

Acts Devotionals & Sermon Illustrations

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ACTS 1

Acts 1:1-8

Let the Whole World Hear!

By Vernon C. Grounds

Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. —Mark 16:15

Fritz Kreisler (1875-1962), the world-famous violinist, earned a fortune with his concerts and compositions, but he generously gave most of it away. So, when he discovered an exquisite violin on one of his trips, he wasn't able to buy it.

Later, having raised enough money to meet the asking price, he returned to the seller, hoping to purchase that beautiful instrument. But to his great dismay it had been sold to a collector. Kreisler made his way to the new owner's home and offered to buy the violin. The collector said it had become his prized possession and he would not sell it. Keenly disappointed, Kreisler was about to leave when he had an idea. "Could I play the instrument once more before it is consigned to silence?" he asked. Permission was granted, and the great virtuoso filled the room with such heart-moving music that the collector's emotions were deeply stirred. "I have no right

to keep that to myself," he exclaimed. "It's yours, Mr. Kreisler. Take it into the world, and let people hear it."

To sinners saved by grace, the gospel is like the rapturous harmonies of heaven. We have no right to keep it to ourselves. Jesus tells us to take it out into the world, and let it be heard.

Someone told you about Christ. Have you told anyone lately?

The Missionary Option

Acts 1:1-8

By Dennis J. De Haan

You shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. —Acts 1:8

There are two kinds of people when it comes to missions—those who need to share Christ and those who need to hear about Him.

H. A. Ironside used to tell a story about a meeting in which a missionary offering was taken. When the collection plate was handed to a wealthy man, he brushed it aside and said, "I do not believe in missions." "Then take something out," said the usher. "This is for the heathen."

As a boy I looked up to missionaries as godly people who sailed to some far-off, uncivilized land and didn't return for several years. Being a missionary was the ultimate calling—nothing could be more noble or admirable. I still believe that God calls men and women to missionary service in other lands, and I still have great respect for them, but my idea of missionaries has changed.

Every Christian is part of Christ's mission in the world. What Jesus told His disciples in Acts 1 applies also to us. We are His witnesses and therefore must speak and live so that others will glorify Him when they hear our message and see our faith in action.

Being a missionary is not an option—it's what we are called to be.

I am a missionary, Lord,

Wherever I may be;

At home or in a distant land,

I'll tell the world of Thee. —Brandt

One thing you cannot do about missions—escape your responsibility.

Acts 1:1-8 He Wanted To

By Richard De Haan

You shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. —Acts 1:8

In his book *Love Is Now*, Peter Gilquist mentioned that he and several other friends were invited to speak to a group of UCLA students. After the meeting, a young man expressed a desire to discuss the matter of salvation. So Gilquist arranged to meet with him the next morning.

The student said that he really wanted what he saw in the lives of believers. But he hesitated to make a commitment because he thought he would have to tell others about Jesus. Gilquist, however, assured him that to become a Christian he was not required to do anything but place his trust in Christ.

Realizing that salvation is by God's grace through faith, the student gladly received the Lord Jesus as his Savior. But a strange thing happened as he went back to his fraternity house. He met a friend and told him of his newfound faith in Christ. Before the day was over, he had testified to every one of his fraternity brothers about Jesus.

Our witness for Christ should reflect a grateful heart—a sincere desire to share salvation's blessings with others. If we shrink from giving a word of testimony, let's ask God to give us the desire to speak out for Him. Then we'll witness because we want to.

Lead me to some soul today;

O teach me, Lord, just what to say.

Friends of mine are lost in sin

And cannot find their way. —Houghton

If you know Christ, you'll want others to know Him too.

Acts 1:12-14 Going Away

By Dave Branon

Luke 24:36-53

They worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. —Luke 24:52

It was the most unusual "going-away party" ever. There stood Jesus, who had recently risen from the grave. And there stood His followers, listening to His teaching as they had on so many occasions. Jesus spoke about the coming of the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49), and He told them that it would be their task to be His witnesses.

Then an unusual thing happened. Luke said that Jesus led His disciples to Bethany (v.50), and as He was blessing them He was "carried up into heaven" (v.51). Mark recorded, "He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God" (16:19).

To see Jesus ascend to heaven was amazing, but what happened next was also remarkable. Instead of being downcast because He had gone away, the disciples responded with renewed purpose. They worshiped Him (Luke 24:52). They joyfully returned to Jerusalem, where they prayed (Acts 1:12-14). Then, after receiving the Holy Spirit (Acts 2), "they went out and preached everywhere" (Mark 16:20).

Although Jesus has gone away, the Holy Spirit makes real to us His presence so that we too can worship, pray, and witness as His disciples did centuries ago. These are still the best ways to celebrate what Jesus has done for us: Worship. Prayer. Witness. —JDB

Jesus conquered death and fear;

Now He reigns from heaven above.

Spread the word both far and near

Of His great redeeming love. —D. De Haan

Jesus had to go away so the Holy Spirit could come to stay.

Acts 1:1-9

He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15).

While speaking to the Radio Bible Class staff at a chapel service, John De Vries of Bibles For India told what might have happened when Jesus entered heaven immediately following His ascension.

The angels, rejoicing that Christ's mission on earth had been completed, gathered to welcome Him home. They were eager to know who would have the privilege of proclaiming to the world the good news that Christ had been born, had lived, had died, and had risen from the dead to provide salvation from sin. In fact, the angels were hoping they themselves would be given the honor. So they were greatly disappointed and amazed when Jesus looked down to earth and pointed to the tiny group of followers He had just left behind. "Those are the ones I want to be My witnesses," Jesus announced. "I have given to them the commission to go into all the world and preach the gospel. They have experienced the thrill and reality of redemption from sin; they are to be My messengers!"

The torch of the gospel, handed to those early followers of Christ, has been passed down through the generations until today it is in our hands. The responsibility of proclaiming that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners is ours to fulfill.

Angels might long for the privilege of telling the world about Christ, but they have not experienced the joy of forgiveness and the hope of glory. That's why the task has been entrusted to us. —R. W. De Haan

Our only real excuse for living in this world

is to be witnesses for Jesus Christ. —Sweeting

Acts 1:1-9

Home Missions

By Richard De Haan

You shall be witnesses to Me ... to the end of the earth. —Acts 1:8

One morning as I was strolling along the shore of the Gulf of Mexico, I saw a middle-aged man sitting in the water. We exchanged greetings, and then he painfully struggled to his feet and began to talk.

What a story of angry resentment! As a young man, he was about to set up a law practice when he was called into the armed forces during World War II. While in the military, he contracted a disease that left him maimed in body and bitter in soul.

Tears streamed down his cheeks. Sensing that he needed to know God's love, I explained the gospel to him. Then I asked, "Wouldn't you like to trust Christ as your Savior?" I was thrilled when he said, "Yes, I would." So right there, standing knee-deep in the Gulf of Mexico under a golden morning sun, we prayed. When we finished, he looked at me and made this shocking statement: "Do you realize that no one has ever talked like this to me before!"

That educated man had never been told of God's saving grace. This seems hard to believe, doesn't it? Yet, what if we all were asked, "How long has it been since you personally spoke a word for Christ?" In our enthusiasm to reach lost multitudes across the sea, we must not forget that lost person nearby. —RWD

As You have loved me, let me love

Lost souls in darkness dwelling;

To draw the needy ones to You,

Lord, give a zeal compelling. —Bosch

Do we have a burden for the lost, or have we lost our burden?

Acts 1:1-10

He Lives!

By Dave Branon

He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs. —Acts 1:3

When the World Trade Center towers came crashing to the ground in a deafening roar of billowing debris, citizens of New York experienced what many people in other parts of the world had already known—the fear of terrorism. Subsequent attacks in other countries have heightened the concern that mankind may be spiraling toward self-destruction.

All the unrest in the world might make us think that our future is very bleak. We might even conclude that this is not the kind of world in which to have children.

Yet one shining hope remains that can brighten our view of the future. Bill Gaither captured it in his song titled, "Because He Lives." The idea for it came to him in the late 1960s, a time of social unrest in the US and conflict in Southeast Asia. His wife Gloria was expecting a child, and they felt that it was a poor time to bring a child into the world. But when their son was born, Bill thought of the living Savior and these words came to mind: "This child can face uncertain days because He lives."

Two thousand years ago Jesus rose from the grave and gave "many infallible proofs" that He was alive (Acts 1:3). That's why we can keep going in the face of fear. Because Jesus lives, we can face tomorrow.

Up from the grave He arose,

With a mighty triumph o'er His foes;

He arose a Victor from the dark domain,

And He lives forever with His saints to reign. —Lowry

Christ's empty tomb fills us with hope.

Acts 1:1-11

The Ascension

By Herbert Vander Lugt

I go to prepare a place for you... I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. —John 14:2-3

The repeated appearances of Jesus after His death brought His followers such joy that they must have wanted the visits to continue indefinitely. But on the 40th day after His resurrection, having given His disciples final instructions, Jesus slowly ascended and a cloud hid Him from view.

Jesus could have vanished instantly, as He had done on previous occasions. But this time He chose to ascend visibly to impress on His followers that this was the end of His visits. His bodily presence would soon be replaced by something even better. Jesus' ascension marked the beginning of a new era.

In His glorified human body, the Lord Jesus ascended, entered heaven, sat down at the right hand of God, sent the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14:16-18; Acts 2:33), began His ministry of intercession for us (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25), and now permeates the whole universe with His spiritual presence and power (Eph. 1:15-23; 4:10).

An ancient writing says that Jesus ascended bodily into heaven "our entrance to secure, and our abode to prepare." That's true. But it's also true that as God, He is always spiritually present with us and will be "to the end of the age" (Mt. 28:20). What a wonderful Savior we have!

The Lord ascended bodily

From earth to heaven's throne;

Now He is there to intercede

For those who are His own. —Sper

Jesus went away so the Spirit could come to stay.

Acts 1:1-11

The Ascension

By Julie Ackerman Link

While they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. —Acts 1:9

When the husband of my longtime friend and publishing colleague collapsed and later died, there was no doubt that life had slipped away from him. There were witnesses. The same was true when Jesus died. But three days later, Jesus was raised from the dead! We have no doubt that this is true because there were witnesses who later saw Him alive.

When we gathered for Dave's memorial service, we read familiar passages of Scripture that affirm our hope that he is now enjoying new life in heaven. But we claimed these promises by faith because none of us witnessed Dave go to heaven. There was, however, a witness who saw Jesus in heaven. Not long after witnesses saw Jesus ascend (Acts 1:9), Stephen saw the heavens open "and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" (7:56). One of the reasons we know that Jesus spoke the truth about going to prepare a place for us (John 14:2) is that He has been seen alive in heaven.

When a loved one goes ahead of us to heaven, we feel as if we're being pulled in the opposite direction—down into an abyss of sadness. Yet, because God kept His promise to raise Christ and take Him to heaven, we can trust Him to do the same for all who love and follow Him.

The Lord has promised to prepare

A place in heaven above—

A home where we will always be

With Him and those we love. —Sper

The promise of heaven is our eternal hope.

Acts 1:1-11

Why Did He Leave?

By Herbert Vander Lugt

Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven. —Acts 1:11

As a young boy, I loved the story of Jesus ascending into heaven. I visualized Him slowly rising above the earth with hands outstretched in blessing. I remember wondering why He went up visibly instead of instantly disappearing as He had done at other times after His resurrection. I also wondered where heaven is located and what Jesus is doing there now.

Why did Jesus ascend visibly? Perhaps to show that His earthly ministry was completed and that He would no longer be seen by His disciples. He had paid the price for sin (Romans 5:8), defeated Satan (Hebrews 2:14), and broken the power of death (Revelation 1:18). He had given His followers all the evidence and instruction they needed to live for Him (Acts 1:1-3).

What did He ascend to do? To give “gifts to men” (Ephesians 4:8), to send the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33), to be our Intercessor (Romans 8:34) and Advocate (1 John 2:1), and to take up His role as Head of the church (Ephesians 1:20-23).

Where is heaven? I once thought of it as a place millions of miles away in outer space. Now I think of it as a realm near at hand but undetectable. I know Jesus is there, and someday I’ll be there too. This fills my heart with gratitude and praise. How wonderful that we have an ascended Savior!

To the Father Christ ascended,

For His work on earth had ended;

Now in heaven interceding

By His Spirit He is leading. —Sper

The work Jesus accomplished for us the Spirit now accomplishes in us.

Acts 1:1-11

Infallible Proofs

By M.R. De Haan

He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs. —Acts 1:3

The Bible says that Jesus “presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs” (Acts 1:3). This is more than a historic statement made by Luke. It is a challenge to all the critics who would deny the literalness of the bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Luke made the amazing and startling statement that Jesus was alive, He was seen by a great multitude of people, and His resurrection was confirmed by a great number of convincing proofs.

Today, nearly 2,000 years later, no other doctrine of the Scriptures has been more persistently attacked than the bodily resurrection of our Lord. And no wonder, for it is the keystone in the great arch of all Christian doctrine.

With the resurrection of Jesus, the whole structure of Christian doctrine stands or falls. If the resurrection could be disproved, Christianity would crumble in the dust and have less credence than the wildest myths of ancient Greece and Rome.

The devil knows this, and so his earliest and most frequent attack on the truth of Christ is against His bodily resurrection. The credibility of our Christian faith rests on the “many infallible proofs” that Jesus is alive.

Christ is the life, the empty tomb

Proclaims His conquering arm;

And those who put their trust in Him

Nor death nor hell shall harm. —Anon.

Because Christ is alive, we need not fear death.

Acts 1:1-11 You Can Believe It

By Mart De Haan

He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs. —Acts 1:3

In 1957, Lieutenant David Steeves walked out of California’s Sierra Nevada Mountains 54 days after his Air Force trainer jet had

disappeared. He told an unbelievable tale of how he had lived in a snowy wilderness after parachuting from his disabled plane. By the time he showed up alive, he had already been declared officially dead. When further search failed to turn up the wreckage, a hoax was suspected and Steeves was forced to resign under a cloud of doubt. More than 20 years later, however, his story was confirmed when a troop of Boy Scouts discovered the wreckage of his plane.

Another "survival story" from centuries ago is still controversial. A man by the name of Jesus Christ walked out of the Judean wilderness making claims a lot of people found difficult to believe. He was later executed and pronounced dead. But 3 days later He showed up alive. And there have been skeptics ever since.

But consider the facts of Christ's life, death, and resurrection. His integrity is well-founded. Prophets foretold His coming. Miracles supported His deity. Eyewitnesses verified His resurrection. And today the Holy Spirit confirms to anyone who is seeking to know the truth that Jesus is alive.

Yes, you can believe it! Do you?

I know that Jesus lives today,

No matter what the skeptics say;

The evidence that we must weigh

Says, "Jesus is alive!" —Sper

The resurrection of Jesus is a fact of history that demands a response of faith.

Acts 1:1-11

The Power Of Pentecost

By Herbert Vander Lugt

You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me. —Acts 1:8

A pastor I know and love is discouraged. Although he is diligent in prayer and works hard, his church remains small while a new congregation nearby is rapidly developing into a megachurch. Yet when I think of the alcoholics, drug addicts, and sexually immoral people he has led to the Savior and a new way of life, I see him as one who witnesses in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Because of what happened on the Day of Pentecost (described in Acts 2), we tend to associate the Holy Spirit's presence and power with amazing phenomena and large numbers. We forget that a little later the same people filled with the same Holy Spirit were rejected, flogged, imprisoned, even executed. But through it all they were powerful witnesses!

The Holy Spirit's presence and power can be evidenced in a dynamic preacher who attracts great audiences. But it is seen as well in the volunteer who carries on a one-on-one prison ministry, in the person who witnesses to a co-worker or a neighbor, and in the Sunday school teacher who faithfully teaches week after week.

The power of Pentecost is not reserved for the highly gifted. It is available to all believers in Christ who want to serve Him.

God's guidance and help that we need day to day

Are given to all who believe;

The Spirit has come and He is the source

Of power that we can receive. —Branon

The power of God's Spirit gives power to our witness.

Acts 1:1-11

Forty Amazing Days

By Herbert Vander Lugt

[He was] seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. —Acts 1:3

During the 40 days between His resurrection and ascension to heaven, Jesus appeared again and again to His disciples. What an amazing and significant time that was! It seemed as if He came out of nowhere, then just as mysteriously He would vanish from their

sight. He spoke to them about the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3), and even ate with them (Luke 24:43). These appearances were not some figment of their imagination.

When I was a boy, I used to ponder those mysterious events. Where did Jesus come from when He appeared, and where did He go when He disappeared? I came to believe that Jesus was able to slip from heaven to earth and back again during those 40 days. Then on the 40th day He ascended and disappeared into a cloud to remain at the Father's right hand until the time comes for Him to return (Acts 1:9-11; Ephesians 1:20-21).

Mystery still remains, but I find comfort in the fact that the Bible records those events. They strengthen my faith in knowing that before Jesus' disciples began to preach the gospel, they were absolutely sure He was alive. They also reassure me that heaven is near at hand.

How wonderful to know that Jesus is alive and that heaven is only a step away!

Jesus the Savior reigns,

The God of truth and love;

When He had purged our stains,

He took His seat above. —Wesley

No matter where we are, Jesus is only a prayer away.

Acts 1:1-11 Ascended and Enthroned

By Vernon C. Grounds

He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens. —Ephesians 4:10

Call the roll of some of the states men and dictators who for a brief time dominated the global stage in this century: Woodrow Wilson, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, Kaiser Wilhelm II, Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin. Where are they now? Dead and buried! But where is Jesus Christ, the rejected and crucified first-century Galilean? He is alive forevermore, enthroned in celestial glory.

After dying on the cross to redeem us, Jesus rose from the grave. Forty days later, He dramatically departed from our sphere of time and space by ascending into the clouds as His disciples looked on. He returned to the indescribable splendor and joy of His heavenly home.

Although we don't often think about Jesus' ascension, it was a pivotal event in His ministry. It marked the beginning of His high-priestly ministry in glory. No longer limited to being in one place at a time, He could be present anywhere as our invisible Intercessor, constantly praying for us (Heb. 7:25). And since our High Priest is also the almighty Sovereign (Matt. 28:18), He controls all things and can make even life's worst evils work out ultimately for His praise and for our good.

What a comfort! Jesus lives on high!

He who came to save us, He who bled and died,

Now is crowned with glory at His Father's side,

Nevermore to suffer, nevermore to die,

Jesus, King of Glory, is gone up on high. —Havergal

Jesus came into the world to intervene for us; now He is in heaven to intercede for us.

Acts 1:1-11

Witnesses

By Marvin Williams

You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me ... to the end of the earth. — Acts 1:8

In a criminal court case, witnesses provide vital information about a possible crime. Being a witness means telling the court the truth

about what you know.

Just as the criminal justice system relies heavily on witnesses, Jesus uses bold, faithful, and credible witnesses to spread His Word and build His church.

Before Jesus ascended to His Father, He gave His disciples a final command—to launch a worldwide witnessing campaign. The Holy Spirit would come upon them and give them supernatural power to be His witnesses throughout the world (Acts 1:8).

Jesus called these early apostles to go into a world where people did not know about Him and to give a truthful account of what they had seen, heard, and experienced (Acts 4:19-20). Since they had witnessed His perfect life, teachings, suffering, death, burial, and resurrection (Luke 24:48; Acts 1–5), they were to go out and give a truthful testimony about Him.

In taking the gospel to the ends of the world, we are called to testify to the truth about Jesus and how He has changed our lives. “How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?” (Rom. 10:14). What are you doing to tell others?

Lord and Savior, Christ divine,

Reign within this heart of mine;

May my witness ever be

Always, only, Lord, for Thee. —Brandt

God has left us in the world to witness to the world.

Acts 1:1-11 More Than Waiting

By Anne Cetas

A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me, because I go to the Father. —John 16:16

I don't know how it works where you live, but when I have to call for a repair for one of my appliances, the company says something like, “The repairman will be there between 1:00 p.m. and 5:00 p.m.” Since I don't know when the repair person will arrive, all I can do is wait.

Jesus told His followers that He would soon be leaving them and they would need to wait for His return in “a little while” (John 16:16). After His resurrection, they saw Him again and they hoped He would be establishing His kingdom on earth at that time. But He told them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority” (Acts 1:7). They would have to wait even longer.

But they were to do more than wait. Jesus told His followers that they were to “be witnesses to [Him] in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (v.8). And He gave them the Holy Spirit to empower them to do this.

We still wait for Jesus' return. And while we do, it's our delight, in the Holy Spirit's power, to tell and show others who He is, what He has done for all of us through His death and resurrection, and that He has promised to return.

Dear Lord, we love You so much. We want

our words and our lives to be a witness

of Your goodness and grace. Please use

us in ways we never thought possible.

Wait and witness till Jesus returns

Acts 1:1-11 Gentle Witness

By Bill Crowder

You shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. —Acts 1:8

Years ago, I was hospitalized following a life-threatening, 38-foot fall from a bridge. While I was there, the wife of the man in the next bed stopped to speak to me. “My husband just told me what happened to you,” she said. “We believe God spared your life because He wants to use you. We've been praying for you.”

I was stunned. I had grown up going to church, but I had never imagined that God would want to be involved in my life. Her words

pointed me to a Savior I had heard of but did not know—and marked the beginning of my coming to Christ. I cherish the memory of those words from a gentle witness who cared enough to say something to a stranger about the God whose love is real. Her words conveyed care and concern, and offered purpose and promise.

Jesus challenged His disciples—and us—to tell others about the love of God: “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

Through the Holy Spirit our words and witness can have the power to make an eternal difference in the lives of others.

I love to tell the story of unseen things above,

Of Jesus and His glory, of Jesus and His love,

I love to tell the story, because I know 'tis true;

It satisfies my longings as nothing else can do. —Hankey

A caring word can accomplish more than we could ever imagine.

Acts 1:1-9 Being A Witness

By Bill Crowder

You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me. —Acts 1:8

When I was a teen, I witnessed an auto accident. It was a shocking experience that was compounded by what followed. As the only witness to the incident, I spent the ensuing months telling a series of lawyers and insurance adjustors what I had seen. I was not expected to explain the physics of the wreck or the details of the medical trauma. I was asked to tell only what I had witnessed.

As followers of Christ, we are called to be witnesses of what Jesus has done in us and for us. To point people to Christ, we don't need to be able to explain every theological issue or answer every question. What we must do is explain what we have witnessed in our own lives through the cross and the resurrection of the Savior. Even better is that we don't have to rely on ourselves alone to do this. Jesus said, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

As we rely on the Spirit's power, we can point a hurting world to the redeeming Christ. With His help, we can witness to the life-changing power of His presence in our lives!

I love to tell the story of unseen things above,

Of Jesus and His glory, of Jesus and His love.

I love to tell the story, because I know 'tis true;

It satisfies my longings as nothing else can do. —Hankey

Our testimony is the witness of what God has done for us.

Acts 1:7 Our Lord's Return

By Herbert Vander Lugt

1 Thessalonians 5:1-22

"Surely I am coming quickly." Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! —Revelation 22:20

Nearly 2,000 years ago Jesus said, “I am coming quickly.” Since then, some have wrongly tried to predict when He will return. Others have scoffed. Was Jesus wrong? Did something happen that He didn't foresee?

Of course not! We view time from the perspective of our own brief life span. But to the eternal God, “One day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (2 Pet. 3:8).

Jesus told His disciples that God had not given them specific information about “times or seasons” (Acts 1:7). He wanted them—as He wants us—to live in an attitude of expectation. Paul echoed this when he spoke of Christ's return as “the blessed hope” (Ti. 2:13).

But how do we live expectantly? Jesus instructed the disciples to be witnesses to all the world (Acts 1:8). Paul said, “Watch and be

sober” (1 Th. 5:6) and love other believers (vv.12-15). John urged us to walk in close fellowship with Jesus (1 Jn. 2:28-3:3) and to purify ourselves so that we will “not be ashamed before Him at His coming” (2:28).

The Lord’s any-moment return is no cause for date-setting but for watchful expectation. Let’s serve Him in every aspect of our lives, and one day we’ll hear Him say, “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Mt. 25:21). —HVL

Blessed are those whom the Lord finds watching,

In His glory they shall share;

If He shall come at the dawn or midnight,

Will He find us watching there? —Crosby

A watching Christian will be a working Christian.

Acts 1:8

Missionary Keith Gustafson was forced to leave the Congo because of the civil war that erupted in 1997. He reported that as the fighting spread, people in the remote area where he lived knew that soldiers were approaching because of the message of the drums. Down the trails and along the riverbanks came the chilling drumbeat that warned of danger.

The drums of the Congo are also used to alert the tribes when there’s been a death, to announce a birth, or to call a meeting. They serve as a general news alert; a messenger follows up with additional information.

We have the opportunity to deliver a news alert to the people with whom we come in contact every day. Our manner of speech and our moral standards can help prepare the way to share the gospel. We can follow up our general testimony with the specific message of the gospel. —D. C. Egner

THEY WITNESS BEST WHO WITNESS WITH THEIR LIVES AND THEIR LIPS.

Acts 1:8

An insurance company sponsored a conference at its huge, national headquarters building in New York City. Agents from all over the country attended. During the convention, one of the delegates from a western state sold insurance to a barber, an elevator operator, and a restaurant employee—all three of whom had worked in that headquarters building for years. That “out of stater” wrote those policies because the local staffers had neglected to do their “homework.”

Acts 1:8 The Needed Antenna

By Vernon C. Grounds

Read: 1 John 1:1-4

The life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life. —1 John 1:2

How would you answer the question, “What is the meaning of life?” Jonathan Gabay of England has published a book containing the answers of well-known individuals to that query. One of them, a church leader, gave an arresting testimony. As a child, he says, he watched his family’s black and white TV, wishing that he could get a clearer picture. But he was glad they had even that unsatisfactory set.

Then his family learned that an outside antenna was needed. “Suddenly,” he said, “we found that we could get clear and distinct pictures. Our enjoyment was transformed.” Then he draws this comparison: “Life without a relationship with God through Jesus Christ is like the television without the antenna.”

Without a knowledge of God and His purposes revealed in Scripture and in Jesus Christ, we finite humans with our sin-darkened minds have at best a blurred picture of the invisible, holy Creator. But when we pick up the Bible and encounter Jesus, the Man who was God-in-the-flesh, the fuzziness vanishes. As the Savior Himself declared, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (Jn. 14:9).

Have you seen Jesus clearly in God’s Word? Are you helping others to see Him too? (1 Jn. 1:1-3; Acts 1:8).

O send Thy Spirit, Lord, now unto me,

That He may touch my eyes and make me see;

Show me the truth concealed within Thy Word,

And in Thy book revealed I see Thee, Lord. —Lathbury

You can't get a clear picture of Christ unless you see Him in the Bible.

Acts 1:8 Our Source of Power (by Warren Wiersbe)

Anointing oil speaks of the presence and the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives. All believers have received the anointing of the Spirit (1 John 2:20, 27), and therefore we ought to be “a fragrance of Christ” to the Heavenly Father (2 Cor. 2:15). The more we are like Jesus Christ in character and conduct, the more we please our Father; and the more we please Him, the more He can bless and use us for His glory.

I once heard Dr. A. W. Tozer say, “If God were to take the Holy Spirit out of this world, much of what the church is doing would go right on; and nobody would know the difference.”

We have so much in human resources available to the church today that we manage to “serve the Lord” without the unction of the Holy Spirit working in our lives. But is that what God wants?

While here on earth, Jesus lived His life and did His work through the anointing of the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:16–19). If the spotless Son of God needed the Spirit's power, how much more do we! Do we dare pray in the energy of the flesh when the Spirit is present to assist us (Rom. 8:26; Eph. 2:18)? Do we try to witness for Christ without asking the Spirit to help us (Acts 1:8)? Can we fellowship with our Lord in His Word apart from the ministry of the Spirit of God (Eph. 1:15–23; 3:14–21)? - Warren Wiersbe

Acts 1:1-8

To The End

By Bill Crowder

You shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. —Acts 1:8

It was my first day of class at the Moscow Bible Institute where I was teaching Russian pastors. I began by asking the students to give their names and where they served, but one student shocked me as he boldly declared, “Of all the pastors, I am the most faithful to the Great Commission!” I was taken aback momentarily until, smiling, he continued, “The Great Commission says we are to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. I pastor north of the Arctic Circle in a village nicknamed ‘The End of the Earth!’” Everyone laughed and we continued with the session.

The words of that pastor, who ministered in the Yamal (which means “end of the world”) Peninsula, carry great significance. In Jesus' final message to His disciples, He said, “You shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Every corner of our world, no matter how remote, must be touched by the message of the cross. The Savior died for the world—and that includes people both near and far.

Each of us has the opportunity to take the gospel to people in our “end of the earth.” No matter where you are, you can tell someone about the love of Christ. Who can you tell today?

People can't believe in Jesus

If the gospel they don't hear,

So we must proclaim its message

To the world—both far and near. —Sper

Any place can be the right place to witness for Christ.

Acts 1:9 - Why The Ascension?

By Herbert Vander Lugt

John 16:5-15; Luke 24:50-53

If I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. —John 16:7

God raised Jesus from the grave and exalted Him to His right hand in heaven (Ephesians 1:20). Yet for 40 days Jesus made many bodily appearances to His disciples. But the 40th day was different. With His disciples looking on, He slowly ascended into the sky

until a cloud hid Him from view (Acts 1:9).

Why didn't Jesus continue His visible appearances on earth? He had told His disciples that the Holy Spirit would not begin His work until after He left (John 16:7). The time had come for His followers to trust His word instead of relying on their physical senses (20:25,29). Their Master's slow, visible, and final ascent was a dramatic way of saying to them that a new era was about to begin.

From heaven Jesus would send the Holy Spirit to replace His bodily presence. Christ would form the church and rule as its Head (Ephesians 1:22-23). By His Spirit, He would live within His followers and fill them with peace and power. In heaven He would intercede for them before the Father's throne (Hebrews 7:25). He would no longer be visibly present, but He would still be with them in a very real way (Matthew 28:19-20).

The same is true for every believer today. That's why we can be thankful that Jesus ascended to heaven.

He who came to save us, He who bled and died,

Now is crowned with glory at His Father's side;

Nevermore to suffer, nevermore to die,

Jesus, King of glory, is gone up on high. —Havergal

Jesus ascended to heaven that He might continue His work on earth.

Acts 1:9-14 ... And His Brothers

By David C. McCasland

These all continued with one accord ... , with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers. —Acts 1:14

For everyone with a close family member who is not a follower of Christ, Dr. Luke has included a wonderful surprise in the first chapter of Acts. Among those gathered for prayer in the days after Jesus ascended to heaven, Luke mentioned Mary, the mother of Jesus, and His brothers (Acts 1:14).

These same brothers grew up with Jesus in Nazareth (Mt. 13:54-55). They came to take charge of Jesus during His early ministry because they mistakenly thought He was out of His mind (Mk. 3:21,31-32). And they sarcastically urged Jesus to launch His "career" in Jerusalem even though they refused to believe in Him (Jn. 7:1-5).

Like many households today, Jesus' own family was divided by the issue of belief in Him. Our Lord experienced the heartache, misunderstanding, and even conflict that can result when families are divided over matters of faith. But at some point, though we are not told when, the brothers of Jesus came to believe in Him as their Lord and Messiah.

We can't compel our families to receive our Savior, but we can continue to love and pray for them. And we can remain confident that in God's providence wonderful surprises still happen.

Thinking It Over

Is someone you love resisting the Savior?

How does God feel about that person? (2 Pet. 3:9).

Pray for your loved one right now.

God loves our lost loved ones even more than we do.

Acts 1:1-11

To Be Continued

By David C. McCasland

You shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. —Acts 1:8

The fifth book of the New Testament, the Acts of the Apostles, records the beginnings of the Christian church under the leadership of the people Jesus had appointed. Some scholars have suggested that this book could also be called the Acts of the Holy Spirit, because the Spirit's power supplied courage for the apostles in the face of every hardship.

Just before Jesus was taken up into heaven, He told the ones He had chosen: "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has

come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). With those words, one chapter in the story of God’s work on earth ended, and a new one began. We are a part of that ongoing story.

The book of Acts describes the faithful witness of Peter, John, Barnabas, Paul, Dorcas, Lydia, and many others during the early days of the church. These ordinary people depended on God to give them strength as they spread His Word and demonstrated His love.

That story continues through us. As we trust God and obey His direction to make Jesus known, He writes through us new pages in His story of redemption.

Gracious Spirit, use my words to help and heal.

Use my actions, bold and meek, to speak for You.

May You be pleased to reveal

Your life to others through mine.

People know true faith stories when they see them.

Acts 1:8 Business Card

By C. P. Hia

1 Timothy 1:1,12-17

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the commandment of God our Savior and the Lord Jesus Christ ... —1 Timothy 1:1

In some cultures, the title below your name on your business card is very important. It identifies your rank. The way you are treated depends on your title as compared with others around you.

If Paul had a business card, it would have identified him as an “apostle”

(1 Tim. 1:1), meaning “sent one.” He used this title not out of pride but out of wonder. He didn’t earn that position; it was “by the commandment of God our Savior and the Lord Jesus Christ.” In other words, his was not a human but a divine appointment.

Paul had formerly been a “blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man” (v.13). He said that he considered himself to be the “chief” of sinners (v.15). But because of God’s mercy, he was now an apostle, one to whom “the King eternal” (v.17) had committed the glorious gospel and whom He had sent out to share that gospel.

What is more amazing is that like the apostle Paul we are all sent out by the King of kings to the world (Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 1:8). Let’s recognize with humility that we don’t deserve such a commission either. It is our privilege to represent Him and His eternal truth in word and in deed each day to all around us.

Let us go forth, as called of God,

Redeemed by Jesus’ precious blood;

His love to show, His life to live,

His message speak, His mercy give. —Whittle

God gave you a message to share. Don’t keep it to yourself!

Acts 1:8 Change The World!

By Vernon C. Grounds

John 17:20-23

You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me. —Acts 1:8

John, do you want to spend the rest of your life selling sugared water, or do you want a chance to change the world?”

That was the challenge Steve Jobs issued in 1983 to John Sculley, then president of Pepsi-Cola. Mr. Jobs was the creative genius behind Apple Computer. He knew that the soft-drink executive could help Apple make its mark on the computer world. Sculley accepted the bold challenge.

Jesus issued a challenge to three fishermen as they tended their nets. He commanded, "Follow Me!" (Mk. 1:17). They did, and with a handful of other ordinary men they changed the world. On the Day of Pentecost the promised Holy Spirit began a new work through them, and 3,000 were saved (Acts 2). Eventually critics would charge that they had turned the world "upside down" (Acts 17:6).

Our world is wrong-side up and right-side down, living by principles opposed to our Lord's teachings. We can either follow the world's dead-end philosophies, or we can accept Jesus' challenge to bring change to the world.

Today let's serve God by praying, giving, and witnessing in our small corner. One day the King of kings will return and transform the whole world!

Christ calls to us, "Come follow Me,

And don't look back to yesterday;

Fresh grace I'll give to change your world,

My joy you'll find as You obey." —DJD

A disciple is known not for what he gives up, but for what he takes up.

Acts 1:8 Have We Learned?

By Vernon C. Grounds

Luke 24:44-53

You shall be witnesses to Me. —Acts 1:8

What happens when we keep to ourselves something that, if shared with others, would enrich their lives? We not only fail to increase their happiness, but we rob ourselves of the joy that generosity brings.

Luigi Tarisio, who loved violins passionately, never learned that lesson. He spent his limited income buying the finest instruments he could find. He owned 246 exquisite violins, which were crammed into every corner of his otherwise barren little house. And they were never played! His obsession prevented those instruments from bringing pleasure and inspiration to other music lovers.

Instead of following Luigi's example, we need to be motivated by the admonition of Proverbs 3:27 to keep ourselves free from the guilt of withholding good. Even more, we should be motivated by grateful obedience to Jesus Christ. And obedience, the Savior assures us, brings joy (John 15:10-11).

As Christians, we have a message that makes the melodies of heaven flood our souls. Our Lord gave us the mandate to share that message with everybody everywhere (Mark 16:15). Are we keeping the heavenly harmonies of saving grace sealed up inside ourselves, or are we obediently letting them ring out through our lips and lives?

O you who are trusting Jesus,

Redeemed at infinite cost,

Are you showing Christ to others

And seeking to win the lost? —Gilmore

Joy is a byproduct of obedience.

Acts 1:8 Power Failure

By Mart De Haan

John 14:15-26

You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. —Acts 1:8

I felt mechanically illiterate. I was struggling with a videocassette player for a study group at church and couldn't make it work. Fortunately, someone saw my plight. I stood there appreciatively as he sized up the situation—and then plugged the power cord into the wall outlet.

Why hadn't I thought of that? I was so preoccupied with patch cords and monitors that I overlooked the obvious. I forgot about the

power.

If I looked foolish there, it's nothing compared to what the angels see as they observe me. They must be astounded by my efforts to make life work without God's power. I join them in sad wonder. How can I forget that the infinite, personal Spirit of Christ lives within me to guide my life and give me power?

The answer is regretfully clear. There's a loose cord somewhere. When I am preoccupied with pleasing myself, I miss the power that comes from a healthy relationship with Christ. His Spirit enables me to do the will of God, to show His attitudes, and to fulfill His purpose. But I have to stay plugged in through prayer, reflection on God's Word, and complete reliance on His power—not my own.

Lord, help us to see the big picture and stay plugged in to the Source of Power—the Holy Spirit.

I'm weak and helpless in life's fray;

Lord, may Your power be my stay,

And may I always seek to be

Renewed in strength for victory. —DJD

A Christian who forgets the Holy Spirit is like an unplugged power cord.

Acts 1:8 Lesson Of The 18-Wheeler

By David C. Egner

John 16:7-15

You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. —Acts 1:8

I was talking with a veteran truckdriver about his life on the road. We discussed interstates, cities, truck stops, engines, and tractors.

As he spoke about his huge rig, he referred several times to steering axles and drive axles. I asked him to explain the difference. He told me that the front axle of a truck is the steering axle. The drive axles, located under the rear of the cab, transfer the power that is generated by the diesel engine. It's the drive axles that enable the semi to climb steep grades, inch down dangerous slopes, and barrel down the highway to get the load in on time.

My discussion with that trucker gave me a new appreciation for those 18-wheelers, and it reminded me of a spiritual truth. Just as steering axles and drive axles are essential to a tractor-trailer, so also direction and power are vital to followers of Christ as we travel through life. The Holy Spirit provides us with both. He was sent to guide us into all truth (Jn. 16:13) and to teach us (1 Cor. 2:10-16). We are empowered by the Spirit to witness (Acts 1:8), to pray (Rom. 8:26), and to live a hope-filled life (15:13).

The next time one of those big semis blows by you on the highway, think about the lesson of the 18-wheeler. Call on the direction and power of the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit gives us power to live

A life that's pleasing to the Lord;

He also guides us and provides

Direction in God's holy Word. —Sper

The power that drives us comes from the Spirit inside us.

Acts 1:15

And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples (Acts 1:15).

Remorse deprives many Christians of the joy that should be theirs. A man in his middle years has withdrawn from the people in his church because he feels so bad about his past infidelity—a sin that broke up his home. An elderly woman needs counseling from time to time because she can't forget an affair she had more than fifty years ago. A young woman sees a psychiatrist because she can't forgive herself for having had an abortion. Each of these people is now a Christian, but each is paralyzed at times by remorse over the past.

If anyone ever had good reason for allowing the memory of a grievous sin to put him on the shelf, it was Peter. He had been such a

coward. He had fled Gethsemane at Christ's arrest, and then denied three times that he knew the Lord Jesus. Later, he felt so bad that he wept bitterly. Yet he did not allow his remorse over past failures to make him ineffective in his service for Christ. He accepted the Lord's forgiveness, and he received new hope from Jesus' commission, "Feed my sheep." In Acts 1:15 we find him back in his role as the leader of the disciples. By taking Jesus' words of forgiveness to heart and by forgiving himself, he put the past under the blood of Christ.

As believers, when we confess our sin, we can leave it with Christ and forget it. Then we can move on to find a new way to serve Him. We need never let remorse remove our joy. —H. V. Lugt

Christians should seek to erase from their memory

the sins God has erased from their record.

Acts 1:1-14

Perhaps Today!

By Dennis J. De Haan

This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go. —Acts 1:11

As we approach a new millennium, many Christians speak of the "soon return of Christ" as if it will happen in their lifetime. And it may!

Down through history, people have predicted specific days, months, and years for Christ's return. The founder of one sect predicted October 22, 1886. Another leader set 1933 as the end of this age. And another predicted that Christ will come in 2005, saying that we can know the "nearness" but not the "exactness."

The dismal record of date-setters has led many to abandon the subject altogether. Andrew Bonar told of a Scottish man who loved the truth of Jesus' personal return. After living in Edinburgh for a time and returning to his village, his neighbors asked him how he liked the Edinburgh preachers. "They all fly on one wing," he said. "They all preach Christ's first coming but not His second coming."

We will miss the purifying effect that comes from thinking about the Lord's return if we avoid the subject entirely or if we set a date (1 Jn. 3:2-3). But if we watch and pray (Mk. 13:33) and live a holy life (Lk. 21:34), we will be ready at all times.

The message of the Bible is clear: Be ready! Jesus could return at any moment—perhaps today!

Look for Christ's return and you'll live for Christ's glory.

ACTS 2

Acts 2:1-11 The Power Of Pentecost

By Herbert Vander Lugt

You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me. —Acts 1:8

God's power was dramatically displayed when the Holy Spirit came upon a small band of Christ's followers on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:2-4). Those present heard a roaring sound like a strong driving wind. Flames like fiery tongues hovered above their heads, and they proclaimed God's wonderful works in languages they had never learned.

Many of us wish we could have a similar experience today. But we tend to overlook the fact that the power of Pentecost was given so that we could be witnesses for Christ (1:8).

Since that great day, the Holy Spirit has been transforming lives through the witness of believers. The testimony of those first-century Christians led thousands to faith in Jesus Christ.

Our problem is that we like the spectacular. But we don't need to see the phenomena depicted in Acts 2. God uses our witness to open the eyes of others to the truth of the gospel. The same Holy Spirit who was revealed in the first century resides in us today. We are now living witnesses of the power displayed on the Day of Pentecost.

Praise God for His Pentecostal power! But don't neglect the reason it was given. Instead, show the Lord your gratitude by using that

power to share the gospel.

The power of our witness comes from the power of the Spirit.

Acts 2:1-2, 4

When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind... And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-2, 4).

WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

In his diary Jim Elliot wrote, "Am I ignitable? ... Saturate me with the oil of the Spirit that I may be a flame."

The disciples went through emotional burnout. The trial, the crucifixion, and the burial nearly snuffed out their flame. The resurrection and forty days with Jesus served as a bellows, but the fire still flickered. Then the Holy Spirit came like a mighty wind, and they became human infernos.

The Holy Spirit participated in creation, empowered Old Testament people, revealed God's Word to the prophets, and played an important role in Jesus' birth; but He never came for a permanent stay until Pentecost. Since then He has made His home in every believer and makes God's firepower available to us all.

The greatest evidence of His work may seem to many the most mundane: He grows spiritual fruit. That does not seem as exciting as starting spiritual fires. But His fruit is characteristic of Christ's life, and so He works at reproducing the best life ever lived in each believer. Like the oil of the olive used in lamps, the juice of this fruit lights the Christian life.

Unlike Jim Elliot, most of us would prefer to hear the Holy Spirit yell, "Lights out!" so we could get some rest. Instead, as a battle commander, He cries, "Fire!"

Acts 2:1-8 The New Harvest

By Mart De Haan

They are the firstfruits to the Lord. —Leviticus 23:17

I was visiting a friend in a Midwest farming community during harvest season. Huge combines churned through his fields, depositing soybeans into waiting wagons. My friend leaped onto one of the wagons to check out his "firstfruits." What he saw was encouraging. Despite the worst corn crop in 40 years, the soybeans gave him reason to thank God for a good harvest.

Pentecost, which we remember today, has its roots in an agricultural setting. Fifty days after Passover, Jewish farmers celebrated the Feast of Weeks (Lev. 23:15-22), in which they recognized the hand of God who gave the crops.

Centuries later, the Lord chose the Day of Pentecost to celebrate a new harvest. Fifty days from Passover, the Holy Spirit came on a small group of believers and moved through Jerusalem, bringing in a different kind of crop. These firstfruits were men, women, and children added to the church (Acts 2:38-46).

Pentecost's historical farming connection reminds us that a world of lost souls is ready for harvest (John 4:35). As believers in Christ, we are God's fruit, but we are commanded to be His farmers as well.

Are we helping to bring in the new harvest?

There's surely somewhere a lowly place

In earth's harvest fields so wide,

Where I may labor through life's short day

For Jesus, the crucified. —Gabriel

Without the Holy Spirit there would be no harvest.

Acts 2:1-8 "THE NEW HARVEST"

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Are we helping to bring in the new harvest? -M R De Haan II

There's surely somewhere a lowly place

In earth's harvest fields so wide,

Where I may labor through life's short day

For Jesus, the crucified. -Gabriel

Without the Holy Spirit there would be no harvest. - Our Daily Bread.

Acts 2:1-21 The Best Consoler

By David C. McCasland

John 14:16-21,24-27

I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever. —John 14:16

When two uniformed men came to my door on Memorial Day afternoon, I thought they were collecting for charity. Instead, they told me that my sister and her husband had been killed in an accident earlier that day.

Just over a year after that shattering event, our church choir sang "Veni, Sancte Spiritus" ("Come, Holy Spirit") on Pentecost Sunday (Whitsunday). It brought a wave of peace over my still-aching soul. One verse says: "Thou best of Consolers, sweet guest of the soul, sweet refreshment. In labor, Thou art rest; in heat, the tempering; in grief, the consolation."

On Pentecost Sunday, many churches celebrate the Holy Spirit's coming in power on the disciples (Acts 2:1-21). But the Spirit came also as the Comforter promised by Jesus: "I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever" (John 14:16). The Spirit lives within each Christian, bringing the peace of Christ along with encouragement and alleviation of grief.

Pentecost and Memorial Day seldom fall next to each other as they do in 2004. But the "sweet guest of the soul" is always with us on any day we remember our loved ones who have died. In grief, the Spirit is our consolation, the light of our hearts, the giver of everlasting joy.

O spread the tidings 'round wherever man is found,

Wherever human hearts and human woes abound;

Let every Christian tongue proclaim the joyful sound:

The Comforter has come! —Bottome

In every desert of trial, the Holy Spirit is our oasis of comfort.

Acts 2:1-4 Shakespeare's Translation?

By Dennis Fisher

2 Peter 1:16-2:3

No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation. —2 Peter 1:20

Some have speculated that William Shakespeare helped translate the King James Bible. They say that he inserted a cryptogram (a message written in code) while he translated Psalm 46. In this psalm, the 46th word from the beginning is shake and the 46th word

from the end is spear. Furthermore, in 1610, while the King James Bible was being translated, Shakespeare would have been 46 years old. Despite these coincidences, no serious evidence supports this theory.

Some people also claim to have found hidden meanings when interpreting the Bible. Certain cults will cite a verse out of context, only to lead someone into heretical doctrine. Some quote John 14:16, for example, and say that the “Helper” refers to their “new revelation.” When compared with other Scripture, however, the Helper whom Jesus sent to us is obviously the Holy Spirit (John 16:7-14; Acts 2:1-4).

The apostle Peter wrote, “No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation” (2 Peter 1:20). To interpret a biblical passage accurately, we must always consider the context and compare it with other Scripture. This respects the clear meaning of the Bible without trying to find hidden meaning in it.

God’s Word does not have secret codes

That need a special key;

It’s understandable and clear,

With truth for all to see. —Sper

The best interpreter of Scripture is Scripture itself.

Acts 2:1-8 Our Comforter

By Dennis J. De Haan

I will pray the Father, and He will give you another [Comforter], that He may abide with you forever. —John 14:16

A seminary student was writing a term paper about confession of sin. At one point he intended to type, “When we confess our sins, He takes away our guilt.” But when he came to the word guilt, he hit the letter q by mistake. This made his sentence read, “When we confess our sins, He takes away our quilt.” He turned in the paper without noticing his error.

When the paper was returned, the student grinned as he read the marginal note from the professor: “Never fear, little one, you’ll never freeze, because God gave us a Comforter.”

Jesus said the Comforter (or Helper) would come and abide with us forever (Jn. 14:16). Since the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2) the Holy Spirit has been carrying on His ministry in the lives of believers.

Here are some of His comforting activities: He guides us into truth and brings glory to Christ (Jn. 16:13-15). He assures us that we are God’s children (Rom. 8:16). He helps us pray (Rom. 8:26-27). He gives us hope (Rom. 15:13). He teaches us spiritual truths (1 Cor. 2:13). He equips us to serve other believers (1 Cor. 12:4-7). He makes us Christlike (2 Cor. 3:18). He strengthens us (Eph. 3:16).

We can face this day with confidence because of the Comforter’s ministry in our lives.

O spread the tidings 'round wherever man is found,

Wherever human hearts and human woes abound;

Let every Christian tongue proclaim the joyful sound:

The Comforter has come! —Bottome

The Christian's heart is the Holy Spirit's home.

Acts 2:1-11 Mysterious Invisibility

By Bill Crowder

Suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. — Acts 2:2

Across the United States and around the world, we often experience the dramatic effect of something no one can see. In 2011, for instance, several US cities were devastated by tornadoes that blew apart neighborhoods and business districts. And during each hurricane season, we are shocked as winds of more than 100 miles an hour threaten to destroy what we have built.

All of this is the result of an unseen force. Sure, we see the wind's effects (flags flapping, debris flying), but we cannot see the wind itself. It works in mysterious invisibility.

In a sense, this is also true of the Holy Spirit. In Acts 2, when believers experienced the filling of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, "suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting" (Acts 2:2). That wind was a tangible demonstration to those early Christians that the unseen Spirit was at work in their lives. And He still works in our lives today! If you are a follower of Christ, be encouraged. The Holy Spirit bears fruit in your life (Gal. 5:22-23), forms believers into one body (1 Cor. 12:13), and assures you of God's presence (1 John 3:24). The Holy Spirit is a powerful Person in our lives—even though we can't see Him.

Silently now I wait for Thee,

Ready, my God, Thy will to see;

Open my heart—illumine me,

Spirit divine. —Scott

The Holy Spirit works powerfully, though invisibly.

Acts 2:1-21 Our Helper

By David C. Egener

The Father ... will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever. —John 14:16

When I taught in a Christian college, I directed travel-study tours of Europe. Before I left for the first tour, I was somewhat apprehensive, but I knew that a Christian brother, Sotos Boukis, would be assisting us during the 7 days our group would be in Greece. I was relieved to discover when we arrived at our hotel that he was there waiting for us. His knowledge, guidance, and personal assistance were invaluable. It gave me great peace of mind to have him with me.

Jesus instructed, encouraged, and knew His disciples intimately. When He told them He was leaving, He promised to send "another Helper" (Jn. 14:16). He was telling them they would have a person like Himself to assist them. So on the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came to indwell all believers and gave them the same individual attention, though unseen, that Jesus had given His disciples.

The Holy Spirit is not some mystical force but a personal Being who lives within every follower of Jesus Christ. He is our teacher (Jn. 14:26; 16:13) and our power for witness (Acts 1:8).

Let's thank the Lord Jesus that He has given us our personal Helper.

Holy Spirit, all divine,

Dwell within this heart of mine;

Cast down every idol-throne,

Reign supreme and reign alone. —Reed

We're never without a helper because we have the Spirit within.

Acts 2:14-36 Truth That Transforms

By Vernon C. Grounds

Read: John 21:14-17

Jesus showed Himself to His disciples after He was raised from the dead. —John 21:14

Truth is truth even if it doesn't seem to affect our lives directly. But the truth that God gives us in the Bible not only opens heaven's door for us, it also changes our lives.

Ron Sider, a leading evangelical advocate for the poor, tells about a conversation he had with German theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg. As they were discussing the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, the theologian emphatically declared, "The evidence for Jesus' resurrection is so strong that nobody would question it except for two things: It is a very unusual event, and second, if you believe it happened, you have to change the way you live."

That's a challenging statement. If we really believe Jesus rose again, that belief mandates a change of life. Peter's life was turned upside-down after he saw the resurrected Christ. Once an impetuous fisherman-disciple who denied even knowing Christ after His arrest, he became a bold witness for Him (John 18:17,25,27; Acts 2:14-36).

Has belief in Jesus' resurrection changed your life? Are your goals and priorities different than they were? Are you kinder, more patient, more forgiving? Ask God what He wants to do in you, and then cooperate with Him in that change.

We want to do great things, O Lord,

To glorify Your name;

When You transform us by Your power,

We'll never be the same. —Sper

The power that God used to raise Jesus from the dead is the same power at work in you.

Acts 2:22-36 A Dead Man Cannot Save

By M.R. De Haan

Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and ... rose again the third day. —1 Corinthians 15:3-4

A young boy stood outside an art store looking intently at a painting of Jesus on the cross. A man approached and asked, "Do you know who that is?"

The boy answered, "Yes, sir, that is Jesus the Savior who died on the cross to save me. Those people around Him are the soldiers who killed Him. And that woman who is crying was His mother."

The man patted the boy on the head and walked away. He had not gone far when he felt a tug on his sleeve. The same little fellow he had spoken to moments before said, "Please, sir, I forgot to tell you something else. Jesus is not on that cross anymore. He is alive because He rose again. He is in heaven today."

That youngster knew the living Savior who died and rose and lives today. He knew the truth of the gospel.

The climax of the gospel is the resurrection. Every sermon preached by the apostles included the news that Jesus is not dead. Today, no matter how eloquent a sermon may be, it is not the gospel if it leaves Jesus on the cross or in the tomb. A dead man can save no one.

Do you personally know and boldly proclaim the living Savior?

I will sing of my Redeemer

And His heavenly love for me;

He from death to life has brought me,

Son of God, with Him to be. —Bliss

The good news is not that Jesus lived and died, but that He died and lives.

Acts 2:22-36 The Greatest Wrong

By Herbert Vander Lugt

God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ. —Acts 2:36

Followers of Christ see His crucifixion as the greatest wrong in all of history. Yet they decorate church buildings with the cross, wear it as jewelry, and sing about it. Why would anyone cherish such a terrible symbol of suffering and shame?

In ancient times many criminals and rebels died by crucifixion. It's said that in the unrest after the death of Herod the Great in 4 BC, Roman soldiers lined a road in Galilee with 2,000 crosses, each bearing the body of an insurrectionist. Their purpose was to strike terror into the heart of anyone who even contemplated rebellion against Rome.

Jesus' death, however, was unlike any of these. Yes, He endured the same physical agony, but He underwent such a terrible sense of abandonment that He cried out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Mark 15:34). As the Son of God, He was

experiencing the righteous wrath of His Father against the sin of all mankind. In dying, He fully paid the penalty for our sin and broke the power of death. To vindicate Christ's work on the cross, God raised Him up from the grave (Acts 2:24; Romans 1:4).

History's greatest wrong secured our pardon from sin. And His resurrection assures our ultimate victory over death. That's why we cherish the cross! —Herb Vander Lugt

The cross of Christ reveals God's love at its best and man's sin at its worst.

Acts 2:22-39 Simply Amazing

By Herbert Vander Lugt

God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ... Repent, and let every one of you be baptized. —Acts 2:36,38

When I met John, he was weighed down with guilt and despair. I told him about the forgiveness and hope that Jesus offers. I invited him to put his trust in Christ. I also tried to show him that this amazingly simple gospel is a mind-boggling message with far-reaching implications for time and eternity.

The apostle Peter noted both the personal simplicity and the cosmic awesomeness of the gospel in his sermon in Acts 2. First he emphasized God's role in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus (vv.22-24). He declared that God had exalted Jesus as "Lord and Christ" (v.36). Peter also pointed to the personal nature of the gospel. He said that we receive forgiveness and become participants in God's eternal program through personal repentance and faith in Jesus Christ (v.38).

Because of Christ's life, death, and resurrection, we can become part of God's kingdom. It's a kingdom with values at odds with the world, a kingdom where the power of death has been vanquished, a kingdom that will shatter all others and usher in everlasting righteousness and peace.

God's boundless grace has ordained this great gospel for all the world—and it's ours personally! By grace through faith in Christ, we belong to an eternal kingdom.

He left His Father's throne above,

So free, so infinite His grace!

Emptied Himself of all but love,

And bled for Adam's helpless race. —Wesley

Salvation is so simple we can overlook it, so profound we can never comprehend it.

Acts 2:22-39 The Cross Speaks

By Herbert Vander Lugt

Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and ... rose again the third day. —1 Corinthians 15:3-4

Crosses decorate church steeples and designate burial places. Sometimes they mark the spot where people died in highway accidents. And they are often worn as jewelry.

Crosses remind people of Jesus Christ. I was made aware of this when a businessman, seeing a small gold cross on the lapel of my jacket, asked me, "Why are you a believer in Christ?" I was glad for the opportunity to share my faith with him.

Jesus died on the cross for us, but we don't worship a dead Savior. Our Lord's body was taken down from the cross and placed in a tomb, and then on the third day He emerged in a glorified body.

The cross speaks to us of the total picture—our Lord's atoning death to pay the price for our sins, as well as His glorious resurrection to deliver us from the power of death.

If it were not for what Christ did on the cross, we would all stand guilty before God and hopeless in the face of death. But through faith in Him, we receive the forgiveness of all our sins and the assurance that death cannot hold us.

Have you looked at the cross and placed your trust in the One who died there? It's the only sure and perfect remedy for guilt and fear.

The cross of Christ—the crossroads to heaven or hell.

Acts 2:22-41 Three = One

By Herbert Vander Lugt

Having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, [Jesus] poured out this which you now see and hear. —Acts 2:33

The Bible teaches that God is one God, even though He exists as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Critics ridicule this concept, saying that we add 1+1+1 and come up with the sum of 1.

While we can show the critics that the doctrine of the Trinity is both biblical and reasonable, we must acknowledge that our human limitations make it impossible to fully understand and explain our infinite God. Yet we must accept the truth that God is triune, for only then can we appreciate all the wonders of our salvation.

In Peter's sermon in Acts 2:22-41, for example, he presented the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit working together to provide for us freedom from sin's guilt, deliverance from death's power, and enablement for the Lord's work. Peter didn't explain the deep secrets of how three personalities are in essence one God; he just gratefully acknowledged the role of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in our salvation.

Let's follow Peter's example. Instead of trying to understand God's triunity, let's humbly accept this biblical truth and join with the Lord's people in praising our God— Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

We do not need to comprehend

One God in three—a Trinity;

But that's what God's Word says of Him,

So it's enough for you and me. —Sper

God would not be worthy of man's worship if He could be comprehended by man's wisdom.

Acts 2:22-39

"Jesus of Nazareth ... you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death" (Acts 2:22-23).

The question of who killed Jesus has fired controversy that has raged through the centuries. During the Middle Ages, the unruly Crusaders sometimes killed Jews on their way to free Jerusalem from the Turks. They considered them guilty of Christ's death and referred to them as "Christ-killers." Even today feelings run deep on this issue. A few years ago a Jewish professor objected to a brief reference in Our Daily Bread that the Jewish leaders of Jesus' day were partly to blame for the Savior's death.

According to Matthew's account, it appears that the Romans were responsible. The Roman governor Pilate delivered Jesus to death, even while declaring His innocence. And Roman soldiers led Him down the Via Dolorosa and publicly executed Him. Yet Peter, preaching several weeks later in Jerusalem, accused the Jews of crucifying Him (Acts 2:22-24).

People who receive Christ as their personal Savior do not argue about who killed Jesus. They know He died for every sinner (2 Cor. 5:15). On the cross, He paid the penalty for the sins of both Jews and Romans, as well as for ours (1 Peter 2:24). Ultimately, then, we are all responsible for His death.

Christ died for us. Our sins cost Him His life. By trusting Him, we receive forgiveness and eternal life. —D. C. Egner

Jesus took our place that we might have His peace;

He took our sin that we might have His salvation.

Acts 2:24 Attempting The Impossible

By Herbert Vander Lugt

Read: Matthew 27:62-28:8

God raised up [Jesus], having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it. —Acts 2:24

It was the day after Jesus was crucified. His body lay in a tomb. But the chief priests and Pharisees who had engineered His crucifixion had the uneasy feeling that this might not be the end of the Jesus story. So they went to Pilate and told him that Jesus' disciples might steal His body to try to convince the people that He had fulfilled His prediction to rise from the grave. Pilate responded, "You have a guard; go your way, make [the tomb] as secure as you know how" (Matthew 27:65).

A guard was posted and the tomb was secured with an official Roman seal (v.66). The religious and political leaders did their very best to make sure that the body of Jesus remained in the tomb, but they were attempting the impossible. Death could not hold the sinless Son of God in its grasp, and on the third day He rose just as He said He would (20:19; 27:63; 28:1-8).

After the resurrection, the chief priests bribed the soldiers and told them to spread a ridiculous story about the disciples stealing the body (28:11-14). Still today skeptics offer one fanciful theory after another, attempting to disprove the resurrection of Jesus. In spite of their efforts to cast doubt on the historical record, the truth is that Jesus came out of the tomb.

We serve a living Savior!

I serve a risen Savior,

He's in the world today;

I know that He is living,

Whatever men may say. —Ackley

Jesus arose despite His foes.

Acts 2:29-39 The Biggest Decision

By Vernon C. Grounds

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved. —Acts 16:31

Decisions! Decisions! Decisions! We're constantly making decisions. Some are trivial, like, "Which outfit will I wear today?" Others are life-shaping, like, "Should I take that job and move my family clear across the country?" But common sense tells us that some are vastly more important than others.

A group of doctors ran an ad in a New York newspaper. Over the picture of an attractive woman, the caption read, "The most important decision I ever made was choosing my spouse. The second, my plastic surgeon." The text of the ad then suggested that the order of the priorities could be reversed!

Choosing a spouse is immeasurably more important than choosing a plastic surgeon. But deciding to put your trust in Jesus as your Savior is the most important decision you can make in life.

The apostle Peter told a group of unbelievers about Jesus and encouraged them to turn from their sin and trust Him (Acts 2). Peter's words speak to us today as well. If you haven't accepted Christ's free gift of forgiveness, pray to Him and ask Him to save you. And once you've done that, make the second most important decision: Determine to follow Christ's leading daily.

If you'd like to know the love of God the Father,

Come to Him through Jesus Christ, His loving Son;

He'll forgive your sins and save your soul forever,

And you'll love forevermore this faithful One. —Felten

Life's biggest decision is what you do with Jesus.

Acts 2:14,22-39 Unreasonable Omission

By Herbert Vander Lugt

This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. —Acts 2:32.

The feature article in the December 1999 issue of Life magazine presented a generally accurate picture of the first 2,000 years of Christianity. It portrayed Jesus and His ministry favorably, acknowledged the phenomenal growth of the apostolic church, and dated the Gospels as written between AD 60 and 85. But the article never mentioned the resurrection of Jesus, without which there would have been no Christianity.

If the apostles had not been convinced that Jesus rose from the dead, they would not have been transformed from a band of cowards into bold witnesses willing to suffer and die for the message they proclaimed.

An unbeliever once admitted to me that something must have happened to convince the apostles that Jesus had conquered death.

But the man was so committed to the idea that a resurrection from the dead is impossible that he refused to accept it.

That response, though, is illogical. The apostle Paul asked people who had a similar attitude, “Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead?” (Acts 26:8). Why indeed! Believing the gospel is a reasonable step of faith. It is a hearty “Amen!” to Peter’s triumphant declaration, “This Jesus God raised up, of which we are all witnesses!”

Christ’s resurrection is rejected by some,

That He rose from the dead is denied;

Yet Jesus still pleads and asks sinners to come

And believe that for them He has died. —Fitzhugh

The empty tomb is the foundation on which our faith is built.

Acts 2:14-21,37-41 The Great Comeback

By Dave Branon

But Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said to them, “Men of Judea ... heed my words.” —Acts 2:14

We like to read about comebacks—about people or companies who face near disaster and turn things around. The Ford Motor Company is an example of that. In the 1940s, a reluctance by leadership to modernize almost destroyed Ford. In fact, the government nearly took over the company lest its demise threaten the US war effort. But when Henry Ford II was released from his military duties to run the company, things turned around. Ford became one of the biggest corporations in the world.

Occasionally, we need a comeback. We need to correct wrong directions or compensate for wrong decisions. In those times, we have an example in Peter. He had failure written all over him. First, he nearly drowned when his faith faltered (Matt. 14:30). Then he said things that were so wrong Jesus called him “Satan” (16:22-23). And when Jesus needed Peter the most, he denied that he even knew Him (26:74).

But that’s not the end of the story. In the power of the Spirit, Peter made a comeback. On the Day of Pentecost, he preached and 3,000 people came to faith in Christ (Acts 2:14,41). Peter returned to effectiveness because his faith was renewed, he guarded what he said, and he stood up for Jesus.

Struggling? If Peter can come back, so can you.

Today Christ calls, “Come follow Me!”

Do not look back to yesterday;

Fresh grace He’ll give to do His will,

His joy you’ll find as you obey. —D. De Haan

To become whole, yield to the Holy Spirit.

Acts 2:40-47 Church Tourists

By David C. Egner

Let us consider one another ... , not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together. —Hebrews 10:24-25

Well, it’s happening again. As the holidays approach, churches are gearing up for their largest attendance of the year. Sanctuaries that usually have plenty of room will be filled to capacity.

Church leaders sometimes refer to these seasonal attenders as “C and E churchgoers”—people who visit only at Christmas and Easter. They can make pastors feel as if their churches are two-season tourist attractions.

Most churches welcome the influx of visitors and try to show them that peace and good tidings are in season year round. But why don’t these “church tourists” attend regularly?

An interviewer singled out some of these people for a news story last Christmas. One woman pointed to busy lives and demanding careers that keep her family from church. Most of those interviewed admitted, “I know I should come to church more often, but ... ” A parent commented, “When the holidays come, it reminds me of all the things we cherish. I want my daughter to experience some of

that.”

Church isn't merely something we should “experience” or attend out of guilt. We need to be with God's people whenever we are able (Heb. 10:24-25). It's only together that we can become all that God wants us to be.

Our week's not complete till we make it our goal

To honor the Lord's Day and nourish our soul;

The help that we need for the tasks that we face

Will come as we worship and draw on God's grace. —DJD

If absence makes the heart grow fonder, some people must really love the church.

Acts 2:40-47 My Two Cents

By Dennis Fisher

Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in the power of your hand to do so. —Proverbs 3:27

Recently, our family had to change Internet cable services. Our former provider promised to send us a postage-paid box to mail their equipment back to them. We waited. No box came. I phoned. The promised box still did not arrive, but we did get a bill for the equipment!

Wanting to get this resolved, I decided to return it at my own expense. I sent several faxes asking if they received it—but no reply. Then I got a refund check of \$.02 for the returned equipment! An experience like that can be frustrating. A simple transaction was complicated by poor communication.

Sadly, some people in our churches may encounter an impersonal response to their needs. Whether seeking marital counseling, childcare, guidance for a troubled teen, or a loving community, they come away feeling uncared for.

The first-century church was not perfect, but it faithfully helped others. The church at Jerusalem “divided [their goods] among all, as anyone had need” (Acts 2:45).

Good communication is the starting point for learning others' needs. This enables us to provide personal and practical help to people when they need it. Resources, both material and spiritual, can then be directed to each person as the object of God's personal love.

All who serve within the church

Should show by word and deed

A sensitivity to those

Who have a special need. —D. De Haan

God cares for you—care for others.

Acts 2:41-47 A "Well" Church

By Anne Cetas

They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship. —Acts 2:42

Pastor and author Greg Laurie says that churches are “well” when they practice these activities:

W-orship

E-vangelize

L-earn

L-ove

Like the early church, we should be active in these ways today.

Worship. We must meet together for fellowship, communion, prayer, and praise (Acts 2:42,47). God is to be the focus of all we do in His church.

Evangelize. As we share the Word, the Lord will add new believers to the church (v.47). We can all take part in spreading God's Word by developing a friendship, by giving someone an article about the gospel, or by sharing some Scripture verses with a stranger.

Learn. We must continue learning sound doctrine taught by qualified leaders (v.42). The Bible is filled with instruction for living, and we should take every opportunity to learn from it, apply it to our lives, and teach others.

Love. We are to share with whoever has need, and enjoy the fellowship of other believers regularly (vv.45-46).

A church whose members worship, evangelize, learn, and love will be a "well" church, effective in the community, and appreciated by "all the people" (v.47).

Churches grow when people pray

And pastors preach the Word,

When love for Christ sends out the call

To those who have not heard. —D. De Haan

A world in despair needs churches that care.

Acts 2:41-47 Contaminate Them

By David C. Egner

We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard. —Acts 4:20

Eighty-year-old Tita Nava gave her testimony in a church in Manila. A retired college professor and administrator, she had been searching in her later years for God. She wanted a relationship with "a living being, not a statue." A friend recommended that she join a group called the "Golden Girls," which was connected with an evangelical church.

Tita began attending the group regularly, opened her heart to Jesus, and was born again. She testified that Jesus took away her sharp tongue, her critical spirit, and her intellectual pride. In their place He gave her joy.

She described what happened when she began to live her faith before her friends: "My former group began treating me as if I had contracted a deadly communicable disease." Then, with a twinkle in her eyes, she said, "I hope I contaminate them."

In the early days of the church, the life-giving gospel spread quickly through Jerusalem (Acts 2:41). But the religious leaders treated this new movement as a deadly disease and tried to stop its growth (Acts 4:16-18).

If you have put your faith in Christ, expose your friends to the truth. "Contaminate" them with the life-giving message of the gospel.

Is your life a channel of blessing?

Is the love of God flowing through you?

Are you telling the lost of the Savior?

Are you ready His service to do? —Smyth

The gospel is contagious—spread it!

Acts 2:41-47 Just Another Sunday?

By Anne Cetas

They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine. —Acts 2:42

Early on a sunny Sunday afternoon after church, I headed out for a walk around the neighborhood. A man was trimming his grass along the sidewalk, and we greeted each other with the usual "Hello, how are you?" In a negative tone, he replied, "It's just another Sunday." Later, I wondered what he had meant by that. Was he saying, I'm just doing my chores—going through the motions?

Sometimes even church attendance can become a matter of merely going through the motions on just another Sunday. For the believers in the early church (Acts 2:41-47), joining with fellow believers was a source of excitement. That was when the church first started and everyone was a new believer—so they were bound to be enthusiastic. But what about us? What can we do to make

each Sunday special?

Go with the anticipation of meeting with God. While He is with us all the time (Heb. 13:5), God is with us in a unique way as we gather with others who know Him (Matt. 18:20; James 4:8). Bring your burdens and praises to Him.

Go to learn about God. We may not learn something new every week, but we can always be encouraged by the truths of God's Word (Ps. 119:105). Expect to hear from Him.

Go to fellowship with others. We need each other in this Christian journey. Encourage others, challenge them in their faith, and pray for them (Heb. 10:24-25).

Lord, give us a renewed enthusiasm of heart for attending church, so that it won't be just another Sunday.

If you want to be spiritually fed, go to church with a hunger for the Word.

Acts 2:41-47 A Neighbor On The Fence

By Anne Cetas

All who believed were together. —Acts 2:44

The fence around the side yard of our home was showing some wear and tear, and my husband, Carl, and I decided we needed to take it down before it fell down. It was pretty easy to disassemble, so we removed it quickly one afternoon. A few weeks later when Carl was raking the yard, a woman who was walking her dog stopped to give her opinion: "Your yard looks so much better without the fence. Besides, I don't believe in fences." She explained that she liked "community" and no barriers between people.

While there are some good reasons to have physical fences, isolating us from our neighbors is not one of them. So I understood our neighbor's desire for the feeling of community. The church I attend has community groups that meet once a week to build relationships and to encourage one another in our journey with God. The early church gathered together daily in the temple (Acts 2:44,46). They became one in purpose and heart as they fellowshiped and prayed. If they struggled, they would have companions to lift them up (see Eccl. 4:10).

Connection to a community of believers is vital in our Christian walk. One way that God chooses to show His love to us is through relationships.

Blest be the tie that binds

Our hearts in Christian love!

The fellowship of kindred minds

Is like to that above. —Fawcett

We all need Christian fellowship to build us up and hold us up.

Insight

In today's reading, we see a preview of many of the functions of the local church. The early pattern of acceptance into church fellowship included believing the gospel, personal conversion, and baptism (v.41). Central to the spiritual nurture of these new believers was teaching in the Word of God. The regular observance of communion by partaking of the bread and the cup reminded them of Christ's sacrifice (v.42). Then through the fellowship of believers, the gospel was shared as a way of life (v.46).

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Acts 2:42

In his book *Why Christians Sin*, J. Kirk Johnston tells about a young Russian woman who, before the collapse of the Iron Curtain, was allowed to visit her relatives in Canada. She was a devout Christian, and her friends assumed that she would defect and seek asylum in Canada or the US because of the religious oppression in the USSR. But they were wrong. She wanted to go back to her homeland.

This Russian woman said that people in the West were too busy acquiring material things and not concerned enough about their relationships. In her homeland, Christian fellowship was essential to their faith because it provided the support and encouragement they so desperately needed.

Genuine Christian fellowship involves much more than visiting over a cup of coffee in the church kitchen. It is loving one another, caring for one another, bearing one another's burdens. —R. W. De Haan

CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP IS ESSENTIAL TO SPIRITUAL GROWTH.

Acts 2:38-47 Grouped For Strength

By Mart De Haan

Let us consider one another ... , not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together. —Hebrews 10:24-25

Several years ago, former American prisoners of war were interviewed to determine what methods used by the enemy had been most effective in breaking their spirit. Researchers learned that the prisoners didn't break down from physical deprivation and torture as quickly as they did from solitary confinement or from being frequently moved around and separated from friends. It was further learned that the soldiers drew their greatest strength from the close attachments they had formed to the small military units to which they belonged.

These observations give us insight into why Christians need the group experience of fellowship with other believers to help them remain loyal to the Lord. Our own personal relationship to God, vital as that is, is not sufficient to produce spiritual maturity and endurance. Relationships within a unified, Spirit-filled body of believers are essential for growth and for maintaining our individual faithfulness to the Savior (Hebrews 10:23-25).

Sometimes we would rather not be involved in church life, thinking it's easier just to go it alone. But Christians who do that miss out on all the benefits. Let's remember that God in His wisdom has grouped us for strength.

Fellowship with other Christians

Strengthens us when we are weak,

Comforts us when we are hurting,

Helps us when God's will we seek. —Sper

Believers stand strong when they don't stand alone.

ACTS 3

Acts 3:1-16 Change Your Name

By Cindy Hess Kasper

Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. —Romans 10:13

Names are important. Parents may spend months researching and deciding on the perfect name for their baby. Often their final decision is based on its sound, uniqueness, or meaning.

One woman took on a new name because she disliked her original name. She mistakenly believed that changing it could alter her destiny. That's not likely, but for those who trust in Jesus as their Savior and are identified by His name from that time on, a radical transformation does take place.

There is a powerful significance attached to the name of Jesus. The apostles performed miracles (Acts 3:6-7,16; 4:10) and cast out demons in His name (Luke 10:17). They spoke and taught in the name of Jesus. They baptized believers in the name of Jesus (Acts 2:38). And it is only through the name of Jesus that we gain access to the Father (Acts 4:12).

When we become Christians, we share in that worthy name. And as we follow Christ, we are able to reflect His light to any darkness we encounter, whether in our neighborhood, our workplace, or even our home. Our prayer should be that when people see us—they will see Christ.

Our names may have meaning or significance. But to bear the name Christian is life-transforming.

Lord of my life, henceforth I bear

The name of Christian everywhere;

Therefore, O Christ, my spirit claim,

And make me worthy of Your name. —Freeman

The name of Jesus is the only name with the power to transform.

Acts 3:11-4:4 You Never Know ...

By David C. Egner

Many of those who heard the Word believed. —Acts 4:4

The Lord uses the most unexpected situations and unlikely ways to bring people to Himself. Our responsibility as Christians is simple and clear: Share the gospel where a lost world can hear it.

Francisco Ramos, a missionary to Spain, is an example of one who was brought to Christ through unusual circumstances. A native of Portugal, he traveled to England to look for work. Because a dangerous aneurysm had been discovered in his father's brain, Francisco had begun asking hard questions about life.

Ramos took a shortcut through Hyde Park one day, his heart aching and his mind filled with questions. A young man was preaching about Jesus, and Ramos stopped to listen. In straightforward, unmistakable terms, he heard the plan of salvation. Later that day he encountered another believer selling Christian books. He bought a copy of Billy Graham's *Peace With God*, not knowing what it was. He read the book that night and trusted in Christ as his Savior. Now he and his wife Stephanie are serving the Lord as missionaries.

Let's find ways to tell others about Jesus and His love and power to save all who call on Him. We never know what God is doing in someone's heart.

Just as the gardener cultivates

Before he plants the seed,

So God prepares a person's heart

To sense his desperate need. —Sper

The next person you meet may need to meet Christ.

Acts 3:17-26 Times Of Refreshing

By Dennis Fisher

Repent ... , so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord. —Acts 3:19

What do you find most refreshing? A cold drink on a hot day? An afternoon nap? Listening to praise and worship music?

The biblical theme of refreshing has a variety of physical and spiritual meanings. In Scripture we read of refreshment by resting on the Sabbath (Ex. 23:12), with cool water after physical activity (Judg. 15:18-19), by soothing music (1 Sam. 16:23), and with encouraging fellowship (2 Tim. 1:16).

The apostle Peter describes a time of spiritual refreshment that took place on the Day of Pentecost. He exhorted his listeners to repent and respond to the gospel "that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19). The apostle's statement was especially meaningful to the Jewish audience with its reference to the millennium when Messiah would rule. But the good news of spiritual life would also be extended to the Gentiles (Acts 10).

Even now as believers we can experience a time of refreshing by quieting our hearts in a devotional time of prayer and Bible reading. When we spend time alone with the Lord, we can experience His peace and joy which renew us in spirit. Aren't you thankful for these daily times of spiritual refreshment?

A Prayer: Lord, I need my spirit refreshed and

renewed today. Speak to me through Your Word that I

might hear Your heart, and help me to share my heart

with You in prayer. Amen.

When we draw near to God, our minds are refreshed and our strength is renewed.

Acts 3:13-21 Recall Notice

By C. P. Hia

Repent ... that your sins may be blotted out. —Acts 3:19

In 2010, auto manufacturers recalled a staggering 20 million cars in the US for various defects. The thought of such a large number of defective cars on the road is startling enough. But what is more disturbing is the apathy of some owners. In one instance, the executive director of the Center for Auto Safety warned owners, "It's a free repair. Get it done. It may save your life." Yet, despite the risk to their own lives, 30 percent never responded.

Likewise, many ignore God's "recall notice" to the entire human race. Unlike a defect found in automobiles, the moral defect of the human race is not the Maker's fault. He made everything "very good" (Gen. 1:31), but people's sin ruined it. God's offer to us is "repent ... that your sins may be blotted out" (Acts 3:19).

God offers not just a free repair of the human heart but a replacement of it (Ezek. 36:26; 2 Cor. 5:17). Though the offer costs us nothing (Eph. 2:8-9), it cost God the life of His only Son Jesus Christ. "[Jesus] bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed" (1 Peter 2:24).

Don't ignore the Lord's call. The free and permanent remedy offered by God for your spiritual defect will save your life!

The heart of man is stained by sin,

From Adam's fall this has been true;

Yet God in Christ can make a change—

Through faith in Him we are made new. —Fitzhugh

For a new start, ask God for a new heart.

ACTS 4

Acts 4:1-12 The Only One Who Saves

By Richard De Haan

Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. —Romans 10:13

A book in my library describes a marshal in Napoleon's army who was completely devoted to the emperor. One day the marshal was mortally wounded in battle. As he lay dying in his tent, he called for Napoleon, who soon came.

The officer thought the emperor could save his life. But Napoleon just shook his head and turned away. The book describes the tragic scene: "As the dying man felt the cold, merciless hand of death drawing him irresistibly behind the curtain of the unseen world, he was still heard to shriek out, 'Save me, Napoleon! Save me!'" In the hour of death, that soldier discovered that even Napoleon could not rescue him.

Similarly, when a person seeks deliverance from spiritual death, he finds that no human being has the power to save—no minister of the gospel, no priest, not even those who are great prayer warriors. Only Jesus can save a soul. The Bible says, "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Have you asked Jesus to save you? If not, do it now! He always answers those who plead for His mercy and put their trust in Him. He is the only One who saves.

There is no other name on earth

By whom salvation's given

Save Jesus Christ the Lamb of God,

God's precious gift from heaven. —Stairs

Christ believed is salvation received.

Acts 4:1-12

What is it that discourages you from witnessing? During China's Boxer Rebellion of 1900, insurgents captured a mission station, blocked all the gates but one, and in front of that one gate placed a cross flat on the ground. Then the word was passed to those inside that any who trampled the cross underfoot would be permitted their freedom and life, but that any refusing would be shot. Terribly frightened, the first seven students trampled the cross under their feet and were allowed to go free. But the eighth student, a young girl, refused to commit the sacrilegious act. Kneeling beside the cross in prayer for strength, she arose and moved carefully around the cross, and went out to face the firing squad. Strengthened by her example, every one of the remaining ninety-two students followed her to the firing squad. (Today in the Word, Feb. 89). What do I risk in witnessing? Possibly rejection or persecution from someone. Whatever the risk may be, I must realize that nothing done for Christ is ever wasted.

Acts 4:1-13 Acts Of Kindness

By David C. McCasland

By the name of Jesus ... , whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. — Acts 4:10

I was traveling with some men when we spotted a family stranded alongside the road. My friends immediately pulled over to help. They got the car running, talked with the father and mother of the family, and gave them some money for gasoline. When the mother thanked them over and over, they replied, "We're glad to help out, and we do it in Jesus' name." As we drove away, I thought how natural it was for these friends to help people in need and acknowledge the Lord as the source of their generosity.

Peter and John exhibited that same joyful generosity when they healed a lame man who was begging outside the temple in Jerusalem (Acts 3:1-10). This led to their arrest and appearance before the authorities who asked, "By what power or by what name have you done this?" Peter replied, "If we this day are judged for a good deed done to a helpless man ... let it be known to you all,

and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole" (Acts 4:7-10).

Kindness is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22) and a powerful context in which to genuinely speak to others about the Lord.

Lord, help me to love with both words and deeds,

To reach out to others and meet their needs;

Lord, burden my heart for those lost in sin,

With mercy and love that flows from within. —Fitzhugh

One act of kindness may teach more about the love of God than many sermons.

Acts 4:1-12 The Only One Who Saves

By Richard De Haan

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There is no other name on earth

By whom salvation's given

Save Jesus Christ the Lamb of God,

God's precious gift from heaven. —Stairs

Christ believed is salvation received.

Acts 4:1-14 Today's The Day

By Joanie Yoder

There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. —Acts 4:12

During a television interview, a comedian was asked, "What do you intend to say when you meet your Maker?" The comedian, assuming possible rejection by God and reflecting today's mindset, quipped, "I'll simply ask for a second opinion!"

There was a time when the opinion of an expert in any field was taken as correct and final. But today we often seek the advice of many professionals until we find the one we think is best. This has given us many valuable benefits. But when we are looking for answers about our eternal destiny, only one opinion matters. God has the final answer.

In Acts 4:12, Peter boldly declared that Jesus is the only name given by God through which we can be saved. We stand condemned before a just and holy God because of our sin. But the good news is that His love has found a way to save us. He sent His Son Jesus Christ to take our place of punishment. We need only to acknowledge our sinfulness, ask for His forgiveness, and trust Him to save us. There's simply no other way to heaven than through Jesus and His sacrificial death on the cross.

What will you say when you meet your Maker? If you're unsure, settle it now—for it will be too late then.

It's foolish to say "tomorrow" when God says "today."

Acts 4:1-20 A Ready Witness

By David C. Egner

Always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you. —1 Peter 3:15

Whenever I read the book of Acts, I'm struck by the spontaneity of the witness of the first Christians. Everywhere they went, in every circumstance, they boldly proclaimed Jesus as the true Messiah and the Savior of mankind—and many people believed. After Peter and John were arrested for proclaiming the good news, Peter told the council, "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20).

Today many of us find it difficult to witness. Sometimes it takes the simple courage of young people to motivate and encourage us.

Last summer, some teens from our church were conducting 5-day Bible clubs in the area. One hot afternoon the pastor took them out for ice cream. The line was long, so one of the teens took out her "wordless book," which was made up of colors to help explain the gospel to young children. Before long, several children and one mom had heard the story of Jesus from that willing witness.

Peter wrote in his first letter, "Always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you" (1 Pet. 3:15). Sometimes the best witness is a simple response to a sudden opportunity to talk about Jesus.

Are you ready?

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Do you know how to explain the gospel to others?

Do you regularly look for opportunities to tell others what Christ means to you?

The good news of the gospel is too good to keep to ourselves.

Acts 4:1-22 Whom Do You Fear?

By Haddon W. Robinson

We ought to obey God rather than men. —Acts 5:29

A soldier was standing at attention during a parade drill when he waved to one of the spectators. The drill instructor went over to the young man and growled, "Soldier, don't ever do that again!" But as his company marched past the reviewing stand the young man waved a second time. When the troops got back to the barracks, the drill instructor barreled in and barked at the soldier, "I told you not to wave! Aren't you afraid of me?" "Yes sir," the private replied, "but you don't know my mother!"

Peter and John had upset the religious elite in Jerusalem. The city's power brokers were disturbed by the message the two men preached and the miracles they performed. They had to be stopped. Peter and John were arrested and thrown into jail. They had every reason to be afraid. Yet, the next day they stood up to their accusers with great courage. "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge," they boldly said (Acts 4:19). They feared God more than they feared their persecutors.

If we are tempted to be quiet when we should speak up for Christ, we must remember that we can speak and act with conviction because we know our God. His authority outranks all others. He is the One we need to please.

Will you be bold in your witness

By giving lost sinners God's Word?

Jesus will honor your service,

And sinners will surely be stirred. —Bosch

When you fear God, you have nothing else to fear.

Acts 4:1-21 Ordinary People

By David C. McCasland

When they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. — Acts 4:13

Bestselling novelist Arthur Hailey (1920-2004) once said of his characters, "I don't think I really invented anybody. I have drawn on real life." When readers open a book by the British author, they encounter ordinary people whom the writer has placed in extraordinary situations.

In Acts 4 we find ordinary people, including the fishermen Peter and John, whom God placed in unexpected situations as witnesses to the reality of the risen Christ. These men, who had fled when Jesus was arrested, were now boldly facing threats and punishment for telling others about Him.

Even the authorities who opposed these followers of Jesus were astonished "when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men ... And they realized that they had been with Jesus" (v.13).

Most of us are ordinary people in a real life of work, relationships, and everyday circumstances. Our opportunities to demonstrate the reality of Christ may sometimes come disguised as difficulties, as they did for the disciples in Acts.

As ordinary people, we can have an extraordinary impact for Christ if we will trust the Author of our circumstances and rely on the Holy Spirit's power.

Just what do Christians look like?

What sets their lives apart?

They're ordinary people

Who love God from the heart. —D. De Haan

God is looking for ordinary people to do extraordinary work.

Acts 4:5-12 Supermarket Religion

By Vernon C. Grounds

There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. —Acts 4:12

It's amazing how many brands of breakfast cereal are offered by a typical American supermarket. And regardless of the countless ads that extol the virtues of one cereal over another, most brands are comparably nutritious and hunger-satisfying.

Is the salvation of our souls like that? In the supermarket of religions, aren't all beliefs and dogmas spiritually nourishing and true?

Absolutely not! But that's the common conclusion of many people—including some so-called Bible scholars. One theologian who clings to such a radically wrong view of Scripture wrote, "If 'saved' means being united and reconciled with God, then Acts 4:12 is palpably false. There are many authentic roads to God, and no religion holds the franchise for illumination."

The writer's insistence is an outright denial of God's Word, which tells us that Christ's sacrifice for sin is the only way we can gain a right relationship with God. Salvation is available through faith in Jesus Christ (Jn. 14:6), and it is absolutely free to anyone who accepts it by faith.

Finding spiritual truth is not like shopping for cereal. There's only one right choice. Make sure you, and those around you, know the difference.

Sincerity is no substitute for truth.

Acts 4:33

With great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

The renowned conductor Reichel was leading a great orchestra and choir in the final rehearsal of Messiah. They had come to that point where the soprano soloist takes up the refrain, "I know that my Redeemer liveth." With the chorus quiet, her elegant voice rang out. It was marked by perfect technique in breathing and enunciation. She sang with near perfection.

As the final note faded into silence, the entire orchestra expected to see Reichel's nod of approval. But instead, he stepped down from the podium and made his way to the singer. With a look of sorrow, he said, "My daughter, you do not really know that your Redeemer lives, do you?" "Why, yes," she blushing replied. "Then sing it!" cried Reichel. "Tell it to me so that I will know, and all who hear you will know that you know the joy and power of it!" Turning to the orchestra, he motioned to begin again. This time the soloist sang the truth as she knew it in her own soul. Those listening wept under the powerful witness. —P R. V.

THEY WITNESS BEST WHO WITNESS WITH THEIR LIVES.

Acts 4:5-13 The Tree Frog

By M.R. De Haan

They saw the boldness of Peter and John ... And they realized that they had been with Jesus. —Acts 4:13

One summer as my wife and I sat on our porch, we were serenaded by a tree frog who had taken up residence in the dense vine climbing a nearby tree. We finally located him, but not until after a painstaking search, because his coloring blended in perfectly with the vine leaves. As we watched him, we remembered a little chameleon we had seen during a visit to Florida. Like the frog, it took on the color of its surroundings.

People often take on the “color” of their environment too. They can become like the people with whom they associate, whether good or bad.

In our Bible reading today, the religious leaders “saw the boldness of Peter and John” and “realized that they had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13). The disciples had become like Jesus because they had spent time with Him, listened to Him teach, walked and talked with Him, and followed His example.

We too will take on the character of Jesus when we spend time in fellowship with Him, listen to the Holy Spirit speak to us through the Word, obey His teachings, and walk and talk with Him throughout the day.

I wonder, can people tell that we have been spending time with Jesus?

Be like Jesus, this my song,

In the home and in the throng;

Be like Jesus, all day long!

I would be like Jesus. —Rowe

The more time we spend with Christ, the more we become like Christ.

Acts 4:5-13 Passionate Boldness

By Bill Crowder

When they saw the boldness of Peter and John, ... they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus. —Acts 4:13

A young man was preaching to the passersby in Hounslow, on the outskirts of London, England. Most ignored him, a few ridiculed, and several stopped to listen. But regardless of the reaction of the people, he was undeterred. With a strong voice and clear resolve, he poured out his heart—not with the words of an angry prophet, but with deep concern for the men and women on that street. His eyes, facial expressions, and tone of voice revealed an attitude of compassion, not condemnation. In it all, he boldly shared the love and grace of Jesus Christ.

In Acts 4, when the church was still new, Peter and John also boldly addressed the people of their generation. The response of the leaders of their day? “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus” (v.13). That boldness was not the fruit of ministerial training but of much time spent in the presence of the Master. As a result, they had become passionate about what concerned Christ—the eternal destiny of men and women.

That same passionate boldness was on the face of the young man in Hounslow. Do people see it in us?

Will you be bold in your witness

By giving lost sinners God’s Word?

Jesus will honor your service,

And sinners will surely be stirred. —Bosch

A Christian is an ambassador who speaks for the King of kings.

Acts 4:5-22 Without A Bumper Sticker

By Joanie Yoder

They saw the boldness of Peter and John ... And they realized that they had been with Jesus. —Acts 4:13

While driving in rush hour traffic one day, I found myself behind a car with a bumper sticker. It had a yellow smiley face on it with these words: Smile—Jesus Loves You.

Suddenly another car squeezed in front of the “smiley” car, forcing the driver to hit the brakes. With that, he shook his fist angrily, displaying anything but a smiley face. I felt ashamed, until I remembered my own impatience as a driver. The incident reminded me that our actions and reactions, more than the display of a sticker on our car, show whether we know the Lord Jesus.

Acts 4 tells us that Peter and John faced opposition from local rulers, elders, and scribes as they proclaimed the good news of Christ. But their reaction caused their opponents to start thinking. Even though Peter and John were not highly educated, the people marveled at their bold witness and realized that these two men had been with Jesus. There was no need for a bumper sticker on the apostles’ donkey—their words and deeds said it all.

Do you feel too untrained or timid to be a witness for God? If you’ll spend time getting to know Jesus intimately, He’ll empower you to impress others with Himself. You’ll have boldness—without a bumper sticker.

For me 'twas not the truth you taught,

To you so clear, to me so dim;

But when you came to me, you brought

A deeper sense of Him. —Clelland

Actions speak louder than bumper stickers.

Acts 4:12 No Other Name

By M.R. De Haan

Isaiah 9:1-7

There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. —Acts 4:12

The angel announced to Joseph, “You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins” (Mt. 1:21).

The name Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew word Joshua, which is a contraction of two words, Jehovah and Hoshea, which means “God the Savior” or “Savior God.”

This is His name. This is the name which is above every name, and the name of the only One who can save us. No one can take His place or approach God without Him.

We respect the names of the patriarchs of the Bible and the godly men and women of more recent history, but everyone will one day bow before Jesus (Phil. 2:9-11). Even His own mother acknowledged her need of a Savior (Lk. 1:47). Jesus alone is the mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5-6).

Yes, we honor godly men and women of the Bible. And we give due respect to those who throughout history have faithfully lived for Christ and proclaimed the gospel. But we are not to worship them or pray to them. Jesus alone is the One whose name means “Savior.” He is the Son of God, of whom Isaiah proclaimed, “His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (9:6).

My heart is stirred when'er I think of Jesus,

That blessed Name which sets the captive free;

The only Name through which I find salvation;

No name on earth has meant so much to me. —Eliason

© 1950 Alfred B. Smith

For time and eternity, Jesus is all we need.

Acts 4:12 READ: Acts 4:1-12

CHRISTIANS are divided into many different denominations. In heaven, however, such distinctions will be unknown. We'll agree on everything, and we will be there not because we belong to a particular group but because of our faith in Christ.

John Wesley, it has been said, had a dream in which he appeared at the gate of hell. He cried out,

"Are there any Presbyterians in there?"

"Yes," came the answer, "a great many."

"Any Church of England members?"

"Yes, lots of them."

"Any Baptists?"

"A large number."

"And, are there any Wesleyans?"

Again the answer came, "Yes, many of them."

Disappointed, especially at that last reply, Wesley next dreamed he was standing at the gate of heaven. He repeated the same questions. Each time he received the same troubling answer:

"No, not one!"

No Baptists, no Church of England members, no Presbyterians, and no Wesleyans!

"Who, then, is in heaven?" Wesley exclaimed.

"We know nothing here about the names you mentioned," came the reply.

"The only name that matters here is Christian. We are all Christians here."

No one is in heaven because of denominational affiliations—only because of a personal relationship with Christ. —RWD

Acts 4:12 Straight To Heaven

By Vernon C. Grounds

John 3:1-8

Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name ... by which we must be saved. —Acts 4:12

An old spiritual warns, "Everybody talkin' 'bout heaven ain't goin' there." Since heaven is God's dwelling place where His presence and glory are manifested in all their splendor, He has the sovereign right to determine who will be admitted and under what conditions. Any other beliefs about the how and why of admission into heaven are sadly mistaken.

Take, for example, the confidence expressed by a well-known actress. Questioned about her faith, she replied, "I pray. I read the Bible. It's the most beautiful book ever written. I should go to heaven; otherwise it's not nice. I haven't done anything wrong. My conscience is very clean. My soul is as white as those orchids over there, and I should go straight, straight to heaven."

God alone determines who goes straight to heaven. In the Bible, God's holy Word, He tells us that only those who have trusted in Jesus Christ as their personal Savior will be admitted. The apostle Peter said, "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Self-judgment regarding the purity of one's soul and one's heaven-deserving character is not the criterion. Only God's Word gives us the standard for admission.

I must needs go home by the way of the cross,

There's no other way but this;

I shall ne'er get sight of the gates of light,

If the way of the cross I miss. —Pounds

Christ believed is salvation received and heaven gained.

Acts 4:12 Nowhere Tickets

By Dave Branon

John 14:1-6

Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. —Acts 4:12

We kept getting tickets to nowhere. We had finished a missions trip to Jamaica and were trying to get home. However, our airline was having problems, and no matter what our tickets said, we couldn't leave Montego Bay. Over and over we heard, "Your flight has been canceled." Even though we had purchased our tickets in good faith, the airline could not back up its promise to transport us to the US. We had to stay an extra day before boarding a plane that could take us home.

Imagine thinking that you are headed for heaven, but discovering that your ticket is no good. It can happen. If you trust the wrong plan, you will get to the gate of eternity but be denied entrance into heaven to live with God forever.

The apostle Peter said there is salvation in no one else but Jesus (Acts 4:12). Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). The only ticket to heaven goes to those who have put their faith in Jesus Christ and His death on the cross as payment for their sin.

Some offer other ways. But those tickets are worthless. To make sure you're going to heaven, trust Jesus. He's the only way.

Lord, I know I'm a sinner and cannot save myself. I need You as my Savior. Thank You for dying in my place and rising again. I believe in You. Please forgive my sin. I want to live with You in heaven someday.

Jesus took my place on the cross and gave me a place in heaven.

Acts 4:12 Two Ways To God?

By Haddon W. Robinson

John 14:1-6

I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. —John 14:6

In the marketplace of ideas, all vendors have an equal right to sell what they believe. But that doesn't mean all their ideas are equally right.

Christians proclaim that Jesus is the only way to God not because they are bigots but because they believe it is true. They take at face value His claim that He alone is the true and living way to God.

Many people shrug off the claims of Jesus as the only Savior of the world by saying, "Well, that's all fine and good, but you have your way to God and I have mine." Jesus stood such thinking on its head when He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (Jn. 14:6).

If Jesus' claims are true, they are true for everyone. If they are false, the sooner we are proved wrong and put on the right road the better. As C. S. Lewis put it, "Christianity is a statement which, if false, is of no importance, and, if true, is of infinite importance. The one thing it cannot be is moderately important."

There are no two ways about it. Jesus doesn't ask for our vote as the most appealing candidate for Savior of the world. He simply states His lordship of the universe and demands our allegiance. Does He have yours?

THINKING IT OVER

What did Peter say about Jesus in Acts 4:12?

What did John the Baptist say about Jesus? (Jn. 1:29).

What did Jesus say about Himself? (Jn. 14:6).

Christ is the only door into heaven.

Acts 4:12 Running For Nothing

By Dave Branon

Romans 4:4-17

Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. —Acts 4:12

As my friend Roger Weber started the 2006 Chicago Marathon, he noticed something on the ground. It was a runner's chip—the device each runner puts on his or her shoe to record progress at various timing stations during the race. Apparently, one poor runner would be traversing the next 26.2 miles on foot with nothing to show for it.

Officially, that runner did not run the race. There would be no record of his participation. Even if he had finished the race in record time, it wouldn't have mattered. The folks who organize the race set the rules, and no matter how well someone runs, if the officials say the runner doesn't qualify, that's the way it is.

In one sense, that's also the way it is with all of us. We can run what appears to be a good race by doing good things for others and obeying lots of rules. But when we arrive at the final checkpoint—heaven—and haven't made sure our name is recorded in the Lamb's Book of Life by putting our faith in Jesus as our Savior, we're disqualified to enter.

Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). Are you trusting in Jesus? If not, you're running for nothing.

It's not what I achieve that qualifies,

It matters not if I gain wealth or fame;

The only thing I must be certain of

Is "Have I put my trust in Jesus' name?" —Hess

If we could earn our salvation, Christ would not have died to provide it.

Acts 4:1-13 The Source Of Impact

By Bill Crowder

When they saw the boldness of Peter and John ... they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus. —Acts 4:13

The Nobel Prize is awarded annually to people in a variety of fields who have made an extraordinary impact. Leaders in economics, physics, literature, medicine, and peace are recognized for their contributions. When a person is acknowledged with a Nobel Prize, it is the ultimate affirmation of years of training, effort, education, and sacrifice in pursuit of excellence—investments that are the source of their impact.

We might wish to make a significant impact spiritually in our world, but we wonder, What is the source of spiritual and ministry influence? If we want to make an extraordinary impact for Jesus Christ, what must we invest in?

Christ's first followers were impacted from spending time with Jesus. Israel's religious leaders recognized this. Acts 4:13 tells us, "When [the leaders] saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus."

Training and education are valuable in the service of the Savior, but nothing can replace time spent in His presence. He is the source of whatever spiritual impact we might have on our world. How much time have you been spending with Jesus—your source of impact?

In the secret of His presence

How my soul delights to hide!

Oh, how precious are the lessons

Which I learn at Jesus' side! —Goreh

To master this life, spend time with the Master.

ACTS 4:13

READ: Acts 4:13-31

STEVIE brought home a paper from kindergarten that was not up to his usual stellar performance—he had failed to color the picture completely. Mom talked to him and explained how important it is to do his schoolwork well. Then, expecting a promise of better things, she asked, "So, what are you going to do about it tomorrow?" "I'm going to stay home!" he replied.

Maybe you've been criticized for something you said or did. Perhaps you've taken on a project that didn't go as planned. Maybe you've gotten involved in a relationship that fell apart. When a new opportunity comes along that might put you in a situation similar to one in which you've not been successful, what do you do? Do you try to improve on your record, or do you run away from it like Stevie wanted to do?

Giving up is always the easy way out of difficulty, but eventually we all need to learn what Peter learned. Just before Jesus was crucified, Peter denied that he was one of Christ's disciples (John 18:15-18). But the story doesn't end with this failure. Later, Jesus encouraged Peter to serve Him, and what happened to Peter? The early chapters of Acts tell us that he was leading the early church and boldly proclaiming the Gospel. Peter had learned how to build on failure, not get buried in its rubble.--JDB

Thank You, Lord, that Your game plan includes restoration. May I never get so discouraged with myself for failing that I stop trying to succeed. And may I never get so proud of my successes that I think I can never fail.

Acts 4:13-31 When People Pray

By Herbert Vander Lugt

When they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken. —Acts 4:31

Peter and John were in danger. The religious leaders in Jerusalem opposing the gospel had warned them to cease their missionary efforts (Acts 4:18). When the apostles reported this to the other believers, they immediately held a prayer meeting.

What happened next is thrilling. The believers first praised God. Then they asked for boldness that they might continue the work. The results were dramatic. The house shook, and the believers were filled with the Spirit. They boldly witnessed (vv.31,33), and enjoyed spiritual unity (v.32). They gave unselfishly to those in need (vv.32,34-37).

I have never felt a building shake at a prayer meeting, but I have seen God's power at work. When I've tried to help repair a broken marriage or a divided church, I've asked those involved to pray. Sometimes they refused. Other times they mumbled carefully worded prayers. The meeting failed.

But occasionally someone would pray in earnest. Almost immediately the atmosphere would change. Confession and forgiveness soon replaced charges and countercharges.

When we pray sincerely, praising God and presenting Him with petitions that seek His glory, great things happen. But first we must pray from the heart.

Dissension's fuse is easy to ignite—

It fuels our anger, yet it dims the light;

Help us, we pray, humbly to seek Your Name,

And in pride's place restore Your Spirit's flame. —Gustafson

Our intercession may be the key to God's intervention.

Acts 4:23-31 When People Pray

By Herbert Vander Lugt

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It fuels our anger, yet it dims the light;

Help us, we pray, to humbly seek Your Name,

And in pride's place restore the Spirit's flame. —TLG

Sincere intercession is the key to God's intervention.

Acts 4:32 - WHO WILL DO THE WORK?

Those who believed were of one heart and one soul.--Acts 4:32

The following letter, which speaks for itself, was circulated in a large congregation.

Dear Friend:

Our church membership... 1400

Nonresident members... 75

Balance left to do the work... 1325

Elderly who've done their share... 25

Balance left to do the work... 1300

Sick and shut-ins... 25

Balance left to do the work... 1275

Members who do not give... 350

Christmas and Easters members... 300

Balance to do the work...

Members who are overworked... 300

Balance left to do the work... 325

Members with alibis... 200

Balance left to do the work... 125

Members too busy with other things... 123

Balance left to do the work... 2

Just you and me, friend, and you had better get busy, because it's too much for me!

The historian Luke said the members of the first-century church were of one mind, they cared for each other, and God was working among them. He will work in our church too if we will let His Spirit work through us. - Haddon W. Robinson

The church is made up of just two kinds of folk;

No matter how you and I view it --

The ones who just talk about what should be done,

And those who get busy and do it. — Anon

ACTS 4:32-37

You are His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you (1 Peter 2:9).

As newsman Clarence W. Hall followed American troops through Okinawa in 1945, he and his jeep driver came upon a small town that stood out as a beautiful example of a Christian community. He wrote, "We had seen other Okinawan villages, ... down at the heels and despairing; by contrast, this one shone like a diamond in a dung heap. Everywhere we were greeted by smiles and dignified bows. Proudly the old men showed us their spotless homes, their terraced fields, ... their storehouses and granaries, their prized sugar mill."

Hall saw no jails and no drunkenness, and divorce was unknown. He learned an American missionary had come there thirty years earlier. While he was in the village, he had led two elderly townspeople to Christ and left them with a Japanese Bible. These new believers studied the Scriptures and started leading their fellow villagers to Jesus. Hall's jeep driver said he was amazed at the difference between this village and the others around it. He remarked, "So this is what comes out of only a Bible and a couple of old guys who wanted to live like Jesus."

The great power of God's Word leads to salvation through faith in Christ, creating a "special people," a community of believers who love one another, exhort one another, and serve God together. We need to pray that our churches will be an example of God's power to a watching world. —H.V.L.

The world at its worst needs the church at its best.

Acts 4:32-37 Will Work For Friends

By Anne Cetas

Nor was there anyone among them who lacked. —Acts 4:34

Six friends have formed a home-repair club in Minneapolis, Minnesota. They meet one Saturday each month at one of their homes to work on projects that cannot be tackled alone. Having helped one another for 20 years, they say they're now bonded together like one big family. A similar group has formed in Snohomish, Washington. Their motto is: "Will Work For Friends."

The concern of these groups for their friends reminds me of the early church (Acts 4:32-37). During this time of great persecution of believers, they especially needed the support of one another. Some people voluntarily sold their lands or houses and brought the proceeds to the apostles, and "they distributed to each as anyone had need" (v.35). They were of "one heart" and "had all things in common" (v.32).

As followers of Christ today, we too need the spiritual support and encouragement of one another. We may be struggling with a decision about how to serve the Lord, or concerned about a problem at work, or unsure of how to discipline a rebellious child. These are good opportunities to enlist the advice and prayer of fellow Christians.

Through love, let's serve one another—physically and spiritually—in the family of God (Gal. 5:13).

Be not weary in your serving;

Do your best for those in need;

Kindnesses will be rewarded

By the Lord who prompts the deed. —Anon.

Christians stand strong when they stand together.

Acts 4:33

With great power the apostles gave witness . . . and great grace was upon them all. Acts 4:33

A musician was walking down the street with a friend when they heard an organ grinder playing a familiar tune. They stopped to listen for a moment, but then the musician hurried away, saying, "That sound drives me crazy"

A few weeks later, these same men went to hear a great orchestra. At the close of a certain piece, the musician stood to his feet, cheering wildly and waving his program. The friend smiled. The tune was the same one that was played by the organ grinder on the street.

There's a world of difference between the grand symphony of the Christian faith lived out prayerfully in the energy of the Holy Spirit and a profession of faith lived out meekly in the energy of the flesh. When people can see the touch of God in a person's life, they are attracted to the Christian faith. That's why the first-century believers had such an influence on their world. We represent the same Savior, but do our lives have the same impact?—H. V L.

IF WE HIDE OUR SHINING LIGHT, HOW WILL OTHERS BE GUIDED IN SIN'S NIGHT?

ACTS 5

Acts 5:1-11 Poor Trade-Offs

By Dave Branon

He who sows to his flesh will ... reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will ... reap everlasting life. —Galatians 6:8

Life is full of trade-offs. Today's poor choices are a down payment on tomorrow's problems. It's all a part of living with the law of God that says we reap what we sow (Gal. 6:7).

That was true of a 30-year-old Mississippi resident. A conviction for felony drunk driving resulted in his getting a 15-year prison sentence. The judge then suspended 14 years of the sentence if the man would honor the terms of a 1-year house arrest.

The trade-off was simple: Stay home and out of trouble for 1 year instead of going to prison for 15. But the man didn't like being cooped up, so he went fishing—driving with a suspended license to get there. He was arrested and the judge threw him in prison. The fishing trip cost him many years of freedom.

What bad trade-offs do we make? Do we reject God's mercy so we can enjoy sin's season of pleasure? In the Bible, we see some examples. Moses traded the Promised Land for an outburst of anger (Num. 20:7-13). David traded his reputation for a night of passion (2 Sam. 11). Ananias and Sapphira traded life for some extra money (Acts 5:1-11).

Are you facing temptation today? Don't give in. Cling to Jesus. Obey His commands. Never exchange fellowship with Him for anything. It's always a poor trade-off.

It's wise to flee when tempted—

A fool is one who'd stay;

For those who toy with evil

Soon learn it doesn't pay. —DJD

In the heat of temptation, don't lose your cool.

Acts 5:1-11 Be Safe—Not Sorry!

By Mart De Haan

Do not quench the Spirit. —1 Thessalonians 5:19

Two young women lost their lives in a fire that swept through their apartment as they slept. Their home was equipped with a smoke detector that was in good working order, but it hadn't gone off. Why? Fire inspectors concluded that the device had been deactivated for a party the night before. The unit had been disconnected to keep it from sounding off because of the smoke from cooking and candles.

In Acts 5 we have another example of two people who apparently deactivated an alarm system that could have saved their lives. Ananias and Sapphira must have quenched the Holy Spirit by turning a deaf ear to their consciences, believing they had plenty of good reasons for doing what they did. But their action cost them their lives.

We need to realize that the Holy Spirit was not given to annoy us like a sensitive smoke detector. He doesn't sound false alarms. When He activates our conscience by bringing to mind a principle or warning from God's Word, it is really His love and wisdom in action.

By weighing the warnings of His love against the cost of our foolishness, we'll soon realize that it's always better to be safe than

sorry. —MRD II

Our conscience is a gift from God,

It is a guiding light;

And when aligned with God's true Word,

It shows us what is right. —Sper

To ignore your conscience is to invite trouble.

Acts 5:1-11 Don't Break Community

By Haddon W. Robinson

Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. —Romans 12:9

The story of Ananias and Sapphira is a depressing chord that disrupts an upbeat account of the young church in action. Thousands of converts had trusted Christ. They were worshiping together and cared deeply for one another.

One member, Barnabas, sold some valuable acreage and gave all the proceeds to meet some pressing church needs. Ananias took his lead from Barnabas and decided that he too would make an impressive gift. But he was only seeking attention. He and his wife pretended to give everything, but they gave only a portion.

They got noticed—they both dropped dead in front of everybody! Taking the offering was never the same after that. Luke tells us that “great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things” (Acts 5:11).

Ananias and Sapphira lied to God by trying to deceive the congregation, which disrupted the sense of church community. To live in community demands that we live with integrity. That's why God took such drastic action.

When we join a church, we become part of other people's lives. Our love for them should be without hypocrisy. That glorifies God and benefits everybody. We are to take our involvement in church as seriously as God does.

We join our hearts and hands together,

Faithful to the Lord's command;

We hold each other to God's standards—

All that truth and love demand. —DJD

To keep harmony in the church, keep in tune with Christ.

Acts 5:1-11 How Honest Are You?

By Anne Cetas

Those who deal truthfully are [God's] delight. —Proverbs 12:22

Woman's Day magazine surveyed more than 2,000 people to check out their honesty level. When asked, “How honest are you?” 48 percent said very honest, 50 percent said somewhat honest, and the other 2 percent said not very honest.

Sixty-eight percent of respondents confessed that they had taken office supplies from their job for personal use. And 40 percent admitted that they would cheat on their taxes if they knew they wouldn't get caught.

Ananias and Sapphira must have thought they could get away with lying (Acts 5:1-11). But they quickly found out differently when Peter confronted them and told them that they had lied to the Holy Spirit. Immediately they were struck dead (vv.5,10).

The Lord's desire was to keep His new church pure so He could use the believers in the lives of others. As Bible teacher G. Campbell Morgan says, “The church pure is the church powerful... The only power [able to make] a church pure is that of the indwelling Spirit of God.” The purity of the church led to their testimony spreading, and “believers were increasingly added to the Lord” (v.14).

Let's be the kind of people who “deal truthfully” (Prov. 12:22) so we can be used by the Lord.

Lord, by Your Spirit grant that we

In word and deed may honest be;

All falsehood we would cast aside,

From You, O Lord, we cannot hide. —D. De Haan

There are no degrees of honesty.

Acts 5:1-11 Closing The Gaps

By Marvin Williams

Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God. —Acts 5:4

After the final episode of the 2002 TV program *Survivor: Africa*, a wrap-up special focused on the final contestants. The show's host Jeff Probst said that the victor won "mostly by sticking with his principles." The champion later explained that he wanted to win while retaining "dignity and self-respect." He elaborated that you don't have to lie, cheat, or do underhanded things to win. You can be competitive, yet still be truthful and nice. In short, he permitted no discrepancy between image and reality.

In the book of Acts we read about Ananias and Sapphira, who did have a gap between what they wanted to be known for and who they really were (5:1-11). Satan filled their hearts with a deceptive plan. They sold a piece of property and brought just a portion of the money to the apostles, while pretending they were giving all the proceeds. They wanted to be recognized as a generous couple, but they were not what they appeared to be. This gap caused them to lie to the Holy Spirit and to the faith community. They paid a terrible price—death. Their example stands as a stark warning to us all.

What discrepancies have we permitted in our lives? We must confess them and close the gaps.

Lord, by Your Spirit grant that we

May live with such integrity

That when we simply give our word

No one will doubt what has been heard. —D. De Haan

Integrity means never having to look over your shoulder.

Acts 5:1-11 Nobody Can Keep A Secret From God

By Vernon C. Grounds

Cleanse me from secret faults. —Psalm 19:12

Washington, D.C., is full of secrets. Some say as many as 3 billion! But not all of them are legitimate secrets that safeguard national security. Many are documents concerning hazardous medical experiments made years ago on human subjects without their knowledge or consent. Others are contracts and bills that civilian manufacturers, often guilty of excessive overcharges, labeled "confidential." But now, under a new policy inaugurated by the Department of Energy, "a pyramid-like tomb of classified documents" is being systematically exposed to public scrutiny. As a result, many people and companies are being sued.

Life, like Washington, is full of secrets. Most secrets are trivial and unimportant. Some, however, are evil and tragic, as illustrated in today's Bible reading. What about secret sins? We may be able to hide them successfully from people, yet on God's timetable a day is scheduled when He who "knows the secrets of the heart" (Ps. 44:21) "will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing" (Eccl. 12:14).

Bring those secrets out in the open. Confess your sins now and claim the complete cleansing that is promised through the Savior's sacrifice (1 Jn. 1:9).

You cannot hide your sin from God,

He knows what's in your heart;

Confession is the quickest way

To make a brand-new start. —Sper

Our secret sins are open scandal to God.

Acts 5:1-11 Restoring Integrity

By Dennis J. De Haan

You have not lied to men but to God. —Acts 5:4

One sunny day, four high school boys couldn't resist the temptation to skip classes. The next morning they explained to a teacher that they had missed her class because their car had a flat tire. To their relief, she smiled and said, "Well, you missed a quiz yesterday, so take your seats and get out a pencil and paper." She waited as they sat down and got ready for the quiz. Then she said, "First question: Which tire was flat?"

No one can get away with lying. In Acts 5, Ananias and Sapphira thought they were lying only to Peter and the other believers. But the apostle said to them, "You have not lied to men but to God."

Truth is an attribute of God. When we lie, we offend Him. And sooner or later He will uncover every falsehood—if not in this life, then at the judgment (Rom. 14:10-12).

We live in a highly competitive world, and sometimes we may be strongly tempted to shade the truth to get ahead. But the short-term gains from lying are worth little compared with the long-term benefits of telling the truth.

If you have deceived someone, confess it to that person and to the Lord. It may be humbling, but it is the first step to restore integrity in your life.

The road that leads to misery

Is caused by a tongue that wags;

Beware of lying lips, my friend,

And a mouth that boasts and brags. —Shade

To avoid lying, do nothing that needs to be covered up.

Acts 5:1-11 Complete Honesty

By Albert Lee

Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God. —Acts 5:4

Ask the friends and families of six people buried in a collapsed subway tunnel about complete honesty. Their loved ones' rescue was delayed for hours when the contractor didn't report the disaster to the authorities immediately. Instead, the company sealed the site and confiscated cell phones. It wasn't an outright lie, but it was a cover-up. This dishonest act showed disregard for life.

In the book of Acts, God gave us a sobering example of how He views dishonesty (4:32–5:11). Some believers had sold their land and shared all the proceeds with the church. Ananias and Sapphira decided to do likewise. But the couple kept some money back despite declaring that they had given the whole amount. Expecting commendation, they were struck dead instead.

Was their punishment too harsh? After all, their "slight" lie wasn't life-threatening. "Whoever falsely boasts of giving is like clouds and wind without rain," warns Proverbs 25:14. The apostle Peter asked Ananias, "Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?" (Acts 5:3), adding, "You have not lied to men, but to God" (v.4).

If we are completely honest with ourselves, can we say that we are completely honest before God

Lord, by Your Spirit grant that we

In word and deed may honest be;

All falsehood we would cast aside—

From You, O Lord, we cannot hide. —D. De Haan

There are no degrees of honesty.

Acts 5:1-11 Which Tire Was It?

By Dennis J. De Haan

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One sunny day, four high school boys couldn't resist the temptation to skip classes. The next morning they explained to their teacher that they had missed her class because their car had a flat tire. To their relief, she smiled and said, "Well, you missed a quiz yesterday." But then she added, "Take your seats and get out a pencil and paper. The first question is: Which tire was flat?"

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Truth is one of the attributes of God. So when we tell a lie, we offend Him. And sooner or later He will uncover every falsehood—if not in this life, then at the final judgment, when we each give an account of ourselves to God (Romans 14:10-12).

We live in a highly competitive world, and sometimes we may be strongly tempted to shade the truth to get ahead. But the short-term gains from lying are worth little compared with the long-term benefits of telling the truth.

If you have deceived someone, confess it to that person and to the Lord. It may be humbling, but it's the first step to restoring integrity in your life.

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Is caused by a tongue that wags;

Beware of lying lips, my friend,

And a mouth that boasts and brags. —Shade

If you always tell the truth, you will never be trapped in a lie.

ACTS 5:15 READ: Acts 5:12-16

IT wasn't like Scott Kregel to give up. He was a battler, a dedicated athlete who spent hour after hour perfecting his free throw and jump shot during the hot summer months. But just before fall practice everything changed. A car accident left Scott in a coma for several days. When he awoke, a long rehabilitation process lay ahead. Like most patients with closed-head injuries, Scott balked at the slow, tedious work required to get him back to normal—things such as stringing beads.

Tom Martin, Scott's basketball coach at the Christian school he attended, had an idea. Coach Martin told Scott that he would reserve a spot on the varsity for him—if he would cooperate with his therapist and show progress in the tasks he was asked to do. And Tom's wife, Cindy, spent many hours with Scott, encouraging him to keep going. Within two months, Scott was riding off the basketball court on his teammates' shoulders. He had made nine straight free throws to clinch a triple-overtime league victory. It was a remarkable testimony of the power of encouragement.

Encouraging others is a good way to glorify God. We cannot begin to imagine the miracles God can work when we are willing to help someone in need. —JDB

Lord, I offer You my life today to use in a way that will encourage one of Your children. Make me aware of someone who needs a little kindness.

Acts 5:17-32 Our Great Deliverer

By David C. Egner

An angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought [the apostles] out. —Acts 5:19

Margaret Nikol was born into a pastor's family in Bulgaria. Her mother and father were murdered for their faith by the communists in the 1960s. Margaret was a brilliant violinist, and in spite of opposition she got an excellent education. She achieved fame throughout Europe and became concertmaster of the Dresden Symphony. But because of her faith in Christ, she was subjected to physical and emotional cruelty. Eventually, she was given a prison sentence—to begin as soon as the concert season was over.

But God had other plans. Margaret was invited to play in Vienna at an Easter concert in 1982. The communists repeatedly denied permission, but finally, because of outside pressure, they relented. "God was faster than they were," testifies Margaret. In Vienna she requested political asylum, and no less than five free nations offered it! Today, Margaret Nikol travels all over the world in behalf of a growing ministry in Bulgaria.

The same God who delivered Margaret from communist oppression, and who sent an angel to free the apostles from prison (Acts

5:19), can also rescue us from whatever is holding us captive—physically or spiritually. We must never give up hope! God is our great deliverer.

Our God can still a raging storm

One word can calm an angry sea;

So when we put our trust in Him,

He breaks our chains and sets us free. —Sper

The God who holds the universe is the God who is holding you.

Acts 5:17-29 Legal Versus Right

By Bill Crowder

Peter and the other apostles answered and said: “We ought to obey God rather than men.” —Acts 5:29

In his powerful book *Unspeakable*, Os Guinness wrestles with the problem of evil in the world. In one section, he focuses on the Nuremberg trials that followed World War II. The Nazis stood charged with crimes against humanity, and their mantra of defense was simple: “I was merely following orders.” The verdict, however, was that the soldiers had a moral obligation to defy orders that, though legal, were clearly wrong.

In a much different context, Peter and the disciples were arrested for presenting the message of the risen Christ and brought before the religious rulers in Jerusalem. Rather than allowing themselves to be shaped by the mood of the mob, the disciples declared their intention to continue preaching Christ.

The orders of the religious establishment may have been legal, but they were wrong. When the disciples chose to obey God rather than the godless religious leaders, they raised a standard of conviction that rose above the opinions of the rulers of this world.

The trials we face may test our commitment. But we will find opportunities to exalt the King if we trust Him for the strength to go beyond the words of the crowd-pleasers and do right as He defines it in His Word.

Say not, “The days are evil. Who’s to blame?”

And fold the hand and acquiesce—oh, shame!

Stand up, speak out, and bravely, in God’s name,

Be strong! —Babcock

We must choose daily the way of the cross over the way of the crowd. —Warren

Acts 5:19

It is God who arms me with strength, and makes my way perfect. Ps 18:32

Margaret Nikol was born into a pastor’s family in Bulgaria. Her mother and father were murdered for their faith by the communists in the 1960s. Margaret was a brilliant violinist, and in spite of opposition she got an excellent education. She achieved fame throughout Europe and became concertmaster of the Dresden Symphony. But because of her faith in Christ, she was subjected to physical and emotional cruelty. Eventually, she was given a prison sentence—to begin as soon as the concert season was over. But God had other plans, and Margaret was invited to play in Vienna at an Easter concert in 1982. The communists repeatedly denied permission, but finally, because of outside pressure, they relented. “God was faster than they were,” testifies Margaret. In Vienna she requested political asylum, and no less than five free nations offered it!

The same God who delivered Margaret from communist oppression, and who sent an angel to free the apostles from prison (Acts 5:19), can also rescue us from whatever is holding us captive—physically or spiritually. We must never give up hope! God is our great deliverer. —D. C. E.

THE GOD WHO HOLDS THE UNIVERSE IS THE GOD WHO IS HOLDING YOU.

Acts 5:29 Would I Step On Jesus?

By David C. Egner

Read: Matthew 26:69-75

Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men.. —Acts 5:29

Twenty-six people died because they would not step on a picture of Jesus. In the 17th century some Christians were faithfully serving Jesus on an island in Japan. According to missionary Tim Johnson, a provincial leader, called a shogun, decided that these believers were a threat to the traditional culture, so he devised a fiendish trap. He placed a picture of Jesus on the street and demanded that the Christians in his province step on the picture in renunciation of their faith. When the test was finished, 26 people had refused. They were crucified at the water's edge for all to see.

It's sobering to realize that the apostle Peter, when questioned about his loyalty, denied that he was a disciple of Jesus (Mt. 26:69-75). But it was that same Peter who deeply regretted his choice and gave the rest of his life in bold witness for Christ.

Every day we are confronted with situations or decisions that tempt us to betray the Lord by choosing the world, the flesh, or the devil instead of obeying Him. We need His help to keep from denying Him by acts of sin or disobedience.

May the resolve of our heart be that we will never betray our Lord. Instead, may we be determined to boldly and unashamedly tell others of our love for Him.

Jesus is all the world to me,

And true to Him I'll be;

O how could I this Friend deny,

When He's so true to me? —Thompson

To keep from denying Christ, you must rely on Christ.

Acts 5:28-29 Two Kingdoms

By Marvin Williams

Read: Matthew 22:15-22

Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. —Matthew 22:21

In a report in USA Today, Rick Hampson wrote: "The young generally don't have the old-time political religion. They look at voting and see a quaint, irrational act." One graduate was quoted as saying, "I don't care enough to care about why I don't care." I wonder if this is how we as Jesus-followers sometimes view our civic responsibility!

The insights of Jesus in Matthew 22 helped His followers think clearly about their civic duty in the world. The Jews were required to pay taxes to the Roman government. They hated this taxation because the money went directly into Caesar's treasury, where some of it supported the pagan temples and decadent lifestyle of the Roman aristocracy. They may have questioned whether they even had a civic responsibility to Caesar. Jesus reminded them, however, that they had dual citizenship. They lived in a world with two kingdoms—Caesar's kingdom (human authority) and God's kingdom (spiritual authority). They had responsibilities to both, but their greater responsibility was to God and His kingdom (Acts 5:28-29).

As followers of Christ, we are commanded to cooperate with our rulers, but we are called to give God our ultimate obedience and commitment.

We live today as citizens of two worlds,

And this demands a duty to fulfill;

But greater far should be our heart's desire

To honor Christ and always do His will. —Hess

Government has authority, but God has ultimate authority.

Acts 5:31-42 Message For All Seasons

By Joanie Yoder

Lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! —John 4:35

I'm a novice at growing flowers. But I've learned to appreciate the difference between annuals and perennials. Every spring I usually buy trays of annual bedding plants. Once in the ground, they immediately take root. Their brief life always ends with the autumn frosts, and the soil lies barren until my next annual spring planting. I prefer to plant perennial flowers. They go on living from year to year, and regularly bloom, flower, and reproduce.

Writer Eugene Harrison describes the evangelistic efforts of New Testament believers as "perennial" in nature. They didn't pour all their energies into once-a-year evangelistic efforts. Instead, according to Harrison, sharing the good news of Christ was "the supreme concern of every believer, every day in the year, in every place." In Acts 5:42 and 8:4, the scope of their witness is clear: They shared Christ and the gospel in the temple, in their homes, and in the marketplace, using the Spirit-given methods of preaching, teaching, and personal testimony.

Jesus taught that the season for spiritual harvest is always today (John 4:35). And the apostle Paul said that "now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2).

Be assured, there's never a time when the harvest is out of season. The fields are white today.

Help us, Lord, to be a lifeline

To a dying world today,

Bringing hope to hopeless people

As we share salvation's way. —Sper

Witnessing for Christ is never out of season.

Acts 5:33-42 Bridges Of Grace

By Mart De Haan

They departed ... , rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. —Acts 5:41

Imagine for a moment that you are driving through the desert in Southern California and you see the magnificent Golden Gate Bridge spanning the dried-up bed of "Three Frogs Creek" on the outskirts of "Turtle Soup Junction." What a ridiculous sight that would be!

So too, the Lord never displays His power and grace at an inappropriate time or place, but He always provides according to the difficulty of the hour. He does not impart strength until it is needed.

We shudder when we think of what some of God's children are enduring because of their faithfulness to the Savior. Many have chosen the path of intense suffering rather than following the line of least resistance. I wonder, would we do the same?

Of course, the Lord does not ask us to make such a commitment before it is necessary. And we can be sure that when we "suffer for His sake" (Philippians 1:29), He will provide whatever we need to endure the pain.

As servants of Christ, we can take one step at a time and be confident that whether we come to a dried-up gulch or a surging river, the Lord's bridges of grace will be just right to allow us safe passage to the other side.

Each day God sends His loving aid

To strengthen you and me;

We need to use today's supply

And let tomorrow be. —Anon.

God gives enough grace for each trial we face.

Acts 5:41

In ancient Rome, crowds by the tens of thousands would gather in the Coliseum to watch as Christians were torn apart by wild animals. Paul Rader, commenting on his visit to this famous landmark, said,

"I stood uncovered to the heavens above, where He sits for whom they gladly died, and asked myself, 'Would I, could I, die for Him tonight to get this gospel to the ends of the earth?'"

Rader continued,

"I prayed most fervently in that Roman arena for the spirit of a martyr, and for the working of the Holy Spirit in my heart, as He worked in Paul's heart when He brought him on his handcuffed way to Rome."

Those early Christians

"lied on the threshold of heaven, within a heartbeat of home, no possessions to hold them back."

Acts 5:42 ADVERTISING THE GOSPEL

And daily ... they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.

According to a recent newspaper article the ten top advertisers in the United States spent more than \$1.3 billion in one year alone for the promotion of their products. How much more is spent annually by thousands of other firms I don't know, but the total must reach astronomical proportions.

Webster's New American Dictionary defines the word "advertise" as follows: "To make public by a printed notice, broad-cast message, or any means of publicity. To give warning or information." As believers-we too have an obligation to "advertise." It is our duty to "make public" the good news of God's Word by every means available. Jesus said, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."

J. I. Rodale, in his book *The Synonym Finder*, gives the following substitutes for the word "advertise": "To make a public announcement of, to circulate, post, blazon, propagate, disseminate, trumpet, proclaim, or make known." This is what we should do with the message of God's saving grace. To send forth the Gospel is "advertising" in the best sense of the word without any of its distasteful connotations.

When we consider the tremendous effort and huge expenditures being made today to promote the material things of this world, with their temporary worth and shallow satisfaction, how much more diligent we should be in "telling the story of Jesus"! Let's not be stingy in the work of "advertising" the Gospel!

Tell it out among the highways and the lanes at home; Let it ring across the mountains and the ocean's foam! Like the sound of many waters let our glad shout be, Till it echoes and re-echoes from the islands of the sea!

— Havergal

It is a solemn responsibility to have in one's possession a reprieve for men under condemnation and then not to deliver it!

ACTS 6

Acts 6:1-10 Life-Giving Rain

By David C. McCasland

They were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke. —Acts 6:10

During the August heat of 1891, R. G. Dyrenforth arrived in Midland, Texas, determined to blast rain from the sky. Known as a "concussionist," he and his team launched and detonated huge balloons filled with explosive gases, fired cannons, and exploded piles of dynamite on the ground—shaking both earth and sky. Some believed he made it rain a little, but most said all he caused was noise. The explosive power was impressive but ineffective.

When the early church needed overseers, they sought people with a different kind of power. They chose "seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom" (Acts 6:3) to manage the daily distribution of food. One of those was Stephen, a man "full of faith and power, [who] did great wonders and signs among the people" (v.8). When disputes arose, those who argued with Stephen "were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke" (v.10).

The Bible makes it clear that Stephen's spiritual effectiveness came from being filled with the Holy Spirit, who gave him the right balance of faith, wisdom, and power.

God's Spirit in our lives today replaces the loud noise of self-interest with His gentle, life-giving rain.

Holy Spirit, I want my life to be marked

by Your power. May my words and actions

give life-giving rain to encourage others

to know You and trust You.

In our life for Christ we accomplish nothing without the power of the Spirit.

Insight

Today's text not only highlights the source of the power with which the Christian works—the Holy Spirit (v.5)—but also our responsibility in relation to that power—faith (vv.5,8). Stephen was a man known to be full of both.

Acts 6 Enemy Tactics

We are not ignorant of [Satan's] devices. --2 Corinthians 2:11

Satan uses many methods to hinder the work of the Lord. Chapters 6 through 8 of Acts contain three illustrations of how he does his evil work through people and circumstances.

1. Satan creates dissension within the church. "In those days ... there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists" (Acts 6:1). When a church becomes known for its bickering and backbiting, its witness in the community will be damaged.

2. The enemy tries to divert ministers and teachers from their main purpose of preaching the gospel. The apostles were feeling pressured to "leave the Word of God and serve tables" (6:2). Satan employs a similar tactic today by getting a pastor so involved in church programs that he has little time for prayer and the study of the Word.

3. In every age Satan seeks to destroy God's people. In Acts 7 and 8 we read that Stephen was martyred, and that Saul "made havoc of the church" (8:3).

We need to be aware of Satan's tactics and be on guard against his attacks. We don't want to be a cause of dissension and diversion in the church. Instead, let's prayerfully focus on Christ's purpose for our lives. --RWD

I want to live above the world,

Though Satan's darts at me are hurled;

For faith has caught the joyful sound,

The song of saints on higher ground. --Oatman

Know satan's strategy to avoid sin's tragedy

Acts 6 - DISSENSION—DIVERSION—DESTRUCTION

For we wrestle ... against spiritual wickedness in

high places. Ephesians 6:12

While I was enjoying a visit with Mr. H. Hildebrand, of the Briercrest Bible Institute, Caronport, Saskatchewan, he pointed out to me that the book of Acts, chapters 6, 7, and 8, suggests three ways by which the devil tries to hinder the work of the Lord. These three avenues of attack are: (1) dissension, (2) diversion, and (3) destruction.

Satan attempts to frustrate our efforts for the Lord by causing dissension and strife within the church. In verse 1 of Acts 6 we read: "And in those days ... there arose a murmuring." How often we have seen strong testimonies completely silenced because of dissension, murmuring, complaining, bickering, and backbiting on the part of some within the church. In addition to dissension, however, the evil one will also resort to diversion, sidetracking us from our main purpose. How he would like to have seen the twelve apostles in Acts 6 "leave the word of God and serve tables." The devil is busy at work using this very same tactic today. It is easy in our busy church programs to become side-tracked, diverted, and engaged in everything else but the ministry of the Word. In addition to dissension and diversion, the devil uses destruction. In chapter 7 we see Stephen martyred, and in chapter 8 we are told that Saul "made havoc of the church." But, even as the Psalmist declared: "The wrath of man shall praise thee," so Satan's destructive attack is taken by God Him-self and used for the accomplishing of His own program. As a result of the devil's persecution the believers "that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word."

Conscious of these three possible areas of attack, let us be on guard and prepared for the onslaughts of the adversary that the

"work of the ministry" be not hindered. Let us put on "the whole armour of God" that we "may be able to withstand in the evil day" (Eph. 6:13). And through it all remember, "the battle is not yours, but God's," and He it is who "goeth before you."

I want to live above the world,

Though Satan's darts at me are hurled;

For faith has caught the joyful sound,

The song of saints on higher ground!—J.Oatman, Jr.

Exercise your graces, or Satan will exercise your corruptions!

Acts 6:1-7 Good Listeners

By David C. Egner

Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak. —James 1:19

In his book *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, "The first service that one owes to others in the fellowship consists of listening to them. Just as love for God begins with listening to His Word, so the beginning of love for the brothers is learning to listen to them. It is [because of] God's love for us that He not only gives us His Word but also lends us His ear."

Listening was a key element in solving a problem between two ethnic groups in the infant church in Jerusalem (Acts 6:1-7). One group felt that their widows were being discriminated against in the distribution of food. So the apostles wisely listened to their complaint, worked out an acceptable solution, and settled the dispute.

Listening to others is also important today because our churches are becoming increasingly diverse. We come from broad ethnic and racial backgrounds and are at different levels of maturity. But if we show our love by listening, our common faith in Christ can bind us together.

Are we so driven to express our views or vent our feelings that we don't really hear what others have to say?

Lord, teach us how to love. Make us good listeners to others, as You are to us.

Be this our common enterprise:

That truth be preached and prayer arise,

That each may seek the other's good,

And live and love as Jesus would. —Brewster

Listening may be the most important thing you do today.

Acts 6:1-7

Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer understood the GERMAN importance of listening to one another. He wrote,

"The first service that one owes to others in the fellowship consists of listening to them. Just as love for God begins with listening to His Word, so the beginning of love for the brothers is learning to listen to them. It is [because of] God's love for us that He not only gives us His Word but also lends us His ear." (*Life Together*)

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When we are driven to express our views or vent our feelings, we fail to hear what others are trying to say. If, on the other hand, we follow Paul's admonition and esteem others better than our-selves (Philippians 2:3), we will improve our listening skills and reach a much higher level of love for one another.—DCE

Lord, when I am more interested in being heard than in hearing, I am in danger of causing division and strife in Your family and in

mine. May I learn to hear what others are feeling as well as what they are saying. And may I respond in love to their true need not just their spoken one.

Acts 6:1-15 Enemy Tactics

By Richard De Haan

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The song of saints on higher ground. —Oatman

Know satan's strategy to avoid sin's tragedy.

Acts 6:8, Acts 7:54-60 The Courage Of Conviction

By Haddon W. Robinson

Acts 7:54-60

Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. —Acts 6:8

Shortly before the American Civil War, a young lawyer from Vermont settled in Adams County, Pennsylvania. There he witnessed fugitive slaves escaping from bondage, so he devoted himself with all his powers to free those who were in slavery.

When the war broke out, Thaddeus Stephens was a powerful influence in the US government. But at his death years later, he was virtually alone. Written on his tombstone in an obscure cemetery are these words: "Finding that other cemeteries were restricted as to race by charter rights, I have chosen to lie in this humble spot, in order that I may testify, even in my death, to those principles which I have advocated through a long life."

In Acts 6 and 7, we read about a man of God named Stephen. He was full of faith, power, and conviction. He was brought before the Jewish ruling council on trumped-up charges and allowed to make a statement. It turned into a powerful indictment of the religious leaders. They despised him and his message, so they dragged him out of Jerusalem and stoned him. Stephen fell to his knees and prayed for his killers. The way he died spoke as eloquently as his sermon.

As followers of Christ, we must be people of conviction. How far are we willing to go for what we believe?

Convictions forged in pain and loss

Provide the strength that's needed

For those sold out to serving Christ,

Those who His call have heeded. —Sper

It is better by far to die for something than to live for nothing.

Acts 6:8-15; 7:54-60 Standing Ovation

By Jennifer Benson Schuldt

Look! I see ... the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God! —Acts 7:56

Susan Boyle spent most of her adult life living with her cat Pebbles, caring for her aging mother, and singing in church. She certainly didn't look like a musical superstar. That's probably why the audience laughed at this unassuming middle-aged woman before she performed in a talent show. Undeterred, Susan faced the unfriendly crowd, sang beautifully, and went on to receive a standing ovation.

Stephen was confronted by a hostile crowd in the days of the early church (Acts 6–7). A panel of religious authorities listened to lying witnesses accuse him of blasphemy (Acts 6:13). Stephen responded by speaking the truth of God's Word, which reinforced his faith in Christ. At the end of his speech, he said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" (7:56). Then the crowd stoned him (v.58). Jesus, who was watching from heaven, welcomed Stephen home.

Most Christians aren't confronted with this much hostility. Yet we all need to "stand fast in the Lord" when the pressure is on (Phil. 4:1). We can't let others silence our voice for Christ. Speaking up for Jesus does not always win the crowd's favor here on earth, but it does ensure His approval in heaven, where it matters the most.

Stand up, stand up for Jesus, the strife will not be long;

This day the noise of battle—the next the victor's song.

To him that overcometh a crown of life shall be:

He with the King of glory shall reign eternally. —Duffield

If you meet opposition, maybe it shows that you are doing something that counts.

Acts 6:8-15

when Moses came down from Mount Sinai .. the skin of his face shone Exodus 34:29

The late G. Campbell Morgan once told of a factory girl who, after she was saved, simply radiated Christian joy. One day while waiting for a train at York station she slowly walked up and down the platform to pass the time. A highly cultured lady, sitting nearby, observed her closely. Finally, impressed by her sweet face, she called to her, "Excuse me, Miss, but what makes you so happy?" The girl replied, "Was I looking happy? I didn't know it showed, but I certainly am. I'll be glad to tell you why!" She then witnessed to the woman concerning the wonders of salvation and the joy it brings to the heart, and eventually led her to a personal acceptance of Jesus Christ.

This girl wasn't trying to look happy. Her face just naturally reflected the joy of her soul. Moses also did not know his skin was shining with a celestial glow when he came down from the Mount. It glistened because he had been in close touch with God. The same was true of Stephen the day he laid down his life to become the first martyr of the Christian church (Acts 6:15). His face lit up with angelic glory because of his close relationship to Jesus Christ.

I am not much impressed when I see someone deliberately turn on a "Pepsodent smile" and assume a "happy" attitude in a Christian meeting. Unsaved people in the entertainment world have the ability "to put on a happy face," even when their hearts are full of pain and sorrow. What we need is such a glorious consciousness of the indwelling presence of the Lord that we will glow with spiritual health like Moses who "wist not that the skin of his face shone." This will give us a song in the darkest night, and joy in the midst of life's deepest trials. It will make us living demonstrations of the transforming power of the Savior.

You don't have to tell how you live each day, You don't have to say if you work or pray, A tried, true barometer serves in its place;

However you live, it will show in your face! —Anon.

The light of God's Son in your heart will put His sunshine on your face! —Bosch

Acts 6:9-15 A Daily Beauty

By Vernon C. Grounds

All who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel. —Acts 6:15

When you look in a mirror, what do you see? Do you see a lovely reflection? A handsome face? Or do you see a plain or unattractive

countenance?

We want to give those who behold us what my friend called an aesthetic blessing. But what about the beauty of holiness? Are others blessed by the beauty that flows through us from Christ?

A distinguished Bible scholar of the 19th century, J. B. Lightfoot, was described by one of his devoted students as “startlingly ugly: a stout little man with a grotesque figure and a squint.” But that same student also said that Lightfoot was “the best man I have ever encountered, and I say this deliberately after the experience of many years. In a day or two ... his face appeared the most beautiful and lovable thing imaginable.”

When Stephen was brought before the Jewish council for interrogation, “they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke” (Acts 6:10). As he was being accused, they “saw his face as the face of an angel” (v.15).

By God’s transforming grace, we too can have a daily beauty in our lives. As we walk prayerfully in the Spirit, our faces increasingly reflect the beauty of Jesus.

Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me,

All His wonderful passion and purity;

O Thou Spirit divine, all my nature refine

Till the beauty of Jesus is seen in me. —Orsborn

Nothing can dim the beauty that shines from within.

Acts 6:15 UNDENIABLE EVIDENCE

And all that sat in the council ... saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.

Someone gave me a card the other day with this question printed on it, "If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?" As I thought of this I couldn't help wondering how many enemies of the Gospel would testify that I was guilty of witnessing to them concerning my Savior? How many wicked people would say that my godly conduct and Christlike spirit put them to shame? Would unsaved individuals charge that the influence of my life constitutes a menace to their cause?

Our suggested Scripture reading (Acts 6) presents Stephen on trial because of his devotion to Jesus Christ, and the evidence was indisputable. In fact, the reason for his arrest was that his adversaries had become infuriated when "they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke." They had been silenced by his arguments and confounded by the Christlike attitude he evidenced. They hated him so much they resorted to bribery and perjury to destroy him. However, as they looked upon him, their faces angry and their eyes flashing, they saw Stephen's countenance glowing as if reflecting the very presence of God. This radiance was too much for his antagonists, and they soon hustled him out to the stoning ground. One of their number, Saul of Tarsus, however, never forgot that scene. The remembrance of it burned in his soul until he accepted Jesus as his Master and, like Stephen, became a Spirit-filled Christian witness.

Ask yourself the solemn question, "If I were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict me?"

Has someone seen Christ in you today?

Christian, look to your heart, I pray.

The world, with a criticizing view,

Has watched, but did it see Jesus in you?—Hopkins

ACTS 7

Acts 7:51-8:2 A Watching World

By Joanie Yoder

He knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin.. —Acts 7:60

We don't need ideal circumstances to be effective witnesses for Christ. Nor are God's purposes hindered by our problems.

Stephen was a powerful witness in a situation that was far from ideal. He was falsely accused and arrested (Acts 6:8-15). After he had witnessed at great length to the angry religious leaders, they rejected his words and took him out to be stoned (7:1-53).

That was the end of Stephen's witness, right? Wrong! His humble surrender to a martyr's death and his Christlike prayer that God would forgive his killers resulted in the greatest witness of Stephen's life (7:54-60).

But how does Stephen's martyrdom relate to our mundane lives? Joseph Aldrich, in his book *Life-Style Evangelism*, wrote, "When the non-Christian observes a believer responding to pressure and pain with a Spirit-controlled response, he is seeing God at work in human experience. Stephen's response to stoning caught the attention of a man named Saul!" Later, Saul became a zealous follower of Stephen's Lord (Acts 9—28).

Instead of praying for fewer difficulties so that we might witness better, let's pray that we might witness better through our difficulties. Who knows, another "Saul" may be watching.

We often think that if life were smooth

We would a better witness be;

But God knows best—that faith mid trials

Can honor Him more powerfully. —Cetas

We can have our best witness in the worst of times.

Acts 7:51-60

PEOPLE who announce bad news sometimes get blamed for causing it. It is difficult to be the one who bears unwelcome news. The meteorologist can upset people by predicting rain on the Fourth of July. It's not the forecaster's fault, yet he or she still takes the heat for bringing the message.

On a much more serious note, when Stephen addressed the religious leaders of Israel, he incurred their wrath because he boldly told them the truth about themselves. He criticized their ancestors and implicated the whole council in the murder of Jesus Christ.

Everything he said was true. So what did they do with this indictment? They "gnashed at him with their teeth" (Acts 7:54). They threw him out of the city and killed him. Because he told the truth, Stephen died under a barrage of stones.

When we speak out for purity, righteousness, and godliness in a sinful, pleasure-loving world careening toward destruction, we too will be criticized. But no matter what happens to us, we belong to God, and ultimately He will vindicate us, if not in this life, in the life to come.—J D Brannon

Acts 7:51–8:2 Worth The Risk

By Albert Lee

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. —Ephesians 2:8-9

What would one give in exchange for a new iPad? One 17-year-old boy gave a kidney! Apparently, he couldn't afford an iPad and wanted one so badly that he was willing to risk surgery.

Stephen, in Acts 7, took a serious risk, but it was for proclaiming the good news about Jesus. While performing miracles, he was seized, falsely accused of blasphemy against God and the Mosaic law, and brought before the high priest (6:8-14). In response to a question from the high priest (7:1), Stephen took a risk and preached a sermon he knew his hearers would not like. He said that throughout Israel's history, the nation had repeatedly rejected God's messengers. And now, they had rejected the Messiah.

Stephen's sermon provoked a strong reaction. "They cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; and they cast him out of the city and stoned him" (vv.57-58). Why would Stephen risk his life to preach about Jesus? He desperately wanted his hearers to know that because of Jesus' death and resurrection, they no longer needed to live under the law but could live under grace and forgiveness (6:13-15; Eph. 2:8-9). Jesus died so that we may have eternal life.

Lord, You have done so much for us. You give us

our very breath and blessing upon blessing.

We give ourselves back to You to use

to spread the glorious gospel of Christ. Amen.

A Christian's life is a window through which others can see Jesus.

Acts 7:51 TELL IT LIKE IT IS

You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. --Acts 7:51

It is difficult to be the one who bears unwelcome news. The TV meteorologist can upset people just by predicting that it's going to rain on the Fourth of July. It's not his or her fault, yet the forecaster still takes the heat for bringing the message.

On a much more serious note, when Stephen addressed the religious leaders of Israel, he incurred their wrath because he boldly told them the truth about themselves. He criticized their ancestors and implicated the whole council in the murder of Jesus Christ. Everything he said was true. So what did they do with this indictment? They "gnashed at him with their teeth" (Acts 7:54). They threw him out of the city and put him to death. Because he told the truth, Stephen died under a barrage of stones.

When we speak out for purity, righteousness, and godliness in a sinful, pleasure-loving world that seems destined to self-destruct, we too will be criticized. But no matter what happens to us, we can call on God as Stephen did. We can take comfort in knowing that we belong to Him and that ultimately He will vindicate us.

As God's people, let's pray that we will have the courage to tell it like it is. - J D Brannon

Lord, give us courage to speak out

Against the evils of our day;

For only when the truth is known

Can sinners choose the better way.--D J De Haan

It's better to declare the truth and be rejected than to withhold it just to be accepted.

Acts 7:52-60 In Memory

By Mart De Haan

Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. —Hebrews 11:35

After a long winter, a local news paper celebrated the first summerlike day with a photo of a young man stretched out under the warm sun. He was wearing sunglasses, a baseball cap, blue jeans, and a sleeveless shirt. One hand rested on his forehead and the other balanced a radio on his stomach. This was obviously his kind of day.

But there was more to the picture. The man was relaxing lazily on top of a large monument in a veterans' memorial park. On the marker were the names of 225 soldiers who had died for their country. As I looked at that photo, I realized that brave men and women had given their lives so that he could enjoy his.

This reminds me of the many gallant servants of God who willingly made the supreme sacrifice so that we could hear the gospel (Acts 7:59; Heb. 11:35-38). They went from house to house, city to city, and continent to continent with the good news. Their testimony, often sealed in blood, made it possible for us to bask in the warmth of God's love.

Let's pause to remember the great price paid by our spiritual forefathers. Then, let's ask ourselves if we are willing to do the same for our children. May we determine to stand for Christ faithfully in life and in death.

Faith of our fathers, living still

In spite of dungeon, fire, and sword—

O how our hearts beat high with joy

Whene'er we hear that glorious word! —Faber

We may not walk to the martyr's stake, but we must walk in the Master's steps.

Acts 7:54-60 The Courage Of Conviction

By Haddon W. Robinson

Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. —Acts 6:8

Shortly before the American Civil War, a young lawyer from Vermont settled in Adams County, Pennsylvania. There he witnessed fugitive slaves escaping from bondage, so he devoted himself with all his powers to free those who were in slavery.

When the war broke out, Thaddeus Stephens was a powerful influence in the US government. But at his death years later, he was virtually alone. Written on his tombstone in an obscure cemetery are these words: "Finding that other cemeteries were restricted as to race by charter rights, I have chosen to lie in this humble spot, in order that I may testify, even in my death, to those principles which I have advocated through a long life."

In Acts 6 and 7, we read about a man of God named Stephen. He was full of faith, power, and conviction. He was brought before the Jewish ruling council on trumped-up charges and allowed to make a statement. It turned into a powerful indictment of the religious leaders. They despised him and his message, so they dragged him out of Jerusalem and stoned him. Stephen fell to his knees and prayed for his killers. The way he died spoke as eloquently as his sermon.

As followers of Christ, we must be people of conviction. How far are we willing to go for what we believe?

Convictions forged in pain and loss

Provide the strength that's needed

For those sold out to serving Christ,

Those who His call have heeded. —Sper

It is better by far to die for something than to live for nothing.

Acts 7:54-60 Beyond Calm Acceptance

By Herbert Vander Lugt

God ... has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. —1 Peter 1:3

In a television interview, a prominent Hollywood actress said that she eagerly anticipated her death because this would bring her "oblivion." I could hardly believe my ears! Why would anyone be pleased with passing into oblivion? Are we all nothing but cosmic accidents? Does nothing we think or feel or say or do have any lasting meaning or value?

Some people are able to convince themselves that oblivion is something to look forward to. But it seems to me that most unbelievers either entertain a vague hope of an afterlife, or they avoid thinking about it.

Distressed that the subject of death and dying is becoming taboo in our culture, Bill and Judith Moyers produced a TV series showing that an honest discussion of the subject helps many die with calm acceptance. But no mention was made of faith in Christ or His resurrection. Therefore, it gave no example of anyone dying triumphantly.

When Stephen was being stoned, he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (Acts 7:59). Only those who believe on Jesus are able to die with joy and eager anticipation. Because Jesus died for our sins and rose from the grave, we who believe on Him can die with a living hope. And that goes far beyond a calm acceptance.

When by the gift of His infinite grace

I am accorded in heaven a place,

Just to be there and to look on His face

Will through the ages be glory for me. —Gabriel

Death is the last chapter in time but the first chapter in eternity.

Acts 7:59-8:2 No Grieving Allowed

By David C. McCasland

Weep with those who weep. —Romans 12:15

The American Hospice Foundation says that bereaved people tend to keep their grieving a secret in the workplace. Many of us have grown up with the idea that sorrow should be overcome quickly. What often happens is that we deny our pain, bottle it up inside, and

try to go it alone. A sign that reads NO GRIEVING ALLOWED might as well be posted on the walls at work.

Unfortunately, this same dangerous attitude can invade our homes and communities of faith as well. Grieving presents a dilemma for many Christians. When we feel the deep pain of loss, we often hide it, believing we should be outwardly joyful no matter what has happened. But notice the words of Acts 8:2. Luke wrote that after Stephen was stoned to death by an angry mob, godly men buried him and “made great lamentation over him.” Godly men crying and mourning deeply may seem contradictory to some, but the Bible states it plainly in all its emotional impact.

The Lord never asks us to ignore the pain in our hearts. Instead, He calls us to “weep with those who weep” (Rom. 12:15). We are to love and support one another as we move together through the process of grieving.

A heartfelt tear can show such love

As words can never do;

It says, "I feel in part your pain,

My heart goes out to you." —DJD

A sorrow shared is a sorrow halved. —Shakespeare

Acts 7:54-8:4 The Witness Of Suffering

By David C. Egner

Those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the Word. —Acts 8:4

A brilliant philosopher and theologian made this strong statement: “No one was ever saved by apologetics.” He wasn’t downplaying the importance of being ready to give reasons for our faith. But persuasive arguments aren’t enough. People must choose for themselves to believe in Jesus.

How do we lead them to choose Christ? The use of logic is one way. But we will probably get a lot further by demonstrating an active, unwavering faith.

Consider the witness we give when we are faithful through suffering. My mind is drawn to Annie Johnson Flint, author of 6,000 hymns and gospel songs. She was an orphan. She lived with crippling arthritis. She was stricken with cancer. Yet her faith was especially evident in this hymn:

He giveth more grace as the burdens grow greater,

He sendeth more strength when the labors increase;

To added afflictions He addeth His mercy,

To multiplied trials His multiplied peace.

God has a remarkable way of using evil circumstances to bring about good. The persecution of the early church, while intended to stamp out the gospel, actually resulted in its rapid growth (Acts 8:4). And though no one would call the suffering of Annie Johnson Flint a good thing, her faithfulness through trials was a wonderful witness to God’s grace.

May our faithfulness in the midst of suffering be used to deliver a powerful witness for Christ.

Faith often shines brightest when life seems darkest.

Acts 7:59-8:8 Just Tell The Story

By Joanie Yoder

Those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the Word. —Acts 8:4

The main character in the movie *Up Close And Personal* is a TV newsman who dies trying to get a story in one of the world’s trouble spots. After his death, he is remembered for saying, “I once thought reporting was about glory. But I’m here for only one reason—to tell the story.”

In Acts 8, we read that Jerusalem’s Christians were scattered abroad to escape persecution. Everywhere they went, they preached the message of Christ (v.4). Saul, their persecutor, was later converted and became an apostle. Toward the end of his life, Saul, also

known as Paul, decided to go to Jerusalem, where he knew he would be persecuted. But he remained undeterred, declaring that his purpose was “to testify to the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24).

God still calls people to tell the good news of Jesus to those who don't know Him. In his book *The Conversion Of The Church*, Samuel Shoemaker states, “The demand is human heart-hunger. The supply is the grace of God. We are only distributors.” But we don't work alone or with mere human energy. God is working in us (Philippians 2:13).

When witnessing for Christ, may it be with love and humility—motivated by a desire for His glory, not our own. We're just here to tell the story.

I love to tell the story,

For some have never heard

The message of salvation

From God's own holy Word. —Hankey

God has left us in the world to witness to the world.

Acts 7:59–8:8 The Viral Gospel

By David C. McCasland

Those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the Word. —Acts 8:4

The term “viral video” refers to a short clip posted on the Internet that spreads rapidly as the link is sent from one person to another. The video may be funny, inspiring, or thought provoking, and it can quickly spread around the world and be seen by millions of people. It's an advertiser's dream, but few marketing experts are able to exploit it. Lacy Kemp wrote: “How do you make something spread like wildfire? The answer is that you can't. It's not something to plan for or else everyone would be doing it. It has to be awesome enough on its own to get there.”

The gospel of Jesus Christ is “viral” in the way it spreads from one person to another. After Stephen, a leader in the early church, was stoned for his faith, the followers of Jesus in Jerusalem were persecuted and forced to leave their homes (Acts 8:1-3). Instead of fearfully holding back, these Christians told people about Him wherever they went. “Those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the Word” (v.4).

When we truly know Christ we cannot keep the good news about Him to ourselves. Even in the most challenging circumstances, we want to keep on telling others about our Savior and Lord.

Lord, You have been so gracious to save us

and give us eternal life. We love You and want

to tell everyone we can

about Your amazing grace. Lead us, we pray.

Spread the gospel; it's contagious!

ACTS 8

Acts 8:1-8 Fence-Breaking

By Haddon W. Robinson

You shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria. —Acts 1:8

It was a significant statement by Luke when he wrote that the church was “scattered throughout ... Samaria” (Acts 8:1). Prior to this time, the Christians lived in the familiar surroundings of Jerusalem—home to the memories of Pentecost and the explosive expansion of the church. The early Christians would have been content to stay there forever. But persecution scattered them into a new territory—Samaria.

Samaria was beyond their comfort zone. They saw it as a vile place that decent Jews avoided. Old Testament prophets denounced Samaria, and Nehemiah knew enough about the Samaritans' character not to let them help with the building of the temple (Neh. 2:19-20). Because of the longstanding social and religious barriers between Jews and Samaritans, the early Christians were able to imagine God as a fence-keeper.

But God tore down the fences with Samaria. He hates anything that keeps the gospel from people. Jesus had ordered His followers to be witnesses in Samaria (Acts 1:8), but it took the threat of death to get the young church to take Christ's fence-breaking commission seriously.

What fences are keeping you from sharing your faith? Do you need to move beyond your comfort zone?

Breaking down the walls and fences

Keeping us apart

Happens every time the gospel

Penetrates a heart. —Sper

God has left us in the world to be witnesses to the world.

Acts 8:1-4, 7:54-60; HONORING THE DEAD

And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. Acts 8:2

Memorial Day was unofficially begun by women of the South during the American Civil War when they strewed flowers over the graves of the "men in gray." In 1868, General John A. Logan, Commander in Chief of the Grand Army of the Republic, issued an order officially setting aside May 30 as Decoration Day. It has now become an occasion on which we remember not only those who have fallen in war, but all our dead.

However, we will not honor them in a fitting manner if we think of them as prisoners in their caskets or if we let grief and despondency overpower us. Certainly God expects us to shed tears when we recall vividly those "memories that bless and burn," but knowing our believing loved ones who died are with Christ, we should not feel any sense of pity for them! Furthermore, if they could, they would tell us that we honor them best by living wholeheartedly for Jesus Christ.

Stephen, the first Christian martyr, died at a very young age. He was a talented and courageous leader, and many felt keenly the tragedy of his loss, for we read that he was buried by godly men who greatly lamented his departure. However, they did not completely give way to numbing grief or paralyzing despair but kept up their spiritual courage. Even the wave of violent persecution, triggered by Stephen's death, did not silence them. In-stead they scattered, and everywhere they went they told the story of Jesus — the very message for which Stephen had died — and thus paid a glowing tribute to this first martyr.

Let us also honor our Christian dead this day by renewing our devotion to Jesus Christ!

We sorrow not as others do,

Whose hopes fade like the flowers;

There is a hope that's born of God,

And such a hope is ours! — E. McNeil

The caverns of sorrow oft contain mines of diamonds.

Acts 8:1-8 Scattered!

By David C. McCasland

Those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the Word. —Acts 8:4

In August 2005, Hurricane Katrina struck the US Gulf Coast and displaced an estimated 1.3 million households. With cities and towns evacuated, homes destroyed, and jobs gone, people relocated to communities in every state including Alaska and Hawaii. Because Christians are not immune to the storms of life, it's likely that thousands of people who love the Lord found themselves in places they never expected to live.

Yet many of those same people whose hopes and plans were shattered by Katrina would also bring God's love to others across the

US. Like the early Christians who were forced out of Jerusalem by persecution, it could be said of them: “Those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the Word” (Acts 8:4).

While none of us would choose this kind of financial loss and disruption, would we see it as an opportunity to share the hope Jesus Christ has given us?

The apostle Peter’s letter reminded Christians who had been scattered among the nations to “be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15).

If we are uprooted, we can scatter the seeds of the gospel wherever we go.

We’re always sowing seeds in life

By everything we do and say,

So let’s make sure we sow God’s Word

Among the ones we meet each day. —Hess

There’s no wrong place to share the gospel.

Acts 8:1-4 Scattered

By David C. McCasland

Those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the Word. —Acts 8:4

If I had been among the early Christians forced to leave Jerusalem because of persecution (Acts 8:1), what would I have said to my new neighbors? Would I have reminisced about how much I missed my home church? Would I have complained about how hard it was on the kids to start over in a new place? Probably!

But there’s no hint of complaint among those displaced believers— only an enthusiastic witness to Christ the risen Lord. After being “scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria,” they “went everywhere preaching the Word” (Acts 8:1,4).

What began in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost was not tied to geography, peace, or prosperity. It was the Spirit in them fulfilling Jesus’ promise in Acts 1:8, “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

When God allows difficult circumstances in our lives—a lost job, a demanding family need, a relocation to another city, state, or country—can we see His hand and sense His power? May we be like those early Christians, accepting the Lord’s leading and joyfully proclaiming His Word wherever we are.

The Holy Spirit gives us power

To witness far and wide,

Equipping us to do God’s work

And changing us inside. —Sper

The power that compels us comes from the Spirit who indwells us.

Acts 8:1-8 Of Starfish & Christians

By Richard De Haan

Those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the Word. —Acts 8:4

Did you know that if one of the arms of a starfish is severed, a new one will grow in its place? In fact, if a starfish is cut up, any piece that contains a part of the central disc will develop into a new starfish.

Some oyster fishermen found that out, much to their dismay, when their oyster beds became infested with starfish. The fishermen had cut up the starfish they caught and tossed the pieces back into the water. Rather than destroying them, however, they were actually helping them multiply.

For centuries, Christians have been hated and viciously opposed in many nations. But persecution has not destroyed Christianity. Even under the most dire circumstances, it has not only survived but thrived. Jesus said of His church that “the gates of Hades shall

not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18).

First-century believers in Jerusalem were severely persecuted, but it resulted in their being scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. And wherever they went, they preached the Word and many more believed. In Acts 8:4-6, we read that multitudes responded to the preaching of Philip.

Yes, the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, no matter how severely persecuted, continues to grow. Even the forces of hell itself cannot overcome it!

The church of Christ can't be destroyed,

Though many enemies have tried;

Whenever persecution comes,

The church is spread and multiplied. —Sper

The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church. —Tertullian

If a starfish is cut up, any pieces that contain a part of the central disc will develop into a new starfish. Some oyster fishermen found that out, much to their dismay, when their oyster beds became infested with starfish. The fishermen cut up the starfish they caught and tossed the pieces back into the water. Rather than destroying them, however, they were actually helping them multiply

Throughout the centuries, Christians have been hated and viciously opposed in many nations. But persecution did not destroy Christianity. Even under the most dire circumstances, it has not only survived but thrived. Jesus said of His church that "the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18).

The church of the Lord Jesus Christ, no matter how severely persecuted, continues to grow. Even the forces of hell itself cannot overcome it!—R. W D.

To THE WISE, GOD'S WORD IS SUFFICIENT.

THE CHURCH-ROOTED IN GOD-CAN NEVER BE UPROOTED BY MAN.

Acts 8:1-8 The Church In The World

By David C. Egner

Those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the Word. —Acts 8:4

I recently saw a photograph of people leaving a church after a service. They were carrying Bibles and smiling. As I looked at those men, women, and children, I thought, there goes the church. The building will stay, and it will be referred to as "a church." But those bricks can't preach and those pews can't witness. Only people can do that.

Author R. C. Sproul wrote, "Where the people of God are, there is the church—under the lordship of Christ and indwelt by the Spirit."

This is the essence of the commission Jesus gave to His disciples just before He left them. He promised them power from the Holy Spirit, and said they would be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8). And when the first-century church of Jerusalem came under persecution, that's what happened. They were scattered and proclaimed the gospel wherever they went (8:4).

When believers in Jesus Christ leave a worship service, the building stays, but God's people—the church—fan out into the community. Throughout the week, they continue to be the church wherever they are in the world—in shops, universities, restaurants, and homes. I wonder, is the world hearing the gospel from the church?

The witness of the church on earth

Must shine with brightest light

To all who need the second birth

And strength to live aright. —JDB

The world won't go to the church, so the church must go to the world.

Acts 8:1-8 Scattered To Serve

By David C. Egner

Those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the Word. —Acts 8:4

Saul hated Christians. He did all he could to hurt the cause of Christ when he launched his intense persecution of the early followers of Jesus. But when they fled Jerusalem to escape persecution, they proclaimed the gospel everywhere they went (Acts 8:4). This caused the church to grow more rapidly—just the opposite of what Saul intended.

Joseph Stalin didn't plan to assist the church in Russia during his purge of political and religious dissidents. But he did help it when he sent some pastors and Christian leaders to the labor camps of Siberia. From Magadan, where they got off the ships, the prisoners were sent in work gangs to forests and mines and remote areas to clear land, dig out vital ore, and cut roads through remote areas. It was grueling work that many did not survive.

But those believers were not silent. They banded together, and as they were sent from place to place they witnessed and taught, leaving behind clusters of believers. In many communities of Eastern Siberia, strong churches still stand and groups of Christians witness to the faith and courage of those dedicated servants.

If God has sent you to a new job, neighborhood, or environment, ask yourself, "To whom can I witness here?"

Will you be bold in your witness

By giving lost sinners God's Word?

Jesus will honor your service,

And people will surely be stirred. —HGB

Acts 8:4

A small light can dispel great darkness.

Those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word. Acts 8:4

Because of the intense competition in the automobile industry, carmakers like to keep their design breakthroughs secret. A company that can offer a new and desirable feature on its cars gains a tested selling edge in a tough market.

I guess that's why I was surprised when I saw a Mercedes-Benz commercial on television. It showed one of their cars being crashed into brick wall during a safety test. The way it withstood the impact

revealed why its energy-absorbing construction has saved lives. Even though Mercedes-Benz holds the patent on the safety design, competitors are free to use it because the company does not enforce its claim. When asked why, the Mercedes-Benz spokesman replied, "Because some things in life are too important not to share."

The message of salvation is the best news mankind has ever received. Yet all too often that good news is not shared. So tell someone. The gospel is too good to keep secret!—D. C. Egner

THE GOSPEL IS TOO IMPORTANT NOT TO SHARE.

Acts 8:4-8,26-35 A Difficult Place

By Randy Kilgore

I will never leave you nor forsake you. —Hebrews 13:5

When a sudden change in technology made his job obsolete, a highly trained scientist found himself working in a fast-food restaurant. One evening after our Bible study he described the situation as difficult and humbling. He said, "One good thing I can say is that the young people there seem very interested in my faith." A member of the group responded, "I admire you for being humble. I know your faith must have something to do with it."

Like my acquaintance, Philip may have wondered why God would pull him off an assignment in Samaria (Acts 8:4-8) and plop him in the middle of the desert (v.26). But then he found that the Ethiopian needed help understanding the Scriptures (vv.27-35), and his place made sense.

When Jesus promised He would never leave us alone (Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5), He meant in the hard times as well as in the good times. Our mission in the difficult seasons of life is to work or serve remembering we are doing it for God, and then to watch as God

works to accomplish His purposes.

Look for God in your difficult place and discover what He's doing in and through you there.

Disappointment—His appointment,

No good thing will He withhold;

From denials oft we gather

Treasures of His love untold. —Young

What's better than answers to our why questions? Trusting a good God who has His reasons.

Acts 8:4-8 Good Gossip

By Henry G. Bosch

Those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the Word. —Acts 8:4

Acts 8:4 has been paraphrased as follows: "Those who were scattered abroad went everywhere gossiping the Word." It is interesting to note that the first meaning of the word gossip was to "chat" or "rehearse." The early Christians, when scattered by persecution, could not help but repeat the glorious message of the gospel to everyone they met.

Good gossip, in the original sense of the word, can become a glorious instrument for spreading the truths of the gospel. When you get together with your friends, do you make it a point to discuss the things of the Lord? David said, "My tongue also shall talk of Your righteousness all the day long" (Ps. 71:24). Another psalm says, "Talk of all His wondrous works!" (Ps. 105:2).

A woman was discouraged because she thought she had no opportunities to serve Christ. She couldn't teach or sing or do much in the church because she had a large family to care for. Then one day she realized that she could testify to the people who made deliveries to her house. It proved to be a wonderful avenue of service, and the Word of God bore fruit. Through witnessing she found great joy.

Wherever you are today, remember to seize every opportunity to "gossip" the gospel to everyone you meet.

Gossip the gospel!

Acts 8:9-23 Toxic Look-Alikes

By Julie Ackerman Link

Your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this your wickedness. —Acts 8:21-22

Our yard makes poison ivy happy. I learned this the hard way. Even though I was being careful, I came in contact with the plant and ended up with a nasty, itchy rash.

Poison ivy looks like many harmless plants, and it keeps company with some beautiful ones. One gardener couldn't figure out why she got poison ivy whenever she pruned her roses. She later discovered that a poison ivy vine was taking advantage of the tender loving care she gave to her rosebush.

Some people are like toxic plants. They look harmless, and they blend in with people who, like roses, are fragrant and beautiful.

Simon the sorcerer fit this description. He followed Philip and was baptized, but then he asked to buy the ability to lay hands on people so they could receive the Holy Spirit. Peter was appalled at his request and urged him to repent (Acts 8:22).

Sometimes people use the favorable environment of a healthy church as a network for selfish purposes. Like poison ivy among roses, they cause much misery. Like Simon, anyone who does this needs to repent, and everyone else needs to avoid contact with such a person. Spiritual look-alikes appear good but their "fruit" is toxic.

A Prayer:

Help me, Lord, to be discerning and not let others

lead me astray with their falsehood. May the fruit

of my life be an example of a follower of Christ. Amen.

A false life belies a true faith.

Acts 8:9-25 No Sale

By Mart De Haan

Peter said to him, "Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money!" —Acts 8:20

Police officers in St. Louis have had at least one easy arrest. It occurred at the back door of the police station when a drunk driver pulled his car right up to the booking window, thinking he was at Burger King. After attempting to place his order at what he thought was a drive-up window, the surprised driver was arrested by the booking officer and charged with drunk driving.

A man named Simon also got the surprise of his life. According to Acts 8, he was a former sorcerer in Samaria before becoming a follower of Christ. His surprise came when he walked up to the apostles and offered them money. He wanted them to give him the power to lay hands on people and impart to them the Holy Spirit. The apostle Peter emphatically refused, and accused him of being under the influence of something worse than alcohol.

Peter wasn't overreacting. It's dangerous to think that the power of the Holy Spirit is like a product that can be bought and sold. The Spirit's work is a gift of God that is freely given on the basis of faith, and faith alone. He has given us His Spirit to accomplish His purposes, not ours. The Spirit cannot be bought or bargained for.

Thank You, Lord, for the gift of Your Spirit.

Holy Spirit, all divine,

Dwell within this heart of mine;

Cast down every idol throne,

Reign supreme and reign alone. —Reed

We don't need more of the Spirit; the Spirit needs more of us.

Acts 8:26-34 Watching The Wind

By David H. Roper

He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap. —Ecclesiastes 11:4

When it comes to telling others about Jesus, I'm sometimes like a cautious farmer who keeps his eye on the weather, looking for the perfect day to plant his crops. The season passes and he sows nothing. The opportunity is gone; the harvest is lost (Ecclesiastes 11:4).

I hesitate and wonder, "Is this person ready to listen to the gospel? Is this the time to speak?" You can never tell what's going on in the depths of another person's heart. Some may be dwelling in darkness yet longing for someone to lead them into the light.

The Ethiopian eunuch in his royal chariot seemed to have it all together (Acts 8:27). He enjoyed prestige, wealth, and power, yet inwardly he was empty and searching. He was reading Isaiah's promise of the suffering Savior and trying to come to grips with his words. Right at that moment, Philip took the opportunity to tell the eunuch about Jesus (v.35).

I have a friend who often leads people to Jesus. I asked him once how he knew they were ready to receive the gospel. "It's easy," he replied. "I ask them."

So I must stop worrying about the wind and the clouds and get on with it—scattering the seed wherever I go, regardless of the weather. You just never know.

Toiling through the changing seasons

In the sunshine and the rain,

Zealous sowing with compassion

Yields a wealth of golden grain. —Anon.

Sowing the seed of God's Word is never out of season.

Acts 8:26-40 Adopt A Highway

By David C. Egner

Philip opened his mouth, and ... preached Jesus to him. —Acts 8:35

Have you ever seen those adopt-a-highway signs as you've traveled along an expressway?

The Next 2 Miles Adopted By Employees Of Kane Industries.

Or it might be the Rockford Adult Hockey League or the Lincoln County Library Staff or the Sigma Rho Alpha sorority. In the state of Michigan, the group that adopts a section of highway commits itself to cleaning up litter two or three times a year.

Pastor Don Logue commented on this practice: "There is a great lesson to be learned if we compare the adoption of a highway with the responsibilities of Christians. Suppose Christians adopted the stretch of land closest to where they live or work, and assumed responsibility to see that some kind of testimony for Christ was given during the year in the homes closest to them."

When Philip walked the stretch of highway from Jerusalem to Gaza, he wasn't there to pick up broken harnesses or mangled chariot wheels. He was sent by the Holy Spirit to present Christ to a man from Ethiopia.

As believers, we have been called by God to witness for Christ in our areas of influence. Let's use wisely the opportunities He gives us.

Have you pointed the lost to Jesus

And urged them in Him to believe?

Have you told of the life everlasting

That all, if they will, may receive? —Crosby

The best place to witness is where God has placed you.

Acts 8:26-35 A 'Must Read' Book

By Vernon C. Grounds

Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him. —Acts 8:35

Shortly after the novel *Gone With The Wind* had been published, a young woman sat beside a history professor at a dinner. Trying to make conversation, she asked him if he had read it. "No," the professor answered. The woman admonished, "You'd better hurry up. It's been out 6 weeks." Then the professor inquired, "Have you read Dante's *Divine Comedy*?" "No," the woman said. The professor responded, "You'd better hurry up. It's been out 600 years."

These days, new books dealing with all sorts of subjects pour from printing presses in an overwhelming cascade. Even if we did nothing but read, we couldn't keep up with the output. So we must discriminate and decide what we'll read and what we'll ignore.

But there's one ancient book we must not ignore. It's the Bible, God's inspired Word. For many centuries, it circulated in scrolls and handwritten manuscripts. But ever since Johannes Gutenberg devised the printing press, Scripture has been reproduced in countless forms and editions.

Important as many books are, only the Bible reveals the good news about Jesus (Acts 8:35). Only the Bible teaches us how to please Him. So let's make sure we give the Bible the priority it deserves. It's a "must read" book.

The Bible is God's Word to us,

Still fresh through all the ages;

And if we read it we will find

God's wisdom in its pages. —Sper

Many books can inform, but only the Bible can transform.

Acts 8:26-35 One By One

By David H. Roper

Philip ... preached Jesus to him. —Acts 8:35

Edward Payson was a famous preacher in a bygone era. One stormy Sunday, he had only one person in his audience. Some months later, his lone attendee called on him: "I was led to the Savior through that service," he said. "For whenever you talked about sin and salvation, I glanced around to see to whom you referred, but since there was no one there but me, I had no alternative but to lay every word to my own heart and conscience!"

God saves us one by one. If you have access to one, that is your mission field. "Every soul with Christ is a missionary; every soul without Christ is a mission field," the slogan goes. One person cannot reach the entire world, but we can love our neighbor. "Who is my neighbor?" we ask. The next person we meet along the way.

The Spirit brought Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch who was reading the Scriptures and needed someone to explain them to him (Acts 8:26-35). The Spirit gave Philip the right words to say, and the eunuch confessed his faith in Christ (v.37).

Ask God to bring you to the one He has prepared. He'll get you to the right place at the right time to speak to that individual. He will speak through your lips, work through your hands, and fulfill in you the great purpose of His will.

Father, we've been called to witness—

Called to speak of Your dear Son;

Holy Spirit, grant discernment;

Lead us to some seeking one. —D. DeHaan

You are a success in God's kingdom if you are faithful where He has placed you.

Acts 8:26-38 Seize The Opportunity

By Dave Branon

Philip opened his mouth, and ... preached Jesus to him. —Acts 8:35

Cedarville College president Paul Dixon tells the story of a high school girl who was in the audience several years ago when he was speaking about the need to tell others about Christ. As she listened, she decided she wanted to make a difference in her high school. She asked God to give her an opportunity.

The next day at school, one of her teachers who was fed up with the way things were going walked into his classroom and said, "I've had it. I'm tired of the hassle of teaching kids who don't have any respect. If any of you can tell me what life is all about and what our purpose is, go ahead."

Surprised, the girl raised her hand and explained that she had found answers to those questions in Jesus Christ. The teacher, who was an agnostic, invited her to stay after class and explain her beliefs. When she suggested that he attend an evangelistic meeting, he agreed. That Friday night he put his trust in Jesus as Savior, and today he's active in Christian service.

She had seized a God-given opportunity—like Philip did with the Ethiopian official (Acts 8:29-30).

We may have sweaty palms and cottonmouth as we witness to unbelievers. But when the Lord gives us the opportunity to talk about Him, let's seize it.

Father, we've been called to witness—

Called to speak of Your dear Son;

Holy Spirit, grant discernment;

Lead us to some seeking one. —DJD

Any place can be the right place to witness for Christ.

Acts 8:26-38 Seize The Opportunity

By Dave Branon

Heavy rain was falling outside as Marcia, the director of the Jamaican Christian School for the Deaf, spoke to our group. Thirty-four teenagers and several adults were visiting the school. But one of our students was not distracted by the rain or the children running

around the room.

That teenager heard Marcia say, "My dream for these kids is to have a playground." She took that sentence, and through the prompting of the Lord turned it into an idea. Later that day she told me, "We should come back and build them a playground." An opportunity for service was born.

A little over 4 months later, on another rainy day in Jamaica, we held a celebration in that same room. We had just assembled a wooden playground—complete with slides, a ladder, climbing bars, swings, forts, and a trapeze. One student seized an opportunity, and a dream was fulfilled.

How often does God prompt us to take action to meet the needs of others and we let the opportunity go? How many times does the Spirit nudge us to say or do something in Jesus' name and we shake off the nudging? Like Philip in Acts 8, let's honor the Lord by responding with action. Let's seize each opportunity God gives us to serve others in His name.

Jesus said to one and all:

"Take your cross and follow Me."

When you sense the Spirit's call,

Seize the opportunity! —Hess

When the Spirit prompts, take action.

Acts 8:26-40 'Do You Love Jesus?'

By Dennis J. De Haan

Beginning at this Scripture, [Philip] preached Jesus to him. —Acts 8:35

A man was assigned a middle seat on an airplane. Tired and wanting to sleep, he was irritated when the young girl next to him with Down syndrome asked, "Mister, do you brush your teeth?" "Yes," he replied. "That's good. People who don't, lose their teeth."

A little later she asked, "Mister, do you smoke?" "No," he answered. "That's good. People who do, die."

After a long silence, she turned to him again, "Mister, do you love Jesus?" "Yes, I do," he responded. "That's good," she added. "People who do, go to heaven."

Though deeply touched, he settled back, hoping there would be no more questions. Just then the girl said, "Mister, ask the man next to you if he brushes his teeth."

Well, you can guess what followed. When she came to the question about Jesus, the second man became thoughtful. "I'm afraid I don't understand," he said. For the next hour the two men talked about eternal issues.

Sometimes opportunities for sharing God's love may come in unusual ways, as was the case in Acts 8 when Philip pointed a total stranger to Christ. If we are willing, He will bless even our feeblest efforts to tell others that Jesus loved them so much that He died for them.

People searching for an answer,

Looking for a better way,

Can discover truth and meaning

If God's love we will display. —Sper

You can never speak to the wrong person about Christ.

Acts 8:26-40 One Person A Day

By David C. Egner

Philip ... preached Jesus to him. —Acts 8:35

I was privileged to hear retired Salvation Army Commissioner Andy Miller speak at a Bible conference. At age 75, smartly dressed in his uniform, he spoke with gentleness, conviction, and a twinkle in his eye.

Commissioner Miller said that as a 19-year-old cadet in training he made a commitment to the Lord that he would tell one person a day about Christ's love. That's quite a commitment! Throughout his ministry he has led many to put their trust in Jesus Christ for salvation.

Now, I know it's not easy to talk to some people about Jesus. But we can and should learn how, because it was Jesus' command to His followers before He returned to His Father in heaven (Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8-9). In our Scripture reading for today, the Holy Spirit led Philip to the Ethiopian official and gave him the right words to say (Acts 8:26-40). And as we seek the Lord's help and depend on Him, He will do the same for us.

You may come in contact with one or with many people throughout your day. Consider the commitment that Commissioner Miller made years ago, and then ask the Lord what He would have you do. You too can be a witness of His love every day.

Your parting words, O Lord, give hope,

They're filled with promise, joy, and love;

What You have done, help us to share

With Spirit power from above. —DJD

God longs to do for others what He has done for you.

Acts 8:35

Shortly after the novel *Gone With The Wind* had been published, a young woman sat beside a history professor at a dinner. Trying to make conversation, she asked him if he had read it.

"No," the professor answered.

The woman admonished, "You'd better hurry up. It's been out 6 weeks."

Then the professor inquired, "Have you read Dante's *Divine Comedy*?"

"No," the woman said.

The professor responded, "You'd better hurry up. It's been out 600 years."

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Important as many books are, only the Bible reveals the good news about Jesus (Acts 8:35). Only the Bible teaches us how to please Him. So let's make sure we give the Bible the priority it deserves. It's a "must read." —V. C. G.

MANY BOOKS CAN INFORM, BUT ONLY THE BIBLE CAN TRANSFORM.

ACTS 9

Acts 9:1-5 He Feels Your Pain

By Haddon W. Robinson

I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. —Acts 9:5

The 20th century could well be labeled "the century of martyrs." Thousands of Christian brothers and sisters throughout the world have been imprisoned, tortured, and murdered on account of their faith. In fact, more Christians have been killed for their faith during our century than in all the previous centuries combined.

Does God care? Does the blood, pain, and death of Christ's witnesses mean anything to Him?

The first Christian martyr was Stephen. He was stoned to death for his allegiance to Jesus Christ, and a young man named Saul consented to his brutal murder (Acts 8:1).

Shortly after Stephen's death, Saul was traveling to Damascus when he was knocked to the ground. He heard a voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" (9:4). Saul might have wondered, "You? I didn't persecute You. His name was Stephen." Yet the voice declared, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" (v.5).

Every stone hurled at Stephen was hurled at Christ. Every stone that hit him hit Christ. Every pain he felt, Christ felt.

The Lord Jesus knows when we are hurt for His sake. He experiences our pain. No attack comes to us that Christ does not feel. He is a sympathetic Savior.

Never a weakness that He does not feel,

Never a sickness that He cannot heal,

Never a sorrow that He does not share,

Moment by moment I'm under His care. —Whittle

When You take a stand for Christ, He stands with you.

Acts 9 - Conversion

By Julie Ackerman Link

2 Corinthians 12:14-21

I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls. —2 Corinthians 12:15

Before my husband and I travel, we go to the bank and trade in our US dollars for the currency of the country we'll be visiting. We do this so we can pay for expenses while we're away from home.

When we become Christians, another kind of exchange takes place. Our lives are like currency that we convert from one medium to another. We trade our old life for a new one so that we can begin "spending" ourselves in a different kingdom. Instead of spending ourselves for the causes of this world, we are able to start spending ourselves for the cause of Christ.

The apostle Paul is a good example of this difference. After his dramatic conversion on the way to Damascus (Acts 9), he began spending his life in a dramatically different way. Instead of pursuing Christians to imprison and kill them, he began pursuing non-Christians to convert them. Then he spent the rest of his life for their welfare. He wrote to the church at Corinth, "I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls" (2 Cor. 12:15). Everything he did was for the edification of his spiritual children (vv.14,19).

Conversion is far more than just changing our final destination. It's changing the way we spend each day of our lives.

Lord, help me to spend myself on what will last,

not on what will fade away one day.

I give my life to You that I might spend and be spent

for others and Your will. Amen.

Conversion takes only a moment—transformation takes a lifetime.

Acts 9:1-9 Needed: Power To Change

By Vernon C. Grounds

John 8:31-36

If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed. —John 8:36

Author Gerald N. Callahan is a professor at Colorado State University. Colorado has long been my home, so I was interested in his recent book *River Odyssey*, in which he discusses his experiences and thoughts about life. Interesting, for example, is his rueful confession, "I drink too much ... I eat like myocardial infarctions and colon cancer don't kill middle-aged men, and every morning I swear I'll change, but nothing ever changes."

That confession could be made by multitudes of people. How difficult it is to change! Whether we want to revolutionize our whole lifestyle or give up certain habits—how hard it is to do that!

Dramatic change is possible, however, when we open our hearts to Jesus Christ. Instead of being “a slave of sin,” we can be set free (Jn. 8:34-36). The transformation that happened to bigoted Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus can happen any day to anybody (Acts 9:1-9). The miracle of the new birth is an offer of God to you. If you have never experienced that new birth, call on Christ now. If you have, then prayerfully ask for the help of the Holy Spirit to make the necessary changes. He is the One who gives the power to change.

Father, thank You for Your Spirit,

Fill us with His love and power;

Change us into Christ's own image

Day by day and hour by hour. —Anon.

A changed life is the result of a changed heart.

Acts 9:1-6 'I Found Jesus'

By Vernon C. Grounds

You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins. —Matthew 1:21

Sundar Singh was an angry young man. After his mother died when he was 14 years old, he became a fierce opponent of Christianity in his northern India community. But then, in a dramatic conversion, he turned in faith to Jesus Christ. For the next 25 years he exerted a far-reaching, international influence.

Once he was visited by a professor of comparative religions from Europe. When that agnostic scholar asked Singh with curiosity, “What have you found in Christianity that you did not find in your traditional religion?” Singh replied, “I found Jesus.” “Yes, I know,” the professor said impatiently. “But what particular teaching or doctrine did you find?” Singh simply repeated his answer, “I found Jesus.”

Singh later wrote, “When people ask me, ‘What made you a Christian?’ I can only say, ‘Christ Himself made me a Christian.’ When He revealed Himself to me, I saw His glory and was convinced that He was the living Christ.”

Have you, like Saul in today's Bible reading, had a life-changing experience with the Lord Jesus? (Acts 9:1-6). Have you been convinced that He is the only way to God?

Jesus Christ is the difference between all religions and Christianity. —VCG

I've found a Friend, oh, such a Friend!

He loved me ere I knew Him;

He drew me with the cords of love,

And thus He bound me to Him. —Small

Many religious leaders have risen to greatness; only Jesus has risen from the grave.

Acts 9:1-8 Letting Go

By David C. McCasland

Philippians 3:3-11

What things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. —Philippians 3:7

It has been said that “one person's junk is another's treasure.” When David Dudley tried to help his parents clear their house of “unnecessary items” before moving to a smaller home, he found it very difficult. He was often angered by his parents' refusal to part with things they had not used for decades. Finally, David's father helped him understand that even the worn-out, useless items were tied to close friends and important events. Clearing the clutter felt like throwing away their very lives.

A spiritual parallel to our reluctance to let go of the clutter in our homes may be our inability to clear our hearts of the attitudes that weigh us down.

For many years, Saul of Tarsus clung to the “righteousness” he had earned by obeying God's law. His pedigree and performance were prized possessions until he encountered Jesus in a blinding moment on the Damascus Road (Acts 9:1-8). Face to face with

the risen Savior, he let go of his cherished self-effort and later wrote, "But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ" (Phil. 3:7).

When the Holy Spirit urges us to release our grip on any attitude that keeps us from following Christ, we find true freedom in letting go.

Speak to us, Lord, till shamed by Thy great giving

Our hands unclasp to set our treasures free;

Our wills, our love, our dear ones, our possessions,

All gladly yielded, gracious Lord, to Thee. —Anon.

Through Christ we have the freedom to let go.

Acts 9:1-16 Ask Every Morning

Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? Acts 9:6

A prominent individual recently said that his little daughter often supplements her usual evening prayer with many requests for special favors from the Lord. However, one night—as a sweet afterthought — she closed with the words, "And now, God, what can I do for You?"

I am sure the Lord was pleased with this petition. True, He is not helplessly standing by, hoping people will come to His aid, for He is Almighty God, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. The "cattle upon a thousand hills" are His, and He is entirely self-sufficient. However, in His infinite wisdom and good pleasure He has chosen to carry out His program upon earth through people like you and me — frail and imperfect as we are. Therefore He loves to see us warmly and willingly offer Him our hearts and hands.

When Paul met the risen Christ, the question he asked was basically the same as that voiced by the little girl. He exclaimed, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" From the day of his conversion he never forgot that he had been saved to serve, for he calls himself "Paul, a servant (literally, bondsman) of Jesus Christ ... " (Ro 1:1).

Christian friend, God wants you to rejoice in the riches of your salvation, and He also invites you to come to Him with your requests. However, He is especially delighted when one of His children looks upward and says, "And now, God, what can I do for You?"

O let us be loyal to Jesus,

The faith we confessed let's renew;

And ask Him this question each morning,

"Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"

— Pangborn

The work of the Lord is done by the few; ask God what part He would have you do!

Acts 9:1-9 A New Purpose

By Cindy Hess Kasper

I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. — Jeremiah 29:11

A 60-year-old hotel in Kansas is being renovated into apartments. A rusty ship that is docked in Philadelphia is being restored and may become a hotel or a museum. Hangar 61, an admired piece of architecture at the old Stapleton Airport in Colorado, is being transformed into a church. Each structure had a specific use that is no longer viable. Yet someone was able to see promise and a new purpose in each one.

If structures can find new life and purpose, why not people? Think about these men in the Bible whose lives took an unexpected direction. There was Jacob, who wrestled with the angel of the Lord (Gen. 32); Moses, who talked to a burning bush (Ex. 3); Paul, who was temporarily blinded (Acts 9). Their stories were different, but all had a change of purpose when their encounter with God sent them down a new path.

We too may experience circumstances that change the course of our lives. But God reminds us of this: I loved you before you loved

Me. I want to give you hope and a future. Give all your worries to Me because I care about you (1 John 4:19; Jer. 29:11; 1 Peter 5:7; John 10:10).

As you cling to God's promises, ask Him to reveal new direction and purpose for your life.

God has a purpose for your life,

So what you have to do

Is follow Him, believing that

He'll keep directing you. —Sper

Keep your eyes on the Lord and you won't lose sight of life's purpose.

Acts 9:1-9 Bless The Interruptions By Joe Stowell

Psalm 33:10-15

The Lord ... makes the plans of the peoples of no effect. The counsel of the Lord stands forever. —Psalm 33:10-11

If your life is anything like mine, it's pretty well planned out. I have a calendar that reminds me of appointments, meetings, and other "to-do" items. Inevitably, interruptions change my day dramatically; and while they can be frustrating, they also can be productive.

Some of the great advances in God's plans have come through "interruptions" to the normal routine. Take Mary, for example. An angel interrupted her life with the announcement that she would have a son named Jesus. Since she was a virgin and engaged to be married, this news was undoubtedly shocking and deeply troubling (Luke 1:26-31). And Saul, the Jewish zealot who persecuted early Christians, was on his way to Damascus to arrest more followers of "the Way" when he was blinded by Jesus Himself (Acts 9:1-9). This life-changing interruption had huge implications for the future of Christianity.

The psalmist reminds us that the Lord can make "the plans of the peoples of no effect" (Ps. 33:10). Yet all too often we respond to the interruptions of our well-ordered lives with attitudes like frustration, irritation, fear, and doubt. God's surprises in our day are full of opportunities. Let's welcome them as a new "to-do list" from Him.

Lord, if I'm feeling rushed today,

I need Your eyes to help me see

That when an interruption comes,

It is an opportunity. —Sper

Look for God's purpose in your next interruption.

Acts 9:1-9 A Noble Request

By Herbert Vander Lugt

So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" —Acts 9:6

As a seminary student I was often impressed by stories of Christians who made a great impact for God. So I asked the Lord to give me the same spiritual insight and power they had. On the surface that looks like a noble request. But one day I realized that it was actually a self-centered prayer. So instead of asking God to make me like someone else, I began asking Him to show me what He wanted me to do.

When Saul of Tarsus was converted on the road to Damascus, he asked two questions. The first was, "Who are You, Lord?" Realizing he was in the presence of the living God, only one other question mattered: "Lord, what do You want me to do?" (Acts 9:5-6). He recognized that obedience to God's will for him was to be the central focus of the rest of his life.

Requests for health, healing, success, and even spiritual power are not wrong, but they can become selfish prayers if they do not flow from a heart determined to obey God. Jesus said, "He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father" (John 14:21). Obedience expresses our love for God and enables us to experience His love for us.

Have you made that noble request: "Lord, what do You want me to do?"

Master, speak, and make me ready,
When Thy voice is truly heard,
With obedience glad and steady,
Still to follow every word. —Havergal

The best way to know God's will is to say "I will" to God.

Acts 9:1-9 Dynamited Into Change

By Vernon C. Grounds

He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love. —Colossians 1:13

When a newspaper editor learned that a man named Alfred Nobel had died, he assumed that the deceased must be the same man who had invented dynamite. So he published an obituary calling Nobel the merchant of death.

When Nobel read the account of his own death, he reacted like a blind man suddenly gaining sight. From that day on, Nobel devoted himself to philanthropic causes—especially peace.

Saul of Tarsus experienced a transformation far more dramatic than Nobel's. While on the road to Damascus to take captive those who followed Jesus, Saul met the Lord Himself. Temporarily blinded by his encounter, Saul devoted the rest of his life to serving the One he had formerly persecuted. The enemy of Jesus became His dedicated apostle (Acts 9:15-16).

Our own experience will not likely be so earthshaking. Yet we must ask ourselves if we have had an encounter with the Savior—one that has changed the direction of our lives.

If that is not your experience, turn to John 3 and read what Jesus said about being born again. Then, with a simple prayer of repentance, you may open your heart to Him. An honest commitment to the Lord will put you into a new relationship with Him—one that will last for eternity.

Salvation is more than breaking bad habits, it's creating good character.

Acts 9:1-9,17-18 A Tale Of Two Slaves

By Dennis Fisher

Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle. —Romans 1:1

Spartacus is not just a film legend but a historical figure. Historians say that he was likely a Roman soldier who deserted, was recaptured, and then sold into slavery as a gladiator.

While at the gladiatorial school at Capua, Spartacus led a rebellion. This act of defiance attracted massive numbers of slaves, growing to an estimated 70,000. Initially, Spartacus' slave army enjoyed spectacular victories. But they were eventually defeated, and the captured rebels were crucified along the road to Rome.

What a contrast to Spartacus is the apostle Paul. Saul of Tarsus (as Paul was also known) was born a free man and yet was destined to become a slave. Acts 9 records the fateful day when Saul came face to face with the Savior he sought to oppose. From that time on, he served Jesus wholeheartedly.

Spartacus was forced to serve a Roman taskmaster. But Paul, in response to God's grace, voluntarily became a slave to Jesus Christ.

In the believer's heart rages a spiritual war between sin and righteousness. We can obey the slave-master of sin, or we can say yes to the God of grace who has made us free (Romans 6:16; John 8:34). Our greatest liberty lies in serving the One who created and redeemed us.

Christ broke the bonds of sin, that I

Might know His strong eternal tie;

This blood-bought liberty I bring

To be Your bond-slave, Master-King. -F. Hess

True freedom is found in serving Christ.

Acts 9:1-16 Behind The Scenes

By David C. McCasland

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! —Romans 11:33

While learning to use a new computer, I was troubled by a faint clicking sound that indicated it was working even though nothing was happening on the screen. The manufacturer's representative on the help hotline said, "No problem. The computer is probably running an application you can't see and is working in the background."

As I thought about the phrase "working in the background," I began to realize how visually oriented I am in my relationship with God. If I can't see something, I assume it's not happening. But that's not the way God operates.

I see a striking example of God's "behind the scenes" work in the conversion of Saul. While Christians were suffering under his ruthless persecution (Acts 8:1-3), God was preparing to transform him into a dynamic representative of Christ (9:15).

Is there a situation in your life today where you cannot see God working? It may be that your circumstances are resisting every attempt at change. Perhaps someone you love is obstinately refusing to respond to God. Even though it may appear that nothing is happening, God is at work—behind the scenes, in the background, accomplishing His purpose.

Behind my life the Weaver stands

And works His wondrous will;

I leave it in His all-wise hands

And trust His perfect skill. —Anon.

In the drama of life, God is the director behind the scenes.

Acts 9:1-22 Never Say "Never"

By David C. McCasland

Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God. —Acts 9:20

While a friend and I walked along the path of the former Berlin Wall, he told me, "This is one of those 'never say never' places in my life." He explained that during the years when the Wall divided the city, he had made a dozen trips through Checkpoint Charlie to encourage members of the church living under continuing surveillance and opposition in East Germany. More than once, he had been detained, questioned, and harassed by the border guards.

In 1988, he took his teenage children to West Berlin and told them, "Take a good look at this wall, because someday when you bring your children here, this wall will still be standing." A year later it was gone.

When Saul of Tarsus began to attack the followers of Jesus, no one could have imagined that he would ever become a disciple of Christ. "Never. Not a chance." Yet Acts 9:1-9 records the story of Saul's blinding encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus. Within a few days of that life-changing event, Saul was preaching in the synagogues of Damascus that Jesus was the Son of God, to the astonishment of all who heard him (vv.20-21).

When it comes to God's work in the most difficult people we know, we should never say "never."

God's power cannot be confined

To what you think is possible;

So when it comes to changing lives—

Imagine the impossible. —Sper

Never say never when it comes to what God can do.

Acts 9:5-6 - TWO CRUCIAL QUESTIONS

Who are you, Lord? ... Lord, what do you want me to do?

Receiving Jesus as our Savior from sin brings us into a life changing relationship with the Son of God. Although we may not know at the time all the far reaching implications of our commitment to Him, we cannot escape the fact that because He is God, He has a right to be Lord of every area of our lives. Sooner or later we must come to that point where we confess, in the words of Thomas, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28)

In Saul's conversion experience, he recognized Jesus as both Savior and Lord. When Saul heard Jesus' voice on the Damascus highway, he asked the crucial question: "Who are you, Lord?" From the answer, "I am Jesus," Paul instantly realized that the One he had been persecuting truly was the Savior. In that moment he cast himself on His mercy. Trembling in the divine presence, he asked a second crucial question, "Lord, what do you want me to do?" He was, as Oswald Chambers put it, "giving up his right to himself."

Believer, you've trusted Jesus as your Savior. You've settled the issue of who He is. But have you asked that second crucial question, "Lord, what do you want me to do?" Say to Him today, "Lord, I'll do whatever You ask!" - D J De Haan

Take my life and let it be

Consecrated, Lord, to Thee;

Take my hands and let them move

At the impulse of Thy love. - Havergal

Because Christ purchased us, he has the right to possess us.

Acts 9:6 You Can't Say That!

By Anne Cetas

Genesis 3:9-19

According to a career-building Web site, certain words should be avoided on the job. When someone in authority asks you to do a project, you shouldn't say, "Sure, no problem," if you don't mean it and aren't going to follow through. Otherwise, you'll become known as someone who doesn't keep his word. And don't say, "That's not my job," because you may need that person's help in the future.

And if your boss comes to you with a problem, careerbuilder.com suggests it's best not to blame someone else and say, "It's not my fault!"

That's the excuse Adam and Eve gave to God. They were told not to eat from the fruit on the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:16-17). When they disobeyed and were confronted by God, Adam blamed God and Eve, and Eve blamed the serpent (3:9-19). They basically said, "It's not my fault!"

Perhaps there are things we should avoid saying to God about what He's told us to do or not to do. For example, He gives us specific instructions for Christlike behavior in

1 Corinthians 13, yet we may be tempted to say, "I just don't feel convicted about that," or "That's not really my gift."

What is the Lord asking of you today? How will you respond? How about, "Yes, Lord!"

God wants complete obedience,

Excuses will not do;

His Word and Spirit show His will—

Then we must follow through. —Sper

The highest motive for obeying God is the desire to please Him.

Acts 9:6 TWO SOLEMN QUESTIONS

Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? Acts 9:6

Two portraits by the German artist Sternberg — his "Dancing Gypsy Girl" and the "Crucifixion" — are linked to one another by an unusual set of circumstances. The pretty maiden who served as the model for the first portrait took an unusual interest in the unfinished painting of our Lord's final suffering. One day she commented, "He must have been a very bad man to have been nailed to a cross like that." Sternberg replied, "No, He was a good man, the best that ever lived! Indeed, He died for all men." "Did He die

for you?" asked the puzzled girl. This question made a profound impression upon the artist. He did not know the Lord as his personal Savior, and didn't understand that salvation is received by faith alone. Some time later, however, he attended a meeting of humble believers who led him to Christ. Sternberg, his technical skill now coupled with a heart full of love and gratitude, completed his painting of the crucifixion and under it wrote the words: "This I did for thee; what hast thou done for Me?" It was placed in a famous gallery where a young aristocratic count named Zinzendorf saw it and was touched by the words written under it. He was a Christian but was convicted of his failure to serve the Lord. He later became the organizer of a missionary brotherhood known as the Moravians.

If you read today's Scripture lesson, John 19:16-22, you were brought face to face with the voluntary death of Jesus Christ. I urge you to answer the gypsy girl's question, "Did He die for you?" If He did, "What are you doing for Him?"

I gave My life for thee,
My precious blood I shed,
That thou might'st ransomed be,
And quickened from the dead;
I gave, I gave My life for thee,
What hast thou given for Me?

—Havergal

The only sermon that never wearies us is that of an eloquent life!

Acts 9:6 "WHAT'S NEXT?"

Having just received the Lord Jesus as his Savior from sin, an enthusiastic young boy blurted out, "Now what do I do? What's next?" He had the right idea! Although nothing further had to be done to receive salvation, there was much more to do to serve God.

The Bible, in Ephesians 2:8-9, makes it crystal-clear that we are saved by grace through faith. We could never do anything to deserve salvation. The best we have to offer is not good enough to meet the Lord's holy standards. We experience forgiveness of sin, find peace with God, have the promise of heaven and become possessors of everlasting life by trusting the Lord Jesus and Him alone. It is impossible for anyone to earn these favors!

Following conversion, however, we should respond as that young boy and the apostle Paul did, "Now what do I do? What's next?" Immediately after stating that we are not saved by works, Ephesians 2 tells us, "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (v.10).

Find there's faith, then comes service. We believe to become Christians. We serve because we have been saved. That's what's next! - R W De Haan

Oh, what can I give to the Master,

The One who from sin set me free?

I'll give Him a lifetime of service

To thank Him for dying for me.- K. De Haan

We cannot work for salvation, but salvation is followed by works.

Acts 9:17-27 Building Bridges

By Kevin M. Williams

Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. —Acts 9:27

A new believer recently attended our worship service. He had long, multicolored, spiked hair. He dressed in dark clothes and had multiple piercings and tattoos. Some gaped; others just gave him that "It's good to see you in church, but please don't sit next to me" smile. Yet there were some during the greeting time who went out of their way to welcome and accept him. They were bridge builders.

Barnabas was that bridge builder for Saul (also called Paul). When Saul arrived in Jerusalem 3 years after his conversion, many

disciples were afraid of him and doubted his transformation (Acts 9:26). He didn't receive a warm welcome from the Jerusalem church greeters for good reason. Saul had a terrible reputation for persecuting Christians! But Barnabas, a Jewish convert, believed God's work of grace in Saul's life and became a bridge between him and the apostles (v.27).

Saul needed someone to come alongside him to encourage and teach him, and to introduce him to other believers. Barnabas was that bridge. As a result, Saul was brought into deeper fellowship with the disciples in Jerusalem and was able to preach the gospel there freely and boldly.

New believers need a Barnabas in their lives. We are to be a bridge in the lives of others.

Oh, I would be to others

A cheering ray of light,

Inspiring them with courage

To climb some newfound height! —Bosch

Be a bridge of encouragement to someone today.

Acts 9:18 After First Sight

By David C. McCasland

Galatians 1:11-18

There fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once. —Acts 9:18

In 1991, two operations restored Shirl Jennings' sight after 40 years of blindness. His family and friends reacted with absolute euphoria, but the next day Shirl's fiance recorded in her diary that he was "trying to adjust to being sighted ... Not able to trust vision yet... Like [a] baby just learning to see, everything new, exciting, scary, unsure of what seeing means."

Although Shirl knew people and objects through his other senses, he could not recognize them by sight. People expected him to be fully adjusted immediately, but he was trying to figure out what everything was.

Isn't it much the same for us when we receive God's gift of salvation?

After Paul was blinded on the road to Damascus, the restoration of his physical sight became a powerful metaphor for the new spiritual sight he received from the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 9:3-17). We don't know much about Paul's 3 years in Arabia following his conversion (Galatians 1:15-18), except that it must have been a period of profound relearning about life and God.

It takes time to grow in our relationship with Christ, and to see with the new spiritual eyes He has given us. So let's be patient with each other, and especially with every new Christian we meet along our journey of joyful discovery. —DCM

More about Jesus let me learn,

More of His holy will discern;

Spirit of God, my teacher be,

Showing the things of Christ to me. —Hewitt

Conversion is a step of faith; maturity is a journey of faith.

Acts 9:20-30 Facing Our Past

By David C. McCasland

He tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple. —Acts 9:26

Chuck Colson, founder of Prison Fellowship, spent 40 years helping people hear and understand the gospel of Jesus Christ. When he died in April 2012, one newspaper article carried the headline, "Charles Colson, Nixon's 'dirty tricks' man, dies at 80." It seemed surprising that a man so transformed by faith should be identified with things he did as a politically ruthless presidential aide decades earlier before he knew the Savior.

The apostle Paul's conversion and his early Christian witness were greeted with skepticism and fear. When he began preaching that Jesus is the Son of God, people said, "Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here

for that purpose?" (Acts 9:21). Later when Paul went to Jerusalem and tried to join the disciples, they were afraid of him (v.26). In years to come, Paul never ignored his past, but spoke of it as evidence of the mercy of God (1 Tim. 1:13-14).

Like Paul, we don't need to parade our failures or to pretend they didn't happen. Instead, we can thank the Lord that through His grace and power, our past is forgiven, our present is changed, and our future is bright with hope for all He has prepared for us.

Transformed by grace divine,

The glory shall be Thine;

To Thy most holy will, O Lord,

We now our all resign. —Burroughs

Only Jesus can transform our life.

Acts 9:36-42

A CHRISTIAN businessman picked up a young man who was hitchhiking in lightweight clothing on a very cold day. This small kindness eventually led to the salvation of the young man, his family, and some of his friends.

A twelve-year-old boy named Cliff Miller went daily to the fence surrounding the athletic field at Georgia State Penitentiary to talk with and witness to inmate Harold Morris. These contacts played a large part in Harold's eventual conversion. Since receiving a pardon, Harold has spoken to thousands of young people around the country about Jesus Christ.

We sometimes think that if we can't do something big for Christ we might as well do nothing. But even a smile can make someone's day go better. In the name of Jesus we can say an encouraging word, run an errand, mow a lawn, take a meal, care for a baby, or do a variety of other small favors. They will make an impact. Even if they do not produce immediate and spectacular results, God takes note of them. —H V Lugt

Acts 9:36-43

ONE day while driving down a country road, a woman named Ruth passed a small, wooden house with a sign outside that read "Quilts for Sale." She stopped, knocked on the door, and was greeted by a little old woman in a faded gingham dress.

"Hello, my name is Ruth. I'm here to see your quilts," the visitor said.

The woman smiled and answered, "You and I both have Bible names. Mine is Martha."

Martha led Ruth to a large cupboard and showed her beautiful quilts of every color and pattern imaginable. Pinned on each one was a blue ribbon.

"I make quilts, too," Ruth said, "but I've never been able to win a blue ribbon."

Martha replied, "My child, maybe your quilts don't have heart. Do you only want the blue ribbon? Every one of mine was made with someone special in mind."

We live in a day of shallow superlatives. Entertainers and athletes perform feats hailed "the greatest" by the world. But truly great human endeavors are those done for Jesus with some needy person in mind. And they bear the mark of eternal excellence. Such was the labor of Dorcas of Joppa. Her loving, charitable heart was seen in the clothes she had made for the poor (Acts 9:39).

When we give our best out of love for Christ and others, our efforts become blue-ribbon service.—D A D

ACTS 10

Acts 10:1-8 What's Wrong With That?

By Dennis J. De Haan

Cornelius [was] a devout man and one who feared God with all his household. —Acts 10:1-2

A prominent senator was dropped from the "Green Book"—the list of Washington societal elite who are invited to special functions. Why? Because he never attended the events. Instead, he went home each night to be with his family.

Then he discovered he had cancer. A difficult career choice faced him. The night before he announced his decision not to run for office again, he said to his wife, "You know, the only thing I'll probably ever be remembered for is that I loved my wife." To which she replied, "And what's wrong with that?"

Families that are built on love, respect, and togetherness instead of social climbing or the pursuit of successful careers are a nation's hope for survival. And when their values reflect a love for Jesus Christ, they hold a special place in God's plan for the world.

Cornelius was a Roman soldier who feared God even before he came to know Christ. God used him to spread the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 10:24-48). Rome could have used more families like his.

God-fearing families provide stability to individuals and nations when adversity strikes. And there's everything right about that.

Think About It

How do strong families provide stability for a nation?

Did my parents teach me about Christ? How can I

be a godly influence in my family? My nation?

A nation is only as strong its families.

Acts 10:1-8,44-46 Try A Little Kindness

By Julie Ackerman Link

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you. —Ephesians 4:32

Cornelius, a first-century Roman military official, was assigned the task of maintaining order in turbulent Judea. Most Romans of that time believed in many gods—but not Cornelius. He feared the one true God, gave generously to the needy, and prayed regularly (Acts 10:2). Even though the Jewish people didn't accept him as one of their own, God recognized him as one of His. Cornelius agreed with God about what was good and he acted accordingly.

Because of Cornelius' kindness and prayers, God chose him for a special assignment and sent an angel to tell him what to do. The angel didn't explain why, and he didn't say what the outcome would be, but Cornelius followed the instructions. Because he obeyed, he and his household became the first Gentile believers to receive the Holy Spirit.

The example of Cornelius reminds us that God not only sees the good we do but is on the lookout for people who share His values. He wants to make them His partners in changing the world.

Today is World Kindness Day. If we follow the example of Cornelius, perhaps God will use our simple acts of kindness to change our world.

Lord, compassion is part of Your character, and

kindness is one of the best ways to show the world what You are like.

May Your compassion fill my heart and spill over into the lives

of everyone I encounter. Amen.

Kindness is the oil that takes the friction out of life.

Acts 10:1-22 Outside Our Comfort Zone

By Haddon W. Robinson

God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean. Therefore I came. —Acts 10:28-29

Longfellow wrote, "The vine still clings to the moldering wall, but at every gust the dead leaves fall." Like that vine, many churches today cling to the crumbling wall of traditional programs, losing members like dead leaves carried away by the biting winds of our times.

To put it another way: We refuse to leave our comfort zones. We like to stick to the familiar, the predictable, the usual.

In some ways our attitude resembles the way Peter felt before the Lord prodded him into new territory. Peter knew that Christ's strategy was Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and then the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 1:8). But Peter simply wasn't comfortable

with Gentiles. They were not “his kind of people.” Yet, God shook him loose to go to the house of Cornelius and give them the good news about Jesus (Acts 10).

The church, like Peter, is often locked behind the walls of its brick and shake-shingle fortress. We tend to stay where we feel unthreatened, among the people who make us feel accepted and loved. It takes a clear vision of God’s compassion for the lost to get us beyond our comfort zone to reach those for whom the Savior gave His life.

Have we gotten too comfortable?

Go to the lost, in the home, in the mart,

Delay no longer, today make a start;

Tell them of Jesus who bled for their sin—

From byways of darkness bring others to Him. —Houghton

The church is a training center, not a country club.

LONGFELLOW wrote, “The vine still clings to the moldering wall, but at every gust the dead leaves fall.”

Many churches today, like that vine, are clinging to a crumbling wall. Their programs, once alive and meaningful, are suffering from neglect, and the churches, like aging vines losing their leaves, are losing members with each gust of change.

People hate to give up what is familiar, predictable, and comfortable, but those who refuse to do so eventually die.

Peter felt this way until the Lord prodded him into new territory. Peter knew that Christ’s strategy was Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 1:8). But Peter wasn’t comfortable with Gentiles. They were not his kind of people. Yet God sent Peter to the house of Cornelius, a Roman governor, to tell him the good news about Jesus.

Christians often lock themselves inside their brick and shake-shingle fortresses. Surrounded by people just like themselves, they feel safe and unthreatened. It takes a clear vision of God’s love for the lost to get people to leave the comfort and safety of such a place. So if we have no willingness to go, perhaps it is because we have no love for the lost.—HWR

Acts 10:1-23 Tuned In

By Dennis J. De Haan

While Peter thought about the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Behold, three men are seeking you.” —Acts 10:19

God speaks to us primarily through His Word, the Bible. Sometimes, however, He directs in ways we do not expect.

Gary Dougherty, a co-worker at RBC Ministries, was walking home from church one evening when he saw a young man coming from the opposite direction. A strong urge came over Gary to talk with him about becoming a Christian. He hesitated at first, but then he said to this total stranger, “Pardon me, but I believe God wants me to tell you how to become a Christian.”

“I just asked my girlfriend’s mother that question,” said the man, “but she didn’t know.” “You mean you want to become a Christian?” Gary asked. “Yes, I do!” he replied. Still incredulous, Gary asked him again and then shared the plan of salvation with him. That night a young man met Jesus as his Savior.

Some might call this a coincidence, but there’s a biblical parallel in Acts 10 with Cornelius and Peter, two men who were in touch with God’s Spirit.

Not all believers have equally dramatic experiences. But if God’s Word, prayer, and obedience are a daily part of our lives, we will be tuned in to the Spirit’s leading and be ready to convey God’s love to others.

Father, thank You for Your Spirit,

Fill us with His love and power;

Change us into Christ’s own image

Day by day and hour by hour. —Anon.

When you open your heart to the Lord, He opens your eyes to the lost.

Acts 10:34 OPEN YOUR MOUTH!

Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons.

Have you ever found yourself doing something you thought you never would? I have. I know people who have said, "I'll never give up the pleasures of sin and become a Christian." But they did! Praise God!

Peter never expected to preach the Gospel to the heathen. He felt that they were outside the scope of God's redemptive love, and most likely found it difficult to develop a keen love for Roman soldiers who held the Jews in captivity. However, God had been working. He had prepared both Peter, and Cornelius the Centurion, for this special occasion recorded in Acts 10; and so the Apostle "opened his mouth" to present God's message.

As children we used to say, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." We wanted to give the impression that unkind expressions or insults did not really give pain; but down deep in our hearts we knew better. Words can hurt, harm, yes, actually destroy a person. God speaks to human hearts through words, and permits our mouth, when controlled by the Spirit, to become a channel through which He brings the Gospel to needy hearts. Yes, it is by the witnessing of believers that souls are brought to the blessings of salvation.

Too many of us seldom open our mouths for Christ. We open them to eat, to gossip, to criticize, and to cheer for the home team, but not to present the Gospel. Perhaps we are afraid it will cost us something. You may suffer a bit of ridicule, or be the recipient of a look of disdain, but think of the gain if a soul is saved from eternal death. Notice: Peter opened his mouth for Jesus Christ, and a whole household was led to salvation!

How about your mouth? Are you willing to open it for Jesus? Your testimony for Christ may make you a partner with God in working the greatest of all miracles, the miracle of salvation.

Is there anything else that's of more worth

As along life's way we plod,

Than to find some wandering soul of earth,

And bring him home to God? —Anon.

The torch of Christianity may be lit in the church, but it does its best burning in the shop and in the street!

Acts 10:34-43 The Forgotten Tree

We are witnesses of all things which He did ... , whom they killed by hanging on a tree. --Acts 10:39

In Acts 10:39, the cross of Calvary is called a tree. It's also referred to this way in Acts 5:30, Acts 13:29, Galatians 3:13, and 1 Peter 2:24.

At this season when much attention is paid to the Christmas tree covered with tinsel, ornaments, and colored lights, the rugged cross of Calvary might well be called the forgotten tree of Christmas. Many people completely overlook the purpose for which Jesus came to earth. The true significance of His birth can be lost in the trappings, gift-giving, and party-going associated with the celebration of this holiday.

We must keep clearly in mind the real meaning of Christmas. Luke tells us that "the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Lk. 19:10). The Babe of Bethlehem was born to die. He came to give His life as a sacrifice for sin by hanging on a tree--not a tinsel-covered thing of beauty, but an ugly, cruel instrument of execution.

As we remember our Savior's birth in Bethlehem's stable, let's be deeply conscious that it is vitally related to Golgotha's hill where He was crucified, and where He shed His blood for the sins of the world.

Don't let Calvary's cross be the forgotten tree of Christmas. It's the most important one! --RWD

This joyous season of the year

Should prompt us to recall

That Jesus' death on Calvary

Provides new life for all. --Sper

The mission of the cross is hidden in the message of the cradle.

Acts 10:38 Doing Good

By Marvin Williams

Luke 6:27-36

Jesus of Nazareth ... went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. —Acts 10:38

Someone once said, “The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow. Do good anyway.” I like that; it’s a great reminder. In the book of Acts, Luke summarized Jesus’ earthly ministry by saying that He “went about doing good” (10:38).

What does the Bible mean when it tells us to “do good”? Jesus did good by teaching, healing, feeding, and comforting people. Using Jesus as the perfect example, His followers are called to meet the needs of others, including those who hate them: “Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you” (Matt. 5:44; see also Luke 6:27-35). They are to serve their enemies without expecting anything in return.

Moreover, as opportunity arises, His followers are to do good especially to fellow believers (Gal. 6:10). They are not to let persecution, selfishness, and busyness cause them to forget to do good and to share what they have with others (Heb. 13:16).

To be like our Savior and His early followers, we should ask ourselves each day: “What good thing can I do today in Jesus’ name?” When we do good, we will be offering a sacrifice that pleases God (Heb. 13:16) and that draws people to Him (Matt. 5:16).

From the example of Jesus,

Who went about doing good,

We are to honor our Savior

By helping wherever He would. —Hess

Imitate Jesus—go about doing good.

Acts 10:38 Do All The Good You Can

By David C. McCasland

Titus 2:11-3:2

[Jesus Christ] gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed. —Titus 2:14

At the church I attend, the Sunday morning service closes with a song based on John Wesley’s words. We sing, “Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in every place you can, at all the times you can, to everyone you can, as long as you ever can—do all the good you can.” I’ve come to appreciate these words as a fitting challenge to live like Jesus, who “went about doing good” (Acts 10:38).

In Paul’s letter to Titus, there are several references to doing good. We are told that a church leader is to be “a lover of what is good” (1:8). Christians are to be “zealous for good works” (2:14) and “ready for every good work” (3:1). Believers must “maintain good works” (3:8).

People everywhere are hungry for the reality of a personal touch from God, and we as Christians can do something about that. The wonderful gift of the love of Christ, which was given to us when we trusted in Him as our Savior, was never intended to be kept to ourselves. It should break out in acts of love, kindness, help, and healing wherever we are and in everything we do.

It’s a great theme song for every Christian every day—“Do all the good you can.”

Follow with reverent steps the great example

Of Him whose holy work was doing good;

So shall the wide earth seem our Father’s temple,

Each loving life a psalm of gratitude. —Whittier

Count that day lost in which you’ve not done something good for another.

Acts 10:38 "THINK ON THESE THINGS"

Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report; if there be any virtue, any praise, think on these things. Philippians 4:8

The best way to keep evil ideas out of our minds is to concentrate on things that are good and pure and beautiful. The mind cannot be entirely at rest; it is not a blank. Hence the exhortation is given to think about right things. We are to be occupied with the Scriptures, with loving attitudes and holy desires. We must look only on worthy things and meditate primarily on that which is of good report. To praise rather than to criticize is our first duty. As we thus allow the Holy Spirit to bring every thought into captivity to Christ, we will find that good deeds will automatically flow from such lofty and spiritual attitudes. Like our blessed Savior, we too will then go about "doing good" (Acts 10:38).

A college girl who was a fine scholar and had a noble spirit volunteered to be a counselor at a girl's camp. Despite her abilities, she was required to peel potatoes in the kitchen. The head mistress of the camp, realizing that this was quite a menial task for such a talented and highly intellectual girl, exclaimed, "It's too bad that a young woman of your education should have to peel potatoes." The girl who was a splendid Christian looked up brightly and replied, "But, Miss Baldwin, remember, I don't have to think about potatoes while I'm peeling them." The application is obvious. You can keep your soul out of the dust no matter what your task, if you center your thoughts on the things mentioned in our text. Let the Holy Spirit discipline your mind by dismissing suspicion and replacing it with hope and trust. Forego grudges. Flout envy. Be appreciative, be kind, be gentle. Rejoice in the Lord a little more. Take pleasure in beauty and virtue. Clear away the cobwebs of doubt, frustration, and anger. Let your mind dwell on Christ and He will beautify your life.

Think truly, and thy thoughts

Shall be a fruitful seed;

Live truly, and thy life shall be

A great and noble creed. — H. Bonar

You're not what you think you are; but what you THINK—you are!

Acts 10:38 Faith At Work

By Vernon C. Grounds

James 2:14-26

Let us love not in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. —1 John 3:18

Christians sometimes sing the following words:

This world is not my home,

I'm just a-passing through.

Does that mean that we who are headed for heaven aren't to have a concern for the present world? No. We can't pray as Jesus instructed us, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Mt. 6:10), and be indifferent to the needs and evils of our planet. On the contrary, we ought to be eager to carry out Paul's counsel, "As we have opportunity, let us do good to all" (Gal. 6:10).

British historian Paul Johnson points out that our spiritual forebears in 19th-century England battled against slavery, poverty, vice, and illiteracy because of their devotion to God. He wrote, "Generous-minded Victorians, who took big risks by publicly expressing their concern for the poor, did not pretend that they knew everything about the problem or propose specific solutions." The dynamic of their concern, Johnson asserts, was their solid belief in God.

We are saved by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8), but our faith is to produce "good works" (v.10). Let's follow the example of those Victorian Christians. And may we be like Christ, "who went about doing good" (Acts 10:38).

So let our lips and lives express

The holy gospel we profess;

So let our works and virtues shine,

To prove the doctrine all divine. —Watts

A living faith is a working faith.

Acts 10:38 No Body But Ours

By Joanie Yoder

1 Corinthians 12:12-27

We are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. —Ephesians 5:30

In Acts 10:38, Peter described our Lord as “Jesus of Nazareth, ... who went about doing good.” Those acts of service and kindness were expressed through His earthly body. Since ascending to heaven, Christ no longer has a body on earth except ours. In other words, He has no hands, legs, or feet on earth except for the members of His body, the church. So we must never underestimate the importance of being the body of Christ on earth, not only spiritually but also physically.

There’s a story of a little child who was put to bed in a dark room. She was fearful of being left alone, so her mother brought her a doll. This didn’t satisfy her and she begged her mother to stay. The mother reminded her that she had the doll and God, and needn’t be afraid. Soon the child began crying. When the mother returned to her side, she sobbed, “Oh, Mommy, I want someone with skin on!”

We’re all like that child at times. In our loneliness and suffering, Christ doesn’t condemn us for wanting “someone with skin on” to be with us and to care for us.

Therefore He sends us out to be His body to one another and to the world, and to go about doing good. Remember this: Right now Jesus has no body on earth but ours!

The love of Christ has freed us,

Has lifted us from shame;

Now we His path should follow,

And reach out in His name. —DCE

God works through us to meet the needs of those around us.

Acts 10:42 The Carpenter Judge

By Richard De Haan

Acts 17:22-31

It is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead. —Acts 10:42

Jesus Christ is the Inescapable One. We must either receive Him in this life as our loving Savior or stand before Him in the life to come as our eternal Judge.

There’s a story in the Gray and Adams Commentary about a doctor who “made it his chief concern in matters of religion to degrade the character and dignity of Christ.” He viewed the Savior with so much contempt that he always spoke of Him in a demeaning way by calling Him “the carpenter’s son.”

In time the physician became terminally ill. During the weeks before his death, he became very agitated. He remarked to the person who was attending him, “I’m a dying man, and what affects me most of all is that I must be judged by the carpenter’s son!”

That doctor faced the terrible future that awaits all who reject Christ. Yet, even in his last conscious moments, if he had trusted Him as his Savior he could have found peace and received eternal salvation.

How have you been treating Christ? Remember, “the carpenter’s son” is the Son of God, the “Word made flesh.” Trust Him today! You will receive the blessing of salvation—not the sentence of condemnation (Jn. 3:17).

What will you do with Jesus?

Neutral you cannot be;

Someday your heart will be asking,

“What will He do with me?” —Simpson

Everyone must choose—Christ or condemnation!

ACTS 11

Acts 11:19-26 Known For Compassion

By David C. McCasland

He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. —Acts 11:24

During Major Gen. Mark Graham's 2 years as commander of Fort Carson, Colorado, he became known and loved for the way he treated others. One US Army colleague said: "I have never come across another general officer who was so compassionate and so concerned about the well-being of soldiers and their families." After losing one son to suicide and another who was killed in action, Mark and his wife, Carol, dedicated themselves to helping soldiers and their families cope with service-related stress, depression, and loss.

In the book of Acts, a follower of Christ was well known for his care and concern toward others. His name was Joseph, but in the early church, the apostles called him Barnabas—"son of encouragement." It was Barnabas who vouched for the newly converted Saul when others doubted the sincerity of his faith (Acts 9:26-27). Later, Barnabas brought Saul from Tarsus to teach the believers in Antioch (Acts 11:25-26). And it was Barnabas who wanted to give John Mark a second chance after his failure on a previous missionary journey (Acts 15:36-38).

Compassion is an inner feeling resulting in outward action. It should be our daily uniform of service (Col. 3:12). By God's grace, may we be known for it.

Lord, help us be compassionate

To people in their grief;

Then tell them of the love of Christ,

Who'll bring their souls relief. —Sper

True compassion is love in action.

Acts 11:19-26 Tonsillitis Jones

By Richard De Haan

The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. —Acts 11:26

A psychologist made the observation that children often develop lifelong complexes because of their names. That may have been true in the case of a boy I read about. His parents gave him the name Tonsillitis Jones, and it caused him difficulties in school and again when he tried to enlist in the navy.

I know from personal experience that our names have a definite bearing on how we feel about ourselves and the way we behave. Because my father was a well-known preacher by the name of De Haan, I felt that people had higher expectations of me than of my peers. But the family name was also a helpful reminder of many positive values that were to guide my behavior.

According to today's Bible reading, the disciples of the Lord Jesus in Antioch were the first to be called Christians. It's a name that could never be improved on because it identifies believers as followers of Jesus Christ. And what an honor to bear a name linking us to God's Son, our Savior and Redeemer! This should shape and mold our manner of living so that it becomes increasingly consistent with the way Jesus spoke and conducted Himself.

If we want to call ourselves Christians, let's live up to our name!

O to be like Thee, blessed Redeemer!

This is my constant longing and prayer;

Gladly I'll forfeit all of earth's treasures,

Jesus, Thy perfect likeness to wear. —Chisholm

Christians are either Bibles or libels.

Acts 11:19-26 Giving Others A Push

By Anne Cetas

[He] encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord. —Acts 11:23

When Jean was a teenager, she often walked through a park where she saw mothers sitting on benches and talking. Their toddlers sat on the swings, wanting someone to push them. "I gave them a push," says Jean. "And you know what happens when you push a kid on a swing? Pretty soon he's pumping, doing it himself. That's what my role in life is—I'm there to give others a push."

Encouraging others along in life—that's a worthy purpose. Joses, a godly man mentioned in the book of Acts, had that gift as well. In the days of the early church, he sold some land and gave the money to the church to use for the less fortunate (4:36-37). He also traveled with Paul on missionary journeys and preached the gospel (11:22-26; 13:1-4).

You may know Joses as "Barnabas," which is the name the apostles gave to the "Son of Encouragement." When the Jerusalem church heard that people in Antioch were coming to know Jesus as Savior, they sent Barnabas because "he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith" (11:24). He "encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord" (v.23).

We too can give others a "push" of encouragement in their walk with the Lord.

Lord, I would be to others

A cheering ray of light,

Inspiring them with courage

To climb some new-found height! —Bosch

A little spark of encouragement can ignite great endeavors.

Acts 11:19-26 What Else Can We Be?

By Richard De Haan

The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. —Acts 11:26

During an interview, the great Polish pianist Ignace Paderewski said, "It is not from choice that my life is music and nothing more, but when one is an artist what else can he be? When a whole lifetime is too short to attain the heights he wants to reach, how then can he devote any of the little time he has to things outside of his art?"

The interviewer then inquired, "And you have not yet attained the heights you seek?" "I am nothing!" replied the artist shaking his head. "If you could know the dream of what I would like to be, you would realize how little I have accomplished."

Paderewski's words spoke to me of the goal and attitude that every Christian should have. He had declared, "When one is an artist, what else can he be?" I would ask, "When one is a Christian, what else can he be?"

In the early church, the disciples were called Christians, which means "those belonging to Christ." Their love and service for the Lord was obvious. If a great pianist can recognize who and what he is, and give his entire life to the development of his art, how much more should we strive to be like our Lord and Savior! With the noted pianist we should be able to say, "What else can we be?"

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Jesus, Thy perfect likeness to wear. —Chisholm

Every child of God should grow in likeness to the Son of God.

Acts 11:19-26 Bearing The Name

By David C. McCasland

The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. —Acts 11:26

Hans Geiger, Marie Curie, Rudolf Diesel, Samuel Morse, and Louis Braille share something in common. They all invented or discovered something significant that bears their name. Their names, along with many others, appear in the "Encyclopedia Britannica's Greatest Inventions," a list of "325 innovations that have had profound effects on human life."

We who follow Christ bear His name. In Luke's record of the early church, he said: "The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (Acts 11:26). Later, Peter urged the early believers not to be ashamed of suffering as "a Christian" (1 Peter 4:16). The term Christian, once directed at Jesus' followers in scorn, was embraced by them as a badge of honor, a mark of allegiance to Him.

E. M. Blaiklock, former Chair of Classics at the University of Auckland, wrote that in the first century the term Christian had "a certain appropriateness, for it implied loyalty and acceptance of a person, and that person, the Messiah (Christ)... The true modern use of the word follows the same tradition... The Christian is one who accepts, with all its implications, the lordship of Jesus Christ."

As followers of Christ today, we gladly bear His name as our Savior, Lord, and Friend.

Just what do Christians look like?

What sets their lives apart?

They're ordinary people

Who love God from the heart. —D. De Haan

Don't be a Christian in name only.

Acts 11:19-26

The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. --Acts 11:26

During an interview, the great Polish pianist Ignace Paderewski said, "It is not from choice that my life is music and nothing more, but when one is an artist what else can he be? When a whole lifetime is too short to attain the heights he wants to reach, how then can he devote any of the little time he has to things outside of his art?"

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In the early church, the disciples were called Christians, which means "those belonging to Christ." Their love and service for the Lord was obvious. If a great pianist can recognize who and what he is, and give his entire life to the development of his art, how much more should we strive to be like our Lord and Savior! With the noted pianist we should be able to say, "What else can we be?" --R W De Haan

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Every child of God should grow in likeness to the Son of God

Acts 11:19-26 What's In A Name?

By C. P. Hia

Walk worthy of the calling with which you were called. —Ephesians 4:1

My Chinese family name sets me apart from others with different family names. It also confers on me a family responsibility. I am a member of the Hia family. As a member of the family, I am expected to carry on the Hia line and uphold the honor of my ancestors.

Believers who have been saved by the atoning blood of Jesus Christ have a spiritual family name. We are called "Christians."

In the New Testament, the name Christian was first given to the disciples in Antioch by those who noted their behavior (Acts 11:26). Two things defined these early believers. They talked about the good news of the Lord Jesus everywhere they went (v.20). And they

eagerly learned the Scriptures as Barnabas and Saul taught them for a whole year (v.26).

The name Christian means an “adherent to Christ”—literally, one who “sticks” to Christ. Today many people call themselves Christians. But should they?

If you call yourself a Christian, does your life tell others who Jesus is? Are you hungry for God’s Word? Do your actions bring honor or shame to Christ’s name?

What’s in a name? When the name is Christian, there is much indeed!

Teach us that name to own,

While waiting, Lord, for Thee,

Unholiness and sin to shun,

From all untruth to flee. —Cecil

A Christian reflects Jesus Christ.

Acts 11:26 Living Up To The Name

By Richard De Haan

Read: Ephesians 2:1-10

[God] made us alive together with Christ. —Ephesians 2:5

A new Christian was reading through the Gospels. After she finished, she told a friend she wanted to read a book on church history. When her friend asked why, the woman replied, “I’m curious. I’ve been wondering when Christians started to become so unlike Christ.”

We can understand why this new convert was perplexed. There is a great disparity between the life of Christ and the lives of many who bear His name. In fact, some believers are even imitating the world instead of trying to live like Jesus.

Almost 2,000 years have passed since followers of Jesus were first called Christians (Acts 11:26). Today, we who have placed our trust in the Savior still bear that name and march under the same banner as those early believers.

The Bible says that we are God’s “workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10). When we call ourselves Christians, we are saying to the world that Christ is our Savior and that we are following Him.

Christians have a glorious name. It is a great privilege to be identified with Christ—and a great obligation to live up to His name!

More like the Master I would live and grow,

More of His love to others I would show;

More self-denial, like His in Galilee,

More like the Master I long to ever be. —Gabriel

When you walk with Christ, you’ll be out of step with the world.

Acts 11:19-26 What’s In A Name?

By Poh Fang Chia

John 1:35-42

You are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church. —Matthew 16:18

My friend wrote a letter to his newborn child that he wanted him to read when he was older: “My dear boy, Daddy and Mummy wish that you will find and stay focused on the Light. Your Chinese name is xin xuan. Xin means faithfulness, contentment, and integrity; xuan stands for warmth and light.” He and his wife carefully chose a name based on their hopes for their baby boy.

When Jesus renamed Simon as Peter/Cephas (John 1:42), it wasn’t a random choice. Peter means “the rock.” But it took a while for him to live up to his new name. The account of his life reveals him as a fisherman known for his rash ways—a shifting-sand kind of

guy. Peter disagreed with Jesus (Matt. 16:22-23), struck a man with a sword (John 18:10-11), and even denied knowing Jesus (John 18:15-27). But in Acts, we read that God worked in and through him to establish His church. Peter truly became a rock.

If you, like Peter, are a follower of Jesus, you have a new identity. In Acts 11:26, we read, "The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch." The name "Christians" means "Christ-ones." You now are one of the Christ-ones. This title lifts up who you are and calls you to become what you are not yet. God is faithful, and He will complete His good work in you (Phil. 1:6).

Dear Father, thank You for the incredible privilege

of being called Your child. May we understand

more fully what it means to be identified with Your

Son, Jesus Christ. Work in us and through us.

We honor God's name when we call Him our Father and live like His children.

Insight

Today's reading records a call to discipleship. After John the Baptist identified Jesus as the "Lamb of God," two of his disciples followed Jesus. Andrew is named, but the second spiritual seeker is not. Many commentators believe that the apostle John is the second disciple. Notice the easy conversation which takes place between the two disciples and Christ. He asks what they seek. They inquire about where He is staying, and He invites them to come and see. The tenth hour by Jewish reckoning was 4:00 p.m. Obviously, the day was coming to an end. Andrew became so excited about Jesus' invitation that he went to find his brother Simon and brought him to meet the Master.

Acts 11:19-26; 13:1-3 Time Out

By David C. McCasland

Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away. —Acts 13:3

El Bulli restaurant, 2 hours north of Barcelona, is so popular that customers must reserve a table 6 months in advance. But noted Spanish chef Ferran Adrià decided to close the doors of his award-winning restaurant for 2 years so he and his staff could have time to think, plan, and innovate. Adrià told Hemispheres Magazine, "If we are winning all the prizes, why change? Working 15 hours a day leaves us very little time to create." In the midst of great success, they took time out for what is most important to them.

The first-century church in Antioch experienced a time of exciting growth when "a great number believed and turned to the Lord" (Acts 11:21). As a result, Barnabas and Saul came to teach the new believers (vv.25-26). But along with the hard work, they took time to seek the Lord through prayer and fasting (13:2-3). Through this, God revealed His plan for taking the gospel into Asia.

Few people can take 2 years off to think and plan. But all of us can build time into our schedule to seek the Lord earnestly through prayer. As we open our hearts and minds to God, He will be faithful to reveal the steps of life and service that honor Him.

There is a blessed calm at eventide

That calls me from a world of toil and care;

How restful, then, to seek some quiet nook

Where I can spend a little time in prayer. —Bullock

Prayer is as important as breathing.

Acts 11:22-26 Quiet Encouragers

By Cindy Hess Kasper

[He] encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord. —Acts 11:23

One of the qualities I most admire in others is the gift of quiet, behind-the-scenes encouragement. I remember arriving home from a stay in the hospital and finding that my friend Jackie (who had surgery a few days earlier) sent me a book of God's promises.

My Uncle Bob was so thankful for the people who cared for him at the cancer center that he sent hundreds of complimentary notes to their work supervisors.

My cousin Brenda experienced the agonizing loss of a child almost 20 years ago, and now her quiet deeds of compassion are treasured by many.

Often it is the very people who have experienced the most suffering—physical and emotional—who are the most abundant providers of encouragement to others.

In Acts, we read about Barnabas, who was known as the “Son of Encouragement” (4:36). He was “a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith” (11:24) and encouraged others so “that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord” (v.23). His acts of encouragement must have had a wide and strong sphere of influence.

Just as we have been blessed with encouragement, let’s be a modern-day Daughter or Son of Encouragement to others.

The human spirit rings with hope at the sound of an encouraging word.

ACTS 12

Acts 12:1-11 Living Beyond The Odds

By David C. McCasland

Constant prayer was offered to God for [Peter] by the church. —Acts 12:5

Many of us make daily decisions based on the odds. If there’s a 20 percent chance of rain, we may ignore it. If there’s a 90 percent chance, we’ll take an umbrella. The greater the odds, the more our behavior is affected because we want to choose wisely and be successful.

Acts 12:1-6 describes a situation in which Peter’s odds of survival were very low. He was in prison, “bound with two chains between two soldiers” while others guarded the door (Acts 12:6). Herod had already executed James, one of Jesus’ closest followers, and he had the same fate in mind for Peter (Acts 12:1-3). A gambler would not have put any money on Peter getting out of this alive.

Yet God’s plan for Peter included a miraculous deliverance that even those who were interceding for him found hard to believe (Acts 12:13-16). They were astonished when he showed up at their prayer meeting.

God can operate outside the odds because He is all-powerful. Nothing is too hard for Him. The One who loves us and gave Himself for us is in charge of our lives. In ordinary circumstances and impossible situations, God can reveal His power. Whether we are showered with success or sustained in sorrow, He is with us.

Dear God, we’re so thankful that nothing is too

difficult for You. You can do amazing things!

Help us to trust that You are always with us

and always in control. We love You, Lord.

God is always in control behind the scenes.

Acts 12:1-19 The Only Way To Help

By Dave Branon

Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church. —Acts 12:5

I looked at my watch. To my dismay, it was 1:45 in the afternoon. I had promised my daughter Lisa, who was playing the piano in a competition for college scholarships at 1:30, that I would pray for her. I got busy, though, and forgot all about it. By 1:45 I knew she had already finished.

I sat at my desk with a feeling of lingering emptiness. I felt as if I had failed her. I knew that the only possible way I could have assisted Lisa during her competition was to ask God to calm her and help her recall the music she had practiced so long and hard to master.

As I contemplated this situation, I was reminded of how important prayer is as a link with those we cannot reach. By talking to the

Lord about a friend or loved one's needs, we have a unique opportunity to make a difference in their lives— even though we can't be with them in person. What an amazing concept!

No matter what the circumstances of our friends or family members who are away from us, prayer is always an effective way we can support them and be of help. It worked for the people who prayed for Peter (Acts 12), and it can work for us.

No greater help and care is given

To others in their need

Than when we bear them up in prayer

And for them intercede. —DJD

When you can't be there, you can help through prayer.

Acts 12:1-16 You Can Always Pray

By Dave Branon

I called on the Lord in distress; the Lord answered me. —Psalm 118:5

The young mother called out to the missionary, "Come quick! My baby is going to die." Gale Fields was in Irian Jaya helping her husband Phil translate the Bible into Orya, a tribal language. But they also provided medical help whenever possible. Gale looked at the malaria-stricken child and realized she didn't have the right medicine to help the infant.

"I'm sorry," she told the mother, "I don't have any medicine for babies this small." Gale paused, then said, "I could pray for her though."

"Yes, anything to help my baby," answered the mother.

Gale prayed for the baby and then went home feeling helpless. After a little while, she again heard the mother cry out, "Gale, come quick and see my baby!"

Expecting the worst, Gale went to the baby's side. This time, though, she noticed improvement. The dangerous fever was gone. Later, Gale would say, "No wonder the Orya Christians learned to pray. They know God answers."

The early Christians prayed for Peter to be released from prison and then were "astonished" when God answered them (Acts 12:16). We respond that way too, but we shouldn't be surprised when God answers our prayers. Remember, His power is great and His resources are endless.

Forgive us, Lord, when we're surprised

By answers to our prayer;

Increase our faith and teach us how

To trust Your loving care. —Sper

The most powerful position on earth is kneeling before the Lord of the universe.

Acts 12:16 UNBELIEVING PRAYER

... when they ... saw him [Peter], they were astonished. Acts 12:16

The story is told about a church in a small town which seemed to have everything going its way. There were no gambling casinos, no liquor stores, and no "beer joints" in the entire area. After several years, however, a night club was built right on Main Street. The congregation was very much disturbed and held several all-night prayer meetings in which some members specifically asked God to burn the tavern down. Well, a few days later, during a tremendous thunderstorm, lightning did strike the drinking establishment and fire completely demolished it. The owner, knowing how the church had prayed, sued them for damages. His lawyer claimed that it was their prayers which caused the loss. The church, however, hired their own lawyer and fought the charges. After many hearings and much deliberation, the judge declared: "It is the opinion of this court that wherever the guilt may lie, the tavern owner is the one who really believes in prayer, while the church members do not!" Doesn't this suggest how faithless we often are? Even those in the early church were guilty of such unbelieving prayer. Acts 12 tells us that Peter, having escaped from prison, went to the house of Mary the mother of John where many Christians were gathered together praying for his release. He knocked, and Rhoda went to the door; but, hearing his voice, she was so thrilled that, without opening it, she ran to the "prayer meeting crowd" and told them that

Peter was outside. "Thou art mad!" they said. As she insisted that it was really Peter, they concluded, "It is his angel." As the apostle continued knocking, they finally opened the door. Seeing him, they "were astonished." How often we are like that: surprised at the way God answers prayer.

When we pray, let us be confident that God "is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Eph. 3: 20).

God answers prayer; shouldst thou complain?

Be not afraid, thou canst not ask in vain.

He only waits thy faith in Him to prove,

Doubt not His power e'en mountains to remove! —Anon.

Have faith to believe that where prayer focuses, power falls!

Acts 12:20-24 Irreverence

By Herbert Vander Lugt

The people kept shouting, "The voice of a god and not of a man!" Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him. —Acts 12:22-23

King Herod, dressed in his royal apparel, delivered an oration to an audience eager to win his favor. He reveled in their flattering response. "[This is] the voice of a god and not of a man!" shouted the crowd (Acts 12:22). Fear and awe of the one true God should have led him to protest, but he didn't. For his failure to "give glory to God," he was immediately struck by an angel of the Lord. He suffered an excruciating death because of his lack of reverence for God.

Paul and Barnabas, on the other hand, had such a great reverence for God that they nearly panicked at the thought of being worshiped (Acts 14:14-15). Upon seeing the apostle Paul miraculously heal a man who had been crippled from birth, the onlookers shouted, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!" Then they prepared to offer sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas (vv.11-13). When the apostles heard this, they "tore their clothes and ran in among the multitude, crying out, ... 'Why are you doing these things?'" (vv.14-15).

In these contrasting biblical accounts, we see a solemn call to give God reverence in our irreverent world. He is the only one who is worthy of glory, praise, and honor. He is the only one who merits our worship.

To fear the Lord means giving Him

Our reverence, trust, and awe,

Acknowledging His sovereignty,

Submitting to His law. —Hess

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to Your name give glory. —Psalm 115:1

Acts 12:25-13:3 MATTHEW 28:19

COCA-COLA seems to be everywhere. But how does it get there? This motto, posted in the company's headquarters, explains it: Think Globally, but Act Locally.

What this slogan is to Coke, the Great Commission is to the church. A church that wants to obey the Lord's command to make disciples of all nations must first be faithful locally.

The early church's missionary outreach began when a group of sinners, changed by God's Spirit and united in a unique body, began ministering to the Lord (Acts 13:2).

The word minister can also be translated "worship." As early believers gathered to worship and pray, the Holy Spirit told them to send out Barnabas and Saul. Responding to God's love in worship led them to take His love to the world. That's God's plan for the success of His work. Through our worship, the Holy Spirit gives us discernment to recognize those whom He calls as missionaries. He also gives us the responsibility to support them financially and with prayer.

If we're worshipping the Lord properly we'll be sending out missionaries regularly.—DJD

Lord, may my worship result in willingness to go—to the person next door, in the next office, down the street, in the inner city, or on

the other side of the world—as well as in willingness to glue so that others might go.

Acts 12:10

The Departing Angel (by George H Morrison)

"And they [Peter and the angel] went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him" (Acts 12:10).

I wonder if you grasp, then, what I should venture to call the helpful doctrine of the departing angel? I think it is a feature of God's dealing that has been somewhat neglected in our thought. It means that in extraordinary difficulties we may reasonably look for extraordinary help. It means that when we are shut in prison walls, and utterly helpless to extricate ourselves, God has unusual powers in reserve, that He is willing to dispatch to aid His own. But when the clamant need goes, so does the angel. In the open street, under the common sky, do not expect miraculous intervention. It was better for Peter's manhood, and it is better for yours, that only the hour of the dungeon should bring that. The angel departs, but the law of God abides. The angel departs, but the love of Christ remains. And I think that all God's leading of His people, and all the experience of the Christian heart, might be summed up, with not a little gain, in the departing angel and the -- George H Morrison

ACTS 13

Acts 13:1-5 Pray Or Act?

By Dave Branon

Having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away. —Acts 13:3

A missionary comes to your church and says that he needs some short-term help. Do you pray or do you act?

The youth pastor says your church needs some new musical instruments for the youth ministry. Do you pray or do you act?

A mission needs help in a soup kitchen. Do you pray or do you act?

Prayer is one of the most powerful tools we have at our disposal. It allows us to speak to the Lord and to petition Him directly for guidance and help.

But sometimes we can be the answer to our own prayer. Those are the times when we should pray and act. Maybe that missionary's request can be answered by your willingness to go. Perhaps you can donate a musical instrument. Are you the person God is leading to help in that soup kitchen?

In the first century, the good news of Christ was spread by people going out and taking action. That's why their story is told in a book called The Acts of the Apostles, not The Prayers of the Apostles.

We should never downplay prayer, for it is something God commanded us to do. But let's realize that sometimes we need to back up our prayers with action. —JDB

Lord, when I sense Your call to serve,

Help me to follow through;

I must not simply pray and wait

When there is work to do. —Fasick

God may want you to be the answer to your own prayer.

Acts 13:1-5 Are You Ready?

By Dave Branon

As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work." —Acts 13:2

Three months before a planned missions trip, a friend and I were talking about the upcoming event. He said to me, "If anyone can't go, I'd be willing to step in and join you." This was not going to be an easy 8 days, for we would be painting, repairing, and fixing

stuff in the July heat of Jamaica. Yet my friend seemed eager to go.

About 6 weeks before we were scheduled to leave, there was an opening. I e-mailed my friend—whom I hadn't seen in the interim—and asked if he was still interested. He immediately responded, "Sure! And I got a passport just in case you asked." He had made sure he was ready—just in case he got the call to go.

My friend's preparation reminds me of what happened back in the first century at Antioch. Paul and Barnabas were among a number of people getting themselves ready spiritually for whatever God might ask them to do, or wherever He might send them. They didn't prepare by getting a passport, but they "ministered to the Lord and fasted" (Acts 13:2). And when the Holy Spirit said, "Separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work" (v.2), they were all set for the journey.

Are you preparing for what God might want you to do? When the Spirit says, "Go," will you be ready?

Keep your tools ready—God will find work for you.

Acts 13:1-13 Doing Things God's Way

By Dave Branon

Being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia. —Acts 13:4

Again and again we hear of groups who claim to be doing things in God's name yet don't seem to be truly serving Him. For instance, we see cults rising up—groups that are headed by a leader with personal magnetism, who draws people to himself with promises, claiming to have special knowledge from God.

To avoid being carried away by this kind of person, it might be helpful to look closely at the suggestions of Watchman Nee, a Chinese Christian writer. He said God will bless:

- what He initiates
- what depends on Him for its success
- what is done according to His Word
- what is done for His glory

The work of Paul and Barnabas in their first missionary journey met those guidelines. As we read Acts 13, we see that God initiated it (v.2), the people depended on God (v.3), it was done according to the Word of God (v.5), and God received the glory (v.12).

Whenever we wonder whether some work we hear about is done with God's blessing, we need to apply this four-step test. It's the best way to make sure things are done God's way, not man's.

They truly lead who lead by love

And humbly serve the Lord;

Their lives will bear the Spirit's fruit

And magnify His Word. —DJD

The only leader worth following is the leader who is following Christ.

Acts 13:13-23 Tough To Love

By Dennis Fisher

Now for a time of about forty years [God] put up with their ways in the wilderness. —Acts 13:18

Years ago I was a camp counselor for some rebellious boys. I found it challenging to deal with their behavior. They would mistreat the animals at the petting zoo and occasionally fight among themselves. So I adopted a calm and firm approach to leading them. And although they often exasperated me, I always made sure their physical needs were taken care of.

Even though I had a kind and loving exterior, I often felt on the inside that I was just "putting up with them." That caused me to prayerfully reflect on how a loving heavenly Father provides for His rebellious children. In telling the story of the Israelites during the exodus, Paul said, "For a time of about forty years [God] put up with their ways in the wilderness" (Acts 13:18). In Greek "put up with" most likely means to patiently provide for people's needs despite an ungrateful response.

Some people may not react favorably to our efforts to show care and concern. When this happens, it may help to remember that God is patient with us. And He has given us His Spirit to help us respond with love to those who are hard to love or who are ungrateful (Gal. 5:22-23).

Give us Your patience, Lord, for anyone in our lives who is difficult to love.

I want the love that sweetly bears

Whate'er my Father's hand may choose to send;

I want the love that patiently endures

The wrongs that come from enemy or friend. —Anon.

Be as patient with others as God has been with you.

Acts 13:22 The Heart Of The Matter

By David C. Egner

1 Samuel 16:1-13

Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart. —1 Samuel 16:7

How often are we guilty of leaving God out of our decision-making? Sometimes when we're faced with a choice, the right answer may seem obvious to us and those around us. But if we fail to ask the Lord to help us get to the heart of the matter, we might jump to a wrong conclusion.

That's what Samuel did when he set out to anoint Israel's next king. When he saw Eliab, Jesse's oldest son, Samuel was sure he had his man. Wrong! In fact, God chose the least likely of Jesse's sons, the youthful David. He was a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22), but Samuel saw only the outward appearance.

Including God in decision-making is a vital principle for churches too. When seeking a new pastor or someone to lead a church ministry, we're tempted to look only at externals. We're concerned with such things as speaking skills, friendliness, and ability to inspire—and we should be. But if we haven't asked God to get us past appearances to the heart, we haven't looked deep enough. We can't read hearts, but the Lord can. He knows when someone is closely following Him.

As you make your decisions today, be sure to include God.

Not mine—not mine the choice,

In things both great and small,

Be Thou my Guide, my Strength,

My Wisdom, and my All. —Bonar

If you don't want to end in failure, be sure to begin with God.

Acts 13:22 Wait On The Lord

By Dennis Fisher

Psalms 27

I waited patiently for the Lord; and He inclined to me, and heard my cry. —Psalm 40:1

With so many instantaneous forms of communication today, our impatience with hearing a reply from others is sometimes laughable. Someone I know sent an e-mail to his wife and then called her by cell phone because he couldn't wait for a reply!

Sometimes we feel that God has let us down because He does not provide an immediate answer to a prayer. Often our attitude becomes, "Answer me speedily, O Lord; my spirit fails!" (Ps. 143:7).

But waiting for the Lord can transform us into a people of growing faith. King David spent many years waiting to be crowned king and fleeing from Saul's wrath. David wrote, "Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart" (Ps. 27:14). And in another psalm he encourages us with these words, "I waited patiently for the Lord; and He inclined to me, and heard my cry.

He ... set my feet upon a rock, and established my steps" (40:1-2). David grew into "a man after [God's] own heart" by waiting on the Lord (Acts 13:22; see 1 Sam. 13:14).

When we become frustrated with God's apparent delay in answering our prayer, it is good to remember that He is interested in developing faith and perseverance in our character (James 1:2-4). Wait on the Lord!

Sweet hour of prayer! Sweet hour of prayer!

Thy wings shall my petition bear

To Him whose truth and faithfulness

Engage the waiting soul to bless. —Walford

God stretches our patience to enlarge our soul.

Acts 13:36 Why Not Now?

By David H. Roper

John 13:33-38

David, after he had served his own generation ... fell asleep. — Acts 13:36

I have a dear friend who served as a missionary in Suriname for many years, but in his final years he was stricken with an illness that paralyzed him. At times he wondered why God allowed him to linger. He longed to depart and to be with his Lord.

Perhaps life is very hard for you or a loved one, and you are wondering why God has allowed you or your loved one to linger. When Jesus said He was going to heaven, Peter asked, "Lord, why can I not follow You now?" (John 13:37). You, like Peter, may wonder why entry into heaven has been postponed: "Why not now?"

God has a wise and loving purpose in leaving us behind. There is work to be done in us that can only be accomplished here on earth. Our afflictions, which are for the moment, are working for us "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. 4:17). And there is work to be done for others—if only to love and to pray. Our presence may also be for the purpose of giving others an opportunity to learn love and compassion.

So, though you may desire release for yourself or a loved one, to live on in the flesh can mean fruitfulness (Phil. 1:21). And there is comfort in waiting: Though heaven may be delayed, God has His reasons. No doubt about it!

Not so in haste, my heart!

Have faith in God, and wait;

Although He seems to linger long

He never comes too late. —Torrey

Our greatest comfort is to know that God is in control.

Acts 13:36-41 A Past Long Gone

By Vernon C. Grounds

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. —Romans 8:1

According to the English novelist Aldous Huxley, "There are no back moves on the chessboard of life." Yet we remain aware of things we have done and things we have left undone. Our sins worry us. They motivate us to wish fervently that somehow we could undo the past.

That's why those who put their faith in Jesus can be thankful for God's message in both the Old and New Testaments. When Paul preached in Antioch, he said, "By [Jesus], everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses" (Acts 13:39). The law condemned us (Romans 7:10-11), but Jesus offers deliverance and new life (8:1).

Are you worried about what you've done in the past? Rejoice! God has "cast all our sins into the depths of the sea" (Micah 7:19). Are you still concerned about your sins? Rejoice! "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more" (Hebrews 10:17). And "I have blotted out, like a thick cloud, your transgressions" (Isaiah 44:22).

If you have put your faith in Jesus and asked Him to forgive you, the past is truly forgotten. “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us” (Psalm 103:12). Trust and rejoice!

My sin—O, the bliss of this glorious thought—

My sin, not in part but the whole,

Is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more,

Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul. —Spafford

God's forgiveness frees us from the chains of regret.

Acts 13:39 “I’m Justified!”

By Henry G. Bosch

Romans 4:13–5:2

By Him everyone who believes is justified from all things. —Acts 13:39

One day Bible teacher and evangelist R. A. Torrey spoke with a woman who lacked assurance that her sins were forgiven. He told her to read aloud Acts 13:39, “By Him everyone who believes is justified from all things.”

Then Torrey inquired, “Who does God say is justified?”

“Everyone who believes,” she replied.

“Believe on whom?” he asked.

“Believe on Christ,” she said.

“Have you accepted Him as your Savior and Lord?” asked Torrey.

“Yes,” replied the woman.

“Then what does this verse promise?” he prodded.

The doubting woman could not say, “I’m justified from all things.” So Torrey went over that Scripture again and again. At last the simple meaning of the words dawned on her. “Praise God!” she exclaimed. “I’m justified from all things!” She finally experienced the peace that comes from knowing complete forgiveness.

Self-effort, religious ritual, or agonizing prayer cannot take away sin. But when we trust in Christ for salvation, we are justified—declared righteous by God. Then, as we lose our burden of guilt and experience total justification, we will have real peace.

Justification: Our guilt gone, Christ’s goodness given.

Acts 13:44-52 Witnessing Smarter

By Dave Branon

The word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region. —Acts 13:49

Joyce Gleave, an art teacher from Mustang, Oklahoma, had a burden for the spiritual welfare of the 600 students she taught in the public school. So while on a trip to the Holy Land, she purchased 600 tiny wooden crosses. But when she discovered that she would not be allowed to give the crosses to her students in the classroom, her witnessing opportunity seemed doomed.

Instead of giving up, Joyce embarked on an ambitious project. Armed with her crosses and gospel tracts, she visited every one of her students in their homes—all 600 of them! “Many parents were moved to tears that I cared for their child,” she said of her visits.

The life of the apostle Paul points out that witnessing for Jesus Christ is neither easy nor popular. In his case, he was sometimes told by city officials or opposing groups to get out of town. Yet Paul still found a way to tell the story of Jesus—even at the loss of his freedom.

A world trying to eliminate Christianity is one that needs Jesus Christ more than ever. As we face obstacles in our efforts to tell others about our faith, let’s look for new ways to spread the gospel. We may need to witness smarter.

Lord, give us wisdom from above

To share the message of Christ's love;

And help us always persevere

To make that message loud and clear. —DJJ

The rewards of witnessing are worth the risks.

Acts 13:44-49 ADVERTISING THE GOSPEL

And daily ... they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ. Acts 5:42

According to a recent newspaper article the ten top advertisers in the United States spent more than \$1.3 billion in one year alone for the promotion of their products. How much more is spent annually by thousands of other firms I don't know, but the total must reach astronomical proportions.

Webster's New American Dictionary defines the word "advertise" as follows: "To make public by a printed notice, broadcast message, or any means of publicity. To give warning or information." As believers—we too have an obligation to "advertise." It is our duty to "make public" the good news of God's Word by every means available. Jesus said, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."

J. I. Rodale, in his book *The Synonym Finder*, gives the following substitutes for the word "advertise": "To make a public announcement of, to circulate, post, blazon, propagate, disseminate, trumpet, proclaim, or make known." This is what we should do with the message of God's saving grace. To send forth the Gospel is "advertising" in the best sense of the word without any of its distasteful connotations.

When we consider the tremendous effort and huge expenditures being made today to promote the material things of this world, with their temporary worth and shallow satisfaction, how much more diligent we should be in "telling the story of Jesus"! Let's not be stingy in the work of "advertising" the Gospel!

Tell it out among the highways and the lanes at home; Let it ring across the mountains and the ocean's foam! Like the sound of many waters let our glad shout be, Till it echoes and re-echoes from the islands of the sea!

—Havergal

It is a solemn responsibility to have in one's possession a reprieve for men under condemnation and then not to deliver it!

Acts 13:44-52

But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy (Acts 13:45).

Envy and jealousy are feelings of discontent and resentment aroused by thinking about another person's desirable qualities or possessions and wanting them for ourselves. Here are some classic examples: Rachel envied Leah because she bore children (Gen. 30:1); Joseph's brothers resented him for his dreams (Gen. 37:11); Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and two hundred fifty princes envied Moses (Num. 16:1-3); Saul was jealous of David because the women praised him (1 Sam. 18:7-9); and in Acts 13:45, the Jews opposed Paul's preaching for the same reason—envy.

Any advantage held by another—intelligence, good looks, a slim figure, popularity, a good job, or even a person's spiritual insight—may trigger this feeling. The most devout Christian is not immune to its subtle attack. When F. B. Meyer first held meetings at Northfield, Massachusetts, large crowds thronged to hear his stirring messages. Then the great British Bible teacher G. Campbell Morgan came to Northfield, and the people flocked to hear his brilliant expositions of Scripture. Meyer confessed that at first he was envious.

He said, "The only way I can conquer my feeling is to pray for Morgan daily—which I do."

A negative reaction toward anyone who possesses what we lack quenches the Holy Spirit's work in our hearts. That's why we must root out all envy and jealousy from our lives. We know we are gaining victory when we desire good for the one we envy. —R. W. De Haan

A daily dose of Christlike love will heal the disease of jealousy.

ACTS 14

Acts 14:1-7,19 For His Sake

By Mart De Haan

I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. —2 Corinthians 12:10

I remember a time when my children were young and my wife was in bed with a stubborn case of the flu. I was trying to fill in for her the best I could, but the kids weren't cooperating. Even though I spent a lot of time playing with them, they seemed determined to fill the house with more noise and mess than I could tolerate. Why couldn't they calm down and do more to help? I wondered why they couldn't be more considerate for their mother's sake—and for my sake?

Then I thought about my relationship with God. Do I treat Him the way my kids were treating me? He must be grieved at times by my insensitivity to His concerns.

Later I began looking up every passage of Scripture that mentions doing something for the Lord's sake, doing what we know pleases Him. I read about Paul, Peter, and Stephen—men who put their lives on the line for Christ's sake. For them that phrase was a way of life, not just empty words. On one occasion, the apostle Paul was even stoned and left for dead because he dared to proclaim the gospel (Acts 14:19).

I wonder how much of what I do and say is for my Lord and Savior's sake? That's a good question for all of us to ponder.

Your mission as a Christian is to take

The cross of Christ and do His perfect will;

To love and serve the Lord for Jesus' sake—

You have no higher purpose to fulfill. —Hess

Jesus gave His all for us—are we giving our all for Him?

Acts 14:1-7,19-22 Briers And Buttercups

By Julie Ackerman Link

We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God. —Acts 14:22

The buttercups in our backyard were unusually bright and beautiful due to the generous amount of spring rain God sent our way. I wanted to take some pictures of them before they faded, but I had trouble getting close enough because they were growing in a very soggy wetland. One sunny afternoon, I pulled on a pair of boots and trudged through briers and brambles toward buttercup bog. Before I got any pictures, I got muddy feet, multiple scratches, and numerous bug bites. But seeing the buttercups made my temporary discomfort worthwhile.

Much of life is about “getting through” the trials and troubles that are inevitable in our sinful world. One of these trials is persecution. The disciples certainly found this to be true. They knew the good things that Jesus has ready for those who follow Him, but they met harsh resistance when they tried to tell others (Acts 14:5).

Those of us who have chosen God's way, and who know from experience that it's “a more excellent way” (1 Cor. 12:31), will persevere even when we have to go through danger and difficulty. By doing so, we show others a beautiful picture of God's peace, mercy, and forgiveness. The joy that awaits will make our temporary discomfort worthwhile.

As sure as night, life's troubles come,

As sure as day, they're past;

But surer still that endless joy

When heaven we reach at last. —D. De Haan

Earth—the land of trials; heaven—the land of joys.

Acts 14:8-18 Glory Deflectors

By Dennis Fisher

I will not give My glory to another. —Isaiah 48:11

Barbara Mertz has a complaint about Egypt's Pharaoh Ramses II. In her book *Temples, Tombs, and Hieroglyphs*, archaeologist Mertz writes, "One gets so tired of Ramses; his face, his figure, and/or his name are plastered over half the wall surfaces still standing in Egypt—at least it seems that way." Insatiably thirsty for glory, Ramses reveled in Egyptian religion, which taught that the pharaoh was divine.

Contrast Ramses' desire for glory with the attitude of Paul and Barnabas. On one of their missionary journeys, they faced a situation during which they refused to accept vainglory. When a crowd in the idolatrous city of Lystra saw them heal a crippled man, the people exclaimed, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!" (Acts 14:11). They immediately prepared animals to sacrifice in honor of Paul and Barnabas. But the two quickly objected, saying, "We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God" (v.15).

We do not rival the apostles in our accomplishments for God, but we all have things we do for Him. It's then that we must be "glory deflectors," making sure God gets all the glory for everything we have done.

May everything we do—

By word or deed or story—

Be done to please the Lord;

To Him be all the glory. —Roworth

Man's greatest goal: Bringing glory to God.

Acts 14:17 Life Is Good

By Julie Ackerman Link

Romans 8:31-39

I am persuaded that [nothing] shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. —Romans 8:38-39

While shopping in a nearby tourist town, I wandered into a small store stuffed with clothing and other items all marked with the slogan "Life is good." Sometimes we need to remind ourselves of that simple truth.

When the work of earning a living, raising a family, maintaining health and fitness, and managing relationships starts to overwhelm us, it's good to think about how small our part in the universe really is. While we obsess over our work, God quietly does His. He keeps the earth rotating, the planets revolving, and the seasons changing. Without any help from us, He makes the sun rise every morning and set every evening. Every night He changes the pattern of lights in the sky. He turns out the light so we can sleep, and turns it on again so we can see to work and play. Without lifting a finger, we get to enjoy sunrises and sunsets. Every year the seasons change on schedule. We don't need to pray about it or tell God that it's time to send spring. All that He does reminds us He is good (Acts 14:17).

Life will at times be difficult, often it is painful, and for now it is imperfect. But still it is good, for in all these things nothing can separate us from God's lavish expressions of love (Rom. 8:39).

Thank You, loving Father, for the good gift of life. Forgive me for making it complicated for myself and others. I thank You and praise You for all You do so that I can enjoy so much. Amen.

God's grace is immeasurable; His mercy inexhaustible; His peace inexpressible.

Acts 14:17 The Voice Of The Lord

By Herbert Vander Lugt

Psalms 29:1-11

He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons. —Acts 14:17

The long dry summer season in Lebanon and Israel usually ends in October with welcome rains that are often accompanied by strong winds, lightning, and thunder.

The writer of Psalm 29 may have had in mind an autumn storm as it moved from the Mediterranean Sea across Lebanon (v.5), down through the wilderness (v.8), and over the temple in Jerusalem (v.9). He spoke of the storm's elements as "the voice of the Lord" (v.3), and the joyful response of the worshipers in the temple as they shouted, "Glory!" (v.9). The psalm closes with the people of God enjoying the peace He alone can give (v.11).

Seeing and hearing a violent storm is an awesome experience that quite naturally turns one's thoughts to God. In Romans 1:20, Paul told his readers that God's eternal power and Godhead are clearly seen in the created world. He makes Himself known through nature. I've heard His "voice" many times—in the stillness of the woods after a heavy snowfall, in a gentle breeze, or in the singing of birds on a spring morning.

Yes, God speaks to us through His marvelous creation. His power and majesty are inescapable if we would just pause to listen. Like the people of ancient Israel, let us respond, "Glory!" —Herb Vander Lugt

The treasures of the crystal snows

And all the wonders nature shows

Speak of a mighty Maker's hand

That all in love and wisdom planned. —Bosch

All creation sings God's praise.

Acts 14:27 Respond And Report

By David C. McCasland

Read: Luke 9:1-10

When they had come and gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done with them. —Acts 14:27

During a Sunday night service, a man described a week-long mission trip from which he and a half-dozen others had just returned. There was a vibrancy in his voice as he told why they went to a needy area in another state, how many yards of concrete they mixed and poured for a church sidewalk, and how their lives were changed in the process. I was moved and encouraged as he reported what God had done in and through all those who went.

I see this same pattern of respond-and-report in Jesus' training of His disciples. In Luke 9 we read, "He called His twelve disciples together and gave them power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases. He sent them to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick" (vv.1-2). They responded by obeying His call (v.6), then returned to report what they had done (v.10). I believe Jesus enjoyed those gospel team reports as the disciples brought encouragement to Him and to each other.

We can follow that same pattern today as we first respond to God's call to serve and to witness, whether it is close to home or far away. When we report the results of His work to others, the joy is multiplied.

So, what are we waiting for?

THINKING IT OVER

How have I been encouraged by the reports of those

who have served God faithfully? How have I had

opportunity to respond and report?

Your response to God's Call is not complete until you report God's work.

ACTS 15

Acts 15:1-11,19-21 Pure Milk

By C. P. Hia

As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the Word, that you may grow thereby. —1 Peter 2:2

Recently it was discovered that some milk producers in China had been diluting cow's milk and adding the industrial chemical Melamine. This chemical was added because it artificially enhanced protein readings. Several infants died and others became seriously ill. Such adulteration is not new. Other countries have been adding Melamine to animal feed for at least 40 years for the same purpose, resulting in the death of animals.

Another kind of adulteration is when people add to God's Word, "the pure milk of the Word" as Peter described it (1 Peter 2:2). The word pure means "unadulterated" or "uncontaminated." The early church had to deal with those who considered circumcision necessary for salvation (Acts 15:1). That idea was rejected because it was not in accordance with the Word of God, which says that salvation is by grace alone. Peter encouraged his brethren in the Lord: "Why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples? ... We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved" (Acts 15:10-11).

Examine carefully any teaching that asks you to do anything more than what is in God's Word. Otherwise it can be deadly to your spiritual well-being.

The Lord has given man His Word,

His will He has made known;

Let man not try to change that Word

With words that are his own. —D. De Haan

God's Word needs no additions or subtractions.

Acts 15:3 LESSONS FROM THE HEART

Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life. - Proverbs 4:23

A good Christian friend in Monrovia, Liberia, recently related to me some of the unique expressions of certain non-English speaking tribes in his area. For example, in speaking of conversion, they would declare that a person "turned his heart." In-stead of saying an individual is patient, they express it: "He put his foot on his heart." It is interesting to note how their picturesque speech corresponds to the true Scriptural meaning. Acts 15:3, for instance, mentions "the conversion of the Gentiles," and the term literally means: "to turn to," or "to turn around." That is also what those who became Christians in Thessalonica did: they "turned to God from idols" (1 Thess. 1:9). How fitting then that the Africans should say that conversion is "a turning of the heart." Note, too, that Ecclesiastics 7:8 tells us: "... the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit." The word "patient" is basically the same term as that translated "slow" in Proverbs 14:29, "He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding: but he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly." When aroused to become angry, he who is wise will be patient, and slow to lose his temper. Once again the African correctly says, "He put his foot on his heart."

To express the fact that one is disappointed, they say: "His heart fell down." Satisfaction is expressed in this way: "His heart is set on fire."

All of these things are related to the core of man's being, and rightly so, for as the Bible says, "out of it [the heart] are the issues of life." The first step in the direction of God is to have it "turned around," the second is to wait patiently on Him for guidance. If we have done this, our heart will never "fall down" (be disappointed), but will rather experience blessed and holy satisfaction — or, as the African says: "It will be set on fire!" Indeed, these four native expressions aptly point out the only way to peace and true happiness.

Hardening of the heart ages people more quickly than hardening of the arteries!

Acts 15:18 It's Elementary!

By Bill Crowder

Psalm 139:1-6

Known to God from eternity are all His works. —Acts 15:18

On a recent trip to London, we exited the Baker Street underground station where we were greeted by a life-size statue of legendary detective Sherlock Holmes. Created by novelist Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Holmes was an investigative genius who could routinely assess seemingly random clues and solve the mystery.

Baffled by Holmes' uncanny brilliance, his sidekick, Dr. Watson, would ask for an explanation—to which Holmes would glibly respond, "Elementary!" and then proceed to unfold the solution.

If only life operated that way. So often, we face events and circumstances that are far more baffling than a Sherlock Holmes mystery. We struggle to figure life out, but we always seem to come up short.

In times like these, it's comforting to know that we have a God who doesn't need to assess the situation—He already knows everything perfectly well. In Acts 15:18 we read, "Known to God from eternity are all His works." He never has to wonder or resort to inductive reasoning.

Despite our finiteness, our lives rest in the hands of the One who knows all the whats, whys, and whens we'll ever face. As we trust in Him, He'll guide us in the path He desires us to take—and His way is never wrong.

God is the One who sees the whole,

His knowledge is complete;

We see but portions of the truth

As lines that never meet. —D. De Haan

In a world of mystery, it's a comfort to know the God who knows all things.

Acts 15:10 An Easy Yoke

By Anne Cetas

Matthew 11:25-30

Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me. —Matthew 11:29

A Sunday school teacher read Matthew 11:30 to the children in her class, and then asked: "Jesus said, 'My yoke is easy.' Who can tell me what a yoke is?" A boy raised his hand and replied, "A yoke is something they put on the necks of animals so they can help each other."

Then the teacher asked, "What is the yoke Jesus puts on us?" A quiet little girl raised her hand and said, "It is God putting His arm around us."

When Jesus came, He offered an "easy" and "lighter" yoke compared to the yoke of the religious leaders (Matthew 11:30). They had placed "heavy burdens" of laws on the people (Matthew 23:4; Acts 15:10), which no one could possibly keep.

God knew we would never be able to measure up to His standards (Romans 3:23), so He sent Jesus to this earth. Jesus obeyed His Father's commands perfectly and bore the punishment of death for our sins. As we humble ourselves and recognize our need for forgiveness, Jesus comes alongside us. He places His yoke on us, freeing us from guilt and giving us His power to live a life that's pleasing to God.

Are you in need of Jesus' help? He says, "Come to Me ... Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me" (Matthew 11:28-29). He longs to put His arm around you

Heavy is the load of guilt

That sinners have to bear;

Light and easy is the yoke

That Jesus wants to share. —D. De Haan

God's easy yoke does not fit on a stiff neck.

Acts 15:25-26 Taking Risks

By Dennis Fisher

Acts 15:7-26

Barnabas and Paul ... have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. —Acts 15:25-26

In his book *Stuntman! My Car-Crashing, Plane-Jumping, Bone-Breaking, Death-Defying Hollywood Life*, Hal Needham reflects on taking risks. Needham has slugged it out in fist fights, raced cars at high speed, walked on wings of airborne planes, fallen off

horses, and has even been set on fire! He risked his life to entertain film audiences and to distinguish himself as a top Hollywood stuntman.

Paul and Barnabas were also “men who have risked their lives” (Acts 15:26). But their motivation was far different. Their goal was to exalt Christ through the preaching of the gospel. As a missionary in the Roman Empire, Paul faced hazards that resulted in shipwrecks, beatings, persecution, and imprisonment—just to name a few (2 Cor. 11:22-30). But Paul was more than willing to take these risks to make Christ known.

Many believers take risks to spread Jesus’ good news. But fear of rejection causes others to remain silent. Have you been passively sitting on the sidelines ignoring opportunities to share the gospel? God has provided His Spirit to empower you (Acts 1:8) and His Word to make the message clear (Rom. 1:16). Ask God for the courage to speak up and witness for the Savior. Taking the risk will be well worth it.

Will you be bold in your witness

By giving lost sinners God’s Word?

Jesus will honor your service,

And sinners will surely be stirred. —Bosch

The rewards of witnessing are well worth the risks.

Acts 15:36-41 Learning From The Past

By Herbert Vander Lugt

Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry. —2 Timothy 4:11

We all have some regrets about the past and try to forget our sins and mistakes. We feel a lot like the Peanuts comic strip character Linus, who said, “Maybe we should think only about today.” Charlie Brown disagreed, “No, that’s giving up. I’m still hoping yesterday will get better.”

We know that we can’t change what happened yesterday. But we can learn from yesterday’s sins and mistakes, and with God’s help we can use that knowledge to make a better tomorrow.

That’s what John Mark did. He had started on a missionary journey with Paul and Barnabas, but when they entered Asia Minor he abandoned them and went back home (Acts 13:13; 15:38). We’re not told why he left, but the apostle Paul saw it as a shameful desertion.

Later, Mark became a co-worker with Barnabas (15:39). We don’t know the details, but at some point Mark must have changed and reconciled with Paul (Colossians 4:10-11). When Paul was in prison awaiting execution, he asked Timothy to come and to bring Mark with him. He indicated that Mark was “useful to me for ministry” (2 Timothy 4:11).

We cannot erase yesterday, but we can learn from it. When we take our sins and mistakes to the Lord and seek His help, we can be better today and tomorrow.

For Further Study

How do we know that God forgives us? (1 John 1:9-2:1).

Read the online version of the booklet *When We Don’t Measure Up*

Failure is never final if you begin again with God.

Acts 15:36-41 Resolution

By Dave Branon

The contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. —Acts 15:39

In May 1884, two young parents disagreed about what middle name to give their newborn son. The mom preferred Solomon; the dad, Shippe—both family names. Because John and Martha couldn’t agree, they compromised on “S.” Thus Harry S. Truman would become the only US president with an initial for a middle name.

Over 120 years later, we still know about this conflict—but we also know that a reasonable resolution was reached.

In the New Testament, we read about another disagreement that has lived on in history. This one was between two missionaries: Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15). Barnabas wanted to take Mark with them on a trip to check on some churches they had helped previously (v.37). But Paul did not trust Mark because of an earlier incident (v.38). Paul and Barnabas disagreed so sharply that they parted ways (v.39).

We still read about this argument 2,000 years later. What's important is not that it lived on in history, but that it didn't leave permanent relationship scars. Paul apparently reconciled with Barnabas, and in his final days asked for Mark to be with him because "he is useful to me for ministry" (2 Tim. 4:11).

Arguments happen. But let's make sure they are resolved. Grudges are a burden too heavy to carry.

Arguments can lead to grudges,

Which, if left, will cause a rift;

But if we bring resolution,

Our relationships won't drift. —Sper

A grudge is one thing that doesn't get better when it's nursed.

Acts 15:36-41 Helping With Hurdles

By Dennis Fisher

Two are better than one ... For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. —Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

When my daughter Debbie was a little girl, she took ballet lessons. One dance exercise involved jumping over a rolled-up gym mat. Debbie's first attempt resulted in her bouncing off this hurdle. For a moment she sat on the floor stunned, and then she began to cry. Immediately, I darted out to help her up and spoke soothing words to her. Then, holding her hand, I ran with her until she successfully jumped over the rolled-up mat. Debbie needed my encouragement to clear that hurdle.

While working with Paul on his first missionary journey, John Mark faced a major hurdle of his own: Things got tough on the trip, and he quit. When Barnabas tried to re-enlist Mark for Paul's second journey, it created conflict. Barnabas wanted to give him a second chance, but Paul saw him as a liability. Ultimately, they parted ways, and Barnabas took Mark with him on his journey (Acts 15:36-39).

The Bible is silent about John Mark's response when Barnabas helped him over his ministry hurdle. However, he must have proven himself, because Paul later wrote that John Mark "is useful to me for ministry" (2 Tim. 4:11).

When we see a believer struggling with an apparent failure, we should provide help. Can you think of someone who needs your help to clear a hurdle?

Lord, I want to show the kindness of Your

heart today. Please show me who I can help

and in what way. I want my words and deeds

to convey Your love. Amen.

Kindness picks others up when troubles weigh them down.

Acts 15:36-41 FAILURE

But Paul insisted that they should not take [him] (Acts 15:38).

Get Mark, ... for he is useful to me (2 Timothy 4:11).

Although we can never undo a failure, we can learn from the experience and profit by it. A baseball pitcher who loses a game because he throws a fastball right where the batter wants it may come back four days later and hurl a shutout. He'll never erase the lost game from his record, but his failure can teach him valuable lessons that will help him to chalk up more wins than losses.

In Acts we read that John Mark accompanied Paul and Barnabas when they started their first missionary journey (Acts 13:5), but he soon departed from them (Acts 13:13). While he was at home, he apparently regretted what he had done, so he asked to be included the next time his older friends set out. Barnabas wanted to give him another chance, but Paul didn't, so they parted

company and formed two teams—Barnabas taking Mark, and Paul taking Silas. Young Mark couldn't erase his first failure, but he must have learned from it because he became a respected Christian leader of his day. Furthermore, God used him to write one of the four gospels; and Paul, in his second prison epistle to Timothy, asked for Mark, saying, "He is useful to me for ministry."

It doesn't do any good to brood about what went wrong. Wishing we could do something over is an exercise in futility. Each day is new. With God's help we can succeed, if we learn from yesterday's failure.

Christians live in "the land of beginning again." —H.V.L.

Failure doesn't mean you'll never succeed; it will just take longer.

Acts 15:37 READ: Acts 15:36-41

IN a moment of teenage carelessness, a sixteen-year-old girl wrecked her mother's car. She was uninjured, so she called home to tell her parents, fully expecting an angry reaction. Instead, her father asked only about her physical and emotional condition. When he arrived at the accident scene, he checked to make sure she was unhurt before turning his attention to the mangled auto being towed away. When it was time to go home, he handed her the keys to his car and got in on the passenger side. No angry tirade from this father! Just a lot of love and an overwhelming vote of confidence.

"Words can't describe what my father's Godlike act did for my self-esteem that day," the young woman commented years later. The major impact of that event was not metal against metal; it was spirit against spirit. The daughter saw in her father the character of the God he loved.

When someone fails due to weakness, carelessness, or even sin, the hardest thing to do is to show forgiveness and Christlike love. It is easier to give the person a piece of our mind than a vote of confidence.

We don't know why Mark deserted Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15). But we do know that he later wanted another chance to serve with them. And Barnabas gave it to him.

When God forgave us through His Son Jesus, we were given another chance—one we didn't deserve. That's the ultimate vote of confidence—and one we should not only accept for ourselves, but also give to others. —HVL

Lord, may I be as quick to give second chances to others as I am to accept them for myself.

ACTS 16

Acts 16:1-5 'Good' Sinners

By Dennis J. De Haan

From childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation. —2 Timothy 3:15

Stephen Conn sensed that God wanted him to be a preacher. But he felt a certain disadvantage. Because he had been saved when he was 7 years old, he would never be able to hold an audience spellbound with stories of a wicked past.

He foolishly considered asking God for permission to backslide just long enough to "enhance" his preaching later on. But deep within he knew that God would not answer his misguided request. He decided to preach the Bible without a dramatic testimony.

Conn later wrote, "I realize now what a great testimony I really have. God not only has the power to deliver from sin, He has the even greater power to keep from sin... God not only saved my soul—He saved my entire life!"

We know little of Timothy's early life except that his God-fearing mother and grandmother faithfully instructed him in the Scriptures (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15). Because of this, he might be called a "good" sinner. Yet God used him as an effective leader in the early church.

All redeemed sinners can speak of God's matchless grace. If you've been spared a life of sin, you may have the most dramatic testimony of all. Thank God, by His grace He can use us just as we are.

God's grace can take a sin-stained life

And make it clean within,

Or He by grace may spare a life

From ruin caused by sin. —DJD

The best testimony exalts God's grace, not sin's disgrace.

Acts 16:1-15 It's An Adventure!

Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me. —Psalm 139:10

My wife and I love to travel roads we've never been on before. Last fall we drove down a county road in northern Wisconsin. The autumn colors were near their peak, and every turn brought us a thrilling new sight. Maples of red and orange, green pines, and yellow softwoods painted the ever-changing landscape. Not knowing what to expect next made the journey memorable.

One of the many exciting aspects of walking with Christ is that we don't know what's going to happen next. At times we may be uncomfortable with the twists and turns, but God reserves the right to lead us wherever He wants.

Paul and his missionary companions were making their way through Asia Minor when God changed their plans (Acts 16:6-7). Instead of going to Bithynia, they went to Troas. That night Paul saw a vision of a man pleading, "Come over to Macedonia and help us" (v.9). Paul's plans were changed when God revealed His.

As we prayerfully consider what God wants us to do, we can be confident that He will lead us day by day through His Word and by His Spirit within us (Psalm 139:10). Because He is good (25:8), we can trust Him with our lives in this great adventure called the Christian life.

There's a path His love is planning

Which must mean the best for you;

There are blessings, countless blessings

Which are hidden now from view. —Chambers

You don't need to see the way if you follow the One who is the way.

Acts 16:6-10 Listen To His Promptings

By Marvin Williams

After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them. —Acts 16:7

On Friday, my day of rest as a pastor, the Holy Spirit prompted me to call a young single mother in our faith community to see if her car had been repaired. I had some reservations about making the call, but I obeyed.

Little did I know that my obedience would help save her life. She said later: "Friday at work I was planning on taking my life; but in a time of need, I believe God was there for me. He had Pastor Williams call me, and just by listening to his voice, I knew that God loved me."

The apostle Paul must have had reservations when the Holy Spirit prompted him and his team not to go into the provinces of Asia and Bithynia. Instead, they felt the Spirit's call to go into Macedonia to preach the good news. In each situation, they obeyed the Spirit's promptings. As a result, Paul and his team were instrumental in giving birth to a new faith community in Philippi (Acts 16:11-15).

As believers in Christ who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 2:22), our desire should be to please Him. May we not grieve the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30) by ignoring His gentle promptings. When we obey Him, we might be used by God to lead someone to Christ, to disciple new believers—or even to help save somebody's life.

Holy Spirit, we would hear

Your inner promptings, soft and clear;

And help us know Your still, small voice

So we may make God's will our choice. —D. De Haan

Make the right choice: Obey the Spirit's voice.

Acts 16:6-12 Frustrated Plans

By David C. Egner

They were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the Word in Asia. —Acts 16:6

A young man went to college and then to seminary, determined to become a pastor. God blessed his years in school and gave him many opportunities to preach.

After graduation he looked for a church to pastor but couldn't find one that needed him. So when he was offered a contract to teach in a Bible college, he said yes, still intending to pastor a church someday. But after 2 years of teaching, it finally became clear that God wanted him to be a teacher rather than a pastor.

God sometimes frustrates our own plans as we seek to determine His will. We head in one direction; He blocks our way. Finally we become content to go where He directs us.

Paul experienced that kind of frustration in Asia Minor on his second missionary journey. He headed for the Roman province of Asia, but was "forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the Word in Asia" (Acts 16:6). So he and his companions tried to enter Bithynia, "but the Spirit did not permit them" (v.7). So they journeyed to Troas, where Paul learned that God wanted him to preach in Macedonia (vv.9-10).

Is God frustrating your plans? He may be trying to lead you. Be open to His will and sensitive to His guidance, and He will use you and bless you.

I want to follow You, O Lord,

Your plans for me I will obey;

So when You close or open doors,

Help me to see Your perfect way. —Sper

Contentment comes when we want God's will more than our own way.

Acts 16:6-15 The Man From Macedonia

By Haddon W. Robinson

A man ... pleaded with him, saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." —Acts 16:9

When the apostle Paul saw in a vision the man from Macedonia, it changed the history of the world. Heeding the man's plea to "come over to Macedonia," Paul altered his plans. It was in Macedonia he led Lydia to the Lord, and it was there that the evangelization of the Western world began.

All Christians should be on the lookout for "the man of Macedonia." That man or woman may be well-educated, or have no education at all. He may drive an expensive car, or he may be poor and eke out a living ransacking garbage cans. He may live next door, down the street, or across the sea. He may speak a different language. But wherever you find him, and whatever his situation, he has one pressing need—to know Jesus Christ as his Savior.

Sometimes that need is expressed as a cry for help. At other times it is veiled in bitter hostility to the Savior and the gospel. Many times his sins and errors and crimes announce his desperate condition. Yet despite the thousand different ways he voices that need, the plea is always the same: "Come over ... and help us" (Acts 16:9).

Sooner or later someone will call out to you for help. Will you be quick to answer?

O stir me, O stir me, Lord, till all my heart

Is filled with compassion for those who are lost,

Until Your compelling love drives me to pray

And follow Your leading, not counting the cost. —Anon.

If you've accepted Christ's invitation to come, have you obeyed His commission to go?

Acts 16:9, Luke 16:27,28, Mark 16:15 - Cry From Above and Beneath and Without

Some years ago, a very good friend of mine, Dr. E. Myers Harrison, gave a missionary message that I cannot forget. It was to a

small group of people, but I will never forget the sermon. Dr. Harrison is now at home with the Lord, but he was a great servant of God and a great missionary statesman. He said that each of us as Christians must hear what God has to say. There is the command from above: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature? (Mark 16:15). Have you heard that? I've heard people say, "But God wants our church to be different. We're not supposed to have a missionary program.? I don't believe that. I believe the command from above is given to every Christian and to every assembly that God has raised up.

Then there is the cry from beneath. Remember the rich man who died and woke up in hell and begged for someone to go and tell his brothers? (see Luke 16). "I pray thee, therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house (for I have five brethren), that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment? (Lk 16:27,28). There is the cry from beneath. If you and I could hear the cries of people in a lost eternity right now, we'd realize how important it is to get the Gospel out. There's the command from **above**. Have you heard it? There's the cry from **beneath**. Have you heard it?

Then, according to Dr. Harrison, there is the call from **without**. Acts 16:9 says, "Come over into Macedonia, and help us.? People around us are saying, "Please come to help us!" So much money, time and energy is being spent on routine church matters in America when there is a whole world to reach for Christ! We face so many open doors!

[Something Happens When Churches Pray](#), Warren Wiersbe, pp. 102-3 (1984)

Acts 16:9-31 Divine Appointments

By Dave Branon

Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. —Acts 16:25

Have you ever been stuck in an airport? For 24 hours? In a city where you can't speak the language? Four thousand miles from home?

It happened to a friend recently, and we can learn from his response. While most of us would find such an inconvenience intolerable, my friend John saw God's hand in his delay. As he waited out his forced stay, he looked for opportunities to connect with fellow passengers. He "happened" to find some fellow Christians from India—and in talking to them he heard about a ministry they were involved with. In fact, because John's interests matched his new friends' ministry, they invited him to India to participate in a short-term project.

How often do we experience delays, changes of plans, and redirections and treat them as intrusions? It could be that God is detouring us so we can do something different or new for Him. Consider Paul's trip to Philippi in Acts 16. He had gone to Macedonia because of a God-directed vision (vv.9-10). How could he know that he would end up in prison there? But even that trip to jail was God-led, because He used Paul to bring salvation to a jailer and his family (vv.25-34).

God can use inconveniences in our lives if we look at them as divine appointments.

"Disappointment—His appointment,"

Change one letter, then I see

That the thwarting of my purpose

Is God's better choice for me. —Young

God can turn obstacles into opportunities.

Acts 16:10 - "LED" INTO PRISON

we endeavored to go... assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us. - Acts 16:10

In a vision, Paul saw a man of Macedonia who said, "Come over... and help us." Assured that the Lord Himself had thus called him to preach the Gospel in that area, he and Silas — and evidently Dr. Luke — set out at once for their new "mission field." But what a reception they received! The record tells us that the "multitude rose up together against them" and "beat them" and "thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks." If they would have reacted like many of us today, Paul would probably have complained, "Well, isn't this just fine: led by God into prison! Here we were obedient to the heavenly vision, and this is our reward!"

Was this Paul's attitude? I should say not! Listen to the story in Acts 16:25: "And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God." Singing in prison! Paul knew that "all things work together for good to them that love God." With the eye of faith he could see some future good, and in that confidence was happy even while enduring severe trial. When the Lord had accomplished His purpose, demonstrated His power, and saved the jailer and his family, then Paul and Silas were commanded to

"depart and go in peace."

Sometimes we find ourselves in troubling situations as the result of our service for the Lord. Doing that which we believe to be right and according to His will, we seem to end up in the "prison" of suffering, hardship, and loss, and are tempted to complain, "Lord, is this what I get for my faithfulness?" Then He comes and assures us that He "doeth all things well," and that Romans 8:28 is still in the Book! When all has been accomplished, we shall be able to look back and clearly see His hand and purpose in it all. "Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator" (1Pe 4:19).

There's One who will journey beside me,

In weal, nor in woe, will forsake;

And this is my solace and comfort,

"He knoweth the way that I take!" —Anon.

Every lock of sorrow has a key of promise to fit it!

Acts 16:16-24 The Rescuers

By Dave Branon

These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation. —Acts 16:17

You've taken up spelunking, and you're busily exploring an interesting cave. You check out the tunnels and pathways for hours, wandering deeper and deeper into the unfamiliar darkness. Others outside, realizing you must be lost, send someone to rescue you. Suddenly you hear a voice calling your name.

The rescuer greets you, saying, "Follow me, I know the only way out." You protest, "How can you say there's just one way? There must be others." The rescuer replies, "I've explored this cave, and you must go my way or you'll never get out." "You're too narrow," you reply. "Go on. I'll figure it out myself."

It sounds foolish, but that's the way some people respond when you mention that the only way to get to heaven is through faith in Christ. You would expect them to say, "Wow! Thanks for the good news!" Instead, you might get a reaction similar to that of the cave explorer: "Leave me alone. I don't believe that one-way business."

A rescuer loves, cares, and risks his well-being for others. The apostle Paul was a rescuer who was thrown in jail for trying to spread the good news (Acts 16:23). People won't always receive our rescue attempts with open arms, but that must not stop us from showing the way. Be a rescuer!

Some people do not like to hear

That Jesus is the only way,

But we must still proclaim that truth

So they will follow and obey. —Sper

Those who are lost need someone to show them the way.

Acts 16:16-25 The Gloom Index

By Mart De Haan

At midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God. —Acts 16:25

Gray skies and blue moods—the two seem to go together. In fact, some weather forecasters describe the amount of cloudy days a region can expect during its winter season as "the gloom index."

Other factors might be figured into a gloom index. Think, for instance, of what Paul and Silas, those two first-century co-workers for Christ, endured (Acts 16). Any one of their troubles was enough to ruin the sunniest day.

Try to imagine the frustration of dealing with greedy profiteers who had turned a demon-possessed girl into a sideshow (vv.16-17). Think about the pain of confronting an angry mob and furious judges (v.22), of receiving a whipping and imprisonment (v.23), and of having your feet locked in stocks (v.24). How's that for a gloomy atmosphere?

Paul and Silas were able, though, to rise above their circumstances (v.25) because they were motivated by a desire to obey God and spread the message of Christ.

We too can rise above the gray skies of discouraging circumstances by relying on the Holy Spirit. We can find encouragement and hope in God's Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We can overcome the gloom index.

God, give us wings to rise above

The clouds of trial that block the sun,

To soar above gray skies and see

The love and goodness of Your Son. —Sper

No day is dark when you live in the light of God's Son.

Acts 16:16-31 Gloom Index

By Mart De Haan

At midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God. —Acts 16:25

As Christians, we understand the spiritual significance of Christ's sacrifice at Calvary, but it's easy to forget about the tremendous agony He endured there. The worst aspect was separation from the Father, but the physical suffering was also horrible beyond comprehension.

In his book *Dare To Believe*, Dan Baumann shares some thoughts that can deepen our figured into a gloom index. Think about what Paul and Silas endured (Acts 16). Any one of their troubles was enough to ruin the sunniest day. Imagine the irritations of dealing with greedy profiteers who had turned a demon-possessed girl into a sideshow (vv.16-17). Think about the pain of confronting an angry mob and furious judges (v.22), of receiving a whipping and imprisonment (v.23), and of having your feet locked in stocks (v.24).

But Paul and Silas rose above it (v.25). How did they do that? They were filled with the Holy Spirit, and they had a sense of mission. They were motivated by a desire to obey God and spread the message of Christ.

Like them, we can rise above the mood swings prompted by our circumstances. By being strong in the Spirit, we can overcome the gloom index.

God often sends me joy through pain,

Through bitter loss, divinest gain;

Yet through it all—dark days or bright—

I know my Father leads aright. —Conklin

God's Son can brighten our darkest days.

Acts 16:16-34 One String

By Joanie Yoder

At midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God. —Acts 16:25

Italian violinist Niccolò Paganini (1782-1840) was playing a difficult piece of music before a large audience. Suddenly one string on his violin snapped, yet he continued to play, improvising beautifully. Then two more strings broke, and he completed the composition playing with only one string.

When the applause eventually stopped, he nodded at the conductor to begin the encore. The violinist smiled at the audience and shouted, "Paganini ... and one string!" Placing his instrument under his chin, he played again with that one string.

With that in mind, Charles Swindoll writes, "The longer I live, the more convinced I become that life is 10 percent what happens to us and 90 percent how we respond to it." Supporting his conviction with Scripture, Swindoll reviewed the response of Paul and Silas as they sat in stocks in prison. Instead of bemoaning their lot, they made use of the "one string" they had left—they prayed and sang praises to God (Acts 16:25). As a result of their testimony, the jailer and his entire household were converted and baptized.

Have you allowed life's adversities to discourage and immobilize you? With God's help, make the most of the "one string" you have left. —JEY

In times of great adversity,

Resources nearly gone,

Through faith in God a Christian can

Triumphantly go on. —Hess

If you keep in tune with Christ, you can sing even when all is dark.

Acts 16:16-34 Good Question!

By Joanie Yoder

"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved." —Acts 16:30-31

Finding the right questions is as crucial as finding the right answers," says devotional writer Henri Nouwen. Yet how easy it is to run ahead of God's Spirit as we talk to nonbelievers about Christ, giving pre-packaged answers before we listen to their questions.

This tendency was highlighted several years ago when someone scrawled the words "Christ is the answer!" on the side of a building. A cynical passerby added these words: "What is the question?"

Paul and Silas, thrown into prison for the gospel's sake, provoked a deep spiritual question in the heart of their jailer. This wasn't achieved, however, by preaching a three-point sermon at him. Instead, they prayed and sang hymns to God. When an earthquake opened the prison doors and broke their chains, the jailer tried to kill himself, fearing that he would be put to death if his prisoners escaped. But Paul and Silas stopped him by choosing to stay in prison for his sake. At this he cried out, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30).

Today, as then, the Spirit will create the right questions in people's hearts and make them ready for the right answer—Jesus Christ.

Christians worth their salt make others thirsty for the water of life.

Acts 16:22-29 Praise—Even In Pain

By Vernon C. Grounds

[God] has blessed us with every spiritual blessing. —Ephesians 1:3

Terry Waite, a courageous British negotiator during an international hostage crisis, had gone to Lebanon to arrange the release of prisoners. But he himself was arrested and detained in solitary confinement.

Through long, lonely days and nights, he was unsure that his life would be spared. Nevertheless, every morning he offered as his own a prayer written in 1596 by Queen Elizabeth I. In it he expressed "most humble and hearty thanks for manifold mercies so abundantly bestowed upon me as well as for my creation, preservation, regeneration, and all other of Thy benefits and great mercies exhibited in Jesus Christ."

Is this how we react to hardships? When troubles engulf us, we plead with God for relief from suffering, for healing of disease, for comfort, for strength, and for the supply of our needs. Such petitions are certainly legitimate, and we should bring them to the Father. But do we remember, as Paul and Silas did from the depths of a jail cell, to offer thanks for God's lovingkindness? (Acts 16:25). Do we praise God for giving us life itself, as well as the blessed promise of eternal life?

When we acknowledge God's great mercies, we are able to offer Him praise—even in pain.

When upon life's billows you are tempest-tossed,

When you are discouraged, thinking all is lost,

Count your many blessings—name them one by one,

And it will surprise you what the Lord has done. —Oatman

Praise comes naturally when you count your blessings.

Acts 16:25-40 God Will Make A Way

By David C. Egner

Psalm 27

Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart. —Psalm 27:14

Rebecca was at her lowest as she drove her aging car to the day-care center to pick up her daughter. Her boss was making life difficult again. The landlord was raising the rent. And as a single mom, she felt all alone. "I'm trying my best," she told God. "Please help me."

Just then these words by Don Moen came on the radio in a song:

God will make a way

Where there seems to be no way;

He works in ways we cannot see,

He will make a way for me.

"Please do that for me, God," Rebecca pleaded. "I can't go any further."

The psalmist David too called out to the Lord when he was in desperate straits. He prayed, "Hear, O Lord, when I cry with my voice!" (Ps. 27:7). Then David testified expectantly, "Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart" (v.14).

God specializes in showing His power in hopeless situations. Israel was in just such a place when God parted the sea before them (Ex. 13:17-14:31). Daniel was protected in the lion's den (Dan. 6:10-23). Paul and Silas were delivered from prison (Acts 16:25-40).

God made a way for Rebecca too. A better job she had applied for months earlier suddenly opened up. The increase in her income would cover the rent. Then a family in her church made a newer car available to her.

If life seems to be closing in on you, don't despair! Trust God. He has promised to make a way.

Our unknown future is secure in the hands of our all-knowing God.

Acts 16:25-34 A Forgiving Spirit

By David C. Egner

Pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you. —Matthew 5:44.

During the war in Kosovo in 1999, three Americans were captured and held hostage for more than a month. After intense negotiations, a breakthrough occurred and the prisoners were allowed to go free.

Roy Lloyd was part of the delegation that secured their release. He reported, "Each of the three young soldiers was very religious. One of them, Christopher Stone, would not leave until he was allowed to go back to the soldier who served as his guard and pray for him."

Here was a young man who knew something about the principles of Jesus. He could have resented his circumstances and hated his captors. He could have developed a bitter, vengeful spirit. He could have carried a burning rage out of that difficulty. But following the command of Jesus (Matthew 5:44) and the example of Paul and Silas in Philippi (Acts 16:25-34), he forgave his captor and ministered to him.

In a world where retaliation is common, believers are called to be different. We are to pray for our persecutors, forgive them, and minister to them.

Jesus' principles for His followers are challenging, but with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us we can choose to have a forgiving spirit.

For Further Study

Why should we forgive? (Matthew 6:14-15).

Whom should we forgive? (Luke 17:3-4).

How can we forgive? (Galatians 5:22-25).

We are never more Christlike than when we choose to forgive.

Acts 16:25 Powerful Influence

By Herbert Vander Lugt

2 Timothy 1:1-7

At midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. —Acts 16:25

I'm sure that I am a Christian today because of the formative influence of my parents in my childhood. They taught me by example and from the Bible. Just as Timothy was reminded by Paul of the faith of his mother and grandmother (2 Timothy 1:5), so too I recall the faith of my mother and father. At an early age, I committed my life to Christ. I realized I was a sinner and needed His forgiveness.

Strong influences may also come from people outside the family. I know a young man who became a devout believer as a young boy because he saw Christ in the life of his Sunday school teacher.

In Acts 16 we read that Paul and Silas sang and prayed in a Philippian jail at midnight. When an earthquake broke open the prison doors, the jailer was so terrified that he was about to commit suicide, but Paul stopped him. Seeing that the prisoners did not try to escape, the jailer fell down trembling. "What must I do to be saved?" he asked (v.30). That day he and his entire household became believers. Why? Because of the powerful influence of two men who were faithful to Christ.

The way we live does affect others for good or for bad. This is a sobering and challenging truth that should influence the way we as Christians walk and talk. —HVL

Only one life, so live it well,

And keep your candle trimmed and bright;

Eternity, not time, will tell

The radius of that candle's light. —Miller

Your life either sheds light or casts a shadow.

Acts 16:25-34 Open Doors

By Dennis Fisher

1 Corinthians 16:1-12

For a great and effective door has opened to me. —1 Corinthians 16:9

The Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) wrote: "If I were to wish for anything, I should not wish for wealth and power, but ... for the eye which, ever young and ardent, sees the possible."

The apostle Paul saw some great ministry possibilities in his life situations. He used the open doors God provided to witness for Christ. When he was arrested in Jerusalem and appeared before Governor Felix, he used the opportunity to proclaim the gospel (Acts 24:24). While he and Silas were in prison, they shared the gospel with the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:25-34). And later Paul used his imprisonment in Rome as an opportunity to encourage the Philippian believers in their faith (Phil. 1:12-18).

In writing to the church at Corinth, Paul told the believers he wanted to visit and spend some time with them, but that he needed to stay in Ephesus because of an opportunity for ministry: "I will tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost. For a great and effective door has opened to me" (1 Cor. 16:8-9). And Paul also involved others by asking them to pray for open doors so he could speak clearly about Christ (Col. 4:3).

Ask God to show you possible open doors of service. You might be surprised at what you see.

Jesus said to one and all:

"Take your cross and follow Me."

When you sense the Spirit's call,

Seize the opportunity! —Hess

God writes opportunity on one side of the door and responsibility on the other.

Acts 16:25-34 A 'Him' Sing

By Mart De Haan

At midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God. —Acts 16:25

How could Paul and Silas sing in their terrible circumstances? They were in a strange city far away from home. They were risking their lives to proclaim Christ to people who resented them and bitterly opposed their message. Men with selfish motives had spread lies about their work and had demanded their arrest. The town officials ordered that they be beaten and thrown into prison.

It was under these conditions that Paul and Silas were singing. How can we account for this? The answer is clear. They could sing in the dark because they were doing what God wanted them to do.

The midnight songs of those two men remind me of the nightingale. Observers of this remarkable bird have wondered why it continues to sing after sundown. While other birds are quiet, the lilting melodies of this creature can still be heard. The dark does not silence its song. The nightingale sings at night because that's what God designed it to do.

When we walk with the Lord, we can have a song even in the midst of trouble. We won't be discouraged by circumstances. Our joy will be in doing what the Savior wants us to do. Our greatest delight will be knowing God and singing of Him, even in the dark.

There's within my heart a melody

Jesus whispers sweet and low,

"Fear not, I am with thee—peace, be still,"

In all of life's ebb and flow. —Bridgers

There's a song in the night for those who walk in the Light.

Acts 16:25-34 Feeling Or Faith?

By Henry G. Bosch

He who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son. —1 John 5:10

Many people seem to think that it's wrong to say we know we are bound for heaven. But the Bible tells us we can be sure.

Jesus said, "He who believes in Me has everlasting life" (Jn. 6:47). To question, therefore, whether one has been redeemed after he has fulfilled God's requirement for salvation is to call God a liar! This is a terrible sin. How much better to trust God's Word, which says, "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God" (1 Jn. 5:1).

A believer was once asked, "Do you feel that your sins are forgiven?" "No," was the reply, "I do not always feel that they are forgiven, but I know they are, because God says so in His Word!"

Paul did not say, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will feel that you are saved." He said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31). Not all people feel that their sins are forgiven the moment they put their faith in Jesus Christ and receive the gift of salvation, but they are saved nonetheless. The feeling may come later.

Even the faintest cry to God for salvation is heard and answered. Rest on the rock-solid foundation of the Word, not on the sinking sand of your feeling!

Salvation is not feeling, but faith.

Acts 16:31 - Rescued

By C. P. Hia

1 Corinthians 15:1-4, 20-25

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved. —Acts 16:31

Manuel Gonzalez was the first rescue worker to reach the 33 miners trapped for 69 days in a Chilean mine explosion in 2010. At

great risk to his own life, he went underground more than 2,000 feet to bring the trapped men back to the surface. The world watched in amazement as one by one each miner was rescued and transported to freedom.

The Bible tells us of an even more amazing rescue. Because of Adam and Eve's disobedience, all of mankind is trapped in sin (Gen. 2:17; 3:6,19; Rom. 5:12). Unable to break free, everyone faces certain death—physically and eternally. But God has provided a Rescuer—Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Everyone who accepts the free gift of salvation offered through His death and resurrection is freed from sin's grip and its resulting death penalty (Rom. 5:8-11; 10:9-11; Eph. 2:1-10).

Jesus Christ is the "firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor. 15:20). He was the first to be raised from the dead, never to die again. Likewise, all will be given life who put their faith in Christ (Rom. 8:11).

Are you still trapped in your sins? Accept Jesus' gift of salvation and enjoy the freedom of life in Christ and eternity with Him (Acts 16:31; Eph. 2:1; Col. 2:13).

Thinking It Over

What keeps you from calling out to God for spiritual

rescue? Do you fear that you are too bad for God's

grace? Read and think about Romans 3:23-26.

Through His cross, Jesus rescues and redeems.

Acts 16:1-5

AS a teenager, J. Stephen Conn sensed God calling him to be a preacher. But he felt a certain disadvantage. Because he had been saved when he was seven years old, he would never be able to entertain audiences with stories of a wicked past. So he asked God for permission to get some experience in a life of sin to enhance his preaching later on. Deep within, he knew God would not answer such a request, so he decided just to preach the Bible without a dramatic testimony.

Some time later Conn wrote, "For the past eleven years I've been pastoring a church. I realize now what a great testimony I really have. God not only has the power to deliver from sin, He has the even greater power to keep from sin... God not only saved my soul —He saved my entire life!"

We know little about Timothy's early life except that his God-fearing mother and grandmother faithfully instructed him in the Scriptures (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:15). Because of this, he might be called a "good" sinner. Yet God used him as an effective leader in the early church.

Those who have been spared a life of sin can thank God for His grace. Their lives and testimonies can be just as effective as those of the worst sinners. All sinners, good and bad, can speak of God's matchless grace.—DJD

Acts 16:31 THE ONE YOU CAN TRUST

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved. Acts 16:31

While driving along the highway, I found myself behind a car bearing a bumper sticker which said, "Vote for Robert Chase—THE MAN You CAN TRUST." In this day of "gaps," and especially the "credibility gap," I can see why this politician chose that particular slogan. His hope was that the voters in his district would think of him as a man they could believe, one who would make good on every promise he gave. I know nothing about this Mr. Chase, but I am acquainted with Someone who can be trusted — a Man with a perfect record and who has the praise and endorsement of God Himself — One who keeps His Word. It is the Lord Jesus Christ. After examining the Savior, Pilate declared, "I find no fault in him." And Judas, following his dastardly deed, cried out in remorse, "I have betrayed innocent blood." God the Father expressed His approval of Him, for at His baptism a voice came from Heaven, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

We should also believe what He said, for He predicted that He would die and rise again the third day — and He did! His resurrection was proof that He was everything He claimed to be—truly the Son of Man, and truly the Son of God. It was a declaration that He had fully paid for the sins of the whole world. Forgiveness of sin and life everlasting is now offered to all who put their faith in Him. John tells us in his gospel, "But these [things] are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name" (John 20:31). Yes, the Lord Jesus is "the One you can trust."

Trusting as the moments fly,

Trusting as the days go by;

Trusting Him whate'er befall,

Trusting Jesus, that is all! —Page

He pleases God best who trusts Christ most!

Acts 16:16-25 Choose Your Color

By Vernon C. Grounds

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. —Philippians 4:13

A college student decided one summer that he would earn money for his tuition by selling Bibles door-to-door. He began at the home of the school president. The president's wife came to the door and explained politely that her family didn't need any more books. As the student walked away, she saw him limping. "Oh, I'm sorry," she exclaimed. "I didn't know you were disabled!"

When the student turned around, she realized she had offended him. So she quickly added, "I didn't mean anything except admiration. But doesn't your disability color your life?" To which the student responded, "Yes, it does. But thank God, I can choose the color."

When Paul and Silas were imprisoned at Philippi and their backs were raw from beatings, they sang hymns (Acts 16:23-25). They chose the bright color of praise instead of the dark colors of depression, bitterness, and despair.

No matter what affliction or crisis we may face, we too can decide how we will respond. With the enablement of the Holy Spirit, we can refuse to paint our lives in the dull gray of grumbling and complaining. Instead, our chosen color can be the azure blue of contentment because God's help is always available.

He gives me joy in place of sorrow;

He gives me love that casts out fear;

He gives me sunshine for my shadow,

And "beauty for ashes" here. —Crabbe

God chooses what we go through; we choose how we go through it.

Acts 16:16-26 God Will Make A Way

By Dave Branon

I know that You can do everything. —Job 42:2

Missionary Bill Moore serves in South Africa, but one day he visited neighboring Zambia to help his mission organization buy some property. The first problem he ran into was that the mission was not recognized by the government, which meant they could not buy any land. Registration could take months. Bill and his co-workers prayed, and God provided a contact who helped them secure the needed papers in 15 minutes.

Next, Bill's group needed permission from the land commissioner to buy the property. This was another months-long process—usually. However, they walked out of the office with approval in minutes. What could have taken a year—getting these two documents—took less than an hour! They discovered that God can make a way when it seems there is no way.

Paul and Silas found this out too. While they were praying in prison, God sent an earthquake to free them (Acts 16:26).

Does this mean that we can always expect God to arrange things exactly how we want them? No. But in His sovereignty, He makes a provision for things to get done the way He wants them done. Our job is to pray, to follow His leading, and to trust Him with the results. If He wants it done, God will make a way.

God is greater than our greatest problem.

Acts 16:16-29 Everyday Blessings

By Vernon C. Grounds

In everything give thanks. —1 Thessalonians 5:18

Missionary Benjamin Weir was held hostage in Lebanon and imprisoned under miserable conditions for 16 months. In his first

interview after his release, he was asked how he spent his time and how he dealt with boredom and despair. His answer stunned the reporters. He simply said, "Counting my blessings."

"Blessings?" they responded.

"Yes," he explained. "Some days I got to take a shower. Sometimes there were some vegetables in my food. And I could always be thankful for the love of my family."

We can understand why the reporters were astonished. It's hard for most of us to be consistently thankful for the commonplace blessings that make life pleasant and comfortable—the unfailing supply of our daily needs, the provision of food and shelter, the companionship of friends and families. There are times when we may even forget the wonderful mercies of God's redeeming grace.

Paul and Silas, though they were beaten, thrown into prison, and placed in stocks, were still "singing hymns to God" (Acts 16:25). May we learn from them, and from Benjamin Weir, to count our blessings no matter what our circumstances. We have many reasons to rejoice.

Are you ever burdened with a load of care?

Does the cross seem heavy you are called to bear?

Count your many blessings, every doubt will fly,

And you will be singing as the days go by. —Oatman

Praise to God comes naturally when you count your blessings.

Acts 16:16-34 The Only Remedy

By Richard De Haan

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household. —Acts 16:31

What does it mean to "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ"? (Acts 16:31). Here's an illustration that may help to answer this question:

Suppose you are sick and call for a doctor. After a thorough examination, he says you've contracted a fatal disease, but medical science has discovered a cure. You may be convinced that he is the best physician available, that his diagnosis is accurate, and that the medication he prescribes is your only hope. But you must take the medicine. If you just lie there and refuse the remedy, you will die!

So it is with God's offer of salvation. You may say you're sure that the story of Jesus is true, but if you don't reach out the hand of faith you will be lost for all eternity. You must personally receive the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the only remedy for your sins.

An elderly man in the hospital told a visitor, "When I became very ill and was taken to the emergency room, a physician I had never seen examined me. I could tell that he really knew his business. I had so much confidence in him that I said, 'I want you to be my doctor.'"

That's how we receive salvation. When we hear the gospel message and are introduced to the Lord Jesus, we must say, "I want You to be my Savior!"

God sent His Son to die for us,

No other life would do;

So why not trust in Christ today—

Accept His gift to you. —JDB

Salvation is a free gift, but we must receive it.

Acts 16:31 Fantastic Offers

By Dave Branon

1 Peter 1:3-9

[God's] abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus. —1 Peter 1:3

I am amazed at the unbelievable offers that flood my e-mail box every day. Recently, I added up the offers of free money that came to me in a week, and my "take" totaled \$26 million. But each of those offers was a fraud. Every one—from a \$1 million prize to a \$7 million offer—was nothing but a lie sent by unscrupulous people to squeeze money from me.

We're all vulnerable to fantastic offers—to scams that in reality pay off with nothing but trouble. We are offered false hope that ends in dashed dreams.

There is one offer, however, that is genuine, though fantastic beyond belief. It's the offer God makes to us—salvation through faith in Jesus' finished work on the cross: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31). It is an offer that cost Him greatly—and we get the benefits. The book of Romans tells us, "He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification" (4:25 niv).

By saying yes to salvation, we can have hope (Titus 1:2), peace (Rom. 5:1), forgiveness (Eph. 1:7), incomparable riches (2:7), and redemption (4:30). This is the real deal. Jesus' death and resurrection guarantees it.

Our salvation was infinitely costly to God, but it is absolutely free to us.

Acts 16:31

Read Romans 4:1-5

For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.- Luke 19:10

If a man unable to swim fell into deep water and was crying out for help, what would you do? Throw him a book on Five Easy Swimming Lessons? Shout encouragement? How about jumping into the water and crying out, "Just look at me, brother! Follow my example! I'll teach you how to swim and save your-self!" You would do no such thing! This drowning man doesn't need swimming lessons. It's too late for that! What he needs is a savior, one who will come to him in his desperate state, reach down, lift him up, and deliver him from the clutches of death.

It's the same way with man's spiritual condition. The Bible says that "all have sinned" and that the "wages of sin is death." Everyone born into this world has fallen into sin, and in its clammy embrace is doomed to destruction. The only means of escape must be through a "Savior," one who stoops down in grace and delivers the needy soul from judgment. It is impossible for a man to learn to "save himself." Trying his best won't do, and following the example of others is of no avail. What he needs is a Savior. How thankful we should be then that "the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). He delivers all who trust Him for their salvation. Even as a drowning person must relax and cease his struggling in the arms of his rescuer, we must do the same with this Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Someone has aptly expressed it in this way, "Let go and let God." "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31).

I was sinking deep in sin, far from the peaceful shore,
Very deeply stained within, sinking to rise no more;
But the Master of the sea heard my despairing cry,
From the waters lifted me — now safe am I. —Rowe

The God who was wise enough to make a perfect man is loving enough to rescue a fallen one

Acts 26:9-18 What's Your Story?

By Dennis Fisher

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved. —Acts 16:31

Every believer has a unique story of encountering Christ. Ann, a receptionist at RBC Ministries, told me that she has kept a journal for much of her life. She treasures the account she recorded about her conversion when she was 15. Here is an excerpt. "[I] went to see Billy Graham. I got saved! I'm very happy... When I got saved I felt warmth in my heart."

Years ago, in a personal evangelism course I taught, I asked the students to write out their story of how they came to faith in Christ. It struck me how different each journey was. Some were saved out of a life of drugs and immorality. Others were church attenders who came to Christ after years of biblical instruction.

Conversions vary. The apostle Paul had a crisis encounter with the Savior that turned him from a persecutor into a preacher of the gospel (Acts 26). In contrast, Timothy was quietly nurtured in the Scriptures from early childhood, resulting in his salvation experience (2 Tim. 3:14-15). No two faith journeys are identical. But each has the common element of turning to the Lord Jesus in faith to be saved from sin and to receive a new heart.

Can you retrace the steps that God helped you take in coming to Christ? What's your story?

We once were held by Satan's chains,

Imprisoned by our sin;

Then Jesus Christ delivered us

And made us new within. —Sper

We need more than a new start—we need a new heart!

Acts 16:31 - Getting To Heaven

By Dave Branon

Romans 3:21-28

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved. —Acts 16:31

While working with third- and fourth-graders at our church's Vacation Bible School, I decided to give all 25 of the children a gift on the last day. But I told them that in order to receive it, they would each have to tell me how a person can get to heaven.

It was interesting to hear what these 9- and 10-year-olds said. Many were clear that salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ, but some were not yet equipped to explain the gospel. "You have to be good and go to Sunday school," said one. Another asked tentatively, "You have to pray to God?" Still another: "If you are nice to your friends and obey your mom and dad."

As I gently tried to direct the thinking of each child to the central element of salvation—faith in Jesus who died to pay for our sins and then rose again—I thought that these kids represented so many others in our world who don't yet understand the gospel.

How about you? Are your ideas about salvation based on biblical truth? Think about the importance of what Jesus did for you. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 16:31). There is so much more at stake than getting a free gift for answering a question.

A Matter Of Faith

Jesus paid the penalty for your sins by His death. When you admit you are a sinner and place your faith in Him alone for forgiveness, you will be reconciled to God.

Believing Christ died—that's history; believing Christ died for me—that's salvation.

Acts 16:16-34 Good Question

By Joanie Yoder

"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved." —Acts 16:30-31

"Finding the right questions is as crucial as finding the right answers," says devotional writer Henri Nouwen. Yet how easy it is to run ahead of God's Spirit as we talk to unbelievers about Christ, giving pre-packaged answers before we listen to their questions.

This tendency was highlighted several years ago when someone scrawled the words "Christ is the answer!" on the side of a building. A cynical passerby added these words: "What is the question?"

Paul and Silas, thrown into prison for the gospel's sake, provoked a deep spiritual question in the heart of their jailer. This question was raised not because they had preached a three-point sermon at him but because they prayed and sang hymns to God. When an earthquake opened the prison doors and broke their chains, the jailer was about to kill himself, fearing that he would be put to death if his prisoners escaped. But Paul and Silas stopped him by choosing to stay in prison for his sake. At this he cried out, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30).

Today, as then, the Spirit will create the right questions in people's hearts and make them ready for the right answer—Jesus Christ.

Christians worth their salt make others thirsty for the water of life.

ACTS 17

Acts 17:1-12 Following The Leader

By Richard De Haan

They ... searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. —Acts 17:11

My wife and I were driving to church one Sunday when we came to a red traffic light, so we stopped. There was only one car in front of us. While I waited, my mind began to wander. When the car ahead started to move, I was far away in thought and absentmindedly followed right along without even glancing up at the light. Only after I had driven through the intersection did I realize that I had blindly followed the leader. If the other driver had moved ahead before the light had turned green, my following along might have caused a serious accident.

As I reflected on my carelessness, I thought about people who blindly follow their religious leaders. Many are attracted to speakers who have dynamic personalities, the ability to communicate effectively, and an air of authority. They accept and do everything these preachers say without ever thinking for themselves. In sharp contrast, the Christians in Berea "received the Word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11).

Blindly following the leader can be dangerous. That's why we must test everything by what the Bible says. Then we will know if the leader is following the truth.

The best translation of God's Word

That we will ever read

Is found in servants of the Lord

Who live that Word in deed. —DJD

It's good to follow the teacher who follows the Master teacher.

Acts 17:11

(They) searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. Acts 17:11

Children sometimes do unusual things to song lyrics. One child sang a verse of the "Battle Hymn of the Republic" as follows: "He has trampled on the village where the great giraffe is stored." And my preschooler Melissa likes to sing the familiar spiritual, "Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho." Only she sings it, "Joshua fit the battle of Cherry Coke."

Word-twisting stops being funny, though, when adults alter Scripture to make it say what they want it to say. Maybe they take a verse out of its context to prove a pet teaching. Some use Jeremiah 10:2-4 to prove that we should not have Christmas trees. Or it may be reinterpreting Scripture to make it support a belief that is not orthodox. Some alter the wording of John 1, for example, to make it say that Christ is not God. When we study the Bible, we must be careful to get the words right—to let Scripture say what it says. And even more, we must make sure we do not read into it what is not there.—J. D. B.

WE MUST MAKE SURE WE ARE HEARING WHAT GOD HAS SPOKEN.

Acts 17:11

A PASTOR called my father one Saturday night and said, "I have my sermon prepared from a certain text, but I can't find it in the Bible."

"What is the text?" my father asked.

"Give me liberty or give me death," the pastor answered.

Although the idea expressed in the quotation is noble, it is not Scriptural. Those words were spoken by American Revolutionary leader Patrick Henry, not by any biblical character.

Many people, including that pastor, think they know the Bible, but don't. To assess your own biblical knowledge, determine which of the following are biblical quotations.

- Cleanliness is next to godliness.
- God helps those who help themselves.
- An honest confession is good for the soul.
- We are as prone to sin as sparks fly upward.

- Money is the root of all evil.
- Honesty is the best policy.

The answer? While some of these statements contain elements of truth, none of them are found in the Bible!

A thorough knowledge of God's Word comes by diligent study. To grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord, we must "let the word of Christ dwell in [us] richly in all wisdom" (Colossians 3:16). When we search and study Scripture, we find out that clever quotations are no substitute for biblical truth. —P R Van Gorder

Acts 17:10-15 For Honest Skeptics

By Herbert Vander Lugt

They ... searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. —Acts 17:11

A skeptic is one who is inclined to doubt. If such a person is honestly seeking to know the truth, his doubting may be the first step toward finding the truth.

When Paul came to Berea, he found Jews who were more "fair-minded" than those in Thessalonica. They received the word "with all readiness," but also "searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11). Although they believed in the Old Testament, they had a healthy skepticism about the subject of Paul's preaching. Yet when they found it to be supported by Scripture, they became strong believers in Christ.

Not all skepticism is wrong. The Bereans were commended for their readiness to listen to Paul and for their diligence to evaluate carefully what he said in the light of Scripture.

An honest skeptic will give the gospel a fair hearing. He will be willing to consider the evidence for the truthfulness and unique authority of the Bible. He will examine and test the claims of all who say they have a message from God (1 Thessalonians 5:21). He will recognize that Christians have a rational basis for their faith and that there are sound reasons for their hope (1 Peter 3:15).

Yes, God welcomes honest skeptics.

If you doubt but want to know God,

Doubt can help you find His way;

But your doubts will lead to darkness

If His will you disobey. —D. De Haan

Honest questions can lead to faith-building answers.

Acts 17:11 - Is It True?

By Cindy Hess Kasper

Galatians 1:1-9

They received the Word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. —Acts 17:11

Trust, but verify." My husband loves that quote from Ronald Reagan. During his time in office, the former US President wanted to believe everything he was told in his political dealings with others. But since the security of his country depended on the truth being told—he strived to verify everything.

Acts 17:11 tells us that the Bereans had a similar attitude about knowing the truth. "They received the Word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so." In other words, the Bereans didn't simply believe what someone else was telling them. They also verified it on their own—on a daily basis.

That's important for us to consider as well. Whether we receive our Bible teaching through church, Sunday school, radio, or TV—we need to test what we hear against God's inspired Word (2 Tim. 3:16-17). We are to "be diligent to present [ourselves] approved to God, ... rightly dividing the Word of truth" (2:15). If we do this, we won't become prey to those who teach "a different gospel," and those who "want to pervert the gospel of Christ" (Gal. 1:6-7)—false teachers who come as wolves in sheep's clothing (Matt. 7:15).

Remember, trust—but verify!

Protection from false teaching comes

The more we read God's Word;

For once we know the Scripture's truth,

What's false will sound absurd. —Sper

Knowing what's true is the first step in knowing what's false.

Acts 17:11

Give me understanding according to Your word. PSALM 119:169, , 2Ti 2:15

CONTEXT, INDUCTIVE STUDY

Peter Deison tells about a friend who visited New York City and got lost among the maze of streets. So he took an elevator up to the observation deck of the Empire State Building and looked out over the city. He carefully noted prominent buildings, landmarks, and major streets. Having them firmly fixed in his mind, he said to a friend, "Now I understand where we are and where I want to go." Deison commented, "He went back down to the busy streets and never got lost again. He finally understood where to go because he got an overview of the city"

To get the most out of studying a portion of the Bible, we need the big picture. It's important to know the major divisions of the Bible, the Old and New Testaments, and how they are related. It helps to know the general themes of the Bible and the specific theme of each book, who wrote the books, to whom they were written, and their time period. It's also helpful to know that there are different types of literature in the Bible such as history, prophecy, and poetry. As you read God's Word the Author Himself will guide you. —R. W. D.

To KEEP FROM GETTING LOST IN BIBLE VERSES, BE WELL-VERSED IN THE WHOLE BIBLE.

Acts 17:11 "MORE NOBLE"

Acts 17:11 These were more noble ... in that they ... searched the scriptures daily.

One of the most prevalent causes for spiritual anemia is the neglect of God's Word. How many people day after day never open the Bible to feast upon God's bountiful provisions! Some go to church; they may hear a Gospel broadcast or watch a telecast, and may even hurriedly scan through the stories in this book, but fail to study the Word of God itself! By the way, did you read today's suggested passage? If not, please do so now. (Should time allow only one or the other, the Scripture or the rest of this devotional,, make the wise choice!)

An unknown author tells the following story: "Some Christian women had gathered in a home for Bible study. The leader, much to her dismay, discovered that she had come away without her Bible. So the hostess hurried to get hers. She looked where she usually kept it, but it wasn't there! She searched for it every-where but still couldn't find it. 'What will those ladies think of me?' she thought. Running downstairs, she said to the newly employed cleaning woman, 'Pearl, have you seen my Bible?' The maid exclaimed, 'Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!' 'What do you mean, Pearl?' Beaming with joy, she said, 'The first thing I do when I go to work at a new place is hide the Bible.' 'But why?' the other asked in astonishment. Pearl replied, 'Just to find out how long it takes the people to miss it! I put yours in the linen closet under the sheets!' "

Dr. Luke tells us that the Christians in Berea "searched the scriptures daily." For this they were commended and called "more noble." Does that describe you?

Search the Scriptures, thou wilt find Guidance there for heart and mind; Test each doctrine by its light,

Stand "more noble" in His sight. —Bosch

The truths of Scripture are like flowers; meditation, like the bee, draws the honey out of them!

Acts 17:11 STANDARD EQUIPMENT

These . . . received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily. Acts 17:11

The pony express was a thrilling part of early American history. It ran from St. Joseph, Missouri, to Scranton, California — a distance of 1,900 miles. The trip was made in ten days. Forty men, each riding 50 miles a day, dashed along the trail on 500 of the best horses the West could provide. To conserve weight, clothing was very light, saddles were extremely small and thin, and no

weapons were carried. The horses themselves wore small shoes or none at all. The mail pouches were flat and very conservative in size. Letters had to be written on thin paper, and postage was \$5.00 an ounce (a tremendous sum in those days). Yet, each rider carried a full-sized Bible! It was presented to him when he joined the pony express, and he took it with him despite all the scrupulous weight precautions. Why? Because the Scriptures were deemed standard equipment! God was important to people in those frontier days, and they recognized the need of daily searching the Word, and giving heed to it with all readiness of mind!

Our life is much like the "pony express." We hurry through it on our way to a distant destination called eternity. God has determined that He will not leave us without compass or guide, so He has provided us with "the standard equipment" of His precious revelation called the Bible. Like the noble Bereans of old, may we receive this important "love-letter" with a readiness of mind that will cause its truths to bear fruit in our lives.

Is the Bible precious to you? Is it standard equipment as you go along the journey of life? Do you search its pages daily? I hope so!

The Bible, the Bible! more precious than gold; Glad hopes and bright glories its pages unfold; It speaks of the Father and tells of His love,

And shows us the way to the Mansions above. —Anon.

One evidence of the value of the Bible is the character of those who oppose it

Acts 17:16-31 Who Says?

By Herbert Vander Lugt

He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. —Acts 17:31

I had always admired a well-known television news personality and thought of him as someone with high moral standards. So it surprised me one day when I heard him remark that he doesn't want anyone telling him what is right and what is wrong. He made it clear that he answers to no one but himself.

The idea that we are not accountable to anyone—not even to God—appeals to many people. But it contradicts the deep-down feeling that there are things we ought to do and things we ought not to do. The Bible calls that inner conviction our conscience.

In Romans 1:18-20, the apostle Paul stated that the voice of conscience reveals God's standards in the hearts of those who've never even heard the Word of God. And Ecclesiastes 3:11-14 declares that God has placed a sense of eternity in everyone's heart, a conviction that what we do has everlasting consequences.

I am thankful that the Bible tells us about the One to whom we are accountable and that it clearly defines what is right and wrong. But I'm also grateful that God offers forgiveness to us through faith in Christ, so we don't need to fear His judgment (Acts 17:31).

Like it or not, we are accountable to God.

Our conscience is a gift from God,

It is a guiding light;

And when aligned with God's own Word,

It tells us wrong from right. —Sper

Only God has the right to say what's wrong.

Acts 17:16-34 The One True God

By Dennis J. De Haan

Every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. —Philippians 2:11

The Pantheon in Rome is a magnificent circular structure that was built in 27 BC and completely reconstructed by the emperor Hadrian about AD 120. Its purpose was to unite the conquered peoples of the empire by providing a central place for their gods. When Christians were offered a niche for a statue of Jesus, they replied, "Never! He cannot stand beside gods that are not true."

In AD 609 the Pantheon became a Christian church. Centuries later, a British lecturer visited Rome and found that all the niches around the wall were empty except one. It contained a statue of Jesus.

This reminds me that Jesus Christ has no equal in the world. He stands out from all others. For that reason, Christianity is both the

most exclusive and inclusive religion of all. Christ said that He Himself is the truth and the only way to God (Jn. 14:6). But forgiveness of sin and knowledge of the true God are available to all who put their faith in Christ and His atoning death. It's no wonder that Paul could not remain silent when he saw an altar in Athens addressed "to the unknown god."

Father, we believe that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. Help us by Your power to let Him have His way in our lives so that others may know You, the one true God.

He is the way, the truth, the life—

That One whose name is Jesus;

There is no other name on earth

That has the power to save us. —Sper

You can have tons of religion without one ounce of salvation.

Acts 17:22-34 "To the Unknown God"

By Dennis J. De Haan

The One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you. —Acts 17:23

Bible in a Year:

Deuteronomy 14-16; Mark 12:28-44

It is said that in ancient Greece a plague once swept through Athens. To pacify the gods they supposed were responsible, altars were erected to every god known to the Greeks. Yet the scourge continued. Finally in desperation, another altar was built bearing these words:

To the Unknown God

Soon afterward, the plague subsided.

Many years later, when Paul visited Athens on his second missionary journey, he walked about the city and saw that inscription. Seizing the opportunity, he proclaimed to his listeners, "The One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you." That one God, of whom they knew nothing, Paul knew personally. He presented Him as the "Lord of heaven and earth" (Acts 17:24). But the apostle didn't stop there. He also called for repentance, for the world would someday be judged in righteousness by Jesus Christ.

We don't need to go through life searching for an unknown god, for the one true God has already revealed Himself to us through His Son. The moment we turn from our sin and accept Jesus as our personal Savior, we come to know the Creator Himself.

Do you know Him, or is He still unknown to you?

Man gropes his way through life's dark maze,

To gods unknown he often prays,

Until the day he meets God's Son—

At last he finds the Living One! —DJD

In creation, God shows us His hand; in redemption, He shows us His heart.

Acts 17:16-34 Who Is God?

By Herbert Vander Lugt

God, who ... in various ways spoke in time past ... by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son. —Hebrews 1:1-2

The religion editor of a newspaper said that to know God's will on current issues we should "try to get into the mind of Jesus." He suggested that we should set aside differences in beliefs about His deity, His atonement, and His resurrection, and think of Him instead as a kind and good man.

This editor's idea that we can think and feel our way to God and truth may be appealing, but he makes the same mistake that the pagans of long ago did. They made idols to represent their concept of deity, but their religious efforts only led them further and further away from the one true God (Rom. 1:18-32).

Paul gave a dose of the truth to some godless philosophers on Mars' Hill. He declared to those educated Greeks that instead of making more gods they should listen to the one true God. God has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ, and He commands all to believe what He has said and to repent of their sin (Acts 17:30-31).

We can never reach God by trying to get into the mind of a Christ of our own making! Rather, God reaches us through what He has said in the Bible (2 Tim. 3:16), by the witness of His Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:16), and through His Son the Lord Jesus Christ (Heb. 1:1-2).

O send Thy Spirit, Lord, now unto me,

That He may touch my eyes and make me see;

Show me the truth concealed within Thy Word,

And in Thy Book revealed I see Thee, Lord. —Groves

Knowing the Bible is vital to knowing the God of the Bible.

Acts 17:16-34 A Gentle Witness

By Herbert Vander Lugt

A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient. —2 Timothy 2:24

In our Bible reading today, we see how followers of Christ can be tolerant of people of diverse religious beliefs without compromising their Christian convictions.

When the apostle Paul came to Athens, he was distressed by the idolatry he saw. Yet he spoke respectfully to his pagan audience, even affirming the words of some of their poets (Acts 17:28). He didn't denounce his hearers, nor criticize their beliefs, but began by declaring truths they would not find offensive. He spoke of God's greatness as our Creator (vv.24-25). He said that God is actively involved with mankind so that people might seek Him and find Him (vv.26-28).

Paul didn't compromise the truth. He showed the folly of worshiping idols and boldly declared that God commanded people everywhere to repent. He further stated that God had appointed a Man to judge the world and proved this by raising Him from the dead (vv.29-31).

In a global society we will come in contact with more and more people of different religious beliefs and practices. Our witness will be most effective when we avoid quarrels and arguments, and share our faith with respect, kindness, and gentleness. The Holy Spirit will bring conviction and enlightenment as people see the truth lived out in us.

O Lord, transform my stubborn heart

And help me always see

That gentle, kind, and courteous

Is what I ought to be. —Anon.

A kind witness is the right kind of witness.

Acts 17:16-31 Foreign Worship

By Dave Branon

"[Paul] seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods," because he preached to them Jesus. —Acts 17:18

During a trip to the Far East, I visited an unusual shrine made up of hundreds of statues. According to our guide, worshipers would pick the statue that looked the most like an ancestor and pray to it.

A few years ago, I read about a student named Le Thai. An ancestor worshiper, he found great comfort in praying to his deceased grandmother. Because he was praying to someone he knew and loved, he found this to be personal and intimate.

But when he came from Vietnam to the US to study, Le Thai was introduced to Christianity. It sounded like a fairy tale based on

American thinking. To him, it was the worship of a foreign God (see Acts 17:18).

Then a Christian friend invited him to visit his home on Christmas. He saw a Christian family in action and heard again the story of Jesus. Le Thai listened. He read John 3 about being "born again" and asked questions. He began to feel the pull of the Holy Spirit. Finally, he realized that Christianity was true. He trusted Jesus as his personal Savior.

When friends see Christianity as foreign worship, we need to respect their heritage while sharing the gospel graciously and giving them time to explore Christianity. And then trust the Spirit to do His work.

Man gropes his way through life's dark maze,

To gods unknown he often prays,

Until one day he meets God's Son—

At last he's found the Living One! —D. De Haan

God is the only true God.

Acts 17:16-31 Still True Today

By Bill Crowder

While Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols. —Acts 17:16

The Chester Beatty Library in Dublin, Ireland, has an extensive collection of ancient Bible fragments dating back to the second century AD. One fragment on display is a piece of Acts 17:16.

The message that ancient fragment displays, however, is as contemporary as today's newspaper. It reads, "While Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols." Paul was angered by the proliferation of idols in ancient Athens, and I am convinced he would be upset with us today.

Some idols that we see in today's world are different than the ones in Paul's day. Whether it's wealth, fame, power, athletes, entertainers, or politicians, contemporary idols abound. As always, our spiritual enemy, Satan, seeks to lure us away from the Savior to the false worship of idols. Christians are not immune, and thus we must guard our hearts against self-righteous anger toward unbelievers who seem to worship everything but God.

We must also be drawn by Christ's love to reach out to those who don't know Him. Then, like the believers at Thessalonica, they may turn "to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (1 Thess. 1:9).

The dearest idol I have known,

Whate'er that idol be,

Help me to tear it from Thy throne

And worship only Thee. —Cowper

An idol is anything that takes God's rightful place.

Acts 17:28

"For in Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

When life gets heavy, humor lightens the load. I have heard, for example, that in Russia peasant farmers enjoy telling this story: A commissar came to a farmer one day and inquired about the year's potato crop. "Oh, it was wonderful," replied the farmer. "Good, good," said the official. "Just how big was it?" "Oh, it was so big it reached up to the very foot of God." The commissar's countenance changed. With a scowl, he said, "But comrade, this is a communist state and we are atheists. You must not forget, there is no God!" "That's right, commissar, that's what I mean. No God—no potatoes."

A deep truth lies hidden in this humorous tale. God is the source of all things—whether we admit it or not. The apostle Paul went so far as to tell his pagan audience, "For in Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). And he focused the great creating and sustaining work of God in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ (Col. 1:16-18). Without Him, we could not draw a single breath, our bodies could not function, and we would have no provision for our daily sustenance.

Atheists may have convinced themselves that God does not exist. Yet we who are His children through faith in His Son know otherwise. But do we show it by the way we live? That is the key question. Each day we must depend on Him, so that we recognize every blessing as coming from His gracious hand. —D. J. De Haan

However long the chain of secondary causes,
the first link is always in God's hand

Acts 17:19-31 Becoming Bilingual

By Bill Crowder

In Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, "For we are also His offspring." —Acts 17:28

Is it possible—in a society that seems increasingly indifferent to the gospel—to communicate the Good News to people who don't share our faith?

One way to connect with people who are unfamiliar with the things of Christ is to become culturally "bilingual." We do this by communicating in ways people can easily relate to. Knowing about and discussing music, film, sports, and television, for example, can offer just such an opportunity. If people hear us "speak their language," without endorsing or condoning the media or events we refer to, it could open the door to sharing the timeless message of Christ.

Paul gave us an example of this in Acts 17. While visiting the Areopagus in Athens, he spoke to a thoroughly secular culture by quoting pagan Greek poets as a point of reference for the spiritual values he sought to communicate. He said, "In Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring'" (Acts 17:28). Just as Paul addressed that culture by knowing what they were reading, we may have greater impact for the gospel by relating it to people in terms they can readily embrace.

Are you trying to reach a neighbor or a co-worker with the gospel? Try becoming bilingual.

To earn your neighbor's ear

And prove you really care,

Use terms he understands

To show you are aware. —Branon

The content of the Bible must be brought into contact with the world.

Acts 17:22-31 Where Did I Come From?

By Anne Cetas

[God] has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth. —Acts 17:26

My 7-year-old African-American friend Tobias asked me a thought-provoking question the other day: "Since Adam and Eve were white, where did black people come from?" When I told him we don't know what "color" they were and asked him why he thought they were white, he said that's what he always saw in Bible-story books at church and in the library. My heart sank. I wondered if that might make him think he was inferior or possibly not even created by the Lord.

All people have their roots in the Creator God, and therefore all are equal. That's what the apostle Paul told the Athenians: "[God] has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth" (Acts 17:26). We are all "from one blood." Darrell Bock, in his commentary on the book of Acts, says, "This affirmation would be hard for the Athenians, who prided themselves in being a superior people, calling others barbarians." However, because we all descended from our first parents, Adam and Eve, no race nor ethnicity is superior or inferior to another.

We stand in awe of our Creator, who made us and gives to all "life, breath, and all things" (v.25). Equal in God's sight, we together praise and honor Him.

Every life has been created—

God's handiwork displayed;

When we cherish His creation,

We value what He's made. —Sper

God loves each of us as if there were only one of us.

Acts 17:22-31 From A Distance

By David H. Roper

Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it. —Genesis 28:16

A popular song from years ago titled "From a Distance" envisions a world of harmony and peace. It says, "God is watching us from a distance." Indeed God is watching us, but not from a distance. He is present, in the room with you, right in front of you, gazing at you with unbounded love in His eyes.

I think of the example of Brother Lawrence, who spent long years working in a kitchen washing pots and pans and repairing the sandals of other monks. He wrote: "As often as I could, I placed myself as a worshiper before Him, fixing my mind upon His holy presence."

That is our task as well. But we forget and sometimes need reminders of His presence. I have driven an old handmade nail into the shelf over my desk to remind me that the crucified and resurrected Jesus is always present. Our task is to remember to "set the Lord always before [us]" (Ps. 16:8)—to know that He is with us to "the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20) and that "He is not far from each one of us" (Acts 17:27).

Remembering may be as simple as calling to mind that the Lord has promised to be with you all through the day and saying to Him, "Good morning," or "Thank You," or "Help!" or "I love You."

So near, so very near to God—

I cannot nearer be;

Yet in the person of His Son,

I am as near as He. —Paget

No one can come so near that God is not nearer still.

Acts 17:22-31 The Carpenter Judge

By Richard De Haan

It is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead. —Acts 10:42

Jesus Christ is the Inescapable One. We must either receive Him in this life as our loving Savior or stand before Him in the life to come as our eternal Judge.

There's a story in the Gray and Adams Commentary about a doctor who "made it his chief concern in matters of religion to degrade the character and dignity of Christ." He viewed the Savior with so much contempt that he always spoke of Him in a demeaning way by calling Him "the carpenter's son."

Eventually, the physician became terminally ill. During the weeks before his death, he became very agitated. He remarked to the person attending him, "I'm a dying man, and what affects me most of all is that I must be judged by the carpenter's son!"

That doctor faced the terrible future that awaits all who reject Christ. Yet, even in his last conscious moments, if he had trusted Jesus as Savior he could have found peace and received eternal salvation.

How have you been treating Christ? Remember, "the carpenter's son" is the Son of God. Trust Him today! You will receive the blessing of salvation—not the sentence of condemnation (John 3:17).

What will you do with Jesus?

Neutral you cannot be;

Someday your heart will be asking,

“What will He do with me?” —Simpson

Everyone must choose—Christ or condemnation.

Acts 17:22-34 Christmas In Tokyo

By David C. McCasland

The One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you. —Acts 17:23

On Christmas Eve 2003, noted painter Makoto Fujimura gathered with other artists for a party at Sato Museum in Tokyo. Many had donated their works for a benefit exhibit to raise money for children in Afghanistan. After the meal, Mr. Fujimura, an ardent Christian who lives in New York, shared some words about the true meaning of Christmas and their opportunity as artists to create works that help bring hope into the world.

Reflecting on that event, Fujimura wrote: “I was convinced, that evening in Tokyo, that Jesus invited Himself to be among artists who may not even know His name. Some of these artists, I suspect, have already sensed His presence in their studios as they labored to create peace via their paintings. All gifts of creativity, like the Magi’s [star], point straight to a stable in Bethlehem.”

Paul said that God is at work among people of all nations “so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:27-28).

We should be alert for the Lord’s presence where we least expect to see Him. Jesus may invite Himself to any Christmas party. After all, it’s His birthday.

The star shines forth in its glory bright

To lighten the gloom of earth’s darkest night;

And Calvary’s Christ will still impart

His comfort and love to the needy heart. —Richey

This Christmas, be alert for the work and presence of Jesus.

Acts 17:22-31 Common Ground

By Dennis Fisher

That I might win those who are without law. —1 Corinthians 9:21

Roman emperors are not generally remembered for their wisdom, but there are a few exceptions. One great thinker was Marcus Aurelius, emperor of Rome from AD 161 to 180. Gifted with a brilliant mind, he was one of the great intellectual rulers in Western civilization.

Although he never became a convert to the new faith that would be called Christianity, he displayed remarkable insight. His wisdom reflects the law of God written in the heart of someone who did not have God’s Word (Rom. 2:14-15). For example:

- The happiness of your life depends on the quality of your thoughts.
- You have power over your mind—not outside events.
- Your life is what your thoughts make it.

These words sound similar to Proverbs 23:7, “As [a person] thinks in his heart, so is he.” We can learn helpful principles from non-Christians and use their beliefs as common ground for sharing the gospel. When Paul stood on Mars Hill addressing some of the leading intellectuals of his day, he did not belittle their beliefs but established common ground with them and then gave the gospel (Acts 17:26-28).

Let’s look for common ground with our neighbors, so that we may lead them to Christ.

What common ground do you share with your friends?

Books read Hobbies Travel

Children Sports Upbringing

Work A grief experience Military service

A faith worth having is a faith worth sharing.

Acts 17:22-31 A Spiritual Journey

By Dennis Fisher

You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God. —1 Thessalonians 1:9

The miracles that God worked through Moses challenged the many gods of Pharaoh. Yet, in another time, there was a Pharaoh who promoted the belief in one deity. Pharaoh Akhenaten pointed to the rising and setting sun as the great deity who gave life to the earth. His religious symbol for Aton, the sun god, was represented by a single disc of light with emanating rays. Though this Pharaoh's idea came closer to the one God of the Bible, it was still idolatry.

When Paul addressed the people in Athens, he was grieved by the idolatry in that city. Yet he used the people's imperfect understanding of God to point them to the God of Scripture. Of their efforts in trying to find God, Paul said: "God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands" (Acts 17:24).

In our increasingly pluralistic world, the people around us may worship a multiplicity of deities. Yet their spiritual journey need not end there. We never know when someone might be moving toward the kingdom of God. Following the example of Paul, we should respect a person's religious background, watch for spiritual receptivity, and then point him or her to the one true God of Scripture.

A Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to lead the lost away from all that is false. And to lead them to You—the one and only God— who alone offers true life. Amen.

God alone is worthy of our worship.

Acts 17:22-34 The One whom you worship without knowing,

Him I proclaim to you. --Acts 17:23

It is said that in ancient Greece a plague once swept through Athens. To pacify the gods they supposed were responsible, altars were erected to every god known to the Greeks. Yet the scourge continued. Finally in desperation, another altar was built bearing these words: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Soon afterward, the plague subsided.

Many years later, when Paul visited Athens on his secomissionary journey, he walked about the city and saw that inscription. Seizing the opportunity, he proclaimed to his listeners, "The One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you." That one God, of whom they knew nothing, Paul knew personally. He presented Him as the "Lord of heaven and earth" (Acts 17:24). But the apostle didn't stop there. He also called for repentance, for the world would someday be judged in righteousness by Jesus Christ.

We don't need to go through life searching for an unknown god, for the one true God has already revealed Himself to us through His Son. The moment we turn from our sin and accept Jesus as our personal Savior, we come to know the Creator Himself.

Do you know Him, or is He still unknown to you? Author: Dennis J. De Haan

Man gropes his way through life's dark maze,

To gods unknown he often prays,

Until the day he meets God's Son --

At last he finds the Living One!

--DJD

In creation, God shows us His hand; in redemption, He shows us His heart.

Acts 17:24-31 Finding God In The Darkness

By David H. Roper

The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost. —Luke 19:10

When our boys were small, we played a game called "Sardines." We'd turn out all the lights in our home and I would hide in a closet or some other cramped place. The rest of the family groped about in the darkness to find my hiding place and then hide with me until

we were squeezed together like sardines. Hence the name.

Our smallest family member at times became frightened in the dark, so when he came close, I would whisper to him softly: "Here I am."

"I found you, Dad!" he would announce as he snuggled against me in the darkness, not realizing that I let myself be "found."

Likewise, we have been made to search for God—to "grope for Him," as Paul put it so vividly (Acts 17:27). But here's the good news: He is not at all hard to find, for "He is not far from each one of us." He desires to make Himself known. "There is a property in God of thirst and longing. He hath longing to have us," wrote Dame Julian of Norwich centuries ago.

Before we come to know Christ, we grope for God in the darkness. But if we search for Him in earnest, He will make Himself known, for He rewards those who diligently seek Him (Heb. 11:6). He will call to us softly: "Here I am."

And He awaits our reply: "I found You!"

Man gropes his way through life's dark maze;

To gods unknown he often prays,

Until one day he meets God's Son—

At last he's found the Living One! —D. De Haan

Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. —Isaiah 55:6

Acts 17:26 Unity In The Faith

By Vernon C. Grounds

Ephesians 4:1-6

[God] has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth. —Acts 17:26

Aristides, a second-century apologist for the Christian faith, wrote this to the Roman emperor Hadrian about believers in his day:

"They love one another. They never fail to help widows; they save orphans from those who would hurt them. If they have something, they give freely to the man who has nothing; if they see a stranger, they take him home, and are happy, as though he were a real brother. They don't consider themselves brothers in the usual sense, but brothers instead through the Spirit, in God."

As human beings, we all belong to the same family. Even though we are divided by all sorts of barriers and differences, "under the skin" we're all the same (Acts 17:26).

As believers in Jesus Christ, then, whatever our differences—denominations, preferences, worship styles—we are one spiritual body that acknowledges the same heavenly Father (Ephesians 4:4-6). The example of our spiritual forebears can be an instructive challenge to us as disciples of Jesus in the 21st century.

Let's do all we can to demonstrate our unity in Christ. Unity in our diversity is the most effective witness to this sin-fractured world.

Join hands, then, brothers of the faith,

Whatever your race may be;

Who serves my Father as a son

Is surely kin to me. —Oxenham

Unity among Christians comes from their union with Christ.

Acts 17:26-27 A Basis For Confidence

By Herbert Vander Lugt

Read: Daniel 10:1-21

He has ... determined their preappointed times ... , so that they should seek the Lord. —Acts 17:26-27

A government official recently said we have no way of making sure that a terrorist group or a madman will not obtain nuclear

weapons. Some people responded to his words by saying that the human race is on the verge of destroying itself.

Most people, however, tend to be more hopeful and don't think that such a disaster is likely. Is such a view foolish and naive? What is the proper response to doomsday predictions?

Bible-believing Christians can be optimistic about the future because of their confidence in God's Word. Daniel 10 assures us that God is always in control, so we can be confident that all will end well for those who are trusting in Him. Daniel had fasted and prayed, but for 3 weeks he had heard nothing. Finally an angel appeared and explained that he had been detained by an evil spirit until the archangel Michael had arrived to help him (v.13). He went on to show the prophet that though the battle between the invisible forces of good and evil would continue (v.20), God would surely win the war (ch. 11-12).

It's comforting to know that God permits the rise of evil forces and orchestrates their fall as part of His master plan. Through it all, He draws unbelievers to Himself and brings about the eternal good of His children.

What God is doing you may not know now;

But someday you'll understand why;

Questions that taunt you and trouble your mind

Will one day have heaven's reply. —Hess

Because God is in control, we have nothing to fear.

Acts 17:25 Grace, Mercy, And Peace

By Albert Lee

2 Timothy 1:1-10

Bless the Lord, ... who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies. —Psalm 103:1,4

The words grace and peace are found in all of Paul's greetings in his New Testament letters to the churches. And in his letters to Timothy and Titus, he also includes mercy: "Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord" (2 Tim. 1:2). Let's examine each of these words.

Grace is what our holy God gives that we, as sinful people, don't deserve. In Acts 17:25, we learn that "He gives to all life, breath, and all things." His gifts include our very next breath. Even in our darkest hour, strength is given by God so that we can endure.

Mercy is what God withholds that we do deserve. In Lamentations 3:22, we read, "Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed." Even when we're wayward, God gives time and help for us to turn back to Him.

Peace is what God brings to His people. Jesus said: "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you" (John 14:27). Even in the worst of times, we have inner tranquillity because our God is in control.

We can be encouraged that throughout our lives the Lord will give us the grace, mercy, and peace we need to live for Him.

He giveth more grace when the burdens grow greater,

He sendeth more strength when the labors increase;

To added affliction He addeth His mercy,

To multiplied trials, His multiplied peace. —Flint

God's grace is immeasurable, His mercy is inexhaustible, His peace is inexpressible.

Acts 17:22–31 Pride And Prejudice

By David H. Roper

He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth. —Acts 17:26

Back in the 1930s, my childhood home was loving and happy, but my parents were often away. On those occasions, the center of warmth in our home was the kitchen and our tiny, joyous housekeeper named Annie.

I spent many hours with Annie, sitting at our kitchen table reading books or playing with toys and listening to her sing and hum

spirituals and hymns. From her heart sprang a continual flow of wisdom, cheerfulness, and song.

One morning, with childish exuberance, I used a racial slur I had heard. “Oh my, no,” she said, and then proceeded to pour out her heart in a gentle lecture on the harm and hurt in that, accompanied by a terrible sadness in her eyes. I never used that word again.

I learned that we cause unfathomable sorrow when we dishonor and debase others through bigotry. Every human being is created in the image of God—more like God than any other creature and worthy of honor. To demean that image is to wound another human being at the deepest level.

There is but one race: the human race. God “has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth” (Acts 17:26). We are of the same family, made to be treasured and cherished by one another.

Of all creation’s treasures rare,

Not one compares in worth with man,

In God’s own image he was made

To fill a place in His great plan. —D. De Haan

God desires that we show respect to all people, because everyone bears His image.

Acts 17:27 Reframing The Picture

By Julie Ackerman Link

Deuteronomy 32:7-12

As an eagle stirs up its nest, ... spreading out its wings, ... so the Lord alone led [Jacob]. —Deuteronomy 32:11-12

For 3 months I had a ringside seat— or should I say a bird’s-eye view—of God’s amazing handiwork. Ninety feet above the floor of Norfolk Botanical Garden, workers installed a webcam focused on the nest of a family of bald eagles, and online viewers were allowed to watch.

When the eggs hatched, Mama and Papa Eagle were attentive to their offspring, taking turns hunting for food and guarding the nest. But one day when the eaglets still looked like fuzzballs with beaks, both parents disappeared. I worried that harm had come to them.

My concern was unfounded. The webcam operator enlarged the camera angle, and there was Mama Eagle perched on a nearby branch.

As I pondered this “reframed” picture, I thought of times when I have feared that God had abandoned me. The view in the forest heights of Virginia reminded me that my vision is limited. I see only a small part of the entire scene.

Moses used eagle imagery to describe God. As eagles carry their young, God carries His people (Deut. 32:11-12). Despite how it may seem, the Lord “is not far from each one of us” (Acts 17:27). This is true even when we feel abandoned.

Under His wings I am safely abiding;

Though the night deepens and tempests are wild,

Still I can trust Him—I know He will keep me;

He has redeemed me and I am His child. —Cushing

Because the Lord is watching over us, we don’t have to fear the dangers around us.

Insight

Today’s reading provides us with a wonderful template for instructing the next generation in the provision of God. The entire “Song of Moses” extends from Deuteronomy 31:30–32:43. In it we see praise given for the God of Israel in spite of the nation’s periodic lapse into disobedience. In His good providence, God created for Himself a chosen people whom He has both redeemed and preserves. This theme of divine love that will not let go is to be reiterated to each new generation so that God’s covenant people may continue in relationship with their Creator and Sustainer. We learn from the New Testament that through Christ’s atoning work on the cross, this covenant has been extended to all who believe (Rom. 5:6-11).

Acts 17:28 'No God, No Potatoes'

By Dennis J. De Haan

Colossians 1:13-18

In Him we live and move and have our being. —Acts 17:28

It's been said that in the former Soviet Union the peasant farmers often enjoyed telling a humorous story to lighten their dreary lives.

It seems that one day a government official came to a farmer and inquired about the year's potato crop. "Oh, it was wonderful," the farmer replied slyly. "It was so big it reached up to the very foot of God."

The commissar's countenance quickly changed. With a scowl, he said, "But comrade, this is a communist state and we are atheists. You must not forget, there is no God!"

"Ah, that's my point," the farmer replied. "No God—no potatoes!"

Yes, whether we believe it or not, God is the source of all things (Psalm 136:25). The apostle Paul told a pagan audience, "In Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). And in Colossians 1:16-18, he focused on the great creating and sustaining work of God in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. Without Him, we couldn't draw a single breath, and our bodies could not function.

Do we who confess faith in a personal God, to whom we owe our very existence, respond with thanksgiving, worship, and praise? If not, we differ little from that commissar who saw no connection between God and potatoes. —DJD

Part of God's name divinely stands

On every work impressed;

Each is the labor of His hands,

By each His power confessed. —Anon.

God is the first link in our life's chain of events.

Acts 17:28 Our Dependency

By Anne Cetas

Read: 1 John 2:24–3:3

In Him we live and move and have our being. —Acts 17:28

While enjoying the arrival of a new great-niece, I was reminded of how much work it is to take care of a newborn baby. They are needy little creations who want feeding, changing, holding, feeding, changing, holding, feeding, changing, holding. Totally unable to care for themselves, they depend on those older and wiser people surrounding them.

We're dependent children too—reliant on our Father in heaven. What do we need from Him that we can't provide for ourselves? "In Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). He supplies our very breath. He also meets our needs "according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19).

We need our Father for peace in our troubles (John 16:33), love (1 John 3:1), and help in time of need (Ps. 46:1; Heb. 4:16). He gives victory in temptation (1 Cor. 10:13), forgiveness (1 John 1:9), purpose (Jer. 29:11), and eternal life (John 10:28). Without Him, we "can do nothing" (John 15:5). And from Him, "we have all received one blessing after another" (John 1:16 NIV).

Let's not think of ourselves as totally independent—because we're not. The Lord sustains us day by day. In many ways, we're as needy as a newborn baby.

We are dependent on the Lord

Who showers us with blessing;

He gives us everything we need—

Without Him we are nothing. —Sper

Depending on God isn't weakness; it's acknowledging His strength.

ACTS 18

Acts 18:1-4 Opening Our Homes

By Marvin Williams

Because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers. —Acts 18:3

In *Outlive Your Life*, Max Lucado writes: “Hospitality opens the door to uncommon community. It’s no accident that hospitality and hospital come from the same Latin word, for they both lead to the same result: healing. When you open your door to someone, you are sending this message: ‘You matter to me and to God.’ You may think you are saying, ‘Come over for a visit.’ But what your guest hears is, ‘I’m worth the effort.’”

This is what the apostle Paul must have heard and felt when Aquila and Priscilla opened the doors of their home to him. When he arrived in Corinth, he was probably exhausted from his journey from Athens. He may also have been discouraged because of his seemingly unsuccessful ministry there (Acts 17:16-34). He later wrote, “I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling” (1 Cor. 2:3). Aquila and Priscilla probably met Paul in the marketplace of Corinth and opened their home to him. They provided a spiritual oasis through Christian hospitality.

As followers of Jesus, we are called to be hospitable, to be a “hospital” that helps those who are going through life’s storms and need restoration. We can be used by the Lord because He has provided for us.

Heavenly Father, make me open to be willing to serve
others through showing hospitality.

May I provide a safe haven for those going through
the storms of life. Amen.

Christian hospitality is an open heart and an open home.

Acts 18:1-3,18-28 An Unusual Couple?

By Dave Branon

Aquila and Priscilla ... explained to [Apollos] the way of God more accurately. —Acts 18:26

The more we see marriage problems all around us, the more we wonder where to look for a marriage that is working.

How about the story of a couple who not only made their marriage work but who also used their unity to assist the early church? Their names were Aquila and Priscilla.

Notice the characteristics that made them so helpful to Paul, and which, I believe, reflected the strength of their marriage.

They were selfless and brave. In Romans 16:4, Paul said they “risked their own necks” for him.

They were hospitable. A church met in their home (1 Cor. 16:19).

They were flexible. Twice they had to move—once by force from Rome (Acts 18:2) and once by choice to go on a missions trip with Paul (v.18).

They worked together. They were tentmakers (v.3).

They both were committed to Christ and teaching others about Him. They invited Apollos to their home, where they “explained to him the way of God more accurately” (v.26).

Aquila and Priscilla were a unit—a team—an inseparable twosome. That may make them an unusual couple, but it’s a difference we who are married should all hope to imitate.

A man and wife who serve the Lord

Will serve each other too;

And jointly they will show the world

What's right and good and true. —K. De Haan

Marriage works best when a couple has a single purpose.

Acts 18:1-11 Many People

By David C. McCasland

I have many people in this city. —Acts 18:10

New York City. Easter Sunday, 7:30 a.m. I was the only customer at Jimmy's Diner in East Harlem when a man entered and approached my table. He said, "Good morning, and God bless you," left a gospel tract, and quickly walked out. I smiled, appreciating his witness and realizing that God has His people everywhere. That night I attended church with our daughter Debbie, joining an enthusiastic congregation of 300 people, most in their twenties and thirties. Their infectious love for Christ and others was a bright light in a city that is often considered spiritually dark.

In the first century, Paul visited the Greek city of Corinth, which was known for its immorality and corruption. When he faced opposition for presenting Jesus as Messiah, the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: "Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city" (Acts 18:9-10).

No matter where we go, the Lord's people are there. The risen Christ is powerfully present in and through all who know Him. The Lord has His people where you are today. Look for them. Join them.

Christ is risen indeed!

When Christians join in blessed fellowship

Commemorating Jesus' resurrection,

They sense a common bond of unity—

Their mutual faith in Him the true connection. —Hess

God has His people where you are today.

Acts 18:9

Are you discouraged because the work that God has called you to do is off to a slow start? Remember, some of our most wonderful inventions got off to slow starts as well.

The first electric light was so dim a candle was needed to see its socket. The first steamboat took 32 hours to chug its way from Buffalo to Albany a distance of 522 miles. Wilbur and Orville Wright's first airplane flight lasted only 12 seconds.

In his ministry at Corinth, the apostle Paul went every Sabbath to the synagogue and tried to persuade the Jews that Jesus is the Christ, but they refused his message. So he turned to the Gentiles, and many believed.

Don't let a rough beginning in your endeavor for the Lord get you down. When you know you're in God's will, stick with it! —D. C. Egner (Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved)

God can make a great finish out of a slow start.

Acts 18:9-11 In All Kinds Of Weather

By David H. Roper

Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. —Matthew 28:20

When Jesus sent His disciples out, He gave them this promise: "I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20). Literally, the word always means "all the days," according to Greek scholars Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown.

Jesus didn't simply say, "always," but "all the days." That takes into account all our various activities, the good and bad circumstances surrounding us, the varied responsibilities we have through the course of our days, the storm clouds and the sunshine.

Our Lord is present with us no matter what each day brings. It may be a day of joy or of sadness, of sickness or of health, of success or of failure. No matter what happens to us today, our Lord is walking beside us, strengthening us, loving us, filling us with

faith, hope, and love. As He envelops us with quiet serenity and security, our foes, fears, afflictions, and doubts begin to recede. We can bear up in any setting and circumstance because we know the Lord is at hand, just as He told Paul in Acts 18:10, “I am with you.”

Practice God’s presence, stopping in the midst of your busy day to say to yourself, “The Lord is here.” And pray that you will see Him who is invisible—and see Him everywhere.

God’s unseen presence comforts me,

I know He’s always near;

And when life’s storms besiege my soul,

He says, “My child, I’m here.” —D. De Haan

Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. —Isaiah 55:6

Acts 18:18-28 Helpful Honks

By Haddon W. Robinson

[Apollos] greatly helped those who had believed through grace. —Acts 18:27

Each fall we are visited by flocks of migrating geese that stop off at a meadow near our home. For several weeks those birds fly in long, wavy V-formations over our house, honking as they go. But then, as winter approaches, they are off again on their long flight south.

A student of mine increased my appreciation for these visitors from the north. He told me that geese fly at speeds of 40 to 50 miles per hour. They travel in formation because as each bird flaps its wings an updraft is created for the bird behind it. They can go 70 percent farther in a group than they could if they flew alone.

Followers of Christ are like that in a way. As we work together to move toward a common goal, we strengthen and help one another (Acts 18:23,27). We can accomplish more together than we can alone.

Geese also honk at one another. They are not critics but encouragers. Those in the rear sound off to exhort those up front to stay on course and maintain their speed. We too can make greater progress if there is someone behind us encouraging us to stay on track and keep going.

Is someone flying in formation with you today to whom you might give some “helpful honks”? —Haddon Robinson

Thinking It Over

How have others helped you through a difficult time?

Is there someone who needs your encouragement?

What specific help can you give that person today?

When you encourage someone, both of your loads will be lighter.

Acts 18:24-28 Eloquent, Yet Humble

By Cindy Hess Kasper

The humble [God] teaches His way. —Psalm 25:9

I admire people who can articulate their beliefs and persuade others with their rhetoric. Some call it “the gift of gab” or “having a way with words.” Others call it “eloquence.”

Apollos had that gift. We are told that he was “an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures” (Acts 18:24). But although he taught accurately about Christ, he preached only of the baptism of John which was a baptism of repentance from sin (v.25; 19:4).

Apollos knew about Jesus’ teachings but may not have known about His death and resurrection and that the Spirit had now come (Acts 2). His teaching was incomplete because he didn’t know about being filled with the Spirit for daily empowerment.

So Priscilla and Aquila, a wife and husband who were friends of Paul, invited Apollos into their home to correct his teaching. Although he was highly educated and knew the Scriptures well, Apollos humbly accepted their instruction. As a result, Apollos was

able to continue his ministry, but with newfound understanding.

Psalm 25:9 reminds us that God “guides the humble in what is right and teaches them His way” (NIV). If we have a spirit of humility, we can be taught by God and be used to touch the lives of others.

More like the Master I would ever be,

More of His meekness, more humility;

More zeal to labor, more courage to be true,

More consecration for work He bids me do. —Gabriel

The place of humility is the place of power.

ACTS 18:26

READ: Acts 18:1-3, ACTS 18:18-28

THE more we see marriage problems all around us, the more we wonder where to look for an example of how marriage is supposed to work.

Aquila and Priscilla were a first-century couple who not only made their marriage work but who also used their unity to assist the early church. The characteristics that made them so helpful to Paul also explain the strength of their marriage.

They were selfless and brave. Paul said, “they risked their own necks” for him (Romans 16:4). They were hospitable. A church met in their home (1 Corinthians 16:19). They were flexible. They moved twice—first when they were forced out of Rome (Acts 18:2) and second when they chose to go on a missions trip with Paul (ACTS 18:18). They worked together. They were tentmakers (ACTS 18:3). They were committed to Christ and to teaching others about Him. They invited Apollos to their home, where they “explained to him the way of God more accurately” (ACTS 18:26).

Aquila and Priscilla were a unit—a team—an inseparable twosome. That may make them an unusual couple, but it’s a difference we who are married should strive to imitate. Their kind of marriage was not about feelings; it was about working together to promote what is right and good and true. —JDB

Lord, every day I need to be reminded that my marriage is a picture to the world of Your relationship with the church, Your bride. Marriage is more than just a meaningful relationship; it is a sacred symbol. With every passing day may I gain a deeper understanding of the holy nature of this spiritual union.

ACTS 19

Acts 19:17-41 Changing Culture

Many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds.--Acts 19:18

Tite Tienow, a West African professor of missions and theology, was confronted by his physician during a medical exam. The doctor disagreed with the work of the professor and said that he was teaching Americans to “colonize” his native land. But Tienow pointed out that the aim of missionaries is not to change culture but to lead people to faith in Christ.

It’s true that when people become believers they abandon some of the practices that mark their culture. But that’s a result, not the goal. For example, when people of the Udek tribe in Chali, Sudan, became Christians, they rejected the practice of burying a live baby with its mother if she died during childbirth. These new Christians didn’t set out to turn their culture upside down. But United Nations officials have publicly noted the difference between the Udek believers and their non-Christian neighbors.

The apostle Paul saw the gospel at work in the society of Ephesus. When sorcerers turned to Christ, they burned their occultic books valued at 50,000 days’ wages (Acts 19:19). And the silversmiths who made shrines of Diana were almost put out of business (vv.23-27).

It’s not our responsibility to change our culture. Only the power of God through the gospel can do that! --HVL

Christ frees us from the penalty

And power of our sin,

And He will change society

As hearts are changed within. --Sper

The gospel produces a change within that breaks the chains of sin.

Acts 19:23-41 Wrong Worship

By Dave Branon

This trade of ours [is] in danger of falling into disrepute. —Acts 19:27

If you really want to get folks upset, threaten their economy.

A bad economic picture gets politicians voted out of office, and the threat of a downturn nearly got the apostle Paul kicked out of Ephesus.

Here's what happened. Paul came to town and started "reasoning and persuading concerning ... the kingdom of God" (Acts 19:8). For more than 2 years he shared the gospel, and many began following Jesus.

Because Paul was so successful in getting people to see that there is only one true God, many Ephesians stopped worshipping the goddess Diana. This was bad news for the local silversmiths, who made their living creating and selling Diana statuettes. If enough people stopped believing in her, business would dry up. A commotion and an uproar broke out when the craftsmen figured this out.

This Ephesus incident can remind us to evaluate our reasons for worshipping God. The silversmiths wanted to protect their worship as a way of protecting their prosperity, but may that never be said of us. Don't ever let your worship of God become an avenue to good fortune.

We worship God because of His love for us and because of who He is, not because loving Him can help our bottom line. Let's worship God the right way.

We worship God for who He is,

And not because of what we'll get;

When we acknowledge what we owe,

We'll thank Him that He paid our debt. —Sper

Don't worship God to gain His benefits— you already have them.

ACTS 20

Acts 20:7-12 Proper Preparation

By Herbert Vander Lugt

In a window sat a certain young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep. —Acts 20:9

Eutychus was probably not the first person to fall asleep listening to a preacher in a church meeting (Acts 20:9), and he certainly won't be the last. Part of the blame can lie with the humdrum nature of the worship service and the dullness of the sermon. But other factors can also be at work.

For instance, as a boy I noticed that men who worked outdoors in the winter found the warmth of a church building most conducive to sleep. A few years later, after working 17 hours on Saturday in a meat market, I struggled to stay awake in the Sunday morning service. Saturday evening social activities can also make for slumberous Sunday mornings.

One of the keys to having a vital encounter with God on Sunday morning is proper preparation the day before. Yes, those in leadership should give much thought and prayer to every part of the worship service. But those of us who sit in the pews should also keep Sunday morning in mind as we plan our Saturday activities. Then we'll be alert and ready to sing, pray, and take in all that is being said, including the truths given in the sermon.

We can have a fresh vision of God's greatness and love, plus a renewed desire to do His will, if we make proper preparation for worship.

THINKING IT OVER

In what ways can you better prepare yourself for worshipping God?

Consider these: Prayer, Bible study, confession of sin, adequate sleep.

Worship on Sunday morning should begin on Saturday night.

Acts 20:16-24 Hopes And Dreams

By David C. McCasland

So that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. —Acts 20:24

In 1960, everyone in the high school I attended participated in Project TALENT. For several days, we took tests that surveyed our aptitudes in academic subjects. In addition, we were asked to express our plans, hopes, and dreams for the future. What we didn't know was that we were among 400,000 participants from 1,300 schools in the largest study of high school students ever conducted in the US. None of us involved in the study could have imagined how our lives would turn out.

The same was true for Saul of Tarsus. As a young man, his goal was to destroy the followers of Jesus (Acts 7:58–8:3; Gal. 1:13). But after his conversion, he became the apostle Paul, whose mission was to multiply them. As he journeyed to Jerusalem, facing prison and hardship, Paul said, "I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace" (Acts 20:24 niv).

When our goal is to honor the Lord, He guides and guards us each step of the way. Whatever our hopes and dreams may be, when we place them in God's hands we know that everything, including setback or success, is under His control.

When we give our hopes and dreams to God

And then leave them in His hand,

We can trust His love and care for us

To fulfill what He has planned. —Sper

Live the Christian life in the same way you began it— by trusting Christ.

Acts 20:17-21,31-38 Life Shadowing

By Dave Branon

Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ. —1 Corinthians 11:1

When our daughter Julie was a high school senior, she had the opportunity to "job shadow" for 2 weeks. She went "on the job" to find out firsthand about two professions that had captured her interest. For the first week, she sat in on the classes of a math teacher at another school. For the second week, she shadowed a college basketball coach.

The idea of shadowing is a vital one, because it emphasizes the importance of example. A person who is being shadowed knows he or she is setting an example for the student.

We are all participants in a process that might be called "life shadowing." If we are parents, our children shadow us all the time, learning how to act as adults. At work, we have fellow employees who notice our reactions to all kinds of situations. In our community, our neighbors observe us and see how Christians live, even when we don't realize they are watching.

Is our life worthy of shadowing? Does our example lead others in the right direction? Paul said that his life was worth shadowing because he followed Jesus—the ultimate example (1 Cor. 11:1).

If you want to become a worthy example for others, shadow the Savior!

You're teaching a lesson each day that you live;

Your actions are blazing a trail

That others will follow for good or for ill;

You'll help them or cause them to fail. —Bosch

To cast a good shadow, walk in God's light.

Acts 20:17-31 'I Didn't Witness!'

By Dave Branon

For three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. —Acts 20:31

When my daughter Lisa arrived for another day of teaching her high school music classes, she found that the students and faculty were grieving. A senior boy had died in a car accident the afternoon before. As Lisa made her way toward her classroom, she saw a student she knew was a Christian, sitting in the cafeteria, crying.

When Lisa reached her, the student hugged her and said between her sobs, "Oh, Mrs. Spangler, he's in hell, and I didn't witness to him." She knew that the young man had clearly spoken out about his professed atheism—and she hadn't told him about Jesus.

That girl may have been a better witness for the Lord than she realized in the way she lived. Nonetheless, she understood an important concept: It is our job to tell the world about the saving power of Jesus. We see Paul as an example of one who carried out this mission (Acts 20:17-31).

Life seems so comfortable at times—so certain—that we move along each day without thinking of the eternal implications for others. And sometimes we bask in the assurance of our own salvation, forgetting that most people we meet do not have the same hope that we have in Christ Jesus.

Is there anyone you need to talk to about Jesus today—before it's too late? —JDB

Wanted: Messengers to deliver the good news.

Acts 20:17-27 The Legend Of The Pelican

By Mart De Haan

None of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy. —Acts 20:24

I was surprised to learn that in religious art the pelican has long been a symbol of self-sacrifice. Having observed these strange birds firsthand while fishing along the west coast of Florida, I felt that they were more like lazy freeloaders than self-denying saints. With pitiful stares that masked hearts full of envy, they would sit and lust after every fish I caught. Once in a while they would even try to intercept one before I could reel it in.

Their behavior, however, is not why they symbolize self-sacrifice. The association is made because of their red-tipped beak. According to legend, when a mother pelican cannot find food for her young, she thrusts her beak into her breast and nourishes her little ones with her own blood. The early church saw in this story a beautiful picture of what Christ did for us and what we in turn should do for one another. The apostle Paul reflected this self-giving attitude as he made his farewell speech to the Ephesian believers (Acts 20:24).

Because of our sinful nature, we are characterized more by greed than by self-sacrifice. But that can change. Through faith in Jesus, we are forgiven and our hearts are transformed. Then, as we depend on God's Spirit who lives within us, we will practice the art of self-sacrificing love.

Were the whole realm of nature mine,

That were a present far too small;

Love so amazing, so divine,

Demands my soul, my life, my all. —Watts

Nothing is more pleasing to God than self-sacrifice.

Acts 20:17-32 One Life Is Enough

By Joanie Yoder

Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. —Philippians 1:20

A mature Christian said longingly, “Oh, that I could turn back the clock 20 years and go on ministering for the Lord!” That’s a commendable wish but impossible to fulfill. One life is all we’re given. Within God’s sovereign purposes, one life, whether long or short, is enough.

In Acts 20:22-23 and 21:11, God revealed that tribulations and possible death awaited Paul in Jerusalem. But instead of avoiding Jerusalem, Paul declared, “None of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus” (20:24). Paul’s goal was not to extend his ministry but to complete it.

Our goal, like Paul’s, should be to glorify Christ in our body, “whether by life or by death” (Phil. 1:20). Then, if necessary, we can afford to lose our liberty and our very lives. We can be sure God will use others to carry on His work and bring it to completion.

Paul’s death did not bring his influence to an end. In Acts 20:28, he bequeathed his ministry to the church overseers, and we’re still reaping the benefits of his life today.

Life is brief—“a vapor” (Jas. 4:14). With Christ’s help, let’s invest our lives in something that will outlast us.

Living for Christ makes life worth living.

Acts 20:17-32 Life Wish

By David C. McCasland

None of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy. —Acts 20:24

Bible in a Year:

Psalms 16-17; Acts 20:1-16

A Colorado mountaineer and guide was once asked if he thought climbers had a death wish. He replied, “Actually, they have a life wish, to live life to the fullest.” As a careful yet adventurous climber, he explained why he considered the risks worth taking: “When it comes time for me to die,” he said, “I do not wish to discover that I have not lived.”

As the apostle Paul traveled to Jerusalem, it may have appeared to his closest friends that he had a death wish. At one point, several people warned him of the danger and urged him not to go (Acts 21:4,12). But Paul had already made up his mind in Ephesus, where he clearly stated that his purpose was to “finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God” (20:24).

Paul did not take unnecessary risks in his witness as a Christian, but he never shied away from publicly declaring his faith in Jesus Christ. His goal was not to play it safe and protect himself. Instead, he lived to finish his spiritual race with joy, and to complete God’s task for him.

Paul’s courage challenges us to live for Christ with selfless abandon, not apprehension. That’s the way to know ultimate fulfillment and joy. Do we share his life wish today?

To find the greatest joy in life, give your life to Christ.

Acts 20:17-32 Of Mice And Christians

By M.R. De Haan

Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock ... to shepherd the church of God. —Acts 20:28

Someone shouted, “There goes a mouse! Get it!” But she disappeared in a small hole in the floor of the cottage porch. So we set a trap. The next morning, we had the mouse. (Mice aren’t too smart.)

The following day we were surprised to see a tiny mouse crawling on the floor. A few minutes later we found another and then three more baby mice wandering aimlessly in search of something.

We had caught the mother mouse, and now the babies were leaving their nest in search of mama and food. They were content as long as mama fed them, but when they got hungry they became restless and began to search for something to eat.

Little mice will stay put as long as they are properly fed. This is also true of God’s people, often referred to in the Bible as sheep. Why do so many members of our churches get drawn away by cults and teachers of error? It is very hungry sheep who wander about looking elsewhere for food. When I read the church ads in the newspaper and see what people are being fed, I’m surprised

that there aren't more wandering sheep.

Church leader, feed your flock well. And church member, be careful what you swallow.

THINKING IT OVER

Is the Bible taught faithfully at your church? Do you read and study your Bible to know if what you are being taught is true? (Acts 17:11).

A well-nourished Christian won't snack on error.

Acts 20:17-38 Painful Farewells

By Mart De Haan

They all wept freely, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him, sorrowing ... that they would see his face no more. —Acts 20:37-38

Saying goodbye to someone you love can be awkward and difficult. Down deep you wonder, Will I ever see this person again? You almost wish you had never gotten so attached. It hurts so much to let go.

I thought of this as I looked at some pictures a young woman had collected during her high school years. She talked to me about several students from abroad who had become her dear friends. When I asked how she had grown so attached to them, she replied, "I don't know. But it sure was hard to say goodbye!"

Sooner or later, we all will experience the tears of separation. The apostle Paul nurtured and taught the believers in Ephesus for 3 years. But when he had to leave, "They all wept freely, ... sorrowing ... that they would see his face no more" (Acts 20:37-38).

As Christians, we have good reason to establish close ties, even though they will eventually be broken. Our hope in the resurrection to come assures us that someday we will be reunited in the presence of God.

Farewells can be very painful. But don't let that keep you from building close relationships with others who love the Lord. He makes those friendships worthwhile—both now and in eternity!

Farewells and partings may bring grief;

The sorrow can be hard to bear;

But someday those who know the Lord

Will meet in heaven with Him there. —Sper

Christians never say goodbye for the last time.

Acts 20:17-21,31-38 Life Shadowing

By Dave Branon

Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ. —1 Corinthians 11:1

When our daughter Julie was a high school senior, she had the opportunity to "job shadow" for 2 weeks. She went "on the job" to find out firsthand about two professions that had captured her interest. For the first week, she sat in on the classes of a math teacher at another school. For the second week, she shadowed a college basketball coach.

The idea of shadowing is a vital one, because it emphasizes the importance of example. A person who is being shadowed knows he or she is setting an example for the student.

We are all participants in a process that might be called "life shadowing." If we are parents, our children shadow us all the time, learning how to act as adults. At work, we have fellow employees who notice our reactions to all kinds of situations. In our community, our neighbors observe us and see how Christians live, even when we don't realize they are watching.

Is our life worthy of shadowing? Does our example lead others in the right direction? Paul said that his life was worth shadowing because he followed Jesus—the ultimate example (1 Cor. 11:1).

If you want to become a worthy example for others, shadow the Savior!

You're teaching a lesson each day that you live;

Your actions are blazing a trail

That others will follow for good or for ill;

You'll help them or cause them to fail. —Bosch

To cast a good shadow, walk in God's light.

Acts 20:17-25 Home Before Dark

By David C. McCasland

None of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy. —Acts 20:24

Parents often tell their children, "Be home before dark." And in areas not served by electricity, travelers feel a pressing need to reach their destination while light still lingers in the sky. "Home before dark" means a successful journey and a safe arrival.

Robertson McQuilkin used this phrase to express his desire to remain faithful to the Lord throughout his spiritual journey. His prayer ended with the words "Lord, let me get home before dark." He explained this by first saying, "I fear ... that I should end before I finish, or finish but not well. That I should stain Your honor, shame Your name, grieve Your loving heart. Few, they tell me, finish well."

McQuilkin's words echo the heartfelt longing of the apostle Paul as he faced danger ahead in Jerusalem: "None of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24).

It is God's word of grace (v.32) that encourages us to continue in faith, for it tells us that He is able to strengthen us until the end of our lives. So let's keep walking and trusting as we pray, "By Your grace, Father, I humbly ask You to help me get home before dark."

Immortal words of truth we've read,

So powerfully penned, so filled with grace,

Will follow us through all our days

And spur us on to win life's race. —D. De Haan

The race of life is run by faith and won by grace.

Acts 20:22-32 Always On Duty

By Marvin Williams

Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. —Hebrews 13:17

As my kids were discarding their trash at the local mall food court, my oldest son was almost run into by a man who was clearly on a mission. My younger son jokingly remarked, "Maybe he stole something." Thinking I might be able to use this as a teachable moment, I said, "That's what the Bible calls judging." He then asked with a smile: "Why are you always 'pastoring' me?" After I finished laughing, I told my sons that I could never take a vacation from shepherding them.

The apostle Paul told the Ephesian elders that they too could never take a vacation from shepherding God's people (Acts 20). He was convinced that false teachers would try to ravage the church (v.29), and the elders needed to protect the group from them. Caring for God's people includes feeding them spiritually, leading them gently, and warning them firmly. Leaders in the church are to be motivated by the incalculable price Christ paid on the cross (v.28).

Church leaders have a big responsibility to watch over our souls, for one day they will give an account to the Lord for their work among us. Let's bring them joy now by responding to their faithful, godly leadership with obedience and submission (Heb. 13:17).

We join our hearts and hands together

Faithful to the Lord's command:

We hold each other to God's standards—

All that truth and love demand. —D. De Haan

After we hear the Word of God, we should then take up the work of God.

Acts 20:22-35 Tough Or Easy?

By Dave Branon

... nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy. —Acts 20:24

The Christian life—is it tough or easy? Which is it supposed to be? Does our faith in Jesus Christ cause us difficulty, hardship, suffering, and loss? Or does it pave for us an easy road to heaven?

These aren't easy questions. But if we look at some of the people in the Bible—the ones we admire and respect for their obvious faithfulness to the Lord—we see that they didn't have a life of ease. Paul, for example, faced difficulties that would make most of us wonder where God is: shipwrecks, imprisonments, beatings, and other kinds of abuse (2 Corinthians 11:23-28). It seems he was better off before he started following Jesus.

In his book *Amusing Ourselves To Death*, social critic Neil Postman wrote, "Christianity is a serious and demanding religion. When it is delivered as easy and amusing, it is another kind of religion altogether." He's right. Jesus Himself said, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me" (Matthew 16:24). That's a clear call for self-denial.

Paul was given a task, and he did it wholeheartedly for God's glory, no matter what the cost (Acts 20:24). Are we willing to do what God has called us to do with the same dedication, whether it is easy or tough? —JDB

I do not ask for easy paths

Along life's winding roads,

But for the promised grace and strength

To carry all its loads. —Meadows

Following Jesus is always right—but seldom easy.

Acts 20:23-24 Steadfast Service

By Vernon C. Grounds

Be steadfast, immovable, ... knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord. —1 Corinthians 15:58

How do we react to tragic events? When upsetting experiences come into our personal lives and create an atmosphere of darkness and gloom, how do we respond? We may tend to panic or lose heart. A man named Abraham Davenport can teach us a lesson in steadfastness.

On May 19, 1780, a mysterious phenomenon took place. Thick darkness (perhaps caused by smoke from forest fires combined with dense fog) covered areas of New England. Filled with fear, many people thought the world was coming to an end.

The Connecticut legislature was meeting that day, and many members were urging adjournment. Abraham Davenport, however, proclaimed to his colleagues, "I am against adjournment. The day of judgment is either approaching or it is not. If it is not, there is no cause for an adjournment; if it is, I choose to be found doing my duty. I wish therefore that candles may be brought."

The apostle Paul had a similar determination. Even though he had faced severe hardship and opposition, and he was hearing gloomy news about his future, he was determined to "finish [his] race with joy" (Acts 20:24).

Let us, then, with soul-quieting confidence in our Lord, remain steadfast in serving Him all our days.

We have an anchor that keeps the soul

Steadfast and sure while the billows roll,

Fastened to the Rock which cannot move,

Grounded firm and deep in the Savior's love. —Owens

To survive the storms of life, be anchored to the Rock of Ages.

Acts 20:24

About 200 years ago in England there lived a great humanitarian named Jonas Hanway. In his travels in foreign countries, he had discovered the usefulness of what was then the little-known umbrella. He decided to introduce it to England, believing it would be readily accepted.

Many people poked fun at him, however, and young boys often pelted him with cabbages and rotten eggs because they considered him peculiar. Hanway never let this stop him, even though he was ridiculed for 30 years as "the umbrella man." Eventually people recognized the usefulness of the umbrella, and today few would want to be without one.

A spiritual parallel to this story is found in the perseverance and faithfulness of the apostle Paul. That "ambassador in chains" was kept in cruel Roman dungeons and endured terrible persecution; yet he confidently declared that none of these things moved him. In spite of all opposition, he clung to the truth of the gospel, which the Lord had commissioned him to proclaim to the world. —H. G. Bosch

GREAT ENDURANCE IS ESSENTIAL TO GREAT ACHIEVEMENT.

Acts 20:24

THE name Mickey Thompson used to be one of the most recognized in auto racing. His team built the fastest cars on the track. But not one of those cars ever brought Thompson a checkered flag. Although his cars took the lead in the first twenty-nine races they entered, they never won a race. Why? Because they did not finish.

Thompson could make the fastest cars, but he couldn't build them to last. They all broke down during the race. Engines blew. Gearboxes broke. Carburetors failed. His cars were good starters and fast runners, but they were not good finishers.

As we run the race of the Christian life, we need to end well. The apostle Paul is an example of a good finisher. He received Christ on the Damascus road. He attended "seminary" in the Arabian desert (Galatians 1:17-18). He served Christ in spite of hardship and persecution. He opened Europe to the Gospel. And at the close of his life, he could say with confidence, "I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7).

What about us? What stalls our spiritual engines? What causes us to break down? When we find ourselves out of the running, we need to diagnose the problem, make the necessary repairs, and get back into the race. God needs people He can count on to cross the finish line.—D. C. Egner

Acts 20:24 A Ruling Passion

By Vernon C. Grounds

Philippians 3:7-14

For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. —Philippians 1:21

Vladimir Lenin was the fanatical architect of the former USSR. A colleague once said of him, "Lenin thinks about nothing but revolution. He talks about nothing but revolution. He eats and drinks revolution. And if he dreams at night, he must dream about revolution."

No matter how much we deplore Lenin's fanaticism and all the evil that came from it, we must recognize that his single-minded passion not only helped him accomplish his goals but affected the entire course of history.

What is our ruling passion? Is there some cause, some sport, some hobby, some project that fills us with enthusiasm, focuses our energies, and commands the untiring investment of our time and thought and money? In light of what God says has eternal significance, what value does our passion really possess?

The apostle Paul expressed a worthy goal when he wrote, "None of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24).

To know Jesus Christ, to trust Him, to love Him, and to serve Him—that is a passion with eternal value.

Living for Jesus who died in my place,

Bearing on Calv'ry my sin and disgrace;

Such love constrains me to answer His call,

Follow His leading, and give Him my all. —Chisholm

Without a heart aflame for God, we cannot shine for Jesus.

Acts 20:27-32 Handle With Care

By Bill Crowder

I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up. —Acts 20:32

While visiting Jakarta, Indonesia, for a Bible conference, I was invited to speak in a church there. Before the first of two services that Sunday morning, one of the elders asked me to give him my Bible. He explained that the elders were responsible for the biblical reliability of the teaching the congregation received, and that he would return my Bible to me in front of the congregation. It was a tangible way of showing the church family that the leadership was entrusting the ministry of the Word to me on that day.

This practice was both sobering and encouraging. It reminded me that the privilege of presenting the truths of the Bible to people is not one to be taken lightly. It also was encouraging to see the degree to which these Indonesian elders took seriously their responsibility for the care of the flock.

In Acts 20, we read that Paul met with the elders of the church at Ephesus. In his charge to these leaders, the apostle warned them of the danger of false teachers (vv.28-29) and the responsibility of the church leadership to help the congregation grow in the Word of God (v.32).

No matter what our calling is, let's handle the Word with care. When we do, God's people will grow.

O God, in whom our trust we place,

We thank You for Your Word of grace;

Help us its precepts to obey,

Till we shall live in endless day. —Huss

The Spirit of God uses the Word of God to change the people of God.

Acts 20:28-38 Is It Blessed To Receive?

By Dennis J. De Haan

It is more blessed to give than to receive. —Acts 20:35

We admire people who take responsibility for their lives and try not to burden others. Such self-sufficiency is commendable. But if every needy person in the world—and that includes all of us at one time or another—refused help, there would be no opportunity for anyone to give.

When we read Jesus' statement in Acts 20:35 that "it is more blessed to give than to receive," we tend to focus only on the virtue of giving. Our Lord did not say that it's undesirable to accept a gift, but that by comparison our goal should be to give, not to get. Actually, both giving and receiving are commendable, enriching, and even necessary.

Perhaps it's risky in a greedy age to extol receiving. Yet many sincere, well-meaning people hesitate when offered this lesser but equally valid blessing. They say, "Oh, I can't take that!" or "You really shouldn't!"

Why are we like this? Personally, I've concluded that it's often because I don't want to feel indebted to others, or I'm proud, or I want to have control. But these hidden attitudes are selfish and run contrary to the spirit of Him who said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Perhaps we need to give others the blessing of giving by learning to be a gracious receiver.

I gave out of abundant pride

And blessing took its leave,

Till humbly to the Lord I cried,

And learned how to receive. —Gustafson

Grateful receiving, like gracious giving, comes from the heart.

Acts 20:16-31

"I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears" (Acts 20:31).

Some people think crying is a sign of weakness. But our Savior wept. And the apostle Paul was not afraid to mention his own tears when he wrote to the Ephesian elders about his burden for the people he was trying to reach. Good servants or ministers of Jesus Christ will be like that—they will have tender, compassionate hearts. They will be so filled with concern and love that those feelings will often splash over as tears. If not tears on the cheek, certainly deep feeling in the soul.

One day D. L. Moody preached an especially moving sermon about the compassion of Christ. When a friend asked him how he had prepared such a message, he answered, "I got to thinking the other day about the compassion of Christ; so I took the Bible and began to read it over to find out what it said on the subject. I prayed over the texts as I went along until the thought of His infinite compassion overpowered me, and I could only lie on the floor of my study with my face in the open Bible and cry like a child."

As we stand in the shadow of the cross and let God's love in Christ flood our souls, our hard hearts will melt, and coldness will give way to warmth. If we allow the Holy Spirit to control us, He will produce in us a Christlike concern. Then His burden and His compassion for the unsaved will become ours. The love of Christ will cause us to reach out to others. And that caring attitude will be accompanied by timely tears. —P. R. Van Gorder

Tears flow freely from the fountain of a love-filled heart.

Acts 20:32-38 Toddler's Creed

By Haddon W. Robinson

You shall not covet. —Romans 7:7

Elisa Morgan, president of MOPS International (Mothers Of Pre-Schoolers), shared this insight into a child's view of the world:

Toddler's Creed

If I want it, it's mine.

If I give it to you and change my
mind later, it's mine.

If I can take it away from you,
it's mine.

If I had it a little while ago,
it's mine.

If it's mine, it will never belong to
anyone else, no matter what.

If we are building something together,
all the pieces are mine.

If it looks just like mine,
it is mine.

Anyone who has ever known a toddler knows the truth of that creed. We expect to see this trait in toddlers, but we despise it in adults. It is called covetousness.

The apostle Paul, who had led an outwardly religious life before he became a follower of Jesus, wrestled with that sin (Rom. 7:7). After carefully studying the law, he recognized covetousness for what it was. But God in His grace changed Paul. Instead of being a coveting, grasping man, he became a truly generous person (Acts 20:33-35). Generosity may be the acid test of whether or not we are still spiritual toddlers.

Have you allowed Jesus Christ to create in you a new, giving heart? Or are you still following the "Toddler's Creed"?

Gratefulness overcomes selfishness.

Acts 20:35 The Benefit Of Giving

By Richard De Haan

2 Corinthians 8:1-15

Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive.. —Acts 20:35

After the great Chicago fire of 1871, D. L. Moody went to New York to solicit funds for its victims. When he arrived, he was introduced to a wealthy man who was reported to be very generous. Impressed by the great need in Chicago, he gave Moody a check for a great sum of money. He then directed the evangelist to several other men in the area, who also gave large contributions.

When Mr. Moody was about to leave, he shook the benefactor's hand and made this parting comment: "If you ever come to Chicago, be sure to call on me. I'll return your favor." The man responded, "Mr. Moody, don't wait for me to come. Do it to the first man who comes along." Commenting on that experience, Moody said, "I never forgot that remark. It had the ring of the true Good Samaritan."

That man was the kind of giver who pleases God. Moved by the needs of others, he willingly gave of his means to alleviate their suffering. He didn't give to gain attention or to satisfy his ego. Nor did he give "grudgingly or of necessity," but cheerfully (2 Corinthians 9:7).

We can be sure that we benefit the most when we give, because the Lord Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

He who has no other pleasure

Ever may rejoice in this:

Not in having or receiving

But in giving, there is bliss. —Anon.

The greatest blessing comes to the One who freely gives and expects nothing in return.

Acts 20:35 The Blessing Of Giving

By Philip Yancey

Mark 12:38-44

It is more blessed to give than to receive. —Acts 20:35

It made no sense for a widow to donate her last few coins to a corrupt institution in Jerusalem, where scribes who were dependent on those gifts "devour[ed] widows' houses" (Mark 12:40). But in that woman's act, Jesus saw a moving display of the proper attitude toward money (vv.41-44).

Gordon Cosby, while serving as pastor of the Church of the Saviour in Washington, DC, tells of a widow whose income was barely adequate to feed and clothe her six children. Yet every week she faithfully placed \$4 in the offering plate. A deacon suggested that Cosby go to her and assure her that she could use the money instead for her family's benefit.

Cosby followed the deacon's advice—to his regret. "You are trying to take away the last thing that gives me dignity and meaning," she said. She had learned a key to giving: It can benefit the giver more than the receiver. Yes, those in poverty need financial help. But the need to give may be as important as the need to receive.

The act of giving reminds us that we live by the grace of God—like the birds and the flowers. Those creations don't worry about their future; neither should we. Giving offers us a way to express our confidence that God will care for us just as He cares for the sparrow and lily (Matt. 6:25-34).

Whatever, Lord, we lend to Thee,

Repaid a thousand-fold will be;

Then gladly will we give to Thee,

Who givest all—who givest all. —Wordsworth

We disarm the power of money by giving it away.

ACTS 21

Acts 21:40-22:10 What's Next?

By Richard De Haan

Lord, what do You want me to do? —Acts 9:6

Having just received the Lord Jesus as his Savior from sin, an enthusiastic young boy blurted out, "Now what do I do? What's next?" He had the right idea! Although nothing further had to be done to receive salvation, there was much more to do to serve God.

The Bible, in Ephesians 2:8-9, makes it crystal-clear that we are saved by grace through faith. We could never do anything to deserve salvation. The best we have to offer is not good enough to meet the Lord's holy standards. We experience forgiveness of sin, find peace with God, have the promise of heaven, and become possessors of everlasting life by trusting the Lord Jesus and Him alone. It is impossible for anyone to earn these favors!

Following conversion, however, we should respond as that young boy and the apostle Paul did, "Now what do I do? What's next?" Immediately after stating that we are not saved by works, Ephesians 2 tells us, "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (v.10).

First there's faith, then comes service. We believe to become Christians. We serve because we have been saved. That's what's next!

Oh, what can I give to the Master,

The One who from sin set me free?

I'll give Him a lifetime of service

To thank Him for dying for me. —K. De Haan

We cannot work for salvation, but salvation is followed by works.

Acts 21:1-14 Surrender

By Herbert Vander Lugt

When he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, "The will of the Lord be done.. —Acts 21:14

In the early 1940s, the president of Dallas Seminary, Lewis Sperry Chafer, gave a very brief banquet speech. Introduced after a long program, he announced his subject: "The Reasonableness Of Fully Surrendering Our Lives To God." Then, because of the lateness of the hour, he gave only the three points of his message.

Reason 1: God is all-wise and knows better than anyone else what is best for my life.

Reason 2: He is almighty and has the power to accomplish what is best for me.

Reason 3: God loves me more than anyone else does.

Chafer concluded, "Therefore the most logical thing I can do is surrender my life to God. What more can I say? What more need I say?"

The apostle Paul had the same conviction. He knew that prison and hardship awaited him in Jerusalem, but he also knew that God wanted him to go (Acts 20:22-23). Even his sorrowing friends wisely concluded, "The will of the Lord be done" (21:14). They knew that Paul was right.

No matter what happens, when we do God's will we're in the safest place in all the world. The Lord is all-wise, almighty, and all-loving. Doesn't it make sense to surrender your life to Him?

All to Jesus I surrender,

All to Him I freely give;

I will ever love and trust Him,

In His presence daily live. —Van de Venter

Surrender means victory when we surrender to God.

Acts 21:7-14 People Of Courage

By Mart De Haan

God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. —2 Timothy 1:7

Police found it hard to believe, but an unarmed housewife captured three burglars singlehandedly. The woman had come home and found three men loading household items into their car parked in her driveway. She pulled her van behind their car and then ordered the men to carry her belongings back into the house and sit on the couch until the police arrived. Later, when asked why they didn't escape, she replied, "The Lord was with me... I wasn't going to move my van so they could get away. What was I to do? Run away?"

The apostle Paul also showed unusual courage. His friends probably thought he was being reckless when he insisted on going to Jerusalem after he had been warned of the danger that awaited him (Acts 21:11-13). A strong argument could be made for him to delay his trip. After all, on another occasion he had escaped from danger (9:23-25). Yet Paul knew what he had to do. With unwavering determination he courageously headed for Jerusalem.

It's not easy to know when such boldness is wise or foolish. Only the Spirit can show us. But one thing is sure, Christians have reason to be courageous. God is our helper. And when we rely on Him, He'll enable us to stand firm no matter what danger we may face.

Ask God for good judgment and courage

To face unexpected events;

To follow the teachings of Scripture

Is the best, most effective defense. —Hess

Courage is fear that has said its prayers.

Acts 21:7-15 For The Name Of The Lord

By Albert Lee

I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. —Acts 21:13

Matthew Henry, the famous Bible scholar, was once accosted by thieves and robbed. In his diary, he wrote: "Let me be thankful first, because I was never robbed before; second, because they took my purse and not my life; third, because although they took my all, it was not much; and fourth, because it was I who was robbed, not I who robbed."

For Matthew Henry, doing God's will was far more important than what had happened to him. The apostle Paul also demonstrated this attitude as he was told about his future. Though the prophet Agabus had foretold his imprisonment in Jerusalem (Acts 21:10-11), Paul was undeterred. His desire was to do God's will and fulfill His purpose for his life, no matter what might happen to him. Paul desired to obey the Lord for His name's sake.

None of us knows what tomorrow holds. Sometimes God's will involves walking through "the valley of the shadow of death" (Psalm 23:4). At other times we may have to choose the path of hardship because we wish to do what is right, rather than what is easy.

In all of life's difficulties, we can remember that obeying God's will "for the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 21:13) is far more important than what may happen to us. —AL

We go in faith, our own great weakness feeling,

And needing more each day Thy grace to know;

Yet from our hearts a song of triumph pealing:

We rest on Thee, and in Thy name we go. —Cherry

What we call adversity, God calls opportunity.

Acts 21:13

The courage of Civil War leader Stonewall Jackson in the midst of conflict can be a lesson for the believer. Historian Mark Brimsley wrote,

“A battlefield is a deadly place, even for generals; and it would be naive to suppose Jackson never felt the animal fear of all beings exposed to wounds and death. but invariably he displayed extraordinary calm under fire, a calm too deep and masterful to be mere pretense. His apparent obliviousness to danger attracted notice, and after the First Manassas battle someone asked him how he managed it. “My religious belief teaches me to feel as safe in battle as in bed,” Jackson explained. ‘God knows the time for my death. I do not concern myself about that, but to be always ready, no matter where it may overtake me.’ He added pointedly, ‘That is the way all men should live, and than all would be equally brave.’”

ACTS 22

Acts 22:1-16 Changed To Bring Change

By Vernon C. Grounds

You will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. —Acts 22:15

One night a woman dreamed that she was having a conversation with God. She was angry about all the suffering and evil she saw around her, so she complained to the Lord, “Why don’t You do something about all this?” God gently replied, “I did. I created you.”

God could send another flood, as He did in Noah’s day, to cleanse away the wickedness of the world. He could, but He won’t. He has promised never to do that again (Genesis 9:11). Instead, He chooses to work through human beings like us, changing them, then enabling them to function as His agents of change.

He changed Paul from a persecutor of the church to “His witness to all men” (Acts 22:15). Paul’s life and letters taught, inspired, and comforted the church in its early days, and they still do today. It was the power of God that changed Paul, then used him to change the world around him.

What about you? Have you been transformed by the power of Jesus Christ? Are you now obediently serving Him to change the lives of people around you?

Let’s ask God to work in our hearts and lives so that through us He will bring about change in our families, our communities, and the world.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

A transformed life means more than a change in behavior.

To find out why, read the online booklet [Transformed Lives](#).

Only when we are changed can we help others to change.

Acts 22:1-15 Talking Or Doing?

By Henry G. Bosch

You will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. —Acts 22:15

A talented young Christian artist painted a picture of a forlorn woman and child out in a storm. His portrayal moved his heart so deeply that he laid down his palette and brush, declaring, “I must go to the lost, instead of painting them.”

He soon began working in the city slums and studying for the ministry. That young British artist was Alfred Robert Tucker (1849-1914), who served as a missionary in Uganda and eastern Africa for 20 years.

All of us must get out of the rut of just talking about missions and witnessing, but doing nothing about it.

Pastor Horace Bushnell (1802-1876) wrote: “The following are excused from giving or going: Those who believe the world is not lost

and does not need a Savior. Those who wish the missionaries had never come to our ancestors, and that we ourselves were still heathens. Those who believe that it is 'every man for himself' in this world, and who, with Cain, ask, 'Am I my brother's keeper?' Those who believe they are not accountable to God for the money entrusted to them. And those who are prepared to accept the final sentence, 'Inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me' (Matthew 25:45)."

What are you doing for Christ?

Help me to see the tragic plight

Of souls far off in sin;

Help me to love, to pray, and go

To bring the wandering in. —Harrison

When The Lord says go, how can we say no?

ACTS 23

ACTS 24

Acts 24:10-26 A Born Atheist?

By Vernon C. Grounds

How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? —Hebrews 2:3

All of us have an innate sense of God's existence (Rom. 1:18-21). But some may suppress that deep-down awareness of God and may even convince themselves that He is not real—until a moment of crisis.

Novelist Eric Ambler was making a World War II documentary in Italy, *The Battle of San Pietro*, when exploding shells knocked him to the ground and he thought he might die. In his autobiography he wrote, "My unconscious mind chose to play a nasty trick on me. I heard myself saying, 'Into Thy hands I commend my spirit.'" Unhurt, he resolved never to reveal that momentary abandonment of his unbelief.

Such a flash of insight is a gift of grace that can cause the long-suppressed truth to become conscious trust in God. But Ambler refused to let that spark of faith become a steady flame that would illuminate the darkness of his unbelieving soul with redemptive truth.

Felix, the governor of Judea, put off a decision for Christ until "a convenient time" (Acts 24:25). But convenient times have a way of eluding us. We all need to commit ourselves into the hand of God, not just at death but in life. It starts by accepting the gift of salvation by faith in His Son.

If you haven't trusted Christ as Savior, do it today.

Almost persuaded now to believe;

Almost persuaded Christ to receive:

Seems now some soul to say, "Go, Spirit, go Thy way,

Some more convenient day on Thee I'll call." —Bliss

You can't repent too soon, because you don't know how soon it may be too late.

Acts 24:10-16 THE LESSON OF THE JAPANESE DENTIST

... exercise thyself ... unto godliness. 1 Timothy 4:7

A man, selling a new kind of liquid adhesive, displayed his merchandise along with a sign which read: "A box of this glue given free to anyone who can break these items apart." At the base of the poster were spools, pieces of wood, and other articles which had

been cemented together. An Oriental gentleman stopped to look, pointed to a peg that had been inserted and glued into a two-inch-deep hole drilled in a small wooden block, and asked what the reward would be if he could pull it out. "Pull it out!" cried the man; "why, if you can do that, I'll not only give you a free box of -glue, but ten dollars on top of it!" The dowel projected scarcely a quarter of an inch above the surface of the block, but the challenger was undismayed. Placing his left hand on the square of wood, he took the peg between the thumb and forefinger of his other hand, and removed it with apparent ease — although a portion of the wood block came along with it. The salesman gasped. "What kind of a strong man are you?" "I'm just a Japanese dentist!" replied the other with a smile. So saying, he pocketed his reward and walked away. The London Telegraph, which reported the incident, confirmed the fact that some Japanese dentists do use their fingers for forceps. Part of their dental training in the Orient consists of strenuous exercises which develop an incredible amount of power in the hands.

Whether in dentistry in Japan, or in the realm of the Christian life, it is constant application to the task and diligent exercise which brings results. The believer must give daily attention to prayer and the study of the Scriptures. He must frequently examine himself in regard to his spiritual walk, and put forth a zealous effort to grow in the grace of witnessing.

Let us heed Paul's admonition to "exercise" ourselves in these necessary endeavors, and we too will soon be doing incredible things for God in the "power of His might."

Exercise your FAITH, before the devil gets you to exercise your FAULTS! —H.G.B.

Acts 24:16 A Cleansed Conscience

By David H. Roper

Read: Romans 2:12-16

I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men. —Acts 24:16

The much-loved children's story Pinocchio is about a wooden puppet whose nose grows long when he tells a lie. His friend Jiminy Cricket chirps, "Let your conscience be your guide." Pinocchio follows his advice, repents, and returns to Geppetto his creator, where he is given a heart of flesh and is freed from his strings.

There's a principle in this story for God's children. If we don't listen to that voice deep down inside that tells us what we should and should not do, we live in bondage. But a cleansed conscience brings freedom.

Some people have no strong basis for making godly decisions. Their conscience is weak, and they can be easily swayed by the behavior of others. Then there are those whose conscience is defiled. The standard by which they measure good and evil is corrupted, polluted, and impure (Titus 1:15). But saddest of all are those who have a "seared" conscience (1 Timothy 4:2). They have resisted that inner voice for so long that they no longer hear what it has to say.

But you ask, "How can we have a cleansed conscience?" We must repent of our sin and return to our Creator. We must ask Him to conform our desires and behavior to His Word and then be careful to obey it.

There is a treasure you can own

That's greater than a crown or throne;

This treasure is a conscience clear

That brings the sweetest peace and cheer. —Isenhour

Conscience is a trustworthy compass when God's Word is your true north.

Acts 24:16; Ephesians 4:31-32 The Pain Machine

By Dennis Fisher

I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men. —Acts 24:16

Dr. Paul Brand, who served as a medical missionary in India, told about lepers who had terrible deformities because their nerve endings could not feel pain. It didn't hurt when they stepped in a fire or cut their finger with a knife, so they left their wounds untended. This led to infection and deformity.

Dr. Brand constructed a machine that would beep when it came in contact with fire or sharp objects. It signaled the warnings of injury in the absence of pain. Soon machines were attached to the patients' fingers and feet. That worked well until they wanted to play basketball. They took the machines off, and often became injured again without knowing it.

Like physical pain to our bodies, our conscience alerts us to spiritual harm. But habitual and unrepentant sin can numb the conscience (1 Tim. 4:1-3). To keep a clear conscience, we need to respond to the pain of appropriate guilt by confession (1 John 1:9), repentance (Acts 26:20), and restitution to others (Luke 19:8). Paul could say with confidence, "I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men" (Acts 24:16). Like him, we should not grow numb to God's painful reminder of sin but allow it to produce in us godly character.

My conscience must be well-informed

From God's own sacred Word,

For conscience may be much deformed

When standards pure are spurned. —Fraser

A clear conscience is a soft pillow.

ACTS 25

Opportunities—Opened in strange ways (Acts 23-26). When men think they are blocking the gates of the Gospel, God is opening them. Paul, as result of his trials, gets chance to preach the Gospel to men in high places. (Keith Brooks)

Trials—The succession of (Acts 23-28). It never rains but it pours. The mysterious law of succession in troubles. God keeps them up until His purpose has been accomplished. (Keith Brooks)

ACTS 26

Acts 26:1-18, 27-32 The Difference Jesus Makes

By Herbert Vander Lugt

I would to God that ... all who hear me today, might become ... as I am. —Acts 26:29

Throughout history, people have treated others with unbelievable cruelty in the name of religion. They have often done so without feelings of remorse or guilt. Muslims and Christians have fought "holy wars" against one another, which have been anything but holy. And within their own ranks, so-called Christians have persecuted other Christians. Like Saul of Tarsus before he became Christ's apostle to the Gentiles, they think they are doing God a service when actually they are persecuting Jesus (Acts 9:4).

When I first learned about the atrocities committed in the name of religion, my boyhood confidence in the Christian faith was shaken. I didn't dare tell my parents about my misgivings, so I talked to the Lord about it. He led me to notice what happened in Paul's life.

As a powerful member of the Pharisees, Saul (the Hebrew name of Paul) thought he was pleasing God by persecuting Christians. Then he met Jesus (Acts 9:1-19). From then on, he peacefully sought to bring even his enemies to Christ.

It's not Christ's way to force His will on us. Neither should we force our will on others. As we put God's ways into practice, we'll find we can love those with whom we disagree. That's the difference Jesus makes!

Thinking It Through

How did Jesus react to Peter's attempt to defend Him with a sword? (Jn. 18:10-11). What did Jesus say should be our attitude toward our enemies? (Mt. 5:43-48).

No force is greater than the power of God's love.

Acts: 26:1-23 Responsibility

By Herbert Vander Lugt

I am ... not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. —1 Corinthians 15:9

When God confronted Adam for eating from the forbidden tree, Adam blamed Eve (Gen. 3:12). Ever since then, people have tried to avoid taking responsibility for their actions by shifting the blame to others or to circumstances beyond their control.

Today the art of blaming others has reached new levels. In a television interview a high-ranking government official said that pro-life advocates are ultimately responsible for the 1.6 million abortions that occur annually in the United States. He argued that if those who oppose abortion would simply volunteer to take the babies into their homes, mothers wouldn't have to abort them.

If you follow this line of reasoning, the woman who chooses to have an abortion because a baby would inconvenience her life is not responsible for the death of her child. The unwritten rule seems to be: "Never blame offenders for their wrongs. Those responsible are the people who want to punish them for their crimes." How contrary to the Scriptures, which teach that God holds each of us accountable for what we do!

The apostle Paul showed us how we should respond. He admitted the awfulness of his sin, and he recognized how gracious God had been to him (1 Cor. 15:9-10).

Thank You, Lord, for giving us a mind and the ability to choose between right and wrong, truth and falsehood. Help us to accept responsibility and seek Your forgiveness when we make the wrong choices.

If you make an excuse for sin, your sin will not be excused.

Acts 26:1-8,24-32 A Witness Of Hope

By David C. Egner

Always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you. —1 Peter 3:15

Bible in a Year:

Exodus 4-6; Matthew 14:22-36

As a child growing up in the former Soviet Union, Nickolas was the only one in his school who refused to join the political group for young people. Because of his faith in God, he was singled out for ridicule, given bad grades he did not deserve, and denied a recommendation to the university. Despite the opposition, he persisted, and in later years he led some of his persecutors to trust in Jesus Christ. Now he is the pastor of a thriving church in Belarus.

The apostle Paul also suffered persecution. His faith landed him in the court of King Agrippa, and he had opportunity to tell how God had changed his life. He testified, "Now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers" (Acts 26:6). His witness to the king about salvation in Christ and the hope of resurrection was clear and convicting.

When we live out our faith in Christ, we're bound to attract the attention of others and may even face persecution. We know our sins are forgiven, and we look forward to being with Jesus forever in heaven. We want to share our faith with others, and some people will want to know the reason for our hope (1 Peter 3:15). When questions come, let's be ready to give a witness.

When witnessing, if people ask,

"How do you know it's true?"

Remember that they can't deny

What Christ has done for you. —Sper

Our witness for Christ is the light for a world in darkness.

Acts 26:6-23 What God Has Done

By Herbert Vander Lugt

King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. —Acts 26:19

In a debate at Boston College, Christian scholar William Craig Lane convincingly set forth the historical arguments for believing in Jesus' resurrection, much as the apostle Paul did in Acts 26. Then Lane told the story of his conversion.

As a child he never went to church, but in his teens he began to be plagued by questions about death and the meaning of life. He started going to church, but the sermons didn't answer his questions. What he saw in his church-going classmates led him to conclude that most Christians were phonies. He became an angry loner. One day a girl who always seemed to be happy told him

that her joy came from having Jesus in her life, and she assured him that Jesus wanted to live in him too.

Lane spent the next 6 months soul-searching and reading the New Testament. “I came to the end of my rope and cried out to God,” he said. “I cried out all the bitterness and anger that was within me. And I felt this tremendous infusion of joy, and God became at that moment a living reality in my life—a reality that has never left me.”

We tell others our logic for believing in Jesus, which is based on God’s Word. But it’s also important to tell them what He has done for us personally.

You may be tempted to debate

To change another’s view,

But nothing speaks with greater power

Than what Christ does for you. —Sper

When telling others what Jesus can do for them, tell them what He has done for you.

Acts 26:8 Resurrection

Resurrection is not an incredible, irrational idea. We can see illustrations of resurrection all around us in nature. For example, Egyptian garden peas that had been buried for 3,000 years were brought out and planted on June 4, 1844. Within a few days they had germinated and broken the ground. Buried for 3,000 years—then resurrected. That’s amazing!

Why then should it be thought incredible that God should raise the dead? That was the surprised question of Paul to King Agrippa (Acts 26:8). If God could take some dust and breathe life into it to create a man (Gen. 2:7), why would anyone think it incredible for this same God to raise someone from the dead?

Yes, it is most credible that Jesus would arise. It would be incredible if after the miraculous life He lived He had remained in the grave. Hallelujah! Christ arose! —M. R. De Haan. (Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved)

ONLY A LIVING SAVIOR COULD RESCUE A DYING WORLD.

Acts 26:12-29 A Powerful Witness

By Vernon C. Grounds

You almost persuade me to become a Christian. —Acts 26:28

British scientist Thomas Huxley (1825-1895) vigorously supported the theory of evolution, which earned him the nickname “Darwin’s bulldog.” As an agnostic, he believed religion was a harmful superstition.

One day Huxley asked a deeply committed Christian, “What does your faith mean to you?” Knowing Huxley’s skepticism, the man paused and then replied, “You are very educated, and you can dispute anything I say.”

Huxley urged him to explain why he was a Christian. So from his heart the man told what Jesus meant to him. Huxley, deeply moved, didn’t argue. Wistfully he said, “I’d give my right hand for your faith in Jesus.”

We can draw two lessons from this encounter. One is that while we may prize knowledge, we know that formal education is not necessary for the exercise of life-changing, saving faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). The second lesson is that a simple, straightforward testimony from the heart can often be more effective than a scholarly argument.

As the apostle Paul stood before King Agrippa, he told how Jesus had transformed his life, and Agrippa was deeply moved by what he heard (Acts 26:28).

Let’s not hesitate to tell people what Jesus means to us personally.

Putting It Into Practice

To whom can you speak about Christ today?

Read How Can I Break The Silence?

When telling others what Christ can do for them, tell them what He has done for you.

Acts 26:12-23 Change Your Mind

By Julie Ackerman Link

... repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance. —Acts 26:20

One of my favorite Peanuts comic strips features Charlie Brown saying to Snoopy, “I hear you’re writing a book on theology. I hope you have a good title.” Snoopy responds, “I have the perfect title: Has It Ever Occurred To You That You Might Be Wrong?”

Snoopy’s title reminds us that our understanding of God and what He requires of us is sometimes twisted. Because our wrong beliefs lead to wrong behavior, we need to “repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance” (Acts 26:20).

The Greek word translated “repent” is *metanoeo*, which means “change your mind.” As Paul indicated, repentance does not mean just nodding in polite agreement with God, and continuing the same way we were going. When we turn our thoughts toward God—when we truly agree with Him about what is right—our behavior will follow. Like a car, we go in the direction we are pointed. So, when we truly turn our minds and hearts toward God, our actions change accordingly.

Instead of going happily along, assuming that our choices are right, we need to regularly stop and ask ourselves Snoopy’s question. As Paul taught, it is only when we are willing to admit being wrong that we can be certain of being right with God.

We must acknowledge when we’re wrong,

Confessing it as sin,

If we would know God’s power to heal

And cleanse us from within. —Fasick

Either we conform our desires to the truth or we conform the truth to our desires. —Os Guinness

Acts 26:19-32 Mystery And Madness

By Herbert Vander Lugt

I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason. —Acts 26:25

Bill is a successful businessman and a personal friend of mine. He loves to tell about the dramatic change in his life since he received Jesus as his Savior. Many people have been deeply impressed by Bill’s testimony, but one man told me that he viewed it as “emotional and irrational.” In fact, he implied that my sanity was open to question because I put so much stock in what Bill said.

This skeptic makes the same mistake that the Roman governor Festus made with Paul. Because Festus couldn’t identify with the wonder of a life-changing encounter with Christ, he dismissed the apostle’s testimony as irrational. Festus should have listened to Paul and admitted that the elements of mystery could very well be true. After all, Paul spoke with “truth and reason” (v.25), and his witness was verifiable—“this thing was not done in a corner” (v.26). As for Bill, his testimony is backed by 50 years of godly living.

God doesn’t ask us to believe the absurd, but He does demand that we believe what He says in the Bible. Even when we don’t fully comprehend God’s ways, we can rely on the truth of His Word. And in His Word He promises to change our lives when we put our trust in Him. Don’t confuse divine mystery with human madness.

Great works, Jehovah, You have wrought,

Exceeding deep Your every thought;

A foolish man knows not their worth,

Nor he whose mind is of the earth. —Psalter

God’s truth and human wisdom don’t travel the same highway.

Acts 26:19-32 The Best Place To Witness

By Dennis J. De Haan

I stand, witnessing both to small and great. —Acts 26:22

Missionary Doug Nichols and his Filipino co-worker Aries went to a Manila garbage dump, asking God how they might effectively

reach the poor who scavenged there. Soon an old man approached and asked if they would guard his handful of cans while he hunted for more.

Doug asked the man how old he was, since it's respectful in the Philippines to ask older people their age. "Oh, it's wonderful you asked," replied the man with a big smile. "I'm 78 years old today."

Aries and Doug sang "Happy Birthday," then shook his hand and gave him a hug. "Are you prepared to go to heaven?" asked Doug. When the man indicated that he wasn't sure, Doug shared the gospel. That day the garbage-dump resident trusted Jesus and became a citizen of heaven.

The apostle Paul had an opportunity to witness to a governor, a king, and prominent citizens (Acts 25-26). We don't know the results of his witness, but Paul was faithful where God had placed him.

When you are concerned for the spiritual needs of others and God opens a door of opportunity, any place is the best place to share the gospel—whether it's at a garbage dump or in a king's palace.

Go to the lost, in the home, in the mart,

Waiting no longer, today make a start;

Tell them of Jesus who died in their place,

Share the good news of salvation by grace. —HGB

Any place can be the right place to witness.

Acts 26:19-32 Who's Mad Here?

By Mart De Haan

[Paul] said, "I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason.. —Acts 26:25

In his book *What Ever Became Of Sin?* Karl Menninger writes, "On a sunny day in September 1972, a stern-faced, plainly dressed man could be seen standing still on a street corner in the busy Chicago Loop. As pedestrians hurried by on their way to lunch or business, he would solemnly lift his right arm, point to the person nearest him, and intone loudly the single word, 'Guilty!' Then, without any change of expression, he would resume his stiff stance for a few moments before repeating the gesture."

The effect of this action on passing strangers was almost eerie. They would stare at their accuser, hesitate momentarily, turn away, look at him again, then hurriedly move on.

If that man was crazy, as many thought, he was a madman telling the truth. Everyone he pointed to was guilty! Sin is universal (Isaiah 53:6; Romans 3:23). The worst kind of insanity is to deny one's guilt while living in sin and unbelief.

Festus, the Roman governor of Judea, accused the apostle Paul of being mad (Acts 26:24). But it was Festus who was out of touch with reality, for he rejected God's truth.

What about you? Have you acknowledged your guilt before God and turned in faith to Jesus as your Savior and Lord? It's madness not to.

How To Be Forgiven

Admit that you are guilty of sin. Believe that Jesus died on the cross for you and rose from the dead. In faith, ask the Lord Jesus Christ to save you.

To deny one's guilt and reject Christ is the worst kind of insanity.

Acts 26:1-8 Incredible?

By M.R. De Haan

Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead. —Acts 26:8

If Jesus did not rise from the dead and there is no future day of resurrection for us, then life loses all its meaning. If this life is all there is—just a few years of alternate crying and laughing (mostly crying) and then darkness—with Paul we can say, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable" (1 Cor. 15:19).

Resurrection, however, is not an incredible, irrational idea. We can see illustrations of resurrection all around us in nature. For example, Egyptian garden peas that had been buried for 3,000 years were brought out and planted on June 4, 1844. Within a few days they had germinated and broken the ground. Buried for 3,000 years—then resurrected. That's amazing!

Why then should it be thought incredible that God should raise the dead? That was the surprised question of Paul to King Agrippa (Acts 26:8). If God could take some dust and breathe life into it to create a man (Gen. 2:7), why would anyone think it incredible for this same God to raise someone from the dead?

Yes, it is most credible that Jesus would arise. It would be incredible if after the miraculous life He lived He had remained in the grave. Hallelujah! Christ arose! —M. R. De Haan, M.D. (founder of RBC Ministries)

Up from the grave He arose,

With a mighty triumph o'er His foes;

He arose a Victor from the dark domain,

And He lives forever with His saints to reign. —Lowry

Only a living Savior could rescue a dying world.

Acts 26:18 Open Their Eyes

By Vernon C. Grounds

Psalm 19:1-14

Open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light. —Acts 26:18

Do you agree with the apostle Paul that nature bears witness to the wisdom and power of God the Creator? (Acts 14:15-17; Rom. 1:20). Or do you think that everything accidentally evolved? According to astronomer and writer Carl Sagan, "Nature does not require a Designer. Maybe there is one hiding, maddeningly unwilling to be revealed."

As believers in Christ, we are saddened by people's inability to see the fingerprint of God everywhere in the world (Ps. 19). Many also do not believe that God has revealed Himself in His Son Jesus Christ (Heb. 1:1-3). They disagree with the Scriptures which declare that the light of the knowledge of God's glory shines in the Savior's face (2 Cor. 4:6) and with our Lord's positive declaration: "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (Jn. 14:9).

If the Lord has opened the eyes of our understanding so that we believe in Him, we can only humbly thank Him for His grace. Because we have done nothing to merit God's mercy, we need to keep praying that the almighty Designer will do for unbelieving skeptics what He has done for us: "Open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light" (Acts 26:18).

Talk to God about the lost—then talk to the lost about God.

Acts 26:24-32 Gentle Persuasion

By David C. Egner

We urge you ... that you may walk properly toward those who are outside. —1 Thessalonians 4:10-12

While teaching a college writing class, I used a textbook based on Aristotle's classic work *Art of Rhetoric*. He outlined three forms of persuasion that can apply to the way we witness to others about Christ.

1. Ethos (character). Henry Stanley said of Scottish missionary and explorer David Livingstone, "He never tried to convert me, but if I had been with him any longer I would have become a Christian." When people around us see the reality of Christ in our lives (1 Thessalonians 4:12), our words are taken more seriously.

2. Pathos (feeling). While touring Europe, a group of students from a Christian college witnessed to their busdriver. One girl tearfully pleaded, "If you don't accept Jesus, you'll go to hell. Please, please trust in Jesus." That reminds me of Paul's impassioned plea and its effect on King Agrippa (Acts 26:28).

3. Logos (reason). When we live a holy life, we will attract attention. This will lead to questions. It's then that we are to be ready to give reasons for what we believe, and we are to do so gently and humbly (1 Peter 3:15).

Is God leading you to witness to someone? Ask for His help. One, two, or all three of these classic methods may help open the door

of that person's heart. —DCE

Thinking It Over

Why is your character so crucial to your witness?

Do nonbelievers sense your compassion for them?

Why do you believe in Christ? Have you told anyone?

When you know Christ, you want others to know Him too.

ACTS 27

Acts 27:9-25 | Expect Jesus

By Richard De Haan

I believe God that it will be just as it was told me. —Acts 27:25

A Sunday school teacher gave every boy in his class a New Testament and encouraged each of them to write his own name inside the front cover.

Several weeks later, after repeatedly inviting the boys to receive Christ as their Savior, he asked those who had done so to write these words under his name: "I accept Jesus." One boy scribbled instead, "I expect Jesus." When the teacher talked to him, he realized that the boy knew what he had written after all. He had not only trusted the Lord for salvation but expected Him to be with him at all times and to do all He had promised.

That boy's statement presents a simple yet profound commentary on the true meaning of faith.

In Acts 27, we see the apostle Paul's expectant faith. He was a prisoner being transported by ship to Rome when a violent storm arose and threatened to destroy the vessel. During the night, an angel of the Lord told Paul they would all survive (vv.23-24). He knew the word of the Lord could be trusted. In the midst of the storm, he said, "I believe God that it will be just as it was told me" (v.25). And so it was.

It should be no surprise to us when God keeps His word. It's to be expected

O for a faith that will not shrink

Though pressed by many a foe,

That will not tremble on the brink

Of any earthly woe. —Bathurst

Attempt great things for God; expect great things from God.

Acts 27:9-25

"Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid" (Isaiah 12:2).

An old seaman said, "In fierce storms we can do but one thing. There is only one way [to survive]; we must put the ship in a certain position and keep her there." Commenting on this idea, Richard Fuller wrote, "This, Christian, is what you must do. Sometimes, like Paul, you can see neither sun nor stars, and no small tempest lies on you. Reason cannot help you. Past experiences give you no light. Only a single course is left. You must put your soul in one position and keep it there. You must stay upon the Lord; and, come what may—winds, waves, cross seas, thunder, lightning, frowning rocks, roaring breakers—no matter what, you must lash yourself to the helm and hold fast your confidence in God's faithfulness and His everlasting love in Christ Jesus."

In the storms of life, we must place our trust in the Lord and cling firmly to the sure promises of His Word. Our confidence in God should be so steadfast that no matter how severe the trial, with Job we can resolutely affirm, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him" (Job 13:15). And to those who trust Him, He gives His "perfect peace" (Isa. 26:3).

With the psalmist we can say, "Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me! For my soul trusts in You; and in the shadow of Your

wings I will make my refuge, until these calamities have passed by" (Psalm 57:1). —R. W. De Haan (Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved)

We realize the strength of the Anchor

when we feel the stress of the storm.

Acts 27:13-26 Every Inch Of Me

By Herbert Vander Lugt

Take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me. —Acts 27:25

Shortly before Peter Doot died at age 92, he said, "I am six-foot-four, and every inch belongs to the Lord." I had known him for 65 years, and I'm sure what he said was true.

As a younger man, Peter had left a well-paying job so he could serve as an evangelist for his church. He made a profound impact on hundreds of lives, even though he had little formal training. When I was 19, he challenged me to witness and to preach the gospel in street-corner meetings.

What made Peter so effective? His way of life. Everybody could clearly see that God was his Master.

The same could be said about the apostle Paul. In Acts 27 we read that when he was a prisoner being taken to Rome, the ship on which he was sailing was being battered by a furious storm. The sailors had given up all hope. But when Paul spoke, everybody listened and was encouraged. Even the Roman centurion followed his instructions. Why? Because it was obvious that Paul was a godly man who was telling the truth. They had good reason to believe him when he spoke of "the God to whom I belong and whom I serve," and when he said there would be no loss of life (vv.22-23).

Let's yield ourselves to God so that we too can say, "Every inch belongs to the Lord."

O loving Savior, here's my will—

With Yours, I pray, may it be one;

I long to know You more each day

So that Your will in me is done. —D. De Haan

Give your all to Christ; He gave His all for you.

Acts 27:13 DON'T FAIL TO LOOK IN GOD'S BOOK.

When the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their desire... they sailed. Acts 27:13

In Acts 27 we read that Paul, a prisoner headed for Rome, warned the centurion of disaster if they set sail. The man, however, listened to contrary advice and gave orders for the ship to leave port. When a gentle south breeze got them off to a favorable start, it ked as if Paul had been wrong. But soon the sky darkened. The breeze med into a howling wind. Waves battered the ship with merciless fury several days later the vessel ran aground and was broken into pieces by the storm. Paul had been right!

J. C. Macauley used this story to show what happens to a young person who is lured by the soft south wind of pleasant circumstances t may temporarily accompany wicked conduct. He described five

stages of decline in Acts 27. A youth leaves (Acts 27:13) the moorings of home and church, is caught (Acts 27:15) in a whirl of excitement, is driven (Acts 27:17) by the winds of passion, is lightened (Acts 27:18) of his or her former virtues, and finally is broken by the storm (Acts 27:41). Don't be lured by the "soft south wind."—H. V L.

IT IS ONLY WHEN WE ARE DECEIVED BY SIN, THAT WE TAKE DELIGHT IN SIN.

Acts 27:21-36 Encouragers

By Vernon C. Grounds

I long to see you ... that I may be encouraged together with you. . —Romans 1:11-12

Discouragement is a problem for many Christians. While they may not be distressed about health, family, or work, they're discouraged about their spiritual service. They compare themselves to others who are gifted with musical talents or the ability to

teach the Bible. They see people who are able to give generously and pray with evident effectiveness, but they think they can't do these things. As a result, they feel they are useless to God. They need to realize, however, that every Christian is qualified to carry on at least one helpful ministry—the ministry of encouragement.

Renowned preacher Robert Dale was walking one day in Birmingham, England, where he was pastoring the great Carr's Lane Church. He was under a dark cloud of gloom when a woman came up to him and exclaimed, "God bless you, Dr. Dale. If you could only know how you have made me feel hundreds of times!" Then off she hurried. Dale later testified, "The mist broke, the sunlight came, and I breathed the free air of the mountains of God."

The apostle Paul knew how important it was not only to be encouraged by others (Phil. 2:19) but to be an encourager (Acts 20:2; 27:35-36). That's a ministry all of us can be involved in.

It may seem insignificant

To say a word or two,

But when it is encouragement,

What wonders it can do! —K. De Haan

Even if you have nothing else to give, you can always give encouragement.

Acts 27:27-44 Safe In God's Care

By David C. Egner

The Lord shall preserve your going out and your coming in from this time forth, and even forevermore. —Psalm 121:8

President Franklin D. Roosevelt loved the song we call the Navy Hymn. It was sung at his funeral in Hyde Park, New York, on April 14, 1945. The words of the hymn were written in 1860 by William Whiting, who taught and directed a 16-voice boys choir. He penned them for a student who was about to set sail for America and who was apprehensive about the journey.

The beautiful tune was written by John B. Dykes and first published in 1861. He named the hymn tune Melita, the Roman name for Malta, the island where Paul was shipwrecked.

The hymn is a simple prayer based on the profound truth that the eternal God who created the universe controls all the elements of nature and can protect His own no matter how great the peril. Wind and wave are subject to His command. The first verse reads:

Eternal Father, strong to save,

Whose arm doth bind the restless wave,

Who bidd'st the mighty ocean deep

Its own appointed limits keep;

O hear us when we cry to Thee

For those in peril on the sea.

When we or loved ones take a journey to some far-off destination, or if we only travel to and from work, we can be sure of His protection and care.

We need not fear shipwreck with Jesus at the helm.

ACTS 28

Acts 28:11-16,30-31 Courageous And Consistent

By David C. McCasland

When Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage. —Acts 28:15

While reading the obituary of Eugene Patterson, Pulitzer Prize-winning editor of the Atlanta Constitution from 1960 to 1968, I was

struck by two things. First, for many years Patterson was a fearless voice for civil rights during a time when many opposed racial equality. In addition, he wrote a column every day for 8 years. That's 2,922 newspaper columns! Day after day, year after year. Courage and consistency were key factors in the impact of his life.

We see those same qualities in the apostle Paul. Acts 13–28 records his bravery in one harrowing situation after another. After being shipwrecked on his way to stand trial before Caesar, he landed south of Rome, where many brothers in Christ came to meet him (Acts 28:11-15). "When Paul saw them," Luke wrote, "he thanked God and took courage" (v.15). During the next 2 years as a prisoner, Paul was allowed to live in his own rented house where he "received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence" (vv.30-31).

Every follower of Jesus can be a consistent giver and receiver of courage. The Lord can use us today to encourage and strengthen each other.

O keep up your courage, each day to the end;

Go forth in the strength of the Lord;

Trust wholly in Jesus, thy Savior and Friend,

And feed on His own blessed Word. —Miles

When people share their fears with you, share your courage with them.

Insight

Today's passage chronicles one of Paul's journeys and how he and his companions were received and shown hospitality. It is easy to forget that this was not a luxury cruise with an exotic island destination. During this trip, Paul was a prisoner and he and his companions (soldiers included) were met by and stayed with Christian believers. It is possible that Paul was allowed to live in his own rented home under house arrest and share the gospel (vv.30-31) because the soldiers were impressed by the hospitality that had been shown to them.

Acts 28:11-16 Let's Go Higher!

By Richard De Haan

When Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage. —Acts 28:15

Author Ragnar Arlander tells about the time he and some friends scaled Mt. Rainier. When they reached a plateau, the group decided they had gone far enough.

Arlander, however, continued the climb to find a person who had traveled on ahead. Eventually he found him resting, gazing at a beautiful glacier. The man was ready to go back, but when he saw Arlander approaching, he jumped up and exclaimed, "Since you've come, let's go higher!"

This experience makes me think of the events described in Acts 28. As the apostle Paul was traveling to Rome, he met some fellow believers, and "when Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage" (v.15).

What better compliment could be offered us than to have someone say, "Talking to you has encouraged me to continue on in my spiritual walk." The world is filled with troubled and discouraged souls who are struggling along in the Christian life. Battle weary, they are almost ready to give up. When they see you, what influence do you have on them? Do you inspire them to more noble lives of service? Or does your example tend to drag them down?

May we influence others in such a way that they will take heart and say, "I want to go higher!"

Oh, I would be to others

A cheering ray of light,

Inspiring them with courage

To climb some new-found height! —Bosch

The human spirit soars with hope when lifted by an encouraging word.

Acts 28:16-31 A Universe Of Humanity

By David C. McCasland

Paul ... received all who came to him. —Acts 28:30

During the 1920s and 30s, photographer August Sander set out to portray a cross-section of German society. Through his lens he saw factory workers and financiers, actresses and housewives, Nazis and Jews. Even though his published collection contains only people in and around his hometown of Cologne, he captured what David Propson, writing in *The Wall Street Journal*, called “a universe of humanity in his restricted sphere.”

That phrase strikes me as an apt description of our lives and the people we meet day by day. Wherever we live, we cross paths with people from many backgrounds and beliefs.

For years, the apostle Paul traveled and preached before being imprisoned in Rome. There he continued to touch people with the gospel because he cared about them and wanted them to know Jesus Christ. The book of Acts concludes with Paul confined in Rome, living under guard in a rented house, where he “received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 28:30-31).

Instead of focusing on his restrictions, Paul saw opportunities. That’s the key for us as well. There is a universe of humanity within our reach today.

You are called with a holy calling

The light of the world to be,

To lift up the lamp of the gospel

That others the light may see. —Anon.

The gospel is a priceless gift that’s offered free to everyone.