

# Virtual Christian Magazine

Hope And Encouragement  
For The Real World

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*“But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”—Acts 6:4*

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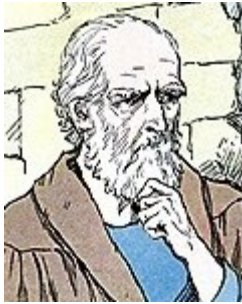


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## Peace Arch: Symbol of Unity

By David Palmer

*There are lessons to be learned and remembered from our past and present relationships.*



**P**OISED ABOVE THE INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY of Canada and the United States, the Peace Arch stands between Blaine, Washington, and Surrey, British Columbia. It represents the longest undefended boundary in the world. It literally straddles the Canadian/U.S. border with one side on Canadian soil, the other on American.

The American side of the Peace Arch is inscribed with the words *CHILDREN OF A COMMON MOTHER*; the Canadian side with *BRETHREN DWELLING TOGETHER IN UNITY*. Within the portal of the arch on the west side are the words *1814 OPEN ONE HUNDRED YEARS 1914*; and on the east side, *MAY THESE GATES NEVER BE CLOSED*.

Excerpts from the official Peace Arch Web site provide us with a little history:

“The Arch was constructed to commemorate the centennial (1814-1914) of the signing of the Treaty of Ghent on December 24, 1814. The Treaty of Ghent ended the war of 1812 between the United States and Great Britain, a conflict that was waged in North America and involved Canadians, as well as Americans and British.

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*Each year the Peace Arch is the scene for a celebration called “Hands Across the Border.”*

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“Standing 67 feet high, the Peace Arch is made of concrete and reinforced steel. Its foundation consists of 76 fourteen-inch pilings driven 25-30 feet into the earth. The Arch was said to be one of the first structures in North America constructed to be earthquake-proof.

“The 3500 sacks of concrete for the Arch’s foot walls were donated by R.P. Butchart, of Victoria, British Columbia’s Butchart Garden’s fame; and 50 tons of steel were donated by E.H. Gary of New York...

“Two bronze plaques are placed above the exterior foot walls of the Arch. One is of the Canadian steamship the Beaver; the other of the Mayflower. Wooden relics, allegedly cut from each ship, were sealed behind each plaque when the Arch was dedicated in 1921...

“The International Peace Arch is one of the few landmarks in the world listed on the National Historic Registries of two different countries.

“The history of the Peace Arch reflects more than our past; its existence gives meaning to our present. As the world moves further into the twenty-first century the Peace Arch is a beacon of hope for our future” (<http://www.peacearchpark.org/history.htm>).

Each year the Peace Arch is the scene for a celebration called “Hands Across the Border,” which observes the anniversary of the dedication of the international monument. The event takes place the second Sunday in June; hosting alternates between the United States and Canada.

Participants traditionally include adult military veterans, law enforcement (including Canadian Mounties in full regalia, available for photo opportunities), and youth organizations from both countries. Girl and Boy Scouts of America, Campfire USA, Explorers, Girl Guides and Scouts Canada all join in. Annual attendance ranges from 13,000 to 20,000, most of which are youth.

The annual event provides opportunity for young participants to trade flags, pins and souvenirs representing their countries and groups, while meeting their counterparts from across the border, in an activity, which fosters international cooperation and understanding.

If only the nations around the world could have the same attitude towards each other. Imagine what this world would be like without war and pain! As Christians, we know the day will come when we will finally live in peace. Soon after Christ’s return, we will find our troubles are behind us. Psalm 72:7 reads, “In His days the righteous shall flourish; and abundance of peace, until the moon is no more.”

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*Imagine what this world would be like without war and pain.*

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The symbolism of the Peace Arch can be summed up with a portion of the lyrics from the song “Children of a Common Mother” written by U.S. recording artist Christina Alexander:

*Standing tall  
There for all  
A symbol of freedom peace and harmony  
Our fathers eyes saw troubled times  
So, they built a reminder  
For all the world to see*

*A sign of hope  
From sea to sea  
It binds together two countries that are free  
Let’s not forget our precious debt  
For the gift of knowing what it means to be*

*Canadians and Americans are free  
To show the world our strong diversity  
Dwelling in unity*

*Canadians and Americans are free*

*Children of a common mother*

*We are sisters we are brothers*

*Children of a common mother*

*We are sisters we are brothers*

*Children of a common mother*

*Sisters, brothers it's all about you*

*Sisters, brothers it's all about you*

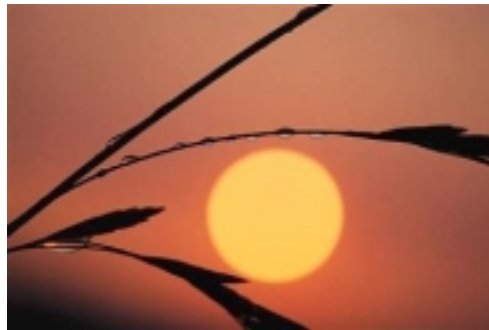
*Sisters, brothers it's all about you and me*

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## The Wonderful World Beyond Today! Part 1: Future Visions

By Mike Bennett

*Will science create a gleaming utopia of peace and happiness for all? Or does a nightmarish world await us? Futurists offer a variety of conflicting visions. But is there a way to foresee what it will really be like in the world beyond today?*



**W**HAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD—FOR YOU?

When you imagine the future, what are the first things that come to mind? Perhaps cutting-edge inventions and science-fiction-inspired gadgets?

Science and technology promise continuing advancements almost beyond belief. With human knowledge doubling every 10 years and computing power doubling every 18 months, it's no wonder many futurists see a world of spectacular human achievements ahead.

### Scientific saviors?

After interviewing more than 150 other scientists, Michio Kaku, professor of theoretical physics at the City College of New York and cofounder of the string field theory, focused on three key developments that are radically changing our world.

He highlighted the computer revolution, the biomolecular revolution, which “will ultimately give us the nearly godlike ability to manipulate life almost at will,” and the quantum revolution, “which will give us control over matter itself” (*Visions: How Science Will Revolutionize the 21st Century*, 1997, pp. ix, x, 4, 9).

Ultimately, Dr. Kaku says, these advancements “will make it possible to fulfill our destiny and take our place among the stars. The harnessing of these scientific revolutions is the first step toward making the universe truly our backyard” (p. 355).

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*One view of technological progress forecasts that by 2025 we'll be using clean hydrogen engines for transportation.*

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One view of technological progress forecasts that by 2025 we'll be using clean hydrogen engines for transportation, domestic robots to take care of household chores and cybernetic health enhancements to make ourselves better than we naturally would be.

By 2040 innovation and scientific advancement would lead to the virtual elimination of hunger and poverty, free quality education, longer life and a marked increase in personal wealth available to all (James Canton, *The Extreme Future*, 2006, pp. 51, 53).

Another futurist and science fiction writer takes us on a tour of the home of tomorrow: “You don't have a 'shower stall.' You have a standard, everyday body-imaging system that gives you complete interior and exterior health scans every morning as it washes you. Your toothbrush scans the contents of your mouth and catalogs its microorganisms...

“In your kitchen, the mops have more processing power than twentieth-century national bureaucracies” (Bruce Sterling, *Tomorrow Now: Envisioning the Next Fifty Years*, 2002, pp. 8-9).

Science will not only change our environment, but futurists foresee it changing humanity itself. “We might become ageless, or geniuses, or prosthetically enhanced, or cyberneticized, or any combination of those. We might be severely transformed by an unknown technology that we can't yet imagine” (Sterling, p. 296).



Some focus on the promise of specific technologies. At the World Nano-Economic Congress in 2003, U.S.

Undersecretary of Commerce for Technology Phillip Bond described the potential of nanotechnology as “truly miraculous: enabling the blind to see, the lame to walk, and the deaf to hear; curing AIDS, cancer, diabetes and other afflictions; ending hunger; and even supplementing the power of our minds...

“Nanotechnology will deliver higher standards of living and allow us to live longer, healthier, more productive lives. Nano also holds extraordinary potential for the global environment through waste-free, energy-efficient production processes that cause no harm to the environment or human health” (*State of the World 2006*, Worldwatch Institute, 2006, p. 78).

But not all forecasts are as rosy.

### Doomsday visions

Other voices draw different conclusions looking at some of the same scientific revolutions and technologies. They fear the godlike powers described above will be used for destructive purposes—as every previous scientific advance has been.

In 2007 the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists'* Doomsday Clock was moved up to five minutes to midnight, signaling their view of how close humanity is to catastrophic destruction. In the jubilation after the end of the Cold War and deep cuts in nuclear stockpiles, the clock had moved as far as 17 minutes to midnight in 1991.

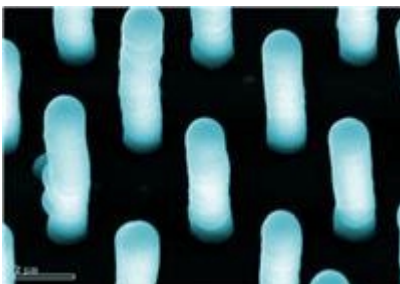
But now “the world stands at the brink of a second nuclear age. The United States and Russia remain ready to stage a nuclear attack within minutes, North Korea conducts a nuclear test, and many in the international community worry that Iran plans to acquire the Bomb.

“Climate change also presents a dire challenge to humanity. Damage to ecosystems is already taking place; flooding, destructive storms, increased drought, and polar ice melt are causing loss of life and property” ([www.thebulletin.org](http://www.thebulletin.org)).

This group also foresees dangers in emerging technologies—some of the same ones seen as so promising to the futurists mentioned earlier.

“Advances in genetics and biology over the last five decades have inspired a host of new possibilities—both positive and troubling. With greater understanding of genetic material and of how physiological systems interact, biologists can fight disease better and improve overall human health. But this knowledge may also afford opportunities to program organisms to do our bidding for malign purposes by manipulating brain functions, compromising bioregulation, and even by altering our reproductive capabilities.

“Complicating matters further, more groups and more individuals possess these high-consequence technologies than in the past—and more and more people will acquire them in the future.



“The emergence of nanotechnology—manufacturing at the molecular or atomic level—presents similar concerns, especially if coupled with chemical and biological weapons, explosives, or missiles. Such combinations could result in highly destructive missiles the size of an insect and microscopic delivery systems for dangerous pathogens” ([www.thebulletin.org](http://www.thebulletin.org)).

Realistically, which human advances throughout history have not been turned to selfish and destructive uses? In addition, technological advances can have unexpected side effects. “For example, the effects of manufactured nanoscale particles on human health and the environment are unknown and unpredictable, though hundreds of products containing nanoparticles are already on the market” (*State of the World 2006*, p. 79).

Looking at recent history and today's headlines is not reassuring. The 20th century was by far the bloodiest on record. In spite of amazing advances in agriculture and medicine, millions are malnourished and millions more are dying of contagious diseases. Well-meaning governments and the United Nations have proven ineffective in stopping genocide and the spread of weapons of mass destruction. Peacekeepers are powerless to bring peace to many of the world's hot spots.

Fraud and scandals in business affect millions of investors, as well as undermining the trust on which the world's predominant economic system, capitalism, is built.

Consider these comments by the longtime editor-in-chief of that bastion of capitalism, *The Economist*: "Capitalism is unpopular for its greed and ruthlessness. It can be frighteningly unstable. It brings about inequalities in incomes that have the ability to cause political backlashes. It causes resentment" (Bill Emmott, *20:21 Vision: Twentieth-Century Lessons for the Twenty-First Century*, 2003, p. 321).

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*Advances in genetics and biology over the last five decades have inspired a host of new possibilities—both positive and troubling.*

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In a world of globalization and freer markets, the poor have gotten poorer, and the rich have gotten richer, increasing the tensions caused by inequality and injustice.

Greed, violence, selfishness and evil have always lurked in the hearts of men. Pessimists—and realists—ask, what has fundamentally changed that would make the future a better place? Human nature hasn't changed. Only the tools of destruction have changed—becoming much more deadly!

Even acclaimed Cambridge professor Stephen Hawking believes that man's days on earth are numbered. "I don't think the human race will survive the next thousand years unless we spread into space. There are too many accidents that can befall life on a single planet" (Lawrence E. Joseph, *Apocalypse 2012*, 2007, p. 3).

### Who is right?

Will the future bring the glittering world of the optimists? Or the doomsday world of the pessimists?

Is there a way to know? If the pessimists are right, do we even want to know?

There is a source that claims the authority—and the power—to predict and actually bring about its vision of the future. It's not a source from the scientific world—or the governmental, commercial or educational worlds. It's a source that claims extraterrestrial origins. Consider this statement:

"I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done" (Isaiah 46:9-10).



Who better to predict the future than the all-powerful Creator who can control the outcomes! And the best part is, God promises real hope for a real world of peace and happiness beyond humanity's wildest dreams.

It's not dependent on the Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde world of scientific advances. And the sinister side of human nature can't thwart it. God promises to not only save this world from itself, but to make it possible for each human being to achieve his or her incredible potential.

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But of course, our modern world conditions us to reject that possibility. Even many of those who believe in a God don't see evidence of His working in the world today. It seems preposterous that He would intervene tomorrow.

This has led to the world the apostle Peter described: "Scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, 'Where is the promise of His coming?'" (2 Peter 3:3-4).

It is easy to wonder, If God is in charge and wants to turn things around, why hasn't He done it yet? Peter answers in verse 9: "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (New International Version).

God has a plan for every person who has ever lived, and He reveals that plan in the Holy Bible, and especially in the prophetic books like Revelation. That book, the last one in the Bible, starts by identifying the true source of understanding the future: "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place" (Revelation 1:1).

What are those things that must shortly take place? How can we understand the mysterious symbols and other elements of prophecy and get a clear framework for the future? A good place to start is with an inspiring and informative free booklet, [\*You Can Understand Bible Prophecy\*](#).

*Look for further articles in this series in upcoming issues.*

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## Wrestling—in Prayer

By Graemme Marshall

*In hearing our prayers God sometimes makes decisions we wouldn't normally expect.*



**T**HE CHURCH IN COLOSSE BEGAN when a local man named Epaphras traveled to Ephesus to hear the teaching of Paul (Acts 19). While Acts 19 doesn't tell the story of Epaphras and the origin of the Colosse congregation, it is explained in Bible encyclopedias and in any good study Bible. Epaphras later became the pastor of Colosse, nearby Laodicea and Hierapolis.

While visiting Paul in Rome, he became a “fellow prisoner” (Colossians 1:7; Philemon 23). He brought news of heresy problems, which prompted the letter to the Colossians. A reader of the original may have sensed at Paul's signature the chains on his wrists also lying across the parchment (4:18). In this last chapter, Paul commends Epaphras, his fellow worker, with this outstanding endorsement; “He is always wrestling in prayer for you” (4:12, New International Version throughout, except where noted).

*Wrestling* in fervent prayer—it's an interesting description for this vital part of Christian life. To *wrestle* is to struggle, be in anguish, labor fervently and be in agony. It's related to the same Greek word used of Christ in Gethsemane where, “being in *agony* [of mind], He prayed [all the] more earnestly and intently; and His sweat became like great clots of blood dropping down upon the ground” (Luke 22:44, Amplified Bible).

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*To wrestle is to struggle, be in anguish, labor fervently and be in agony.*

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Epaphras's prayer for God's people was that they: “Stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured” (Colossians 4:12). Who wouldn't appreciate fervent prayers made about these things?

## Heart-filled words move God



God responds to heartfelt petitions made by faithful believers. And we know He values the righteous. This is comforting. The angels sent to destroy Sodom responded patiently to Lot's hesitancy: "Very well, I will grant this request too; I will not overthrow the town you speak of. But flee there quickly, because I cannot do anything until you reach it" (Genesis 19:21-22). For us it is reminiscent of the scripture in Matthew, "for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened" (24:22).

To *wrestle* is to do one's utmost in dealing with a task, to strain and strive as in a hard struggle.

Here are ways we can be like Epaphras and *wrestle in prayer* for others:

### ***Wrestling for intervention from sickness and disease.*** King

Hezekiah of Judah was told by divine decree his life was over. But his impassioned prayer from his deathbed (he "wept bitterly") affected a change of heart in God (2 Kings 20:1-6). He was granted 15 more years. We note from Scripture that he didn't make the wisest choices in those years. Nonetheless, he was allowed to die in peace. Parallels in our life might be where God has granted us respite and space for things to work out. Serious health needs call for our prayers of intercession.

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*Fervent prayer  
moves God.*

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***Wrestling for conscience or embarrassment.*** The prophet Ezekiel was commanded by God to portray famine by using human excrement as fuel to cook a meager meal. But this represented a ceremonial defilement for a priest. Although God commanded it, Ezekiel just could not bring himself to agree to the requirement. In prayer, he explained why he could not, and it was sufficient for God to change His mind. In effect, God said, "Oh, all right, if you don't want to then use cow dung" (Ezekiel 4:14-15).

There are also times our human nature gets in the way of admitting we've said the wrong thing. An inner thought might be: "Well, I've gone and said it so now it's too late." Ezra did just that before the Persian monarch. He was later too ashamed to ask for troops to protect them on their journey. Instead, Ezra and the people fasted and prayed (Ezra 8:22-23).

***Wrestling for a warning witness.*** God said, "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up your voice like a trumpet; declare to my people their transgression, to the house of Jacob their sins!" (Isaiah 58:1, Revised Standard Version). And in the next chapter, He was appalled that "there was no one to intervene" (59:16). Ezekiel quotes God as saying: "I looked for a man to...stand before me in the gap on behalf the land...but I found none" (22:30).



Pray for people to "save [themselves] from this corrupt generation" (Acts 2:40). Why? Because God is "not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). Pray for righteously inclined people to make a stand for truth.

**Wrestling for financial stability, peace and safety in life.** Paul exhorted that “prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority” (1 Timothy 2:1-2). Why? “That we may live peaceful and quiet lives, in all godliness and holiness.”

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*Wrestling in prayer  
is important for  
Christians.*

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Pray that those who support God’s Church can receive job and financial blessings. Pray, too, that our national leaders will make decisions that promote economic stability and physical safety for God’s people.

*Wrestling* in prayer is important for Christians, especially when many have lost their sense of urgency. Be like Epaphras. He’s a good scriptural role model for fervent prayer.

### Recommended reading

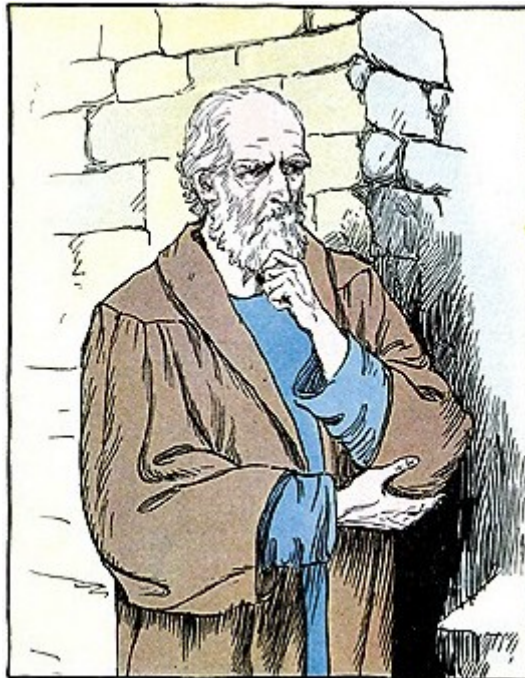
Request our free booklets [Is the Bible True?](#) and [Making Life Work.](#)

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## Why Would Paul Cry?

By Robert Berendt

*Close to God, a leader in the Church, loved by so many—what could bring a man like him to tears?*



**T**HERE IS A SAYING that some things “could make a grown man cry.” That comment is sometimes made in jest because grown men seldom cry. It is not considered a manly thing to do. Men are supposed to be strong and reliable. They are the “knights in shining armor” who rescue the damsels in distress. Women can also show great courage and strength, but there is

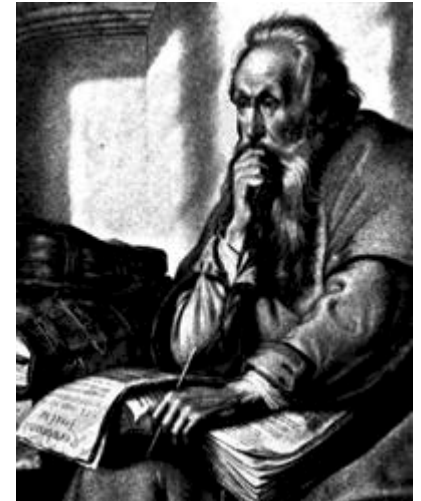
usually a difference in the way in which men and women approach trials and troubles in life. Men are, generally speaking, less likely to cry.

### Paul endured much physical hardship

Paul was a very strong man. He survived the arenas of the Roman Empire (1 Corinthians 15:32). He was beaten more times than he could count (although he sometimes did count—2 Corinthians 11:23-24) and took those beatings “like a man.” It does not seem that those beatings brought Paul to tears. In addition, Paul did not hesitate to board a ship and head out to face the most severe storms at sea (2 Corinthians 11:25).

He also faced raging crowds who were shouting for his death and picking up stones that they then used to try to put him to death. Stoning in those days was more than throwing a rock in the recipient’s general direction. When they left him, he was considered dead.

A person is hard-pressed to find a more heroic, strong-minded, death-defying hero than Paul; and yet the Bible tells us that Paul was reduced to tears on more than one occasion. Here is a “man’s man” who cried and yet who lost none of his manliness. Who was responsible for his tears and what was it that made Paul cry?



### Paul’s emotional involvement in the Church

Acts 20:17-31 describes the work Paul was doing in Ephesus and other cities. He had come to Asia and served with “many tears” (verse 19). Those tears were not for him—they were for the people he was serving. He was so deeply concerned about their well-being that he was intensely emotionally involved.

In verse 31 he speaks of the consistent warning he had given the Ephesian congregation. That warning described dangers the members of the Church would face. He wrote about “savage wolves” that would come in and not spare the flock or the Church (verse 29). Paul would have liked to be there with the Ephesians to fight off these attacks. The savage wolves were not animals as he had fought in the arena—they were humans pushed on by Satan to destroy the Church.

In Revelation 12:3 and 13, Satan is depicted as a “great, fiery red dragon” that persecutes the woman (the Church). Paul was right to be worried about the danger to the members of the Church.

Paul wrote about the functions within the Church, which is the body of Christ. He continued to strongly remind the brethren to be gentle and longsuffering and to strive for peace (Ephesians 4:2-3). He seems to indicate that there were great problems. When one writes to a group or a church and gives a message that includes “putting away lying” (verse 25), it seems clear that some must have been lying.

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Paul found a great deal to remind and warn the Christians in Ephesus about. He detailed the kind of sins that would keep them out of the Kingdom of God. John would be inspired to write that liars would not inherit the Kingdom (Revelation 21:8), and Paul would have understood and known this. His concern was for the well-being of the members. He had his own list of barriers to the Kingdom of God in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10. He knew the background of those he served and worried about them slipping back to the darkness from where they came.

Those responsible for Paul's tears, then, were the converted members of the congregations he served. As time passed, he began to feel like a father to them, and a genuine love and concern grew towards these brethren. Paul writes about his heartfelt bond as he addresses the members of the church in Galatia as "my little children" (Galatians 4:19). He went on to say he would like to be with them and change the tone of his letter, which revealed his worries about them.

Paul is not the only apostle who felt so strongly about the people he served. In 1 John 2 we find several references to Church members whom John addressed as his "children."

### Tears are not unmanly

Sometimes when a man is at a point of frustration or a point where he does not know what the next step should be he becomes very sad. When the potential is recognized and the good things documented, and yet people discard them like something of little or no value, Paul and others like him are reduced to tears. Children who reject every good gift that is offered also reduce parents—who see the potential of their children and want only good for them—to tears.

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*Those responsible  
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Paul had learned the hard way that God's way is the only way and God's promises have no equal or parallel. He suffered physical loss and abuse in order to preach the word of truth and hope to others. He spent his years instilling the hope for the Kingdom of God and eternal life in all people, Jew and gentile alike. Sometimes Paul must have felt that his work was for nothing.

Paul explained to the Corinthians that he wrote with many tears that they would know the genuine love he had for them (2 Corinthians 2:1-4). His intention was not to make them grieve. He was looking for spiritual growth in them, and thus was suffering the deepest inner grief and anguish over his inability to come to them and help solve the ongoing problems that they did not seem to be addressing. He would rather have rejoiced in the spiritual growth that should have been present, but he found things that caused only sorrow.



There are other reasons why Paul may have been reduced to tears. Sometimes a person has an emotional side to him or her that is easily touched. Since God is Almighty and does not allow evil to go unpunished, His servants know that those who oppose God will have a terrible price to pay.

Paul loved the Philippian church, but even in this "favorite" church of his he found things to be deeply concerned about. Philippians 3:18-19 shows that even in Philippi there were brethren who were enemies of the Church. He begs them to stand fast in the Lord (Philippians 4:1-3).

Paul had seen many things in his life. He was fiery and had a zeal that burned strongly within him. That zeal had driven Paul to persecute the Church when he was Saul the Pharisee. His views changed, but his zeal was always present. It allowed him to be in labors more abundant than all of those who were causing trouble (2 Corinthians 11:23).

Those who made Paul cry were those whom he loved and for whom he had given up everything. He feared that they might be “disqualified” (1 Corinthians 9:27). He knew that, once the blood of Jesus had been shed for a person, that person had to go forward. His eternal life would be at stake if he or she failed (Hebrews 6:4-6). Paul was not able to make decisions for them, and he was not always able to be there. He was forced to stand by and watch how they responded.

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We read the story of Jesus who also wept as He approached Jerusalem (Luke 19:41-44). He wept because He knew that they had rejected Him and He could foresee the warfare and devastation that was to come to the city with all the accompanying pain and suffering that was not necessary.

Those are the reasons the strongest men weep. It is not for themselves, and it is not caused by suffering or weakness. It is for others that these men weep. Paul wept for the sake of those he loved and who loved him. So must we all.

### **Recommended reading**

To learn more about the early Church and the hardships it faced, please request our free booklet [\*The Church Jesus Built.\*](#)

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## “Please, Lord, Save Me From Your Followers”

By Lorelei Nettles

*What kind of bumper sticker would you inspire?*



**A**S I WAS CARRYING MY CLOTHES from a Laundromat some years ago, I saw a few bumper stickers on the car next to mine.

I love to read bumper stickers. They are a window into the mind of the owner of the vehicle. Whether they are expressing humor, travel, love, anger or hate, they tell a little story about what that particular person is like or what he or she has experienced.

One of the bumper stickers on this particular car intrigued me. It said, “Please, Lord, save me from Your followers!” That’s quite a statement to have plastered across your bumper. It made me wonder about the owner of the car and what might have happened to bring on these feelings. Did this person not believe in God? Or worse yet, had the person turned away from God?

My first emotion was sadness and then pity. I wanted to tear the sticker off and replace it with something pleasant and uplifting. I wanted to reach out and touch the person so he or she wouldn’t feel such anger. Of course, that idea was ridiculous, as it seemed to me, that this person would probably never accept such a message. Yet it seemed that this person had already been influenced by what others had said or done. Obviously, he or she had felt threatened or offended by those whose bumper stickers might have read, “Follow the Lord.”

### **Driving people into hiding**

I remember once when a new church moved into my neighborhood. A few of the members came by my home to drop off a welcome message card with an invitation to attend their church and a hope that I would be saved. This was a nice gesture and I thought at the time that it was a pleasant way to introduce their church. Unfortunately, it didn’t stop there.



A new person or group of people from this same church would come to my door every other week! They would tell me they were trying to save me and that I should attend their church. While I appreciated how they felt, I began to get irritated at their continuing interruptions into my life and their inability to hear my words. I told them over and over again; I would not be attending their church because I had my own affiliation and beliefs.

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*My neighbors told me that they hid in their homes and shut off the lights when they saw these churchgoers coming.*

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I knew that they felt they were doing good and meant well, but at what cost?

My neighbors told me that they hid in their homes and shut off the lights when they saw these churchgoers coming, afraid to deal with more of their questions and their pressure to convert them and make them attend their church.

Is this what the proselytizers wanted, to drive people into hiding in their own homes? Not likely, but they are the people who first came to my mind when I read that bumper sticker. Certainly, this is not the only kind of action that can intimidate, but it's one example. Could it be that a similar thing happened to the owner of that car?

Then I asked myself if I was ever guilty of the same kind of offense. Did that bumper sticker apply to me in any way? Was I turning people from God instead of leading them toward Him? While I may not knock on doors or stand on the corner with flyers to try to save those around me, my conduct and words may insult, scare or pressure others.

So I wondered, what kind of bumper sticker would I inspire? What might it say about me? Would it say something uplifting? Would it make others smile, cringe, hate or weep? It really made me stop and think.

Sometimes, we can offend just by pushing our opinions on others. We can show ourselves in a way that may seem hypocritical or we can simply offend by being showy with our beliefs.

### **On the other hand...**

Have you ever met people who inspired you to do wonderful things? Are there people you want to emulate because they are full of joy and happiness? Have you come across people who awe you with their generosity and kindness or who are so insightful you want to gobble up all the wisdom they carry within them?

There have been people like that in my life. They are the people who I believe would inspire uplifting bumper stickers because of their lifestyles, works and words. I long to be like them, to know what they know and to have the joy they carry with them every day. They don't cause me to run inside and shut off my lights. On the contrary, I want them around—I welcome them in with open arms.



Let me tell you about one of those people. Her name is Loraine. She is an older woman who used to be my neighbor. We met informally when she offered me the use of her clothesline. That kind gesture started a friendship between us that continued to grow and still remains to this day, though only through letters now.

I would often go to her home just to visit or for the occasional dinner. Whenever I came by, I would find her studying her Bible or making up something terrific in her kitchen for one function or another. When she wasn't working at her full-time job, she was at church, a Bible study, helping some of the other older women from her church. (Mind you, she was then in her 70s herself and is now in her 90s.) She was often out driving someone to and fro, working on a fund-raiser or spending time with her grandchildren.

Loraine was and is an inspiration to me. She was always on the go, always there to lend a helping hand or just to talk. If she couldn't do it for you, she would recommend someone who could. She never pushed her beliefs on me or anyone else, but was willing to answer questions when asked.

She just went about her business and allowed others to observe. She was just plain good; and just by being around her, I was made better. She didn't have to push me into spending time with her, I wanted to. I wanted to find the joy, love and diligence that just seemed to come naturally to her. She was uplifting without even trying to be.

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*I wanted to find the joy, love and diligence that just seemed to come naturally to her.*

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We know God calls us to Him and no one can come to Him otherwise (1 Corinthians 1:26; Ephesians 1:18); but we, by our actions and words, can easily influence someone in a way that may cause a rejecting of that calling. Or we can make a person feel their calling more strongly.

“Please, Lord, save me from Your followers”? No one would feel the need to be “saved” from Loraine. In fact, if Loraine had lived next to the owner of that bumper sticker, the message might have eventually come off. Maybe having a few more people like her around could even wipe out the memory of that person's bad experiences so far. That is, as long as other “followers” didn't continue to insult, scare or offend.

So, think about it. How do you influence people? What kind of bumper sticker would you inspire?

### **Recommended reading**

Check out this free booklet: [Making Life Work](#).

## Making Prayer a Priority

By Joy Porter

*Being too busy is one of many barriers that can trip up our prayer life. What can we do to better take advantage of the priceless privilege of communicating with our Creator?*



**A**S I BEGIN TO PRAY, I let out a sigh. It feels good, I think. I try to remember the last time I prayed.

Yesterday? No, I was busy getting the house ready for company. The day before? No, we were rushing around trying to get house projects done. Finally, I come to the conclusion that it has been four days since I've gotten to my quiet time with God. Four days!

How did this happen? Well, you've been really busy, I think to myself. But wait a minute—too busy to pray? What is going on?

### Too busy

My parents set a wonderful example of daily prayer and Bible study. It has always been something that I knew I should be doing. But through high school and college, I never got into the habit. I was always "too busy." Deep down I always knew I needed to improve in this area!

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*My parents set a wonderful example for me of daily prayer and Bible study.*

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When I married, I thought things would improve because I would have my husband there guiding me. But the truth is, your spiritual life remains your responsibility even after marriage.

After the birth of our child, I began to realize that soon my actions would be my child's textbook on how to love God, and I didn't think I was doing a very good job.

I have always loved God and wanted to please Him, but my devotion has always been in “spurts,” with periods where I would stay connected to God and periods where I would not do very well at all.

### All or nothing

One thing that I have realized is that I am an “all or nothing” kind of person. I realized this was happening in my prayer life too. I would pray consistently for a while, but when I got off track, I would feel ashamed and embarrassed. I think I didn’t want to apologize to God! (This was illogical because He already knew exactly what was going on.) So instead of praying again as soon as possible, I would just avoid God and avoid prayer for long periods of time, all the while feeling more and more guilty!



Would that I had realized that God was never waiting to “punish” me for not praying. He just wanted a relationship with me. If I missed a day of talking to Him, it didn’t mean He would never want me again. A conscious realization of what I was doing has helped me immensely to overcome this barrier in my prayer life.

### The only way to bear fruit

Jesus says, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; *apart from me you can do nothing*” John 15:5 (New International Version, emphasis added throughout).

Jesus tells us to remain in Him. What does this mean? It reminds me of how it felt when I first met my husband. He was always on my mind, and we were in constant communication. Even though we lived several states away from one another, it was as if he was with me throughout the day because my mind seemed to dwell on him! We remained in each other’s hearts even though we were physically separated.

To remain in Christ and have Him remain in us, we must also stay in constant communication with Him. This is accomplished through regular prayer and Bible study along with meditation and fasting.

In the second part of the verse, Jesus says that when we remain in Him, we will bear fruit; but if not, we can do nothing. For a task-driven person such as me, that was a wake-up call. I realized that even though I could be checking things off on my list faster if I skipped prayer and Bible study, the truth was I wasn’t really accomplishing anything worthwhile. I wasn’t bearing fruit and all the results of my hard work seemed hollow.

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The Bible says that we are to put God first in our lives, and when we do so He will give us everything we need (Matthew 6:33). Putting God first includes making our commitment to spend time with God a top priority even during busy and difficult times in our lives. It is a step of faith to take an hour to pray and study your Bible when you have 24 hours of work to accomplish in 12

hours! But the amazing thing is that when you do it, things in your life start to work together. Your relationship with God will outlast your daily to-do list.

## My prayer plan

After I began to understand these concepts, I realized that a daily prayer time was a necessity for me. I had to develop a specific prayer plan that was tailored for my personality.

The most vital key is asking God for help in our prayer lives. If you admit that you have a problem and show God through determined effort that you are willing to strive to improve, the results can be amazing. Making physical changes to your prayer atmosphere can also make a difference.

It's important to evaluate your prayer life to see what areas need improvement and then make necessary changes. I knew that praying silently in my bedroom led to nothing but daydreaming and sleepiness for me. While it is the quintessential picture of prayer to see one kneeling by the bed, it just didn't work for me. So I took my prayer time to the kitchen table (with its hard wooden chairs!) during part of the day when I could be alone.

I also began to journal my prayers, forcing myself to be specific with my thoughts and feelings instead of making generalizations. In the past, I would pray for a bit, then start daydreaming, and completely lose my focus. Simply praying out loud may be the trick that keeps a person's prayers focused.

I also put together a "prayer basket." Just seeing it is a physical reminder of my commitment to prayer. In it I keep my Bible, my prayer notebook, church materials I have been studying, as well as cards and stamps if I need to send someone a card. I also keep a second notebook in which I list the people I am praying for. Sometimes we have to be hard on ourselves in order to make the necessary changes. Trust me, this is an area that's worth it!



## An appointment with God

Once you have developed a specific prayer plan, the hard part begins—sticking to it! We need to pray and study the Bible every single day. We need to make a commitment to put God first in our lives each and every day. They say that a new habit takes six weeks to solidify, but sometimes I think it can take longer! Think of ways you can stay on track with your prayer time.

For me, it helps to think of my prayer time as an actual appointment with God. This includes having a specific time and place to meet Him. How hard this can be sometimes, when there are a million things to do! After several weeks, I actually began to look forward to my prayer time, and it was not so hard to stop thinking about my to-do list.

I have found that disruptions to my normal daily schedule throw me off track. This can include having houseguests, going on a trip or having a family illness. Writing out a plan of when and where I am going to pray in advance of situations like these helps me.

## Embarrassed to talk about prayer?

One final thought about prayer is that we don't need to be embarrassed about prayer. God tells us to do our prayer in a solitary manner and to not try to "show off" by praying. For a long time, I was too embarrassed to tell my husband that I wanted to go and pray. Sometimes I wouldn't pray at all, because of this embarrassed feeling.

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*Sometimes we must be persistent in order to make the necessary changes. It is certainly worth it!*

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While we do need to guard against trying to look "superspiritual," we also need to realize that God comes first. Husbands and wives will need to discuss making time for prayer in a frank and honest manner, as will roommates or anyone who lives together in close quarters with other people. This can be hard, but it is necessary. Ask God for the strength and the right words to express your needs without seeming like you are trying to show off.

As I have worked on this area of my life, the results have been tremendous. I thank God for helping me to get this far, and I realize that without the gift of His Holy Spirit I would probably never even want to try and certainly would have never been able to progress to this point.

## No excuse

Now is the time to stop making excuses. I personally am quite acquainted with all of those excuses. Sometimes we may even think that God understands when we cut corners in our prayer and Bible study because of all of the pressures and stresses that make our lives busier than they should be. The truth is, God doesn't understand when we don't put Him first. While He knows how hard our circumstances are, He also has unlimited power to help us through them.

If you commit to a daily prayer time with God, He will help you to get everything else done. Believe it and make a commitment to daily prayer today!

## Recommended reading

Check out our free booklet [\*You Can Have Living Faith.\*](#)