

# UNUSUAL BIBLE TOPICS

By Pastor Glenn Pease

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## 1. **IS MARRIAGE FOREVER?** based on Matt. 22:23-33

**One of the greatest romance stories of all history is that of Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning. Elizabeth was a normal active girl up to age 15, but then life ceiling tumbled in for her. She became an invalid, who for the next 20 years was confined to bed in a darkened room. She was a prisoner of pain and loneliness. Her mother died when she was 22, and she was left in the hands of a cruelly stern father. Later, her favorite brother was taken by a drowning accident. Few people have ever written of the depths of despair as she did.**

**In spite of her tragic and lonely life, she managed to write poetry**

of such quality that it was published. She made a name for herself among the world of poets. In 1845, after her 38th birthday, a poet six years younger than her, by the name of Robert Browning, wrote to her, and asked if he could visit. Her spirit was willing, but her flesh was weak, and she was reluctant to let any man see her frail and tortured body. He was insistent, however, and so the day came when he entered her darkened room.

The light of love altered the darkness of her life almost instantly. They began to write letters to each other, and her health took a sudden positive turn. She wrote later that love drew her gently back from the gates of death. Her father fought this love, and forced them to carry on their friendship in secrecy. After a year of this, with a friends help, she stole away, and was married to Robert Browning. Her father never forgave her, and they never met again.

Her wedded life was a taste of heaven. Love lifted her from 20 years in bed to a life of adventure with her husband. They went to Italy, and together wrote great poetry. She bore Robert a son, and she became famous for the poetry her love inspired. One day she handed him a little pile of poems and said, "Read these, if you don't like them tear them up." These were the now famous Sonnets From the Portuguese. It is said of them, "No purer expression of a heart on fire with love has ever been written." The most famous of all is this one which introduces us to our subject.

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.  
I love thee to depths and bredth and height  
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight  
For the ends of being and ideal grace.  
I love thee to the level of every day's  
Most quite need, by sun and candle light.  
I love thee freely, as men strive for right.

**I love thee purely, as they turn from praise.  
I love thee with the passion put to use  
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.  
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose  
With my lost saints. I love thee with the breath,  
Smiles, tears, of all my life; and, if God choose,  
I shall but love thee better after death.**

**The question is, was her hope of a better love after death a vain hope? Is this merely poetic dreaming, with no foundation in fact? Does love last forever? Does death become the dividing line that divorces all true lovers? These are not minor questions, but ones which all loving mates ask at some time or another.**

**It is fascinating to study the marriages of great men of God, and see how the hope of reunion with their mates is such a vital force in their lives. When William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, stood at the side of his wife's grave, he spoke these words, "I have never turned from her these 40 years for any journeyings on my mission of mercy, but I longed to get back, and have counted the weeks, days, and hours which should take me again to her side." After some other words concerning his sorrow he said, "When I have served my Christ and my generation according to the will of God, ...then I trust that she will bid me welcome to the skies."**

**Jonathan Edwards, one of the greatest preachers and theologians America has ever produced, did not die speaking of books and theology, but rather, of his dear wife, Sarah. His final words were, "Give my kindest love to my dear wife, and tell her that the uncommon union which has so long subsisted between us has been of such a nature as I trust is spiritual and therefore will continue forever."**

**The fascinating book, *The Courtship Of Mr. Lincoln*, ends with these hopeful words of Mary Todd, that great president's devoted wife--"The only consolation left me, is the certainty, that each day brings me nearer my loved and lost....I shall not much longer be separated from my idolized husband, who has only gone before and I am certain is fondly watching and waiting for our reunion, nevermore to be separated." We could go on and on quoting the hopes of lovers through the ages, both great and small. It is a universal conviction that what the Song of Solomon says about love, is true. In 8:6 it says, "Love is strong as death," and in verse 7 it says, "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it." The context makes it clear that this is the love of a man and woman. All else may be washed away in the flood, but love endures forever. Christina Rossetti expressed the universal hope of lovers in poetry-**

**O my love, my dove, lift up your eyes  
Toward the eastern gates like an opening rose.  
You and I who parted will meet in Paradise  
Pass within and sing when the gates unclose.  
This life is but the passage of a day,  
This life is but a pang and all is over,  
But in the life to come which fades not away  
Every love shall abide and every lover.**

**This universal hope would, no doubt, be unquestioned by Christians were it not for the interference of the skeptical Sadducees, who asked Jesus the difficult question we read in our text of Matt.22:23-33. The Sadducees were a sect of the Jews started in 250 B.C. by Sadok, a president of the Sanhedrin, the ruling body of Judaism. They did not believe in any resurrection at all. They knew they couldn't convince those who believed in a restored paradise to give up the idea as nonsense, so they tried the next best thing. They tried to make the idea look so complicated and ridiculous that men**

would have to laugh at it. Ridicule has always been a powerful tool in theological debate, and the Sadducees were skilled at it.

They had, no doubt, watched many a pious Pharisee squirm as they presented this problem, which seems to throw a monkey wrench into the machinery of marriage forever. The Pharisees were the largest of the Jewish sects and they did believe in the resurrection. Keep in mind, the motive behind this question is not the desire to find truth, but to make the hope of the resurrection look foolish. How amusing the whole thing was to them. How delighted they must have been to have thought of this example. Imagine one wife bewildered as to which of her seven husbands she should choose in the day of resurrection. How hilarious to imagine the other six walking away rejected to enjoy paradise alone. Their sides must have ached from the laughter, as they reviewed their question, and its implications. Trying to hold back the smile, and look solemn, the Sadducee hit Jesus with this question, "Now then, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her?"

At first glance, the answer of Jesus seems to shatter the hopes of lovers through the ages. In verse 30 Jesus says, "At the resurrection people will neither marry or be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven." It would appear that the Sadducees came off with a considerable victory here. Even if they did not destroy the hope of the resurrection, they appear to have robbed it of one of its greatest joys.

This passage had disturbed many who fear that Jesus is saying, husbands and wives will not be united in eternity, and all the hopes of eternal love are mere human sentiments, and of no interest to God in His eternal plan. Such fears are unfounded, however, if we see that Jesus is only concerned about destroying the Sadducees basis for ridicule. Jesus is not eliminating reunion and love, but only those

**aspects of earthly marriage which would make it as complicated and ridiculous as the Sadducees suggest.**

**The Sadducees have painted a picture of heaven that is filled with conflict that is worse than what we see in time. The seven husbands in time were had one at a time, and so there was no conflict. But now, in the resurrection, they are all there at once, and they will be fighting over which one is to have this woman as their wife for eternity. This picture is based on the assumption that in our resurrection bodies we will still have sexual needs, and that no man is going to want to be without a sexual partner for all eternity. Thus, heaven will be filled with civil wars, with millions of men fighting to possess a woman who was also married to another man in time. If nothing is different from time, between the sexes, then you can see the mess there will be in heaven .**

**But the answer of Jesus eliminates the problems the Sadducees foresee, that make heaven such a mess. Jesus says people will be like angels in heaven. What does this mean? It means the whole issue of sex is taken away. Angels are sexless beings, and they do not have conflict over relationships. You never read about Mrs. Gabriel, or of any angel having a mate. There is no adultery among angels. There is no jealousy or lust, nor any the problems that sex leads to in this life. Jesus is saying that sex is not necessary in heaven. There will be no death there and no need for reproduction to keep the new heaven and new earth populated. Sex is what makes marriage an exclusive relationship in time, and it leads to a lot of emotions that will not be a part of eternity.**

**The Sadducees were trying to carry over all the baggage of sexuality in time, into eternity. If this was what eternity was to be, they had a point. But Jesus makes all their objections irrelevant by making it clear that the conflicts of sexuality will not exist in the**

resurrected bodies. James M. Campbell in his book, *Heaven Opened*, writes, "True marriage is something more than a civil contract, a partnership of convenience, a legalized indulgence. Where it represents only those things it has in it no element of perpetuity, and can have no existence beyond the present. But that which underlies all true marriage, the union of souls, the ever deepening companion of souls, abides. 'The children of this age' marry in a conventional fashion only for earth, but 'the children of the resurrection,' who 'marry in the Lord,' are united forever. They are 'as the angels,' that is to say, they have reached that androgynous condition in which sex distinctions are transcended, or rather, in which the qualities of both sexes are blended together."

This means that the millions who have had two or more mates in this life need not worry about making choices in heaven. Their will be none of that says Jesus. The millions of singles need not worry that they will be left out, as if heaven will be a continuation of the couple oriented society of time. All angels are single, and Jesus is single, and all of the redeemed will be single. Marriage, in the sense of an exclusive relationship, will be no more. We may love millions without any jealousy on the part of others we love, for the sexual and exclusive is no more. We will be like brothers and sisters to millions with Jesus as our Elder Brother. Their will be no jealousy or envy in the family of God. All will dwell in perfect harmony in the Father's house.

But what about the universal hope of lovers? Does the answer of Jesus eliminate all these hopes? Not at all. It only eliminates the problems, but it does not eliminate the dreams of lovers of having a special relationship in the eternal kingdom. We shall be like the angels. Are we to suppose that this means some kind of demotion to a state where love is less than what we know in earthly marriage? Jesus is not letting the Sadducees rob heaven of love. He is telling them they

**are ignorant of the power of God, and they have too small a view of God's potential to see that He will make love even greater in eternity than it is in time. They have tried to limit God to their concept of love, but God is not so limited. He has a higher level of love for those in the resurrection. It will be a promotion to a love level enjoyed now by the angels. We will be moving on up to a level of love where all the problems, the Sadducees could conceive, are gone forever.**

**We are not to read into this that there will be no unique love relationships in heaven. Jesus is not saying, that in the restored Paradise, Adam will have no special relationship to Eve. Will Eve pass her former husband on the streets of gold and say to her companion, "He looks familiar but I don't know him from Adam?" If so, then all that Scripture says about reunion of families, retention of memory, and maintaining our identity is meaningless. Jesus said in Matt.8:11 "I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven." But what about Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel? Is heaven to be for men only? Of course not! These couples in the Bible will not lose their identity. If they did, there would be no meaning to knowing them in eternity, for they would be a bunch of total strangers. It is the retaining of the memory of who they were in time that gives meaning to meeting them in eternity. You can eliminate conflict over sexuality and exclusiveness, but you cannot eliminate the relationship of married couples in heaven. Once you do that you destroy all that the Bible says about recognition and reunion in heaven. This makes heaven meaningless, for then it is just a mass of beings who are in paradise, but with no identity. This is a rejection of the Biblical hope.**

**So, what do we conclude? Marriage as we know it will be no more, but the relationship of married people will not be eliminated. Just as friends and family will have a special relationship in eternity, so**

**married people will have such a relationship. If it was an unhappy or mediocre marriage, the couple will not have to be in any relationship in heaven, even though all hostility will be gone. But for those who want to go on forever in a special love relationship, there is no reason, whatsoever, why this should not be so.**

**Rachel and Leah are not going to go on for all eternity fighting over which one gets Jacob to sleep with them, but there is no reason to doubt that they will both have a very special relationship to Jacob, which they will not have with you and me, even though we might become the best of friends in heaven. It can never be that these people were not married, and so, even though they will not be married in the sense of having an exclusive sexual relationship, they will be married for all eternity. Will marriage be forever? The answer is both yes and no. It is no, to the Sadducees limited concept of marriage, but yes, to the concept of marriage, as a quality love relationship that the redeemed want to possess forever.**

**I might find myself greatly interested in Sarah. I have preached sermons on her, and I might want to spend long hours hearing her story in heaven. She would become a special friend to me and a sister in the family of God, but she would always be the wife of Abraham. He would not be jealous of the time she spends sharing her story with me, or millions of other men, for there is no reason for jealousy, and no basis for fear that their unique relationship can be stolen. This means the marriage relationship is more secure in heaven than it could ever be in time. In time there are many things that can change the best relationships, but in eternity they will be what they are forever, with no possibility of change, except to get better. There is no decline of anything good or loving in heaven. Progress is forever, but regress is never.**

**This means that marriage will be forever for those who have a love**

**they want to enjoy forever. Not all married couples have such a love, but for those who do, heaven will be the fulfillment of their hopes. Everyone will be married in heaven, in at least one sense, for all will be married to the Bridegroom, who is Christ. Matthew Henry, the great commentator, says, "The joys of that state are pure and spiritual, and arise from the marriage of all of them to the Lamb, not of any of them to one another." He may be overstating the case, and be implying that there are no joys in any other relationship than that we will have with our Savior, but his point is good. Just as all will love Christ without any jealousy, so any love in heaven will not present any problem as it often does in time.**

**A husband was consoling himself and his wife who was on her death-bed. He said they would meet again and be together in heaven. But she replied that she would not even notice him in heaven for she would be occupied forever in praising her Lord. This sound super-spiritual, but it has no basis in fact. We will be ever in our Lord's presence and worship will be a perpetual state of the redeemed, but to suggest that all other relationships have to be denied is going against the grain of all Christian hopes. We are to love God now with all our being, but this in no way detracts from loving others. In fact, the second commandment is to love our neighbor as ourself. God is to be our number one priority, but He expects us to love others as well. There is no reason to suppose this will be changed in heaven where we will finally be able to obey God's commands completely. We will be able to love God fully and still be able to love others in a special way, as well as love all the redeemed. We must love others here to really love God. It will be even more so in heaven. Our total love for God will make us all the more loving to others.**

**Charles Spurgeon, considered by many to be the greatest preacher in history, had a very interesting and unique perspective on this issue. He writes, "I expect to see and know all the saints, to recognize them,**

**and rejoice with them, and that without the slightest prejudice to my being wholly absorbed in the sight of my Lord. Let me explain to you how this can be. When I went the other day into a friend's drawing-room, I observed that on all sides there were mirrors. The whole of the walls were covered with glass, and everywhere I looked I kept seeing my friend. It was not necessary that I should fix my eyes upon him, for all the mirrors reflected him. Thus, brethren, it seems to me that every saint in heaven will be a mirror of Christ, and that as we look upon all the loved ones, gazing round upon them all, we shall see Christ in every one of them, so we shall still be seeing the Master in the servants, seeing the head in all the members. It is I in them, and they in me. Is it not so? It will be all the Master. This is the sum total of heaven." Spurgeon saw no problem in loving one's mate forever, for it would not be a conflict with loving one's Lord supremely.**

**The Sadducees tried to make love a problem in order to make the whole idea of the resurrection a problem. Jesus made it clear, their limited idea of love and marriage was not the only concept of love and marriage God was capable of designing. Failure to evaluate the answer of Jesus in the context of this attack of the enemies of the resurrection has led some to conclude that Jesus rejects the idea of love forever for mates.**

**This is not so, and Christians all through history have never doubted that true loving relationships will be eternal. Charles Kingsley wrote, "All I can say is, if I do not love my wife, body and soul, as well as I do here, then there is neither resurrection of my body nor my soul." This is the conviction of many who have given this issue any thought. In the famous Pulpit Commentary, widely used by pastors, we read these words on this passage, "Our Lord says nothing here concerning mutual recognition in the future state; nothing about the continuance of those tender relations which he sanctions and**

**bleses on earth, and in the absence of which we cannot imagine perfect happiness existing...Love will continue, purified and deepened; husband and wife, once joined together by God, cannot be put asunder." Herbert Lockyer, author of numerous Christian books, says, "What kind of home would it be if its members are to be strangers to each other for ever? ...the beautiful but broken relationships of earth are resumed in the Father's house above where, as members of the same family we dwell together in perfect harmony."**

**It is no contradiction to the words of Christ to affirm that marriage will last forever. It is probably more accurate, however, to say that the relationship and love of married people will last forever, after marriage itself has passed away. Marriage is an earthly concept, but love is heavenly and eternal, and that is what lovers want. The old puritan theology of marriage put it this way--"husband and wife are to help each other to live together for a time as copartners in grace here, that they may reign together forever as coheirs in glory hereafter." The idea that we will be like angels ought not to cause us to reduce our concept of love. Are we to suppose for one minute that angels are less loving than we are, and that to be like them is a step down from our level of love. For all we know angels have a pleasure in love that is far superior to what we know of in sex. All we know is that there will be no jealousy and conflict in angelic love.**

**There is a land where beauty will not fade,  
Nor sorrow dim the eye;  
Where true hearts will not shrink nor be dismayed  
And love will never die.**

**Marriage existed in the first Paradise and God declared that it was not good for man to be alone. God provided a partner for Adam,**

**and Paradise was only complete when he had his partner. Certainly, the final Paradise will not be less than the first. There will be no widows or widowers in heaven. There will be no lonely singles. Not all singles are lonely, but the fact is, many are so in time. This will not be the case in heaven. Everyone will have a partner, for if it was not good for Adam to be without a partner, it certainly will not be good for anyone in the everlasting paradise to be without one. Christ will have His Bride, the Church, and every man will have a companion, if not a wife, and every women a companion, if not a husband. Nobody will be left out of a perfect love relationship in that eternal Paradise. This would be a contradiction to all we know of God in the Bible.**

**It is a problem to grasp just what the relationship of mates will be in heaven, because we are limited, like the Sadducees were, in our understanding. But it will be something special. C.S.Lewis wrote, "About the nature of the relation between spouses in eternity I base my idea on St. Paul's dictum that 'he that is joined with a harlot is one flesh.' If the lowest, most corrupt form of sexual union has some mystical 'oneness' involved in it,...the married and lawful form must have it par excellence. That is, I think the union between the risen spouses will be as close as that between the soul and its own risen body."**

**Richard Crashaw put the following epitaph on the tomb of a young married couple who died and were buried together.**

**To these, whom death again did wed,  
This grave's their second marriage bed;  
For though the hand of fate could force  
Twixt soul and body a divorce,  
It could not sunder man and wife,  
Cause they both lived but one life.**

**The last line is the key to the hopes of lovers. If they are one in Christ, that unity will be everlasting, but if they lack that oneness, they have no basis for eternal oneness. All oneness, and all love that will be eternal, will be so, because of a oneness in time in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is love for Christ that makes every other love eternal. That is why Christians have always known that their earthly loves will be a part of heaven. David knew that he would love his son, he lost as a child, in heaven.(IISam.12:23). Dr. Lee Roberson, the great preacher in the South, said in a message on this text, "This verse tells me that we shall see our loved ones in heaven and know them." Martha knew she would know and love her brother Lazarus, in heaven.(John 11:24). Paul expected to know his Christian friends in heaven. In I Thess.2:19-20 he wrote, "For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when He comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy." See also, II Cor. 1:14 and 4:14. How can we possibly think that all relationships, but those of mates, will continue forever? All of our problems with this reality revolve around the same issue the Sadducees saw, and which Jesus eliminated-sex. Ellicott in his commentary says, "The old relation may subsist under new conditions. Things that are incompatible here may there be found to co-exist. The saintly wife of two saintly husbands may love both with an angelic, and therefore a pure and unimpaired affection."**

**The answer of Jesus, to the trick question of the Sadducees, does not, in any way, rob heaven of one of the great hopes of Christian lovers through the ages. On the tomb of Charles Kingsley and his wife are three Latin words which give a message that millions of mates feel is true. The three words say, "We have loved, we love, we shall love." This has been the hope of Christians through the centuries. St. Augustine, one of the greatest theologians of all time, wrote a letter of consolation to Italica, a Roman lady of rank who had lost her husband, way back in 408 A.D. In it he said, "We have not lost our**

dear ones who have departed from this life, but have merely sent them ahead of us, so we also shall depart and shall come to that life where they will be more than ever dear as they will be better known to us, and where we shall love them without fear of parting." This was also the conviction of Ambrose, the famous bishop of Milan from 340-397 A.D. He wrote of his brother who died, and imagines the happiness of Theodosius, "when he receives Gratian and Pulcheria, his sweetest children, whom he had lost here; when his wife Flacilla, a soul faithful to God, embraces him; when he rejoices that his father has been restored to him;...." Recognition of, and reunion with, loved ones has been the universal hope of believers. There is no way you can leave mates out of this hope. John Greenleaf Whittier in *Snow Bound* wrote these famous words of the Christian hope,

Alas for him who never sees  
The stars shine through his cypress trees;  
Who hopeless lays his dead away,  
Nor looks to see the breaking day  
Across his mournful marbles play;  
Who has not learned in hours of faith  
The truth to flesh and sense unknown,  
That life is ever Lord of Death  
And Love can never lose its own.

## **2. GHOSTS OF THE GODLY Bases on Matt. 27:5-54**

History is full of the weird and mysterious in relation to the dead. In Barbados, in the West Indies, in 1812, a vault was opened and three coffins were in a confused state. In 1815 and 1819 it was opened, and again, each time the coffins were in disarray. The

**Governor, Lord Cambermere had the vault carefully checked and cemented up and sealed. Nine months later it was opened in his presence with thousands of spectators. To everyone's amazement the coffins were scattered about, one was on end, and some on top of others. No one could explain it, and so it entered the books as another ghost story, along with hundreds of other unexplained mysteries.**

**Christianity has always been involved in the history of the unexplained, because it too deals with the supernatural. Many of the haunted houses of history have been parsonages, and you wouldn't believe all the weird goings on that preachers have experienced. Much of the history of ghost haunting and hunting has been written by Christian men. For example, Sabine Baring Gould, author of *Onward Christian Soldiers*, who died in 1924 at the age of 90, wrote much about ghosts, and his own brother was seen by his mother after his death.**

**Ludwig Levater, a Protestant Calvinist minister in Switzerland wrote a book in 1572 with the title, *Of Ghosts and Spirits Walking By Night*. He believed that the dead could appear, but felt most ghosts were due to hallucination and pranks. He told of how merry young men would throw sheets over themselves and scare the wits out of travelers at Inns. Sometimes they even went so far as to hide under the bed. Ghosts are still a part of most Halloween parties today, but they are so tame that seldom will a ghost ever win a prize.**

**There was a young man of Bengal,  
Who went to a Halloween ball.  
He thought he would risk it,  
And go as a biscuit,  
But a dog ate him up in the hall.**

**He would have been better off as a ghost. This type of humor was not appreciated by the Catholic Church. They officially believed in ghosts, and took the matter quite seriously. In 1509 when four monks came to John Jetzer at night with sheets over them to give him some theological answers from the other world, they were caught, and made to give up the ghost in more ways than one, for they were condemned to die at the stake. Some people just can't take a joke. That phrase, giving up the ghost, is used 5 times in the King James Version to refer to the death of Jesus on the cross, and it is used also to describe the dying of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.**

**The ghost, of course, refers to the spirit of man. Only once did we find a reference to a ghost in its eerie supernatural sense in the New Testament. When Jesus came walking for the disciples on the sea, in the night, we read in Matt. 14:26, "But when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" and they cried out for fear." Any of us seeing a white figure moving across the water in the night would jump to that same conclusion that it must be a ghost. Mark tells us the same thing, and both use the word phantasma. This is the only place where the word is used in Scripture. It does reveal that the disciples believed in the possibility of ghosts. This is not surprising, for most everybody did in their day.**

**The issue of the reality of ghosts revolves around the question of whether or not the dead can ever return and appear unto men. The Catholic Church has concluded that the dead in heaven or hell can never return, but the dead in purgatory might, if God permitted. Protestants concluded that all the visions and contact with the dead are simply demons impersonating the dead. That is, they do not deny the evidence of the supernatural appearances, but they feel it is demonic deception rather than the return of the actual dead. The Catholic Church tended to support the stories of good ghosts who would return to make up for their sins. They would haunt a**

**murderer until he confessed, or help solve some injustice and encourage the faithful. The Puritans so objected to this that they went to the other extreme, and wanted nothing to do with the dead, and so they ceased even to have funeral sermons.**

**The point of this introduction is to show that there has been a history of Christian debate over ghosts. The debate goes on yet today, and there is a great interest in the subject. Dorothy Scarborough in her book, Famous Modern Ghost Stories writes, "Man's love for the supernatural, which is one of the most natural things about him, was never more marked than at the present." Along with the growing interest in the occult there are also a growing number of books on ghosts. Shopenhower asserted that belief in ghosts is born with man, and that no one is free from it. It is true that such beliefs are found in all lands and ages, but it is not true everywhere. I asked my three children if they believed in ghosts, and they thought it was silly. Mark even said that is like believing in Santa Claus.**

**Most American Christians would be highly skeptical of anything to do with ghosts, and I am sure most of us would fit this category. I'm not interested in looking at ghost evidence, but our text brings us into a realm far more mysterious than any story you ever heard of about ghosts. Some believe these dead raised to life were ghosts. It all depends on your definition. My interest in the passage is to point out how much more mysterious reality is than fiction. People flock to see horror movies with all the terror of ghouls, vampires, and monsters of every sort. Blood flows freely, and people get their sadistic kicks out of it all. But its all fiction, and everybody knows it, even those who scream and get goose pimples.**

**But our text, and the whole of Matt. 27 is a record of historical fact. This chapter is so filled with evil and horror, and supernatural**

**mystery, that if we could see it portrayed as it really happened, it would make the Hollywood horror films look like bedtime stories. I defy anyone to show me anywhere in all the literature of history a record of more horror and mystery than we have here in Matt. 27.**

**It begins with the evil satanic inspired plot to kill the Son of God. It records His capture and deliverance to Pilate. Secondly, it tells of the stricken conscience of Judas, and his terrible despair that ended in a most gruesome suicide. Thirdly, we have here a supernatural dream of Pilate's wife giving warning. Fourthly, we have the demonic plot successfully carried out of releasing a known criminal, who was Barabbas. Fifthly, we have the cry of the cruel mob saying, "Crucify Him and let His blood be upon us and our children." Sixthly, we have the inhuman mockery, and the crowning of Jesus with thorns. Seventhly, we have the scene of dying men forced to drag their cross to the place of skull-Golgatha. It was a place of horror and death. Eighthly, we begin to see the whole creation involved in this most supernatural event. At noon the sun goes black and for three hours the land is draped in darkness. Nothing Hollywood could do could ever match such a setting for the conflict of good and evil. Ninthly, near the end of darkness a blood curdling cry came from the middle cross, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?"**

**There is more horror and mystery per verse here than anywhere in God's Word, or in all creation. If the world is hungry for the mysterious and supernatural let them read the Bible, and let us who believe it share it, and let the world know. We have a text that should be a thrill to anyone who longs for more insight into the supernatural. It is a text that has a fantastic history, and more implications than we can begin to cover. It raises many questions that nobody can answer. It leaves commentators mystified, and many just skip over it. Christians are often afraid of the supernatural, and text like this bother them, and so they ignore them. People say they believe the**

**Bible, but if you ask them if they believe any have ever risen from the dead, and come out of tombs, and appeared unto others, they would write you off as some kind of a kook. Most Christians are not even aware this passage is in the Bible.**

**Maybe some would like to believe it is one of those passages that got into the Bible by mistake. No chance, for there is scarcely a scholar anywhere who does not agree that this is a part of God's original revelation. It is as authentic as John 3:16. There is no escaping it, and so we must treat it as God's revelation, and incorporate it into our theology. The earthquake, the tearing of the veil in the temple, and tombs being opened, are all connected, and each has a valuable message to convey. We are focusing our attention on the saints who rose from the tombs. An unknown poet has put the whole scene into poetry.**

**The graves flew open, and exposed their store,  
And into bodies shook the human ore;  
The temple corner-stones were seen to yield,  
And to and fro the laboring fabric reeled,  
The hallowed loaves were thrown the floor about,  
And the seven golden burning lamps went out.  
The sacred incense lost its odorous scent,  
The awful veil was into pieces rent.**

**Heaven and hell were locked in mortal combat. The destiny of men in the world was being decided. And because Jesus, through death, conquered death, and delivered those in bondage by destroying the power of the devil, even Hollywood knows that the way to deal with Dracula is by means of the cross. Here we have the real war to end all wars, for this war opened the way to eternal peace with God. The open tombs and risen saints bore testimony to the cataclysmic effects of the cross. The magnitude of what Jesus did in dying could**

not be revealed except by a very extraordinary miracle. The Roman Centurion was so impressed by the supernatural effects of Christ's death he confessed that He was the Son of God. Luke 23:48 says, "And all the multitude who assembled to see the sight, when they saw what had taken place, returned home beating their breasts." We cannot be touched that deeply, but let's see what we can learn about these temporary tenants of the tombs. The first question we will look at is-

**I. WHO? Who were these saints whose bodies came to life again? There are two views. They could be saints of the Old Testament, or as most believe, they could be believers in Christ who died during His ministry. If the thief on the cross was promised an entrance into paradise that very day, what about those who believed before the cross, but who had died already? Would they be blessed with a destiny less than that thief because they died sooner? Most say no, for it is fitting that all the followers of Christ would join Him in this conquering of death. Some commentators mention such people as Joseph the husband of Mary, and Simeon, and John the Baptist. The evidence does support the view that these were Christian saints rather than Old Testament saints. The word for saints is used only here in the Gospels, but everywhere else in the New Testament it always refers to Christians. If we go to be with Christ when we die, why should all of those who died during His life not join Him immediately in entering paradise? The day of resurrection was not only for the head, but for all of the Body that had been dead up to that point. The second question is -**

**II. HOW? Were they raised like Lazarus in their natural body which would be subject again to death? Were they raised as was Jesus with spiritual bodies, able to appear and disappear, and ascend with Him to paradise? Again we can only make intelligent speculation in an area of such unusual mystery. Either view is**

adequate. If they arose in their natural body, they did not have to die and be buried again, but could have ascended like Enoch and Elijah did in their natural bodies. Most everyone agrees that these saints did ascend with Christ, and did not have to die again. Spurgeon felt they were given the spiritual body we all we have in the day of resurrection. He said of them, "How I should like to know something about them! They were representative men; they arose as specimens of the way in which all the saints shall in their due time arise." There is no way to be sure of the nature of their bodies, but if they were raised with bodies like Jesus, bodies that could disappear and go through walls, then they would fit the description of what we think of as ghosts. In many lands the ghost has a body identical to its body of flesh, and it can eat and even marry, and none can tell the difference. If such be the case here, we have the ghosts of the godly. The third question is-

**III. WHEN?** In verse 53 Matthew makes it clear that it was after the resurrection of Christ that the saints came out of the tombs and appeared to others. The timing is important because the Scripture makes it clear that Jesus was the first born from the dead, and that He was the first fruits of those who slept. The resurrection of Christ would be anti-climatic if the saints had appeared before Him. The Christians would not have doubted the resurrection of Jesus if they had already seen dead friends and relatives who had come back to life.

The text says that the earthquake prepared the way for this resurrection by opening the tombs. The earthquake did not wake the dead. The tombs were open as Jesus died, and no one did anything about closing them up, for to touch a tomb or body would defile them, and they would be eliminated from participation in the Passover events. We have here the weirdest weekend of the world's history. You can search the records and you will never find an earthquake in

history that added to the world population. They all subtract but this one. Earthquakes are a mouth of death swallowing up people, but here is one, like the great fish of Jonah, vomiting up the captives into life. There were more people alive after this earthquake than before it began. Nature helped Jesus literally rob the graves. Jesus was the greatest grave robber of all time, and He is not through yet, for He says in John 5:28-29, "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear His voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment." All the spook shows of the world are kids stuff compared to what our Lord has done and will do in the display of supernatural power. The final question is-

**IV. WHY? Did Jesus just have a flare for the spectacular, or was there a good reason for these saints rising and appearing? Obviously there was purpose, and some reasons are evident. Jesus could do many things as the Son of God that no one else could do. If He rose from the dead alone, it would still not be evidence that anyone else could do so. In these saints, however, we have a concrete example of the power of the resurrection. If Jesus entered death and set the captives free, then there should be evidence of it, and these saints were that evidence. John Calvin in his commentary on Matthew writes, "Christ, in rising from the dead, brought others along with Him out of their graves as His companions. Now by this sign it was made evident, that He neither died nor rose again in a private capacity, but in order to shed the odor of life on all believers." There was more than one empty tomb on that first Easter. Because Jesus died and rose again, there were godly ghosts who walked the earth, and they represent, not just the victory of Jesus over death, but the victory of all who put their trust in Him.**

### **3. THE COINS OF THE BIBLE Based on Mark 12:41-44**

**Florence Banks in her book *Coins Of Bible Days* says that the handling of ancient coins does with time what radio and TV do with space. There are hundreds of miles between us and California, but TV eliminates those miles, and puts people there in our presence here. So Bible days are hundreds of years back, and a great gap separates us from the people who lived then. But to see and touch the bits of silver, bronze, and gold that those people used, as we use dimes and dollars, brings them nearer. She writes, "When we hold in our palms the one thing we can hold which we have a reasonable right to believe could have been in the hand of Nicodemus when he bought the hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes for Jesus's burial; in the hand of Martha when she went to market; in the hand of Mary of Bethany when she bought her precious alabaster box of spikenard, or in the money bag of Judas when he purchased food for the disciples, we feel a closer acquaintance with those personages of the Bible than we had ever dreamed we could."**

**Money in those days was not called in when it got old like it is today. There were no banks, and so people hoarded money and hid it in caves and wells, and buried it in the ground. That is why archaeologists are able to find so much of that ancient money. When Jesus told the parable of the treasure buried in the field He was not dreaming up a hypothetical situation. He was speaking of a common practice of His day. Many coins are also found in ancient ships that have sunk, and so the result is there are actually more coins available from the ancient world of Greece and Rome than there are from the 18th century in the United States. There are enough of the coins of Bible times available so you can own one for just a few dollars.**

**The study of coins can make history come alive. The symbolism has much meaning, for coins often had the image of some deity on them. This led to people using them as magic and good luck charms. Some use to put coins under their pillow to cure headaches because the god on the coin was a god of healing. Jewish coins, however, did not follow the imagery of other people, for God commanded them not to make images. Of great interest to coin collectors, however, is a coin that was made by the people in Gaza, the Philistine City in about 400 B.C. It has a helmeted head of an unknown male god on one side, and on the other is a bearded figure of man seated in a winged wheel and holding a hawk on his hand. Three Phoenician letters are also shown which are transliterated as YHD or YHW. Kenneth Jacob in his book *Coins And Christianity* says that this coin may be the only known example of the God of the Israelites being depicted on a coin. The Jews did not make the coin, but it was made by the people who made coins to appeal to a number of different cults by using their deities. This was their method of trying to open up trade. The wings and the wheels fit the vision of Ezekiel. This unique coin is in the British Museum.**

**The Jews learned the value of coins from others. For centuries they used precious metals as money according to weight. The first rich man mentioned in the Bible was Abraham. He lived in the 19th century B.C. Gen. 13:2 says, "Now Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold." In Gen. 23 we have an account of a real estate transaction. Abraham bought a piece of property from the Hittites for a burying place. When agreement had been reached Abraham weighed out, "Four hundred shekels of silver, according to the weights current among the merchants." This was equal to about \$220.00 in our money in the 1960's. Today we could hand over \$220.00 and a man could slip it into his billfold and go about his business feeling no burden. In that day you had to have**

**bags to carry your metal weights to measure, and then a beast of burden to carry away your profits.**

**Through most of the Old Testament the weight system was used. This became so inconvenient that men had to devise an easier way of transferring wealth. That is why coins became such a helpful invention. Not all have caught on to this convenient idea even in modern times. If you go to the small island of Yap in the Pacific, you will find that they still use for their money huge stones up to 50 pounds. They have holes in them so a pole can be put through, and two men can carry it. It is the largest and heaviest currency in the world. In their primitive society it is no problem, but you can't even imagine what an intolerable nuisance it would be in our society. There are also people in the Pacific who use bird feathers for money, and so the heaviest and the lightest money in the world is used by primitive peoples in the Pacific.**

**The Jewish people were more primitive than others peoples when it came to matter of science, culture, and business. The first coins were made in about 700 B.C. in Lydia, which is now the coast of Turkey. Gold was so plentiful there that the river was said to be flowing with golden sand. Croesus, who reigned from 560 to 546 B. C. was world famous for his extreme wealth. He was the first to make coins of pure gold. Some of them have survived to this day. Deluded by his wealth he believed he was invincible, and decided to take on Cyrus the king of Persia. In two years he was defeated, and his fabulous fortune and mint were taken by Cyrus. The Persians had no coins, but Cyrus liked the idea and made his own coins.**

**He then went on to conquer Babylon where the Jews were in captivity. This is where the Jews first came into contact with the idea of coins. When Cyrus sent them back to Jerusalem, they took**

**with them vast quantities of these Persian coins called drachmas. This is the first coin mentioned in the Bible in Ezra 2:68. In Neh. 7:70-72 we also read of the thousands of drachmas given to help build up the wall. From this time on gifts to the temple are no longer in weights of gold and silver, but in gold and silver coins.**

**Jewish coinage then began after the captivity, and, therefore, at the end of recorded Old Testament history. This means we must study the intertestamental period to learn of Jewish coinage. This is of interest, but of even more interest is the study of coins in the New Testament. We actually have coins in collections which were made by Herod the Great, his son Archelaus who is also mentioned in the New Testament. Also we have them by Herod Antipas who had John the Baptist beheaded; Herod Agrippa who had Peter imprisoned, and Pontius Pilate. Collectors are eager to find his coins marked the 16th year of Tiberius, for that was the year of the crucifixion. It is a coin with a vessel on one side and three ears of barley on the other.**

**The coin most in demand by collectors is that piece of money Jesus held in His hand called the tribute penny. The Pharisees tried to trap Jesus in a political blunder by asking Him if it was lawful to pay taxes to Ceasar or not. Jesus in Matt. 22:19 asked them to show whose likeness and inscription was on the coin. When they said Ceasar's, he responded, "Render therefore to Ceasar the things that are Ceasar's, and to God the things that are God's." This coin that Jesus looked at was a silver coin with Tiberius Ceasar on one side and this inscription-Tiberius Ceasar Augustus, son of the divine Augustus. On the other side is a female seated with a spear in her right hand, and an olive branch in her left. She represented Rome, and the inscription Pontifex Maximus meant chief priests or Pontiff.**

**It is of interest to note the symbolism of war and peace which we still use on our coins, but also to note the difference. On this coin that Jesus held the symbol of war is in the right hand showing a preference to war. On American coins the eagle holds both the arrows of war and the olive branch of peace, but it is the peace symbol that is in the right talon showing a preference for peace. There can be no doubt that this slight reverse in symbolism is due to the influence of Christ in our culture and heritage. You could take a 50 cent piece or dollar bill and ask somebody why the arrows are in the left talon, and explain that in the time of Christ they were in the right, but He has made a difference. A coin is a basis for a witness to Christ. He is the author of peace, and you can speak of peace that He can give to those who will put their trust in Him.**

**The same Roman denarius was the coin that Jesus used in His story of the Good Samaritan. In Luke 10:35 after he took the injured man to an inn we read, "And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the inn-keeper, saying, take care of him and whatever more you spend I will repay you when I come back." A denarius was equal to about 20 cents, so he gave him an equivalent of 40 cents. That would not go far in a Holiday Inn, but it was considerable money in that day. In fact, it was equal to the average man's wage for two days. In Matt. 20 Jesus tells another parable of laborers in the vineyard. They agreed to labor for a denarius a day. This means the Good Samaritan gave the inn keeper two days of salary.**

**In Mark 12:41-44 Jesus sits and watches people in their giving. He sees the widow give her mites. These mites were copper coins which together equaled the smallest of the Roman coins. In our day they would be a half a penny each. The RSV says instead of a farthing, a penny. Here was giving on a level that is the least**

possible unless she would give only one mite. Yet Jesus praises her, for relative to her wealth she gave more than a millionaire who would give half a million, for he would still have half a million left. She gave her all, and in so doing she pleased Christ, and made the little coin called the mite, or lepton, famous for all history. This provides a real stewardship lesson, and gives even our penny a place of potential in the service of Christ. Littleness of value can be multiplied if given to Christ. The poet put it-

**Little drops of water,  
Little grains of sand,  
Make the mighty ocean,  
And the beauteous land.**

**Little seeds of mercy,  
Sown by youthful hands,  
Grow to bless the nations  
Far in heathen lands.**

**Never underestimate the power of small giving which is sacrificial giving.**

**We don't have time to look at every coin in the Bible, but we want to look at a few interesting facts about the role of coins following the New Testament. The Romans made a big thing of their destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. They minted 15 varieties of coins to celebrate this event. Vespasian struck one of silver which can be seen on display in Philadelphia. On one side is himself, and on the other is a female captive with her hands bound standing before a palm tree. The words on it are Judea vanquished.**

**When Constantine, the Roman Emperor, became a Christian in**

**312 A.D., he began a process of Christianizing coins. It was slow at first, and there were just hints of Christian symbolism mixed with pagan symbols. After a century the cross was a frequently used symbol on coins. In 450 A.D. the emperor Marcian struck a coin with he and his wife joining hands in marriage with the figure of Christ standing between them. This was the beginning of many coins on which Christ appeared.**

**In the East in the 6th century some silver coins had the cross and the inscription-the light of the world. Justinion II had his coins with himself and the inscription-the servant of Christ. On the other side was a portrait of Christ and the inscription-Jesus Christ-King of Kings. Sometimes Jesus was portrayed with a long beard, and other times with a short beard, but the cross is almost always present to make clear who it is. In the 10th century a series of bronze coins had Christ on them, and in the 12th century Christ is shown crowning the emperor.**

**In England coins with the cross were common, and also the holy dove. In France in the 10th century there is coin of a bird with a twig in its beak representing the dove of Noah. Some coins also had the Lamb of God. Many Bible characters and scenes were put on coins, and it became a custom to associate Christianity and coin symbols. So much was this the case that when a new silver florin was made in 1849 with reference to God omitted, a cry went up from the people against what they called the godless florin. The outcry was so great that the coins were promptly withdrawn, and a new coin made that had reference to God. The value of knowing this history is that it gives the Christian another open door to use a common interest, which is money, to witness for Jesus.**

#### **4. THE REALITY OF ACCIDENTS Based on Luke**

## **13:1-5**

**No doubt everyone of us has had our share of accidents. If not in a car, or with a knife, or some other sharp object whereby we cut ourselves, then all of us have at some point in our life fallen down. It is a part of growing up to fall down, and so it is hard to conceive that even baby Jesus did not fall down at sometime, or fall against some piece of furniture that Joseph had made. It would not be a normal childhood to grow up without some kind of an accident. But whether Jesus did or not is not the issue, for nobody else does escape all accidents. We all have them, and the longer we live the more we have.**

**In the battle of Sockett's Harbor during the War of 1812, David Sockett had his hand blown off at the age of 76. Most men had no such accidents at 76 because most men never lived that long in that day. Some years later a tree fell on Sockett's head and fractured his skull. A few years after that he was standing by when a cannon misfired and both his eyes were damaged by the blast. After this a horse kicked him in the face causing permanent disfigurement. You have to conclude that he was accident prone, but it was something he learned to live with for he lived to be 115.**

**In contrast was our 17 year old neighbor. She was riding with her brother when a Christian man in another car had an epilepsy attack. His foot froze on the gas pedal, and he ran into their car. She was thrown into the windshield where glass cut her jugular vein, and she died in just a few minutes. At 17 one accident ended her life. In another church I served an army officer had a wife and three children who were hit by an oncoming car, and the wife and two of the children were killed instantly. The third child was thrown out the back window and survived. It was the first and only three casket funeral I have ever seen.**

**These accidents didn't last very long, but the suffering they left behind still goes on. I have had my own share of accidents, and have wrecked a couple of cars quite severely but have suffered no bodily injury. My children cannot say the same. My oldest son was hit by a car while on his bike and ended up in the hospital for a month. My youngest son fell down the stairs and was taken to the hospital. My daughter once rolled down an embankment and smashed up a truck and broke her neck. She had to spend weeks in the hospital and months in traction, and with a lifetime of side effects.**

**I read the same statistics that you read, and know that ten of thousands of people a year die in car accidents, and hundreds of thousands suffer injury, but cold statistics are not why I believe in the reality of accidents. It is my experience of accidents that convinces me they are real, and also my study of God's Word. But there is always this wide spread saying that keeps coming up that says, "With God there are no accidents." This is one of those popular theological sayings that people use to cut off debate on a sensitive issue. What can you say to such an absolute statement? It seems sacrilegious, or at least futile, to argue with such a statement. After all, who is going to have the audacity to challenge the competency of God to run the world? The result is that this little phrase quite effectively cuts off both debate and thought on the subject of accidents. But we cannot escape the fact that our experience suggests that accidents are a very real part of the world in which we live.**

**Some pastors I have talked to about accidents feel that they have to support the idea that there are no accidents in the life of a Christian. I tried to argue with one Christian leader that such a view doesn't seem to fit the facts, and he became emotionally upset and did not want to pursue the issue. So I am aware that this is an**

**emotional topic, and you may not like questioning one of the strong convictions of many Christians. But I decided that the best way to deal with a dilemma is to look it square in the face, and ask some serious questions. People make a lot of claims for God, but what does God claim for Himself? What does the Bible really say about accidents, and the things that happen by chance? Is there such a thing, or are these pagan ideas that do not belong in the minds of God's people?**

**Philip P. Bliss, who wrote so many of the songs Christians love to sing, such as Hallelujah What A Savior, Wonderful Words Of Life, The Light Of The World Is Jesus, Almost Persuaded, Dare To Be A Daniel, And Jesus Loves Even Me, and many more, was on a train with his wife heading for Chicago for a series of meetings. A bridge gave way and more than 100 people on the train were killed including the Blisses'. He gave so much of what we sing, but his accident did not lead to more praise to God, but less. Bliss wrote the music to It Is Well With My Soul, but the words were written by H. G. Spafford. He sent his family to Europe, and the ship sank, and all four of his children went down with it.**

**Amy Carmicheal went to India as a missionary in 1895. She did much to alleviate the suffering of children, but in 1931 she took a serious fall, and for the next 20 years she was confined to her room. She was in constant pain, but still managed the mission and wrote 13 books. She gained many victories, but not because of her pain, but in spite of her pain. When David Livingston went to Africa and devoted his life to reach those people he faced constant danger. A lion attacked him and left him wounded. He was handicapped for the rest of his life on one side. A mad buffalo almost killed him, and a hippopotamus tipped his boat, and he nearly drowned. He suffered more fevers than anybody I ever read about, and spent a**

**major part of his life recovering. There seemed to be no end to the problems, injuries, and suffering he endured.**

**R. G. LaTorneu gave millions to the cause of Christ. He crashed his car through 8 sections of a fence and broke his neck. He spent two months with his head laying useless on his shoulders. Later on in 1937 he and his wife and their quartet were on their way to share the Gospel in word and song at a special meeting. They had a head on collision that killed all three in the other car and two of their quartet. LaTorneu had both hips and a leg broken, and his chest was crushed. His wife was severely injured as well, but they both recovered and went on to serve the Lord, and gave millions more to His cause.**

**We could go on and on, but the point is that the children of God, as far as the record of history and the record of God's Word goes, do not have any promise that they will escape the suffering that comes through accidents. Godly people and leaders frequently die in accidents. Some Christians think that all of these accidents are really good because they are a part of God's plan. But I do not see this supported by Scripture at all. My study of the Bible has led me to see that all of the events of life fall into four categories. You may see other categories, but here is how I see the breakdown of all events.**

## **1. EVENTS WHICH GOD PLANS.**

**These events have to happen because they are a part of God's purpose, and they are predestined. They cannot not happen. The cross is a good example. It was planned before the world was even created, for God could not, or would not, create such a high risk being as man with his freedom to fall without committing himself to pay the price to redeem and restore him. The cross was the**

most necessary event of history.

## **2. EVENTS WHICH GOD PREVENTS.**

**These are things that would have happened if God had not stepped into history and by His providence prevented. Pharaoh took Sarah because of her beauty, but God prevented his having her, and got her back to Abraham unharmed and unused. The same thing happened later with Rebekah. The killing of baby Jesus by Herod was also prevented. There is no way to know how many terrible things never happened because God prevented them from happening. These two kinds of events-what God plans, and what God prevents, represent God's will in the world. They happen or don't happen because God's plan demands it. But there are two other kinds of events also that we want to look at.**

## **3. EVENTS WHICH GOD PROHIBITS.**

**These are all the things that God forbids. He forbid Adam and Eve to eat a certain fruit. He gave commandments of what men should not do. These things do take place, however, because God has given man the freedom to disobey Him. God does not will these events, nor does He prevent them. They happen against His will. All such events are what we call sin and evil.**

## **4. EVENTS WHICH GOD PERMITS.**

**These are events which God has not planned, but neither has He prohibited, or prevented them. They may cause a great deal of suffering, but they are not events of choice, and so there is not the same guilt connected with them as with those events which God has prohibited. This fourth category is where we put accidents. Accidents are events which God did not plan to happen, nor did**

**man choose to happen. They happen because of mistaken judgments, carelessness, and unawareness of the consequences of what is being done. They are necessary possibilities in a truly free world. They are events that do not need to happen, for they are preventable.**

**The Old Testament law had a very clear distinction between an act of violence which was chosen, and an accidental act of violence. In Ex. 21:12-13 we read, "Anyone who strikes a man and kills him shall surely be put to death. However, if he does not do it intentionally, but God lets it happen, he is to flee to a place I will designate." The first is what we call first degree murder. It is a willful planning to take another's life. The second is what we call manslaughter. There was never any willful desire to take another life. It happened because of unforeseen events which we call accidents. There are all kinds of degrees of responsibility for these kinds of events.**

**A ferry heading for Dover, England sank and a couple of hundred people died. It was because of avoidable human error. Someone was careless and forgot to close a certain door, and it led to the tipping of the ferry. Hundreds of examples of this sort of thing happen. Is human error God's will? If so, then there is no such thing as mistakes and human error, for if they are God's will, and what he has ordained, then they had to happen, and man is not responsible for them, for God made them make those mistakes. God alone then is responsible for all human error. This takes away the responsibility of man and puts it all on God, and this is false theology. We are responsible for our own mistakes, and we cannot throw them back on God. It is part of the risk of a free world where we can make choices. We often make bad ones, and they are our choices and not God's. If we make bad choices on purpose it is sin, but if we make them out of ignorance they are accidents.**

**Either way, we are the ones responsible.**

**Before you ever say there are no accidents again, let me share with you the implications of what you are saying. An accident is something that is not planned by God, or foreseen by man. But if it is a high risk situation where it should be foreseen, then we hold those responsible for the act to a higher degree of responsibility. For example, when a boy is throwing a hard ball against the side of a house where a window is just a few feet away. This scene gives us a good illustration of the difference between determinism and freedom. When the boy lets go too soon and the ball goes flying through the window, you do not get angry at God or the ball. You know the ball had no choice in the matter, and so you do not get a hammer and pulverize it. On the other hand, the boy who chose to throw it so near the window does have a responsibility for what happened. If he has been warned before not to play there, he is even more guilty. If there has never been any warning, his guilt will be less for this first offense, for in ignorance he did not realize the risk involved. His punishment will be in accordance with the degree of his knowledge. If this is the third offense, he is in deep trouble.**

**But now let us look at this event with the assumption that it is true that there are no accidents. If this broken window is no accident, but is the will of God, then the boy becomes identical with the ball. He is now equally without choice, and had no more of an alternative than did the ball. To punish him is the same as pounding the ball, for the boy is merely a tool in the hands of God, just as the ball was a tool in the hands of the boy. The no accident theory traces all apparent accidents back to the only one with a choice, and that is God. This means God is the one who chooses all of the bad, foolish, and ignorant mistakes that make the world so full of accidents. This is bad theology.**

**If there are no accidents, there is nobody to blame for the evils of life but God. You cannot blame the devil or man, because they only do what God has planned for them to do. This reverses the revelation of God's Word, and makes Him the cause of all evil, and the devil and man are mere victims. The Bible says just the opposite, and that Satan and man by their choices made the mess that God had to pay a great price to clean up by the sacrifice of His own Son. If there are no accidents because all is God's will, then it is no wonder that people get so angry at God for all of the terrible tragedies of life. You do not even need a devil or evil forces, or even the free will folly of man, for God alone can be the cause of all we hate about life. But once you admit that all is not God's will, and that evil forces and man can do what is not His will, then you open the door to the reality of accidents. You can't have it both ways. If God's will is not always done on earth as it is in heaven, and why pray this prayer that Jesus taught if it is, then accidents have to be a part of reality in a world where free choices are made every moment by imperfect beings.**

**People like the theory of no accidents because it becomes a sort of magical way to get rid of evil and responsibility, and all of the things that are disturbing about life. It is a form of escapism. Dr. Paul Tournier, the author of numerous books, says in his book *A Doctor's Casebook In The Light Of The Bible*, "The spirit of magic lies in wait for the Christians as much as for the agnostics and the pagans. It arises, in fact form an inherent tendency in human nature, and none of us can boast of being proof against it wiles. It is the longing for the fairy tale, for the magic wand that will charm away the difficulties of life, the suffering, the limitations, and the uncertainties of our human condition."**

**Most of our superficial ideas about suffering arise from our desire for a magical simple answer. What could be more simple**

than to believe that there are no accidents, but that all is a part of God's plan? This means that all is good, and there is no real evil in life. It is true that God can and does work in all things, even evil and foolish mistakes, to bring forth good, but to say that the evil and foolish mistakes are good is going beyond Scripture and common sense. People do get comfort by believing that all is part of God's plan, but I get more comfort by not believing that all of the suffering in the world caused by accidents is the will of God. You can take your choice, but I choose that which is based on the Word of God, and not a traditional saying.

Now, at last, we come to our text in Luke 13. Jesus is dealing with some of the tragedies of his day. He chooses one from the world of suffering caused by the inhumanity of man to man. Pilate had mixed the blood of some Galileans with their own sacrifices, and the implication is that they were violently killed. The other tragedy he deals with comes from the perversity of inanimate objects. Murphy's law comes into play, and things like apartment buildings collapse and people are killed. Jesus refers to the tower in Siloam which fell and killed 18 people.

The main point Jesus is making is that the victims were not meeting such a tragic end because they were being judged for their sin. They were just at the wrong place at the wrong time, and they suffered the consequences. They were not worse sinners than anyone else. They did not deserve their violent end anymore than those who escaped. Neither of these events were planned by God. They fall into the category of events God permits, but does not will. When a plane goes down and kills all who are on board, those people who die are not any worse than those whose plane does not go down. People who die in auto accidents are not worse than those who do not. The whole idea of suffering and death being connected with the sinfulness of the victims is rejected by Jesus.

**This is a false view of suffering to link it to the sinfulness of people as if all suffering and death were in some way a form of judgment. Jesus is saying that suffering and tragedy can often be accidental, and not a part of some plan to punish or discipline.**

**There is all kinds of discipline in life, and plenty of punishment, but to look at an accident as one of these two is superficial and contrary to the teaching of Christ. Spurgeon, one of the greatest preachers in history, and a strong Calvinist, speaks very openly about the reality of accidents. He said, "It is very customary among religious people to talk of every accident as if it were a judgment. The upsetting of a boat upon the river on a Sunday is assuredly understood to be a judgment for the sin of Sabbath-breaking. In the accidental fall of a house, in which persons were engaged in any unlawful occupation, the inference is at once drawn that the house fell because they were wicked. Now, however, some religionists may hope to impress the people by such childish stories as these, I for one, forswear them all. I believe what my Master says is true, when He declared concerning the men upon which the tower of Siloam fell, that they were not sinners above all....They were sinners, there is no doubt about it, but the falling of the wall was not occasioned by their sin, nor was their premature death the consequence of their excessive wickedness."**

**Common sense tell us this is so, for accidents happen to the innocent so often. Children fall, and children get into poisons, and nobody suffers more accidents free of all sinful and wicked intentions than do children. There is no connection between sin and accidents as a necessity. It is equal folly to say there never is a connection, for people who drive and drink kill thousands every year, and their suffering is a direct result of their sin and folly. It is not the case with their victims, however. Pilate was doing evil when he killed the Galileans. They were innocent victims of his**

**evil, but there is no record that he suffered, just as the drunken driver often escapes injury as he kills others.**

**You cannot find a connection between sin and suffering that fits the whole world of innocent and accidental suffering. To even try is to reject the Lord's rejection of the whole idea, and try to make all suffering some form of judgment. Jesus says this tragic suffering and death is not judgment, and it is obvious that it cannot be for discipline. Discipline is for teaching so as to correct bad behavior. Death is definitely overkill for this purpose, and so we are left with a form of suffering we put into the category of accidental.**

**What does this mean? An insurance agent once asked a cowboy if he had ever had an accident, and he said, "No, none to speak of. A bronc kicked in my ribs and busted my collar bone, and a rattlesnake bit me last year." "Good heavens," said the agent, "Don't you call them accidents?" "No," said the cowpuncher, "They done it on purpose." There are accidents which are done on purpose. We have all seen a movie where the bad guys fix the brakes on the good guys car so they will go out when he is driving down the mountain, and thereby have an accident. Technically this is not an accident, but a plan event to look like an accident. God prohibits such events, and so it is no accident, but an evil act done by choice.**

**An authentic accident is an event that takes place without God willing it to happen, and with no human foresight or expectation. It is not the result of a plan, but the result of chance. Anything that happens as a result of a plan is not an accident. This is why many Christians say there are no accidents, for they believe that everything that happens is a part of God's plan. If that was the case then everything is planned, and there would be no accidents. Other Christians find this intolerable for it makes God responsible**

**for all that we find most evil about the world of suffering. The innocent who suffer and die in war; because of alcoholic drivers, and because of all the foolish mistakes adults make are all a part of God's plan, if this theory is correct, and that is not acceptable to most Christians.**

**It would be easy to believe that Satan is responsible for all this evil suffering, but to call it part of the plan of God blurs the distinction between good and evil. The Bible says that God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all. It is hard to believe this if one also believes that all of the accidents of the world are really planned by God. The issue of responsibility is what we are dealing with. I once pulled into an intersection as it was getting dark, and a car without its lights on tore the front end of my car off. When the police arrived they did not give me a ticket even though I pulled right in front of the guy. It was because he had a responsibility to have his lights on at that time. He got the ticket because he failed to do what he was responsible to do.**

**I have made mistakes in driving also, and I could have caused an accident by these mistakes. If I would have, it would not be God's responsibility, but my own. To throw blame back on God for all human error, carelessness, and irresponsibility is passing the buck. We don't like it, but we have to accept the fact that God has given us a great responsibility in determining what happens in this world. Most accidents are because we fail in our responsibility. God permits this because He permits us to be free.**

## **5. THANK GOD FOR GRANDPARENTS Based on II Tim. 1:1-7**

**Professor Gordon Rupp, the British historian, was asked how**

**the church could survive the decades of persecution and communist propaganda in Russia. His answer was, "It's largely due to grandparents." The communists made the big mistake of thinking that because the church was only full of old people it had no future. They failed to realize that grandparents have an impact on their grandchildren. The old Russian grandparents passed their faith on to their grandchildren, and that is why there is a new revival of Christianity in Russia.**

**We often look at the masses of youth in our schools and colleges and say that they are our future, and it is truly so, but let us not forget that our future is also in the past because the older people pass on their old values and faith to those masses of youth. Paul recognized this in the life of young Timothy. He loves Timothy dearly, but he recognized that his gifted young Christian servant was not merely a product of his own making. He had a heritage that went back to grandma Lois. She was the one who had faith in God, and she passed that faith on to her daughter Eunice, and together they instilled it in Timothy. He was not a self-made man. He was a product of a godly heritage that came to him from his grandmother.**

**The Bible is filled with grandparents. All of the Patriarchs of the Old Testament were grandparents, and practically every famous person in the Bible was a grandfather or grandmother. Every person in the genealogy of Jesus was a grandparent. The grandfather of Jesus is mentioned 3 times. A major portion of the Bible was written by grandfathers. But Lois is the only person in the Bible actually given the label of grandmother. There is one in the Old Testament given the name grandmother as well. Her name was Moaca the grandmother of King Asa, but she was a bad example. So Lois is the only named grandmother in the Bible with a positive influence.**

**Her grandson Timothy is one of the major New Testament servants of God, and Paul's two letters to him are a major part of the New Testament. We do not know a lot about Lois, but her faith touched her family, and through her family has touched all of history. She became an ideal example of the value and influence of grandparents, and on this grandparents day we want to focus on the role they play in God's plan for the family. It is of interest to note that the Greek word for grandmother is mamme. It is very close to mommy, and from which we get the term of respect, which is mom.**

**Grandparents should be addressed with terms of affection and respect. A Swedish proverb says, "Where there is a grandmother in the house the children always have a friend." In a world where children in greater numbers than ever have to endure the trials of divorced parents, and multiple kinds of abuse, the grandparents often are the glue that keeps together any semblance of continuity. If kids loose the present, but still have a pass to tie into, they can bridge the gap to the future, but rob them of their grandparents too and they are cut off and abandoned. That is why the courts in recent years have given grandparents the right of visitation so that no matter how messed up the parents are, the children can still develop a healthy relationship to grandma and grandpa.**

**Rita Fuentes received this letter from her grandson that illustrates the impact of grandparents, and one way we can let them know of our love.**

**"Dear Nana and Pop-pop:**

**I was reading a book written by one of my favorite poets, Rod McKuehn, and all of the sudden the phone rang. Immediately I scanned my desk top for some kind of bookmark and settled on a wallet-sized photo of you two from 1983.**

**After finishing my phone conversation, I opened the book and**

**saw those two familiar faces saving my place. And then it occurred to me that the two of you have been saving a place for me for a long time now.**

**So basically, in celebration of Grandparents Day, I decided to let you know that I have a special place saved in my heart for both of you."**

**When the Star Tribune back in 1991 asked for letters of affection from 11 thousand students they did not write about boyfriends and girlfriends, or even about mom and dad, but mainly about grandparents. One of the main values grandchildren love is the escape from legalism they experience in their home. Grandparents will often let rules slide. This is called spoiling the grandkids, but it is great fun for everyone involved. When I was a young boy I was not allowed to drink coffee, but grandma would put a little in the bottom of a glass and then fill it up with milk. I felt proud to be able to drink coffee at grandma's house. There is no such rule there about no cookies before supper. All of the forbidden treats are available at any time at grandma's house.**

**It is part of the fun of the young and the old to escape for a while from the legalism of everyday life. It makes grandparents feel like liberators. Freedom is a gift that grandparents give to children. They need the discipline of rules and consistency that parents give them, but they also need to taste the freedom to explore, which grandparents often allow on a different level than they get at home. Grandparents help them see the bigger picture of their mom and dad. They are adults who were once children and they did a lot of crazy things as kids too. Grandparents tell about all of the silly pranks of their parents. This is great fun and gives the kids perspective. They also know they are loved when they blow it, for blowing it is part of the family tradition.**

**In the Old Testament there were cities of refuge where guilty people could run to for protection. Many children see the home of their grandparents as their city of refuge. Even the guilty need a place to flee to where they can be accepted in their guilt until they can work out their problem, and grandparents can provide this refuge. I can remember running across the field to grandmas house when I felt rejected at home.**

**Grandparents focus on making life fun for children, and teach that being spiritual and committed to Christ does not mean a loss of enjoyment and pleasure. They do not demand as much as parents, but give a lot out of sheer grace, and ask nothing in return. They illustrate the love of God who gave His Son while we were still sinners. The free gifts of love from grandparents leads to a sense of gratitude in grandchildren. They have to get into their 20's or 30's before they fully appreciate all that mom and dad have done for them, but they can feel it early toward grandpa and grandma, and that leads them to want to do what pleases their grandparents. Grandparents provide an alternate atmosphere for children. They do not carry the daily burden of raising children, and so they are more free to provide an atmosphere of more fun.**

**Millet, the French artist, who gave us the Angelus and The Man With A Hoe, and some 20 other works that are in the Louvre in Paris had a godly grandmother. At his wedding she said to him, "Remember my Francois, that you are a Christian before you are a painter. Never sacrifice on the altar of Baal." He promised he would not use his gift for any evil, and he kept that promise to his grandmother. Her standards became his, and like Lois, she passed on her faith to her grandson.**

**I read of Darwin Carlisle, the girl who refused to die. Her mother abandoned her at age 9 and left her in an unheated attic**

for several days. When she was found her legs were so frostbitten they had to be amputated. Here was a case where great grandma took over. She was fitted with artificial legs, and great grandma went to court to get custody. She gave her great encouragement to overcome her handicap, and in two months Darwin was roller skating and riding a bike. You can never underestimate the influence of grandparents.

We have all been entertained by Bill Cosby. We have his grandfather to thank for that. Bill is a funny guy even off stage, and he loves to tell funny stories. His grandfather was his role model, and he was always clowning around and telling funny stories, and so Bill became a comedian because of this influence. His grandfather usually had a moral point to his stories, and so Bill learned to stick with good clean humor. A grandfather with a less godly sense of humor would have influenced him all together differently.

Grandparents have gone through many hardships and yet because they are faithful in their faith they have a great impact on children. I can remember my grandmother, who had 9 children and who labored from morning till night on the farm, still having time to be faithful in her Bible reading. She even continued to play Christian music on the organ into her 90's. Her faithfulness to the Lord and the church had a great impact on me, for she was an example of persistence in faith. You do not just serve the Lord while you are young, and then back off as you get older. You persist in faith and the labor of love all of your life. This poem by an unknown author fits my grandmother perfectly, and many others as well.

Grandmother, on a winter's day,  
Milked the cow and fed them hay,

**Slopped the hogs, saddled the mule  
And got the children off to school;  
Did the washing, mob the floors,  
Washed the windows, and did some chores,  
Cooked a dish of home-dried fruit,  
Pressed her husband's Sunday suit,  
Swept the parlor, made the bed,  
Baked a dozen loaves of bread,  
Split some fire wood, and lugged in  
Enough to fill the kitchen bin;  
Cleaned the lamps and put in oil,  
Stewed some apples she thought would spoil;  
Cooked a supper that was delicious  
And afterward washed up the dishes;  
Fed the cat and sprinkled the clothes,  
Mended a basket full of hose;  
Then opened the organ and began to play,  
"When you come to the end of a perfect day."**

**I have known Christians who are very embarrassed by the antics of their grandparents when they get so old that their arteries harden. They begin to do things they have never done in their lives. One old godly gentleman began to swear, and he had never used such language in his life. His daughter was mortified, but I assured her that everyone who knew his godly history would recognize that this is the result of his loss of control due to old age. It is not a sign that he is rejecting his faith. A quiet talk with the man revealed he was persisting to the end in his faith, and this deviation from it in his language was not a matter of choice.**

**The example of persistence is a powerful influence on grandchildren, and if old age weakens that appearance of persistence grandchildren need to realize that this is a matter**

**beyond the control of the person they love. Most of my family were not Christians when I was a child. It was my grandmother's faith that influenced me, and then through me touched my parents. My personal experience confirms history and Scripture. Grandparents make a major difference in this world for the kingdom of God.**

**Margaret Mead, the world renowned author, wrote, "The closest friends I have made all through life have been people who also grew up close to a loved and loving grandmother or grandfather." This was true for Paul and his dear friend Timothy, and it is our responsibility as grandparents to make it true for those who befriend our grandchildren. We need to pass on our faith so that our grandchildren can pass it on again to the next generation.**

## **6. GODLY GRANDPARENTS Based on Ruth 4:13-17**

**Among the many things that makes man unique in creation is the presence of, and the influence of, grandparents. F. W. Boreham many years ago pointed out that in the vegetable world, "The bursting buds of spring push off the last lingering leaves of the previous season, and thus decline to have anything to do with the generation that preceded them, to say nothing of the generation before that. Among animals and birds a certain filial affection is sometimes found for fathers and mothers, but of the grandfather and grandmother never a trace. But a man is so much greater than either a tree or a beast that a special factor is introduced into his training. He comes under the influence not only of teachers and tutors, of fathers and mothers, but grandfathers and grandmothers as well."**

**The impact of grandpas and grandmas in history is beyond calculation. Most of the famous people of the Bible from Adam and Eve on were grandparents. Often the grandparents played a key role, if not the major role, in the way history went. Hezekiah was one of the best kings God's people ever had, but his father was Ahaz, and he was one of the worst they ever had. But his grandfather was Jotham, and he did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord. Hezekiah took after his grandfather rather than his father, and the result was victory for the kingdom of God.**

**Because of the powerful influence of grandparents there is always hope even if one generation goes astray, because the next generation can be brought back, and in that lies the glory of grandparents. They often bridge the gap between parents and children, and they make major differences in the course of history. The relationship of grandparents and grandchildren is so unique because it is so full of hope and expectation. This explains the mystery of how a boy who is not good enough for your daughter can father such marvelous children. And it explains why the girl unworthy of your son can bear such brilliant beings as your grandchildren.**

**It is a strange question to ask, but the book of Ruth makes us ask it: Is a baby on the day of its birth more a child or a grandchild? In other words, who is to be more congratulated, the parents or the grandparents? For some reason the book of Ruth votes for the grandparents, and it makes this passage one of the most powerful exaltations of a grandmother you will find anywhere in human literature. It is almost as if the goal of this book was to come to a happy ending with grandma Naomi holding grandson Obed in her lap, and everybody singing her praises.**

**Note how suddenly the story of Ruth and Boaz comes to an end.**

**Their romance has dominated the stage for most of the book, but their wedding and 9 months of pregnancy, and their whole life together is wrapped up rapidly in verse 13. When Ruth gave birth to that baby boy, she and Boaz left the stage, and the spotlight focuses on grandma Naomi for the closing scenes of the story. There is not one more scene about the parents, for the star now is grandma. All of the praise and rejoicing now revolve around her. Naomi has a kinsman- redeemer. Naomi has a comfort for her old age. Naomi has a grandson, and they say she has a son.**

**This radical removal of the parents, and this thrusting of grandma and grandchild front and center is a powerful revelation of just how important a role grandparents play in the life of a child, or should we say, can play, or should play? Every person in the blood line from Adam to Christ was a grandparent. The genealogy that ends this book is a list of people all of whom became grandparents. Obad, the baby of Ruth, was the grandfather of King David. What a delight it would be to know more about these grandparents, but the book ends with a special emphasis on grandparents, and with such a deliberate focus on Naomi that I do not know of anywhere in the Bible where you can find a better text for grandparents day.**

**Someone may point out that Naomi was not Ruth's mother, but her mother-in-law, and so technically she was not the grandmother, but just the opposite is the case. This first child of Ruth and Boaz was to preserve the name and inheritance of Ruth's first husband and Naomi's son Mahlon. It was equivalent to Mahlon's son, and thus, technically it was her grandson. But who cares? Who cares about the grandparents of George Washington, or Lincoln, or any other famous man or woman? Apparently God cares, for the book or Ruth only exists because all of these people were grandparents and great grandparents of David, the great**

**king of God's people. God is into genealogies and roots. And so God is into grandparents. God has so made life that grandparents play a major role of what happens in history, and it is because of their special love and influence on grandchildren.**

**So great is this influence that even parents who fail their children can become such successful grandparents that the family tree is healed, and restored as one that bears fruit for the kingdom of God. There are many ways in which the role of grandparents is superior to the role of parents. We can't cover all that is precious about the grandparent-grandchild relationship, but we can look at the two R's of this relationship suggested by our text. These can instruct and inspire us to make the best of this great blessing God has given, not to animals, not to angels, but to man. The first R is-**

## **I. ROOTS.**

**The book of Ruth exists to trace the roots of David the king of Israel, and there is no way to do this apart from getting into the lives of grandparents. This is true for all of us. It was true for the only man in all of history who had two letters written to him which became a part of God's Word to the world. Those two letters are I and II Timothy. One of the things we know about Timothy is that his Christian faith had its roots in his grandmother. Paul tells it clearly in II Tim. 1:5, "I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and I am persuaded, now lives in you.**

**Paul made a major point of the roots of his faith, for the fact is, what the grandparents were makes a big difference in the majority of lives. There are millions of ungodly grandparents who make their grandchildren like them, but Christian grandparents do the same, and give the faith of their grandchildren deep roots, it is**

**hard for me to imagine that I would be the Christian I am without the influence of my grandmother. My father ran away from home at 18, and he became a cowboy. He roamed all over the country with rodeos, and was far from being a godly man in his youth. My parents did not go to church when I was growing up, and I never remember any instruction in the things of the Bible in my home.**

**It was my grandmother who read her Bible, who prayed, and who gave me a comic book Bible when I was a child. That book changed my life, for it made me fall in love with the Bible stories at a early age. It was my grandmother who would argue and defend the Bible, and the Christian way of life, at family reunions where her own skeptical sons, who were my uncles, would challenge her faith. I can't begin to measure the impact of that one woman in my life. She never led me to the Lord, but she gave my Christian faith its roots. When I became a part of the family of God, I already had family in that family.**

**The older I get the more I realize how important roots are, for had I not had the roots I had, I do not know where I might be in my relationship to Christ. My mother's mother did not have the spiritual impact on me as did my father's mother. But my German Lutheran grandmother still gave me roots. I belonged to a greater family of people than just mom and dad, and that is important for establishing identity.**

**Margaret Mead, the noted anthropologist, has said a lot of controversial things, but you will find no authorities debating her statement in her article Grandparents and Educators. In it she said, "Somehow we have to get the older people, grandparents, widows and widowers, spinsters and bachelors, back close to children if we are to restore a sense of community, a knowledge of the past, and a sense of future to today's children."**

**Rootless people are the result, at least in part, of being ripped away from the influence of their grandparents. Grandparents can be just that, parents who are grand. They do not have to be the disciplinarians of life, and so they are more free to be the teachers of values. They have opportunities to talk and share in ways that parents often do not have, or do not take advantage of, because they do not see from the same perspective as do grandparents. Leo Tolstoy said, from birth to the 5th year is an eternity, but from 5 to old age is a step. It is a gift to be there for the one to 5 period of their life in order to be the place of refuge and an oasis in the hard land of growing up.**

**Grandparents are often the key to a child's self-esteem. Children are difficult and life is complex, and often parents give most of their energy to discipline, and only a fraction to love. This is where the grandparents can add the ingredient that makes the family balanced. In troubled families they are even more important. Dr. R. Lofton Hudson of the American Association For Marriage And Family Therapy tells of one of his clients who was working through her emotional problems. He asked, "Who was the biggest influence in your growing up? I don't know who the significant others were in your life with your father gone most of the time, and your mother running around and getting drunk. Who did you look up to?"**

**"That's easy," she replied. "It was my grandfather and grandmother. I didn't spend much time with them because my mother hated them. They were daddies parents. But the loved me and told me so." Dr. Hudson said, "How could they have influenced you much when you seldom saw them?" She responded, "Oh, but they believed in me. They made me believe in myself. I remember once my grandfather talked to me and said 'Ellie, I want to tell you something. You don't have to let your parents**

**problems ruin you. There is something great in you. There is not telling what you can become. The world out there needs you.' I shall never forget that speech. He made me believe in myself."**

**There is a powerful influence of even a rare opportunity to build up your grandchildren's self-esteem. Don't sell yourself short. You can be the key, with even a few brief words, to the encouragement of your grandchildren. Grandparents provide the opportunity for grandchildren to develop roots, and establish an identity that is not limited to the present, which may be far from ideal. Grandparents can help them have roots that reveal a larger picture in which they are a part. The next R we want to look at is-**

## **II. RENEWAL.**

**The grandchild- grandparent relationship is a two way street. The child has as great an impact on the adult as the adult on the child. In verse 15 the women say of baby Obed, "He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age." This little guy was to be to Naomi all that Geritol is today, and more. There is something about a grandchild that can change the whole psychology of life, and bring hope and joy to the forefront. Pro. 17:6 records this universal reality: "Children's children are a crown to the aged." Your children may have kept you poor, but their children will make you rich. They renew your spirit, and give you a whole new role in the world of loving, lifting, and serving.**

**Until this scene where Naomi becomes a grandmother her life has been one trial after another. Life has been a burden, and she has suffered sorrow and grief beyond the average. She has suffered the loss of her husband and two sons. She has had to endure the life of poverty and despair. She has had to bear the responsibility of caring for Ruth, and trying to get her established**

**in a home of her own. Naomi has had little joy in this story until this closing scene where she is grandmother. Now it is almost a heavenly scene. All tears are wiped away, and there is a spirit of praise and joy, for now her whole future looks bright, for she has a grandson.**

**The event of being a grandmother has changed the whole psychology of her mind, and she is in a state of renewal. Dr. Lewis A. Coffin in his book *The Grandmother Conspiracy* wrote, "As soon as a person becomes a grandparent he or she undergoes a radical personality change-stern fathers become cooing grandfathers: harpie-type mothers melt and crawl on the floor, sing lullabies, and cram cookies and cookies and cookies down their sweet little grandchildren's throats, take them to the ice-cream store, bake cakes and pies for them, and stand back admiringly as the little ones swell, tweet their obese little cheeks approvingly, and raise a terrible hue and cry if anyone tries to interfere."**

**They often become a problem to their children because they allow the grandchildren to do what they forbid. My grandson Jason is a jumper. He loved to climb up on things and jump to me. Once I let him stand on the roof of the car and jump off to me. It was pure pleasure for both of us, but my daughter almost flipped when she saw it. A child was injured near her by climbing on the car, and she was teaching Jason never to climb up on a car. And here I was having fun with him doing the very thing he was not to do. I let our grandchildren bounce on our bed, and play with my tape recorder, and who knows how many others thing they are forbidden to do by their parents. The point is, there is a different psychology between grandparents and grandchildren then between parents and children.**

**Grandparents have changed from when they were parents. They now value relationship with a child higher than things, and so they risk more for the sake of relationship. My parents would never let me drink coffee. They said it would stunt my growth. But grandma always let me have coffee. Of course, it was one part coffee for each one thousand parts of milk, but I always felt like it was a big deal to get my glass of coffee with the big people.**

**The reason grandparents tend to spoil grandchildren is because of this renewal in the minds of the grandparents. They are so grateful for the new joy and pleasure of life that they say thanks by being over indulgent. This makes the grandparent-grandchild relationship one which is dominated by the positive, and it is one of fun. The fun is mutual, for most grandparents get more laughs from their grandchildren than they do from comedians. I can't imagine being with my grandchildren for an hour without some laughter at the cute or ridiculous things they say.**

**One little girl said, "I am sorry grandma I scratched my arm on your cat." Another little girl who was taken to a theatre for the first time tickled her grandfather by whispering, "Grandpa what channel is this?" For renewing and refreshing fun I'll take grandchildren over the comics. It is not all fun, of course. I had to watch my grandson fall out of the swing, and almost fall from the monkey bars. I watched him stumble and almost bash his head into the concrete. He missed catching a frisbee which hit his lip and it swelled up for a while. There is a price to pay for the laughs you get. Someone said, "Children are always a handicap to grown ups who want to lead a dull life." The beauty of being a grandparent is that the price is so minimal compared to that of parents who must endure childishness 24 hours a day.**

**One of the reasons grandparents are often more fun than**

parents is because they have more time. Parents are so loaded down with responsibility that they do not have the time for fun with their children. A 9 year old girl has written this description of a grandmother, and it has become a classic.

**"A grandmother is a lady who has no children of her own, So she likes other people's little girls. A grandfather is a man grandmother. He goes for walks with the boys and they talk about fishing and tractors and like that.**

**Grandmas don't have to do anything except be there. They're old, so they shouldn't play hard or run. It is enough if they drive us to the market where the pretend horse is and have lots of dimes ready. Or if they take us for walks, they should slow down past things like pretty leaves or caterpillars. They should never ever say 'hurry up.'**

**Usually they are fat, but not too fat to tie kids shoes. They wear glasses and funny underwear. They can take their teeth out and gums off.**

**It is better if they don't typewrite or play cards except with us. They don't have to be smart, only answer questions like why dogs hate cats and how come God isn't married. They don't talk baby talk like visitors do, because it is hard to understand. When they read to us they don't skip, or mind if it is the same story again.**

**Everybody should try to have one, especially if you don't have television, because grandmas are the only grown ups who have got time.**

**Time is one of the treasures of life that grandparents have learned to use more wisely. Dale Evans Rogers has written a lot about her 16 grandchildren, and her advise is, if you want to establish a warm bond with your grandchildren, get rid of the**

parents. That is, be alone with your grandchildren. It will be a time of learning, growth, and renewal for both generations. She wrote, "One of our grandchildren was spending the weekend with Roy and me, and I was clowning around with her in the kitchen. Suddenly she put her hands on her hips, cocked her head to one side, and stared at me. I knew one of the those piercing statements that children are prone to make was forthcoming. A child has not learned the art of tact, and frequently her remarks unveil a trait or weakness in us adults that we'd rather not have exposed. This time, however, her comments were welcome. She said, 'Why, grandma, you have fun. I thought grandmas were too old to have fun!' Lord, help us grandparents to be young at heart with the young."

But lets not leave grandpas out, or older grandchildren either. One of their older granddaughters who graduated from the Bible Institute of Los Angeles wanted Roy to take her hunting as a graduation gift. It was very unusual in that she had never had an interest in hunting, but Roy took her, and a week later he got this letter from her.

Dear Grandpa Roy,

I want to thank you so much for the "bestest" present I've ever gotten. Beside the excitement of learning to shoot a gun, watching the dogs work and later even cooking a pheasant, my most favorite part was being with you, just you without a crowd. I guess I enjoy being comfortable when you feel comfortable. I wish I would have caught on to the fact that you're a neat grandpa about 20 years ago, when I was hiding in closet from you! I couldn't think of adequate words to thank you so I drew this picture for you, because I want you to know there is something about a grandpa that no one else can copy. Spending time together with you meant more to me than any other present

**you could buy. I really felt loved...and love is the most precious gift I can think of to give to anyone.**

**I love you, Grandpa.**

**Time alone together with grandchildren is one of the most fun, educational, and influential experiences of life. Grandparents can learn plenty too. One grandmother wrote, "I've been an artist for 40 years. My grandson has taught me a new way to paint. I always thought I had to set aside a whole day, decide on my subject, study it, get equipment and paints together, then spend the rest of my time-uninterrupted-until my picture was completed.**

**My grandson, age 4, comes bursting in, exclaims, 'Maw Maw, let's paint a picture!' He works on the back ground, but tells me what he wants me to paint as the main idea. At Christmas, it was Santa Claus. Sometimes its monsters. In 10 minutes we have completed an entire picture-colorful, exciting-satisfying to both of us."**

**The relationship of grandparents and grandchildren is like the period of courtship, whereas that of parents and children is more like that of marriage. The first is more dominated by fun, and the second by responsibility, and that is a major reason why there is a different psychology at work. One little girl said, "Grandparents are like this. When you tell them you want to do something, they will say that is what they want to do. They will even say it when they don't exactly mean it. But after they do it with you, they will have fun anyway. This can be a problem for parents. Judith Viorst tells of getting her children back from a fun filled week with the grandparents. She writes, "After 7 days of paradise my children returned to plain, ordinary, grumpy, preoccupied me. The reentry problem was shattering. The kids kept asking what wonderful plans and pleasures I had arranged for them today.**

**And I kept telling them I wasn't their social director. It was only after considerable scolding and weeping that we all finally got use to each other again."**

**It is one of the paradoxes of life that after great fun there is weeping and wailing because it cannot last forever. It is a price worth paying, however, for it deepens the roots, and opens channels of renewal, and that is what the grandparent-grandchild relationship is all about. The evidence is enormous that grandparents are key people in the lives of most children. Grandparents are one of God's major weapons to keep His plan unfolding and progressing. We see it in David's heritage in Ruth, but the stories are endless, and they are going on today in the lives of millions.**

**In China a grandmother took her sick grandson to a mission hospital in Canton, and not only was the child healed, but she became a Christian. She returned to her village and shared Christ with another grandmother. She prayed with her for her sick grandchild, who was also healed. That whole family became Christians, and one son became a Baptist pastor. The baby who was healed grew up to be a medical doctor, and his son grew up to become the president of the Baptist World Alliance. He was David Y. K. Wong. It was all because of a grandma who cared.**

**Godly grandparents have such a powerful impact on the lives of grandchildren that one is not far from the mark to say that the church and the Sunday School, and all other arms of the kingdom of God are supplements to the influence of grandparents. They change the course of history, and no matter how rotten a generation becomes, there is always hope for renewal because the next generation can be turned toward righteousness by the grandparents. Eight year old Ann Johnson wrote this poem which**

**expresses the influence of millions of grandparents on their grandchildren.**

**My grandma likes to play with God,  
They have a kind of game.  
She plants the garden full of seeds,  
He sends the sun and rain.**

**She likes to sit and talk with God,  
And knows He is right there.  
She prays about the whole wide world,  
Then leaves us in His care.**

**May God help all us to be aware of the importance of our role as godly grandparents.**

## **7. GRANDPARENTS AND GRANDCHILDREN**

**Based on Psa. 128:1-6**

**Almost everybody you know in the Bible became a grandparent. But since the term is not used in the Bible we tend to ignore this fact and seldom think of people as grandparents, and of children as grandchildren. When I read the blessing at the end of Psa. 128 that says may you live to see your children's children, I realized that is the way the Hebrews described grandchildren. They are your children's children. So I looked up children in the concordance and realized it would take many hours of searching to find all the places where children's children are mentioned. So I typed it into the computer and it told me instantly that grandchildren are referred to ten times.**

**The one thing the Bible makes clear is that grandparents are often the determining factor in the righteousness and love of God being passed down from generation to generation. If grandpa and grandma do not care about the will of God, and it is not a priority in their lives, the flame of faith can go out, and the torch will not pass to the grandchildren. It can often skip a generation, and children may rebel and depart from the faith. We see it often in the Bible. But if grandparents are faithful the grandchildren can pick up where they leave off, and they can keep the fire of faith burning.**

**Psa. 103:17-18 says, "But from everlasting to everlasting the Lord's love is with those who fear Him and His righteousness with their children's children-with those who keep His covenant and remember to obey His precepts." Grandparents play a vital role in keeping God's kingdom going and going. In the Lord's prayer we pray for His kingdom to come and His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. This prayer is answered in large measure because of godly grandparents.**

**When you read the biographical writings of Christians it is amazing how often you read that it was the grandparents who most impacted them for Christ. For example, here is the testimony of Dale Evans Rogers: "My childhood hero was my Granddaddy Wood of Uvalde, Texas. As I look back now, I still believe he was one of the finest and most generous men I ever knew. The people of Uvalde, a small, typical Southwestern Texas town, dearly loved and respected my grandfather Wood. He was tall, broad-shouldered with a thin frame-a no-nonsense man, but I especially recall the warmth and kindness in his eyes. Two memories especially stand tall in mind: During my high school days I loved to play the piano and sing for him because he was so appreciative and complimentary. And then I recall the nightly**

**prayer time in his bedroom. All of the family was expected to attend, and we did! His goodnight prayer sent us all off to bed with the feeling we had been with God. Granddaddy loved unselfishly, and was greatly loved in return. He taught me much about love. It is true he wasn't much of a talker, but he was a real doer."**

**This is a very common testimony, and I have the same one. It was not my mother and father that most influenced me for Christ. It was my godly grandparents. There was also an uncle that influenced me, and he too was a grandpa. Margaret Mead, the world famous author, made this statement: "The closest friends I have made all through life have been people who also grew up close to a loved and loving grandmother and grandfather."**

**One of the reasons for this being so true for so many is because of the very nature of the relationship of grandparents and grandchildren. Parents have to be more Old Testament in relation to a child. There is a lot of law involved in the training of a child. But grandparents can focus on grace. They are more New Testament in their relationship to the grandchildren. A high school youth said, "When my father says, 'you are so dumb,' that makes me feel just terrible. So when I can, I go to see my grandmother and tell her about it. Then she says, 'I think what you did is not so good. But you're O. K.'"**

**Parents often have to be involved in discipline, and justice often leads to conflict. Kids feel they are being treated unfairly, and often it is true because parents are not omniscient and really do not know the degree of guilt in each child. On the other hand, grandparents can focus on mercy and give love and understanding even to the guilty child. Many a rebel who cannot get along with their parents is saved for the kingdom by grandparents who do not need to deal with the tensions from the same perspective. It is**

**because their role is so different that they are so important for balance.**

**Many Christian parents do not know how to handle a rebel child. They feel obligated to condemn them if they fall into some serious sin. This role is not always out of line, but it can be so severe that they fail to mix in a measure of mercy. Grandparents can often make up for this imbalance and give the child the hope of being restored and loved again. Part of the problem of our culture and the breakdown of families is that grandparents are not what they use to be. Today we have self-help books, pre-marriage counseling, marriage enrichment, and seminars on every subject, but all of them together cannot do what a godly set of grandparents use to do for families. They use to be living demonstrations of love and loyalty to God and family, and this is often missing today.**

**Godly grandparents are worth more than all the seminars man can ever produce, for they are God's method of keeping balance in life. Paul in Titus 2 reveals that he is convinced that older men and women are the key people in keeping families growing in love, and being pleasing to God. If you want to help the younger generation to be better, the best place to start is with grandparents. I know this is an over simplification, for our culture has so changed that the good old days are gone. Grandparents are a different breed in modern life. Some anonymous poet put this change into poetry:**

**In the dim and distant past,  
When life's tempo wasn't fast,  
Grandmas use to rock and knit,  
Crochet, sew, and baby sit.**

**When the kids were in a jam,**

**They could always count on gram.  
In the age of gracious living,  
Grandma was the gal for giving.**

**Grandma now is in the gym  
Exercising to keep slim;  
She's off touring with the "bunch"  
Taking clients out to lunch.**

**Driving North to ski or curl,  
All her days are in a whirl,  
Nothing seems to stop or block her  
Now that grandmas off her rocker.**

**I think the point is, if grandparents are no different than parents, which is often the case, then the children do not get the benefit of what grandparents can give. This leaves the whole family structure as dysfunctional, and everybody loses. It is important for grandparents to be different. Children too quickly conclude that grandparents are just old fashioned and their ways are obsolete. This leads to much conflict which is unnecessary.**

**Judith Viorst writes about her conflict with her mother about how to raise the kids. She said, "Some of us may have to ask ourselves if we are willing, when grandmother is the sitter, to let her handle our children her way, even when her way is not ours." This is hard because parents fear that the differences of grandparents will be harmful, and so there is resistance and conflict. But wise parents will let grandparents be free to love the way they feel comfortable in loving. The differences will be positive and not negative. Grandparents are supposed to be different, and the difference will be beneficial to the kids.**

**This works both ways, and so grandparents need to have a hands off attitude, and let the parents be different too, and not try to force them to do things their way. The Bible says a man is to leave his mother and father and cleave to his wife. The implication is that each couple is to be independent and to formulate their own ways of loving and raising children. Whether is it better than the way they were raised is not the issue. The issue is, are they free and independent, and able to decide for themselves what is best for them.**

**Grandparents cause most trouble in families where they try to force their children to duplicate them, and try to control their decisions. The most flagrant example of this is the cartoon where an older couple is seated at the table with a younger couple, who are obviously their children, and the older woman says, "We've decided not to have grandchildren." There are many decisions in life that are not up to grandparents, and the sooner they learn this the happier everyone will be. This often calls for a lot of tongue biting, but the experts say don't even give advice unless you are asked, and even then do so sparingly. This will prevent more uncivil wars than any other bit of wisdom.**

**It is an illusion that because we lived a certain way that it is the best way for our children too. Life changes, and there are so many differences that what we did may not be the best for our children. Seeking conformity to your pattern of life is saying that we are superior and you are inferior. This is offensive. The best relationships come to people who treat each other as equals. I read of a 7 year old boy who was told by his parents he was not to eat any milk products. Grandpa thought this was a bunch of poppycock. He said that milk is good for everyone. One Saturday afternoon he bought the boy an Eskimo Pie. The boy had an attack of asthma and had to be taken to the emergency room. Grandpa**

**should have listened to his children, for they often know what is best for their kids, even if it does not make sense to us.**

**Gram and Gramps are not to be grumps in trying to keep on raising their raised kids. That job is over, and their job now is to make sure the grandkids have pleasurable experiences. In his book *Then God Created Grandparents And It Was Very Good*, Charlie Shedd says that one of the main functions of grandparents is to make life fun. He quotes a grandchild's perspective, "My grandmother was my very best friend. I mean my best friend ever. The winter before she died she came to live where we did. Only she had an apartment on the corner. Every night I would get off the school bus and stop to see her. She would always be waiting for me by the window. Then we ate some cookies, had hot chocolate, lemonade, played games. We played "Kings and Queens" and sometimes animals. She could meow just like a cat, and bark almost like a dog. We also played movie stars and people from our favorite TV programs. I could talk about everything around my grandma and imagine anything. She wouldn't laugh at me. Grandparents are the most fun, because they aren't afraid to pretend."**

**I can remember as a young boy always being excited when I knew grandma and grandpa were coming to visit. It was because they always brought us things, but it was also because they were fun. They gave us good things to eat and they made us laugh. All my memories are positive about my grandparents, and this means they fulfilled their role well in my life.**

**The Psalmist says it is one of God's great blessings to live long enough to see your grandchildren. Let's remember that this is to be a two way street. It is to be a blessing to them also that you live to see them. This means you must play a positive role in their lives.**

**The key elements for having the kind of impact God wills are faith and fun. These are the two things grandkids most remember. Billy Graham reflects on his grandparents and says that long before he was saved he was led in the right direction by their example. The testimony of many in the kingdom of God is that it was grandparents that most influenced them to come to Christ.**

**Dale Evans Rogers in her book Grandparents Can says that they way we do this is not by being perfect but by helping our grandkids see that parents are not perfect, but they are trying to do their best. She tells of the many mistakes she made as a mother. She accused her kids of things and punished them only to find out later that they were innocent. Sharing her mistakes makes her grandkids understand their parents better. They come to recognize their parents make mistakes, but this does not hinder their love. Grandparents are to be aids to the parents, and help kids understand how hard it is to be wise and right all the time.**

**Grandparents still make mistakes and they need to admit it to themselves and the kids. The National Safety Council reports that 17% of all prescription drugs ingested by children belong to their grandparents. No grandparent plans this, but it happens because kids are hard to watch every second. It takes forethought to be good grandparents. You have to prepare the environment for their coming, and put things away that can do harm. It is not all fun and games. There is also work involved. Life is seldom fun without some work of preparation, and so grandparents have to work at being fun.**

**It is interesting to read the prophets and their prophecy about the ideal life of those who are faithful to Him. We read in Zech. 8:4-5, "Once again shall old men and old women sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each leaning on a stick because of their great age; and**

**the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls, playing in the streets." The good life is old and young together in a setting that is filled with fun.**

**Grandparents and grandchildren are the two extremes that make the picture ideal. Everybody else in between is there also, but these two groups give it completeness. No picture of the good life is adequate without grandparents and grandchildren. God drew this picture, and we know from experience that God is right. Prov. 17:6 says, "Children's children are a crown to the aged." When a grandchild is born a new king and queen are born as well-Grandpa and Grandma. They now reign over an empire and not just a family. The grandchild represents the potential for their family to become a kingdom characterize by faith and fun. May God help us be faithful in our role as grandparents.**

## **8. THE SPIRIT OF SPORTS Based on Heb. 12:1-2**

**Back in the days of depression the mighty Babe Ruth was asked to take a salary cut for the first time in his career. He didn't go for it, but insisted on his customary \$80,000 contract. "But Babe," protested an official of the Yankee Ball Club, "These are trying times. That's more money than Hoover got last year for being president of the United States." "I know," persisted Babe, "But I had a better year than Hoover." And indeed he did, and many sportsmen have better years than the president. We have come to the age of the affluent athlete. The ancient Greeks and Romans loved sports, but they could never imagine an athlete who was wealthier than the Emperor.**

**The reason this is the case today is because people are wild about sports, and they are willing to pay to be involved. The**

**American people spend more on sports each year than is spent for national defense. Anything this big is bound to come under criticism. Many feel that we are over doing it, and we are giving sports to big a role in our culture. Too much time and energy are being given to sports, and this keeps people from doing more important things.**

**Before we look at the positive side we must admit that sports can become an idol, and many outstanding Christian athletes have given testimony to this fact in their own experience. Millions are more enamored of the sermon on the mound than by the Sermon on the Mount. One of the great empires in the history of baseball was Bill Klem. He said, "Baseball is more to me than the greatest game in the world! It is a religion." He was not alone, for one writer said he was amazed that the sick were not being brought to home plate to be healed during the World Series.**

**Sports and religion have this in common-they both spawn fanatics. In 1969 the referee awarded a late penalty to El Salvador in their World Cup football match against their neighbor Honduras. El Salvador won the match. When news of the results spread riots broke out in both capitals as fans refought the match in the streets by beating up the opposition supporters. As a direct result war broke out between the two neighbors, and before it ended 2,000 soldiers were killed. Both nations suffered serious food shortages. This was a case of idolatry, for "idolatry is investing undue significance, even reverence and adoration, in temporal objects and pursuits." When a sport becomes a matter of life and death it is idolatry and not merely a game.**

**Sydney Harris says, Karl Marx made a mistake in his famous saying that, "Religion is the opium of the people," for the fact is, sports are the opium of the people. Sportianity has captured the**

**hearts and zeal that Christianity once had. Sports draw the biggest crowds, and players are the best known, highest paid personalities in our culture. Sydney Harris wrote, "Sport is as necessary, as useful, as nourishing to humans as any other natural activity-but it is no longer a natural activity; in its cancerous form, it has displaced religion, dislodged citizenship and even further dislocated communication between the sexes."**

**People can become fanatics about sports. They are like the Yankee fan who complained, "What a day. I lost my job, my wife ran away with a salesman, and the Yankees lost to the Senators. Imagine that-leading by 3 in the 8th and they blew it." The negatives are real, and no doubt many a wife lives in frustration because her husband appears to have more interest in one kind of game or another than in her. On the other hand, there are those Christians who see sports as a golden opportunity. The Fellowship Of Christian Athletes is making a tremendous impact on the whole world of sports. Best selling books are available with their Christian testimonies by famous sportsmen. Several films have been produced sharing the fruits of being a Christian athlete.**

**One high school youth in North Carolina went to a conference where some of the great athletes were speaking, and when he came back he gave this testimony-"I went to this conference to see my gods in the athletic world. When I got there I heard my gods talking about their God, and before the week was over, their God became my God." Hero worship of sportsmen has been going on ever since Heracles started the Olympics in 776 B.C. Modern Christians have discovered that hero worship can lead to worship of the hero's Hero and Savior if the hero points the way. And the only way he can get to be a hero is to do his best until he is a great athlete and a winner. Men with this conviction loves sports, and they feel it worth all the time and energy they give to it.**

**Sports have even been used for missions, and Ken Anderson, founder of Ken Anderson Films traveled with the Venture For Victory basketball team all through Asia drawing great crowds. At every half time they gave their testimony and saw numerous decisions. Rev. A. D. Obot, head of the youth movement in Nigeria said, "In my country we find preaching and athletics, when combined, provide a wonderful way to turn people to Christ."**

**Because sports are a major part of life for many people, Christians have sought for ways to have an impact in this world of sports. Campus crusade has its Athletes In Action. Baseball Chapel Inc. sponsors Sunday services for major league teams. The Institute for Athletic Perfection seeks to get athlete's into a stable local church setting with their family. Pro-Athlete's Outreach seeks to use the pro's to influence young people. These are just a few of the outstanding ministries through sports. There are numerous men and women in the sports world who are dedicated Christians, and who use their time, money, and talent to teach the Word of God, and spread the good news. But what does the Bible have to say about sports?**

**In the Old Testament there is almost nothing said about athletic events and skills. It was an honor for a Jew to be a swift runner, and to be skillful with the bow, spear, and sling, but not for athletics, but for war. The Jews always preferred the arts and the wisdom of the mind rather than the feats performed by the body. The Jews were disgusted with the Greek Greeks and their gymnasiums, and all their emphasis on the body. The Saducees like the gymnasium, but the Pharisees did not. Jews were divided concerning the value of sports, and the result was Jews did not begin to excel in sports until the late 18th century.**

**It all began with the great Jewish boxer Daniel Mendoza who**

**was called the father of the art of boxing. He opened up a school to teach Jewish youth how to box. In the 1920's the all Jewish soccer team were unchallenged world champions. Then in the 70's the most famous sportsman in the world was the Jew Mark Spitz with 7 gold medals from the Olympics in Munich. Jews have worked hard to overcome the image that they are too intellectual. The fact remains, however, that there is little in the Old Testament that refers to sports.**

**When we come to the New Testament it is a different story. Much of the New Testament was written to Greek Christians who had grown up in the Greek culture where sports and the gym had been a part of their way of life. Paul was a Roman citizen, and he must have enjoyed the athletic games of his day, for he uses them often to illustrate the Christian life. He refers to racing, boxing, and wrestling, and applies them to the Christian experience. Paul's favorite sport was obviously racing, for he uses this to illustrate most often. Racing was the most common of the ancient events, and would capture the attention of the most people.**

**Paul's own personal testimony was put into athletic terms in Phil 3:13-14. "...forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." The Christian life is a race, and like a disappointed coach he wrote to the Galatians and asked in Gal. 5:7, "You were running well, who hindered you from obeying the truth?" Paul knew a winning athlete had to obey rules or he would run in vain. He wrote to his young son in the faith, and said in II Tim. 2:5, "An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules."**

**If you break a rule in the Olympics you can lose your gold medal, or miss your chance to get one. Babe Ruth made some of**

**the most spectacular plays in baseball. One of them goes down in history as a first, and probably the last. The bases were loaded and Babe came to bat. He hit a high drive into deep right field. The Dodgers on first and second hesitated to see if it would be caught. Meanwhile Babe came charging right past the man on first with his head down. His illegal passing electrified his friend on first, and paralyzed the one on second. All three players reached third base at the same time. Two of them, of course, were put out to retire the side. No matter how good you are, you have to play by the rules or lose.**

**Paul was a spiritual coach who wanted his team to stop being sinners, and start being winners. He knew they had to give to the Christian life all an athlete gives to be a winner. Listen to his pep talk to his team in Corinth. In I Cor. 9:24-27 we read, "Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Well, I do not run aimlessly, I do not box as one beating the air; but I pummel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified." Paul was a great spiritual sportsman, and when his life draws toward the end he makes this judgment on his own efforts in II Tim. 4:7. "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."**

**The fact that Paul could use sports to illustrate the Christian life means that the spirit of sports is a positive spirit. The virtues of the athlete are of value for all of life, and that includes the spiritual life. If we could develop the spirit of the good sportsman, we would be better Christians. Our purpose, therefore, will be to look at the spirit of sports, and show how it applies to the Christian experience. Heb. 12:1-2 is one of the great sports text of the Bible.**

**The reference here is to the great Olympic games so familiar to the ancient world. They were held every 5 years, and the ambition of every youth was to get a chance to compete in the Olympic.**

**The author of Hebrews is telling us that every Christian is in the greatest Olympic contest of all. The greatest event of life is the Christian race. The audience is spectacular beyond anything that can be imagined. In the Olympic stadium the veterans of by gone days were given a place of honor from which to view the achievements of the younger generation. This stimulated the runners to do their best. The author of Hebrews says that we also have a great cloud of witnesses watching as we run the Christian race. They are not mere spectators, but are those men and women of faith who have gone before, and have set great records for God. They behold us and cheer us on as we run the race of faith. Whether you like sports or not, as a Christian you are obligated to learn and apply the spirit of sports in your Christian life. At the very foundation we see-**

## **I. THE SPIRIT OF COOPERATION.**

**The spirit of cooperation is even more fundamental than the spirit of competition. In sports even your opponent must agree to cooperate and play by the same rules, or the game can have no meaning. The competitive spirit says, I want to win, but the spirit of cooperation teaches us to discipline our lives so we win according to the rules which all must obey. A poor sport is one who cannot tolerate the discipline of the rules. The good sport is one who must learn to accept defeat or penalty when he violates the rules. When all submit to the authority of the rules, then all is fair, and the spirit of cooperation can lead to exciting competition.**

**People in sports are still sinners, and they are narrow and have**

**prejudice. They have their convictions on politics and religion, and are just like people everywhere. But if they are good sportsmen, and show the true spirit of sports, they suppress their differences for the sake of the common cause, and strive for teamwork. No team ever gets good which lacks teamwork or the spirit of cooperation. In sports the Christian cooperates with the non-Christian, for they have a common cause. Can you imagine one of the Dallas Cowboys who is a Christian deliberately throwing a bad pass to his teammate who is not a Christian? Can you imagine a coach telling some of his Christian linemen to let some opponents be free to sack the quarterback because he is not a Christian? A house divided cannot stand Jesus said. The reality is that a Christian will stop another Christian on the other team from getting to his quarterback who may be an atheist. Unity and the spirit of cooperation is at the very heart of sports, and if Christians are going to do an effective job for Christ, this spirit must be at the heart of their labors.**

**Unfortunately, many Christians have not learned from sports the power of cooperation. Christians often magnify their differences rather than their common cause. The result is that the church is often as ineffective as a relay team that is divided as to which hand they should use in the transfer of the baton. Tom Landry was a great Christian and a great sportsman, and he said that just being a Christian does not help you win. He said you have got to play according to the rules, and you have got to work and discipline yourself. Atheistic athletes can win just the same as Christian athletes. God doesn't take sides in sports. He is the author of the laws that govern sports, however, and if a atheist team learns to develop the spirit of cooperation better than the Christian team, than the atheist team is more likely to win. God is no respecter of persons, and that is why the church sometimes loses to the world. We could never be winners and gain the prize of**

**God's best if we fail to develop the spirit of cooperation. Next we consider-**

## **II. THE SPIRIT OF CONFIDENCE.**

**The spirit of cooperation has to do with your relationship to others, but the spirit of confidence has to do with how you feel inside about yourself. Sportsman are often accused of being proud, and this can be a vice, but on the other hand, you cannot become a winner if you lack the confidence that you can win. Sports develops in a person the values of the power of positive thinking. The mind plays a major role in sports. It is far from being a thing of the body only. How you think is vital to victory. Everything the New Testament says about sports is positive. The values of discipline and persistence are stressed, and we are encouraged to press on with confidence that we can win.**

**Paul did not say, I have fought a poor fight, and have failed to finish the race. Instead, he spoke with confidence that he had done well, and was pressing on to do even better. That is the spirit we need to be good sportsmen and good Christians. You cannot be either without it. I've read the testimony of many Christian athletes, and everyone of them is a person with confidence that they can win. If a Christian lacks confidence, he will be a loser before he even begins. Bill Krisher played with the Pittsburgh Steelers. One day his opponent across the line said, "I've heard you're a Sunday School guy," he snarled, cursed, and then added, "I'm going to hit you so hard you'll lose your religion." Bill smiled back and said nothing. The ball was snapped and the guard picked himself up off the grass. After the game he came to Bill and said, "Lemme shake your hand Krisher. Your religion is as tough as your body block." Had Krisher lacked confidence as an lineman, or as a Christian, he could have lost out all around in that conflict,**

**but he had the confidence to stand fast and win.**

**When a Christian is attacked, mocked, and offended, and he begins to go to pieces, it is due to a lack of confidence. Many a new Christian says they cannot live up to the Christian life. The pressures are too great, and they feel they cannot learn all they need to know. People razz them and they feel they just can't take it. That is the thought process that produces a loss. No great sportsman can go into an event saying, "I'll never make it. I'm not good enough. I'll never hold up. I can't take the pressure." Undermine the spirit of confidence, and you are almost a sure loser. But if you develop this spirit you will be a winner, for even if you lose a game, you know you can do better the next time, and you will keep pressing on to get better.**

**The author of Hebrews says we must lay aside every weight and sin which clings to us to win the race . We let so many things rob us of victory in the Christian life. We think wrong and have the wrong attitudes, and these hold us back. Glenn Clark, who was a coach, wrote the book, Power of the Spirit on the Athletic Field. He tells of Bob in the book, who was only a mediocre runner. They were holding him back he thought. He even prayed hard to win, but he never did. One day Dr. Clark, who saw his potential told him to change his attitude toward the other runners. Pat them on the back and wish them luck sincerely. Do not fear them, but enjoy their competition for the sheer joy of running. The next day on the 220 Bob came around the bend 20 yards ahead of his nearest competitor, and he broke all local records. He was holding himself back with the weight of wrong and negative attitudes toward his fellow runners.**

**Many Christians never gain victory in the Christian life because they wear the weight of wrong attitudes toward fellow believers.**

**You cannot wear combat boots and expect to win the speed race. God will not reward folly, and answer the prayer for victory when you do the very thing that makes victory so unlikely. We must take off the weights and develop the spirit of cooperation and confidence as we hope to be winners. The third spirit we want to consider is-**

### **III. THE SPIRIT OF CONSTANCY**

**Other words to describe this are grit, pluck, tenacity, persistence, and perseverance. It is the pressing on spirit of Paul. It is the never say die spirit. Sports writers have a saying that expresses it, "Quitters never win, and winners never quit." Mark Twain once interviewed a man over 100 years old, and he asked him how he accounted for his longevity. He gave the reply that he avoided the bad habits of life and cultivated the good ones. But Twain protested that he knew a man who followed the same pattern and he only lived to 80, and he asked him how he accounted for that. The old man just replied, "He didn't keep it up long enough."**

**Many a runner starts off well and takes the lead, but they never take the prize because they do not keep it up long enough. Our text tells us to run the race with patience. Pace yourself and learn how to run so as to always have the stamina to keep going no matter how many obstacles you encounter. It is not enough just to do your best, for you must keep going and get even better than your present best. Nobody is ever satisfied with a world record in sports. Nobody ever says that is good enough, and so lets stop trying for anything better. No, they say we must train and get so good we can break that record.**

**Paul says we are to forget what lies behind and press on to what**

**is a better goal ahead. Forget the record of yesterday and aim for a better record tomorrow. You lived a great Christian life last year, but do not rest on that record. You need to press on and do even better this year. Rafer Johnson was one of the great Olympic record holders, and he said, "It is sometimes said that winning is not important, that the important thing is competing. But when we go to the hospital for an operation we expect more from the surgeon than a good try. We expect him to win." Johnson loved Jesus and knew that Jesus did not want him to be second rate in anything he did. Jesus will not come in second in the competition with Satan, and He does not want us to be anything less than winners. Johnson says, "Championships will soon be forgotten. Trophies grow tarnished and old. But the Christian team will go on to greater and greater victories in Christ."**

**He learned the truth that Paul wrote of in I Tim. 4:8, "For while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come." We cannot all become great athletes of the body, but we can become sports persons, and run the Christian race with the spirit of cooperation, confidence, and constancy, that will win the prize.**

## **9. THE POWER OF MEMORY Based on Ex. 12:1-16**

**One of the most important battles in the history of our nation was won by 262 Minnesotans. It is generally agreed by historians that the battle of Gettysburg was the turning point that led the North to win the tragic Civil War. That battle was going badly for the North, and at one point the Confederates had them in retreat and they were in hot pursuit. They were only a half mile from a**

**position where they could cut the union line in half and have a decisive victory.**

**The only troops who might prevent this were the First Minnesota Volunteer Regiment. These 262 officers and men were camped right in the path of the attacking Confederates. They were out numbered many times over, but when Colonel Covill gave the order to charge they did so with such force that they stunned the larger army. They were cut to ribbons, however, and most of them died. Only 47 survived, but they held the line until reinforcements arrived and made it possible for the North to finally win that battle that led to the winning of the war. General Hancock, who was there, said of this sacrifice on July 2, 1863, "There is no more gallant deed recorded in history."**

**I discovered this bit of history in the book 101 Best Stories Of Minnesota by Merile Potter. It made me realize that we cannot remember what we have never known. Just as you cannot go back to where you have never been, so you cannot remember what you never forgot because you never knew it. I never liked history as a student, and it is a shame that so many students feel this way. It should be one of the most exciting classes in school.**

**God made history a required course for His people, and then gave memorials to make sure they never forgot their history, and the grace of God that made them a people. Everything they were, and all they had, was because of events of the past. The deliverance out of Egypt was the beginning of Israel as an independent people. They owed their existence and survival to the Passover when God judged Egypt and set them free. God felt it was so important that every generation of Israel remember this event that He established a memorial feast of the Passover, and it was so important that the people observed this memorial in every**

**detail that God gave severe laws to excommunicate anyone who treated them lightly.**

**In Esther 6:1 we read where the king could not sleep and ordered the record book of his reign to be read to him. In so doing he was reminded of the heroic deed of Mordecai the Jew, and because of that memory being restored by that record the entire race of Jews was saved from the conspiracy of Haman to destroy them. They were saved by the power of memory. The Bible makes it clear that God loves memorial events, for they force our minds to reflect and remember, and this keeps the past alive in the present so that the future can be what He wills.**

**That is why Jesus left the church only one event to remember Him by. It is a memorial service that we call communion, and by which we remember that His death on the cross is the foundation for all we have as Christians in time and eternity. Do this in remembrance of me Jesus said because He knew the power of memory and the importance of having roots in the past.**

**Memorial Day has never had a great deal of meaning for me. I have had many members of my family in the armed services, and an uncle who won the purple heart, and who was a prisoner of war. I've never lost a loved one in war, and so I have never been a part of a family who went to the cemetery to place flowers or a wreath on the grave of one who died for our country. It use to be called Decoration Day for that is what families did for loved ones who died in service.**

**Even those who had such graves to visit began to lose interest. Theodore Ferris, who was pastor of the historic Trinity Church of Boston, had a long family tradition of doing this. His grandmother said, "When I am gone nobody will continue this," but his mother**

**did all her life. But when his mother died, he reasoned that his loved ones were not in the cemetery and so he let the tradition die. My point is, Memorial Day for the majority of people is more a day for making new memories of a great weekend of fun and travel rather than a day of remembering the past and the sacrifices that make such enjoyable freedom possible.**

**I do not feel it is of any value to try and provoke a guilt trip in anyone's mind, but I do feel it is of value to try and get us all to give thought to the value of memorials and to the power of memory. Our nation has fought 8 major wars, and over a million men and women have died in them. All that we enjoy as Americans has had a high price tag. Somebody else had to sacrifice for the benefits we enjoy. The least we can do is to acknowledge their sacrifice.**

**Memories of bad things of the past are an aid to preventing bad things in the present and future. War is terrible and we need to be reminded of its terror and cost lest we forget and let it happen again. In Israel there is a memorial called the Memorial of Witness and Warning in Jerusalem. It is in memory of the 6 million Jews killed in the Holocaust. There are mementos and even pictures of children being herded into the gas chambers. What a horrible memory to keep alive, but the Jews work hard at it. On this memorial are the words of an 18th century Jewish scholar which read, "Forgetfulness prolongs the exile: Remembrance is the secret of redemption."**

**It is the remembrance of just how awful prejudice and hatred can be that will save the world from another Holocaust. It is forgetfulness that leads to history repeating itself in its most despicable events. Memory is the key tool in the prevention of the terrible. Memory is what helps all of us become efficient in the**

**prevention of suffering. Bad experiences of the past, when they are remembered, cause you avoid those same experiences.**

**There is a positive side to Memorial Day. The day had its beginning in the loving compassion of Civil War mothers in Columbus, Mississippi. In the spring of 1863, 2 years before the war ended, these mothers went out to lay flowers on the graves of their Confederate dead. There were Union soldiers buried there also. These mothers realized that the mothers of the North could not come to the graves of their sons, and so in love that rose above the hatred of the war they put flowers on the graves of the Union soldiers as well. This practice spread all over the South and then into the North, and that's how Memorial Day began. It was a day to remember an honor all who died in war. In our day it has come to be a day to remember all who have died in any way, for life itself is a form of warfare, and so all who die do so in combat of some sort.**

**Lynette Wert was a student traveling in Italy when she got a letter from her mother urging her to visit the American cemetery in Florence where American service men were buried. A friend's son was buried there and the mother never saw the sight, nor had any of the family. It all seemed so meaningless to her, and it was out of the way, but she finally found it. There were rows of crosses and finally she found the one with the name Terry Stewart. She was shocked to discover that he had been born the same day as her father. It could have been her father buried there, and she would have been deprived of the chance to even exist.**

**She gained a deeper appreciation for the sacrifice of American service men, for she realized that her very existence depended on someone else paying the price so that others could be free to live, love, and make a future possible. She said, "My father could have**

**died in warfare, but he did not, for others died in his place. My grandfather could have died in war, but he did not, for others died in his place. My great grandfather and his father, and on and on you could go. All of them were spared because others died in the wars that might have killed them. Everyone of us is here today because we have a family tree where our limb was never cut off because someone else died in the place of the one who kept our branch growing. Everyone one of us owes our very existence to those who died."**

**Both our temporal life and eternal life are ours because of the death of others for us. Only the death of Jesus makes our eternal life possible, but many have died that we might enjoy the present physical life. And without physical life we could never have eternal life. This leads to some startling conclusions that make Memorial Day far more significant than any of us could imagine. If began with those mothers who rose above prejudice and honored the enemy soldiers who died fighting their own sons. This unity of all humanity, and oneness even with our enemies, is an inevitable part of Memorial Day, for the dead who died for our freedom and very existence were often people very opposite from us.**

**Catholics died for Protestants and vice versa. Blacks died for whites and vice versa. Atheists died for Christians and vice versa. In war every traditional enemy died for the other. Arabs died for Jews, and Jews died for Nazi lovers. Every one alive is so because of the sacrifice of their enemies as well as their friends. Remembrance of this reality could go along way in preventing the prejudice and other human follies that lead to the evil of war. For the Christian it is also another reason for the promotion of loving those who may not love you. If there are people you do not like, it is likely that some of their very group died in a war in order that you might enjoy the life you do. The memory of this can have the**

**power to heal your prejudice, and produce in you the compassion of Christ for those very people.**

**The Civil War was the worst war ever for Americans, but the memory of how it ended is one of the best memories we can have. General Lee on April 9, 1865 stood before General Grant to surrender according to Grant's terms. The terms were generous, for Lee's army was free to go home, stipulating only that they leave their arms. Lee responded, "This will have a very happy effect on my army." He then explained that the Confederate cavalymen and artillery men owned their own horses and inquired if they might keep them. Grant recognized they would need their horse or mule to work their little farm and so he granted this request plus a supply of rations. This act of love toward the enemy was a major step in uniting a severely divided people.**

**War is hell, but the memory of the heroic and loving acts of many who died and who fought wars can possess the power to make the present heavenly. The more I study war the more I hate it, but, on the other hand, the more I love people, and the more I have compassion for all people. Foolish people learn only from their own experience, but wise people learn from the experience of others. We do not have to make the same mistakes of previous generations that led to war. We can, by the power of memory, honor the heroic dead most of all by preventing the follies that killed them.**

**Christians should be leaders in learning from history, because the Bible was given to us by God that we might be just such learners. Paul stressed this in Rom. 15:4, "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." Over and over again the Old Testament reveals the power**

**of God's memory. Salvation is based on God's remembering His people and His promises. God remembered Noah, and God remembered Abraham, and God remembered Rachel, and God remembered His covenant with His people. If God never had a Memorial Day in which He looked back and remembered His promises the people of God would have ceased to exist. They have been saved many times because of God's memory.**

**Ex. 6:5 is representative of numerous examples. It says, "And I have also heard the groaning of the children of Israel whom the Egyptians keep in bondage; and I have remembered my covenant." That Memorial Day of God became a perpetual Memorial Day for Israel because it became the day of their deliverance out of Egypt. God's people are to perpetually remember that God remembered them.**

**Memorial Day is to remember those who have died, but keep in mind that it is also a day to remember the providence of God that used the death of others as a basis for the life we now live. It is a Thanksgiving Day for those who see that they only live because God remembered and refused to let evil win and destroy the good. In every crisis of history where evil threatens to conquer the world, God and His providence comes to the rescue. Many good people die, but God's people live on, and His kingdom presses on giving all people the hope of eternal life in Jesus Christ.**

**Remember the Alamo, and remember Pearl Harbor, and remember Iwo Jima, and remember all the heroic battles and sacrifices, but above all, remember the God who remembers that we are but dust, and yet provided a way for all men to have hope of an eternal destiny where sin and all of its consequences will be remembered no more.**

**An event happens only once in history, but in memory it can happen over and over. The memory can give the event power beyond what the event itself had. We can reflect on the sacrifices of the past and be changed because of them. The memory has the power to give the past event and impact in the present. It is my means of the memory that the past still lives.**

**One of the most important things we need to remember is that the millions who died for our freedom would have accomplished nothing had it not been for the providence of God. The more you study the wars of our history, the more you discover that they were not won by man alone. No where is this more evident than in the Revolutionary War.**

**The British sent an invading force of 55 thousand men to defeat the American army. On one August morning in Brooklyn 15 thousand British and 5 thousand Hessian troops who were well trained faced Washington's 8 thousand men half of whom were untrained. Washington watched as one by one as his generals were crushed. It was only a matter of hours and the Revolution would be over, and he and his remaining troops would be dead or in chains. But for some unknown reason the British general Howe decided to wait until the next day. It was that mistake that changed the history of our nation.**

**The next day the weather was not fit for a war. It was such a dark and dreary day. It gave Washington an idea for the greatest escape plan in American history. He decided to risk taking his entire army off Brooklyn in small boats right under the noses of the British. All night long skilled oarsman noiselessly rode the troops a mile across the water. It was mission impossible, and yet it was working. As dawn came the sky was clearing, and they were far from finished. It was with great anxiety that they watched the**

**rising sun that would expose them and leave the remaining troops at the mercy of the British. But to their amazement fog began to rise off the river, and it kept them covered until the last boat with Washington in it left. Then it lifted and the British ran to the shore firing, but they were out of range.**

**Eight thousand men were saved from certain death or imprisonment, and the American army was spared to fight another day, and eventually drive the British out of our land. It was not cost free, for 15 thousand Americans died that battle, but by the providence of God their deaths were not in vain, for God spared the rest of the army to go on to victory. The point is, when we remember those who have died it borders on idolatry unless we also remember the hand of God in giving us the victories that preserve our liberties. No number of deaths could have given us what we have without the hand of God in our history. Therefore, let us look back and remember our heroic dead with a spirit of thankfulness to God, and the kind of humility we see in George Washington which he made clear in this prayer he wrote:**

**"O God, who art rich in mercy and plenteous in redemption, mark not, I beseech Thee, what I have done amiss; remember that I am but dust, and remit my transgressions, negligences and ignorances, and cover them all with the absolute obedience of Thy dear Son, that those sacrifices which I have offered may be accepted by Thee, in and for the sacrifice of Jesus Christ offered upon the cross for me."**

**Washington recognized that the greatest power of memory is experience when we look beyond all that we have done, or all that the heroes of history have done, to what God has done for us in Jesus. There is no greater memory than to remember that it is His death that gives value to all other deaths on our behalf. Every**

**Memorial Day is to be a day of thanksgiving to our Lord who brings life out of death. Thank God for the power of memory, for by it we can see abundant reasons to thank God for the past sacrifices that have given us a great land for time, and a greater yet for eternity.**

## **10. HARMLESS AS DOVES MATT. 10:16**

**A small boy sat by the side of a pool fishing. "What are you fishing for," asked a man who passed by. "Sharks," replied the boy. "But there are no sharks in that pool my little man," said the stranger. "There ain't any fish in this pool at all," answered the boy. "So I might as well fish for sharks as anything else."**

**Children have a vivid imagination, and this is certainly one of the characteristics Jesus had in mind when He said men must become as little children before they can enter the kingdom of heaven. Imagination is the eye of the soul. Without it we are, as Beecher once said, "And observatory without a telescope." You cannot enter into the world of great literature and poetry without imagination. Robert Louis Stevenson discussed every sentence of Treasure Island with his schoolboy step-son before giving it its final form. He knew that if his story was to be great he had to appeal to the imagination of youth. Einstein said that even in science, "Imagination is more important than knowledge." Imagination is the key to great discoveries in every realm of life, including the spiritual. John Davidson wrote,**

**That minister of ministers, Imagination, gathers up--  
The undiscovered Universe, Like Jewels in a jasper cup.**

**No one can begin to understand the teaching of Christ without imagination. Jesus constantly spoke in parables, and used imagery that would leave a man in the dark who did not have the illumination of a childlike imagination. The common people heard Jesus gladly because he did not speak in abstract theological terms, but in common pictures that appealed to the imagination. The kingdom of heaven, he said, was like a man sowing seed, like a woman putting leaven in bread, like a merchant in search of fine pearls. Or else he would say, it is like a mustard seed, or treasure buried in a field, or like a net thrown into the sea gathering fish of every kind.**

**Jesus took His illustrations from life, and from nature, and appealed to the imagination. He did so because God made nature the greatest resource for material for visual aids in religious education. Jesus also knew what modern psychology has discovered-that the imagination is more powerful than the will. Win a man's imagination and he is your captive. Great leaders must appeal to the imagination of their followers to hold their allegiance. Napoleon said the human race is governed by its imagination.**

**On an individual level you can demonstrate this easily. Take a ten inch plank and put it on the ground and walk from one end to the other. It is simple. But put the same plank across two buildings ten stories up and you could no longer do that simple act. Your imagination would fill your head with visions of falling and it would leave you powerless. Modern psychology says that whenever the will and the imagination come into conflict the imagination always wins. This means that a mind filled with visions of tragedy and evil around the corner cannot be set at rest by good news and positive signs. The imagination reigns and makes them pessimistic inspite of all evidence to the contrary. On the other hand, fill the**

**imagination with pictures of glory and victory, and all the storms of hell will not be able to blow you off the pleasant path of optimistic assurance. That is why the book of Revelation is so precious to Christian in persecution. Its vivid scenes of glory around the throne of God, and the victory songs of Christ and all His saints wins the imagination over and makes it a friend rather than an enemy in the battle of life.**

**This means that a Christian generally lives on a level that corresponds with his imagination. If it is weak, he will be like the man of whom Macaulay said, "His imagination resembled the wings of an ostrich. It enabled him to run, though not to soar." The Christian, however, is never to be content with wings that do not lift him aloft. We are meant to mount up with wings like an eagle. We are to have aspirations like David who wrote in Psalm 55:6, "O that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest." These wings of the dove, that David longed for, are available to all believers who have the imagination to appropriate them. Ever since the Holy Spirit came down in the form of a dove, theology has been linked to the wings of the dove. Spurgeon pointed out that many astounding sermons have been preached on the dove. All history has been ransaked for facts and fables about doves, and they have been used to teach lessons of Christian truth.**

**As far back as the second century Tatian began to speak of the fall of man as the loss of his spirit wings. These wings are restored to man when he is filled with the heavenly dove--the Holy Spirit. The wings of the dove came to mean detachment from the world, and from the weight of flesh. To be sanctified and separated from the world was to rise with the wings of the dove. In the fourth century, Gregory of Nyssa developed a whole system of Christian mysticism based on the idea of the wings of the dove. We cannot begin to cover all the references to doves in Christian theology and**

**hymnology, but we want to look at some of the most important Biblical references.**

**If we use our imagination we can see many parallels between literal birds and the work of the Holy Spirit. As the Holy Spirit hovered over the dark world before it burst into life and light, so He hovers over every life in darkness eager to mother it out of the shell of sin into the world of light, and give it wings to soar.**

**Charles Wesley put it in poetry—**

**Expand Thy wings celestial Dove,  
Brood o'er our nature's night;  
On our disordered spirits move,  
And let there now be light.**

**After we have been hatched by the Heavenly Dove, which is another way of saying after we have been born again by the spirit of God, we are not through with the concept of the dove in the Christian life. There is more to the dove than wings.**

**It has character also, and it is the dove's character that Jesus is interested in, in our text. Jesus is preparing His disciples for the greatest mission of their lives. It is literally a matter of life or death, for they will face opposition and in tense hatred like they never saw before. It is no time for light entertainment and small talk. They need to be given some deep impressions and profound assurances. It is in a context like this that Jesus twice uses birds to get His message across, and into their imagination. Birds have lessons of value for the Christian, not just in the hour of gaiety, but in the most crucial hours of life.**

**Jesus said to them, "Behold," --that is, pay attention to this; get the full and realistic picture of what you are heading into. "I send you out as sheep in the mist of wolves, so be wise as serpents and**

**innocent (or harmless) as doves." The disciples had to have knowledge of four different kinds of creatures to be able to understand and obey Jesus. He paints a word picture with animals, serpents, and birds--the crawlers, the walkers, and the flyers, all in one little verse. With imaginative interruption we could describe how the wolves devoured the sheep in the early centuries. We could show how many were wise as serpents in obedience to Christ. We could consider the fascinating fact of how Jesus selected a quality of the serpent for us to imitate even though the serpent, all through Scripture, is a symbol of Satan. Jesus can find some good for illustration in every creature He has made. This would be an interesting study, but for now we are limiting our attention to the last of these creatures--the dove.**

**How many Christians face a crisis, and an encounter with the world, with their minds on doves? A Christian who talked about birds at such a serious point in life would probably be looked upon as being crazy as a loon. In reality, he would be seeking to take his Lord seriously. Jesus says the dove has something a Christian needs. It has a character that is harmless, innocent, blameless, and gentle.**

**The dove is the most Christlike of all the birds. The dove is the first bird to play a role in the life of Christ. When Jesus was just a baby, Mary and Joseph brought Him to Jerusalem, and according to the law of Moses, it says in Luke 2:24, they offered a sacrifice of a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons. Doves and pigeons are of the same family. The law in the Lev. 12:8 says that for those who cannot afford a lamb for atonement and offering of two turtle doves or two pigeons can be a substitute. This means that Mary and Joseph could not afford a lamb, and so birds were their substitute. What this means is that Jesus the Lamb of God is also the Dove of God, for both were offered in atonement for sin.**

**The dove became a symbol, not only of the Holy Spirit, but of Christ also. In the middle ages the vessels in which wafers were kept for the Lord's Supper were sometimes made in the form of doves. The dove was the bird of good news from the beginning. It brought back the evidence to Noah that the water had departed and land was uncovered. The ancients carried doves on their ships, for they were often literal saviours of lost men. When a storm would blow a ship off course, they would release their doves and the direction in which they flew would indicate the way to the nearest land. Columbus used doves on his ship. The dove is symbolic of the Savior in that it is a sacrifice for atonement, and it is a guide to safety.**

**Someone might object that I am taking birds too seriously, and that I have let my imagination run beyond what the Scripture would authorize. Let us deviate from doves for a few moments, therefore, and see just how seriously God takes the birds. In Gen. 9 God takes birds so seriously that He includes them in His covenant with Noah never to destroy the world again with a flood. In verses 8-11 we read, "Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: 'I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you and with every living creature that was with you--the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those who came out of the ark with you--every living creature on earth. I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth.'"**

**Samuel Cox, the great Bible expositor once said, "To care for birds, we may even say, is to worship God." That sounds like a radical statement, and you might wonder if Cox is getting close to idolatry, for God clearly forbids the making of an idol of any winged creature. On the other hand, if obeying God's commands is**

**a part of the worship of God, then bird care is clearly included. In Deut. 22:6-7 we read, "If you come across a bird's nest beside the road, either in a tree or on the ground, and the mother is sitting on the young or on the eggs, do not take the mother with the young. You may take the young, but be sure to let the mother go, so that it may go well with you and you may have a long life." God takes birds so seriously that He makes the same promise and warning in connection with them as He does with the command to honor one's father and mother. To disobey God's concern for mother birds can lead to the same judgment as disrespect for your own mother. Motherhood is sacred in bird life as well as human life.**

**The idea of conservation and animal sanctuaries, and game laws, as well as human societies are all based on God's love for His own creation. It is God's will that man be wise and humane in his dominion over nature. If his greed leads him to exploit nature, and drain the land of resources, and wipe out certain species of birds and animals, he is not just disobeying a government law, but he is defying the law of God as well. God expects His people to respect game laws. Some birds are no doubt flying in Israel today only because of God's laws to protect them.**

**God even went further than this law for the birds. He provided a sanctuary where no bird could be molested in any way. God made His temple in Jerusalem a bird sanctuary. In Psalm 84:3-4 we read, "Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may have her young--a place near your altar, O Lord Almighty, my King and my God. Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you." Birds and believers together in the house of the Lord praising their Maker, Redeemer and Protector.**

**Now all of this has been relevant to our study of the dove and**

**what Jesus wanted us to understand about being harmless as the dove. If God expects us to be gentle and kind to birds, how much more should we have this attitude toward all people, even to those who approach us like vicious wolves to devour us. They are still men with a worth infinitely greater than that of birds, and we are to like our Lord meet their force with love and gentleness. The Christian has a responsibility to suffer wrong rather than to inflict it. The best is to be like a wise serpent and be able to avoid conflict, but if no amount of wisdom can help you escape your oppressor, you are to face him as a dove. In a showdown where you must either do wrong or suffer wrong, the Christian who obeys Christ will suffer wrong and be innocent of evil. Jesus is a perfect example of being wise as a serpent and harmless as a dove. He outwitted His foes time and time again, but when he could no longer escape the cross without forsaking all men to their fate, He let His enemies kill Him. He went like a lamb, or like a dove, quiet and gentle, though He could have fought and destroyed them all.**

**It is not easy to combine the wisdom of the serpent and the innocent gentleness of the dove, but Jesus did not say it would be easy to follow Him. He said it would cost plenty. You have to die to self to face a hostile world with the character of a dove. You can only obey Christ, and be harmless as a dove, by the help of the Divine Dove-the Holy Spirit. Our desire must be that of David who cried out, "O that I had the wings of a dove." We should long even more to have the character of the dove, for the dove is the bird of love. The dove has been the emblem of love all through history. In the Song of Solomon the dove is used 6 times as an affectionate word for a lover. Love, perfection, gentleness, innocence, and purity are just some of virtues connected with the dove. The study of the natural dove can teach us these virtues, but only the Heavenly Dove can provide us with the wings necessary to rise to these ideals. Therefore, let us sing the song prayer of**

**George Herbert, the great Christian poet who wrote—**

**Listen, sweet Dove, unto my song,  
And spread Thy golden wings in me;  
Hatching my tender heart so long,  
Till it get wings and fly away with Thee.**

**I trust that you have an imagination that is alive, and one that can be motivated by the sight of any bird to realize that God is calling you to fly; to mount up with wings like eagles, and to live on a higher level. Of course, if you do not know the Lord of birds, you can be a lover of birds and still be lost. If you do not have any desire to obey Christ and please Him by your life, you have no reason to believe He is your Lord. If He is not your Lord you can love all the birds, but you will never get off the ground and soar spiritually. The only way to get wings for time and eternity is to receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.**

## **11. TALKING TREES Based on Judges 9:7-15**

**One of the questions most often debated among amateur philosophers is whether or not a tree falling in the woods makes any noise if no one is around to hear it? From a biblical perspective there is never a time when the trees are not being heard, for if we take seriously the Lordship of Christ over all creation, then we know he hears not only the music of the spheres, but the songs of the forests as well. They are perpetually making sound, even when they are not falling.**

**Trees are very musical in the Bible. In I Chron. 16:33 we read, "then shall the trees of the wood sing for joy before the Lord." In**

**Ps. 96:12** we read again, "Then shall the trees of the wood sing for joy before the Lord." Isaiah mentions the trees getting excited several times. In **44:23** they break forth in singing, and in **55:12** all the trees of the field clap their hands. All of this is figurative and poetic language, but trees do literally make a variety of noises. Bark peels off some with noise; bamboo grows so fast it whines. The canon-ball and shotgun trees actually have fruit that explodes and send seed flying up to 200 ft. There are crying trees on Pacific Ocean islands. The flowers make a peculiar crying sound when they open. The tropical Asian tree called the woman's tongue rattles like mad from the seeds in a foot long pod as the wind blows.

We seldom think about it, but trees do have more than a poetic connection with music. Many of the musical instruments of the Old Testament were made of wood, just as they are today. Man in his dominion over the trees has used them to produce music for the praise of God. We have modified trees in our piano and organ. Trees have other connections as well, for they have inspired men to write great music. One of the greatest examples is Beethoven. Listen to his prayer to God in the woods. "Almighty One, in the woods I am blessed...Every tree speaks through Thee, O God! What glory is in the woodland! On the heights is peace, peace to serve Him."

Bernard of Clairvoux wrote a number of hymns. The best known is **Jesus The Very Thought Of Thee**. He wrote this in the 12th century. "What I know of the divine sciences and Holy Scriptures, I learned in the woods and the fields. I have had no other masters than the beeches and the oaks." Many true lovers claim to learn much from the trees. This should not be surprising to the Bible student, for the first reference to knowledge in the Bible is connected with a tree. God filled the Garden of Eden with

trees of beautiful and delicious fruit, and one of them was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Another unique tree that was there was the tree of life. All who love Jesus Christ will one day eat of this tree in heaven. It is the most unique tree ever, for Rev. 22:2 says it has 12 kinds of fruit, and yields its fruit each month. It will be a perpetual fruit of the month club to have access to this tree in heaven.

There is so much in Scripture about trees that we can only survey the subject in one message. There are over 500 references to trees, and they play a major role in God's revelation. The text we are looking at in Judges 9 is not the most important, but it is the most conspicuous. There are only two fables in all of the Bible, and both of them are fables of talking trees. Here and the other one is in II Kings 14:9. The one here has a powerful political message. Gideon, the great judge of Israel had 70 sons, and when he died one of his sons by the name of Abimelech decided to eliminate all the competition. He killed all of the sons of Gideon except Jotham. He was the youngest, and he hid. The people then made Abimelech their king by a great oak tree.

Jotham heard of this, and he came and stood on the side of the mountain overlooking them. He spoke this fable as a political speech. It has many valuable implications we cannot get into now, but the gist of it is this: The highest places in the state should be given only to the best of men. The tragedy, however, is that the best men are often content to let someone else do the job. The result is the greedy and unscrupulous get into places of leadership and everyone suffers. Bad men become leaders because good men would rather not get involved. The end result is they are involved in a fire that consumes good and bad alike.

The olive, the fig, and the vine represented the finest trees of the

**society. The bramble was good for nothing but fuel. The bramble represented Abimelech. He was the worst possible choice, but they chose him, and if you read on, you see the fable fulfilled. He became a treacherous tyrant, and he set fire to over a thousand men and women in the tower of Shechem. Many feel this is probably the oldest fable in history. It is different than most of the references to trees in the Bible in that it is quite negative. This is due to them being used to illustrate human nature. They are made to be complacent, foolish, gullible, and dangerous. Literal trees can have some negative aspects too. One little boy complained,**

**I've one complaint against the trees,  
It doesn't seem just right,  
The way they stand with outstretched arms  
To catch a fellows kite.**

**We have little to complain about, however, compared to David's son Absalom. He got his hair caught in an oak tree, and as he hung there he was killed. A tree helped get him murdered. On the other hand, it was the sycamore tree that aided little Zaccheaus to see Jesus, and Jesus him, and so a tree helped him to salvation and getting into the kingdom of God. The positive values of trees outweigh any negatives. "Cursed in every man who is hung on a tree." That is the negative side of the cross. But that tree split time in half and opened the door to eternity for all who put their trust in the Christ of the cross. He bore our sins their, and makes it possible for us to be reconciled to God.**

**The tree has always been associated with man's salvation. God commanded Noah to make an ark of gopher wood, for only trees could save man in the flood. We are being saved every day by the trees, for they keep our atmosphere so it is breathable for us. Without them we would soon perish. In Isa. 11:1 we read, "There**

shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots." This is a tree being used to illustrate the coming of the Messiah. You have, no doubt, seen a stump of a tree that looks dead, and yet out of it will come shoots with new life. We have just such a tree in the back of our house. It was cut off, and yet out of the stump has come an entire new tree with many branches. Zech. 3:8 also refers to the Messiah as The Branch.

Jesus said he was the vine and we are the branches. Paul devotes almost the whole of chapter 11 of his letter to the Romans in describing the Church and Israel as branches being cut off and grafted into the olive tree. Tree imagery is everywhere in Scripture. Why is it that the tree is so prominent in biblical imagery? It is because the tree is the source of life in so many ways. The more you study their role in keeping life going in creation, the more you can understand Joyce Kilmer's poem-

I think that I shall never see  
A poem lovely as a tree.  
Poems are made by fools like me,  
But only God can make a tree.

The breath of life comes from trees. They take in carbon dioxide and give off the oxygen necessary for man to breathe. When you look at a tree, remember it is your friend providing you with the breath of life. So the tree of Calvary makes it possible for us to receive the Spirit of God, or the breath of God, that gives life to our spirit. All that the Holy Spirit does in our life is called the fruit of the Spirit, and again we see the tree image with its fruit. A tree is know by its fruit, and so is the believer.

In the Song of Solomon 2:3 Jesus Christ is described as fruitful

**tree among the trees of the woods. Jesus stands out from all the others in his value and usefulness to mankind. Like a fruit bearing tree in the midst of trees with nothing but leaves, is our Lord. As trees are the source of so much medicine for the health of man, so Jesus is the Great Physician. Trees play a role in healing, and are symbolic of Jesus.**

**Jonathan Edwards is most known for his hell fire preaching, but he also used trees in much of his teaching. He refers to the balm in Gilead, the chief medicine for healing wounds in the land of Israel. It is procured by piercing the balsam tree and the tree bleeds this healing balm. So the piercing of Christ and the flowing of his blood provides the healing stream for our souls. Moses cast a tree into the bitter water and they became sweet waters, and so Jesus when taken into the bitter waters of our life makes them sweeter, and we become like Ps. 1 says, "trees planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither, and in all that he does he prospers."**

**Ps. 92:12-14 says, "The righteous flourish like the palm tree, and grow like a cedar in Lebanon. They are planted in the house of the Lord, they flourish in the courts of our God. They still bring forth fruit in old age, they are ever full of sap and green,..." God delights in fruit trees that bear much fruit. They are one of the marvels of his genius, and he loves them. He was concerned lest men in the heat of war be destructive of fruit trees and so in Deut 20:19 he command his people, "When you besiege a city for a long time, making war against it in order to take it, you shall not destroy its trees by wielding an axe against them; for you may eat of them, but you shall not cut them down." God was concerned about ecology long before it became an issue with man.**

**Fruit trees that bore not fruit could be cut down. Jesus cursed a**

**fig tree in a parabolic act to symbolize that Israel was a fruitless tree, and so the axe was to be wielded against it. But if Israel would repent she would become a fruitful tree, and the remnant who became the church did just that. God spoke the same language in the Old Testament. God says this if his people will repent and return to him in Hos. 14:5-6, "I will be as the dew to Israel; he shall blossom as the lily, he shall strike root as the poplar; his shoots shall spread out; his beauty shall be like the olive, and his fragrance like Lebanon."**

**God even identifies himself with the evergreen in Hos. 14:8 where he says, "I am like a green pine; your fruitfulness comes from me." All through the Bible the tree plays a major role in imagery to illustrate the Persons of the Godhead. Trees also play a major role in the spread of the Gospel, and all of God's revelation in that the Bible is made from trees in most cases.**

**Tree illustrations do not always convey a message that gets across, however. A teacher was telling her class of how Sir Isaac Newton sat under an apple tree and watched an apple fall, and it led him to the discovery of gravitation. She said, "Isn't that wonderful?" "Yeah," said one guy in the back of the room. "But if he would have been sitting in school like we are now it never would have happened."**

**God is a great tree lover and planter. Just a few of the many verses will give you the picture. In Gen. 2:8-9 we read that God planted a garden in Eden, and out of the ground he made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. God created many trees just for their beauty. They serve no other purpose than that of pleasing the eye. God loves order and beauty. In Num. 24:5-6 Balaam in blessing Israel describes her beauty. "How fair are your tents, of Jacob....like valleys that stretch afar,**

like gardens beside a river, like aloes that the Lord planted, like cedar trees beside the waters." God's creation, and especially his trees, become a standard for testing the beauty of man made things. When man conforms to the order of God he achieves true beauty in his planning. When man plans a beautiful setting in the home or business, or office, he plant trees of some kind to enhance the beauty of the man made with the Creator made images.

When man becomes careless with trees and destroys them with no thought of their importance, he brings judgment on himself. So much sorrow and famine have been caused by the willful destruction of trees. But so many blessings have come to man by the preservation of trees. Arbor day used to be a popular holiday in America. It was a day for planting trees, and it had an impact on schools and churches, and it transformed the state of Nebraska.

God is the great tree planter. In Ps. 104:16 we read, "The trees of the Lord are watered abundantly, the cedars of Lebanon which he planted." Jesus also speaks of the green thumb of his heavenly Father in Matt. 15:13. "Every plant which my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up." All of nature is the garden of God. Trees are the oldest living things on this planet. Some are four and five thousand years old, and so they have survived through almost all of the known history of man. They are marvels of God's handiwork.

Martin Luther loved his apple tree. It was a time of great turmoil and trial, but he said, "Even if I knew that tomorrow the world would go to pieces, I would still plant my apple tree." The planting of a tree is a symbol of hope for the future. We had a tree in the back of our house in South Dakota that bore delicious apples. It was planted by a pastor of the church I was serving over 20 years before I came. I was so grateful for a man who looked

**ahead and planted a tree that would be a blessing to other in the future.**

**The Bible implies that a man of wisdom will have a love of, and a knowledge of trees. Solomon was the wisest man of his time by God's grace. I Kings 4:29 says, "And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding beyond measure, and largeness of mind like the sand on the seashore." How did he use his wisdom, and how did he express it so as to draw kings and queens of all the nation to hear him? Verse 33 tells us: "He spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of the wall."**

**The Bible refers to 37 specific trees, and many of them with practical and symbolic value. The little we have considered of this forest of beauty and wealth is just enough to stimulate your awareness of God's love for trees, and the vast resource they are for growth in spiritual wisdom. One prominent educator said, "Any teacher who has not taste for trees, shrubs or flowers is unfit to be placed in charge of children." This may be extreme, but there is no doubt one would be better teacher if they had a taste for trees. One would also be a more effective Christian witness if they had a taste for trees. Southey, the poet, wrote,**

**O Reader! Hast thou ever stood to see  
The Holly tree?  
The eye that contemplates it well perceives its glossy leaves  
Order'd by an intelligence so wise'  
As might confound the atheist's sophistries.**

**There are over 20 references to leaves alone in Scripture. Many of the most sacred objects in Israel's worship were made from trees. You have the Ark of the Covenant, and the cherubim. It was no accident that the Son of God incarnate was a worker with**

**wood as a carpenter, and no mere accident that he was not stoned, but instead, nailed to a tree. God deliberately made the tree the most prominent symbol in his plan from paradise lost to paradise regained. The carpenter of Nazareth built a bridge to God on the tree of Calvary.**

**If we want to be deeply rooted in God's will; if we want the stability of Cedar of Lebanon, and the fruit of a tree planted by the river of water; if we long to be as pleasant and helpful as the palm in the desert, and if we want to be a tree of righteousness and one day eat of the fruit of the tree of life, then we must come to the Master of trees who died on a tree to set us free from the power and penalty of sin. We are not talking poetry, but plain fact. If we do not receive Jesus as Savior, and walk in the light of his love, we will have no right to eat from that tree of life. The cross is the greatest talking tree, for it is saying to all, "Come and taste of the fruit of salvation. Come and find rest, and receive from Christ God's very best."**

## **12. HELPING THE HANDICAPPED Based on II Sam. 9:1-13**

**Joni Eareckson Tada is probably the most famous handicapped person in the Christian world. She tells of a girl she knows named Betty who cannot speak, cannot walk, and cannot feed or dress herself. She has no control over her bowels or bladder, and needs constant care. She often wakes in the night with screams for help. At first you might jump to the conclusion that this is another hell on earth story. But in fact, nobody even feels bad for Betty, and the reason is that she is an 8 month old baby. This is Joni's clever way of getting us to realize that at one point we were all severely mentally and physically handicapped. We have all been so handicapped that we would die in a short time without loving care. Every mother and father are in the business of helping the handicapped, for all normal babies are just as**

**handicapped as those who are not normal. Everyone of us is alive today because of the helpers of the handicapped.**

**We do grow out of many of our early handicaps and become somewhat independent, but we are never totally free of handicaps. Most people cannot do all that they dream and wish they could. There are so many limitations of time, talent, and treasure. Mrs. Sarah Ophelia Calley Connors set out to be actress on Broadway. It did not work out and she had to choose second best. She became a comedian whom we all know as Minnie Pearl. She had this philosophy about it: "Success is not always getting what you originally thought you wanted. To me, successful people are the ones who leveled with themselves. They were able to realize that in a lot of cases, second best is every bit as good as first choice. We must realize that many times our plan is not God's plan."**

**One of the most famous handicapped people in Minnesota history illustrates this. Michael J. Dowling was 14 years old when he sat on a soap box in the back of a wagon with two men up front. They left Canby, Minnesota and were out on the prairie when a blizzard stuck. The wagon hit plowed ground and he was jolted off the back. He yelled at the top of his voice, but the men did not hear him. He tried to follow the wagon, but the snow soon obliterated the tracks. He stumbled blindly and finally found a straw pile, and he dug his way in. He survived until the morning, and then found his way to a farm house where the doctor was called. He had to have both his legs amputated 6 inches below the knees. His left arm was taken off below the elbow, and all his fingers and part of his thumb on the right hand.**

**You would think that meaningful life would be over for this poor young victim of a tragic accident, but not so. He got artificial limbs, went to Carlton College, became a teacher, then became a principal, and then a banker, then a newspaper man, and finally a politician. He was once mentioned as a candidate for governor of Minnesota. He was sent as a member of a Commission to the Philippines where he had to help get the attention of the Sultan to impress him with the importance of education. The Sultan was bored by the Americans and had a hard time staying awake until Michael took off his left leg and threw it on the floor. Then he removed both feet and tossed them down before the astonished ruler. He was captivated and gave full attention to what they had to say.**

**Dowling turned his handicap into an asset, and he proved that second best can be ever bit as good, if not better, than first choice. The handicapped are often just like everyone else. They just need help to figure out how to use their handicap in an effective way. Our text is a whole chapter about a handicapped son of Jonathan. It was bad enough that he was lame, but to add to his burden he had one of the most unpronounceable names in the Bible. Don't look for it in your little book of 300 names for your new baby because the name Mephibosheth just never caught on, and never became popular, even though it is a biblical name.**

**The handicapped compel the mind to ask why? Why should anyone have to be deprived of the mental or physical abilities that are considered normal for the human race? In the case of Mephibosheth the Bible tells us clearly. He was handicapped by an accident. We read of it in II Sam. 4:4. When he was 5 years old the news came that his father and his grandfather, who was Saul, had been killed in battle. His nurse grabbed him and ran. In her haste she dropped him and he became a cripple. He was the victim of a human mistake. A person who loved him and cared for him was trying to save his life, but in her panic to do good she did harm, and he ended up handicapped for life.**

**It happens every day as the handicapped population grows due to the accidents of life. Even those born handicapped have their defects due to accidents. The things that are suppose to happen in developing a child do not happen, and so the child is born with defects. These accidents are the result of a fallen world where nothing is free from Murphy's Law. Nothing is perfect the way God made it, and the result is something can go wrong with anything, and that includes the way babies are made.**

**We know that a mother can take drugs and produce an abnormal baby because of it. Handicapped children are born by the thousands due to chemical accidents. No mother deliberately does it, but she does not know the consequences of her behavior, and so she takes drugs that interfere with the process that produces a normal child. In other cases there is no external cause, but an internal defect in the mother or father that causes the child to be handicapped.**

**The point is, neither God nor man is in the business of producing handicapped children. They are not the result of anyone's will, but they are**

**the product of a monkey wrench in the works. Anyone who thinks all accidents are the will of God have rejected the fall of man and the resulting fall of nature. If all accidents are God's will then we must conclude that God is still saying what He did after creating this wondrous world. He said that it is very good, and if all accidents are His will then all is still very good. No one can honestly believe that the world is still very good and so the wiser way to think is to recognize that all is not good, and the world is full of things that are not ideal and not a part of God's will. In a perfect world a nurse would not drop a little child and injure it for life, but such a world does not exist for us as humans, at least not yet.**

**The number one answer for the question, why are persons handicapped, is that they are the result of accidents. It may be before birth, during birth, or after birth, for there are no end to the things that can go wrong in a fallen world. They happen to God's people just as they do to the world. There is not now, nor has there ever been, a group of God's people who did not have handicapped children. Every problem in the book happens to God's people, and even to those whom He chose to be His priestly people. It was sad indeed for the descendents of Aaron to have a child with any defect, for the law demanded that all who approached the altar in the temple be free of all abnormalities. Not only was the sacrifice to be as perfect as possible, but so was the sacrificer. Any handicap meant a child could never be a priest even though that was his destiny by being a descendent of Aaron.**

**To even suggest that God deliberately made children born in the priestly line handicapped is to make God very cruel, for he forbid them to ever function in their family tasks. Listen to this clear passage where the handicapped are severely restricted. They are not rejected as people, but they are free to eat the most holy food and be one with the family of God, but they are not allowed to ever offer the sacrifice as a priest.**

**Lev. 21:16-23 says, "The Lord said to Moses, "I say to Aaron: For the generations to come none of your descendants who have a defect may come near to offer the food of his God. No man who has any defect may come near: No man who is blind or lame, disfigured or deformed; no man with a crippled foot or hand, or who is hunchbacked or dwarfed, or who has any eye defect, or who has any festering or running sores or damaged testicles. No descendent of Aaron the priest who has defect is to come near to present the offerings made to the Lord by fire. He has a defect; he must not come**

**near to offer the food of his God. He may eat the most holy food of his God as well as the holy food; yet because of his defect, he must not go near the curtain or approach the altar, and so desecrate my sanctuary. I am the Lord, who makes them holy."**

**God did not will these children to be born with these defects. They happened to the priestly families for the same reason they happen to anyone else, and that is the accidents that we have mentioned due to defects in the genes and environmental problems. Joni Eareckson Toda said that there are 516 million people in our world with disabilities. She is one due to a diving accident, and she has plenty of company. She tells of the many paraplegics in Bangladesh who are young men who have injured their spinal cord by falling out of palm trees while cutting coconuts. All over the world she finds the victims of this fallen world, and she starts ministries for them.**

**She ended a conference in Manila with these words: "No other ministry better demonstrates Christ's heart of compassion than ministries to people with disabilities. Those who are helpless, no matter what their handicap, see themselves in the Man of Sorrows because He became one of them. Jesus' message was clear. We are without help or hope as long as we are without Him. But He was also clear that His good news was, in some way, especially for those who suffer the helplessness and hopelessness that physical infirmity can often bring."**

**God in His sovereignty uses accidents and handicaps to change lives for good, but it does not mean that He wills everything, for then He would be the author of evil. What it does mean is that He can use everything, and even bring good out of evil. This is what He is ever doing in the realm of accidents and the resulting handicaps. It is part of the fallen world, but where people choose to seek His guidance there can be blessings for time and eternity that come out of the burden of being handicapped.**

**Sir Walter Scott and Byron were both lame, but Byron loathed it and brooded over it. He was a bitter man because of being handicapped. Scott, on the other hand, never complained of his disability. He accepted it and coped with it. It is no wonder that Byron wrote to him once and said, "Ah Scott, I would give all my fame to have your happiness." A bitter spirit is worse than any mental or physical handicap. Most all handicapped people face this temptation to become bitter, but those who overcome it discover**

they can be as happy as anyone else if they maintain a positive attitude. Joni went through the pits and wanted to take her own life because she was so bitter, but by the grace of God she came out of that pit and has brought happiness to multitudes.

The great battle of most handicapped people is the battle with a low self-image and a sense of inferiority. Most non-handicapped people struggle with this as well, and so why should they not do so when their problem is often so conspicuous? Mephibosheth had this battle. We see it in verse 8 where he says to David, "What is your servant, that you should notice a dead dog like me?" Talk about a low self-image. He was on the bottom and felt as worthless as a dead dog, and not just a lame dog, a sick dog, or a mere mangy mongrel.

This is a common problem of the handicap, but one that is very serious. If this low self-image is allowed to persist it leads to a loss of all their potential because they just give up. Mephibosheth had two bad feet and that eliminated him from a lot of normal activity, but he still had two good hands and arms and a good mind. He had great potential beyond any living dog let alone a dead dog. We have no idea of what he did with what he had, but we know of people with similar handicaps who have built careers in business, music, art, and even sports. Many famous people have been handicapped. Milton was blind; Beethoven was deaf, and Helen Keller was blind and deaf, just to name a few.

At the age of 19 Stan Musial was playing center field for the Daytona Beach Islanders. He caught a fly ball at his feet and took a somersault. It damaged his body so that it almost ended his career in baseball. His dream was to be a pitcher, but the pain in his shoulders made that impossible. Branch Rickey of the Cardinals recognized in him a great hitter, and so he took him on. As a handicapped player Musial went on to lead the national league in batting 7 times. He could not pitch, but he could still hit, and he became famous for it. He illustrates that a handicap does not necessarily limit a person in all areas of life.

Sometimes a handicap does not even limit a person in areas that it should if they have enough determination. Peter Gray tried to hop a train when he was 6 years old. I know the danger for I was that age when I use to do it, and I know it is easy for your leg to slip as you jump for the ladder.

**Pete did slip and lost his right arm. He had to learn all over to use his left arm for everything. He loved baseball and refused to quite just because of a missing arm. He got so good that he worked his way up to the professionals. In 1944 he was the best player in the Southern Association. A one arm player in the major leagues is rare, for most two arm players never make it. Here is an example of how handicapped people can even be superior to those who have no such handicap. He had the choice to be bitter and be a quitter, but he chose instead to be determined to be excellent in spite of his handicap.**

**Life has more handicaps than we usually think. All of us are handicapped in some way just because all people have limitations. Youth feel bad because they can't do what adults do. They have to wait to drive and it drives them crazy. On the other hand being older has its limitations too. Older people can no longer enjoy all the new slides in the modern park. The older you get the more you are limited, and to be middle aged can be just as bad. You are too old to get the free kids meal and too young to get the senior citizen's discount. It is a handicap just to be the age you are whatever that age is.**

**Some people get bitter about being young or old, or in between. You can be bitter about any of life's limitations and become a spiritual handicapped person. But on the other hand, you can be spiritually mature if you learn to accept any and all limitations and use them to the glory of God. Booker T. Washington use to say all the time the phrase, "The advantages of disadvantages." They can stimulate, motivate, and cause people to rise above them and develop a spirit that is truly beautiful and pleasing to God. This is success on the highest level. Joni and many others have come to the point where they can identify with the words of Helen Keller: "I thank God for my handicaps, for through them I have found myself, my work, and my God."**

**Harold Russell had his hands blown off by a blast of TNT. Lying in a hospital, he didn't care much whether he lived or died. He had a visitor who had lost his own hands in World War I. He told him to look up the word handicap in the dictionary. He did so and read this definition: "Any disadvantage or hindrance making success in an undertaking more difficult." This made him realize that a handicap just meant he had to work harder for success. He went on to become a writer and a lecturer, and he**

**developed abilities he never dreamed he had. He wrote, "My weakness-my handlessness- my sense of inferiority-has turned out to be my greatest strength....this seeming disaster as brought me a priceless wealth of the spirit that I am sure I could never have possessed otherwise. I have enjoyed a life that has been full and rich and rewarding, a life that has had a meaning and depth it never had before...It is not what you have lost, but what you have left that counts."**

**None of us are all that God intended people to be, and so all of us are in some way handicapped, and none of us are whole and complete. Even though Jesus was the perfect man, even He was handicapped in the sense that He gave up equality with the Father and took on enormous limitations to become a man. As the Son of Man He was greatly limited. He became a handicapped person and suffered even greater handicaps for our salvation and our perfection. He did so in order that we might have an eternal life free from all the handicaps of a fallen world.**

**Meanwhile, we have to live in this fallen world and cope with its limitations. David was kind to the handicapped son of Jonathan, but he was often cruel to himself by not over coming his handicaps. He had poor control over his own sex drive and over his children. These were handicaps that lead to great suffering and sorrow for him and his whole family. Life is a battle with handicaps, which are all of the weaknesses and limitations that make us less than ideal.**

**When you are kind to any person you are being kind to the handicapped, for that is the state of all people. Show me a person who is in no way damaged or defective and I will show you an illusion. All people are handicapped, but some are more conspicuous than others, and so they have more conspicuous needs to be met. But all people have the same need to be encouraged to overcome their handicaps. Nobody needs to accept a less than excellent life. Disabilities need not stifle us from making the best of a bad situation.**

**Ted Engstrom in his book The Pursuit of Excellence p. 81-2 writes, "Cripple him and you have Sir Walter Scott. Lock him in a prison cell, and you have a John Bunyan. Bury him in the snows of Valley Forge, and you have a George Washington. Raise him in abject poverty and you have an Abraham Lincoln. Strike him down with infantile paralysis, and he becomes**

**Franklin Roosevelt. Burn him so severely that the doctors say he'll never walk again, and you have a Glenn Cunningham-who set the world's one-mile record in 1934. Deafen him and you have a Ludwig van Beethoven. Have him or her born black in a society filled with racial discrimination, and you have a Booker T. Washington, a Marian Anderson, A George Washington Carver....call him a slow learner, "retarded," and write him off as uneducable, and you have an Albert Einstein."**

**If you want to see lists of famous people all through history who have overcome handicaps go to-**

**<http://members.aol.com/disablenet/Leaders/Leaders.html>**

**One of the most famous musicians in our world today who has played his violin all over the world to cheering crowds had polio in his early life. He has to play on crutches, but he brings thrills to Kings and Queen, Presidents, Leaders of all nations, and to the masses. His name is Itzhak Perlman. The point of all this is not that every handicapped person can become famous, for that is not even true of the non-handicapped. The point is that a handicap does not mean that the person who has it is any less of a person, but that they have the capacity to be all they can be too, and sometimes that is a great deal more than those who have no such handicap. That is why they need to be encouraged, like everyone else, to seek to discover their gifts; develop them, and dedicate them to the cause of Christ.**

**The seven letters of Christ to His churches in Rev. 2 and 3 make it clear that Christians are handicapped people who have many defects, and Jesus encourages each to see that they also have virtues and assets to overcome those handicaps. Helping the handicapped is what those seven letters are all about, and that is what the Christian life is all about. The greatest handicap of all is to be a person made in the image of God with an eternal soul, and yet be so lame you cannot walk in the light of God's will. It is awful to be so dead in sin that you are like a dead dog as far as your value to the kingdom of God. The Gospel is the good news that Jesus died for just such dead dogs. He rose again that they might live too and be raised to run with the Hound of Heaven in helping the other handicapped find their legs so they too can walk in newness of life. We are all like Mephibosheth, for we are all handicapped, but we are also all called in Christ to be like David and be helpers of the handicapped.**

### **13. THE POWER OF MUSIC Based on Psa. 47**

**Paul Aurandt tells this fascinating historical example of the victory of the underdog. Sybaris was one of the wealthiest of Greek cities. The people lived in luxury and were the envy of others. But some people are never satisfied, and so one of the leaders persuaded the tribunal to confiscate all the wealth of the 500 richest men in the city. These 500 fled to the city of Croton, which was 75 miles away. The Sybarites sent messengers to Croton saying return the 500 or risk war. Croton was only one third the size of Sybaris, and so it looked like a wise thing to do to cooperate.**

**They sent 30 diplomats to Sybaris and they were all killed. This made the Crotons so angry they decided to risk war even if the odds were against them. The amazing thing was that they won the war and totally demolished the city of Sybaris. They even diverted a river so that the very sight of the city was eliminated. How could they do it? By the power of music. As the two armies approached each other for battle the Crotons had their musicians play a favorite Sybarite tune. It was a tune they used in their parades. Their magnificent horses had been trained to dance to this music. Now in the midst of battle they began to dance and prance. The Crotons were able to sweep in and put the entire cavalry out of commission, and the Sybarites were defeated. There is power in music when it is rightly and cleverly used to even win a war.**

**Music has always been one of the weapons of warfare. The bugle, trumpet, drums, and the song have all been used to motivate men to march out to engage in battle. The sound of these instruments alone use to drive off the Indians when they signaled the coming of the cavalry. The Bible has examples of the power of music as a weapon. When Joshua fought the battle of Jericho, the priests were to march around the city seven times blowing the trumpets of rams horns. It was on the signal of a long blast from these trumpets that all the people were to shout, and when they did the walls came tumbling down. We have all seen the high pitch voice that breaks the goblet, but here was a spectacle of trumpets and voices breaking down a city wall.**

**When Gideon with his 300 men took on the vast hoard of Midianites he did so with 300 trumpets. All of his men blew their trumpet and broke jars.**

**This threw the enemy into a state of panic, and they began fighting each other and defeated themselves. We know there is power in missiles, but we forget the power there is in music. Psa. 150:3 says, "Praise Him with the sounding of the trumpet." The trumpet can help win a war, or help us praise God, and numerous other things that demonstrate the power of music. Music has the power to give life meaning, and so one of the worse judgments God can inflict on a people is to deprive them of music. Listen to the punishment on the city of Babylon for its great wickedness. In Rev. 18:22 we read, "The music of harpists and musicians, flute players and trumpeters, will never be heard in you again."**

**There will be no music in hell, but there will be music forever in heaven, and it will be both vocal and instrumental. God enjoys singing, and the prophet implies that the trumpet of the Lord is really an instrument that He plays. Zech. 9:14 tells us that God shall sound the trumpet. It is important that we keep instrumental music in mind, for the Bible clearly exalts the power of both vocal and instrumental music. Because the early Christians did not use instruments it has led to a history of controversy on the subject. The early Christians were a persecuted people, and so the blowing of trumpets, or even the playing of the harp, would not have been good for their health. When you were meeting in secret and trying to keep from being raided by the Romans, the one thing you would not do is play any type of instrument.**

**Unfortunately, many took this unusual situation as the standard for all time. They said Christians should not use instruments in worship. The Eastern Orthodox church uses only vocal music. There is a whole history of how primitive Baptist and Free Methodist, old Mennonites, and some Presbyterian groups fought the use of instruments. This prohibition is waning, however, and is most conspicuous in certain Churches of Christ whose leaders insist on strict adherence to the New Testament practice.**

**I don't want to take time debating the issue, but to simply point out that the New Testament does clearly reveal the use of instruments for making music in heaven. It also clearly makes the loss of musical instruments a severe judgment on Babylon. That ought to be sufficient evidence, even without the abundance of Old Testament references, which make it obvious that God is pleased with the music of instruments. This whole business of what instruments that are appropriate for Christian worship is so subjective.**

**Don Hustad, Billy Graham's organist of many years, and teacher of music, tells of how in the mid 1960's many evangelicals opposed the use of guitar in the church because it was a symbol of the youth culture in their rebellion.**

**This all seems so ridiculous to him because he grew up with Norwegian Gospel music which used the guitar all the time. Way back in the early 1800's Oscar Ahnfelt popularized the guitar in Sweden. Scandinavian evangelicals developed string bands and they became as basic to them as the Gospel song. Hustad says he is very open minded and feels all instruments can be used in the church-all except the saxophone. He was joking of course, but that stuck me as funny, because in a church I served in Michigan one of the most frequent instrumentalists was a saxophone player who used his saxophone for the glory of God. The problem people have is that they associate certain instruments with the world, and this makes it hard to think of them as fitting for sacred music.**

**The issues around instruments can be so subjective. The real question should be, does the music have the power to move men for God? That is what William Booth asked as he sought to minister to the needs of the working people of England. His goal was to take the Gospel into the streets and touch people where they were. The organ and piano were not practical for this goal, and so he organized a band. It had to be loud to get attention, and so it was a brass band with drums, and by the power of these instruments he began a movement that has reached around the world. The Salvation Army may never have marched around the block had they used only the piano, but they marched to a different drum, and they reached people with the power of powerful music.**

**This influenced others like Billy Sunday. He had his song leader Homer Rodeheaver play his trombone. Other evangelists used trumpets or violins, and the dynamic Paul Rader, in the 1920's, used a full concert band which drew tremendous crowds. This may bother some of God's people, but the Bible has a band of its own. Listen to this list of instruments used in the Old Testament.**

**STRING**

**Psaltry of ten strings**

**Dulcimer**

**Harp**

**WIND**

**Cornet**

**Flute**

**Organ**

**PERCUSSION**

**Cymbals**

**Timbrals or Tabret**

**Hand drum**

**Sachbut**

**Rams horn  
Trumpet**

**Triangle  
Costanets**

**Man is the greatest musical instrument himself, for he can use his voice to sing, to hum, and to whistle. He can use his body to move in rhythm, and he can clap his hands. Clapping the hands is not just an expression of appreciation, it is part of the music of life. It is the expression of joy by means of sound. The Jews used the clapping of hands as a synonym for singing. Psa. 98:8 says, "Let the rivers clap their hands; let the mountains sing together for joy." Isa. 55:12 says, "The mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands." Here in Psa. 47, the song begins with a call to the nations to express their joy with the voice, and with the clapping of the hands.**

**If you thought you could not play any instrument, wipe that false idea from your head, for the hands are a Biblical instrument of music, and by means of them we can make sounds that express joy and praise to God. Forget the old joke about all I can do is play the radio or the phonograph. You can play the same instrument that the great musicians of history have used-the hands. They have developed the ability to use the hands to play other instruments, but even the least musical of us can make some rhythmic sound with the hands by clapping them or tapping them on something else.**

**You may think I am stretching Biblical poetry too thin to make a point, but it is not so. A. Z. Idelsohn in his book Jewish Music In Its Historical Development tells us that the Arabic meter in music comes from the rhythmic movements of the body and the trot of the horse and the camel. Clippity clop, clippity clop, clippity clopping along. These animals trotting are another form of clapping the hands. The point is, this Arabic meter became a major influence in Jewish music.**

**The human body is an instrument of music, and not only the hands, but the heart as well. The first music a baby hears is the beat of the mother's heart. Tests have demonstrated that the soft rhythmic beat of the heart calms a child and gives them peace and security. Stop it and they become agitated and cry. The music of the mother's heart has power to calm and cheer. It is not just poetry, it is literally true that where there is life there is music. Luther Burbank said, "Music is fundamental-one of the great sources of life, health, strength, and happiness."**

**Louis Braille discovered the power of music to give life when he entered the National Institute for Blind Youth in Paris. He discovered that the blind are equal to the seeing in music, and, in fact, they often excel the seeing. More than 50 of the graduates at that time played as organists in the Paris churches. This is in the early 1800's. He took lessons on piano and organ, and learned he was richly talented. He would so enter into the music that he was caught up into another world where there was no stumbling, no hesitation, no fear. Music set him free from his earthly limitation. Music has this power to set men free and thus motivate them to go beyond their handicap. He did so, and helped the rest of the world of the blind to do so by developing the Braille system of reading. Music has tremendous healing power in all sorts of ways.**

**We all know how David, by the playing of his harp, calmed the demented soul of Saul, and brought peace and stability to his troubled mind. Music as medicine for the mind has been used by people all through history. Today it is a major field, and musical therapy is used for the mentally ill, and for health in general. Homer in both his Iliad and Odyssey gave illustrations of how music and song led to healing. To be sick meant to be out of tune and harmony according to the Greeks. Music could get you balanced and back into a state of harmony. Plato and Aristotle and other Greek philosophers all agreed that music affected the mind more than any other art, and, therefore, was a powerful form of therapy to aid in healing the mind.**

**The Roman physicians and priests followed in their steps and used music for therapy. The Arabs did also, and by the 17th century harpsicords were found with the inscription on them: "Music, the medicine of men's minds." This is not a new idea, and when you set in the dentists chair, or have minor surgery, and hear the pleasant music which is being used as a mild anesthesia, remember that man has been doing this all through the ages. When you hear the music piped into the office, where it has been proven to relieve fatigue, monotony, and stimulate moral and production, remember that music's power to do this same thing was used by the Egyptians to help the slaves in building the pyramids.**

**In Grove's Dictionary of Music he tells the story of Farinelli, the greatest Italian singer of his time. In 1737 he was on tour in Spain, and he came to Madrid. King Philip V was in a state of deep depression. For weeks he had taken no part in the affairs of state, and the whole country was in a critical**

situation. The Queen invited Farinelli to come and sing in an adjoining room where the king sat dejected, unshaven, and unkempt. When the king heard this lovely music, and the beautiful songs, he was moved out of his state of lethargy and sent for the singer to thank him. The king hired him to sing for him every night, and by the power of music he lived and ruled in a normal state of mind for the next 10 years. Mirandalo was right when he said, "Music produces like effects on the mind as good medicine on the body." The first history of music was written in the 1600's by Pierre Bourdelot. He was physician to the king of France and the Queen of Sweden. Music and medicine go together, for both have the power of healing.

Like all other powers, the power of music can also be corrupted. The forces of evil abuse and misuse the power of music to lead astray. The old German story tells of the Lorelei whose songs were so irresistible they led men to drown in the Rhine. The ancient Greeks tell of the Sirens who could cast a spell on sailors with their songs, and lure them to destruction on the rocks. In Europe there is the Pied Piper legend. A strange man appeared in the rat-infested town and offered to purge the town of its pests. He played his flute, and all of the rats followed him to the river and were drowned. When the ungrateful people refused to pay for his services he played again and all of the children followed him, hypnotized by his music, and they were never seen again.

These stories run all through history making clear that music has the power to entice people into the path of the demonic as well as the divine. It is a power for evil as well as good. This makes it all the more important for Christians to take the power of music seriously, and be zealous to use it for the glory of God. The music you love to listen to will affect your life. This power of music to change both character and conduct has been recognized by all men of wisdom. Plato warned in his day that bad music can even change the laws of a nation, and Aristotle said, "If one listens to the wrong kind of music he will become the wrong kind of person; but conversely, if he listens to the right kind of music he will tend to become the right kind of person." If non-Christians recognize this, how much more ought Christians to see the power of music in helping us be what God wants us to be.

The more I study music the more I realize it is one of life's greatest powers. But what makes it special is that it also enables man to have the

power to please God. God is pleased when we pray, but prayer often has a selfish slant to it, but when we praise God it is because we are full of joy, and long to exalt Him who is the source of all that is precious. Music lifts man to the level where he lifts his voice and his clapping hands in praise to God. That is why we have the Psalms. "Hail heaven born music! By thy power we raise the uplifted soul to acts of highest praise."

The Jews read the Bible to music. The ancient Jewish Talmud said the Bible was to be read in public, and made to be understood in a musical sweet tune. Not to have a tune was to show disrespect for the Bible. That is how the Jews memorized so much Scripture. It was set to a tune, and anybody can remember a song they learned better than text they have read. I can hear a tune and remember the words even if I haven't heard that tune for many years. Music and the memory work as partners. The Jews used music as a key to religious education, and Christians followed in their steps.

Jesus grew up with song and the Scripture, and this is the path God expects all of His children to take. That is why the Psalms are a major part of His Word. There is power in music and song to guide and mold our values and character. One of the greatest powers of all is music which gives us the power to praise God. Music enables us to communicate our love and joy in God. The power of praise is one aspect of the power of music about which many have written. Music and song are essential in the communication of love. Sister Miriam wrote,

Give me the sun, a bird, a flower,  
And I will sing you a song,  
That will live an hour.

Give me a heart, a joy, a tear,  
And I shall weave you a song,  
That will live a year.

But give me a love death cannot sever,  
And I will build you a song  
To live forever.

There is power in music and song to lead, to lift, and to express love. Yet we often fail to use this power. We let the discords of life, which are very

real and powerful, to drive out the song and harmony, and we become a part of the negatives of life without a song. We then sing the blues and increase the world's discord. If a Christian rightly grasps the power of music and song, they will never again be a practicing pessimist. They may feel pessimistic and have negative thoughts, but they will always act optimistic and sing praise to God. Those who do not use the power of music to aid them in being optimistic will become a burden to themselves and to the body of Christ. They will be a weight that drags down rather than wings that lift up.

Do not underestimate the power of music to help you fight off the temptations of life to give in to the disappointing, discouraging, and depressing realities that all have to face. Paul wrote to the Ephesians and told them not to be foolish but to be wise. He said they were not to let the world get to them, and drive them to choose its way of escape through wine. He said they were to be filled with the spirit instead, and speak to one another with Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. They were to sing and make music in their hearts to the Lord. You are a powerful musical instrument is what Paul was saying to them. Use that power to praise, rejoice, and overcome the negatives of life that would defeat you and lead you astray. You can gain the victory every time if you recognize God's gift of the power of music.

## **14. THE POWER OF NEGATIVE THINKING Based on Isa. 1:1-17**

Abraham Lincoln told of how he and his brother were plowing the corn one day. He was driving the horse, and his brother was holding the plow. The horse was lazy, but suddenly it took off so fast that even with his long legs Lincoln could hardly keep up. On reaching the end of the furrow he checked the horse, and he found what they called a chin fly fastened on him. Lincoln knocked it off, but his brother scolded him for doing so. He said, "That's all that made him go."

The prophet Isaiah was like a chin fly on Israel. The prophets were not popular. They were despised because they were always biting and stinging,

**and aggravating the people by their constant denunciation of their sin. However, without this negative aggravation the people would have been like a lazy horse, and they would have done little or nothing for God. The prophet kept them going, or at least kept the remnant going by reminding them constantly of their folly and their duty.**

**The prophets were great examples of the power of negative thinking. It is superficial to be always encouraging people. When they are missing God's best, they need to be discouraged, and then condemned in order to motivate them to stop going down the wrong road. It does not harm your child to be scolded and disciplined for their foolish acts, and when they rebel and begin to go the way of the fool, they need to be punished. The negative approach, when they are going astray, is just as important as the positive approach when they are walking in obedience to God's light. Isaiah is an excellent example of how the negative and the positive can both be used effectively. In Isaiah we see the ideal balance of God's justice and God's mercy.**

**One of the reasons modern Christians do not care much for the prophets is because we live in an era of positive thinking, and the prophets are too negative. They go on for chapters at a time denouncing sin and evil. It gets to be quite a bore when you are conditioned to hearing the positive. If we are to gain the value from Isaiah that God intended His people to gain, we must be convinced of the value of the negative. In other words, we must see how the negative can lead to positive values. This alone will motivate us to pay attention to the negative thinking of Isaiah.**

**First, let me share with you what Dr. Dunlap, a psychologist learned. He made a simple but irritating error as he typed. Instead of THE, he typed the H first and had HTE. The harder he tried, the more he goofed. He decided to try something. He began to deliberately type HTE over and over hundreds of times. After this deliberate negative practice, he discovered he could then type it right with no difficulty. He found this negative practice worked in many areas of life, such as swimming, golf, sending Morris code, etc. When you bring the subconscious mistake to the surface, and gain conscious control over it, you gain freedom from it. He wrote, "By practicing the mistake you learn to break the power of the mistake over you."**

**How does this apply to the prophet Isaiah and his condemnation of sin?**

**In this way. We know that the more unconscious sin is the greater power it has over our life. The man who does not even know he uses a curse word in every breath he takes cannot break the habit because he is blind to his folly. However, if a man can be made conscious of his bad habit, so he is shocked by it, and aware of what an offense and embarrassment it is, he will have a choice at least to stop or alter his habit. Awareness of the negative is a key to reaching the positive. Being tied up makes you long for freedom; being hungry makes you long for food; war makes you long for peace; loneliness makes you long for fellowship. The negative experiences of life drive us to seek the opposite and positive experiences. It is only those who fully feel their lossness who respond to the Gospel, and rejoice in being found by the Good Shepherd- the Lord Jesus.**

**Find a man who is perfectly content with himself, and no matter how wicked and lost he is, he will have no interest in salvation. It is only the man who thinks negative about himself, and who feels worthless and lost who can benefit from the positive Gospel of salvation. It is the same story with those who are saved. If they backslide and are content in their fallen state, they will not be interested in repenting and returning to God. It is only when they become conscious of their folly, and begin to think negative about their rebellion against God, that they will respond to the mercy of God, and like the prodigal return home.**

**The positive thinker fanatics which can never tolerate the value of negative thinking would have the prodigal son saying something like this to his father: "It was a tough experience dad, but I learned a lot about life, and now I'll be a better man for it all." But what the prodigal really felt and said was, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants." It was the power of this negative thinking that changed this rebel into a son who could humble himself before his father, and return determined to follow the path of wisdom.**

**Don't knock all negative thinking. It is God-ordained method of reaching men, and one of the primary methods of the prophets. Let's examine some of Isaiah's negative thinking as he begins his own lament over Jerusalem and Judah.**

**In verse 4 we see the first word is oh, or alas. It is used by Isaiah 21**

times, and all the other prophets together use it only 28 times. It is one of his favorite words, and it expresses his emotion of mystified wonder that people can be so utterly foolish in their relationship to God. He pictures them as laden with iniquity. The Living Bible says, "They walk bent-backed beneath their load of guilt." But instead of turning to God, who alone can remove that heavy load, they do just the opposite. They turn from Him and forsake Him. Their folly is to be compared to men in a sinking ship who throw their life preserver overboard. Or to men in a falling plane who throw out their parachutes. Isaiah has already said it, they are more stupid than the dumbest beasts known to man.

God is saying to His people through Isaiah just the opposite of what Jesus cried on the cross. God is saying, "My people, my people, why hast thou forsaken me." God's people had abandon Him. They were like an entire army who had gone AWOL. God refers in verse 9 to the remnant. There were a few fine guards who stayed at their posts of duty, but the vast majority had fled the camp of God.

The fact that God even bothered to send His prophet Isaiah to these deserters has a powerful lesson to teach. God does not forsake those who forsake Him. Most pastors and church members do not have much hope for those former members of the church who have become inactive dead wood. We get more excited about new bodies than about trying to revive the life of the dead bones of, used to be members. This is natural and normal, and also realistic. But one of the facts we must also face is this: That God never gives up on His apostate people. His wrath falls, and He punishes them severely, but He always has a profit in the field crying out for them to repent and return, and I will forgive. God never forsakes even the hopeless case, and so we must never stop trying to win those out of fellowship.

Man use to throw away the wood chips from the mill. Now they use them for useful wood products. The so-called dead wood of the church can also be reprocessed and made into useful servants for the kingdom of God. It is no easy task, and like the work of the prophets, it is mainly failure, but God cared enough to send the prophets anyway, and we should care enough for any rebel to never give up. Dr. Walter Woodbury, secretary of evangelism for the American Baptist Home Mission Society, delivered a stirring message on this theme to the delegates of the American Baptist Convention. He got the deacons of a large church to join him in calling on the good-for-nothing

**indifferent members. It was very disappointing and frustrating. He felt the deacons were right, and it was useless and hopeless.**

**He had a burden, however, and asked people in every group of the church to pray for those non-attending members. Deacons were asked to pray even in the morning service for them. The atmosphere began to change, and people no longer looked on them as good-for-nothing, but as people with a deep need that only Christ could meet. After a month the deacons went out again, and they found a radical change in the attitudes of people who were AWOL. Over a hundred on a list of four hundred were brought back into the fellowship, and Dr. Woodbury said some of them became the finest Sunday School teachers he ever worked with. There was not total success, but they won back a noble remnant. That is God like work, for that is what God is ever seeking to do among His people.**

**We need to learn not to let that three fourths of failure rob us of that one fourth of success that makes it all worth while. Let us also keep in mind that the backsliding people may be from your own family. All through history the people who fall away from God often have a great heritage. They are the sons and daughters of the leaders of God's people. Great and righteous kings had rebellious and wicked sons who led the people astray. This was the case with the great priest Eli whose sons were totally corrupt.**

**The Waldenses were a noble people of God in the Piedmont Valley of Northern Italy. They refused to conform to the corrupt ways of the Catholic church, and they went off to worship God according to Scripture. They sent out many missionaries, and copied the Bible by hand. They spread the truth of the Gospel everywhere. Many died for their faith, as they were captured and burned at the stake. Recently, a church group of youth camped in that valley. They sang Christian songs around the campfire, and some of the Waldensian people came by to listen.**

**After the songs and testimonies were over, one of their elders stepped into the light of the campfire and said, "We are proud of the history of our people, but during the last years in these valleys so filled with sacred history, we have no longer the vision we once had. We have tried vainly to hold our young people in the church. Their interest is now down in the bright lights of the big city. No longer do they want to remain here. What a miracle it is that your church still has young people who are interested in coming up here**

**to our valley to study the history we have so much loved. But that is all in the past now. The sad thing is that we are not moving forward with courage for the future. You must carry on!"**

**The Apostasy of Israel is symbolic of the process that goes on all through history. Converts are full of zeal, and they follow Christ with full devotion, but their children are less devoted, and their grandchildren may end up back in the world completely. Some great theologian said, "The church is always just one generation away from extinction." This is a great negative reality of life and history, but knowing it, and being conscious of it, can be a positive force in keeping us from falling away. It can convince us of never taking anything for granted, but to assume that all of our youth are consistently battling the temptation to forsake God and be conformed to the world. If we would listen and take seriously the negative message of the prophets, we would be a much more powerful and positive force in achieving the goal of keeping God's people faithful to Him and His Word.**

## **15. PETS ARE FOREVER Based on Isa. 11:1-9**

**Ralph Helfer is one of those famous people very few know about. He is well known to those who use his services, but they are so specialized that most of us never become aware of his uniqueness. He has entertained all of us even though we have not likely ever seen him. Ralph has supplied animal performers for over 5,000 movies and TV programs. He has won 18 Patsy Awards for the best animal performer on the screen. He owned and operated the world's largest wild animal rental company, and is the founder of Marineworld/Africa USA.**

**He has revolutionized the animal training industry by rejecting the old methods of training by fear and violence which had led to many injuries. Animals were kept under constant threat of physical abuse if they did not perform. It worked, but as soon as an**

**animal saw a chance for revenge, he took it, and every trainer had fingers missing, and a good number of scars, and some were even killed. He was trained in the old school, and had been clawed by lions, attacked by bears, bitten by snakes, and nearly suffocated by a python. He said, "Enough of that," and he developed what he calls affectionate training in which he uses love, patience, understanding, and respect, to get animals to perform.**

**He had the only lion in the world that could play a whole movie live without a stuffed replica. He posed no danger to anyone. He knew he was loved and respected, and so he loved and respected in return, and never gave a scratch to anyone. His lion was the only one in the world that could be trusted to work with children. He eliminated the danger of working with animals, and for him, the day is already here when the lion can lie down with the lamb. Love doesn't just work on people, it works on any creature that has the capacity to relate and respond to another creature.**

**He was mocked and scorned, and called a loony, but when he proved it could work, everybody wanted his animals, for they could do what no others could, for they were risk free. By love he lifted the man-animal relationship to a new level. This should not be surprising for those who know their Bible, for the God who created man, and provided for his salvation, is the same God who created the animals first, and revealed His love for them also again and again.**

**God gave man dominion over the animal kingdom, and He expected man to treat the animals with love and respect. Adam was given the authority to name all the animals and the birds. We read in Gen. 2:20, "So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air, and all the beasts of the field." Man and animals were linked from the start to share this earth together, and to be**

**mutually beneficial. Every time God saved man He also saved the animal kingdom, for man cannot survive without the animal kingdom.**

**So in the flood God saved the animal kingdom. In the exodus out of Egypt God saved the animals of the Jews. When God spared Nineveh of its great judgment, He also spared their animals. In fact, in the last verse of Jonah, God said the reason He had compassion on that pagan city is because of the 120 thousand babies and the many cattle. It is strange that God would link babies and cattle, but they are both in the same category. They are innocent, and God loves and has mercy on the innocent.**

**No animal has ever sinned. They are innocent of all wrongdoing. And they do not need a Savior like man does. They are saved in the sense of being spared judgment because God loves them, and they have no reason to be judged. In fact, God says the animal kingdom is superior to man in the sense that they always obey Him as Lord, and do not rebel as man does. The prophet Isaiah begins his book with this lament of God: "Here, O heavens! Listen, O earth! For the Lord has spoken: I reared children and brought them up, but they rebelled against me. The ox knows his master, the donkey his owners manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand."**

**Because of the greater love and loyalty of animals to their master there were a number of animal rights laws in the Old Testament. There were laws for proper killing of them, and for caring for them when they were injured, and for their proper feeding. Prov. 12:10 puts it all in a nutshell. "A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast." That is the KJV. The NIV says, "A righteous man cares for the needs of his animal." We do not have time to look at the many texts that deal with animals in the Bible,**

**but what we want to focus on is the fact that all the evidence indicates that man will end as he began, in a paradise filled with an animal kingdom for his enjoyment and excitement.**

**The man-animal relationship is not just temporal, it is eternal. Man is not complete without the animal kingdom. Some people do not like animals very much, but they will in the new heaven and the new earth, for all that is repulsive or frightening about them will be gone. Some Christians may not like fruit now, but they will love the fruit from the Tree of Life that has 12 different kinds of fruit each year. I would not want any of my grandchildren playing with a cobra, but in that day I will not be alarmed, for all the hostility and fear between the animal kingdom and man will be eliminated along with sin. The point is, do not let your present emotions toward animals rob you of the joy of knowing you will enjoy the pleasure of pets for all eternity, even if you don't enjoy them now.**

**You can dismiss it as mere symbolism that Rev. 19 pictures Jesus riding out of heaven on a white horse, and the armies of heaven following Him on white horses, but the fact is, the horse has always been one of God's favorite animals, and there is every reason to believe He will have literal horses in heaven, and they will be enjoyed by God's people for all eternity. If you look up horse and horsemen in your concordance, you will discover that you could spend a long time studying all that the Bible says about horses. But my goal is more general, and it is to convince you that the whole animal kingdom will be a literal part of the eternal kingdom.**

**This is not an off the wall, crackpot theory, but the conviction of the great theologians of the Christian faith. Martin Luther assured his son Hans that in heaven he would have a nice pony. He was not just trying to pacify his son, for it was a serious conviction with him, as we see in the following quote. "Asked whether there will be**

**animals in paradise, Luther quickly answered: "You must not think that heaven and earth will be made of nothing but air and sand, but there will be whatever belongs to it-sheep, oxen, beasts, fish, without which the earth and sky or air cannot be." He also referred to insects: "Ants, bugs and all unpleasant stinking creatures will be most delightful and have a wonderful fragrance." Since everything will be as it was in Eden, every man will be like Adam who "was stronger than the lions and the bears, who strength is very great. He handled them the way we handle puppies."**

**Calvin agreed with Luther that the plant and animal kingdom will be perfected, and will continue for eternity. It is inconceivable that a new earth would be without the plant and animal kingdom. Paul does not leave us to merely speculate. He tells us point blank in Romans 8, the creation will be liberated from the bondage due to man's fall. In other words, the whole creation will be saved. Roses will no longer decay; rabbits will no longer die, but all creation will be restored to perfection without any of the effects of sin. In Rom. 8:21 Paul says, "...the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. In the final salvation of man the animal kingdom will again share in the victory.**

**In The Yearling by Marjorie Rawlings there is the moving funeral scene of the pitiful crippled and retarded child called Fodder-wing. The child had a special love for animals, and they loved the child, and became his friends. There was no preacher in that primitive area, and so Benny was asked to say a few words because he had a Christian upbringing. He began his prayer by remarks about the wonder of how birds and wild varmints move freely about Fodder-wing, and then he closed with this paragraph.**

**"Now you've done seed fit to take him where being crooked in**

**mind or lame don't matter. But Lord, it pleasures us to think now you've done straightened him out... It pleasures us to think on him, moving around as easy as everyone. And Lord, give him a few red birds, and maybe a squirrel and a coon and a possum to keep him company, like he had here. We know he will not be lonesome do he have them leetle wild things around him, if it ain't asking too much to put a few varmints in heaven. Thy will be done. Amen."**

**Some may think this is what you would expect from some ignorant uneducated hillbilly, but the fact is, the greatest minds have thought the same way. C. S. Lewis, one of the greatest Christian minds of the 20th century wrote, "I have been warned not even to raise the question of animal immortality, lest I find myself in company with all the old maids. I have no objection to the company." Lewis joined the ranks of the great who believed God would save the animal kingdom, and make them a part of our eternal experience. Lewis felt that our pets would be pets forever. He was greatly influenced by George MacDonald who felt there was no reason why God would not raise up those creatures He had taught His children to love. Love is eternal, and why should any form of love be eliminated from heaven? It is only sin and evil, and all of its consequences, that will be eliminated. Nothing good will be done away with, and so all objects of love will be a part of heaven. Lewis wrote in his book *The Problem of Pain*, "pets may have an immortality, not in themselves, but in the immortality of their masters." "Very few animals indeed, in their wild state, attain to a 'self' or ego. But if any do, and if it is agreeable to the goodness of God that they should live again, their immortality would also be related to man -- not this time to individual masters, but to humanity."**

**MacDonald wrote, "Can you imagine that if one asks for a kitten or pony or dog in heaven the Father will say no? If God gave these companions to man without his asking for them, will He not grant them these objects of love when they do ask?" There is much speculation about the issue of pets in heaven. Osborne Leonard wrote in My Life In Two Worlds, "When an animal that you have loved and who has loved you dies, it goes to the third sphere where somebody takes care of it until you arrive." In Love After Death, Shaw Desmond insisted that often a pet "is the first to greet us on the other side of death..."**

**All we know for sure is that Isaiah in this text tells us the Messianic Kingdom will be a kingdom where the animals are totally tame, and a child can play with the most dangerous creatures without fear, for there will be no harm from the animals in that ideal kingdom. Since Scripture makes clear the whole creation will be redeemed, and since it pictures an ideal kingdom as one with animals, it seems wise to keep open the possibility that pets will be in heaven. Those who reject the idea do not realize they may be turning off pet lovers to the Gospel. Pierre Barton, a Canadian broadcaster, was soured on going to church, and the whole Christian faith, because he was told that there were no animals allowed in heaven. He said, I was quite shaken by this revelation. An afterworld that deprived me of my dog seem to me less than heaven."**

**There are a number of books written about the immortality of the animal kingdom, and about pets being a part of heaven. One of the most popular is Will I See Fido In Heaven? Here is the testimony of the author: "Many Christians do not believe that animals go to Heaven. I have to admit that for more than 40 years, I was one of them. But one day as I was reading the book of Romans, I was amazed at what I read. I called some friends and**

**before long, through various contacts, there was a team of Christians studying the word of God and delving into old Hebrew and Greek word study guides to seek the truth. The results were joyous and shocking. One person, Roger Fritz, delved into every word, phrase, and sentence making sure we stayed focused on the mortality and immortality of both man and animals. In comparing the differences, we discovered God's wondrous design for the earthly and eternal survival of the lives of every living creature and the eternal choice man must make concerning his own destination. It has been a most fascinating journey. We all hope you will have much fun, joy, laughter, and grow in your knowledge, and Godly wisdom."**

**Mary Buddemeyer-Porter**

**Author of "Will I See Fido in Heaven?"**

**FR. TED STYLIANOPOULOS writes, ". In Orthodox icons, St. Gerasimos is shown with a lion. The saint has just pulled a thorn from the lion's paw, which he holds tenderly. Both the man and the lion gaze happily toward Christ, who is in heaven. St. Seraphim of Sarov, who lived in a forest for many years, is shown peacefully feeding a huge grizzly bear. I have no doubt that these saints would rejoice in seeing their animal friends in heaven." He goes on to say,**

**"The book of Genesis says that "God made the wild animals...and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good" (Genesis 1:25)! In the book of Psalms we read: "Every wild animal of the forest is mine.... I know all the birds of the air, and all that moves in the field is mine" (Psalm 50:10).**

**Would not a loving God want all things that he has made to live with him forever? A hint of this is in the book of Revelation, which teaches that evil and the power of death, which are a corruption of all that is good, will be completely defeated and a new world more glorious than ours will arise. God's promise is: "See, I make all**

**things new" (Revelation 21:5)."**

**Many conclude from this information that God would not destroy forever what He claimed was very good. Then we also have this text in Rev. 5:13, "Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be raise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever." If all creatures will be praising God and the Lamb forever then they have to be a part of forever. It is a logical conclusion to come to that the animal kingdom will be a part of the new heaven and new earth.**

**This subject is very relevant to the millions who love their pets equal to, and ever better, than family members. Dan Schaeffer in the best article I have read on the subject, and from which I quote extensively, and which you can find in the May/June 2001 issue of The Plain Truth online, reports, "For many people, their most trusted and loved friends have four legs and a tail. In a "Pet Love Poll" done by America Online in September 1999, more than 20,000 people were asked: What level of importance does your pet hold relative to other family members? Do they hold more, equal or less value? Almost 15 percent of those surveyed said their pets hold more value than family members, and fully 51 percent said their pets hold equal value. Only 28 percent said their pets have less value than their family members.<sup>1</sup> It seems that these statistics may hold true for Christians as well as non-Christians." He goes on to report of the response that comes when pets are eliminated from heaven.**

**"Author and artist Joni Eareckson Tada found out just how strongly many Christians feel about their animals when she suggested in her book, Heaven Your Real Home, that pets would**

**not be resurrected from the dead. She received more critical letters over one paragraph than all her other writings combined. One person after another questioned how she could possibly say that their pets would not be in heaven. After rethinking her position, she decided, "If God brings our pets back to life, it wouldn't surprise me. It would be just like him. It would be totally in keeping with his generous character." She went on to say, "Heaven is going to be a place that will refract and reflect in as many ways as possible the goodness and joy of our great God, who delights in lavishing love on his children. So will pets be in heaven? Who knows?!"**

**Dan quotes other authorities and animal lovers: "The Reverend Brian T. McSweeney, vice chancellor of the Catholic Archdiocese of New York, contends that by virtue of their relationship with humans, dogs may find themselves in heaven. Though he believes that heaven was designed for humans, the reason dogs or pets may be there is for us, not for themselves. "I would think a loving God wants us to be happy and allows us to have animals that shared love with us."**

**"Having just lost their dog, Star, to cancer recently, Norm and Karen Rech had strong feelings. While they do not believe that animals have souls, they do believe there is a place in heaven for them. "They are still his creations, and we can't see him leaving them out [of heaven]. Throughout the Bible God uses animals to communicate with people, such as the dove and the donkey. Isn't that another indication that animals have a special place in God's heart and, therefore, a place in heaven?" While Norm and Karen admit that their belief may just be based on wishful thinking, they nevertheless conclude, "We love animals and know God does, too, or he wouldn't have created them for us to use for our needs, but also to enjoy as companions."**

**"Popular Christian author and speaker, Sigmund Brouwer, articulated the obvious. "I would really have a tough time committing either way, but I would want to believe it [that animals went to heaven]." Brouwer shares a personal story that reinforces the difficulty this issue raises. His wife's nieces had two little kittens, which were killed by dogs. The girls, ages seven and nine, were understandably upset, so Brouwer's wife Cindy, and her sister, had a funeral for the kittens and prayed over them. The mother assured the girls that the little kitties were indeed going to heaven. At that point the youngest said, "Good, and I hope those dogs are going to hell!"**

**In this excellent article Dan goes on to describe people with dogs that are a pain, and who are full of mischief, and so they hope they are not in heaven. He raised many complex questions that are hard to answer if pets are in heaven. But he concludes, "It seems, ultimately, what a person believes is strongly influenced by the nature of their relationship to pets or the animal world. The stronger their "emotional resonance" with an animal, as Sigmund Brouwer puts it, the more likely they are to want to see their pets in heaven, and vice-versa. It appears that at times we are eager to find in scripture the answer we are looking for, and whether you believe pets will be in heaven or not, scripture provides hope, for it neither affirms nor denies the possibility."**

**There is no need to deprive anyone of their hope for pets in heaven since it has been the hope of many of the great and small in the Christian faith. Many testify that heaven will not be heaven without pets, and that God is not the God of man only, but of all creatures. John Wesley preached on animal immortality, as have many others, because it has been a desire of men for all ages. The ancient Egyptians had replicas of their favorite animals placed in their burial rooms, for they desired their pets to be with them in the**

**afterlife. Millions of Christians have felt the same desire. Maybe we cannot be dogmatic, but since there is nothing to forbid it, and much to imply it, there is no reason to deny it, but many reasons to affirm it that pets are forever.**