



Shepherd's Voice.

Winter 2014
Free!

M A G A Z I N E

The Healing Leaf





Shepherd's Voice.

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Shepherd's Voice Magazine is a production of the Chicagoland Church of God in a cooperative effort with other individuals and church organizations in the Sabbath-keeping community in the United States and Canada. This magazine is distributed and made possible by tithes and offerings of the readership and of those who support this work.

Photos: iStockphoto.com, sharefaith.com

Front Cover: Single leaf depicting a droplet of oil extract

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Periodical mailed: 921 Other mail classes:151; Internationally reprinted: 95; e-mail: 772. Identification Statement: Shepherd's Voice Magazine is published quarterly (4 times per year). Issues are regularly sent free to people who requested the publication and are genuinely interested in it. Shepherd's Voice Magazine is published by the Chicagoland Church of God, 11308 Highland Dr., Plainfield, IL 60585; circulation office: 8180 Port Dr, Port Austin, Michigan 48467. CCOG reserves the right to refuse service to anyone for any reason. Periodical postage paid at Plainfield, Illinois and other mailing offices (USPS 016-995). Postmaster: send address changes to Shepherd's Voice Magazine, PO Box 474, Port Austin, Michigan 48467-0474.



Greetings!

God's mercy, I believe, can be abundantly found in nature, though it may take some proper perception to find it. When I reviewed Jim Petersen's article *The Necessities of Life and Divine Healing* covering essential oils, I found it thought provoking to also consider what he described for Adam and his descendants as a road of discovery after the fall of humankind. I had always perceived it singularly as a road to perdition. God's mercy and goodness, however, has been available for us to discover in life here on earth in various ways even though we have been subject to the elements, and with humanity having a relationship with the Creator marred by sin.

Therefore our cover art depicts the leaf as a source of healing, as the leaf has been a subject of research for thousands of years for its medicinal purposes in alleviating sicknesses and other ailments. We cannot separate the material from the spiritual. We are given resources to aid each other, and the article on divine healing ties this fundamental teaching of Jesus Christ together, illustrating our participation. If we are to love our neighbor, we need to recognize that the anointing oil of Mary and the oil used by the Good Samaritan are costly extracts, for the love of God is the love that costs.

This issue includes a lengthy installment of the *Children of God series Part 9—Relationships and Marriage*.

Norman Edwards touches on the tough lessons of reality regarding relationships, and is able to speak from the experience they have had at the PABC. These experiences include the difficulties resulting in unplanned pregnancies and other challenges that people face when they deviate from God's will in relationships. Norm then provides an outline for a life plan for young people in six practical stages, and at the same time recognizes that everyone is different. The underlying theme is to seek God's direction throughout life in finding guidance through the complexity that exists in personal relationships. As Norm continually reminds us, this series is for every believer because of the influence we have on others.

Lastly, in the article *Leftovers and Little Things*, we again take the opportunity to change our perspective somewhat to see where we can also take our discoveries of the vastness of the heavens to see God's glory when it comes to His attention to little things, including the little things you do in His service.

May this issue be a blessing to you.

In Christ's Service
Jim Patterson

The Necessities of Life and Divine Healing

The creation was set up specifically to serve man; and the herbs in particular for his service. (Psalms. 104:14)

When man sinned God set him on a path of discovery and took away the abundant Garden of Eden that yielded abundant food grown on trees. Man was given animals and all plants for his service for food and medicine because sickness and disease would now be with him. The wisdom of God was to supply everything man needed to learn His eternal lessons; medicine was included in that plan. Ezekiel 47:12 describes the leaf as a source of medicine in his prophecy about a new world for Israel. It should come as no surprise that man learned about the medicinal properties of the plants God provided for him for he had to contend with disease, infections and malnutrition in his walk of discovery he had chosen.

Over time man discovered that the active ingredients in the plants could be effectively extracted and concentrated through using oil or fat as an absorption agency and carrier. Egypt is the most ancient people to have used essential oils and ointments. The Hebrews would only naturally have learned about them, in particular Moses who was educated in all of the wisdom of the Egyptians. Because we understand that food is necessary for man for his survival, we also understand that we as God's people (who are to love our brother as ourselves) must see to it that our brother is not denied that basic need. It follows that since God provided the medicine in plants He expects us to see to it that our brother has it as he would the food. We learn some lessons from scripture when we realize that the anointing of humans was often more than just a brief ceremony or ritual.

When the Samaritan came to the aide of the traveler who had been beaten by thieves, he first attended to his wounds (Luke 10:33, 34). He poured oil on the man's wounds and also wine. The oil he used was probably of the anointing variety of the day, which today we would call essential oil. Oils for anointing were often made from olive oil which was the carrier for the essence extracted from spices or plants. The wine was obviously used as a disinfectant. This story was used by Jesus to drive home the understanding of who one's brother truly is and the extent to which one should go to care for him. The Samaritan, driven by compassion, turned a blind eye to the high cost of the oil, and even went to inconvenient lengths to find him a secure place. Others passed on avoiding the possibility of becoming involved. Jesus mentions the oil and the wine in His story to show how one should consider his neighbors' welfare as more important than his possessions, wealth and time.

In another story about Lazarus and the rich man, Jesus again makes the point about men passing by a neighbor in need. This time the man Lazarus was poor, starving and sick needing medical attention, something the rich man could have easily alleviated for him with food and medicine. Lazarus, because he had no access to medicine, resorted to a primitive form of health care; that of having dogs lick his sores. In these two stories we see what was done and what was not done, we see the necessities of life being given to one and withheld from the other.



One cannot live his life believing he has salvation through a covenant with God if he fails the basic duty of caring for his fellow man, bringing him necessary food and medicine when it is needed. The mention of oil for the travelers' wounds, and the lack of it for Lazarus' sores is a clear message that providing medical attention is a priority along with providing food and shelter. The medicine of that day for healing was primarily anointing with essential oils, and these oils were very expensive because of the labor intense method of extracting the oils from the various spices and plants. We know them today as essential oils. Pliny (the elder) writes of their essential oil preparations and their efficacious values in Book 23 of his extensive works on the knowledge of the world of his day. Pliny wrote how these essential oils were readily absorbed by the body and carried their vital elements to nourish, strengthen and heal. Recent studies have shown that essential oils rubbed on the feet find their way through the body within twenty minutes.

Sanitation was not always the best in Rome; sewage was often flushed down the street. Washing ones' feet became a priority to ward off disease. Opportunities for infections lurked in open places and so it is that we should consider the stories of scripture about anointing and washing in this light. It is intriguing that Jesus' feet were infused with the ultra-expensive immune building, antibacterial, and anti-fungal anointing oil of Spikenard. Roman soldiers were not prone to sanitizing their swords, or even less a flagellant for that matter. Infection could have easily set in when Jesus was beaten and it could have turned quite quickly to cellulitis and degeneration of the cells. Without a fortified immune system and bodily levels of bactericides He would have been at risk. It is therefore more credible to recognize the anointing of His feet six days before His death as a providential act over and above that of the profound humility on the part of Mary. (John 12:3) Shortly thereafter another woman came two days before His death and broke a costly jar of the same Spikenard oil and poured it on His head. (Mark 14:3)

In both incidents the attitude of certain onlookers viewed the use of the oil as a total waste. They clearly did not see the need for that anointing because they didn't comprehend what it was that Jesus was about to suffer. The providence of God here was in the fact that in accordance with prophetic pronouncements Jesus' flesh was not to see corruption, and this costly oil was insurance against that. The trouble Jesus faced was known by the disciples and the women. (John 14:29)

The anointing oils of Spikenard, Frankincense and Myrrh were medicinal treatments used more often by kings and the gentry, those who could afford the high cost. Their value was much higher than that of gold. In 1922 when King Tut's tomb was opened it was discovered that gold was left untouched by thieves in favor of the contents of the 50 alabaster ointment jars. Essential oils were used quite readily throughout the ages... the Ebers papyrus of 1500 B.C. lists some 800 remedies

from essential oils (*Ancient Aromas* by D. Gary Young). At the time of Jesus, essential oils and topical ointments were the medicine of the day; even Luke the beloved physician, would have had them at his disposal and likely was knowledgeable in their formulation.

The real divine healing done in the Apostles' time was that of the laying on of hands and prayer. It was quite apart from the anointing with the medicinal elements. Often people combine the anointing and the laying on of hands in the divine method. Scripture, however, speaks often of simply laying on of hands and prayer, with those unusual incidents like the touching of Jesus' garment, and the cloths sent from Paul's body as examples of the pouring out of the mercy of God in a time of great need. James, in writing to the entire 12 tribes of Israel gave instructions on dealing with the sick. If any were sick the elders (mature and responsible leaders) of the local church should be called and they were to anoint the individual in the name of the Lord. (James 5:13-16) This anointing would have been in accordance with James' charge of providing the necessities of life for the poor and the sick as he laid out earlier:

If a brother be naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be warmed and filled; what does it profit? Even so faith, if it has not works, is dead being alone (James 2:15-17).

So it would be with the faith of divine healing, one must feed and treat the malnourished sick individual first in order that your brotherly duty does not remain at fault. It was for this very reason that Paul comes down upon the Corinthian brethren and charges them with the sickness and deaths of some of their brothers, citing the Passover covenant with Jesus as a reminder that they had become one body together with Him. The Corinthian had neglected the poor and the sick, failed to gather together to teach basic personal health guidelines, to provide the food or necessary medical treatments (such as anointing oils the brethren could not afford). The Corinthian was like the rich man in Jesus' story. James charges Israel with that duty here.

It is all too interesting that there was a demise of anointing with essential oil for the sick around 300-500 A.D. And it was not revived again until around 1300 -1500. Sources are varied on these dates but they seem to indicate a power that came along in what is called the dark ages and stamped the practice out. Being burnt at the stake on charges of being a witch or being caught with some elixir would be deterrent enough to banish the practice. Of greater interest is this incident mentioned in *The History of the Anointing of the Sick* by Karl Reenact. In 235, Hippolytus of Rome (a theologian, the disciple of Iraneus, the disciple of Polycarp) includes a blessing for olive oil to be used for anointing the sick. At first blush the average person might not suspect foul play, but first off this is a change to something else that was a standard practice. Secondly and highly suspect is that it is coming from a Bishop from the Roman church that has somehow elevated itself to a position of power where other Bishops such as Polycarp and Polycrates were compelled to go before them to face charges of heresy. This preeminence amongst the churches of God seems unwarranted and a highly unusual practice. This prayer for the anointing oil moved the duty to provide the necessities of life to a sick brother to that of a convenient dabbling with oil. No more did the Elders of the church have to burden themselves with finding medicine and food for their brother. It also put the power of healing in the hands of the compliant hierarchy. Is it any wonder that those who administered medical treatment and divine healing behind their backs were branded as heretics and persecuted until that stronghold was broken with the Reformation?

In the end we see that God has not failed in His promises to heal, the prayer of faith will save the sick. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. But perhaps we have been a bit short on taking care of our brothers needs' as we ought. 🙏

Frankincense, Myrrh and Spikenard

Frankincense and Myrrh were gifts given to Jesus at His birth, and He was anointed with Spikenard before He was crucified. It is not often if ever questioned why and what for. Most have passed it off as being no more than offerings of respect towards a King, or just a symbolic gesture of servitude. Few have laid it to heart that these very valuable herbs God created had known medicinal value and were administered in respect of that knowledge. Though used often as treatments for sickness they also served as preventative medicine.

The Maji (leaders and men of wisdom) from the house of Israel in the Far East, brought two of these valuable herbs as gifts because they were things “fit for kings”. Whether they were in their raw or rendered state is not known. Being more valuable than gold and available in that eastern locality made them a gift of choice, but more over they were very usable items. Modern scientific research (readily available to anyone) has confirmed the efficacious value of these herbs, supporting understanding, knowledge, in ancient times. It goes without saying that Jesus used these items, or had them used on Him. They were not just set on a shelf and displayed as a gift to a King. The following is a general understanding of what these items are treatments for:

Myrrh: Antiseptic, sunburn protection, insect repellent, antioxidant, cancer and tumor treatment. It contains 75% sesquiterpenes, an active ingredient that stimulates the emotional control side of the brain, and stimulates the hypothalamus, pineal and pituitary glands that produce the body’s hormones.(experience essential oils)

Frankincense: Pain relief, swelling reduction, immune building, cancer fighting, gastro intestinal treatments, skin disorders, tumors, ulcers, vomiting, dysentery and fevers. It is also stated by Pliny to be an antidote to Hemlock (a poisoning that influential people and Kings were susceptible to). (Healing oils of the Bible by Samantha Mackenzie)

These two herbs display things that would give a child a good start in life and serve as medicine and health maintenance.

Spikenard: Heart and nervous system, anti-bacteria, anti-fungal, anti-inflammatory, immune stimulant, deodorant. Documented benefits: allergies, candida, indigestion, heart arrhythmias, insomnia, nausea, nervous tension, perfume, rashes, staph infections, stress, tachycardia and wounds that won’t heal. (www.medicalnewstoday.com, Young living)

This herb is strikingly different in its benefits, a preparatory treatment of choice if one were going to war or facing a prolonged torture.



Myrrh



Frankincense



Spikenard

Father Forgive Them

Has anyone ever sinned against you, wronged you, insulted you, or hurt your feelings in a deliberate manner? If so what was your response? Did you follow the principle Jesus gave in the model prayer in Matthew 6:12, i.e., did you ask God to forgive your trespasses even as (to the same degree) you forgive those who trespass against you?

If we are to emulate Jesus Christ, it is incumbent upon us to forgive others. Even casual students of the Bible are familiar with Jesus' words "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" found in Luke 23:34. Here Jesus looked down from the stake upon a scene that was most distressing to Him. Roman soldiers were casting lots for His clothing (John 19:23-24); the criminals on the stakes to either side of Him were reviling Him (Matthew 27:44); the religious leaders were mocking Him (Matthew 27:41-43); and the crowd was blaspheming Him (Matthew 27:39). Jesus looked down upon this unworthy lot and asked His Father to forgive them.

How could this be? Even in His agony Jesus' concern was for the forgiveness of those who counted themselves among His enemies. He asked the Father to forgive the thieves on the stake who jeered and made fun of Him, one of whom went on to accept Jesus' love and mercy (Luke 23:32-33; 39-43). Jesus asked the Father to forgive the Roman soldiers who had mocked Him, had spat on Him, had beaten Him, had yanked out His beard, had whipped Him, had put a crown of thorns on His head, and had nailed Him cruelly to a stake. These men personally held no ill will toward Jesus, whom they had beaten

into an unrecognizable state (Isaiah 52:14). They simply were following orders. This was the normal treatment for condemned men after all, and the tormentors of Jesus believed that He truly deserved it. They did not know that they were killing the Son of God (1 Corinthians 2:8).


**LOVE
YOUR ENEMIES
AND PRAY
FOR THOSE WHO PERSECUTE YOU.
MATTHEW 5:44**

Jesus asked forgiveness for the angry mob that had mocked Him, had jeered Him, and had called for His crucifixion (Mark 15:29-30). Again, they did not really know whom they were trying to destroy. The Sadducees and the Pharisees had deceived them into believing that Jesus was a fake and a troublemaker (Acts 3:17). Jesus forgave the Sadducees and the Pharisees who had demanded His death. They had rejected Him as their Messiah even though they knew just who and what He was. Jesus, in His infinite mercy, still loved them and would have forgiven them

had they only humbled themselves and repented (Matthew 18:14; 2 Peter 3:9). Most importantly, on the stake Jesus provided forgiveness for all those who would believe in Him in the future (Matthew 20:28).

The stake did not kill Jesus. The Roman soldiers did not kill Jesus. The Sadducees and Pharisees did not kill Jesus. Jesus willingly gave up His earthly life for the sins of His own (John 10:17-18). He paid the penalty for the sins that we commit in our ignorance (and even the ones we have committed deliberately). In forgiving us Jesus fulfilled yet another Old Testament prophecy (Isaiah 53:12). He also made a reality of His own preaching. Jesus had said, "Love your enemies" (Matthew 5:44); now He was leading by example.

Stephen, the first Christian martyr, continued Jesus' example and forgave those who took his life (Acts 7:60). If Jesus and Stephen could forgive those who persecuted them, surely we can forgive those who make themselves our enemies. The beauty of the Bible is that it reveals God's forgiveness, available to us through Christ and exemplified in Jesus' sacrificial death on the stake (John 3:16-17).

When we come to Christ in faith and repentance as a result of His drawing us to Himself (John 6:44), He says of us, "Father, forgive them." The Father does precisely that. For God's infinite forgiveness to be ongoing, however, we must say the same of those who have wronged and continue to wrong us. We too must say, "Father, forgive them." And we must mean it. 



You are here

The Earth as seen from about 6 billion kilometers (3.7 billion miles), appears as a tiny dot (the blueish-white speck approximately halfway down the brown band to the right) within the darkness of deep space. The original image contained 640,000 pixels, and the earth takes up less than a single pixel. The bands of color seen in the image are scattered light rays resulting from taking the image with a small angle between the Sun and the Earth [picture taken by Voyager I space probe in 1990].

LEFTOVERS AND LITTLE THINGS

Looking at things from another perspective often helps give insights not otherwise easily understood. Growing in grace and knowledge will give the believer the benefit of seeing life and creation from new vantage points as God reveals Himself. As large as our God is, He also reveals Himself by showing His attention to little things, and things we might not think would matter. We should take heed to this fact, and some reverence to this understanding can only be of benefit. In this article we will examine some Biblical testimony on the little things, and God's concern with leftovers, as little as they are, and why it matters to you.

An Irrelevant Planet?

I suggest we start out with our perceived place in the Universe in the world of cosmology. If we watch the history and science channels and other media about the Universe and the natural world, there is the erosion of credit given to a Creator God. The rise of pseudo history is also of particular concern.

Our earth revolves around a common sized star called a brown dwarf. Our galaxy the Milky Way does not appear spectacular as far as galaxies go. The late cosmologist, Carl Sagan described our home on earth in the cosmos as this:

Our posturings, our imagined self-importance, the delusion that we have some privileged position in the Universe, are challenged by this point of pale light. Our planet is a lonely speck in the great enveloping cosmic dark. In our obscurity, in all this vastness, there is no hint that help will come from elsewhere to save us from ourselves.

Brilliant scientific minds such as those of Carl Sagan and others are challenged by the claims of God who created the entire universe, and is at the same time passionately concerned for what occurs here. From a cosmology point of view, we exist on a non-special planet moving around a non-special star in a non-special

galaxy. How would a sparrow be of any significance to a God who created all of this?

Even so we ought to realize that throughout the universe, the most significant parts of things are rarely the biggest. If we look at our own planet from outer space, we see almost no evidence of our own work. If we traveled to the "biggest" parts of our planet, we would find ourselves at the ocean, deserts, mountains, forests or icecaps. But those would be fairly boring, dangerous places to live. It is in the cities, villages, buildings and houses where we will find intelligence, music, art, history, sports, science, shelter, food, love and the other significant things of life. And even then, the characteristics of the people who make those things are not governed by the great mass of each person involved, but by microscopic DNA, and a consciousness in the human mind that we cannot even find.

Consider then how God's mindfulness of mankind on this insignificant planet** is a testimony to His glory and a witness to His unfathomable capacity. Our lowly place in the cosmos is yet another wonder in His ability to be intimate with all of creation. If we take a moment to think about it, it begins to make sense.

Blessings from God, and a Little Bit of Perspective

When God blesses His creation, it is not in vain. His word will not return to Him empty:

For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth;

it shall not return to me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it (Isaiah 55:10, 11).

The word of God plants the seed of repentance in the heart of the sinner, and there is expectation of blessing for both the Giver and the receiver. His servants have a role to play here, where there is a casual word, an act of kindness, an occasion for hospitality and a tiny act of faith, God may choose to bless the occasion if done in His name. Little acts of faith are events done on an insignificant planet, but these little things in His name matter, and they matter a lot.

The question to ask here is what small blessing of God, what small act, or a Word from His mouth is too small that He would not have the expectation for it to prosper? Can the least be forgotten by God? Can a cup of cold water go unnoticed? God's investments are a serious matter, and let us remind ourselves also God is very particular about His word, and how it is handled.

There are great claims over God, be it His actual name, and what He is doing, or what church He is backing, and all seem to be associated with the claimant's authority of a special revelation or calling. However, I caution against this, as God reveals Himself only to a limited extent, and even this limited extent is fulfilling.

The limited perspective of God and what He is doing inspired the preacher of Ecclesiastes to write the following:

He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end (Ecclesiastes 3:11b).

*I know that whatever God does, it shall be forever; nothing can be added to it, and nothing taken from it. God does it, **that men should fear before Him** (Ecclesiastes 3:14).*

** The reader is referred to The Privileged Planet, and the position of the Earth in the Universe is actually special. Go to www.privilegedplanet.com for more information.

Solomon recognized that even though we have a limited perspective, the expectation of God is still there. Whatever revelation we receive gives cause for us to fear. A higher view of God and greater awareness of whom He is should compel us to consider what more we might be overlooking. And if the creation reveals His glory, then we consider carefully how He is also fully capable of knowing what is in the hearts of us all, including every secret thing. There is cause to fear before we boast. Never develop a vain idea about your relationship to God or your calling. Just be grateful and be careful of your contentions with other brethren if you feel a special revelation.

Little Bits of Faith

We commonly ask God for things which are seemingly straightforward. We may even know these requests to be self-evident to be according to His will. Even then we may be perplexed by the answer. The answer challenges our thinking. Such was the case when the disciples asked the Lord to increase their faith.

And the apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith." So the Lord said, "If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to the mulberry tree, 'Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you" (Luke 17:5, 6).

The answer challenged the apostles and now us. Perhaps they were intimidated by being a small group in an otherwise hostile land while considering whatever their visions of success were at the time.

A mustard seed, is a little thing, but is also tough. A mulberry tree is a deep rooted tree. Mustard seeds grow under the most unfavorable circumstances. It has been known to crack concrete because of its persistence. The Lord has us thinking differently about our littleness. Though we may have a little faith, use the faith we have.

Do not try to hide behind or within those who boast of great resources, or have other large claims.

As a note, humble beginnings such as what Christ is advocating here, often lead to achievements that cause the believer to consider themselves more than they ought to. Large organizations (church or otherwise) often boast of their humble, disadvantaged beginnings. It is a common theme where humble beginnings end in schisms and splits, dissolve or physically and spiritually go bankrupt. That is why the Lord immediately cautioned them to recognize that we are best to consider ourselves as servants, unprofitable, and accomplishing only what was expected.



Have we stopped to consider that the widow's mite that she put in the treasury can accomplish more than the gifts of the rich (Luke 17:1-5)? We know that it has, as it is recorded for us for all time as an example. Notably, those who were around Him at the time the widow made her offering, were admiring the temple, the ornate stones, and donations. This did not impress Him apparently, but rather spoke of their destruction (Luke 21:5, 6).

"And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward" (Matthew 10:42).

Even a small act of kindness, not even in the name of the Lord, but of a disciple, will not be overlooked. Yes, these things matter, and they matter plenty. When Christ spoke of separating the sheep and the goats, He seemed to already have a foreknowledge of how the righteous would answer Him:

"Then the righteous will answer Him saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see you sick, or in prison, and come to You?'"

... Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to me" (Matthew 25:37-40).

The righteous forgot and did not recognize what they did to serve Him. We forget the little things, and we forget the least of His. The Lord evidently does not forget.

Fear and Value

It is astounding that the Creator of the Universe, seen and unseen, who sustains it by His power does not overlook the life of a sparrow:

And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will? (Matthew 10:28, 29).

In the context regarding the value of a sparrow, it is in regard to fear. Fear and value go together here. Our great value to God should give us cause to fear, which is to consider the fact how mindful He is of us if even a little sparrow does not escape His attention. Our value has an expectation (v. 31-33).

A Little Bit of Leftovers

The account of feeding the 5000 is given in all four gospel accounts. We will need information from three of them to appreciate the significance of the occasion.

I had always felt that the twelve full baskets of leftovers were a testimony of the abundance the miracle had produced. In reality it was very little, and this very little was of concern to Jesus Christ.

Matthew and Luke report that they

were in a relatively deserted place, and because the day began to wear away they suggested to Jesus to send the people away to find their own food (Luke 9:12, 14:15). Instead, the Lord blessed the few loaves of bread and fish that were available and thanked God for them.

Already late in the day before this began, by the time all were fed we know it was even later. Nevertheless, Jesus required His disciples to *“Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost.”* (John 6:12).

There are ideas that the 12 baskets represent the twelve tribes of Israel in some fashion. However, for the purpose of this discussion, twelve full baskets of left overs is very little compared to the 5000 men, besides women and children. There were likely ten to fifteen thousand mouths to feed. Even though it was late, and little left over, the blessing of God was not to be wasted. It is likely they got help by the people who would chip in, and I would guess there was murmuring as nobody likes to go to work with full stomachs, but we can see that it takes work to ensure nothing was to be lost. Jesus concerned Himself with what God had blessed, however little left over there might be.



Jesus comments on the event later in the Chapter. We include His words here:

“Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the

signs, but ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him” (John 6:26,27).

When asked what they shall do to do the works of God, Jesus answered them:

“This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent” (v 29).

We know we cannot earn our salvation, but what is implied here is that it takes work to believe, and it takes work to get others to believe, and work to keep them believing, *and every little bit of these efforts count.* The labor counts because His word will not return to Him empty (Isaiah 55:10, 11), and that the one out of a 100 sheep matters. Any labor that is done is valuable as there are few laborers.

Can we be trusted with the least? If so, we need to make sure we recognize what little things have been put in our care. If we get hung up over what we think is big, then we will miss what is least.

“He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much.” (Luke 16:10)

We can be distracted by big things. Larger donors get the attention, the larger congregations get the attention. The Lord warns in a few verses later, we cannot favor both, it is one or the other.

A Small Church

In the article, *To the Angel of The Scattered Churches*, (SVM Winter, 2010), we covered Jesus Christ’s encouraging words to His little flock. We include that portion of the article here.


“Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32)

Do not fear little flock. I am not sure of a way to truly quantify what our Lord means by little, but this is not the purpose of His message here. Perhaps He means a few, one or two dozen or a few hundred in a congregation, and thousands in a collective group of organized churches? Perhaps He means little in influence?

What is of primary interest to Him is that we do not fear, and why we should not fear in light of being either small in number, small in influence, or both. In the mind of Jesus our fears that are born out of being little in strength by virtue of our size and influence is countered by realizing the desire the Father Himself has in giving us the Kingdom. Jesus understood what our fears would be born out of, which is our own measure of what makes us acceptable and blessed.

Countering our fear of being small is that the Father Himself is large and of ultimate influence. This is why we are not to fear, for despite disappointments in organizational churches and opposing forces within and without, God will not allow Himself to be diverted in purpose and wants us to feel the same way.

Conclusion

Therefore, let us not underestimate the attention that the Lord puts on the little things. The Kingdom is progressing unnoticeably to the untrained eye at first, but will become big and everlasting (Luke 13:18-21, Luke 17:20, 21). We are given the opportunity to have trained eyes on the little things that matter. Don’t worry about the next great thing to happen or to support, do your little bit now to be a part of it. 

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It is made possible by the tithes and offerings of the Chicagoland Church of God members, participating churches, and individual contributors. Donations are welcome and may be tax deductible.



Scribe's Square

A lawyer's discussion of Biblical laws



When former football coach Mike Ditka was fired by the Chicago Bears, Ditka quoted from the Bible with the phantom quote, "This, too, shall pass."

That Ain't In the Bible!

A Look at Popular Phrases Thought to be in The Bible - Part 1

In this two-part Scribe's Square presentation, we shall discuss the phenomenon of commonly cited phrases thought to be in the Bible that are not in fact contained in our Bible. Some of these phrases appear nowhere in scripture while others are errant quotations of true Biblical phrases. Some of these misquotes are harmless while others distort the Word of God.

On whom or what can we blame the spread of phantom biblical verses? According to Baylor University history professor Thomas Kidd, it is because these phrases sound Bible worthy. Kidd told CNN in an interview that "if it sounds proverbish, people figure it must come from the Bible." Sidnie White Crawford, a religious studies scholar at the University of Nebraska attributes it to our selfish desire to "infect the Bible with our own values and morals." Whatever the reason for these mistakes, it is important to rightly divide the word of truth.

Now let us examine a few popular phrases erroneously thought to be in the Bible, discuss their origin, and compare and contrast them with actual scripture.

"This Too, Shall Pass"

When Mike Ditka was fired as head coach of the Chicago Bears back in 1993, he decided to quote from the Bible in his farewell speech. "Scripture tells you that all things shall pass," explained an emotional Ditka after leading his team to only five wins that season. "This too, shall pass." The problem is . . . that phrase is not in the Bible.

The phrase, "this, too, shall pass" originates in ancient Persian and Turkish folklore and stands for the proposition that all material or earthly conditions are temporary. In modern times, this phrase is used to encourage a person during difficult times, but it originally spoke to the impermanence of both positive and negative conditions.

The notion that conditions of mourning or laughing are temporary does have Biblical support in some contexts. Jesus Christ said, "*Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words shall never pass away*" (Matthew 24:25). Concerning the righteous, our Lord said, "*Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted*" (Matthew 5:4). And concerning the wicked, Jesus said, "*Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep.*" (Luke 6:25) The apostle Paul wrote that "*the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us*" (Romans 8:18). Mike Ditka may have gotten his Bible wrong, but the scribe supposes that he was correct in claiming that the pain from being fired as a football coach would eventually pass over.

“Spare the rod, spoil the child”

A child reading this and wishing to avoid a spanking should not celebrate too quickly. Although “spare the rod, spoil the child” is not in the Bible, the principal that failing to discipline one’s child is harmful to that child is certainly Biblical (Hebrews 12:7; Deuteronomy 8:5; Proverbs 3:12; Proverbs 19:18; Proverbs 22:15; Proverbs 22:13; Proverbs 23:13-14; Proverbs 19:15-17). In fact, this phrase might actually be a slight misquotation of Proverbs 13:24 which states, *“He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes.”* As a parenthetical thought, please note that this “rod of correction” may be a figurative rod as well as a literal rod (Psalm 2:9; Revelation 2:26-27; Revelation 12:5; Revelation 19:15). Corporal punishment, if used, must be reasonable and measured. The Bible in no way endorses child abuse.

“To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord”

This phrase is a misquote of 2 Corinthians 5:8. The verse should read, *“We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.”* Unlike the previous misquotation, the errant citation in this case is not harmless. In this passage, the apostle Paul expressed his desire to be absent from his physical body and to be present with the Lord at the resurrection. Mainstream Christians, however, have twisted Paul’s words and used it as a “proof text” of the erroneous notion that those who die in Christ retain all consciousness and immediately go to heaven or paradise to be with the Lord as soon as they die. Jesus Christ and Biblical writers, however, make it clear that death is a sleep and that *“all who are in their graves will hear His voice and come forth”* at *“the last day”* (Ecclesiastes 9:5-10; Daniel 12:2; Job 3:11-17; 1 Thessalonians:4:15-17; John 6:40-44). Paul, therefore, was declaring his desire to be absent from his physical body and present with the Lord at the resurrection at the end of this age.

“The church is in the hearts of men”

The Bible certainly states that a Christian’s individual body is a temple of God (I Corinthians 6:19), but nowhere in the scripture does it state that the church is in the hearts of men. Those who quote this phrase and tout its Biblical pedigree often claim that they do not have to meet with other Christians for worship services or Bible studies because the church is in the hearts of men or because an individual Christian *is* a church. But they probably do not know the difference between a church and a temple.

A temple is a tabernacle or dwelling place. It may literally refer to a building in which religious activity takes place or it may figuratively refer to a human body (John 2:21). A church, by contrast, in a Biblical sense, refers to a group of people. The Greek word translated church in the Bible literally refers to an assembly, congregation, or even a riot mob.

Because the Spirit of God dwells in each true follower of Christ (Romans 8:9), Paul states that our bodies are temples of God. This is quite different, however, than saying that the church is in the hearts of men or that an individual Christian is a church. A church requires at least two or three members (Matthew 18:20; 2 Corinthians 13:1; Deuteronomy 19:15, Ecclesiastes 4:11-12).

“Only what you do for Christ will last”

“Only what you do for Christ will last” is based upon a poem by missionary C.T. Studd who said, “Only one life, ‘twill soon be past; only what’s done for Christ will last.” This phrase is not in the Bible, but it is arguably supported by Biblical truth. Paul wrote, “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man’s work shall be *continued on pay 21*

December 22, 2013

Dear Norm,

In the beginning when He created the heavens and the earth, what was the Holy One of Israel thinking? What vision guides Him, then, now, and forward, driving all His works, fueling His passion?

Let any person or group with knowledge of the divine King give an answer, regardless of the opinions of others!

Every person on earth, especially the smallest children are able to understand these questions, please ask God to empower the vision of the King to become known to every person in every nation!

-Jeffery Caldwell.

Dear Jeff,

Our editor, Jim Patterson, answered this question in his article "Blessed for His Namesake" in the Spring 2013 issue. It basically explains that He purposed in Himself to be glorified. The Family of God has come about to fulfill that purpose, not being the original purpose. It contains quite a few scriptures illustrating this.

My approach was to go to the end of the Bible to see how God wants things to turn out in the end. There certainly are many verses there talking about the glorification. Four living creatures appear to glorify him continually (Revelation 4:8).

But I think the scripture also shows us that He had essentially the same goals and aspirations that righteous people have throughout the centuries. They want intimate relationships with a family and friends—they want children of their own. God put that desire in us because it was in Him.

Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Him-

Ask Norm!

self will be with them and be their God. "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away" (Revelation 21:1-4).

This seems very clear to me. God wants to live with a happy family! Indeed, he may be thinking about billions or trillions of people compared to the dozen that we would consider a big family. We can look to the vast number of stars in space or the grains of sand on the sea shore to see that God thinks much bigger than we do (Genesis 22:17; Hebrews 11:12).

Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful." And He said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." (Revelation 21:5-8)

God declares the end from the beginning. He knew exactly what his goals were at the beginning and is able to bring them to pass. He made the "fountain of life" to give to those who will take it. Even so, He has left some of the decision-making in our hands. It says "He who overcomes shall inherit...." We must choose to do the overcoming, though all the power we need to do that is available in Jesus Christ (John 15:4-7; 2 Corinthians 3:4-5; Philippians 4:13; Ephesians 6:10)

While some believers may have trouble with this concept, the Bible never claims that God knows what each person will do before they do it. Rather, He tests mankind to see what they will do in certain situations:



I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give every man according to his ways, According to the fruit of his doings (Jeremiah 17:10).

There are many other Scriptures that show this principle (Genesis 22:12; 1 Chronicles 28:9; Psalm 7:9; 17:3; Jeremiah 11:20; 20:12; Rev 2:23. Many other scriptures promise judgment for our actions (Ecclesiastes 12:14; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 1 Peter 1:17). How could God judge us if he already knew all that we would do in advance? If God already knows every sin we will commit before we will commit it, is there any way we could avoid committing them? Rather, the Bible teaches that there are some sins that God never thought people would commit (Jeremiah 7:31; 19:5; 32:35).

While God may give us free will much of the time so that He may know our hearts, He also reserves the right to defeat that free will in any manner he desires to stop us from ruining His plan.

There are many plans in a man's heart, Nevertheless the LORD's counsel -- that will stand (Proverbs 19:21).

All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, "What have You done?" (Daniel 4:35).

The Creator of the Universe is able to carry out His awesome master plan for His children, in spite of anything anyone might do! Let each person seek Him to learn more about His plan for us as a people and each one of us individually! Let us become one of the children He loves!!

March 1, 2014

Greetings and Happy Sabbath,

I would like to donate my tithe to the Kenya brethren featured in the Spring 2013 of *Shepherd's Voice Magazine* I just finished.

Also, my husband and I are just so excited because we are planning to go on the Cruise for the F.O.T!

Though my husband isn't a church member, we've attended Several Feasts together the past 12 years. So we are receiving e-mails from Kathy and are in the process of getting started with the planning and are both extremely excited.

Thank you for all your excellent issues with excellent articles. May God continue to bless, guide, and lead you.

In Him,
T.V.

Dear T.V.

We appreciate your prayers and encouragement. We realize that without the prayers of righteous people, we would be able to accomplish little. We are glad that these issues have been a blessing to you.

January 17, 2014

Dear S.V. magazine, "Ask Norm!"

I am very happy to be on your mailing list and first time writing. May God's grace and mercy be upon you and family. Me and another inmate were discussing Scripture concerning Mary, the Mother of "Jesus Christ". Scripture plainly says she had other sons and daughters (Gal 1:19; Matt 12:46; 13:55; Mark 6:3; 15:40; Luke 3:22; 1Cor 9:5; John 6:42). Would you please write and explain or refer to other books for more information on the subject? Are these Joseph's Children after Christ's birth? And why didn't His siblings take over to take care of Mary after His death?

Thank you! I will be waiting for the answer to this soon.

Sincerely,
Curmit Hatcher, Tx

Dear Curmit,

Thank you for your interesting question. I had wondered about this myself for some years. It did not understand it until I was involved in a ministry of my own that appeared troubled due to outside persecution. I do not believe there are any reference books that would have any direct information, other than the Bible, so I will explain it from the Bible. The key verses are Matthew 12:47-50 or its counterpart here in Mark:

And a multitude was sitting around Him; and they said to Him, "Look, Your mother and Your brothers are outside seeking You." But He answered them, saying, "Who is My mother; or My brothers?" And He looked around in a circle at those who sat about Him, and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother" (Mark 3:32-35).

Here, Jesus clearly showed that his ministry was more important than His own family. And for him, it certainly was. Today, many ministers of the Gospel fight a constant battle between attention to their families and attention to their ministries. When they spend too much time on their ministries, their family frequently turns against them.

It is ever worse with a persecuted ministry. When a man serving God is denounced by other civil or religious leaders, or if he ends up in jail, many people will assume he is doing something wrong—often with no real investigation on their own. They will say, "If he had been conducting his ministry properly, he would not have gotten into these troubles." Even though Jesus and the New Testament apostles spent a reasonable amount of time in trouble and even in jail, they still say these things today, usually without even considering that it might be unjust persecution.

When Jesus said that those who followed him were closer than his own family, it must have been very difficult for them to accept. Even though they knew he was an honest man, they must have thought he was a little bit crazy. When he was scourged and crucified, they must have been sure that he had some kind of mental or demonic difficulties. Mary, his mother, is the only

member of his family that stayed with Jesus through His most difficult times, his trial and crucifixion. Mary was an exceptional woman. In the unusual events of John the Baptist's and Christ's birth, Mary readily accepts the things told to her by the angels and "ponders them in her heart", whereas Zecharias and Joseph doubt them at times (Luke 1 & 2).

Were all of Mary's children also Joseph's children? We do not know for sure, but the evidence indicates they are. Joseph was with Mary at least until Jesus was 12 (Luke 2:42-52, but there is no mention of him living beyond that time. He could have fathered all of Jesus recorded four brothers and two or more sisters (Matt 13:55-56) during those twelve years. In John 6:2, He is still referred to as "Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know". If Mary had a new husband, he should have been mentioned here. If we were to theorize that Joseph never fathered any children and died when Jesus was 12, and then Mary immediately remarried and had more children, that would make all her children less than 21 years old when Jesus died (Jesus being 33 when he died, minus 12 years when Mary was with Joseph). Most of these children would have been minors at Jesus' death and it is unlikely they would have been named in Scripture. It is much more sensible that all of Jesus brothers and sisters were fathered by Joseph, and were between 21 and 32 years old at Jesus death. (If Joseph lived a few years past Jesus 12th birthday, then some of his children could be less than 21 at Jesus' death.)

I believe that Jesus brothers and sisters felt he was shirking his responsibility as the oldest son, that he had brought a bad name upon the family by getting in such trouble with the authorities and that their mother Mary should stop encouraging Jesus in all his nonsense. Mary is mentioned as being with Jesus on several occasions throughout His ministry. They may well have made her future support contingent on her leaving Jesus ministry. (This is a good technique to use when

continued on page 33

Children of God Part 9 — Relationships and Marriage

The last two parts of this article covered teenagers and adult children. Eventually, nearly all of those teens and adults will enter a relationship with the opposite sex, most will get married. This is the first commandment God gave to Adam and Eve:

Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed (Genesis 2:24-25).

Mankind has, to a large degree, obeyed this command through the centuries, though too often out of order. Today, it is common for young people to do it backwards: get naked and have sex (“one flesh”), then think about getting married and/or being able to afford to leave mother and father. Such a practice is absolutely devastating to family and future. But it essentially taught in most public schools. Most secular counselors today teach sex between consenting adults (and maybe teens) is fine as long as love is involved. But what does God say?

*Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children. Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God. Let there be **no sexual immorality**, impurity, or greed among you. Such sins have no place among God’s people. Obscene stories, foolish talk, and coarse jokes -- these are not for you. Instead, let there be thankfulness to God. You can be sure that no immoral, impure, or greedy person will inherit the Kingdom of Christ and of God. For a greedy person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world. **Don’t be fooled by those who try to ex-***

cuse these sins, for the anger of God will fall on all who disobey him. Don’t participate in the things these people do (Ephesians 5:1-7, NLT).

The goal of public school sex education is to help teens make “informed choices” and practice “safe sex”—avoiding diseases and unwanted pregnancy. But after decades of that kind of education, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention tells us there are still 110 million Americans with Sexually Transmissible Infections. Also, in round numbers, there are about 2 million unwanted babies born in the USA each year. Half of them are aborted, the other half are raised by somebody who may or may not love them: maybe both parents, but more likely one parent, a grand parent, a friend, a foster family or a combination of the above.

The Tough Lessons of Reality

These unplanned children are the focal point of family fights, custody battles, child support cases, abuse, government assistance cases, and so many other things that make their lives and our lives unhappy. This writer has worked in a ministry to homeless people for the past four years and has experience first-hand the children—some now adults—who grew up knowing they were unwanted by one or both parents.

In our brief experience helping homeless single women with unplanned pregnancies, we have experienced nearly the full spectrum of difficulties: The mother wants to keep her baby and her family wants him (babies are “him” for clarity) aborted. Her family wants the baby but her mother wants him aborted. The mother wants the baby and the father does not—and vice versa. A women wants a baby so bad they are willing to get pregnant by almost anyone—because she wants someone to love and hopes the baby will love her. The mother wants a baby to get his government assistance and child support. A woman wants a baby, but frequently leaves him with family and friends for extended periods of time—sometimes without warning. Some men

Every Believer’s Help Is Necessary

Whether you are male or female, single or married, adult or child, grandparent or grandchild, you have a tremendous influence or marriage and relationships of those around you.

Too many times this writer has cringed when hearing one Christian talk seriously about beginning a possible male/female relationship, only to hear a second “Christian” ask some sensually oriented comment such as “Is he/she hot?” “What kind of stuff does he/she have?” Maybe worse.

When confronted, the “Christian” may answer, “I was just joking”. But our marriages, families and society are being gradually destroyed by unbiblical relationships. In a society that markets casual sex, every positive comment and example upholding godly relationships of great value. Who can you influence for good?

go around getting many women pregnant—knowing that there is a maximum percentage that can be taken from their checks for child support—and they have already reached it. Some

men do not care about child support because they never plant to work. Our courts often do become wise to these situations and terminate current and future parental rights to these irresponsible parents.

We have known people who told partners they were infertile so that they could have unprotected sex—but were actually lying. Our homeless ministry once housed three women who were all told a similar story by the same man—and who had all gotten pregnant by him. On the opposite side, we have seen women claim to be pregnant when they were not—either hoping a man would marry her thinking she had his baby, or simply because others would give things to a poor single mom. All of these lies just make it more difficult for people to practice the truth of God and to care for the real babies and mothers who honestly want help, and who often got into such a mess without knowing what they are doing. Indeed, some of them grew up with their parents frequently lying to them and having sex with whoever was convenient at the moment.

Men have long-term consequences as well as women. Once a court orders a man to pay child support, if he gets behind in his payments, he is likely to have his wages or bank account garnished or his driver's license suspended—anywhere in the country. This is in some ways like the biblical requirement for a single man who has sex with a single woman—me must pay the “bride price” no matter what, but the woman's father can refuse him as a husband (Ex 22:16-17). Needless to say, immoral men who are able to earn a good living do not like the prospect of paying child support for 18 years to someone they do not really care about.

One future-thinking immoral man we knew, when a girl friend told him she was pregnant by him, committed a burglary and used the proceeds to pay for their baby's abortion. He was sentenced to a couple years in prison for the burglary, but the abortion was legal. Another woman who previously stayed with us had an immoral boyfriend who was not so future-thinking. She obtained court-ordered child support, so he moved

to another state hoping to avoid it. When back child support payments caught up with him, his solution was to come back and kill their baby. He is now doing a life sentence in prison. This is just part of the mess that grows out of unmarried sex. Our nation, legislature and our courts will some day be judged for telling our mothers and fathers it is all right to kill their babies—as long as they do it before they are born. But so many young people simply do not think about any of these complications when they want sex without commitment.



Almost as sad, are some of the parents who decide to keep and love their unplanned children, but simply are not able to. Some of them have so little knowledge of the things they need: how to build good relationship, why a lifelong marriage is important, how to get a job, how to work hard at a job, how to keep their home organized, how to teach and train a child, etc. Most of them are running on the media's teaching that sex and relationships are fun, and the “sex education” they had in high school

Sex education teaches “informed choices”, but sometimes all of the choices are bad. A parent with an unwanted child is often left to choose between:

- 1) Abort (kill) the baby.
- 2) Raise the baby knowing one or more people will likely be forever angry at the baby (because of child support payments or because the baby will remind them of someone's illegitimate sex).
- 3) Put the baby up for adoption (which may be a disaster for the parent who loves the baby—and a future nightmare when the child later decides to find out who are his or her real parents and who abandoned him or her).

The “sex education” method to prevent this problem is to better educate them to practice “safe sex”. But that goes against the nature of sex. It is so powerful; it is so emotional. When sex is awesome, one's logical processes give way to one's passion. And that is good. People should experience sex to the fullest. God said it was very good (Genesis 1:31). But that is why He said sex belongs in marriage—where there are loving, committed parents to raise any babies that come along—planned or not. But when sex is outside of marriage, when powerful passions cause people not to remember the pregnancy prevention they learned in high school, the result is millions of unplanned pregnancies and STIs. Sure, there are many birth control methods that boast over 95% effectiveness. This writer has met individuals who claimed to have gotten pregnant while using nearly every one of the different available “foolproof” methods.

Even if sex education programs had 10 times the budget and could become 10 times as effective, they would still be failures. 11 million Americans with STD's and 200,000 unwanted babies born every year would still be way too many.

It Happens to Church Folks

While the Bible-believing readers of this publication may wonder if we are “preaching to the choir,” we are saddened to observe so many divorces, affairs and illegitimate births in nearly every church group we encounter. The full story is often difficult to determine because church goers want to appear righteous and often do not talk about it. (Whereas, those who are not sure about what is right are often willing to talk.) This article begins with the clear message to avoid premarital sex because it often brings a disaster from which people rarely recover—and almost never recover completely. Once people have had sex before marriage, there is a huge tendency to continue that path from one relationship to the next. The problems frequently continue for multiple generations.

Everyone needs to seek a Godly life starting right now. God forgives all

sins if we confess them (1 John 1:9-2:1). If one has children by multiple partners, the best thing one can do for the children is enter into a stable marriage. No matter what kinds of love, hate or child custody issues exist between estranged parents, a stable family is the best place for children to go. Court orders or their own desires may prevent them from living with you now, but children of fractures nearly always want to, and are often required to live with each of their parents at some time in their life. The rest of Christian relationship teaching is of little value until a stable marriage can be achieved.

In his ministry to churches, this writer has known Christian men and women, who were theoretically opposed to sex before marriage, but who still had unwanted pregnancies. Only a small percentage of incidents involved physical force. Many involved one Christian with another not-so-Christian who was experienced at talking the other into having sex. Most heard lots of promises of love and marriage in the near future—and explanations why sex beforehand wouldn't hurt anyone—especially if nobody knew. Some used various scriptures to convince the other that they were “already married” in God's sight. Others were with friends who were used to sexual activity and said “nothing bad ever happened.” Others were conned into sex by people who threatened to hurt or kill themselves unless their partner agreed to sex. In all of these cases, most people agreed to some kind of limited sexual activity—but during the passion managed to “make babies.”

We believers who want to spare others these difficulties need to do more than simply educate people with the true facts. We need to find a way to grab their hearts and help them understand the enormity and seriousness of the problem. We are continually bombarded by mainstream media telling us that relationships are about fun—that people can do whatever they want whenever they want as long

as both parties agree. Well-acted scripts convince us that people have great amounts of love, pleasure and satisfaction with a partner they met a few days ago. And we have internet sites that will send you intimate pictures of a potential partner right now or “hook you up with someone tonight.”

Just out of curiosity...

Has any reader of this article ever written to the FCC, local law enforcement, local papers or any branch of government or business asking for something to be done to reduce the amount of casual sex type of material that is continually marketed to the public?

We need powerful presentations of the truth to counteract this. We need movies, songs, articles, conversations and other reminders of the virtue, goodness and love of life-long relationships and happy families. When we are frustrated, bored, or feeling discouraged, we need to remember the blessing that God has promised to those who follow his ways—and be reminded of the physical reality of how well that works.

So if Christians need to be inspired to live moral lives and save sex for marriage, how much more does the non-Bible reading world need it? Young people who grow up with television and movies as their moral guide to life often have no idea that anything could be wrong with pre-marital sex until they have a disease, a pregnancy or a court trying to collect child support from them.

If this writing prevents one person from getting involved in sex outside of marriage, it has more than served its function. May God strengthen and bless everyone who reads it.

The Most Awesome Thing Ever

Now for some positive, encouraging words on how to do it right. Every young person needs to think about and plan their answers for these three questions:

1. How they will serve God?
2. What kind of fulfilling work they will do to support themselves and their family?
3. Whom they will marry?

These are things that will bring lasting happiness and accomplishment. Entertainment, sports, parties with friends, obtaining possessions all eventually lose their luster. But knowing God, doing good work, and good family relationships are valuable and fulfilling for one's entire life. Sex is just one part of one of these three points, but it belongs here. This writer has known married people who have had sex from the day they were married until the day they died—with no concerns over disease, pregnancy or somebody “finding out about it”. It is an incredibly binding force in marital relationships and a microcosm of the joy experienced by parents who bring children into the world and ultimately by God when He brings his family into the world (Is 62:5; John 16:20-22; Ephesians 5:30-31; 1 Peter 1:3-5; Revelation 19:7-9).

A hundred years ago, conversations about these three important questions were common for teens. Some held jobs and married at that age. Today, in our public schools, these conversations have largely been replaced by “get a good education so you can get a good job” and the assumption that almost nobody will go without sex all the way through college and through whatever time it takes to become economically self-sufficient. Even parents and churches rarely talk to their young people about establishing relationships leading toward marriage—apparently fearing that such talk might lead to premature interest in relationships and sex. But good relationships and good marriages are the main thing that parents can hope to assist their children in establishing. Sometimes, young people say: “I do not think I want to get married”. There is nothing wrong with that feeling.

When one has not met someone with whom they want to spend the rest of their life—it is good that they are not thinking about marrying somebody who “might be O.K.”. Also, marriage is a massive responsibility and it is understandable why one might not feel

What about Homosexuality?

The Bible teaches homosexuality is a sin (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Rom 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9; 1 Timothy 1:10; Jude 1:7). Indeed, it was part of the reason of the destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:1-29). Unfortunately, many self-righteous religious leaders of today treat homosexuality like some kind of worst possible sin. However, the Bible teaches that corrupt religious leaders have worse sins than Sodom:

“And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you” (Matthew 11:23).

“But whatever city you enter, and they do not receive you, go out into its streets and say, ‘The very dust of your city which clings to us we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near you.’ But I say to you that it will be more tolerable in that Day for Sodom than for that city” (Luke 10:10-12).

Jesus answered, “You [Pilate, the Roman Governor] could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore the one [Caiaphas, the high priest—John 18:28] who delivered Me to you has the greater sin” (John 19:11).

Indeed, the Old Testament gives the same punishment for homosexuality and adultery, something that is all too common in our society—even among church-going people. In his ministry to homeless people, this writer has worked with both adulterers and homosexuals—all trapped in an ongoing turmoil of lies, broken relationships, violence and threats—like the alcoholic or drug addict. People in these lifestyles should seek God to know what is causing their suffering, repent, accept his forgiveness and by His power recover. Christians, need to have the love of God for them, to lead them to this way that they are not likely to find on their own.

ready for the challenge in one’s teens or twenties. Even so, everyone needs to intellectually plan for a marriage, so that when the right person enters his or her life, there is a foundation laid that will support a marriage. It is sad to see persons in their thirties or older who have found someone with whom they desire a marriage and family, but who have not thought much about serving God or finding a career.

Making a Life Plan For a Good Marriage

The best way to plan for a life-long marriage is to trust God to help you find the right person. A person who

does this is far ahead of anyone else. They know that they will not have to compromise their Christian values in order to attract someone. They know they will not have to lie to impress the other person. They know they do not have to go to great lengths to make themselves appear more beautiful or wealthier than they really are—because a good marriage is not based on looks or wealth. Praying to God about a spouse is not difficult. These few Scriptures are good things to meditate upon and remind God about in prayer:

Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us

(1 John 5:14).

And the LORD God said, “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.”... Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh (Genesis 2:18, 24).

With a very few exceptions, such as Christ, John the Baptist and Paul, the will of God is for most people to marry. While most verses are written from the viewpoint of a man, God is equally concerned about women (Galations 3:28):

He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the LORD (Proverbs 18:22).

Houses and riches are an inheritance from fathers, but a prudent wife is from the LORD (Proverbs 19:14).

Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies. The heart of her husband safely trusts her; so he will have no lack of gain. She does him good and not evil all the days of her life.... Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, but a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her own works praise her in the gates (Proverbs 31:10-12, 30-31).

As soon as a young person recognizes that they are interested in the opposite sex, they need to realize that the rest of their life should be divided into six general stages:

1. Too early to look for a spouse—but time to prepare for marriage
2. Ready to consider the right person at the right time
3. Actively looking for a spouse
4. Steady dating
5. Engagement
6. Marriage

These stages vary greatly, some many years others only a few months. If a spouse is found in Stage 2, Stage 3 will not exist. If insurmountable difficulties are found in the last 3 stages, a person may need to go back to one of the first three stages. We devote a section, below, to each of the above six stages. What

a person needs to do in each of the six stages varies greatly. Though the two most important tasks remain constant through it all: Prayer and **Truth!** We cannot control our own nature and especially not the nature of other people. We need to pray to the Creator of the Universe to form us into the right person for marriage and to help us to do what is necessary to find the right person. Secondly, learning to be truthful with others, especially our spouse, will make every Stage go better.

Stage 1: Too early to look for a spouse—but time to prepare for marriage

This stage generally applies to high school age students and young people who are not yet able to support themselves. It probably applies to most full-time college students up to a year or two before their graduation. It also applies to older people who are recovering from substance abuse, incarceration, long-term job loss, immorality, etc. They should not immediately seek a person to marry, but seek to recover first.

When young people first start noticing the opposite sex, there is a huge tendency to want to dress up, look good, say the right things, do the right things and know what the other side is saying and doing about them. Both genders want the attention of the other. Young men often want to get their eyes and hands on young women, women often want the security of having a “boyfriend”. Young people need to strongly resist the temptation to do most of this. They need to learn to talk to each other, work together, have fun together and respect each other. They need to make opposite sex friends and do good things in groups. But the standard boyfriend/girlfriend routine causes more harm than good.

Good relationships are not about **finding** the right person as much as they are about **becoming** the right person.

Parents, teachers and friends need to assure their young people that they have what it takes to attract a good mate someday. Many young people run to the arms of an opposite sex friend because they are **not** loved

and respected at home—or because they think that if they don’t find “somebody” now, they never will.

In what ways should a person prepare for marriage? The following outline mentions many of the important things. Obviously, nobody can or even should do everything suggested in this outline. But in general, the more good things, the better. The better prepared you are, the easier it will be to find a well-prepared person whom you can grow to love and spend your life with.

a) Relationship with God. Do you believe that the universe and mankind is the purposeful creation of God? Do you pray, read the Bible or attend a church service regularly? Do you talk to others about God? Do you try to live by Christ’s “two commandments” (love God and the Golden Rule) or the “ten commandments”? Have you repented, been baptized and received the Holy Spirit? (Acts 2:38). Have you ever given of your time or money to serve God in some way?

b) Domestic skills. Can you keep a house clean? Do you have a designated place for each of your things, and keep everything put away? (Some people never acquire this skill, and an otherwise-good marriage can break up over it.) Can you do your own laundry? Are you able to buy food and cook for yourself? Can you cook for others? Do you mostly heat up prepared food or can you “cook from scratch”? Can you keep the dishes cleaned up? (While virtually every person alive eats 2-3 times per day, it is amazing how many people never acquired some of these basic skills.) Some of these skills are more frequently used by women than men, but good husbands need to be able to step in if their wife is busy with babies, becomes sick or would appreciate a break once in a while. Nearly all teens could learn these things at home, but so many of them are so busy “hanging out” with friends that they do not learn these basic skills that would make them more desirable as marriage partners.

c) Education. Are you doing reasonably well in your classes now? (Not everyone is equally gifted in all subjects, but working hard in something that does not come easy for you is a good skill for marriage.) Do you complete most of your assignments on time? Do you know what you want to study in the future? Have you researched the job for which you are studying? Have you talked to people who do it? Can you learn the necessary skills from the Internet, books and practical experience? Or, do laws require that you have a degree for it? Can you get through college without taking out a student loan? (Student loans offer limited options of refinancing and generally cannot be discharged in bankruptcy. People who incur big student loans and cannot pay them back right away often become slaves to them for life—a great burden on a marriage.) If you plan to be a stay-at-home mother, do your career plans allow you to finish your school and get a return on your educational efforts before the age you would like to be married and raising children?

d) Work skills. Are you able to work hard at something you personally enjoy and be successful in it? (Sports, music, art, model building, photography, construction or any hobby.) Can you plan what you want to do in and then follow through on your schedule? Or do you do what is fun for the moment? Do you have a resume and the government documents necessary to get a job? How many jobs have you applied for? How long have you worked? Have you ever worked for yourself? If so, is your business expanding? How many promotions or raises have you received? Have you ever been fired? How long have you supported yourself on your own? (Unfortunately, many people’s first introduction to work is either their parent trying to get them to do something that the parent does

e) not want to do—or their parent giving them a punishment. Young people need to work with parents who are willing to share the joy of *continued on page 22*

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made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire" (I Corinthians 3:11-15).

If C.T. Studd meant that the only meaningful foundation upon which an endeavor should be made is Jesus Christ, then he was uttering a truthful and Biblically-based statement. But rather than use what might or might not have been Studd's brief and attention-grabbing restatement of scripture, it is better to cite the scripture passage itself to retain the original meaning and avoid confusion.

"Charity Begins at Home"

This phrase does not come from the Bible, but originates with English theologian and physician Sir Thomas Browne, who in his book wrote, "But how shall we expect charity towards others, when we are uncharitable to ourselves? 'Charity begins at home,' is the voice of the world."

Some people make the argument that while this quote is not verbatim from the Bible, the concept definitely is. They cite 1 Timothy 5:3-4 which says, "*Honor widows that are widows indeed. But if any widow have children or nephews, let them learn first to shew piety at home, and to requite their parents: for that is good and acceptable before God.*" They claim that Paul was instructing Timothy that while the Church should always be a haven and support for those in need, charity should first come from one's own family. While this may be true, it is a dangerous thing to convert Paul's instruction regarding financial assistance to widows into a blanket statement that "charity begins at home." This philosophy can easily be used as an excuse to refuse helping those in need who are not in our immediate family, local congregation, or home town. Such an attitude was not taken by the followers of Christ in Macedonia and Achaia who made a "*contribution for the poor saints [in] Jerusalem*" (Romans 15:26).

The scribe wishes to tax your time no further, and will now conclude part one of this series. Next issue, we shall continue our study of misquoted scriptures and see if the Bible really says that the Ephesians lost their first love, if God helps those who help themselves, if Christ is coming back for a church without a spot or wrinkle, and if the Lord works in mysterious ways. May God bless you, and may God bless Mike Ditka. 🙏

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f) taking care of one's self, family and possessions.)

g) Business skills. How well do you manage your own money? Do you have your own bank or credit card accounts? Do you balance these when you get statements? Are you debt-free? Do you have a savings? Are you a good shopper? Do you buy mostly things you need or have planned to buy for some length of time? Or do you buy things on impulse or because you saw an ad for it? (Learning to have control of your own money—rather than letting advertisers do it—is a huge skill for marriage!) Do you own a vehicle? Are you able to properly maintain it? Do you own and maintain a computer? Do you pay your own bills? Have you ever missed an important payment because you spent money on unimportant things? Do you fill out all of the necessary forms for licenses, jobs, taxes, etc. or does somebody do them for you?

h) Physical health. Are you living a healthy lifestyle? Could you walk all day at an amusement park without getting tired out? Do you get enough sleep? Do you get enough exercise? Do you choose healthy foods? Or do you tend to eat what you see advertised or what makes you feel good for the moment? Are you overweight or underweight? Do you have habits of smoking, alcohol or drugs of any kind? Do you often feel too cold or too hot in situations where other people are comfortable? If you do have some ongoing health difficulty, do you know how to take care of it as much as possible?

i) Social maturity. Do you value other people—even though they are not like you? Do you make friends easily? Or are most of your friends people who are friends to nearly everybody? Are you a happy and fun person most of the time? Are you genuine? Are you a tolerant or a fussy person? Do you keep your promises to friends? Can you avoid getting angry, upset or panicky most of the time? When you need to talk

to somebody about something they are not going to like, can you do it? Can you stay calm? (This is a tremendous relationship skill!) Can you work together with other people in school or work situations? Can you get along with a room-mate? Can you do things “someone else’s way”? (Eat their homemade food, keep things according to their organization, listen to their music, etc.) Can you engage in social activities with the opposite sex and stay relaxed and “be yourself”, or do you feel compelled to act in a way you think they want you to act?

Do not be overwhelmed by the above points. Nobody does it all. But would you want to spend your life with a fun person who says they love you, but who has almost none of these skills? Would you want to always have to do their share of the family work? You can find areas where you need to improve. If you do not think you need much improvement, give a close friend this list and ask them what they think you need.

What should happen in the rare cases where a person meets their spouse during Stage 1? This writer has seen people marry their childhood sweethearts and have good lifelong marriages. The answer is simple: If you think you have met the “right one” in Stage 1, do not start a physical relationship, but prepare for marriage anyway. If you reach Stage 2 and you both still want to marry each other, it will probably work. Premarital sex or marrying before one is prepared greatly increases the chances of a breakup, even among otherwise compatible people.

Stage 2: Ready to consider the right person at the right time

Finding someone to love and marry is not simply math or social science. Art and intangible feelings are involved as well. If a man who walks up to a woman he does not know well, hands her a brochure about himself and says “I am now in Stage 3, read this over and let me know if you are interested in marriage,” he is not likely to get anywhere. Nor is the woman who feels ready for marriage, but sits at home wondering why nobody is interested in her.

Good relationships require people to have a similar level of interest in each other at similar times. They usually start casual, and then gradually deepen until one person, hopefully the man, has the courage to talk about a marriage. If one party is clearly more interested in marriage than the other, usually the other will be “scared away” and abandon the friendship. There are many levels of familiarity that each person must pass through. It is often good for a life-time relationship to start off slowly, so that each person gets to know the other as a friend before getting to know him/her as a lover. Showing that one is willing to wait for the other person is important.

Stage 2 usually begins when a person has matured in regard to many of the points in Stage 1. They have learned to get along with a diversity of people and manage their own life without continual aid or reminders from parents or friends. They have either advanced in the working world, or are about to complete college with a job waiting for them after they graduate. This stage does not require one to be married “right now”, but at least have a time when marriage will be appropriate “in sight.” Whereas a Stage 1 person should generally say “no” to others looking for a spouse, the Stage 2 person might want to get to know them better and at least think about it.

At Stage 2, people need to deliberately place themselves where they will meet similar-age people of the opposite sex. That may be automatically provided by one’s church, work, school or living environment. But if it is not, one needs to seek out a church, social club or something where one can meet others who are eventually seeking marriage. Religious or charity missions are one of the best places to find other young, caring people. One does not want pressure to “find somebody” right way, but an opportunity to get to know a diversity of people.

This should be a time of getting to know a diversity of people—finding out who you like and who likes you. Recommendations from parents and friends who really care about you (not who simply want to be a

“matchmaker”) can be worthwhile. It is a mistake to latch onto the first person who shows interest in you. Going to group social activities, dating more than one person during the same time period, all help you realize that you have value as a person and that you have a choice—so make a good choice!

If you live in a place where it is difficult to meet new people like you, the Internet provides a means of conversing with a great diversity of people without getting physically involved. Can internet relationships turn into good marriages? This writer knows of some that did. There were failures, as well. When one is interested in someone met online, the key is starting the relationship over in real life. Throughout history, men and women have pretended to be good in order to attract a good spouse—only to unleash a torrent of bad personality traits once that spouse has a life-time commitment to them. It is **much easier** to portray a false image over the Internet. People who think they are in love and ready to marry solely from their Internet relationship are making a huge mistake. It is much better to physically move close together so that both can get to know each other in “real life.”

Becoming acquainted with a person of the opposite sex should involve fun times, but so much more is needed. Marriages usually struggle when a couple mostly has fun together before they were married, and then must be about the business of working together and getting along at peace in difficult situations. Couples planning to marry need to be with each other in many different types of situations—including work and difficult situations. There are people who work hard and maintain cheerful attitudes even during difficult times. They make great spouses!

There is nothing wrong with seeking out people who look good to us. Jacob sought out Rachel because she “*had a beautiful figure and a lovely face*” (Genesis 29:17, NLT). But this cannot be the main or only factor—as is so often promoted in our world today. Indeed, the main method some women use to attract men is to look, dress and act as feminine, even sexy,

as possible. Indeed, some men are looking for women just like that. But marriages that start like this only last if both people grow up and learn the other important aspects of marriage. Excess emphasis on appearance is a mistake. Remember, Rachel was also good at tending sheep (Genesis 29:9). The apostle Peter warned about this, and King Solomon advised people to admire a partner’s beauty within a marriage:

Don't be concerned about the outward beauty of fancy hairstyles, expensive jewelry, or beautiful clothes. You should clothe yourselves instead with the beauty that comes from within, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is so precious to God (1 Peter 3:3).

Why spill the water of your springs in the streets, having sex with just anyone? You should reserve it for yourselves. Never share it with strangers. Let your wife be a fountain of blessing for you. Rejoice in the wife of your youth. She is a loving deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts satisfy you always. May you always be captivated by her love. Why be captivated, my son, by an immoral woman, or fondle the breasts of a promiscuous woman? (Proverbs 5:16-20, NLT).

Do not be quick to dismiss people because they don’t look “perfect” or because you have found some other difficulty. You may have misjudged them. It may be something they want to improve. You may be missing out on a lot more that is good. If someone seeks you out, give that person the same kind of consideration that you would hope others will give you.

During this time of possibilities, one must continue in the Step 1 preparation process. We can always become a better person for our mate. There are no shortcuts to finding a good one. If we do something clever to make them think we are a better person than we really are, we will pay for it when the truth is discovered. Developing a life-long relationship is all about telling the truth. God promises to reveal all of our secrets on the Day of Judgment (Ecclesiastes 12:14; Romans 2:15; 1 Corinthians

5:5). But a spouse will find out most of them before that. When a lie is discovered, the result is almost always worse than if the truth had been told from the beginning. Similarly, one should flee from a relationship where one finds oneself being lied to. Yes, there is a time to forgive a person for lying to you. But when a person finds themselves continually lied to about important matters, no matter whatever good qualities the other may have, it is time to break off the relationship until that other person prepares for marriage.

Stage 3: Actively looking for a spouse

Stage 3 is for people who spend some number of years in Stage 2 and are still single. We are all different. Some people make the mistake of trying to get married too soon and being too willing to accept almost anyone who says “*I love you*”. But others enjoy their single life and are overly concerned about what could go wrong in a marriage. They may be very accomplished people themselves, but they also have a detailed list of what they expect in a spouse and are not going to marry until they find someone that fits every qualification. These people need Stage 3.

Stage 3 may be needed for many other reasons. Some people simply do not meet enough people in Stage 2. Others have unusual personalities which makes them hard to match up. Still others may have physical or mental handicaps, which make them less desirable.

Whatever the cause may be, all Stage 3 people share the common problem of being unable to find a mate from the more casual approach of Stage 2. **It will be up to each person in Stage 3 to determine the causes of their continued singleness, and to do something about them.** It may not always be easy, but changes will need to be made if a marriage needs to take place. Many older single persons try to keep doing what they have been doing to find a mate—and are not willing to consider that it might be ineffective. One of the best ways to get help is through honest friends that sincerely want to help you.

Often, the reason a person thinks they are not married is not at all, or maybe even opposite of, the reason they are not married. This writer once met a single millionaire who thought maybe he needed to make his “second million” before he got married. The truth was he needed to spend less time on his business interests and more time interested in others. At the opposite extreme, this writer was asked to help find a wife by a man who owned about 15 semi-trailers full of scrap metal on his property, but did not have a dwelling—he slept in his car. I suggested he would be more likely to attract a wife if he sold his scrap metal and used the proceeds to get a dwelling on his property. He did not want to sell it until the price went higher. I told him he would need to choose what was more valuable to him: a wife or his scrap metal.

Stage three is the process of identifying the things in your life that are making it difficult to find a spouse, and then making a definite plan to change them—no matter how difficult that may be.

Here are some reasons to consider and suggested solutions.

- a) **Too shy.** Some simply lack the confidence to pursue others or to respond to someone else’s pursuit. Many of these people should marry, because they are peaceful, non-demanding people and easier to get along with. Pray for confidence every day. Write down Scriptures about marriage and realize it is something God wants for you. Read them daily. Set a goal to attend a certain number of social events a month. Set goals to ask certain people to events—or to respond to everyone who asks you (barring those you consider dangerous).
- b) **Too selfish.** Set a goal to do a certain number of good things for others for which you expect no return. Try to make one new friend per month who does not appear to be useful in some way. Make a point to learn about them, not tell them about you. Get involved with

a church out-reach ministry.

- c) **Too busy with work, hobbies, sports or other activities.** Make a clear plan to limit some of these things. You will want to cut back so many hours per week. Replace them with activities that will bring you into contact with more people.
- d) **Totally unreasonable expectations.** Some people have checklists that go on for pages regarding the qualities of the person they would like to marry. This writer has asked some of them if they have ever met anybody anywhere, married or single, who had all of those qualities, and was told, “No!” When people are looking for a person so good that they do not exist, they are not being careful; they are making an excuse for being afraid of marriage. They need to apply the long list to themselves for their own improvement, and make a new very short list of only essential points for their potential spouse.
- e) **Unreasonable expectations for you.** It is not reasonable for an older, unattractive person with few financial resources and a serious health condition to expect to find a young, attractive, healthy spouse with lots of money. We will not say that God never does this, but most good marriages are between people with similar amounts of overall capability. It is rare for somebody with mostly “plusses” in life to marry somebody with lots of “minuses”. When it does happen, breakups are more likely. However, marriages between people with complementary “minuses” often do work. For example, a very attractive woman may have three rebellious teens from a previously failed marriage. Attractive men many not want to take on that responsibility, because they can find someone else. But she may marry an unattractive man who is kind and

willing to work with her children. If you have “minuses” in your life that you cannot easily change—such as physical handicaps or medical conditions—realize that this will affect who is willing to marry you, but you can compensate by developing other qualities. Pray and work with what God has given you.

- f) **Obnoxious habit.** Many things fall into this category—it is worth thinking about. If your friends tell you a bad habit is keeping you from getting married, don’t make the excuse that you know someone else with the habit that is married. Change yourself for the better so you will be desirable to others.
- g) **Too boring of a person to attract others.** Deliberately do uncomfortable things to make yourself more interesting. Read good jokes or funny stories from the Internet or newspaper and share them with others, start an unusual hobby and tell others about it, ask others you do not know well about themselves.
- h) **Too unattractive.** This problem is rarity. Most people spend too much time and money trying to make themselves attractive to the opposite sex and do not concentrate on more important things. This point is not for people who wished everyone at school/work would notice them everyday. This is for people who are almost never attracted to anyone of the opposite sex. If you realize that your facial features, height, weight or body shape make it difficult to be attractive to others, it is reasonable to do what you can with makeup, clothes, and a positive attitude to attract some attention. The goal is not to attract the wrong kind of attention, but good attention. This writer knows of a young woman who had a rather plain face, dressed in modest Christian attire, had a good

job, and was “everybody’s friend”, but for years no men where ever interested in her as a woman. One summer she switched to a fancy hair style and wore shorts and a tank-top when appropriate. In about a year, she was married to a fine Christian man who had not taken notice of her previously. There is nothing wrong with physical attraction—but it must be used for good. If this woman did not have so many other good qualities, improving her appearance probably would not have worked the same for her.

The key to Stage 3 is to make marriage a high enough priority in one’s life that it becomes a reality. If that means changing ingrained habits, earning more money, earning less money or doing less of things you like to do, it is worth it. There is nothing else like marriage and the creation and molding of a new human life.



Stage 4: Steady dating

When one has been honestly considering another to become their life-time partner, a serious conversation is in order. While surprise engagements may be the stuff that romance books and videos are made out of, they do not allow for making joint plans with family and friends. Marriages do not just affect the couple involved. They affect each person’s family, each person’s friends and each person’s church (if they are different). These groups can all give vital input that the couple should consider before engagement. Couples need a chance to talk everything out before they make a commitment.

Some Christian writers are opposed to steady dating—they recommend going from an uncommitted state directly to an engagement. However,

the reality is that couples need to spend a lot of time with each other before the formal step of engagement. And even those who do not technically believe in “steady dating” usually end up seeing only each other for some number of months right before the engagement. So, regardless of the terminology, a potential bride and groom need to learn everything they can about each other before they make a commitment.

Some of those things include:

- a) Relationship with God and religious history
- b) What each likes and does not like about his/her potential life partner
- c) Educational experience and plans for the future
- d) Work experience and goals for the future
- e) Views of how a marriage should function—the decision making process
- f) Desire for children and plans to raise them
- g) Other goals for the future
- h) Means of keeping and organizing a home
- i) Family history
- j) Political philosophy
- k) Entertainment, hobbies, recreational preferences
- l) Tastes in music, movies, literature, art, etc.
- m) A summary of previous sexual relationships, if any
- n) Type and cost of wedding you might hope to have

Even though the Bible may have specific teachings on some of the above subjects, the man and woman still must go over their understanding of those teachings and how they will apply them in their marriage. Sometimes, one person in a marriage attempts to be the only one who can speak for the teaching of the Bible and the will of God in the marriage—that rarely works. Agreement is necessary—even if it means that one person simply defers to the other in certain areas.

For example, the Bible does not say much about romantic/sexual practices before marriage. Is one kiss all right? What about an hour of kissing? Leviticus 18 talks about not exposing the nakedness of another person, but what about touching? The

overwhelming teaching of the Bible is to reserve sexual intercourse for marriage; the overwhelming teaching of human experience is people who try to get as close as they can to it without doing it, often end up going all the way. Couples should make their own guidelines, which they pledge not to violate, and stick to them.

Some decide that they do not want to hug, kiss, or lay/sit on each other until their engagement or even their wedding day. Some who are greatly concerned about their passions may even promise not to be alone together in a secluded place. More commonly, a couple will agree to certain limitations while steady dating, and then accept extended kissing and closeness while engaged. Rarely, one person may have serious questions about whether or not the other has any interest in a physical relationship. In those rare cases, it is probably best to include more kissing and hugging in the plan. (This writer knows of both men and women who married mostly for mostly economic reasons. They hid their disdain for a physical relationship under the guise of Christian modesty. This is fraud and the marriages ended in divorce—it would have been better for the problem to have been discovered in the engagement.) This writer knows of many young couples who have set guidelines and stuck to them—and had an enjoyable time of dating, engagement and marriage; in a few cases, when they decided not to marry, they still had their purity to share with someone else.

If a couple discusses all of the above points and finds themselves agreeing on everything, somebody probably is not telling the truth. One should expect differences, but the ability to come to a solution when there are differences is far more important. One Christian couple, after just arriving home from their honeymoon, got into an argument as to whether or not a mayonnaise jar should go in the refrigerator. They both had technical reasons why they thought they were right. Beyond that, he said he was the husband and head of the house; but she said she was in charge of the kitchen and it was her domain. They were not poor—they could have

bought another jar and kept one in each place. Fortunately, they both realized that if they could not learn to make peace on this issue, they would have a much bigger struggle on important issues.

Couples need to learn how to deal with each other on a daily basis. What can they do that makes the other happy? Give gifts, talk, do activities together, write encouraging notes? What are the signs that the other person is upset? What are the best ways to help the other when that happens? Do I have characteristics that cause major difficulties for the relationship?

The period before the engagement is often a wonderful time of good feeling looking forward with great anticipation to the engagement and the marriage. Enjoy it. But an enduring relationship will also require the couple to talk about and resolve serious matters, both among themselves and with their families. It is time to meet each other's families at this point in the relationship—even if it is only by phone or e-mail. Whether they will be for the marriage or against the marriage, it is better to communicate sooner than later. The couple will have to deal with the family members eventually. It is fair to involve them at this stage so everyone knows what they are getting into.

The Bible does not address most of today's engagement and wedding traditions, such as rings, announcements, wedding location, etc. Should the couple spend a lot of money on these things or save it for essential things they will need later in life? The answer is, again, the couple needs to work these things out among themselves and their families as to which traditions they will follow and how much they will spend on each.

If the couple can come to agreement on the issues herein, and still love each other, an engagement is the important next step.

Stage 5: Engagement

In the Bible, engagements or "betrothals" are serious things. Engaged people are referred to as "husband" and "wife" and breaking

off the engagement is like a divorce (Matthew 1:18-20). In that Scripture, Joseph thought he had to "put away" Mary because she was pregnant, even though he had never been intimate with her. Indeed, the breaking of an engagement today should only be done for some similar serious issue—or some kind of fraud (a person claimed not to have been previously married or claimed to be able to have children when the reverse is actually true).

While there are many examples of marriages arranged by parents in the Bible, there is no biblical command for parents to choose spouses for their children, nor is there any command for a young person to marry whom their parents choose. Rather we find the responsibility placed on the man, with agreement by the woman:

"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24).

"This is what the LORD commands concerning the daughters of Zelophehad, saying, 'Let them marry whom they think best, but they may marry only within the family of their father's tribe'" (Numbers 36:6). [They were required to marry within their tribe because they had no brothers, so they had a land inheritance.]

Even so, the command to honor one's parents (Exodus 20:12) should be an integral part of any marriage decision. If the parents have the children's best interests at heart, the children should be listening. On the other hand, some parents have selfish motives—they want their child to marry someone wealthy, someone in a certain family or someone they can control. Ultimately, it is the couple who will be responsible to God for keeping their marriage vows, so they must evaluate the advice given and act accordingly. If they believe parental advice to be erroneous, they would do well to compare it with the advice of older believers who know them.

Engagements are a time to begin to think and work together like a single unit. They are a time to pray together and read the Bible together. They must plan a wedding and make future plans

for the bride and groom's new home together. They are a test as to whether or not the two can work effectively together in complex situation, with deadlines, and sometimes with many relatives each with their own idea of what should or should not be done in the wedding. It is a very important time for the couple to commit to peacefully making those decisions.

This article will give not advice on wedding ceremonies, honeymoons or anything of the sort. But it will guarantee that it is best for the couple to concentrate on doing these things in peace and harmony, rather than each getting their way or on satisfying some relative. If relatives (usually the bride's parents) volunteer to pay for a significant part of the wedding, the couple should be careful to ask about any conditions attached—will the parents insist on doing certain things a certain way, or else refuse to pay? If there are conditions, the couple needs to decide if they can accept them or if they need to have the wedding without the relatives help. It might pay to put some of these things in writing, to remind the supporting relatives, if they try to take control of the wedding contrary to what they promised. These situations are not fun, but they are the stuff that real life brings upon us all at times.

In some relationships, people want to marry so bad that they are artificially nice to the other person throughout the dating/courtship period. They are nearly always pleasant and willing to do things the other person's way without a complaint. But later, they become a very different, much more difficult person. This may be thought out, or it may simply be a learned pattern of getting what they wanted from others. Sometimes this changed behavior occurs after the engagement—when there is a tendency to think my spouse is now "stuck with me". People have related to this writer how the first time they were ridiculed, ignored, yelled at or hit was shortly after the engagement.

When this phenomenon occurs, it is not necessary to immediately end the engagement; the offender may be willing to change. But the problem **must be** dealt with! If the offending person is ever going to

be married, they must come to grips with the problem. Taking time for them to understand it and attempt to resolve it is essential—even if it requires delaying the wedding date. If the person utterly refuses to acknowledge or to change, this is a good reason to end the engagement. You do not want to marry or raise children with someone who puts on a false good behavior for months, changes to be much more difficult, and cannot recognize it.

And finally, couples must resist the temptation to have sex during the engagement period. If a long engagement period was planned, and they cannot wait, they should shorten it. The purpose of the engagement is to plan a wedding and be sure that the couple is ready for marriage. Sometimes, a man and woman discover good reasons why they should not marry and break off the engagement. These are reasons they did not understand when they both agreed to be engaged. But if they have had a sexual relationship or a pregnancy during the engagement, they are left with two choices, **both bad**: 1) get married anyway—even though they know it is a mistake or 2) enter the same troubled world of people who have had premarital sex—the fact that it was during an engagement will not make it any better!

Stage 6: Marriage

Marriage is largely a matter of continuing those things discussed in previous stages, but now question, “How do we solve this problem together?” must completely replace the question of “Do I still want to marry this person?” The added joy of complete physical intimacy should cover over a multitude of difficulties. The Scripture teaches that intimacy should continue, except for an agreed upon time of fasting and prayer (1Cor 7:5). The first year of marriage should never include some long time of separation between husband and wife:

“When a man has taken a new wife, he shall not go out to war or be charged with any business; he shall be free at home one year, and bring happiness to his wife whom he has taken” (Deut 24:5).

For a Christian marriage to work, each person must continue to seek God through prayer, Bible study and fasting. There is no substitute for a relationship with Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Beyond that the best advice for dealing with a Christian marriage comes from the Scripture:

Don't be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, and making music to the Lord in your hearts. And give thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 5:18-20, NLT).

While the scripture mentions only wine, any kind of substance abuse or addiction usually ruins a marriage? Why? Addictions are an effort to escape reality rather than deal with it. For example, a person can be depressed because they do not have a job, may seek alcohol to forget about this difficulty rather than seek the Holy Spirit to overcome the depression and do what is necessary to seek a job. When a single person suffers a severe addiction, they frequently are unable to provide for their own needs—and the disasters caused by that sometimes cause them to seek help for the addiction. However, a married person with a severe addiction will usually not be doing their share of the work to support the marriage. The non-addicted spouse may provide their needs anyway, enabling their addiction to last much longer. They may be embarrassed about the addiction, and help to cover it up rather than get help to end it. They frequently endure it till they give up and want a divorce.

Sometimes, a person can be driven to addiction by a mate who is completely dysfunctional in some area and who refuses to change. In that case, both husband and wife need to recover.

The solution stated is clear: a filling of the Holy Spirit, a positive attitude, and thankfulness to God for what we have. The Scripture mentions singing songs. Today, many people do not sing themselves, but play recorded music. That will probably work

about the same if you play positive music honoring God, as opposed to love songs that are frequently about unmarried sexual relationships.

And further, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ (Ephesians 5:21, NLT).

There are times for both husband and wife to submit to the other. When one partner is dealing with their own personal needs, their own relatives or other issues with which they are most familiar the other one ought to submit to them. Both are made in the image of God and saved by Jesus Christ. They were able to manage their own affairs before the marriage. One member of a marriage cannot always control the other.

For wives, this means submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For a husband is the head of his wife as Christ is the head of the church. He is the Savior of his body, the church. As the church submits to Christ, so you wives should submit to your husbands in everything (Ephesians 5:22-24, NLT).

Notice that this command is written to wives, not to husbands. It is not a command to husbands to make their wives submit to them—or to pass laws requiring such. There are no such commands in the Bible. Rather women are commanded to voluntarily submit to their husbands, just as the Church must voluntarily submit to Christ. If one looks at the New Testament, or later church history, the Church did not always do a very good job of submitting to Christ. So men should not be alarmed if wives do not submit to them. They can still lead their wives as they are ready to accept it, just as Christ leads the church as it accepts Him.

Wives do need to take notice here. When God has given a leadership role to husbands, you will not be successful in trying to take it away. You will only find contentment and happiness by learning to respect and cooperate with your husband. This does not mean that you need to follow him in things that are contrary to Scripture, but that is rarely an issue. It does mean that you need to submit to him when you think you have a

better way or when you just don't feel like it. God will certainly judge your life by how well you cooperated when cooperation was possible.

For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her to make her holy and clean, washed by the cleansing of God's word. He did this to present her to himself as a glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish. Instead, she will be holy and without fault. In the same way, husbands ought to love their wives as they love their own bodies. For a man who loves his wife actually shows love for himself. No one hates his own body but feeds and cares for it, just as Christ cares for the church (Ephesians 5:25-29, NLT).

Men, this is a very tall order. To love as Christ love requires continual prayer and seeking of the Holy Spirit. Christ died for us while we were sinning against Him (Rom 5:8). A man is required to love his wife even when she is sinning against him. Over the long term, women do not respond well to harsh treatment. They do respond to love. That is how Christ will make his wife ready, and Christian men can do the same. Men who degrade their wives or cheat on them can expect to reap no end of difficulty from them. Husbands try this for a few years—pray to have the love of Christ for your wife, and see what kind of changes occur.

Women need to realize that they cannot make their husband love them—either by nagging them about it or by bribing them with various kinds of seduction. A woman must escape a seriously abusive husband, but lacking that, she is best to deal with his inadequacies through prayer and submission. Women should not make the mistake of coveting or comparing their husband to other women's husbands who seem to be more loving.

And we are members of his body. As the Scriptures say, "A man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one." This is a great mystery, but it is an illustration of the way Christ and the church are

one. So again I say, each man must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband (Ephesians 5:30-33, NLT).

Husbands and wives utterly must think of themselves as operating as a single unit—each with their own mind and abilities, but operating together as a team. This is how Christ and the Church operate. He is in heaven, but the Church is on earth. More Bibles have been produced than any other book on earth, and its message has been carried to the world. When husbands and wives work against each other, little good results.

Of course, one key is for the husband to love the wife—to think about what she needs, not about what she could do that is convenient for the husband. This writer has frequently been appalled at men who say numerous mean things about their wives—and then go on to complain that she isn't interested in sex with them any more. The other key is for the wife to respect the husband. This writer has also been amazed to hear wives frequently talk about the faults of their husbands—either real or imagined—and then wonder why their husbands fulfill their predictions and accomplish little.

Even when God does not bless a marriage with children, it is still an illustration of the relationship between Christ and the Church, and should be conducted in a godly manner. Single people need to see examples of how good husbands and wives treat each other, so they can visualize the way Christ will deal with his wife at His return (Revelation 19:7; 21:9) When husbands and wives offend each other, they should not ignore the issue or hold grudges. They can certainly use Christ's formula for dealing with all offenses:

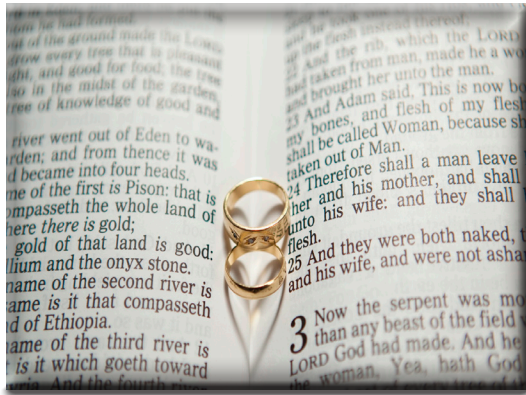
"Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' And if he refuses to hear them, tell

it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector" (Matthew 18:15-17).

This is a formula recommended by numerous marriage books and counselors. First, the two should try to work out their problems alone. If that fails, then get a couple of witnesses involved. If one does not have friends that can help, plenty of marriage counselors will work for varying fees. This step makes sure that the arguments are clearly understandable and reasonable. If there are facts in dispute, these witnesses may be able to determine them. Many people will reconcile before getting to this step because they know their argument would look foolish to others. Finally, one's local church could get involved in making a judgment about what should be done. Unfortunately, most church congregations do not normally do this—even though they know the couple best and could learn a lot themselves from hearing the case and rendering a Biblical judgment. Such decisions are usually made by the church pastor or a secular family court—not in accordance with scripture. The Bible teaches that believers should make such judgments, rather than going to court with unbelievers (1 Corinthians 6:1-11).

If a person will not hear the council of the brethren—or whatever entity is taking its place—Christ said to regard him as an unbeliever. This is significant in that 1 Corinthians 7:10-17 states a believer is "not in bondage" to an unbelieving spouse who departs from their marriage.

Does that mean that the New Testament permits divorce? Yes, it does. But before anyone runs out to get a divorce, they need to realize that it is only when one's spouse is an unbeliever who departs—and it seems that only a group of believers have the authority to make that decision. Even the apostles Paul and John did not of their own declare flagrant sinners unbelievers, but instructed local congregations to put them out of their congregation (1 Corinthians 5:4-5; 3 John 1:9-12). Furthermore, everyone needs to know that a divorce is a very difficult



solution—it is never a blessing and rarely an improvement for husband, wife or children.

The Old Testament clearly allows a man to write a bill of divorce to his wife (Deuteronomy 24:1-4); even God did it with the nation of Israel that disobeyed him (Jeremiah 3:6-8). But did Christ change that law to eliminate divorce in the New Testament? Many people think so. Sadly, though, they think he did it in the Sermon on the Mount, which begins by stating it is not a change in the law (Matthew 5:17-18). In that sections, Christ says a person who hates is like one who murders (v 21-22) and one who lusts has committed adultery in his heart (v 28). He also mentions removing our eyes and hands to prevent ourselves from sinning. Fortunately, almost nobody thinks those statements were intended to be enacted into law—else we would have many dead and maimed Christians. In the same message, Jesus also said:

“Furthermore it has been said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery” (Matthew 5:31-32).

Christ’s message was full of the spiritual intent of the law. Every believer should strive to avoid lust, hating ones neighbor and divorce—even when those things require diligently seeking God for the necessary great spiritual strength. It is more fully explained here:

The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?” And He answered and said to them, “Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.” They said to Him, “Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?” He said to them, “Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery.” His disciples said to Him, “If such is the case of the man with his wife, it is better not to marry.” But He said to them, “All cannot accept this saying, but only those to whom it has been given: “For there are eunuchs who were born thus from their mother’s womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake. He who is able to accept it, let him accept it” Matthew 19:3-12).

The Pharisees were asking Jesus about “no-fault” divorce (“for any reason”); an issue that still differs among the states of the USA today. Throughout history, courts of men have struggled with the issue of when they should allow divorce. Of course, those questions are most frequently asked by men and women who do not want to be faithful, but who want a reason to abandon their present relationship for someone they think is better. God says he hates that (Malachi 2:13-17). Christ states that the spiritual purpose of marriage was to stay together. Because of hard-hearted unbelievers, divorce was allowed. As we saw in 1 Corinthians 7,

above, some believers end up married to hard hearted unbelievers who want to depart. This is the condition where the Christian might divorce—when a spouse is an unbeliever, departed and hard-hearted.

The disciples found it scary to marry under those conditions. Christ explains, just as in Matthew 5, this is not a change to the law, but it is something for those who can accept it. Those who have the Holy Spirit will be able to love and respect even a difficult spouse in a way that others might not, and thereby save them (1 Corinthians 7:16). Believers should be learning the forgiveness and faithfulness of Christ in dealing with a difficult spouse. Unbelievers may stay in marriages mostly when they are a net “plus” for themselves.

Finally, Matthew 5 and 19 both make clear that divorce is acceptable for the believer when the spouse is having sex outside of the marriage. Even God did that when Israel deserted him for idols (Jeremiah 3:6-8). This brings us back full circle to the need to stay sexually pure the entire time before marriage. Once the habit of immorality is established, it is difficult to break, even in a good marriage. And it is a great destroyer of marriages.

May God pour out his blessings on everyone who seeks and teaches His ways in marriage. He is faithful to us. We must be faithful to Him and faithful to our spouses and families.

More to Come

Of course marriages eventually bring children. We refer you to the beginning of this article series for help with that great blessing. They are available on the Internet at <http://shepherdsvoicemagazine.org> or from the publisher (see page 2).

Additional writings of this author on love, marriage and sex are available at <http://www.cbtm.info/marriage/index.html>

Next time: Children of God Part 10 – Godly Grandparenting

East Tennesseans Launch New Church of God Congregation in Knoxville

First sermon makes plea to reach out to people “right here in our community”

A small core of Sabbath-keeping East Tennesseans have launched a new congregation in Knoxville, Tennessee under the stewardship of Shepherd Voice Magazine’s very own Dr. Bruce E. Horne. After decades of service in the Church of God, including his most recent tenure with the Sevierville-based Church of God Worldwide Ministries as an elder, television presenter and president of its evangelistic association, Dr. Horne has stepped out with his wife Janet and other sisters and brothers in Christ to form the “Church of God Knoxville.”

The first church service, attended by 12 persons, was held Saturday, January 4, 2014. In fitting manner, Dr. Horne gave a sermon entitled, “I Will Build My Church.” Dr. Horne began by asking the fundamental questions concerning the definition, function, and purpose of the church. Said Dr. Horne in his introduction: why a church here at Knoxville, Tennessee. Why? So we can get together and enjoy each other’s fellowship, have snacks afterwards, cake and cookies and wonderful potluck meals? Well sure, that’s part of it. But there’s so much more than that.

Using scripture, Dr. Horne went on to explain that the true church is a “group of called out individuals” who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ. He explained that the church’s function is two-fold: 1) to make disciples of all nations; and 2) to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of God.

[We are] called out to do what? To be what? To be an evangelizing organism. An entity that goes out into the world and make disciples of all nations; baptizing them into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; teaching them all the things that Jesus taught his core group of disciples. It’s simple. This is not a complicated formula.

In addition to starting a multi-media ministry intended to reach out to the world, Dr. Horne also besought the Knoxville brethren to become involved “right here in our community with people who need our help.”

So often the churches of God are isolationists. They have their own in-groups. And that’s all they do. We don’t want to do that. We want to reach out to those in need. Preaching the gospel is primary. Feeding the flock is derivative. But reaching out to all of those whom God calls, or may call or simply have need in our community are things we hope and pray God gives us the means to do.

Dr. Horne concluded the church's inaugural sermon by stating that the church needs the support of those listening in the audience, on the internet or via DVD. He invited listeners from everywhere to join the Church of God Knoxville in their endeavor to do God's work.

In an interview with *Shepherd's Voice Magazine*, Dr. Horne describes his approach and the congregation's approach as "trunk of the tree." The congregation will consider new ideas and forms and discard others; but it will certainly hold on to the fundamental truths of the Church of God.

Church of God Knoxville congregant Cristina Tulbure, a resident of Knoxville who was raised a Seventh-Day Adventist in Romania, appreciates this approach.

"Bruce is very good at what he does, Ms. Tulbure said. "He loves speaking. He is willing to listen to others and is good with giving advice or help if needed."

The Church of God Knoxville may be small, but it has big aspirations. According to Dr. Horne, the congregation intends to record and produce DVDs and CDs of its sermons, start a new television program, and host an internet website with an extensive database of Bible lessons, news articles, essays, commentaries, sermons, and links to other Church of God resources.

"We are trying to get a new television show on the air in the spring," said Dr. Horne. "We will start out on public access and on the internet. Little by little, we will grow this small group."

While the church is working diligently to establish a permanent website, one does not have to wait to view the

church's first seven sermons. They are posted on the church's temporary website, <http://www.oureivillage.com/cogkt/>. Sermon topics include "In Search of a Strong Man," "I Am That I Am," "Repent," "The Omega Point," and "Fruits of the Spirit."

The congregation has chosen for a meeting place the Super 8 Knoxville/Downtown/West located at 6200 Papermill Drive. The meeting room features a screen projector and television and desk-like tables with chairs facing the lectern, making for a classroom-style church format or even a more intimate setting if desired. Ms. Tulbure agrees. "My sons and I love this place," explained Ms. Tulbure. "It is easier to place our Bibles on the tables instead of holding them."



Bruce Horne (sitting at left) with another member of the new congregation


The congregation will hold Sabbath services at the same above-mentioned location each Sabbath (Saturday) at 2 p.m., and it welcomes any person who wishes to attend. In addition to holding weekly Sabbath services, the congregation intends to host the observance of the Passover as well as services on other biblical Feast days.

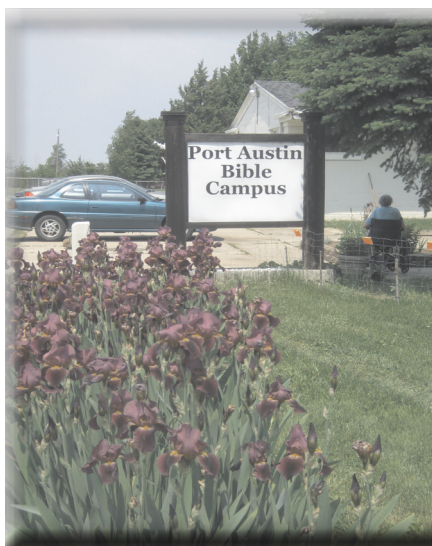
Dr. Horne will not be greedy with the church's pulpit. Properly-vetted

Church of God ministers, ministers in training, and even aspiring speakers are encouraged to make arrangements and visit the Marble City and give sermons or sermonettes at the Church of God Knoxville.

Traveling Sabbath-keepers would be happy to know that Knoxville, TN is conveniently situated at the crossroads of three major interstate highways, I-75, I-40 and I-81. Situated in an area where the Foothills of the Great Smokey Mountains give way to the Tennessee Valley, the Knoxville area has long acted as a nexus between the Midwestern region to the north and the Appalachian towns in the mountains to the south.

In the very own words of the church's temporary website, "If you are in the area on this or any Sabbath be sure to come and worship with us."

For more information concerning the Church of God Knoxville, you may write the Church of God Knoxville, 448 N. Cedar Bluff Road, Suite 207, Knoxville, Tennessee 37923 or email Dr. Bruce E. Horne at drbeh@yahoo.com, or call him at (423) 914-5475. 



PABC Provides 20,000 Bed- Nights

This July, our homeless ministry will have been in operations for four years. At this writing, we have had 255 Guests stay with us: 106 men, 89 women and 60 children. Their average length of stay is 80.1 days. A total of 20,421 bed-nights have been provided. (This is the sum of all the nights that all the people have stayed.) At present, we only have 12 people here, but more are planning to come.

It has been our experience that the greatest need for emergency housing occurs in early spring and late fall. Most people are slow to leave or to send somebody out in the cold of winter. (Michigan has had its coldest winter in decades, with the lakes having the greatest ice coverage in 35 years and an all-time record likely to be set.) But once the weather warms up, people who are in abusive situations, behind on their rent, staying with a friend where

they are not on the lease, and many other difficult situations will be looking for a new place to stay. The increase in homeless people during the fall is caused by people trying to get out (or put someone else out) of an unacceptable situation before the winter sets in.

During the last few months we have helped several people with severe illness. They are not severe enough to be hospitalized or live in a nursing home, but they would have a great difficulty living all alone. Most of these people have no family that can help them. Even though our nation's medical systems are trying to take care of the poor, there are so many places where things "slip through the cracks". For instance, an ambulance will take someone with a life-threatening condition to whatever hospital is best able to treat him. But when he is released from the hospital, there is no means of returning him to his home. Or, doctors can mandate a medicine schedule, but insurance or other payers can delay it by weeks—even if the patient has no means to pay to get it on time. We can help them with these genuine needs. People who stay with us may only be costing us a few dollars per day, but they might cost \$100 or more per day in any kind of medical institution.

Need for Christian Mentors

Most of our guests get jobs and move into their own apartments. A few leave to places that are probably not good for them, and a few are required to leave by us, for breaking our rules. If we had the staff, there is a lot more we could do for some of the troubled people. There are people whom we could accept, that we otherwise refuse.

We are down to only three staff members right now. We really need

a man and a woman who would like to spend their time helping people understand the laws of God that make a good life, the Love of Christ, and the power He can bring through baptism, repentance and the Holy Spirit. So much of our time is consumed with running the physical part of the mission. We teach Bible classes five days a week, but we do not have time for much one on one teaching.

If you or someone you know would consider becoming a mentor and Bible teacher at PABC, we would appreciate hearing from you. We would be grateful for someone who was able to spend three months, one year, or several years evangelizing the hundreds of people who stay with us. It is this kind of mission that gives the faith that we read about so many places in the Scriptures. Everyone works here on a volunteer basis, but part time work or PABC have always managed to cover the essential needs of our volunteers.

The Edwards and William Buckman have lived on the property here for nearly 10 years. There has never been a surplus of funds and there has always been a lot of debt, yet the ministry has always continued. Most of our debt is at 0% or some other very low rate. Even so, we still have over \$140,000 in short term debt. When one of our ongoing funding sources stops, it seems that another one opens up. We can afford some supplies for projects to keep some of our facilities from further deteriorating. We hope to have some more positive announcements for our next PABC Update.

If anyone is seriously praying and thinking about coming to PABC to assist us in our ministry, we would appreciate a call at 989-738-7774 or e-mail pabc@portaustin.net.

Church versus State Case Appeal Lost

On February 18, 2014, the Huron County Circuit Court heard our appeal of the Huron County District court case. This time, there was actual discussion of what I consider to be the real issue: Does a zoning apply to an unincorporated church? Most churches in the USA are corporations, and zoning applies to corporations, because they are created by the state and therefore regulated by the state.

ASK Norm!

continued from page 15

Jesus said that it is sometimes necessary to leave one's own family for the sake of the Gospel (Matthew 19:29; Mark 10:29-30).

So, Mary chose to stay with Jesus and His brothers and sisters chose to distance themselves from Jesus and Mary. Hence, Jesus asked John to take care of His mother as he was dying (John 19:26-27). Nevertheless, after the resurrection of Jesus, which Mary witnessed, and His brothers and sisters certainly had opportunity to witness, some of them became believers—even apostles (Galatians 1:19; 1 Corinthians 9:5).

February 7, 2014

Sir,

Enclosed is a small offering to help promote the gospel. I wish it could be more. But I just work part time.

It is just my opinion, but here it is.

What is the most important thing God wants you to DO???

This is more important than your personal Salvation.

You need to answer this question NOW. Like Now—today.

Unless you come to grips with this question, you are still on the sidelines. I won't tell you—you ought to know the answer.

Take care, Vic.

We brought up a number of entities to which zoning does not apply: Schools, various governments, utility right of ways, military bases, etc. All of these entities are regulated by some other branch of Government, so townships cannot control their land through zoning. We further stated that governments do not have any regulatory power over churches at all—there is no state or national agency governing them—so therefore they should not be subject to zoning either. The judge did not see it this

Dear Vic,

I realize you have been a *Shepherd's Voice Magazine* reader since its beginning and a *Servants' News* reader from its beginning in 1995. I realize that you have read and studied widely during these years. I hope that this "most important thing" is something that we might all learn from.

However, I am a little puzzled that you clearly state it is your opinion—not a direct revelation from God or an obvious conclusion from Scripture. Yet, you are not going to tell us what your opinion is, but expect us to figure it out—today! If either I or our readers tried to figure it out "today", we would have no way of knowing if we came up with your answer. In some ways, this reminds me of things little children say to tease others: "I've got a secret, you need to know it, but I'm not going to tell you what it is!" It frustrates the hearer and to some degree gives the speaker power over the hearer. I do not think this is an effective method of communicating the Gospel

I would encourage you to write again and share your opinion about the most important thing God wants us to do. It could be a blessing to many. Till then, I will leave our readers with a few verses of the NIV translation where Jesus discusses the most important commandment:

One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good

way, but stated that unincorporated churches do not have any rights at all because they are not recognized by the government in any way.

Unfortunately, we did not have a lot of the cases ready to present where unincorporated churches are recognized at law. We can ask Michigan Court of Appeals to hear our case, but they can decline. Nevertheless, that would be a much better court in which to win as it would set a binding precedent for the state. There is very little precedential value set by a favorable circuit court decision. We are still weighing our options as we go to press. ☹

answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:28-31, NIV).

If we set our hearts on this, and also realize "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4), we will certainly encounter everything that is important for us to do. ☹

Pentecost Reading Project

Seven "I am" statements from the Gospel of John

The Gospel of John contains seven statements in which Jesus proclaims that He is a certain thing. These "I am" sayings harken back to Exodus 3:13-15 where Yahweh revealed Himself as "I am that I am." Let us please count the seven sabbaths from the Days of Unleavened Bread to the Day of Pentecost by reading about the seven "I am" statements of Jesus in the Book of John, one statement each week. (The Day of Pentecost is Sunday, June 8, 2014).

1) "I am the bread of life"

John 6:32-51

Week ending April 26

2) "I am the light of the world"

John 9:1-7

Week ending May 3

3) "I am the door"

John 10:9-10

Week ending May 10

4) "I am the good shepherd"

John 10:11-18

Week ending May 17



<https://www.facebook.com/groups/461271183974574/>

5) "I am the resurrection"

John 11:17-26

Week ending May 24

6) "I am the way, the truth, and the life"

John 14:5-11

Week ending May 31

7) "I am the vine"

John 15:1-10

Week ending June 7

"And you shall count from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven full sabbaths shall they be, counting fifty days to the morrow after the seventh sabbath...And you shall make proclamation on the same day; you shall hold a holy convocation; you shall do no laborious work" - **Leviticus 23:15**

2014 Feast of Tabernacles Bermuda & Caribbean Cruise

*Sponsored by the Church of God Downers Grove
Pastor Ken Svebla*

9 night sailing out of Cape Liberty to Bermuda, St. Maarten, San Juan and Labadee.



For further information contact Amber Warrington
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For information on church services, contact Ken Svebla at mosaic2016@aol.com or 708-785-3651.

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Who: All members of the Churches of God

What: Feast of Tabernacles Bermuda & Caribbean Cruise (many activities geared toward singles)

When: October 9, 2014 departure from Cape Liberty , New Jersey

Inside Stateroom from \$1,005.56 per person

Promenade Stateroom from \$1,025.56 per person

Oceanview Stateroom from \$1,295.56 per person

Balcony Stateroom from \$1,435.56 per person

Above group prices include all taxes, fees, and gratuities. Prices are per person based on double occupancy. Triple and Quad staterooms are available. Please contact Kathy for pricing. Additional category staterooms are available at the current pricing.

Western Canadian 2014 Feast Site

Join us again this year for the Feast of Tabernacles 2014, from October 9-16 in Canada's "Napa Valley," at the city of Penticton in British Columbia's spectacular Okanagan Valley.

For Feast and accommodation information, go to <http://cogwebcast.com/>. You may contact Alex Kennedy at 204- 231-0555 or Jeff Patton at 250-716-1141 or email at cinnabarvista@gmail.com for additional information.

The Western Canada Feast is sponsored by the Winnipeg Church of God and other participating ministries. All are welcome.



Shepherd's Voice Magazine®

Winter, 2014

Shepherd's Voice Magazine®
PO Box 474
Port Austin, MI 48467-0474
USA

Periodical Postage paid,
USPS 016-995,
at
Plainfield, Illinois
and additional
mailing offices

