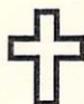
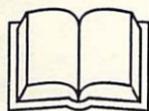


"Holding fast the Faithful Word . . ."



The *Word and Work*



"Holding forth the Word of Life."

April 2007

**Do you Pray FAST,
or FAST and PRAY?**

Heartbreaking Statistics

**Human Persecution
and Divine Judgment**

"The Devil's Beattitudes"

If the devil were to write his beatitudes, they would probably go something like this:

1. Blessed are those who are too tired, too busy, too distracted to spend an hour once a week with their fellow Christians - they save me the effort of trying to keep them from God's blessings.

2. Blessed are those Christians who wait to be asked and expect to be thanked - its pretty easy to keep them from working for God.

3. Blessed are the touchy who stop going to church - they are my missionaries.

4. Blessed are the trouble makers - they shall be called my children.

5. Blessed are the complainers - I'm all ears for them.

6. Blessed are those who are bored with the minister's mannerisms and mistakes - for they get nothing out of his sermons.

7. Blessed is the church member who expects to be invited to his own church - for he is a part of the problem instead of the solution.

8. Blessed are those who gossip - for they shall cause strife and division - that pleases me.

9. Blessed are those who are easily offended - for they will soon get angry and quit.

10. Blessed are those who do not give their offering to carry on God's work - for they are my helpers.

11. Blessed is he who professes to love God but hates his brother and sister - for they shall be with me forever.

THE WORD AND WORK

"Declare the whole counsel of God"

Alex V. Wilson, Editor

Dennis L. Allen, Missions

Bennie Hill, News & Notes

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Sermon on the Mount--

“Spiritual Disciplines”

A Review of Matthew 5 and Preview of Matthew 6

In Matthew chapter 5, Christ *begins* His Sermon by urging us to be humble. He calls us to realize and *admit our lack of righteousness*, and to mourn over it. He calls us to *hunger and thirst for righteousness*, as starving men crave food and drink. By the *end* of the chapter He urges us to *practice righteousness*, and to do it so thoroughly that it is obvious that God has made a huge difference in our life. (To turn the other cheek and go the second mile, for instance.) He wants to help transform those who seek Him and His righteousness into people obviously different from those who do not follow Him.

Now in chapter 6:1-18 Jesus teaches us about three *roots or means of righteousness*: prayer, fasting, and helping the poor.

ACTORS on a STAGE, or CHILDREN of the KING?

Used
Feb 2017
WxW website

A Survey of Matt. 6:1-18
a.v.w.

It seems Jesus in this sermon chose to teach about the practices of alms-giving, praying, and fasting --not because they were being neglected, but because they were being abused. They were not *un*-used but *mis*-used. The Jewish religious leaders of His day emphasized and practiced them. But Jesus said God was not impressed. (How does He feel today, about me?)

Perhaps a devoutly religious Jew in the first century wanted to make amends for “some command I may have broken.” Or wished to build up a supply of “extra merit” with God. How could he reach such goals? Their Jewish traditions and rabbis recommended those three activities: charity to the poor, and prayer, and fasting.

Those practices were not required in the 10 Commandments--the most important summary of their duties. But they were like doing overtime on the job, or writing an optional extra-credit assignment at school. They could bail you out of trouble with the Lord.

What do you think of that? Do you know anyone who fits that mold today? On the one hand those were wrong motives for per-

forming duties. Legalistic self-righteousness—trying to earn brownie-points with God--was not what the Lord sought. It is a dangerous threat. Yet, on the other hand, all three of those duties were good and important. Hmm, something to ponder: *important, but dangerous!*

Jesus begins with a Warning

“Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ in front of other people, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.” (6:1.)

He warns them against “theatrical righteousness,” merely acting out a part as in a play. “Watch out--don’t do your righteousness in front of other people *to be noticed by them.*” That expression, “To be noticed by” comes from a Greek word, *the-a'-then-ai*, to be a theater to others, to *play a role* in a public drama.

He continues, “So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites [actors, pretenders, phonies] do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. 3 But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

5 “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.... 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him....

Giving to the Poor--

In chapter 5 He told us *what* to do: be concerned and generous to the truly needy. Now he speaks of *why* we do it. Our motives can “make or break” our deeds. In some synagogues the most generous donors were summoned to the front of the gathering to sit by the rabbi. (James 2:2-4 refers to that custom). Perhaps in some mega-synagogues trumpets were actually blown to honor such donors on those occasions. “Tah-dahhh: Let’s now honor our Donor Of The Month!”

No, NO! Such self-promoting cancels the virtue of giving. Yet let’s do help the poor. There are many opportunities to do that.

(We examined this topic in some depth previously, so will not say more now. Next in this text, Jesus teaches more about prayer. But we’ll return to that next month, Lord willing. So we move on.)

Fasting--

"When you fast [note that He said *when*, not *if*], do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when *you* fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."

So Jesus says, *Practice fasting, but do not show it off nor brag about it nor rely on it for merit before God.* (Luke 18:12 gives an example of that last point.) Since in our day there is less practicing of and preaching about fasting than about prayer and giving, let's examine it some more. John the Baptizer's disciples once asked Jesus, "How is it that we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" Jesus answered, "The time will come when they...*will* fast."

And they did. Note Acts 13:1-3. "While [the church leaders at Antioch] were worshiping the Lord and *fasting*, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' 3 So after they had *fasted and prayed*, they placed their hands on them and sent them off." Again in the very next chapter we read, "Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, *with prayer and fasting*, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust."

Thus in *receiving God's call of missionaries*, and in *sending them out*, God worked in response to their prayer and fasting. Also in *appointing workers and leaders for the young churches*--ditto. Church history through the ages shows the same. The great evangelical awakenings through the ages often were preceded by fervent prayer with fasting. When political, military or spiritual crises arose in England during John Wesley's time, he would challenge his followers to fast and pray. During many emergencies on the mission field, Hudson Taylor called the China Inland Mission to days of fasting and praying.

For decades in the mid-1900s a Church of Christ editor, Jimmy Lovell, urged his readers, "Miss a meal a month for missions!" He thus not only promoted prayer but raised much money for missionaries--the money which would have been spent on that meal! Many times when Southeastern Christian College or Portland Christian School faced crises, some of the Lord's people would go to their knees instead of their table. In fact a number of concerned supporters practice(d) fasting on Thursday noon even when there were no crises! Is there no need for this in these present days of darkness? At Portland Church we encourage our members to fast and pray on the

first Tuesday of each month (or some other time if need be). We don't meet together, nor set which meal nor how many meals to miss. We don't even know who or how many participate in this. But I believe that the church would have closed its doors years ago were it not for the Lord's faithful working in response to the prayers of His people.

Questions may arise. "Should I fast if I have poor health?" I suggest you ask your doctor if you have a serious condition. Or if it's just iffy, give fasting a try; if it does cause a problem, quit. God understands, and He wants us to care for our bodies. "I need to eat something before taking my medicine every few hours." Some people in that case take just 2-3 crackers instead of a full meal, and still spend extra time at God's throne.

J. Oswald Sanders, former missionary leader, wrote, "Not all Christians find fasting an aid to prayer. Some godly people I know have found it more of a hindrance than a help." He then adds these points: Okay; the main thing is not missing a meal but spending some extra time in prayer—which can be carved out from other activities instead. Non-fasters do not break any New Testament command, just some important advice which most people can follow and benefit from. Sanders' conclusion: "The fact remains that prayer with fasting has been the habit of the greatest saints in all ages." Unless there are important reasons, don't rob yourself of the rich blessings related to this spiritual discipline.

Celebrate DISCIPLINE? Why? CELEBRATE Discipline? How?

Insights from Richard Foster

Those three practices Jesus mentioned summarize three basic *relationships in life*. Giving to the needy is one of our duties toward *other people*. Prayer springs from our relation to *the Lord God*. Fasting illustrates *self-control*. Today these practices are often called *spiritual disciplines*, but they are not the only ones. Others include Bible study, meditation, worship, service, fellowship and confession of sin or need. (Can you think of more?)

In chapter one of his classic book *Celebration of Discipline*, Richard Foster clearly and powerfully explains the concept of spiritual disciplines. He calls them "the door to liberation." Here are some key excerpts from that chapter in the 1978 edition:

The Disciplines of the spiritual life call us to move beyond surface living into the depths. They urge us to be the answer to a hollow world.

We must not be led to believe that they are for spiritual giants and hence beyond our reach, nor [only for those] who devote all their time to prayer and meditation. Far from it. God intends the Disciplines of the spiritual life to be for ordinary human beings: people who have jobs, who care for children, who must wash dishes and mow lawns....

[And] we need not be well advanced in matters of theology to practice the Disciplines. Recent converts should practice them. The primary requirement is a longing after God (Psalm 42:1,2)... Neither should we think of the Spiritual Disciplines as some dull drudgery aimed at exterminating laughter from the face of the earth. Joy is the keynote of all the Disciplines. [Their] purpose is liberation from the stifling slavery to self-interest and fear.

There is no slavery that can compare to the slavery of ingrained habits of sin. Sin is part of the internal structure of our lives. Our ordinary method of dealing with ingrained sin is to rely on our willpower and determination. We determine never to do it again; we set our will against it. But it is all in vain....

Paul listed some of the outward forms people use to control sin: 'touch not, taste not, handle not.' He then added that these things "have indeed a show of wisdom in *will worship*" (Col. 2:20-23, KJV). The moment we feel we can succeed and attain victory over our sin by the strength of our will alone is the moment we are worshipping the will....

[But] the will can deal only with externals. It is not sufficient to bring about the necessary transformation of the inner spirit. Inner righteousness is a gift from God to be graciously received. *The needed change within us is God's work, not ours. The demand is for an inside job, and only God can work from the inside. We cannot attain or earn this righteousness of the kingdom of God; it is a grace that is given....*

In the book of Romans the apostle Paul went to great lengths to show that *righteousness* is a gift of God. [Righteousness in both its outer and inner senses: justification--our legal status in the court of heaven; and sanctification--our righteous character and practice here on earth.] Paul used the term 35 times in that epistle and each time struck home the

fact that *righteousness is unattained and unattainable through human effort*. One of the clearest statements is Romans 5:17, "...the *free gift* of righteousness."

The moment we grasp this breathtaking insight we are in danger of an error in the opposite direction. We are tempted to believe there is nothing we can do. If all human strivings end in moral bankruptcy, and if righteousness is a gracious gift from God, then is it not logical to conclude that we must wait for God to come and transform us? Strangely enough, the answer is "no." We do not need to be hung on the horns of the dilemma of either human works or idleness. *God has given us the Disciplines of the spiritual life as a means of receiving His grace. The Disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God so that He can transform us.*

The apostle Paul said, "...he who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life" (Gal. 6:8). A farmer is helpless to grow grain; all he can do is to provide the right conditions for the growing of grain. He puts the seed in the ground where the natural forces take over and up comes the grain. That is the way with the Spiritual Disciplines--they are a way of sowing to the Spirit. They put us where He can work within us and transform us. By themselves the Spiritual Disciplines can do nothing; they can only get us to the place where something can be done. They are God's means of grace.

It would be proper to speak of "the way of disciplined grace." It is "grace" because it is free; it is "disciplined" because there is something for us to do. **God's grace is unearned and unearnable, [but] if we expect to grow, we must take up a consciously chosen course of action involving both individual and group life.** (End of quotes from Foster's *Celebration of Discipline*.)

A Follow-Up to the Above

For first-timers (and for many longtime pilgrims too), a good introduction and application of the disciplines is Donald Whitney's book *SIMPLIFY YOUR SPIRITUAL LIFE -- Spiritual Disciplines for the Overwhelmed*. Published by Navpress, it has 208 pages and costs \$11.99. Be sure to notice the sub-title. The foreword explains that this book "confronts the clutter, complexities and distractions of our age and brings us back to the simplicity of the kingdom of God. It presents Jesus before us front and center. It is not about an oppressive legalism, but the practical day-to-day of the Christian devotional walk."

The book has about 90 small meditations or lessons, most of them only 2 pages long (or even 1)! Reading one a day for 3 months would help us rearrange our lives in a profitable way. They are gathered around 8 major subjects. First some basic principles are explained. Here are some of the titles in that part: Know Why You Simplify. Remember, It's About Jesus. Take Up Your Cross Daily. Experience Congregational Spirituality. Don't Mistake Simplicity for Heaven. Beware of Simplifying.

Then there is a main section devoted to "Simplifying and the Truth." Its 13 reflections deal with practices related to Bible reading and meditation. There also are main sections regarding our mind, our heart, our use of time, our relations to other people, etc. Some are doctrinal, others devotional, and others practical.

Reading this on your own would be very beneficial. But going through it with a class or other group would probably be even more profitable. It would be a good follow-up if a class has already gone through the 40-day study of *The Purpose-Driven Life*.

I recommend either or both the books described so far: Foster's *Celebration of Discipline*, and Whitney's *Simplify Your Spiritual Life*. But as always, read with discretion. —a.v.w.

An Important Point that's Not on the Surface

There's one other key theme in Matthew 6:1-18 which we have not said anything about. Have you noticed it? Jesus uses this word 10 times in those verses alone, and 17 times in the whole Sermon on the Mount.

But before we reveal its identity, here's a question: *What is God's major relationship to us humans?* That is, which is the most important--the fact that He is our creator, or our lord, or our savior?

What about *Creator*? We wouldn't even be here if He were not that. But no—that's not the most important. Creation was *a means* to an end. So we must ask, What is that end or goal? *Why* did He make us? What about His being our *Lord*? Is that the ultimate relationship? No, that is simply the rightful relationship a creator should have over his creation—with all his creatures. But again, what is the *goal* of that lordship? Then what about His being our *Savior*? Surely that's the peak, His prime relation, isn't it? No, for what if we had never sinned? And anyway, the goal of His saving us from sin is to

make possible the relationship that is supreme--or to *restore* it if it's broken.

What then, is that supreme relationship ?

I believe it is His being our *Father*. He wanted more than mere creatures, or servants, or redeemed beings—as fabulous as all that is. He wanted a family. Children. Creatures in His own image and likeness.

“Father”: That word is rarely used as a title or name of the Lord in the Old Covenant writings. But it's used 42 times in the Gospel of Matthew alone!

God made us, and when we sinned He saved us, and He calls us to obey His lordship. But all of those fantastic privileges were and are for the more basic purpose of having a deep personal relationship of loving, joyful interaction with us as His dear children.

So it seems to me that “Father” is the term which most deeply and fully pictures the major relationship the Most High God seeks with us. And *as our Father He calls us to be like Him*. Jesus said, “Be perfect--mature in goodness and mercy--as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matt. 5:48; Luke 6:36.) Not in order to earn our way into His family, but because in Christ His eternal Son He receives by grace all believers into His family, and wants us to imitate Him. “Like Father, like son” or daughter—that's His stupendous goal for us.

To consider these matters is unpleasant to some people, because of the mistreatment they received from their human fathers. If you did not have a happy relationship with your earthly dad, think of those who do enjoy that privilege, and then realize that God's love outshines the best human bond as the light of the sun exceeds that of a candle.

HOW can we be like our Father?

Two answers to that important question come to mind. *First, by imitation. We should imitate God.*

Maybe you reply, “What? How can *that* be? Maybe we can imitate *Jesus, sort of, but...but...*” [We interrupt here to say, Yes, you're right about imitating Jesus. At least four passages in scripture clearly tell us either to imitate Him or to follow His example—the same thing: Jn. 13:15; Phil. 2:5-8; 1 Pet. 2: 21; 1 Jn. 2:6.]

“But,” you might continue, “*where are we told to imitate our Heavenly Father?*”

Well, notice Ephesians 5:1, "*Be imitators of God*, therefore, as dearly loved *children*." We should become acquainted with our Heavenly Father's moral attributes, and copy them!

"But," you might reply, "that's impossible."

In answer, we can only state what the Word of God says repeatedly. Already we've seen Matt. 5:48, Luke 6:36 and Eph. 5:1. There is also 1 Peter 1:14-16, "As obedient children...just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: Be holy, because I am holy." What Old Testament passage was Peter quoting there? Several; Leviticus 11:44-45 is one: "I am the LORD your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy.... I am the LORD ...your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy." When we get right down to it, it's an obvious and inescapable Bible teaching. We should imitate the Lord God our heavenly Father, as well as seeking to imitate Christ our Savior.

But to the question, "How on earth can we be like God?" there's also a *second answer*. Here it is:

By the Divine Nature we Inherit.

Eric Fife was an English missionary leader in the 1950s and following. His father had died before Eric was born, so the son never saw nor heard his dad. Yet as Eric grew up, every once in a while his mom told him, "Your facial expressions and mannerisms a while ago were just like your dad's." Or, "When you led in prayer at church today, you sounded so much like your dad I could've sworn he was the one speaking." But how could that be? No way could he copy him. Yet he resembled his dad because of the genes he inherited from him.

And when we received Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we were born again, of water and the Holy Spirit--born from above. Thus the genes of God are in us! We became "partakers of the divine *nature*" (2 Pet. 1:4) so that it becomes "*natural*" (as well as *supernatural*) for us to act in God-like ways! The implanted life of God in us enables us to be more loving, honest, kind, truthful, pure, and helpful, than we could ever be otherwise. Of course, like new-born children we still have lots of "growing up" to do. But if we're truly born from above, we'll start doing that--growing up spiritually as we imitate our God more and more.

Thanks be to Him that He not only adopts us, but by His Spirit imparts His own nature to us.

Think on These Things

More on "Our Father"

The word Jesus used for "father" was *abba*: "the intimate term used by little children for their fathers." Compare *da-da*, *papa*, or *tatay* in other languages.

Yet *abba*, "unlike its English equivalents, remained in use during adulthood." And even the concept of fatherhood then differed some from common ideas in our culture today: The father in those days was his children's friend but also provided, taught, guarded, and disciplined his children. So *Abba* suggested not only tenderness but also strength and authority.

* * *

Resolving the 'Contradiction' between Matt. 5:16 and 6:1.

Matt 5:16, Let your light *shine before men*, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

Matt 6:1, Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

A. B. Bruce explains, "Show when tempted to hide. Hide when tempted to show." That is, Don't be ashamed to do the good and loving deed as it is needed; don't let fear of men's ridicule make you refrain from carrying out your duty: Boldly let your light shine. On the other hand, your purpose in performing virtuous deeds should not be to boost your reputation or create your own fan club, but simply to do right for the sake of God and goodness.

Levertoff summarizes it thus: "Although the disciples are to be seen doing good works (5:16), they must not do good works in order to be seen (6:1-18)."

* * *

We May Confidently Pray God's Promises Back to Him!

The Puritan preacher and commentator Matthew Henry points out an important principle in Bible study. He observes that the petition in the Lord's Prayer, *Thy kingdom come*, "plainly refers to Christ's preaching, *The kingdom of heaven is at hand.*" [4:17.] The kingdom of your Father who is in heaven, this is at hand. So pray that it may come. We should turn the word we hear into prayer." Then he gives another example from the closing verses of the Bible. There Christ promises, "Surely I come quickly." On the basis of that sure promise our hearts should answer, as John did, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

The Puritan concludes, "What God has promised we must pray for; for promises are given, not to supercede [replace or take away] prayer but to quicken and encourage it."

Praying can be Dangerous!

(A Dialog; author unknown)

"*Our Father which art in heaven...*"

--- Yes?

"Don't interrupt me. I'm praying."

--- But you called me

"Called you? I didn't call you. I'm praying. *Our Father which art in heaven...*"

--- There, you did it again

"Did what?"

--- Called me. You said, "Our Father which art in heaven." Here I am. What's on your mind?

"But I didn't mean anything by it. I was, you know, just saying my prayers for the day. I always say the Lord's Prayer. It makes me feel good, kind of like getting a duty done."

--- All right. Go on.

"*Hallowed be Thy name.*"

--- Hold it. What do you mean by that?

"By what?"

--- By "Hallowed be Thy name?"

"It means. It means..... Good grief, I don't know what it means. How should I know? It's just a part of the prayer.... By the way, what does it mean?"

--- It means honored, holy, wonderful.

"Hey that makes sense. I never thought about what 'hallowed' meant before.... Let's see, what's next? Oh yeah, *Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*"

--- Do you really mean that?

"Sure, why not?"

--- What are you doing about it?

"Doing? Nothing, I guess. I just think it would be kind of neat if you got control of everything down here like you have up there."

--- Have I got control of you?

" Well, I go to church. "

--- That isn't what I asked you. What about your temper? You've really got a problem there, you know. And then there's the way you spend your money -- all on yourself. And what about the kinds of books you read and what you watch on TV?

"Stop picking on me! I'm just as good as the rest of those people at church. "

---Excuse me. I thought you were praying for my will to be done. If that is to happen, it will have to start with the ones who are praying for it. Like you, for example.

"Oh, all right. I guess I do have some hang-ups. Now that you mention it, I could probably name some others. "

---So could I.

"I haven't thought about it very much until now, but I'd really like to cut out some of those things. I would like to, you know, be really free. "

--- Good. Now we're getting somewhere. We'll work together, you and I. Some victories can be truly won. I'm proud of you.

"Look, Lord, I need to finish this up here. This is taking a lot longer than it usually does. "

'Give us this day our daily bread. '

--- You could cut out the bread. It would help you lose weight.

"Hey, wait a minute! What is this, 'CRITICIZE ME day'? Here I was doing my religious duty, and all of a sudden you break in and remind me of all my hang-ups. "

--- **Praying is a dangerous thing. You could wind up changed, you know.** That's what I'm trying to get across to you. Keep praying. I'm interested in the next part of your prayer.

--- (Pause) Well, go on.

" I'm scared to. "

--- Scared? Of what?

"I know what you'll say. "

--- Try me and see.

"Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. "

--- What about Ann?

"See? I knew it! I knew you would bring her up! Why Lord, she's told lies about me, spread stories about my family. She never paid back the money she owes me. I've sworn to get even with her!"

--- But your prayer? What about your prayer?

"I didn't mean it."

--- Well, at least you're honest. But it's not much fun carrying that load of bitterness inside you, is it?

"No. But, I'll feel better as soon as I get even. Boy, have I got some plans for that neighbor. She'll wish she had never moved into this neighborhood."

--- You won't feel any better. You'll feel worse. Revenge isn't sweet. Think of how unhappy you already are. But, I can change all that.

"You can? How?"

--- Forgive Ann. Then I'll forgive you. Then the hate and sin will be Ann's problem and not yours. You will have settled your heart.

"Oh, you're right. You always are. And, more than I want to get revenge against Ann, I want to be right with you. But.....(Pause).....(Sigh)..... All right, I forgive her. Help her to find the right road in life, Lord. She's bound to be awfully miserable now that I think about it. Anybody who goes around doing the things she does to others has to be out of it. Someway, somehow, show her the right way."

--- There now! Wonderful! How do you feel?

"Hmmm. Well, not bad. Not bad at all. I feel pretty great. You know, I don't think I'll have to go to bed uptight tonight for the first time since I can remember. Maybe I won't be so tired from now on because I'm not getting enough rest."

--- You're not through with your prayers. Go on.

"Oh, all right. *'And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.'*"

--- Good! Good! I'll do that. Just don't put yourself in a place where you can be tempted.

"What do you mean by that?"

--- Don't turn the TV on when you know the laundry needs to be done and the house needs to be picked up. Also, about the time you spend with your friends, if you can't influence the

conversation to positive things, perhaps you should rethink the value of those friendships.

Another thing, your neighbors and friends shouldn't be your standard for "keeping up." And please don't use me as an escape hatch.

"I don't understand that last part."

--- Sure you do. You've done it a lot of times. You get caught in a bad situation. You get in trouble and then you come running to me, crying, 'Lord, help me out of this mess, and I promise you I'll never do it again.' Do you remember some of those bargains you tried to make with me?

"Yes, and I'm ashamed. Lord, I really am."

--- Which bargain are you remembering?

"Well, there was that night when I was home and the wind began blowing so hard I thought the roof would go any minute and tornado warnings were out. I remember saying, 'Oh God, if you spare me, I'll never skip my devotions again.'"

--- I did protect you, but you didn't keep your promise, did you?

"I'm sorry, Lord I really am. Up until now I thought that if I just prayed the Lord's Prayer every day, then I could do what I liked. I didn't expect anything to happen like this.

--- Go ahead and finish your prayer.

"*For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.*"

--- Do you know what would bring me glory? What would really make me happy?

"No, but I'd like to know. I want to please you. I can see what a mess I've made of my life. And I can see how great it would be to really be one of your followers."

--- You just answered the question.

"I did?"

--- Yes. The thing that would bring me glory is to have people like you truly love me. And I see that happening between us. Now that some of these old sins are exposed and out of the way, there is no telling what we can do together.

"Lord, let's see what we can make of me, OK?"

--- Yes, let's see.

FINDING TIME FOR PRAYER

EDWARD FUDGE

A gracEmail subscriber aboard a U.S. Navy vessel asks, "How do I make myself pray? I seem to end the day finding I gave God little time, and I wonder what steps I might be able to take to keep that from being the case any longer."

* * *

That is a very good question, my brother. Our society is not conducive to prayer -- nor especially, I suspect, is the schedule and environment aboard a naval vessel. I think the key might be to "call up" God as soon as we wake in the morning and then "leave the phone off the hook," as it were, until we go to sleep that night. Sometime between waking and sleeping there will be moments when one is alone, and then one can express in greater detail the praise and worship of which God is worthy, enumerate things for which one is particularly grateful, voice one's concerns for other people near and far, and state to the Father one's own timely requests and needs.

Our prayer need not be formal, nor must it be "fixed" in form (although the Book of Common Prayer has been for centuries a helper to many believers around the world, especially when one's own thoughts are not flowing freely and words are hard to come). I like to begin my prayers each morning with the Lord's Prayer, sometimes elaborated phrase by phrase, because it simply helps me get started and its substance stands on good authority.

It would be nice if we always had a quiet place of retreat for prayer. But one does not always have access to a peaceful forest, or a quiet lakeside, or a wave-tossed ocean coast. So we pray sometimes where we are -- standing up, walking, eyes open. Not that my practice is a model for anyone else, but I usually begin my daily prayers during the beginning of an hour-long commute to work. Wherever we are, God is always there and listening. Most of all, I think, the Father is pleased with open-ended conversation with his children. Remember also that such two-way communication does not require that we do all the talking. Begin the practice of daily prayer wherever and however you can, then let the relationship blossom and take it from there!

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VOICES from the FIELDS

Cecil & Betsy Garrett and some Russian orphan girls were featured in an email sent out by Mike Cantrell of St. Petersburg. Mike is a friend of the Garretts and Dan Wilson, and W&W ran an article by him some time ago. Here is part of his report:

Two teenage girls, Katya and Ira, were baptized this past Wednesday. They both live in Marina Topoltsyeva's transitional home ministry for orphans. That ministry is called the Road of Life (www.roadoflifenet.com) and has three apartments for orphans who are making the transition from institutional life to independent living.

A young woman, Lucia, has been essential in leading Katya to the Lord and influencing her to get baptized. Lucia is the 'house mother' and leader in the transitional home where Katya lives. Mark and Marina Dotson (who have an arts ministry to orphans) were also influential in Katya's path to faith. Sarah Hipple is an American who lives in the transitional home with the girls and is a witness to them. Last year Cecil and Betsy Garrett lived in the transitional home for a year and were very influential in the girls' spiritual life; they are here now for a three-week visit. Cecil performed the baptism. MIR (Mike Cantrell's ministry) makes it possible, by issuing Letters of Invitation, for Cecil, Betsy and Sarah to be in Russia; this is one way in which we serve.

God uses many of His people, in many ways, to bring about His eternal results. Some people prepare the soil, some sow the seed, some water, but it is the Lord who brings the growth and the fruit in season.

[You may be able to see the email and some pictures too, at www.cantrell.cc or www.mir-russia.com]

Michiya and Tomoko Nakahara Shizuoka City, Japan
March 21, 2007

The cultic religious group has now finished their building construction just behind our church, as was mentioned in our past newsletters. This building is about the size of a "Home Depot," so you can imagine the size of this facility. It is a sad reality that a strange cult-like religion receives so much attention and support from the Japanese people.

A faithful member of our church, Mrs. Abe (she became a Christian through my father's ministry), shared with me that she gets

together with three of her friends weekly over dinner. These ladies are members of this new religious group. She continues to share her faith with them, and what Christ means to her and is doing in her life. Mrs. Abe and her husband own a local produce market. She shares the gospel with these friends, who are also her customers, as well as with other customers. However, her husband is not a believer, so there is pressure there, and it limits how much she can share while she works. When a Japanese Christian pronounces her faith in public (such as Mrs. Abe) she is faced with many pressures and oppositions. I am so encouraged by Mrs. Abe's testimony which resembles that of Priscilla's (Acts 18). I am confident that what Mrs. Abe is doing, and what our church as a whole, is doing to spread His good news will not go in vain, but will bear fruit! (Isa. 55:11). As small as our congregation is, God is surely blessing us with faithful followers.

Our oldest son, Kazuma just graduated from the 6th grade and is getting ready to go to a local junior high school in April. Tomoko and I are so thankful to see his growth both physically, emotionally, but most importantly, spiritually. He is small for his age, but we continue to ask God to raise him to be strong in the Lord, and let nothing sway his faith. I sense that Kazuma is getting very close to accepting Christ as his personal savior and then be baptized in the near future. Please pray for the children in our church. As they get older and enter the next phase of their lives, pray that they will be directed and taught based on the Word of God, and that they will grow to be faithful servants for the Lord.

As I write this letter, it takes me back seven years ago today when I stood at my mother's memorial service. The Sakura (cherry blossom) is a national tree, and is dear to the Japanese. As I observe the cherry blossom season, it brings back her doctor's words, "I wonder if Mrs. Nakahara will be able to see the Sakura this year." I ponder his words every year as the cherry blossoms start to bloom. But Hallelujah! She and Dad are both with the Lord Jesus Christ! (2 Cor. 5:6-8). That makes cherry blossoms pale in comparison. Many of you supported my parents (Shichiro and Teruko) and continue to support the next generation of this ministry today. How grateful we are for your generosity and for your faithful journey with Nakahara Missions.

I am very aware that my visit to the USA to see you is long overdue; but I am sad to have to tell you that it will not be possible again this summer. [My neck] was examined by a group of physicians to see...if I could make the trip. It appears that some new ligaments are beginning to form around my disjointed vertebrae and are starting to make progress. However, this is the most crucial time of healing; if something were to happen and interrupt this forming proc-

ess (likely caused by a sudden change of temperature or pressure which occurs in air travel), it will most likely result in paralysis of the left side of my body. According to the doctors, if I continue to do rehabilitation exercises, and avoid air/train travel and long car rides, the ligaments will continue to grow and get stronger (fusing with the bones) in a year or two. Please pray that this healing process will take place and I will be able to come share with you in person very soon.

May the Lord bless each of you until He comes again. Maranatha!

[The Nakaharas' treasurer is Bob Yarbrough, 19930 County Road 324, Terrell, TX 75160.]

Lessons from the Farm (9)

Bob Yarbrough

I live on a farm. While not totally unique to a farm, fire ants have become a terrible plague to all farmers and ranchers in the southeastern United States whose livelihood depends upon crops and animals. Fire ants are no respecter of locations, however, because they invade city homes, lawns, gardens, and parks as well. They can destroy crops, kill farm animals, and often result in a reduced efficiency of labor and machinery during crop harvest. Even one sting to a human can be a miserable experience. The history of the black fire ant and its introduction into the USA from South America goes back to 1918 and Mobile, Alabama. The red fire ant came along in the 1930's, also to Mobile. These imports quickly spread throughout Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, Florida, Georgia, Arkansas, Tennessee, North and South Carolina. They have the potential to spread westward all the way to the Pacific Ocean. Fire ants prefer open sunny areas but appear to be limited in their northward spread by low temperatures in winter. What started out rather innocently, has now become a national problem with no known solution in sight. These fire ants can be *controlled* by both natural and chemical products, but they cannot be totally eradicated. Our lot in life at present is to tolerate their existence.

Each spring I take the appropriate chemicals and begin my trek around the farm to do my part in controlling these little beasts. Their mounds are everywhere. Fortunately, agricultural universities, such as Texas A & M and others, are constantly at work developing new ways to solve this growing menace. Distressing indeed are the times when one of our little grandkids unknowingly steps on a fire ant mound and is stung multiple times by these creatures. It is amaz-

ing what such a small insect can do. The sting creates a tiny blister that lasts several days before it disappears, but when multiplied, it can be a terrible ordeal for a child, or for anyone. When a mound of ants is disturbed, literally thousands of worker ants appear in a frenzy to defend their territory. Not only does the sting hurt the individual, it distresses me because I then know that I missed destroying the very mound of ants that attacked and stung a person. In addition, I personally have been stung several times and it is not a pleasant experience. Therefore, I know first hand the results of the sting, and that is why I try to control them on my property. Also I try to exercise some control measures beyond my fence line to keep fire ants from encroaching upon my land.

Perhaps by now you have been able to see where this lesson from the farm is headed. When I think of the fire ant, I am reminded of the terrible effects of *SIN* in this world. In many ways there are similarities to the behavior of these tiny creatures and how sin affects the human race. I use the term *similarities* loosely, because I stand on theologically shaky grounds by comparing sin to fire ants; although after a sting or two a case could be made. It is much like getting overly detailed with the parables of the Bible and losing sight of their central message. However, let me illustrate a few of these similarities. There was a point of origin when sin entered the world. The Bible says that sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and death came to all people because all have sinned (Genesis 3; Rom. 5:12). When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, sin and death entered the world and it continues to the present day. The local cemetery should forever remind us of the consequences of sin. The Apostle Paul tells us that "the sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law" (I Cor. 15:56). All have sinned and are plagued with the consequences of sin (Rom. 3:23; 6:23), and we deceive ourselves when we say that we are not sinners (I Jn. 1:8-10).

O what damage sin can do! Like a single fire ant bite, one little sin can have grave consequences. Think of the lives that have been ruined, the homes that have been destroyed, churches that have been rendered ineffective, and testimonies that are now useless as a result of one sin. It hurts to see those we love torn apart by the effects of sin in their lives. To a world without Christ, human behavior is excused and explained in terms of social, economic, or educational deprivation. It is only because one is poor, or because he lacks education that he behaves in the manner he does. But God sees things differently. He declares that "the heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" (Jere. 17:9). God says that "there is none righteous, no not one" (Rom. 3:10). Sin is at the root of all human behavior. That is why the psalmist declared that he was born into a world filled with sin and therefore he, too, was a sinner from birth (Psa. 51:5).

But there is good news about sin. It has been defeated. Even though “the wages of sin is death, the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ” (Rom. 6:23). Sin, like those pesky fire ants can spread from coast to coast; but God can remove our sin from us through Christ as far as the east is from the west (Psa. 103:12). “Where sin increased, grace increased all the more...to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:20). Just as fire ants can be eradicated and controlled by new and improved products on the market, so it is with sin. Sin is under the control of the Holy Spirit in a believer’s life. He is dead to sin but alive unto God. However, just as one stray fire ant can “cause a world of hurt,” so sin continues to “crouch at the door” of the believer’s heart waiting for an opportunity to enter (Gen 4:7; I Pet. 5:8). We must always use the protection God has given us to oppose the darts of sin (Eph. 6:10-18).

I do the best I can to keep the fire ants away from my door. I don’t want them in my yard, I don’t want them bothering me, or bothering those I love. I keep the chemicals handy so that I can eliminate any I see, and I have cautioned the grandkids to keep a sharp eye out for their presence. I certainly would not want anyone to be stung because I was not on guard against them.

I feel the same way about sin. I don’t want it around me, or those entrusted to my care. I take great comfort in these words of scripture: “Sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace” (Rom. 6:14). Meanwhile, watch out for those fire ants. They sting!

A QUOTE You Should NOTE:

HEARTBREAKING STATISTICS

(Excerpts from an article by **Jim Putman**
in the March 18, 2007 **Christian Standard**)

According to the Barna Research Group, there are about 386,000 churches in America. Surveys tell us only 14 percent of these churches are growing, with only 2 percent of churches growing *because of new converts. Most growth is happening through transfer of membership.* This means bigger churches are getting bigger and smaller churches are shrinking.

Fifty percent of evangelical churches in America did not have any converts last year. The positive twist is that 50 percent did have new converts. “Go Team! . . . right?” No, apparently not, because it seems we gain a little and lose a lot. The death rate of elderly Christians contributes to the reason the numbers don’t change. An-

other major contributor is a wide open back door where people leave unnoticed.

Josh McDowell . . . says 85 percent of kids who come from Christian homes do not have a biblical worldview. Most of those 85 percent are leaving the faith between ages 18 to 24, and most may never return. Many of the churches that do list conversion numbers actually report the number of children baptized from their Christian families. Sadly, we find many of those young converts do not keep their faith past their 18th birthday.

While the church loses people, cults are growing.... Mormonism is the fastest-growing religion in America....

When you ask the unchurched why they are not a part of a Christian community, 90 percent say they have not been asked. George Barna reports *most Christians will die without ever sharing their faith with anyone.*

....We want the lost to answer a want ad or decide to visit on their own. Jesus was into relationships with those he led. He did not make disciples by remote control or e-mail, or by creating a show he hoped people would attend.

When I look at how the church operated in the first century and how it operates now, I wonder if any of the apostles would recognize it. The Word of God's influence is diminishing in our churches. The church has become a show led by paid entertainers, and the people are "fans" who come to watch. Growth occurs from having the best show in town, instead of personal contact and face-to-face discipleship.

There's a B-I-G DIFFERENCE between the Great Tribulation and the Day of the Lord

Alex V. Wilson

In the September '06 Word and Work we explained two differing views of the imminence of Christ's return. We tried to show that though we are to "watch" and "wait" eagerly for His glorious second coming, at the same time both Jesus and the apostles indicate the church will go through the "great tribulation" by the Man of Sin, or "the Beast."

You may be thinking, "But in at least 3 passages we are promised deliverance from that dreadful time!" I ask, **Are you sure?** Please read on, checking out God's Word on these questions.

It seems to me that an important point in this question is often overlooked: the difference between the Great Tribulation and the Day of the Lord. Often it seems to be assumed that the Great Tribulation and the Day of the Lord occur at the same time, or at least overlap. Sometimes it is definitely said so, as in this quote from a book: "*The Day of the Lord* is that extended period of time which begins with the inception of the Tribulation following the rapture of the Church and extends through the millennial age." That is, the author believes the two periods begin at the very same time. (From now on, we'll use these abbreviations: GT for the Great Tribulation, and DL or "the Day" for the Day of the Lord.)

Something Comes in Between

That idea seems untenable because of the clearly-stated fact that something divides the GT from the DL. Something comes in between! Notice carefully the following Scriptures:

(1) "*Immediately after the (great) tribulation* of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken..." (Matt. 24:29,30).

(2) "The sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, *before the day of the Lord comes*" (Acts 2:20, where Peter quotes Joel 2:31).

If Friday comes after Thursday and before Saturday, then Thursday and Saturday cannot overlap. Likewise, if the darkening of the sun and moon *follows* the GT but *precedes* the DL, then those two periods cannot be simultaneous or even overlap at all, can they? Thus these passages give us This Order Of Events: the period of the GT, followed immediately by the stunning sign of the sun and moon's light being almost totally blocked out, followed by the period of the DL. (See the diagram that follows.) The two references given above are not the only places where inspired writers mention the lights of the universe being darkened or turned bloody red. This cosmic crisis is often referred to in passages that describe the DL.

The time of fierce judgment and wrath that closes this present age is a constant theme of the prophets and is known to them as the "Day of the Lord." Isaiah, Ezekiel, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Zephaniah, Zechariah, Malachi, Luke in Acts, Paul in Thessalonians, and Peter – all these use the term. In their descriptions it is frequently accompanied by tremendous natural disasters.

Apart from the book of Revelation we are told ten times (if my count is correct) that there will be signs in the sun,

moon and stars. It is one of the most unmistakable signs of the end of the age, and one of those most often given in the Bible.
--G. R. Crow

Let's notice two of the main passages regarding these signs and the DL, in addition to Acts 2:20 which we quoted above. Isaiah says, "Behold, *the day of the Lord comes*, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the earth a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it. For *the stars* of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; *the sun* will be dark at its rising and *the moon* will not shed its light. I will punish the world for its evil" (Isa. 13:9-11).

Then in the last book of the Bible, we read of what will happen when Christ opens the sixth seal: "There was a great earthquake; and *the sun* became black as sackcloth, *the full moon* became like blood, and *the stars* of the sky fell to the earth..." Then all the ungodly will cry out in terror, "The great *day of God's wrath* has come, and who can stand before it?" (Rev. 6:12-17).

Thus Isa. 13, Joel 2, Acts 2 and Rev. 6 teach that there will be a darkening of the heavenly bodies *before* the DL bursts forth. And Matt. 24:29 (also Mark 13: 24-25) reveals that the GT occurs *before* that miraculous universal blackout—and thus before the DL begins, of course.

So, What's the Difference?

You may be wondering at this point, "What difference do these facts make?" The answer: A great deal of difference. For the passages commonly used to show that the church will escape the GT do not actually refer to the GT (at least so it seems to this writer), but to the DL! If this be true, then we are not promised escape from the persecutions by the Beast but rather from the outpouring of *divine* judgments during the Day of God's wrath that follows (and brings to an end) the reign of the Beast.

Look, for example, at Luke 21:36. Christ says, "Watch at all times, praying that you may have strength to *escape all these things* that will take place." He clearly implies that those who watch and pray will escape. But escape *what*? "All these things." But what are those things to which He refers? Verses 25-35, which directly precede His statement, give the answer:

There will be *signs in sun and moon and stars*, and upon the earth distress of nations in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting with fear and with foreboding of THE THINGS which are coming on the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and glory. Now

when THESE THINGS begin to take place, look up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near (25-28).

...When you see THESE THINGS taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near (31).

...Pray that you may have strength to escape all THESE THINGS that will take place (36).

The things we should pray to escape are the devastating judgments which will follow right after the signs in the sun, moon and stars—the cosmic convulsions we mentioned earlier. But when will they take place? “Immediately *after* the tribulation,” says Christ in Matt. 24:29 and Mark 13:24-25. This entire passage in Luke seems strongly to indicate that Christians will be on earth when God veils the heavenly lights—how else could we “see these things taking place”? Thus we would have to be on earth during the GT that precedes that veiling, would we not? However, by watching and prayer we can escape the awful outpourings of God’s wrath that follow, during the DL.

Are you confused? Please look it up in your own Bible, and read it carefully, in order.

Then What About *This* Promise?

Another oft-quoted verse is 1 Thes. 5:9, “God has not appointed us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.” It is said this proves that the rapture mentioned in 4:16,17 will occur before the GT. In other words, the wrath Paul talks about must refer to the GT. But is that really what Paul says here? He never mentions the GT even once in this entire prophetic section (1 Thes. 4:13-5:11). Check it out.

But he does mention the DL. “You know well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night,” bringing destruction on those in spiritual darkness (5:2-3). For *them* the Day will be unexpected (like a thief’s coming), and also inescapable (like travail before birth). But, in contrast, “*you* are not in darkness, brethren, for that day to surprise you like a thief” (4). That is, Christians ought not be surprised when the DL comes. Why? Is it because they will have already been raptured years before that time? No, he makes no mention of that. Rather it is because they ought to know the “times and the seasons” (v. 1). That is because they should know that the GT will come first, before the DL!

This was also a major point of his second letter to Thessalonica. Don’t get excited, he warned them, by thinking “that the day of the Lord has come. Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will

not come, unless...the man of sin is revealed" (2 Thes. 2:2,3). That is, the Beast and his reign (which is during the GT) precede the DL. He does not say, "You can know the DL isn't here because we Christians will all be raptured years before the DL comes"—though that would be the thing to say, if it were true. Instead he says, "The DL can't be here now, because the Man of Sin hasn't appeared yet and he must come first." So again we get the same order: The GT, when the Man of Sin rules the earth, followed by the DL.

And notice that from the context Paul seems to expect that the DL is the time of "*the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto Him*" (v. 1). Isn't that "gathering together" of Christians to Him the rapture? Notice that Matt. 24:29-31 also puts these two things together—"the Son of man *coming*" and the angels *gathering together* His elect—and Christ says it is "*after* the tribulation." So the DL seems to be the time of: (a) the rapture (2 Thes. 2:1-2; Matt. 24:29-31); followed by (b) God's judgments out-poured (Isa. 13:9-11); and (c) the defeat of the Beast at Armageddon (2 Thes.2:8; Rev. 19:11-21). And this period follows the GT and the dimming of the sun and moon.

The following diagram may clarify this article's viewpoint. Study for yourself from God's Word. We do not claim this is infallible!

The Abom. of Desolation
/ begins the Grt. Trib.

The signs in sun, moon & stars
/ begin the Day of the Lord

(Note:

The diagram makes the GT and the DL look as though they are about equal in length. Actually the GT is 3-1/2 years long, but the DL seems to be only a few hours, days or weeks!)

During the DL occur:

- 1) the 1st resurr. & rapture
- 2) Bowls of God's wrath
- 3) Christ + Cns come to defeat the Beast.

"Yes, but Revelation 3:10 says..."

Another verse supposed to support the pre-tribulation rapture is Rev. 3:10. Christ says, "Because you kept my word of patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial which is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell upon the earth." Notice whom this hour of trial will try--"those who dwell upon the earth." That sounds like everybody, but in Revelation John uses this term to describe *only the unsaved*, not the people of God. See 6:10; 11:10;

13:8,14 for proof of this. So this hour of trial from which faithful disciples will be kept is a short period (an "hour," not a day) of awful trouble for the unsaved. Now the DL fits that description well, but the GT does not. The GT will be a time of trouble for *Israel* (the "time of Jacob's trouble" when many Jews will be so distressed they will awake and repent, Jer. 30:7 & context) and also for *all followers of Christ* (Matt. 24:15, 21-22 & context; Rev. 12:17; 13:7; 14:12 & context.). But the DL will be the time of God's worldwide plagues of judgment upon the *unrepentant*, "those who dwell upon the earth." Thus Rev. 3:10 promises us protection from the DL, not the GT.

Tribulation, Not Wrath

There is another important point: tribulation from men should be distinguished from the wrath of God. People sometimes say, "We cannot go through the GT, for that is when God will pour out His wrath and He promises that we shall escape His wrath."

It certainly is true that we shall never be the object of *God's wrath*, for the Lamb of God has borne that for us. "Since we are now justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God" (Rom. 5:9). "Jesus...delivers us from the wrath to come" (1 Thes. 1:10; also 5:9). We are promised escape from God's anger.

But we are never promised escape from *tribulation*—the persecutions of men. Just the opposite, we are repeatedly told that tribulation is the Christian's normal lot! "In the world you will have tribulation. . ." (Jn. 16:33). "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). "We told you beforehand that we are to suffer *affliction*" (same Greek word translated "tribulation" in the other two verses; 1 Thes. 3:4). Many other scriptures state the same truth: 2 Tim. 3:12; 1 Pet. 2:21; 4:1, 12-13.

Now the GT is just what its name says--the most terrible time of *tribulation* that will ever take place. But we are nowhere promised protection from tribulation, or the GT, that I can find. It will be the time of *men's* wrath against Christians, of *Satan's* wrath and *the Beast's* wrath. From such we have no immunity, though we will be provided divine strength to meet those trials when they arise.

What we are promised is deliverance from *God's* wrath, and that will be unleashed during the DL. In the book of Revelation, God's anger is especially related to the 7 bowls of wrath. That period seems to be previewed in Rev. 6:12-17 (the sixth seal; note "the day of wrath"); introduced in 11:15-19 (the seventh trumpet; note "your wrath" and "destroy them that destroy the earth"); and actually portrayed in chapters 15-16 (the 7 bowls, "which are the last plagues,

for with them the *wrath of God* is ended," 15:1). It seems this time could only last a matter of hours, days or maybe weeks at most, for how could anything exist longer under such conditions? Notice 16:14, 15 in passing, where Christ warns--"Lo, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is he who is awake." And He makes that statement right after "the great *day of God*" is mentioned. This fits in with the other passages where Christ's coming and the DL are mentioned together: 2 Thes. 1:6-10; 2:1-2; 1 Cor. 1:7,8; and Matt. 24:29-31 compared with Acts 2:20.

Conclusions

We realize that these views are contrary to the cherished beliefs of many wonderful Christians. We do not wish to stir up angry debate, nor to cause divisions in any way. On the other hand, these views are not at all novel or new. Many fine Bible students have held this general outline: George Mueller, G. Campbell Morgan (though not in his early years), Horatius Bonar, A. B. Simpson, S. P. Tregelles, Oswald Smith, and others. But we must never decide on our beliefs by looking to see who else believed this way or that. The Word of God is always to be the final basis. Examine, then, the teachings set forth here; and if there be errors, please correct them.

We conclude with two quotations from Oswald Smith, one a warning and the other a word of wise advice:

I wonder if we have been lulling the Church into a false security? Can it be that we have been preaching an easy escape? Ought we to prepare the Church for the greatest of all ordeals? Should not our teaching harden her for the fires of the Tribulation? What kind of soldiers are we training? We need men and women today of the martyr spirit.

You ask, Is the Church to go through the Tribulation? That is not the question. It is this: **Is the Church ready? Are you ready, ready either for Tribulation or Rapture? If you are, that is all that matters.** What difference does it make so long as you are ready? If you are to be in it, you cannot avoid it, and if you are to escape, you will not be in it.

(Editor's note: Be assured we do not plan to make a hobby out of our own prophetic views, or those of others. This article and the one last September both present points too often overlooked, it seems to me. Study carefully, looking up the Biblical passages, whenever you read articles on prophecy. And don't let differences on such matters dim our love for one another.)

Witnessing at Her Own Funeral

By John Jessup, CWNews

CWNews.com – Northern Virginia. It was a crime that shocked and saddened residents living around the nation's capitol: two police officers gunned down and killed in an ambush at a police station in suburban Washington, D.C. But as tragic and painful an ordeal as it was, it's apparently sparked a religious awakening for hundreds in the area.

It was a day that started like any other. Forty-year-old Vicky Armel went to work, as usual, at her police station. What would happen hours later, no one ever expected. "Vicky, the aggressive detective, was the one who said to our boss, 'Hey, there's been a couple of carjackings. Are we going to go out and look for it?' I'm 15 seconds behind her," recalled Detective Mike Motafches of the Fairfax County Virginia Police Department.

As they headed out to do their jobs, Detective Armel and Master Officer Michael Garbarino were fatally shot in the parking lot of the police station, ambushed by an 18-year-old gunman armed with an AK-47 assault rifle, five handguns, and a hunting rifle.

Armel was the first officer to be killed in the line of duty in the department's nearly 70-year history. The news shocked many around the region and drew the community's show of support in a makeshift memorial at the police station—and even more at her funeral. Police estimate that anywhere between 7,000 to 10,000 people paid their final respects at Detective Armel's funeral, many of them law enforcement officers from around the country, in town for National Law Enforcement Memorial Week. Grieving friends and family came to mourn the woman they describe as well-liked and respected, kind, creative, and often candid about what she was thinking. They thought they would never hear from her again. But they were wrong.

Imagine the emotions when they heard these words: "My name is Vicky Armel, and if you told me last year that I'd be standing in front of hundreds of people talking about Jesus Christ, I'd say you're crazy."

During the service, the packed auditorium listened to a recorded speech that Vicky gave last year, recounting how she came to make one of the biggest decisions of her life: to become a Christian.

Vicky's faith journey started two years before, with her friend and police partner Mike Motafches.

"We knew it was going to be a long day on our investigation out in Maryland, Mike said, and she said, 'You have the whole day to convince me that this Christianity stuff is true or God exists. I'm your audience for the next five hours.'"

But as a detective always examining the facts, Vicki wasn't an easy sell. A veteran law enforcement officer of 16 years, she had the toughest time accepting the Bible's claim that Jesus rose from the dead.

"I have gone to those homicides and suicides, and never once did that dead person get up in three days. I could not even entertain the idea of the resurrection of Jesus," she explained in her recorded speech.

"I know that it was very difficult, and I know the resurrection was a big part of her skepticism," said Vicky's husband, Tyler, also with the Fairfax County Police Department. "If I had to pinpoint one issue, that was probably the biggest one. And that's why she liked that book so much."

That book was *The Case for Easter*. Thousands of copies were passed out at Vicky's funeral. In it, author Lee Strobel set out to write a book debunking Christianity. Instead, he wound up becoming a believer himself.

Vicky, an avowed agnostic, was compelled by what she read. She made a decision to give her life to Jesus Christ and joined a church. "Like anything else she did, she jumped in with both feet and came to the conclusion herself that she needed to follow Christ," Tyler said. He also says that Vicky's decision gave her peace, as well as more patience in dealing with him and their two young children.

And now, her journey from skeptic to baptized believer is still having an impact on others, even months after her death. Vicky's taped recording continued, "The reason why I came...is because there's probably a Vicky or Victor out there." "People are making radical life changes, many of them turning back their lives to Jesus Christ," said Mark Jenkins, Vicky's pastor. "They're all used to a pastor saying things about God, saying things about faith, meaning to rethink life. Not too many people are used to going to a funeral and hearing the person they're there to mourn and grieve."

Since the funeral, Vicky's church has received phone calls and e-mails from people all over northern Virginia, including some who knew her well and others who didn't know her at all.

"Some people just walked off the street," Jenkins said. "They walked in and said, 'We want what Vicky had.' That's just radical. That's not a man thing, that's God doing His work in the hearts and lives of people who had become way too comfortable, and through the death of someone they didn't even know. [It] shook them up and reintroduced them to the realities of life they had to face."

Those who knew Vicky say they won't let her death be in vain. The church continues to share Vicky's story and give out copies of the book that changed her life like they did during the local Fourth of July parade.

Vicky's pastor shares one message he received from someone who heard about Vicky's story. "It made me rethink my whole life over," Jenkins recalled the person said. "I know I've made many mistakes and hurt some people. I want to tell you I want to be saved. I want the Lord in my life. I want Him to know that I love Him. I'm not sure how to go about doing this. Can you help?" Those who knew Vicky say she would be surprised at all the reaction. "I wonder if she ever imagined what an impact she made, because she was always on fire, always spunky, always assertive," said church friend Julie Higdon. "And I just feel like she'd be up there going, 'Yeah!' if she knew what was going on down here. It was probably bigger than what she ever imagined."

"Vicky didn't just save lives, she also saved souls," said Dwayne Higdon, another of Vicky's friends from church. Jenkins said, "Because she was willing to testify, it's still leading people to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ today."

Vicky's story may have sparked a spiritual awakening throughout the community. But the person she most wanted to reach was closer to home—the man she married. Tyler said, "I know it caused her some concern that I haven't been saved yet... She had confided in some friends that have since told me she thought I would eventually get there, and I know that would mean a great deal to her."

Tyler, now a single dad, says that Vicky's death will not push him away from pursuing the God his wife served. "There's no anger, which honestly – it surprises me," Tyler said. "And I cannot explain it: a gift from God, a gift from Vicky? ...It makes me want to seek him more, because I want to see Vicky when I die."

Vicky, a woman who wore a badge of courage and honor and picked up a shield of faith is far from being forgotten. With each look at her picture, her smile grows a little brighter, her words ring

a little louder, and the impact of her life looms far bigger than she ever thought.

[I have not read *The Case for Easter*, but Strobel's books *The Case for Faith* and *The Case for Christ* are both excellent. He holds a Master of Studies in Law degree from Yale Law School and was the award-winning legal editor of the *Chicago Tribune*. He was an atheist during that period, but when his wife was converted to Christ he set out to prove her wrong. Guess what happened! --avw]

NEWS and NOTES

Edited by Bennie Hill, BHill40482@aol.com

2007 Ladies Inspiration Day was truly a day of "Inspiring Joy" for every lady in attendance. The eight Central Kentucky Churches that sponsored the day were Antioch, Belmont, Bohon, Cramer & Hanover, Ebenezer, Mackville, Parksville, and Salem. Seventeen churches of Christ were represented in attendance along with seven other visiting congregations. What a blessing was the singing led by Joan Marsh with specials from both Belmont and Bohon. Peggy Carter, the featured speaker was used of God to convict and inspire with her "Complete Joy." The two skits helped to bring home the message of joy. The workshop leaders were Claudia Hovan, Sheila McNerney, Deborah Kesel, Sarah Preston, Monica Ware, Amy Reeves and Joan Marsh. The emcee was Adele Hill. Every lady took home a Joy Angel and Joy Jewels as reminders of God's outpouring of joy on each of us. The entire day was truly an inspiring one.

The 2nd annual *Hoosier Ladies Inspiration Day* was held in the Linton, Indiana area on Saturday May 12, 2007.

Max Lucado Stepping Out of the Pulpit "Internationally-known minister and best-selling author with more than 25 million books in print, and perhaps the Stone-Campbell Movement's most well-known author is leaving the pulpit of the Oak Hills Church of Christ in San Antonio, Texas, a congregation he has served for nearly twenty years. Lucado, 52, was recently diagnosed with the heart disorder atrial fibrillation. Max will remain on staff of the Oak Hills Church --which numbers about 5,500 members--as part of the teaching staff. He will also continue writing. Lucado has two books due out in 2007. www.oak-hillssa.org We would encourage your prayers for Max Lucado at this time." --From 'ChristiaNet' -- Monthly Global News and Information related to churches of the Stone-Campbell movement around the world

"Prayer Focus: Hyperinflation is destroying the lives of many in Zimbabwe who have no ability to pay in local currency nor leave the country. Severe drought, high unemployment and economic hardship have left many in desperate need. The National Council of Churches

of Christ in Australia have commenced an effort to raise \$250,000 (AU) by June 30, 2007 in order to purchase food (particularly maize), distribute this food and drill wells to provide water in rural areas where rivers have dried out. To assist in this effort contact the Global Mission Partners at gmp@gmp.org.au. The presence of the Stone-Campbell Movement has been felt in Zimbabwe since 1898 (see Zimbabwe profile at www.worldconvention.org) and our churches there are quite strong including ties to all three streams of the movement." --'ChristiaNet'

Sometimes Bouquets, Sometimes Brickbats A few months ago a letter from Texas came to the office of *Word & Work*: "I have heard that pre-millennial Churches of Christ do not believe that they alone are 'the one true church.' I have also heard that they do a better job preaching grace and love that are so often left out of other CofC groups. Is this true?"

We sent the questioner some W&Ws regarding God's incredible grace and great big family. Later we got this reply: "I got the copies of *Word and Work* and have read through them. They certainly are not the typical low quality dribble you find in [some other] magazines. These in *WW* were well thought out, scholarly, and make you think." Please pray for and help promote the *W&W*. We are unsure how much longer it can go on. This is its 100th year; no wonder we're tired!

A Course in the School of Biblical Studies called "The Role of Women" will be taught by Ruth Wilson in the Fall Semester at Portland Ave. Church of Christ (2500 Portland Ave., Louisville, KY) on Tuesday evenings, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m. Three ladies have already

shown interest. There's room for more.

Ladies Retreat (overnight) will be held September 28-29, 2007 at Camp Kavanaugh, Crestwood, KY. Be sure to register early, ladies. Contact Ruth Wilson (231 S. Galt Ave., Louisville, KY 40206 or call 502-897-2831) if you need more information.

Same Place and Ministry, New Name and Director: For some time now Maple Manor Children's Home has been renamed Kingsfield Children's Home. Lots of us old-timers call it by the old name out of habit. It's still at the same location in Sellersburg, IN. Robert Istre was honored at a retirement ceremony. He served for 28 years—from 1978-2006! Paul Denny is the new Executive Director. For more information of how to help this good ministry to needy children, visit www.kingsfieldkids.com or call 812-246-2769. Ask to be put on the mailing list for their newsletter, *The Horizon*.

School of Biblical Studies Fall Schedule At the Buechel Church campus in Louisville, Bud Ridgeway will teach *Development of the English Bible* (Mon. 6-8 p.m.), and Ervin Denkins will teach *New Testament Church* (Tues. 7-9 p.m.). "The Role of Women" will be taught by Ruth Wilson at the Portland Ave. Church campus (Louisville; Tues. 6:30-8:30 p.m.) And in Harrodsburg, KY Julius Hovan will teach "Prison Epistles" (Eph., Phil., Col. & Philemon) Tues. 6:30-9:30 p.m. Take Advantage of these Opportunities. The class in Harrodsburg had the largest enrollment the past 2 semesters—good for them! For more information call 502-499-2702 or visit www.pcsbs.org.

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[We originally planned to use this last year—till it got lost for months! Though out of date, it still is valuable because it includes a dimension hardly ever mentioned by the general press. Of course this isn't the whole story either.]

“Beyond the battlefield, U.S. soldiers are working to win hearts and minds. The Army Gulf Region Division is working alongside the Department of State’s Iraqi Reconstruction Management Office, USAID, and other military and government agencies to rebuild Iraq. Reconstruction projects include schools, health-care facilities, water and electrical facilities, transportation systems, police and border stations, courts, and prisons. In July, U.S. forces completed construction on an irrigation project and a police station in Baghdad Province, launched street-paving in Najaf, and began digging five wells in Erbil Province.

“Thus far, American forces have completed 2,440 of 3,408 planned reconstruction projects, according to the Aug. 7 Iraq Reconstruction Report, including: Increased power generation to 1.3 million of a projected 1.4 million homes. Renovated 11 of 14 hospitals. Built or renovated 834 of 847 schools. Completed construction of 341 of 399 police stations, and 247 of 253 border forts. Completed installation of a 911 emergency service covering 12 million Iraqis in 15 cities. The push to rebuild Iraqi water-treatment facilities appears to be lagging behind other reconstruction efforts. To date, U.S. military units have completed just 20 percent of planned water-treatment capacity-improvement projects. Meanwhile, civil affairs units have fanned out across Iraq, assisting villagers with both reconstruction and community-development projects....”