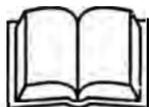


"Holding fast the Faithful Word . . ."



The **Word and Work**



"Holding forth the Word of Life."

OCTOBER, 2004

YOU can influence
the ***WORLD***,
by **P-R-A-Y-E-R!**

Finding God's Will

by Rubel Shelly

Do you ever pray for *discernment*? To know the will of God? To grasp divine mysteries in order to walk more closely with the Lord?

An overweight businessman decided it was time to shed some of the excess weight he had accumulated over the years. He had his annual physical and talked things over with his physician. Exercise and diet were to be the key elements of his new lifestyle. So he began walking every evening and took his new diet seriously. He even changed his driving route to the office to avoid having to pass by one of his more serious centers of temptation – the local bakery.

One morning he arrived at the office with a gigantic coffeecake and a box each of chocolate-iced doughnuts and Danish pastries. His assistant looked at him with raised eyebrows. But he simply smiled.

"This is a very special day," he explained. "I inadvertently happened to drive by the bakery this morning, and the sight and smell of these delicacies seemed to call my name. I felt there was something very purposeful about my being on that street at that very time, but then I remembered my diet. So I prayed, 'Lord, if you want me to have some of those delicious breads, give me a sign! Let me have a parking place directly in front of the bakery's front door.' "

"Sure enough," he said, "on my twelfth trip around the block, there it was!"

It sounds all too familiar. I've heard people justify everything from breaking lines at airports to dishonesty with company funds to affairs with "reasoning" that sounds strangely like that man's excuse for chowing down on calories. And I have learned to be even more skeptical of the person who had been given a revelation for me or who offers to discern the meaning of my circumstance.

A reasonable fear is that some of us use language about discernment and seeking God's face as a pious mask for having our own way.

No, I don't have a surefire method for figuring out the mind of God. The power of holy discernment is a gift of the Spirit. But here are three things to keep in mind: (1) the Spirit of God is not going to call you to disobey Scripture, (2) it is from sincere prayer that the divine will emerges most clearly, and (3) both Bible study and prayer are most productive in community.

With decisions that have spiritual significance, don't be like the man who deceived himself into thinking pious words can hide basic selfishness.

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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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OUR GREATEST WEAPON

Dennis Allen

"The harvest indeed is plenteous, but the laborers are few. Pray therefore the Lord of the harvest that he send forth laborers into his harvest." (Matt. 9:37,38.)

The harvest was plenteous in Jesus' day. It is estimated that the population of the world at that time was about 250 million. It took over eighteen centuries, or until about 1850, for the world's population to reach one billion. But by 1930 it had risen to two billion. Only thirty years later it had risen to three billion. By 1975, fifteen years later, it was four billion. By 1986 it was five billion. And now we are headed toward seven billion. How much more plenteous the harvest is today! How are we going to catch up?

The Lord has told us how. The harvesters are multiplied by prayer. As we pray He sends laborers. Billy Graham has said that he would rather be alive today than to have lived when Jesus was here on earth. Through the marvels of mass media he has had the opportunity to bring the gospel to far more people than in any other generation.

It is not an accident that the exodus to the cities continues to accelerate. There they can be reached with the gospel much more quickly. Now twenty percent of the population of Mexico lives in Mexico City. This is happening all over the world. Half of the babies born in the world are now born in cities. Paul centered his evangelistic efforts in cities. From there the Gospel could reach out to the towns and villages. People who have recently left their roots and the traditional pressures of family and friends and gone to the cities, are more open and responsive than at any other time. The best opportunity is before they put down roots again. We certainly found that true in Hong Kong among the refugees from China.

There is a much larger population in the world today, but there are also more believers living now than at any other time in history. Christ's church has spread to more areas of the world. The Bible is translated into more languages than ever before. There are more local churches and evangelists.

Besides this, through the tremendous media advances in radio, television and electronics, the gospel can reach many more people in a shorter time. God can, and is, using all of these things, but the most important resource we have is still prayer, because prayer brings down the power of God. It was the key to the initial advance of the gospel and is just as essential today. It is the greatest resource that we have.

God is not wishing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. But God has chosen to work through His people in answer to prayer. Doors are opened. People's hearts are opened when we pray.

Jesus never mentioned unanswered prayer. He said, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for everyone that asks receives, and he that seeks finds; and to him that knocks it shall be opened." (Matt. 7:7, 8.) The answers will be in accordance with His will and nature and not ours, but He will answer. "If we ask anything according to his will, he hears us: and if we know that he hears us whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions which we have asked of him." (1 Jn. 5:14b, 15.)

If we believe the fulfilling of the Great commission is the most important work of the church, then that should be the main thrust of our prayers. In Psalm 2:8 Jesus is commanded to ask for the nations as His inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession. Jesus is the divine "yes" to all of God's will, but He chooses to work through us. Prayer enables us to touch the throne of God with one hand and the needy world with the other. Many who are reading this because of your age and infirmities are unable to go personally to places where the gospel has not reached, but you can pray. Prayer gives you a ministry with no limitations. Through prayer you can accompany any missionary to the far reaches of the globe. You can be by their side. You can fight battles with them, and rejoice in victories won, because God answers prayer. People's hearts are opened when we pray. Distances cannot hinder nor can obstacles or closed doors. (Col. 2:5.)

Every need we hear about, or are confronted with is an invitation to prayer. The news we are bombarded with, instead of filling us with despair, can be an opportunity for intercession. God broke the power of communism in Eastern Europe in answer to prayer. Can He not penetrate the hearts of terrorists and radical Muslims?

The Scriptures indicate that in the last days the battle with the powers of darkness will only intensify, but the outcome is certain. Prayer is the weapon we must use to overcome. To use this weapon effectively we must be committed to using it to wrestle with the spiritual hosts of wickedness arrayed against us. We must take the time to know the needs of those on the firing line and to carry the burdens to the throne of grace. No saints of God need to feel useless as long as they are faithfully wielding the weapon of prayer. We must not merely assent to this truth. We will not become prayer warriors unless we commit to it.

THE PLACE OF PRAYER IN MISSION WORK

R. H. Boll, 1954

When to the commandment of the Great Commission the Lord added the promise, "Lo, I am with you always even unto the end of the world," He implied that in the carrying out of this work especially, they must altogether reckon on His presence and aid. Constantly the supernatural power of Christ would be needed. For the missionary's task is an attack on the enemy's realm, and the power of the Prince of Darkness, who will certainly oppose such effort with all of his might, can be countered only through the supernatural power of Christ. Our attitude in this work (though indeed this applies to everything in Christian life), in this undertaking especially, must be one of dependence on Him in prayer. The following from Robert E. Speer sets forth this necessity in well-put words.

"Aside from the example and teaching of Jesus, there is no richer field than missionary biography for the study of one who believes in prayer and would help others to realize its power and use it . . . The evangelization of the world in this generation depends first of all upon a revival of prayer. Deeper than the need for men; deeper, far, than the need for money; deep down at the bottom of our spiritless life, the need for the forgotten secret of prevailing, world-wide prayer. Missions have progressed slowly abroad because piety and prayer have been shallow at home . . . Of far greater service than any array of learning or gifts of eloquence; more to be desired than gold and fine gold; more to be sought than a great name or apparent opportunities for large usefulness is this gift—the secret and sweetness of unceasing, prevailing, triumphant prayer for the coming of the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ."

ASK AND YOU SHALL RECEIVE

In his volume *Taking Hold On God* Samuel Zwerner (himself a missionary to Muslim countries) tells of the effectiveness of prayer in missions. Thus in John G. Paton's experience -- how by prayer he was led into his life-work as missionary to the South Seas; by prayer won the affection of degraded savages, arrested the hand of the assassin, found the right words for his gospel translations and by prayer influenced the lives of young and old during his travels in Scotland and America. He mentions also the work of Gossner, of Louis Harms, of William Carey, and J. Hudson Taylor -- men whose work was a demonstration of providential, but plainly supernatural intervention of God in answer to prayer.

ON WINGS OF PRAYER

The whole missionary enterprise, from its start to its final accomplishment is conditioned on prayer. First of all there must be the prayer for God-chosen servants: "Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that he may send forth laborers into his harvest" -- an injunction which the Lord Himself gave, and which is all too often overlooked. Men and women are sent and go out as missionaries without much thought or prayer. But there are distinctions among God's servants. Not every Christian is fitted for missionary work. Nor even everyone that wants to go should go. Of the five "prophets and teachers" at Antioch the Lord sent forth two: "Separate me Barnabas and Saul unto the work whereunto I have called them" (Acts 13:2). Not that any miraculous call is needed now, but prayer, much earnest prayer, to direct the right person to this decision. Then prayer for the right field and location; also for means for travel for those who go, and for their sustenance, and for the success of their service -- that the Lord may send His angel before them (Gen. 24:7) -- prayer for the missionaries themselves, and prayer for them by the home churches continually. Prayer is the absolute essential to the real work of missions. In Antioch "they fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them and sent them away" (Acts 13:3). (The laying on of hands as always, signified the delegating of a work--in this case it meant that they were delegated to represent the church on this mission. So should it be today.)

'LO, I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS'

It is not in hours of ease, in the comforts of home and in pleasant surroundings, that God's hand is so much manifest, but the faithful and hard-pressed missionary can tell you of evident interpositions of Divine power and of answers to prayer. "God Himself," said J. Hudson Taylor, "is the great source of power. Power belongeth unto God; and God's power is available power. We are a supernatural people, born again by a supernatural birth, kept by a supernatural power, sustained by a supernatural food, taught from a supernatural Book. We are led by a supernatural Captain in right places to assured victories."

He knew all this from many-fold experience. For again and again he saw the help and guidance of the Lord in His work. The supreme need as it was felt by him and his co-workers, was (to use his own words) "to get God's man in God's place, doing God's work in God's way, for God's glory. God alone is sufficient for God's own work." And this he often saw fulfilled. On and on through the years, in ways that could not be accounted for on natural grounds, God's hand and God's work was manifest. The God of Elijah is living yet, and He will manifest His hand and His power always among those who trust and obey Him.

The SCOPE of PRAYER

Dennis Allen

The proper scope of prayer for the Christian is exceedingly broad. "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ" (2 Cor. 1:20). Whatever be the promises of God the "yes" to them for our lives is our portion in Christ. How timid and constrained is most of our praying in contrast to this prospect! "He hath blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3), but those blessings become ours only as we claim them through believing prayer. The fullness of Christ, His love flowing through us, His compassion, His boldness, His patient endurance of sufferings are all proper subjects for earnest, believing prayer with assurance that the Lord will hear and in His own way grant us the desires of our hearts.

On the other hand the Christian may find that much of his praying runs out of the proper bounds. As we come to a clearer understanding of the mind of Christ, we may see that much of our praying is not according to His will and must be classified as "asking amiss" (1 John 5:14; Jas. 4:3), hence we do not receive. We may be asking that the difficulty or obstacle should be removed, when God's will is to give us the grace to surmount it and thus reveal His power. We may be asking that the persecution be taken away, when God's will is to give us boldness that Christ might be magnified in our bodies, whether by life, or by death (Phil. 1:20).

Can I ask the Lord for a job or financial advancement and then use what He gives me on luxuries that only dull my spiritual senses and leave me with financial obligations that keep me from giving to the Lord that which rightfully belongs to Him? As our praying is brought into line with the promises of God and the mind of Christ we will find how glad our Father is to answer "Yes." In Christ is the yea to all the promises of God.

[More from our former editor on Prayer. It's interesting to note that his earlier article and the two short items that follow were written (or possibly re-run by him from earlier times) during the last 2-3 years of his life. Perhaps he saw more and more the urgent need of spiritual intercession, though he had always strongly emphasized it.]

WHY PRAYER GROWS TIRESOME

R. H. Boll

One thing that has made prayer irksome to many of us is the strained, unnatural attitude into which we place ourselves when praying. I am not speaking of bodily attitude, but of the spirit. I feel most comfortable in the presence of the friend who understands me; before whom I can be simply myself without fear of being unkindly criticized or misunderstood; who appreciates, sympathizes, thinks, and feels with me; and I call him "congenial." There are others in whose company I feel more or less constrained and cramped. I am, in fact, not quite myself when I am in their company, but assume, unintentionally, a more or less artificial attitude. This latter kind of association soon grows wearisome. The fault, indeed, lies with us in such a case, but the fact remains that we are burdened and bored.

Now here is the strange thing. Most of us, when we go to God in prayer, try to force ourselves into an artificial attitude of heart, and are, consequently, very glad to get through and done with it. We have an idea that we must be awfully good when speaking to God; and we "put on," forgetting the while that God knows us anyhow, and we can't "make impressions" on Him anyway. If He does not receive me "just as I am," He would of a certainty not accept me when I am in a false attitude before Him. So it is a great thing for us to take this lesson: You can be just yourself with God, without being in the least cramped or constrained. What were the use of being otherwise? And God appreciates it. He would have us lay our hearts open before Him and show Him our unworthiest thought and tendency, that He may heal us. Go to him and say: "Lord, I have no claims to make. I am this and that. In my self-deceit I hardly know when I am sincere. I do not know even now as I pray whether I am wholly sincere; but here is my heart with all its failings, and my help is in Thee alone." Such a plea, when based on the blood of Jesus, is effectual--infinitely more so than empty profession and vain praise of God that is not from the heart. --Feb. 1955 *Word & Work*

PRAYER FOR ALL MEN

R. H. Boll

“I exhort therefore, first of all, that supplications, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings be made for all men; for kings and all that are in high place, that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and gravity.” (I Tim. 2:1, 2.) The reason is not a selfish one for in giving His people a quiet and tranquil life, the world round about will, of course, partake of the same, and that for the sake of God’s praying people. (Comp. Jer. 29:7-- “And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray unto Jehovah for it; for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace.”) For the sake of ten righteous persons in the middle of Sodom that city would have been spared. And because of Paul’s presence on the storm-tossed ship, all that were on it, “two hundred and three score and sixteen souls,” were saved alive--“God hath granted thee all them that sail with thee.” (Acts 27:24, 37.) The prayers of God’s people have their repercussions in the council chambers of the nations. By their supplications wars are averted, and the course of human affairs is altered. --May 1955 *Word & Work*

CHINA’S SPIN ON THE ROLE OF MISSIONARIES

Luo Guanzong, who headed up the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) until 2002 has recently published a book entitled “Remembering the Past as a Lesson for the Future.” He writes,

“After the founding of New China... the sinful abuse of Christianity by the imperialist forces was brought to light... Missionaries were involved in Chinese politics and used their missionary activities to serve their respective governments in their invasion of China... The real aim of providing education in China was to nurture a number of future Chinese leaders who would be loyal to their foreign benefactors, thus cementing foreign control in political, economic and cultural matters... With our publication of this book, we do not only look back, but hope that the past will serve as a guiding lesson for the present and the future. To this day, forces opposed to us use Christianity to conduct activities of infiltration, and in order to destroy their activities, we need to raise our vigilance.” (Amity News Service)

Sadly, this view of Christianity as a tool for foreign domination of China has been taught in Chinese schools for many years. As a result, many Chinese people still see Christianity as a foreign religion. One young man has commented,

"The instinct of my cultural background pushed me to reject Christianity. I did not want to become a Christian. Why? Because Christianity was a 'foreign' religion, and anything with a western origin was regarded as obtrusive and exclusive. I was indoctrinated by the government: 'The Imperialists knocked open China's door with guns and boats. Then the missionaries followed in their footsteps to preach the Gospel. The privilege of preaching the Gospel was guaranteed and written in black and white on the unequal treaties that China made with western countries. The missionaries were at the forefront of imperialistic invasion. They were carrying out a cultural invasion under the protection of powerful western aggressors' ... I could not be objective when the humiliation of China in the recent hundred years was so fresh on my mind." (Overseas Campus Magazine)

While we rejoice at the rapidly growing number of Christian believers in China, our hearts are saddened that there are still those whose view of Christianity has been tarnished by the communist government's teaching on history.

Pray that more Chinese people might recognize the communist version of history as only one biased view and be willing to consider the Christian faith with an open mind.

--China Prayer Update, May 2004

The Life of Rest

J. Hudson Taylor

[The following is taken from a letter by J. Hudson Taylor, founder of the China Inland Mission, to his sister. This would have been written in the mid 1800s.]

So many thanks for your long letter. . . . I do not think you have written me such a letter since we have been in China. I know it is with you as with me -- you *cannot*, not you *will* not. Mind and body will not bear more than a certain amount of strain, or do more than a certain amount of work.

As to work, mine was never so plentiful, so responsible, or so difficult; but the weight and strain are all gone. The last month or more has been, perhaps, the happiest of my life; and I long to tell you a little of what the Lord has done for my soul. I do not know how far I may be able to make myself intelligible about it, for there is nothing new or strange or wonderful--and yet, all is new! In a word, "Whereas I was blind, now I see."

Perhaps I shall make myself more clear if I go back a little. Well, my mind has been greatly exercised for six or eight months past, feeling the need personally, and for our Mission, of more holiness, life, power in our souls. But personal need stood first and was the greatest. I felt the ingratitude, the danger, the sin of not living nearer to God. I prayed, agonized, fasted, strove, made resolutions, read the Word more diligently, sought more for retirement and meditation--but all was without effect. Every day, almost every hour, the consciousness of sin oppressed me. *I knew if I could only abide in Christ all would be well, but I could not.* Each day brought its register of sin and failure, of lack of power. To will was indeed present with me, but how to perform I found not. [Romans 7:18]

Then came the question, "Is there no rescue? Must it be thus to the end--constant conflict and, instead of victory, too often defeat?" Instead of growing stronger, I seemed to be getting weaker and to have less power against sin; and no wonder, for faith and even hope were getting very low. I hated myself; I hated my sin; and yet I gained no strength against it. I felt I was a child of God: His Spirit in my heart would cry, in spite of all, "Abba, Father"; but to rise to my privileges as a child, I was utterly powerless.

I would not give you the impression that this was the daily experience of all those long, weary months. It was a too frequent state of soul; [it was the condition] toward which I was tending, and which almost ended in despair. And yet never did Christ seem more precious--a Savior who *could* and *would* save such a sinner! . . . And sometimes there were seasons not only of peace but of joy in the Lord. But they were transitory, and at best there was a sad lack of power.

Oh, how good the Lord was in bringing this conflict to an end! All the time I felt assured that there was in Christ all I needed, but the practical question was how to get it out. He was rich, truly, but I was poor; He strong, but I weak. I knew full well that there was in the root, the stem, abundant fullness; but how to get it into my puny little branch was the question. [But] gradually the light was dawning on me. I saw that faith was the only pre-requisite, was the hand to lay hold on His fullness and make it my own. *But I had not this faith.* I strove for it, but it would not come. [I] tried to exercise it, but in vain.

When my agony of soul was at its height, a sentence in a letter from McCarthy was used to remove the scales from my eyes, and the Spirit of God revealed the truth of *our oneness with Jesus* as I had never known it before. McCarthy, who had been much exercised

by the same sense of failure, but saw the light before I did, wrote (I quote from memory):

"But how to get faith strengthened? Not by striving after faith, but by resting on the Faithful One."

As I read I saw it all! "If we believe *not*, He abideth faithful." I looked to Jesus and saw (and when I saw, oh, how the joy flowed!) that He had said, "I will never leave you." "Ah, *there is rest!*" I thought, I have striven in vain to rest in Him. I'll strive no more. For has He not promised to abide with me--never to leave me, never to fail me?" And, *He never will!*

But this was not all He showed me, nor one half [of it]. As I thought of the Vine and the branches, what light the blessed Spirit poured direct into my soul! How great seemed my mistake in having wished to get the sap, the fullness out of Him. I saw not only that Jesus would never leave me, but that I was a member of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. [Now I see that] the vine...is not the root merely, but all--root, stem, branches, twigs, leaves, flowers, fruit. And Jesus is not only that: He is soil and sunshine, air and showers, and ten thousand times more than we have ever dreamed, wished for, or needed. Oh, the joy of seeing this truth!

Oh, my dear sister, *it is a wonderful thing to be really one with a risen and exalted Savior*; to be a member of Christ! Think what it involves. *Can Christ be rich and I poor? Can your right hand be rich and the left poor, or your head be well fed while your body starves?*

The sweetest part, if one may speak of one part being sweeter than another, is the *rest* which full identification with Christ brings. *I am no longer anxious about anything*, as I realize this; for He, I know, is able to carry out His will and His will is mine. It makes no matter where He places me, or how. That is rather for Him to consider than me; for in the easiest positions He must give me His grace, and in the most difficult His grace is sufficient. *It little matters to my servant whether I send him to buy a few cents worth of things, or the most expensive articles. In either case he looks to me for the money, and brings me his purchases. So, if God places me in great perplexity, must He not give me much guidance; in positions of great difficulty, much grace; in circumstances of great pressure and trial, much strength? No fear that His resources will be unequal to the emergency! And His resources are mine, for He is mine*, and is with me and dwells in me. All this springs from the believer's oneness with Christ. And since Christ has thus dwelt in my heart by faith how happy I have been!

Strive NOT, and STRIVE

Alex V. Wilson

Hudson Taylor (1832-1905) has been one of my heroes since college days, if not before. His trust in God, burden for a lost world—especially China and its masses—, his prayerfulness, hard work and sacrifice: wow! He wasn't perfect, but who is? (By the way, have you ever read any missionary biographies? Have you read any to your children and grandchildren? Christian biographies can be a great tool in God's hand.)

He was a man with a great God. Who could count the numerous answers to his prayers the Lord gave through the decades. But his faith didn't spring up full-grown all at once. It was a matter of time, and ups and downs, and learning and experiencing more and more of God's faithfulness. His letter preceding this article makes that clear. He struggled in his quest for holiness and fruitfulness, as every growing believer does.

To paraphrase the key expressions in his letter, *How can I have stronger faith? By resting on the Faithful One.* It seems—in fact he confesses it—that for some time he had focused more on the *amount and strength* of his faith, than on *the Object* of his faith! Then he realized his folly and learned the lesson.

How may faith be strengthened? “Not by striving after faith, but by resting on the Faithful One....Has *He* not promised to abide with me--never to leave me, never to fail me? And, He never will!”

Most of us, indeed all of us need (or have needed in the past) to learn that same lesson. I know I do, very much. And not just once or twice, but repeatedly. I pray for you, beloved readers of this journal, and ask you to pray for me—that we all will grow stronger and deeper and higher in faith. Or to say it better--grow stronger, deeper and higher in Christ Himself. For we must not forget what Taylor learned: real faith focuses not on itself but on its object.

The Lord is great and gracious, wise and powerful. But I sympathize more and more with Hudson Taylor in his struggles when he said, “Must it be thus to the end--constant conflict and, instead of victory, too often defeat? Instead of growing stronger, I seemed to be getting weaker and to have less power against sin; and no wonder, for faith and even hope were getting very low.” May God grant us grace to grasp and use the truth that Hudson Taylor used: Rest upon the Faithful One. Set the eyes of your heart on *Him*. Consider

His mighty acts, and His concern for the weak, struggling and flawed. May we not trust in our good works and striving for holiness, nor even in our faith or faithfulness. Remember, "Great is *Thy* faithfulness, Lord, unto me." Focus on *Him*. In this way our own faith and faithfulness can be revitalized.

Another Angle

But let me be bold enough to differ with the way Hudson Taylor expressed himself, or at least to clarify an important term. Here is his fuller description that faith comes "not by striving after faith, but by resting on the Faithful One....I thought, I have striven in vain to rest in Him. I'll strive no more." Note the words *striving*, *striven*, *strive*. And note the negative aspects of each: "not by striving . . . striven in vain . . . I'll strive no more." He found victory by learning to quit striving.

Yet we'll see in a moment that the New Testament *commends* striving! So there must be at least two types of striving —a bad kind but also a good kind. In English there are several definitions for *strive*: "to struggle, endeavor, go all-out, do your utmost, do your best, make every effort, try hard." Nothing wrong *per se* with any of that, *unless* we are self-reliant in our efforts -- self-dependent instead of God-dependent. Such self-confidence leads to self-righteous glorying in doing our best, and is the way of "the flesh" -- our sinful, self-centered nature. Like the struggling missionary, I (and you?) need to find victory by learning to quit that kind of striving. We should relax in faith, walk in the Holy Spirit, and hand ourselves and our problems over to Him who is able to do far more than we can ask or think.

If we do that, we then can intensify the other, *good* kind of striving. Notice Col. 1:28-2:2 in the RSV (and ASV): "Him we proclaim, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man mature in Christ. 29 For this I **toil, striving with all the energy which he mightily inspires within me.** [Don't overlook that last part.] 2:1 For I want you to know how greatly I **strive for you . . .** that [your] hearts may be encouraged . . ."

Also ponder 1 Tim. 4:7-10 NIV, "Train yourself to be godly. 8 For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come. 9 This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance 10 (and for this **we labor and strive**), that we have put our hope in the living God."

Instead of “strive,” some versions say “**struggle**,” and others say “**wrestle**.” The Greek word is “agonizomai,” from which our words *agonize* and *agony* come. Other possible synonyms are “contend or fight.” It refers to any activity in which one seeks to *cause* agony or needs to *endure* it. Wrestling in the early Greek Olympic Games might be what Paul had in mind as he used the word.

But what does this metaphor of striving or wrestling mean? That is, *whom* are we wrestling and *how* do we do it? The first question seems easy to answer. We don’t wrestle against flesh and blood, but against Satanic spiritual forces who oppose us with the ferocity of terrorist suicide bombers. Satan and his troops are the enemies we strive against: Eph. 6:11-12.

But how do we wrestle against invisible, intangible spirits? Two other scriptures give the answer. Rom. 15:30 NAS says, “I urge you, brethren, . . . to **strive together with me in your prayers** to God for me.” And Col. 4:12-14 NIV tells us, “Epaphras . . . sends greetings. He is always **wrestling in prayer for you**, [ASV: always **striving** for you in his **prayers**] that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured. 13 I vouch for him that he is **working hard for you** and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis.”

Say, friends, does our praying bear any resemblance to striving, wrestling, and working hard? That’s how Paul urged the Romans to pray, and that’s how he described the praying of Epaphras. May the Lord teach us more about this aspect of intercession. He Himself knew such intensity of prayer, as two more passages show. Heb. 5:7, “During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud [or *vehement*] *cries and tears* to the one who could save him from death.” Also Luke 22:44, “Being in *anguish*, he prayed more *earnestly*” It’s true that His prayers in Gethsemane shortly before His passion were more passionate than usual. We’re not saying this is the only way nor the usual way to pray. But it’s certainly a valid way. Let’s review Paul’s appeal to the Roman church and his praise for Epaphras, and evaluate our praying in light of them.

Finally, in the epistle to the Hebrews there are two interesting references to profitable striving. They sound ironic, almost self-contradictory. “There remains a sabbath rest for the people of God; for whoever enters God’s rest also ceases from his labors as God did from his. Let us therefore **strive** to enter that **rest**, that no one fall by the same sort of disobedience” (4:9-11 RSV). Strive to enter rest. Hmm. Again, “**Strive** for **peace** with all men, and for the **holiness** without which no one will see the Lord” (12:14-15 RSV). To strive for peace almost sounds like a slogan, Fight against fighting. And

that may be near the meaning of the text. For the peace here probably doesn't mean calmness or tranquility in our spirit, but harmony in our churches. That's worth striving for!

So we learn that there is a self-reliant striving which we ought to reject, as Hudson Taylor experienced. But there's a most important type of striving which we ought to engage in, especially in prayer. While the Christian life is a life of rest and peace, it is also a life of labor and wrestling. May the Lord give us wisdom to find the balance, and experience both aspects.

P.S. for those who want to hear "the rest of the story":

There's another form of strife Christians should *avoid*, which we've not studied here: "Don't strive [dispute, wrangle] about words," 2 Tim. 2:14. And there's a striving we should urge our unsaved friends to *do*: In Luke 13:23-24 someone said to Jesus, "Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?" And He said to them, "Strive to enter through the narrow door . . ." Let nothing stop you; go to Jesus now!

The Story behind "The Room"

According to an email forwarded to me, Brian Moore was a 17-year-old high school student who excelled in academics and athletics. And he was a loving son and Christian. He wrote "The Room" as his devotional talk for a meeting of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. It had a sobering impact on all who heard it. About two months later—May 27, 1997—Brian was killed in an accident. That fact adds to the poignancy of his article. We're not saying his story tells things as they will be, of course. But, well, just imagine that *you* wind up in a room like this. --avw

The Room . . .

Brian Moore

In that place between wakefulness and dreams, I found myself in the room. There were no distinguishing features except for the one wall covered with small index card files. They were like the ones in libraries that list titles by author or subject in alphabetical order. But these files, which stretched from floor to ceiling and seemingly endless in either direction, had very different headings. As I drew near the wall of files, the first to catch my attention was one that read "Girls I have Liked." I opened it and began flipping through the cards. I quickly shut it, shocked to realize that I recognized the names written on each one. And then without being told, I knew exactly where I was.

This lifeless room with its small files was a crude catalog system for my life. Here were written the actions of my every moment, big and small, in a detail my memory couldn't match. A sense of wonder and curiosity, coupled with horror, stirred within me as I began randomly opening files and exploring their content. Some brought joy and sweet memories; others a sense of shame and regret so intense that I would look over my shoulder to see if anyone was watching.

A file named "Friends" was next to one marked "Friends I have Betrayed." The titles ranged from the mundane to the outright weird. "Books I Have Read," "Lies I Have Told," "Comfort I have Given," "Jokes I Have Laughed at." Some were almost hilarious in their exactness: "Things I've yelled at my Brothers." Others I couldn't laugh at: "Things I Have Done in My Anger," "Things I Have Muttered Under My Breath at My Parents." I never ceased to be surprised by the contents. Often there were many more cards than I expected. Sometimes fewer than I hoped. I was overwhelmed by the sheer volume of the life I had lived. Could it be possible that I had the time in my years to write each of these thousands or even millions of cards?

But each card confirmed this truth. Each was written in my own handwriting. Each signed with my signature. When I pulled out the file marked "Songs I have Listened to," I realized the files grew to contain their contents. The cards were packed tightly, and yet after two or three yards, I hadn't found the end of the file. I shut it, shamed, not so much by the quality of music but more by the vast time I knew that file represented.

When I came to a file marked "Lustful Thoughts," I felt a chill run through my body. I pulled the file out only an inch, not willing to test its size, and drew out a card. I shuddered at its detailed content. I felt sick to think that such a moment had been recorded. An almost animal rage broke on me. One thought dominated my mind: "No one must ever see these cards! No one must ever see this room! I have to destroy them!" In insane frenzy I yanked the file out. Its size didn't matter now. I had to empty it and burn the cards. But as I took it at one end and began pounding it on the floor, I could not dislodge a single card. I became desperate and pulled out a card, only to find it as strong as steel when I tried to tear it. Defeated and utterly helpless, I returned the file to its slot. Leaning my forehead against the wall, I let out a long, self-pitying sigh.

And then I saw it. The title bore "People I Have Shared the Gospel With." The handle was brighter than those around it, newer, almost unused. I pulled on its handle and a small box not more than three inches long fell into my hands. I could count the cards it con-

tained on one hand. And then the tears came. I began to weep. Sobs so deep that they hurt. They started in my stomach and shook through me. I fell on my knees and cried. I cried out of shame, from the overwhelming shame of it all. The rows of file shelves swirled in my tear-filled eyes. No one must ever, ever know of this room. I must lock it up and hide the key.

But then as I pushed away the tears, I saw Him. No, please not Him. Not here. Oh, anyone but Jesus.

I watched helplessly as He began to open the files and read the cards. I couldn't bear to watch His response. And in the moments I could bring myself to look at His face, I saw a sorrow deeper than my own. He seemed to intuitively go to the worst boxes. Why did He have to read every one? Finally He turned and looked at me from across the room. He looked at me with pity in His eyes. But this was a pity that didn't anger me. I dropped my head, covered my face with my hands and began to cry again. He walked over and put His arm around me. He could have said so many things. But He didn't say a word. He just cried with me.

Then He got up and walked back to the wall of files. Starting at one end of the room, He took out a file and, one by one, began to sign His name over mine on each card. "No!" I shouted, rushing to Him. All I could find to say was "No, no," as I pulled the card from Him. His name shouldn't be on these cards. But there it was, written in red so rich, so dark, so alive. The name of Jesus covered mine. It was written with His blood. He gently took the card back. He smiled a sad smile and began to sign the cards. I don't think I'll ever understand how He did it so quickly, but the next instant it seemed I heard Him close the last file and walk back to my side. He placed His hand on my shoulder and said, "It is finished." I stood up, and He led me out of the room.

There was no lock on its door. There were still cards to be written.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." – John 3:16

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." --Phil. 4:13

GRACE IS PERSONAL

Edward Fudge, GracEmail

"I hear much about the doctrine of grace," writes a gracEmail subscriber. "Can you give me a good definition of what it really means?"

* * *

We must never think of divine grace as some impersonal, abstract reality which can be defined and discussed apart from a relationship between two or more real living persons. Grace is nothing less than the undeserved mercy and kindness which the living God pours out freely on all who entrust themselves to him as known through his Son Jesus Christ, surrendering to the Father their sins, their merits and their lives for his disposition and control.

In Jesus Christ, God reveals himself as the Judge who possesses life-and-death power, but who is ready, even eager, to forgive those who repent. He is the Father who waits with fresh robe, ring and fattened calf for his wandering children's return. He is the Physician who heals because he cares and loves. Jesus shows us God the Almighty who becomes a human infant, weak and dispossessed, to save those who have no strength themselves. He reveals God as the offended deity who, incarnate in the Messiah, embraces the offenders' guilt then personally goes the gamut of punishment and disgrace until his body is broken and his blood poured out on a Cross.

"Grace" is not a theory, a concept or a doctrine. It is God-in-Christ-for-sinners. Nothing we do can earn it, create it, or make it happen. We can only receive it with the empty hands of faith, trusting God and relying on his promise that he has forgiven our sins and has accepted us for Jesus' sake. Until we do that, we miss the point with all our lists of rules, requirements, conditions and obligations. But when we do trust the gospel promise that God receives sinners, we happily entrust ourselves to such a God -- eager to seek and to know what pleases him, ready to obey his every command.

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Guy King wrote, "Some Christians are inclined to take a lax careless view of sin, seeing that by the grace of God and through the blood of Christ we have been saved from its penalty and eternal doom. But sin in a believer is infinitely worse than in an unbeliever --just as an inkstain is far worse on a white dress than on a black one."

Will We Christians be JUDGED by God?

A.V.W.

What did James mean when he said, "Speak and act as *those who are going to be judged* by the law that gives freedom" (James 2:12)?

Note 3 basic truths about this question:

1. All people deserve judgment because we have broken God's moral law and thus are sinners.... law-breakers! Criminals!

2. Real Christians escape the judgment of damnation and hell, because Jesus bore it for us on the cross:

a. John 5:24, nkjv, "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and *shall not come into judgment*, but has passed from death into life.

b. Jn. 5:24, niv, "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and *will not be condemned*; he has crossed over from death to life." [Note the slight difference in wording between the two translations.]

c. Rom 5:6, 8-9, niv, When we were still powerless, *Christ died for the ungodly*. 8... God demonstrates his own love for us in this: *While we were still sinners, Christ died for us*. 9 Since *we have now been justified by his blood*, how much more shall *we be saved from God's wrath* through him!

d. Rom 8:1, niv, There is now *no condemnation* for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Review those first two facts about judgment. And give thanks to the Lord!

But there are also other verses which we need to face, and see how they fit in with the two biblical facts we saw above. Let's do some detective work....

a. 1 Cor 4:4-5, My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. *It is the Lord who judges me*. 5 *Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring*

to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each [Christian] will receive his praise from God.

b. Rev 22:12, Behold, I am coming soon! *My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. niv; ...to every one according to his work. nkjv.*

Those two passages are positive in emphasis, mentioning praise from God and rewards from Christ for His people. Let's continue.

c. Rom 14:10 & 12, Why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? *For we [Christians] will all stand before God's judgment seat.... 12 So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.*

The above passage is neutral, not clearly specifying whether "judgment" refers to *rewards* for what is good or *penalties* for what is bad. [But the context is about a kind of derogatory judging that some people were doing, which Paul disapproved of.] The Greek word translated "*judgment seat*" sometimes refers to *where judges at the athletic contests gave honors to the winners*, rewarding them for their good work. But more often it refers to *where a judge tried court cases*, such as when Pilate tried Jesus. (Matt. 27:19; John 19:13) or Paul was hauled into the Roman courts (Acts 18:12,16; 25:10).

d. 2 Cor. 5:9-10, We make it our goal to please him... 10 *For we [Christians] must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.*

e. Colossians 3:22-25, Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything.... 23 *Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, 24 since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. 25 Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism.*

**These 2 passages definitely refer not only to Christians receiving rewards for our good works and service but also some undefined repayment for wrongs we do.

On the basis of these 5 scriptures (and others could also be quoted), it seems clear that **the Bible teaches a third truth about Christians and God's judgment:**

3. Christians will be judged for our conduct and service as children of God. This will not be a courtroom trial to condemn and sentence sinners to hell. Instead it will be a "family matter," as we

give an account of ourselves to our Father and elder Brother. It will be a time of *glorious rewards* for our holy actions and loving, faithful service. That positive aspect is what is mostly emphasized in scriptures that refer to our coming judgment. Here's another example: Christ said that when He returns and "sits on his glorious throne ... everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life." Matt. 19:28-29

But for some believers it will also be a time of *shame*. Why? Due to good things we *could* have done but *didn't*, or *bad things we did as Christians and never repented of and asked forgiveness for*. Erich Sauer makes three helpful observations on this matter:

a. *What we have judged, God will not judge again*: 1 Cor.11:31, "If we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment."

b. *What we have uncovered, He will cover*: 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins."

c. *What we have covered, He will uncover*: Luke 12:2, "Be on your guard against...hypocrisy. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known."

That is, the sins we uncover, by confessing them, God will cover by forgiving them. But those we keep covered and "hidden"--unrepented and unconfessed to God--He will uncover by exposing them at the judgment seat. Sauer's conclusion could also be based on **the reverse** of 1 John 1:9. It says, "*If* we confess our sins, He...will forgive us," which implies that if we *refuse* to confess our sins to Him here and now we will face them there and then -- at His judgment-seat.

Let us therefore keep our consciences tender before the Lord, for He saves the contrite and broken-hearted. Let us confess our sins to Him and also -- when necessary -- to others also. Let us pray for His forgiveness, and then forgive those who wrong us. Let us set our hope fully on the grace--yes, *grace!* --that will be given us when Jesus Christ returns. We are saved by grace from first to last. Through our Savior "we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand." So let's thank Him wholeheartedly that when "the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness then *every [Christian] will receive his commendation from God.*" What fantastic love! In the light of His love, and realizing how deeply our sins grieve the Lord, let us pursue holiness. And, don't forget the judgment-seat of Christ.

Meditations on Heaven--

**Blessed are the Pure in Heart, For They Shall
SEE GOD!**

Those who are pure in heart, who seek to have an undiluted and undivided loyalty to the Lord, may “see” Him and know Him personally even *now*. But we will truly see Him in his fullness of glory only *later*. Frederick Faber wrote a powerful hymn about this. Ponder it well.

My God, how wonderful Thou art, Thy majesty how bright!
How beautiful Thy mercy seat in depths of burning light.
O how I fear Thee, Living God, with deepest, tend’rest fears,
And worship Thee with trembling hope and penitential tears.

Yet I may love Thee too, O Lord, Almighty as Thou art,
For Thou hast stooped to ask from me the love of my poor heart.
Father of Jesus! Love’s reward! What rapture shall it be
Prostrate before Thy throne to lie and gaze and gaze on Thee.

MISERABLE in HEAVEN?

“None but the pure in heart are capable of seeing God, nor would heaven be happiness to the impure. As God cannot endure to look upon their iniquity, so they cannot look upon his purity.” Thus said Matthew Henry, Puritan preacher in England during the 1600s.

Do you get what that statement means? Heaven would be like hell to the un-converted. Those who are not born again and thus receive from the Lord a new heart – a new nature – would be *miserable* in His holy presence! They couldn’t stand it. If they can’t endure being in a prayer meeting for 30 minutes or an hour now, how could they stand worshipping and serving the Most High God forever?

Christ can give you a new, holy heart that delights in Him. Receive Him! If you are already born again, ask Him to keep on renewing your heart, to strengthen and deepen your devotion to Him.

“Who Created Our Creator?”

by Joyce Broyles, Alex Wilson, and Motoyuki Nomura

The question in the title is from a letter written by Iris, a young lady in Hong Kong, to Joyce and Douglas Broyles. She formerly lived with them as an exchange student. Douglas baptized her in April of 1994 after she studied Scripture with them from the previous September.

This year she was in a Christian seminar in Hong Kong, about creation and science. But she remained—or became—puzzled. Her question is, “God created the universe and all, but where did God come from? I mean what created God? This is a question I have never thought of in the past but now it is very important to me. Thanks in advance. Love, Iris”

Joyce replied to that letter. But then she forwarded Iris’ question, and her own answer to it, to brother Moto Nomura in Japan and also to me. She asked us to add our responses.

Joyce’s Reply

I’m glad to hear you are studying about God. Please keep studying, especially about Jesus, and although you don’t understand everything, (I still don’t!), just keep your faith in him, believing he is God’s son, no matter what! Your question is a difficult one, and demands faith in someone who is invisible but whose works are plainly visible. I hope I can do a sufficient job in helping you understand or have some ideas, at least.

Genesis tells of the origin of the universe, but there was a time when nothing existed but God. There was no world of time and space. Apart from God there was nothing. We are not able to shape in our minds any idea of what it was like then. It was not a world of empty space, for emptiness has no meaning before the world of time and space came into being by God’s creative action.

Before the creation of the world, God existed alone in splendid majesty, exclusively. Neither the world nor any other divine beings existed in that timeless, ancient past. By the time Genesis was written, people had made all kinds of idol gods to worship, but the author of Genesis believed in the true God alone.

Who is God? Genesis says God is a person who is lovingly, intimately, and totally involved in our universe and in the unfolding of history. God created the world and saw that his work was good.

Our universe is personal and purposeful because it was created by this loving God. God invites all of us to come to him as the originator of all things.

But where did *He* come from? I don't know. John 1:1 says when God spoke, his Word brought life itself into existence and it was this Supreme Being who later became man, the man we know as Jesus Christ.

The couple created by God were "made in the image of God." The one thing that made them different from other created beings is that they were made in the image of God. They are not like God in his shape or power, but they can understand, communicate, and choose to listen and make decisions. Many people today teach that God is beyond human understanding and that we can only speak about our own experience with God. However, I believe that faith is an expression of knowledge, not just emotion or experience. Such knowledge is not limited to just what we observe.

Read Hebrews 11:1-2, & 6. "1 Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. 2 This is what the [people in ancient times] were commended for. 3 By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.... 6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." (NIV) It says that faith includes a future of hope as well as conviction of the existence of spiritual beings. God revealed himself through Christ and his Word (the Bible) and the creation. He also spoke to a limited number of people through history. We believe that everyone in the world knows about God (or that there *is* a god) to some extent (whether they have access to the Bible or not) by outward "general revelation," that is, by looking at the wonderful things God created (nature). Inward general revelation is when our conscience tells us when something is wrong because we feel like there is a higher law. Proverbs 1:7 says the fear (reverence or respect) of God is the beginning of wisdom, so we can learn about him if we have respect for him.

Iris, I don't know what else to tell you, except the story my dad told me when I asked him about where did God come from. He took Mom's wedding ring, a gold band, and asked me where it started. I looked but there was no crease anywhere, and I said I couldn't tell because it was just a circle with no starting place. He said God was like that. He has always been, he is now, and he will always be. Our human minds can't comprehend that. It just takes faith to believe in something like that when we cannot see or understand.

Write to me any time and ask any question or tell me anything. I don't have all the answers, but it helps me renew my faith when I have to explain what I believe and why!

A Brief Reply by A.V.W.

Good job, Joyce. I would have added that if we said some being or force named ABC made God, then the question would be, Who made ABC? Etc. etc. As you said, God is the original, always-existing Being and source of all. For a specific passage to support some of what you said toward the end, I would recommend she read Romans 1-3. Paul mentions God's revealing Himself to all humans through (1)the Creation and also through (2)Conscience, and revealing Himself even more to the Jews through (3)His Law, which was later written down in (4)Scripture.

Through these means, He revealed Himself as the I AM, the always-existing, always-present One. Romans 1-3 says lots more too, of course: God, or "I AM," is Judge, and - best of all -- He is the seeking Redeemer. The Bible announces (but doesn't try the impossible job of explaining), "In the beginning, God." We can't grasp it, but it sure makes sense! What other alternative does? Alex

Brother Nomura's Answer

The most beautiful answer was Brother Moto's. He wrote as follows:

Iris: Here is another way to look at the question you sent to Joyce in Louisiana:

Supposing your boy friend has sent you a beautiful red rosebud for you to enjoy. A friend of yours, a botanical scientist, looking at the rosebud says, "Oh, this belongs to so and so species, and came from so and so country." And he measures the rosebud--how long is the stem, how large is the bud., etc., etc., and jots down the notes in his memo pad.

Another friend of yours, a florist, looking at the rosebud says, "Oh, we sell it for \$1 apiece. It's a sort of new product from our bio-technological development."

Another guy comes. He is an Oriental medicine man. He says, "Oh, this one is good for your cold. Dry out the flower and put it into boiling water for a cup of tea."

I believe they are all correct and reasonable. There is nothing wrong with these friends of yours. But their analyses are wrong. The

red rose your boy friend sends you represents his love and affection, his appreciation of what you mean to him. It represents something science cannot prove. It represents an invisible value...his love to you.

You see tears in your mother's eyes. You do not say, "There goes H2O plus some salt in it." In her tears you see your mother's love and prayers for you when you do something wrong. In her tears you see your mother's joy for something nice you have done for her.

There are always many ways to look at one thing. God is not something you need to prove but to appreciate and accept in your heart. God is not something you can understand scientifically but is someone you are to believe in as the very source of your whole life. Not someone else's life, but your own life. God wants you to be happy. He wants you to know that He leads your life. He wants you to be His child. He wants you to serve your fellow Asians as His instrument.

In Asia we have so many suffering friends--billions of them--without food, shelter, freedom, hospitals, medicine, education, clothes. And God wants you to be a servant, to serve them. I have spent a good portion of my life in Asian slums, including your own Hong Kong years ago. God needs His workers. Mainland China needs God and His message of love. He is not someone you can analyze, for He is so big and large that you and I can not measure Him. But He is the One who gives you and me our very life, its meaning and its purpose. There are certain things in our life that we do not need to know everything about, but to believe in it and appreciate it—things such as love... life... death... your own life.... --Motoyuki Nomura, Bethany Home, 1381 Koarama Nagasaka-Cho, Kitakoma-Gun Yamanashi-Ken 408-0031 Japan

By the way, friend, what would you have written?

Sunday School Teacher's Prayer

O God, they sit before me week after week.
Those who want to learn and those who won't.
Those who trust me
and those who find it difficult to trust anyone.
Each child represents diversity;
varied aptitudes and attitudes,
homes of love and homes of hurting,
foundations of faith and those of failure.
How difficult my task, dear God.
Their trek is an awesome climb;
too intimidating and slippery
to be traveled without a guide.
I am willing, Lord, yet I am only one.
Renew my weary spirit, Father.
Fill my mind with imaginative ways
of communicating concepts these children must learn
to grow and mature in the Faith.
Give me eyes to see
what these lives may one day yet become.
And lest I yield to the temptation
to quit in utter frustration, please pass the patience.
Your Son was a servant-leader, as am I.
May His example energize me
to cherish each life, to view each child
as one created in Your image.
To lift up the downcast, to go the extra mile,
to lead by serving and love by listening,
to be satisfied with my best
and to trust You with the rest,
to grasp Your values that never change,
and to value Your grasp of me
in all that I attempt to do for Jesus' sake. Amen.

--Greg Asimakoupoulos

[If you're like me, the following article will shake you up--a little or a lot. Feel free to agree, disagree or in between. But we need to think and talk about it. Since these methods are used in our pupils' schools, at least we'll know where they're coming from. This copyrighted article was originally published in Grace Centered Magazine (www.gcmagazine.net), a daily, online publication, dedicated to stimulating personal and public thought, prayer, and discussion about living the Christian life. —avw]

Bore No More

by Jeremy Walden

“Church is so boring!!”

It's a reason people leave the church. It's a reason they don't invite their friends. It's killing the passion we should have for God.

In response, many well-meaning souls scream, "We are not in the entertaining business!" What's missing is an understanding of our current educational culture.

The new buzzword in education circles is "edutainment." It simply means the act of learning through a medium that both educates and entertains (The American Heritage Dictionary). It is the way we have learned and are learning. We are a generation that grew up learning by watching Sesame Street and Mr. Rogers. Our children have learned to read and spell with computer programs. We have been edutained.

We have discovered that there are various ways to learn. Each person has a dominant learning style: either visual (seeing), kinesthetic (touching), or auditory (hearing). One size doesn't fit all. One method of teaching doesn't fit all.

The ways schools teach have changed tremendously over the last 30 years. Here are a few comparisons to consider:

Passive learning (sit and learn) Active learning (move and learn)

- | | |
|----------------------|------------------|
| * Lectures | * Learning games |
| * Handouts | * Role-plays |
| * Fill-in-the blanks | * Field trips |
| * Textbooks | * Drama |

* Listening to music

* Group projects

* Video/TV

* Internet

Old School

* Teacher-oriented

* Teaching

* Whole class

* Do specific assignment

* Distinct subjects assignment

New School

* Student-oriented

* Learning

* Small groups

* Given options within assignment

* Integrated subjects/themes

At its root, entertainment is about holding someone's attention. Jesus was a master at it. He taught with stories, questions, object lessons, and miracles. People were amazed at his teaching (Mark 1:22, 27).

I'm urging us to reconsider everything - preaching, worship, classes, etc. What will you do with this information? Teach us the way we learn, please.

A Terrible Experience

**Condensed from Robert Garrett's Email sent from
Zimbabwe, Oct. 29, 2004**

It happened on Tuesday evening October 26 about 8 pm . Two men, very smartly dressed in police uniform came up onto the verandah. They were holding prisoner between them a third man with his hands handcuffed. They said they were police from a nearby town and had arrested this man when he was trying to sell what appeared to be stolen property. He had confessed to them that he had stolen it from this place and led them here. As we had suffered a severe break-in and robbery only 10 days earlier I naturally thought that this was one of the culprits and that there was a strong possibility of recovering much of what had been stolen.

I went outside to talk to them. They then said that their prisoner claimed that he had been assisted in the robbery by one of my em-

ployees. I knew that could not be true but called Edwin and Joe. They questioned them and then asked to see the place where the robbery had taken place. I showed them the door that had been broken and we went into the room. They asked us all to sit down. They suddenly turned on Edwin and Joe and said "You are suspects. Lie face down on the floor." Joe was a little slow in complying and one kicked him in the head. Still believing they were genuine police, I protested, exclaiming, "You have no call to do that!" while the one was subduing Edwin and Joe the other was unlocking the handcuffs from their prisoner. It all happened in a second. At my protest they jumped on me and made me lie face down and forcing my hands behind my back they put the handcuffs on me. I knew then we had been conned and that these guys were professional thieves.

Face down on the floor with my hands cruelly cuffed behind my back I still had a secret weapon-- I could pray. They tied Edwin and Joe's hands behind their backs, and tied our legs together and put gags in our mouths and tied them tight.

I knew that Joy was as unsuspecting as I had been and that these men would enter the house and rob it of everything of value. I prayed that the Lord would protect her. What we did not know was that there was a fourth man who had remained out of sight. While the first three were subduing us, he entered the house, grabbed Joy by the collar of her dress, slapped her face, and shook her all the while demanding money. He dragged her into my office and tied her in my office chair. He discovered some cash (about US \$1,000.)

Joy told him that the Lord would judge him for all this and that what he was taking belonged to the Lord. He replied, "I am of the Devil."

The men stripped almost everything of value they could easily see. I had 2 computers in my office which they took, plus a scanner, my Laser Printer, the voltage regulators, surge protectors, my mobile phone. They took the TV, the VCR, the microwave, electric kettle, coffee-maker, toaster, electric iron, electric fan. In the bedroom they filled several of our suitcases with clothing, mostly my new shirts and trousers, and Joy's new leather jacket. They also took my electric shaver, and our watches and cameras, blankets, quilts, and so forth. They took my wallet and wristwatch and keys to my old pickup.

As they left they said "Any funny and you die." They tried to start my pickup but it would not start so they abandoned it. I telephoned the Ruwa police who said they had "no transport." So I had to go fetch the police officer to make the report!

We bless the name of the Lord for He kept us from any serious harm. We have heard of numerous cases where thieves have broken into people's houses and severely injured and sometimes murdered the occupants in order to steal. The things we lost are only things, although they were acquired over a lifetime, and their replacement cost over here is about three times the USA price. The worst loss is the computer which contains years of work-books, tracts, sermons, lessons, Shona Hymn Book, and more.

"The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord," said Job. And our sufferings are as nothing compared to his. We believe that the Lord still has much work for us to do and ask your prayers that we be able to accomplish it.

Added Comments by Alex Wilson. Much of what follows is based on further information sent by Robert. He had an old, beat-up computer which was not taken. After some time he was able to fix it up and send and receive email.

Here are some answers to our questions, plus suggestions re: the best solutions to their plight.

Since they've had several burglaries in recent weeks, what can be done to prevent recurrences? He explains, "We were in the process of installing a security alarm before this happened but it is difficult because of the large area and layout of the buildings and their distances from each other. It will take us another week to get it ready and it will only cover part. Our next trip down south we will buy more components, Lord willing."

Should friends in the U.S. send replacements for their losses? "The cost of shipping is so high, and the authorities do charge high customs duties. It matters not if the item is used or new or donated, they want their pound of flesh. Computers and such are available both here and in South Africa. They are usually cheaper in South Africa and once a month we can make a trip down south and bring back about US\$500 worth of stuff duty free. Anything over that we must pay 65% duty."

So how can individuals and churches in the U.S. help the most? "I think money is the best. Electrical items are best bought here (Zimb.) or in South Africa because our electricity is not the same as in the U.S. Here everything is 220 Volts and 50 Cycles.

"My basic needs would be 1st a Laser Printer. (Ink jets are no good for publication work.) 2nd, a good and larger monitor. 3rd a

better computer and surge protectors, voltage regulator, UPS to go with it.

“We both need watches, I need a mobile phone and then after that can come the things like microwave, etc., etc. We do not have to get everything at once. I still have enough clothing to get along. They did not take my suits.”

AVW's closing comments: Any checks for the Garretts should be made out to Portland Church of Christ, noted “Garretts/ Zimbabwe,” and sent to their treasurer Joann Wiese, 3508 Evergreen Circle, Jeffersonville IN 47130. Her phone is 812-288-7872.

Strategy: It is plain to see that funds are desperately needed. But along with that, and **more important** than that, is **Prayer**. Remember this month's main theme? “You can influence the WORLD, by PRAYER!” Pray that the robber band will be caught and imprisoned, that the stolen goods be recovered, and especially that all God's people there may have *a strong testimony for the Lord* during times of crisis, abuse and suffering. May the Lord protect them *from* trials, and *in* trials, according to His grace, wisdom and power. If and when their goods are recovered, Robert will of course notify us. In the meantime, these servants of the Lord need our generous aid. Many items lost were not merely personal but a vital part of the ministry there.

NEWS and NOTES

Edited by Bennie Hill, BHill40482@aol.com

Medical chip stirs privacy fears! During the month of October, the United States Food and Drug Administration gave its approval for an implantable chip which can be used for medical purposes. A microchip the size of a grain of rice can be inserted below the skin - and will carry an individual's medical records which can be read by a scanner.

The makers of the VeriChip say it will carry information that can save a patient's life during an emergency - such as details of

medication, blood groups and allergies or if they have conditions such as diabetes.

Sanctity of Marriage is once again being challenged. Tens of thousands of Christians rallied at the National Mall in Washington, D.C., during the month of October to support traditional marriage, with many calling for a national amendment to protect against homosexual activists who want to change its definition.

Among those in attendance & support were Dr. James Dobson.

He said, "we are not here for purposes of hatred; we are not here to disparage anyone. We are here because we believe in the institution of marriage. It is so important that we treat every human being with dignity and respect, even towards those who we feel have a destructive lifestyle." Ken Hutcherson, a preacher (& former player for the NFL's Seattle Seahawks), initiated the event after organizing a "Mayday for Marriage" rally with Dobson in Seattle. Hutcherson said, "I think that traditional marriage is under attack. I think it's an emergency situation. The church has to stand up."

PRAYER/PRAISE BOOKS - will be available for the Louisiana Fellowship at Glenmora in November and the annual Thanksgiving service in Louisville. There has been good response and much updated material will be available from missions around the world. This also includes many "home" missions. If you're unable to attend one of the meetings mentioned above and would like a copy, please contact:

Bennie Hill,
P.O. Box 54842
Lexington, KY 40555.
bhill40482@aol.com

The booklets are provided FREE of charge by the Church of Christ Worldwide.

Vote "Yes" for Marriage! On November 2, 2004, we will have the opportunity of expressing our stand on the institution of marriage. Voting "yes" for an amendment to the Kentucky Constitution will define marriage as being between one man and one woman. Whether or not you choose to vote is between you and

God. Everyone can pray for the moral and spiritual revival in our churches and our nation.

Ky Ave. Church of Christ (Louisville) announces a "Friend Day" for Nov. 7, 2004. The goal is 100 this time (twice our average attendance). There will be a fellowship dinner and afternoon devotional. Start praying and planning to bring someone with you!

5th-Sunday Singing Meetings: Buechel Church of Christ (Louisville) hosted the Greater Louisville area singspiration on Oct. 31. And Bohon Church of Christ hosted the singspiration for several Central Kentucky Churches.

Moving to Ross Point KY. This good news is an answer to many prayers for Harry and Kate Coultas. Brother Harry served the Ross Point Church as minister for several years. This was home for Kate. She has relatives there and both Harry and Kate have friends there who are eager for their return. They plan to leave Louisiana after preaching December 26. Bro. Harry will begin his ministry on January 2, 2005.

Please join in prayer for the Turkey Creek LA Church, as they search for a pulpit minister. All who know Harry and Kate love and appreciate them. (submitted by Dale Offutt)

Honor to Whom Honor is Due At the Woodland Bible Camp annual meeting on Oct. 16 a special tribute was made to Brother Orell Overman. He has stepped down from Woodland's Board of Directors after having served since the board's beginning in 1964.

Eugene Mullins, Sr. went home to be with his Lord Sept. 21, 2004 in Garland, Texas. He was almost 79, and had been seriously ill for some time. He was the son of Frank Sr. and Ophelia Mullins. Gene ministered at Eastern Hills Church of Christ in the Dallas area, worked with East Dallas Christian School, and served as principal of Aurora Christian School in Aurora, Illinois. He made mission trips to Russia – with the CoMission educational outreach and with teachers from Christian schools in the U.S. – and also to Mexico. He is survived by his wife of 55 years, Mary Lou, and their 4 children and their families. Pray especially for Mary Lou who has suffered from severe illness for a number of years.

Church Growth in India Ken Grimm, from Westminster Church of Christ, MD, has been in India again for some months. Part of his report: “In Hyderabad I went to many, many prayer meetings and made many home visits. These are the two major foci of evangelistic efforts in the *current flood of evangelism that is sweeping across India. Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims are coming to*

Christ in unprecedented numbers.” He writes that “the usual process” is that friendships are built through repeated home visits. The visits are made to get better acquainted, but also include (when the family desires it) praying for the family -- “blessing” them. “In India, everyone wants their house blessed, but the other religions charge money for the blessing”! (Ken did not elaborate on this, but I’m guessing the people there want blessings due to the fear of evil spirits in Hinduism. – avw)

Change of Address in Japan
After Nov. 1, our address will be revised as follows:

Motoyuki Nomura
Bethany Home, 1381 Koarama,
Nagasaka-Machi, Hokuto-Shi,
408-0031 Japan
phone: +81-551-32-5579
fax: +81-551-32-4999

This is due to our mountainous rural communities getting together to form a city system. We have not moved but remain in the same strongly Nichiren Buddhist community.