

Bible Lessons



“As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith...” Colossians 2:6-7

“This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.” Galatians 5:16

**Volume 50, No 1
January • February • March
2018**

Quarterly Bible Lessons for Adults and Young People

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Volume 50

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No 1

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Publishing the Bible truths in the interest of Jesus Christ and His Church

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The Bible Lessons are published by

CHURCH OF GOD TODAY Phone: (859) 319-9721. (Please leave text or voice message.) Lessons are available free of charge online at <churchofgodtoday.com> and can be downloaded for printing in booklet or other format.

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THEME FOR BIBLE LESSONS FOR FIRST QUARTER, 2018

Guiding Principles For Young People

Fresh for the new year, God inspired me with the idea to address topics relevant to our younger members of the class. It may seem difficult at first to find scriptures that deal with the many new and intricate situations in which we find ourselves. But the beauty and majesty of God's Word is that its truths are timeless. There are guiding principles that will provide the ranges and boundaries we need when confronted with any "modern" questions.

The two most important principles of all, which will be foundational for every lesson in this series, are the ones Jesus laid down when He said, "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matthew 22:40). They are, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Matthew 22:37-39). What Jesus said applied then, and it will be the basis for every decision now.

This is what I love about Bible study. The "old, old story" is always new, and it always works.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

JANUARY 7, 2018

THE CHRISTIAN WALK

A Walk In Christ

Colossians 2:6 As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him:

7 Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.

A Walk in Wisdom

Ephesians 5:15 See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise,

16 Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

Colossians 4:5 Walk in wisdom toward them that are without,

redeeming the time.

A Walk In Love

Ephesians 5:1 Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children;

2 And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us,

A Walk By Faith

II Corinthians 5:7 For we walk by faith, not by sight.

A Walk In the Spirit and Not After the Flesh

Galatians 5:16 This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.

Galatians 5:25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

Romans 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

A Walk In the Light and Not In Darkness

I John 1:6 If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth:

7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

I John 2:10 He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him.

11 But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.

MEMORY VERSE: Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more. —I Thessalonians 4:1

CENTRAL THOUGHT: As young people we can find scriptural guidelines for our walk as a Christian. Applying those guidelines to particular situations help us know how we ought to live.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Colossians 2:6 “Received”: to receive near; associate with oneself (in any familiar or intimate act or relation); to learn; take unto.

Colossians 2:7 “Rooted and built up”: to become stable and built upon. “Stablished”: from a root implying *the foot*, from which we get our English word *base* and *basis*; confirmed; made steadfast, firm and sure; to make stable.

Ephesians 5:15 “Circumspectly”: exactly; perfectly; diligently. “Literally, looking on all sides; looking round. Hence, cautious; prudent; watchful on all sides; examining carefully all the circumstances that may affect a determination, or a measure to be adopted” (*Webster’s*).

Ephesians 5:1 “Followers of God”: Imitators of God.

Galatians 5:16 “Fulfil”: complete; execute; make an end; reach the limit; accomplish the goal.

Galatians 5:16 and Romans 8:1 “Flesh”: the body as opposed to the soul or spirit; human nature with its frailties (physical or moral) and passions.

I John 1:7-8 “Fellowship”: from a root meaning *common*, or *shared*; partnership; communion; participation.

LESSON BACKGROUND

These scriptures provide a general outline of a life or walk with God. Most of them come from letters of instruction which Paul the apostle wrote to the different congregations. Several come from the letter the Apostle John wrote to the saints.

Paul was addressing many of the new Gentile Christians who were just learning, for the first time, of God’s will for man. He spent a great deal of time instructing them about their walk or behavior which was on display to the heathen world around them. He also wrote instructions to the Jewish Christians who were learning the difference between the law and salvation by faith through God’s grace.

John specified that much of his instruction was to “young” men. He puts great emphasis in his three epistles on living free from

worldliness, sin, idolatry and darkness. He also deals with brotherly love and fellowship.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *In Christ:* Why is it important that my life—my “walk”—subsequent to coming to Christ for salvation be “in Him,” rooted and established in Him, and what are ways to practically do this? Name some “other ground” upon which we are tempted to place our dependence, trust or expectations for support, guidance or spiritual authority.
2. *Walk in Love:* Who set the standard for the love in which we are to walk?
3. *By Faith:* Share specific areas in life where this principle can apply.
4. *Flesh and Spirit:* You must make a decision whether or not to attend a movie with the rest of your class. How can these verses help you decide?
5. *Fellowship, Love and Light:* A brother or sister is hard for you to “like.” How can this affect your walk with God?
6. *Abounding More and More:* Is there ever a point where you can relax and think, “I’ve got this”? What is the danger here?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

It is imperative that we learn to apply these simple concepts to daily living—our “walk.” We can begin by asking ourselves some questions:

Am I learning to receive my sustenance, guidance and comfort from daily, earnest prayer and communion with Christ and diligent study of His Word or does all my spiritual food come from a secondary source, such as a personal friend, devotional book, blog or other social media, inspirational author or speaker, or weekly worship service?

Is this particular activity causing me to abound more and more in my Christian walk, or does it make me feel lethargic, distant, not as warm or fervent in my love for God, confused, angry with others, or

depressed?

When I am with this person or group of persons, am I more tempted with the things of this world or drawn to the things of the Spirit?

After engaging in this activity, reading this literature, listening to this music, or consulting with this particular source, is my walk by faith strengthened or weakened?

When I evaluate this particular way of thinking/speaking/acting in terms of godly wisdom or sinful folly, how does it measure up?

Learn to measure all the things in your life by these standards: spiritual progress, trust and faith in Christ, godly wisdom, love for God and others, light versus darkness, and attraction of the flesh or the Spirit.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

“Oh how sublime is the life a Christian!” Walking daily with Jesus, and knowing you are a child of the King, is a glorious life. It’s a walk not always easy on the flesh, but ultimately blessed by God. I wouldn’t trade it for anything.

The lesson gives plenty of scriptural pointers on walking with God, but I have a few thoughts on it as well. As Christians who walk the straight and narrow, we are new creatures. We aren’t the same as someone who is walking the broad way and following after the world. Holy living is a transformative experience, not one tainted by the influences of the world.

Colossians 3:9-10 describes Christians as people who have “...put off the old man with his deeds: And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him.” Our walk with Christ changes our life from an old, sinful life to that of a new, purified member of the body of Christ. Yet, salvation isn’t a one-time silver bullet for a blessed, happy life. Like the lesson earlier detailed, it’s a daily walk to maintain the favor of God. There are lessons to be learned along the way to love the Lord with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength and follow Him.

In our “new body,” we have challenges to walk worthy of our vocation (Ephesians 4:1). Some of those are found in verses 12-14 of the third chapter of Colossians: “Put on therefore, as the elect of

God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another and forgiving one another...And above all these things, put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.” Each of these are Christ-like traits which are found in the lives of those walking in the footsteps of our Savior. It is certainly a challenge, but something so very worth our effort.

Spiritual progress comes by prayer and adding these teachings to our daily lives. Having the love of God in our lives, and sharing that love with everyone else is a perfect bond. It strengthens us in our daily walk. Praise God for saving, keeping grace! What a blessing it is to daily walk with our Savior, our Teacher, and Friend!

—Bro. Bretton Cole, Neosho, MO

JANUARY 14, 2018

SCRIPTURAL BOUNDARIES AND GUIDELINES

Your Body is God's Temple

I Corinthians 3:16 Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?

17 If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.

I Corinthians 6:19 What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?

20 For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

Do All to the Glory of God

I Corinthians 10:31 Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.

Be Separate

II Corinthians 6:16 And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

17 Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you,

18 And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and

daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.

Abstain From Fleshly Desires

II Timothy 2:22 Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

I Peter 2:11 Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.

MEMORY VERSE: Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness? —II Peter 3:11

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The scriptures set boundaries on our thoughts, desires, words and actions. They may not spell out specific things, but provide a principle or a standard to which we can compare every issue of life.

WORD DEFINITIONS

I Corinthians 3:16 “Ye”: true believers; genuine Christians, whether individually or collectively as the church. “Temple”: sanctuary; sacred abode; the place of Divine manifestation.

17 “Defile” and “Destroy”: from a word meaning *I corrupt*; perish; waste away; spoil; ruin; destroy.

I Corinthians 10:31 “Do all to the glory of God”: “This rule is designed to be one of the chief directors of our lives. It is to guide all our conduct, and to constitute a ‘test’ by which to try our actions. Whatever can be done to advance the honor of God is right; whatever cannot be done with that end is wrong” (*Barnes’ Notes on the Bible*).

II Corinthians 6:17 “Come out from among them”: from Isaiah 52:11; historically applied to the priests and Levites who were returning from Babylon, and now a call to God’s people, the church of God, to forsake the company and conversation of idolaters, false churches, and evil customs and manners of the world.

II Timothy 2:22 and I Peter 2:11 “Lusts”: desire; craving; eagerness for; passionate longing; especially for what is forbidden.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Reminding ourselves of the literal tabernacle which Moses built after God's set pattern, and the judgments that went forth upon the men who defiled it by bringing in strange fire or going into the holiest place in flagrant violation to God's strict commands; and the later temple which Solomon erected—the glory of God that descended there and the sacredness of that place—helps us to be more aware of the reverence still owed to God concerning both our own bodies individually and the body of Christ collectively.

The admonition to do all to God's glory and to glorify God in body and spirit comes out of the discussion about idolatry and eating foods offered to idols and the often accompanying immorality and fornication. The early Christians were learning this amid a society whose leaders taught that fornication was not wrong, much like our society today. Paul's clear command was to come out from among these grievous evils and be completely separate, whether in business partnerships, close friendships, spiritual fellowship, or marriage.

Paul's charge to Timothy, targeting the evils especially appealing to youth, was to flee from them and pursue, with all haste, and aggressively chase, as a hunter after his prey, the positive qualities of a Christian.

Peter's charge is to abstain, or keep absolutely away from the desires of the flesh which we know are forbidden by God. Why? They war against the soul. They not only impede Christian progress, but they actively assail the regenerated soul. Peter also gives us a general standard of all behavior—that which will ensure the believer is completely READY to meet the Lord on that last, great day.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *Eating, Drinking and Fornication:* Which scriptures provide guidelines for what is associated with the body?
2. *For God's Glory:* Which verses explain this all-important motive which should direct every thought, word and action?
3. *Separate:* God said to "come out from among them." What might that mean to us today?

4. *Lusts*: What words describe the action we should take concerning fleshly lusts? Apply this to a particular situation in a young person's life.
5. *Ready*: What actions might we list as important to being prepared to meet the day Jesus comes? Which would we definitely avoid?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

Today we included verses that provide principles which will help us determine what we should do in any given situation.

Consider what we do with our bodies. Paul said he kept under his body, meaning that he didn't allow his appetites to rule him (I Corinthians 9:27). Another principle he gave was that he wouldn't allow himself to be brought under the power of anything (I Corinthians 6:12). These concepts go together with the awareness that my body is God's temple, it has been purchased at the price of Jesus' own blood, and I am not my own. Everything I do, eat or drink must be for His honor and glory. Not long ago, I was meditating on this principle and the Lord spoke to me so clearly: "That is a forgotten principle." It seems that teachings along this line are not thought to be important anymore. Allow me to reason with you just a little.

There are substances that are clearly understood to be habit-forming; that bring one under their power. There seems to be no question about hard drugs, pain-killers, or powerful inhalants that destroy the bodies and minds of men, women, boys and girls. But lines are being blurred in society today concerning "soft" drugs—marijuana, for example—and "legal" drugs, such as alcohol, even though they are highly addictive, destructive to the body, and mind-altering. I think we can agree that such effects would definitely not be to God's glory; neither would the abuse given to the body by the substances in smoking or chewing tobacco.

The use of stimulants such as caffeine, whether mild-to-moderate or jolting in intensity, although widely used and accepted as a part of daily life, should also be considered in the light of these biblical principles. There is no question but that caffeinated beverages, which have skyrocketed in popularity and consumption, are highly addictive. Even professed Christians make excuses and

joke about how dependent they are on their daily dose, experience withdrawal symptoms if they are deprived, and admit to not being able to get through the day without it. That is truly being “under the power.” Would this be to God’s glory?

Another “untouchable” but highly addictive substance is sugar, the over-consumption of which is the hidden source, as many medical studies indicate, of most major diseases—cancer, heart disease, and diabetes. Obesity, depression, and behavioral problems can all be related to imbalances in the delicate systems of the body which are caused by too much sugar.

Some other things to consider: Temperance and moderation are enjoined in the entirety of Scripture. Solomon advised on the wisdom of eating “for strength and not for drunkenness” (Ecclesiastes 10:17) and eating only as much honey (natural sugar) as was “sufficient” for your body (Proverbs 25:16). It is not good, he warns, to eat “much” of it (Proverbs 25:27). These principles give us a good idea of how God intended for us to feed the bodies which are His temple. How much is too much? It is our solemn responsibility to study the facts carefully and make our decisions, not from fleshly desires but from educated convictions.

There are other specific areas addressed by these scriptures which we will deal with in later lessons.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

One Sunday morning in Kenya, I was listening to a message that dealt with this subject—the body being His temple. It was one of those times God came down and I sat for several hours reveling in His presence and marveling at a deeper revelation of His Holiness. It was one of those times I did not want to leave. A greater vision of His Holiness changed me. It changed my desires, my actions and my heart.

Sometimes when talking about bringing one’s body under subjection, the flesh can rise up within and rebel at God’s word. Through this encounter with God, He showed me it isn’t about a list of rules, although I do need to follow the guidelines established in the scriptures. But more than that, when we see God in His purity, in

His power, and in His glory, it changes our hearts. And that change in turn gives us the desire to be more like Him—to be pleasing in His sight and in His presence.

When God came down into the tabernacle and into the temple, it was because they had followed the instructions He had given and He found it a worthy dwelling place. How can we expect it to be any different today? If our body is His temple, we should have the desire for Him and make any personal “sacrifice” we must, that He would find us ready for Him to dwell within. Let us take the time to increase our vision of God. It will increase our desire to cleanse and maintain our bodies for His presence. How can words describe when God finds our lives, our conduct, our choices and our sacrifices worthy, and fills our body with His presence and glory? There is nothing more beautiful!

—Sis. Nicole Elwell, Keizer, OR

JANUARY 21, 2018

SHOULD CHRISTIANS DRINK?

Old Testament Priests Forbidden Under the Law

Leviticus 10:8 And the Lord spake unto Aaron, saying,

9 Do not drink wine nor strong drink, thou, nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations:

10 And that ye may put difference between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean;

11 And that ye may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the Lord hath spoken unto them by the hand of Moses.

Wisdom Warns Against Drinking

Proverbs 20:1 Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise. (Also Hosea 4:11.)

Proverbs 23:20 Be not among winebibbers; among riotous eaters of flesh.

29 Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes?

30 They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed

wine.

Kings and Princes Forbidden

Proverbs 31:4 It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink.

Woe Pronounced Against Drunkenness and Enabling Drunkenness

Isaiah 5:11 Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; that continue until night till wine inflame them!

Habakkuk 2:15 Woe unto him that giveth his neighbor drink, that putteth thy bottle to him, and maketh him drunken also, that thou mayest look on their nakedness!

New Testament Warnings Against Drunkenness

Luke 21:34 And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares.

Romans 14:21 It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.

I Corinthians 6:10 Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. (Also Galatians 5:21 and I Thessalonians 5:7.)

Ephesians 5:18 And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit. (Also Romans 13:13-14.)

Titus 1:7 For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre;

8 But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate.

MEMORY VERSE: All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. —I Corinthians 6:12

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The Bible contains many serious warnings against drunkenness, many instances of the effects and consequences of drinking alcohol, sound principles enjoining self-control and caution concerning taking liberties which give occasion to the flesh or which cause a brother to stumble.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Leviticus 10:9 and Proverbs 20:1 “Wine”: From an unused root meaning to *effervesce*; fermented juice of grapes. “Strong drink”: The word (*shēchār*) is the general name of intoxicating drinks, whether made of wheat, barley, millet, apples, dates (palm), honey, or other fruits (besides grapes).

Proverbs 20:1 “Is deceived”: errs, or staggers or reels (*Revised Version*).

Proverbs 23:30 “Mixed wine”: “Not wine mixed with water, as used commonly by temperate people in hot countries; but either mixed with spices, to make it more palatable, or with different sorts of wine, some very strong, and more heady and intoxicating (*Gill’s Exposition of the Entire Bible*). (In today’s society, it would be called a *cocktail*.)

Luke 21:34 “Overcharged”: Be made heavy; weighed down; burdened or pressed down. “Surfeiting”: Drunken nausea; headache. “Excessive eating and drinking, so as to oppress the body; indulgence in the pleasures of the table. This word does not include ‘intoxication,’ but merely indulgence in food and drink, though the food and drink should be in themselves lawful” (*Barnes’ Notes on the Bible*). “Drunkenness”: intoxication. This word also occurs in Romans 13:13 and Galatians 5:21

Titus 1:7 “Given to wine”: staying near wine; one who sits long at his wine; addicted.

I Corinthians 6:12 “All things are not expedient”: all things are not profitable. “It is a maxim of Christian liberty, which does not refer to matters which are absolutely wrong, and that even in its application to indifferent matters it must be limited, and guarded by other Christian principles” (*Ellicott’s Commentary for English Readers*).

LESSON BACKGROUND

It is an interesting study—the history of drinking alcohol and its relationship with religion; especially as it has to do with Christianity and its teachings from the time of the early church. In the Bible we can trace winemaking clear from the time of Noah. In Chinese

ancient history, fermented beverages were an important part in religious life and ceremonies and in traditional medicine for thousands of years and in all segments of society. Evidences of alcoholic beverages can be found in historical records from ancient Egypt and other African nations, Babylon, and pre-Hispanic Mexico. Around the time of Christ, wine was part of the everyday diet of the Greeks and Romans, who generally drank it diluted in varying strengths—one part wine and one part water, to one part wine and four parts water.

By the Middle Ages, beer, often of very low strength, was part of the everyday European diet of all classes and ages of people. In the developing Americas, the native civilizations had developed alcohol by this time.

In many-to-most of these civilizations, alcohol was closely related to the worship of their gods. They worshipped wine gods and goddesses. In the cult of Dionysus, wine deity of the Greeks (who were otherwise observed to be the most temperate of ancient peoples), intoxication was believed to bring the worshippers closer to their god. The Roman name for this same deity was Bacchus, also known as the Liberator (Eleutherios), who freed one from one's normal self by madness, ecstasy, or wine. The worship of the native American Mayan deity, Acan, was connected with a fermented drink made from honey.

In the worship of Jehovah, as we can see from the scriptures in our lesson, the priests were forbidden to drink wine as they were performing their tasks about the sanctuary. As this prohibition came immediately after Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, offered strange fire before the Lord and were stricken dead by the Lord, it is believed they must have done so because they were drunk. Additionally, those who had taken a Nazarite vow, or who were chosen of the Lord to be Nazarites, such as Samson, Samuel or John the Baptist, were also to abstain from both grapes and fermented beverages. In Solomon's writings, strong admonitions of temperance were emphasized, especially for kings or rulers. In the time of Jeremiah, the sons of Rechab, in several following generations, were found to be abstainers, in faithful obedience to the command given by their father; such obedience was commended by God. In all other instances, wine was used in the Old Testament as a relief from

common ailments, as a tonic for the ill or dying, and in moderation during times of rejoicing and feasting.

In the New Testament, while John the Baptist abstained from wine, Jesus did eat and drink with the common people and performed his first miracle at a wedding in Cana, changing water into wine. Paul recommended for Timothy to use a little wine for his weak stomach. However, repeated warnings are given against drunkenness. Consider that the Gentiles were becoming followers of Christ, having been devotees at the pagan altars, where shameless immorality was normal, food and alcohol were offered to idols, and drinking was associated with communion with the deity. Those who rejoiced in their “liberty” had to be reminded that the weaker believer might stumble back into sin; therefore, followers of Christ were commanded to abstain from food OR drink which might make their brother come under condemnation.

Is there a clear-cut, general command to ABSTAIN from fermented beverages in any of Scripture, besides these particular examples which we have cited? One cannot find such a one. In studying the history of alcoholic drinking, I believe I see the wisdom of God in NOT giving a direct command, either in the ceremonial laws, in the ten commandments, in Jesus’ commands, or in the teachings set forth by the apostles. Let me explain: there have been times and places in history where, because of poor sanitation, the only beverage fit for drinking was fermented. One such example was Medieval Europe. The consumption of alcohol—small beer (which was generally 1% alcohol), ale or wine—was a way of avoiding diseases carried by contaminated water. The boiling of water for beer and growing of yeast killed the dangerous microorganisms, and the alcohol content allowed them to be stored for months or years, which was commonly done, especially on sailing vessels where they would be the only source of hydration for crews on long voyages.

Those who followed Christ and adhered to His Word were guided during these times by the clear command to be moderate and temperate, to abstain from that which would cause a brother to stumble, and to keep the flesh, with its affections and desires, CRUCIFIED and their appetites fully under control.

The process of distillation, which began crudely as far back as 800 BC, spread slowly through the centuries until the invention of a

still which allowed for the effective distillation of alcohol in the 8th century A.D. Beginning usage was primarily scientific and medical, but by the 1600's distilled alcohol became recreational, and the process evolved as it spread throughout Europe. By the 1700's alcohol consumption peaked in England but by the end of the century dropped again, one of the numerous factors being the Great Awakening, a religious revival which spread throughout Europe and the Americas.

Since that time, because of the increased intoxication made possible by distillation, strong religious feelings against *any* use of alcohol gave rise to temperance societies, the era of Prohibition (1920-1933), and other efforts to curb the potential destructive elements and abuse of alcohol.

In the history of the Church of God of the evening light time, the use of alcohol has been strongly condemned, along with other addictive substances, including narcotic drugs, tobacco and caffeine.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *Priests and Kings:* Give your thoughts on why restrictions on drinking were put on those who held these positions. Would these point forward as a type fulfilled in a spiritual priesthood and kingdom?
2. *Guidelines for Temperance:* Give scriptures which provide boundaries for God's people.
3. *History:* Have there been times where the rise of the abuse of alcohol created an apparent need for Christians to abstain? Explain.
4. *Apply:* What is the expedient course for saved and sanctified people today?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

This lesson was suggested by an older teen who related that the need was very great for teaching in this area. I, too, have had a growing awareness of the alcohol-themed society in which we live. In studying the history of alcohol, it is alarming to find the excesses

to which our culture has gone. Indeed, the prophecy that the end time would be like Noah's, in eating and drinking, is certainly being fulfilled in these days as drinking has moved "up-scale," college binge-drinking is epidemic, and many churches are encouraging recreational drinking.

We have already mentioned that there is no "Thou shalt not" in the Bible about alcohol. But a strong case can certainly be made using the principles we have laid down in the first two lessons. To those who want to find "permission" to drink, would a definite commandment make a big difference anyway? Look, for instance, at the ninth commandment, "Thou shalt not bear false witness." And Paul's command, "Lie not one to another." Yet people constantly justify deceit, outright lying, little white lies, and cheating, all the while claiming to be children of God. Citing "there is no commandment" as a reason for drinking is, for the most part, merely an excuse.

We have already cited scriptures forbidding yielding to the lusts of the flesh. Wisdom, expedience and charity all warn against recreational drinking. The concept of "your body is God's temple" brings great responsibility. The principle of not allowing anything to bring you under its power pounds the final stake into the barricade against drinking for pleasure.

Remember, what you allow into your home will be taken much farther by your children. Many who have decided that social drinking is okay "once in awhile" have children who are now addicts. It's not worth the risk. Drunkenness is part of the darkness; the night of the world. We are now children of the day. We have been filled with the Spirit, Who cheers our hearts with heavenly joy so that we have no more need for earthly wine. Let us keep ourselves entirely pure.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

I can think of many reasons why a Christian should not drink. I have experienced many troubles due to alcohol and know many others who have as well. When answering this question, what stands out to me the most as a Christian is where the Bible says to "Be not drunk with wine, but be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18). This

scripture tells me that I can't be drunk with wine and filled with the Spirit at the same time. I must choose between the two.

I, for one, would much rather be filled with the Spirit. I've been drunk and no matter how much I drank, it never satisfied. I was always left empty and had a longing for something alcohol could never satisfy.

When the Holy Spirit came I was sincerely filled, as the Word says, to overflowing. My soul was satisfied. The joy of salvation was pouring out of me. His Spirit satisfies like nothing else can. I have found nothing better than walking in the Spirit and conducting my life under the influence of God. There is no greater pleasure than to have God say, "Well done, my good and faithful servant." The infilling of God's Spirit has been my greatest joy. I can't imagine trading the experience of God's Spirit filling me for the emptiness alcohol provides.

—Bro. Marvin Moles, Tryon, OK

JANUARY 28, 2018

ENTERTAINMENT

Theater, Dance, Music, Competitive Sports or Pageants

Romans 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

Romans 13:12 The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.

13 Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying.

14 But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.

I Corinthians 6:20 For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

Philippians 4:8 Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

I Timothy 2:9 In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array.

I Thessalonians 5:22 Abstain from all appearance of evil.

I John 2:15 Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

Galatians 5:19 Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness,

20 Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies,

21 Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

Philippians 2:3 Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.

5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.

MEMORY VERSE: And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him. —Colossians 3:17

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The principles of truth, purity, humility, modesty, separateness from the world, and doing all to the glory of God and in His name help to form boundaries as to the various activities and pleasures of popular culture.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Romans 12:2 “Be not conformed to this world”: assuming a

similar outward form (expression) by following the same pattern (model, mold). “Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould” (*J. B. Phillips translation*).

Romans 13:13 “Rioting”: a letting loose: carousing. Adam Clarke quotes Hesychius, a commentator from the fifth century who defined rioting as: “unclean and dissolute songs, banquets, and the like.” “The Syriac and Arabic versions read, “in singing”, or “songs”; meaning lewd ones, sung at riotous feasts and banquets, made not for refreshment, but for pleasure and debauchery” (*Gill’s*).

“Chambering”: sexual promiscuity. “Wantonness”: outrageous conduct; conduct shocking to public decency, a wanton violence; lewdness. “Strife”: readiness to quarrel (having a contentious spirit), affection for dispute (*HELPS Word Studies*). “Envyng”: “burning emotion; the feeling of boiling over; used positively (zeal) or negatively (jealousy; rivalry)” (*HELPS Word Studies*). The same word as *emulations* in Galatians 5:20.

14 “Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ”: “To be clothed with a person is a Greek phrase, signifying to assume the interests of another—to enter into his views, to imitate him, and be wholly on his side” (*Clarke’s Commentary*).

I Timothy 2:9 “Modest”: orderly, virtuous, decent, modest, well-ordered. “Apparel”: a garment let down (*Strong’s Concordance*). Some earlier commentators said that it means “a long upper garment which covered the body every way.” “Broided”: braided; (Peter says “plaited”); elaborately curled or braided or woven with ornaments of gold or jewels.

I John 2:16 “Lust of the flesh”: “Sensual and impure desires which seek their gratification in women, strong drink, delicious viands, and the like” (*Clarke’s*). “Either the lust of uncleanness, which includes all unchaste desires, thoughts, words, and actions, fornication, adultery, rape, incest, sodomy, and all unnatural lusts; or else intemperance in eating and drinking, gluttony and drunkenness, excess of wine, surfeitings, rioting, and revellings, and all the sensual pleasures of life” (*Gill’s*).

“Lust of the eyes”: “Inordinate desires after finery of every kind, gaudy dress, splendid houses, superb furniture, expensive equipage, trappings, and decorations of all sorts” (*Clarke’s*). “That which is designed merely to gratify the sight. This would include, of course,

costly clothes, jewels, gorgeous furniture, splendid palaces, pleasure-grounds, etc" (*Barnes' Notes*). "A sinful curiosity of seeing vain sights, and shows...visible things, as gold, silver, houses, lands, and possessions" (*Gill's*).

"Pride of life": "Hunting after honors, titles, and pedigrees; boasting of ancestry, family connections, great offices, honorable acquaintance, and the like" (*Clarke's*). "Thirst after honour and applause" (*Matthew Henry*). "Ostentation or boasting, and then arrogance or pride" (*Barnes' Notes*).

Galatians 5:20 "Strife": rivalry; carnal, selfish ambition; acting for one's own gain, regardless of the discord it causes (*HELPS Word Studies*).

LESSON BACKGROUND

Tertullian, a pagan-turned-Christian who lived in Carthage around the year 200 A.D. wrote concerning the theatre, games and circus of his day: "The faith of some, either too simple or too scrupulous, demands direct authority from Scripture for giving up the shows, and holds out that the matter is a doubtful one, because such abstinence is not clearly in words imposed upon God's servants. Well, we never find it expressed with the same precision, 'Thou shalt not enter circus or theatre, thou shalt not look on combat or show;' as it is plainly laid down, 'Thou shalt not kill; thou shalt not worship an idol; thou shalt not commit adultery or fraud.' But we find that that first word of David bears on this very sort of thing: 'Blessed,' he says, "is the man who has not gone into the assembly of the impious, nor stood in the way of sinners, nor sat in the seat of scorners.'"

Life for the new church among the Gentiles wasn't too different in Tertullian's day than it is for us today. The people lived for pleasure and indulged themselves in shameless immorality, the hallmark of pagan idolatry. It was easy to be swept into the sea of spectators thronging the Coliseum. We can gather from what he wrote that many professing Christians were justifying their involvement.

Tertullian reasoned: "Why may not those who go into the temptations of the show become accessible also to evil spirits? We have the case of the woman—the Lord Himself is witness—who

went to the theatre, and came back possessed. In the outcasting, accordingly, when the unclean creature was upbraided with having dared to attack a believer, he firmly replied, 'And in truth I did it most righteously, for I found her in my domain.'"

The scriptures in our lesson, although not "Thou shalt not" commands, have directly to do with not only the worldly pleasures of that day, but also give understanding to us whose Coliseum may now be a screen, a classroom, a cinema, a house of worship, a concert hall, a stadium.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *Broadway, Hollywood and Nashville:* These represent to us what the Coliseum must have represented to early saints. What scriptures help us know the extent of our involvement in these things?
2. *Professional Sports and Other Competition:* How much can a saint of God be involved? When does it become ungodly? Give scriptural guidelines.

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

Asking ourselves questions prompted by our guideline scriptures may help us to know what is right or wrong for us.

Concerning theater, drama, television or movies: Does this show have men and women engaging in immorality or immodesty? Is there violence, profanity, mockery of the things of God, pride, vanity, witchcraft or magic, horror or fantasy? If the answer is "No, this is a good show," then one must question, "Is this good use of my time? Does this strengthen my faith and devotion to prayer and reading of God's Word? Does this take time away from our family's daily worship? Is this habit-forming, and do I find myself wanting more and more and thinking about the things I've seen? Is it a good Christian witness for me to be seen in this place?"

Concerning music and dancing: Are the moves suggestive and provocative? Are the dancers immodestly dressed? Does the dance bring men and women together in an unchaste manner? Is the music

that which would glorify God? Is the beat/rhythm of the semblance of other popular secular music? Does it promote a sensual mood? Are the lyrics honoring to God; pure, lovely, praiseworthy? Is the music part of idolatrous worship?

Concerning sports and other competition: Are the financial sponsors and advertisers liquor enterprises? Are the cheerleaders immodestly dressed and performing suggestive routines? Is the spirit of the crowd God-fearing, loving and kind, humble and meek? What kind of feelings or attitudes are produced in me as I watch or partake? Is this good use of my time and money? Am I taking pleasure in the idolatry of sports heroes and celebrity worship?

If I love these things, can I really love my heavenly Father too?

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

This lesson brings to mind God's comparison of Israel in the Old Testament to an unfaithful spouse, and to Himself as the sorrowful yet loving and kind husband. In Isaiah 5 He asks the question, "What more could have been done than I have done?" God longed for His people to serve Him not from fear or threats, but because they wanted to, because they loved Him. By His many acts of love He made it so very easy to do.

If I perceived that my wife enjoyed spending time with other men more than with me, I would rightly feel that something was terribly wrong. I want to be the one she enjoys being with the most, the one she loves, her rock, her joy, her fulfillment. If I were not all these things to her, I would desperately want to know how I could do better.

I feel that today, God's people have such blessings, fulfillment, and abundant life waiting for them if they will live a life not to themselves, but to the Lord. To me, the entertainment issue is not always so much a question of "Is this wrong?" as it is "Why would I need this to be happy?" Indeed, why would we need to constantly stimulate our senses, feed our flesh, inflame our minds, and be entertained in order to be content? It is not at all that we should not do anything enjoyable in life. There are so many wholesome things that we can enjoy in life (nature, family time, etc.), but I have found

that many of the things mentioned today tend to steal from or hinder our relationship with the Lord, even in limited amounts. They take away from or replace what God wants to give to us.

Why is it so easy sometimes to get all fired up and vocal at a sports event, but so hard to do at service? Do we really enjoy the benefits of salvation? Do we love to praise God? Do we get more joy from His service and His presence than we get from fleshly pleasures? Just like a spouse, God wants to be that Source of joy, peace, contentment, fulfillment, and blessing.

*“Christ, the source of all my pleasure, now in Him my soul doth find
Joy unspeakable, exceeding earthly pleasures all combined.”*

—Bro. Joseph Gellenbeck, Gravel Switch, KY

FEBRUARY 4, 2018

SELF EXPRESSION

The “Separateness From Idols” Principle

Leviticus 19:27 Ye shall not round the corners of your heads, neither shalt thou mar the corners of thy beard.

28 Ye shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor print any marks upon you: I am the Lord. (Also Leviticus 21:5)

The “Trade Identity” Principle

Proverbs 7:10 And, behold, there met him a woman with the attire of an harlot, and subtil of heart.

The “Humility” Principle

Isaiah 3:16 Moreover the Lord saith, Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with stretched forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, and making a tinkling with their feet...

I Peter 5:5b And be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.

The “Discreet, Chaste” Principle

Titus 2:4 That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children,

5 To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.

The “Modesty” Principle

I Timothy 2:9 In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array.

The “Becoming” Principle

I Timothy 2:10 But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works.

The “Hidden Ornament” Principle

I Peter 3:3 Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel;

4 But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.

The “Charity /Brother’s Keeper” Principle

Romans 14:21 It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.

I Corinthians 8:13 Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.

MEMORY VERSE: (*The “Example” Principle*) Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity. —I Timothy 4:12

CENTRAL THOUGHT: How we express ourselves, whether by conversation, skin, hair, outfit—the whole attitude—is to be governed by the principles of godly identity and separation from idolatry, humility, discretion, chasteness, modesty, shamefacedness, propriety, meekness, quietness of spirit, and charity.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Leviticus 19:27 “Round the corners...mar the corners”: the custom of the Arabs; also the Egyptians, from whose dominion and idolatrous influence God wanted to deliver His people, to cut their hair into a round shape like a bowl, and to make their beards into a

square shape in imitation and honor to their gods. It was also customary to present these beard cuttings to their gods. God wanted Moses to make sure His people did not carry out these idolatrous symbols. “Thou shalt not make any cuttings...”: “It was a very ancient and a very general custom to carry marks on the body in honor of the object of their worship. All the castes of the Hindoos bear on their foreheads or elsewhere what are called the sectarian marks which distinguish them, not only in a civil but also in a religious point of view, from each other. Most of the barbarous nations lately discovered have their faces, arms, breasts, etc., curiously carved or tattooed, probably for superstitious purposes” (*Clarke’s Commentary*). “This, according to the ancient authorities, was effected by making punctures in the skin to impress certain figures or words, and then filling the cut places with stibium, ink, or some other colour. The practice of tattooing prevailed among all nations of antiquity, both among savages and civilized nations, The slave had impressed upon his body the initials of his master, the soldier those of his general, and the worshipper the image of his deity” (*Ellicott’s Commentary For English Readers*).

Proverbs 7:10 “Harlot”: prostitute.

Isaiah 3:16 “Wanton eyes”: winking, ogling eyes. The Syrian and Arabic translations have “painting their eyes.” “Falsely setting off the eyes with paint” (*Jamieson-Faucett-Brown Bible Commentary*).

Titus 2:5 “Discreet”: Of sound mind; self-controlled; balanced; moderate. “Chaste”: Pure. “Applied to persons before marriage, it signifies being pure from all sexual commerce; undefiled; applied to married persons, being true to the marriage bed. Free from obscenity” (*Webster’s*).

I Timothy 2:9 “Modest”: virtuous; decent. “Restrained by a sense of propriety; hence, not forward or bold; not presumptuous or arrogant; not boastful; not excessive or extreme; not extravagant” (*Webster’s*). “Shamefacedness”: modesty; bashfulness; reverence.

LESSON BACKGROUND

The scriptures in our lesson give a well-rounded picture of a person who is endeavoring to live a life of virtue, and how he or she

is to express him/herself in attitudes, interaction with people and personal style—dress, hair, etc.

The verses from Leviticus come from a “thou shalt/thou shalt not” list within Moses’ law. The essence of many of these commands had to do with God’s desire for His people to be separate unto Him and free from the defiling elements of idolatry. Even to one’s skin, hair and clothing, God had specific desires. Many of the ceremonial laws were fulfilled in Christ and no longer apply, except in a spiritual way; for example, the prohibitions on unclean meats, giving of sacrifices, observing of days and feasts. But when there was a principle involved of separation from ungodliness, I believe God still applies the principle today, especially regarding idolatrous practices, worship rituals or lifestyles.

Tattoos have been around for thousands of years. As was mentioned in the Word Definitions, the Egyptians used them as part of their worship. They were used by the Greeks and Romans to mark slaves, criminals, and prisoners of war. The Japanese used tattoos for decorative or spiritual (idolatrous) purposes and to mark manual workers, prostitutes and criminals. In the Philippines, some believed tattoos had magical qualities.

Concerning their use by “secret societies” I read, “It has been believed that the wearer of an image calls the spirit of that image. The ferocity of a tiger would belong to the [person tattooed with a tiger]. That tradition holds true today shown by the proliferation of images of tigers, snakes, and bird of prey” (*A Brief History of Tattoos* on powerverb.com).

During the gradual process of Christianization in Europe, tattoos were often considered remaining elements of paganism and generally legally prohibited. In the 1700-1800’s they became associated with sailors around the world and the lower or even criminal class, but by the 1870’s in Europe, among the upper classes, and even royalty, tattoos became fashionable. The earliest appearances of tattoos on women during this period were in the circus, where ladies were covered with images and used in sideshows.

Since the 1960’s tattoos have steadily grown in popularity. “For many young Americans, the tattoo has taken on a decidedly different meaning than for previous generations. The tattoo has ‘undergone

dramatic redefinition’ and has shifted from a form of deviance to an acceptable form of expression” (D.J. Roberts, *Secret Ink: Tattoo’s Place in Contemporary American Culture*, 2012). According to a poll in 2012, for the first time women outnumbered men in getting tattooed—23%, compared to 19% of men. Celebrities have made tattoos more acceptable in recent years, with popularity resurging particularly in Europe, Japan, and North and South America (en.wikipedia.org).

The remaining principles in our lesson have mainly to do with the way a person expresses her/himself in clothing or hairstyle. The verse from Proverbs is from a dramatic story of a young man’s seduction by a wicked woman. The story describes her attire, her attitude (loud and stubborn) and her flattering persuasion with which she accomplishes his ruin and death. Isaiah describes the backslidden, proud women of Jerusalem who had taken on the cosmetics, jewelry and attire of the idolaters. Clearly, these are examples to avoid.

In the New Testament, Paul and Peter give us a glimpse of how God is desiring His church to display holiness, humility, modesty and godly reverence in and through the apparel and demeanor of the body.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *Origin:* Where did tattoos, piercings and cosmetics have their beginnings?
2. *Poles Apart:* Name the attributes that are in God’s sight “of great price” and those of the immoral woman that are direct opposites.
3. *Covered:* Explain how avoiding revealing or form-fitting clothing manifests humility, reverence, purity and charity.

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

We live in a world where people are obsessed with expressing themselves—by social media; by clothing, shoes, hats, and t-shirts; by bumper stickers, art or photography; by hairstyles, jewelry,

piercings or body art. But we have been saved from the corruption that is in the world. It is now our desire to express His life, His love, His will. We are not our own, so now we want to glorify Him with our bodies and with our spirits—with what we breathe out of us and how we express ourselves.

We have learned that includes the way we speak, write, think, dress and style our hair. We no longer want to advertise ourselves. We want to manifest Christ. While we still have individual personalities and it is not wrong to be ourselves, our focus is now on Christ living in and through us.

We presented a list of Biblical guidelines. But how can we know, how can we decide every minute detail? God has promised to give us His Spirit, Who would guide us into all truth. He promised to write His laws in our hearts. As we yield our minds and bodies to Him, He transforms our minds so we don't have to conform to the world. Isn't this better than a code, or a document of do's and don't's?

“Lord, give me as a woman a meek, quiet and humble spirit! Take away my love for the world and my desire to fit in with the world. Show me how to portray holiness in all I say and do and wear.”

“Lord, give me as a man virtue, honor and humility. Help me to portray purity and holiness in my clothing, walk and conversation.”

And we all can pray, “Lord, help me to express YOU!”

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

Several years ago, I was struggling to find the balance of self expression in my own life. It became such an obsession to find out exactly how a woman of God should dress that it was a bondage to me. There are so many fads and fashions out there that are not necessarily wrong, and there is a very real pressure, especially for young women, to want to "fit in." The devil wants to torment us and make these things into a terrible muddle that steals our peace. This is the opposite of what our walk with the Lord should be. While our conduct, dress, and words should glorify Him in every way, I believe we are not "cookie-cutter Christians" in our styles, and we as women do not have to wear the exact same dress pattern or color of

garment, or the exact same hairstyle. Rather, we should seek the Lord daily for guidance in these things.

I find that when I seek Him daily with all my heart, mind and soul, the things pertaining to the outward appearance will naturally fall into line with the desires of God's heart. It is also good to seek the advice of godly older women in our lives. They have walked this road ahead of us and can give insight and wisdom to the concerns of the younger generation. Let us be willing to change our thoughts, preconceived ideas, and ways of dress to please Him Who has called us to holiness!

“Let me lose myself and find it Lord, in Thee!
Let all self be slain, my friends see only Thee.
Though it cost me grief and pain, I will find my life again,
When I lose myself and find it Lord, in Thee!”

—Sis. Valerie Eck, Edna, KS

FEBRUARY 11, 2018

THE GENDER PRINCIPLE

Genesis 1:27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

Genesis 2:18 And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.

21 And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof;

22 And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.

Leviticus 18:22 Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination.

Leviticus 20:13 If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them.

Deuteronomy 22:5 The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the Lord thy God.

Romans 1:22 Professing themselves to be wise, they became

fools,

23 And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.

24 Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves:

26 For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature:

27 And likewise the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet.

I Corinthians 6:9 Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, (See also I Timothy 1:9-10.)

10 Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.

I Corinthians 11:14 Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him?

15 But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering.

MEMORY VERSE: For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: that every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour. —I Thessalonians 4:3-4

CENTRAL THOUGHT: God's Word is very clear about the lines of separation between the genders, the sanctity of marriage, and the purity required in the life of the child of God from all sexual immorality.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Genesis 2:18 "Help": helper; aid; from a root meaning to

surround; succor. “Meet”: suitable; correspondent to him; answering to his needs; counterpart.

Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; 22:5 “Abomination”: something morally disgusting; detestable.

Romans 1:24 “Uncleanness”: physical or moral impurity.

Romans 1:26 “Vile”: disgraceful; dishonourable; reproachful or shameful.

I Corinthians 6:9 “Effeminate”: soft; a male who submits his body to unnatural lewdness; self-polluters. “Abusers of themselves with mankind”: a homosexual; sodomite.

I Corinthians 11:15 “For a covering”: *instead* of a covering.

LESSON BACKGROUND

We find solid evidences to God’s will—His purpose and intention—in gender issues when we go back to the beginning and see how God created the man and the woman. When Jesus was questioned by the Pharisees about marriage and divorce where did He point them? “From the beginning it was not so.” When God said woman was made “meet” or suitable for man, that means no substitute would be suitable.

In the law given to the Israelites, we read of many prohibitions given in reference to the idol-worshipping nations around them. They were to destroy them, their temples, their pictures and sculptures, and not imitate them in any way. Not in hairstyles, cosmetics, jewelry, music, moral practices, marriage practices, eating, sacrificing—the whole life was to be different. In the laws describing the abominations—adultery, incest, rape, fornication, homosexuality—the penalty was death. This gives us an idea of how God felt about someone defiling His creation; sins against the body is how Paul puts it in I Corinthians 6. Other New Testament descriptions are “vile affections,” “abusing themselves,” “uncleanness,” “inordinate affections,” “lusts for other [unlawful] things,” “foolish and hurtful lusts.”

Throughout the Bible we can trace God’s will for the separate roles of men and women. The man is to be just and reverent toward God; he is to labor with his hands to provide for his household, give himself for his wife, honor her, and bear the rule in his home,

answering to his authority, which is Christ. The wife is to bear children, reverence and obey her husband, guide and keep the home, and live worthy of the respect, honor and praise of her husband and children by being virtuous, meek and modest. The way God intended for both men and women to dress and wear their hair was to depict this distinction of the equally valuable and honorable positions into which He placed them in the home.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *In the Beginning*: God made them _____ and _____.
2. *Still in Effect*: Who upheld this distinction as being God's will and law when asked about marriage?
3. *Abomination*: Define this word and list several acts described as thus.
4. *Gender-specific*: Describe the distinct roles God purposed for men and women. Discuss how they are to portray this distinction in personal appearance.

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

My heart goes out to the young men and women of this age who are being bombarded by the propaganda of popular culture that blurs and distorts what God has made. Our intention in teaching what is so clear in Scripture is not from hatred or fear; rather, it is to let our young people know that we realize your battles and pray earnestly for you who may feel alone and confused.

Perhaps you were abused or molested; God knows and understands all the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual chaos that has resulted from that. I entreat you to seek for help in prayer and counsel from a trusted, spiritually sound man or woman of God. Memorize these biblical principles and commands and plead for God's will in your life, for healing of your mind and body, for restoration of purity and wholeness.

You may have been tormented from childhood by unnatural feelings and fears. Jesus encountered and healed a young person in that exact condition; He is just the same today. He said that this kind of oppression requires prayer and fasting for deliverance. Ask your

parents or your pastor for this kind of intervention.

You may be afraid to reveal this kind of battle. The world around you is urging you to embrace your “orientation.” They falsely promise “peace.” But it will not be so. Depression and suicide go hand in hand with transgender issues. Your only peace will be from complete deliverance from oppressing spirits of uncleanness. Don’t be afraid to confront the demons. Step out and engage in spiritual warfare. Get to the bottom, to the root causes of your struggles. Do you harbor hatred or bitterness toward a father or mother? Have you felt abandoned or disconnected from your parents? Are you embittered from a bad relationship with the opposite gender?

Or, have you engaged in pornography or promiscuity? There are evil spirits associated with those things—repentance, fasting and prayer are going to be your only way to deliverance.

Address the whole person. Physically, your hormones may be out of balance. Educate yourself so you can understand how to feed your body and restore the delicate balances. Ask for anointing and prayer to heal your physical and mental imbalances.

Don’t be discouraged when you don’t see your temptations go away instantly. God is going to have to recondition all your thought patterns, reflexes and impulses. Be patient with Him. Keep fighting. Ask for help. Repent and keep going when you feel like you’ve failed.

Remember, your family loves you. The church loves and cares about you. God is for you and against all your enemies. Jesus died and shed His blood for you, and you can be all He created YOU to be.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

Our society is seemingly forcing its ideas and agendas into the Christian arena. The world we live in today needs good examples of young men and women with integrity who are not afraid to stand out from the crowd. It might not be the popular thing to do, but it is the right thing to do. Your stand for truth and right can and will have a positive influence on those around you.

Recognize the power of God working through you. Greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world. If you have had some struggles in your life with different aspects of sexual immorality, I encourage you to draw a line in the sand and purpose in your heart

to gain victory over the enemy of our souls. The tricks and traps of the enemy are not new. These similar tactics and tricks were being used in the days of Noah before the flood and at the time when Sodom and Gomorrah was destroyed with fire and brimstone.

The teaching of the Bible is clear and plain. God's word is true; it is the same yesterday today and forever. His power has not diminished. Be encouraged and know that despite Satan's relentless attacks that God will never leave us or forsake us.

I am reminded of the song, *Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus* by George Duffield, Jr.:

*Stand up, stand up for Jesus! ye soldiers of the cross;
Lift high His royal banner, it must not suffer loss:
From vict'ry unto vict'ry, His army shall He lead,
Till every foe is vanquished, and Christ is Lord indeed.*

*Stand up, stand up for Jesus! Stand in His strength alone,
The arm of flesh will fail you, ye dare not trust your own;
Put on the gospel armor, and watching unto prayer,
Where calls the voice of duty, be never wanting there.*

—Bro. Tavis Browne, Albuquerque, NM

FEBRUARY 18, 2018

A SOLEMN CHARGE TO STUDENTS

I Timothy 1:18 This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare;

19 Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck.

I Timothy 4:12 Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.

I Timothy 5:22b Neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure.

I Timothy 6:11 But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.

12 Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good

profession before many witnesses.

II Timothy 1:7 For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.

8 Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God; (Also II Timothy 3:12.)

9 Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.

II Timothy 2:1 Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

3 Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

4 No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.

15 Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

II Timothy 3:14 But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them.

MEMORY VERSE: O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called: which some professing have erred concerning the faith. —I Timothy 6:20-21

CENTRAL THOUGHT: As a spiritual father, Paul gave Timothy a charge to keep a faithful trust, fight a good fight, be a good soldier and a good example, keep pure from worldly lusts and entanglements, endure hardships and persecutions, study to be a good workman, and avoid making shipwreck of his faith. These same admonitions given to Timothy, who lived in the very center of idolatry, are relevant for any young person in high school or university.

WORD DEFINITIONS

I Timothy 1:19 “Which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck”: willful resistance to the voice of conscience.

“Hence the important lesson that deviations from the true faith are preceded by violations of the conscience. The surest way to maintain a pure faith is to maintain a good and tender conscience” (*Pulpit Commentary*).

I Timothy 4:12 “Conversation”: manner of life. “Purity”: chastity in mind as well as in body.

II Timothy 2:3 “Hardness”: hardship

II Timothy 2:15 “Study”: be swift, eager, earnest, diligent; make every effort. Same word as “labor” in Hebrews 4:11 and “diligent” in II Peter 3:14.

LESSON BACKGROUND

When I considered how important education is in the lives of young people today—the dangers involved and the choices presented—which major, which degree, whether or not to live on campus, etc., plus the decisions that have to be made about school costs, I knew that a lesson addressing this topic should be a part of this series. I asked God, “Where shall I find scriptures that apply?” He directed me to the counsel Paul gave to young Timothy.

Timothy’s home was Ephesus, which was the fourth greatest city in the New Testament era, and the center of the mother goddess worship of western Asia. Ephesus was known as the “Light of Asia” and the “Gateway of Asia.” With a population of 300,000, it was a chief commercial city of the province.

Ephesus, home of a huge temple to the goddess Diana (her Roman name), or Artemis (Greek), was full of wizards and witches, astrologers, fortune tellers and sorcerers. “The goddess...was at the core of so much human thinking. She derived from those early manifestations of religious belief, the mother-goddess figures to be found from Asia Minor to the Cyclades, and westward to Sicily. The embodiment of the female principle, she represented not only fertility but resurrection in the shape of new birth, the eternal return of life to the earth and, as found in a number of early carvings, the ‘Tree of Life’. As Isis she bore the divine son, Horus; and as Artemis she was the Mother of Wild Things, the goddess of all animals. The Isis-Artemis conception embraced everything. It could be taken at any level; from the simple peasant's conception of the divinity who

would ensure that his beasts and land were fruitful, to the intellectual idea of an all-creating mother who sustained the whole universe” (from *Paul the Traveler* by Ernle Bradford). “For over a thousand years this goddess with her temple provided a focal point for the rich religious, economic, and cultural life of her worshippers” (from *Biblical Sites in Turkey* by Everett Blake and Anna Edmonds).

Famous points in Ephesus included the 100-foot wide lantern-lit marble street used for parades and ceremonies, the Arcadian Way; the great theater which seated 25,000 people, where the uproar against Paul over the worship of Diana took place; Curetes street, named after the college of priests who served Artemis and decorated with inscriptions and art, such as Nike, the goddess of victory; and later, a beautiful temple, a fountain, and 1,500-seat amphitheater used for social events, political meetings, concerts and theatrical performances. A great library housing thousands of scrolls and parchments was built in 135 A.D.

Knowing about Ephesus gives us perspective on Timothy’s life there. Some scholars feel he was about twenty-three at the time Paul disciplined him, around the age of many young people attending college. The influence pagan culture had on art, architecture, philosophy, science, entertainment, politics, society and literature is similar to the strong, ungodly influence today in university life. We can understand many of Paul’s warnings to Timothy as we look at his environment.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *A Good Conscience:* How could this teaching be applied to college life?
2. *An Example:* How important is this on campus?
3. *Purity:* Explain how this virtue is attacked in high school and college.
4. *Flee:* Describe how you would need to apply this warning.
5. *Persecutions and Afflictions for the Gospel’s Sake:* Will you face this at college? How can you overcome?
6. *What Resonates:* Share a verse from the lesson that

particularly encourages you as a student.

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

While the emphasis in today's lesson is primarily toward students already pursuing higher education, here are some points we all should consider:

It may not be God's will for you to seek an education at a secular university. While that is the push for young men and women today, it is becoming more and more a dangerous risk for young Christians. "Around two out of three Christian students from conservative churches will leave the church when they become adults" (Dr. Jason Lisle, <https://answersingenesis.org/college/surviving-secular-college/>). Dr. Lisle goes on to say, "Many colleges that are classified as 'Christian' do not teach a truly biblical worldview...I would never recommend a compromised Christian college. These are much worse than secular colleges, in my opinion. Secular colleges are honest about their rejection of the biblical worldview. Compromised positions can be far more seductive and dangerous than an outright rejection of God's Word."

I found many articles just like this as I researched. More and more young people who want to serve the Lord may have to look at alternative choices, even if they have to accept a field of employment with a lower pay grade. Paul warned Timothy about a materialistic mentality; going to college simply for financial prosperity may prove to be a wrong choice fraught with "many sorrows," as Paul warned. There are also alternatives of study where you can achieve the same degrees while at home. God can direct you to just the right way for you (Proverbs 3:5-6).

If you do feel it is God's will to attend college, you'll need to equip yourself with all the armor to be a good soldier, because you'll have a fight on your hands. "Let the conservatives breed," one educator said, "we'll get them in college." So it's not just that there are a lot of evil temptations to face; there's a deliberate agenda to seduce you away from your Christian faith.

My prayer is that you will follow Paul's message and that of the first Psalm: "Blessed is the man [or woman] who walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor

sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season...and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.”

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

This section of the lesson is aptly named as it is truly my reflections on my experience as a student at a large public university. I first want to make a disclaimer and say that I in no way feel that I was a model of the way things should be done as a Christian going through college. I will be the first to say that those years were definitely not my most spiritual. I did, however, maintain a desire to stay saved. I credit that entirely to my roots in a godly home, regularly attending church service, and maintaining my godly friendships in the church.

I carefully considered what advice I would give to a new college student that is endeavoring to serve the Lord and my first thought was that I could never recommend living on campus. I feel that this is a very dangerous place that no young Christian should ever place themselves in. I know that some universities require that all freshmen live on campus for their first year, but I feel it is something that needs to be seriously prayed out.

Another thing that kept me is I never immersed myself in their lifestyle. Oh, I made good friends in college and I feel it's important to do so; however, special care should be given so we don't become too entwined with their lives. The scriptures are very plain in the instructions about the kind of friends we should choose.

The last key to maintaining your salvation throughout college is this: NEVER, NEVER, NEVER isolate yourself away from a congregation. There are plenty of congregations that are near quality universities. Do not choose one that has no place to worship with the saints.

Please pray earnestly about each decision regarding this phase of your life. I went through it, and I know what kind of temptations are there. The college life is not one in which any saint of God should immerse themselves. Also know that it is possible to go through it

with victory with God's help. May God be with you. Amen.

—Bro. Jared Williamson, Loranger, LA

FEBRUARY 25, 2018

VICTORY IN THE SINGLE LIFE

Promise

Psalm 16:11 Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.

Psalm 23:1 The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

Psalm 34:9 O fear the Lord, ye his saints: for there is no want to them that fear him.

10b But they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing.

Psalm 37:3a Trust in the Lord, and do good.

4 Delight thyself in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.

5 Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass.

Challenge

II Kings 18:1 Now it came to pass... that Hezekiah the son of Ahaz king of Judah began to reign.

3 And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that David his father did.

4 He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brasen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan.

5 He trusted in the Lord God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him.

6 For he clave to the Lord, and departed not from following him, but kept his commandments, which the Lord commanded Moses.

7 And the LORD was with him; and he prospered whithersoever he went forth: and he rebelled against the king of Assyria, and served him not.

II Corinthians 10:5 Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;

Opportunity

I Corinthians 7:32 But I would have you without carefulness. He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord:

33 But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife.

34 There is difference also between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit: but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband.

Prayer

Psalm 31:1 In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust; let me never be ashamed: deliver me in thy righteousness.

3 For thou art my rock and my fortress; therefore for thy name's sake lead me, and guide me.

5 Into thine hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth.

7 I will be glad and rejoice in thy mercy: for thou hast considered my trouble; thou hast known my soul in adversities;

14 But I trusted in thee, O Lord: I said, Thou art my God.

15a My times are in thy hand....

19 Oh how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men!

MEMORY VERSE: Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the LORD. —Psalm 31:24

CENTRAL THOUGHT: God loves all His children and desires us all to lead happy, fulfilled, and contented lives in His presence, exemplifying to all those who know us that we trust in a God who does not leave us wanting. He strengthens us. We can have joy and contentment as a statement to others that we lift our Heavenly Father up above any other fleshly desire or “good thing.”

LESSON BACKGROUND

We humans experience many seasons in our lives. It seems that the natural course would be to grow up, fall in love, marry, serve God together, raise a family, and enjoy many years before passing on

to eternity. However, we realize this path is not laid out for every person as we consider the population as a whole. Some feel like they may never marry, some lose companions along the way, and some find themselves in an unequally yoked marriage that feels very lonely.

These situations can be labeled as “less than ideal” by the general population, and it is a sensitive topic to discuss because many who find themselves in one of these “less than ideal” situations feel inferior or feel like no one understands. The first is completely untrue. God created us all and He makes no mistakes—there is nothing inferior about us, regardless of the life situation that may be presenting itself at the moment. We can trust that truth and trust Him that He has prepared a path for each of us to walk in this life. The promises in the Bible are for all mankind—He is no respecter of persons (or situation). If we find ourselves walking the single life, may we focus less on our state and have a heart of prayer similar to the prayer in Psalms 31. May we hope in the Lord and claim Him as our God. May we cling to Him for all we need and want and live victoriously despite our circumstances. He fulfills like no other!

—Sis. Ranelle Moles, Tryon, OK

DISCUSSION:

1. *He Shall Bring It to Pass:* What are four directives given for the conditional promise that God will work for you?
2. *An Example:* What qualities did Hezekiah have for the Lord to be with him and prosper his life?
3. *No Other Gods or High Thing:* Why did Hezekiah break the brazen serpent in pieces? Who must be lifted up in our hearts?
4. *Paul's Viewpoint:* What is the difference between a married and unmarried person?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

God understands everything about us and knows our hearts. Others may or may not be able to give a comforting word when we

find ourselves in a difficult place in life, but God's promises carry us through. One thing to remember is that the "single life" is only one of the many situations that may arise in life that we feel is "difficult, unfair, or unbearable." In reality, God has prepared a plan of victory for His children that spans all difficulties. As we learn to "trust, delight, and commit" to His way, we find the secret to the deep wells of joy He has for the sheep of His pasture that satisfies every longing. May we sincerely pray, "Lord, my times are in thy hand, and I am well pleased that they are so; they could not be in a better hand. Thy will be done" (*Matthew Henry's Commentary*).

The conditional promises in Psalms 37 are wrapped up with the command to "do good." Paul reminds us that it is easier to be about the work of the Lord as a single person. We know God strengthens all who work for Him, but there is a freedom and energy in the single life, regardless of age, that those who are given the responsibility of marriage and/or family do not have. However, having been told this myself as a single person, I know this fact can lack in comfort, and we can lose sight of what it truly means to serve God with ALL our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

I feel impressed to share how God dealt with me through the story of Hezekiah when I began to focus more on my desire for a godly marriage and less on the desire to further the Kingdom of God. Hezekiah's example was to eliminate anything that was lifted up to be worshiped other than the One True God. We can easily see how images (idols) shouldn't be worshiped, but what about the brazen serpent? Did not God command Moses to lift it up on a pole for the children of Israel to look upon and be healed (Numbers 21:8-9)? The same question could be asked of a godly marriage: did not God ordain that a man should leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife (Matthew 19:4-6)? The answer to both questions is "yes." However, the danger is when we begin to "offer incense" to something God set up as "good." Are we desiring and holding up something high above God that diminishes Him as the One who satisfies our every longing? Are we lifting Him above all our imaginations of what we think should happen in our lives? When we submit all our desires and thoughts to Christ, we find He fulfills our heart more than we could ask or think (Ephesians 3:16-20). He would have us learn contentment in Him in each stage of life, so we

can deal with future difficulties with the same victory. May He always be high and lifted up!

—Sis. Ranelle Moles, Tryon, OK

REFLECTIONS

When contemplating this subject, the verse in Philippians 4:11 came to my mind. "...for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." Most young people envision themselves being a spouse, becoming a parent, and later on a grandparent, but that's not always providence. God in His mercy blesses and teaches "the single person" how to be content, while living in a world of "couples."

In order to acquire this contentment, one's heart, mind, and attitude must be readjusted. Jesus stated in Matthew 6:33, "...seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." Once God becomes your primary focus, He provides insight and guidance on how to fill the desire of being loved, needed, respected, and protected. He wants the "single person's" life to be as rewarding, fulfilling, and productive as the "married person."

Some suggestions on finding contentment after seeking the Lord first:

- Choose to be happy by counting your blessings and maintaining a positive attitude.
- Show yourself to be friendly. You must be a friend to have a friend.
- Think about and do for others. Your actions can make a difference to others and yourself.
- Take care of yourself—soul, mind, and body. Meditate on things that are edifying. Be careful with your selection of friends, reading, listening materials, etc. Look your best by being neat and healthy.
- Find a mentor with whom you can laugh, talk, seek advice, and pray.

There will be times when you are alone and a "What if?" thought comes. That's when we stand on the Lord's promise in Hebrew 13:5. "...I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." Since God is faithful to

be our constant companion, we are thus content.

—Sis. Gertrude Lounds, Merriam, KS

MARCH 4, 2018

DOUBTS AND ACCUSATIONS

“You don’t feel joyful, so you must not be saved.”

Ephesians 2:8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.

Romans 10:13 For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

“Your prayer wasn’t answered, so God must not be listening to you.”

Matthew 7:7 Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.

I John 5:14 And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us:

15 And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.

John 6:37b And him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.

“You failed to obey God, so you aren’t saved anymore.”

I John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

I John 2:1 My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

“If you were really saved, you wouldn’t have this temptation.”

I Corinthians 10:13 There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.

James 1:12 Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.

13 Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man:

14 But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.

15 Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

Hebrews 4:14 Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.

15 For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

16 Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

“God doesn’t love you, and no one understands your problem.”

I John 4:10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

16a And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love.

I Peter 5:7 Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.

8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:

9 Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.

MEMORY VERSE: And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.

—Revelation 12:10-11

CENTRAL THOUGHT: We all experience up-and-down emotions, temptations, dry and dull feelings, doubts as to our salvation, our sincerity, and worthiness; accusations against God’s love and care, and hopeless feelings that no one understands. God’s Word is more than enough to refute all of satan’s accusations and our own personal doubts.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Matthew 7:7 “Ask...”: “Keep asking, and it will be given to you. Keep searching, and you will find. Keep knocking, and the door will be opened to you” (*Holman Christian Standard translation*). “Ask with confidence and humility. Seek with care and application. Knock with earnestness and perseverance” (*Clarke’s Commentary*).

I John 2:1 “Advocate”: one who pleads another's cause before a judge; a pleader; counsel for defense; legal assistant.

I John 4:10 “Propitiation”: the atoning sacrifice that appeases God’s wrath.

I Peter 5:9 “Stedfast”: “Solid (firm); referring to what is immoveable (will not budge); stable (not changeable), standing fast without buckling or giving way (steadfast)” (*HELPS Word Studies*).

LESSON BACKGROUND

There are so many comforting promises and sure-fire answers for all the enemy throws at us. Remember that Canaan, a type of the Christian conquest, was full of battles with enemies. It was a land of hills and valleys. (But—as in I Kings 20:28—so is our God a God of the hills and valleys!) Some enemies were to be driven out little by little. Some enemies weren’t annihilated, but were left as slaves, a type of our human emotions. Being saved doesn’t take away personality, emotions or feelings; rather, we are to rule over them, as a mother who quiets unruly children.

There are many other kinds of doubts and accusations we will have hurled our way. These are just a few very common ones. But the scriptures listed here can be applied over and over again, to every situation. They are powerful weapons, mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *Jesus Loves Me, This I Know*: Which scriptures can we use to affirm our belief in God’s love and care?
2. *No One Understands*: What verses let us know this isn’t true?

3. *Might As Well Quit*: We can guarantee this is whose voice?
4. *More Where That Came From*: Name other verses you have used for weapons against doubts, temptations and accusations.

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

Dear young child of God, if only I could convey the intense, overwhelming love of Christ for you! His mercy and compassion is so great you cannot measure it. He is “touched” by your weaknesses. You’ll find victory by focusing on that great love.

Here is something else I found helpful in my experience: “One other point of which I must speak in this connection is the difficulty I experienced in endeavoring to locate myself spiritually when in the midst of the confusion.... Could I be saved at all when in such a state? Did I need to repent, or only try to do better? Were my careless actions and thoughtless words sins, or only mistakes? Fortunately, I was advised not to try to figure out so carefully what was sin and what was not, but to present to Jesus anything that troubled me, and to trust him implicitly to work in me the victory that I needed. By humbly confessing my weakness and claiming the promise of Philippians 2:13, ‘For it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do his good pleasure,’ I was enabled to gain victory almost immediately over many faults and failures with which I had wrestled long and over which I could never have gotten victory if I had spent my time picking every failure to pieces to find out whether it was something of which I needed to repent as a sin or only a mistake. I felt that God was pleased to have me humbly confess and trustingly turn over to him for correction any and every error whether it seemed to me serious or not” (Experience Number 13: Deliverance from Discouragements and Extremism in *Riches of Grace* by E. E. Byrum).

Another important point is that you can turn every one of satan’s advances into a time of worship and praise. That he cannot stand! Then ignore his ongoing ranting and go and help someone else. Devote all that time and energy you would spend rebuking him doing deeds of love and kindness for others.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

The enemy of your soul is cruel and relentless in his quest to bring you to a place of discouragement and despair. He will stop at nothing. His strategy is to plant seeds of doubt, and questions in your mind, leaving you tormented, disoriented, and confused. He leaves no direction or answering solution—just hopelessness and despair.

In my own experience, the Devil started exploiting my tender conscience at a very young age. He would bring crushing feelings of guilt over mistakes and slip-ups I made, and since I wanted so badly to please the Lord, I fell for it every time, thinking that it was the Lord pricking my conscience to “fix it.” The problem is, it never stopped, but became more and more unreasonable. I was soon staggering under a load that I was never meant to carry.

Finally, one night, I came to the end of myself and what I could endure. In my despair, I cried out to God and He came to my rescue! This was the first time I remember the Lord unmistakably speaking to me and it is a sacred memory I treasure. He gave me Revelation 8:8,10, and 11, assuring me without a doubt that I was clear before Him, and that He had an open door, a way of escape, for me out of that awful bondage. This was such a relief to my tormented spirit.

From that point on, it was a journey up and out from that place. It has been a slow and sometimes painful process, for the Devil doesn't give up easily, but the Lord has been a patient and gentle Teacher. He taught me that my worrying and fear were rooted in me not trusting Him to take care of me and keep my soul. I was letting fear of straying rob me of the peace that comes with God's keeping! He let me know that “in returning and rest shall ye be saved, in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength.”

Oh, dear one, “tossed with tempest and not comforted,” don't be afraid to ignore Satan's whispers and questions he puts in your mind. God does not partner with fear, doubt, or confusion. If these accompany your dilemma, you can be sure of its source. Dare to trust God's promise to keep you (Philippians 3:15, Psalm 56:13). Turn it over to God! He WILL be true!

—Sis. Jenee Doolittle, Loranger, LA

MARCH 11, 2018

WHEN I SIT IN DARKNESS

When My Heart Is Broken

Psalm 34:17 The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles.

18 The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.

Psalm 147:3 He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds.

When I Have Sinned

Psalm 37:24 Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand.

Micah 7:8 Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me.

9 I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me: he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness.

18 Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy.

19 He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.

When I Am Afraid

Psalm 56:1 Be merciful unto me, O God: for man would swallow me up; he fighting daily oppresseth me.

3 What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee.

Isaiah 43:1 But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.

2 When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.

Isaiah 51:12 I, even I, am he that comforteth you: who art thou,

that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass.

When Others Say There Is No Hope For Me

Psalm 3:1 Lord, how are they increased that trouble me! Many are they that rise up against me.

2 Many there be which say of my soul, There is no help for him in God.

3 But thou, O Lord, art a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter up of mine head.

When I Am Tempted to Take My Life

Isaiah 50:10 Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.

Psalm 18:28 For thou wilt light my candle: the Lord my God will enlighten my darkness.

Psalm 42:5 Why art thou cast down, O my soul? And why art thou disquieted in me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance.

Lamentations 3:21 This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope.

22 It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.

23 They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.

MEMORY VERSE: Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in the Lord forever: for in the Lord JEHOVAH is everlasting strength.

—Isaiah 26:3-4

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Although we may be in a time of darkness, there will be light—we just can't see it yet. It is through believing God's Word and trusting in His grace and love that we can have peace and hope in seemingly hopeless times.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Today's lesson is a continuation of precious promises for when

we go through seasons of heaviness. Many of our verses come from David's times of despair, when he was pursued by outward enemies and tormented by inward ones. David despaired of his life at times, but he talked himself out of it by reminding himself of all of God's mercies. Every time he ended up praising God. There is a great secret here for all of us in times of trouble.

Isaiah also wrote many encouraging promises to God's people who were going through "rivers" of afflictions and times of great darkness. Jeremiah, "the weeping prophet," found his comfort in the little scroll—God's law—he found hidden in the temple. God's Word brought him hope. Micah also ministered to God's people who felt hopeless after their sins. His promise of forgiveness and hope after transgression give light and comfort to us today.

There are many false teachings promising peace for those who take their own lives. God's Word teaches differently. In life there is mercy and hope; in God there is help. Suicide is the ultimate expression of unbelief. If we perish at our own hand in desperate unbelief, we choose to separate ourselves from God eternally. This is a hard saying, as this situation touches our lives closely. Let us stay close to God's Word and trust His Wisdom.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

I look not back; God knows the fruitless efforts,
The wasted hours, the sinning, the regrets.
I leave them all with Him who blots the record,
And graciously forgives, and then forgets.

I look not forward; God sees all the future,
The road that, short or long, will lead me home,
And He will face with me its ev'ry trial,
And bear for me the burdens that may come.

I look not round me; then would fears assail me.
So wild the tumult of earth's restless seas,
So dark the world, so filled with woe and evil,
So vain the hope of comfort and of ease.

I look not inward; that would make me wretched;
For I have naught on which to stay my trust.
Nothing I see save failures and shortcomings,
And weak endeavors, crumbling into dust.

But I look up—into the face of Jesus,
For there my heart can rest, my fears are stilled;
And there is joy, and love, and light for darkness,
And perfect peace, and ev'ry hope fulfilled.

This poem was written by Annie J. Flint, who, beginning in her twenties, was crippled and bedfast from arthritis until her death at age 66. (Poem could be sung to the tune of “He Looked Beyond My Fault and Saw My Need,” with the last verse being the chorus after each of the other four verses.)

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

There are many things that can cause depression and I don't pretend to understand all of them. I have had my own battles with this darkness from my teenage years. Back then my walk with the Lord was not steady and I can only say that He showed great mercy to me in that I was not consumed by the darkness at that time. I believe depression can stem from a broken relationship with God, but what if you are walking closely with the Savior and still this darkness obliterates your joy and hope? This is my personal testimony of how the Lord delivered me from a time of deep depression. I don't recall now how long I was in this place. Depression creeps in unannounced and then silently drains every drop of life out of you. I know that it had gone on long enough that others were aware that something was wrong, though I don't think I said anything. I couldn't smile or laugh. The only thing that gave life meaning was my relationship with the Lord and yet I felt hopeless and helpless in the grip of this darkness. I couldn't understand how it could happen when I was earnestly seeking Him daily.

I will never forget the day that the Lord delivered me from this darkness. I remember where I was when I cried out to the Lord

silently, “I’m sick and tired of being this way! I’m going to fight it.” At that moment I felt something break loose, like a chain had suddenly snapped. Hope began to rise, but I knew I had to have some weapon against this spirit of darkness. So I asked the Lord, “What do I fight with?” The answer came swiftly, “Praise.” I recognized immediately the truth of this as I obeyed and the darkness retreated.

From that time I have had much greater victory over a spirit of depression. I constantly look to the Lord to be “the lifter up of my head” whenever discouraging thoughts try to infiltrate. Maintaining a heart that is full of praise for our wonderful Lord and Savior makes it very difficult for the darkness to creep in. May The Lord bless each one struggling today and give you your own testimony of deliverance.

—Sis. Sarah L. Herron, Shawnee, OK

MARCH 18, 2018

FACING ILLNESS

Common Human Weakness and Sickness

Matthew 8:16 When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick:

17 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses.

James 5:13 Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms.

14 Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord:

15 And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.

16 Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

Sickness That Manifests the Work and Glory of God

John 9:3 Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his

parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.

John 11:4 When Jesus heard that, he said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.

Afflictions Allowed for a Trial to Your Faith

I Peter 1:6 Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations:

7 That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

I Peter 4:12 Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you:

13 But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. (See also verse 19).

Afflictions Sent to Teach, Chasten or Humble Us

Psalms 119:67 Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word.

71 It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.

75 I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.

II Corinthians 12:7 And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

8 For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.

9 And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Affliction Which Prepares Us for Death

II Corinthians 4:16 For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.

17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

5:1 For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

MEMORY VERSE: But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. —Isaiah 53:5

CENTRAL THOUGHT: We all endure common human weaknesses and illnesses; these we bring to the Lord in faith for healing, trusting in the blood of His atonement for sins and sicknesses. Some illnesses are allowed by God to try our faithfulness, chasten or teach us, or to manifest His glory. Others are unto death; through them God prepares us for heaven and manifests His keeping grace to others.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Matthew 8:17 “That which was spoken by Esaias”: a quote from Isaiah 53:4, “Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.” “The word translated ‘griefs’ in Isaiah, and ‘infirmities’ in Matthew, means properly, in the Hebrew and Greek, ‘diseases of the body.’ In neither does it refer to the disease of the mind, or to sin. To bear those griefs is clearly to bear them away, or to remove them. This was done by his miraculous power in healing the sick. The word rendered ‘sorrows’ in Isaiah, and ‘sicknesses’ in Matthew, means ‘pain, grief, or anguish of mind.’ To ‘carry’ these is to sympathize with the sufferers; to make provision for alleviating those sorrows, and to take them away. This he did by his precepts and by his example; and the cause of all sorrows - ‘sin’ - he removed by the atonement” (*Barnes’ Notes on the Bible*).

James 5:13 “Afflicted”: to suffer or endure evils, pain, hardship or troubles.

James 5:15 “Save”: rescue; preserve; heal; deliver out of danger into safety.

1 Peter 1:6 “Heaviness”: distress; deep, intense emotional pain or sadness; severe sorrow; the word is even used to refer to the pain of childbirth.

LESSON BACKGROUND

The verses from Matthew come from the scene where Jesus, after He had healed Peter's mother-in-law of a fever, healed the multitude of sick and possessed people who came to Him that evening. As He accomplished both spiritual and physical healing, Matthew recalled the prophecy given of the Messiah by Isaiah. In another place Matthew told of Jesus healing "all manner of sickness and all manner of disease" and "divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatick, and those that had the palsy" (Matthew 4:23-24). This lets us know that he healed diseases of the body, those of the mind, and those of demonic possession. He is just the same today!

James brings us the truth again that Jesus is healer of both soul and body. Jesus commissioned His disciples to preach the gospel to all the world, promising them signs that would follow, among which was the recovery of the sick when the disciples laid on hands. James was admonishing the church to continue this command, and early church history records that they rejected the healing temples dedicated to the healing god, Aesculapius, and relied upon prayer instead. An interesting detail about Aesculapius is that he was depicted carrying a staff entwined about with a snake. The symbol is used as a medical emblem today.

In John's account of Jesus healing the blind man, the disciples had asked Jesus if his blindness was a result of his sin or the sin of his parents. Some Pharisees believed in the transmigration of souls—the false idea that the souls of men were sent into other bodies for the punishment of some sin they had committed in a pre-existent state. The disciples may have been referring to this, or to another view that unborn babies had emotions which might be and often were sinful. Blindness can also be a result of a sexually transmitted disease in the mother. But Jesus refused those ideas and said the blindness was for the purpose of God's works being made manifest in the man, as Jesus proved when He healed him.

Later on Jesus was told of his friend Lazarus's sickness. He delayed going to visit him, saying that the sickness was not unto death. Lazarus did die, however, and Jesus, arriving after he had been buried, wept with his friends at the tomb before working a

miracle and bringing Lazarus back to life. May we not conclude then, that there are illnesses that would be fatal, but God sees fit to intervene and extend life; in other cases He may make it known that the sickness is “unto death.”

Some illnesses and afflictions—losses, persecutions, oppression from satan—are for spiritual reasons, as the author of Psalm 119 and both Paul and Peter explain. They work much good for our souls and for the kingdom of God. They try, prove, and increase our faith and trust in God. They demonstrate God’s power and grace to endure suffering with joyfulness. They refine us from selfish desires and carnal personality traits. Sometimes they chasten us because of unwise choices we’ve made, proud or uncharitable attitudes we may have had, or harsh and critical judgments we’ve passed on others. Suffering tempers these things and makes us compassionate toward others like nothing else can.

As we definitely know, it is appointed unto man once to die; the disciples all died and so have all that have come after them. At some point, God says it is our time to go. True saints of God love not “their lives unto the death.” They trust God and praise Him in death as well as in life; thus by life or by death, they magnify and glorify God in their bodies (Philippians 1:20).

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *A Healer Foretold:* Who prophesied that Jesus would bear our sicknesses and infirmities? What does that mean to you?
2. *For Us To Do:* What five things did James tell us to do when we are sick?
3. *Trials of Faith:* Share spiritual blessings that result.

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

Most of us take good health for granted when we are young. We feel great, have lots of energy and strength, and can eat pretty much anything. But some face real struggles with illness. It can be discouraging to never feel good, day after day; to be prayed for time after time and never see any change.

If you're in this place as a young person, I want to encourage you that having prolonged illness doesn't mean God doesn't love you or that He's not hearing your prayers. It doesn't mean that Jesus didn't bear YOUR burden of infirmity; nor does it mean that you don't have faith, or that you have done something wrong. Read the precious promise in Isaiah 30:19-21.

Trusting Him doesn't mean we don't do *anything*. Rather, we do all we can to care for this temple the Lord gave us. We can learn which foods are best for us, and which to avoid. Simple things like pure water, fresh air, exercise and good rest can cleanse and restore the body. These things are to God's glory as much as clean, honest living. When we have done our best, we can trust Jesus to do the rest, in His time and in His way.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

"Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction." (Isaiah 48:10)

Many times throughout my battle with autoimmune disease, I have asked God, "Why?" I struggle with feeling like I am being punished for something, I know not what. But God's answer came so clearly to me one day, "I have chosen you for this battle," just as Isaiah 48:10 says. I should count it a privilege, not a punishment, that God has the confidence in my faith in Him to allow me to go through these trials.

There are many such examples in the Bible; God handpicked men and women to endure great pain and hardship in order to refine them and redeem others around them. Esther's uncle Mordecai admonished Esther "...who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14b) Esther saved the life of her uncle and the entire Jewish race because she bravely embraced the trial God gave her. Paul faced numerous perilous mishaps and trials, and begged God three times to remove his affliction. However, because of all the hardships Paul endured, he is one of the greatest examples of courage and dedication we have in the Bible. The story of Joseph has richly blessed me, as well. Trial after trial broadsided Joseph, yet he never admitted defeat or

wavered in his faith.

I encourage each of you to not shun the cross God has chosen for you, but rather, to embrace it! Then we, like Joseph can say, "But as for you, ye thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good..." (Genesis 50:20) With God on our side, our final outcome is always victory!

—Sis. Megan Williamson, Beggs, OK

MARCH 25, 2018

THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW

Psalm 42:5 Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance.

7 Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me.

8 Yet the Lord will command his lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life.

Psalm 23:4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Matthew 5:4 Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

II Corinthians 1:3 Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort;

4 Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.

Isaiah 53:3a He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.

Isaiah 66:13a As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you.

Isaiah 41:10 Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.

13 For I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto

thee, Fear not; I will help thee.

Deuteronomy 33:27a The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.

MEMORY VERSE: For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. —Romans 8:38-39

CENTRAL THOUGHT: When we are overwhelmed by grief, our God has promised to be with us, and He Who is acquainted with grief has promised to comfort us, strengthen us and never forsake us.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Psalm 42:7 “Deep calleth unto deep...”: afflictions and sorrows, like the deep waters of the sea, that come pouring in, one upon another; or like the roar of torrents of a swollen river; or like the writhing, twisting funnels of cloud over the sea, which suck up water and then pour it out in a sudden deluge.

Psalm 23:4 “Valley of the shadow of death”: a narrow gorge or ravine. The picture created is that of Death personified, standing between the sun and the valley, casting the shadow of darkness on the inhabitants.

Matthew 5:4 “Comforted”: to call near.

DISCUSSION:

1. *Promised:* List the promises God gives in these verses.
2. *Waves:* Share how this word describes grief.
3. *I Will Draw You Near:* Tell how God has done this for you.

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

The valley of the shadow of death can be long and wearisome, with hours of toilsome care, gradual loss of mobility, body functions, and mental awareness. Painful, restless nights and the equally

painful loss of personal dignity and privacy because of terminal illness can wear away faith and courage. Watching a loved one waste away can be such a shock to your system. As the physical body deteriorates, what better comfort and assurance can we find than in the truths from God's Word? These, found in the Bible or in inspired songs, are the truly lasting, enduring realities.

Others walk the valley of sudden death. A stroke or heart attack, or a fatal accident. Short term illness that we thought God would surely heal. Hopes are crushed and everything seems out of control. I'll never forget the agonizing words of a widow: "How could something so cruel be God's will?" Again we have God's Word; His promise that He is still with us. Little drops of comfort and discoveries that God had made preparation for this terrible suddenness long before it happened.

The Bible describes death as an ENEMY—an enemy that we all have to face many times in our lifetime and finally with our own mortality. Death's mortal thrusts are many. Shock. Stunned, vacant silence. Anger. Grief for what we didn't get to enjoy with our loved one; emptiness in the place of what was our very life and joy. Hopelessness as we face the future. Yet we know, because of the abiding Comforter, He carries us, and we are not alone. We do not sorrow as those who have no hope, because Jesus has taken away the sting of death, which is sin (I Corinthians 15:54-57), and gives us a wonderful hope because of these words: "And so shall we ever be with the Lord" (I Thessalonians 4:17).

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

Had you brought up the subject a year ago of losing a loved one soon, I'd have met it with a significant degree of resistance. The thought was simply too awful to entertain! I could only quickly shove it aside with an "I'm not crossing that bridge till I get there" attitude. Well, God saw fit to allow that "bridge" in my path sooner than I'd expected. But the good news? He had no intentions of me crossing it alone. He was standing right beside it, waiting to accompany me—just like He'll always be, for any "bridge" we may face in life.

This first time to ever lose a close loved one wasn't sudden. That

was God's mercy, easing me into this inevitable part of life. In January of 2017, my grandpa developed congestive heart failure. As I began facing the reality that I might have to say goodbye unless the Lord raised him up, something amazing took place. That reality began losing the unbearable awfulness with which I'd always seen it before. And, strange as it may sound, the dread began being replaced by a sort of anticipation. Anticipation in that I was eager to see how God would carry me through this part of life. It'd be totally new territory. But I just had this assurance, that God would be right there for me through it all.

I must further clarify the anticipation. As I watched Poppa face this battle, I saw God drawing him closer to Himself in a way almost too special for words. As his physical life and strength drained, his spiritual life and determination escalated. He was choosing to leave himself in God's hands, placing his trust in the One he knew had the perfect plan. That was a great part of the reason I could look at the situation more with anticipation than dread. I knew Poppa was in the best place he could possibly be. And if God chose to take him, I knew exactly where he was going. That was the safest feeling! I knew, too, this parting would not be final. Should I have to say goodbye now, it would only be for a time. I simply can't explain the comfort that brought!

By the time God decided to take Poppa home in April, I can truly say that, somehow, I was ready. Not that I'd never miss him. I knew that would invariably come. But God had been preparing me! During those months that in some ways dragged on and in other ways flew by, God was working in my life, to show me that He was there. There for Poppa, in body and spirit, as he faced the sickness; there if it came down to death. As he clung to the Lord more tightly than ever, He didn't let him down! And through it all, God showed me He was there for me. To carry me through, to give comfort and assurance, and to bring that peace that truly "passeth all understanding."

Through the loss, my eyes were opened to a little secret. In the past, I'd only been an onlooker to losing close loved ones. I saw others' grief and didn't know how they could bear it. I couldn't imagine how I ever could! But what I found: God has a special grace He's faithful to pour out in those special-needed times. Others looking on may be able to perceive and share our sorrow, but not

that special grace that's feeding us. Because it's just that—special; there only when it's needed, and specific to the person needing it. Should another later face the loss themselves, I believe it will be there for them, too. I found that special grace to be very real and personal.

After Poppa passed on, heaven took on a little different light to me. No longer did it seem quite so beyond reach and realization. I found a new little “connection,” that someone I closely knew and loved (not just someone else's loved one) was up there now. And with that came the reassurance that, if he could indeed make it, so could I!

I know every loss and each person facing it is unique. But I believe God longs to pour out His love and power to each one, very personally. It was all new to me, yet I can say that “yea, though I walked through the valley of the shadow of death, He was with me.” I'm very thankful God proved Himself faithful to me through it all. It gives me courage to face the coming months and years, whatever they may hold, as I know that His faithfulness will continue.

—Sis. Kendra Cole, Neosho, MO

