



Foundation of Faith

Caution- Danger!

Danger Recognized, Danger Averted

Anything but Lukewarm!

Danger of Bitterness

Focus on the Essential

Contents

CAUTION – DANGER!

- 4 **Danger Recognized, Danger Averted**
How do we deal with danger? It is a big mistake to ignore clear danger and fail to protect ourselves against it.
- 6 **Anything but Lukewarm!**
Lukewarmness in serving God is the greatest self-deception.
- 8 **Beware!**
Five things we should not forget.
- 9 **The Stolen Crown**
A warning to the church.
- 12 **The Danger of Bitterness**
How to deal with offenses and overcome bitterness.
- 14 **Focus on the Essential**
Don't lose sight of the goal!

3 **Editorial**

CHILDREN'S CORNER

- 16 **Laura Gave Her Heart to Jesus**
17 **Matthew Follows Jesus**

YOUTH PAGES

- 18 **Danger of Social Media**

FAMILY PAGES

- 20 **Detecting Danger and Staying Safe**

SERIES

- 22 **I Will Be With You (Part 2)**
- 24 **Relationships, Longevity, and Happiness**
What makes people live longer, happier lives?

26–27 **Testimonies**

- 26 **Anything Goes—For Three Days!**
27 **Announcements**

POEMS

- 7 **Never Lukewarm!**
28 **Later—Too Late**

FOUNDATION OF FAITH

Editor

Hans-Dietrich Nimz

Editorial Team

Niko Ernst

Harry Semenzuk

Ron Taron

Hermann Vogt

•

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

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

•

Questions and suggestions can be sent to:
contact@foundationoffaith.cc

Please address all other correspondence
and subscription requests to:
Christian Unity Press
5195 Exchange Drive
Flint, MI 48507
Tel.: (810) 732-1831
or email us at
cupress@thechurchofgod.cc
www.christianunitypress.com

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission.

FOUNDATION OF FAITH (USPS 9008) is published monthly by Christian Unity Press, 5195 Exchange Dr., Flint, MI 48507, USA. Periodicals postage paid at Flint, MI, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Christian Unity Press, 5195 Exchange Dr., Flint, MI 48507, USA Volume 22 Issue 2

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

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

Editorial

Dear Reader!

The world is always looking for the best, the greatest, the highest, and the most impressive. In sports, it's all about the gold medal, the highest prize, and the greatest win. But when we stop and think about it, we realize how vain and fleeting it all is! We also often hear that many competitions are won through cheating or drugs, or in an unfair, deceptive manner. What a disgrace!

In addition to sports, we could also look at politics, the world of business, and the entertainment industry, and realize that there is also a lot of deceit and fraud.

But, dear Reader, we can look away from all these vain, fleeting, earthly examples and ask ourselves: Who is really the highest, the greatest, and the best? The songwriter Philip F. Hiller gives us a wonderful lead when he writes:

*Christ the King and Savior reigneth;
all creation He sustaineth.
At His feet the world must bow.*

*O ye mortal tongues, confess Him,
as the Lord of lords address Him,
endless homage to Him vow!*

Yes, Jesus Christ is the highest, the greatest, the King of kings, the eternal God and ruler for all eternity. God has put everything under His Son's feet. So many millions do not see and know this, and many who know it do not want to believe it. This is also what the writer of Hebrews says: "But now we do not yet see all things put under Him [the Son of God]" (2: 8). But the hour and the time are coming when all generations on earth will see Jesus coming in the clouds of heaven with great power and glory (see Matthew 24: 30). Then all futile, empty, earthly pretense and transient splendor will come to an end!

Therefore, dear Reader, know and recognize that Jesus Christ is great and exalted above all, for His "is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever." Amen.

H. D. Nimz

Danger Recognized, Danger Averted

The small village of Brienz, with fewer than 200 inhabitants, is picturesquely situated on the sunny slopes of the Albula Valley in the canton of Graubünden in Switzerland. The village settlement with its beautiful townscape and surrounding mountain landscape has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2008. A piece of paradise on the southern edge of the Plessur Alps. On June 15 of this year, the inhabitants of the village narrowly escaped a catastrophe. Shortly after 11 p.m., 1.2 million cubic meters of rock slid down a mountainside, accompanied by large rockfalls and a huge thunderclap, directly towards the small village. The whole event lasted a good 10 minutes, and the masses of rock came to a halt just a few meters from the edge of the village. Nobody was hurt, and only an access road was buried under the rubble. Lucky, right? Not quite, because even if the entire village had been buried by the debris, not a single resident, nor even a farm animal or pet would have been injured or killed, because from June 9 to 12 the entire village was completely evacuated—under supervision—and after 6 p.m. on June 12, no one was allowed to enter the village for an indefinite period of time.

People had been aware of the danger for years, but it wasn't until 2019 that a landslide occurred on the mountain, causing a boulder weighing around 100 tons to hurtle down into the valley at almost 100 km/h (62 mph). At the bottom

of the valley, it rolled past a children's playground and came to rest on a meadow. Once again, we were warned, and so the movements on the mountain were closely monitored, measuring systems were set up to raise the alarm in good time, and evacuation plans were drawn up. Not surprisingly, experts spoke of this as being the best-monitored mountain in Switzerland. And it is quite right to say: danger recognized, danger averted! It had little to do with luck.

Now, our position as children of God, isn't that—in a figurative sense—also a type of paradise? A person who is at peace with God and his neighbor, who knows that his sins are forgiven, who has a goal in mind and is constantly heading towards it. What a wonderful life! Is it any wonder that Isaiah wrote a song of thanksgiving for the redeemed?

“And in that day you will say: ‘O LORD, I will praise You; though You were angry with me, Your anger is turned away, and You comfort me. Behold, God *is* my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid; ‘For YAH, the LORD, *is* my strength and song; He also has become my salvation.’ Therefore with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. And in that day you will say: ‘Praise the LORD, call upon His name; declare His deeds among the peoples, make mention that His name is exalted. Sing to the LORD, for He has done excellent things; this *is* known in all the earth. Cry out and shout, O inhabitant of Zion, For great *is* the Holy One of

Israel in your midst!’” (Isaiah 12).

So much for the theory, right? Correct. And the practice can and should look the same. It's not about an exalted, fanatical Christianity, or about hovering five meters above the earth's surface as saints and thus avoiding all dangers. Rather, it is about being aware of the danger surrounding us as children of God, as saints, and facing it—with Christ as Lord.

When Isaiah says “Behold, God *is* my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid,” he is making it very clear that there are things in our lives that make us afraid and can make it difficult for us to trust. We need to be aware of this real danger. Peter once put it very succinctly: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8).

A big mistake we can make is to take this danger lightly. This could have the same effect on our life of faith as a rolling 100-ton boulder on a children's playground.

Another mistake, however, is to give this surrounding danger our full attention. You see, the people of Brienz lived a fairly normal life until June 9. Even though the danger was real, they were not driven by the fear of what could happen. They had something that gave them security, something they trusted. And Isaiah expresses it like this: “God *is* my salvation, I will trust.” What a perspective! What an outlook! A person who does not remain rooted to the spot in the face of danger, but instead



looks to the Lord and knows, “the Lord God *is* my strength!” This statement becomes all the more significant when we consider the time in which Isaiah wrote these words. For him it meant, in a figurative sense: danger recognized, danger averted.

And what about us? How can we benefit from this? Well, basically in the same way as Isaiah. But what does this mean in practical terms?

We are constantly faced with challenges and dangers in our life of faith. The individual articles in this issue give us a small sample of things that can threaten us. It is not the same for everyone and not with the same intensity. But sometimes this means that we have to go through difficult times, that we are challenged in our faith, that we feel alone and abandoned. We sometimes realize that we are not succeeding in things, and there is perhaps a danger of giving up. And these, dear reader, are the moments when you need to remind yourself: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13). A wonder-

ful Bible verse, isn’t it? It wasn’t just theory for Paul, it was practice, because have you ever noticed what is written in the verses before it? Paul says there that he learned (!) to be content in every situation in life. He could be poor and he could have abundance. He was acquainted with everything, being full and going hungry, having plenty and suffering lack. Remarkable, isn’t it? But that is by no means all. He writes to the Corinthians: “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. *We are* hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; *we are* perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed” (2 Corinthians 4:7–9). Paul experiences these difficult times.—How does it feel to not know what to do?—But he is not focused on the problem, rather on the Lord, on the all-surpassing power of God. Remarkable, isn’t it? But that’s not all. Paul describes another situation to the Corinthians that is very challenging for him. He speaks of a “thorn in the flesh,” and most Bible commenta-

tors interpret this to mean that the apostle was suffering physically and wanted to be freed from it. He repeatedly prayed to God about this and received the answer we are generally familiar with: “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

For Paul, all this was not just theory. Did you notice that he had to learn to accept it all, learn to deal with the individual situations properly? It didn’t just fall into his lap. So don’t be discouraged if you don’t succeed straight away. I recently read a remarkable saying: Be faithful. It’s always too soon to quit!

“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith” (Hebrews 12:1–2a). Then it will also be said for us: danger recognized, danger averted.

Niko Ernst
Herford, Germany

Anything but Lukewarm!

In a parking lot that I frequently use, there is often a car with the license plate “LAU-7xx.” “Lau” is the German word for lukewarm. When I drive past the car, a song by Brother Ruben Schimann comes to mind, “Nur nicht lau!” (“Anything but Lukewarm!”). This gets me singing the chorus of the song, thinking about this serious thought, and then praying: “Lord, keep me from becoming lukewarm!” What does spiritual lukewarmness mean? Isn’t a little warmth better than none at all when serving God? What does Jesus have to say about this?

“And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: ‘I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth’” (Revelation 3: 14–16).

Pretty serious words! How does spiritual lukewarmness come about? Obviously, there was a higher spiritual temperature or spiritual fire in this preacher and congregation in the past. Through some cause or causes, the fire was extinguished, and the soul began to cool. It is not yet so cold that you can easily observe spiritual decay, but the damage is done. And Jesus, who sees and judges everything correctly, expresses His disgust at such a state: “I will vomit you out of My mouth.”

What is the cause of lukewarmness? Negligence! Negligence in our prayer life, and indifference in drawing strength from the Word of God and the source of life. In addition, there is often a gradual cooling in one’s daily relationship with Jesus. We begin to see Him as an addition to everyday life instead of the central focus. The Christian feels comfortable in his own skin and in the bustle of the world. In Revelation 3: 17, Jesus says: “You say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing.’”

The great danger with lukewarmness is that you often don’t recognize your condition. The church in Laodicea thought everything was fine. But Jesus stood unnoticed outside the door, knocking sadly but lovingly (verse 20). Our own state of lukewarmness is

probably so difficult to recognize because it develops gradually. We can progressively become accustomed to a slowly deteriorating spiritual state.

Why does the Savior say “I could wish you were cold or hot”? Precisely because one who is already completely cold (dead) is more likely to discover his spiritual deficiency than someone who is lukewarm. In a lukewarm state, you can look at certain external characteristics and convince yourself that you are still a good Christian. “I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing!” Who doesn’t want to be “rich” in their service to God? It can be easy to see yourself as richer than others. But how does the Lord see it? “[Y]ou . . . do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.” How great is the danger of lukewarmness!

Lukewarmness rarely develops overnight. It is almost always associated with a longer process. It can simply be that you become so accustomed to serving God that doing so becomes a habit. Your daily time with God gradually becomes normal, even boring, and leaves little impression on the soul. Maybe it’s because we are too well off. And that brings us to the dilemma of our heavenly Father: If, in His gracious love, He gives us as His children too much good, we desire Him less! If He blesses us too abundantly with earthly benefits, we behave as if we don’t need Him much. If we see ourselves as rich and prospering and having need of nothing, our relationship with God will change. Oh, may God remind us continually of the truth that without Him we are indeed nothing!

How can I be saved from lukewarmness?

Let’s look at the words of Jesus. He says in Revelation 3: 18, “I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire.” Laodicea was an affluent city, and the Christians there were probably no different. It may have been easy for them to get ensnared in collecting earthly gold. But Jesus strongly counsels them to acquire other gold—His gold! What is this gold? It is gold that has been refined in the fire of the Holy Spirit. It is fundamentally different from earthly gold, even if such is 99.9999% pure. It is the gold that you

receive when you give up everything else to obtain Him, Jesus. It is a burning love for God, His kingdom, and His children, generated by the Holy Spirit. It is a life sacrificed and sanctified to His exclusive service. Gold refined in holy fire. How precious and glorious!

Jesus further advises the lukewarm: “I counsel you to buy from Me . . . white garments, that you may be clothed, *that* the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed.” Lukewarm Christians do not recognize their spiritual decay, that they are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. And in a lukewarm state, it doesn’t take long for dirt to get on your garment. You rub a little and try to wipe away the stains, but without the blood of Jesus it never works. Only white garments will stand before God. So take the Savior’s advice and let Him give you white garments. If you are a child of God on the right path, then keep your garments white! Only purity of heart will save us from lukewarmness or falling away.

In verse 18, Jesus goes on to say: “[A]noint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.” Laodicea was renowned as the source of a special eye salve, and yet Jesus gives the pastor and the church the urgent advice to buy eye salve from HIM so that they can recognize their spiritual condition. To stay safe from lukewarmness, stand in the light of God. Let yourself be examined by His Spirit and His Word, verify that everything is in order, and determine whether the fire of the Spirit is still burning hot within you.

Finally, Jesus says in verse 19: “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.” Although He threatens to vomit them out, He lovingly pleads with those who have become lukewarm. “Be zealous and repent.” There is still time and there is still grace, and it is there for you! I love you and will chasten you to draw you to Me. How great and sublime is the love and compassion of our Savior! He wants to help you and me, but . . . anything but lukewarm!

*Ron Taron
Steinbach, Manitoba*

Never Lukewarm!

Never lukewarm here in earthly days!

Not half-hearted when the battle cry rings out!

We are not of those who falter and despair,

When the masses mock and curses shout.

Never lukewarm in our walk and daily living!

Not half-hearted when it’s time to stand for God!

Christ has given us the best example:

He was faithful unto death.

Never lukewarm in our prayers and intercession!

Not half-hearted in humility, devotion!

Much prevailing at the throne of mercy

Will give courage, victory, and pow’r.

Never lukewarm, as the earthly sun is quickly setting!

Not half-hearted, it is worth the fight!

See, the crown of life awaits the overcomers,

Soon bestowed by God in heaven’s light.

Gertrud Taruttis

Beware!

“Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God.” (Deuteronomy 8: 11)

When the long wandering in the desert came to an end and the people of Israel were to take possession of the land of Canaan, a rich, watered, fertile land, the Lord warned them through His servant Moses that they should not forget their God! This admonition also applies to us as the New Testament people of God. “Lest—*when* you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwell *in them* . . . when your heart is lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God” (Deuteronomy 8: 12,14).

Forgetting often has very tragic consequences. For example, someone forgets to turn off the gas tap and poisoning or even a large explosion is caused. Train accidents have happened because people forgot to switch on the warning signals for the oncoming express train. But no forgetting is as catastrophic as forgetting God!

Below are five things that we should definitely not forget!

1. Do not forget that God is our Creator and that we, as His creatures, are accountable to Him. I believe that this is the reason why the theory of evolution is so strongly asserted in our colleges and universities and why the Bible’s account of creation is ridiculed. People want to master their own lives and decide for themselves what they can and may do.

Let us not forget that everything is manifest before Almighty God. He is omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent. He is all-seeing, and we can hide nothing from Him!

2. Do not forget that we have been given a special time of grace for repentance. In His great love and mercy, God offers grace and forgiveness to us

who have earned death through our sins and transgressions! Let us be “looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God” (Hebrews 12: 15). “How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?” (Hebrews 2: 3).

3. Do not forget that what you sow in your life will bring a harvest! “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life” (Galatians 6: 7–8).

4. Do not forget your Christian duty to your neighbor. “Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so *doing* some have unwittingly entertained angels. . . . [D]o not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased” (Hebrews 13: 2,16).

5. Let us not forget that we have no permanent place here on earth. In Psalm 90: 12, we read: “So teach *us* to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.” How easily we forget that when things go well for us! We are healthy, have good income potential, and see opportunities where we can invest well to increase our wealth even further. Our lives are very limited, and everything we earn here on earth will burn up one day. Only what we have done for the Lord and our fellow humans will last for eternity. “For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?” (Matthew 16: 26).

So beware that you do not forget the Lord your God!

Art Lange
Vernon, British Columbia

The Stolen Crown

“Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.” (Revelation 3: 11)

This warning was sent to the church in Philadelphia. God had shown His approval to the church in what they were doing. The Lord had lovingly promised His protection in upcoming battles and temptations. However, the church also received a serious warning not to allow itself to be robbed of its testimony and its crown of victory. “Hold fast what you have” was Jesus’ challenge to the present and future church.

Near Alasehir, only ruins remain of Philadelphia, once an important and prosperous trading center in ancient times. All that is left of this city are fragments of walls and the remains of an ancient theater. Had the community forgotten the serious warning they had received or simply underestimated it? Is this the reason why only ruins remain as a reminder of the once flourishing community?

What makes the universal Church of God so unique?

What distinguishes it as a ministry or local church from other organizations or religions? What legitimizes an assembly as a church of God? The strong and unique relationship with the triune God makes the decisive difference. He Himself is their Creator and builder. God is protector, guide, teacher, and strength. The church was created by God to worship, glorify, and serve Him. God organizes and governs the church—yesterday, today, and forever.

Why did Jesus issue this warning when He had promised His protection? The church is made up of human members, people who lead a holy and redeemed life. As human beings, we are created with free

will and are responsible before God for our decisions and actions. Daily and hourly, without fail, we must willfully and consciously remain within the sphere of God’s preserving power and grace. Then there is no danger (Romans 8: 35–39).

However, two elements can threaten our position and the promised crown of victory: the loss of the Holy Spirit, and the cooling of our first love for God. Without the sustaining and governing power of the Holy Spirit and the burning love for God, a church of God becomes merely a human assembly—without authority and divine blessing.

Loss of the Holy Spirit

The fundamental promise of God: “I will build My church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16: 18) has been part of the Holy Spirit’s mission since Jesus’ ascension. Jesus entrusted the disciples to this Comforter (John 16: 7). It was important to Him that they not begin the great work without the fullness of the Holy Spirit. That is why the disciples stayed together in Jerusalem (Luke 24: 49) until they were filled with the power of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

The Holy Spirit is the life force for the children of God, without Whom they can do nothing (John 15: 5). At the same time, He is also the promised teacher and mentor who develops each individual and makes them usable. The Holy Spirit works the gifts in the children of God—as He wills and as the church needs. He then uses them as instruments, giving blessing and success for their respective tasks (1 Corinthians 12). ▶

In what way could we lose the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives? He is a personality. If, in human wisdom and power, we begin to belittle Him and His divine instruction, He will be grieved and quietly withdraw (Ephesians 4:30). We may still assume that all is well, perhaps see ourselves as fighting for biblical truth, and yet we are already traveling into darkness without this heavenly Leader.

Christ's warning to Philadelphia was so imperative because the enemy of our souls will always tempt our human side. He wants to make us great and secure in our own eyes. He will sow seeds of doubt within us about the wisdom and faithfulness of God and will whisper to us that we are responsible and can do things on our own rather than waiting on the Holy Spirit to work in us. He will make us anxious and send us counselors who recommend human values and goals.

That is why it is so important to live within the will of God, to understand His words, and to recognize open doors. Where people are filled with the Spirit of God, they will allow themselves to be used by God. They will ask for open eyes to see the ripe harvest field, and the need of souls will urge them to earnest intercession and personal service. It is the church's task to be a light and to be used by God for missionary purposes. Ultimately, the guidance and effectiveness in this work comes from the Holy Spirit.

In order not to grieve the Holy Spirit, it is extremely important not to fall into human activity and strategies for building the church. When human laws and regulations become more important than the freedom of the gospel, when we fill the functions in the church according to human criteria, we displace the Holy Spirit from His ministry. If we choose preachers and teachers who

satisfy human qualifications or please our eyes and ears (2 Timothy 4:3–4), then the Holy Spirit will withdraw.

The sheer volume of knowledge available to us today is a huge problem. We have many ways and techniques to get a whole range of answers to every question. In addition, a good, preferably academic education seems to be standard—an education that is deeply anchored in a humanistic world view and value system which we then absorb. Are the words of Jesus still valid, in which He thanked the Father for hiding the true knowledge from the wise and prudent of this world (Matthew 11:25)? Do we no longer need the One who will “guide us into all truth” (John 16:13)? At the time of John, it was still true: “But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him” (1 John 2:27).

Can we still wait quietly to receive a divine answer to questions regarding the Word of God or making good decisions? Have we learned to entrust ourselves completely to His guidance and His divine plan? If theological training becomes more important than the shaping of our heart and character by the Spirit of God, we are in grave danger. Church history teaches that it was precisely the loss of the initial “enthusiasm”—the fullness of the Holy Spirit—that led to the consolidation of the young church into human formality and church hierarchy, to the first apostasy.

Loss of a burning love

Jesus acknowledged that the works in the church of Ephesus were of a high standard. They were diligent



and had a clear sense of discernment (Revelation 2:1–7). But for all their zeal for God, they had unfortunately lost an essential element: burning love for God (verse 4). “Without love” means “without God”—because God is love (1 John 4:8).

Do you know 1 Corinthians 13? How often have you prayerfully read this chapter, studied it carefully, and even spoken on it? It says that we could speak with a perfect knowledge of biblical truths, have a perfect faith that even moves mountains, even sacrifice all our wealth and ultimately ourselves completely, but without love, it is worth nothing.

“Love suffers long *and* is kind . . . bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Corinthians 13:4, 7). But what does it look like in everyday (church) life? How much of this divine attitude is still within us? Jesus gives us clear instructions for our relationship with our brothers: “Judge not” (Matthew 7:1–5). Are we more inclined to be an intercessor for our brother, or do we accuse him before God? What about our love for redeemed children of God if they do not recognize the biblical doctrine about the church or entire sanctification?

God is love. If we have *Him*, if we are a church filled with the Holy Spirit, we will also have the divine love (agape) in us.

What can we do to protect ourselves from these two dangers?

How can we keep this promised crown meant for conquerors? Paul tells us a number of times: “Brethren, pray for us” (1 Thessalonians 5:25). This request is still extremely relevant and necessary today. Those responsible in the church and ministry, the

pastors and teachers, are in daily need of earnest and persistent intercession. God can only be gracious to us if those in authority lead a consecrated life, full of love and humility before God. When the Holy Spirit can work through them with power, and reveal God’s will, then we will experience the glory of God.

Live daily under the leading of the Holy Spirit. Welcome Him as your teacher and your guide throughout your life. Learn to better recognize His voice and translate His will into concrete actions. If you have not yet experienced sanctification like the disciples at Pentecost, seek this grace of God. Consecrate yourself and your life completely to the service of God and allow yourself to be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Study the love of God in His Word and in your own life. Let your love for God, your brothers and sisters, and all people grow. Spread this love lavishly so that tears are dried, wounds are healed, and hearts regain courage for the future. The more that love can reign in us, the more clearly can we see how our fellow human beings need this love. They need salvation, and they need the Savior.

The more our lives are fed by the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit, and the more His divine love fills our lives and shapes our character, the more firmly we are anchored to the blessings that guarantee us the eternal crown. We will then be with God for all eternity and bring worship and honor to our eternal King together with all the saints.

*Hermann Vogt
Gifhorn, Germany*



The Danger of Bitterness

“Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.”
(Ephesians 4: 31–32)

What is bitterness, and how can you recognize it?

We have all eaten food with a bitter aftertaste. This causes an unpleasant feeling to spread across our tongue that doesn't quickly disappear on its own. It is often possible to wash down the bitterness with plenty of water, but it can be “neutralized” more quickly by eating something sweet.

Doesn't our soul sometimes feel the same way? There may have been repeated hurts, disappointments, or grievances in interpersonal relationships in our lives. What remains is a bitter feeling, and the longer our thoughts revolve around these painful experiences, the more bitter our feelings become. We develop an increasingly negative view of the past and the future, our zest for life dwindles noticeably and, ultimately, our trust in people or even God.

Unless we are vigilant at this point and consciously place our emotional world under God's guidance, we run the risk of becoming embittered. By definition, bitterness is a consequence of grievances or injuries that have not been dealt with.

Perhaps we have had repeated conflicts with our neighbors in the past, felt humiliated by our work colleagues, or been bullied by classmates. We may have felt increasingly misunderstood by our spouse, or we may still be suffering as adults from the far-reaching consequences of an unhappy childhood. Perhaps a conflict with a brother or sister in the congregation has been simmering for years without a solution emerging.

The consequences of bitterness

All of this can severely disturb our inner peace. We sink deeper and deeper into self-pity and fall into emotional and spiritual distress. In the end, we only see life through the lens of bitterness, misinterpret even harmless situations, and increasingly convey our bad feelings to those around us. This can ultimately lead to an inner withdrawal, or even to thoughts of revenge and sinful reactions. Then, at some point, the built-up bitterness bursts out uncontrollably. Our introductory text from Ephesians describes a downward spiral:

“bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking.” By then, God has long withdrawn from us.

Great harm can come to the life of the church if we influence other brothers and sisters with our bitterness. Before you know it, the enemy of the soul has succeeded in tearing a rift through the congregation. This is why the writer of Hebrews warns us: “Looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled” (Hebrews 12: 15).

Preventing and overcoming bitterness towards people

So how can we prevent bitter feelings from arising so that we don't fall into the downward spiral of bitterness described above? How can we overcome this negative attitude? Asaph gives us a good insight into the process of overcoming his bitterness in Psalm 73: 16, 17: “When I thought *how* to understand this, it *was* too painful for me—until I went into the sanctuary of God.”

“Thus my heart was grieved and I was vexed in my mind. I *was* so foolish and ignorant; I *was like* a beast before You. Nevertheless I *am* continually with You; You hold *me* by my right hand. You will guide me with Your counsel, and afterward receive me *to glory*” (Psalm 73: 21–24).

When bitter emotions threaten to overwhelm us, we should also go “into the sanctuary of God,” namely into God's presence through prayer. There we can be sure of God's loving counsel. We can tell Him everything that has hurt, disappointed, and offended us. He patiently listens to us, and we can feel understood by Him.

Once we have poured out our entire heart to Him and have found inner peace, we can also ask Him to give us an objective view of the causes of our bitter feelings so that we can reflect on and analyze our own attitude. When we have conflicts with others, let us pray that we may also see the other person's perspective. Think through the hurtful situations. Would we assess them

differently if the roles of those involved were reversed? With God's help, let us work our way through the bitter attitude in this way—until we achieve inner peace.

After we have discussed everything with God and asked for a forgiving heart, we seek, if at all possible, a personal discussion with the one we became bitter towards. Let us not formulate our concerns reproachfully, but rather honestly describe our views and feelings. Give the other person the opportunity to explain themselves, admit possible mistakes, and seek pardon if necessary. Perhaps we too need to ask forgiveness for a one-sided point of view.

According to Ephesians 4:32, let us forgive one another wholeheartedly. Ultimately, we harm ourselves the most when we give in to bitterness. Guilt that remains unforgiven by us burdens us emotionally, spiritually, and sometimes even physically. It puts a strain on our relationship with others and with God.

The importance of such "reconciliation conversations" in God's eyes can be read in the Gospels: "Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (Matthew 5:23–24).

If, despite our efforts, a discussion or reconciliation does not occur, let us remember how we can "neutralize" a bitter taste on the tongue in natural life. Let us meet offenses and hurts with "sweetness," according to the Bible: "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you" (Matthew 5:44).

So, let's be there when our "difficult" neighbor needs help. Show appreciation for the work of a colleague who is annoying us. Take an interest in the problems of our bullying classmates. Treat our partner or our parents with love and respect, even if things have gone wrong in the past. When dealing with our spiritual brothers and sisters, let us remind ourselves repeatedly of the "perfectly joined together" princi-

ple described in 1 Corinthians 1:10. Let us consider whether we ourselves have lived out our Christianity with sufficient wisdom, or if we have unknowingly become a nuisance.

Bitterness towards God

What can we do when we realize how our bitterness is directed towards God? When we feel abandoned by Him in certain situations in life? When things happen that we no longer understand? When we are shaken to the core? Perhaps we are suddenly affected by unemployment, or we have to deal with a serious accident, a serious illness, or the loss of a loved one. Despite intensive prayers, God seems to remain silent. Neither health nor a solution to our problems appears. These are truly extreme situations in human life.

Even then, let us not throw away our faith and trust in God, and let us not be discouraged from continuing to bring our concerns before God's throne. We can ask our brothers and sisters in Christ for prayer support and seek encouragement in pastoral care. We can ask God for the necessary confidence that He is pursuing a higher goal with all the details of our lives. It helps us if we ask for profound submission to God's will, for the strength to endure all things without protesting. We can believe that our heavenly Father also wants to bring good out of everything that is currently so difficult.

Through this unshakeable trust in God, we will certainly become a blessing for others and a living testimony of what God is able to do in a human heart. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

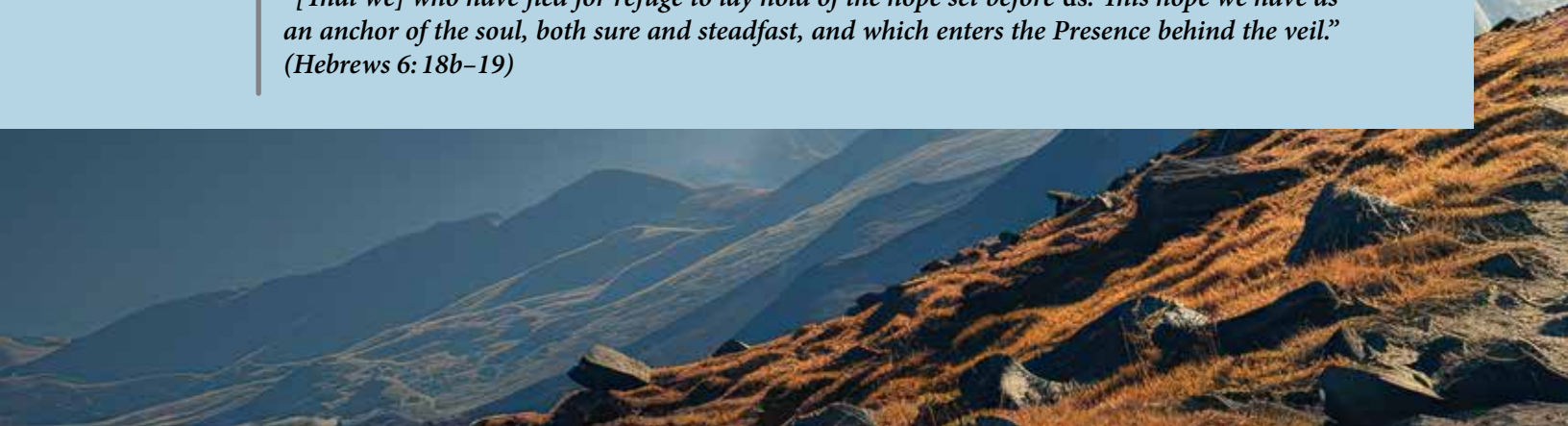
In this way, our faith reaches an even more mature level where we experience deep love for God, regardless of what He is doing for us at the moment. This faith is based solely on who He is: our Lord, our heavenly Father, and our best friend.

*Brigitte Ress
Herford, Germany*



Focus on the Essential

*"[That we] who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil."
(Hebrews 6: 18b-19)*



As believers, we are on the way to heaven, but we have not yet arrived. Yet we have this hope that is set before us. It is God's intention that we keep this hope as an anchor for our souls, so that by faith we are sure of our destination and rejoice about soon being with the Lord.

If we have this sure and steadfast hope, it will help us through the difficult circumstances of everyday life because it encourages us and keeps our hearts focused towards heaven. As followers of Jesus, life is not with-

out problems and temptations, and these need to be overcome.

The enemy of our souls will not only try to get us down, depress, hinder, and hassle us, but may try to put all sorts of obstacles in our way in order to discourage us. Here are a few real-life examples:

- Non-believers may not understand why we do certain things. Since they do not relate to the way we act, they may misunderstand our mo-

tives and think we are conceited and have a “holier-than-thou” attitude. That hurts us and can tempt us not to follow Jesus with all sincerity.

- When we stand up for Jesus, we often experience rejection and the hatred of the world. In John 15:20, Jesus said: “A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.” Through peer pressure or colleagues making fun of us, we may be tempted to make wrong decisions or questionable compromises.
- Unfortunately, it is also possible that other so-called Christians or believers may be the reason we are no longer committed to follow the Lord with all of our hearts. If we take them as our examples, even though their actions do not conform to the teaching of our Lord, then they will become a stumbling block for us.
- In following Jesus, we should not look for any kind of recognition for ourselves. All praise and honor belong to the Lord. Our old human nature does not like that. If we are not ready to deny ourselves, then we cannot be true followers of Jesus Christ.

We live in a world that has no desire to know God. At the same time, we notice that even Christianity itself is turning away from God’s Word. And then our own failures and lack of faith trouble us. When we look at our own strength and the environment we live in, we can come to the conclusion that it is impossible for us to reach the heavenly goal. The obstacles are too great, and our faith is too small.

That would be true if we only had ourselves to rely on. But we need not depend on ourselves and our own resources. God is able to keep us from falling! The Bible says: “Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to God our Savior, who alone is wise, be glory and majesty,

dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen” (Jude 24–25).

God is able to help us in every situation so that we can stand fast in our faith and be kept from stumbling and falling. No one who is redeemed by the precious blood of the Lamb will be left abandoned on the road to heaven. God will enable all believers who trust in Him to reach the goal. His power is greater than the power of the world and the power of the devil.

Therefore, we need not be discouraged by opposition on the path of faith. If we hold firmly to our God every day and count on His help, we can take sure steps of faith and avoid the snares that the enemy puts in our way. At the heavenly goal, we will recognize how often God has saved us from stumbling. For this we will thank Him from the bottom of our hearts and praise His greatness.

It could even be that the enemy whispers to us questions of doubt: Will you even make it to heaven?

In these trials, let us remember that through faith, “This hope we have as an anchor of the soul.” When a ship lies at anchor, you cannot see the anchor, because it lies at the bottom of the sea. Just as a ship’s anchor remains connected to the ship by a chain, so our soul is connected to the Lord Jesus in heaven, who is beyond all storms.

Is there any greater comfort for our trembling hearts than this? There is no one greater than our Lord who can help us through all the difficulties in this world. Our anchor is “both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil.” Our anchor is secure during all the storms of life because it has already taken hold in heaven. Soon we will be in glory with Christ and will rejoice in His wonderful grace.

Therefore, focus on the essential, on our refuge, and “lay hold of the hope set before us.” Keep your eyes on the Lord Jesus Christ and follow Him without compromise, without wavering, and faithfully. This hope is secure.

*Alexander Gross
Eppingen, Germany*



Laura gives her heart to Jesus

For some time now, Laura has been thinking about a particular illustration from her children's Bible. It shows Jesus standing at a door, knocking. Mom had read aloud the words of Jesus: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him" (Revelation 3: 20). Mom had also told Laura that Jesus waits patiently because the door can only be opened from the inside. Laura then said that she wouldn't keep Jesus waiting long if He was ever at her door.

Today, the Sunday School teacher had told the children that Jesus wanted to live in their hearts. The door in the picture represents the door to their hearts. Often, much evil, such as disobedience, fighting, envy, and other wrong things, live in the heart, and these lead to evil actions. Jesus died for all these wrongs, and He wants to make everyone who

believes in Him a happy child of God. The children should pray to God for forgiveness and invite Jesus into their hearts. When He lives in their hearts, He gives them the strength to decide against evil and for good every day.

Yes, Laura knew that she sometimes found it very difficult to obey her parents. She had often argued with her brother Nicholas. And she had done some things for which she needed forgiveness. That is why she now prayed to Jesus that He would forgive her all her wrongs and cleanse her heart. She invited Jesus to live in her heart. And then she noticed how happy she became. She remembered the story in which Jesus said: "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God" (Luke 18: 16).

Helene Rotfuss

*"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name."
(John 1: 12)*



Matthew follows Jesus

Matthew sat in a tax payment booth every day, counting money and writing down who paid how much. That was his job: he was a tax collector. And he was very, very lonely, because tax officers were not popular with their countrymen. On the contrary, they were hated because they collected taxes for the enemy Romans and often demanded more money than was required. What the people had to pay in excess went into the tax collectors' own pockets. The Israelite townspeople therefore called the tax collectors "sinners," and avoided them everywhere.



Today, Jesus walked past the tax office and saw Matthew. But Jesus didn't just see what everyone else saw—the hated tax collector with money he had stolen. No, he saw deep into Matthew's heart—how lonely and miserable he was, how he longed for peace and forgiveness, for a friend. The eyes of Jesus

did not condemn Matthew; they were full of compassion. Then suddenly, Jesus said just two words: "Follow Me." And Matthew got up and followed Jesus. He left the payment booth, the money, and his secure income behind. He was ready to follow Jesus anywhere.

Jesus forgave Matthew for all the evil he had done and was not ashamed to be his friend, for Jesus came to seek and to save sinners.

Today you too can experience forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ and become His follower. This means that Jesus becomes the King of your heart and that you submit your life to Him and that, with His

help, you act in the way He Himself showed us. Jesus has left us His example and wants us all to be with Him in heaven one day: "If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor" (John 12: 26).

Questions:

1. How did Laura know that she was now a child of God?
2. What does it mean to be a follower of Jesus?
3. Are you already a child of God, and do you follow Jesus?



You'll find the answers later in this issue—can you spot them?

Helene Rotfuss

You can read other descriptions of how people responded to Jesus' call and whether they were happy with their decision:
the rich young man (Matthew 19: 16–22)
and the fishermen of Galilee (Matthew 4: 18–22).

Dangers SOCIAL MEDIA



For most of us, using media is a regular part of our daily routine. We check our email when we wake up, scroll through Facebook to see if there's anything new, and download our favorite podcast for our ride to work or school. We text our friends and family throughout the day, and it's rare for us to be unreachable by phone. In fact, when we don't receive an immediate response from the person we are contacting, we are surprised and wonder what is taking so long. While media, and social media in particular, provide many benefits to our lives, we also recognize that there are dangers associated with using them.

1. One of the biggest challenges in managing our media usage is limiting the time we spend on screens. It's easy to take a free moment to check our social media, and we tell ourselves we will just quickly scroll through, and the quick scroll turns into half an hour or more. It's important for us to monitor the amount of time we spend (and dare I say, waste) on screens and set boundaries for ourselves. Paul warns us to be "wise, redeeming the time" because time is such a limited commodity (Ephesians 5:15-16). How can we be wise with our time on social media? There are apps available that can track your screentime and can even turn off your phone when you've reached your self-imposed boundary. Getting an accountability partner, like a friend or parent, who you can report to is another helpful idea to help manage the time we spend on our media devices.
2. Another challenge with social media can be the apps themselves. Certain apps, like Facebook, can

YOUTH PAGES



be used for good if we fill our feed with Bible verses and appropriate photos and we use them to stay in touch with loved ones. Other apps, like Snapchat and TikTok, are full of dangers at every turn. Pornographic images and videos are available at the swipe of your finger, even if you don't purposely seek them out. On TikTok, videos encouraging young people to attempt dangerous, even life-threatening challenges, abound. It's also important to mention that every photo, video, and comment posted online is there forever. Future employers and others can look up our posts and see everything we've ever said and done online. We need great discernment in what we share with the world, and we need to remember that as Christians, we are commanded to "abstain from every form of evil" (1 Thessalonians 5: 22).

3. Internet search engines like Google can be amazing tools to find answers to any question we might have. Or, if we need to repair something, there's probably a YouTube video showing us how. While these opportunities for accessing information are beneficial to us, they also require us to sift through a lot of lies to find the truth. Every kind of ideology, philosophy, and lifestyle can be found online. These ideas are proclaimed, recommended, and defended. Logic tells us they cannot all be good, and they cannot all be true. We need to be grounded in God's Word so that we can discern between good and evil and then "abhor what is evil" while we "cling to what is good" (Romans 12: 9).
4. Finally, social media and being "plugged in" can rob us of our quiet time. How often do we see someone

walking on the street or riding the bus without ear pods? Seldom! We ourselves might spend several hours a day listening to something: music, a podcast, a video, or the news. Have we ever considered that we might be doing ourselves a great disservice by drowning out our daily quiet time with noise? Our quiet time allows our minds to rest and our thoughts to develop. Our quiet time is also useful to God; God often chooses to speak to His children during quiet times of reflection. For example, we know from the story of Elijah in 1 Kings 19 that God did not speak to him in the earthquake, or fire, or mighty wind, but instead in a still, small voice (vv. 11–12). Rather ironically, there is a new trend on TikTok called "quiet walking." Its advocates proclaim the benefits of walking in silence, unattached to any form of media. In this instance, they have a point! Walking in silence, driving without any music, waiting at the bus stop quietly—these are all great opportunities to be silent and let our thoughts reflect on God, on the Bible text we may have read that day, or to pray and allow God to speak to us.

Social media is an important tool in our world today and can benefit us in many ways. However, as with many other things in life, it's a tool that can be used for good or evil. Let us make every effort to be watchful of the time we spend on media, the content of the apps and websites we use, the information we consume, and the amount of quiet time we allot ourselves. May God help us to use this tool for good!

*Karina Knelsen
Hamilton, Ontario*

Detecting Danger and Staying Safe

Dangers are ever present, threatening us in differing ways and in diverse life situations. Age and marital status play no role in this. A survey among believers regarding current dangers would reveal a variety of threats that affect all of us. It is almost impossible to capture them all, and not every danger affects everyone equally. For example, the road sign “Sharp Curve” poses no real concern to someone taking a leisurely drive through the countryside. However, for someone who passes him at high speed, there is grave danger, especially if he decides to ignore the warning.

To protect ourselves from danger, it is crucial to recognize it. The devil does not announce his presence with the words, “Hello, I am the devil, and I intend to bring you down.” He is a master of deception. He comes incognito with skillful cunning and deceit.

An incident described in Joshua 9 reinforces this conclusion. The Israelites were on the verge of conquering the promised land of Canaan with divine help. This was to be their new home after eliminating the people living there. However, a small local tribe felt threatened by the God of Israel and His people. They feared the same fate as those already conquered. Therefore, they devised a plan to deceive God’s people through trickery. This deceit was so skillfully executed that even today it is referred to as the “Gibeonite

deception.” Despite living nearby, the Gibeonites pretended to have traveled a great distance. They dressed accordingly, and the Bible says: “[T]hey took old sacks on their donkeys, old wineskins torn and mended, old and patched sandals on their feet, and old garments on themselves; and all the bread of their provision was dry *and* moldy” (vv. 4b–5). In this garb, they approached Joshua and the men of Israel. Their goal was to make a pact with Israel to secure their safety. Although making a covenant with the inhabitants of the land was forbidden by God, it was permissible to do so with people living outside. Hence, the Gibeonites created this deception by pretending to come from far away in order to secure a treaty.

Put yourself in the position of Joshua and the elders of Israel. The evidence seemed obvious: worn-out shoes and all the other items supported the story of the long journey. One could almost exclaim, “Caution, danger!” But who could warn them? The deception was so convincing that they were caught off guard. A sad verse is recorded in the Bible: “Then the men of Israel took some of their provisions; but they did not ask counsel of the LORD” (v. 14). Shortly thereafter, the Israelites reached the city of Gibeon. As they prepared to take the city, the covenant not to harm them was presented to them. They had not recognized the danger and were deceived.



This example illustrates that we must be vigilant. Where deception is involved, even a great danger may seem harmless. Convincing camouflage can mislead us to carelessly stumble into danger. Similarly, the Israelites relied on their own cleverness and accepted the “old, patched sandals” as evidence instead of seeking the Lord’s counsel.

This reminds me of the words in Proverbs 3:5–6, written by a wise man almost 3000 years ago. This saying has not lost significance to this day. It is advisable to take these words to heart and always remember them.

Verse 5 states: “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding.” Never before have people been as extensively educated as they are right now. Education is especially valued today, and minds are filled with knowledge. Nevertheless, Solomon urges his descendants (and us) to trust completely in the Lord and not rely solely on their own understanding. In figurative language, you should “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight” (RSV). This was the Israelite leaders’ mistake; instead of asking the Lord for advice, they relied on their own insight. The verse encourages us to always consider the Lord in all aspects of life, ask Him for advice, and trust in His guidance.

Verse 6a says: “In all your ways acknowledge Him.” Instead of looking for reasons to support our own opinion, we are urged to think of the Lord. This “acknowledging Him” means seeking His advice, asking Him, and listening to His leading. The reasons for this are obvious: God is not only omniscient but also all-wise. He has a broader perspective than we have with our limited view. He comprehends the plans of the powers of darkness and recognizes the reality behind the “old, patched sandals.” In all your ways, whether in questions or decisions, direct your gaze upward and trust in divine guidance.

Verse 6b: “And He shall direct your paths.” This promise states that the Lord will lead those who rely on Him on the right path. This applies to all aspects of life and decisions. God warns of impending dangers so we can recognize and avoid them. This is about our safety and reaching our heavenly goal.

It would be advisable to post these two verses in a prominent place in our home as a reminder to always prompt us. This will also be enduring advice for our children as they grow and develop. During family discussions, we can reiterate this advice to rely on the Lord in times of uncertainty and seek His guidance on the right path.

*Harry Semenjuk
Wetaskiwin, Alberta*



I Will Be With You

Part 2: Early Experiences

by Salomon Weissburger (1887–1968)



At the young age of 17 I was in a business apprenticeship in southern Germany. God had allowed the radiance of the Gospel to shine into my life. My Lord and Redeemer had found and redeemed me. The first weeks and months had many battles and storms.

I unexpectedly received a telegram ordering me to return home immediately. It was signed by my brother, but as it turned out, the actual sender was a Jewish teacher who wanted to guide me back to Judaism. In response to the telegram, I returned home, where I spent several days locked in intense conflict. I was urged to return to my old job with the Jewish businessman, which I very much did not want to do. I prayed much until an inner voice said, “Flee!”

Secretly, I left southern Germany by taking the train north, to Brother Karl Arbeiter in the city of Essen. When I told him what had happened, he said, “You did not do the right thing! You should submit to your parents but still remain true to the Lord!”

He asked, “Do you want to return home?”

I answered, “If that is God’s will, then I will return home.”

When God saved me, He laid the spirit of obedience into my heart so that I would be willing to do God’s will under any and all circumstances. I wrote to my parents, asking for forgiveness for having left home without their approval and saying that I would be willing to return if they wished me to. It took around three

weeks for a reply to arrive. In the meantime, it had been a great blessing to me to spend time with Brother Karl Arbeiter. I was baptized and took part in the ordinances in accordance with the New Testament. The letter to my parents was answered by my uncle, who asked me to join his business.

Return to My Family

Before I left Essen, Brother Karl Arbeiter prayed with me. He admonished me to submit my life and death to the Lord. I followed that instruction with all my heart, and I believe that I experienced sanctification at the time. The power of the Holy Spirit, with His fruits, became evident to me in the conflicts that I faced soon after.

You can imagine how I felt on the journey home and how I was greeted by my family. However, I had a strong certainty that the Lord Jesus was with me. For a few weeks, I was placed under the utmost pressure to return to the Israelite religion. They took my Bible away, and any correspondence with sisters and brothers of the Church of God was cut off. However, a few letters were held at the post office for me, as was a New Testament, which I guarded like a precious treasure—in my shirt pocket during the day and under my pillow during the night—until it was discovered and taken away too. That is one example of why it is so important to love the Word of God and keep it in our heads and hearts, not only as words on a page. Those weeks were



“Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will declare what He has done for my soul.”

(Psalm 66: 16)

filled with the most intense battles, but the Lord stood by me and was wonderfully near to me. I spent a lot of time in secret prayer. In response, the Lord gave me complete victory and took away almost all temptations. My heart was also filled with sincere pity and compassion for my family. It was a good thing that Brother Karl Arbeiter had prayed with me before this big battle began and that I had received the power of the Holy Spirit, which helped me to successfully endure these trials with love, peace, and patience. The fruits of our actions show whose spiritual children we are.

When my relatives realized that they would not be able to separate me from Jesus through direct pressure, they took a different approach. At that time, Germany was waging a colonial war in Africa, and they asked me to join up. Since I had promised to submit to my parents in all things, I did as they asked. However, the Lord prevented me from being accepted. When this approach failed, they wanted me to sign on as a cabin boy in a ship, probably thinking that my peculiar new beliefs would be beaten out of me by the other crew members. However, the application process required them to pay a bond of 300 German Marks, which they were unwilling to do; in 1905, that was still a lot of money, so that approach failed as well.

When my relatives saw that they were making no progress with me—keeping in mind that they were probably ashamed that one of them, who had high status in the community, had rejected Judaism to accept

Christianity—my father reluctantly gave me permission to go wherever I wanted. These events took place between May and September 1905.

I immediately set out for Essen to be with the community of believers there, having so personally experienced the truth of the Lord’s promise: “I will be with you.”

Looking back on this time in my life, there is one thing that stands out to me. As a young child in Christ, I was powerfully drawn to the meetings and congregations of children of God and to a pastor in order to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord. Earthly advantages or disadvantages did not enter the equation. I was driven by the urge to make spiritual progress.

These things are taken much less seriously today. People leave congregations or move to cities without a community of believers for the sake of worldly advantages. Many end up in similar situations to Lot, who prioritized material considerations and moved to Sodom; they, too, move to places where they lose their spiritual life. But the Lord says, “For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it” (Luke 9:24).

It is another matter if we move somewhere with the goal of beginning a new congregation to lead people to Jesus; that motivation can come from the Lord. As I look back, I can only praise and thank the Lord for having given me complete victory in all the intense conflict with my relatives. ■



Relationships, Longevity, and Happiness

Although not an official holiday, the third Monday in February has been declared by five provinces in Canada an annual holiday to celebrate the family. It is known as Family Day. If not relationships, what is family?

A Harvard study, the world's longest study of adult development, examined the connection between relationships, longevity, and happiness. In this link, study director Robert Waldinger provides the data-backed answer to what makes people live happier and longer lives.

It turns out that there is a common factor. "The people who were healthiest as they aged, the people who lived the longest, were the people who had the warmest connections with others. In fact, good relationships were the strongest predictor of who was going to be happy and healthy as they grew old." One might expect that good relationships would bring happiness. But good health?

Given the outcome of this fascinating 85 year-long study, it is tempting to ask:

- In our society, women have a longer life expectancy than men. Might one factor be that they tend to be better at forming lasting relationships?

- Being married was associated with a 15% overall lower risk of death from all causes. Relationships?
- A Pew research study provides evidence that religiously active people tend to be happier. Relationships?

Back to Family Day and family relationships. Scripture gives specific and helpful instruction on relationships in the family. When a new family unit is established, "a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). This does not imply a break in the relationship with mother and father. It does, however, demand a switch in allegiance. The new family unit is now the priority, the focus. Not mother! Not father! Mother and father, too, are addressed by this scripture. They are instructed to accept this new relationship, to recognize and to respect it. Warm relationships do not prosper and flourish in the rocky soil of interference.

And then, for the new family unit, Scripture has this to say. "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right" (Ephesians 6:1). I see in this not just a responsibility for children but for parents. Is there a better place to teach obedience and respect than by demonstrating these qualities in the home? Personal-

ly demonstrating respect? Exemplifying obedience to law and to God? Raising law-abiding children? Raising children obedient to God? Obedience not out of fear but out of love? And so, God's Word reminds fathers, "Do not provoke your children to wrath" (Ephesians 6:4). "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her" (Ephesians 5:25–33). That speaks to sacrificial love, unconditional love! "And let the wife see that she respects *her* husband" (Ephesians 5:33). Family relationships.

But warm relationships go beyond the family. "Pursue peace with all *people*" (Hebrews 12:14). Not to leave us guessing how to achieve warm relationships with others, Scripture is literally brimming with specific instruction. It speaks of forgiving as Christ forgave us. It speaks of seeking forgiveness and of reconciliation and of restitution. It speaks to anger management and humility. There is not a situation in relationships on which the Bible does not instruct.

Is the clamor for health and happiness not a universal pursuit? What a variety of avenues are engaged to achieve good health and happiness! Not all lead to the desired outcome. The Harvard study, the world's longest study of human behavior, concluded that good relationships are the strongest predictor of who was going to be happy and healthy as they grew old. When I became aware of this study, it was the impetus for me to put "pen to paper" to thank family and close relatives on Family Day for the role they play in my happiness.

There is an often-overlooked relationship that deserves further attention and that relates to Christians. The Pew research study, cited earlier, provides evidence that religiously active people tend to be happier. Some Christians speak of a personal relationship with God. Does that, plus their relationship with other believers in church, explain why religiously active people tend to be happier?

In the year 2019, I found myself on the operating table for open-heart surgery, not one bypass, not two, not four, but six bypasses. For me and for everyone around me, it was completely unexpected. Before this valley (simultaneously mountain top), never had I experienced such comfort, such peace, such support flowing from warm relationships with family, with fellow believers, and above all with my heavenly Father.

Already in the first few pages of the Bible, in the account of creation, we read how God was in the habit of coming down in the cool of the day (Genesis 3:8) to commune with man, seeking a relationship. Just as then, God still seeks a personal relationship with His creation. With you. With me. Today!

That personal relationship which God sought with His creation was destroyed by sin, with all its ugly consequences (Genesis 3:1–19), and none of us escaped the consequences, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). But 1 John 1:9 guides us like a GPS to the restoration of that personal relationship with Him: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

King David expresses his relationship with God and with fellow believers this way: "For a day in Your courts *is* better than a thousand" (Psalm 84:10). A modern Bible paraphrase, *The Message*, attempts to put this quote into a modern context: "One day spent in your house, this beautiful place of worship, beats thousands spent on Greek island beaches."

Warm relationships don't just happen. Relationships are built. God grant that the relationships we build among family, our neighbors, with fellow believers, and with our loving God are warm, abundant, and intentional.

*Hardy Sonnenberg
Hamilton, Ontario*

¹ <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/mckinsey-on-books/author-talks-the-worlds-longest-study-of-adult-development-finds-the-key-to-happy-living>

² <https://torontosun.com/health/married-men-live-longer-married-women-not-so-much-study>

³ <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/31/are-religious-people-happier-healthier-our-new-global-study-explores-this-question/>

⁴ Personal testimony at <https://www.thechurchofgod.cc/matters-of-the-heart>

I want to write a testimony to God's glory. First, I want to testify that Jesus has forgiven all my sins and that I am a child of God.

I would like to thank God from the bottom of my heart for preserving my life. On May 16, 2023 at 6:00 a.m., there was suddenly a loud bang in the apartments at the retirement home where I lived. The wall between my apartment and my neighbor's apartment had fallen, and I saw that it was on fire. I wanted to go out, but I couldn't because my wardrobe had fallen in front of the door, making it impossible for me to get out. The floor in the other room had also caved in. I just stood inside the door and called out to see if someone could help me. A night guard and another woman came to my aid and dragged me over the wardrobe and out of the door. My clothes were all torn, and the fire was so close that I had slight burns on my leg. By a miracle of God, I stayed alive. I then went across the courtyard

into another building to seek shelter. I asked God if He would preserve some money that I had hidden in the freezer so that it wouldn't burn, and the good Lord did. Everything else, except the one Bible I was holding in my arms, was burned. Although I lost everything, the good Lord has already provided for me so that I have a nice apartment again.

I would like to thank you for the *Evangeliums Po-saune* (the German version of the *Foundation of Faith*) which we always receive so punctually. It is a great blessing to me. My prayer is that we will receive it again and again and that many more people will read it. Yes, it is worth serving God, even if it is not always easy.

Your sister in the Lord,
Aganetha Martens
Neustaedt, Mexico

Anything Goes—For Three Days!

Editor's note: Carnival is not as well-known an event for those of us in North America, but is held in a number of other countries. Wikipedia states: "This festival is known for being a time of great indulgence before Lent (which is a time stressing the opposite), with drinking, overeating, and various other activities of indulgence being performed." There is an Italian phrase that is referenced in this short story: A carnevale ogni scherzo vale! (At carnival anything goes!)

Daughter: "No, Mom, I'm going to the masked ball tonight. And I won't be home until the morning."

Mother: "Please, I beg you, don't go there!"

Daughter: "Why not? I have to slave away in my dull office all year. That's why I'm looking forward to these three days when I can finally do what I want. Nobody can tell me what to do, including you, Mom!"

Mother: "Why can't anyone tell you what to do?"

Daughter: "Oh, Mom! You have no idea. That's the motto at carnival: anything goes—for three days!"

Mother: "That's strange! Anything goes, so everything is allowed? Who, my child, who on earth allowed everything?"

The daughter shrugged her shoulders: "What do I know? Everything is allowed!"

Mother: "That's a terrible mistake, a terrible deception. Do you actually know who gets to say what's good and bad?"

The daughter remained stubbornly silent.

Mother: "It's not me who decides that for you, but the holy God! Has He now stepped down for three days? Please, answer me!"

The daughter shook her head.

Mother: "That is not true; the holy God is not stepping down. And do you really believe that He would allow anything for three days, that God would set His commandments aside for three days? You don't really believe that."

Daughter: "No, I guess I don't."

Mother: "Look, my child, then that can only mean that people want to put God out of action for three days. But that is terrible! They want nothing of God for three days. I'm very much afraid that God wouldn't want us for an eternity. Aren't you afraid of that?"

The daughter replied thoughtfully: "I think you're right, Mom. But then people will be terribly deceived."

Mother: "Yes, that's right! The carnival is based on the devil's darkest lie that you can put God aside for a few days."

Daughter: "Mom, I'll stay with you tonight, and thank you!"

“Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits.” (Psalm 103:2)

To the glory of God, I would like to write a testimony of how God has led me.

I was born in Mexico and grew up among the Old Colony Mennonites. At the age of 12, we were allowed to go to church but could not understand what was being read. After 8 years, my parents took me to another community where it was preached that Jesus died for us and that we must receive Him into our hearts. Then I prayed that Jesus would forgive me, and He forgave me and gave me great joy. I had a physical ailment, and He healed me of it. God also made a way for me to get a job in a Christian children’s home, which was a great blessing for me.

After four years, the widower Johan Redekop, who had five young children, came to me and asked me if I would marry him. I couldn’t say yes or no. The task seemed too big for me. I then prayed a lot; some days I couldn’t eat. I searched the Bible a lot for an answer. Then God told me the words from Proverbs 3:5–6: “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.” Then I asked God to lead me right, and He gave me a deep peace and joy. Although I knew it wouldn’t be easy, I felt that it was God’s will for us to get married. And God blessed us.

A few weeks later, pastors from Canada came, and so the Church of God began there in Mexico. We did

our best to work together. Then after a few years, I got sick, so it was hard for me to even put food on the table. My husband said, “Shall we ask the pastor to act on James 5:14?” We did, and God healed me.

Thank God, I have often experienced how God has helped me. Sometimes God’s ways were different from my wishes. Later, my husband became ill and often had to go to the hospital. It wasn’t easy, but God always helped and gave me the strength I needed. It has now been over 15 years since God took him home.

Last year, I fell off the stairs outside and landed on the cement on my head. I had several injuries to my body, but nothing was broken. Because my balance wasn’t good, I fell again. I didn’t feel well at all after that. They discovered that I had bleeding in my brain. I had myself anointed again. God didn’t heal me suddenly, but He helped through pleading. After a 20-hour stay in the hospital, I was allowed to go home again.

Although my children were told not to leave me alone, I am able to help myself again through prayers, although I have to be careful. I am so grateful to God for His help. All glory to Him!

I often say, as it says in a song: “When I look back, how well God has carried me through good and difficult years!”

*Margaretha Redekop
Kitchener, Ontario*

Announcements

Easter Conference 2024

March 29th to April 1st, 2024

Venue: Hamm, Germany

Langewanneweg 248

Start: Good Friday at 2:30 pm

Further information at:

www.gghamm.de or phone +49 2381/410124

Answers from the children’s page:

- 1: Because she believed God’s Word.
- 2: Submitting to Jesus’ will and example.
- 3: Personal answer

Later-Too late

*“Not now,” you think
When Jesus gently calls you
And pleads with you: “Come, follow Me,
Give Me your heart.”
Yes, you could live a life of value;
Your soul’s destruction you would never see.*

*“Not yet,” you say.
“Sometime later, I will see,
When once again I hear Your voice.
It’s good advice,
But I’m not ready yet, I’m busy.
When I’ve got more time, then I’ll make the choice.”*

*“I still have time.
I’ll come when I am older,
When I have done the things I want to do
Then I will come.
In days to come I will be bolder,
And God will still have mercy and be true.”*

*Before you know,
Your life, which is unsteady,
May quickly end, and what if death bells toll?
Now you have time.
Do not delay, make yourself ready
To meet your God, and He will save your soul!*

*The time may come,
If you neglect the Savior,
That when you seek to enter heaven’s gate
You’ll seek in vain.
You snubbed God’s grace and loving favor,
Now you’re forever doomed, it is too late.*

*What final word
Will the Master utter
On that awful Judgment Day, stern and slow?
“I know you not;
Depart from Me!” Then you will shudder,
Forever condemned to darkness and to woe.*