

TAKE TWO: GIVE ONE TO A FRIEND

— KANSAS — FAITH AND FAMILY

MEMBER



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PUBLISHED THE FIRST THURSDAY OF EVERY MONTH

VOLUME 25 NO. 12

OCTOBER 2026

"YOU WERE ONCE DARKNESS, BUT NOW YOU ARE LIGHT IN THE LORD. LIVE AS CHILDREN OF LIGHT..." EPHESIANS 5:8

More Than a Card: A Ministry of Encouragement

Encouragement Culture turns handmade cards into a "Snail Mail Ministry"

By Faith BroKar

In a world of instant messages, social media notifications and quick texts, there is something increasingly unusual about opening the mailbox and finding an envelope addressed specifically to you.

Inside is not a bill or advertisement, but a handmade card. Someone thought about you. Someone sat down and wrote to you. Someone took the time to put a stamp on an envelope and send a little encouragement your way.

For Jamie Eubanks, that simple act has become a ministry.

A wife, mother of three daughters and follower of Jesus, Jamie describes herself as someone called to be an encourager. Through Encouragement Culture, she creates one-of-a-kind handmade cards as part of what she affectionately calls her "Snail Mail Ministry."

Her goal isn't simply to make cards. She hopes to inspire others to become encouragers themselves.

"I want them to open their mailbox and know—not just feel—that they are truly seen, loved, and cared for," Jamie said.

From Business to Ministry

Jamie began making cards nearly 20 years ago. At first, it provided a creative outlet and an opportunity to earn some additional income.

Over time, however, something changed.

Jamie felt the Lord leading her away from a traditional business model and toward ministry. Today, she doesn't place fixed prices on her cards. Instead, people are invited to give whatever they feel led to give, allowing the ministry to remain Lord-led.

The mission, she says, is more important than

the profit.

She also began noticing something else: encouragement spreads.

As she intentionally encouraged others, those people often became inspired to encourage someone else. A simple card could start a chain reaction.

"I noticed that the more I encouraged others, the more they felt inspired to do the same," she said.

That realization helped shape what Encouragement Culture has become.

Snail Mail Isn't Dead

Technology makes communicating easier than perhaps ever before. We can send someone a message in seconds.

But Jamie believes convenience can never completely replace intentionality.

"In this world of technology, text messages are quick and easy, but a

handmade, handwritten card shows intentionality," she said. "It lets the recipient know someone took the time to create, write, package, and send something directly from the heart."

Convincing people that "snail mail" still matters has been one of her greatest challenges.

"Technology is a tough cycle to break," she said, "but it is very rewarding to rewind the clock and make things more personal."

Her cards are intentionally simple in their purpose. Rather than competing with companies such as Hallmark by producing cards for birthdays and other traditional occasions, Jamie focuses solely on encouragement.

A card might simply say "Praying for You" or "Thinking of You."

Every card is left blank inside, allowing the sender to add the words

that person needs to hear.

Jamie does not take custom thematic orders and each design is one of a kind.

Encouragement at Just the Right Time

Over the years, Jamie has heard from people on both sides of the mailbox—those who sent her

cards and those who received them.

Some of those stories have stayed with her.

She has received multiple testimonies from people who said a card arrived at precisely the time its encouragement was needed.

Continued on page 13



Misunderstood Scriptures: “I Can Do All Things Through Christ”

By Faith BroKar

“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” — Philippians 4:13

Philippians 4:13 may be one of the most encouraging verses in Scripture—and also one of the most misunderstood.

We see it on shirts, signs and social media posts. It is often used to mean, “With Christ, I can accomplish anything I set my mind to.”

But when we read Paul’s words in context, we discover something deeper. Paul was not talking about achieving every goal. He was talking about remaining faithful and content regardless of his circumstances.

What Was Paul Talking About?

The verses immediately before Philippians 4:13 are essential.

Paul wrote:

“I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.”

— Philippians 4:11

Then he explained:

“I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.” — Philippians 4:12

Then comes the familiar statement:

“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”

The “all things” Paul was describing included

both abundance and need. He knew what it was like to have plenty, but he also knew hunger and hardship.

His confidence was not that Christ would prevent difficult circumstances. His confidence was that Christ would give him the strength to remain faithful through them.

A Promise of Strength, Not Unlimited Success

Philippians 4:13 does not promise that every Christian will win every competition, receive every promotion, accomplish every dream or overcome every earthly obstacle exactly as desired.

Sometimes God’s answer is no. Sometimes His plan takes us

through suffering rather than around it.

Paul’s own life demonstrates this.

He experienced imprisonment, beatings, rejection, hunger and persecution. Yet none of those things meant Christ had failed him.

Christ gave Paul strength in the middle of those circumstances.

That makes Philippians 4:13 far more meaningful than a motivational slogan. Christianity does not promise that everything will always go our way. It promises that our strength does not have to depend upon our circumstances.

Learning Contentment

There is another important phrase in the

passage that can easily be overlooked:

“I have learned... to be content.”

Contentment did not simply happen to Paul. He learned it.

We often believe we will finally be content when our circumstances improve—when finances are better, the problem disappears, the prayer is answered or life becomes easier.

Paul learned something different.

His contentment rested in Christ rather than his circumstances.

Whether he had much or little, Paul knew the source of his strength remained the same.

What This Verse Really Teaches

Philippians 4:13 is not a promise that Christ will enable us to accomplish anything we decide to do.

It is something better.

It is the assurance that whatever circumstances God allows us to walk through, we do not have to face them in our own strength.

There may be seasons of abundance and seasons of need. There may be victories as well as disappointments.

Our circumstances will change.

Christ will not. And because our strength comes from Him, we can learn to say with Paul:

“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”



PUBLISHED THE LAST THURSDAY OF EVERY MONTH
WWW.KANSASFAITHANDFAMILY.ORG

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The publication will be distributed freely to any Christian Church in the trade area. The publication date is the last Thursday of the month (holidays may require exceptions). Free copies are also available various outlets with public access. Paid annual subscriptions by mail are available for \$25 for 12 months.

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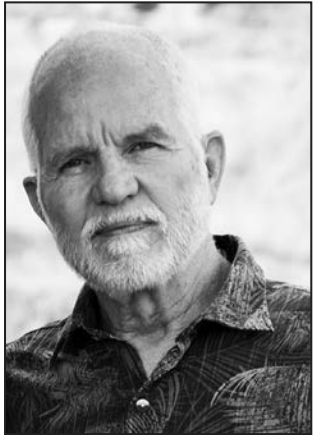
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Faith BroKar

KANSAS FAITH AND FAMILY

What Frightens You?



By Carl D. Everhart

If you're a True Christian, this article's not written for you; it's written for the one who's fooling themselves, like I did for about 60 years. However, I encourage everyone to read this and then pass it on to someone who needs it. If anything written here offends you ... that may be evidence it was written for you. Before I make my small effort to scare someone out of Hell (as opposed to scaring the Hell out of someone), I'll first offer some comforting news.

If you're a True Christian, there's no condemnation, because you've been rescued from your sin! What a blessing it is to know God! You understand there's no fear in love, and Jesus destroyed both death and the fear of death. You've discovered the connection between God's Love, Grace, Mercy, and the fear of Him, His wrath, His Gospel, and His Law; without all that, the likelihood of Salvation decreases significantly.

The frightening news starts here. Survey results continue to verify that most of mankind, and many self-proclaimed Christians, are on their way to Hell. Even if you lead a church ministry or a home Bible study, the Lord may still say to you, "I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness." End of life will not bode well for pretend Christians.

"But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves."

At least 75 times, the Bible tells you, "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." It also tells you that you were born unto your father, the devil. Hell is excited to meet you at your coming. The grave is licking its lips and opening its mouth wide, ready to swallow up and destroy the arrogant. The wrath of God burns, His fist crushes those who continually reject Him, their corpses litter the streets like garbage. How terrible it will be for those who spout lies to deceive others, these sinners profess to know God, but their actions are detestable, disobedient, and worthless. Their physical and eternal punishment will include the following: Darkness, burning, loneliness, stench, sepa-

ration, and of course, weeping and gnashing of teeth. Does that frighten you?

The following should concern everyone, because we all sin: If you've broken just one commandment, you've broken them all. If you don't love your neighbor, you sin. If you bow down before any idol, you sin. If you take the Lord's name in vain (even saying OMG), you sin. If you hate anyone (regardless of what they did to you), you sin. If you really want something your neighbor has, you sin. If you look at someone with lust, you sin. If you judge others and refuse to forgive them, you sin. Both your actions and thoughts can send you to Hell. The more you know, the more you're held accountable for.

Jesus asks you, "Why do you keep on saying that I am your Lord, when you refuse to do

what I say?" If you refuse to do what He says, that should frighten you. If you're not thirsty for the Living Water, and hungry for the Bread of Life, then ask yourself what you're thirsty and hungry for? If you refuse to be His witness because you're ashamed of Him, then He'll be ashamed of you, and you're probably not saved at all. To do the will of God, you must first learn the Word of God. If you refuse to believe all of His Word, you're calling Him a liar.

Does the fruit you exhibit look more like the negative traits Jesus warned about, than what Paul described from the Holy Spirit? (If you never hear from the Holy Spirit, you probably don't have Him in you.) If you don't bear good fruit, you'll be pruned and thrown into the Lake of Fire (Hell)! Wake up! Becoming saved was never in-

tended to be a one and done event. God doesn't grade on a curve, and He cannot be bribed with your good works.

The Parable of the Sower explains why so many people fall away from their faith.

For the True Christian, life on earth is the closest they'll get to Hell. For the Non-Christian, life on earth is the closest they'll get to Heaven. Every True Christian will die their first death, but because they're born twice, they'll die only once. Every Non-Christian will be born only once, but they'll die twice. If this confuses you, that alone should frighten you!

Dear Lord, please help me to help others to never hear You say, "Depart from Me." Amen.

To read more from this grateful Prodigal son, lay pastor, and sinner (saved by grace), search: everhartandsoul.com (then select "Blog").

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Does God Punish Us for Our Parents' Sin?

By Aaron Garriott, *Ligonier Ministries*

There are times when the Bible seems to contradict itself about whether we are punished for our parents' sin—sometimes even in the same book. For instance, the second commandment forbids the worship of God through images because the Lord is “a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments” (Ex. 20:5–6; Deut. 5:9–10). We also read in the book of Numbers that the Lord will “by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, to the third and the fourth generation” (Num. 14:18). Yet in Deuteronomy, we read, “Fathers shall not be put to death because of

their children, nor shall children be put to death because of their fathers. Each one shall be put to death for his own sin” (Deut. 24:16).

Centuries later, Ezekiel warns:

The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself. (Ezek. 18:20)

Similarly, Jeremiah prophesies of a day when “they shall no longer say: ‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge’” (Jer. 31:29). So, which is it? Does God punish children for the sins of their fathers? The answer is yes and no. Let’s get the yes out of the way first.

Adam, Federal Headship, and Original Sin

God does punish us for the sins of our

first parents (see Rom. 5:12–14; 1 Cor. 15:22). This is because of the covenantal role Adam played as a federal head in the prelapsarian covenant of works. Adam uniquely represented all his posterity, such that when our first parents fell, they incurred punishment not only for themselves but for their descendants—all people who would be born into this world through ordinary generation (see Westminster Shorter Catechism 13–17). The Westminster Confession of Faith explains regarding our first parents and original sin, “They being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed; and the same death in sin, and corrupted nature, conveyed to all their posterity descending from them by ordinary generation” (WCF 6.3). The only way, then, that we’re delivered from the sin and misery brought on us by our first parents is by be-

ing united by faith to a faithful head—the Lord Jesus Christ. Concerning our federal parentage, then, God deals with us according to our parents’ sins or obedience. In this way, our answer to the question at hand depends on how we define parents in context.

The parentage that truly matters is whether we’re under the headship of Adam or Christ.

Now that we’ve discussed Adam and his unique role as federal

head in the covenant of works, we can consider the question closer to home—your father and my father, which is typically the way the question is framed.

Individual Culpability vs. Corporate Consequences

Unlike Adam, our parents are not in a position of federal headship in a covenant of works wherein their obedience or disobedience determines everything thereafter for their de-

scendants. Therefore, we can safely say that God does not directly punish children for the sins of their parents. Yet at the same time, the consequences of sin often affect future generations, and in this way, there is a sort of indirect punishment. For example, the sins of idolatry and false worship become deeply planted in the religious life of any society or family. This is why, for

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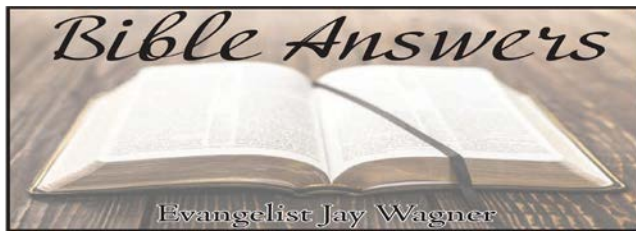
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Q: 1 Thessalonians 5:17 says to pray without ceasing. How is that even possible?

A: First of all, it is important to understand what prayer is. Many Christians think that prayer is a time set aside when they present their requests to God and thank Him for His blessings. This is an incomplete picture of prayer that causes us to impose unfounded limitations on our communion with God.

Viewing God as our Heavenly Father can be helpful in clarifying what prayer is and how it can be possible to "pray without ceasing." When my father was alive, I could talk to him about anything any time we were together, whether in person or by phone or even letter (remember, I'm old enough that I grew up before computers and cell phones). Our communication wasn't just me talking to Dad, though. Dad also talked to me, whether to pass along things he wanted me to do or answer my requests for information or advice.

The one thing that kept me from being able to talk to my dad constantly was those times when I wasn't physically with him and couldn't reach him by phone. In those cases, I could still write a letter, but most such occurrences were when I was in the Navy and halfway around the world, so the process, while still possible, were slow.

The limitation on my communications with my earthly father doesn't exist with my Heavenly Father. Since God is everywhere at the same time, we are never apart, and our communications can't even be slowed. I can share anything with God any time and He can answer or share with me at any time.

My earthly father and I didn't talk constantly when we were together, but we both knew that if we felt something needed to be said, we could say it. My Heavenly Father and I don't talk constantly, either, but the lines of communication are open any time. If I need God's attention or advice, all I have to do is say so and He's right there. When God has something for me to do He can just tell me and, if I'm keeping that line open like I should be, I will get the message and either obey or disobey, and if I disobey, I deserve any consequences that come my way.

So "pray without ceasing" doesn't mean that you need to close yourself off from everyone else and bombard God with requests, thanks, and praise. What it does mean is to keep the lines of communication open both ways, cry out to God when you need to, thank and praise God as you feel the urge, and listen when God speaks to you, which He can do through thoughts, visions, dreams, or even audibly if He chooses. If that line is open and you're willing to both speak and listen, you are praying "without ceasing."

I welcome reader questions. E-mail your question to answer67547@gmail.com.

Sin

Continued from page 4

instance, in the accounts of the various successive kings in Israel, we often read of kings who follow in the ways of their fathers—whether for good or for ill. King Ahaziah, for example, "did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and walked in the way of his father and in the way of his mother and in the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin" (1 Kings 22:52). Idolatry and false worship aren't easily extinguished once they're inherited from previous generations. It takes intentional, Spirit-wrought reform, like that carried out by Josiah, who "did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and walked in all the way of David his father, and he did not turn aside to the right or to the left" and destroyed the high places upon which idols were worshiped (2 Kings 22:2; 23).

There is no guarantee, however, that righteous fathers will beget righteous sons and wicked fathers will beget wicked sons. Josiah's son, Jehoahaz, "did what was evil

in the sight of the Lord" (2 Kings 23:32). Hezekiah, on the other hand, had a wicked father in Ahaz, yet he "did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, according to all that David his father had done" (2 Kings 16; 18:3). Notice that the author of Kings mentions David as Hezekiah's father. Hezekiah followed in the godly ways of David rather than the wicked ways of Ahaz.

In these Old Testament examples, we see that idolatry passes easily from one generation to another, and God often punished the Israelites as a result of their idolatry. Although the Lord does not punish people directly for the sins that their fathers commit (the Lord punishes those who follow in the sins of their fathers), their fathers' sins often reverberate, and the consequences can be felt for generations to come. Also, although a righteous son will not suffer directly for the sin of an unrighteous father, he's susceptible to following in the path of his wicked father. He will often indirectly suffer the consequences of some of his father's unrighteous behavior.

For example, if a father is given to drunkenness, his son is more likely to experience abuse and follow in his father's footsteps. Nevertheless, each human bears the punishment for his own wickedness. As Matthew Henry says, "God does not punish the children for the fathers' sins unless they tread in their fathers' steps." Therefore, our answer to the question at hand depends on how we define the word punish in context.

So What?

What does this mean for us? We can draw several applications, but let's just note a few. First, we must be quick to repent, being especially careful with sins that have so easily entangled our family members in the past. Our sins, if not mortified, will affect our children. Second,

we're reminded of the importance of Christian parents' properly discipling and praying for their children. Typically, God blesses through familial lines. Third, sin has direct consequences for those who commit it, but it can also have indirect consequences for those around us and future generations. Last, we're not slaves to the sins of our parents. We are either slaves to sin or slaves to righteousness (Rom. 6:12-23). God has providentially placed us in our respective families, cultures, and societies, with all the privileges, temptations, and disadvantages that come with that context (see Acts 17:26). The parentage that truly matters is whether we're under the headship of Adam or Christ (Rom. 5:12-21).

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"Quality Creates It's Own Demand"

FIRST PERSON: How desperation led me to my front porch

By Robby Gallaty, Baptist Press

Editor's note: The following is an adapted expert from "Wait, Hear" a book by Robby Gallaty, releasing Sept. 22 from B&H Publishing.

Before coming to Christ, my motto was, "If it's meant to be, it's up to me."

Tell me I couldn't achieve something, that I couldn't put a plan together for it and accomplish it and here's what I'd tell you: You should plan on being amazed at how anyone, having this many things on his plate, could somehow pull off another one as well. And could do it so well.

That was me.

The one who knew what to do and made it look easy.

After all, I'm a pastor. Desperate people are who I meet with, not who I am. I'm paid not to be desperate, never to look rushed or overwhelmed – to know what the Bible says, to know who God

is, to know where He is and to keep my cool while I'm waiting for Him. People come asking me questions. Desperate people. Not the other way around. I can't afford to be desperate.

Or that's what I thought.

Until I was.

And, believe me, I was desperate.

If this was what it was like to be in ministry – pastoring a declining church, something I'd never experienced in all my years of full-time service – I was so done with it. I was sick of trying to keep everybody pleased around me, only to be told how far short I was falling of doing what they expected.

I was trying my best. And yet I was being constantly critiqued and criticized for doing what I thought was the right way, the best way, to get our church growing and thriving again.

I cared about revival, but all I could do was just focus on survival.

This was not how I saw my life playing out when I'd been given the opportunity to serve God at this incredible place. I wished for more.

And now, truth be told, I was sometimes wishing for the exit door.

For two months after being told the church was falling out underneath me, I committed every available breakfast and lunch slot in my schedule for meeting with a revolving door of concerned church members.

I asked them, one after another, to help me see what I obviously wasn't seeing, to point out for me the blind spots that were hindering me from being the pastor they felt like I needed to be.

I'd sit there with both my heart and my notebook lying wide open. I have no other agenda, I'd say to them, except for being here to learn. I wanted the truth. And I'm sure it was important for me to hear every nugget of honest feed-

back that they dared to address with me.

But after a while, it just left me reeling. Could all of it really be true? About me? Successful me? About the megachurch pastor in me? I had to remind myself I wasn't as good as I thought, but surely I wasn't as bad as others said I was.

It was brutal. It was painful. And I don't know why I didn't give up right then because I know I felt like it. And from what people were telling me, I wasn't the only one who shared that sentiment.

But somehow, one night, I ended up on my front porch.

Just sitting there, staring off into the distance and darkness, not knowing what was out there.

Little did I know that desperation would lead to months of similar moments.

For ten months, I sat out on my porch every night, spending much of my evenings in silence

and solitude. And during that time, the Holy Spirit spoke something into my heart that has altered me forever.

"Robby," He seemed to say, "you have as much of me as you want. And I want you to know that there is so much more."

More of His power.

More of His companionship.

More of His personal speaking voice.

More of Him, and of all the ways He wants to communicate His heart with us if we, His dearly loved children, will simply draw close enough to hear.

We shouldn't be surprised by that. "Draw near to God," the Bible says, "and he will draw near to you" (James 4:8). "Seek, and you will find" (Matthew 7:7). "Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and incomprehensible things you do not know" (Jeremiah 33:3). But not if we insist on staying the same. Not

if we avoid letting him turn the spotlight on our most undetected or untouchable sins.

After letting the Lord cultivate my spiritual soil, so to speak, I witnessed one of the greatest revivals of all time.

On a Sunday in December 2020, God led 99 people to be baptized at our church. All morning and afternoon, person after person declared they wanted to commit their life to Jesus.

Out of this spiritually dry season, the Lord worked in a way that could only be attributed to Him.

The ten months I spent on my porch weren't just about obedience or discipline. They taught me to enjoy being in the presence of my Heavenly Father.

So, I ventured out to the porch that same Sunday evening, just as I had every other night. But this time I came shak-

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Who Was John Newton?

By Alex DiPrima, Ligonier Ministries

*Amazing grace, how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found;
Was blind, but now I see.*

“Amazing Grace” is perhaps the most well-known and best-beloved hymn in the history of the Christian church. But the remarkable story of its author, John Newton, is not so well-known. Who was the man behind the most famous hymn in church history?

John Newton (1725–1807) was born in London. His father, John Newton Sr., was a sea captain and a hard man who, though he loved his son, struggled to express affection. Newton’s mother, Elizabeth, was an extraordinary

woman of deep spiritual devotion. She sought to teach her son the Scriptures, the Westminster Shorter Catechism, and the theology of the Puritans. Sadly, she died when he was only six years old, but many years later God would bring fruit from the seeds she sowed in her son’s young heart.

As Newton entered his teenage years, he became increasingly wayward. By the time he was eighteen years old, he had become an altogether immoral, dissolute, and debased young man.

Around this time, Newton was press-ganged into service, which officially commenced his naval career at sea. As a midshipman in the Royal Navy, Newton continued his moral decline into all forms of sin, especially drunkenness, blasphemy, and sexual immorality. He became so sinful that even his naval colleagues grew weary of him.

Eventually, Newton was transferred to a slave ship bound for West Africa. He would make a living in the slave trade for the next

decade, eventually capturing several slave ships. On various ships, Newton participated in and witnessed extreme cruelties toward African slaves.

While aboard one slave ship, Newton became known for such flagrant expressions of lewdness, blasphemy, and immorality that, once again, many of his fellow sailors felt scandalized. Newton was so disliked among the crew of his ship that he was eventually abandoned on the west coast of Africa and forced into

slavery under an African princess who treated him cruelly. He was abused, starved, and often forced to engage in degrading activities with other slaves.

“I remember two things: that I am a great sinner and Christ is a great Savior.”

In 1747, after nearly two years in Africa, Newton was rescued by a ship whose captain had been asked to look for him at the request of Newton’s father. It was on the voyage back to England in 1748 that Newton was converted.

The ship and crew were caught in a violent storm that threatened to sink the ship. Newton woke in the middle of the night to find his room rapidly filling with water. In the midst of this panicked scene, he cried out to God for the first time in years, asking the Lord to be merciful to him. He remembered many of the texts his mother had taught him when he was a small boy and then pleaded them before God. For the rest of his life, Newton marked

Continued on page 9

Porch

Continued from page 6

ing, weeping and praising God for what He had done.

I was sitting on Holy Ground. I had done nothing; He had done everything.

My invitation to you is to find your spot. Whether it’s your front porch, the neighborhood park or in a quiet spot of your home. Dedicate a place to meet with the Lord and wait for him to speak to you. And I promise that it will be worth it.

THE TRUE GOSPEL

The good news of God’s grace, through His Son, for the glory of His grace.

1 GOD’S SOVEREIGN GRACE



Salvation begins with God. He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world.

Ephesians 1:4-5

“Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.”

2 OUR TOTAL DEPRAVITY



We are sinners—spiritually dead in transgression and unable to save ourselves.

Ephesians 2:1

“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins.”

3 CHRIST’S ATONING WORK



Christ died for His people. His death was a sufficient sacrifice to save completely.

John 10:11

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”

4 IRRESISTIBLE GRACE



God’s grace effectively calls His chosen people, giving them new life and faith.

John 6:37

“All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.”

5 PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS



Those whom God saves, He keeps. His grace preserves His people to the end.

Philippians 1:6

“He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”



THE GOSPEL IN ONE WORD: JESUS

We are not saved by our efforts, but by His. It is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, for the glory of God alone.

(Ephesians 2:8-9)

HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND?

 Repent of sin

 Trust in Christ alone

 Rest in His finished work

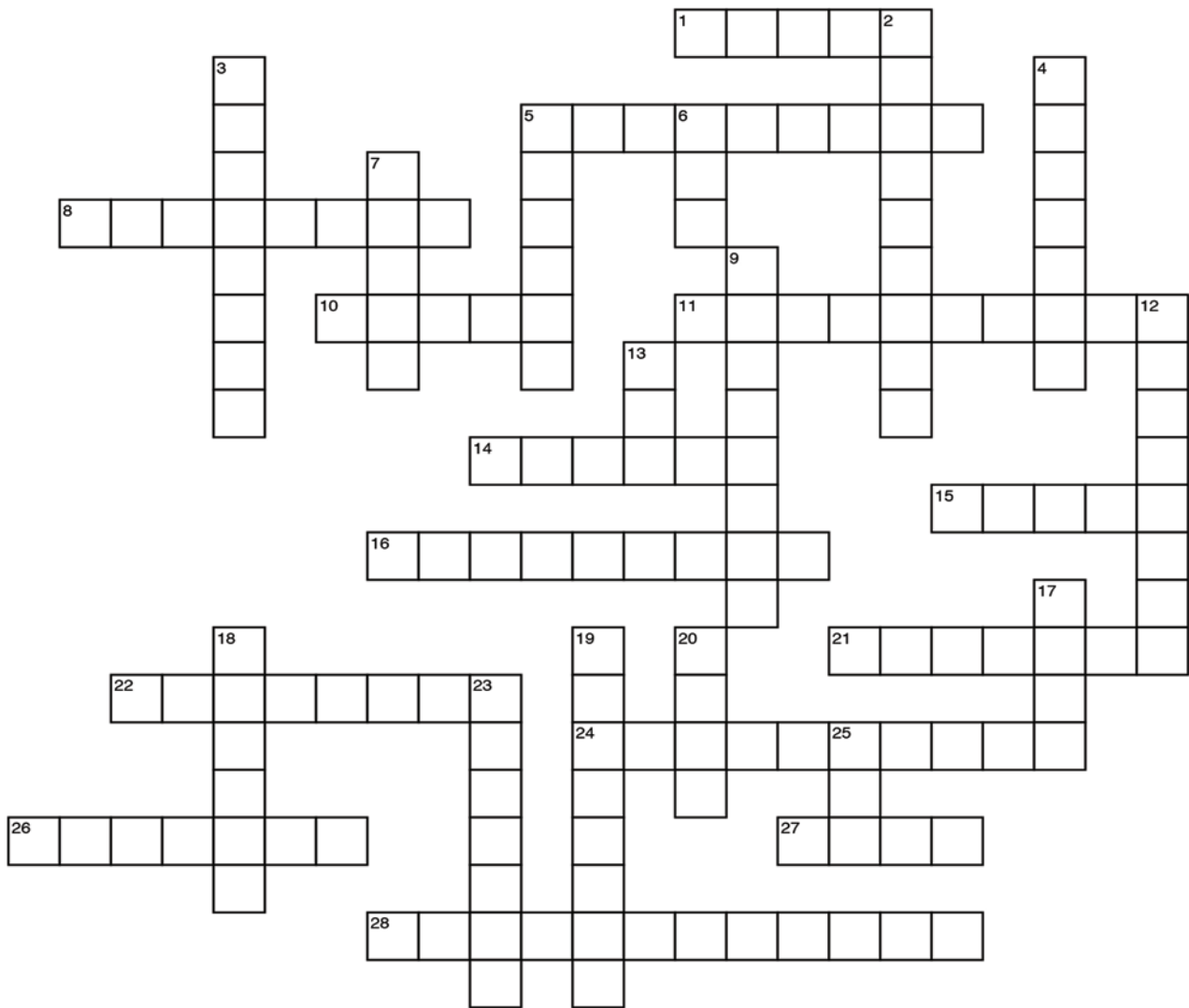
 Follow Him in grateful obedience

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” 2 Corinthians 5:17

A Little Bit of Laughter and Fun
Proverbs 17:22 – “Laughter is like taking a good medicine.”

GENESIS

Mikey’s Funnies



ACROSS

- 1 What Sarah wanted most
- 5 Adam and Eve sewed them together (2 wds)
- 8 What Sarai did to Hagar
- 10 Came from the rib of man
- 11 They were sent ahead with messages
- 14 Where the ark landed
- 15 What Joseph left in Potiphar's house
- 16 In the _____ God
- 21 What the angels did to the men at Lot's door
- 22 What Simeon and Levi were
- 24 Jacob did this to his father (2 wds)
- 26 He was more crafty than any of the wild animals
- 27 What Jacob did when he thought Joseph was dead
- 28 What Lot's wife became (3 wds)

DOWN

- 2 What Adam fell into (2 wds)
- 3 "Be fruitful and _____"
- 4 Where the ram was found by Abraham
- 5 Severe lack of food
- 6 Abraham's nephew
- 7 Noah found this in the eyes of the Lord
- 9 Eating and drinking
- 12 Jacob removed these sheep from the flock
- 13 It was on Rebekah's shoulder
- 17 He was formed from dust
- 18 The part of Jacob's hip which was touched
- 19 He was the Captain of the Guard at Pharaoh's palace
- 20 Abel was his brother
- 23 400 were paid for land to bury Sarah
- 25 First woman

A pious man, who had reached the age of 105, suddenly stopped going to synagogue. Alarmed by the old fellow’s absence after so many years of faithful attendance, the Rabbi went to see him. He found him in excellent health, so the Rabbi asked, “How come after all these years we don’t see you at services anymore?” The old man lowered his voice. “I’ll tell you, Rabbi,” he whispered. “When I got to be 90, I expected God to take me any day. But then I got to be 95, then 100, then 105. So, I figured that God is very busy and must’ve forgotten about me, and I don’t want to remind Him!”

Why do people who live in Greece hate waking up at dawn? Because Dawn is tough on Greece.



Answers in next
month’s issue

20/20 Vision

By La Rena Hildebrand, Ellinwood

Matthew 13:13

This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.

When I was a child in school, I discovered that my eye sight was not 20/20. Teachers would put my desk closer and closer to the board but to no avail, my vision was out of focus. Seeing an Optometrist, it was confirmed that I needed glasses to correct my vision. When I got my glasses, I discovered that I could even see the detail of leaves on trees. Has your vision become out of focus? A relationship with Jesus will bring everything into focus. We as humans, have the tendency to place our trust in things. We trust that our job will continue on, we trust our spouse will always love us, we trust we will have enough money for retirement and on it goes. None of these things are a for sure guarantee. If you just place your life in things, your life will be out of control and out of focus. Jesus said that He came so that we might have life and have it more abundantly. Keep your eyes on Jesus. He is the author and finisher of your faith. Then and only then will your vision be 20/20.

Answers to last month's Crossword

FOUR IN THE FIRE

Solution:



Newton

Continued from page 7

that day, March 21, 1748, as the beginning of his conversion to Christianity. Though greatly damaged, the ship survived the storm and the crew returned safely to England.

In the years after his conversion, Newton became zealous and matured through studying the Scriptures and taking in sermons from leading evangelical preachers of the day. He was especially taken with George Whitefield, who became an informal mentor to Newton and profoundly influenced Newton's own aspirations to pastor and preach.

Within a few years of his conversion, Newton married his childhood sweetheart Mary Catlett, left the slave trade, and settled in Liverpool. By 1764, he published a popular account of his conversion story under the title *An Authentic Narrative*, which was an immediate best seller and did much to establish him as a transatlantic evangelical celebrity. In that same year, Newton took his first pastorate in the market town of Olney, located about sixty miles north of London. He would carry on a faithful pastorate there for over fifteen years. During those years he developed a significant reputation as a great letter writer, publishing collections of his letters to edify and encourage

believers. He also collaborated with the poet and hymn writer William Cowper to produce one of the leading hymnals of the evangelical movement titled *Olney Hymns*. This hymnal included many of Newton's hymns that are now regarded as classics, such as "Amazing Grace," "Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken," and "How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds."

In 1780, Newton moved to London to pastor St. Mary Woolnoth. He would minister there until his death in 1807. These were remarkably fruitful years

for Newton as a pastor. Yet the most notable contribution he made during this period was to befriend and mentor a young evangelical member of Parliament named William Wilberforce. Wilberforce had been thinking of leaving politics and pursuing pastoral ministry. However, Newton convinced him to stay in Parliament in order to promote the cause of Christ in the public sphere and specifically to bring about an end to the slave trade. Wilberforce would ultimately be successful in his campaign to end the British slave trade, relying heavily on Newton

not only for wise counsel but also to provide expert testimony before Parliament that contributed to the defeat of the slave trade.

In the waning days of Newton's life, he reflected, "My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things: that I am a great sinner and Christ is a great Savior." This summarized the theme of Newton's life and ministry. He was a man amazed by the surpassing grace of God toward needy sinners—grace that not only saved a wretch like him, but grace that finally led him home.

THANK YOU FOR CELEBRATING

Autumn
WITH US!



AMERICA'S LAST CHANCE AT FREEDOM IN 2026

Dr. Rodney Crowell

So far, attempts at election reform in 2026 have failed: a small cadre of Democrats plus treacherous RINO Majority Leader John Thune spitefully stalled the President's SAVE America voting act after it had passed the House. Then Trump's Executive Orders in March 2025 and 2026 encouraging states to comply with citizenship verification and tighter mail-in ballot controls faced a barrage of Deep State-funded lawsuits claiming "executive overreach." You know what's far worse? Overreach by the 20 Blue states whose Secretaries of State still refuse permanent removal of dead or non-citizen voters, or to fix their hacked voting machines, or to end Voter ID and mail-in ballot abuses despite 80% of Americans pleading for it! (To their credit, the SOS's from KY, MS and NE filed a Supreme Court brief SUPPORTING proof of citizenship to vote, but it wasn't enough.) Why don't ALL State officials comply? Because the Democrat party – now totally ruled

by "Mohammunists" (Muslims, Communists or people who are both) – realize it's their last chance to impeach Trump and Vance in favor of Hakeem Jeffries or a similar tool of the One-world globalists. A recent Washington Post poll indicates that roughly 75% of Democrats would SUPPORT a Socialist or Communist candidate for President – and presumably, a Muslim one also. Meanwhile, our Supreme Court initially supported Trump, then reversed course. Was the majority doxxed or threatened? Perhaps! If you detest this growing mess, Christian, then read on for a solution!

Peter Tiktin and Jerome Corsi say, "There is no question the Globalists are desperate.... Donald Trump is making progress to eliminate the cheating in our voting system, to eliminate their crooked cash flow (as in USAID) and to restore our military." [One could also add, "to further secure our borders, keep reducing violent crime or drug and human trafficking, to end hundreds of BILLIONS

of dollars in Federal benefit fraud by illegals and also reduce inflation by defeating the Mideast Muslim oil pirates and cutting onerous Biden-era regulations." Did you really expect all these problems Trump inherited to be solved in a mere two years' time? Please, let him and Vance finish their jobs in the time allowed!

But to do that, they must on November 3 defeat the same crooks that cheated in 2020. In August, Trump ordered a Homeland Security investigation of nine states (WA, WI, MO, GA, CA, PA, NV, NY and CT); over a QUARTER-MILLION non-citizens were found on voter rolls in just FOUR of them, but with hostile state bureaucracies slow-walking cooperation, Election Day will come first. So Trump's last move and thus, America's last chance at freedom, can only be this: to declare a NATIONAL ELECTION EMERGENCY as he did with the crisis at our southern border in 2018-19 in accordance with Section 301 of the National Emergencies Act (50 USC 1631). The Deep State thugs filed multiple federal lawsuits to block it, claiming Trump's misappropriation of Congressionally-controlled funds, but they all failed, for the Supreme Court ruled that only a two-thirds vote of both houses can rescind

a presidential national security declaration under the NEA 1976 act. Nonetheless, Democrats are frantically seeking enough radical Mohammunists to form that two-thirds majority; they frankly don't CARE what concerns you or your family, else they would have opposed Biden's COVID rules, his deadly Immigration Flood as well as his transgender child indoctrination in our schools!

Therefore, the mechanisms behind a National Election Emergency would need to equal the massive number of cheating strategies currently run by Democrats and their allies. It would probably include (1) Federal supervisors (FBI/DOJ lawyers) in each major city with military support nearby to overrule compromised local cops or Democrat thugs locking out credentialed election observers and blocking windows with pizza boxes (happened during 2020 in Philadelphia & Detroit!); (2) Random paper ballot audits by Homeland Security due to the security risk posed by Chinese manufactured components in widely-used voting machines (five foreign countries can hack our machines – China, Russia, Iran, North Korea and Venezuela); plus (3) the enactment of Trump's 3/31/26 Executive Order 14399 requiring mail-in bal-

lot envelopes to use official election markings and tracking bar codes to determine which ballots are, or are not, being mailed to legitimate addresses where voting CITIZENS reside. (States would be required to share voter rolls in order to have accurate mail service of ballots.)

While our Constitution gives election administration to Congress and the states, the President must still defend America against "all enemies, foreign and domestic," which is the very reason for the National Emergencies Act! Do you honestly believe that Mus-

lims and Communists pose no existential threat to our nation, or that 19 states REFUSING to supply voter registration data to our Department of Justice is not a crisis? State failure to cooperate with Federal orders is a de facto admission of plans to CHEAT again! Trump will not allow it and neither should we.

Health and Human Services Director Robert F. Kennedy Jr. – nephew of JFK and FORMER Democrat – recently documented how the political party he left has trampled on the Consti-

Continued on page 11

How do you make holy water?

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Kansas Christians Gather for Prayer, Fellowship and Spiritual Growth This October

October will bring several opportunities for Christians across Kansas to gather for prayer, biblical teaching, worship and fellowship. From a 24-hour prayer gathering in Kansas City to conferences for men and women, believers have several events to choose from throughout the month.

StandFirm Men's

FREEDOM

Continued from page 10

tution's Bill of Rights: on the 1st Amendment, by deplatforming and censoring Americans who protested COVID tyranny, even prohibiting religious gatherings while allowing bars to remain open; on the 4th Amendment against "unreasonable searches and seizures" by requiring Americans to disclose personal medical information before exercising their Constitutional rights; on the 5th Amendment by shutting down businesses and seizing their property "without just compen-

sation"; and on the 7th Amendment, denying a right to trial by jury through BLOCKING liability suits against the Big Pharmaceutical companies, regardless of negligence, toxic ingredients or severity of injury.

My question to you, Christian, is this: will you allow the Democrats who did ALL THIS to deceive you into thinking THEY care about our freedoms while Trump DOESN'T? Galatians 5:1 is true in every respect, politically as well as spiritually: "For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery."

Bible Trivia

Q: What were men trying to do at the Tower of Babel?

Answer

A: Built a tower to reach to Heaven.

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Conference — Oct. 3

The 8th Annual StandFirm Men's Conference will be held Saturday, Oct. 3, at Immanuel Baptist Church in Wichita.

This year's theme, "Built Different," will challenge men to build their lives on the firm foundation of Jesus Christ and remain faithful in a changing world.

Men from throughout the Wichita area are invited for a day of biblical teaching, worship, fellowship and encouragement. The conference will feature four pastors from the greater Wichita area and is scheduled from 8:45 a.m. to 2 p.m.

FORGED Kansas Men's Conference — Oct. 15-17

First Pentecostal Church in Wichita will host the FORGED Kansas Men's Conference Oct. 15-17.

Based on Proverbs 27:17 and its reminder that "iron sharpeneth iron," the conference encourages men to strengthen one another and become the men God has called them to

be.

Rev. Travis Houston will speak during the Thursday and Friday evening services, with another service Saturday morning. Meals are included with paid conference registration, while the worship services themselves are free and open to attendees.

A separate men's golf tournament is also planned for Friday, Oct. 16.

24 Hours of Unbroken Prayer — Oct. 16-17

Christians from different churches and communities are invited to come together for 24 Hours of Unbroken Prayer at Westside Family Church's Speedway Campus in Kansas City, Kansas.

Beginning at 6 p.m. Friday, Oct. 16, and continuing through 7 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 17, individuals and groups will maintain continuous prayer for the Church, Kansas City, families and individuals.

The gathering will include live worship, guided prayer stations,

prayer walks and opportunities for both individual and group prayer. Prayer leaders will also be available for those who would like someone to pray with them.

The gathering is being led jointly by UNITE KC and Westside Family Church and is open to everyone. Participants may come for an hour or remain for a longer portion of the event.

Women's Retreats — Oct. 16-17

Women will also have opportunities to gather for Christian fellowship during the same weekend.

The Kansas District Church of the Nazarene will hold its District Ladies Retreat Oct. 16-17 at the Wichita Marriott.

In Olathe, the Kansas City District Church of the Nazarene will host its 2026 Women's Retreat at Olathe Westside Church of the Nazarene. The theme is "Choose Joy," with the weekend focused on fellowship, encouragement and growing in faith.

The Olathe gathering

begins Friday evening and continues Saturday. Childcare will be available for children from birth through fifth grade.

A Month to Gather

While the events vary in format and audience, each offers Kansas Christians an opportunity to intentionally set aside time for their faith.

Whether through joining other believers in prayer, strengthening Christian men, encouraging women in their walk with Christ or simply spending time in fellowship with other believers, October offers numerous opportunities to gather.

As Hebrews 10:24-25 reminds believers, Christians are called to encourage one another and not forsake "the assembling of ourselves together."

Those interested in attending any of the events are encouraged to check with the sponsoring ministry or church for registration requirements and the latest information before traveling.

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Let 'Em Know or Let It Go?

By John MacArthur,
Grace to You

How do we know when to confront and when to quietly forgive and forget?

That's a good question because most people seem to err on one side or the other. Some people think it is best to overlook every offense and take pride in their tolerance. However, Paul confronted the Corinthians for tolerating sin in the church and rebuked them for failing to deal with a man living in sin (1 Corinthians 5).

On the other side of the issue are people who confront over any slight infraction and make themselves intolerable.

Are there any biblical principles to help us make the right choice? Yes! Here are six guidelines to help you know whether to quietly forgive or to lovingly confront.

1. Whenever possible, especially if the offense is petty or unintentional, it is best to forgive unilaterally. This is the very essence of a gracious

spirit. It is the Christ-like attitude called for in Ephesians 4:1-3. We are called to maintain a gracious tolerance ("forbearance") of others' faults. Believers should have a sort of mutual immunity to petty offenses. Love "is not easily angered" (1 Corinthians 13:5). If every fault required formal confrontation, the whole of our church life would be spent confronting and resolving conflicts over petty annoyances. So for the sake of peace, to preserve the unity of the Spirit, we are to show tolerance whenever possible (see Matthew 5:39-40; 1 Peter 2:21-25).

2. If you are the only injured party, even if the offense was public and flagrant, you may choose to forgive unilaterally. Examples of this abound in Scripture. Joseph (Genesis 37-50), David (2 Samuel 16:5-8), and Stephen (Acts 7:60) each demonstrated the unilateral forgiveness of Christ (Luke 23:34).

3. If you observe a serious offense that is a sin against someone other than you, confront the

offender. Justice never permits a Christian to cover a sin against someone else. While we are entitled, and even encouraged, to overlook wrongs committed against us, Scripture everywhere forbids us to overlook wrongs committed against another (see Exodus 23:6; Deuteronomy 16:20; Isaiah 1:17; Isaiah 59:15-16; Jeremiah 22:3; Lamentations 3:35-36).

4. When ignoring an offense might hurt the offender, confront the guilty party. Sometimes choosing to overlook an offense might actually injure the offender (by allowing him to continue unwarned down a wrong path). In such cases it is our duty to confront in love (Galatians 6:1-2).

5. When a sin is scandalous or otherwise potentially damaging to the body of Christ, the guilty party should be confronted. Some sins have the potential to defile many people, and Scripture gives ample warning of such dangers (see 1 Corinthians 5:1-5; Hebrews 3:13; 12:15). In

fact, Scripture calls for the church to discipline individuals who refuse to repent of open sin in the body, so that the purity of the body might be preserved (Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 5).

6. Lastly, any time an offense results in a broken relationship, confrontation of the sinner should occur. Any offense that causes a breach in relationships simply cannot be overlooked. Both the offense and the breach must be confronted, and reconciliation must be sought. And both the offended party and the offender have a responsibility to seek reconciliation (Matthew 5:23-24; Luke 17:3). There is never any excuse for a Christian on either side of a broken relationship to refuse to pursue reconciliation.

The only instance where such a conflict should remain unresolved is if all the steps of discipline in Matthew 18 have been exhausted and the guilty party still refuses to repent.

The Bright Forever

*Breaking through the clouds that gather,
O'er the Christian's natal skies,
Distant beams, like floods of glory,
Fill the soul with glad surprise;
And we almost hear the echo
Of the pure and holy throng,
In the bright, the bright forever,
In the summer land of song.*

*Yet a little while we linger,
Ere we reach our journey's end;
Yet a little while of labor,
Ere the evening shades descend;
Then we'll lay us down to slumber,
But the night will soon be o'er;
In the bright, the bright forever,
We shall wake, to weep no more.*

*O the bliss of life eternal!
O the long unbroken rest!
In the golden fields of pleasure,
In the region of the blessed;
But, to see our dear Redeemer,
And before His throne to fall,
There to bear His gracious welcome,
Will be sweeter far than all.*

Fanny Crosby

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Snail Mail

Continued from page 1

"I've found that God has been using this ministry to touch people when they need it most," she said.

Two passages of Scripture have become particularly important to the ministry.

First Thessalonians 5:11 says, "Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do."

Proverbs 12:25 similarly reminds believers, "Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop: but a good word maketh it glad."

For Eubanks, encouragement isn't simply a nice gesture. It is part of how Christians are called to live.

Ministers of Encouragement

"I believe that as Christians we are called to be ambassadors of the Kingdom of God," Jamie said. "It is our responsibility as the church to combat darkness with light. We are called to love God and love others."

She describes Christians as potential "ministers of encouragement"—people intentionally watching for those around them who may need to experience the love of God.

Sometimes that begins with prayer.

"Through prayer, God can bring people to your mind or heart that He desires to build up and encourage," she said. "This card ministry is one way we can do that."

For someone who feels prompted to encourage another person but doesn't know what

to say, Jamie suggests watching for one of her monthly "card drops." A particular card may bring someone to mind and provide the starting point needed to sit down and write.

Her hope for the future of Encouragement Culture is therefore somewhat different from the goal of most small-business owners.

She isn't dreaming primarily about increasing sales or growing the company.

She wants to see a revival of snail-mail encouragement.

"It isn't about the business thriving," Jamie said. "It's about people stepping out and encouraging others."

Find Encouragement Culture

Jamie typically releases a new "card drop" each month. Previous designs and new releases can be found through Encouragement Culture on Facebook (@Encouragement Culture) and Instagram (@encouragement.culture), or by visiting www.kingdom-bringer.com/encouragementculture.

In an age when communication has become almost instantaneous, perhaps slowing down enough to write a few words, seal an envelope and place it in the mail can still make a difference.

Sometimes encouragement doesn't need to be complicated.

Sometimes it just needs a stamp.



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1983-2012
29
YEARS OF
EXCELLENCE

THEY SHOULD HAVE READ THE BIBLE

By Van Yandell

In the early 1840's, a Hungarian doctor named Ignaz Semmelweis made a discovery. A doctor had performed an autopsy. Then he went directly to the delivery room and delivered a baby.

Soon after the delivery, the mother died. Semmelweis determined the doctors hands were covered in a substance that caused the mother's death and insisted doctors wash their hands often and with a cleansing agent.

He presented evidence their hands were transferring "cadaverous particles," which we now call bacteria to the mother and baby. As a result of his assertion and subsequent practice of extensive hand washing by physicians, the death rates of maternity clinics dropped significantly from eighteen percent down to one to two percent.

In 1847 Semmelweis demanded doctors wash their hands in a chlorinated lime solution before being in physical contact with patients.

Had they read the Bible, they would have known God knew, and published in Leviticus, the necessity of washing hands under running water. This simple

action could have saved many; written over three-thousand years before their actions of ignorance killed the first mother and baby.

Leviticus 15: 13 "And when he that hath an issue is cleansed of his issue; then he shall number to himself seven days for his cleansing, and wash his clothes, and bathe his flesh in running water, and shall be clean."

Washing hands in running water is now a common practice in operating rooms around the world. Washing in a pot of still water only circulates and redistributes the germs.

Microorganisms were first seen under hand-made microscopes in the 1670's. Connecting them to diseases did not occur until the 1860's when numerous experiments proved the connection.

By surgeons knowing to thoroughly wash their hands, many lives were saved that may have otherwise died a horrible death.

The Bible also teaches quarantine which is another disease preventing measure. Leviticus 13: 46 "All the days wherein the plague shall be in him he shall be defiled; he is unclean: he shall dwell alone; without the camp shall his habitation be."

We saw quarantine practiced extensively during the covid years. By keeping those with infectious diseases away from the healthy, the spread appeared to be restrained.

Perhaps people prior to the discovery of the Western Hemisphere should have also read the scriptures. People mostly believed before 500 years ago the earth was flat and was stationary in space.

Job 26: 7 "He stretcheth out the north over the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing." Obviously, God knew and the writer of Job realized the earth is constantly spinning and in an orbital path around our star (the sun). Those movements keep us in orbit and keep us from falling into the sun.

Isaiah 40: 22 "It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in."

Bible scholars mostly agree Isaiah was written between 800 and 600 BC. God, of course, has the advantage of observing our planet from anywhere including outer space.

A circle can be a flat disc but from a few thousand miles above

the earth, it can be observed rotating on an axis thus indicating a sphere.

Prior to a few hundred years ago, many believed the earth was flat and stationary in space. In the third century BC however, Aristotle observed the earths curved shadow on the moon and hypothesized the earth was round and moving.

At the time, many saw him as a lunatic for even suggesting such an absurdity. Conventional wisdom is many times not wisdom at all. Generational handed-down information is also, at times, inaccurate. Always read the scriptures to know what God says.

Prior to the placing of the space telescopes by NASA (Hubble 1990 and James Webb 2021), some astronomers claimed that someday, they would chart and name the stars.

Jeremiah 33: 22a "As the host of heaven cannot be numbered, neither the sand of the sea measured." God and Jeremiah told us 2700 years ago there were so many stars they could not be counted; astronomers are now in agreement, that is correct!

With the space telescopes we are now told there are billions of galaxies, most of those having billions of stars.

Counting the stars in the heavens would be like trying to count the grains of sand on all the world's beaches.

When we come to the understanding that God knows more than we do, then we can come to grip with the truth of the scriptures. Several have been credited with the statement "If one knows a little about the Bible he is an atheist; if he knows a lot about the Bible he is a believer in God."

God told us about the currents in the seas (Psalm 8: 8), proper nutrition (Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14), photosynthesis (Genesis 1: 1-3) and many other science related topics.

Whereas we under-

stand God gave us tremendous information thousands of years ago that no man could have known, perhaps we should listen when He tells us about His Christ being the Savior of the world!

The Bible teaches there is only one eternal salvation. That is by a faith based belief (Ephesians 2: 8) that Christ Jesus was crucified (Matthew 27: 35) for the remission of sin (Romans 4: 25), resurrected (Matthew 28: 6) and ascended alive into Heaven (Acts 1: 9).

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Discerning Leaders

By John MacArthur,
Grace to You

In my previous post on discernment, I closed by quoting 1 Thessalonians 5:21–22, which is essentially the biblical recipe for discernment: “Examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil.”

“Examine everything carefully” (1 Thessalonians 5:21) is a command for all believers. In the context of the passage, Paul sets discernment alongside some of the most basic commands and instructions for the Christian life. Just like prayer and contentment, discernment is a crucial element of the effective Christian life.

That may surprise some Christians who see discernment as a uniquely pastoral responsibility. It is certainly true that pastors and elders have an even greater duty to be discerning than the average lay per-

son. Most of the calls to discernment in the New Testament are issued to church leaders. In 1 Timothy 4:6–7, for example, Paul told Timothy:

Be constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following. But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women.

“Worldly fables fit only for old women” was an epithet Paul applied to the philosophy of his day. He was urging Timothy to know the difference between the truth of God and the nonsense of the world. If Timothy couldn’t tell the difference between sound doctrine and dangerous philosophy, he would not be able to protect the flock. Just a few verses later, Paul added, “Give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching” (1 Timothy 4:13). And then, “Pay

close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things” (1 Timothy 4:16).

Throughout his epistles to Timothy, Paul repeatedly commanded the pastor to pay close attention to sound doctrine, preach the Word, preach and teach these things, guard the truth, and so on. Paul also charged Timothy to avoid empty talk, shun worldly wisdom, turn away from false teachers, and rebuke those who oppose the truth. Timothy needed to stay alert to the differences between the truth and lies, to separate the truth from falsehoods and half-truths. Paul was commanding him as a pastor of the flock to be discerning.

Every elder is required to be skilled in teaching truth and able to refute unsound doctrine (Titus 1:9). As a pastor, I am constantly aware of this responsibility. Ev-

erything I read, for example, goes through a grid of discrimination in my mind. If you were to look through my library, you would instantly be able to identify which books I have read. The margins are marked. Sometimes you’ll see approving remarks and

heavy underlining. Other times you’ll find question marks—or even red lines through the text. I constantly strive to separate truth from error. I read that way, I think that way, and of course I preach that way. My passion is to know the truth and proclaim it with au-

thority. That should be the passion of every elder, because everything we teach affects the hearts and lives of those who hear us. It is an awesome responsibility. Any church leader who does not feel the burden of this duty ought to step down from leadership.



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1 Chronicles 4:10



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The Vine and the Branches

At key points in His ministry, Christ emphasized His equality with God in the clearest possible terminology. The strongest affirmations of His deity employed the name for God used when the Father first revealed Himself to Moses—"I AM" (Exodus 3:14).

Jesus had already said, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12); "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35); "I am the Way" (John 14:6); and "I am the Door" (John 10:9). Now, the night before His death, He tells them, "I am the Vine." Like the other great "I am" passages recorded in the Gospel of John, it points to His deity. Each one is a metaphor that elevates Jesus to the level of Creator, Sustainer, Savior, and Lord—titles that can be claimed only by God.

I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone

does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. (John 15:1-8)

The metaphor in John 15 is of a vine and its branches. The vine is the source and sustenance of life for the branches, and the branches must abide in the vine to live and bear fruit. Jesus, of course, is the vine, and the branches are people. While it is obvious the fruit-bearing branches represent true Christians, the identity of the fruitless ones is in question. Some Bible students say the barren branches are Christians who bear no spiritual fruit. Others believe they are non-Christians. As always, however, we must look to the context for the best answer.

The true meaning of the metaphor is made clear when we consider the characters in that night's drama. The disciples were with Jesus. He had loved them to the uttermost; He had comforted them with the words in John chapter 14. The Father was foremost in His thoughts, because He was thinking of the events of the next

day. But He was also aware of someone else—the betrayer. Judas had been dismissed from the fellowship when he rejected Jesus' final appeal of love.

All the characters of the drama were in the mind of Jesus. He saw the eleven, whom He loved deeply and passionately. He was aware of the Father, with whom He shared an infinite love. And He must have grieved over Judas, whom He had loved unconditionally.

All those characters play a part in Jesus' metaphor. The vine is Christ; the vinedresser is the Father. The fruit-bearing branches represent the

eleven and all true disciples of the church age. The fruitless branches represent Judas and all those who never were true disciples.

Jesus had long been aware of the difference between Judas and the eleven. After washing the disciples' feet, He said, "He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you." For He knew the one who was betraying Him; for this reason He said, "Not all of you are clean" (John 13:10-11). Once a person is forgiven by God, he is clean and does not need the bathing of forgiveness again.

All that is necessary is to clean the dust and dirt of daily sins from his feet.

His point was that a child of God who commits a sin doesn't need to be saved again; he needs only to restore his personal relationship with the Father. But Judas had not even been "bathed," because he was not a child of God, and Jesus knew it. That is why He added, "not all of you are clean." Judas appeared to be like the other disciples. He was with Jesus for the same amount of time—he had even been given the responsibility of keeping the money. It appeared that he was a branch in the vine like the others—but he never

bore real fruit. God finally removed that branch from the vine, and it was burned.

Some would say he had lost his salvation. According to them, the same could happen to any believer who does not bear fruit. But Jesus made a promise to His children, "I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand" (John 10:28). He guaranteed the security of the child of God: "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out" (John

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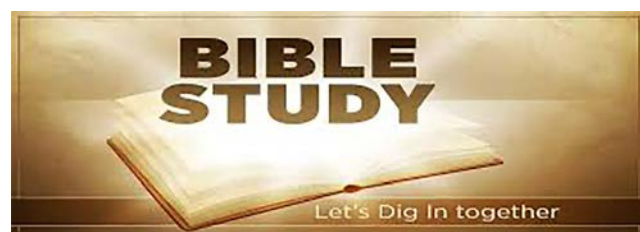
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When God Seems Silent

Key Scripture

"But I have trusted in thy mercy; my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation."

—Psalm 13:5

Introduction

There are times when God seems very near. We pray and see answers, read His Word and find direction, and clearly recognize His hand at work.

But there are also seasons when we pray and hear no answer. We seek direction, but the path remains unclear. During these times, we may wonder whether God hears us at all.

Scripture reminds us that God's silence does not mean His absence.

Teaching

David understood what it felt like to wait on God. In Psalm 13, he cried, "How long wilt thou forget me, O LORD? forever?" David felt forgotten, but his feelings did not reflect the truth of God's faithfulness.

By the end of the same psalm, David declares, "But I have trusted in thy mercy." His circumstances may not have changed, but his focus had. Instead of dwelling on what he could not understand, David remembered what he knew about God.

We are called to do the same.

Hebrews 13:5 contains God's promise, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." Even when we cannot see what God is doing, we can trust what He has already said.

Waiting also does not mean that God has stopped working. Throughout Scripture, God's people experienced periods when His plan was not immediately visible. Abraham waited for the promised son. Joseph endured slavery and imprisonment. David waited years between being anointed and becoming king.

God was working even when they could not see it.

Application

Is there something you have prayed about repeatedly without seeing an answer?

Continue praying. Continue reading God's Word. Continue obeying what He has already revealed to you.

Instead of allowing uncertainty to determine what you believe about God, remember His past faithfulness. Write down prayers He has answered, difficult seasons He has carried you through and promises from Scripture you can depend upon.

Faith means trusting God even when you cannot yet see what He is doing.

Closing Thought

God's silence is not proof that He has forgotten you. Sometimes we must trust His heart when we cannot see His hand.

Like David, we can look beyond our present circumstances and say, "I have trusted in thy mercy."

The answer may not come when or how we expect, but God remains faithful while we wait.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, help me trust You when I cannot see what You are doing. When my prayers seem unanswered and I become discouraged, remind me of Your faithfulness. Give me patience to wait, strength to continue praying and faith to trust Your Word above my feelings. Help me remember that You will never leave nor forsake me. In Jesus' name, amen.

Branches

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6:37). A true believer cannot lose his salvation and be condemned to hell.

A branch that is truly connected to the vine is secure and will never be removed. But one that only appears to be connected—one that has only a superficial connection—will be removed. If it does not have the life of the vine flowing through it, it will bear no fruit. Those are the Judas-branches.

There are people who, like Judas, appear by human perception to be united with Christ, but they are apostates doomed to hell. They may attend church, know all the right answers, and go through religious motions; but God will remove them, and they will be burned. Others, like the eleven, are genuinely connected to the vine and bear fruit.

Christ Is the True Vine
Jesus was not introducing a new idea by using the metaphor of a vine and branches. In the Old Testament, God's vine was Israel. He used them to accomplish His purpose in the world, and He blessed those connected with them. He was the vinedresser; He cared for the vine, trimmed it, and cut off branches that did not bear fruit. But God's vine degenerated and bore no fruit. The vinedresser grieved over the tragedy of Israel's fruitlessness:

Let me sing now for my well-beloved a song of my beloved concerning His vineyard. My well-beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hill. He dug it all around, removed its stones, and planted it with the choicest vine. And He built a tower in the middle of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; then He expected it to produce good grapes, but it produced only worthless ones. "And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between Me and My vineyard. What more was there to do for My vineyard that I have not done in it? Why, when I expected it to produce good grapes did it produce worthless ones? So now let Me tell you what I am going to do to My vineyard: I will remove its hedge and it will be consumed; I will break down its wall and it will become trampled ground. I will lay it waste; it will not be pruned or hoed, but briars and thorns will come up. I will also charge the clouds to rain no rain on it." For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel. (Isaiah 5:1-7)

God had done everything He could to make Israel bear fruit, yet it bore none. So He took away its wall and left it unprotected. It was then trampled down by foreign nations and laid waste. Israel was no longer God's vine; it had forfeited its privilege.

Now there is a new vine. No longer does

blessing come through a covenantal relationship with Israel. Fruit and blessing come through connection with Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the true Vine. In Scripture, the word true is often used to describe what is eternal, heavenly, and divine. Israel was imperfect, but Christ is perfect; Israel was the type, but Christ is the reality.

He is also the true Tabernacle, as opposed to the original, earthly tabernacle (cf. Hebrews 8:2). He is the true light (John 1:9). God revealed His light before, but Christ is the perfect light; He is all that can be revealed. He is also the true bread (John 6:32). God had sustained men by manna from heaven, but Christ is the highest quality of bread, the perfect spiritual sustenance.

Jesus chose the figure of a vine for several reasons. The lowliness of a vine demonstrates His humility. It also pictures a close, permanent, vital union between the vine and branches. It is symbolic of belonging, because branches belong entirely to the vine; if branches are to live and bear fruit, they

must completely depend on the vine for nourishment, support, strength, and vitality.

Yet many who call themselves Christians fail to depend on Christ. Instead of being attached to the true vine, they are tied to a bank account. Others are attached to their education. Some have tried to make vines out of popularity, fame, personal skills, possessions, relationships, or fleshly desires. Some think the church is their vine, and try to attach themselves to a religious system. But none of those things can sustain or bear fruit. The vine is Christ.

The Father Is the Vinedresser

In the metaphor, Christ is a plant, but the Father is a person. Certain false teachers have claimed that that shows Christ is not divine, but lower in character and essence than the Father. They say if He is God, His and the Father's parts in the metaphor should be equal; He should be the vine, and the Father should be the root of the vine.

But to make such a claim is to miss the whole

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Branches

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point of Jesus' metaphor and the reason the apostle John included it in his Gospel. While He is affirming His equality in essence with the Father—by claiming to be the source and sustainer of life—He is also emphasizing the fundamental difference in His role and that of the Father. The point is that the Father cares for the Son and for those joined to the Son by faith.

The disciples were familiar with the role of the vinedresser. After a vine is planted, the vinedresser has two duties. First, he cuts off fruitless branches, which take away sap from the fruit-bearing branches. If sap is wasted, the plant will bear less fruit. Then he constantly trims shoots from the fruit-bearing branches so that all the sap is concentrated on fruit-bearing. Both of those duties are described in verse 2: "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He

takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit."

The fruitless branches that are cut off are useless. Since they do not burn well, they cannot even be used to warm a house. They are thrown into piles and burned like garbage. As verse 2 says, they are "taken away." He doesn't repair them; He removes them.

Those who are removed only appear to be connected to Christ. They don't really abide in Him. They were never

saved. They are Judas-branches that don't really follow Jesus, and they bear no fruit. At some point in time, the Father removes them to preserve the life and fruitfulness of the other branches.

The fruit-bearing branches are pruned so they will bear more fruit. We know these branches represent Christians, because only Christians can bear fruit. Pruning is not done only once—it is a constant process. The Father prunes a branch so it may bear more fruit. After continual pruning, it bears much fruit. As verse 8 says, "My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit."

The Fruitless Branches Are Removed

Fruit-bearing and non-fruit-bearing branches grow rapidly and must be carefully pruned. If there is to be a large quantity of fruit, the fruitless branches must be removed, as well as the shoots that grow on the fruit-bearing branches.

In first-century Palestine, it was common to prevent a vine from bearing fruit for three years after it was planted. In the fourth year it was strong enough to bear fruit. Its fruit-bearing capacity had been increased by the careful pruning. Mature branches, which had already been through the four-year process, were pruned annually between December and January.

Jesus said His follow-

ers were like mature branches that bore fruit but needed pruning. There is no such thing as a fruitless Christian. Every Christian bears some fruit. You may have to look hard to find even a small grape, but if you look enough, you will find something.

It is the essence of the Christian life to bear fruit. Ephesians 2:10 says, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." The fruit of salvation is good works. James 2:17 explains the close relationship between faith and works, "Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself." If saving faith is legitimate, it produces fruit. That does not mean a person is saved by works, but works are evidence that faith is genuine.

Jesus said a genuine believer can be tested by his fruit. In Matthew 7:16-17 He said, "You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor figs from the thistles, are they? So every good tree bears good fruit; but the bad tree bears bad fruit" (emphasis added). Jesus' illustration would make no sense if every Christian did not bear at least some fruit.

John the Baptist recognized the connection between salvation and fruit-bearing. When he saw the Pharisees and

Sadducees coming to be baptized, he said, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance" (Matthew 3:7-8). Lack of fruit showed that their repentance was not genuine.

Since all Christians bear fruit, it is clear that the fruitless branches in John 15 cannot refer to believers. In fact, the fruitless branches had to be eliminated and thrown into the fire. Yet, in verse 2, Jesus refers to the fruitless branches as those who are "in Me." If they are "in Him," are they not genuine believers?

Not necessarily. Other passages in Scripture show it is possible to be attached to the Vine without being a true believer. For example, Romans 9:6 says, "For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel." A person can be part of the nation of Israel yet not be a true Israelite. Likewise, one can be a branch without abiding in the true Vine. In a similar metaphor, Romans 11:17-24 represents Israel as an olive tree from which God has removed branches. Those branches were cut off because of unbelief (Romans 11:20).

Some only appear to be a part of God's people. Luke 8:18 says, "So take care how you listen; for whoever has, to him more shall be given; and

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Branches

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whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has shall be taken away from him." Those who only appear to belong will be removed from God's people.

Clearly, some who appear to be in Christ do not truly abide in Him. As 1 John 2:19 says, "They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us."

If you are religious, you need to be sure your connection to Christ is genuine. The apostle Paul said, "Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?" (2 Corinthians 13:5).

We have a stern warning from Scripture to check our own lives and make sure our salvation is real. This is serious; a branch that does not bear fruit is taken away and burned. Those who say the discarded branches are Christians have a problem: the branches are burned. If they are Christians, it would mean they have lost their salvation forever.

But those fruitless branches are Judas-branches, false branches,

people who associate themselves with Jesus and His people and put on a facade of faith in Him. But even though they may appear to be connected to Christ, their association is superficial. So the Father removes them.

The Fruitful Branches Are Pruned

Although the fruitless branches are removed from the vine and burned, the Father tenderly cares for the fruit-bearing branches. In verse 2, Jesus told His disciples, "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit." All the fruit-bearing branches are included. The vinedresser prunes the branches so they will bear much fruit.

Kathairo is the Greek word for "prune," or "cleanse." In farming, it referred to cleaning the husks off corn and cleaning the soil before planting crops. In the metaphor of the vine, it refers to cleaning shoots off branches.

In first-century Palestine, vinedressers removed shoots in several ways. Sometimes the tip was pinched off so the shoot would grow more slowly. Larger branches were topped to prevent them from becoming too long and weak. Unwanted flower or grape clusters were thinned out.

Pruning is also necessary in our spiritual lives. The Father removes sins and the su-

perfluous things that limit our fruitfulness. One of the best ways to cleanse us is to allow suffering and problems to come into our lives. He prunes us with a vinedresser's knife. Sometimes it hurts, and we wonder if He knows what He is doing. It may seem we are the only branch getting pruned while other branches need it more. But the Vinedresser knows what He is doing.

Spiritual pruning can take many forms. It may be sickness, hardships, or loss of material possessions. It may be persecution or slander from non-Christians. For some it is the loss of a loved one or grief in a relationship. Or it may be a combination of difficulties. Whatever the method, the effect is to narrow our focus and strengthen the quality of our fruit.

Whatever the method of pruning God uses, we can be assured He cares about us and wants us to bear much fruit. He wants to free us from the shoots that drain our life and energy. He continues His care throughout our lives to keep us spiritually healthy and productive.

Knowing the Father's love and concern should change the way we look at trials. He does not allow us to experience problems and struggles for no purpose. The problems He permits are designed to develop us so we can bear more fruit.

He does that because

He loves us. As Hebrews 12:6 says, "For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives."

Do you look at trials and problems as pruning done by our loving Vinedresser? Or do you lapse into self-pity, fear, complaining, and brooding? Perhaps you feel God had good intentions but now just doesn't know what He is doing. Or maybe you ask, "God, why me? Why do I have to have problems when it seems like no one else does?"

If we remember that God is trying to make us more fruitful, we can look past the pruning process to the goal. It is thrilling to realize that God wants our lives to bear much fruit. Hebrews 12:7 encourages us to have a proper perspective on God's perfecting process: "It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?"

In verse 10, He goes on to emphasize that it is for our good; "For they [our earthly fathers] disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness." The pruning process hurts, but the fruit—holiness—is well worth it.

The Vinedresser's pruning knife is the Word of God. In John 15:3, Jesus said to the disciples, "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you." The word translated "clean" in that verse is the same word He used in verse 2 to describe the pruning process. God's Word cleans the sin out of our lives. That stimulates fruitfulness.

The Father uses affliction to make us more responsive to His Word. Most of us become more sensitive to the truth of Scripture when we are in trouble. When we have a particular problem, a verse of Scripture sometimes will seem to jump

off the page. In adversity, the Word of God comes alive.

Spurgeon once said, "The Word is often the knife with which the great Husbandman prunes the vine; and, brothers and sisters, if we were more willing to feel the edge of the Word, and to let it cut away something that may be very dear to us, we should not need so much pruning by affliction. It is because that first knife does not always produce the desired result that another sharp tool is used by which we are effectually pruned."

The pruning process helps us bear more fruit. If there is no fruit in your life, if there is no genuine connection to Jesus Christ, you are in danger of being removed and cast into the fire of hell. If there is fruit in your life, you can rejoice that affliction is making the pruning knife more effective, and that the Vinedresser's ultimate goal is that you bear much fruit.

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A Disciple's Journey: The Drift.

By Micah Powell, Grace Community Church in Great Bend

In Prince Caspian, the Pevensie children are traveling through the forest in search of Aslan. Lucy sees Him first and begs the others to follow, but they hesitate. They trust their instincts, not her word. Eventually, they realize they've gone the wrong way—not because they ran from the path, but because they drifted.

That is exactly how spiritual drift often works. Not through dramatic rebellion, but slow forgetfulness. Not through outright denial, but subtle distraction. In Judges 2, we see Israel caught in that exact spiral. And if we are honest, we can see ourselves in

it, too.

1. When We Forget the Lord (Judges 2:6-10).

At first, everything looks good. The people had followed Joshua faithfully. They had entered the land and received their inheritance. However, when Joshua and his generation passed away, a tragic event occurred. A new generation arose "who did not know the Lord or the work He had done for Israel."

That word "know" does not just mean information. It implies a relationship. They didn't walk with God. They had heard of Him, but they didn't treasure Him. The stories of God's faithfulness became second-hand. And slowly, they forgot.

That is where the drift

begins, not with complete rejection, but with spiritual amnesia. We stop remembering. We assume our kids will absorb the faith without instruction. We think yesterday's fire will keep today's heart warm. And before we know it, our love grows cold.

Joel Beeke once wrote, "The greatest threat to the church is not from outside enemies, but from within—from forgetfulness of God's faithfulness and a slow cooling of our first love." Discipleship does not drift upward. It drifts away when we stop remembering who God is and what He has done. So we must stop and ask: Am I walking with God, or coasting on memory? Have I passed on His works to the next generation, or just assumed

they're watching?

2. When We Turn to Other Gods (Judges 2:11-15).

As the memory of God fades, something else takes His place. The Israelites "abandoned the Lord and served the Baals."

These false gods were not harmless statues. Baal worship involved dark, twisted practices, rituals, immorality, and even child sacrifice. Israel did not fall into this overnight. They slowly adjusted, blended, and compromised.

Idolatry does not begin with a golden calf. It begins when we stop treasuring the true God and start chasing satisfaction elsewhere. Today, the idols may look more refined, but the root is the same: control, approval, success,

comfort. When we lean on anything more than we lean on God, we are bowing to another altar.

And God responds, not with silence, but with discipline. He lets Israel feel the consequences of their choice. He gives them over to the very things they trusted. Not to crush them, but to wake them.

Tim Keller puts it plainly: "An idol is whatever you look at and say, 'If I have that, then I'll feel my life has meaning.'" And when that thing fails us, as it always does, we end up exhausted, bitter, or numb.

3. When God Still Shows Mercy (Judges 2:16-19)

Here is the miracle. Even after Israel forgets, even after they replace God with idols, He does not give up.

"The Lord raised up judges who saved them."

These were not perfect heroes. They were flawed leaders. But they were vessels of God's mercy.

Verse 18 says God was "moved to pity by their groaning." Not their performance. Not their cleaned-up religion. Just their honest desperation. Even when they drifted, His mercy came calling. He heard them. He raised up help. He did what only He could do, rescue.

God does not wait for us to fix ourselves before responding. His grace

moves toward our need. He is not impressed by our promises. Our pain moves him. And when we cry out, He acts.

John Stott once said, "Grace is love that stoops and rescues." That is what God does in the book of Judges. And that is what He still does through Christ.

The Way Back

If you've been drifting, you probably know it. Your prayers have grown cold. Your joy feels distant. You go through the motions, but your heart is numb. Let me say this clearly: you are not disqualified. You are invited.

You are invited to return, not to the performance, but to the grace. Not to guilt, but to mercy. You return by remembering who God is. You return by confessing what you've trusted instead of Him. You return by crying out. And when you do, He meets you there.

Jared Wilson writes, "As soon as we start thinking of the gospel as something instead of a Someone, it becomes a word easy to hyphenate, and Jesus becomes a Savior easy to forget." The gospel is not just our starting point. It is the map, the anchor, and the invitation to come home.

So do not stay in the drift. Remember what He has done. Confess what you have replaced

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Relief efforts continue following Nepali mudslides



A group of Nepali men push a truck through a muddy road following devastating mudslides in the country. Send Relief photo

By Karen L. Willoughby,
Baptist Press

The situation in Nepal is much more dire than news reports indicate, says the pastor of an unnamed Christian church in Kathmandu and leader of a Nepali

Drift

Continued from page 20

Him with. Examine your heart, your habits, and your hopes. And return, because mercy is already running toward you.

network of more than five hundred churches across Nepal.

"Eyewitnesses tell us that more than 25 to 30 thousand people died but the government has only reported 12,500," the Nepali pastor on Sept. 5 texted Marc Maurer, pastor of Journey Church in Grand Junction, Colo. "We are not told how many people really are missing. Flash floods are worse than what we have been told in the news.

"What is being re-

ported is what is easily accessible," the Nepali pastor continued. "The damage is more far-reaching than that."

Reports from partners on the ground working with Southern Baptists' global humanitarian and community ministry Send Relief underscored the severity of the situation, with aid efforts complicated by worsening road conditions and monsoon rains.

Maurer has been serving in short-term missions in Nepal since 2011. He leads pastoral training sessions over a two-week period each fall throughout Nepal at numerous sites.

He is familiar with the terrain left devastated when a slab of ice 49 acres in size (equal to 37 American football fields) broke off a glacier in the Himalayans Aug. 26.

A cascading wall

of melted ice, pulverized rock and mud fell 10,000 feet in 50 minutes through narrow mountain gorges on its way down to the plains. The sludge that reached as high as 250 feet on the sides of the gorges swallowed homes, villages and towns of four to six story buildings that had clung to either side of the Bhotekoshi river system, which meanders along the Nepal/China border.

Various news media, including the onsite reporting of India Today, told of 41 bridges and a dozen hydro plants severely damaged or destroyed, 25 miles of road obliterated, and 20 schools gone in an area of about 93,000 people.

"More than 20 pastors and 200 Christian families are missing," the Nepali pastor texted Maurer on Aug. 28.

Maurer told Baptist Press he personally

knows pastors who are working with a network of other pastors in the region.

"What's amazing to see," Maurer said, "is that as these pastors meet physical needs with the help of donations from partner churches in America, they share the Gospel and people who have lost everything get the hope they need to start over, this time with Jesus at their side."

Maurer knows devastation. He was by God's providence onsite in 2015 when a 7.8 earthquake in central Nepal resulted in nearly 9,000

deaths and massive destruction. Maurer and his team of five Colorado pastors were on a short-term mission to train network leaders when the earthquake hit.

Restricted travel left them stranded in Kathmandu, where they pivoted and ministered to those displaced by the quake, handing out hundreds of New Testaments written in the Nepali language, praying with the displaced victims, and sharing the gospel message.

"We saw several come

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When Spiritual Authority Becomes Control: The Mica Miller Story

The death of 30-year-old Mica Miller in April 2024 drew national attention to a South Carolina church, a troubled marriage and difficult questions about what can happen when spiritual authority and personal control become intertwined.

More than two years later, Mica's story is again receiving widespread attention following the August release of Netflix's three-part documentary *Death of the Pastor's Wife*. Meanwhile, her estranged husband, John-Paul "JP" Miller, is awaiting trial on federal charges of cyberstalking and making false statements to investigators. He has pleaded not guilty.

For Christians, the

story raises an important issue that extends far beyond one pastor or one congregation: How should the church respond when claims of abuse involve someone in spiritual authority?

The Death of Mica Miller

Mica was the wife of JP Miller, then pastor of Solid Rock Church in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, where Mica had also served as a worship leader.

On April 27, 2024, Mica was found dead at Lumber River State Park in North Carolina. The Robeson County Sheriff's Office concluded that she died by suicide after reviewing surveillance footage, interviews, physical evidence and findings from the North Carolina

Medical Examiner. The medical examiner subsequently confirmed the cause of death as a gunshot wound to the head and reported no evidence of a physical struggle.

Her death came two days after she had served JP with divorce papers.

Mica's family and friends have since publicly described what they say was a lengthy pattern of coercive and abusive behavior within the marriage. JP has denied abusing Mica. Importantly, he has not been charged with causing or participating in her death.

Federal Charges Follow

The criminal case now facing JP concerns alleged conduct before

Mica's death, not her death itself.

In December 2025, a federal grand jury indicted him on one count of cyberstalking and one count of making false statements to federal investigators.

According to the U.S. Attorney's Office, prosecutors allege that between November 2022 and April 2024 JP repeatedly harassed Mica, including contacting her more than 50 times in one day, having tracking devices placed on her vehicle, interfering with her finances and daily activities, posting a nude photograph of her online without her consent and damaging her vehicle's tires.

Prosecutors further allege that JP later false-



Micah Miller

ly told investigators that he had not damaged the tires, while investigators say evidence showed he had purchased a tire-deflation device and communicated with others about Mica's vehicle. These are allegations contained in the federal case and have not been proven at trial. JP has pleaded not guilty and is presumed innocent unless proven guilty.

His case has experienced several delays. As of September, jury selection is scheduled for Oct. 13, 2026, with a pretrial conference scheduled for Oct. 6.

When Leadership Goes Unquestioned

Whatever the eventual outcome of JP Miller's criminal case, Mica's story presents Christians with a broader question worth considering.

Biblical leadership is not unquestionable leadership.

Pastors are given important responsibilities within the church, but Scripture never places them beyond accountability.

Peter instructed church elders:

"Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock."

— 1 Peter 5:3

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Miller

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Jesus likewise contrasted godly leadership with worldly authority, telling His disciples that those who would be great among them should become servants.

A pastor’s position therefore should never be used to demand unquestioning obedience, isolate someone from family or friends, excuse sinful behavior or silence legitimate concerns.

Scripture also provides standards by which church leaders are to be evaluated. First Timothy 3 describes an overseer as one who should be “blameless,” “vigilant,” “sober,” “of good behaviour” and one who rules his own

household well. Holding church leaders accountable to those standards is not rebellion against biblical authority. Those standards come from Scripture itself.

Recognizing Spiritual Abuse

Spiritual abuse can be particularly difficult to recognize because biblical language may be mixed with unhealthy behavior.

Submission, forgiveness, reconciliation and respect for authority are biblical concepts. But they can be distorted when someone uses them to obtain control over another person or to prevent legitimate concerns from being addressed.

Christians should be especially cautious when a spiritual leader suggests that question-

ing him is equivalent to questioning God.

The Bereans were praised in Acts 17:11 because they examined the Scriptures to determine whether even the apostle Paul’s teaching was true.

That principle remains important today.

Our ultimate authority is not a pastor, denomination, ministry personality or church institution.

It is God’s Word.

A Responsibility for the Church

Churches should be places where those experiencing abuse can seek help without automatically being treated as disloyal, rebellious or spiritually deficient.

Allegations should not automatically be assumed true simply because they are made. Neither should seri-

ous allegations automatically be dismissed because the accused person is respected, successful or holds a position of ministry.

Christians can take both truth and due process seriously.

Paul instructed believers in Ephesians 5:11 to “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.”

The reputation of a ministry should never become more important than truth.

Mica Miller’s story is tragic. It is also a reminder that a title such as pastor does not remove the need for accountability.

Healthy spiritual leadership points people toward Christ rather than making them dependent upon the leader.

And when authority inside the church is used in ways that appear inconsistent with Scripture, Christians should not be afraid to ask questions, seek wise counsel and bring what is hidden into the light.



J.P. Miller

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Nepali

Continued from page 21

to Christ," Maurer said. The Colorado pastor's background as an architect became useful as he worked with Southern Baptists, providing building inspections for the housing of displaced international and local ministry partners.

"Southern Baptists distributed tons of supplies and hundreds of people came to know the Lord," Maurer said as a result of Western Colorado churches in 2015 raising much-needed relief funds. "The funds from Western Colorado helped to purchase tarps for temporary shelters, potable water, and food supplies. Partnering with

Nepali Network pastors and local government officials, the distribution of these supplies was safeguarded and met the needs of more than 2,000 people in some of the hardest-hit areas.

"Prayer, Bible distribution, and the faithful presentation of the Gospel message by these network pastors and their churches resulted in multitudes of professions of faith, baptisms, and the planting of numerous new churches," Maurer added.

The difference between the 2015 earthquake and the Aug. 26 glacier-fall is the difference between rubble and mud the texture of wet concrete, he said.

"This time flooding left mounds of sand and mud and debris in

and around peoples' homes," Maurer said. "Downstream towns, including Galchhi, were flooded in mud up to six feet. For the survivors of that, there's the difficulty of finding food and especially water. Flooding always destroys wells and other potable water sources."

The southern half of Nepal, called the Terai Region, is wide river valleys and plains, where a wide range of crops grow. "Certain areas will grow rice, others, beans, and in a lot of these places, crops are grown for a regional distribution," Maurer said. "So, if crops are destroyed, they affect a vast number of people."

Southern Baptist Send Relief has been onsite in Nepal since Aug. 27 working with local partners in Nepal to distrib-

ute emergency supplies and aid within 24 hours of the disaster, including food staples, first aid and hygiene kits, water filters and purification tablets, cookware, blankets, tarps and tents, mosquito nets and solar lights.

"Send Relief works through local partners and believers who are already in these communities to assess what each village needs," said a Send Relief leader of a Disaster Assistance Response Team, whose identity was withheld due to security concerns. "We help them identify the full range of needs in their communities – clean water, sanitation, food, shelter, healthcare, and the emotional weight families are carrying – and then equip them to meet those needs.

"Our prayer is that as we serve alongside these communities, everyone will have the opportunity to hear the hope of the Gospel."

Since Send Relief's Nepal flood response began, the organization has distributed aid through partners and believers on the ground to more than 3,000 survivors of the disaster.

"The churches we work with are already there and will still be there long after the water is gone," said Jason Cox, Send Relief's vice president for international ministry.

"Families in Nepal are still waiting for answers," he said. "Please pray for families grieving the loss of loved ones, for those searching while waiting for word, for families who lost their homes, for

rescue workers moving through dangerous conditions, and for the churches and believers in Nepal serving their neighbors, that they would bring real comfort to their friends and neighbors as they share the hope of Jesus."

Donations can be made online at SendRelief.org.

"Our efforts during the 2015 earthquake helped me to see firsthand how Southern Baptists managed relief funding at scale, where the funds given were the funds distributed in the field, in the hardest-hit locations," Maurer said. "This year our spearhead efforts will work through Send Relief with similar anticipated results for the victims of this natural disaster."

OPPOSING VIEWPOINTS

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