



# Foundation of Faith

## **The Holy Spirit** *Indispensable for the Church*

*The Spirit Builds the Church  
Do Not Grieve the Holy Spirit  
A Comforter for the Church  
To My Dear Mother*

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## *Editorial*

Dear Readers,

May is often an eventful month in the church year—and this year proves no exception. In accordance with the Lord Jesus' commandment, "Honor your father and mother," one day is set aside especially for our mothers. This is followed by the commemoration of the ascension of Jesus and the celebration of Pentecost.

Jesus did not merely complete His mission on earth and then return to His place at the right hand of God's throne in heaven—just as we set aside our daily work at the end of the day and go home. No, Jesus promised that the Comforter and Helper would come: the Holy Spirit of truth. How powerfully the Holy Spirit filled and transformed the lives of God's children who were assembled there! Full of power and under His guidance, they went out to reach the world with the Gospel.

Even today, the Holy Spirit is indispensable to the church of God. Without His work, His guidance, His rule, and His comfort, the church would soon fall into error and decay. Human ideas and power struggles would destroy everything. And without the Spirit's work and His convicting voice, no one would turn to God. In the following articles, we will be reminded anew of these essential roles of the Holy Spirit.

May He, the God of all comfort, also fill your heart and life with His presence!

Ron Taron

## A Mother's Love Lets Go and Heaven Draws Near

**I**t was in a hospital. The head nurse had seen both young and old struggling in the agony of pain and the fear deep within their souls. She had observed people from all walks of life and various beliefs as they prepared themselves for that decisive final step.

Among her memories there was one that moved her heart more deeply than all the others. A mother had come with her seriously ill child. Poor mother! Like a sacrificial lamb the child lay on the examination table. The doctor touched the delicate little body which she would have preferred never to let go from her motherly hands. One could see how her mother's heart suffered during the examination. Yet she remained calm and composed. It almost seemed as though the doctor was struggling even more than the mother to compose himself as he approached her after the examination.

"It is as I feared," he said. "There is no hope in this case. An operation might ease the pain somewhat, but the surgery cannot save her."

The mother's face became a shade paler, but she kept her composure. The doctor thought he had never seen such courage as on the face of this woman. She went into the room where her only child was lying in bed again and slowly coming out of the anesthesia. She knelt down beside the bed. Now she could no longer hold back the tears. But she buried her head so deeply in the pillow that the little one could not see her. Once she had received her child from the Lord as a precious gift. Now she needed to be ready to lay it back into His arms again.

But could she truly say from her heart, "Your will be done"? Life without her beloved child? "Lord, give me strength to bow under Your will! Give me strength to make the last path easy for my little one!" She still had much to say to the Lord. The fact that she had long ago given Him her heart and life, everything she had—that helped her in this terrible struggle.

"Mommy!" The dear eyes opened. The blond little head lifted from the white pillow. The mother was

ready for her final, difficult task as a mother. Quickly she brushed away the final tear and forced the smile she had asked God to give her. "Mommy, what happened to me? I slept, but it was different than usual."

"If you only knew, dear, what I must tell you! Something so beautiful! What would you say if it was suddenly Christmas now in the middle of summer?"

"Is that possible, Mommy?"

"No. But you are going to experience something far more beautiful. I have a real surprise for you."

"Mommy, tell me quickly!"

For a moment she hesitated. Wasn't this beyond her strength? But she had resolved that her little one should go toward death with the bright joy of a child. Certainly, it was beyond her strength—but she had a Helper. She held fast to the One she could not see as if she saw Him.

"Mommy!" The little voice sounded impatient.

"Just think—Jesus wants you to come to heaven. You know that it is much more beautiful there."

"Oh Mommy, then I will see Jesus Himself, won't I? And the angels!" Never had she seen her child's eyes shine so happily.

"Yes, dear—perhaps in eight days."

"Mommy, if I wake up now and you say I only dreamed it, that would not be a good story! But, Mommy, it is really true, isn't it?"

The little girl did not notice how her mother's voice trembled as she said, "It is really true, my child."

She had not been mistaken. Her child was already "at home" in heaven. In the short time she had been able to raise her, she had led the child's soul so near to the best Friend of children that this little one could imagine nothing more beautiful than going to Him.

"Mommy, only seven more sleeps—or was it eight? And then heaven?"

The mother's heart tightened painfully. But the child laughed her bright, cheerful child's laugh.



“Well, it’s so nice to hear such joyful laughter in here,” the nurse said as she walked in. Quietly she thought, *How good that a child doesn’t have to understand how close death is.* But that wasn’t the case.

“Have you heard already? I’m going to be with Jesus!” And once again, the child’s bright laughter filled the room.

The nurse was speechless. The child’s laughter, together with the quiet strength in the pale mother’s face, moved her so deeply that she quickly stepped out of the room.

*These Christians are remarkable,* she thought. *So full of joy and strength. If only we could save this woman’s child . . .*

“Mommy, will you come too?” The mother had feared this question. Oh, if only she could have said yes!

“A little later, my love.” She tried to smile.

“That will be so special. Then you can come to the door when I arrive. And you can show me everything.”—Oh, the power of a mother’s love!

If only the day had not come when she had to bring her child to the door of the operating room!

“Mommy, now?” That question—asked with shining eyes—was the last thing she heard from the bright little voice.

“My child, Jesus will come very soon now,” she answered slowly.

Later, as her child lay in the coffin, a smile of joy rested on her small face, born from a confident hope of meeting the Savior. The long-suppressed grief in the mother’s heart finally broke forth. Yet she walked bravely to the door through which her child had gone.

For the head nurse, it felt as though she had been given a glimpse into an unknown world. And in the years that followed, whenever patients lay in the hospital struggling between life and death, she would sometimes share this most precious and sacred memory—a faith radiant like the sun, a courage strong enough to fill even the darkest valley with light.

From “God’s Garden”

# Thoughts for Mother's Day

**M**other's Day! There will always be those who have mixed, yet deep feelings about it. Some find it strange that an entire nation needs to be reminded to celebrate a mother's love. Others are bothered by the fact that gratitude seems to be limited to a single day a year—when it should really be part of our everyday lives.

Of course, that's true: gratitude should be lived out every day. But that is precisely the point of Mother's Day. It's meant to remind us and give us direction for the entire year. After all, we humans forget quickly. Perhaps we are even the most ungrateful of all creatures.

A plant turns toward the sun. An animal seeks the closeness of its master. Both show gratitude for light, warmth, and protection. Humans, on the other hand, often feel gratitude but don't know how to express it. Especially in the moments when we feel it most, words often fail us.

So, isn't it nice to have a day that helps us? A day that encourages the quiet ones to give their mothers flowers or a small token of love. Perhaps someone will finally sit down and write the letter their mother has been waiting for.

Mothers have always been humble. They simply did what was needed, without expecting thanks. They asked for nothing in return—not even recognition. They often endured pain, put themselves last, and kept giving. They never expected gratitude.

That's why resistance to Mother's Day often comes from the mothers themselves. They think they haven't done anything special. Yet

does a gift become any less meaningful simply because it was given with joy and love?

Any gift that comes at a cost can stir in the recipient a sense of indebtedness or obligation. Yet no one has ever felt diminished by what their mother has done. For she has done even the hardest things out of love.

The fact that we often take a mother's love for granted is due to her humility. However, the fact that we do not return this love with equal

love—that is our fault.

There are many holidays that do not speak to everyone. Some have no faith, no roots,

no family. But there is no one without a mother. And hardly anyone who has not become deeply indebted to their mother. For this reason, Mother's Day can be a celebration for all people—a day on which we honor our origin, our source of life.

This day has another special significance. Many who commemorate their mothers today are mothers themselves. They celebrate—and are celebrated. This can also be humbling. Even the best mother, in such moments, thinks about what she has fallen short of, where she feels she did not measure up.

There is only one response to this feeling: the firm resolution to live responsibly with God's help. In everything that life brings, we should remember that we bear the name of a mother—and with it comes a great responsibility.

*Hertha von Gebhardt*

*The fact that we often take a mother's love for granted is due to her humility.*



To My Dear Mother,

There have been so many times I wanted to thank you for all you have done for me and my siblings. You were always there for us, working hard and giving so much of yourself. But most of all, you showed us Jesus—not just in words, but in the way you lived every day.

You showed us, as written in Ephesians 5: 22–33, how to honor and love our husband. The way you love and honor Dad is a beautiful example for us all. Always there for him, encouraging him, and helping him in all that he does, you show us how much you love him. When Dad had surgery, you were beside him during recovery, caring for him in a way only a loving wife could. Your devotion and tenderness in those moments spoke volumes about the depth of your love and commitment.

You taught us the importance of modesty, as written in 1 Timothy 2. Our beauty is not dictated by our outward appearance but rather by our inner character and how we treat those around us. Inappropriate clothing was simply not allowed, and I thank you for that. You instilled in us a sense of dignity and self-respect, and that is how I have tried to raise my own children. Your example continues to guide me as a mother.

You showed us sacrifice. Through your actions and your heart, you have given us lessons that will last a lifetime. During the most trying times of my life, you were there for me. You sacrificed your time and energy so that I would be taken care of. You would drop all you were doing and come to me when I needed you, no matter what it was. Your willingness to put others before yourself has left a lasting impression on my heart.

But the most important thing you and Dad taught us is the value of the Bible and what it teaches. You made sure we understood that God’s Word is the foundation for our lives, and you encouraged us to seek its wisdom in everything we do. You also made sure that we understood how to think critically.

When we encounter any books, songs, or teachings, you taught us to test them against the Word of God to make sure that they are biblically sound. This has given me a strong foundation and discernment that I carry with me every day.

As I look back, I realize how truly blessed I am to have you as my mother. Your faith, your strength, and your unwavering love have shaped who I am. I hope that I can pass on these same values to my own children, just as you have passed them on to me. Thank you, Mom, for your love, your faith, and your example. I am so grateful for you, and I pray that God continues to bless you with health, joy, and peace.

Your Loving Daughter

## Two Ascensions

**W**e are aware that everything on earth has a beginning and an end. No one can change the fact that everyone who is born must also die. This is a given for human beings.

However, the Holy Scriptures tell us of individuals who ascended to heaven without experiencing physical death—for example, Elijah and Jesus Christ, our Savior.

### **Elijah's Ascension**

Elijah was a unique prophet. He stood before God and interceded on His behalf. He lived for a time by the Brook Cherith and later was miraculously provided for by a widow in Zarephath. Equally remarkable is God's judgment on Mount Carmel—and we could list many other miracles. Elijah also found his successor, Elisha, and trained him for ministry.

In 2 Kings 2:1 we read: "And it came to pass, when the LORD was about to take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal." Then they went on to Bethel, then to Jericho, and finally across the Jordan.

We read further in verses 11–12: "Then it happened, as they continued on and talked, that suddenly a chariot of fire *appeared* with horses of fire and separated the two of them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And Elisha saw *it*, and he cried out, 'My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and its horsemen!' So, he saw him no more."

### **The Ascension of Jesus**

John the disciple later recalled how Jesus had already spoken of His ascension during His conversation with Nicodemus: "If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, *that is*, the Son of Man who is in heaven" (John 3:12–13).

Indeed, the Son of God knew that after fulfilling the plan of salvation—after His suffering, death, and miraculous resurrection—He would return to heaven.

Luke reports in Luke 24:50–52: "And He led them

out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven. And they worshiped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy."

Jesus ascended into heaven, but He prom-

ised His disciples—and us as well: "And lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). Yes, he is our High Priest, who intercedes for us before the Father and pleads on our behalf (read Romans 8:34 and Hebrews 4).

So that we need not be alone, He sent us the Comforter, the Holy Spirit. Through Him, Jesus is with us every day until the end of the age. Yet He will return, hold judgment, and take His children to Himself into glory.

*H. D. Nimz*

*So that we need  
not be alone,  
He sent us the  
Comforter,  
the Holy Spirit.*

## Farewell and Yet Hope

The hour had come for Jesus to return to His Father's throne. As the divine Conqueror, He would enter through the gates of heaven bearing the sign of victory. Before His death, He had cried out to His Father: "I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do" (John 17:4). After His resurrection, Jesus remained on earth for a short time to show His disciples His glorified body. Now He was leaving them.

For His ascension, the Savior chose the place He had often visited. It was not Mount Zion, where the City of David lay, nor Mount Moriah, where the temple stood. There, Christ had been mocked and blasphemed. There, the waves of divine love had broken against hardened hearts. From there, Jesus had departed, weary and heavy of heart, to seek rest on the Mount of Olives. Here He stood once more, taking His leave. The Mount of Olives had often been a witness to Jesus' struggles and triumphs. From here, He would ascend into heaven.

The disciples did not know that today would be the last time they would be with their Lord. Here He gave them the Great Commission: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). Then He raised His hands, stretched them out in blessing over the small group, and was slowly taken up into heaven before their eyes. The disciples watched Him until a cloud hid Him from their sight. Yet the Lord had given them this promise: "And lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

While the disciples were still looking up, two angels spoke to them: "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This *same* Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

Christ ascended to heaven as "the firstborn from the dead." The disciples saw a cloud take Him up. This Jesus, who had walked, spoken, and prayed with them, who had broken bread before them, who had been with them on the sea, and who had just climbed the Mount of Olives with them—this Jesus had now ascended before their very eyes to share the heavenly throne with His Father. The angels assured the disciples that this Jesus would return. Yes, He will return: "He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him" (Revelation 1:7).

In Matthew 25:31, we read: "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory." And then the promise He made to His disciples will be fulfilled: "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also" (John 14:3). This promise must have filled the disciples' hearts with joy.

When the disciples returned to Jerusalem, they did not appear dejected or sad. No, they were not mourning their dashed hopes. Full of praise and thanksgiving, they told of Christ's miraculous resurrection and ascension, and their testimony was accepted by many.

They were no longer afraid of the future. They now knew that Jesus was in heaven and would continue to support them with guidance and help through the Holy Spirit. They also knew that they could bring everything to the Father in heaven in Jesus' name. They believed in Jesus' promise: "Whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full" (John 16:23–24).

Then at Pentecost, they experienced the fullness of joy through the revealed presence of the Comforter, whom the Master had promised them. ■

# A Comforter for the Church

*“Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you: but if I depart, I will send Him to you.” (John 16: 7)*

Jesus was about to take leave of His disciples. He had much on His heart that He wanted to tell them, including the promise that the Holy Spirit would come to them and upon them. Here Jesus calls Him the Helper or Comforter (KJV). Why did the disciples and, by extension, the church, need a Comforter?

For the disciples, it wasn't hard to understand. Jesus had to suffer and die, and would soon be taken from them. When the person we love most in the world dies, we desperately need comfort! Yet Jesus had promised them that He would remain with them always, even to the end of the age. And yet He died, rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven about forty days later. How, then, could this promise of Jesus be fulfilled for them (and for us)? Through the presence of God in the form of the Holy Spirit.

When the disciples set out on their mission, they repeatedly noticed that the Holy Spirit was at work in a powerful way. What a comfort! Jesus continued to be present through His Spirit.

As the young church grew and rapidly multiplied, fierce opposition arose. Persecution of the Christians broke out, and they were driven out everywhere. Many were imprisoned and lost their lives. Who gave them comfort and support? It was the Holy Spirit. But not only that—He also gave them the strength to stand firm in the face of such fury from the enemy. Yes, they often had to flee and hide, but it was precisely in their greatest distress that the Holy Spirit worked, so that more and more souls sought God and joined them. What a comfort it is to know that even if we lose our homes and possessions—and perhaps even dear fellow pilgrims—Jesus still keeps His word and is with us in the midst of our greatest distress.

## **“He will guide you into all truth”**

Jesus spoke these words to His disciples in His farewell discourses. Two kinds of comfort stand out. First, the Holy Spirit will enable God's children to know the

truth. Over the years, many different opinions about serving God have emerged. There are thousands of denominations and movements that believe and advocate different things. How is one to find one's way through all this? What is truth as God sees it, and what is human opinion? “However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth” (John 16: 13).

The second comfort Jesus offers in this verse is that the Holy Spirit will not only lead us into the truth, but will also guide us on our paths and in our decisions. What if we simply cannot discern what God's will is? We face decisions and do not know what to do. How do we find the way, especially when it is our deep desire to walk in God's way and please Him? “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him” (James 1: 5). What a comfort it is to know that “The Holy Spirit will guide me rightly. He will show me the right way, the truth!”

## **Comfort in weakness**

God's children are constantly attacked, accused, and harassed by the enemy of our souls. In the midst of such struggles, we often feel alone, abandoned, and as if no one truly understands us. But Jesus understands us, our struggles, our weaknesses, and our needs. and He has promised that the burden will never exceed our capacity! He is there, standing by us in every situation and every struggle, even when the devil tries to convince us that we are nothing but failures.

Paul writes the following in Romans 8:26: “Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.” Once again, we see the comfort of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit helps in our weaknesses. Do we see what lies behind these words? The Holy Spirit is on our side! He helps us, not because



we are such good and strong warriors but because He has a very special heart for the weak.

Paul responded with the following words: “Yet of myself I will not boast, except in my infirmities” (2 Corinthians 12:5). And further in verse 9: “And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” This comfort from the Holy Spirit applies to every child of God who recognizes their weakness on the spiritual battlefield.

### **Comfort in Prayer**

In the passage from Romans 8:26 quoted above, Paul also speaks of the role of the Holy Spirit in our prayer: “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.”

How often our prayers fall short. We ask for something we desire or think is best. We simply can't see

any other solution, yet God's Word tells us here, “We do not know what we should pray for as we ought.” If God were to respond to our prayers literally, it would sometimes be a disaster! It would not be for our good, nor for the good of God's cause. But here we have a wonderful comfort: “But the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.”

The Comforter presents our imperfect prayers before the Father's throne in a way that we here on earth, using human terms, could never understand. And these feeble prayers reach God in their best form. What a comfort! If we consecrate ourselves to God and serve Him in full devotion, even our weak prayers become like a precious, fragrant aroma before God—through the working of the Holy Spirit!

The Comforter of the church is always at work, influencing the lives of God's children in countless ways. Thank God for such grace! Let us allow Him to complete His work in our lives according to His will and pleasure.

*R. Taron*

## The Spirit Builds the Church

*“For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many.” (1 Corinthians 12: 12–14)*

It is through the Holy Spirit’s working and leading that God builds and maintains His church. Our Lord Jesus says in Matthew 16: 18b, “I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” We know that the Holy Spirit replaced Jesus on earth after He returned to His Heavenly Father. Jesus builds and maintains His church through the Spirit. How does He do this?

It was the Holy Spirit who convicted our hearts while we were still sinners and showed us our need of a Savior. This matches what Jesus says of the Spirit in John 16: 8, “And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.” It is the Spirit who allows us to be born again (born into the family of God), as Jesus describes in John 3: 5–6. It is the Holy Spirit who promises to fill the life of any born-again believer who asks for Him in faith (John 16: 23). It is the Holy Spirit who guides us in all truth as we walk the narrow way that leads to eternal life (John 16: 13). It is the Spirit of Truth who helps us to understand God’s Word with the lens of Christ’s teachings. It is the Holy Spirit who unites the hearts of all believers and allows us to love God above all and our neighbor as ourselves.

The Holy Spirit is the breath of life within the body of Christ. As God breathed life into the first man Adam, He also breathed spiritual life into His church on the day of Pentecost when the Spirit descended and filled the lives of the believers. What does the body of Christ look like when the Spirit unites Christians? Paul describes it perfectly in Colossians 3: 12–17, “Therefore,

as *the* elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must do*. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.”

The kind of Christian unity described by Paul to the Colossians is deeply rooted in *agapé* love, which is a self-sacrificing love that comes from God through the person of the Holy Spirit. How do we know that it comes from the Holy Spirit? Paul says, “put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering” (Colossian 3: 12). Are these not the fruit of the Spirit from Galatians 5: 22–23a? Scripture states, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” Christians who treat each other with the fruit of the Spirit safeguard their hearts and relationships from disunity. Once again, we see how the Holy Spirit unites the lives of believers in the body of Christ.

The Holy Spirit is essential to the health and well-being of the church and its ability to carry out the Great Commission. Without the Spirit, no church can



maintain a clear, biblical course. The church's roadmap is the Word of God through which the Spirit speaks to us. The Spirit wants to communicate with us for various reasons. He wants to encourage us and exhort us to continue doing the things that we are doing right for Him. He comforts us in difficult situations. He wants to warn us of dangers that exist, like false teachers and false doctrines. He wants to lead our lives as we work for the Lord. Should it happen that we stray from His leading, He will convict us of wrongdoing. For the Spirit to be able to convict, encourage, and guide us, we need to have a sensitive heart to hear the speaking of the Spirit. Listening to the Spirit, and being obedient to His prompting, is a sure way to accomplish the work He has for us, and ultimately get us to our final destination victoriously.

In Revelation 2–3, we find a clear illustration of the importance of God's church listening to the Spirit. There, Jesus commands the Apostle John to document how the seven churches of Asia Minor stood before God. John was to share these reports with the churches to direct or redirect their spiritual course. Of those seven churches, only two were on a healthy spiritual course, five of them were not. Yet, even of the five, Jesus commends them for the good that they were doing, before He mentions the areas where they needed to mend their ways. John records how Jesus closes His

address to each church with the words, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Revelation 2:7a). In this case, it was Jesus who spoke to John about the state of the churches. Perhaps some of these congregations had stopped listening to the Spirit's leading, and Jesus wanted to remind them to listen and "hear what the Spirit has to say." It's vital that we listen to the Spirit's voice. There are other voices that try to get a church's attention, like trends and traditions. We must be careful to listen to the voice of the Spirit, and not these other voices.

Jesus had something to say to each of the seven churches: some things positive, and some things negative. Let's remember that this illustration applies to every church today. Jesus wants every church to listen to what the Spirit has to say. If we fail to listen, how will we know the Spirit's leading? If we refuse to allow the Spirit to lead His church, He will no longer abide with us, nor give us the strength to work effectively for Him. If Jesus gave a report on your spiritual health or the health of your local congregation, what would He have to say? I'm sure He would have some good things to say, but what else would He tell you? Perhaps He's trying to tell you something today; are you listening?

*David Knelsen  
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# Do Not Grieve the Holy Spirit

*“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Ephesians 1: 1–2)*

Paul was very familiar with the church in Ephesus. He preached in this city for three years, and the church grew to become one of the strongest in the entire region. God’s work was so evident that the followers of the goddess Diana, fearing her increasing irrelevance, fell into great distress and saw no other way out than to instigate a riot against Paul and the Christians.

Was it Paul who had achieved this? Luke tells us in the Book of Acts that the word of the Lord spread rapidly and proved to be a power that brought about a visible transformation in people (Acts 19: 17–20). Undoubtedly, this was due to the Holy Spirit, who was able to use Paul as a suitable instrument. And so, in its early days, the church itself was able to experience how necessary the power of the Holy Spirit was for its own transformation and, at the same time, how profound and enduring its effect was. For as the Word spread, so did the church. But not only that; it was also the Holy Spirit who was able to work through the people of the church in their surroundings—becoming a visible sign throughout the entire region (Acts 19: 19).

About five to seven years later, during his imprisonment in Rome, Paul wrote a letter to the church in Ephesus, which he begins with the verses quoted above. He writes to his brothers and sisters, the saints and believers in Christ Jesus. We do not know today whether he had a specific reason for writing the letter. However, we recognize that he addresses a whole range of points relating to the daily life of a Christian. It was important to him to remind his fellow believers that, as people who belong to God and who have been sealed by the Holy Spirit through rebirth, they have been empowered by the same Spirit to lead a new life. This is evident in the family, in the marriage, at work,

and also in the church. It is a life that is pure—the Bible often speaks here of “holy”—in thoughts, words, and deeds. It is a life that brings joy to the Father in heaven.

Paul goes so far as to establish a connection between our behavior—or our lives as Christians—and our relationship with the Holy Spirit. He warns us that the Holy Spirit can be grieved by us humans, who belong to God (Ephesians 4: 30). It is worth reflecting on this statement and its implications, for grieving the Spirit has dramatic consequences for our spiritual life, if it is not remedied! The Holy Spirit will withdraw from us. The Comforter, the divine Helper, the Teacher and Counselor, the Communicator of divine truths will increasingly scale back His work in our lives. The effects of this will become clearly visible not only in our personal spiritual lives, but also in our families and ultimately in the churches. Decay and disintegration instead of unity and love in the Holy Spirit will be the result.

It seems that Paul already had such fears when he took his leave of the brothers and sisters in Ephesus. There is hardly any other way to interpret the urgent exhortation to the church leadership in Acts 20: 28–30. It was clear to Paul that difficult times were coming for the Ephesians and that even from among their own ranks men would arise who would spread false teachings and attempt to bind the believers to themselves rather than to Christ. These are people who no longer follow the Holy Spirit, but from whose lives the Holy Spirit has withdrawn with sorrow. They are people who have made themselves the rulers of their own hearts and think they can determine what is right and necessary.

But how can this come about? Let us hear what Paul has to say. The warning not to grieve the Holy Spirit is

found in Ephesians 4:30. Just before that, Paul writes a sentence that we can easily put to memory: “Do not give the devil a foothold” (Ephesians 4:27 NIV). This verse teaches us at least four things:

1. The devil is real. His declared goal is and remains to destroy our relationship with God.
2. Our lives offer us the freedom to make decisions.
3. The devil desperately wants to gain a foothold in our lives.
4. We have access to the tools to prevent this.

We must be clear: When we become children of God, the Lord reigns in our lives through the Holy Spirit. We have been sealed with Him. Figuratively speaking, we have received a new heart—a heart in which the devil no longer has a place. But the devil wants to regain that place—that is, his influence in our lives—with all his might. He wants the Holy Spirit to withdraw. And unfortunately, he often succeeds—far too often. How does he go about it? Does he bring out the big guns and announce himself with fanfare? By no means. It often happens subtly, almost unnoticed. And that is exactly his intention. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul provides us with important clues that we need to take to heart.

Did you know that the devil wants to gain ground in your life by tempting you to lie? You say, “I never lie.” That is commendable. But consider this situation: Two weeks ago, you noticed that one taillight in your car wasn’t working. You did not get around to fixing it, and the other taillight was still working. Shortly after, a police officer pulls you over and says, “Your taillight isn’t working!” You reply in surprise, “Oh, really?” And to emphasize your surprise, you get out of the car and check for yourself once more. Did you lie? Not with words, but with your behavior. Did you harm anyone? No, and yet you were dishonest, and the devil has gained a foothold. This situation can be applied to our marriages, and also to how we interact with fellow believers in the church. What happens when your spouse asks you what you were doing last night that kept you up so late before you went to bed? You were replying to messages, scrolling through the news, and check-

ing your emails. All true. But did you perhaps leave something out of your list that you did not want her to know? Don’t give the devil a foothold!

Did you know that he wants to gain ground by tempting you to steal? You say, “I’ve never stolen anything!” That’s honorable. But what about time at work? Are you compensating for the time when you handle personal matters during work hours? You may be planning a purchase and use a less stressful workday to simply do some research and compare options. No one can see your screen, and to others, it looks like you’re working. Whom does this time belong to? And what about your marriage? Doesn’t your spouse have a right for time with you as well? How much of that do you simply “steal” for yourself? How many marriages break down because one partner doesn’t give the other the time and attention they deserve? Or what about our time for the Lord? Do we sometimes “steal” time from Him and use it for ourselves? Don’t give the devil a foothold!

Did you know that the devil wants to gain ground by making us bitter toward others? These bitter roots sometimes go back for years and prevent reconciliation. It is the devil who has gained ground in our lives. He also tries to do so through anger, rage, shouting, and blasphemy. How quickly does a disagreement between two people turn into a war of words for which one must later ask for forgiveness—and thank God if it comes to that! But how often does reconciliation not come about?

When all these things—and Paul addresses many more in his letters—find their way into our lives and remain there, they give the devil a foothold and at the same time grieve the Holy Spirit. And as I said: It will have consequences—for our spiritual lives, our marriages and families, and ultimately for our churches as well. Doesn’t the letter to the church in Ephesus found in Revelation also suggest that his strategy had some success? “Nevertheless I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent” (Revelation 2:4–5).

Let us therefore take Paul’s admonition seriously. Each of us should set in order the things the Lord may show us, and thus regain the ground, so that we do not grieve the Holy Spirit.

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## When Math is Hard



It was Monday afternoon. Nicholas sat on the front steps, looking very sad and staring into space. Laura walked by and asked, surprised, “What’s wrong? Why are you so sad?”

Nicholas sighed. “Our math teacher told us today that we would have another test soon. We just had one! Why do we have so many?”

Laura sat down next to him. “Last time you studied, we prayed about it, and you got a good grade. We can do that again.”

But Nicholas covered his face with his hands. “Yeah . . . but this time I didn’t understand the lessons at all. I tried to study. Dad helped me, but it just wouldn’t stay in my head. I didn’t know what to do anymore.”

Frustrated, he picked up a few small stones and tossed them onto the lawn. Laura stood up quickly. “Come on, let’s go talk to Mom.”

Laura ran into the house to find Mrs. Werner. Nicholas followed slowly, his head down and his shoulders drooping. Mrs. Werner listened carefully and then said, “We have a heavenly Father who knows us very

well. He knows what you can do and where you need help. Nothing is impossible for Him. He can help you with this too. Come, let’s pray together.”

So they prayed and asked God to help Nicholas understand the math and not be afraid.

The next morning at school, Nicholas sat with his friend Peter during recess. “Hey, Nicholas,” Peter asked, “did you understand the math?”

Nicholas shook his head. “No, not at all. It was still very confusing to me.” He felt sad again.

Peter smiled and said, “I felt the same way at first. The teacher made it sound really hard. But now I understand it. If you want, we can study together after school. I can help you.”

Nicholas’ face lit up. He gladly agreed. As they studied together, everything suddenly became clear.

On the way home, Nicholas felt happy and relieved. He wasn’t worried about the test anymore. Jesus had heard his prayer and had sent him help. Nicholas stopped for a moment and quietly said, “Thank You, Jesus.”

## Do It Like David

Every child knows David from the Bible. There are many stories about him: David the shepherd whom God chose to be king of Israel, how he defeated Goliath, his friendship with Jonathan, his many victories in battle, and much more.

But David wasn't always strong and successful. There were times when he was afraid or sad. Before he became king, he had to flee from Saul because Saul wanted to kill him. And when David's son Absalom rebelled against him and died in the process, David was very sad.

In good times and bad, David wrote many songs. These are called psalms. One example is Psalm 27: 1: "The LORD *is* my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD *is* the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?"

David was afraid, but he always trusted in God. In this psalm, he compared God to a fortress that protects him.

Have you ever been to a fortress? Most of the fortresses in Europe that can still be seen today date back to the Middle Ages, that is, the period between AD 1000 and 1300.

In David's time, there were already fortified cities. They were often situated on a hill. A wall was built around a palace and various other buildings. Inside the wall were dwellings for the people, storage areas for supplies, and administrative buildings. The walls were thick and made of stone to provide protection. There were towers from which soldiers kept watch



over everything and gates that could be locked. When danger threatened, people fled to the fortress. There they felt safe.

That's how David felt with God: safe and protected. Whether he faced a giant opponent like Goliath, was pursued by enemies, or had to fight against a large army—he trusted that God was with

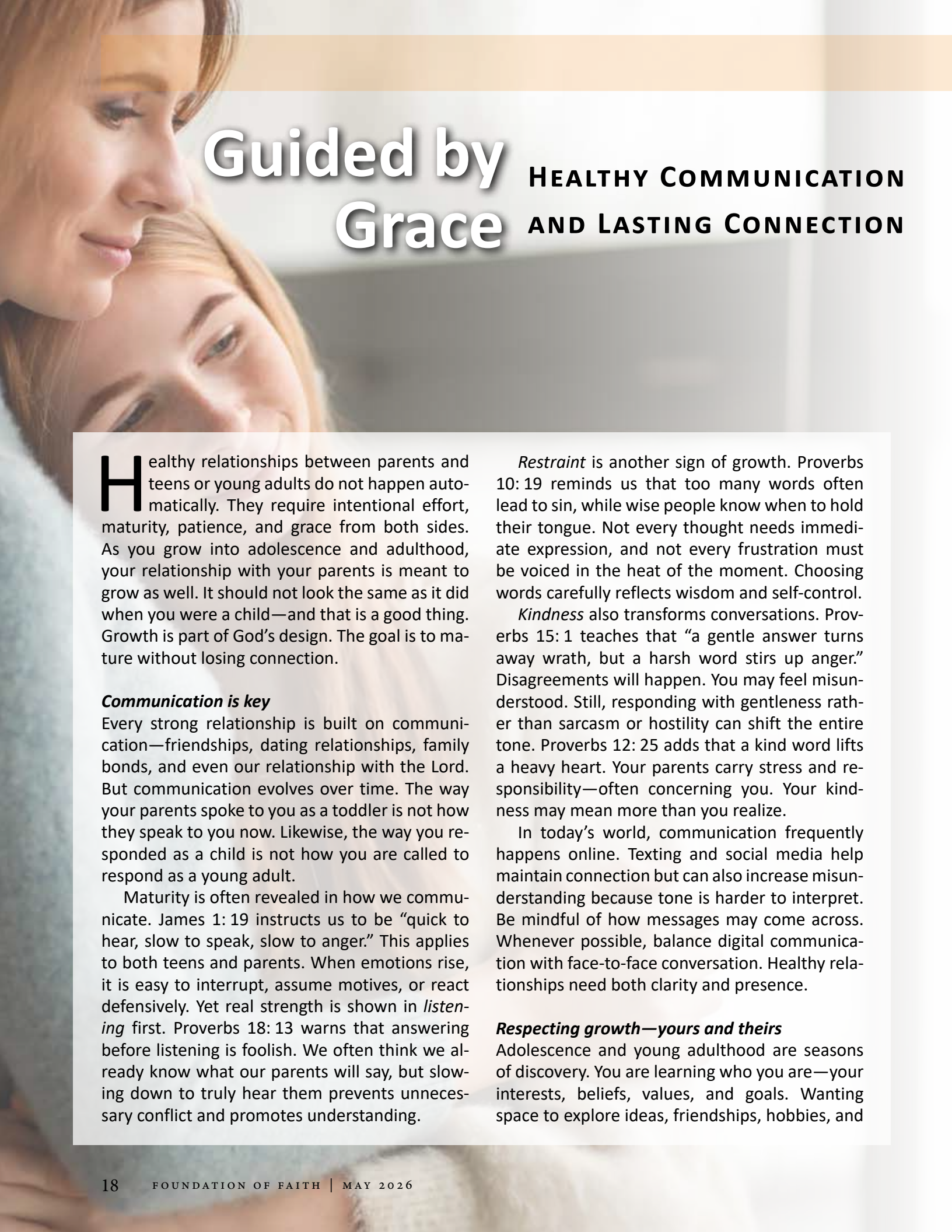
him.

You don't face dangers like David's today. But sometimes you're given tasks that seem overwhelming. Or your classmates laugh at you because you don't go along with certain things. Maybe you have to stand up to other kids because your faith makes you see things differently.

Then: Do as David did. Trust in God!

Give all your worries  
and cares to God, for  
He cares about you.  
1 Peter 5:7 (NLT)





# Guided by Grace

## HEALTHY COMMUNICATION AND LASTING CONNECTION

**H**ealthy relationships between parents and teens or young adults do not happen automatically. They require intentional effort, maturity, patience, and grace from both sides. As you grow into adolescence and adulthood, your relationship with your parents is meant to grow as well. It should not look the same as it did when you were a child—and that is a good thing. Growth is part of God’s design. The goal is to mature without losing connection.

### **Communication is key**

Every strong relationship is built on communication—friendships, dating relationships, family bonds, and even our relationship with the Lord. But communication evolves over time. The way your parents spoke to you as a toddler is not how they speak to you now. Likewise, the way you responded as a child is not how you are called to respond as a young adult.

Maturity is often revealed in how we communicate. James 1: 19 instructs us to be “quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.” This applies to both teens and parents. When emotions rise, it is easy to interrupt, assume motives, or react defensively. Yet real strength is shown in *listening* first. Proverbs 18: 13 warns that answering before listening is foolish. We often think we already know what our parents will say, but slowing down to truly hear them prevents unnecessary conflict and promotes understanding.

*Restraint* is another sign of growth. Proverbs 10: 19 reminds us that too many words often lead to sin, while wise people know when to hold their tongue. Not every thought needs immediate expression, and not every frustration must be voiced in the heat of the moment. Choosing words carefully reflects wisdom and self-control.

*Kindness* also transforms conversations. Proverbs 15: 1 teaches that “a gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” Disagreements will happen. You may feel misunderstood. Still, responding with gentleness rather than sarcasm or hostility can shift the entire tone. Proverbs 12: 25 adds that a kind word lifts a heavy heart. Your parents carry stress and responsibility—often concerning you. Your kindness may mean more than you realize.

In today’s world, communication frequently happens online. Texting and social media help maintain connection but can also increase misunderstanding because tone is harder to interpret. Be mindful of how messages may come across. Whenever possible, balance digital communication with face-to-face conversation. Healthy relationships need both clarity and presence.

### **Respecting growth—yours and theirs**

Adolescence and young adulthood are seasons of discovery. You are learning who you are—your interests, beliefs, values, and goals. Wanting space to explore ideas, friendships, hobbies, and

independence is natural. Developing independent thinking is part of becoming an adult.

However, independence does not require disrespect. Growth does not mean isolation. Your parents are adjusting as well. They are learning to transition from managing a child to guiding a young adult. That shift can feel unfamiliar and sometimes uncomfortable for everyone.

Healthy boundaries are important. You can respectfully express your need for privacy, responsibility, and space while still honoring your parents. When you demonstrate maturity in handling freedom, trust often grows. Romans 15: 5 reminds us that God provides patience and encouragement so that believers can live in harmony. Seeking His help strengthens relationships during seasons of change.

### **Love, humility, and apology**

*Love* is the foundation of every meaningful relationship. Love is more than a feeling; it is a choice to seek another person's good. 1 Peter 4: 8 says that earnest love covers a multitude of sins. There will be misunderstandings and disagreements. You will not always respond perfectly, and neither will your parents.

In those moments, *humility* becomes powerful. Apologizing quickly is not weakness—it is strength. Saying, "I'm sorry," or "I misunderstood," requires courage and maturity. Small conflicts left unresolved can grow into lasting bitterness. Giving each other the chance to explain intentions prevents deeper wounds and allows for healing, growth and understanding.

*Forgiveness* is equally essential. Colossians 3: 13 instructs believers to bear with one another and forgive as the Lord forgave them. Forgiving does not mean pretending nothing happened. It means choosing not to hold the offense over someone's head. It means releasing resentment instead of replaying hurt. Forgiveness often requires inner reflection—examining your expectations, reactions, and heart posture. This inner work pays off: that is frequently how growth and maturity happen.

### **Understanding your own story**

As you mature, *understanding yourself* becomes crucial. Each person develops patterns shaped by past experiences. The way you handle conflict, express emotion, or respond to authority is influenced by your history. Recognizing your triggers, fears, and habits allows you to respond thoughtfully rather than react impulsively.

Psalms 139: 23–24 models this *self-examination*: "Search me, O God, and know my heart." Inviting God to reveal areas of growth cultivates emotional and spiritual maturity. You are not only growing in independence—you are growing in character.

Colossians 3: 12 encourages believers to clothe themselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. These traits are not optional; they are essential for healthy relationships. Learning to communicate well, apologize sincerely, forgive deeply, and love intentionally will shape not only your relationship with your parents, but also your future friendships, marriage, workplace interactions, and spiritual life.

### **A relationship that matures**

The parent–young adult relationship is designed to evolve from dependence to guidance, from instruction to mutual respect. That transition is rarely seamless, but it can become deeply meaningful. As you step into greater independence, choose *maturity*. Be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger. Speak kindly. Set respectful boundaries. Apologize when necessary. Forgive fully. Let love guide your actions.

When both parents and young adults commit to growing—not only older, but wiser—the relationship can become one marked by trust, respect, and lasting connection. Such growth brings joy and deep fulfillment that can endure for a lifetime.

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## Time

**A**n older brother from our congregation was admitted to the hospital. After various tests, his condition was deemed serious, and he was transferred to hospice care. Everyone knows what that means. I set out to visit him. En route, I prepared myself for the meeting. Softly, I knocked on the door. He asked me to come in. Our eyes met. Before I could say a word, he spoke in a quiet but determined voice: “My time has come.” I sensed no resentment. On the contrary, he spoke of his joyful anticipation of seeing Jesus soon.

Time—what a mysterious, yet fascinating word it is. The more one reflects on it, the more intensely the topic occupies our mind. Time is a constant com-

panion and yet each person experiences it differently. For a young person, time seems almost limitless, filled with possibilities, plans, and dreams. For them, time is synonymous with hope and the future. For an older person, however, time holds a greater significance—it becomes more precious, more intentional, and is often taken more seriously. One recalls the past and is reminded to get affairs in order, and to let go, yes, to focus on what truly matters.

The Bible also addresses the topic of time and ascribes a deep spiritual meaning to it. My Bible lies open on my desk. Solomon begins his discourse on time with the well-known words: “To everything *there* is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven: a

time to be born, and a time to die . . .” (Ecclesiastes 3:1–2).

With these words, he stretches a wide arc over our lifespan. In the subsequent verses, he describes the different phases and experiences a person goes through—times of building up and tearing down, of laughing and weeping, of seeking and releasing. Solomon reminds us that our life is not about coincidences, but of times determined by God, which come and go, often independent of our own will.

We understand Solomon’s train of thought and can follow it well. This is only possible because we have lived through these seasons of life. They are not foreign or theoretical to us but hit home—through our own experiences, in our joys and losses, in the peaks and valleys of our lives. Precisely because we have experienced these times firsthand, Solomon’s words resonate with us and we identify.

Perhaps your life is running through your mind like a movie right now. How much have we witnessed, experienced, and learned throughout our lives. Looking back, we see paths we would never have planned and moments when God quietly and faithfully guided us. With gratitude, we fold our hands and give God all the glory for His Hand that protected and guided us.

Solomon’s reflections also capture the thought that we must clearly recognize and accept our season of life in order to live in the present. We cannot halt the hands of time. Yet we repeatedly encounter people who struggle with their stage of life, who refuse to accept or even deny the process of aging. In doing so, they make life unnecessarily difficult for themselves—and often for others as well. Wisdom is shown in recognizing one’s lifespan as given by God and living life intentionally trusting Him. Acknowledging that God determines our lifetime, and fully trusting in Him, demonstrates wisdom.

In no way is this acceptance an easy matter. After all, who really wants to admit that they are old or are getting older? Sometimes it is hard for us to acknowledge the reality of aging, and yet it is part of life. Who

is happy about wearing a hearing aid, using a cane, or even depending on a walker? All these are signs of aging that we find difficult to accept—and yet they are par for the course of life, which we cannot stop. “To everything *there is* a season”—that’s how it is.

We can fight it or accept the advice of children and others close to us. After all, they mean well and want

to support us lovingly—and make life easier for us. When we concede and use hearing aids, we can once again actively participate in conversations. The cane makes walking easier, and the walker helps us keep our balance and provides an opportunity to rest when our feet won’t keep

***“To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die . . .” (Ecclesiastes 3: 1–2).***

up. In this way, despite its challenges, life becomes easier and safer.

“To everything *there is* a season . . . a time to be born, and a time to die.” Our entire life unfolds between these two bookends, just as Solomon describes in the subsequent verses. And one day, we too will reach the moment when we can say: “My time has come.” But we are not helplessly at the mercy of fate. Rather, we can confidently say with David: “My times *are* in Your hands” (Psalm 31:15). God’s eyes watch over us, His hand holds us fast—until the moment comes when He calls us home. This, too, happens at His appointed time.

For now, we are still here—and we gratefully accept the gift of time from God’s hand. We want to use it well and redeem our remaining time, as we read in Ephesians 5:16. As long as we live, we want to be a blessing to others, to support the kingdom of God through our gifts and prayers, and to bring light into the world. We want to leave footprints that testify of love and faithfulness.

I have long forgotten who it was, but someone once told me: “As long as we are here, the Lord is with us. And when we are gone, we are with the Lord.” This makes it clear: we are always with Him—every single moment, whether here on earth or with Him in heaven.

*Harry Semenjuk  
Wetaskiwin, AB*

A man puts a bridle upon the horse, saddles it, and rides away wherever he will. The horse may want to rest a bit under the shade of a tree but it cannot do that; it is bridled. The bridle is controlled by another will. The horse would go south, but its head is turned north by the bridle, and the way it is turned it must go. Now, the horse is much stronger than the man. If it would exert its strength and exercise its own will, it could overcome the will of the man. It could nullify the power of the bridle. Sometimes this occurs. But in general, the horse has been haltered and bridled so often that it has yielded to the mastery of these things. It does not exert its own strength or its own will as it could. All its life therefore it is mastered. It can only be a servant, very unlike its fellows in wild freedom upon the prairie.

It is not only horses who wear halters and bridles. There are men and women all about us wearing them. Circumstances halter many people and tie them up within narrow limits, restricting their freedom, shutting them off from the good things of life, making their lives narrow and often very unsatisfactory. There are other circumstances that bridle people and force them to go where they don't want to go. Many times, people act against their own best judgment and against their wills. They are victims of circumstance, just as much as the horse is the victim of the bridle. How often we permit circumstances—our feelings, our fears, our doubts—to strap a halter upon us and lead us about where we would not go and tie us up somewhere so that it seems we cannot get away.

### **In bondage to circumstances**

Many people realize that they are haltered, but like the conquered horse, they think they are securely held by the halter. They thirst for freedom. They long to be unrestricted. They want freedom of expression, freedom of action, liberty to do as they choose, to turn their lives into the channels that would yield them greater happiness and contentment. But alas, they are haltered. So, they look at their halter of circumstances, of feelings, of doubts, of fears and say, "Oh, I can't help it," then cease to try to help it.

Some horses will pull back on their halters for a few times but not sufficiently to break them. Thinking they are securely fastened, the horses cease to try to get loose. We humans do the same. We make some slight

efforts to overcome our circumstances and to do the things we really desire to do. We do not exert all our strength. We try only halfheartedly. Then we conclude we cannot break away and cease to try. We surrender to circumstances. We permit them to have a halter upon us through the years, and we permit them to bridle us and to ride us wherever they will. Life is a bondage to circumstances.

### **Created to be free**

Man was never meant to wear a halter. We are told that when man was created, God set him over the work of His hands. God made man master of things. He intended that man should always be master—master of himself, master of his circumstances. Jesus said, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). And again, "If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed."

The Christian life is a life of freedom. It is therefore a normal life. It is divinely given mastery. If we use the liberty that we are given, instead of wearing the halter of circumstances, it is our privilege to put the halter upon circumstances and to master them. God wants us to be men and women, to look circumstances straight in the face, to assert our dominion over them. The attitude of God is plainly shown in the Scriptures. Of Jesus, it is said He "has made us kings and priests to His God and Father" (Revelation 1:6). But does that refer to heaven? No. Revelation 5:10 says, "and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth."

That does not mean some future reign. It is here and now, as Paul tells us in Romans 5:17: "those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ." That means we shall put the halter on our circumstances and our difficulties and master them, bringing them into subjection to our wills, asserting ourselves, thus becoming triumphant Christians.

### **Taking hold of the halter**

One may say that is all very well to talk about, but how shall we do it? The answer of the Scripture is: "this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith." With our two hands, we may put the halter on all our circumstances. These two hands are faith and determination. Faith is very good, but it is not enough. Works



must go with faith. In the siege of Verdun in World War I, when attacked by a greatly superior force, taken by surprise, and at first driven back with heavy losses, the French rallied and adopted the slogan, “They shall not pass.” With grim determination and a courage that would not yield, they held on until they overcame.

Many times in our lives, we shall have to say to circumstances, “You shall not pass. You shall not master me. I will not yield to you. I will overcome you.” Frequently people have tried to discourage others by saying, “You cannot do that.” The answer of determination has been, “But I will do it.” Did you ever read the poem by Edgar Guest about, “That couldn’t be done—and he did it”? Right now, perhaps someone may be saying, “Yes, that is the way to do it. That is the attitude to hold. I should like to do that if—” Yes, there is the if. What does it mean? It means I have not the courage or the will to try. Very well. Reach out your head and submit to the halter. You have your choice. You can halter the circumstances, or they will halter you. We can be free men or slaves. We can spend our days haltered in the stall, ridden where we do not want to go, or we can use our strength and be free.

### Use your circumstances

It is true that we cannot always change our circumstances. We need not always change them or even frequently change them to be free, to have the mastery over them and to be happy. Circumstances do not make us nor break us. It is using them or surrendering to them that determines the outcome. So many say, “But my circumstances are so unfavorable.” That does not mean you need to be defeated by your circumstances. It only means an opportunity for greater conquest. All real accomplishments in this world are made, not because of circumstances, but in spite of them. Everyone who has become really great in accomplishment, or in self-mastery has done so by overcoming obstacles and difficulties. This is the very thing that has made him great, and without these things to overcome he never would have become great; his powers would never have been developed.

It has been repeated that we should not pray for burdens equal to our strength but for strength equal to our burdens. Happiness does not come from favorable circumstances. The rich who are not compelled to work and who may do as they choose with their time are rare-

ly  
hap-  
py. Shall we say,  
“If circumstances were more favorable, I could be happy?”

Are we sure of this? By no means. It takes more than circumstances to make anyone happy. The secret of happiness does not lie in circumstances. It lies in us. Our circumstances may be unfavorable, but that does not mean we must be unhappy. People are happy in circumstances far more unfavorable than ours. One of the happiest, most cheerful ladies whom I ever met, I called upon, in company with others, many years ago. We found her helpless in her bed. She could move her head slightly from side to side and move one hand a little. Rheumatism had made the remainder of her body almost immovable. But her face was radiant with joy. She told us how happy she was. We marveled at it. For years she had been in this condition. Still, she was happy, cheerful, and rejoicing. When we expressed our sympathy, she said, “I am contented.” Circumstances, even such circumstances, could put no halter on her.

### The joy inside

There are faces that shine in the darkest night with the beauty of an inner glory, with a joy that does not depend upon circumstances. Perhaps you can think of others whose circumstances are worse than yours, yet their lives seem happier than yours. Why should this be true? Why should you be less the master of your circumstances than they of theirs? Resolve that you will no longer be dominated by your feelings, your doubts, your fears, your trials or your circumstances. If you have tamely submitted to these in the past, make a declaration of independence, start a warfare to conquer them. Be tied up no longer by them. Choose the direction of your own life. Faith and determination, by God’s help, will make you master, and you shall be free indeed; and when you have gained that freedom, when you are master of your circumstances, when you have the halter on them, when you can tie them up, you will have gained that victory over life and everything in it that will start the joybells pealing. You will then know *the Secret of the Singing Heart!* ■

# Diamonds Grow in the Dark

(Part 2)

Her struggles reached their peak in the question of whether the life she was expected to live was even a life at all. Being confined to her bed, paralyzed at times and unable to speak, significantly diminished her quality of life. The answer to this question truly required spiritual depth. God granted this to Elfriede, so that she could take comfort in the verse, “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly” (John 10: 10). She understood that true life takes place within the soul of a person. Full satisfaction comes from peace with God, God’s love, and the manifold ways of sharing it, as well as the hope of eternal glory.

She was particularly struck by a motto on the wall of a hospital: “Love your fate, for it is God’s way to your soul.”

Was she to love her fate? How differently had she imagined her future when she was young! She would have liked to pursue a good career and had hoped to start a family of her own. Instead, there was this helplessness! In her loneliness, she thought a lot about God, eternity, and the meaning of life. Looking back, she realized that without this silence, she would hardly have entered into such a close relationship with Jesus. In the end, she was able to apply the words of the psalm, “He leads me in the paths of righteousness” (Psalm 23: 3), to her difficult life.

Although Elfriede greatly appreciated her visitors, she also had to learn to share in their joy selflessly and not to envy the experiences they had outside the hospital walls. Often, all she could do was look out the window. She began to take delight in the small beauties of nature and came to the conclusion that God’s creation is so diverse that there is something for everyone to rejoice in.

“The works of the LORD *are* great, studied by all who have pleasure in them” (Psalm 111: 2). Of course, one cannot simply switch to “joy mode” at will. It requires the special help of the Holy Spirit to avoid comparing one’s own fate with the supposedly easier paths of others and becoming dissatisfied.

Elfriede also struggled with the fact that, in her helplessness, she felt like a burden to her family. Until God showed her what a great blessing an ill person can be who does not give in to bitterness, but carries their burden with trust in God. “God has chosen the foolish things of the world” (1 Corinthians 1: 27). In her case, it became clear to those around her that she was not acting out of her own strength, but out of God’s strength.

Just as fears about the future were beginning to take hold as she stood on the threshold of a new year, she received a promise from God that even the rockiest path does not lead to meaninglessness, but to the heavenly home. She began to write down experiences and events that revealed God’s mercy in her life, and in doing so, she was able to respond to the call “Taste and see that the LORD *is* good” (Psalm 34: 8) in her own very personal way.

Despite her difficult life, she always found reasons to be grateful. She had come to understand that true happiness does not depend on favorable circumstances, but that gratitude is the shortest and surest path to happiness. “The moment we thank God, we are transformed from demanding rebels into children who have received a gift” (quote from Elfriede D.). And so, despite all adversities, she lived by the Bible verse: “Giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 5: 20).



## *From Depths to Blessings*

Dear reader, whatever inner or outer distress may be weighing on you right now, and whatever circumstances may be challenging you at this time, let the image of the diamond growing in the dark give you courage. A mature and steadfast faith does not simply fall into our laps; rather, it develops especially under the pressures of life. We are like a rough diamond being

polished. It must be polished through the challenges of life to acquire a radiant appearance that is appealing to those around us.



God desires to shape the inner structure of our hearts so that the rays of Jesus' love are reflected within us and passed on to our surroundings.

Hardships and problems tear us away from our familiar routines and challenge our faith and our trust in God. But they also open up new horizons of experience for us, allowing us to reflect on our ingrained behaviors. Difficulties can open up new, unexpected perspectives for us and bring a change of direction to our lives. Hardships make us more empathetic toward our neighbors. We learn to understand them better and judge them more kindly.

What we once took for granted now fills us with gratitude. Not least, difficult times also call for a solid knowledge of Scripture—a treasure trove from which we can find daily guidance and draw strength and courage. How well Elfriede Deiss knew her Bible! For every agonizing question, for every temptation and trial, she found a scriptural answer and was sufficiently devoted to God to act upon it. And so the blessing of the diamond that grows in the darkness continues to have an impact to this day.

*Brigitte Röss  
Herford, Germany*

## LEARNING FROM GOD

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**L**earning from God is related to being called by Him. God's calling is about the inner certainty that He is talking to you. However, between this call and a practical, fruitful service there is almost always a stage that is less visible, but all the more formative. Calling is a consecrated beginning. Preparation is the long journey that only reaches its goal at the end of life.

Scripture leaves no doubt that God not only appoints His messengers, but also prepares them—and continues to shape them in the course of their service. Whoever overlooks this will easily misunderstand their own way or the ways of other messengers of God.

David is a vivid example of this. After he was anointed, he first returned to the field (see 1 Samuel 16). The anointing changed his standing before God, but not immediately before people. Between the anointing and the throne lie about 15 to 20 years of obscurity, scorn, and danger. This time is not a waiting room, but God's workshop.

### The depth of preparation

In the stillness, David learns to trust. His battles with lions and bears are not described. Instead, the focus is on the quiet, hidden lessons—that's where his faith grew, the same faith that later carried him when he faced Goliath. Whoever experiences God's faithfulness in the small things will not fail in the big ones.

The next stage of David's life saw him serving in Saul's court. There, David served a king whom he knew God had rejected. He is met with envy, volatility, and open hostility; nonetheless, he remained faithful. Twice, he could have killed Saul. Twice, he chose not to. "The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my master, the LORD's anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, seeing he *is* the anointed of the LORD" (1 Samuel 24:6). Here it becomes evident: God cultivates not only courage, but reverence—not only determination, but self-control.

In Ziklag, every outward sense of security is shattered. The city is burned, and his own men turn against him.

"But David strengthened himself in the LORD his God" (1 Samuel 30:6). This sentence—one I have read through tears more than once—does not describe a broken David, but a man of God shaped through the storm, who knows exactly where his help comes from. David had learned to draw his stability from God Himself, not from circumstances or others' approval.

Such experiences are not limited to the Old Testament. Paul reports of times when he was "burdened beyond measure" so that he might learn to "not trust in [himself] but in God" (2 Corinthians 1:8–9). Peter had to go through the bitter failure of his denial of Christ before he could strengthen others. God does not (only) work on our natural and intellectual abilities, but also on our character and our spiritual capabilities.

### What does God work on?

God's training ground also has clear and decisive purposes for ministry today.

First of all, it teaches spiritual resilience. Those who carry responsibility face expectations, conflicts, and disappointments. Without inner serenity, we grow hard or tired, so God leads us through situations where patience, gentleness, and steadfastness must grow. Ephesians 4:15 speaks of adherence to the truth in love. Truth without love is often hurtful, and love without truth becomes shallow. The skill of finding this balance doesn't come from theory, but is formed in God's training ground.

Another central element is the refinement and cleansing of our motives. Why do you serve? To be recognized, to make a difference, or out of love for Christ? In John 21, the Risen Lord asks Peter three times: "Do you love me?" Only once Peter has confirmed his love three times does he receive his commission. The question of love is paramount to the task. To this day, God keeps bringing His workers back to this point. When we do not receive outward affirmation from others, it becomes apparent whether our hearts are truly filled with Christ.

The next subject in God's school is pastoral care. When purely theoretical, it remains powerless; it is God's training ground



## THE CALLING OF A PASTOR (PART 5)

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that provides the valuable experience required to give it power. In 2 Corinthians 1:4, it is described that the comfort we receive is to be shared. If we ourselves have gone through phases of spiritual drought, doubt, or struggle, and have experienced God's faithfulness, we have gotten to know the loving Father. Then, our words come across as sincere because they were shaped through personal experience.

Another key lesson is not to be swayed. Public service comes with praise and criticism, both of which can affect us. Galatians 1:10 asks the sobering question of whom we ultimately want to please most. God uses situations in which approval is withheld or opposition increases to liberate His servants inwardly. Sometimes, it can be painful disappointment that loosens our grip (Psalm 118:8–10). This freedom does not make us cold toward others, but focuses us entirely on God alone.

Finally, God's training ground leads to an ever more conscious dependence on the Holy Spirit. Knowledge, methods, strategies, and experiences may all be helpful, but they must never form the foundation. "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit" (Zechariah 4:6). God allows moments when our own abilities fail; it is precisely there that we as His servants learn to pray, to wait, and to be led. This guards against self-driven activity and spiritual overconfidence.

### **The methods of God's training ground**

How does God teach His lessons? Most of His means are unspectacular but effective.

They often involve time in the desert: periods without visible success, sermons that seem to bear little fruit, conversations that lead to no immediate change. In such times, it becomes clear whether our identity rests on results or on God's promise.

Conflicts are another tool. When opinions differ, personalities clash, and tensions or misunderstandings arise between siblings in Christ, it becomes apparent whether we are truly living out gentleness and authenticity. In 2 Timothy 2:24 we are reminded that

a servant of the Lord should not seek strife but peace. Such attitudes do not grow in a sheltered setting, but in the storms of life.

God also allows internal struggles: times when you question your calling, moments of fatigue or doubt. God uses such seasons to strip away false securities. "My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9). Weakness in itself is not the goal, but a sober recognition of our own weakness opens us to God's power.

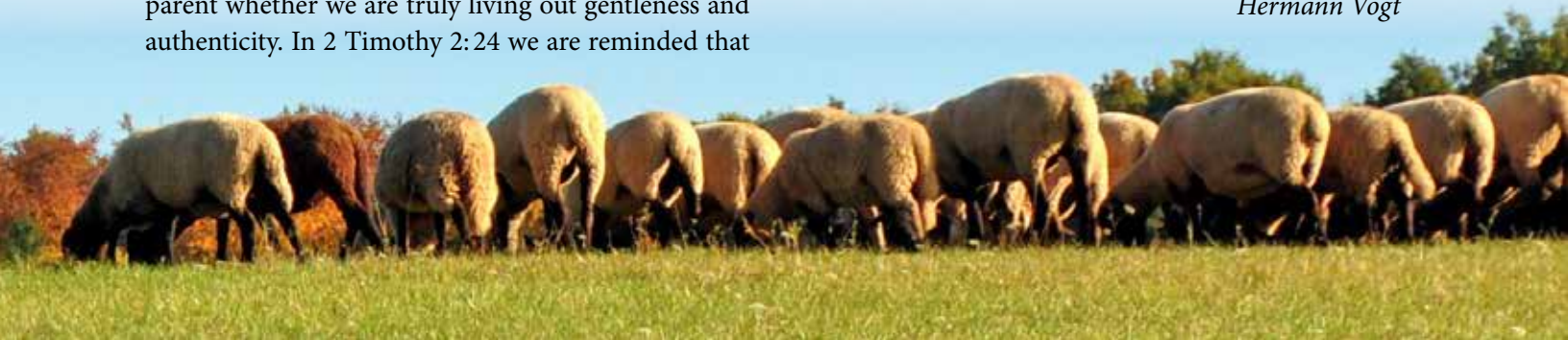
The Word of God itself is a powerful teaching tool as well. Hebrews 4:12 describes its penetrating power. When we serve, we are not only reading the Scriptures for others but find ourselves illuminated by God's light through them. Through this process, motives are refined, thoughts are sorted, and priorities are realigned. The Holy Spirit lets us experience biblical truth in a very practical way. This inner confrontation is a central part of God's training ground.

### **The conscious "yes, Lord"**

Romans 12:1 speaks of the conscious consecration of one's life. This also includes not resisting God's refining work, even when it becomes uncomfortable. Not every tension needs to be resolved immediately; rather, challenges become part of our normal everyday lives. This path is marked by contrasts, as times of rich blessings stand next to painful depths. "As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing" (2 Corinthians 6:10)—this tension remains. However, it is under God's sovereign hand.

In the end, God trains not perfect workers but people with mature hearts: people who have learned to wait, trust, and serve, not by their own power but in awareness of their dependence. There is a depth to this training that does not look outwardly spectacular, but has staying power. By going through this training, we gain this certainty: Without the Lord I am nothing, but "by my God I can leap over a wall" (Psalm 18:29).

*Hermann Vogt*



# *Leading Children with Grace and Truth*

*If you have children of your own,  
Let grace and kindness guide your actions.  
With every word, let love be known,  
Let love be shown in each reaction.  
A loving touch, a word of praise,  
A smile to show your satisfaction,  
Is more than wealth. Let loving ways  
And time for them inform each action.*

*If there is reason for complaint,  
And therefore action must be taken?  
Don't show your anger, use restraint;  
Let not your gentleness be shaken.  
Pray for wisdom, you must be firm.  
With mildness address the transgression;  
Show the consequence, let them learn.  
Let insight lead to a confession.*

*And when your child has come to rest,  
Then come to its bed and say a prayer:  
"O Lord, please let this child be blessed;  
Please, keep it from harm and in your care."*

*And God, who watches over all  
Will hear your prayer and petition.  
He sees the heart of those who call  
And loves to help those in submission.*

*You call them children of your own,  
Yet you know they are a gift from God.  
Teach them to serve the Lord alone  
For eternity, not just for this sod.  
He can guide them and keep them from wrong  
And bless them in joy and in pain.  
Lead them to the Savior early on;  
So you'll see them in glory again.*