

"Holding fast the Faithful Word . . ."



The *Word and Work*



"Holding forth the Word of Life."

February 2007

“Saints who from their labors rest”—

What might they be doing now, as they wait for us
and for our Lord’s coming in glory?

God’s Word gives us some hints.

* * *

Sermon on the Mount:

Do more than others do.

In fact, *be perfect as God is perfect!*

For example, *love your enemies!*

< Some disciples have done just that, in ways that
take your breath away. At least 14 such instances
are recorded in this issue. ;

Any Volunteers? Pray about it.

Sister Louise Wells has been Word & Work's office manager for many years now. She handles the record keeping required by the Postal Service, and the listing of new or renewing subscribers plus changes of address, and sending reminders to lapsed subscribers, and the banking, etc. Moved by Christ's love and the importance of helpful Bible teaching for His people (which is W&W's goal), she works hard. We Could Not Go On Without Her [or some other God-given assistant(s)]! Thank you, faithful sister!

Other friends come in to help her on mail-out days, and with proof-reading, etc. But we need *at least* one additional volunteer to assist Louise with the jobs listed above. Needed qualifications include patience, perseverance, love, and "a sound mind" or "self-discipline" (2 Tim. 1:7, NKJV, NIV).

Is God calling *you* to this sphere of humble service? Great will be your reward in heaven! Ideally you are not too old, but perhaps retired from a regular job so you can work irregular hours – in spurts. Some weeks there may be nothing to do but read the mail for awhile. On the busiest weeks you might be needed several hours on 2 days (or maybe 1 long day, or maybe parts of 3 days)—especially if there are 2 of you. Less time will be required if there are 3 of you. Of course for practical reasons you need to live east of the Mississippi River! (I'm not really prejudiced, just smiling.)

Word & Work Cannot Stay Afloat If It Only Has An Editor And Some Writers. Without an office worker(s), we'll be sunk! I believe the Lord wants this ministry to continue. Many readers testify to spiritual renewal and "light from above" through its pages, praise the Lord! Any volunteers? Please pray about this need, at least, whether you're eligible or not. Thank you; we appreciate you all. –avw

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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2 Strong Soldiers of the Cross Go Home to Glory

Nathan Burks left here for Heaven, and was buried on Jan. 15--only a few months after his brain cancer was discovered. Elsewhere in this issue (and next month too, we trust) you may read more about our brother.

Added grief came (though our sorrows can't compare to those who have no Savior and no hope) when we learned that **Antoine Valdetero**--"*Brother Val*"--fell asleep in Jesus on Jan. 26. Cancer waged war on him for many years before he succumbed. Yet he, like Nathan, was able to preach off and on till just a few weeks before his home-going. We know there will be tributes to him also in coming issues. What a blessing to have known these dear brothers through the years! Let us uphold before God's throne of grace Joann Burks and Jean Valdetero and their extended families.

And notice Dr. Dale Jorgenson's article on Christians and death. There is interesting food for thought there.

For all the saints who from their labors rest,
Who Thee by faith before the world confessed,
Thy name, O Jesus, be forever blest:
Hallelujah!

Thou wast their Rock, their Fortress and their Might;
Thou, Lord, their Captain in the well-fought fight;
Thou in the darkness drear their one true Light:
Hallelujah!

O may Thy soldiers, faithful, true and bold,
Fight as the saints who nobly fought of old,
And win, with them, the victor's crown of gold:
Hallelujah!

--W. W. How, #544 in Great Songs

Some Miscellaneous Memories about Nathan Burks

Gathered by Jim Rowe, his brother-in-law

Nathan preached his first official sermon June 3, 1962. It took place at the Mount Carmel Christian Church near Cynthinia, KY where Terry Morrison's father attended. (Being the church treasurer at that time, Brother Morrison dug up these exact dates). The church had asked N. Wilson Burks, president of Southeast Christian College (and Nathan's dad) if he knew anybody who might fill in, and he said he would ask Nathan. That's how he happened to get there. Nathan kept preaching there till Sept. 2 of that year. The church paid him \$35 weekly.

Later Nathan preached in southern Indiana at the Carters Creek Christian Church for about 6 months, probably in the late 60's. (We'll have more information about his ministry at Southeast Church of Christ later.)

Recent Volunteer Ministries

In recent years, Nathan has supported the brotherhood in some unofficial capacities that will be greatly missed. My personal belief is that the following such tasks need to be accepted and carried on by another such leader or leaders that God raises up. Some of these responsibilities are: 1) Maintaining a list of addresses (email and postal) and phone numbers of all leaders and ministers in cooperating congregations. 2) Serving as a contact person for multiple congregations who needed ministers either for fill-in or longer term vacancies. 3) Serving as a fill-in preacher himself in various churches. 4) During Robert and Joy Garrett's furlough a few years ago, Nathan served as their person-for-churches-to-contact to make appointments for them to visit. (Thankfully, since Nathan's passing, Robert and Jackie Gill have volunteered to carry on that ministry for the Garretts from mid-2007 through mid-2008.)

Urgency plus a Sense of Humor

Nathan was urgent in serving the Lord, seeking the lost, and teaching the Bible. But he also had a penchant for jokes and an inclination for funny experiences. Here are just a few experiences his friends remember.

A memory from the old 5th & M Street Church where his dad preached was a Sunday morning when Nathan was presiding at the communion table. He attempted to quote the scripture "This Do in

Remembrance of Me” that was engraved on the front of the table. But his memory failed him, so he proceeded to walk around the table in order to read the scripture. (No doubt we all have had such memory lapses at times.)

Nathan was one of very few who have experienced “walking on water” (at least there was some resemblance to that). Several families from the 5th & M Street Church were on a camping vacation at Kentucky Lake. Nate was on the water skies, and was being pulled near the shore; and someone called; “Joann, get the camera!” Suddenly, the fin on the ski struck a rock in the shallow water, and Nate began tumbling across the water, legs kicking in an effort to gain control. This episode gave an appearance of walking (or running) on water. Fortunately there were only a few scrapes, and no serious injuries. However those close friends who witnessed this have often reminded Nate of his “walking on water” experience.

When Nathan was preaching at Mount Carmel Christian Church, he and his family often spent Sundays at the Morrisons’ farm. On one such occasion when Nathan’s sons David and Paul were little, they wanted to go to the tobacco barn there. Brother Morrison took them on a tour, and they wanted to chew some “long green.” He accommodated them, and of course they got a bit sick. That’s one way to try to prevent a nicotine habit.

Then there was the time when the Southeast church choir was leaving for a trip to visit churches in Louisiana. Nathan was asked to lead a prayer asking for guidance and protection on this journey. For some reason, the bus broke down about 50 miles west of Nashville, and the group was forced to sit beside the road for 5 hours until a substitute bus came from Louisville. The group arrived in Jennings, LA about 2:00 am; 5 hours late. On a second similar trip about 2 years later, the group told Nathan that someone else needed to offer the prayer, “because we don’t want the bus to break down again like last time.”

We surely miss our good brother.

Beyond the Dark Glass

Dale Jorgenson

In his *Chronicles of Narnia*, C. S. Lewis tells the story--regarded by many as a Christian allegory--of four children during the Battle of Britain who were sent into the country to escape the German air raids on wartime London. During a game of hide-and-seek, Lucy hides inside an old wardrobe, suddenly discovering that the objects rubbing her face were no longer the soft coats hung in the closet, but branches of trees. Pressing on toward the light ahead of her, Lucy finds herself standing in the middle of a forest with snow falling around her.

The story in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* in Lewis's *Chronicles* describes a new reality discovered by Lucy and her three friends--a reality of which they were not previously aware and which was not apparent to the adults living in the country house where they were staying. It suggests that the one-dimensional view of the "real world" held by naturalistically-minded people (in this case adults) may reflect a lack of awareness--an awareness of other worlds of reality which cannot be measured by the usual empirical processes of sense experiences, but which are just as "real" as that which can be seen and heard. The Apostle Paul refers to this dimension in the well-known exhortation he gives in the letter to the Ephesians: For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of the present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places (Ephesians 6:12 RSV).

As long as we are limited to those experiences which we can perceive with our physical bodies, our awareness of these "spiritual hosts . . . in the heavenly places" is based only on faith. We can anticipate a world of "spiritual hosts" and heavenly armies, but unlike Lucy, generally have little experience of such an extended reality. Again it is Paul who speaks of our limitations in mortal flesh when he writes, "Now we see in a mirror darkly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood" (I Corinthians 13:12).

It seems ironic to suggest that it might be at the moment of death when we say farewell to family, friends, and experiences of this physical life, when we are ushered into another life of far more richness than any we have lived before. It may be then that we come "through the closet" into a perception beyond anything we could ever have grasped with human sense experience. Death is not only "swallowed up in victory" (I Corinthians 15:54), but also represents access into the fullness of life which God has planned for us to enjoy throughout eternity.

In my opinion, the Bible does not give us a great amount of detail concerning the state of the believer immediately following death, but there are many suggestions which hint at this enlarged view of life which comes to the Christian in physical death: Jesus' promise to the repentant thief on the cross (Luke 23:42-43); the parable of the rich man and Lazarus after death (Luke 16:19-31); and Peter's description of Christ's activity during His time in the grave (I Peter 3:19). Paul's account of the tensions he experienced between life and death written to the Philippians also suggests that he expected a closer fellowship with Christ in death than he had ever experienced in life (Philippians 1:21; 23). The Book of Revelation introduces the "souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne" as they cry out for justice from under the heavenly altar during the opening of the fifth seal (Revelation 6:9). Although the "dead who die in the Lord" are called blessed because they can now "rest from all their labors" (Revelation 14:13), that very rest seems to entail a blessed time of richer experience and perception than any which had been experienced on the earth during mortal life.

A fascinating narrative in the Book of II Kings describes the experience of the Prophet Elisha's young servant during a time of extreme stress for both prophet and servant. When the king of Syria sent a "great army" to capture or kill the prophet, Elisha's servant, speaking out of his one-dimensional perception of what was taking place, cried out, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?" (II Kings 6:16). Elisha, in his loving concern for the young servant, then prayed: "O Lord! I pray thee, open his eyes that he may see." So the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha (II Kings 6:17).

Death is only one of the avenues to the broader experience of reality "beyond the looking glass" for the servants of Christ. Christians have historically longed for the return of Jesus Who, at His coming, will change us in a moment, and "the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written, 'Death is swallowed up in victory'" (I Corinthians 15:54). But if our lot should be to part with this body of clay in death *before* Jesus' Coming, the promise of a clearer vision beyond the looking glass is ours. Of course it is both a human and a proper impulse when we mourn the absence of our loved ones and friends who precede us in death, but we can also rejoice in the glorious awakening which the servants of Jesus enjoy as they pass from seeing "in a glass darkly" and emerge into the glorious clear light of God's larger Reality.

Three Funerals

(Judgment Day's a-comin')

Did anybody happen to notice [recently] the picture God painted for us as we watched the events of the day unfold on every news station around the world? The portrait of three men's lives was shown clearly through the events of their deaths. One a wise man, one a foolish man and one a wicked man.

Three men captured the world's attention by their lives and their deaths. Their funerals spoke volumes about the course of life they had chosen to pursue with the few short years God had granted to them. Yesterday, God opened the Book of Proverbs and showed the world the truths contained in His sacred Word.

All three men, President Ford, James Brown and Saddam Hussein had choices in their destiny. Today they have all three stood in front of the God of this universe with those choices unveiled and judged.

God allowed us to see three men yesterday.

President Gerald Ford, a man whose faith in God and service to his country was eulogized by many speakers during the solemn and dignified ceremonies which marked his passing. A man of character and integrity, not perfect but made righteous by his faith in Jesus Christ. It was in this righteousness he lived out his life as a servant to his fellowman and his country. Great men and dignitaries attended his funeral. All coming to pay respect and honor to a man most deserving.

James Brown also was eulogized in a funeral ceremony befitting his life choices. There was blaring rock music, gyrating bodies, costumes, and great sensual displays of revelry to portray the contribution this man had given through his life to his fellowman. He lived a life of drugs, alcohol, fast women, immorality and rock music. He was heralded the father of Rap music and the inspiration of Michael Jackson's path to greatness. His funeral with all of its theatrics was befitting the excess of waste his life portrayed.

Then we had the gruesome hanging of Saddam Hussein. His death as gory as his life. A brutal murderer and dictator, hanged by his neck and secreted away in the middle of the night. Thousands of Iraqis celebrated his death, for through his life he had brought untold misery and death to many. A man so wicked that it seemed the world breathed a collective sigh of relief at the pronouncement of his death.

Three men, three men who left their mark on the entire world, three famous men. All three have gone to their Creator to answer for the choices they made in their life -- as you and I will someday.

There is only one choice and Gerald Ford's life exemplifies the nobility of choosing to walk in harmony with The Creator through the acceptance of Jesus Christ as his Redeemer. James Brown chose to walk in the flesh. His life's work glorified the flesh and his death magnified the flesh. Saddam Hussein chose evil. He was a narcissistic megalomaniac. His life glorified evil and his death was gruesome.

This all played out in one day. God painted a great picture for mankind to see. I pray people got His message.

[The above, here slightly adapted, was on the web, but we could never discover its author. --editor]

Sermon on the Mount--

What Would I Have Done?

Alex V. Wilson

Last month we saw examples of folks living by Matt. 5:42. There Jesus tells us, "Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you." That is, Be compassionate and generous, and share unselfishly what you have. See the Jan. issue for many stirring examples. Here's another one I meant to include.

Brother Stanford Chambers was an early editor of Word and Work, and an evangelist and school teacher and leader. One bitterly cold winter night a destitute stranger showed up at Portland Church's mid-week prayer meeting. He asked Brother Chambers if the church had any warm clothes to give away, especially an overcoat—for he had none. It so happened there was no kind of clothes-closet. But at meeting's end the man went home with a good coat. Brother Chambers, however, walked home without one.

It's easy to say, "May God meet your need for a coat." Or to pray, "O God, may this man be enabled to get the coat he needs." It's harder to pray, "O Father, you know I need an overcoat now; I trust You to provide me with one."

What Are You Doing More Than Others?

Matthew 5:43-48
A.V.W.

Jesus was an expert at puncturing people's pride, wasn't He? Listen to these three pithy commands: *Do more than others do*. In fact, *be perfect as God is perfect!* For example, *love your enemies!* That didn't take long, did it?

Let's look at the conclusion to chapter 5 in more detail.

Matt. 5:43 "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. 46 If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? 47 And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?"

48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

What They Had Been Taught

Jesus said they had heard, "Love your neighbor and hate your enemy." Of course the Old Testament does command us to love our neighbor. But it never says to hate our enemy. The Pharisees had devised ways of escaping the obligations of God's law to love. One of their sayings was, "If a Jew see a Gentile fallen into the sea, let him by no means lift him out from thence. It is written, 'You shall not rise up against the blood of thy neighbor,' but this man is *not* thy neighbor." Jesus of course disagreed with that tradition.

Also later, by the time Matthew wrote his gospel, some Jewish religious leaders who hated the followers of Jesus had composed a writing called *The 18 Benedictions*. The 12th prayer in that book said in part, "Let Christians perish in a moment, let them be blotted out of the book of the living and let them not be written with the righteous." But Jesus taught, "I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you"

How Should We Apply This?

It's obvious we must take these words of His very seriously, but again we must also consider exactly what He meant. There are differing views.

In August, 2004 Louisville's *Courier Journal* ran a letter to the editor. A foreign-born man wrote: [In a speech after 9/11] "Pres. Bush asserted, 'This nation is peaceful, but fierce when stirred to anger.' Bush saw it as our responsibility to 'answer these attacks....' [But] is it Christian to make such a quick leap from sadness to revenge? In Luke and Matthew *Jesus calls on us to love our enemies and teaches us to turn the other cheek. Isn't Christianity a religion of absolute peacefulness and forgiveness?* At least, that was my concept of Christianity before I came to the U.S."

Last month we saw that the words Jesus spoke a few minutes before that just-quoted statement have raised similar questions: He said, Don't resist an evil person: If someone slaps you, just take it, etc. Thus there have been and still are some people who conclude that we should dismantle law courts, police departments, armies and even all governments – because they resist evil and even return evil for evil!

Personal Relations and Government Duties

The letter-writer just quoted feels Jesus' call to love our enemies requires the U.S. not to fight our terrorist attackers, but to forgive them; not to answer their murderous aggression or even defend ourselves from their violence but remain at absolute peace with them.

It's true Christ calls us, His disciples, to be peace-makers. So we as citizens should exert every effort we can to promote peace and avoid war if possible. And we should be peace-makers in our families, neighborhoods, and cities as much as possible.

But our Lord here is not really speaking about national policies nor international affairs. He is not teaching about the role of rulers and armies – what they should do if invaded by enemies who seek to kill, conquer and enslave their people.

To discern God's will about government and its duties, rights and limitations, we must study Bible passages (especially in the N.T.) which *specifically* deal with such questions.

For instance, the major passage on these subjects is Romans 13:1-7. And it says, "Governing authorities [do] not bear *the sword*

for nothing,” and that the ruler’s duty is “to bring *punishment* on the wrongdoer.”

But for us *as individual Christians in our personal relationships*, we are to love our enemies and persecutors. As Paul says in the preceding chapter, Romans 12, We should “not return evil for evil” but “overcome evil with good” by doing such things as “if your enemy is hungry, feed him.” In fact, Rom. 12:14, 17-21 is a paraphrase of Christ’s teaching on the Mount.

Hey, I’m not claiming it’s easy to work out seeming conflicts between Romans 12 and 13. The correlation between our personal relationships to individuals and our duties to government sometimes is very tricky. Devoted Christians through the ages have strongly disagreed among themselves about such matters. But it seems to me that at least one thing is clear: In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus is not talking about citizenship and its duties as such, but about interpersonal relationships.

Cases from History

Once more I use Robert E. Lee, commander of the Confederate Army during the Civil War, as a wonderful example. Earlier we saw his personal humility. But as a commanding General he could also set policies for his entire army. He was a devout Christian. Actually he did not like slavery, but after the Civil War began he fought against the Union over the issue of states’ rights. During the war Lee issued a remarkable decree to his army—General Orders #73.

At that time his army was about to invade northern territory. Already they had begun to hear about the looting, burning and raping by the Northern armies who had invaded their homeland in Virginia. But Lee told his troops:

“The commanding general considers that no greater disgrace could befall [this] army, and through it our whole people, than [for *us* to perpetrate] the barbarous outrages upon unarmed and defenseless [people], and the wanton destruction of private property that have marked the course of *the enemy* in our own country. . . . It must be remembered that we make war only upon armed men, and that we cannot take vengeance for the wrongs our people have suffered without . . . offending Him to whom vengeance belongs, without whose favor our efforts must all prove in vain.”

That is a prime example of Christ’s teaching, “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.”

Here is another case in point: You remember several years ago in Beslan, Russia, terrorists held children, teachers and parents at gunpoint during an opening-of-the-school-year ceremony. And their explosives killed hundreds of those innocent people. Unspeakably terrible grief resulted, of course. And hatred too.

A minister for the Neva church in St. Petersburg, Oleg Yakimenko, said afterward, "So many in Russia are caught up in hatred toward the Chechnyans as a whole nation." That's *natural*, isn't it? In response, Russian ministers (at least some of them) focused their sermons on words of love from the Bible. That's *super-natural*, isn't it!

One preacher said his sermon on the Sunday after the slaughter centered on the very verses we have now come to in our study, Matt. 5:46-47. "If you love [only] those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?"

The Russian preacher explored "the differences between Christians and non-Christians in dealing with enemies." He said, "I chose this topic because it is difficult these days to keep our focus on Jesus' love for his enemies, difficult not to become like everybody else—involved in the hatred and hysteria."

I say *Bravo!* to our brave Russian brother.

The Sermon on the Mount Highway--

“Love my ENEMIES? Oh, C’mon, Lord!”

Now Jesus “meddles” some more: 43 “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ [Actually the O.T. scripture never says to hate your enemy. But some rabbis did.] 44 But I tell you, *Love* your enemies.”

Christ can enable us to do that, too. But do we even *want* Him to? Do we even *want to want* Him to do so? Think about that. Love our *enemies!*

That’s hard, but here is an album of “pictures” of Christians who did it. They Lived the S-O-M, they put it into Practice:

#1. During the days of the Protestant Reformation, it was very **costly** to obey this command of Jesus. "Facing arrest as an Anabaptist, Dirck Willems fled for his life across a frozen lake. When his pursuer broke through the ice [and probably would have drowned], Willems gave up his chance to escape by turning to save his persecutor. He was then captured, imprisoned, and burned at the stake in 1569." (*Christian History* magazine)

#2. Here is a True Story which occurred just before the Korean War in the 1950s: In a South Korean town, hateful Marxist agitation grew as war seemed imminent. During a brawl two local Communists killed the son of a Christian minister. They were caught, and the angry people wanted to have a quick trial and execute them. But the minister (the father of the victim) intervened on their behalf, and asked that the two killers be released from jail and put into his custody! As time went on, he went farther down the Sermon on the Mount Highway and even adopted those two young men as his own sons!!

#3. Another amazing example from that same land and era: The Communists raided the home of a Christian leader. They killed both his wife and father, and thought they'd killed him too. But he was only wounded. When he recovered health and strength, he went to the home of the leader of that raid. But he did not go with soldiers, police or a gun, but with the gospel of Christ! The astonished Communist became a Christian that night. The Christian who'd been wounded later served for years as the national director of Campus Crusade for Christ in South Korea.

#4. Cambodia over 30 years ago: Ta Hum was the name of a Christian man there. In the village where he lived his neighbors bribed a dishonest surveyor to change an official property line or boundary. As a result, Ta Hum lost an acre of land.

His first reaction was, "They may get my land, but they won't get my banana and coconut trees on that land." So he took his machete to cut down the trees. But after cutting down several of them he thought, "This is not what I learned in Bible classes. Jesus said to turn the other cheek." He prayed for God's forgiveness, and returned to his home.

The next morning he went to his neighbors who were building a wall to mark the new boundary. He told them, "You have taken my land; I'll give you my house too. What do I need with houses and lands? I'll move and help a pastor tell others about Christ."

News of what he said spread and reached the village chief, who investigated. He declared to the swindlers, "Everyone knows this land is Ta Hum's. He planted these 200 trees over twenty years ago. I have the deed in my file. If you don't get your wall out of here by evening I will throw you all in jail!" Ta Hum interceded for them: "It's too much work—they cannot do it by this evening. Please give them till tomorrow evening." The neighbors lost not only the land but also their bribe money, for the surveyor had spent it.

When Christians are persecuted the outcome is not always so favorable to them! But Ta Hum's attitude even before he knew how the situation would end showed his great faith in the Lord and his willingness to obey Him. (8-27-75 *Alliance Witness*)

#5. The following occurred soon after the end of the Soviet Empire and of Marxist control in Eastern Europe. "An East German pastor named Uwe Holmer wasn't sure how to respond when leaders from his church district approached him in January 1990 with an unusual request. They wanted him to take in Erich Honecker, the deposed leader of [Communist] East Germany. Honecker, 77, had just been whisked from a state-run hospital, where he was recuperating from cancer surgery, to prison to stand trial on treason charges. But he had hardly been there 24 hours when a court ruled he was too sick to stay in prison. After his release, the state refused to provide him with a place to stay. The former dictator was so despised that no one could be located to take care of him.

"Pastor Holmer directed a church-run convalescent center in the secluded village of Lobetal. He knew it would be the ideal setting for the Honeckers—an out-of-the-way spot where they could easily be protected. But to grant Honecker asylum! Honecker had personally presided over the building of the Wall, which separated Holmer's family when it was erected, and kept him from attending his own father's funeral. And Honecker's wife, who ran the ministry of education, had denied Holmer's ten children admission to any university because of their faith.

"But Holmer thought about his own responsibility as a Christian. It was the very purpose of the ministry at Lobetal to take in the poor, the sick, and the homeless. Honecker was now the poor, the sick, and the homeless. Yet Holmer didn't think it would be fair to put Honecker and his wife up in the church's retirement home, since there was a long waiting list to get in. He decided he had no choice but to shelter the couple under his own roof.

"When Honecker arrived at the pastor's residence, the deposed dictator looked dazed and confused. Holmer welcomed him, 'I know

you have come here to convalesce, and I hope you will find the peace and quiet you need here.' Those sentiments were not shared by the rest of the country."

Hate mail began pouring in. Some church members threatened to leave Holmer's congregation. Supporters of the Lobetal ministry gave notice they were considering cutting off their funds. Bomb threats were made.

Holmer defended his actions in a public letter. "In Lobetal there is a sculpture of Jesus inviting people to himself and crying out: 'Come unto me all that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' We have been commanded by our Lord Jesus to follow him and to receive all those who are weary, in spirit and in body, but especially the homeless....What Jesus asked his disciples to do is equally binding on us."

Heavier, Heartrending Sufferings

The stinking ugliness of unmerciful torture goes on today in Sudan, North Korea, parts of Indonesia and Nigeria and China, Colombia and other lands. Yet so does the radiant blooming of faith and love. For now, instead of telling about current persecutions, here are some of the many incidents recorded by Richard Wurmbrand in his book *Tortured for Christ*. It is a horrendous but life-changing book about persecutions inflicted by the Communists on Christians (and others) in the mid-20th century. It was published in 1967 but is still in print.

Wurmbrand himself was imprisoned for 14 years in his native land of Rumania. Why? Because he was a Christian pastor, evangelist and leader. He was tortured in various ways: beaten, drugged, psychologically brain-washed and much more.

"It was strictly forbidden to preach to other prisoners. It was understood that whoever was caught doing this received a severe beating. A number of us decided to pay the price for the privilege of preaching, so we accepted their terms. It was a deal; *we preached and they beat us*. We were happy preaching. They were happy beating us, so everyone was happy."

At times he and other Christians "were put in wooden boxes only slightly larger than we were. This left no room to move. Dozens of sharp nails were driven into every side of the box, with their razor-sharp points sticking into the box. We were forced to stand in these boxes for endless hours. While we stood perfectly still, it was all right. But when we became fatigued and swayed with tiredness,

the nails would go into our bodies. If we moved or twitched a muscle—there were the horrible nails

“Christians were put in ice-box ‘refrigerator cells’ which were so cold, frost and ice covered the inside. I was thrown into one with very little clothing on. Prison doctors would watch through an opening until they saw symptoms of freezing to death, then they would give a warning and guards would rush in to take us out and make us warm. When we were finally warmed, we would immediately be put back in the ice-box cells to freeze—over and over again! Thawing out, then freezing to within just one minute or two of death, then being thawed out again. It continued endlessly. Even today sometimes I can’t bear to open a refrigerator.”

There were other atrocities too repulsive to repeat. After 14 years of imprisonment, Wurmbrand was released to come to the West for the ransom price of \$10,000. When he arrived in the U.S., he was found to have 18 deep torture wounds in his body. But notice his response.

He writes, “So in December 1965 I could leave Rumania. My last deed before leaving was to go to the grave of the colonel who had ordered my arrest and my years of torture. I put a flower on his grave. By doing this, I dedicated myself to bring the joys of Christ that I have to the communists who are so empty spiritually.

“I hate the communist system, but I love the men. I hate the sin, but I love the sinner. I love the communists with all my heart. I have not the slightest bitterness against the communists or my torturers.”

“A Christian was sentenced to death. Before being executed, he was allowed to see his wife. His last words to her were, ‘You must know that I die loving those who kill me. They don’t know what they do and my last request of you is to love them, too. Don’t have bitterness in your heart because they kill your beloved one. We will meet in heaven.’

“These words impressed the officer of the secret police who attended the discussion between the two. Afterward he told me the story in prison, where he had been put for becoming a Christian.”

Wurmbrand tells elsewhere of a boy whose mother had been arrested and killed. When her next birthday came, her son, about 12 yrs. old, took a potted plant to the officer who’d been in charge of the mother’s arrest and death. He said, “This is my mother’s birthday, and I wanted to give her this plant as a gift. But as you know,

she is not living now. So I decided to give the gift to you, because Jesus taught us to love our enemies.”

No wonder Wurmbrand concludes, “The Underground Church is a poor and suffering church, *but it has no lukewarm members.*”

Many other true stories of S-O-M love could be told--from Russia, China, Ireland, etc. Also of U. S. soldiers captured and tortured by the Japanese during World War-2, as told in Ernest Gordon’s book *Miracle on the River Kwai* (now made into a stirring film available on DVD: *To End All Wars*). By His love, God transformed a camp of demoralized prisoners of war. They had been plagued by malaria but even more by bitterness and hate, yet love won out.

That love brings great glory to God—for only HE can put such astonishing forgiveness in our hearts. Such love preaches God’s grace in a way nothing else can match. It is not only the S-O-M Highway. It is the Way of the Cross, “the way that the Savior trod”—the Calvary Road.

[*Tortured for Christ* may be ordered from Voice of the Martyrs, P.O. Box 443, Bartlesville, OK 74005-9934]

Examples of Greater Relevance to Us—At Least for Now

The following examples are not as dramatic nor astonishing as those already told, for the “enemies” involved were not threatening to torture or kill. Yet for that very reason they may be more pertinent to *our* walk on the S-O-M Highway.

#1. John R. Rice was a well-known Baptist evangelist, writer and editor during the 1900s. He stood up boldly and vigorously for the fundamental teachings of the Bible. That’s good, but sometimes in his zeal he put too much vinegar in his opposition to other preachers. His attacks stirred up counter-attacks against him.

One time another preacher strongly reprimanded him. So John R. Rice sent him a letter. “You have criticized me unfairly and unjustly and therefore you are my enemy. But the Bible tells me to love my enemies. So here’s a check for \$100 for you to spend any way you want.” (*Eternity* magazine, 3/81.)

#2. Is it always easy to follow the S-O-M? Oh no! Frank and Elizabeth Morris are Christians, members of the Little River Church

of Christ in Kentucky. They had only one child, their son Ted—a college student. One dreadful Christmas Eve, Ted was killed in a car wreck. His death was caused by a drunk driver, Tommy Pigage. For the next 2 years they hated Tommy. They wanted him in prison, or dead—especially when the legal system seemed appallingly unjust.

But gradually the Lord enabled them to enter the S-O-M Highway, and they became channels of divine love. They led Tommy to Christ, Frank baptized him, he often eats dinner at their home, they drive him to church with them twice a week. For “the rest of the story,” read the article in this issue, “Couple ‘Adopts’ Son’s Killer.”

3. Last, here’s what happened in a Christian college. Robertson McQuilkin, the college president, tells how 2 students came to him for counseling. These Christian young ladies were troubled about their attitude toward one of their teachers. “We just can’t love her. We know we’re supposed to love everyone, but though we’ve tried we just can’t love her. We really can’t stand her. What can we do?”

Now Pres. McQuilkin had already learned that this teacher was a difficult person and in fact she would not be rehired after that semester. But he couldn’t tell the students that! And that was not the point, anyhow.

So he read to them **Luke 6:27-28**, which is just like Matt. 5:44 except Luke included two additional statements by Jesus:

“‘Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.’ Those are Jesus’ commands, and He can help you. Since she seems to you to be an enemy, will you love her?”

“But that’s why we’re here. We’ve tried but *can’t*.”

“Well, He says to pray for your enemies. Can you do that?”

“Yes, we’ve done that for days. But it doesn’t help.”

“Well, Jesus also says do good to such people. Can you do something nice to her?”

“Well-l-l-l, yes, maybe so – if worse came to worst!”

He challenged them to do so, trusting Christ to work in their hearts as they obeyed. And he had prayer with them. Several days

later they returned, and he could tell from the expression on their faces that the Lord had worked.

“Everything is different now! We thought and thought what we could do for her, and finally decided to bake a cake to take to her. And she’s different now, and we’re different. We even enjoyed our time together! The Lord healed our relationship.” Yes! And He can do that for us, too.

“His power can make us what we ought to be”—if we trust Him and follow the prescription He gives for our sick attitudes. Is there anyone *you* need to make a cake for?

Now we conclude. Alfred Plummer wrote these three lines that sum it all up:

To return Evil for Good is DEVILISH.

To return Good for Good in HUMAN.

To return Good for Evil is DIVINE.

Christ challenges us: “What are you doing more than others?” By trusting Him, may we demonstrate not just natural human responses—but divine ones! Let us examine our lives and hearts. If we were placed on trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict us?

From *anger* to *MADD!*

Couple “Adopts” Son’s Killer

David McCormick in *Christian Chronicle*

[**Note by Editor of *Christian Chronicle*:** Frank and Elizabeth Morris are members of the Little River (Ky.) Church of Christ where Frank is the song leader of the 40-member church. Plomer Hunter, minister and close friend, said, “I don’t think you could find better people on the face of the earth. They are devoted Christians.” The Morrises have appeared on syndicated news shows to tell their story.]

For more than two years, Frank and Elizabeth Morris dedicated their lives to punishing the drunken driver who had killed their only son.

Driven by hatred, they monitored his every court appearance, followed him to the county jail to make sure he was serving his weekend sentence and watched his apartment to catch him violating

probation. "We wanted him in prison," Mrs. Morris said. "We wanted him dead."

Tommy Pigage, the young man who caused the fatal crash, still gets a lot of attention from the Morrises. They drive him to church twice a week and often set a place for him at their table.

Unable to find satisfaction through revenge, the couple recently decided to forgive Pigage and try to rebuild his life along with their own. "The hate and the bitterness I was feeling was destroying me," Mrs. Morris said. "I needed to forgive Tommy to save myself."

Since the Morrises made their decision to befriend him, Pigage, 26, has joined their church, quit drinking and become an active lecturer for Mothers Against Drunk Driving.

"They've given me a better life," he said. "They've made it much easier for me to live with myself and forgive myself."

Pigage said he knew he had been drinking too much at the party he attended before the accident Dec. 23, 1982. Nevertheless, he refused friends' offers to drive him home. "I said, 'No, I'll be all right.'"

He was only a mile from his home when his car strayed across the center and hit an oncoming car driven by 18-year-old Ted Morris, out visiting friends after his first semester away at college. Morris died Christmas Eve morning, and Pigage was arrested for murder after his blood alcohol level registered almost three times the amount required to be legally intoxicated.

The Morrises first saw him at a preliminary hearing a few days after their son was buried. "We wanted to take a look at him and see what they'd do to him," said Mrs. Morris, 40. "We wanted the worst to happen," added Morris, 44, a United Parcel Service Driver.

They were expecting swift justice but the grand jury handed them their first disappointment, reducing the murder charge to second-degree manslaughter. Pigage pleaded innocent, which infuriated the Morrises. "Every time it would be delayed, I would get more upset and hatred for him would grow," Mrs. Morris said.

Their disappointment peaked last October, 22 months after the accident, when Pigage changed his plea to guilty and was freed on probation. "We felt like everything that had happened was to his benefit, not the victim's," Morris said.

To show Pigage the carnage drunken drivers can cause, Circuit Judge Edwin White ordered him to watch an autopsy performed, ride with an ambulance crew on emergency runs and work as a volunteer in a hospital emergency room. He was ordered to spend one night in jail every other weekend, and Mrs. Morris made sure he complied. "I'd go by the jail myself and make sure he was there," she said.

Pigage was also ordered to stop drinking and to share his experience with high school students at MADD lectures. Mrs. Morris, by then a MADD leader, was there last winter for his first speech at the Trigg County High School. "But he didn't say that it wasn't his fault. He got up and referred to himself as a murderer. He said he had received a very light sentence.... He was accepting responsibility for what he did."

"He looked just like a little whipped puppy," she said. "I actually felt sorry for him." She went backstage after the lecture, but her sympathy evaporated when she smelled liquor on his breath.

The next time Pigage checked in with his probation counselor, his blood alcohol level was over the limit. He was ordered to begin serving 10-year jail sentence.

Mrs. Morris visited him behind bars to say she wanted to help him stop drinking. "I felt it had already wiped out one very special life," she said. "I didn't want to see it waste his, too."

It was not an easy meeting. "I was scared to death," she recalled. "I wanted to avoid them, I was so ashamed," Pigage said. "I knew they hated me."

Mrs. Morris continued to visit Pigage in jail, and White ordered that he could be released to the couple's custody for church and other outings. On one visit, Pigage wept and threw his arms around Morris, begging to be forgiven. Returning from a MADD meeting one day, Morris stopped by the Little River Church of Christ and baptized Pigage.

Pigage spent three months behind bars before defense lawyers asked that he be freed again on probation. This time, the Morrisses were in favor. "I feel like he has taken a real about-face in his life," Morris said. "He's on the right track now."

Pigage, a tobacco warehouse worker, still spends alternate weekends in jail and makes speeches for MADD and other groups. "I tell them how much damage they can do to both lives, the family that

loses somebody and also their own," he said. "I don't think people realize what they're playing with when they drink and drive."

The couple see Pigage several times a week now and also have befriended his parents, who applaud his turnaround. "My mom jokes that they've adopted me." Mrs. Morris admitted she had transferred many of her maternal feelings to Pigage. "I figured I wasn't able to help Ted anymore; maybe I could help Tommy," she said.

For his part, Morris said it has been easier to forgive Pigage than to build a relationship with him afterward. "I knew God required me to forgive Tommy at some point," he said, "but I could have dropped it after that and probably would have felt more comfortable. But I felt that forgiveness required me to go the second mile and see what I could do for him."

* * *

AVW: Since the above article came out, a book also was written about Tommy and the Morrises. Bob Stewart was the author, **Revenge Redeemed** was the title, and Fleming H. Revell Co. published it in 1991.

A review of that book gives this conclusion, including a few additional facts—

"The story reaches a climax with Morris baptizing Pigage and the couple informally adopting him. He abandons his past ways, becomes an active church member, marries a Christian and settles down near the Morrises.

"All involved grow in spiritual maturity. The Morrises believe that they understand, at least in part, something of God's suffering when his own son died for our redemption. They also have a clearer perception of what it means to forgive one's enemies.

"[Thus] after a long, bleak struggle with grief, frustration and hate, the Morris family finds redemptive Christian love." —Glover Shipp in April 1992 *Christian Chronicle*

"We have grasped the mystery of the atom and rejected the Sermon on the Mount. We know more about war than we know about peace, more about killing than we know about living."—U.S. Gen. Omar Bradley (a member of the Disciples of Christ)

What did Jesus MEAN by “PERFECT”?

Someone might answer: “You know, Jesus said we must be PERFECT. That’s absurd! Nobody’s sinless or faultless, and it’s just dumb to say we’ve gotta be perfect.”

The word Matthew uses here **can** mean perfect – flawless, without a fault, sinless. But it **also** can mean “fully mature.” For example, the Jewish historian who lived in Jesus’ time, Josephus, used this word to describe a person who is an adult, not a minor--a grown-up, not a child.

Jesus is saying, Press on to spiritual adulthood, to moral maturity. The New English Bible puts it, “You must be all goodness, just as your heavenly Father is all good.”

Another point: **In what particular way** should we be full-grown, mature, perfect? Well, in all the different areas of life Jesus has been dealing with. But the immediate context of this statement--the verses immediately preceding it--talk about loving those who hate us, being good to bad people, showing mercy to the undeserving.

Thus in Luke’s report of this sermon (or a sermon similar to it, perhaps at another time), Jesus says, **Be merciful**, just as your Father is merciful. (6:36). That Jesus did not mean absolute sinless perfection is clear from His other statements. Notice:

The disciple whom God blesses still hungers and thirsts for righteousness (Matt. 5:3). Such a disciple doesn’t feel as if he has arrived at flawlessness. Second, the disciple’s continuing prayer includes the petition for God’s forgiveness (6:12). He realizes he still falls short of God’s holy will, and needs pardon. But his sins grieve him, and he presses on hungering to overcome them, and become more mature. He often sings, “More Holiness Give Me.” And God loves to answer his prayer and renew him by His enabling power.

Be sure to read the following article by Philip Yancey which has some fascinating historical examples.

“Be Ye Perfect, *More or Less.*”

[That was the title of an article by **Philip Yancey** in *Christianity Today* (7-17-95). It flashes with insights, in the author’s usual searching way. He discusses the Sermon on the Mount as understood, applied, taught and experienced by two of the world’s greatest novelists, the Russians Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. Here are some excerpts, reprinted by the author’s permission.]

A problem...vexes every thoughtful Christian, namely, the huge gap between life as it should be and life as it is. New Testament passages, most notably the Sermon on the Mount, spell out lofty ethical ideals: Give to everyone who asks you, Love your enemies, Welcome persecution. But these ideals inevitably shatter against the grim reality of actual human behavior....I find that I write about the spiritual disciplines far better than I practice them.

We are called to strive for ideals that we know will never be attained. I felt this dilemma most keenly during adolescence, when I was haunted by the Sermon on the Mount.... If [it] sets forth God’s standard of holiness, I concluded, then I may as well resign from the start.

[Leo Tolstoy not only wrote classic novels like *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, but also tracts, essays, and commentaries on the Gospels.] The ideals [he] encountered in the Gospels attracted him like a flame; his failure to live up to them ultimately consumed him. He strove to follow Jesus’ teaching literally, and his intensity sometimes caused his family to feel like victims of his quest for holiness. After reading Jesus’ absolute command to the rich young ruler, Tolstoy decided to free his serfs, give away his copyrights, and dispose of his vast estate. He wore peasant clothes, made his own shoes, and began working in the fields.

His diaries record many struggles. His desire to reach perfection led him to devise ever new lists of rules. He gave up hunting, smoking, drinking and meat. Yet he could never achieve the self-discipline necessary to keep these rules. More than once Tolstoy took a public vow of chastity and asked for separate bedrooms. He could never keep the vow for long, though, and much to his shame, Sonya’s 16 pregnancies broadcast to the world that inability.

Tolstoy’s philosophy of nonviolence, lifted directly [and with total literalness—avw] from the Sermon on the Mount, had an impact that long outlived him, in ideological descendants like Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr.

Yet his quest for holiness ended in disappointment. He failed to practice what he preached. His wife put it well (in an obviously biased account): "There is so little genuine warmth about him; his kindness does not come from his heart, but merely from his principles. His biographies will tell of how he helped the laborers to carry buckets of water, but no one will ever know that he never gave his wife a rest and never gave his child a drink of water."

Tolstoy's ardent strides toward perfection never resulted in any semblance of peace or serenity. Up to his death, the diaries and letters kept exposing the vast gap between the high ideals of the gospel and his own life.

What, then, do I learn from Tolstoy's tragic life? In a personal letter he wrote: "I have not fulfilled one thousandth part of them [Christian precepts], and I am ashamed of this, but I have failed to fulfill them not because I did not wish to, but because I was unable to."

A biographer of Tolstoy remarks that he suffered from a "fundamental theological inability to understand the Incarnation. His religion was ultimately a thing of law rather than of grace, a scheme for human betterment rather than a vision of God penetrating a fallen world."

[Yancey continues:] From Tolstoy I learned the need to look inside. I saw how miserably I had failed the high ideals of the gospel. There is only one way for any of us to resolve the tension between the high ideals of the gospel and the grim reality of ourselves: to accept that we will never measure up, but that we do not have to. Tolstoy got it halfway right: Anything that makes me feel comfort with God's moral standard, anything that makes me feel, "At last I have arrived," is a cruel deception. But [the Russian writer] Dostoevsky got the other half right: Anything that makes me feel discomfort with God's forgiving love is also a cruel deception. "There is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus": that message, Leo Tolstoy never fully grasped.

Jesus never lowered God's ideal. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart..." Yet the same Jesus tenderly offered absolute grace. He forgave an adulteress, a thief on the cross, a disciple who had denied ever knowing him.

I read passages such as the Sermon on the Mount with a different spirit now. Jesus did not proclaim these exalted words so that we would furrow our brows in despair over our failure to achieve perfection. He proclaimed them to impart to us God's ideal toward which we should never stop striving, but also to show that none of us

will ever reach that ideal. The Sermon on the Mount forces us to recognize the great distance between God and us.

The worst tragedy would be to turn that Sermon into another form of legalism. The Sermon on the Mount decrees that before God we all stand on level ground: murderers and temper-throwers, adulterers and lusters, thieves and coveters. We are all desperate, and that is, in fact, the only state appropriate to a human being who wants to know God. Having fallen from the absolute ideal, as Tolstoy did, we have nowhere to land but with Dostoevsky, in the safety net of absolute grace.

--Reprinted by permission

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Postscript: In response to Yancey's article, Nathan Hecht wrote a letter to the *Christianity Today* editor. At that time he was a justice on the Supreme Court of Texas. In part he wrote: "I quite agree...that Jesus' Sermon on the Mount was intended not to burden us with more legalism but to push us resolutely toward grace...."

"If Jesus was not exaggerating, what did he mean? Precisely what he said. *If* eye or hand could cause you to sin, the solution would be simple: gouge it out or cut it off. But the "if" is impossible. My eye does not do what *it* wants; it does what *I* want. Neither eyes nor hands nor any other body parts can cause you to sin; rather, it is *you* who cause *them* to sin. Sin cannot be blamed on stray limbs. Sin involves heart, mind, and soul, and none of these can be severed from me. They *are* me...."

"The Sermon on the Mount proves that all struggles to justify oneself are hopeless--not in order to drive us to despair, but to drive us to Christ."

VOICES from the FIELDS

Goin' Fishing Ministries
Jan. 2007 Newsletter (excerpts only)

Ministry to Russia

Ragena Mullins writes: In mid October, an 18-day mission trip to Russia was carried out by Duane Jolibois and Paul Kitzmiller. Most of their time was spent in Kineshma but it was marked off by a brief visit in Moscow at the beginning of the trip and a short stay in St Petersburg at the conclusion. (This was one of an ongoing series of trips designed to evangelize in Kineshma and to assist in the work with orphans in St Petersburg.) It was Duane's first visit to Russia. He is a deacon in the Denham Springs, LA, Church of Christ where Paul preaches regularly.

Paul writes: This trip should be regarded as one of the best yet; most of the developments were very encouraging. We had 4 outstanding Bible studies in Kineshma – good interest, good participation, and even a few breakthroughs on some points. There was much more discussion and study coming from questions that were drawn from their own Bible reading. Some promising new contacts were made there and some older ones were nurtured.

Once again we were blessed to be able to work with Gennady Filippov, a young Russian preacher living in Moscow. We met with him there and discussed strategies for working together in Kineshma. He is quite interested in helping there, but not yet certain if that is what the Lord is leading him to do. A few days later he joined us in Kineshma after riding the train all night. He participated in our Sunday meeting and also addressed the group briefly about God's grace and forgiveness. We continue to pray that he, or someone with a similar background and training, will be able to have an expanded role in Kineshma. It will also be necessary for the study groups there to accept him so that his work can be effective.

While there we were taken to observe a rehab program for drug addicts and alcoholics. It is organized by some Russian Christians from St Petersburg. The facilities are located on an abandoned farm, and the living conditions are very primitive. [No indoor plumbing, and the nearest source of water is 1-1/2 miles away.] They raise their own crops. The Bible is the only reading material they are permitted to have; Bible studies are conducted every day. They are attaining success with the patients. During our visit we were given time to present a Bible lesson to the group. This appears to be an opportunity for ministry by teams in the future.

The work in St Petersburg continues to be impressive. Cecil and Betsy Garrett left a very strong foundation on which others are building.

Some of Duane Jolibois' Comments: I have no words to describe the feelings one experiences to be in the company of people who have walked long distances through icy mud or have ridden rickety old buses in order to attend Bible study. No comfortable pews, no thermostats; just straight back chairs or stools around a crowded room for 2-3 hours of study and discussion. After witnessing their hunger for truth, I could not help but feel a certain amount of shame for not taking full advantage of our free access to so much Bible teaching here at home.

[To get on their mailing list, contact Ragenia Mullins, 812-248-4001.]

Robert & Joy Garrett
Jan. 24, 2007

Box 30, Ruwa, Zimbabwe

Eleven Months in the US: Lord willing we arrive in Louisville May 3 for an 11 month stay. We would like to visit as many churches as possible who have been our prayer and financial supporters. During this time I would also be available for a limited number of meetings. However, the first 3 months, May, June and July, we want to visit our scattered children in KY, NC, MI, Montana and Washington. Lord willing we would return to Zimbabwe in April of 2008. My e-mail while we are still in Zimbabwe is rockwood@mweb.co.zw

The New Year started off well with our "Harvest Day" program New Years day here at Rockwood Camp. The building was full with more than 500 in attendance, good messages and the contribution reached a bit over the target of Five Million Zimbabwe Dollars. The contribution is used for both building costs and evangelism.

The amount would seem like a lot if converted at the official rate of Z\$250 to one US\$. But it is virtually impossible for the average person to buy US dollars from the authorities at the official rate - it is simply not available - and the food prices and cost of building materials and almost everything else reflect the more realistic "Parallel Market Rate" which at that time was about Z\$2,800 to one US\$ and a month later is near 4000 to one. [So the Z\$5,000,000 equaled about US\$1,785 on the day of the meeting.] Our rampant, runaway inflation is the highest on the continent if not the whole world.

Elders: It is with much thanksgiving to our Lord that in November we were enabled to install elders and deacons in the Waterfalls church. We now have three congregations in the city of Harare to have reached this stage. The leadership there has really taken hold and these congregations are growing. We are working with a fourth congregation, Highfield, and it seems there are men there who meet the scriptural qualifications and can be appointed. The word "pastors" in Ephesians 4:11 is speaking of elders, not ministers. It is our goal that these be revealed and appointed by the Lord as He makes His will known.

Shona Hymnal. I hope to get the new revision printed before we leave in May. There is still a lot of work to be done on it before I can print it. Unfortunately one brother on the Songs Committee inadvertently caused a disaster. He gave me a CD he had made of the text of a number of new songs and when I tried to download it into my computer it had a virus which immediately infected my computer and also I could not download those songs. It seems he had got the Virus through an e-mail. My anti-virus program supposedly deleted

the virus but the computer never behaved properly and got worse and worse so I finally erased the hard drive and reinstalled everything. Unfortunately the virus completely destroyed his hard drive and all the work on those songs was lost. I am trying off and on to copy some of them myself. I can scan in the words but the music notation has to be painfully entered one note at a time so it is slow work.

Building Progress: Bulawayo - Last year saw the completion of the rest rooms and office wing, also about a quarter of the auditorium brickwork. There is still a lot to be done on the auditorium and hopefully in February we can send Michael back there to continue with that. Special item for PRAYER: The congregation there was hurt by the defection of Bro. Khumalo. However, a number of those who left with him have returned and the congregation is showing some progress. Pray for Bro. Nyoni and the other leadership.

Hwange. The foundation is done and floor slab completed and the steel columns erected. Next step (possibly in February) is to erect the roof trusses and apply the roof sheets. Once that is completed we can start on the brickwork. Pray that we can find a good reliable bricklayer for Hwange. It is too far to send Michael and he is needed for other work anyway.

Lessons from the Farm (7)

Bob Yarbrough

I live on a farm. For the past several years we have experienced a severe drought in our part of Texas. We have made the national news more than once with farmers whose crops have failed to produce at expected levels, and with ranchers who have had to auction off their cattle simply because they could not afford to feed them. Hay and grain have been at a premium – if they could be obtained at all. Round bales of hay which sold for \$30 just four years ago now sell for \$90-\$100 per bale if one is fortunate enough to find them. I understand the problem first-hand because I have goats that I am trying to feed.

An additional problem has to do with water, or the lack thereof. I have two stock ponds (we call them “tanks”) that survive entirely from run-off water rather than springs. Most ponds in our area are of this type. My ponds were at their lowest level just two weeks ago (five feet below normal). The only redeeming thing about that has been the fishing that I have been able to do with my grandkids. The same amount of fish in the pond occupy a much, much smaller area which results in a catch every five minutes. That makes fishing with

the grandkids a lot more tolerable and fun; because if they haven't caught a fish in five minutes, their attention spans demand that they "call it a day."

The drought and the weather have been major topics of conversation in this part of the country. Even my grandkids check in with me about the level of my ponds and the well-being of our four new baby goats.

And then it happened. The weather changed two weeks ago. Snow, sleet, and freezing rains came, as well as some significant rains. In fact, we have had about six inches of precipitation in January with more predicted – the wettest January on record since 1898. How about that! My ponds are full to overflowing. Our culverts could not carry water off fast enough, causing water from the ponds to rise to the level of our road. There are smiles on the faces of the farmers and ranchers around here because they know that this rain will produce good crops in the spring. What a difference a few days make – from the bleak to the sublime, from despair to hope, from dependency to confidence in the future. While our lakes and reservoirs are still below normal, our ground has been saturated and our ponds have been filled.

I have set this scene in order to make three observations. First, while we were not anywhere near famine conditions, there are parts of our world that are. Famines on other continents are terrifying when seen on TV news networks. We are so blessed by being spared from that scene – but it could happen.

The prophet Amos spoke of another kind of famine, however. He called it a famine of "hearing the words of the Lord" (Amos 8:11). The people of Amos' day had no appetite for God's Word. Because of their apathy God said He would take away even the opportunity to hear His word. While a lack of food or water can lead to disease and death, a famine of the Word of God can produce eternal consequences. Without God's Message we lack understanding and the good news of eternal life in Jesus Christ. We need the "milk of the word" (1 Peter 2:2) and the solid food for the mature (Heb. 5:14). We should identify with the prophet Jeremiah who said "Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart" (Jer. 15:16). The world is starving for the message of Christ. Let's help fill hearts of the world by sharing His Word. Let's help people know it before a time comes when they cannot find it.

Second, God is in total control of His creation. He spoke, and the worlds came into being. We are surrounded by fantastic displays of God's craftsmanship – the earth and the heavens give dramatic

evidence of His existence, power, love and care. And He causes the rains to fall on the righteous and the unrighteous because He desires to create in His people a climate of love. Love is like the sunshine and the rain that the Father sends so graciously to all (Matt. 5:44-45). The sending of rain reminds us that God cares for us and He knows our needs – even before we ask. Because he cares, and because he has demonstrated that care over and over again, Jesus taught us to not to worry or fret about our life and our daily necessities. As an illustration of this principle Jesus pointed to the birds of the air and the lilies of the field. Since our heavenly Father cares for these, we can be assured that He cares for us because we are infinitely more valuable to Him (Matt. 6:25-34). This was visibly demonstrated once and for all at the cross. God has met our need in Jesus Christ and ultimately, that is all that really matters.

Third, years ago, a song came out with the following line, “What a difference a day makes; twenty-four little hours.” As we endured the drought in our area, no hope seemed in sight; but one day the rains came. So it is as we think about the future. Today, on every front, we live in a world in crisis. Ours is a world of global destruction with over 40 armed conflicts and wars existing at the present time. Ours is a world of national and political turmoil, of personal conflicts, and of spiritual battles with no end in sight, humanly speaking. But God has a “Master Plan” for all of history. Just as it was centuries ago when Israel faced its darkest hours before captivity to the Babylonian empire, the prophet Isaiah offered hope by explaining metaphorically that one day in God’s time “the mountain of the Lord’s temple will be established as chief among the mountains” and “all nations will stream to it” (Isa. 2:2). He went on to describe the earth then as a time of knowing the Word of God, a time of true justice, and a time of universal peace (2:3-4). Given a world in crisis, that’s hard to see now, isn’t it?

All we see now is the drought. But in God’s tomorrow, the blessed rains will come. The Apostle Paul described the whole earth, at the present time, as being in bondage to decay awaiting its redemption. He said that all of creation is now groaning and waits in eager expectation for its liberation (Rom. 8:18-25). This will happen when the Messiah, Jesus Christ, returns and establishes his righteous reign upon the earth. Isaiah declared that “the government will be on his shoulders, and He will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this” (Isa. 9:6-7). Since God Almighty will accomplish this, it’s going to happen. You can bank on it. I’m ready! Aren’t you?

NEWS and NOTES

Edited by Bennie Hill, BHill40482@aol.com

Bryantsville Hunger Relief Project (Dan Chambers) As of 1/31/2007 we are bagging corn! We have 2 shipments in process for February. All total we have a little over 8,000 bushels. That means approximately 11 containers @ 42,000 pounds per container. We have a new-to-us rotary cleaner which speeds up the process, so we can bag a whole shipment in about 5 hours. Any groups wanting to volunteer, we are now able to bag at your convenience, even Saturdays. I would suggest that youth groups consider 12 or 13 as about the youngest that can handle this work, but that also depends on the youth. Those of you that help out financially, with labor, or prayer, we thank you and ask that you keep up the good work.

Does California Set the Standard? Democratic Assemblywoman Sally Lieber wants to tell California parents that they may no longer legally spank their small children. The proposed law would make it illegal to spank any child under the age of four. Parents who violate the law could spend up to a year in jail and pay as much as \$1,000 in fines. Those opposed to the measure say the law intrudes on the rights of parents to discipline their children as they see fit. The Bible is clear as to parental rights when it comes to discipline. Parents are to "train up their children in the way he/she should go" (Prov. 22:6) Also, "The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame" (Prov. 29:15) California doesn't set the standard - God's Word does!

Exciting News from Portland Christian School! (Highland Community Church Bulletin) Beginning this coming fall, PCS will offer classes for K-6 at a new site which they recently purchased near the intersection of the Gene Snyder (I-265) and Taylorsville Road. It is the site of the former Living Stone congregation which was made available to the school at an extremely discounted price. The school's Oldham County and Bullitt County campuses will be folded into this site, and plans call for moving the high school to the new location in 5-6 years. Even after the high school move, an elementary school will remain at the downtown location on Portland Avenue. Completion of the long-term plan will require a significant infusion of funds to accomplish. Remember Portland Christian in your prayers.

An Absolute Right? Absolutely Not! January 22, 2007 has come and gone and most people weren't aware of it being the 34th anniversary of the Supreme Court's decision on the matter of Roe v. Wade - the landmark case that granted women the constitutional right to have an abortion. In the 34 years since the court's ruling there have been more than 45 million abortions in the United States. In the year 2005 alone, there were nearly 1.3 million abortions in the US. Approximately one out of every four pregnancies in the US will end in abortion. The Bible teaches that children are a blessing from God and it repeatedly condemns the killing of the innocent. God considers human life precious because God

made humankind in His own image. Indeed, we can praise our Father in heaven for we are "fearfully and wonderfully made."

Ladies Inspiration Day for 2007 is being planned for Saturday, April 14th and will be hosted by the Cramer & Hanover Church of Christ in Lexington, Kentucky. A planning committee from the Central Kentucky Churches of Christ have been busy planning the program with the theme: "**Inspired by Joy.**" Ladies, this is your invitation to come and share with others and be encouraged and "inspired."

"School of Christian Living,"
March 25-28 That's the name of a 4-night series of fellowship-&-teaching meetings which also are an example of reaching across fences. The host congregation is South Louisville Christian Church, 3845 Southern Parkway in Louisville, 502:361-2379. The theme is "Equipping the Saints." Each evening from 6:30-7 there will be fellowship (get to know brothers/sisters from various Churches of Christ and Christian Churches), from 7:05-7:45 there will be preaching (a different speaker each night, including Alex Wilson), from 7:50-8:30 a choice of workshops to attend on 5 different subjects (including Julius Hovan on Biblical Prophecy), followed by another opportunity for fellowship, 8:30-9:00. The other workshops will be on teacher training, marriage, principles of the Restoration Movement, and purpose-driven youth ministry. Bob Kastens, minister at South Louisville, has spearheaded this effort, and area Christian Churches are sponsoring it. We are glad Bob has for many months regularly attended our citywide church-leaders' lunch. In various ways he seeks to build bridges between believers

who have so much in common, including the same Savior! We encourage our readers to attend and bring others too.

Regarding Moto Nomura

We need to keep praying for Bro. Moto Nomura's health. He still is up and active-- teaching the Bible each Lord's Day and writing articles and books. But he has only one kidney (a condition he's had for decades) and now during the past several years his liver also has been "getting harder and harder." Pray also for his wife Yoriko, plus their children (a son in Japan and a daughter in the U.S.). His email address is motofish@eps4.com-link.ne.jp

Manila, Philippines

David Moldez, evangelist and also president of Central Bible Seminary, reported that the "mission works" or fairly young congregations planted in the Novaliches area of Greater Manila had 10 baptisms shortly before the year ended. Also during December those various churches held a joint meeting to celebrate God's goodness to them, and over 800 people attended. It was held in a public school.

Bro. Moldez also reported that at year's end, leaders held a meeting to plan and set goals for 2007. "We are praying that we will have 70 church members in [each of] the 5 local churches that I am overseeing, and a total of 700 worshippers in the congregations here in Novaliches and around Metro Manila. We are also starting another mission work at Guiginto, Bulacan through one of the graduates of CBS."

Please pray for Central Bible Seminary to overcome its indebtedness and be able to continue training workers for the Lord. [It is not

really a "seminary" in the U.S. sense of the word (i.e., on a post-graduate level), but more of a Bible school or institute. It offers courses of 1, 3, or 4 years in length. In the Philippine educational system, it is classed as a seminary.]

Robert Shank goes Home to Glory We learned from Victor Knowles of Robert Shank's passing. Brother Shank wrote several significant books, including *UNTIL: The Coming of the Messiah and His Kingdom*, and also *Life in the Son* (a thorough study of perseverance of the saints). He had a wide speaking ministry, and was a gracious and scholarly man with strong convictions. Some years ago he gave the Bible expositions at our Ky-Ind Fellowship Week.

Don McGee's first Book is titled, **Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.** It will examine some of the issues the Apostle John might have considered as he contemplated all the things God showed him as he wrote *Revelation*. Also Don will lead another trip to Israel this spring, Lord willing. It is scheduled for April 17-27. For more info call 985-748-2943 or contact:

www.crownandsickle.com

Gary Pearson is an avid W&W reader, & gives subscriptions to a number of members at Westminster

Church of Christ in Maryland, where he serves as evangelist. He reports that the leaders and congregation have prayerfully and carefully sought to remove obstacles to growth and to increase their impact on their community with the love of Christ. One obstacle they seek to overcome is "being an inward-focused church." They asked themselves "Would our community notice if we as a congregation disappeared?" For a copy of his insightful Dec. 31 bulletin, contact www.westcoc.org

Church of Christ Missions (Bob Morrow) By the grace of God and with your help, we have printed 69,000 + booklets and tracts. Of these, over 60,000 have been sent to Zimbabwe and the Philippines. We thank the Lord that since Jo Anna's dismissal from WalMart, the help from congregations and individuals has increased. We trust that in 2007, if the Lord tarries, we will be able to send more literature to the native workers in the Philippines and Zimbabwe. If any congregation would like to have a personal report on the work being done and reports from letters received, I would be happy to come to you. Contact me: Bob Morrow, P.O. Box 406, Glenmora, LA 71433