  
For Satan ruled, producing hate and strife.  
No ray of hope, no welcome light was shining.  
Against the power of Satan, tell me, who can win?  
Is there no Helper, no one who can free from sin?

Yes, God in heaven heard the soul's dire cry;  
He had compassion on us lest we perish.  
He did not want humanity to die.  
He gave His Son, the precious One He cherished.  
Who can comprehend what God has done out of love  
To send us the Savior to the earth from above?

Christ in the manger demonstrates God's love;  
This miracle is incomprehensible.  
Let's follow God's example from above  
And love even the ones reprehensible.  
Oh, let us love as He loved and obey His Word,  
For it is impossible to out-love the Lord.

Peace can enter into the human heart  
Since the Prince of Peace was born in Bethlehem.  
To those who come to Him He will impart  
His peace and Satan can no longer condemn.  
Peace like a river will flow from my heart of love  
If I am a child of peace by God's power above.

The tidings of great joy that the shepherds heard  
The angel proclaiming on that holy night  
Is there for all who will read and love God's Word.  
If you lack joy, pray; God can make your heart light.  
Be filled with God's joy, and for all you are worth,  
Spread joy and be a blessing to others on earth.

The child in the manger, so meek and mild,  
Brought hope to the world that was fettered in sin.  
Repent and believe in the One who died;  
He'll grant you forgiveness and give peace within.  
There is hope for all who will believe in the Lord.  
His blood covers transgressions; He's true to His Word.

We thank You, oh God, for that holy night  
When You sent Your Son into this world of strife.  
In Him we have received love, peace, joy, and light,  
As well as the hope of eternal life.  
Dear God, we praise You and thank You with one accord.  
Lord Jesus, we worship You as our King and Lord.

*Edeltraut Nimz*

