

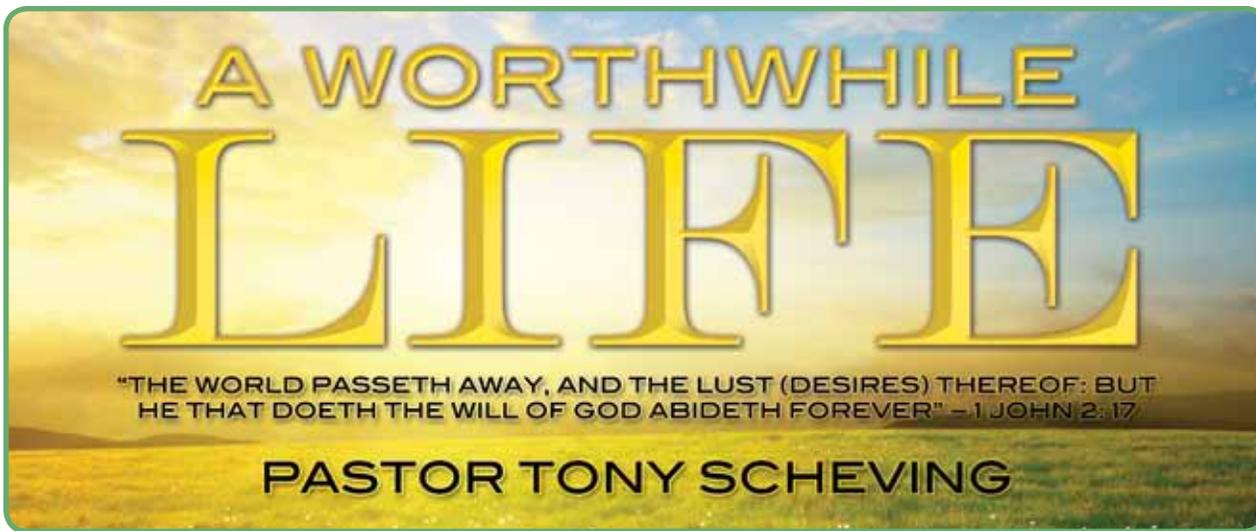
SPIRITUAL INSIGHT FOR YOUR LIFE

FAITH *for life*

*“The **life** which I now live...I live by the **faith** of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” Galatians 2:20*

Complimentary Copy

Volume 5, Issue 1 • from the Ministry of Fargo Baptist Church • Spring Edition, 2012



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In 2002, the British Broadcasting Corporation televised the “100 Greatest Britons of All Time.” It boggles the mind to think of great Englishmen of the past, such as the Duke of Wellington who defeated Napoleon at Waterloo, Sir Ernest Shackleton who went to the South Pole, Charles Dickens (*A Christmas Carol*), William Shakespeare, Sir Isaac Newton, King Arthur, and Oliver Cromwell. But the most beloved Englishman of all time was the fearless leader who helped to save the United Kingdom from the fierce German war machine of Adolf Hitler in WW II. He was a short, heavy and homely man by the name of Winston Churchill. At the same time, there lived a leader in Russia by the name of Joseph Stalin who has gone down in history as the most hated man of all time for ruthlessly murdering millions of his own countrymen. Both of these men left behind a legacy. But your name doesn’t have to be Churchill, Stalin, Clinton, Bush or Obama to leave behind a legacy. We’re all going to do so! The question is, “What kind of a legacy

will we leave behind?” How will we impact our little ‘corner of the world’ before we exit into eternity?

If you read the current headlines to find out what the rich and famous are up to, you’ll read about who’s been kicked off the latest idol show, who’s the latest dance star, who’s cheating on their spouse, who’s getting a divorce, who’s having plastic surgery, who’s making a sex video, who’s posing nude, who’s in line for an Oscar, and so on. A few weeks from now, nobody will care. All this drivel seems as shallow as a bird bath in light of the ‘bigger picture’. Even after winning three Super Bowl rings, New England Patriots quarterback Tom

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FAITH *for life*

Brady said, "There's got to be more to life than this... this isn't what it's all cracked up to be." The average person is looking for some type of greater purpose and meaning to life.

Divine Foundation

A worthwhile life begins with our Creator God. He's the divine foundation. Life is not about getting an education, earning a degree, getting a career, making money, buying things, building up materialism and living a comfortable life. Those things are all fine, but they're not the reason we were put on planet Earth. The Bible says, "*Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created*" (Rev 4:11). We were put on planet Earth by God to carry out what He created us to do. Many years ago, singer Billy Joel sung "This is My Life," but the truth of the matter is that our life is a gift from God designed to be lived for Him. We're breathing God's air, eating His food, drinking His water and so on. We owe our very existence to six inches of God's topsoil. It's all about God! We were made by God, and for God. We need to die to the 'idol of self'. The popular movies, songs, seminars, books and magazines send the message of looking within yourself, believing in yourself, trusting in yourself, and doing what's best for yourself. No wonder people are so miserable. God tells us to 'die to self', and live for Him and others. Until we get a hold of this, life makes no sense at all.

God says, "*I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps*" (Jeremiah 10:23). We might think that we're doing fine on our own, but by whose definition of 'fine'? You can be a 'raving success' by the world's standard, but not God's. The Bible says, "*There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death*" (Proverbs 14:12). The Bible also adds, "*The heart is deceitful above all things... who can know it?*" (Jeremiah 17:9). In a nutshell, mankind doesn't know what it is doing. There are currently around 250 major colleges of psychology and psychiatry and they all disagree with each other. Many years ago, Pontius Pilate asked Jesus Christ, "*What*

is truth?" (John 18:38). While praying to His heavenly Father, Jesus said, "*Thy Word is truth*" (John 17:17). God's Word tells us that you were created to have a relationship with Him. Many people flounder through life all confused with no real purpose because they bypass their Creator God.

Driving Factors

What 'drives' you? What motivates and inspires and propels you through life? Many live to make money or be successful. Others live for applause or approval. Still, others are driven by insecurely trying to prove something. Some live life in guilt trying to make up for something from their past which continues to haunt them. They are manipulated by memories and it's sabotaging their future. Moses lived like that for forty years. Still, others live with deadlines and pressure which continually drive them. Some live in a self-imposed prison with 'fear of failure'. Some people are driven by resentment, jealousy or unforgiveness. They rehearse 'the wrongdoing' over and over again in their heads. Then there are the many that live to acquire things. They earn in order to buy, but soon find themselves bored with the purchase. They believe the myth that more things mean more happiness. Yet Jesus said, "*Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth*" (Luke 12:15). Your value is not determined by your stuff.

So what drives you? The Jews of many years ago said, "*I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for naught (nothing), and in vain*" (Isaiah 49:4). Sadly, that's what many people do. Sadder yet, is the brevity of our time here on Earth. James said, "*For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away*" (James 4:14). What should be the driving factor in your life? To seek God, really know God, love God, and live to please Him.

Definite Function

You are no accident. Even if your parents didn't plan on your conception and birth, God did. Solomon was born as a result of an adulterous relationship between his parents that never should have happened. Yet God wasn't surprised with his birth and created

Solomon for the purpose of being the king over his people Israel. In the same way you were custom-made by God. King David said to God, "*I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made*" (Psalms 139:14). God gave you your personality, looks, talents, and abilities. He chose your parents and where you would be born. In fact, God had you in mind before He even created the world. The Bible says that God "*Hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world*" (Ephesians 1:4). You were born for a purpose; so, your life has significance.

Many years ago in Springfield, IL, a young Abraham Lincoln had just failed in business. He really wanted to be an attorney, but couldn't afford Blackstone's Commentaries, which were the cornerstone of practicing law at the time. The day he closed down his business, he purchased an old barrel full of blankets and junk for fifty cents from a peddler. That night as he was rummaging through the barrel, he discovered it contained Blackstone's Commentaries! He looked up to heaven and realized God had something for him to do! There are no accidents with God. God has a plan for every life. We will one day be amazed to find out what God had actually orchestrated in our own lives. The Bible says, "*For he performeth the thing that is appointed for me*" (Job 23:14). How would it change your life if you awoke every morning with your focus on God instead of yourself? Would it reshape the way you spend your time and money? Would you use your abilities differently to pursue more meaningful things?

What is your life all about? Sometimes you can tell what a person is focused on by looking at his car's bumper sticker. Others reveal their focus in life by the tattoo they wear. Still, others make a statement by the clothes they wear, the car they drive, the people they run with or their very posture and countenance. How do you view yourself and your life? Are you here on planet Earth for a few decades to party, seek entertainment, follow fads, or be successful? Life is a sacred trust. God has given us all certain intelligence, opportunities, possessions, and relationships. We have all been entrusted with certain God-given things which we are to manage properly. The Bible says, "*As every man hath received*

A Worthwhile Life

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the gift (talents or abilities), even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1Peter 4:10).

Life is a sacred trust and everything has eternal implications. A real Christian is on a mission from God.

Destination Forever

You may spend 75 or 85 years on this planet, but you'll spend billions of years in eternity. In fact, your soul, the real you, will live on forever long after your body has died. Picture in your mind a little sparrow picking up a grain of sand from the beach of the ocean and flying 250,000 miles to the moon to put it down; then flying back to the earth to get another grain of sand to take to the moon. By the time that bird finally moves all the sand from the earth to the moon, eternity will just be beginning. Every human being is a product of 'forever'. You are as eternal as the God who made you. You were made in '*His image*' (Gen 1:26-7). This life is simply a dressing room for eternity.

Jesus said, "*I say unto you my friends, be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him*" (Luke 12:4-5). One day, your heart will stop and that will be the end of your life here on Earth, but it won't be the end of you. In light of that fact, every person should consider what's really important. Next to eternity, this temporary world is petty, piddly, and pathetic. All of the trends and fashions are pretty superficial. People are all concerned about what is chic, in vogue, and politically correct. The talking heads of TV and radio split hairs over things that won't matter one day. None of the big events like the Super Bowl, World Series, nor Academy Awards will mean anything one day.

The Apostle Paul lost everything to follow the Lord and he said, "*I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung (manure), that I may win Christ*" (Philippians 3:8). We need to

stop thinking 'short-term'. Life's a very temporary assignment. The Bible reminds us to, "*Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear (of the Lord)*" (1Peter 1:17). Don't set your roots down twenty feet deep. Keep a loose grip on this life and your eyes upon eternity. The Bible says, "*For the fashion of this world passeth away*" (1Cor 7:31). The voice of God says to 'make your life count'. Live with less pride and more patience. Live

with less selfishness and more kindness. Live with less bitterness and more faithfulness. Most of all, establish a relationship with your Creator. Nothing else really matters without it. It all starts with seeking the Lord and finding Him in salvation. ■

For more information, please read pages 6-7, or go online and visit www.7stepstogod.org.

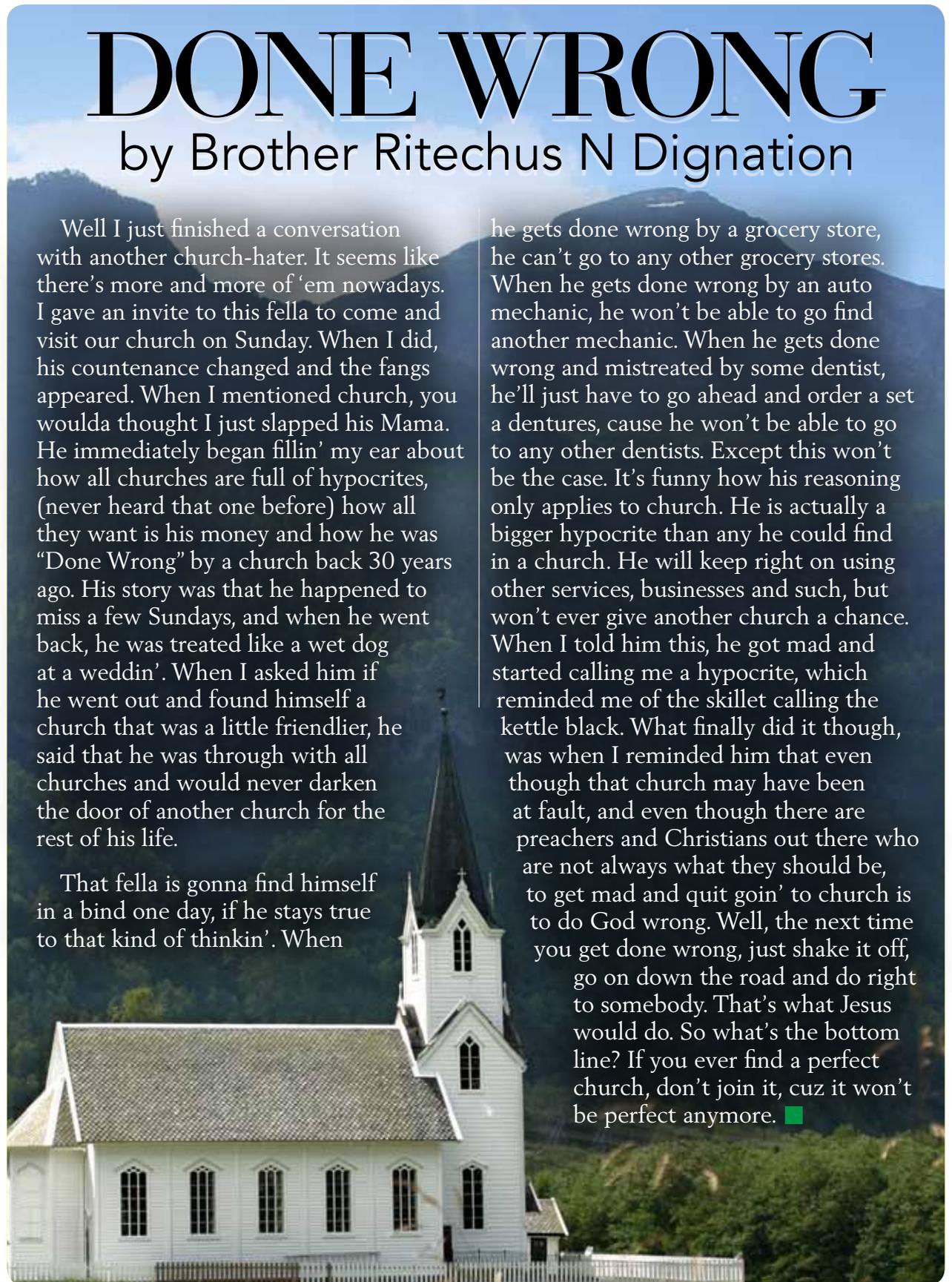
DONE WRONG

by Brother Ritechus N Dignation

Well I just finished a conversation with another church-hater. It seems like there's more and more of 'em nowadays. I gave an invite to this fella to come and visit our church on Sunday. When I did, his countenance changed and the fangs appeared. When I mentioned church, you woulda thought I just slapped his Mama. He immediately began fillin' my ear about how all churches are full of hypocrites, (never heard that one before) how all they want is his money and how he was "Done Wrong" by a church back 30 years ago. His story was that he happened to miss a few Sundays, and when he went back, he was treated like a wet dog at a weddin'. When I asked him if he went out and found himself a church that was a little friendlier, he said that he was through with all churches and would never darken the door of another church for the rest of his life.

That fella is gonna find himself in a bind one day, if he stays true to that kind of thinkin'. When

he gets done wrong by a grocery store, he can't go to any other grocery stores. When he gets done wrong by an auto mechanic, he won't be able to go find another mechanic. When he gets done wrong and mistreated by some dentist, he'll just have to go ahead and order a set a dentures, cause he won't be able to go to any other dentists. Except this won't be the case. It's funny how his reasoning only applies to church. He is actually a bigger hypocrite than any he could find in a church. He will keep right on using other services, businesses and such, but won't ever give another church a chance. When I told him this, he got mad and started calling me a hypocrite, which reminded me of the skillet calling the kettle black. What finally did it though, was when I reminded him that even though that church may have been at fault, and even though there are preachers and Christians out there who are not always what they should be, to get mad and quit goin' to church is to do God wrong. Well, the next time you get done wrong, just shake it off, go on down the road and do right to somebody. That's what Jesus would do. So what's the bottom line? If you ever find a perfect church, don't join it, cuz it won't be perfect anymore. ■



does God have first place

by Austin Wartner

“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”- Matthew 6:33

Tom Landry was the legendary coach of the Dallas Cowboys for 29 seasons. In that time frame, he won 2 Super Bowls, 5 NFC titles, 13 Divisional titles and compiled a 270-178-6 win-loss-tie record. He is listed 3rd in NFL history for the most wins as a coach. His most impressive feat, though, was that he coached the Cowboys to 20 consecutive winning seasons, a record still unbroken and unchallenged. Someone once asked Coach Landry about why he had been so successful in his career. He replied, “In 1958, I did something everyone who is successful must do; I determined my priorities in life; God, family...then football.” Coach Landry put to practice a principle we see in our text verse, “But seek ye first the kingdom of God...” Every person who claims to be a Christian must ask, “Does God Have First Place?” It’s an honest question requiring an honest answer.

One of the most disturbing trends in our nation is the removal of God out of the public arena. Our nation at one time put God in first place, but in many cases He’s been pushed into last place, if any place at all. Our founding fathers, though not perfect men, were God-fearing men who recognized they needed God’s help to establish our nation. Benjamin Franklin said, “God governs in the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an empire can

rise without His aid?” George Washington said, “It is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God and to obey His will.” These statements and others like them, made by our founding fathers, showed their dependence upon God. Yet, today, our society has come a long way from acknowledging God. This fact rouses a sense of frustration amongst those who claim to be Christians; yet maybe Christians should take a step back and ask themselves, “Does God have first place in my life?” How many self-acclaimed Christians skip church on a regular basis, or don’t pray, or don’t read their Bibles. How can Christians expect our society to put God in first place if they don’t?

The reason our nation is heading down a slippery slope of moral decline stems from those who claim to be Christians, yet don’t put God in His rightful place in their lives. The Bible says in II Chronicles 7:14, “*If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.*” Notice that God says, “My people” need to put Me first, seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways. God’s not talking to the anti-God, the anti-Christ, nor the anti-Bible crowds! God places the responsibility on His people, those who are Christians, and those who know Jesus Christ as personal Savior. The Bible says in I Peter 4:17, “*Judgment must begin at the house of God...*” If society is

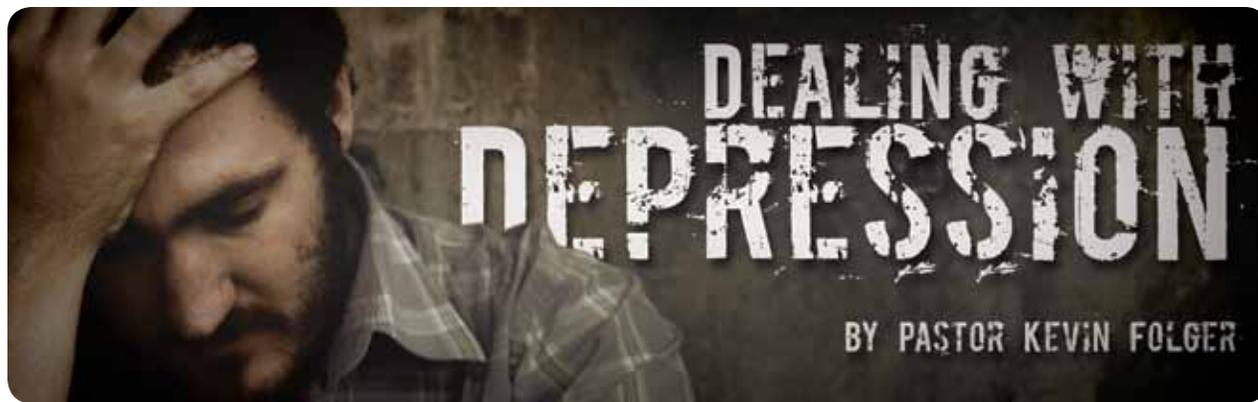
ever to place God first, it must start with Christians putting Him first.

The first of the Ten Commandments states, “*Thou shalt have no other gods before me*” (Exodus 20:3). A ‘god’ is anything put ahead of God. Too many times, Christians are guilty of this. We allow so many other things to clamor for our time and attention and God gets the back seat. Many people want God to bless them, yet how many are actually blessing God? God is not just a crutch we lean on when we need help. He is supposed to be the center of our existence out of which our lives flow.

Life is made up of decisions. In fact, every person is the product of the decisions he has made in the past. The decisions we make will determine the course of our future as well. Have we put God first in them? Do we consider His opinion or viewpoint? God’s wisdom surpasses that of mankind’s. The Bible says, “*O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.*” (Jeremiah 10:23). God has a vantage point we don’t have, so His understanding is infinite. Yet, why do so many who claim to be Christians question or rationalize away God’s Word and the principles found in it? Though people might not say it verbally, they do it through their actions and lifestyles. God wants to give us His best, and it starts by allowing Him to lead us in our decisions. God has promised that He will guide and instruct us: “I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye” (Psalm 32:8). He does this through His Word: “*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path*” (Psalm 119:105). God will never steer you wrong.

The main reason some who claim to be Christians do not put God first may be due to the fact they are not truly Christians. In other words, they’ve never been born again the Bible way. Jesus said, “*... Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God*” (John 3:3). When a person is born again, he places Christ first in his eternal destiny.

For a more extensive Bible study on this subject please go to pages 6-7 of this newspaper, or visit www.7StepsToGod.org.



One of my favorite passages in the Old Testament deals with David and his band of men living in a place called Ziklag.

The Bible records the details of David and his fellow soldiers returning from a long, three day journey; they were just about home and no doubt anxious to be reunited with their wives and children. As they crested the hill that lead to the town they called home, they were emotionally crushed because the town was smoldering and lay in ruins. Several thoughts probably ran through their minds. Perhaps those they loved and cherished were dead, tortured or taken as hostages. They ran into the city to discover that everything they held dear was gone. Their families were gone, their possessions were gone, and they were physically and emotionally spent. Grown men wept until they couldn't cry anymore. The Bible states the men were so discouraged that they spoke of stoning David. He was the one who led them away from their hometown to do battle with the neighboring nations. Now disaster had struck while they were gone. The entire band of 600 men was at the lowest ebb of their lives.

The Bible doesn't sugarcoat stories to make it sound like serving the Lord means a problem free life of pleasure with no hardships. Throughout the pages of Scripture we find some of God's great and choice servants dealing with discouragement and seasons of hardship and difficulty. Noah listened to God's call to build an ark in the desert, and yet he was brutally mocked and ridiculed by the multitude until the day God sent the flood upon the earth. Abraham listened to God and left

his homeland behind to uproot his family and move to Canaan! You would think everything would be great, but they were not there long before a serious famine hit the land. Joseph did what he was supposed to do in life. He obeyed his dad and believed his God-given dream that his life was meant to accomplish something big; yet his pain was immense. I have to believe that there were great moments of discouragement through some of the years of Joseph's life.

What about the great prophet Elijah? Here was a man who saw God sustain him for three and half years during great famine. God hid this prophet so well that evil Ahab and Jezebel weren't able to find him. Then at the appropriate moment God sent him into the open to confront the wickedness of Israel at Mount Carmel. It must have been quite a display of power when God struck the sacrifice with an avalanche of fire because of the simple prayer of Elijah. His adrenaline must have been rushing like a river! At his command, 850 false prophets of Baal died for misleading the people spiritually. The rain that had been withheld by the hand of God for three and one-half years fell when Elijah prayed, causing the draught to be lifted. However, the next day bitter Queen Jezebel's screamed for revenge and the head of Elijah on a platter. Fear entered into Elijah's heart and he ran for his life.

Coming to the New Testament we find many men and women who were busy serving God and doing a great work for Him. Yet in the midst of being faithful to God life took an ugly turn and they suddenly faced adversity. Shipwreck, prison, beatings, persecutions and other hardships are found throughout the pages of Scripture.

Not long ago, I had emergency surgery. Just before dealing with the operation I was inundated with a series of negative

things. They included heartbreaking family problems that someone in our church encountered and other good families leaving the church to pursue work out of state. Then right after my surgery it seemed like the devil himself went to work to seriously discourage some folks in our congregation. I was down physically from surgery, and I was down mentally from being physically hindered and not being able to do anything but sit and wait.

I actually think I dealt with some depression for a few days, but as I waited upon God and kept praying, little by little my fog lifted. That brings me back to the story of the band of soldiers talking about stoning David. The Bible states at the end of that chapter that David 'encouraged himself in the Lord'. Do you know what that means? It means David reached down inside his being and understood the promises of God that had been given to him and he claimed them anew. David trusted God in the midst of the fog and reminded God that He alone could help him. Then he got up and did what he knew was right to do! God did help him and it was not long before David saw God accomplish His great purpose of making him king. Sometimes when God has great things in store for us, the devil takes aim at our lives to attack with his darts of doubt, fear, and discouragement. That same David would go on to write many of the precious Psalms and speak of God's goodness in seeing us through trials.

The answer is always the same as James points out in his epistle: *"But (God) giveth more grace. Wherefore He saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you"* (James 4:6-8). I find that throughout the pages of Scripture the answer to discouragement is found in 'waiting upon the Lord'. It is also found in 'sitting at His feet', reading His Word and speaking to Him in prayer. Those things alone are powerful 'anti-depression' relief. God is able to do what no one else can do! God alone can lift the discouraged soul and we need to look to Him in those moments of frustration and heartache! He is there! ■

HOW TO FIND GOD AND REALLY KNOW HIM

GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION

There are three things that you can know for sure...

1) That you are going to Heaven. *"These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life"* (I John 5:13).

2) That your life will be changed when you get saved. *"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new"* (II Corinthians 5:17).

3) You will never lose your salvation. *"And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."* (John 10:28).

It all revolves around Jesus Christ!

Who is Jesus Christ? John 1:1 says, *"In the beginning was the Word (Jesus), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."* John 1:3 continues, *"All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made."* Jesus was God in flesh or God the son who created everything.

He came to earth to save us. *"For the son of man is come to*

seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). The first step in going to heaven is to realize we need to be saved from our sin.

How do we get to heaven?... *"Jesus answered and said unto him, verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God"* (John 3:3).

There is a difference between a physical birth and a spiritual birth. *"That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the spirit is spirit"* (John 3:6).

Why do we need a spiritual birth? Man was originally created a three part being in God's image—a trinity. *"And God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness: so God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them"* (Genesis 1:26). Man is made up of body, soul, and spirit.

God placed Adam and Eve in the garden. *"And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die"* (Genesis 2:16-17). Man ate of the fruit and though he didn't die that day physically, he died spiritually!

When Adam and Eve had children they were now born spiritually dead as well (no longer in God's 3-part image). Genesis 5:3 says *"And Adam lived an hundred and thirty years, and begat a son in his own likeness, after his image; and called his name Seth."* That is why we must be re-born spiritually.

That is also why we have a sin nature. You don't have to teach a toddler to be selfish, lie, steal things, sass back, fight

with siblings, etc...it is also our nature as we grow up.

Most people fail to see themselves as serious sinners. They feel they are a "good person." They are comparing themselves to others, instead of God's standard; the 10 Commandments. Let's see how you rate compared to the 10 Commandments.

#1 Thou shalt have no other gods before me (Exodus 20:3) No one can claim they have never put anything ahead of God (money, career, own self centered goals, pleasure, sports, entertainment, sin, vice, a relationship with another, etc).

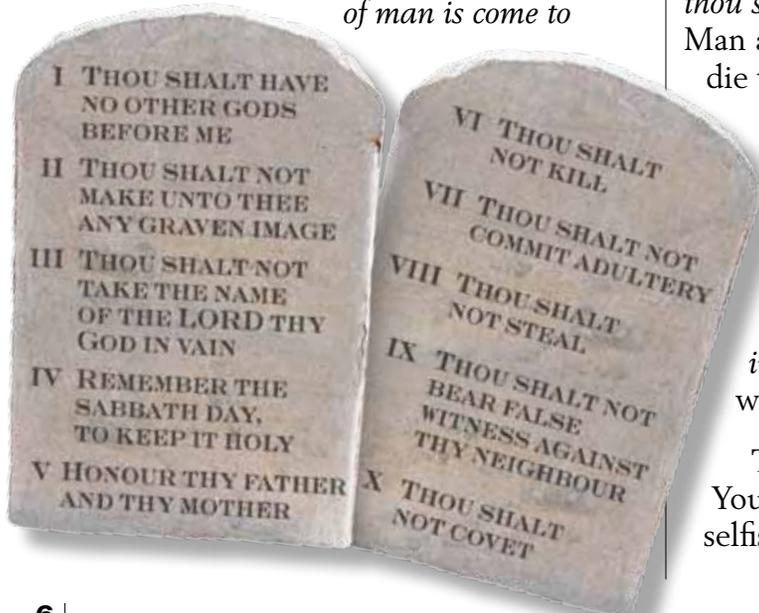
#2 Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image (of God) (Exodus 20:4) Many have been guilty of inventing a God of their own imagination and liking... a God who 'suits them.' People want a "God that overlooks sin and takes everyone to heaven." They have improvised and dreamed up a God of their own image.

#3 Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain (Exodus 20:7) Re-read that carefully. God is keeping record of every time you've used His name as a curse word and you will answer for it one day.

#4 Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy (Exodus 20:8) Have you always honored the Lord's Day or been faithful in church attendance? (Heb 10:25)

#5 Honour thy father and thy mother (Exodus 20:12). Have you ever disrespected or disobeyed your parents. Have you ever argued with them or dishonored them?

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How to Find God

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#6 Thou shalt not kill (Exodus 20:13) Although most people have never committed murder, they are guilty of “murder of the heart.” Jesus clarifies this commandment in Matthew 5:21-2; Whosoever shall kill, shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother... shall be in danger of hell fire. Have you ever been mad or bitter at someone?

#7 Thou shalt not commit adultery (Exodus 20:14) While many have never committed adultery, Jesus said; Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart (Matt 5:27-8). Have you ever lusted after the opposite sex? This is adultery of the heart according to Jesus.

#8 Thou shalt not steal (Exodus 20:15) Who could claim they’ve never taken anything that doesn’t belong to them? ... something small or even the boss’s time?

#9 Thou shalt not bear false witness (Exodus 20:16) No one could honestly claim they have never told a lie!

#10 Thou shalt not covet (Exodus 20:17) Have you ever desired anything you didn’t have or didn’t need? Have you ever been discontented, jealous or ungrateful? This is covetousness.

Most people are guilty of breaking all 10 commandments! Many places in the Bible reveal that liars, adulterers, thieves, the covetous, etc will spend eternity in hell! (Rev 21:8, I Cor 6:9-10, Gal 5:19-21). How could you ever expect to get to heaven by “living a good life?”

Romans 3:10 *As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one:*

Romans 3:23 *For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;*

Sin has a penalty... Romans 6:23 *“For the wages of sin is death”* (hell).

We cannot possibly get to heaven by keeping the law (10 Commandments).

The 10 Commandments were given by God to show us how impossible it is to

be saved by doing good works. *“Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith”* (Galatians 3:24). The law (10 commandments) shows us that we are condemned and need a Savior.

You will never get to heaven by doing good works. Titus 3:5 says, *“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us.”* *“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Romans 5:1).

Yet getting to heaven is not automatic just because Jesus died for your sins! Salvation is a gift that must be received. *“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God”* (Ephesians 2:8). That means that baptism has nothing to do with being saved. Romans 6:23 explains, *“The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”*

How does a person know when they are ready to be born again? They know they are ready when they mean business with God, and are willing to repent of sin. Acts 3:19 says, *“Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.”* II Peter 3:9 says the Lord is *“not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”* Jesus said, *“except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish”* (Luke 13:5). That means being willing to also turn from false religion or false teaching—anything contrary to the word of God, the Bible.

To repent means to change your mind about your sin, and make Christ the Lord

of your life. Are you willing to turn from your sin and turn to God? Do you believe that Jesus paid the full price on the cross for your sins?

Though God hates sin, he loves you and sent Jesus to die for your sins. *“But God commendeth (proved) his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us”* (Romans 5:8).

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

If God is dealing with you about your need of forgiveness, and you would like to be saved (born again), the final step is to ask God for the gift through a simple prayer. *“For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved”* (Romans 10:13). Notice the promise of this verse from a God who cannot lie. Titus 1:2 says, *“God...cannot lie”*. Do you believe that God will save you simply because He said He would? Christ will save you if you are willing to make him the Lord of your life.

If you know that you are ready, you can pray and ask God to save you in your own words such as: “Dear Heavenly Father, I know that I am a condemned sinner unable to save myself, but I am willing to turn from my sins and make Jesus my Lord and master. I now trust in His sacrifice on the cross to pay for my sins. Please forgive me and save me. Amen.”

For more information please go to www.7StepsToGod.org ■

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I Have A Question

by Pastor Tony Scheving

How Do I Explain Jesus Christ?

In these days of religious diversity, we have a lot of Muslims, Buddhists, Hindi, and even professing Christian people who are uninformed about Jesus Christ. If you were to try and explain Jesus to a Muslim co-worker or neighbor, how would you go about it? Back in high school or college, we might have had courses like English 101 or Science 101. The 101 meant it was basic instruction on the subject. How about Jesus 101?

Picture a universe that has no walls with space that never ends. Now, pull in the focus tighter to our own Milky Way galaxy; then tighten the focus even more to our own solar system with the sun 93 million miles away. Now imagine this planet called Earth and the One who created it all actually coming to this planet in human flesh. I've been to the place in Bethlehem where He was born. I've been to the ruins of the synagogue in Nazareth where He taught. I've looked upon the hill, called Golgotha, where He died, and I've been inside the tomb where they say He was buried. I've been to the top of the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, where He bodily ascended and went back to heaven. It's incredible to think that the Creator of this endless universe actually walked this globe! If Jesus Christ was God in the flesh, it changes everything! It's time for those who even claim to be Christians to re-think about Who we're dealing with here.

The One whose birth divided the centuries into BC and AD is the central theme of all time. It is estimated that approximately 20 billion people have walked this globe since its beginning, yet very few of them have had much effect

on human history. But there is one Person who stands out. He has attracted greater admiration, yet opposition, than all of the rest combined. Every recorded word of Jesus has been studied, analyzed and scrutinized from generation to generation. At this very moment, there are millions studying what He said. Jesus of Nazareth existed 2000 years ago. He taught in a tiny land known as Israel. He never traveled more than 200 miles from His birthplace. He never wrote a book or a song, yet more books and songs have been written about Him than anyone else. He never painted or sculpted, yet He inspired more works of art than anyone else. He never had any formal education, yet thousands of schools and universities bear His name. He never raised up an army, yet untold millions have laid down their lives for Him. He never spoke to more than a few thousand, yet billions have claimed to be a follower of this one man. His ministry only lasted three years, yet today His name goes around the world through books, radio, TV, crusades and mission work. Jesus has had more effect on mankind than all other people put together. To explain Him is impossible and to ignore Him is disastrous. Anyone could claim to be the answer for this world, but Jesus proved it by His miracles, His accurate predictions, His perfection, His teaching, and most of all, by His resurrection from the dead.

Robert Ingersoll, the renowned atheist from a century ago, was once riding on a train with his friend and associate, Lew Wallace. As they approached the sprawling city of St. Louis, Missouri, they were discussing Ingersoll's current lecture tour, during which he openly attacked man's

belief in God. Ingersoll said, "Wallace, look at all those church steeples in St. Louis. Such a waste of money! You and I both know that Christ did not really exist. Someone should tell the masses how foolish it is to worship a myth." "It is a shame," agreed Wallace. Ingersoll went on, "Lew, you're an author. Why don't you write a book and prove to the world once and for all that Jesus Christ was nothing but a mythical figure, much less the Son of God?" Wallace replied, "All right, I believe I will." Lew Wallace spent much time and money investigating every shred of evidence that he could find. He read numerous books. He examined many ancient manuscripts. He visited the Holy Land. He read the Bible. But something strange happened to Lew Wallace. The more he studied, the more evidence he discovered to support Christ's existence. He searched more intently and more reverently. The evidence became irrefutable. He concluded that Jesus Christ was the best documented figure of history. Furthermore, Wallace believed Jesus Christ must also have been the Son of God! Lew Wallace accepted Christ as his personal Savior. He did write a book about Jesus, but its message was altogether different from his preconceived notions. Anyone who has read Ben Hur or watched the movie can appreciate Wallace's thorough research and deep, reverent spirit in search of Jesus Christ. Truly, there is more evidence that Jesus Christ walked this planet 2000 years ago, than Thomas Jefferson did 200 years ago.

His Hallowed Deity

Who is Jesus Christ? First of all, He is God in the flesh. That babe in Bethlehem's stable was Deity in diapers, and Majesty in a manger. The angels knew it. The Bible states, "*When He (God the Father) bringeth in the first begotten (Jesus) into the world, He saith, And let all the angels of God worship Him*" (Hebrews 1:6). The followers of Jesus also knew He was God and worshipped Him. They worshipped Him in the fishing boat, and also after His resurrection (Matt 14:33, 28:9). Thomas referred to Jesus as, "*My Lord and my God*" (John 8:58). Of course, Jesus knew He was God in the flesh. In John 8:58, Jesus referred to Himself as the great "*I Am*" of the Old Testament. Jesus also said in John 14:9, "*He that hath seen me hath seen*

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the Father." Paul the Apostle very plainly said in I Timothy 3:16, "God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." Even God the Father proclaimed the Deity of Jesus when He said to His Son, "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of thy kingdom" (Heb 1:8).

His Human Design

Of course no study of Jesus would be complete without also emphasizing His humanity. He was 100% man! We call Him 'The God-Man'. The design of this begins with His virgin birth. He wasn't conceived like every other human being. The Bible says in Matthew 1:18, "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost." Jesus received His human nature from His earthly mother, but His divine nature from His heavenly Father. The virgin birth of Jesus was predicted 700 years beforehand. The prophet Isaiah said, "The Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (meaning 'God with us' - Isaiah 7:14). If you find a 'virgin birth' hard to believe, so did Mary. She said, "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. For with God nothing shall be impossible" (Luke 1:34,35,37). The same God who created the universe out of nothing can easily produce a miraculous virgin birth. Some people today scoff at such a thought. Some even still call themselves Christians. But if a person denies the virgin birth of Jesus, they are not only denying a plain Bible truth, but they are saying that Mary was guilty of fornication and immorality. They are calling Jesus 'illegitimate' and someone born with a sin nature like everyone else (Rom 5:12). This would disqualify Him from being the Savior of the world. It would be an industrial-strength mistake to deny Jesus' virgin birth and humanity. It is the virgin birth of Jesus

that sets Him apart from Muhammad, Buddha, Mary or others. They were all sinners needing a Savior. Jesus is that Savior and the supernatural Son of God.

His Humble Deference

Many so-called religious leaders have used force or coercion to achieve their desired goals. Jesus, on the other hand, was always submissive and obedient to the will of His heavenly Father. He practiced servanthood. When Queen Victoria resided at Balmoral Castle, she sometimes enjoyed an incognito walk in the district. On one occasion, she slipped out by a side gate, accompanied only by her faithful servant John Brown, who followed behind. Along the road, she came upon a flock of sheep being driven by a boy, who shouted, "Keep out of the way, stupid old woman!" The Queen smiled, but said nothing, and when John Brown followed he informed the lad that she was the Queen. "Oh no," said the boy, "she should dress like a queen." There were those who did not recognize the Son of God because He came in humble form. He lived in continual submission and obedience. Jesus said in John 8:29, "The Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please Him." At the baptism of Jesus, "Lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). Jesus Christ was perfect and without sin. The Bible calls Him a "High priest which...was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). When Jesus confronted His enemies He said, "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" (John 8:46). Jesus was perfect and died in perfect obedience to His Father's will. He was not a victim or a martyr. His death was not an accident. Jesus said, "I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again" (John 10:17). Suffering on the cross was the very reason Jesus came to Earth. The Bible calls Him, "The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev 13:8). Jesus said, "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). According to Jesus, He is the only way to get to heaven. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). He didn't say He was a good way to get to heaven, or even the best way; He said He is the only way. While that might not be 'politically correct' or 'open-minded' in today's society, it is what Jesus said. He is the solitary Savior!

Honor Deferred

When the great composer George Handel was writing his Messiah composition, his assistant used to bring him his breakfast in the morning. The assistant often stood silent with astonishment to see the great musician's tears mixing with the ink as he penned his masterpiece. One day, the assistant found the great music writer in the act of composing those pathetic words, "He was despised and rejected of men," (Isaiah 53:3), and Handel was sobbing uncontrollably. When the Jews and Romans had Jesus nailed to the cross, they thought they'd seen the end of Him. But He arose from the grave. It was all part of God's plan to save us from our sins. The Bible tells us that Jesus "Loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood" (Rev 1:5). As a result, the Bible says, "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow" (Philippians 2:9-10). The day is coming when every knee shall bend before Jesus Christ including Nero, Stalin, Hitler, Mussolini, Hussein, and every other terrorist of all time. Satan and his army of demons will also bow before the Lord.

In a nutshell, that's Jesus 101; His past, present and future. The biggest question is, "What does Jesus mean to you?" Have you come to a place in your life where you've made Him your Lord? He alone is worthy as He alone died for all mankind. We owe Him so much! Winston Churchill once paid a great tribute to the young men in the Royal Air Force who guarded England during the great war, saying, "Never in the history of mankind have so many owed so much to so few." The Battle of Bastogne represents one of the bloodiest actions in World War II. A monument there pays tribute to the heroism of the U.S. 101st Airborne Division. It reads; "Seldom has so much American blood been shed in the course of a single action." But when thinking of the cross of Christ, we can say, "Never in the history of the universe has mankind owed so much to One." He shed His blood for us. That Person is Jesus Christ. I'm not ashamed to say that I love Him with all of my heart. Do you really know Him as your personal Savior? ■

For more information please read pages 6-7, or go on-line and visit www.7stepstogod.org.

FORGIVENESS IN THE FAMILY

“AND BE YE KIND ONE TO ANOTHER, TENDERHEARTED, FORGIVING ONE ANOTHER, EVEN AS GOD FOR CHRIST’S SAKE HATH FORGIVEN YOU.” EPHESIANS 4:32

BY AUSTIN WARTNER

One of the greatest needs we all have is the need to be forgiven, especially within our own families. Whether it’s the children, parents, siblings, extended family, etc, we need to know that we have been forgiven and things have been forgotten by those we love the most. In our text verse, the Bible admonishes us to be tenderhearted, and to forgive each other, just like God has forgiven us. One of the greatest keys to unlocking the doors of peace, unity & joy within our homes is forgiveness. Without forgiveness, the best marriages will be hard and in the worst cases, disastrous. So the question is, “How can I have forgiveness in my family?”

The Definition of Forgiveness

What does it mean to forgive? Webster defines forgiveness as, “The pardon of an offender, by which he/she is considered and treated as not guilty.” When a person forgives, he gives up the right to seek consequences and chooses to overlook the offense. The Bible says, *“The discretion of a man deferreth his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression”* (Proverbs 19:11). A person who has a forgiving spirit has a very honorable trait, according to the Bible. Forgiveness is a mark of a spiritually mature Christian. Jesus said, *“Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy”*

(Matthew 5:7). When we forgive, we are showing mercy. When we show mercy, we are more apt to get mercy when we need it ourselves. Let’s face it; who hasn’t messed up? Who hasn’t made a mistake? The answer is obvious: no one. At those times, we all desire to be ‘let off the hook’. Yet, when somebody offends us or hurts us, are we quick to forgive?

If you have been saved the Bible way, you’ve experienced God’s forgiveness. God shows great mercy in forgiving people’s sins against Him. In fact, God is more willing to forgive than people want to be forgiven! The Bible says, *“For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy...”* (Psalm 86:5). In another place, God tells us, *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all*

unrighteousness” (I John 1:9). God has set the standard of forgiveness that we should follow. In our families, we need to be quick to forgive and slow to wrath. Again our text verse says, *“...forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.”*

The Destroyer of Forgiveness

Probably the greatest destroyer of forgiveness in the family is pride. Pride is usually at the core of most marital and other interpersonal problems. The Bible says, *“Only by pride cometh contention...”* (Proverbs 13:10). Whenever there is contention in a home or amongst people, pride can be found right in the middle of it. Pride can be a huge hindrance in rectifying any situation and has the ability to destroy even the best relationships. The Bible mentions, *“Pride goeth before destruction...”* (Proverbs 16:18). Many homes have been dismantled or destroyed due to one or both spouses refusing to humble themselves and forgive the other.

One of the greatest stumbling blocks in marriage is when spouses fail to admit when they are wrong. This attitude creates resentment and frustration in our homes. A family will pay awful consequences as a result. If peace is desired in a home, pride must be absent. People need to humble themselves before God, their spouses, their children, etc. to make this happen. Nothing diffuses anger, frustration, and bitterness quicker than humility. The Bible says, *“... before honour is humility”* (Proverbs 18:12). If we want to restore honor in our homes, we need to forgive and seek forgiveness, which will require a level of humility from both parties.

The Dividend of Forgiveness

Benefits exist when we decide to forgive. In our homes, we’ll experience a peace and happiness that so many are lacking in the world we live in. Too many homes are like a warzone

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Forgiveness in the Family

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instead of a haven of rest. God designed the home to be a place people can feel accepted, loved, and appreciated. In a tough world, the home was meant to be an oasis in the desert. However, due to a lack of forgiveness, many families don't experience the peace and joy they could actually have.

Forgiveness restores broken relationships, mends hurt feelings, and provides a secure environment which benefits the whole

family. Forgiveness is like a soothing salve for a bitter wound. So much anguish in our families could be avoided by putting this simple command of God to practice. The Bible says, *"Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye"* (Colossians 3:13). Real forgiveness in our families also shows love towards one another. In regards to love, the Bible says it, "endureth all things" and that it *"never faileth"* (I Corinthians 13:8-9). So many homes could be spared the agony of

a divorce court if people would forgive and seek forgiveness.

Again, to unlock the door of peace and happiness in our homes, the key is forgiveness. Don't allow petty, insignificant things hinder what God designed the home to enjoy. Let me encourage anyone who needs to seek restoration of a relationship or the healing of a wound to do so. Life is too short to spend angry and frustrated with other people. Allow forgiveness to help. With God's help, even the worst situations can see resolution. ■

SEXUAL BRAINWASHING

In our ever-changing society it has now become trendy to be immoral. Bachelor playboys on TV are considered 'cool' if they can score with the women. Fornication is in vogue. From our ungodly world's viewpoint, maintaining sexual purity is silly. The world makes sex outside of marriage look fashionable and normal. Look at the celebrities and athletes. Many young people are being brainwashed and taking their 'cue' from the world. The problem is that the world is on the wrong course, according to our Creator, and will one day give an account for its sexual corruption.

God's Word (the Bible), regarding sex, cuts right across the grain of our society. Our enlightened heathen culture portrays sex between two unmarried people as casual and harmless. Nothing could be further from the truth. Our society portrays the immoral guy as 'the macho man' and the sexually loose gal as 'hot'. In truth, anyone with weak character can be sexually impure in our present pagan culture. The tragedy is that it will lead to a crippled and frustrated marriage one day. God had our best in mind when He gave us strong directives about sexual purity before and during marriage. There are many benefits to staying pure before marriage and also abstaining from the pornography and filth of this world. Pornography itself gives young men a very warped view of women.

There is a serious misconception in our society today that purity equals weakness. That is not true at all. Purity builds strength and character. Purity gives life purpose and joy. Purity grabs hold of our reckless emotions, and helps us to focus to see life more clearly. Purity does not give into momentary weakness, but it looks to long-term positive impact. Purity attracts like-minded friends. Purity gives respect and initiates respect back. Purity cultivates long term commitment. In today's crazy world, sexual impurity opens us up to all kinds of temptation and sin. By being pure in our thoughts and actions we avoid so much negative influence, and we have the strength to keenly discern right from wrong. Jesus said, *"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God"* (Matthew 5:8).

Remember: Sex is God's idea. So what does our Creator say about it? The Bible says in Hebrews 13:4, *"Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge."* In Numbers 25, God judged the nation of Israel severely for ungodly sexual behavior. Thousands died in a God-sent plague. Of course the seventh commandment clearly says, *"Thou shalt not commit adultery"* (Exodus 20:14).

So how serious is it to be sexually loose? The Bible says in Ephesians 5:3-7, *"But fornication, and all uncleanness, let it not be once named among you... For this ye know, that*

no whoremonger, nor unclean person, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience" (the ungodly and immoral). If you re-read those verses you'll see that God is clearly telling us that the sexually corrupt will miss heaven. The Bible says, *"Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body"* (1 Cor 6:18-19).

When someone controls their sexual impulses it: prevents shame and guilt in the heart, brings selfishness under control, protects from emotional scars that will haunt you later in life, avoids the possibility of an unwanted pregnancy, keeps the conscience clear, gives you something to look forward to on your wedding night, develops good qualities of patience and self-control, and most of all, pleases God. The media promotes safe sex but they still haven't given us a good explanation on how sex before marriage could be safe physically, emotionally and morally. Sex outside of marriage was never our Creator's plan. If you have violated God's commands on sex and regret it, there is hope and forgiveness offered through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. ■

Please refer to pages 6 & 7 for more information and also go online and visit www.7stepstogod.org.

CARY SCHMIDT

WHAT MATTERS MOST

THE PRIORITY OF PEOPLE

Have you ever rushed through your day at a frantic pace, crossing off as many things on your to-do list as possible? Have you ever finished a busy day, collapsed into bed, and wondered what you did of value that day? Have you ever sensed, deep inside, that you're getting a lot of stuff done, but something is still missing? It's easy to do a lot of good things with our time and life, but to miss the really important things—the things that matter most. And when we do, our conscience is unsettled. Perhaps you feel that way right now.

Over the past six months, my family and I have been facing a very different season of life—a battle with cancer. This article isn't about that battle, but about an experience that happened within it. Needless to say, cancer and its related dynamics have changed our schedules and our lives dramatically. Chemotherapy has its way of vastly limiting your capabilities in life; effectively reducing your weekly output by 60%, or more. This experience has required that I refine, refocus, and remain fixed on the things that truly do matter in my family and ministry.

About three months into this battle, on an evening when I had some energy, I said to my wife, Dana, "I really believe the Lord wants me to take Haylee out for a date tonight. I can sense in her heart and spirit that she needs time with me." I have felt bad that my kids have had to watch me suffer through the effects of chemo, and often more so for Haylee, because she's the youngest. It must be hard for a ten year old to process all of that.

Later that evening, to her delight, I told Haylee I had a surprise! She smiled and, of course, asked "What is it?!" "I can't tell you. Just go get ready for a date!" With that, she excitedly began to prepare. She loves to look her best for our dates. Her delightful anticipation assured me that this was a very good decision!

A few moments later, we were in the car, hand in hand, looking forward to time together. We started at Macy's to look for a dress—no luck. Then we made our way to a restaurant in the mall where we shared a meal. Already, the look on her face implied a peaceful heart, a settled spirit, and great contentment in being with her father.

We talked, and talked... and talked. We talked about the problems of growing up, the challenges of fifth grade social politics, and understanding hard things in life. We talked about cancer and how she was doing with this. We even talked a little bit about boys. After dinner, I had some bone pain from some shots I have to take and was finding it a little painful to walk. "Come on Dad, you don't feel well, we can go to the car and go home." I think Haylee had been clued in by Mom to "take care of me." "No, no... I'm fine... come on, we gotta go find you a new outfit." And so we went to Dillards.

It was almost closing time, but Dillards was a gold mine of new, little girl's dresses, and within about twenty minutes it was purchased and we were beginning our long, limpy walk through the mall and back to the car. As we left the store, I gently put my arm around her and said, "This is one of my very most favorite things to do in all of my life—take you out to eat and buy you a pretty dress!" She sweetly said, "Thank you."

Haylee was very quiet for the next ten minutes of our walk. I wondered what she was thinking. Then, out of nowhere, about halfway to the car, she let go of my hand, hugged me with both arms, closed her eyes, and said with a long sigh, "I really, really love you..." It was precious. Unforgettable. The look on her face and the sweet tone in her voice seemed to say, "My heart is SO OKAY right now, I can't even put it into words!"

It was then that the Holy Spirit silently said to me, "This is the most important thing you did today!" I thought back through my day. The morning was spent in bed, trying to answer emails and feign productivity amidst feeling sick. The afternoon enabled me to get into the office for a couple of hours to sign letters, have a couple of meetings, and try to get a little work done. But the value of the day—the real significance of the whole day was found in these final few hours with Haylee. Why?

Well, first because she is dependent upon me. She's my daughter. She, along with the rest of my family, is my most valuable, most significant, most precious ministry. My four family members truly are the only people on the planet who are actually dependent upon me. The rest of the world is not. These precious people are dependent upon me in many ways. Simply put, the most important things any of us do on any day are those things we do to love, care for, nurture, and provide for our family. How can we expect our kids to fall in love with God and grow in His grace, if we aren't falling in love with them and showing His grace?

Second, because she is a person. Her heart, her emotions, her struggles, her feelings, her questions, her burdens matter; and her mother and I are God's gifts to her to walk her through all these new life experiences. She's never been there before! It's called parenting, and what a gift it is! Sometimes I think that we forget that our children are people—new people—and their life experiences are their first! They are people who matter to God, and they are the most important people in your life, if you are a parent. No one else and nothing else should trump your relationship with your family. I don't care who it is, what

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What Matters Most: Priority of People

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they demand, or what kind of pressure they place upon you. Nothing trumps your family!

When we got home that night, Dana instructed Haylee to get ready for bed. A few moments later, Dana came into our room and said to me, “She’s a different person! She’s at peace. She’s whole. She’s gentle and responsive. It’s like these last three hours with you untied every knot in her heart!” I could sense it also. Haylee was a different person, because Dad spent some time loving her. (And by the way, it wasn’t about the new outfit; it was about the connection of hearts.)

We live in a really busy age! This is a day when most people live with little to no margins in life. The spaces on our calendars that jobs and commitments don’t fill, we quickly fill with everything else—from soccer practices to music recitals to bowling leagues. And for all of our urgent busyness and frantic pace to ‘get it all done’, we end our days with a nagging conscience that we missed the things that matter most. A lot of things were ‘checked off the list’, but in the process we paid a high price in neglecting people.

I read an interesting book recently. It was called *Chasing Daylight*. It wasn’t a Christian book, but it was written by a highly successful CEO who was diagnosed with three fast-growing, cancerous brain tumors. Sadly, he

was given three months to live. The book chronicles how he decided to live his last three months of life.

Here was a man, whose life was consumed with success— earning money, making his company successful, and enjoying all the perks of wealth. And he was good at it. He had multiple homes, chartered private jets, and enjoyed everything his heart desired. He provided well for his family. But from the moment of diagnosis, none of that mattered. When given three months to live, there was only one thing that mattered—relationships. He spent his last three months doing what he called “unwinding relationships”—spending time closing his relationships with people he loved and appreciated. Suddenly, money and success faded, and life was all about relationships—people!

Do you want to know what really matters in life? People. Study the life and ministry of Jesus. His days weren’t spent processing projects or checking off His to-do list. (Though most of us must do some of that.) His days were spent touching the lives of people. He lived in balance—resting when necessary, walking with His Heavenly Father, and giving Himself to people. He was never in a hurry. He lived with plenty of margin. (He walked nearly everywhere He went.) He never let urgency determine His agenda. His life, ministry, and daily agenda were driven by the leading of His Father and the lives of people.

With Jesus, on a practical, daily level, people mattered the most.

Do people matter most in your life? Begin with the people closest to you—for they are the ones God has given to you. Then work your way out from there. Focus your life on loving, serving, and investing in people. Connect everything you do—even the task list and the projects—to the needs of people. When you plan your day and your week, begin with people. Make sure that every relationship in your life is healed, restored, right, and healthy. Work to keep them that way. No matter what you accomplish in life, if your relationships are broken or neglected, you are failing at what matters the most to Jesus.

How did you live your life today? What’s your plan for tomorrow? Are you neglecting people for the sake of ‘more important things’? Take a good look at tomorrow’s plan and then next week’s plan—and make it people-centric. Jesus said, next to loving God, there’s nothing more important in life than loving people.

“And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Matthew 22:39).

Someone within your reach has some knots in his heart or emotions that you can help to untie. Now go and do what Jesus would—untie those knots, and truly love that person. In the end, how you lived for and loved God and people is what matters most!



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The advertisement features a photograph of a family—a man carrying a young boy on his shoulders, and a woman smiling in the foreground. The background shows a church building with a large cross on the wall.

DOES GOD REALLY EXIST?

BY DAN ACETTUNA

It is said that when science cries for the proof of God's existence, faith doesn't have to prove a thing. Others, instead, feel the burden of proving 'there is no God', lies upon science. However, faithful Christians do not have to resort to winning the argument by default. There has always been plenty of positive evidence that God exists. The Bible says, *"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork"* (Psalm 19:1). Creation itself, and our very existence, is evidence of a Creator. The Bible further says, *"For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made (us), even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse"* (Roman 1:20)

As we observe this complex, orderly universe, there is no excuse for denying the obvious, self-evident, conclusion that a designer, a Creator, was behind it all – particularly, when, in our everyday lives, we routinely presume every design has a designer. For example, the average geologist can routinely tell the

difference between the arrow head and the rock he found in the middle of the desert. Furthermore, upon noticing the functionally ordered shape of the arrowhead, versus the randomly shaped rock, he concludes, without thinking twice, that one is man-made, and the other is not – one has intelligence behind its conception. Yet, how ironic, that the same geologist will put the rock under a microscope, notice its intricate structure, and deny that there was any intelligence behind its origination – a blatant double standard. This 'bias' toward denying the evidence of God found throughout nature happens to the best of them.

Astronomer Carl Sagan often argued that design, in nature, does not necessitate a higher intelligence. Yet, his approach to searching for extraterrestrial intelligence involved probing the vastness of space for radio transmissions. And how did he plan on distinguishing between an alien transmission and all the noisy 'background' electromagnetic radiation pouring in from space? He rightly presumed the alien transmission would have some non-random pattern, a sign of intelligence behind it. (Ironically, the universe as a whole is not random after all, but exhibits structure, as revealed by what's known as: The Flatness Problem, The Smoothness Problem, The Horizon Problem, and The Matter/Anti-matter Problem.)

This is why the verse we read earlier says, *"so that they are without excuse."* The conclusion, that all of this design-laden complexity we find around us does not imply a designer, is not an intellectually-based deduction. No, the denial of these things 'clearly seen' originates in the heart: *"The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God"* (Psalm 14:1). Intellectually, it is reasonable to accept the possibility of a Creator. Such a conclusion shows a willingness to trust in what is self-evident. Consider, for example, the intellectual honesty of the following scientists:

A.G. Cairns-Smith (Scottish Chemist) said, "After all, what impresses us about a living thing is its in-built ingenuity, its appearance of having been designed,

thought out – of having been put together with a purpose" [*Darwin on Trial*, pg. 111-112].

Vira Kistaikowsky (MIT physicist) said, "The exquisite order displayed by our scientific understanding of the physical world calls for the divine" [*Cosmos, Bios, and Theos*, pg. 52].

Edward Harrison (Cosmologist) makes this deduction: "Here is the cosmological proof of the existence of God – the design argument of Paley - updated and refurbished. The fine tuning of the universe provides prima facie evidence of deistic design. Take your choice: blind chance that requires multitudes of universes, or design that requires only one... Many scientists, when they admit their views, incline toward the teleological or design argument" [*Masks of the Universe*, pg. 252].

Paul Davies (professor of Theoretical Physics and author) said, "The very fact that the universe is creative, and that the laws have permitted complex structures to emerge and develop to the point of consciousness – in other words, that the universe had organized its own self – awareness – is for me powerful evidence that there is 'something going on' behind it all. The impression of design is overwhelming. Science may explain all the processes whereby the universe evolves its own destiny, but that still leaves room for there to be a meaning behind existence" [*Cosmic Blueprint*, pg. 203].

Sir Fred Hoyle and C. Wickramasinghe (cosmologist and author) said, "There must be a God" [*Nature*, Nov. 12, 1981, pg. 105].

Allan Sandage, winner of the Crafoord Prize in Astronomy (equivalent to the Nobel Prize) remarked, "I find it quite improbable that such order came out of chaos. There has to be some organizing principle. God to me is a mystery but is the explanation for the miracle of existence, why there is something instead of nothing" [*New York Times*, 12 March 1991, pg. B9].

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Does God Really Exist?

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Denial takes place in the heart. In spite of what the above scientists have stated, there are many others who still refuse to acknowledge the existence, or even the possible existence, of God. Faced with the same evidence we just read, they choose, instead, to believe that everything came into being through natural selection acting randomly over a vast period of time. The denial of God's existence is a matter of choice, not reason. A person chooses whether or not to accept the evidence for God's existence. It is a choice made with the heart – the seat of man's volition.

One merely has to ask the person who denies God what it would take to prove God's existence. After all, the person insisting that a designed universe is not sufficient proof, must already have criteria by which the proof for God is instantly recognized. However, when asked "What it would take to prove God's existence?" the God-denier often has no concrete answer. Even when asked, "What if Noah's ark were discovered?" or "If a voice from heaven were heard?" etc., the God-denier will still claim that such evidence would not prove the existence of God. In other words, evidence aside, the God-denier's mind, or should we say heart, is made up! It's as simple as that. One has to wonder why some people would take such a 'closed-minded' stand against what is so self-evident. But the next quote reveals one common argument against using God as "The Explanation."

On 12/8/95, *The Times* reported that the distinguished British-born cosmologist Professor Edward Harrison, of the University of Massachusetts, states in an article in the *Quarterly Journal* of the Royal Astronomical Society, September 1995 issue: "We do not know why natural qualities such as the force of gravity, the speed of light, the electric charge on the electron, and so on, have the values they do. Yet the slightest variation of their values would result in a barren universe without stars or light. Why are they precisely adjusted to give rise to life?" *The Times* goes on to say,

"Prof. Harrison says there are two answers to this question. One is that a supreme being – God – designed the universe in just the form needed for life. The only objection he raises to this answer is that it precludes further rational inquiry!"

Ironically, the 'mysteries' behind creation will never be answered unless we seek out the very God, who many consider a non-answer. The professor's objection is commonly voiced among those rejecting a Creator. Too many scientists, merely saying "God did it" is a dead end, a non-explanation that stifles our search for knowledge and doesn't really answer how we came into existence. However, this common excuse overlooks the very reason why we were created. For, rather than stifle inquiry, this 'dead end' should start us inquiring about the Creator Himself. The Bible says we were created to personally know our Creator, not so we could glory in our intellectual ability to deduce how creation came about: *"Thus saith the Lord, let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgement, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD"* (Jeremiah 9:23-24).

Contrary to what science, and many religions think, God is not some impersonal force, too far away to know anything about. The Bible says we were created in His image (Gen 1:27). We were created with the emotional means to fellowship with God. He wants us to know Him, personally. So when anyone comes to the so-called dead-end conclusion that "God did it," the next logical question should be why did He do it? Why did He create us? What is He like? How can I know Him personally? The next level of inquiry is exactly what God wants from us. God promises: *"And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart"* (Jeremiah 29:13). *"Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh (near) to you"* (James 4:8). ■

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Pastor's Perspective



PRESS ON!

"For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again"

- Proverbs 24:16

If you're like me, you would probably rather have a root canal than exercise. It takes determination. With any worthwhile endeavor we need persistence, whether it's learning to ride a bike, play the piano, water ski, master a sport or raise children. If it was easy, everybody would be doing it with ease. Often we might have good intentions, but like the Apostle Paul, we say, *"For to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not"* (Romans 7:18). What Paul was saying is that he had the desire to do what he should, but struggled to actually follow through. Sometimes it's hard to keep going or to 'press on'.

Life can be full of discouragements and setbacks. When Walt Disney applied at the Kansas City Star for a job as an artist, the editor told him he didn't have any talent, and sent him away, urging him to give it up. Even his first series of animated cartoons, "Oswald the Rabbit," failed. Disney was even told by others that he lacked imagination (can you imagine!) Yet he kept on going until he succeeded, and today, Disney is a mega-empire.

The Bible is full of examples of determination. Abraham was persistent in his intervention for Sodom and Gomorrah when God had determined to destroy them. Abraham's grandson Jacob wrestled with an angel all night and would not let him go until he blessed him. Moses fasted for forty days as an act of repentance for the sins of his nation. Even Delilah was persistent in learning the secret of Samson's strength (the devil never quits!) Of course, Jesus showed the most determination by suffering the agony of crucifixion in order to pay for our sins. He now admonishes Christians to press on by saying, *"As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love"* (John 15:9).

President Calvin Coolidge once said, "Nothing in the world can take the place of perseverance. Talent will not; nothing in this world is more common than men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Perseverance and determination alone are almost omnipotent!" As a young man, film director Robert Flaherty spent many months in the far north looking for iron ore and cod. He found neither, but he did shoot 70,000 feet (13 miles!) of film in his travels. Someone encouraged him to edit the film and make a documentary, which Flaherty spent weeks doing. But just as he finished, a fire started among the celluloid, consuming the entire film and burning him badly. All of Flaherty's work was lost forever! His response to the disaster was a determination to return to the far north and make a film of Eskimo life that people will never forget. He did just that, and the result was the classic 1922 documentary, *Nanook of the North*. He pressed on!

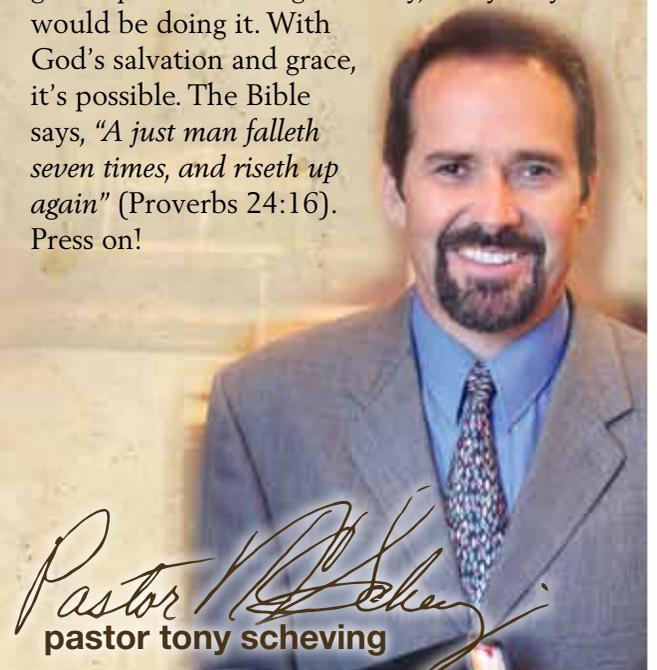
Our human nature likes an easy road with no resistance. I live on the Red River and watch a lot of debris float north, which eventually dumps into the Hudson Bay. Long ago, it occurred to me that 'any old dead log can float downstream'. In the same way, anyone can go with the flow of the ungodly tug of this world. Today, we have a number of folks either selling out, whacking out or bailing out. How can a Christian keep from 'throwing in the towel'? First of all, we must *"Seek the LORD and His strength, seek his face continually"* (1 Chron 16:11). Secondly, we must lead a clean life as the Bible says, *"The righteous also shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger"* (Job 17:9). Sin destroys our determination, assurance, and confidence. Thirdly, we must get rid of any distractions which hinder us from reaching our goal. The Bible says to *"Lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us"* (Hebrews 12:1). There are also other motives that will keep us going such as a love for the Lord, as well as for people.

As a child, I remember many times when my eight siblings and I would try Dad's patience. With a wry grin, he would quip to Mom, "I think I'll go and join the French Foreign Legion." Years later I was reading about this group of Frenchmen who had a

motto that stated, "If I falter, push me on; If I stumble, pick me up; If I retreat, shoot me!" They pressed on! After defeating Napoleon at Waterloo, the Duke of Wellington stated, "We British were no braver than the French, we were only braver five minutes longer."

Following months of bombing from the Germans in WW II, British Prime Minister Churchill was making a speech at Harrow School on October 29, 1941 when he made the famous quote; "Never, never, never give up!" Do we have that quality of being resolute? Do we have the backbone, spunk, and stiff upper lip to keep going when things go wrong? Do we see problems in every opportunity, or do we see opportunities in every problem? In Galatians 6:9, the Bible says, *"Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."*

Psalms 37:23-24 says, *"The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and... though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand."* At the close of the first day of the Civil War Battle of Shiloh, with serious Union defeats, General U.S. Grant was met by his greatly discouraged chief engineer, James McPherson, who said, "Things look bad, General. We've lost half our artillery and a third of the infantry. Our line is broken and we are pushed back nearly to the river." Grant made no reply, and McPherson impatiently asked what he intended to do. "Do?" said Grant, "... reform the lines and attack at daybreak... won't they be surprised!" And surprised they were. The Confederate troops were routed before nine o'clock that next morning. No one is defeated until he gives up. If something was easy, everybody would be doing it. With God's salvation and grace, it's possible. The Bible says, *"A just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again"* (Proverbs 24:16). Press on!



Pastor Tony Scheving
pastor tony scheving