

V THE VOICE OF TRUTH INTERNATIONAL

VOLUME TWENTY-SIX

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to Help**

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God's Wings

An article in *National Geographic* several years ago provided a penetrating picture of God's wings.

After a forest fire in Yellowstone National Park, forest rangers began their trek up a mountain to access the inferno's damage. One ranger found a bird literally petrified in ashes, perched statuesquely on the ground at the base of a tree.

Somewhat sickened by the eerie sight, the ranger reached out to knock the bird over with a stick. As he gently struck it, three tiny chicks scurried from under their dead mother's wings. The loving mother, keenly aware of impending disaster, had carried her offspring to the base of the tree and had gathered them under her wings, instinctively knowing that the toxic smoke would rise. She could have flown to safety but she refused to abandon her babies. When the blaze reached her, the heat had scorched her small body, but the mother had remained steadfast. Because she had been willing to die, those under the cover of her wings had lived.

"He will cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you will find refuge" (Psalm 91:4).

Remember the One who loves you, and then be different from the masses of the world because of that love.

— Author Unknown

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"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19).

THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST SALUTE YOU (ROMANS 16:16).

We Are Here To Help

Roger Mills



You are suffering a great loss, and may be close to breaking. You are in shock. You feel trapped.

Hold on and trust God! *There is help available.* This issue was prepared with you in mind. You have our sympathy and we want to help you through your calamity. Listen carefully.

Many who have written in this issue of **THE VOICE OF TRUTH INTERNATIONAL** have been through similar sufferings. They have helped others. We do not live in an ivory tower. As you read, you can relate to these tragedies and learn better how you can overcome your own difficulties.

My credentials come from Hurricane Andrew in Homestead, Florida. My daughter, Melody, and I almost died from the 175 mile-per-hour winds that tore off the roof and windows in our home. It was a “wake-up” call for me. Yet that was just the beginning of our suffering, and scars still surface. It would take the rest of this issue to relate all of the difficulties we faced.

I wish I could erase all of your horrible, harrowing losses; I cannot, but **God can!** *We can give you something worth more than all you lost.* Our prime purpose is to help you . . .

- ✓ See God’s hand in it all (Romans 8).
- ✓ Develop a deeper faith. Hebrews 11 tells of ancient heroes who grew in faith through their trust and obedience to God.
- ✓ Have an eternal home with Him (Revelation 21-22).

Some who write will tell of their own heartaches. Some are Christians who helped others dramatically and can help you too. Others will introduce you to Churches of Christ and what we can do for you in your present distress.

You may say, “God can’t help me. I am in too deep. I lost so much. I

don't deserve help. I can't stop this roller coaster. There is no solution for my misfortune. It's hopeless" . . . **Such thoughts are all the more reason to turn to God and His word.**

Allow us to point you to God and His Way for the answers to your dilemmas. Search the Scriptures with us (Acts 17:11). For starters, you might observe James 4:8 which teaches, "*Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.*" I've found that to be true. So can you.

It is marvelous to have a Heavenly Father who is always there for His children. He loves you because He created you. Now, be sure you are in His spiritual family. Read John 3:5 and Galatians 3:26-28. He is then by your side through good times and bad. Next, "*Keep yourselves in the love of God*" (Jude 20). Jesus said, "*If you love me, keep my commandments*" (John 14:15). Read carefully each article which will tell you of "*the whole counsel of God*" (Acts 20:27) for your life.

You may have already received some help from a nearby Church of Christ. If not, look them up. They will do what they can to supply your physical needs. If you need more and are searching for answers to your spiritual needs, call or come to one of our services. You will find help for those needs also.

God loves us and has helped us tremendously. God really cares and wants you to seek Him more. We love you, too, and want to be there in your time of need. Have you noticed? Calamities have increased in the last decade.

Some of the articles in this issue will tell about a fraction of the help we have given elsewhere. **We want to do even more** in the years ahead **for folks just like you.** *Loving, helping, serving, and saving* sums us up. **That is New Testament Christianity.**

Hurricane Andrew brought me to a higher level spiritually, even with all its horrors. I would not trade the experience for anything, but I prefer not to go through another one! However, I am more determined to help others who experience similar tragedies. That is a big part of why we are bringing together this issue — to help **you** and countless others. So, **Never give up. Trust God.** Good can come out of all your chaos. We really want to work together with you. Please let us know you and help you. You will be glad you did. †

Roger Mills works with World Evangelism and lives in Florence, Alabama, USA.

FACING DISASTER

J. C. Choate
Editor-in-Chief



Some form of disaster is taking place somewhere in the world every day. Many of these are brought on by nature. There are earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, typhoons, tornadoes, fires, snow and ice storms, and droughts. Some are man-made, such as arson and accidents. Then there are tragedies that are the result

of wars, business failures, plane, car, bus, and train crashes. Heartaches and sorrows are the result of natural and unnatural death. With the world so full of these kinds of things, it makes one wonder why there is not more emphasis on preparing for the next world where we will spend eternity. The greatest loss and tragedy of all would be for one's soul to leave this world unprepared to meet God.

But what do you do when you are faced with a disaster? Sometimes what you have experienced may be almost worse than death, and especially when you have lost family members. But what about losing your house and possessions, or your business? What a challenge to pull things together, to try to salvage whatever you can, and to start over. With such great material losses and financial losses you'll need help, and a lot of it. This is when you need friends, government aid, and maybe those who will move in from afar to help in the emergency.

How will you personally deal with this disaster? Will you accept it and do your best to cope, to rebuild your life, your house, your business, or whatever has been lost? Or will you resent what has happened to you, become bitter, and give up and quit? Even beyond that, will you blame God for all that has happened? Hopefully, you will not blame God, because God did not individually pick you out and send a flood, a fire, a tornado, or some other act of nature to hurt you, your family, or anyone else. You must

understand that with the law of nature being in place, when the elements reach a certain condition, there will be a hurricane, a massive rain that brings on flooding, a snow storm, an earthquake, or whatever else the circumstances produce. Instead of accusing God, you should thank Him that you have been spared. As bad as your experience has been, many others have experienced it too, and no doubt numerous ones have suffered far more than you have. Instead of being bitter, thank God to be alive and to be able to start over.

Let all of this experience be a reminder of how much you need the Lord, and may you make up your mind that you are going to be a changed person — more deeply dedicated to Him, if you are already a Christian; and more determined to become His child if you have been leaving Him out of your life. Read and study your Bible, always seeking the truth, and obey the Lord that you might be saved (Mark 16,15,16), a Christian (1 Peter 4:16), and a member of the Lord's church (Acts 2:47). In doing this you will be in Christ (Romans 6:3,4), where all spiritual blessings exist (Ephesians 1:3). One of those blessings is that of being a child of God (Galatians 3:26,27), and another is having the privilege of calling upon the Lord for His help in such times (1 John 5:14,15). Also, as a faithful Christian God has promised that He will certainly be with you (Matthew 28:20).

But even as a Christian, God has not said that He will forevermore keep you safe and well and that you will never die. We live under the law of nature of this world, and we stand to reap the consequences of particular circumstances, but as a child of God you are in a much better position to deal with whatever comes. Even if you die, as a faithful Christian, you have the assurance that you will have a home in heaven where there will be no heartaches, pain, or any kind of disaster ever again. God's children are promised eternal spiritual victory in the end, a home where we will never die.

In times of terrible crises, you may be blessed to have your government, the people of the area, and even those from afar, to come to your aid, as God helps you through those who care. Maybe for the first time in your life you have felt severe needs and have learned that there are those who are able and willing to come to your rescue. This can give you the reassurance that the world is perhaps not as bad as you feared it was. And through the help of others, you may come to know that brothers and sisters in Christ really care for you and have shown their love in deed, not just in word.

Another good thing that can come out of these kinds of experiences is that you will be far more sensitive in the future to the needs of others who are faced with terrible calamities and disasters. You will know how to bring help and comfort to them, and to strengthen their souls. †



LET ME INTRODUCE THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST

Byron Nichols

If you are not a member of the church of Christ and have been given this magazine by someone from a local congregation of the church, you may well be somewhat curious about this religious group. Following are a few questions that you perhaps would like to have answered concerning us as a church. Hopefully these questions and answers will be helpful in better acquainting you with who we are and what we believe and practice.

“How does the church of Christ regard the Bible?” This is a vitally important question. We regard the Bible as being God’s inspired Word (2 Timothy 3:16-17). We believe that it is without error, that its recorded miracles occurred literally, that the book of Genesis tells how the world actually began, that the miracles found in the Bible really took place, that Jesus was truly born of a virgin, that He literally died, that He was literally raised from the dead by God, that He is living right now in Heaven with God, and that the faithful followers of Jesus will be saved eternally by the grace of God in Heaven, and that the disobedient and unbelieving will experience eternity in a very real Hell. We believe that the Bible contains all of God’s revealed will for mankind, with no additional revelations having ever taken place (Jude 3), and that it is to remain free from any additions or subtractions by men.

“When did this church begin and who started it?” This church, the church of Christ, began long before the Christian religion became so divided. It began in Jerusalem in about A.D. 30-33. We read about its beginning in the second chapter of Acts. That chapter tells about the church being

started on the day of Pentecost, shortly after the death of Jesus. He had promised to build His church (Matthew 16:18), and He had told His apostles that it would come into existence in the city of Jerusalem and that it would take place when they were given special *“power from on high”* (Luke 24:46-49). We find that very thing happening in Acts 2, and the end of that chapter tells us that the church had then just become a reality (verses 37-47).

“How is your denomination different from the others?” Since there are denominations all around us, it is understandable that many people regard churches of Christ as just another denomination. However, this is inaccurate. As was pointed out in the previous paragraph, the church that belongs to Christ, the one that He promised to build, was started in the early part of the first century. The very oldest denominations did not begin until several hundred years later, and many of them have begun only within the last 100 years. The idea of denominations involves the concept of parts of a whole. The church of Christ had existed for many, many years before any of these “parts” came into being.

We are different from other churches in that we have no creed books, but do our best to adhere only to the Bible as our source of religious authority. We believe that Christ has all authority (Matthew 28:18-20). If Christ has **all** authority, that means that no one else has **any** authority.

If you were to visit our worship services (which we would be highly pleased for you to do) you would notice a few distinctive differences from other churches. For example, you would find that we have only congregational singing and we sing without any instrumental accompaniment. This is not because we regard musical instruments themselves as sinful, but because we find no record of the early church having any worship music other than just vocal (a cappella) music. You would also notice that we have a communion service every Sunday, rather than each month, quarter, year, etc. Again, this is done every week because that is what was done by the church from its beginning.

“Who governs the Church of Christ?” The Bible teaches us that Jesus Himself is the head of the church (Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 1:22,23; 5:23). He has delegated oversight of individual congregations to qualified men that the Bible calls elders, presbyters, overseers, or bishops. These men are responsible only for their own congregation, not for a plurality of congregations. Most congregations have a preacher, but he is not the overseer of the congregation.

“Is the church really all that important?” Because some ungodly things are sometimes done in the name of organized religion, it is not uncommon for folks to decide that they still have a high regard for Jesus, but

not for organized churches. Certainly not everything done in the name of Christ is truly Christianity, but it is essential that we understand that the Lord's church (the church we read about in the Bible) exists because God planned for it from the beginning of time (Ephesians 3:11); Old Testament prophets foretold its establishment and its importance; Jesus promised to build it (Matthew 16:18); He is the head of it (see the paragraph above); it belongs to Christ, having been purchased by Him with His blood (Acts 20:28); and all of the saved people are in it (Acts 2:47). Surely we can thus see that the church is of the highest importance. To be saved we must be a part of the church.

“What would I need to do to become a member of your church?” Since the church is not ours, but Christ's, He is the one who has determined the steps to be taken in order to gain membership in the church. We must **believe that He is the Son of God** (John 8:24). We must **confess our faith in Him** as God's Son (Romans 10:9-10). We must **repent of (turn away from) our sins** (Luke 13:3,5; Acts 2:38; 17:30; 2 Peter 3:9). We must **be baptized into Christ for the remission (forgiveness) of our past sins** (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21).

When one does these things, he or she is added to the church by the Lord (Acts 2:47), not voted on by

men. We must then live a life of faithful obedience to Him (Hebrews 5:8-9; Revelation 2:10). These are the conditions of church membership that the Bible reveals were required from the beginning of the church. If we are intent upon obeying Christ rather than men, we will subscribe to these same terms today, and in so doing, we can become Christians just like Peter, John, James, Paul, and all the others of the early church.

We are trying to be Christians only. We want to be the same thing religiously that the believers were in New Testament times, and we believe that this can be true for all of mankind. There is a great deal of confusion and lack of unity in religion today. We believe that if people will follow only what the Bible teaches, we can truly have unity. By disregarding the ideas of men and accepting and doing only what the Bible says we will be what Jesus died for — Christians — people who have had their sins forgiven — members of **His** church, not of a man-made church.

We want to serve you. We especially want to be of spiritual help, but we also want to do what we can in a physical way, too. We want to be your friend, both in good times and bad. You are always welcome to come and worship God with us. You will find yourself in the midst of imperfect people who want to please a perfect Savior. †

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Wait on the Lord;
Be of good courage,
And He shall strengthen your heart;
Wait, I say, on the Lord.
— Psalm 27:14



THE VOICE OF TRUTH INTERNATIONAL

Volume 26 of **THE VOICE OF TRUTH INTERNATIONAL** is our third special issue, this one dealing with disaster and tragedy — but more especially with God's love and care for His children as they live in this sin-stricken world and cope with the good times and bad that come into every life.

As congregations of the Lord's people see the tragedy in individual lives around them, or as they respond to disaster on a massive scale, providing clothes, food, shelter and spiritual concern for the stricken, it is our prayer that many will choose to include this copy of **THE VOICE OF TRUTH INTERNATIONAL** in their care packages.

When people are hurting, often their deepest and most instinctive impulse is to turn to God, either to seek strength from Him or to blame Him for their pain. It is at such a vulnerable moment that words of spiritual guidance can have their greatest impact. People who are hurting need to know the root source of pain in this world. They need to know that God has not ceased to love mankind; they need to know that His desire is always for the welfare of man, and that He can use even pain for their good. — JCC

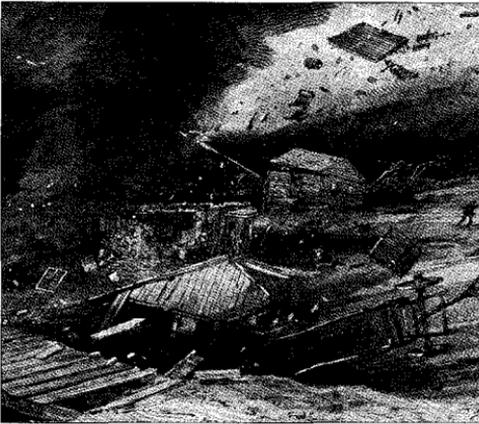
Tomorrow I'll Grapple Again with the World

*Tomorrow I'll grapple again with
the world
With the things that are wrong
And can never be right;
Tomorrow I'll grapple again with
the world —
Dear God, let me rest tonight.*

*Let me have these hours of open
road,
These mountains and skies and
streams,
I'll listen to hymns of long, long ago
And dream of other-world dreams;
I'll hug these minutes all to myself
— counting them off, one by one —
And treasure the warmth of loving
hearts
With the warmth of the setting sun;
I'll reach for the stars in the
evening sky
And tuck them away in my soul
To lighten the days reality clouds
With whatever the future holds.*

*Tomorrow I'll grapple again with
the world,
With the things that are wrong
And can never be right —
Tomorrow I'll grapple again with
the world —
Dear God, let me rest tonight.*

— Betty Burton Choate



Why Did God Do This to Me?

Betty Burton Choate

“Oh, that I were as in months past, As in the days when God watched over me; When His lamp shone upon my head, And when by His light I walked through darkness; Just as I was in the days of my prime, When the friendly counsel of God was over my tent; When the Almighty was yet with me, When my children were around me; When my steps were bathed with cream, And the rock poured out rivers of oil for me! (Job 29:2-6)

*“And now **my soul is poured out** because of my plight; The days of affliction take hold of me. **My bones are pierced** in me at night, And **my gnawing pains take no rest.***

*“**I cry out to You, but You do not answer me;** ...You have become cruel to me; With the strength of Your hand You oppose me. ...when I looked for good, evil came to me; And when I waited for light, then came darkness. **My heart is in turmoil and cannot rest;** Days of affliction confront me. I go about mourning, but not in the sun; I stand up in the assembly and cry out for help. (30:16,17; 20,21; 26-28).*

“Is it not destruction for the wicked, And disaster for the workers of iniquity? Does He not see my ways, And count all my steps? (31:3,4)

“He [God] tears me in His wrath, and hates me; He gnashes at me with His teeth; My adversary sharpens His gaze on me. ... I was at ease, but He has shattered me; He also has taken me by my neck, and shaken me to pieces; He has set me up for His target, His archers surround me. He pierces my heart and does not pity; He pours out my gall on the ground. He breaks me with wound upon wound; (16:9, 12-14).

*“**My eyes pour out tears to God.** Oh, that one might plead for a man with God, As a man pleads for his neighbor!*

“For when a few years are finished, I shall go the way of no return. My spirit is broken, My days are extinguished, The grave is ready for me” (16:21,22; 17:1).

In anguish of soul, often when humans fall into disaster they cry out with many of the same words Job used in the long ago: **“Where is God?”** *“Why is He doing this to me?”* **“I’m not evil – I don’t deserve this!”** *“Why doesn’t God hear me and ease my pain?”* **“I’m broken by this grief that’s more than I can bear. Will there never be peace in my heart again?”**

With Job, we may accuse God of silence, but *the accusation is wrongly made.* There is genuine peace and comfort from God, and there is direction for our steps, to help us through any trouble or disaster. In the words of His Bible, He speaks to us. He shows His love. He calls us to come to Him in good times and in bad.

Do you remember what the Scriptures say of this world when God had completed it on the sixth day of creation? *“Then God saw **everything** that He had made, and indeed it was **very good**”* (Genesis 1:31). The world God planned included **no disaster, no evil, no tragedy, no death.** It was perfect, and it was wonderful — just as we *think* things should surely be “if there is a God.”

*There is an adversary, though, an enemy who is **God’s enemy** first and, secondly, **the enemy of the creation He loves so much that He allowed His only begotten Son to die for us.** That adversary is *Satan.* He was the one who brought sin into the world. **And sin has thrown all of creation into a turmoil that can maim and destroy.** *“For the creation was subjected to futility...because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that **the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now...**”* (Romans 8:20-22).*

Job did not know who was causing all of his trouble, and he wrongly thought it was God. But the Bible tells us *from the very beginning* of the account that it was Satan who was attacking Job, Satan who was using nature to bring storms and disaster, in repeated attempts to destroy him.

Many “natural” disasters occur in our world today. Whether Satan is the cause of a specific disaster, or whether it is the result of the laws of nature having gone awry through sin entering the world, either directly or indirectly we can lay ALL problems at his feet. He is the enemy of God and the enemy of man, and his aim is to destroy us.

“But,” you might ask, **“if God is all-powerful, why does He allow Satan to bring such terrible things into the world?”** Because when man chose to sin, and when he continually chooses to sin, he makes Satan the “ruler of this world”. Jesus came to provide the way to the “*new heavens and new earth in which righteousness dwells*” (2 Peter 3:13). It will be in **that world** that everything will be very good again, and it is to **that world** that He came to show us the way, if we are willing to follow Him.

“Does this mean that God has no real power in this world, or that He does not care what happens to us, here and now?” No, emphatically, no! But we need to understand that God is not going to miraculously overturn the laws of nature that operate in this world, to avert the natural calamities. Tornadoes *will come* when the conditions are right; hurricanes *will come* when the conditions are right; and, yes — danger and death *will come* when the conditions are right.

Other tragedies are caused more directly by sin: the terrible violence that wreaks havoc on humanity, when children murder school mates, when tribal groups slaughter other tribal groups, when alcoholism and drugs bring violence and death. All of these things happen in a world turned upside-down

by the consequences of sin.

God cannot un-do the mess that man has made of his world; He can only promise to take His children from this sin-cursed world to that perfect home He is preparing for us.

And for the time that we must live here, He promises *for His children, for those who love Him, that He will make all things work together for our good* (Romans 8:28). Does that mean that we are hedged about by a wall of protection, as Satan said God had done for Job (1:10)? No, we are a part of this hurting world, and we may very well endure tragedy, untimely deaths of loved ones, storms of life and of nature, calamity and on-going heartache.

But **God will sustain us**, as *His Spirit strengthens us within our own spirits* (Ephesians 3:16); He will use Satan’s very tools of harm and destruction to bring good into our lives if we will remain faithful to Him through the hardship. And He has promised, *“I will never leave you nor forsake you”* (Hebrews 13:5).

God portrays Himself as “our heavenly Father”. If you are a parent and your children are suffering devastation, where will you be? You know you will be feeling *their* hurt as your child *and the extended pain of a parent*; you know you will be *doing all you can to rescue them* from their pain; and you know *you will always be there, ready to be*

supportive, helping in any way you can. And how crushed you would be, if your child in his pain, *blamed* you for his problems and allowed those problems to come between you and him, at the very time you most wanted to be there to help him.

In all of these ways, God is with us as our spiritual Father, no matter what comes into our lives. In the story of the Christian martyr, Stephen, do you remember how he described the One he saw at God's right hand? In every other account, Jesus is pictured as **sitting**, but when Stephen was being stoned he saw Him **standing** at God's right hand, as though the sharing of Stephen's suffering brought Him to His feet. That vivid word picture is a wonderful consolation to us as God's children, whenever we are hurting. We can know that, because of our pain, Jesus has been wrenched to His feet, and that He is reaching out to us, doing all He can to ease our pain and to bring relief from our suffering.

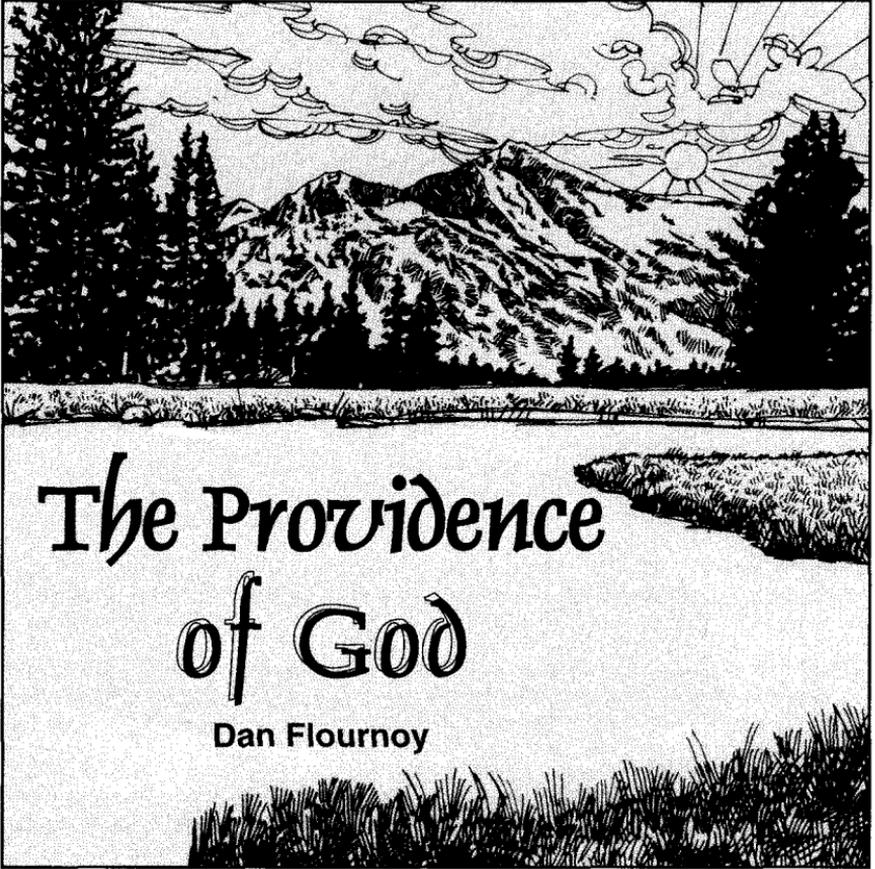
"How does He help?" Not through some miraculous act, for His use of miracles has always been confined to the giving of new law or a new messenger; but God's greatest tools through the ages have been His use of providence: His use of people, governments, circumstances, and events, to bring about the things that are best, physically and especial-

ly spiritually, for His children.

So in times of trouble, He uses the hearts and hands and possessions of **His other children** — His church, His family in this world — to bring comfort and physical help to the children and even to the people of the world who are suffering. He uses governments, doctors, medicines, carpenters, counsellors — and in a comforting and natural-appearing way, slowly these people and things bring new hope to hopeless hearts. People learn to laugh again, and to feel thankfulness for the good that has come into their lives. The despair that Job felt when he said, "*My spirit is broken, My days are extinguished, the grave is ready for me,*" is replaced with the peace he experienced when God had turned Satan's evil and used it to bless his life instead.

God has allowed humans the power to choose Him or Satan, so He cannot **make us choose to be faithful to Him through all the trials of life**, and He can't **make us do the right things**. But as long as we keep our hand in His, we can know that He has promised in Romans 8:28 that He will see to it that even the tragedies of life are turned around and used for our good. **That is a promise, and He won't fail to keep it.** †

Betty Burton Choate is the wife of J.C. Choate, missionaries to India for almost four decades.



The Providence of God

Dan Flourney

The phrase “the providence of God” is not found in the Bible, but the concept certainly fills the Sacred Book. The word translated “providence” is from a Greek word meaning “forethought,” or “to provide for.”

Divine providence may be defined as a part of the nature of God which preserves, governs, and protects His creation. It is sometimes spoken of as God working “behind the scenes” to accomplish His will.

There are two types of providence: general, and special. First, in a general way, God exercises providence over His creation by upholding and sustaining it. “*He makes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust*” (Matthew 5:45). The Hebrews writer declared that “*He upholds all things by the word of His power*” (Hebrews 1:3).

God also exercises a special providence over His people. Peter

GOD

affirmed that *“The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation...”* (2 Peter 2:9). Jesus taught His disciples to pray: *“And bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one”* (Matthew 6:13). It is through the providence of God that *“all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose”* (Romans 8:28).

Providentially, God supplies our needs: *“And my God shall supply every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 4:19; see also 2 Corinthians 9:10). God providentially protects His people: *“The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous and His ears are open unto their cry...the righteous cry...and the Lord delivereth them out of all their trouble.”* Providentially, God governs nations: *“He makes nations great, and destroys them; He enlarges nations, and guides them”* (Job 12:23; see Psalm 22:28; Daniel 5:21; Acts 17:26).

There are times when things don't seem to be going right. When truth and justice seem to be trampled and crushed, rest assured that God is exercising His providence.

James Russell Lowell has captured the essence of God's providence in his poem, “This Crisis”:

“Careless seems the Great Avenger,
History's pages but record.
One doth grapple in the darkness
Twixt old systems and the Word
Truth, forever on the scaffold,
Wrong forever on the throne...
But He who holds the future,
Stands amid the shadows.
Keeping watch above His own.”

“God amid the shadows keeping watch above His own” aptly describes the working of God behind the scenes. Thus, we do not always “see” God working, but we know that He does. When it seems that evil is going to prevail in the world, rest assured that God “stands amid the shadows keeping watch above His own.”

May we never lose heart because things don't seem to be going right. Remember, God is still in charge and *“all things work together for good, even to them that are called according to His purpose”* (Romans 8:28). †

Dan Flournoy preaches for the Beltline Road congregation in Irving, Texas, USA.



God Is Our Refuge

Dalton Key

I once overheard an interesting exchange in the grocery store between one of the checkout clerks and a customer. The clerk asked, “How are you doing?” The customer, an older man, replied, “Just terrible! I’m tired. I’m worn-out. I’m rundown. And I feel awful!” The clerk, somewhat taken aback by the customer’s negative reply, quickly tried to cheer the man up, but was interrupted with, “Oh, don’t concern yourself. This is one of my

better days!”

I’m sure the older man was just teasing, but he did illustrate, even in jest, the depression and discouragement plaguing so many of us.

One thing is certain: life in the flesh is fraught with pain, difficulty, and suffering. Bad things happen, and they often happen to good people. Age, disease, and sickness destroy our health. Family problems enter uninvited into our homes, threatening to destroy the

lives and souls of those we love most dearly. Financial strain, job-related stress, and the challenges of everyday life seem to be like Jesus' description of the poor — “with us always” (Mark 14:7).

The fact of life's problems shouldn't be surprising to us. Didn't Jesus warn, “*In the world you shall have tribulation?*”

We can be thankful, though, that Jesus didn't end His words on that somber note. He continued by promising, “. . . *but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world*” (John 16:33).

The God of heaven cares about us. “*Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you*” (1 Peter 5:7). He sent His Son to die for us “*when we were yet without strength*” (Romans 5:6). His Son, serving even now as our High Priest before the Father, is “*touched with the feelings of our infirmities*” (Hebrews 4:15).

No problem, no catastrophe, no sorrow is larger than God is. And our God, who “*cannot lie*” (Titus 1:2), has promised to help His own. The Psalmist declares, “*God is our*

refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Psalm 46:1). The Hebrews writer reminds us, “*He hath said, 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.'* So that we may boldly say, ‘*The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear...*’” (Hebrews 13:5,6).

And the best-known, most-loved passage in all of Scripture still reads as it always has: “*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want...Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me...Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever*” (Psalm 23;1,4,6).

The question is not: “Does God care?” **He does.** The question is not: “Will God help me through my troubles, through my difficulties, through my sorrows?” **He will.**

No, the real question, the one each of us in Christ must answer, is simply this: “**Do I believe what God has promised?**” †

Dalton Key is the editor of *Old Paths*, and preaches for the North Amarillo Church of Christ in Amarillo, Texas, USA.

If I Could...

Every fragment of my being reaches out and out to you. I would press you to my heart and hold you close, in quietness and in love.

— Betty Burton Choate

GOD

Miracle of
Miracles!

GOD!

Stephen Eckstein

The miracle of miracles is God! He will use His unparalleled power and fulfill His promise through Jesus Christ as set forth in the New

Testament. *He will raise the entire human race from their tombs and change the living in an instant* (John 5:27-29; 1 Corinthians 15:50).

Simply to sit back and reflect upon the magnitude of this coming miracle is mind boggling! Anyone who has traveled over the earth and seen the innumerable cemeteries and countless tombs and graves is utterly overwhelmed by the thought and reality that **GOD** will raise **all** without **ONE MISTAKE**. The world's largest cemetery is Flanders Field in France. With white crosses row upon row for miles, it will suddenly be no more! Those bodies which have been burned up or devoured by wild beasts or birds, or destroyed in unknown ways will be raised also. All the bodies which have been cast into the sea over the millenniums will come forth (Revelation 20:13).

If God cannot or does not do this, He is not what He claims to be. It will not make any difference how many Bibles have been printed and studied, how many prayers have been prayed, how many songs have been sung, or how many times the saints have assembled — **all will be in vain, meaningless — if God does not keep His promise!** It will not make any difference what man has done, whether he has been good or evil, **if God does not keep His promise.**

But God will do exactly what He has said. On the one hand, the total input and output of all the computers, the adding machines, the

record discs, all books of all libraries — everything that has been recorded by man — will be dwarfed to nothing by the perfect righteousness and vindication of God in judging sinful man. Each of the billions will be judged by his or her own works as recorded by God (Revelation 20:12). Note the utter sublimity and simplicity of John's record, "*And if anyone was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire*" (Revelation 20:15).

On the other hand, **the miracle of miracles is that God is so great He will save all those who are His** (2 Timothy 2:19). The saints whose names are in the *Lamb's Book of Life* will be recipients of His matchless love and grace and will be blessed with spiritual bodies fitted for **eternal fellowship with God**. The redeemed will adore and honor, praise and extol, glorify and thank God forever. He and He alone deserves all praise.

Paul is correct in what he writes: "*God will be everything to everyone*" (1 Corinthians 15:28).

"Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth..." (John 5:23,24).

Be it so!

†

Stephen Eckstein, is a preacher of the gospel, and an author, living in Rochester Hills, Michigan, USA.

the BIBLE makes a difference

Eddie Cooper

If you were meeting someone for the first time and he asked you to tell him how the Bible has made a difference in your life, what would you say? If your children wanted some advice for making those difficult decisions of life, which book would you urge as a guide? I believe that the Bible can make a tremendous difference in one's life, if we will use it.

Think about our world for a moment. There is bitterness, animosity, tension, and war between men and nations. All of this comes from discontent and restlessness in the human heart (James 4:1,2). What guide can man use to alleviate these problems? Where can he go to find the principles by which to live that he might have the abundant life (John 10:10)? I believe that God wants us to be happy by making the right decisions. We need the best guide available.

In my life I have been surrounded by those who deeply believed in the Bible as a guide for their lives. Parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, Bible class teachers, and the older preachers have been an inspiration to me. These challenged me to put into practice what I

THE WORD OF GOD

the Bible teaches, and I have been richly blessed for having done so.

I can remember the enthusiasm of the older preachers who came and preached in meetings where we lived and who delivered powerful lessons that would stir to action, motivate us to do right, and call for a response in our lives. *They dealt with the importance of the Bible and sin and its consequences.* They discussed in a forthright manner what one needed to do to be saved. There was no doubt at all as to what was taught. They were not afraid to preach the truth on any matter.

Yes, the Bible has the power to change lives (Romans 1:16; 12:1,2). I'm sure that many of you have seen the life of someone re-shaped so drastically that you felt that the "new" person was not the one you had known before. That is the way it is supposed to be (2 Corinthians 5:17). These changes were not brought about by demands and threats but by **the transforming power of the Word of God.**

Many will claim their allegiance to the Bible until the Bible states the need for change in the practice of their lives; then their true view is known. With scarcely the wink of an eye they reject its commands.

Someone has written: "The Bible is: Supernatural in origin; Divine in authorship; Human in penmanship; Infallible in authority;

Infinite in scope; Universal in interest; Eternal in duration; And personal in application."

Why not give the Bible its rightful place in your life? Take the time to get to know this Book of books, and you will be surprised at the dramatic and eternal changes that can result in your life. †

Eddie Cooper is a gospel preacher living and working in Parkersburg, WV, USA.

My Prayer

I asked for strength
And God gave me Difficulties
to make me strong.

I asked for Wisdom
And God gave me Problems
to solve.

I asked for Prosperity
And God gave me a Brain
and Brawn to work.

I asked for Courage
And God gave me Danger
to overcome.

I asked for Love
And God gave me Troubled
People to help.

I asked for Favors
And God gave me Opportunities.
I received nothing I asked for,
Yet everything I needed!

— Unknown

RESPECTING THE BIBLE IN DIFFICULT TIMES

Steve Snider



“The proud have forged a lie against me, But I will keep Your precepts with my whole heart.... Let the proud be ashamed, For they treated me wrongfully with falsehood; But I will meditate on Your precepts.... They almost made an end of me on earth, But I did not forsake Your precepts.... I will never forget Your precepts, For by them You have given me life.” (Psalm 119:69, 78, 87, 93).

When things in life become difficult, where do you turn? Maybe you go to a good friend, your parents, or to some other family member; or maybe you turn to a brother or sister in Christ, or to one of the church leaders.

Certainly none of these choices would be wrong, but do these people, then, turn us toward the word of God? *Too often we respect the Bible when things are going well, but then we are ready to lay it aside when difficulty arises.* If we would

THE WORD OF GOD

think about what the Bible teaches, we would remember that God's faithful have always had difficulties. Just think about Moses, Abraham, Lot, the prophets, and most importantly, think about Jesus Christ. All of these faithful servants of God experienced extremely difficult periods in their lives. Yet, they all survived!

The Psalmist said that he had been lied about, treated perversely, was almost consumed, but through it all he refused to forsake the word of God. What was his reason for that strong conviction? *"For by them You have given me life"* (Psalm 119:93). The Psalmist knew that **in God's word** he would find encouragement, strength, and guidance for the difficult times in his life.

What do we do when someone lies about us? What do we do when someone treats us in a shameful way? What do we do when it seems

that our problems are about to consume us? Do we give up, get angry, quit the church, or do we cling ever stronger to the word of God?

In Matthew 4, when Jesus was being tempted by the devil, He resisted each temptation **by appealing to the written word of God**. If our Lord found strength and comfort in the promises of God's word, surely that should be an example that we will want to follow.

The real test of our respect for the Bible often comes when the going gets rough. Let us have the determination of the Psalmist and, regardless of what else may be going on in our lives, let us remember that one thing is certain: we will not turn away from God's word because **in that word we know that we find eternal life.** †

Steve Snider is a gospel preacher who lives and works in Barrackville, WV, USA.

Happiness doesn't depend on what we have, but it does depend on how we feel toward what we have. We can be happy with little and miserable with much.

The difficulties of life are intended to make us better — not bitter.

Smile! The world looks brighter from behind a smile.

When you share your joy, you double its true value.

Renewing Hope

Charles R. Brewer

Far out beyond the arch of circling sky,
And far beyond the reach of mortal ken
Lies that fair land where good shall never die,
But live; nor captive be to sin.

There Eden's morn shall dawn with sparkling dew;
No tempting serpent's kiss shall there be heard,
But man, redeemed, shall walk with God anew
And talk with Him who is the living Word.

There anguished hearts no more in grief shall moan,
There tortured limbs no more shall writhe in pain;
There all the curse of sin shall be unknown,
And broken lives shall be made whole again.

Abram, a youth again, with Sarah by his side,
And David clasps the babe for whom he wept
And Mary sees her Son, now glorified,
And understands what in her heart she kept.

I too shall see the loved ones gone before,
And greet again the friends of other years,
And with them dwell in peace forevermore
And never know the sting of bitter tears.

The light grows brighter as I near the end
Ev'n though I bow beneath life's weary load;
I see the lights of heav'n with sunset blend;
My step grows lighter with the ending road.



Unity



In Jesus

Francis David

The religious world is much concerned about unity today. I have talked to many religious leaders and they all seem to be interested in UNITY.

But is Christian unity possible? Unity of any kind can be achieved only if all participants come to one platform of belief or commitment.

Though many religious leaders *speaking* words that express an interest in unity, they refuse to *do the things* that will unite them. They want to hang on to their individual beliefs that make them “unique”, but this uniqueness is actually the multiplicity of doctrines that separates believers from believers!

DOCTRINE TO LIVE BY

It is sad to see so much religious division in "Christianity". Jesus wanted all His followers to be one in Him. He Himself prayed for the unity of His people, throughout the world and throughout all time: "*I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me*" (John 17:20,21).

Recently, a denominational preacher was giving a speech. In his speech he said that it does not matter to which denomination you belong, because we are all one, under one umbrella! He said that this is the unity Jesus prayed for. How could such a thing be possible? Jesus never prayed that all the denominations might be one.

We see that people are trying to make *unions* in order to seem to be united. Is it possible? No, not at all. The unity which Jesus talked about cannot be achieved through our human ideas. It is not based on our human thinking. **The kind of unity which Jesus desires for His people must be based on Scriptures, as they permeate our thoughts and actions.**

All over the world the followers of Jesus are trying to serve Him, but according to their own divisive

methods and actions. The Apostle Paul, while talking to the brethren at Corinth, says, "*Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment*" (1 Corinthians 1:10).

Jesus said in Matthew 7:21, "*Not everyone who says to me Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven.*" My friend, are you willing to do His will? His will is that all His followers may be one. If we are not in unity, then we are disobeying and dishonoring God and Jesus. Let us not give honor to a particular denomination and doctrine. Instead let us honor Jesus through our obedience to His will.

The apostle Paul asked, "*For when one says, 'I am of Paul,' and another, 'I am of Apollos,' are you not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one?*" (1 Corinthians 3:4,5). In verse three of the same chapter Paul told the Corinthians, "*...you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and **divisions** among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?*"

DOCTRINE TO LIVE BY

Jesus our Lord built only ONE church (Matthew 16:18). He is the owner of His church. This church is not a denomination. All the denominations have been established by men. The church of Jesus Christ was established on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). This church is neither Catholic nor Protestant. The church of Christ came into existence in A.D. 33, whereas the Roman Catholic Church had its first "universal" Pope in 606 A.D., and Protestant denominations began since the 1500's.

In the Greek language the word which is used for the church is "Ekklesia". It means "called out". The church of Jesus is His body, made up of people who have been called out of the world, by hearing the Gospel. Those who believe in Jesus, confess Him as the Son of God, repent of their sins and are baptized are saved by Him. All who are saved are added by the Lord Himself to His own body (Acts 2:47).

Only Jesus did the adding of souls to His body in the first century. He did not add the baptized person to a particular sect or denomination, because none existed then. All those who were added to His church were in unity. The Lord was pleased with them because they were all one, the parts of His body, the one church (Ephesians 1:22,23; 4:3-6).

And even today, all over the world there are still people who are walking according to the Bible. They follow only the Bible as their guide. The word of God is their standard in all religious matters. These people call themselves Christians. They do not wear any sectarian names, but they are called "Christian", after the name of their Lord (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16).

Divided Christianity is not the real Christianity. We may call it by that name, but according to the Bible, it is not the kind of Christianity which Christ talked about. Jesus said, "*Every plant which my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted*" (Matthew 15:13).

My friend, we, the New Testament Christians, are pleading with all our friends in various denominations to please come back to the Bible, to the Christianity which was established in the first century. Please leave your creeds, doctrines, and denominations and follow the Bible which is our perfect guide (James 1:25). Sects and denominations will divide us, but the path of Jesus will unite us.

Yes, unity in Jesus is beautiful and pleasant as the Psalmist says: "*How good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell in Unity*" (Psalm 133:1). †

Francis David is a gospel preacher in New Delhi, India.

God has not promised to grant the requests of those who are not Christians. Scripture reveals that there are prayers God will not respond to in a positive manner.

“If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear” (Psalm 66:18).

“Set a wicked man over him, and let an accuser stand at his right hand. When he is judged, let him be found guilty, and let his prayer become sin” (Psalm 109:6,7).

“One who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be an abomination” (Proverbs 28:9).

“For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayers, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil” (1 Peter 3:12, quoted from Psalm 34:15,16).

In order to receive what we request, we must:

- (1) be God’s people who are called by His name (2 Chronicles 7:14);
- (2) ask in Jesus’ name (John 14:13);

- (3) ask in faith (James 1:6,7);
- (4) ask for right things (James 4:3);
- (5) keep God’s commandments and do those things pleasing in His sight

(1 John 3:22);
(6) ask according to His will (1 John 5:14).

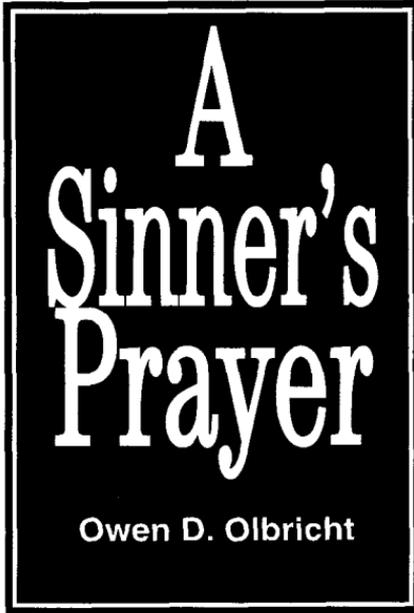
No non-Christians in this Christian age were ever told to pray for anything, much less told to pray to be saved, to be forgiven of their sins.

Bible Examples

Sinners on the day of Pentecost were not told to pray to be forgiven. Peter, in Acts

2:21, quoted an Old Testament passage (Joel 2:32) which is a favorite of those who believe all one has to do to be saved, forgiven, is to “call” on God in prayer. “Call” comes from the Greek *epikaleo* which means to be given a name (Acts 1:23) or to make an appeal (Acts 7:59; 25:11,12; 26:32; 28:19). Those who simply *call*, “Lord, Lord,” will not be saved, but must **do the will of the Father** (Matthew 7:21; Luke 6:46).

When asked by the Jews,



DOCTRINE TO LIVE BY

“*What shall we do?*” (Acts 2:37), Peter missed a great opportunity to tell them that all they needed to do was pray, if prayer is what is meant by “call”. Instead Peter told them to *repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ* in order to be forgiven (Acts 2:38). When Paul was found praying (Acts 9:11) he was told to *be baptized and wash away his sins, calling on the name of the Lord* (Acts 22:16). His appeal to be forgiven was to be made **through** his baptism. Cornelius, whose prayer had been heard, *was commanded to be baptized* (Acts 10:43).

No non-Christians were ever told to **pray** to be forgiven of their sins. In spite of this truth, today many religious groups instruct the lost to say “**the sinner’s prayer**”.

The Sinner’s Prayer

Almost all denominational groups close their writings or preaching by telling people that if they sincerely repeat the sinner’s prayer, they are assured they will be forgiven. This prayer differs from group to group. It seems that if this were a requirement of God: (1) It would be the same prayer. (2) It would have been included in scripture by command or example.

The Book of Hope (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1998), author not given, p. 53, gives this prayer: “God, I’m sorry for my sins. Right now, I turn from my sins and ask you to forgive

me. Thank you for sending Jesus Christ to die on the cross for my sins. Jesus, I ask you to come into my life and be my Lord, Savior, and Friend. Thank you for forgiving me and giving me eternal life. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.”

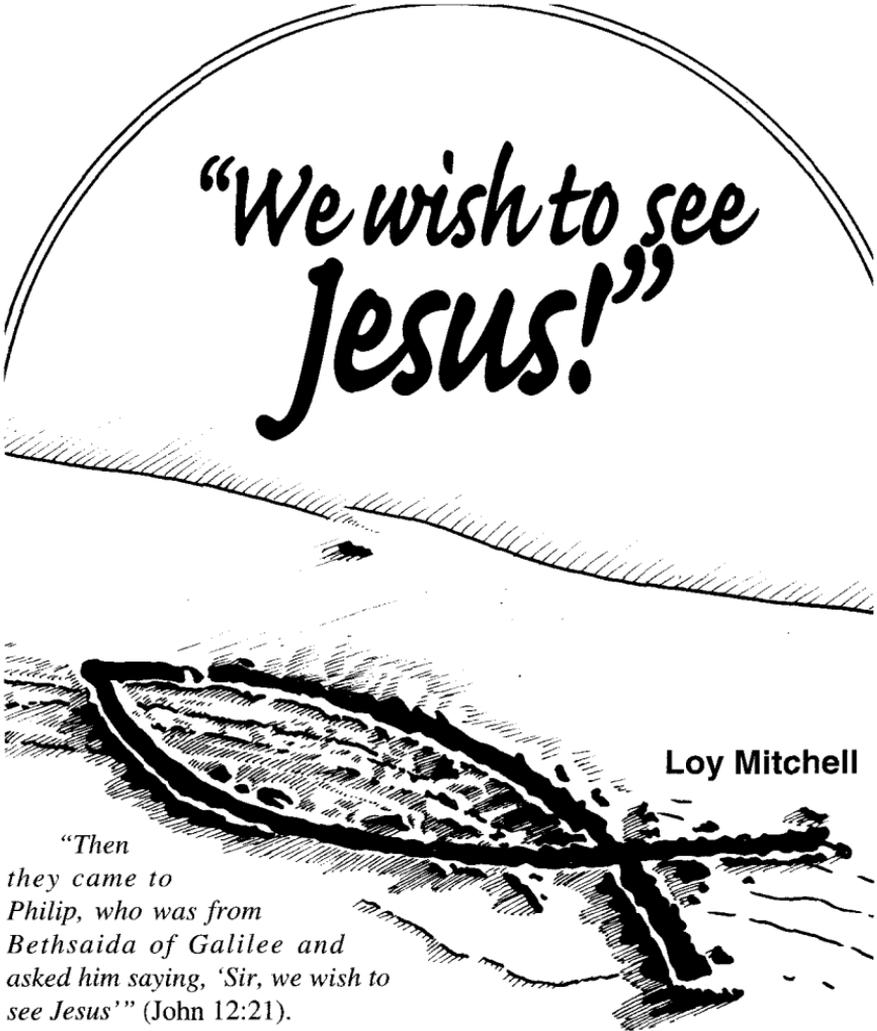
Following this the statement is made, “**If you prayed this prayer and meant it, you can be sure God has forgiven you and received you into his family.**”

This prayer, and the promise concerning such a prayer are not found in the Bible. The promise was made **by man, not by God**; therefore, God is under no obligation to honor it.

Conclusion

Prayer is important in our relationship with God, but we should realize that only those prayers are heard that are according to God’s will. Perhaps non-Christians’ prayers are regarded when they ask for many varied helps and needs (Acts 10:31), but no where are they given instruction or assurance that **their sins can be forgiven simply by saying a concocted “sinner’s prayer.”** Salvation for the lost comes to those who hear God’s word (Acts 11:14), believe, repent, confess and are baptized (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Romans 10:10). †

Owen Olbricht is a writer and gospel preacher living in Sherwood, AR, USA.



*“We wish to see
Jesus!”*

Loy Mitchell

“Then they came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee and asked him saying, ‘Sir, we wish to see Jesus’” (John 12:21).

I. Who were these people?

According to verse 20 they were Greeks. Greeks who were among those who came up to worship at the feast. Were they pious devout men like Cornelius? Were they Greeks who had taken up the Jewish religion? The text does not tell us. Maybe they were just curious. Perhaps they had heard of the great works done by our Lord and wanted to see Him in person. We do not know.

II. Were they trying to see the right person?

YES! YES!

They were on target. Jobs are important, but not as important as seeing Jesus. Food, clothing and shelter are necessary, but to “see” the Lord is of the highest importance. Have you ever seen a President of the USA in person? Those who have, likely count that as an important event in their lives. Many years ago Donna and I sat at the same table with the then President of Rhodesia, Africa. On another occasion we ate supper in the same room with the Prime Minister.

However, to *see Jesus* is the greatest sight of all. Have you *seen* Him as *your Savior*? Have you *seen* Him as *the Messiah or Christ*? Have you *seen* Him as *the head of His church*? Have you *seen* him as *Lord of your daily life*?

III. Where will you and I see Him today?

❖ **We should see Him in the Scriptures.** Look carefully at the sermon given by Peter on Pentecost. He let Scriptures speak so they could see Jesus. The problem is that too few take time to let the

Scriptures speak to us daily. The Old Testament speaks plainly about the coming Messiah (see Isaiah 53). Paul was able to bring many to “see” Jesus by preaching Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

❖ **We should see Jesus in the lives of Christians.** Paul wrote, “*I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me*” (Galatians 2:20).

IV. Are you like these Greeks? Do you wish to see Jesus?

Then open your Bible and let this word speak of Jesus Christ. Ask a teacher to come into your home week after week so you can see Jesus in His Word, the Bible. Make sure you are present for every Bible class on Sunday morning and Wednesday night. Never miss an assembly of the church on the Lord’s day. Look at the Lord through the lives of godly men and women and you will see Jesus.

Can others see Jesus living in you? †

Loy Mitchell, former missionary to Zimbabwe, preaches the Gospel in Topeka, Kansas, USA.

A child of God should bear a marked resemblance to his Father.



Salvation:

God's Free Gift

Gordon Hogan

The truth concerning salvation is vital because accepting error on this subject will result in damnation with the devil and his angels and being separated from God forever. *So this is a life or death matter.*

Jews gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the first Pentecost feast after the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, and they were confronted with the startling truth that they had contributed to the death of the longed-for Messiah. This obviously disturbed them, and they asked the right question, "*Brethren, what shall we do?*" (Acts 2:37 ASV).

To obtain the right answers, we must ask the right questions. These Jews, having received the truth about Jesus Christ being the Son of God and the Messiah, asked the correct question. Peter, inspired by God, answered, "*Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*" (v. 2:38). Peter followed that answer with the exhortation, "*Save yourselves from this crooked generation*" (v. 40). About 3000 people who wanted to be saved were baptized (v. 41).

We will not want to be *saved* unless we first recognize that we are *lost*.

SALVATION

Unfortunately, Satan has succeeded in convincing most of mankind that God will save us no matter what we do or fail to do. Stop a minute and think: *Is it not so?*

Man is separated from God by sin, which is described vividly by Paul as “*unrighteousness, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity, whisperers, backbiters, hateful to God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affections, unmerciful*” (Romans 1:29-32). We all find ourselves somewhere on this list, and the truth is that people who practice such things, who make them a way of life, are *worthy* of death — separation from God.

Thankfully, our heavenly Father through His Son graciously *offers salvation to all people*. Jesus left His home in heaven to save us.

✓ A search for truth reveals that *Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners* (1 Timothy 1:15).

✓ A search for truth reveals God “*would have all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth*” (1 Timothy 2:4).

✓ A search for truth reveals that *our eternal salvation will be revealed in the last time* (1 Peter

1:5).

✓ A search for truth reveals that in none other is there salvation: *for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved* (Acts 4:12).

Harold Haslip, Chancellor of David Lipscomb University, tells a story about a barber who had a sign in his window which read “Free Haircuts Tomorrow”. He never took the sign down; he never gave a free haircut. Tomorrow never comes. The Apostle Paul writes, “*At an acceptable time I harkened unto thee, and in a day of salvation did I succor thee behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation*” (2 Corinthians 6:2). Salvation is for here and now, as well as hereafter.

Salvation is offered freely.

Again Paul tells us, “*for by grace have ye been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God*” (Ephesians 2:8). However, God does not force this precious gift upon anyone. We must **accept** the gift of salvation by the **exercise** of obedient faith.

Jesus tells us, “*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned*” (Mark 16:16). †

Gordon Hogan teaches at Harding University, Searcy, AR USA.

What God Wants You to Know and To Do

Clayton Pepper

“And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power...” (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9)

Since one will be lost in torment who does not obey the gospel, the question arises as to **what** the gospel is and **how to obey** it.

What the Gospel Is.

The apostle Paul provides the answer:

“Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the Gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you,

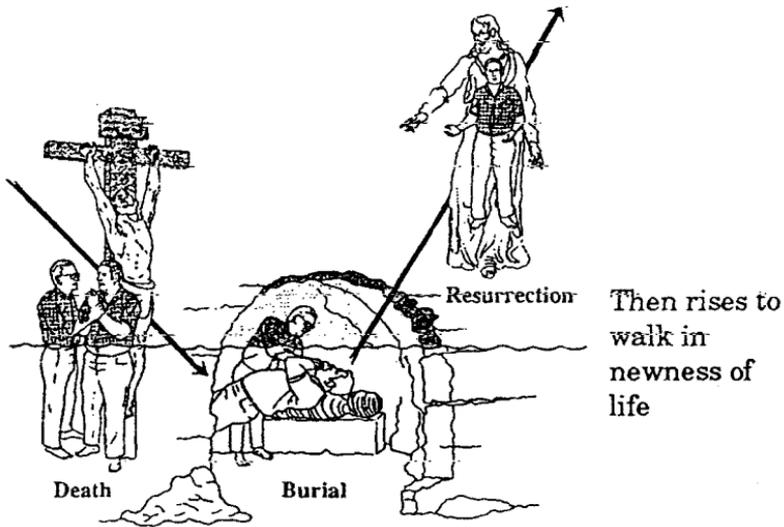
unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the scriptures . . .” (1 Corinthians 15:1-4; See Isaiah 53).

Christ took upon Himself the punishment that we deserve because we have sinned. Paul wrote,

“For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

“For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:6-8).

Is it urgent to obey the gospel?



Art courtesy of We Care Ministries.

There are two reasons why one should not postpone a decision to obey the gospel:

1. The uncertainty of life. We are reminded daily that life is not permanent. Illnesses and accidents bring about death often at the most unexpected times. The writer of the book of Hebrews said, "*And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment . . .*" (9:27)

2. The unexpectedness of Christ's return. The Bible teaches that Christ will come at

an unexpected time. He will come "*as a thief in the night*" (1 Thessalonians 5:2). No one knows when this will be.

Beware of Perverting the Gospel

The Apostle Paul warned of some who would pervert the gospel. He said that even an angel from heaven could not change the gospel without being accursed (Galatians 1:6-8).

Who needs to obey the gospel?

1. All who want to be born again, (John 3:3-5). All lost people who have never obeyed the gospel must do so to be saved. Making a

SALVATION

mental acceptance of Christ as one's personal savior is not enough. It falls short of obeying the gospel.

2. *All who were sprinkled for baptism.* True baptism is a **burial in water** (Romans 6:3-7; Colossians 2:12; John 3:23). Only those who are *old enough* to **be taught and understand the gospel are subject to obeying it**. Children who were sprinkled as babies were not baptized, according to the scriptural meaning of the word.

3. *All who were told to receive Christ into their heart and pray the sinner's prayer.* This action is erroneously based on the incident concerning the publican and Pharisee in Luke 18:9-14. This story teaches us not to be self-righteous, but **to have an attitude of humility**. *It does not tell one how to be saved.* All who teach salvation **apart from baptism** are actually teaching that one can be saved **without obeying the gospel**.

4. *All who were taught that they were saved by prayer.* **Christians** are told to pray when they sin (James 5:16; Acts 8:22). However, one **who has not obeyed the gospel** is not commanded by Christ and His apostles to pray for forgiveness. Forgiveness of sins is granted when the sinner obeys God, not because he has prayed to be saved.

A man dying of cancer was married to a woman who believed

that salvation was by faith and repentance, apart from obeying the gospel. She arranged for her preacher to talk to him. The man already believed in Christ. He was of the disposition of mind to obey the gospel. However, the preacher did not believe that baptism was necessary to be saved. They gathered around his bed, held hands, and all three prayed. The man looked up at his wife and said, "I have just been saved." He did not understand the point of pardon. His wife did not understand what the Bible teaches to be saved. The preacher led him to the door of the kingdom, but he did not teach them how to go inside. The man died thinking he had done what was necessary to be saved (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:15,16; Acts 22:16).

Surely, it is necessary to obey the gospel just as the Lord has commanded. Otherwise, **we will be punished with everlasting destruction from God's presence** (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

Is there a doubt in your mind? It is a comforting thing to **be sure and a disturbing thing** to be in doubt. If you **have not obeyed the gospel, then we urge you to make that decision immediately.** †

Clayton Pepper, long-time promoter of church growth, works with Restoration Network International in Nashville, TN, USA.

Why Baptism?

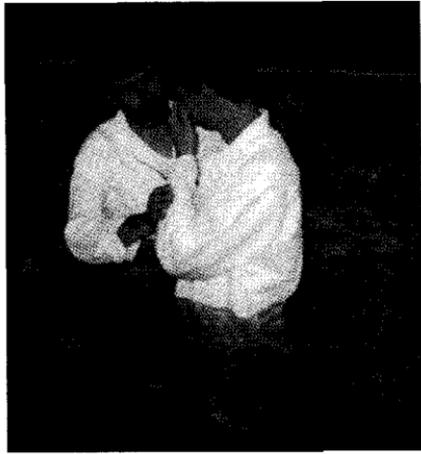
Bobby Wheat

There has seldom been a topic of religious discussion generating more debate than baptism. For some, baptism is unnecessary, perhaps even a nuisance. Others see baptism as a matter of choice in religious practice. And still others regard baptism as a most important teaching in the Bible. Hence our question, "Why Baptism?"

Some questions about how the modern person should understand baptism need to be answered. What was the meaning of baptism in New Testament times? What is the proper mode of baptism? What is the purpose of baptism? Is baptism mandatory or optional in religious practice?

The Meaning of the Word

In order to understand the teachings of the New Testament, we must understand as fully as possible the words which it contains. "Baptism" is not an English word. It is a **transliteration** of a Greek word. In other words, the sounds of



the Greek characters were given English letters so that the word could be used in our language without translating its meaning. Our task, then, is to determine what the word means.

Baptidzo is the Greek word which lies behind our English word baptism. *Baptidzo* was used in common life long before it gained any religious significance. Its basic meaning was "dip" or "immerse." A form of this word would have been used, for example, to talk about the process of "dipping" or "immersing" a piece of cloth into a liquid for the purpose of dyeing it to another color.

Therefore, in order to properly translate the meaning of *baptidzo*, it is necessary to use a word which conveys a picture of pushing, dipping, plunging something beneath a liquid surface, causing it to be com-

pletely covered over with that liquid. We have several such words in English, the best of which is perhaps the word "immerse." It would be better, then, to read "immerse" where our English Bibles give us "baptize."

In Acts 8 we are told about the conversion of the Ethiopian after he was taught about Jesus by Philip the evangelist. In verse 38 Luke tells us that *"both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him."* If the Ethiopian were "immersed" in the water, completely covered by it, then it makes sense that they both went down into the water.

Concerning John the Baptist, we are told in John 3:23 that *"John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were constantly coming to be baptized."* It is significant that John chose a place to baptize which had "plenty of water." Immersion, dipping, completely covering a person with water requires "plenty of water."

The Significance of Baptism

The significance of baptism as a religious rite lies in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Paul expressed very clearly the force of the act of baptism when he wrote:

"What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can

we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection" (Romans 6:1-5).

When a person is dead, we put the body deep into the ground and cover it over with dirt. In Jesus' case, His body was put into a tomb and a large stone was rolled over the entrance. In either situation, the body is covered over, it is left "under" the earth, it is "buried."

Baptism is intended for the Christian to be a reenactment of Jesus' own death, burial, and resurrection. A person commits himself to Christ, desiring to "die" to sin, and so is baptized, or "buried." That person then comes up out of the water, is "resurrected," to a new life.

Paul indicates that our participation in the resurrection is dependent on whether or not we shared in Jesus' death through baptism.

In baptism, then, it is possible for a believer to share in the atoning death, the burial, and the triumphant resurrection of Jesus.

Why Baptism?

It is interesting to note how many times Luke made reference to baptism as he wrote Acts. Two passages stand out for our present discussion.

According to Acts 2, Peter was preaching to the assembled crowd on the Day of Pentecost following Jesus' ascension. When the Jews who were listening realized that they had truly crucified the Son of God, they cried out, "What shall we do?" Peter's answer helps us in answering our question, "Why Baptism?" He said: "*Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*" (Acts 2:38).

Peter's teaching informs us that baptism, when accompanied by repentance, brings about two things in the life of the believer. **One is the forgiveness of sins; the other is receipt of the Holy Spirit as a gift.** The first, forgiveness of sins, can otherwise be expressed with the word "salvation." The other, the gift of the Holy Spirit, supports the first because it is God's presence coming to live in the one who has been saved.

Later in Luke's record we read about the time of Paul's conversion to Christ. Ananias came to Saul (as Paul was then known) in Damascus. He restored Saul's sight, told him

that God had a mission for him, and then he said: "*And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on His name*" (Acts 22:16). Why did Saul need to be baptized? So that his sins could be washed away! So that he could be saved!

Why baptism? Consider finally this passage from Galatians: "*You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ*" (Galatians 3:26,27). Paul makes it clear to us that, **without baptism, it is impossible to become a Christian.** In baptism, when it is accompanied by faith, a person is clothed with Christ, and he becomes a child of God.

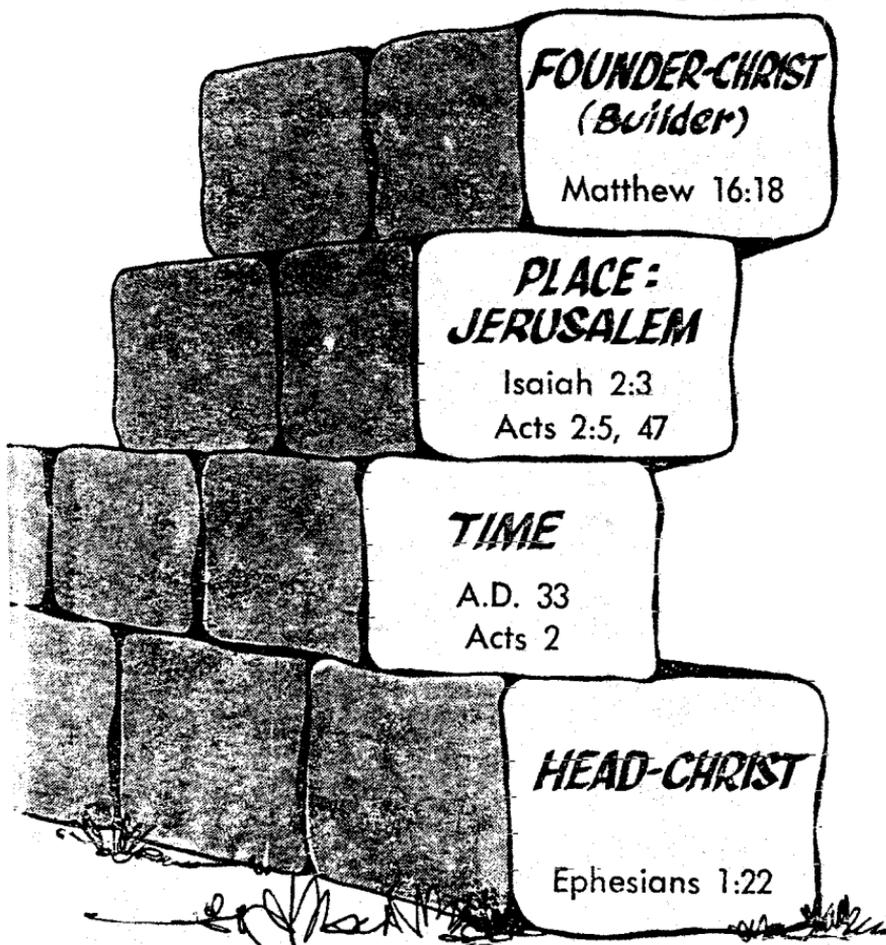
We spoke earlier about baptism being the process which allows us to share in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. When coupled with an abiding faith that Jesus is indeed the Son of God, and with a desire to allow Jesus to be Lord, this "sharing" becomes a life-changing "participation." The person who submits to baptism, to immersion in water, comes up from the water a new person, one who has been saved by the blood of Jesus, a Christian! †

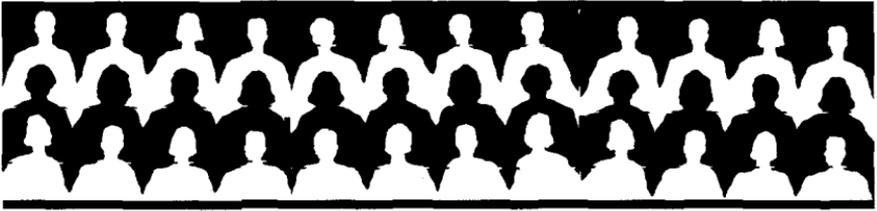
Bobby Wheat is a long-time missionary to Zimbabwe, having recently returned to the USA.

“...and are built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the Chief Corner Stone”

(Ephesians 2:20).

The New Testament Church





A Plea For *Non-Denominationalism*

Carroll Sites

The church of Christ in the Bible was not a “denomination” — not “all-denominational” — not “inner-denominational” — not a *part* of the *whole of anything*. The church in the Bible was **THE church**.

The phrase “church of Christ,” if used correctly, is not a “name” for anything. The church as revealed in the Bible is simply *God’s family*. All of His children are in the family (1 Timothy 3:15). If one is truly a Christian, he is a member of the church, the family.

There is no Christian who has not been born again. There is no such thing as a “not born again” Christian. There is no need to refer to anyone as a “born again Christian”, because to be a Christian one *must have been born* of God (John 1:13), *born anew* (John 3:3), *born again* of water and of the spirit (John 3:5).

“Christian” is not a sectarian name. There is no New Testament teaching for any sectarian name.

Christian is the name for members of the church. We should wear it proudly (1 Peter 4:16).

Church of God (1 Corinthians 1:2), kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 16:19), church of the firstborn (Hebrews 12:23), church of Christ (Romans 16:16), church of the Lord (Acts 20:28), a holy nation (1 Peter 2:9), temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16) — one and all of these make reference to Christ’s body, His church.

Going by the Bible and it alone will produce the unity for which Jesus prayed in John 17:20,21 and of which Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:1-6. The New Testament is our “blueprint” for the church. The Bible, applied correctly, will lead us to **non-denominational** Christianity and the **non-denominational** church, and that is our plea to all people of all time of all the world! †

Carroll Sites serves as the preacher for the church of the Lord in Higden, Arkansas, USA.

The Church and Salvation

Ron Bryant

The salvation of man is the central subject of the Bible. Why is that the case? Just a moment's reflection prompts one to ask the question voiced long ago by the psalmist: "What is man that thou art mindful of him?" (Psalm 8:4).



This question is one of continual challenge. The fact that the God of heaven is mindful of man is the centerpiece in the matter of salvation. Being mindful of man, God has provided a **Savior, a Gospel, and a Church.**

The Savior of mankind is the

Lord Jesus Christ.

The Gospel is God's power to save. It is indispensable to God's purpose.

The Church is also His. It is made up of the redeemed. Jesus purchased the church with His blood (Acts 20:28).

The salvation of man is firmly established in the love and the eternal purpose of God. Additionally, the church of Jesus the Christ also stands firmly established in the love and purpose of God. The pivotal role the church plays in God's scheme of things is set forth most eloquently in the book of Ephesians. There it is declared that

◆ *through the church the manifold wisdom of God is made known to the world.*

◆ It is in the church, the **body of the redeemed over which Christ is head.**

◆ that God and His purpose are glorified (Ephesians 3:10,11; 3:21).

◆ The love of Christ and the death of Christ are revealed as being *for the church* (Ephesians 5:25).

◆ It is the body to which all the

THE CHURCH

saved — the reconciled — are added (Ephesians 2:15).

◆ The church is one body (Ephesians 4:4-6).



One cannot properly understand the past or the present work of Jesus without an understanding of the church, for the church is the body of Christ, and He is head over

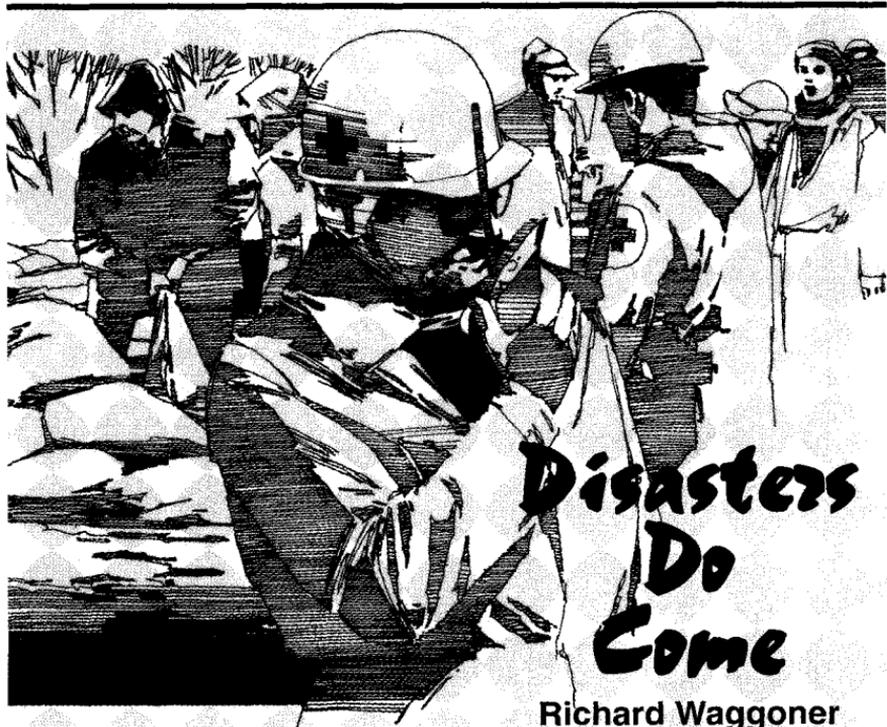
all things to it, and He is the Savior of it (Ephesians 1:22,23; 5:23).

Regrettably, far too many do not have a biblical view of the church. When our view is not biblical we are short-changed. The real need we have is for each of us to see the church in its biblical simplicity and beauty, **not a building but a body of people**. We need to understand that it is in the church that believers have communion with God and fellowship with one another. In it the children of God share life and hope, love and peace. In it

are vested the plans of God for ministry and for the proclamation of the Gospel. God has no other plan for the preaching of the Word than through His people, the redeemed, the church. To it He adds all the redeemed, and through it He calls all men to be reconciled to Him (1 Corinthians 10:16,17; Acts 2:47; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21). Salvation and the church are inseparably connected. The church exists to give glory to God (Ephesians 3:20,21). †

Ron Bryant
preaches for
the Camelback
congregation
in Phoenix,
Arizona, USA.





Disasters Do Come

Richard Waggoner

The face of disaster thrusts itself into our lives. The firefighter holding a limp body of a child, or people struggling, screaming, scrambling for a safe place during an earthquake, or a mother watching frantically as her small child loses his hold and sinks beneath the flood waters, or the paramedic patching crushed bodies and attempting to retard and stop the massive hemorrhaging — any of these scenes can cause panic to grip the heart.

When you see the face of disaster, you can see another face that's like the rainbow during the thunder-

storm. It's the face of our Heavenly Father that shines through the darkest of hours. It's God's face shining through the compassion of His saints, conveying His heart of love for the hurting and the helpless. Christians, such as those of the Disaster Relief Effort of the churches of Christ and Healing Hands in Nashville, Tennessee, reach out with not only skilled and efficient emergency response to the physical and mental pain, but also offer the words of Jesus to give the spiritual support so desperately needed in moments such as described above.

CHRISTIANITY IN ACTION

Yes, because we care, the Lord's people have delivered approximately five million dollars of food and supplies during this past year.

"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongues, but with actions and in truth" (1 John 3:16-18). "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2).

When bad things happen to you and the world seems cold and heartless, and you feel that you're all alone, we want you to know that we care. Remember the story of Job. He lost everything in a series of disasters, and in Job 2:7 he says, *"He was my Lord in good times and He will be my Lord in bad times, also."*

After many years of bad things happening to Joseph, he tells his brothers in Genesis 45:7 that the Lord permitted these bad things to happen to him so that he could be there to save his family then. It's not **what happens to you** that is the most important, but it's **what you do with what you have and what you do with what happens to you** that determines the outcome of your life.

William Mitchell was in a motorcycle accident and fire. He was badly burned about the face and horribly crippled. He overcame the nightmare of appearance and handicap to become a very successful salesman. Then, in an airplane crash his back was broken, and he became a wheelchair case. He didn't give up. He became one of the world's best motivational speakers and began going on tour with a speech theme of, "Have an Attitude of Gratitude."

Glenn Cunningham was badly burned as a child and the doctor said, "You'll never walk again." But after 15 years of effort filled with pain he became the fastest runner of the mile on earth. You may say, "I want to, but I'm afraid I can't do it." No, *you* can't. But with *God and your friends' help* (sometimes found during your disaster), you can and you must! **Take responsibility for choosing your response, and ignore the trash of mind that blames someone or something else.**

Procrastination is deadly. Be active for what you know is right and focus on God to help you into helping others who are suffering also. †

Richard Waggoner works with Disaster Relief Effort of the Churches of Christ based in Nashville, Tennessee, USA.



That They May Glorify The Father

Bill McDonough

May 6, 1981 — Mannheim, Germany. . . For weeks our German television stations had been carrying news about the Solidarity movement in Poland. Now they were saying there is no food and people are going hungry. Churches of Christ from around the world

responded with 600,000 pounds of food that we trucked in through East Germany and Czechoslovakia to hungry families. The distribution was done by local Christians, and as a direct result of assisting the needy, the Communist government, for the first time in modern history, gave

CHRISTIANITY IN ACTION

the Christians living there the legal right to assemble and evangelize.

June 1990 — Georgetown, Guyana . . . When I returned to the hotel after a long day at the clinics we were operating across this little nation, there was a message in my box to call the office of the president. I worried that something had gone wrong, and my call to his office did not alleviate my concerns. I was told, "The president's car will pick you up tomorrow evening at seven o'clock. You are invited to dine with him at his residence."

Only after arriving the next evening were my fears put at ease. The president welcomed me and then said that he simply wanted to thank us for the help we were giving his people. He commented, "No nation can be great without religion, and I thank you, not only for your medical aid, but for your religious teaching as well."

January 1990 — Bucharest, Romania . . . the Minister of Health said, "You are the first foreigner to visit my offices since the

revolution, and we are very grateful for your concern for the Romanian people."

April 1997 — Havana, Cuba . . . The Minister of Health gave us his personal telephone number and said, "If I can be of help to any of your people, tell them to call me."

June 1999 — Jamaica . . . Captain Smith of the Maroon people said, "Never before has an outside group been so kind to us. We will talk about your clinic for generations to come."

In Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Peru, Albania and Myanmar the response is the same. When good is done in the name of Jesus we can anticipate a warm reception.

Matthew 5:16 — *"Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."* †

After spending 20 years as a missionary to Germany, Bill McDonough has served as the International Director of Partners In Progress that has delivered disaster relief to fifty-eight nations since its beginning in 1980.

LORD, let me be a shining light
So others then may view
Your mercy and your love displayed
In all I say and do.
— Unknown



Find Good In Disasters

Ancil Jenkins



Food lines are made ready for those who have lost everything.

“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28).

How could anything good come from what was so destructive? Hurricane Andrew came ashore in Dade County, Florida, early Monday morning, August 31, 1992. The destruction to property, especially in the Homestead area, was almost beyond belief. Thousands found themselves homeless and lacking in food, water, and ice. Yet, in this event and in the days that followed, some who lived through Hurricane Andrew found new meaning in God’s promise to work for our good in all things.

I went first to the Homestead church of Christ and met with several leaders of the church. We joined together in prayer in the ruins of the church building and asked the Lord to help us to find the faith to seek His good in what had occurred. Looking back on this event, one aspect remains large in my thinking. The greatest good which I and countless others received is a firm awareness of the deep and fervent love of the Lord’s church for those in need.

CHRISTIANITY IN ACTION

Some Examples:

- a. Almost as soon as the storm passed, area churches sent vans and trucks with supplies to meet the most immediate needs: water, ice, flashlights, camp stoves, etc. Many brought gifts of money. Some churches thoughtfully sent cash, since the banks in the hurricane area were closed.
- b. Countless churches and individuals telephoned, each asking the same question, "What can we do?" The greatest need, we told them, was money to purchase food in large quantities and to begin to assemble a stock of building supplies.
- c. These same churches and individuals freely and generously gave beyond anyone's expectation. Some immediately sent what they could and later took special contributions to send more. Still others gave once and again.
- d. One church, which had been saving to build a new building, sent their entire building fund.
- e. Another church told us to call any time we needed ice. Each time we called, they immediately sent several tons of crushed ice in bags.
- f. One young girl, hearing of the need and wanting to help, had no money. She had a small box in which she had saved her favorite and most precious trinkets. She put in the few coins she had and sent it all to us.
- g. Thousands of people donated their services. They came to Miami, worked all day and then slept on the floor of church buildings. Some stayed for months. Others volunteered to prepare food, wash workers' clothes, etc.

In looking back on this event, I hope we do not just find a warm feeling of comfort at the love and generosity of thousands of churches and individuals. A great blessing to those surviving disasters is the faith that the Lord's church is willing and ready to help meet their needs.

Even more, let each of us pray that when later disasters strike we will be one of that number who unselfishly and generously give according to our ability. God's sweetest blessings always flow by hands that serve Him here below. †

Ancil Jenkins was the preacher for the Sunset congregation in Miami, Florida, at the time of Hurricane Andrew. He now works with the church of Christ in Jamestown, Tennessee, USA.

Weeping



With
Those
Who
Weep

(A Church's Response in Time of Crisis)

Wayne Burger

Disaster can rock the calmest of communities. When it happens, what can the church do? In some ways each crisis requires unique responses, but there are many basic ways in which the church can and should respond. The ideas below are examples of the way the Columbine Church of Christ responded at the time of the tragic Columbine school shooting on April 20, 1999, in Littleton, Colorado.

First, response must be immediate.

There are some events which take precedence over all others. When such crises occur, all other plans have to be dropped or altered. Such emergencies provide opportunities for being servants for God in

the community. Individuals, as well as the entire congregation, must give attention to the *people who are hurting* physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Failure to act is to fail in fulfilling our responsibility; it is failure to God, ourselves, and those in need.

Second, special services may need to be conducted.

The Columbine shooting occurred about noon on Tuesday. Wednesday night the church conducted a very special time of devotion and service in which the needs of the moment were addressed. Not only did the members of the congregation attend, but people from the community came as well. They

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were there because the tragedy pointed people back to God.

In addition to this special service on Wednesday evening, there was a Sunday afternoon service especially for our teens. This was to address their needs and to provide them with an opportunity to ask questions, express their grief publicly, or make statements as to their thoughts and feelings. During this meeting each person was given a strip of paper on which they could write their thoughts or condolences. These were formed into a paper chain and taken to Clement Park, next to the Columbine High School, where mementos of grief were being collected.

In another similar meeting, there was a small group study in which death and dying were discussed.

Crises of these types will require special sermons, classes, and/or seminars in order to help people cope with their grief.

Third, elders and ministers should make personal visits with the victims.

In our situation, some of these visits were just to express concern and to let the hurting know that we were thinking about and praying for them. In other cases, the visits served as opportunities for the victims of close family members, especially those in the congregation, to have a private counseling session,

with the idea of directing them to professional help if that was needed.

Fourth, elders should organize people into shifts to answer the phones many hours a day.

Hundreds of calls came from all over the world inquiring as to the details, asking how they might help, and just to express sorrow. Such a response should be expected and preparations made to handle it.

Fifth, be ready to be a distribution center.

When a natural disaster occurs in which there is much physical property damage, one would expect to have to be a distribution center for goods and money. But, even in a situation such as the Columbine shooting, thousands of cards were received for victims' families with just their names on the cards. Most of these families had no connection with the Columbine church, but the cards had to be taken to or forwarded to them.

The church also received hundreds of dollars which had to be properly accounted for and properly distributed. Some of the money came with specific names to whom it was to be given. Other funds were donated to a general fund with the church's discretion to be used as to whom it should be given. One church sent 1,700 "What Would Jesus Do?" bracelets for us to dis-

tribute. With dozens of the cards which came to us, we covered a big bulletin board and put them on other walls to let people know that others were thinking of them and praying for them.

Though we don't want crises to strike anywhere, they will inevitably come. What we need to strive to do is handle those crises to the best of our abilities so that God receives the glory and honor. We respond, not because we are looking for an opportunity to "convert" someone or to create a good "image" for the church in the community. We need to look upon the crisis as an opportunity to serve

and "weep with those who weep" (Romans 12:15), and to leave the results with God. †

Wayne Burger is the preacher for the Columbine Church of Christ in Littleton, Colorado, USA.

The Conquerer

Emil Carl Aurin

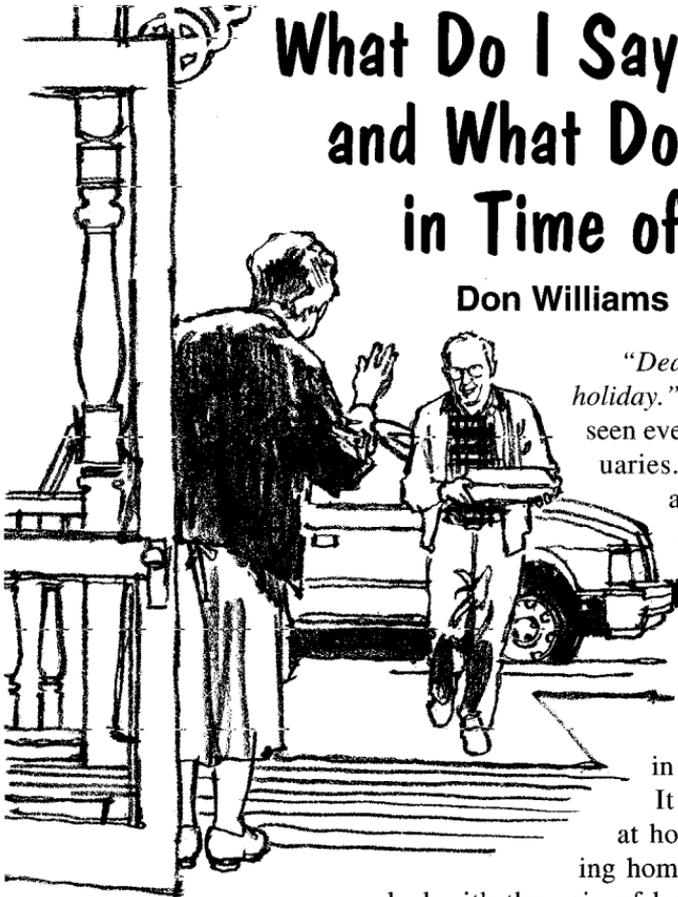
It's easy to laugh when the skies are blue
 And the sun is shining bright
 Yes, easy to laugh when your friends are true
 And there is happiness in sight;
 But when hope has fled and the skies are gray,
 And friends of the past have turned away.
 Ah, then indeed it's a hero's feat
 To muster a smile in the face of defeat.

It's easy to laugh when the storm is o'er
 And your ship is safe and sound in port;
 Yes, easy to laugh when you're on the shore
 Secure at last from the tempest's sport.
 But when wild waves wash the storm-swept deck
 And your gallant ship is a battered wreck,
 Ah, that is the test and it's well worth while
 To look in the face of defeat with a smile.

It's easy to laugh when the battle's fought
 Your armor's off, for the victory's won,
 Yes, easy to laugh when the prize you sought
 is in your hands and the race is run.
 But here's to the man who can laugh when the blast
 Of adversity blows; he will conquer at last,
 For the hardest man in the world to beat
 Is the man who can laugh in the face of defeat!

What Do I Say and What Do I Do in Time of Loss?

Don Williams



"Death never takes a holiday." This sad fact is seen everyday in the obituaries. It is expressed as a long funeral possession makes its way to the cemetery. It is heard in announcements at a worship service, or read in church bulletins. It is demonstrated at hospitals and nursing homes when families

are wracked with the pain of knowing that their beloved "is gone."

In my work with grief I am often asked what can be said or done to help in times of loss and tragedy. The words "I feel so inadequate" are often stated, and rightly so. Nothing we can say or do can undo the death that has occurred or the wrenching pain that is being felt. Yet, there are some things that grieving families have told me were of help and comfort to them that caring "others" did for them. Following are some of these suggestions.

"What Do I Say?"

Nothing can take the place of your presence. It is not the words you use as much as your presence that is so important. When death occurs, go to the

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grieving family and be with them. Job's friends came to him and sat seven days with him without saying anything (Job 2:13). In the New Testament, Mary and Martha had friends to be with them when their brother Lazarus died (John 11:31). Nothing can take the place of your presence.

Some folks do not know what to say, and thus they avoid going to the funeral home or funeral. Others say too much and ask inappropriate questions or make inappropriate statements. Still others burden the grieving family with stories of their own losses that they tell them about. The best thing I have found that can be said is this: "I am so sorry to learn of your loss. I love you and I will be praying for you." Such words can only be appreciated. These words, followed by a hug, or the grasp of a hand, let the grieving family know that you are concerned and that you care.

"What Do I Do?"

After you attend the funeral (if at all possible), do not forget the grieving family in the days and weeks to follow. If the death was

sudden or unexpected, the reality of their loss may just be beginning to sink in as they return home from the funeral. They need the presence of family and friends then more than ever. It has been suggested that 97% of friends stop visiting the grieving family two weeks after the funeral! Continue to go and be with them. Instead of saying, "Call me if you need me," let them know that you will be calling on them in a few days. Reassure them of your desire to do anything you can to comfort their hearts and to help with any need.

If there are small children at home, offer to keep them while necessary errands have to be run. Laundry work, cleaning the house, and taking food to grieving family members can all be beneficial as they try to deal with their shattered lives.

Romans 12:15 tells us to "*weep with them that weep.*" Our continued love and support to hurting family members can be one way of showing the love of Christ within our lives. †

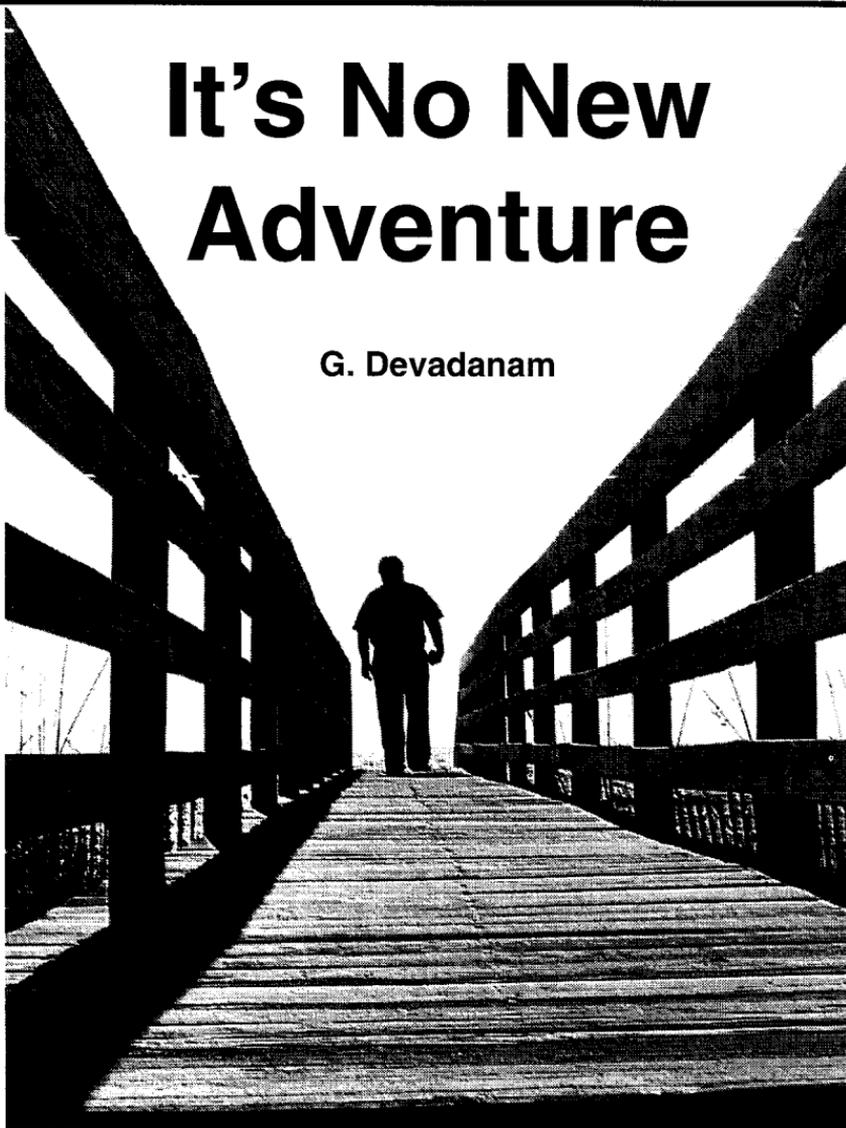
Don Williams is a minister and grief counselor in Killen, Alabama, USA.

**Give what you have. To someone it may be better
than you dare to think. — Longfellow**

Be kind. Every person you meet is fighting a difficult battle.

It's No New Adventure

G. Devadanam



The Christian life, whether or not you realize it, does not call for any *new* adventure, the Hebrew writer maintains. As we are in the

arena, fighting the battle of the life of faith, running the race of faith, he says, "*...we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of wit-*

nesses" (Hebrews 12:1).

While a ball game of some kind is being played, the **experts** are on the field, and the **amateurs** as well as the fans are seated in the spectators' gallery, witnessing and applauding the skills and heroism of the players. But in the spiritual world it is different. The dexterous, the skilful, the experts par excellence through the ages, who campaigned in their own generation and received the highest honors ever, are seated in the spiritual spectators' stand, while the amateurs and the fans are on the playground!

Let me illustrate further: On one occasion, a young preacher trainee was facing an audience of about three thousand people, comprised of mature Christians, elders, deacons and eminent Bible scholars. The young preacher became extremely nervous. There would be nothing strange about that, of course. In his opening remarks however, he said, "We all know that Daniel was in the lions' den; but today, I am kept in the den of Daniels." I can understand his feelings, and you can too. The Christian life is like that!

If we as Christians could only comprehend the reality of the spiritual world, and if we could see the great cloud of witnesses watching us run our race — the prophets, the martyrs, the saints of ages past —

we would surely feel more nervous than that preacher trainee! But, at the same time, surely we would walk more carefully in the footsteps of Christ, knowing that those who have walked in those steps before us are witnessing our trials and our response to life.

When our goal in all that we say and do is simply to please God, if we are hated — hated to the extent of being killed by our own family members — how do we take it? There are places in the world today where such dangers exist. And, yes, among that "great cloud of witnesses" are some who faced that kind of hatred and died rather than give up their faith! This path of being hated is not a new one.

Does your family distract you from walking with God? Keeping family relationships running smoothly, and meeting all the responsibilities without neglecting the prime relationship with God, is a constant challenge. Among the witnesses is a man who walked faithfully with God for three hundred long years! God was so pleased with him that at the end of his journey God invited him to a place of rest. This path of resisting distraction is not a new one.

It is one thing to be one among many; and it is entirely a different thing to stand alone for God. There was a righteous man, blameless man

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among the people of his time who walked with God (Genesis 6:9). When the whole world literally was on one side, he with his wife, sons and daughters-in-law stood together through God's judgment on the earth. They watch our journey, and they remind us that the path of being alone is not a new one.

The father of all of us who believe, the man whose faith directly influenced three generations of his descendants, and who continues to influence all the generations down the centuries thereafter, is one among the witnesses surrounding us. He believed in the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were (Romans 4:17). He watches us, with his son and grandson who shared the promises, despite suffering many hardships and waiting long in patience for the fulfillment of God's promises. The path of endurance is not a new one.

The young man who was hated by his own brethren and was sold into slavery, who later faced sexual temptation, was accused falsely, detained in the prison wrongly, and neglected for two years witnesses our journey, too. He has shown us that the path of righteousness in spite of ill-treatment is not a new one.

Next comes the meekest of the earth, and one who was faithful in all God's house (Numbers 12:3).

Other witnesses who were faithful in the face of every kind of challenge, temptation and hardship were Joshua, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, who through their faith accomplished many mighty things for God (Hebrews 11:30-35).

In the same stadium, as it were, others who refused to deny God were tortured for their faith, hoping for a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were put to death by the sword. They went in sheep-skins and goat skins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated (Hebrews 11:35-37). These, too, remind us that the path of faithfulness — whatever it may require of us — is not a new one.

In this generation, we are the players in the stadium, the athletes in the race. How do we fare? Are we willing to face hatred for pleasing God, to the extent of being killed like Abel? Do we walk with God in an undisturbed relationship so that God will be pleased to take us like Enoch? Is any one of us unique in the whole world as to be recognized by God like Noah? Are we like Abraham, the father of the faithful? Do we fear God as Isaac did or rely on Him like Jacob? Do we display a sublime attitude like

that of Joseph? With whose achievements of faith can we compare our own walk?

Writing to those who were facing one of the cruellest persecutions ever, Peter says, "*Beloved, do not be surprised at the painful trials you are suffering as though some thing strange were happening to you*" (1 Peter 4:12). It seems that nothing we endure now can be equated with the distinct record holders of the past in the realm of faith.

If there is anything of merit in our life's accomplishments, it must be that we have not only been the **recipients of the grace of God**, but that **we are obeying Him in sharing that grace with others**. For "*God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect*" (Hebrews 11:40). This is the gracious provision of God because of Christ! We are of the generations who have been entrusted with the greatest gift and the greatest respon-

sibility of all — of giving our time, and talents, and our very lives to the preaching of the Gospel to the whole world. This is what it means that "*only together with us would they be made perfect.*"

"*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.*

"*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Him Who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. In your struggle against sin, **you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood:***" (Hebrews 12:1-4). †

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"...now he hath promised, saying, 'Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven.' And this word, 'Yet once more', signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.

"*Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire*" (Hebrews 12:26-29).

What was I to do, that Lord's day afternoon, December 20, 1992, when the cracking voice at the other end of the telephone was telling me that my daughter, Jacey, had been involved in a terrible car accident? As God-loving and God-fearing people, how could this be happening to us? Was this a mistake or a nightmare? This was our beautiful seventeen-year old Christian daughter, our star high school athlete, the class president every year, the kind of daughter that every Christian daddy prays and hopes for in life. Is it really my Jacey?

The fear stung me to the very marrow of my bones. Could it possibly be true? In fear and panic I moaned silent prayers to my God. "Lord, she loves You, as our entire family does." "Jacey — Jacey," I moaned, "so full of life, so young, so very pretty. She loves her mother, her brother, and me, her dad, so very much, as we do love and honor her." The world for the entire Colburn family had just turned upside down.

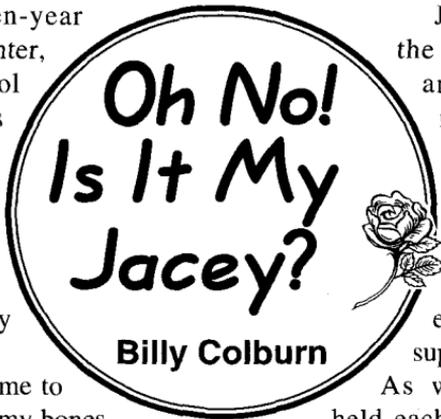
The word passed through the yard and house that our son Roman had just arrived from the campus of the University of Alabama, where he

was preparing for the national championship game against Miami. As Joy, my wife, and I sliced through the gathered masses of friends, relatives, and church people, we went to him. Though alarmed and bewildered by the unexpected crowds of people, Roman had no way of knowing that Jacey had died. Everyone had left that to us to reveal.

Joy tearfully broke the truth to Roman, and like us, it almost destroyed him. He and Jacey were so very close. We wrapped our arms around each other to literally help support one another.

As we huddled and held each other, everyone left us alone to be with God, with the pain, the tears, the sobbing of the three of us, and the pure agony of the loss of our beloved Jacey as it engulfed us.

And, as we supported each other with God right there in the middle in spirit, we reaffirmed our commitment to God and to each other, through the help of our Lord. We would not let this destroy our family. For every thing there is a reason. The time for Jacey to depart this world had come that day, and we had to learn to accept that reality, or die a thousand



deaths ourselves. We never once blamed God or even asked why. We all knew that our belief in God's Word and His divine promises to us as His children would somehow pull us through this tragedy.

As a high school athletic coach and classroom teacher, my wife, an elementary school teacher, and Roman with all his credentials and honors, we were known as God-fearing and God-loving Christians. Now we were being challenged to put into action all that we had ever taught our students, athletes, Sunday School students, and friends. We had always "talked the talk," and now we were about to "walk the dreaded walk." The three of us would learn first-hand a new depth of hope and faith in Jesus Christ our Lord.

We knew we had a living assurance. Psalm 116:15 reads, "*Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.*" As our family regrouped, and under the guidance of God's Word, I firmly believe these aspects of God's teaching helped us regain control of our lives and do the will of the Lord.

1. Like King David, we understood that our child could not come back to us, but we could and would go to where she is, by the grace of God. The Lord gave us that promise. Philippians 1:21 states, "*For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is to gain.*" Understand this with

all your heart — the Colburn family are servants of the Lord Jesus. A home in Heaven we seek.

2. I believe through this promise of God that we will have a great reunion with Jesus and our daughter. John 5:24 states, "*Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.*" The most important thing we can do is help those who have not yet found the key to that life.

3. We will go on in life and do the best we can in the name of Christianity. We will make mistakes, we will have some failure, we will lose some battles — but we will never surrender. "*If God be for us, then who can be against us?*" (Romans 8:31).

In conclusion, may I say to all who mourn for a loved one, let the battle be the Lord's. Jeremiah 17:7,8 states, "*Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope is the Lord. For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, which spreads out its roots by the river, and will not fear when heat comes; but its leaf will be green, and will not be anxious in the year of drought, nor will cease from yielding fruit.*"

May it be well with your soul.✠

Billy and Joy Colburn live in Fort Payne, Alabama, USA.

This is not the final word on courage, although it may be my final word that you will see published, for my medical prognosis is not what the doctor calls good.

Courage is not a veiled death wish as seen in the lifestyles that defy all reasonable expectations. Courage is not the instantaneous acts that most persons think of as heroic. Though many such acts are to be lauded, there is seldom much thought given to the consequences of one's actions.

Do not the Scriptures teach that we are to exercise wisdom, good judgment, and prudence? Courage analyzes all known factors, then decides upon a course of action based on that analysis. Yes, one may be fearful of the unknown. He may be even more fearful of known potentials. But courage acts, even though harm may be to one's self. When David is talking about the person who will abide in God's presence, he says in Psalm 15:1-4,

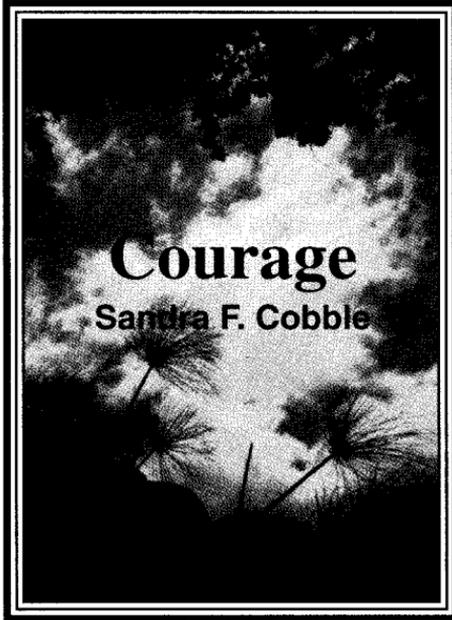
"Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart. He that back-

biteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbor, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbor. In whose eyes a vile person is condemned; but he honoureth them that fear the Lord. He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not."

Note that even when a person swore to his own hurt and yet had

the courage to keep his oath, David pronounced him blessed.

Courage is preparing to live in such a way as to glorify God, despite having been pronounced as terminally ill. **We are born terminally ill.** *"For it is appointed unto man once to die and after that the judgment"* (Hebrews 9:27). As we mature and become aware of death we may begin to make some type of arrangements for expiration, even though the idea of our own death seems unreal. We buy insurance.



We make wills. And the more mature among us begin thinking about making peace with God, with our neighbor, and with ourselves.

But then comes the announcement, "Your form of cancer has no known cure. The symptoms can be treated to some extent with radiation and chemotherapy. But you are dying. You should make arrangements to enter a nursing home so someone can care for you."

Generally persons tend to react in one of two ways. Many do not accept what their doctors have told them. They search everywhere for that elusive cure. Others simply give up. They take to their beds and lie there bemoaning their fate and waiting for death. Some may begin to enjoy the extra attention they are getting. They act in such a way as to evoke the sympathy of others.

But there is a better alternative, one that will glorify God. Even a smile can do wonders for another. So can a simple "please" or "thank you." Taking time to listen to another's problems can ease his burdens. These simple things glorify God.

And a person who is terminally ill can feel freer to ask, "How about a hug?" Both persons will feel better and will glorify God. And when a person comes to cheer up one who is terminally ill and leaves feeling better than when he came, then God has been glorified.

True courage does not ignore obstacles. True courage recognizes problems in the way, but goes on to glorify God despite all obstacles.

Mark Twain put it this way, "Courage is *resistance* to fear, *mastery* of fear, not *absence* of fear."

William Cullen Bryant said, "So live, that when thy summons comes to join the innumerable caravan which moves to that mysterious realm, where each shall take his chamber in the silent halls of death, thou go not, like the quarry-slave at night, scourged to his dungeon, but, sustained and soothed by an unflinching trust, approach thy grave, like one that wraps the drapery of his couch about him, and lies down to pleasant dreams."

However, Paul's inspired statement gives more comfort than any of the writings of ordinary men. He said in Philippians 1:23, "*For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better.*"

Those of us who have put our trust in the Lord and have accepted His grace through an obedient faith can take to heart the statement of Paul, for the great promise it contains. We can face the future with courage. †

Dr. Sandra F. Cobble is a Christian lady who has been diagnosed with terminal cancer. She lives in Manchester, Tennessee, USA.



An assailant came into my father's small convenience store in Belleville, Illinois and tried to kill him, using a filet knife and cutting his throat. The perpetrator's purpose was to kill someone so that he could spend his life in jail, which he felt would be better than the life he was currently living.

"Fasten your seat belts," said the stewardess. My hands were trembling so much I could barely buckle myself in. I

Forgiving the Offender

Debbie Burrow

kept repeating over and over in my mind, "Just hang in there, Dad; please just hang in there. I'll be there soon."

As the plane approached St. Louis International Airport, I tried to visualize what my father would look like. How could this have happened? Why didn't his attacker just take the money? I needed answers.

I stayed with my father in the hospital that night, going over all the questions I wished I could ask him. Then, ever so slowly, it crept in. Something that was so foreign to me — something that I had never had to deal with before. I had never felt anything as intense as the hatred I felt for this man who had hurt my father, my family, and the neighborhood. I did not know how to deal with it. I did not know where to begin.

I watched my family, and they were also consumed with fear and hatred. I did not even know how to pray.

Thinking back to Jesus and His crucifixion, I thought about Mary, His mother, and wondered how she must have felt. How did she deal with seeing her innocent Son put to death? I know she was surrounded by loved ones and that she prayed (Acts 1:14). But I felt I was being pulled farther and farther away from God. Mark 11:25 says, "*And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.*" It says against *anyone*, not just against your brother, but against *anyone*.

Forgive him? **How?**

Through His providence, God sent me Nancy, a close Christian friend.

She asked if she could pray with me. We held hands and she began her prayer. She prayed for my father and my family. Then she began to pray for my father's attacker. I felt my hands trying to pry away from her's. Thankfully she had a tight grip and did not let go.

Later I explained that I felt like I was in a dream, numb at heart. I knew the mechanism of *how* to pray, but I feared that my prayers were not being heard because of my hatred toward that man who had hurt my father.

That evening Nancy came back with a special gift called **The Bible Promise Book**. That book helped me to stay focused. I could look up specific verses that pertained to the way I was feeling. Some verses I would read again and again.

Then I slowly started to understand. *I could not let this man get in the way of my relationship with my God.* He had tried to take my earthly father. **I was not about to let him take my heavenly Father!**

I began looking up more Scriptures. Proverbs 20:22 reminded me, "*Do not say, I'll pay you back for this wrong! Wait for the Lord and He will deliver you.*" Isaiah 41:13 reassured me with the promise: "*For I am the Lord your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, 'Do not fear; I will help you.'*"

Slowly, I began to see how Mary had endured the death of her son on

the cross. God knew Mary would need help, so He gave her John and the other believers to help.

God knew I needed help, so He gave me Nancy and other Christian friends and family at the Fairview Heights Church of Christ. I realize how blessed I am and how sad it would be to go through such a crisis without the love of the Lord and a Christian family.

Fear and forgiving are difficult feelings to reconcile. I have gone to counselors and Christian ladies whose job is consoling and helping people work through their problems; they have helped me some, but unless you've gone through similar situations, it's hard for someone to understand exactly how one feels. I've prayed about this difficult situation that I have been in and have asked God to use me for His purpose. It's been five years now. My father has survived, but he lost his business and sense of peace. He has a constant feeling of fear. At one point I blamed God for all the pain that has come from this experience, but I realize it's not God, but the devil. I have vowed that the devil will not win, and he is not celebrating this as a victory, but a defeat! For I know that **my God** will always be the victorious one. †

Debbie Burrow worships with the Fairview Heights Church of Christ and lives with her family in O'Fallon, Illinois, USA.

Coping with Loneliness

W. T. Allison



Admiral Richard E. Byrd spent the long Antarctic winter nights alone at Bolling Advance Weather Base. During his four months of isolation, he lived in a small shack buried in the Antarctic snow. He lived with constant danger and discomfort. However, his greatest enemy was the solitude and loneliness.

Loneliness is as common today as physical hunger, especially in the great cities of the world. Millions of people crowd the busy streets; however, they are closed off from one another because of fear, selfishness, and unconcern. In a lonely world how vital and relevant becomes the community of Christians called "the church." Jesus developed an amazing strategy. Down in every community He planned to place a group of people gathered around His risen presence where people could count and could simply say, "I belong."

In coping with loneliness, each person has a responsibility. We must get involved with life. The world will let us shut ourselves off from the rest of society. Most of our problems begin when we get up in the morning to start our day. We don't really *start our day*...**We just get up!** One of the most famous neurosurgeons in Atlanta said that the first five minutes of each day determines the way the day will go. We would all do well to begin each day with this prayer: "Oh, God, don't let me die until I am dead." I've witnessed people who seem to die while they were still alive. I don't want this to happen to me. So, in the morning, don't just get up...**face up**, and anticipate what a good day it can be. You can choose to live a lonely life of solitude, or you can invite the world into your life. Don't die until you are dead! †

W. T. Allison preaches for the Creekwood Church of Christ in Mobile, Alabama, USA.

Disappointment In Another

Leon Barnes

Have you ever felt betrayed? Have there been times when someone you believed to be a dear friend let you down and the disappointment welled up into your heart? How do you react when you are disappointed in another?

When Paul had been disappointed in Mark because he turned back and did not go on with him and Barnabas to the work, his reaction was to not want Mark along again on a journey. He felt if Mark turned back once he probably would do so again when the going got tough. But Barnabas lovingly and forgivingly said to Mark, "Come with me and we will go another direction to serve the Lord." It would take time, but years later Paul would write about John Mark to Timothy and say, "*He is profitable to me for the ministry*" (2 Timothy 4:11).

When Demas disappointed Paul by forsaking him in the crisis hour, Paul felt the hurt and noted it to Timothy (2 Timothy 4:10). We

don't know beyond that report what happened with Demas afterward. Could he have regretted his departure and have come back again before Paul was executed? Did he move further and further into the land of sin? We don't know.

What is clear is this: all of us are at times disappointed in people, sometimes because we expect too much; sometimes because we fail to see it is two-sided and they are equally disappointed in us; and sometimes we are wronged by those we should be able to depend upon.

But no matter what men do, our need is to stay close to God and continue His work. Even if we misjudge some who disappoint us, as Paul did Mark, time may give us the opportunity to see the mistake and grow closer than ever before. Disappointments aren't fatal unless we allow them to be so. †

Leon Barnes preaches for the Barrow Road congregation in Little Rock, Arkansas, USA.



Fire never wins....

F Oh, it wins battles quite often, but it never wins the war. There have been forest fires that raged unchecked for thousands of acres, but always the rains or rivers or earth and stone come between the fire and its hunger to consume everything in sight.

-There was the Chicago fire in 1871 that nearly wiped out the city, but once again water finally won. At times fire has burst forth in a mighty effort from places like Vesuvius, Krakatoa, and Mount St. Helens, sure that this time things would be different. But, alas, even these were finally stifled.

Mike Hinton

You see, the fire can never really win in a world that's made up mostly of things that aren't flammable. But it dreams. Each day as the sun passes overhead the fire dreams of that time when it will win, when it will reign supreme. And hope springs eternal in fire, "Someday, someday," it says, "I'm going to win." Yet, for now, save for an occasional outburst, fire remains confined, controlled, enslaved.

Christians are like fire in some ways. Sometimes it seems we can win a battle or two, but the ultimate victory eludes our grasp. From time to time we burst forth and sweep through large areas, converting thousands of the lost. But always we are stifled by the forces of this world — materialism, humanism, paganism — and like the fire, we sometimes just run out of fuel. Each day, though, we look toward the Son and dream of a day when we will win, when we will emerge triumphant in this seemingly one-sided war. But for now we must remain in a world made up mostly of people who can't seem to be ignited by the gospel.

In spite of the opposition, God's remnant here on earth can dream. We can plan and we can work and we can purpose how we will inflame the whole world with the gospel. And we can wait for that final victory God has promised us.

You see, someday both Christians and fire will finally win!
Read 2 Peter 3:10-14.
"But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new

earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless." †

Mike Hinton is a Christian living in Hobart, OK, USA.

Hope

Hope is a window to heaven,
Giving us glimpses above,
Urging us on to that haven,
Completely surrounded by love.

Hope is a fuel that propels us,
Giving us power to go,
Furnishing light to our pathway,
Accenting heaven's bright glow.

Hope is a lifeline that saves us,
As we go struggling along,
Guiding our steps and direction,
Marching to Heaven's sweet song.

Hope is a balm for the Christian,
Soothing the tired weary soul,
Furnishing gentle persuasion
As we press on to our goal.

— Harold D. Duncan

A Ex Gangster's Prayer

Jim Nixon

Heavenly Father, please hear me tonight.
I need so much guidance to live my life right.
Sometimes the pressure is so hard to bear.
I often wonder if anyone cares.

How can I wake up and face a new day
Knowing I must live my life this crazy way?

Heavenly Father, forgive all my sins,
Give me strength to resist the wild life I desire.
Help me escape temptation and the fire.

Please help my family whose eyes silently plead for me
not to do wrong, and they pray for me.
God bless our mothers who cry every night,
Worrying we'll be killed by someone in a fight.

Heavenly Father, please answer my prayers.
Please let me know that you're listening up there.
When will it end? What's it all for?
To prove to my homies I'm down; I'm hardcore?

Sometimes I wonder how I will die...
By a bullet wound or a knife in my side?

Heavenly Father, please hear me tonight.
Show me the way, Lord, show me the light.
Give my heart peace so I won't have to fight.

Thank you for your forgiveness and for still being there.
Most of all, Thank You for hearing my prayer. †

Jim Nixon is an inmate in prison who is trying to turn his life around.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Perhaps few of us would categorize the plight of a criminal with "tragedy and disaster", but that is what his life has become — by the "storm" he has brought to himself. Often, it is in prison that people who somehow went wrong and never could seem to "get it right" are finally able to turn their thinking and their life around. Many in the Lord's church are now ministering to these lost people. May they have success and God's blessing.



A sad-looking old Texan prayed, "I wish it would rain – not so much for me, because I've seen it – but for my 7-year-old grandson."



"How did the wedding go?" asked the preacher's wife. "Just fine 'till I asked the bride if she would obey, and she said, 'Do you think I'm nuts?' and the groom said, 'I do,' and then things really began to happen fast."



Have you ever wondered why *abbreviation* is such a long word?



Old Uncle Charlie is so forgetful that he can play hide-and-seek all by himself.



Bill's wife was about to have their first baby. One day the nurse at the maternity ward answered the phone, and Bill's excited voice was on the other end.

"This is Bill Jones!" he yelled. "I'm bringing my wife in right now – she's about to have baby!"

"Try to keep calm," said the nurse. "Is this her first baby?"

"No!" he yelled. "This is her husband!"



A man's life is made up of 20 years of his mother asking where he is going, 45-50 years of his wife asking him where he's been, and one hour at his funeral when everyone wonders where he is headed.



You may not have heard about the preacher who was feeling under the weather, so he sent his wife to the drugstore for a thermometer so she could take his temperature. It seems that she got a barometer by mistake. She felt that the instrument had diagnosed his condition exactly, however. When she pulled it out of his mouth it read, "Dry and windy."

PROVERBS 17:22

The doctor told me that he'd have me on my feet in no time. It worked. To pay his bill I had to sell my car.



A suburban housewife was telling her neighbor about a new book on weight loss she had bought for \$20.00. Her friend asked how much she had lost so far. The woman replied, "Just \$20.00."



Six-year-old Amanda and her four-year-old brother Andrew were sitting together in church. Andrew giggled, sang, and talked out loud. Finally, his big sister had enough. "You're not supposed to talk out loud in church." "Why? Who's gonna stop me?" Andrew asked. Amanda pointed to the back of the church and said, "See those two men standing by the door? They're hushers."



Little Carl was having dinner at Steven's house. Trying to help their guest, Steven's mother asked, "Are you sure you can cut the meat by yourself?" Carl answered, "Sure. At home, the meat is this tough, too!"

I know this place that serves blended coffee – yesterday's and today's.



They've come out with a new deodorant called Vanish. After you rub it on, you disappear, and no one knows where the smell comes from.



Joe married Flo for her looks, but not the ones she's been giving him lately!



There's a new face cream for men over 40. It makes you look younger by giving you acne.



First man: "How long have you been working here?"

Second man: "Ever since the boss threatened to fire me."



A doctor asked his woman patient her age. "I never tell anyone my age," she answered coyly. "But, as a matter of fact, I've just reached 21."

"Indeed," said the doctor. "What detained you?"



When Disaster Strikes

*“Therefore, as we have
T opportunity, let us
do good to all, especially to*

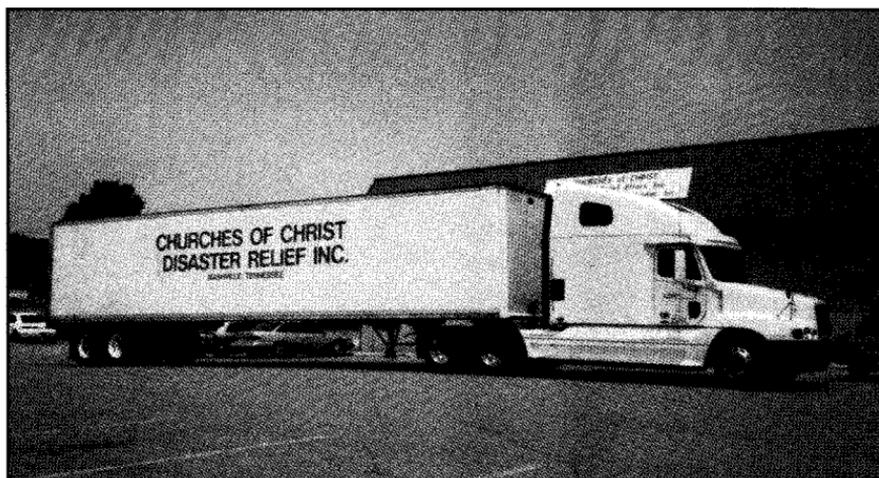
those who are of the household of faith” (Galatians 6:10).

In the life of Jesus, Christians have the perfect example of love toward our fellowman, and mercy toward those in distress. Christians have been blessed with immeasurable wealth in this world, as we experience the salvation of our souls, and God’s watchful care in our daily lives. We are taught to magnify the name of the Lord, by the way we live among our fellow-men (Philippians 1:20). When people are hurting, when they have lost loved ones, or their home and possessions, their physical security, and their emotional peace, then is the time for us as Christians to open our hearts and to help in whatever ways we can to relieve the suffering of the victims.

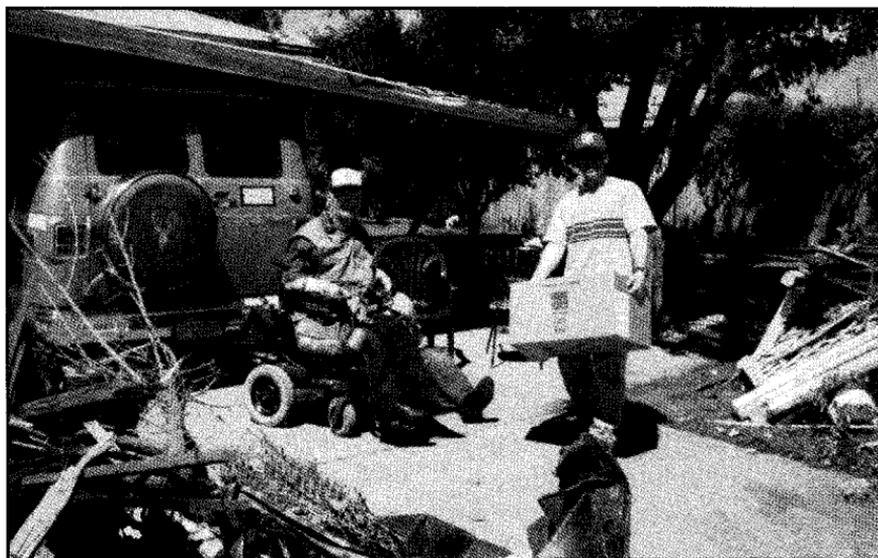
The following stories and articles were written from numerous perspectives. Some express the plight and show the hearts of those who have been victims of disaster. In sharing their own painful experiences, the writers have struggled to bring a measure of reassurance and comfort to those who are suffering some newly-occurred tragedy. Other articles were written by those who have held out the helping hand, and are testimonies to the warm out-pouring of God’s love through the hearts of His children.

Our purpose in preparing this issue of **THE VOICE OF TRUTH INTERNATIONAL** is to bring you hope, sympathy and empathy, and to extend a helping hand in the name of God’s family, the church.

FROM THE HEART OF ...



Spreading the Message of God's Love



in the Midst of Chaos and Despair

Joe L. Dudney

(Managing Editor's note – This article will hopefully serve to acquaint our readers somewhat with what churches of Christ have done and are doing to help in time of great tragedy.)

Newspapers, radio, and television deliver the bad news: **“Hurricane Floyd pummels eastern United States, thousands flee flooding.”**

For Christians, any national disaster instantly becomes a door of opportunity to reach out and touch shocked, frightened victims with the reality of God’s love and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That’s the good news!

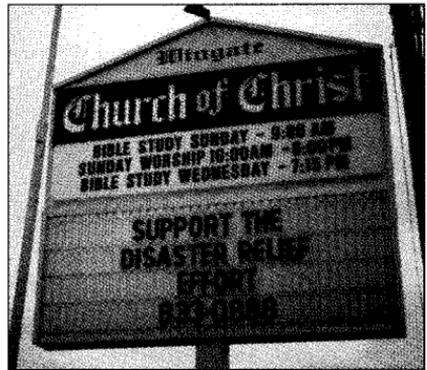
When any major disaster — flooding, hurricanes, tornadoes, ice storms, earthquakes — strikes in the continental United States, staff and volunteers at the Churches of Christ Disaster Relief Effort in Nashville, Tennessee, instantly mobilize to send emergency food, water, cleaning and other supplies to disaster victims.

Housed in a 48,500 square-foot operations center, the Disaster Relief Effort has distributed more than \$15 million in aid to victims in 33 states since 1991.

Individual Christians, congregations, and corporations from all across America demonstrate their love for victims by prayer, sending cash donations, or by donating much-needed food and supplies.

Within hours of any large-scale

disaster, volunteers at the operations center quickly pack Family Food Boxes, personal care and infant care boxes, cleaning and other supplies, and load them on large trucks. All of the supplies are distributed through local congregations in the disaster area in the name of the Lord.



The signboard of the church, urging support for the disaster relief efforts in progress.

Since the beginning of 1999, the Disaster Relief Effort has distributed more than \$4.2 million in food and supplies to victims in 15 states. In 1998, the non-profit organization shipped more than \$4.1 million in aid to victims in 19 states. Low costs and expenses allow Disaster Relief to multiply every **\$1 donation** into **\$4 worth of goods**.



Volunteers filling Family Food Boxes with essential foods and supplies to last a family of four for one week. Other types of boxes, filling special needs, are also supplied.

A **Bible** is included in each relief box, along with a **hand-written letter of encouragement**. The emergency aid is distributed to believer and non-believer, alike. Follow-up reports prove that thousands of people have been reached and helped, many have been restored, and hundreds baptized. As a result of this outreach, many congregations have increased their attendance two-fold and many new congregations established.

All work at operations and in the field follow Biblical cooperative patterns, and heed Biblical com-

mandments to feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, and preach the Gospel. Later, as victims are able to move home, the Churches of Christ Disaster Relief Effort helps in other ways. New beds, furniture, and major appliances are shipped free of charge to replace those damaged by winds or water. Food, water, and other supplies are sent as long as there is need.

Spiritual needs are met, as well. In September of 1999, two seasoned ministry workers were added on staff. These men have established an outreach program to follow up

FROM THE HEART OF . . .

needs in disaster areas. The men, working with local elders and church leaders, will help train, nourish, and support disaster volunteers in the local congregation. They will also help meet physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of the victims.

A veteran gospel preacher travels across America speaking to elders and congregations about the purpose of the Disaster Relief Effort and how we work. As a result, hundreds of congregations have joined hands with us to alleviate human suffering right here in the United States.

Disasters, as grim as they can

be, often present unprecedented opportunities to share the Gospel of Christ. Volunteers and victims alike can see the Gospel in action as caring brothers and sisters around the United States demonstrate their love and concern by sending money to purchase items needed.

For instance, the Disaster Relief Effort must buy about 65% of the contents of the Family Food Box. Corporations donate the other 35%. The Family Food Box contains enough food and staples to last a family of four for one week. Each box costs about \$95 to assemble. Typically, according to need,



Supplies are delivered to victims by local churches of Christ, as in this case in Midwest City, Oklahoma.



An aerial view of Interstate 40 and surrounding houses in the tragic flooding in North Carolina in 1999.

600-800 boxes are loaded at a time on the truck for distribution.

Volunteers are the key to this organization. More than a dozen volunteers — many retired — come to the operations center daily to sort and pre-pack supplies. When disaster strikes, as many as 300 people from area congregations rush to the center to load the huge tractor-trailer trucks. Within a couple of hours the truck is on its way to the disaster area.

The executive director and members of the board of directors

and advisory board are all volunteers. A small support staff runs the center. Low operating costs, including salaries, plus judicious, volume-buying keeps overhead to a minimum. We are proud to say that for every dollar donated, more than 85 cents goes to disaster victims. This ranks us in the elite few of American charities. †

Joe L. Dudney is a retired agricultural expert and church elder who volunteers his time as vice president and executive director of the Churches of Christ Disaster Relief Effort, Inc., located in Nashville, Tennessee, USA.

A Hurting People

Richard Machen

When Augustine gave the starving lady rice, she wept. For eight days she had prayed, "God, what did I do wrong? My children and I are so hungry. My God, where are you?" He responded with rice. What joy, what thankfulness she felt. I cried too. Tons of tears have been shed since Mitch sent such suffering on these humble Hondurans.

We continue to search for answers. Here are two points that keep popping up for us and can also be an encouragement to you in your present distress.

✓ You may receive much-needed help from caring strangers who are Christians. They may become your best friends.

✓ You may also be used by God and become a key helper to other hurting people.

For eleven years our mahogany farm and furniture factory have been located in Trujillo, Honduras. Our factory, employees, vehicles, and equipment made us ideal servants after the storm. Living in Slidell, Louisiana, we had experienced Hurricanes Betsy and Camille, which had wrecked the Gulf Coast. Great preparation for Mitch!

We arrived in Honduras two days before the first warning. Hearing that it was coming, my heart sank. No one else prepared, but with our experience we knew better. Counting our workers and their families, we figured we were directly responsible for 400 lives. We accept them as part of our family, but this storm was so big that we also developed an attachment for everyone around us who would be devastated. These people did nothing to deserve such harsh treatment. We had to help all we could.

Daniel was a godsend in the crisis. When asked to help, he said, "I am only a fisherman, I can't save lives." But he learned quickly. From his boat he saw a huge body of water overwhelming everything. He found folks on housetops screaming to be rescued. The boat quickly filled up. He went to higher ground and rushed back to save more, working three days with no rest. Many were in shock. Water depth was ten feet; the current so swift that a single miscue could destroy the boat and occupants.

One family was on the roof for days without food. When Daniel's

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boat motor was heard, a teenage boy jumped into the torrent, swam a long way to the boat, was taken aboard, and directed them to his ravished family. A few minutes later, the house disappeared. His courage saved his entire family. Others were in trees; their arms were frozen in that clinging position. When rescued, they would lie on their backs for hours, still in that hugging position.

Daniel is my hero and a hero to all those whose lives he touched. He had no other motivation but love. He saved twelve hundred people. He has taught me a lot about giving in secret and putting life's priorities where they should be. We never know how much courage we have until it is tested. One boat sank when thirty people clamored aboard, but by God's providence, all were spared.

About sixty families rescued by Daniel set up a tent city. Daniel and our team brought them food and other needs. Land was given by the city. We gave them water and electricity and built homes for them. Our factory became the command center and relief goods storehouse.

We were swamped doing essential work all over. Our family and friends at home had no idea of whether we were dead or alive, but within a few

days they had set up a center in Slidell to provide major relief for Honduras. My youngest son, Robert, and a close friend, Dick Cookenham, were quick to get there with critical medical supplies. Robert's arrival cheered us all, especially his mother. Her son had come to help, out of his love for his family and many friends he had there.

To you who are in the early stages of your catastrophe, let me say:

1. Bear your own burdens as best you can (Galatians 6:5).
2. Christians want to help you (Galatians 6:2).
3. When you can, start helping others (Galatians 6:10).
4. Trust God to keep His promises (Proverbs 3:5,6).

If you knew the whole story, as I do, you would say . . . What a God! What a victory! What a love! †

Richard Machen is a lawyer, a builder, and a Christian deeply involved in God's work in Honduras. He resides with his wife, Louise, in Slidell, Louisiana, USA.



Shelter, when shelter is gone.



Norberto Otero

A few weeks after the devastating effect of Hurricane Mitch in Central America in October 1998, I had the opportunity of visiting one of the most heavily damaged areas in Honduras, the Valley of Aguan. Recently it was renamed "the Valley of Tears" by those who witnessed its savage and violent destruction, the rising waters that swelled the Aguan River to incredible proportions.

The river was described as a massive body of water seventy miles long and ten miles wide. Entire villages were overrun, thousands of acres of farm and cattle land were destroyed, and thousands of animals were killed in the process. An overwhelming cloud of sadness and sorrow covered the entire Valley. No one knows for sure how many people died, but one could hear and see the pain experienced in those days. Incredible sorrow was painted on the faces of the people we saw.

One morning, I had an opportunity to visit with a group of about twelve kids from a newly established village called **Mision del Caribe de Colon**. These were refugees who had lost their homes and were beginning life anew. Their ages ranged between 7 and 12 years. When I asked them to share their experience with me, I was very surprised to see how eager they were to talk about it. But being kids, they all started to talk at the same

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time. So I asked them to tell their stories, but one person at a time.

Orlin Noel, one of the oldest, started first, and he told me that they really enjoyed the first part of the storm.

I asked, "How can that be?" and added, "Weren't you scared?"

They all raised their voices loudly and at the same time said "Nooooo!" Edwin Vadimir, who was very eloquent and smart, explained the reason. "See, strong winds came through blowing so hard that Sunday afternoon that trees lost their leaves and lots of coconuts fell to the ground, we were sooooo happy!" He added, "We had never seen anything like that."

Edwin's cousin, Odin, said, "Yeah, that's right, and we ate coconut the rest of the day!"

Orbin, another of Edwin's relatives, jumped in the middle of the conversation and said, "True, and we ate so much that we got the runs!"

They all laughed and pointed at each other saying, "You got it too, remember!"

Then Edwin spoke again and said softly, "Then we did not like the storm anymore!" looking down at the ground.

I asked immediately, "Why?"

He said, "Well, we saw how the waters were taking away our homes, our pets and domestic animals and..."

That is when Quenci, a lithe

girl of ten, yelled out, "... and my doll, too!"

They lost everything they had. According to their story everything happened so fast that they can hardly remember how it happened. All of a sudden they found themselves running or swimming for their lives.

Some said that after they left their homes they could not recognize the area. Everything flooded, some areas up to forty-five feet, making it hard to find landmarks to identify where they were. Their parents asked them to climb on trees and go as high as they could. They stayed on those trees for almost three days, with nothing to eat or drink. Some of them saw members of their family leave the trees to go out and find help and never return.

The children told me about their rescue and how they struggled for weeks to find a place they could call home. Finally, after many terrible hardships, a relief organization was able to assist them. They helped them build homes and gave them pieces of land to replace the ones they lost. That is how I came in contact with them. I asked them if they would go back to the place they used to live. They all said in one voice "Nooooo!"

I asked, "Why not?"

They said plainly and convincingly, "Because it might be flooded again."

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One added, "We like where we are because we know that at least this area will not be flooded by waters." Edwin stated "Yes, because we live now *on higher ground.*"

In Latin America people do not have a warning system or a specific plan for evacuation in case of flooding or some other major disaster. That is why so many lives are lost when storms hit in that part of the world. Some governments are now thinking about developing some kind of warning.

The Lord gives us warning in the Bible. He teaches us to be wise and points out that a wise man digs deep and builds his house on the rock, Matthew 7:24b. Also the scriptures say that "*wisdom is sweet to your soul; if you find it, there is a future for you, and your hope will not be cut off*" Proverbs 24:14.

The children found wisdom in moving to higher ground. Jesus

Christ is higher ground for our souls. He is the rock on which you can live in safety and security forever. What a joy to sing the Hymn that says, "On Christ, the solid rock, I stand, all other ground is sinking sand".

We can anticipate other storms coming to shake and test our lives. They may be different in nature, but concerning one thing we can be sure: our foundation is strong if we are standing on Jesus Christ. We do not know what the future holds, but we can have faith in the Lord because *He "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and future"* Jeremiah 29:11b †

Norberto Otero: A Panamanian graduate from Harding University and a Walton scholar. He has served as missionary to Honduras since 1992. He has worked with summer groups, medical programs, and leadership training in the departments of Colon and Olancho in Honduras. He has been working for Mision del Caribe and the Churches of Christ in relief efforts to Central and South America since November 1998. He volunteered

to work with the Honduran government and held a high level position during the relief efforts, assisting both the churches and the local and international communities to get needed supplies to those in need. Presently he travels and gives speeches on relief efforts and missions in Latin America.



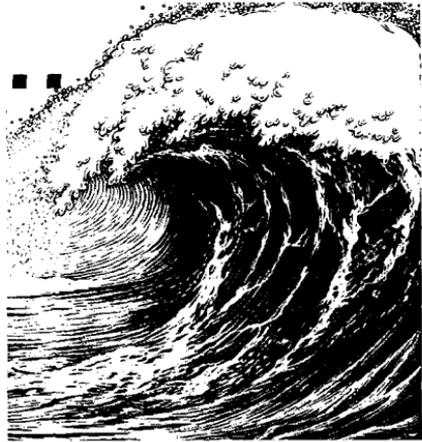
Andrew...

and After

Thelma Mills

We lived amid the plant nurseries and tree groves of Homestead, Florida; and my husband, Roger, preached for the church there. When the news came that Hurricane Andrew was to hit southern Florida early on Monday morning, I was away visiting my sisters in Alabama. Roger and our daughter Melody were at home with four stranded senior citizens.

When I learned of the storm's approach I begged Roger to leave, but there was nowhere to go for safety. There was absolutely nothing I could do except pray, and you can believe I did that! I slept little on Sunday night and was up long before dawn to catch what news I could on television. The devastation they showed was enough to make my heart leap to my throat. I heard that a young woman was killed when the ceiling fell in on her. She lived about a mile north of Homestead, just off Krome Avenue. That fit a description of my daughter and where we lived! The uncertainty, the unknown, the terrible fear of seeing so much and yet knowing so little were torture to my heart.



My daughter Gena, who lived near Ft. Lauderdale, got word to me that Roger and Melody were all right, but I did not have any contact with them for 2-1/2 days, and was not able to speak with Roger until I got home the following Friday night. I know that going through the storm was terrible for those who experienced the reality of it, but it is also heart-rending to be 1,000 miles away when loved ones are in danger.

My sister and brother-in-law, Irene and Alvin Parker, took me home, and we reached Homestead after dark. Can you imagine finding your way off a turnpike and through town, when there are absolutely no landmarks or street signs still standing — no recognizable buildings or houses? There was utter desolation for 50 square miles — worse than a war zone, according to several military veterans.

I was in a state of shock to find most of our belongings ruined, but I was deeply thankful that my family and church family were alive. Yes, physical belongings often dominate our time and thinking, but tragedies get our attention and help us to refocus on more important priorities. *"We brought nothing into this world and it is certain that we will take nothing out"* (1 Timothy 6:7). Jesus' words, *"Lay not up for yourselves treasures on the earth, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven..."* (Matthew 6:19-20) took on a new and deeper meaning.

During the year that it took to rebuild, we experienced many highs and lows. The times that I cried (the highs) were when trucks came in with food and water, showing us that our brethren loved us! Caring brethren from Churches of Christ sent over four million dollars to our congregation in supplies and cash, which fed 300 families a day for four months and helped to rebuild many lives.

One of the "lows" and most depressing thing was the view from our bedroom window — an odorous rubbish heap (about 30' x 40' x 70'), and although the generators kept us going, the loud noises from them night and day were a major source of "sound pollution." Since we had no air conditioning, the windows were all open, so dirt, odors, and noise were constant in our lives.

It took all of our efforts just to exist for six months. We had no electricity for four months and no telephones for quite some time. No grocery stores, no post office, no banks — in short, no support system for day-to-day living.

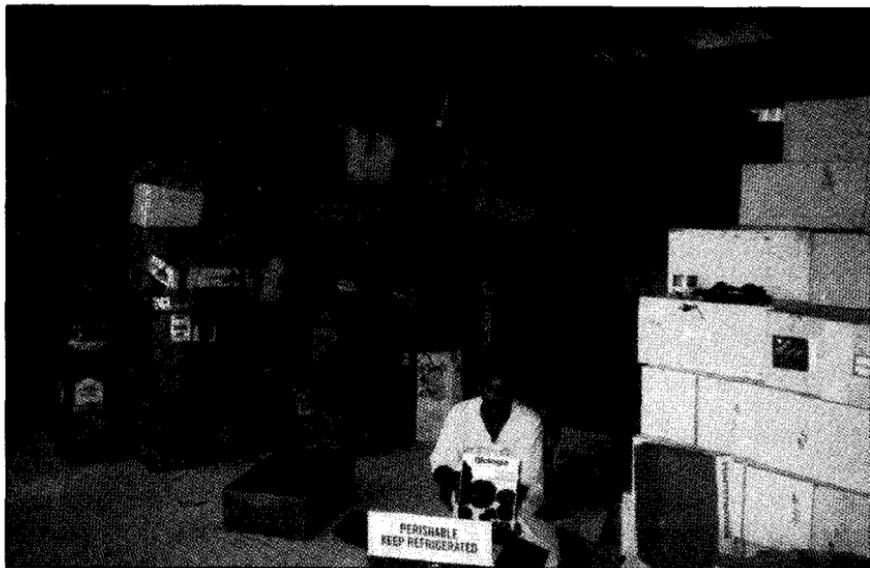
The hardest part was seeing hungry, hurting people and knowing of deaths and injuries to people we knew. There is no way to relate all the traumatic experiences one goes through in these disasters. Only when you have been through a major tragedy can you understand the despair and grief involved. Our hearts go out to anyone suffering any such trauma.

Even though each person's loss and pain is different, rest assured that you can survive — with God's help, with caring Christians, and your own determination to overcome. It will take time, but hang on!

Define your trials, list your strengths, identify your support people, and discover a "pearl" that developed through your tragedy. **Seek God and keep your faith strong.**

God has used Churches of Christ to provide help in many disasters. If you have just experienced a tragedy, we hope and pray that we may be of comfort and assistance to you. †

Thelma Mills and her husband now live in Florence, Alabama, USA.



The Word Is . . .

Hope

Dr. Randy Steger

If you have ever been in a disaster, you may know the feeling of hopelessness that can occur when you are facing a terrible situation. Some people feel all alone. Some feel that they have no control over what is happening to them.

Approximately two thousand years ago a disaster occurred in Jerusalem. Christians were suffering and needed help. We don't know much about all the problems they faced, except that the needs were great and they wanted help.

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Christians in other countries received word of the suffering in Jerusalem, and *the first international relief program of the church was started*. We should not be surprised at the church's response to the need, because anyone who has studied the teachings of Jesus knows how important it is to Him that His people help those who are suffering. We are taught to do good to all men, **especially** those of the household of faith (Galatians 6:10).

As people started receiving help in Jerusalem a wonderful thing happened. Paul writes about this to one of the churches that helped in the relief program. In 2 Corinthians 9:12-15 he states that the people started praising God. You see, God deserves praise for the help that Christians give to others. He taught us how to love strangers, how to feel the pain of those who are suffering and how to care what happens when someone is sick or hungry.

Christians understand the concept that one of the reasons they exist is to help others in the name of the Lord so that His name would be praised. The people in Jerusalem understood they were not alone in facing their suffering and that God cared what happened to them, and as a result, they started praising God.

Two thousand years later the church is still involved in helping

people worldwide. One organization developed by Christians and dedicated to serving those who are in need or who are facing overwhelming troubles is Healing Hands International. Supported by churches of Christ, Healing Hands has been working for over ten years in 31 countries. Sending food, medical supplies, medicine, and other related aid, hundreds of congregations and thousands of Christians are working together through Healing Hands to show the love of Jesus to those who need help.

Paul also wrote in 2 Corinthians 9:14 that the people who received the help "*yearn for*" or "*long after*" those who had sent the aid. Anyone who has experienced a disaster knows the special relationship that develops between those who need help and those who are helping. Those who are facing the crisis begin to realize they are not alone and that others care what happens to them. Those who are helping realize that they are sharing in the indescribable gift that God has for all mankind . . . His love and grace, which give all of us **hope** for a better future with Him.

This is the word everyone needs to remember in a disaster . . .
HOPE. †

Dr. Randy Steger is President of Healing Hands International, which is based in Nashville, Tennessee, USA.

FROM THE HEART OF . . .

The great thing about the “disasters” in my life is that I have been able to live long enough to see the “benefits” of the events. *“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance”* (James 1:1,2).

Barbara and I, Paul, our 12-year-old son, and Alicejoy, our 8-year-old daughter, first went to a foreign mission field in January, 1966, to work with the Nigerian Christian Hospital and the Bible School at Onicha Ngwa-14 Mile Post on the Aba to Ekot Ekpene Road. It was a beautiful old established compound with four houses, hospital, and school buildings.

We were blessed to follow the Jim Massey family there. The work was in full swing with a total of sixty-six Americans living in Nigeria as missionaries. The school and hospital were flourishing. Little did we know that in six months’ time, because of the Biafran War, we would be in a different country where they spoke a different lan-

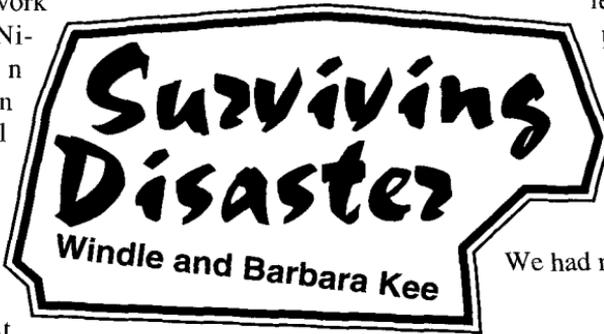
guage — with only three co-workers, and the clothes on our backs.

Our Abrupt Departure From Nigeria During the Biafran War...

We had taken pride in the fact that we went so well equipped, covering all our needs for our three-year tour. We had ten drums of clothing and supplies, a new car and a well-furnished house. But overnight, we only had **three suitcases of things for four people, and no car and no house.** When we had

left the compound and hospital, we were told the bombing was starting very soon.

We had no doubt that



the whole place would be destroyed. It was difficult to leave a work of that size and influence for the Lord.

The details of evacuating a country in time of war are similar, but the blessings from each situation are different. (1) To us, seeing the courage and calm of our missionaries was a great blessing. (2) Having our children say years later that we made it a positive experience and caused them not to fear was a blessing. (3) Learning that “things” are really **not** important and learning to **make-do** with what was available taught us so much. Learning what are the “real values of life” was a great blessing. (4) Being able to help build on the work that had already been done in the country of Cameroon to which we were evacuated was a great blessing. There are about 125 congregations now in Cameroon. (5) Having both of those children who were with us later become foreign missionaries has been a great blessing.

While going through what men call “disasters”, you can be very frightened and almost numb, but we both felt a definite “watchful eye” over us and thank God daily for His presence in our lives.

Being Beaten and Robbed by Thieves in Cameroon....

Having just returned from a trip to celebrate our 39th wedding anniversary in June of 1992, we were

sleeping soundly, when suddenly we were awakened at 1:30 a.m. by the sounds of shouting, hammering, and the crashing in of our front door.

We had lived in Cameroon since 1967 and had watched the political situation deteriorate. There were fewer jobs, higher taxes, and very little representation for the people there. As a result, thieves were rampant, and there was much unrest. Several foreign missionaries had already been beaten and robbed. Many “missions” had sent their people out, and those of us remaining were being warned by our embassies to take precautionary measures.

We had practiced calling out to our African neighbors, made a plan with our “watch night” to not resist but to run for help, and had put four locks on the front door. We never kept much cash in the house and had a minimum of personal possessions. We felt prepared, and after having experienced the situation in Nigeria, we were not as alarmed as many were.

Now the thieves had come to us! We heard the noise, and I immediately jumped to the window and shouted to Terese, our neighbor. “Thieves!” is all I managed to get out before they reached me and began beating me with a steel rod they had wrenched away from Windle. There were five of them, and two beat us while the others ransacked the house.

FROM THE HEART OF . . .

They kept saying they were going to kill us if we didn't tell them where "the safe" was. They wouldn't believe we had such a small amount of cash for a "mission."

I was thinking of the times we had seen and heard of people beating thieves to death on the site of their crime, and we warned these men that our neighbors were coming and they had better go quickly! We couldn't believe it, but they listened and began to leave! It was then that we really did hear our neighbors coming — many of them — and they almost caught the thieves as they ran away.

The most wonderful thing that happened to me in this terrible ordeal was that I realized I was not afraid to die! It was a very good feeling that I had never experienced so vividly before. God said, "*Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.*" So we say with confidence, "*The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?*" (Hebrews 13:5,6).

When our neighbors arrived, they could see we needed immediate medical attention. They called two of our doctor friends. Windle had multiple bruises and wounds, and I had a broken arm, three broken fingers, and had to have several stitches.

We never felt so loved in our lives. The Africans took total care of us for the first two weeks, preparing all our meals. Four African doctors

and many African nurses attended to our wounds. We realized what an opportunity this was for the world to see how Christians react to such a situation. Certainly our pulses raced, but being fully assured of our Father who loved us as His children gave us confidence and lessened our fear.

They were amazed that we could remain in the country after this happened, and now each time we go back and take others with us, they always mention that they thought we'd never come again. We feel that God used this incident and us for many good purposes. Many said they were encouraged by us.

We think of what James 5:11 says when speaking of the perseverance of Job ... "*and have seen what the Lord finally brought about.*" It is the Lord who gives us needed assistance in time of trauma and difficulty. We can now say, "the Lord is full of compassion and mercy."

It gave us a new outlook on the scripture which says, "*Be very careful, then, how you live — not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil*" (Ephesians 5:16,17). It made us want to work even harder "*as we see the Day approaching*" (Hebrews 10:25). †

Windle & Barbara Kee went to Africa first in 1967 and still make working trips to Cameroon and Belize, Central America. Windle now preaches for the church in Onalaska, Texas, USA.

What Do You Do When Your World Is Turned Upside Down?

Benny Baker

What do you do when your world is turned upside down? Everyday, around the world, situations and circumstances are changing lives. It may be a flood, a hurricane, an accidental or premature death, random acts of violence, and the list can go on. Although different, there is a shared commonality in that the events are out of our control and they turn our lives upside down.

Over the last two years, I have been involved in three such events: a school shooting in Arkansas, Hurricane Mitch in Latin America, and a wife trying to kill her husband. These events were not isolated to an individual but affected many families, a church, and communities. Two of these times the world was watching.

How do we help each other deal with pain and tragedy? How do we help turn lives right side up? Obviously, there is no magic cure-all answer to these questions. There is, however, an important relationship with God and with each other that *forms the foundation for deal-*

ing with pain and tragedy when it comes — that is not **if** it comes, but **when** it comes.

To respond to pain and tragedy in your life and in the lives of others, you must first *get started*. After the school shooting in Arkansas, I was at the hospital with the father of one of the victims. As we were leaving the hospital, he asked, “What are we going to do?” My response was, “Nothing tonight, we are just going to take one step at a time, putting one foot in front of the other and leave the hospital.” So often we look for the quick fix to everything, but **there are no quick fixes when pain and tragedy turn our world upside down**. We get started by taking *one step at a time, one day at a time* (Matthew 6:34).

So much of our response to those difficult times in our lives will be set by *what we bring into those times*. Lynette Thetford, the teacher who was wounded, took to school that day a faith in God. When she realized that she had been shot, she began to pray. She felt she was going to die; and as she prayed for

her family and for the forgiveness of those who had done this (not knowing it was one of her students), she looked to her Lord and was at peace, a peace that passes any human understanding. She understood what Paul meant in 2 Timothy 1:12, "...I know whom I believe." She shared with me a lot about that time, but the wisdom she gives us today is to **look to God before the difficult times come so we will know where to look when they do come.** That need for a strong, pre-existing relationship with Him cannot be over-stressed.

A second essential in facing disaster is the relationship we bring with each other. There was a song a few years ago titled "Lean On Me." We are God's arms and legs that provide a place for people to lean during times of pain and tragedy. These relationships are not just contacts with others we meet casually from day to day, but they are relationships we have deliberately developed in our lives. They are relationships that take risks, that are transparent, that care enough to be able to comfortably laugh, cry, and pray together (Romans 12:15; James 15:13-16; Acts 12:12), relationships that move us to be there when support is needed.

In painful situations, people begin to ask questions, many of which are impossible to answer.

The most frequently asked question is "Why?" Everyone wants to know the reason, but *pain and tragedy generally have no obvious reason.*

As children of God we should not debate the reason, but, rather, respond to those that have been affected. We are called by God to reach out and touch others in His name, to serve them, and to show them His love (2 Corinthians 1:3-5; Galatians 6:10). We live in a *fallen world*, not a *perfect world*. But there are times in life that we can make it near-perfect by the way we respond to the hurts and needs of others. Usually we cannot control *what happens*, but with God's help, we can control *how we respond*.

Today, if your life has been turned upside down by pain and tragedy, know that God wants to intervene in your grief, and He has someone to do that for Him. How do I know that there is someone? I know, because someone gave you this magazine to read. Please listen to its message, and let it bring you strength. Some day you may need to be God's arms and legs for someone else who is hurting. †

Benny Baker is presently the preacher for the Thornton Street Church of Christ in Piggott, Arkansas, USA. In 1998 he was working with the church of Christ in Bono, Arkansas at the time of the school tragedy at Westside Middle School. He also participated in relief efforts to Latin America after Hurricane Mitch in October of 1998.

When the kids got up that morning, it looked like a perfectly normal day. They took their showers, did their hair, packed their books, got their lunch money, caught their buses, and began to arrive at their school in the placid little Heath community outside of Paducah, Kentucky.

It was just another day with classes, homework, and band practice. It was not unusual for kids coming in to Heath High School to see the little group of students sitting in the foyer near the school office participating in their morning prayer group. Allison, Ben, Laura, Missy, and a number of other boys and girls gathered there in the mornings to begin their day with God's blessings and a spiritual perspective. As far as they were concerned, they were as safe and secure as they could be.

But that morning, as the prayer group began to conclude its activities, a 14-year-old classmate walked up and took out a .22 caliber automatic pistol. The kids had seen their classmate every day, sat in classes with him, sat in the lunchroom with him, and did not find his presence unusual at first. But then he started shooting. That was when

TRAGEDY

at Heath High School

Dan R. Owen

the safety and security of the group was shattered. The young man fired three shots, hesitated, and then emptied the ammunition clip in rapid-fire. As Allison ducked for cover, bullets were striking students around her. Missy Jenkins was hit by a bullet which severed her spinal cord, leaving her paralyzed from the waist down. Nicole Hadley, Casey Stegar, and Jessica James were killed. In all, eight students were shot. And then, with the encouragement of a classmate, the young man laid down his weapon.

Thousands of lives were changed in those few short seconds. Three young ladies lost their lives, and the lives of their families and friends were changed forever.

FROM THE HEART OF . . .

The survivors of the Heath High School shooting no longer feel safe in their world. Many continue to have nightmares, have difficulty sleeping, and feel afraid. Many of these same kids also realize more than ever before how important Jesus is in their lives. They are more interested in prayer, the study of God's Word, and personal obedience to Jesus. On the morning after the shooting, the small prayer group grew to 150.

These terrible events remind each of us that we are all vulnerable in this world. We never know when the random actions of another person, or an automobile accident, or the onslaught of an unexpected disease, or some other unforeseen factor can interrupt the normal flow of our lives and leave us hurt, or paralyzed, or dead.

We live in a fallen world which is filled with suffering (Romans 8:18-26). We never know when the people closest to us might be taken

away. No building or vaccination or bodyguard or weapon can ever provide real security. The only real security we have in this world is our relationship with Jesus Christ. With the grace of Christ in our lives, we can handle any struggle which comes our way. We can even get through death, if necessary, with the knowledge that God raised Jesus and will raise us also (Romans 8:11).

How is your relationship with Jesus today? Are you walking closely with Him each day, trusting Him and trying to do His will? Are you depending daily on His grace? If you could talk to Missy, Allison, Ben, Laura, or any of the others shocked by the events at Heath High School, they would tell you to put Jesus at the top of your priority list. Find your security in Him. He'll never let you down (Hebrews 13:5,6; Matthew 28:20) †

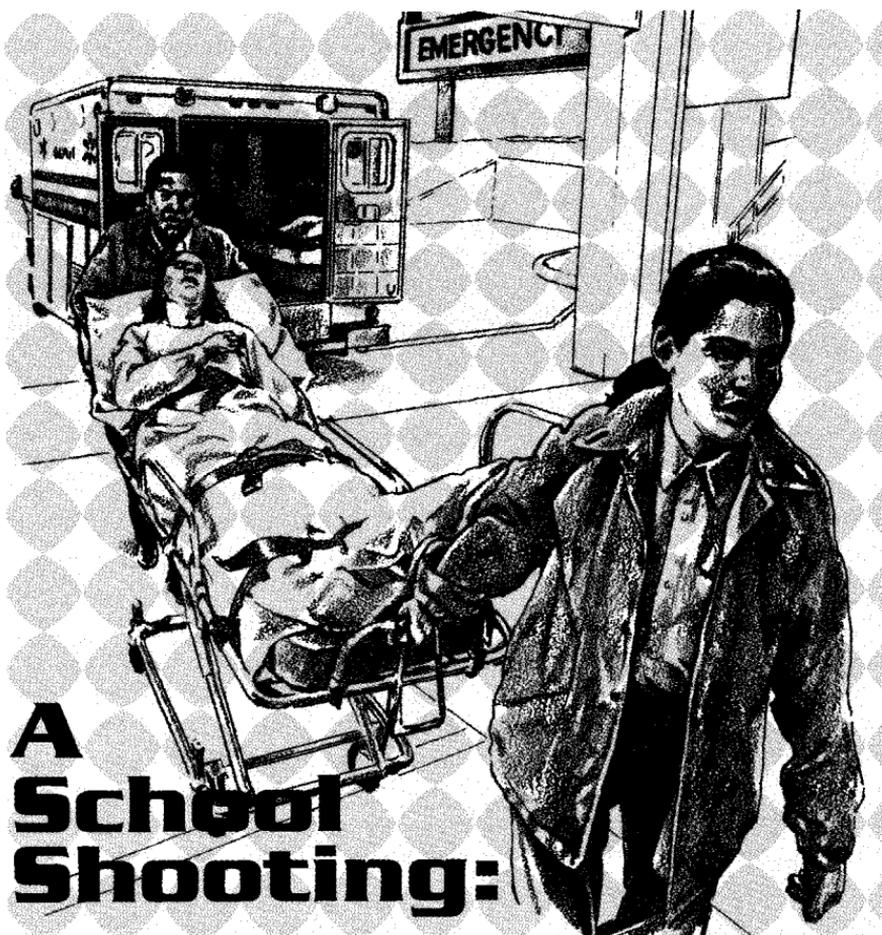
**Dan R. Owen preaches for the
Broadway Church of Christ in
Paducah, Kentucky, USA.**

None of us is responsible for all the things that happen to us, but we are responsible for the way we act when they do happen.

Happiness is in the heart, not in the circumstances.

There is no better exercise for strengthening the heart than reaching down and lifting people up.

FROM THE HEART OF ...



A School Shooting:

A Victim's Perspective

Lynette Thetford

On March 24, 1998, at 12:40 p.m. my life was forever changed when one of my eleven-year-old students, Drew Golden, pulled a fire alarm to lure 89 children and nine

teachers onto the playground. He joined thirteen-year-old Mitchell Johnson and an arsenal of 12 guns. After their rampage, five people were dead and nine were wounded.

FROM THE HEART OF . . .

For me, the shooting was a spiritual experience. There were two defining moments that remain in my memory as absolute horror. The moment of greatest terror came when I saw many students in various positions going to the ground as bullets were hitting them. I began to scream and wave my arms to get everyone down, when I felt a pressure in my abdominal area. I had been shot by what I would later learn was a 30 caliber carbine rifle. As I turned to run, I fell to the ground because the bullet had come so close to the spine that my leg was momentarily paralyzed. As I struggled to move, I turned my head and saw a little girl next to me whose back was completely covered in blood. My moment of greatest helplessness came when I knew without a doubt that some of my kids were dying and there was nothing I could do to stop it.

Two people came to help get me out of the line of fire. As they pulled me to the sidewalk, I prayed. That prayer remains vividly in my mind. I said, "Father, forgive me of all my sins and take me on to heaven to be with you."

I remember thinking that He truly did come as a thief in the night (2 Peter 3:10). I had been in my classroom and everything was so normal. Five minutes later I was lying on the ground, shot, and was

thinking I was going to die — totally unexpected. However, there was a difference. Unlike a thief in the night, God was welcome. After all, He had allowed me to live long enough to rear my children just like I had always asked. My children were all Christians, but my husband had only been an elder for two days, and I dreaded leaving him without a wife (1 Timothy 3:2). I was sure I was dying, but God was there with me through it all, so I wasn't afraid. I felt as if I were watching a movie and wondering how it would end.

The playground that Tuesday was a battleground between good and evil. Satan's presence was obvious, but God's presence was even greater. Looking back, it was almost as if a stage had been very carefully prepared. All the nurses and a few parent volunteers were at the middle school to do scoliosis screening at 12:30. Policemen, normally fifteen minutes away, were only four minutes away in a training exercise with their bulletproof vests already on. All the operating rooms at Saint Bernard's Hospital were empty for the first time in history — just enough for the number of people injured.

Two of my surgeons called my survival a miracle. They said they could not have taken the bullet with their fingers and placed it where it went in more carefully. It missed

two major arteries and the sciatic nerve by a millimeter. It barely nicked a vein that, if hit full force, would have reduced my chance of survival by fifty per cent. The bullet had come within a half an inch of my spine. Recovery was painful and took weeks of physical therapy.

Many people marveled at how "lucky" I was and what a "miracle" it was that I survived, but I know differently. The real blessing lies not only in the presence of God that day, but also in the true miracle of the fact that He gave His only Son for our sins. We can all have eternal life because Jesus faced death at Calvary, but today He lives.

These things are truly wondrous beyond human comprehension. When I get a little depressed and homesick for heaven, I try to remember our purpose here. We need to bring as many souls home with us as possible. We have to tell the world the wondrous good news that Jesus lives! †

Lynette Thetford lives in Jonesboro, Arkansas, USA. She is a teacher at Westside Middle School and was injured in the shooting that took place there on March 24, 1998. She attends Bono Church of Christ where her husband, Carroll, is an elder. She has three children and one grandchild.

Teardrops

Hilda Sherwood

The teardrops in my heart today
That fall like gentle rain
Are washing sorrow's night away
With all its wrenching pain.

My spirit deep within has cried
Is anybody there?
My battered heart reached out for help;
Does any body care?

The grief of many hurting wounds
Has left its reddened scar,
I know just who I am and why,
— Short of the plan, by far.

But when I go to God in prayer
He opens up the door
For healing and forgiveness,
To make me whole once more.

Let teardrops gently, quietly heal
The anguish of the soul,
So once again the heart can feel
The joy of being whole.

Hilda Sherwood is a Christian living in Auckland, New Zealand.

From Tragedy to Triumph

(Emerging From the Smoke of the Columbine Shootings)

Denny Petrillo



It is a story that seems unbelievable. On a beautiful April day two teenage high school students decided to turn their school into a graveyard. They came prepared to detonate over 50 bombs, had more than 200 rounds of ammunition, and carried four weapons, along with hearts filled with hatred and rage.

When it was all over, twelve of their classmates were dead, one of their teachers was dead, and they themselves had died of self-inflicted shotgun blasts. In a matter of approximately 15 minutes, 15 people lay lifeless in the halls of Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado.

A tidal wave of grief and shock gripped the community, the state, and the nation. The pain was unspeakable, the tears continual. Many questions were asked, but all centered around one word: "Why?"

Dealing with tragedy is never easy or simple. With each heart-breaking event a complex series of problems is created, from personal loss to financial loss. Depending on the nature of the tragedy, the kinds of pieces that need to be "picked up" differ.

When innocent people die at the hands of other people, especially when the dead are in their youth, in the prime of life, an excruciating emotional toll is taken. Natural calamities are sometimes viewed as a "fact of life," and the loss of life is expected. But when people kill people — this is a special kind of tragedy. As Christians caught up in the agony, the concern is, "How can help be given to those outside the Lord's church who are trying to 'pick up the pieces'?"

First, figure out how to best serve those who are grieving. What

FROM THE HEART OF . . .

do they need? Someone to sit with them? Baby-sit their kids? Bring in food? Pay bills? Help make burial arrangements? Several of the kids who were shot had extended stays in the hospital or in rehabilitation centers. The families often did not want to leave their loved one alone in the hospital. They needed someone to stay with their son or daughter when they just had to be away from the hospital.

Second, be a silent supporter. Far too many have tried to offer explanations as to why this happened. Most of those explanations end up creating more pain, as well as more questions. Allow the bereaved to talk, to express their hurt, their anger — whatever it is they are feeling. Never say or imply that you know what they are feeling (unless you have endured the exact same tragedy).

Third, be available. After the shootings at Columbine a nearby park was made into a huge memorial — with flowers, posters, and makeshift items. Literally thousands of people came to this memorial. As a result, ministers walked around with shirts that said, “Minister. Would you like to talk?” Hundreds of people took advantage of this, material was given out, and Bible studies were set up.

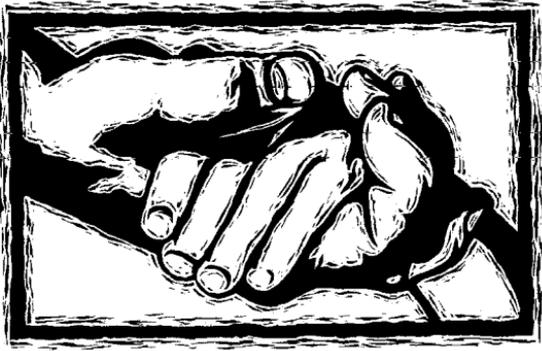
Fourth, advertise special services the church will provide. After

the Columbine shooting, the church held several special meetings, some just for other teens so they could express what they were feeling, some only for the parents, others for the community. During such meetings it should be made known that there are ministers available for private counseling and Bible study. A table at the entrance of the building should be filled with free materials. These materials should not be related solely to dealing with grief and tragedy. The Columbine shootings made many people think about death, the church, God, being more loving, how to help troubled teens, even about their own salvation. Materials should be available to cover all of these potential questions.

In John 9, Jesus and the disciples came upon a man who was living a personal tragedy: he was born blind. Jesus’ comment was, “... *I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is still day, for the night is coming when no man can work.*”

Opportunities to help those who have endured a terrible tragedy are fleeting. God’s people must be ready to respond to the need of the moment. †

Denny Petrillo works with the Bear Valley Bible Institute and the Bear Valley Church of Christ in Denver, Colorado, USA.



We are getting beyond what was perceived as an abyss of pain and shame. It will soon be two years since our community was traumatized by the Heath High School shooting. Families are moving forward. We are all at different stages in our grief re-

Our Community Is Healing

Roger D. Thompson

covery. The shadows of gloom around the school continue to fade, while a new light begins to resurface. Our community is resilient (1 Corinthians 10:13)!

During the first season with Tubby Smith as the Head Coach of the University of Kentucky basketball program, their "Kentucky Wildcats" became known as the "Comeback Cats." They were frequently behind and managed to recover. At times, it seemed to be almost impossible to overcome or overpower the opponents. Diligence in their efforts, purpose, encouragement, and having hope and faith seemed to pull them together. Just like the Cats, we are coming back.

Immediately following the shooting, there was much emphasis placed on faith-oriented issues, especially forgiveness. Prayer groups and special civic prayer sessions sprang up in an effort to cope with the tremendous trauma. Our faith was surely tested, but in the final analysis it has been faith and hope that have gotten us through. After the deaths of John the Baptist (Matthew 14:12) and Lazarus (John 11), the weary and emotionally burdened called upon Jesus Christ to cope. Thanks be to God that we have the same avenue for comfort from today's trauma.

Hope has been thought by some to be a cousin to worry, but worry has been suppressed by its healthier cousin, hope. There had to be a better day. Hope has been here all along, but now it can be seen again. What a relief!

FROM THE HEART OF . . .

Hope was revitalized by the enormous amount of encouragement from all corners of the globe. It was commonplace to hear others talking at the groceries, restaurants, or wherever about the events and also to hear some form of encouragement. In recent years, God and the Ten Commandments had been prohibited to some degree from our schools, but now again many welcome these spiritual realities with open arms.

Our community grief has traveled through the routine stages of grief recovery, while the circumstances have been anything but routine. There have been all of the stages noted by Kebler Ross in some form or the other. However, the major difference has been the attention given by caring people to those who have been hurt.

The attention in many ways paid tribute to those who lost their lives, to those who were wounded, or to those who were present in the prayer group. The attention has given credibility for positive changes in order to make schools more secure. On the other hand, special interest groups have used our community's pain for their own gain. Some groups sought changes for the betterment of people, while other groups' efforts were for control. Emotional scabs were repeatedly torn off, postponing the healing process by their intense focus.

The trauma of a shooting at school had never occurred in this community until now. Because of this trauma, we have developed new depths of coping. Plans have been implemented to make our schools safer places. Special programs have been conducted to restore a brighter tomorrow. New networks of intervention have been formed within our community and with others outside the Commonwealth of Kentucky. These special efforts seem to support the notion that *God does not waste pain*.

Yes, we have scars in Paducah, just as do the communities of Jonesboro, Arkansas; Alberta, Canada; Pearl, Mississippi; Springfield, Oregon; Edinborough, Pennsylvania; and Littleton, Colorado. We continue to have worries, but we also now have hope. Hope has given us the power to risk being resilient. Resiliency has allowed our community to redefine and to climb out of the hole of despair, pain, gloom, and worry. There are other challenges ahead for our community and for us as individuals. Since we do not know all that lies ahead, we hold on through encouragement, love, hope and faith (1 Corinthians 13:1-8). †

Roger D. Thompson is a Christian professional counselor who works with the Broadway Church of Christ in Paducah, Kentucky, USA.

"You Shall See Disaster NO MORE"



Wayne Barrier

Disaster can come in many different ways. Most of us are familiar with the coming of natural disasters — floods, drought, hurricanes, tornadoes, and volcanic eruptions. These events make big news and we see how in a few short minutes, many thousands of people can lose everything they own and even their life. One minute everything was as it had been throughout a person's life and the next minute nothing is the same, or ever will be again. Entire families are killed in an instant. Fortunes that have taken a lifetime to accumulate are lost forever.

Natural disasters usually touch massive numbers of lives and are not the direct consequence of any-

one's action. The just and the unjust are affected alike.

Other disasters, resulting from man's activity and actions also can be equally devastating. Train wrecks, airplane crashes, fires, wars, acts of terrorism, industrial accidents, and many other events often destroy property, injure people, and take lives without warning.

Sometimes disasters are much smaller. A single person can experience disaster, while no others are touched by the event. Accidents, disease, and criminal activity cause individual disaster events. The victim is just as unsuspecting of what is about to happen in this case as the victim of a large disaster.

COMFORT AND REASSURANCE

In all cases, disaster victims are hurt, suffer as the result of something out of their control, endure great loss, and experience great need immediately. For many, relief can be provided and lives can be rebuilt. What about those who do not survive? What about those who never completely recover? These people, as harsh as the reality of the truth can be, must bear some burden the rest of their life. Sometimes, it seems that there is nothing in the world that can be done to remove the burden.

The word of God is filled with instruction, guidance, warnings, exhortation, teaching, etc., to help man prepare for both life on earth and for eternal life after physical death. Instruction concerning ways to deal with hard times, physically, is provided in the Bible.

The words of the Old Testament prophet Zephaniah record powerful guidance for men of all ages. The conclusion of his message is intended for our encouragement. Zephaniah 3:14-20 says, "*Sing, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! The Lord has taken away your judgments. He has cast out your enemy. The king of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; **You shall see disaster no more.***"

"In that day it shall be said to

Jerusalem, Do not fear; Zion, let not your hands be weak. The Lord God in your midst, The Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing."

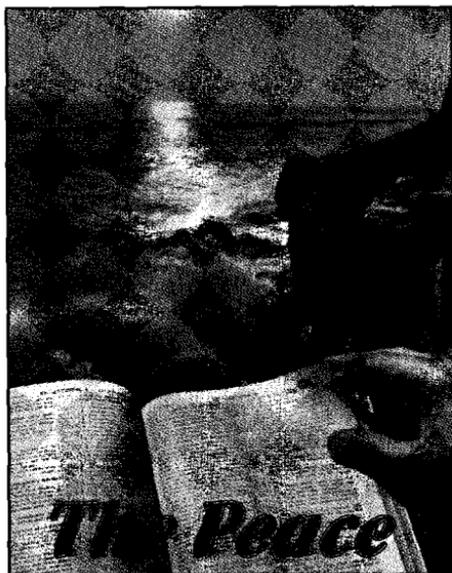
Israel had suffered greatly at the hands of her enemies. Zephaniah's message is for those who have maintained faith in God. These words suggest permanent relief, not only to Israel in Zephaniah's day, but to men of all ages.

That relief comes from God. It is offered to everyone who will be a part of God's family on earth. Today, we can be added to God's family by following the teaching of his Son, Jesus (2 Peter 1:17), as we obey His commandments (Matthew 7:21), and live faithfully until death (Revelation 2:10). The Christian can be free from worry (Matthew 6:25-34) about things of this world and can be relieved of all anxiety (Philippians 4:6).

With God's help we can endure and overcome anything in this life (Philippians 4:13) and look forward to a future home of eternal reward and happiness (Revelation 21:1). We can hope for and look forward to the day when "*we shall see disaster no more.*" †

Wayne Barrier is a co-worker in World Evangelism, living in Florence, AL, USA.

What is this peace? To me it is the knowledge I have that, **regardless of what happens in this life, I will go home to live forever with God and the redeemed.** It is knowing that **there is no power that can separate me from the love that is in Christ Jesus.**



“Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us, For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38).

That Passes All Understanding

Ellen McKee

It is knowing “*that in all things God works for the good of those who love him who have been called according to his purpose*” (Romans 8:28). This is the greatest blessing in the world, knowing that we are accepted by God.

This peace is being able to stand in front of the casket of a beloved parent or child, knowing that he/she is at home with the Lord. There is no greater gift a person can leave his/her loved ones than the knowledge the he/she died a Christian. When my parents died, they left very little in worldly goods, but they left me with the knowledge that they died as faithful Christians. That meant more to me in peace and contentment than an inheritance of millions or billions of dollars.

Life is not easy. In the life of every Christian there will be the deep valleys and the mountain tops. Job experienced these perhaps more than any human who has ever lived, yet he stayed faithful to God throughout.

We're promised in 1 Corinthians 10:13 that God won't allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear, but will provide a way out so we can stand up under problems or temptation. Several years ago I heard a song at a wedding which describes beautifully what God can do for us in the times of temptations especially those that come about in times of sickness or sorrow. *It was written by Annie Johnson Flint:*

What God Hath Promised

*God hath not promised
Skies always blue,
Flower-strewn pathways
All our lives through;
God hath not promised
Sun without rain,
Joy with sorrow
Peace without pain.*

*But God hath promised
Strength for the day,
Rest for the labor,
Light for the way,
Grace for the trials,
Help from above,
Unfailing sympathy,
Undying love.*

†

Ellen McKee, the wife of Colin McKee, works with her husband in Jakarta, Indonesia as missionaries of the Lord's church.

Song of Hope

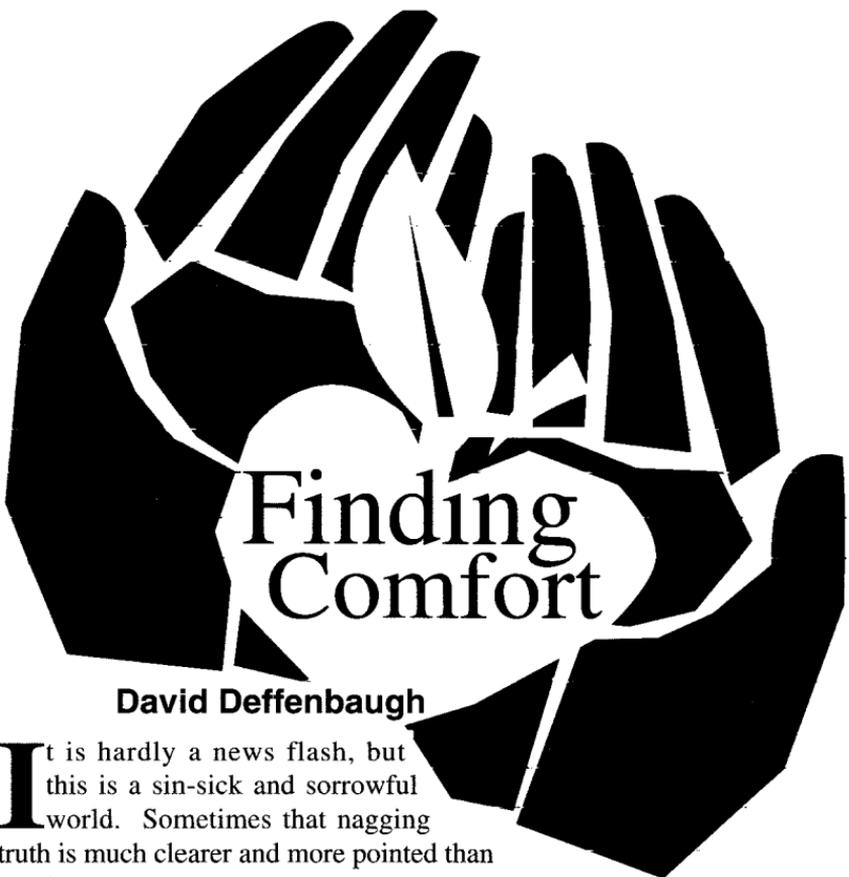
Children of yesterday,
Heirs of tomorrow,
What are you weaving?
Labor and sorrow?
Look to your looms again,
Faster and faster
Fly the great shuttles
Prepared by the Master;
Life's in the loom,
Room for it —
Room!

Children of yesterday,
Heirs of tomorrow,
Lighten the labor
And sweeten the sorrow.
Now, while the shuttles fly
Faster and faster,
Up and be at it,
At work with the Master;
He stands at your loom,
Room for Him —
Room!

Children of yesterday,
Heirs of tomorrow,
Look at your fabric
Of labor and sorrow.
Seamy and dark
With despair and disaster,
Turn it, and — lo,
The design of the Master!
The Lord's at the loom;
Room for Him —
Room!

— Mary Artemisia Lathbury

from *Best Loved Poems
of the American People*



Finding Comfort

David Deffenbaugh

It is hardly a news flash, but this is a sin-sick and sorrowful world. Sometimes that nagging truth is much clearer and more pointed than at others.

There are times when we are caused to suffer from physical ailment, as did Job, or to endure deliberate mistreatment from others, as did Joseph, or to cry out from the loss of a dear loved one, as did Mary and Martha, or to weep over the spiritual callousness of humanity, as did Jesus. The fact is, the condition of the world in which we live and those with whom we share it, demand the need for comfort from time to time.

As Paul opens the second letter to the church at Corinth, he addresses God in a very beautiful and beneficial way, "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and **God of all comfort**; who **comforts** us in all our affliction so that we may be able to **comfort** those who are in any affliction with the **comfort** with which we ourselves are **comfort-***

COMFORT AND REASSURANCE

ed by God" (2 Corinthians 1:3,4).

From that beginning and on through verse 11, the idea of comfort is mentioned ten times. Since we most definitely are in need of comfort, we would be well served to understand something of that comfort which comes from "the God of all comfort".

God is the only genuine source of comfort. Paul speaks of his experience in Asia bringing despair even of life itself (verses 8-10). Being in that circumstance led him to the conclusion that it was God alone who was worthy of man's trust, for it is God only on whom man may depend for deliverance. That hope is real comfort.

We are comforted in order to comfort (verses 5,6). So many times the means of God's help to others is through His own children. While we are well aware of our need of being comforted, God also has in mind that we comfort others, having been comforted ourselves.

Both suffering and comfort are a part of the Christian experience. Naturally, we want the comfort, not the suffering, but the Christian life is not all joy and comfort. God never promised to keep His children from all hurt, pain,

and sorrow. He didn't keep His own Son from those agonies of soul. These things have their place in helping develop our character as Christians (Romans 5:3-5).

Certainly we say with Paul, "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort.*" †

David Deffenbaugh is the pulpit minister of the South College Church of Christ in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, USA.

There's a Guiding Star

Harry Presley

There will be sweet pangs of sorrow
When the earth's foundations fall,
But to heaven's bright tomorrow
There's a guiding star for all.

Heed not lights of man's designing,
Look beyond earth's starry sky
To that light forever shining,
There's a guiding star on high.

Seek that course Divinely given,
Fix upon the light of love.
Turn your sextant unto Heaven
There's a guiding star above.

Passage into life eternal
Is by inspiration's stair,
Lift your eyes to realms supernal,
There's a guiding star up there.

“Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows” (Matthew 10:29-31).

This is a most consoling and enlightening Scripture concerning the nature of our heavenly Father.

These words were spoken by Christ to dispel fear and anxiety and to instill faith and assurance in the hearts of His followers. God intends for His children to live with such assurance and spiritual poise that an inner calm pervades their souls even in the midst of disturbing problems. How can this be done? *“To be spiritually minded is life and peace”* (Romans 8:6).

Assurance of God’s Presence and Personal Concern

One thing which promotes serenity of heart is an understanding of our Father’s relationship to His children. God knows us personally and is interested in our welfare. David said: *“But I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinketh upon me”* (Psalm 40:17).

A young man, father of two, who had been a Christian for many years, lay bed-fast with a fatal dis-



The Fallen Sparrow

**Lottie
Beth
Hobbs**

ease. He talked freely of his future in the next

world. One day he said, “I have always thought God was too busy running the universe to bother with me very much, but it has taken something like this to make me realize that He is personally concerned with my problems.”

This personal relationship is seen also in the New Testament: *“I will be their God, and they shall be my people”* (2 Corinthians 6:16). “My people.” How personal. How wonder-

ful. God's intimate awareness of everything in the universe is seen also in His amazing provisions for all creatures of nature, vividly described in Psalm 104 and other Scriptures. Surely the Father who notes every sparrow that falls is continually concerned about His children.

Assurance that God Hears

Our Prayers

"The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil" (1 Peter 3:12). Understanding our Father's personal concern, His nearness and loving-kindness, should prompt easy and frequent communication with Him. Do we really believe that *"the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much"* (James 5:16)? A sympathetic Savior stands continually ready to hear our pleas and share our problems (Hebrews 4:15,16).

Assurance that God Will Guide Our Steps

Every thinking person comes to realize the absolute weakness of man, his limited knowledge, and inability to direct himself. Life is too big for any person to handle alone. **Sometimes the proud ego-tist boasts that he needs neither God nor man; but when he stands helpless over the ebbing life of a beloved child or views for the last time the lifeless face of a precious**

wife, his arrogance melts in his helplessness.

No need is more acute than the assurance that a higher power is leading us into a future we cannot see. This is a promise given, not to every person, but to God's children: *"The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord"* (Psalm 37:23). *"Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths"* (Proverbs 3:5,6). We know not what the future holds, but we know Who holds it.

We may not always understand why we must walk some paths, but we must trust the One who said, *"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God"* (Romans 8:28).

Assurance of Help in Bearing Our Burdens

We have never been promised a life free of care, but we have been promised help with our burdens. *"Casting all you care upon him, for he careth for you"* (1 Peter 5:7). *"Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved"* (Psalm 55:22). The Father who is conscious of every sparrow that falls is not away on vacation when we need Him. *"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not*

COMFORT AND REASSURANCE

we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea” (Psalm 46:1,2).

Assurance that God Will Supply All Our Needs

“My God shall supply all your needs according to his riches in glory by Jesus Christ” (Philemon 4:19). Think of this reassuring promise. We have already discussed some of our needs: the need of God’s presence, His guidance, His help in bearing our problems. We have other needs, and the Lord has promised to fulfill them all for His children.

Physical sustenance, the material necessities of life, will be supplied to those who *“seek first the kingdom of God”* (Matthew 6:33).

Forgiveness of sins is promised to those who obey (Acts 2:38).

Friendship is assured, for even if all earthly friends forsake us, there is a *“friend that sticketh closer than a brother”* (Proverbs 18:24).

The hope of a better tomorrow is possible only through the Lord.

These Assurances Can Conquer Fear and Anxiety

Fear has to be fought every step of the way from the cradle to the grave. We are born with two fears: the fear of falling and of loud noises. Later in life we acquire others. Some are constructive and others destructive. He who battles on,

though fearful, is the brave person who wins the struggles of the world, and most of all, the struggles in his own heart.

Much fear and consternation result from a weak faith (Matthew 6:25-34). There is no weakness in any phase of life which could not be cured by *a stronger faith in God*. All the assurances discussed in this lesson should strengthen faith and help to control worry. The text of the lesson was given by Christ for this purpose: *“And fear not...”* On another occasion He reassuringly admonished: *“Peace I leave with you...let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid”* (John 14:27). Every destructive fear can be conquered and replaced with peace and tranquility.

The fear of death can be conquered by the child of God. David courageously affirmed: *“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.”*

Paul was convinced that *“to die is gain.”*

“Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints” (Psalm 116:15). †

Lottie Beth Hobbs is a Christian writer living in Fort Worth, Texas, USA. This article has been edited and is used with her permission. It originally was part of her book entitled *If You Would See Good Days*, published by Harvest Publications.

Flash!!!

Attention, elders and brethren,

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MY GRATITUDE

Norman Gipson

For loved ones Thou hast given me,
For friends I cannot number,
For Blood which daily cleanses me,
For nightly peaceful slumber;

For work to do, for love to share,
For burdens often lifted,
For open hearts and open doors
And help from those more gifted;

For guidance of the Living word,
And comfort of the Spirit,
For intercession at Thy throne
When prayer shall bring me near it;

For confidence that others give,
For trust they place within me;
For godly souls who for Thee live,
And strength they ever lend me;

For steadfast souls who stand the shock
When Satan fierce assails them,
Whose feet are firm upon the Rock
Where Thou dost never fail them;

For peace and calm amid the storm,
For lessons learned through failing;
For faith that o'er the evil yet
The good will be prevailing;

For crown and throne and Golden home
And life when life shall end,
I thank Thee, Father, Lord of all
In Jesus' name. Amen.



FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:



Disaster

Workers from Del City Church of Christ deliver supplies to an Oklahoma City neighborhood reduced to splinters by the ravages of a tornado.

Broadwater Marina Lighthouse in Biloxi, MS, hit by a bolt of lightning—the awesome power of the elements of nature. Our appreciation to photographer Tim Isbell, and color consultant Mark Mills, for supplying the front cover.