



Foundation of Faith

LEARN TO RECOGNIZE THE ENEMY
TEMPTATION, DISCOURAGEMENT, AND VICTORY
DON'T LET ANYTHING HOLD YOU BACK!
THE WINNER WILL BE CROWNED

On to the
Battle

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FOUNDATION OF FAITH

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Editorial

Dear Reader!

What courage and determination can be heard in the song by the poet Sabine Baring-Gould:

*Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war,
With the cross of Jesus going on before.
Christ, the royal Master, leads against the foe;
Forward into battle, see His banners go.*

We are not the only ones who have been in battles, Jesus Christ Himself was: when He fasted and prayed for 40 days; when He felt the hatred and attacks of His opponents; when He battled in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane; when He suffered and died for us on Golgotha!

Paul told Timothy and also us today: “Fight the good fight of faith” (1 Timothy 6: 12). As well, Jude, the Lord’s earthly brother, wrote in his letter: “Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 1: 3). Like Paul, he also reasons that we must fight for the faith of the precious gospel, because ungodly and wicked men deny God, cause divisions, despise the grace of God, live as mockers in their lusts, despise authorities and blaspheme rulers.

Dear Reader, what should we do? We should continue to move forward courageously, look to Jesus continually, pray earnestly every day, and remain faithful in all things. Then let us stride forward courageously as Christ’s soldiers. Although there is so much hatred, fighting, murder, and wickedness in the world, we know:

*Crowns and thrones may perish, kingdoms rise and wane,
But the church of Jesus constant will remain.
Gates of hell can never 'gainst that church prevail;
We have Christ’s own promise, and that cannot fail.*

S. Baring-Gould

So let us not cast away our confidence, for we know that the battle will soon be done, and the Lord will come at the Last Judgment!

H. D. Nimz

Soldiers for Christ

Yes—or no! Faithful—or absent without leave?

“Onward, Christian Soldiers!” This song is sung in many churches, and a large number of people confess that they are fighting for Jesus and His cause as soldiers of Christ.

One can volunteer for military service in the temporal world and become a soldier. Or, as is the case in some countries with conscription, they are drafted into service. Soldiers in every army in the world are obliged to serve faithfully. Anyone who is absent without leave or refuses to serve will be punished.

Even in the spiritual realm, a person can respond to God’s great invitation and volunteer to serve as a soldier of Jesus Christ. From that moment on, the motto is:

*Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war,
With the cross of Jesus going on before.
Christ, the royal Master, leads against the foe;
Forward into battle, see His banners go!*
S. Baring-Gould

For the soldier of Christ, the first thing to do is to follow the heavenly commander and put His kingdom and His righteousness first, as Matthew 6:33 admonishes: “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”

Once one has been drafted into the army, he no longer belongs to himself and cannot do as he pleases. He can no longer spend his time as he pleases. He must do what he is ordered to do, and go where he is sent. He must wear the clothes that are specified for him. Yes, you can recognize a soldier by his uniform. The uniform also reveals which unit—army, navy, or air force—he belongs to. It also indicates the soldier’s rank and position.

To expand on this thought, I would like to refer to Jesus’ great invitation to the Lord’s Supper (Luke 14:17–20) and apply it to spiritual “military service.” The invitation went out: “Come, for all things are now ready.” And now, one by one, they all began to make excuses. The first one said: “I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.” And the other said: “I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.” And the third said, “I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.”

My dear Reader, here the Savior shows us people who do not wish to follow Him as the Son of God, as Lord

and Savior, and would rather go their own way.

There are so many in the ranks of the divine army, in which we are to faithfully follow our divine commander as soldiers of Jesus Christ, who profess to be Christians. But when it comes to serving in the kingdom of God, they have their excuses:

“Excuse me, I can’t make it. My family has priority.” Another tells us, “My friends and acquaintances are going on a hike this weekend. Please excuse me!” The third can’t come to prayer meeting because he’d rather work overtime and receive more wages.

If the soldiers in the army all want to impose their will as they please, then chaos ensues, and all is doomed. If soldiers believe that they can be absent without leave, and do as they please, they will be punished and often demoted or immediately dismissed with shame and disgrace.

In the Christian army you often hear: “Why preach about outward things like clothing and such? Let’s just see to it that people are saved. Then everything else will slowly fall into place. The main thing is that the heart is right and that everyone decides how

*In all things,
soldiers of
Jesus Christ should
be a good example
to the outside world.*

they should live, how they should dress, and what they prefer to do.” As children of God, we do not need to wear a uniform, but we must not conform to the world in the way we dress and act. Soldiers of Jesus Christ should be a good example in all things to the outside world.

Dear brothers and sisters, already back then the Lord Jesus knew that many merely said “Lord, Lord,” but did not do His will. There are still people like that today. The Savior says that a “tree is known by its own fruit.”

I ask you today, you who claim to be a child of God: Are you truly a follower of Jesus Christ? Do you belong to the Savior, or is your conduct and speech like that of the worldly? Are you absent and often far from the army of the Lord without divine permission?

I advise you to bend your knees and ask the Savior for forgiveness! Make the Bible, God’s Holy Scripture, the standard and guideline of your life. Don’t look to others, to the majority, but look to Jesus, and then you can sing together with all the faithful soldiers of Christ:

*Crowns and thrones may perish,
Kingdoms rise and wane,
But the church of Jesus constant will remain.
Gates of hell can never ‘gainst that church prevail;
We have Christ’s own promise, and that cannot fail.
Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war,
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S. Baring-Gould

H. D. Nimz

Strong in the Lord

W. J. Davis recounts an incident from his early days as a missionary in Africa:

When I was stationed in Clarkebury in 1932, a chief often came to me, greatly desiring a cooking pot that we needed. Over a long period, he came daily, pleading with me to give him the pot. I gave him many gifts, but I refused to give him the pot because we had no replacement for it.

Finally, one day the chief said, “Davis, I want that pot! And if you don’t give it to me willingly, I will take it by force!” The next day, he arrived with thirty of his warriors. All were armed.

As these men stood before me, the chief said, “Davis, we have come to take the pot!”

“But we need the pot to cook our food, as I have told you so many times before. And I will not give it to you.”

“You must hand it over, or I will take it,” the chief replied.

“With thirty armed men against one unarmed missionary, it is within your power to take it. But if that’s how you treat your missionaries, then I

no longer wish to stay among you. I will go elsewhere.”

“Davis, are you not afraid of me?” the chief asked harshly.

“No, I’m not afraid of you,” the missionary answered. “I know you can kill me. But had I been afraid of death, I would never have come to people like you. I would have stayed in my country with my people.”

“Davis,” the chief repeated, “do you have no fear of death?”

“No, I am not afraid to die. For if you kill me, I have a home in heaven where no ungodly men can trouble me and where the weary find rest from their labor.”

At this, the chief turned to his armed men and said, “This is remarkable. Here is a man who is not afraid to die. We must leave him his pot.”

As the chief turned to leave with his warriors, he looked back once more and said, “Davis, I love you less than before, but now I fear you more!”

And from that time on, the missionary was never troubled or harassed by that chief again; instead, he now had his utmost respect. ■

Learn to Recognize the Enemy

“Above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.” (Ephesians 6: 16)

After their captivity, when the people of Israel wanted to rebuild the temple and the walls of Jerusalem, the enemy threw many obstacles into their path (read the books of Ezra and Nehemiah for the full story). He still takes this approach today, ensuring that efforts to build the kingdom of God are met with challenges and discouragement.

Soldiers who go to war risk injury and death. As followers of Jesus, we are not immune to the enemy's aggression, facing discouragement, disappointment, worries, and misunderstandings. In many cases, we may not recognize them as the flaming arrows of the evil one, but Paul tells us that we are in a spiritual war and should always pray for all the Lord's people. Knowing that servants of God are his greatest threat, the devil tries to render them ineffective. This makes it all the more important that we pray for God's protection for each other!

D. L. Moody was in a miserable state of mind, feeling that God was insufficiently blessing his service. His discouragement and depression influenced everyone around him as he disparaged their meetings and the lack of success. This continued for several months, representing a major trial in the life of the renowned evangelist.

One Monday, he met another preacher, who enthused about the previous day's services before asking Moody, "And how was your day?"

Moody answered, "Not good. No power. I preached about Noah."

"Noah?" smiled the other pastor. "Have you ever really studied Noah's life? He had a wonderful character."

Willing to acknowledge that he might have missed something about this patriarch, Moody reread the well-known story from this new perspective and realized, "Poor Noah! He preached righteousness for 120 years and nobody outside of his family took heed."

Several days later, he spoke with a young preacher who had just finished revival meetings during which ten people had found peace with God. Moody thought to himself, "Noah would have been thrilled with that result! But even without such a success, Noah was not as discouraged as I am. He remained steadfast in faith."

Later, a young man said to him, "Mr. Moody, I'd like you to pray for me." And again, Moody had to think, "It would have meant so much to Noah to hear these words at least once in 120 years!" He was reminded of Psalm 42, saying to himself, "Why are you cast down, O my soul? And *why* are you disquieted within me? Hope in God." Moody hoped in God, took new courage, and continued his work to great effect. Had he not learned to overcome, discouragement would have made him useless to the Lord's work, as has been the case for so many others.

Sabot is a French word for a wooden shoe. Sabotage was the practice of throwing a wooden shoe into a machine to stop production. Later, the word's meaning expanded to include any attempt to obstruct or ruin production. Satan has his own "wooden shoes" with which he attempts to ruin our souls. They include worries, fear, doubts, bitterness, and discouragement.

Do not give up in difficult situations. Resist the enemy! Stay courageous, pray, believe, and trust in God. Remain faithful, and God will carry you through and give you victory! ■

A Life of Victory

How wonderful to lead a victorious life! But who can do it? It is those who have been washed clean of their sins in the blood of Jesus, those who have attained salvation in Christ and have thus experienced a new life. In order to walk in this new life and maintain it, victory is necessary.

Every child of God is exposed to many temptations and difficulties in this life. God's Word states in Ephesians 6:12, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood." In other words, it is not a physical fight. We are up against the powers of darkness and the cunning attempts of the devil. We cannot fight them alone, but God wants to give us victory!

Just as in natural warfare, children of God must also be equipped for spiritual warfare. God has provided us with spiritual armor (see Ephesians 6:10-17); we only need to make use of it to be victorious.

Our first weapon should be the truth. Jesus Christ is the truth. His truth must first transform us, so that we can continue to live in the truth before God and man. Only this truth can conquer the devil, the father of lies.

We are clothed with the "breastplate of righteousness." It is not the righteousness of the Pharisees or a righteousness by works, but the righteousness that was given to us by grace through Jesus Christ. It will stand before God and be reliable against the enemy.

The feet must be shod "with the preparation of the gospel of peace," in order to be ready to march off at

any time. A spiritual soldier with boots on is not satisfied with what he has achieved. He marches forward to further carry the gospel.

In the course of the Christian life, the devil shoots many fiery darts at believers, such as envy, resentment, strife, jealousy, etc., in order to attack them in some way. Here the "shield of faith" should be held up to protect the spiritual body. The arrows of the evil one are warded off by faith and trust, and God gives the victory.

The battle against the powers of darkness also requires the use of the "helmet of salvation." When the enemy tries to take away our assurance of salvation, we can say: "Yes, I was a sinner, but Jesus paid everything and has forgiven me!" Assurance of salvation is our best defense against this kind of temptation.

The foundation of our faith is the Word of God. It is sharper than a two-edged sword. Jesus used this proven weapon to defeat the enemy. That is why we should also use this "sword of the Spirit" so that the enemy cannot harm us.

Children of God are called to lead a victorious life. John says: "For whatever is born of God overcomes the world" (1 John 5:4). Through redemption, God has done everything on His part to make victory possible. Now it is up to us to use the God-given armor in the battle and to pass through victoriously through His power and grace.

*Edith Roesler
Toronto, ON*



Power to Overcome Satan

After the apostle Paul had made it clear how Christ saves from sin and frees from the power of Satan and evil ways, he said: “Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage” (Galatians 5:1). God not only surrounds His people with a protective defense, but He also gives them strength to overcome.

The protective defense that God gives His people is so strong that the devil cannot destroy it. “We have a strong city; *God* will appoint salvation *for* walls and bulwarks” (Isaiah 26:1). This signifies the power of God: the salvation of the soul. He not only gives us strength outwardly but also inwardly. The Scripture exhorts us in Ephesians 5:18: “Be filled with the Spirit.” When Jesus ascended to heaven, He gave His followers the promise of the Holy Spirit. When His power, love, and glory fill the soul, we have a secure and strong protective defense against all the storms we face. Therefore, how necessary it is to be filled with the Spirit of God!

So how can we overcome in battle? Faith is our shield with which we can extinguish all of Satan’s fiery darts. Faith is the victory that overcomes the world. In every battle, we must hold up the strong shield of faith. Some true and honest followers of the Lord sometimes seem to forget, or have not yet fully learned, that Christians must walk by faith. In the morning, they rise with a happy and joyful feeling; they praise and glorify the Lord. They are so happy, but then suddenly a dark cloud comes upon them.

All at once, doubts and bad feelings arise, and they ask themselves: “What have I done wrong?” Although the Lord does not show them anything, a voice tells them that they have somehow done wrong. The more they pay attention to their feelings, the worse it gets,

until the victory they had in the morning is lost. Had they held on to their faith, in spite of their emotions, they would not have been overcome.

Had they realized right away that this was the devil’s discouragement, and firmly resisted him in the name of the Lord and in childlike faith, and sung a joyful song of victory, they could have spared themselves much unnecessary suffering.

If you too find yourself in such a situation in which a voice tells you that you have done wrong, but you are not aware of it, then do not listen to the voice! For if it is the Spirit of God who is warning you, He will show you the wrong you have done and make it clear to you where you have gone wrong, and how to repent and make it right. Pay no attention to your feelings, but look to God, to His greatness and power! Look up to Him who made heaven and earth, who made the waters of the Red Sea part for His people, who rescued the three men from the fiery furnace. Look up to the mighty Savior, who has all power and authority in heaven and on earth. This will strengthen your faith. If we look to the Lord and are obedient to Him, we will have a glorious victory and will be more than conquerors in everything.

Faith must be based on the Word of God. This can never fail. The shield of faith, which we must always uphold, renders the arrows of the tempter harmless and powerless. Jesus has taken away the power of the enemy. Anyone who believes, obeys, and trusts Him can and will be victorious. Every redeemed one can remain protected from sin and be an overcomer—as long as he remains in the freedom he has attained through Christ, is clothed with the whole armor of God, walks in the light of God’s Word, and courageously fights the good fight of faith. ■



Don't Let Anything Hold You Back!

We must not allow ourselves to be unsettled by those who fall. We must go forward with our eyes on Jesus.

It is very sad when Christian brothers and sisters who faithfully served God fall away from Him and suffer shipwreck of their faith. We are then inclined to wonder how this is even possible. Believers who once stood for the truth and then reject it are pitiful people. There have always been and will continue to be such people as long as we live on this earth. We can only pity such unfortunate people and need not be surprised.

A Christian who forsakes the source of life, peace, joy, and comfort is like a wanderer in the desert who has a compass and map but doesn't use them. He asks other travelers how best to reach the first spring of water. However, they show him the wrong way. Having not looked at his map and compass beforehand, he takes the route they suggest. As a result, he never reaches the spring and perishes miserably in the desert.

We, as God's children, are like wanderers in the desert. We are well-equipped with a compass and a map. The compass is Jesus. He says: "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life" (John 8: 12). There is no better compass. The map is the Word of God. In Psalm 119: 105, we read: "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." This is the best map for our earthly journey.

Despite being well-equipped, many miss the right path and do not reach their goal. Jesus says: "For false

christ and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect" (Matthew 24: 24).

If someone strays from the proper path, we should not be disheartened. Some people are very dejected when they hear that someone has turned away. "How could he do that? He was so good at singing, praying, and witnessing; he was a pillar of faith! I am far from being what he was. How will I, then, complete the race?" It is very foolish to speak like this. God calls out to us in His Word: "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12: 9). God shows no partiality (Romans 2: 11).

I can still remember my time as a soldier during the war and how we had to proceed forward during an assault. I often heard screams from those who had been hit by a bullet next to and behind me. Sometimes they were very good comrades of mine. But I didn't stop and say: "What, he got hit?" No, I didn't have time for that. I tightened my grip on my rifle and looked ahead.

Let us do the same in our journey of faith. Clinging to Jesus, our eyes fixed on heaven, we will complete our course with honor. God, who began the work in us, will also complete it. Blessed are those who, at the end of their journey, can exclaim with the apostle Paul: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4: 7).

Rudolf Böttcher

Clinging to Jesus, our eyes fixed on heaven, we will complete our course with honor.



The Winner Will Be Crowned

Many years ago, very early on a Sunday morning, a small town on the slope of the Habichtswald mountain range in Germany, was buzzing with activity. After all, a cycling race was scheduled, and the first cyclists were expected to arrive soon. Sixty cyclists set off early that morning to participate in the team race. The starting point also doubled as the finish line. The ride itself extended across several towns and promised to be very strenuous.

Situated about ten minutes before the finish line was a sharp curve in the middle of the small town. Police officers and paramedics were on hand to quickly handle any problems. For the time being, they were fully occupied keeping the road clear of the curious residents of the village who were eagerly awaiting further progress of the race.

Finally, the crowd became animated. From the next corner, where a better view of the road was observed, arose a cry: “They’re coming!” The news was eagerly passed on by the now very excited onlookers. And there came the first four—tired, exhausted young people who only had one thought: to reach the finish line as soon as possible.

Since the individual teams started at different times, they also arrived at the finish line at different times. The determining factor for the award ceremony was the time it took to complete the course.

And now one team after another arrived, all equally tired yet motivated by the thought of being the first to reach the finish line. However, just before the curve in the road, one of the cyclists cried out, unable to continue. Would this cause the entire team’s effort to be in vain? That just couldn’t happen! “Hang in there!” he was told. Others towed him along for a short time until he was able to continue in his own strength. The interesting thing about this race was that the cyclists of each team had to finish together. So, any member who wasn’t able to endure could spoil the best chances for his whole team.

At one point, a single cyclist came along, red-faced and utterly exhausted. The unfortunate man was likely trying to catch up with his team again. It wasn’t his fault that his bike required repair. He had the same good intentions as the others, and now, because of his bike, it appeared that they all were going to lose

the prize. Should all of his efforts be in vain? It was a poor comfort to know that he wouldn’t be the only one; many other cyclists who didn’t reach the finish line in time would leave empty-handed. And yet, it was foreseeable that not everyone could win the prize. Only the one team with the best time would win the race. How many hopes would be dashed!

But is it the case in all races that only one can reach the goal and the others, despite their good intentions, would achieve nothing? Oh no! I know of a race in which we all participate, in which we can all be crowned winners. Old and young, rich and poor, sick or healthy—all can win the prize. But one condition must be fulfilled: we must wholeheartedly commit ourselves to reach the goal.

The apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 9:25: “And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they *do it* to obtain a perishable crown, but we *for* an imperishable crown.” The following also applies: “But he who endures to the end shall be saved” (Matthew 24:13). Perhaps, dear friend, you set out on the journey at the same time as others and now find that you have fallen behind. You were not as faithful in prayer and Bible reading and have become weaker and weaker. Now the thought weighs heavily that you could have had a better run. But take heart; it is also possible for you to reach the goal. If you just go to our Lord and Savior in faith, then you can be helped. Pour out your heart to Him and ask God to forgive you for having become lukewarm. Tell Him that you once again desire to wholeheartedly join the ranks of the fighters. Be assured that God will hear you!

Perhaps you are doing well in your spiritual life. You are making progress and are full of joy in the Lord. Then you have a responsibility to your brothers and sisters. Don’t we sometimes hear the cry: “I can’t go on!” Here or there, a dear soul has become weak and wants to give up the fight. Faithful people are needed who will not leave the weak to struggle alone. “Hang in there,” we cry. “We want to carry you along and have patience with you. We want to uphold you in prayer before the face of God, and we are sure the Lord will give you new courage.”

How many of our brothers and sisters would still be on the narrow path if they had been given an

encouraging word in their hour of weakness or had been offered a helping hand? Oh, dear brothers and sisters, we need to see our responsibility towards others. We must not imitate Cain and try to reason: “Am I my brother’s keeper?” Let us decisively walk the narrow path of life and remain faithful to the Lord, even when the battle gets hot. We must not forget our brothers and sisters, but be reminded of the words of Tersteegen:

*The strong be quick to raise
The weaker when they fall;
Let love and peace and patience bloom
In ready help for all.*

*In love yet closer bound,
Each would be least, yet still
On love’s fair path most pure from ill,
Most loving, would be found.*

*We shall not rue our choice,
Though straight our path and steep,
We know that He who called us here
His word shall ever keep.
Then follow, trusting; come,
And let each set his face
Toward yonder fair and blessed place,
Intent to reach our home.*

Ernst Kersten



The Christian—a Coward?

“Coward! Coward!” echoed from behind Jonas across the schoolyard. Jonas didn’t mind being called a “coward,” but he didn’t look around. Isolated from his playmates, he walked home alone.

An older schoolmate had offered Jonas’ friends some drugs to try. Of course, no one wanted to be a coward and not take part—except Jonas. Jonas had experienced salvation through the Lord Jesus and knew that he couldn’t join in, even if it meant being the only “outsider.”

No, Jonas was not a coward. Being a Christian is not for cowards! Being a Christian requires courage!

Where did Jonas find the courage to be mocked rather than join in? Jesus said: “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9). Jesus, who now dwelt in his heart, gave him the strength in this situation to turn his back on evil with a firm “No!”

Jesus was also mocked as He hung on the cross and did not defend Himself. It was shouted at Him: “If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us” (Luke 23:39). It would have been easier for Jesus to avoid the cross. He knows what it means to be misunderstood by people. All faithfulness for the sake of His name will be rewarded by Him. He promised: “Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Revelation 2:10). ■



The Good Fight of Faith

“I have fought the good fight . . . I have kept the faith.” (2 Timothy 4:7)

These words were written by the Apostle Paul at the end of his life. He had blessed assurance that he had fought the good fight of faith. Blessed is the one who can say the same at life’s end! Such is a just fight which will bring a crown.

In a sense, everyone is engaged in a battle. Some fight merely for their existence, others for their honor, their rights, their advantage, their well-being, their ideas, their convictions, and so on. Sometimes even

believers contend for such or similar things. They try to prove, using the Word of God, that they are justified in fighting. But this is not the type of battle Paul is referencing here, for he never fought for his rights, his honor, or even just for his opinion. Such matters have nothing to do with faith.

It is known that only few people fight the good fight of faith. Even the Word of God says that not all have faith (2 Thessalonians 3:2).

In general, people have an inclination to see, know, and understand, and want to be able to explain everything. Because that is not always possible in the spiritual realm, they declare the fight of faith to be foolishness. But Jesus calls those blessed who do not see and yet believe (John 20: 29).

In our Christian life, there are times when everything seems dark to us and we see no way out, as if God has turned His face away. David referred to it as the “valley of the shadow of death” (Psalm 23:4). There is also no shortage of “comforters” like Job experienced in his distress. They claimed, in essence, “the path of a true believer is always bright. If things are going so badly, then something must be wrong with you!” If someone does not have a strong faith, he can experience great turmoil in response to such claims.

There are also times of darkness and struggle within the church setting. Working in the vineyard is not easy. The workers at evening said, “We have borne the burden and heat of the day” (Matthew 20: 12). That tells us something! Working for the Lord is always a work of faith; often one sees very little progress. As such, sometimes it seems as if our labor is entirely in vain.

Then there are also those who lack faith. They boldly declare, “It will not work; you see so few people come to church, and few are saved.” It seems that the prophet Isaiah also felt this way, for he writes, “Then I said, ‘I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and in vain’” (Isaiah 49: 4).

Whoever has resolved to fight the battle of faith must continue, regardless of circumstances or feelings. He must also not be held back by those of little faith. He must simply endure and continue to work steadfastly. For him, only the Word of God matters: “knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:58).

Now, if we consider the man who wrote these words, the Apostle Paul, we know that his path was not a bed of roses. How much slander, mockery, scorn, beating, and imprisonment he had to endure. And on top of that, a personal challenge—a thorn in the flesh. What it was, we do not know. In any case, it was something he desired to be released from. But although he had called upon the Lord three times, he was not relieved of it. So, he learned to be content and continued in the fight of faith.

Every Christian faces some type of hardship. Our path does not always go smoothly, but our Christian

walk is not anchored in good feelings, rather in believing the Word of God.

However, the Lord has promised victory to believers. When we face trials, we may be distressed and sad, but that does not signal defeat in our fight of faith. If we come to the Savior and call upon Him for help, we can be conquerors, for He wants to lead us from victory to victory.

Therefore, dear Reader, if you also wish to fight the good fight of faith, do not rely on your undependable emotions! A fighter who focuses on his feelings is fickle. In good times, he may come across as a great hero of faith. He is ready to “go to prison and to death” for his Lord. However, when circumstances change and his feelings follow suit, he lies on the ground utterly discouraged with no strength left for the battle.

God wants to help us fight the good fight, to keep the faith, so that one day we may all receive the crown of victory.

Alfred Berzins

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Temptation, Discouragement, and Victory

Joy and spiritual growth in the Christian's life do not always depend on favorable circumstances. Many men and women have made the greatest spiritual progress amidst the most difficult situations. In our Christian walk, we may often be faced with grief or troubles. But should this cast a shadow upon our lives, even if tribulation persists? Certainly not. By no means should the enemy be able to discourage and distress us through temptation, worries, suffering, persecution, mistakes, misunderstandings, and the like. A discouraged person is of little use no matter where they might be. Therefore, during our trials, let us, in the name and power of the Lord, never give in to discouragement.

Trials and temptations will come. But what does that matter? Others have also had situations just as difficult as ours and have been successful in overcoming them. You and I can do the same. At times, a feeling of depression may try to envelop us, and it may seem as if it is almost impossible to bear. A humble follower of Christ may even feel that their fellowship with God has been severed. It is as if one's prayers fall to earth rather than ascend to heaven. The troubled soul may cry out for help, and no help seems to come. In times like these, it is necessary to patiently wait upon the Lord and humbly submit to His will with the whole heart. That is when the words of the Psalmist come into play: "Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him" (Psalm 37:7). In another Psalm, the same author says, "I waited patiently for the LORD; and He inclined to me, and heard my cry" (Psalm 40:1). In difficult times, it is important to trust in the Lord and not give way to fear.

Jesus was in a similar situation in the Garden of Gethsemane. He felt that the load was just too heavy to bear. Therefore, He cried out to God, that if it were possible, to have the bitter cup of suffering pass Him by. Since He was also fully human, He trembled and quaked in the greatest trial and tribulation of His life, facing the suffering unto death that lay before Him. But in humble submission, He said: "Father . . . not My will, but Yours, be done" (Luke 22:42). That is when an angel came and strengthened Him. The gates of glory were opened, the burden was lifted, and like a prisoner for whom the doors of captivity had opened, He could leave the place where He wrestled in prayer strengthened. As He left, He could face the enemy with all his powerful forces. Although the presence of His Father

upheld Him, and the angel had strengthened Him, in the darkest hour of trial He called out: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46). But even in this last battle, He said: "Father, 'into Your hands I commit My Spirit'" (Luke 23:46). After that, the glory of resurrection followed. What a wonderful lesson of trust and submission!

A sister was sorely tempted to throw away her shield of faith and give up serving the Lord. She had been indirectly involved in a conflict that her husband had with another member of the congregation. She had always trusted and had high respect for this Christian brother, but now it seemed that this was forever shattered. Had it been a similar situation with a non-Christian, it would have been easy to get over. But that a Christian brother could be like that was too much for her to bear. Fortunately, through the grace of God, she was able to overcome the temptations and distress this caused her. To do this, she needed to reach an inner resolve. She resolved to be true to the Lord, no matter where the trials and temptations originated. That is where we sometimes get into trouble, not because the trials or temptations are greater than what we have previously overcome, but because they come from a new and unexpected source.

Rather than focusing on your temptations, and constantly reviewing your sorry situation, and giving in to dark thoughts, cast them aside and think of the many blessings God has given you in the past. When Paul and Silas were in prison, their feet in the stocks and their backs bleeding from the beating they had received, it would have been impossible for them to forget the cruel treatment they had just gone through. Yet they did not focus on that, but counted it for joy to suffer for the Lord: "But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God" (Acts 16:25). There is nothing to be gained by living in turmoil. It does not help to fret in restless anticipation over something before it actually happens. And should it happen, it is even more useless to focus on it after the fact. Most of the worry and anxiety people have is over fears of the future which never materialize.

A sister who lived a godly life and prayed for her family for years was troubled that none of her loved ones gave their hearts to the Lord. She started to blame herself, as if she was not acceptable in the eyes of the Lord. But eventually she realized that although Jesus

was the Son of God, many did not believe upon Him, including at first, His own brothers. So, she learned to leave the responsibility for her family to the Lord. After she did all she could, she had inner reassurance that it was well with her soul.

Beautiful roses, bringing us joy through their color and aroma, have thorns for protection. It is not possible to pick them without contending with the painful thorns. Likewise, a young recruit may look in amazement to an older, experienced comrade, who has endured many a battle and has survived as a hero. His wounds and scars give testimony that his reputation was not achieved without hardship and duress. Standing at our sides are veterans of the cross of Christ whose lives and experiences are enviable and desirable. But without doubt, they can give testimony of prickly thorns in the form of hardship, which have

caused them agony and grief. Yet the roses are not less beautiful, nor do they smell less sweet because they have thorns. In the same way, the life of a Christian is no less glorious and worthwhile because of the trials and temptations. The hardships are mile markers on the way to a life of faith and submission, which serve to beautify the spiritual path of Christ's followers.

When trials come, share them with the Lord! Do so, "casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7). Oh, so deep are "the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:7). The treasures of our Father in heaven are ours for the asking. God offers His blessings to us and is prepared to give them to us abundantly. "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). ■

Protected by God's Angels

It was July 1964, but I remember it as if it were today. I was 24 years old at the time, the oldest of the soldiers, and I was at the wheel of a new military truck "ZIL-157," a three-axle vehicle. At the time, the Soviet army was conducting military exercises with 1,000,000 participants. It was in the mountains of Tajikistan at an altitude of 3,129 meters (10,266 ft). A long column of military vehicles was climbing up a very narrow mountain road. On the right was a very deep abyss, on the left a rock face. I was at the wheel, with a very young officer next to me. It was already early morning and the sun was rising with its first rays. Suddenly the sun blinded me so that I could hardly see anything. So, on a left-hand bend, I drove my vehicle off the road. The truck got stuck on a rock above the precipice.

There were 28 young soldiers sleeping in the back of my truck. This jolt wasn't the only one and luckily they didn't wake up. If just one of the soldiers had jumped from the vehicle, it would have tipped over and plunged into the abyss. The time over the abyss seemed like an eternity. Fortunately, a tractor was driving behind me, so that our truck could be pulled out with a thick rope. The young lieutenant next to me had turned white as a sheet. My fingers were so cramped at the wheel that I could only be freed with outside help. I was a sergeant at the time and responsible for the sol-

diers. Down below, you could see lots of smashed cars. I asked my officer: "Did you see a person in white in front of us?" "No," he said. So it had been a guardian angel that only I had seen!

After the military, at my first breakfast at home, my mother made tea and asked me: "What happened to you on that particular day? The spirit of God woke me up at night and I had to pray until I finally got some peace." It was the very day that God had saved me and those who had been with me. That's how much power my mother's prayer had! My mother's prayers accompanied me until I was finally born-again. One day the news reached us: "Your daughter has become a Christian!" When we saw the change in our daughter, my wife and I also started attending meetings and were converted. What a joy it was!

Fifty-eight years have passed since that accident and I feel as if it were today. It took until 1991 for me to finally turn to God. My mother waited so long and died in 1990. She still knew Brother Malzon and many other preacher brothers. Besides God, I am so grateful to my mother for being a prayer warrior. Her prayers saved my life twice, physically and spiritually. To God be the glory for that!

*Erhard Geier
Herford, Germany*



And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men. (Colossians 3: 23)

It's All about Jesus

Nikolas and Laura were siblings who had both given their hearts to the Lord. They had decided to follow Jesus wholeheartedly and to obey Him. But now and then, it happened that they argued with each other and then felt sorry afterwards. One day, their father said to Nikolas, "Just let Laura be; she's your little sister, after all!" That was difficult for Nikolas to swallow because he thought, "Just because she's a girl and younger than me . . ." Another time, Laura had to go to bed earlier. She would have liked to stay up a little longer, just like Nikolas. They also disagreed about who had to do kitchen duty and clear the table.

One day, Mama called the two children into the living room and asked them to sit on the sofa next to her. She hugged each of them and said, "Do you know that Dad and I love both of you equally—even when we give you different instructions?" Mama explained to them that it's really to obey God in all things. The most important thing in life is not to follow our own ideas and desires. "It's not about us but about Jesus.

You children need to keep asking yourselves: "What would Jesus do in my place?" Then Mama prayed with them and both of them asked God to help them put Jesus ahead of their own desires.

Soon, the children noticed that it really worked. Every morning, they asked Jesus to be with them that day and to help them. When they faced a challenge again, they asked themselves, "What would Jesus do now?" Then it became easier to make the right decision. Yes, it even brought real joy to do the right thing! Afterwards, they didn't have a guilty conscience anymore but were truly happy in their hearts.

They now enjoy doing kitchen duty together because that way they finish faster. Sometimes they tell each other what they've experienced, and sometimes they sing a happy song together or listen to a beautiful story. They know that they can't do good deeds in their own strength, but that Jesus always wants to be with them and help them. Don't you want to ask Him for that too?

Infobox

Please read the whole story of Joseph and his brothers in the Bible:

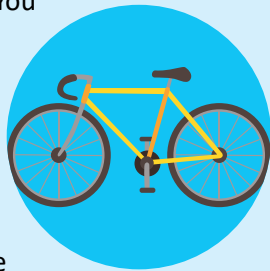
Genesis 37

Genesis 39–45



Have Peace! Avoid Jealousy!

Have you ever wanted something that someone else has? Maybe a fast bike or the latest cell phone on the market? Or your classmate's good grade on an assignment? You know, we find this idea in the Old Testament in a story where many brothers were jealous of one of their brothers. Do you know the story?



That's right! It's the story of Joseph. Joseph's brothers were indeed jealous of him because their father Jacob was particularly fond of Joseph. He even gave him a colorful coat. In addition, Joseph had strange dreams of his brothers and parents bowing down to him, which he told his brothers freely and openly (Genesis 37). They could not imagine bowing down to their brother!



The Bible tells us: "For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and evil of every kind" (James 3:16 NLT). Jealousy and quarreling are not good for us, and do not please the Lord Jesus.

However, Joseph's brothers did not resist the evil thoughts they had, and things got much worse.

One day, when Jacob sent Joseph to his brothers in the field to see how they were doing, they saw him coming from afar and had the idea of killing Joseph. Imagine that: their hatred for their own brother

was that bad! But one of them, Reuben, did not want to go that far and tried to talk them out of their plan. He suggested throwing Joseph into a dry well.



The brothers actually agreed to this. However, Reuben did not tell them that he wanted to get Joseph out again later and bring him back to his father. But before Reuben could do this, the brothers had already implemented another idea: they took Joseph out of the well and sold him to a passing caravan. These were traders traveling to Egypt. They sold their brother for a few coins!—Poor Joseph!

You wouldn't want to hand off your brother or sister, would you? But isn't it the case that sometimes arguments come up between you? Maybe you are upset that the other person has something that you want? Then think about Joseph and his brothers.—Seek peace again quickly. God would like to help you with this.

Questions:

- Did Joseph put God's will above his own? How do you recognize God's will?
- What was it like for the other sons of Jacob?
- What would have been different if Joseph's brothers had thought of God first?

Articles written by: Helene Rotfuss

A Personal **WITH THE** Encounter **RISEN SAVIOR**



It is Easter Sunday. The events of the preceding days follow in quick succession: Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, where the crowds hail Him as King; the great Passover feast and the hustle and bustle in Jerusalem; the sentencing process and crucifixion of Jesus; His burial; and now the news of the empty tomb! The news spread quickly by word of mouth, not through media like today, firstly about the allegedly "stolen body" and secondly about the appearance of the angels who announced to the women that Jesus was alive!

Still full of excitement and deeply impressed by the events of the last few days, the people return to their hometowns, some of them frightened, confused, and hopeless. Many mourn and weep for Jesus.

Then, amidst all the confusion, something special happens. Jesus gradually appears to a few people, showing Himself personally. Who does He meet, and what effect does it have on these people?

1. Mary of Magdala

Jesus first appears to Mary of Magdala. She had been a possessed woman from whom Jesus had cast out seven spirits. She had experienced Jesus' forgiving love and was no longer possessed by evil spirits.

She accompanies Jesus to the cross and witnesses His suffering until His last breath. No, Good Friday does not pass her by coldly and without a trace.

Now Mary stands outside the empty tomb and weeps. Jesus had already become the Lord and Master of her life. Was everything to be over with His death? Now not even His body can be found.

In despair, she laments her loss to the angels sitting at the tomb and then to a man whom she initially believed to be the gardener. "Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him."

Suddenly, she hears her own name: "Mary!" At that moment, she realizes that He is not a gardener,

but is Jesus Himself! With great astonishment, she calls out: “Rabboni!” which means: “My Master” or “Teacher.” Full of joy, she quickly goes to the disciples and brings them the wonderful news, “that she had seen the Lord.”

All sadness, despair, and hopelessness have disappeared—she receives new courage and new hope.

2. The Disciples from Emmaus

Two disciples from Emmaus make their way back from Jerusalem to their hometown and talk animatedly about recent events. They too are still a little shocked by all the news.

In the middle of the conversation, Jesus joins them—without them recognizing Him—and explains to them all the prophecies about His death and resurrection, which are now being fulfilled. They begin to understand. They had hoped that Jesus would free Jerusalem from the political regime. But it was a false hope that collapsed with His death. Now Jesus brings them new hope for eternal life and gives them all access to the eternal kingdom of heaven with the heavenly Father. This sets their hearts on fire so that they later must confess: “Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road?”

Suddenly, when Jesus enters the house with them and gives thanks for the meal at supper, they recognize Him! But He vanishes before their eyes. They immediately get up, go back to Jerusalem, filled with joy, and tell the disciples that Jesus had appeared to them.

3. All the Disciples

After all that took place, the disciples also withdraw behind closed doors for fear of the Jews.

They cannot believe Mary nor the disciples from Emmaus that Jesus is alive. It seems like a dream or a fairy tale. At that moment, Jesus Himself appears and greets them with the words: “Peace *be* with you.”

He shows them His hands and His wounds. Truly! Now they can see it for themselves and convince themselves with their own eyes—hard to believe! Nevertheless, they are very happy. Then Jesus repeats the greeting: “Peace to you!” No, it was not a simple catchphrase! Where Jesus fills completely with His presence, there is peace. All fear, worry, and

doubt must disappear. Deep peace enters and rules in our hearts!

4. Thomas

Thomas, one of the eleven remaining disciples, unfortunately misses this encounter. When the other disciples tell him about it, he simply cannot believe it. He tells them: “Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.” Eight days later, Jesus comes to them again. This time, Thomas is with them. Jesus gives him His hands and says: “Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand *here*, and put *it* into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.”

Now Thomas can really believe it and says, deeply moved: “My Lord and my God!”

5. A Personal Encounter with You

You too may have heard and experienced a lot during these Easter days, perhaps even a church convention with lots of preparation, some hustle and bustle, and pleasant encounters. But should it all pass without having met the Risen One in person?

Has Jesus already become your personal Savior and Master? Have you been able to touch His wounds and nail marks with your heart and mind in faith and, like Thomas, say with full conviction: “My Lord and my God!”

He calls you personally by your name. No matter what situation or crisis you find yourself in, hear Him say: “My child! I am here! I am alive, and I am with you!” Know Him in faith and peace, and rest will come into your life.

May Jesus meet you and me personally during these days, and may the fire of His love burn constantly in our hearts!

*Dina Grötzinger
Eppingen, Germany*

Bible verses for reference:

John 20:11–18

Luke 24:13–35

John 20:19–31



Listening!

I know you think you understand what I said, but I'm not sure if what you understood is what I really meant.

“He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” It is remarkable that Jesus uses this exhortation several times. We find variations of it a total of 14 times in the New Testament. Obviously, from God’s point of view, there is a deficit here, or at least a great risk. God speaks, yet the recipient of the message is not attuned to receive it—he actually does not listen at all.

Could this not also be a problem in marriage and family? Some people don’t feel understood. The adolescent girl has the impression that her parents don’t understand her. The husband feels misunderstood. The wife suffers because her husband doesn’t listen to her. The little boy has fears and worries—and no one is there to listen to them. And there may be a thousand other facets. Communication is conscious action.

Years ago, I had a colleague who constantly used the phrase: “Do you know what I mean?” At some point I said to him: “I hear what you’re saying. But whether you express what you mean, whether I hear what you say correctly, whether I understand what your words mean to you, whether I understand what you really mean, I can’t tell you.” Speaking is only one side—and way—of communication. The other is listening and understanding correctly.

When we pray to God and talk to Him, we can be sure that He is with us with all His attention, He hears the cry of our soul. He understands us completely, even what we cannot express in words. In this communication, the problem lies exclusively with us. Do we hear and understand what God answers us? After we have prayed, He wants to answer. But are we then fully focused on Him, or are we already running on in the restlessness of our lives?

Listening also requires appreciation. We give the other person time and attention. A good listener is very valuable and likable. We feel understood and respected.

Why is communication in marriage often so difficult? Where do the many misunderstandings come from? I am convinced that most of it is due to the fact that a man and a woman are so very different. In addition, we often neglect the basic elements of good communication.

Let’s put it very simply: a woman talks—a man acts. When a man says “yes,” it usually means “yes.” When a woman says “yes,” it can mean: “yes” or “maybe” or “in principle yes” or “actually, rather not” and often “no.” The meaning of this “yes” depends on the situation, the tone of voice, the emotional state or something else. Men prefer simple, clear, direct communication, preferably without many words. Women, on the oth-

er hand, want men to listen to them—until they have said everything. Women want to talk about the problem—men want to solve it. Women tend to ask their questions very indirectly, in the expectation that men will figure out what they mean. But the man hears the question, and in his simplicity gives the answer to exactly that, and is surprised that this is completely wrong.

How can we improve mutual understanding? The man should only answer when he has understood what his wife really wants to say to him.

A dialog could go like this:

Wife: You work so long and are exhausted in the evening. You need more sleep.

Husband: You think I should go to bed earlier?

Wife: Actually, that wouldn't be bad for either of us. Do you understand? We have so little time, so much has fallen by the wayside in the last few months, and sometimes it feels like I'm drowning here at home.

Husband: Help me, how am I to understand what you're saying? What would you like?

Wife: We don't have time for each other. We used to go out for dinner together, at least once a month.

Husband: You'd like us to go out for dinner together regularly?

Wife: I know our budget is tight right now. But if we could have an ice cream or a cappuccino together, I'd be happy.

Husband: Would you like to go out for an ice cream today?

Wife: That would be so nice!

For a man, listening means becoming really quiet and getting completely involved with you. What does she want to tell me? Have I understood correctly what you really want to say or ask? He must approach you with questions and genuinely want to understand. Then she will get involved and together they will explore the real reason behind the initial question.

In the Word of God, we are encouraged to be careful listeners. James writes: "So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath." Even wise Solomon knew: "He who answers a matter before he hears *it*, it is folly and shame to him" (Proverbs 18:13). What example does Jesus give us? What was His aim in asking the disciples, in Matthew 16:13–16, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" Did He not know His disciples? Did He not know the answer to the question He was asking? But it was important to Him that the disciples should reflect on their knowledge and thinking, and come to a personal profession.

Remarkable is the word that the old Samuel said to the young Saul: "[S]tand here awhile, that I may announce to you the word of God" (1 Samuel 9:27). Exactly. This attitude is important for good communication: be quiet, concentrate, and listen. Not only towards your spouse, but also towards children, both young and old.

And what can the wife improve? The old adage often helps: less is more. Just tell your husband what you really want. Don't expect him to send you lots of colorful messages with hearts and kisses and bring you a bouquet of flowers every week. Instead, just see what he does for you. Notice what he does to make you happy, how he makes

your work easier and makes things easier for you, and thank him for that. Many men work so hard to make life comfortable for their wives. Men often speak with actions and are not always understood.

God's blessing and help are the basis for a happy and understanding family life. Becoming silent together before the throne of God, bringing Him worship and all questions, needs, and requests is very important and helpful. God opens the door to better mutual understanding. Heartfelt love and a humble attitude help us to maintain peace and joy in everyday family life.

Hermann Vogt

When we pray to
God and talk to
Him, we can be
sure that He is
with us with all
His attention, He
hears the cry of
our soul.



I Will Be With You

Part 4: Earth-Bound or Heaven-Bent?

by Salomon Weissburger (1887-1968)

If there was ever an Earth-bound person, I think it was me before I was saved. This was a result of my personality and the way I was raised. Before I turned nine, my father took me along when doing business with livestock traders, and I quickly learned to assess the value of young cattle. Later, I studied commerce and was able to independently run a business at the age of 18. I knew all about buying, selling, bookkeeping, and business correspondence.

When the Lord Jesus entered my life, something wonderful happened: He freed me of the old, insincere nature and gave me a sincere heart. I was no longer able to do or say anything that was not right. In the years immediately following my conversion, the enemy once beguiled me into speaking an untruth. I was sincerely sorry, and I would have loved to ask the person in question for forgiveness. I became so careful in my speech that, out of an excess of scrupulousness, I was reluctant to speak at all for some time. That was a step too far, and God showed me how to achieve a

healthy balance. I lived in the presence of God, as described in Psalm 139:4: “For *there is* not a word on my tongue, *but* behold, O LORD, You know it altogether.”

I can say before God that I did not knowingly speak any untruth: not to my wife during our marriage, not to my children, not to the congregation, not to an unbeliever, and not when buying or selling or with regard to money entrusted to me. God gave me grace to achieve this.

The wonderful thing is that the strong, earth-bound aspect of my character took a step back as the first place in my heart now belonged to Jesus—to my love for Him, His Word, His children, and for prayer. This change was so strong that I paid hardly any attention to money or to my job here on earth. All of my energy went towards the kingdom of God and towards making progress in the grace of God.

Seeking fellowship with children of God, I moved to the city of Essen, where I quickly found a factory job at the internationally renowned company Krupp.



*Come and hear, all you who fear God,
and I will declare what He has done for my soul.
(Psalm 66: 16)*

I worked there from 1905 to early 1907, during which time I worked in an ore mine in Niederscheiden in the Rhineland and a coal mine in Katernberg near Essen. Earthly considerations had become minor to me because love towards God, regardless of where He led, had become my priority.

Years later, I clearly saw God's wonderful leading in His wise guidance of my life. When I became a preacher in Essen in 1919, I truly understood why the Lord had put me through such a hard school and why I had to take these humbling paths. The congregation at the time was made up of miners, factory workers, and white-collar workers. Because I had personal experience in each of these fields, I was able to understand the circumstances and challenges they faced.

People are so quick to think that their pastor could not possibly understand their situation, saying that if he were in their shoes, his tune would soon change. But the Lord led my life down a path that taught me empathy, to better serve my brethren in the Lord and

properly represent them as a minister in service to God. This is the same reason our Savior had to come to earth and experienced life through human eyes (Hebrews 2: 17–18).

When I turned to God in 1904, and in the following years, I never imagined that He would call me to be a preacher. Later, several pastors asked me to enter the ministry. However, I had to overcome intense inner conflict before truly joining the work. I was simply unable to say, with full personal conviction, that God had called me to be a pastor.

In 1912, I already had several years of spiritual work behind me when one of the old pioneers wanted to ordain me. Lacking clarity over my calling, I declined. It was a matter of conscience for me. Only when Brother H. M. Riggle from the United States visited Essen as a missionary in 1924 did I relent and let him ordain me. I did not want to take any step without being convinced that it was the Lord's will. This is still my attitude today. ■

Thomas, the Twin

Please read as text: John 11: 1–16

Thomas is also called “the Twin.” He probably had a twin brother or a twin sister. He is a disciple who was never in the foreground but is nevertheless relatively well known to us. This is mainly due to John’s account after Jesus’ resurrection. Thomas was not present when Jesus appeared to the disciples for the first time after the Resurrection and therefore did not want to believe. For this reason, he has the reputation of being a “doubter” or “unbeliever.” He certainly had a tendency to do so, but that was not the main feature of his character.

A Melancholic

Thomas was probably more of a “doomsayer.” He was melancholic, someone who tended to see the darker side of life. Today we would say a pessimist. He had a tendency towards worry and anxiety. We see this tendency in various places in the Gospel of John.

The first place we find it is in the story of the resurrection of Lazarus. This was towards the end of Jesus’ ministry and a phase in His life when the Jews were persecuting Him with the firm intention of killing Him. It was a dangerous time, and Jesus had to keep avoiding them.

During this time, they received the news that Lazarus was ill. At some point, Jesus said: “Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless let us go to

him” (John 11:14–15). And this is where Thomas suddenly appears. Otherwise, we hear nothing from him, but here he makes himself known. “Then Thomas, who is called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, ‘Let us also go, that we may die with Him’” (John 11:16).

This shows us two things about Thomas. Firstly, he saw everything negatively. Jesus told them, they would go to Lazarus so “that you may believe,” whereas Thomas already saw their downfall—they would likely die on this journey. But the second thing we see is his devotion and love for Jesus. He was prepared to go with Him, even if it meant death. And so we also find further evidence in Scripture that underscores this character trait. On the one hand a pessimist, but on the other imbued with love and devotion to Jesus. Thomas was a melancholic.

After the Resurrection of Jesus

We get a further and confirming glimpse into Thomas’ character after the resurrection of Jesus. After Jesus’ death, all the disciples were in deep grief and fear. They did not know how to go on without Jesus, but they gathered together to comfort one another. Only Thomas was not there (John 20:24). He missed this encounter with Jesus.

The question arises as to why Thomas was not there. He was probably so sad about Jesus’ death that he was completely devastated and didn’t want to see or hear any-

one. He kept away from everyone and agonized alone in his grief. Again, he only saw the worst. Not a ray of light. Jesus, whom he loved so much, was no longer there. He was convinced that he would never see the Lord again. Thomas was inconsolable and did not dare to go out among the people, not even among his friends.

But good friends never give up on anyone. They sought him out and brought him the good news: “We have seen the Lord” (verse 25). But in his grief, Thomas couldn’t believe it: “Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.” This reaction earned him the nickname “doubting Thomas.”

At Jesus’ next appearance, however, Thomas was back on board. Hope had sprouted. A tender faith began to grow again. And what did Jesus do? He went to Thomas first. No one had to tell Him what Thomas had been through, how depressed and sad he was. Jesus knew what Peter needed when He spoke to him personally, and He also knew what Thomas needed.

Jesus looked him in the eye with love: “Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand *here*, and put *it* into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing” (verse 27). Jesus spoke very kindly to Thomas. It was not so much a rebuke as an encouragement to believe.

Jesus met Thomas in exactly the way he needed, and now Thomas didn't even have to put his fingers in Jesus' nail marks. No, he fell to his knees and simply exclaimed in amazement: "My Lord and my God!" Now he was completely convinced: here was not just a man, not just a master and teacher, but the true God. This encounter with Jesus probably dispelled his doubts forever.

That was Thomas. We know him as the "doubter." But I think he was more like "Thomas the adorer" who only had to overcome his pessimism through faith in Jesus Christ.

Eusebius writes that Thomas was given Parthia (Iran) as his sphere of activity. Many other ancient testimonies say that he went as far as India. He also died a martyr's death there. Presumably, he was pierced with a spear for the sake of his faith.

This man who was ready to die for Jesus while He yet lived, whose heart was broken when Jesus spoke of His departure, who was grieved to the extreme when Jesus died—this man, whose faith came to full fruition when he saw the mark of the spear in his Lord's side, was reunited with Jesus by a spear thrust.

His love and devotion remained the hallmarks of his life until the end. And that is precisely what we want to take away from this lesson. Let us allow such love for Jesus to set us on fire!

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Announcements

Pentecost Conference 2024

May 18th – 20th, 2024

Place: Herford, Germany
Start time: Saturday, 10:00 am

More Information:
www.gghf.de

Camp Meeting in Blaubeuren

August 16th – 21st, 2024

Bible Course of the Church of God

August 12th – 23rd, 2024

Place: Steinbach, Manitoba





You Can Persevere

High demands are placed on people today. The higher the demands, the more often people give up. Some young people quit their studies. Many are unable to meet the demands of a professional life. Athletes drop out because they can't achieve the expected performance.

Many do not persevere in their faith, although Jesus says: "For My yoke *is* easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:30). John states in 1 John 5:3, "His commandments are not burdensome." Can we agree with this assertion? Don't we sometimes find it extremely difficult to walk in the will of the Lord? Did John perhaps have it easier than we do? No! He calls himself a "brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ" (see Revelation 1:9). He was banished to the desert island of Patmos for the sake of the Word of God. Who can say what he suffered? We can only admire him when he says: "His commandments are not burdensome."

Who can compare themselves with the three men who were thrown into the fiery furnace? Can any of

us compare ourselves with Daniel, who was thrown to the lions because of his faithfulness to God? Nevertheless, we see people giving up on serving God today. John also writes of many who were offended by Jesus' message and therefore no longer walked with Him. Over the years, many have stopped serving God and probably thought they had a good reason for doing so.

It is no different today. We often hear it said, "I can't take this any longer." People give up because they feel the church is not growing or they don't like the pastor and the sermon, or the pastor and staff are uneducated, etc.

But tell me, who actually called you, and in whose service do you stand? Did the church give you salvation? Are you in the service of the pastor, or are you in the service of God? Paul testifies: "[Christ] died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but to Him who died for them and rose again" (2 Corinthians 5:15).

People give up for the smallest reasons because they are not solidly grounded. It is so easy to blame



others for your own failures! The other person is not the problem, rather, the cause of failure and giving up lies with you! An intimate relationship and love for God is missing. Prayer and the right attitude towards God's Word are neglected. If no deep foundation has been laid, the result is quickly giving up.

When John says: "His commandments are not burdensome," he also substantiates this statement. The whole verse reads: "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome." Keeping the commandments is not difficult if love is our motivation! Those who have the right attitude of heart can persevere!

In Matthew 24:12–13, contrary forces are shown. Jesus foretells tribulation and joy. Lawlessness will take hold, and love will grow cold—that is the dark side. This lawlessness arises when love has grown cold. In other words, lawlessness among God's people! In Matthew 10:21–22, Jesus makes this even clearer: "Now brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father *his* child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. And you will be hated

by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved."

Dark conditions are foretold, but victorious perseverance and endurance are also stressed. You and I can persevere! This is possible through the power of the Lord. That is the bright side! Paul tells us about "a messenger of Satan to buffet me" (2 Corinthians 12:7). This refers to the powers of darkness that assailed him. He pleaded with God and received a reassuring answer: "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (verse 9).

You too can persevere if you make the same resolution as the apostle Paul who said, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13). If you start with this resolution and persevere in faith, you can reach the goal and be saved. You can, because He, our Lord, can! Therefore, put new faith in the promises of God. Persevere in this, and you will reach the highest goal of all: the salvation of your soul!

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Arise for Battle!

A midnight cry sounds loud and clear
From Zion's walls: Awake, draw near!
Onwards, soldiers of the Lord;
Fight against the evil of the night.

Be armed with truth at every hour,
Strengthened in prayer with godly power.
The foe attacks with impetus;
His forces have surrounded us.

Deceptive, as if he were right,
Appearing as an angel of light;
Woe, he has felled so many of us.
Some have fled, avoiding the fuss.

Some have grown cold, losing their love,
Heeding the voice not from above.
Like poison, false doctrines abound,
Striking some soldiers to the ground.

And others, inflated much by pride,
He's captured; they're now on his side.
Among us he does sow division
To set us up for great derision.

Nominal Christians by the score,
Useless in battle anymore.
Oh, open your eyes!
See the danger; arise!

Brother, sister, stand for the Lord,
True in battle with one accord.
God gives you strength, and what is more:
A victor's crown on heaven's shore!