

# Virtual Christian Magazine

Hope And Encouragement  
For The Real World

---

*"For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."—Mark 8:36-38*

---

Volume 12 Number 10

December 2010

## Mary: A Woman of Faith

By Robert Berendt

Page 3



*There are many remarkable events that have taken place in the history of mankind—and many remarkable people involved in these events.*

## How to Make Peace With Your Mother-in-Law

By Becky Sweat

Page 6



*Your mother-in-law may mean well, but sometimes it is difficult to get past what feels like an invasion into your marriage. So what can you do?*

## The Bowl of Soup

By Kevin Ford

Page 11



*Our assumptions can often cause us embarrassment, inflict hurt or get us into trouble. It is good advice to always look before we leap.*

## “Wrong” Place, Right Time

By Katherine Rowland

Page 14

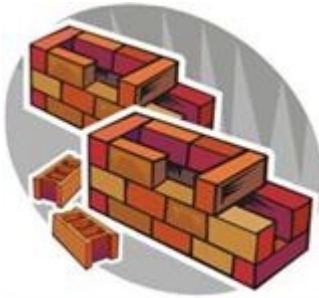


*At certain times in our lives, circumstances seem to be turning against us even when we feel we are doing the right thing. God has a plan for every one of us. God places us where and when He wants. Sometimes, our wrong turn leads us to an opportunity to help another person.*

## The Fortress

By John Elliott

Page 16



*We often build up walls that cannot be penetrated. Unfortunately, they can also lock us away in our own seclusion, blinding us from what we really need to see.*

## Letters to the Editor

Page 18

### **Virtual Christian Magazine Staff**

**Lorelei Nettles** - Managing Editor  
**Lorelei Nettles** - Issue Editor  
**Mike Bennett** - Editor  
**Angela Cardoz** - Editor  
**Gayle Hoefker** - Editor  
**Jada Howell** - Editor

**Patrick Kansa** - Editor  
**David Meidinger** - Editor  
**Suzanne Morgan** - Editor  
**Amy Stephens** - Editor  
**Debbie Werner** - Editor  
**Eric Evans** - Reviewer

**Don Henson** - Reviewer  
**Don Hooser** - Reviewer  
**William Miller** - Reviewer  
**Gerald Seelig** - Reviewer  
**Jeremy Lallier** - Proofreader  
**Chris Rowland** - Web Design

[Copyright 2010 United Church of God, an International Association](#)

---

## Mary: A Woman of Faith

By Robert Berendt

*There are many remarkable events that have taken place in the history of mankind—and many remarkable people involved in these events.*



**P**ERHAPS THE GREATEST EVENTS in human history were the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. One of the most remarkable people involved was a young woman named Mary. God chose this young woman to bear His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. He chose carefully and wisely. Mary had the qualities of character and genetic background that God was seeking. She had the highest standards of personal behavior and of devotion to God and His way of life.

Mary was most likely a teenager when she was engaged to Joseph. Both of them were descendants of King David, though they were not considered among the aristocrats of Israel. Mary was related to Elizabeth, the wife of the priest, Zacharias. Very little is said about Mary's childhood or outlook on religion. She appears suddenly in scripture as the one God selected to bear and give birth to Jesus Christ.

Luke 1:26-28 records that Mary was a virgin who was betrothed to Joseph. Unlike our custom of an engagement, a betrothal was a legally binding commitment to marriage, confirmed by an oath. The angel addressed Mary as "highly favored" and said, "the Lord is with you." The angel went on to explain what was to happen—Mary knowing that if she was found to be pregnant before marriage, she could be put to death. Her answer is an inspiration to us all. Mary

---

*She did not just remain silent as though she had no control. Mary said, "Yes!"*

---

said, “Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38). She did not just remain silent as though she had no control. Mary said, “Yes!”

Her answer reflected unconditional faith towards God. It reflected the complete trust that God requires of those He chooses. It was similar to the trust Abraham showed when God tested him with the requested sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22:2). God did not reveal all that He had in mind for Abraham, and He did not reveal the future in all its detail to Mary. At the presentation of Jesus before God, a righteous old man was inspired to tell Mary that Jesus had a great destiny to fulfill and that a sword would pierce her soul (Luke 2:25, 35). What could all of this mean? Mary and Joseph “marveled” (Luke 2:33) at these words. Mary treasured each event and word in her heart (Luke 2:51), but did not question what God had planned.

### Trusting in God

Mary likely did not expect that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem, or that she and Joseph would have to flee to Egypt. She experienced some wonderful things during the pregnancy and birth, but the true purpose of Jesus’ life and the events that would change the course of the world were hidden from her. She did not expect to be standing at the foot of the cross and watching her Son die a horrible death. It was only later that she, too, knew Jesus’ true identity and purpose. God did not have to ask Mary for her continued obedience; He knew she was committed and the answer would always be, “Yes.”

Mary and Joseph continued on with their lives. Joseph was the father of their other children. God made all the necessary arrangements for the birth of Jesus and the flight to Egypt. He brought the Magi to visit and bring the gifts for Joseph and Mary. Matthew 2:13-15 are revealing verses. Here we see that Joseph too was obedient to God and aware that something from God was happening in his life. God sent an angel during a vision or dream Joseph had—and gave the instructions to go to Egypt. Mary was part of the complete plan and package. Their attitude of obedience to God was impressive. There was no jealousy when God gave the visions to Joseph. Mary accepted that and had no doubts. Matthew 2:19-23 tells of God once again giving Joseph instructions as to when to leave Egypt and where to live in Judea. Nazareth was in God’s plan, not theirs.



### Following Christ

John 2:1-11 helps us understand the relationship between Jesus and Mary. It is obvious that Jesus loved His mother, and she respected Him. When there was a shortage of wine and Mary asked her son to do something about it, Jesus replied, “My hour has not yet come” (John 2:4). Mary knew Jesus was more than just a little unusual, but God did not show Mary every detail of the future. By now, Mary too had been strengthened in her continued trust in God. Now she realized that the scriptures were being fulfilled by Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem and their life in Nazareth. As time passed and Jesus became more visible in Judea, Mary remained involved.

John 2:12-13 show that Mary and Jesus' brothers traveled from Cana to Capernaum with Jesus and the disciples. There was nothing unusual about this. Luke 8:1 reveals that Jesus traveled from town to town. When we see Mary and Jesus' brothers coming to see Him, we need to realize that at a time when communication was long and slow compared to today, it would have been difficult to find out where Jesus was unless He kept in constant contact with His family. (Joseph is not mentioned at all—it is possible that he had died by this time.) When Jesus was informed that his mother and brothers were outside, He continued to do the work of God. Jesus said, "My mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put in into practice" (Luke 8:21, New International Version). That was not a criticism of Mary or of His brothers. Mary was one who showed, through all of her actions, that she served God gladly and willingly.

---

*Mary accepted that part of the plan just as she had accepted her role from that moment when God first reached out to her.*

---

John 19:25 begins to record the final events of Jesus' life. This was the moment that Mary had known was coming—when the metaphorical sword would pierce her, as Simeon had prophesied (Luke 2:35). The fact that Mary was there attests to her frequent presence at all Jesus did. She was devoted to God and growing in the comprehension of the greatness of the moment. Indeed, only a parent can feel the pain Mary felt for her son in those final hours. This too was an event for which she was not prepared. As all unfolded, it would become clear that this too was in the plan of God. Mary accepted that part of the plan just as she had accepted her role from that moment when God first reached out to her. The words of Jesus reflect care and tenderness.

All the mysterious sayings she had treasured in her memory over the years were becoming clearer. There can be little doubt that Jesus' mother was involved in the burial of her Son, and that she was among the women who came to the tomb early that morning long ago (Luke 24:9-10). John was the disciple who was destined to live the longest, and the one to whom Jesus entrusted His mother (John 19:26-27). God looked after every facet and part of the life of His chosen and highly favored vessel, Mary. Her attitude was, "Thy will be done." Although Mary then fades from the pages of the Bible, she will not fade from God's favor—or the future He will give to her.

### Further reading

To learn more about the life of Jesus, read our booklet, [Jesus Christ: The Real Story](#).

---

## How to Make Peace With Your Mother-in-Law

By Becky Sweat

*Your mother-in-law may mean well, but sometimes it is difficult to get past what feels like an invasion into your marriage. So what can you do?*



**W**HILE OUT TO LUNCH ONE DAY at a restaurant, I couldn't help overhearing the conversation at the table next to me. There sat three women, each complaining about her mother-in-law. "My husband's mother started criticizing me at my wedding 20 years ago and she never stopped," one woman said. "My mother-in-law thinks my husband is her personal handy man—she'll call at least once a week, insisting he come over right away and do this and that," said another. "My mother-in-law stops by all the time, expecting us to drop what we're doing and entertain her," said the third woman.

How sad, I thought to myself, that these women had such difficult times with their mothers-in-law. Yet I knew they weren't alone in how they feel. Getting along with your in-laws can be one of the biggest challenges of married life. According to researchers at Utah State University, nearly 60 percent of all marriages suffer from tension with mothers-in-law, normally between the wife and her husband's mother. Somehow, the stereotype of the nagging, meddling mother-in-law can seem like a normal part of life.



Why so many misunderstandings? Dr. Peter A. Wish, former nationally-syndicated columnist of The Family Experience, says, "Often it's a matter of mothers not wanting to let go. The mother may not recognize her son as being an adult, and so she continues to treat him like a kid, even after he gets married and has a family of his own."

Clashes with your mother-in-law may actually intensify as you get older. "A 20-year-old woman may not be very confident

about her own opinions, and if she has a mother-in-law who's been through 40 years of life and she says things ought to be done this way, it's harder to challenge her," says Dr. Everett Worthington, a professor at Virginia Commonwealth University with a special interest in the role of in-laws. "But by the time a woman is middle-aged, she's normally a well-established adult who has her own strong opinions and feels more confident to confront her mother-in-law head-on."

Obviously, in-law clashes are far from ideal. When you and your mother-in-law are on bad terms, the tension takes a big toll. Your spouse and children may feel they are caught in the middle and resent being forced to choose sides. Family get-togethers are strained. Your physical health and spiritual life may suffer.

"Mother-in-law battles can poison family life," says Dr. Judith Sills, a family counselor in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, with a special interest in the role of in-laws. "It may start out as a feud between you and your mother-in-law, but before you know it, your husband, kids, father-in-law and other relatives are also drawn into the conflict."

---

*...nearly 60 percent of all marriages suffer from tension with mothers-in-law, normally between the wife and her husband's mother.*

---

Although it is not necessary to become best friends with your mother-in-law, it is important to be on good terms with her. Romans 12:18 tells us we should live peaceably with everyone, and in-laws are no exception. What follows are five of the most common complaints about mothers-in-law and suggestions for making peace.

### **She's always telling me what to do**

Ramona addresses a common problem when she says; "I can't do anything without my mother-in-law second-guessing me. She sees me wearing a white dress and tells me I would look thinner in black. I put a jacket on my child and she insists he needs his winter coat. She notices me using butter in my cooking and gives me a lecture about cholesterol. I'm 37 and she treats me like I'm a child."

How can you discourage unwanted suggestions without having a big confrontation? One woman I know prepares ahead of time for encounters with her mother-in-law. Prior to an anticipated visit, she mentally reviews the most recent comments that rubbed her the wrong way and thinks about what would be proper responses. "Anticipating the types of remarks my mother-in-law might make and how I could respond shows me where I'm being oversensitive and helps me not overreact when she does say something offensive," she says.

Even if you don't appreciate her choice of words, you can still thank your mother-in-law for her concern. Reassure her that you will ask for her input if and when you feel you are at a dead end. You might say, "Mom, I love you and I appreciate your concern. But the best way for us to be close is for you to let me do things my own way." Make it clear that you still want her to be involved with your family, but it has to be on your terms.

## She keeps meddling

Phil's mother-in-law went beyond giving unsolicited advice and actually interfered. "Our two daughters spent the weekend with my mother-in-law while my wife and I went out of town," he explains. "Grandma has the tendency to spoil our kids, and they already have plenty of toys, so we specifically told her to not buy anything for them that weekend. When we got back Sunday night, the first thing our daughters did was show us the new dollhouse Grandma bought them. I was so mad I could barely speak."

---

*Even if you don't appreciate her choice of words, you can still thank your mother-in-law for her concern.*

---

The best way to handle this type of conflict is to communicate. "You and your spouse should talk to your mother-in-law, as a couple, and make it clear that this is a concern you both have," Dr. Wish says. Set aside a time and place to talk when both you and your mother-in-law feel relaxed and stress-free. Talk in a neutral setting: at the park, in a restaurant, during a walk around the neighborhood—while you're doing something enjoyable.

Fight the urge to run down a list of your mother-in-law's annoying traits. Instead, start with something positive, such as, "Mom, I know you mean well, but it really bothered me when you ignored my instructions for the children." Go into the talk with an open mind and give your mother-in-law a chance to explain herself. You may be surprised at her reasons for doing what she did.

## She wants constant companionship

One of the most delicate mother-in-law situations is when she wants more companionship from you than you are willing or able to give. "I adore my mother-in-law," says Amy. "The problem is, she's retired and lives alone and has lots of free time on her hands. I've got two teens, a husband and house to take care of, as well as a full-time job. A few minutes after I'm home from work, she'll stop over, wanting to sit and chat. But I need to get dinner going, the kids want attention, and I haven't seen my husband all day. If I tell her I don't have time to talk, I feel so guilty."

If your mother-in-law is making too many demands on your time, be honest with her about how you feel. Tell her what you'd like to see in the relationship, and try to establish the right level of involvement for both of you. How often should you get together? Do you want her to call once a week? How much privacy do you need? Can she stop over uninvited? Set clear boundaries you both can agree on.



Frame your words positively. Saying, "We enjoy being with you, however it's unsettling for us to have you just stop by without calling first," is better than announcing, "We don't like it when you come over uninvited." Tell her that you definitely want to spend time together, but that you need to be able to plan when and how often.

Your mother-in-law may be widowed or suffering from poor health and genuinely needs a lot of your time. Check out your other options. Are there other relatives who could do more to help?



Does your mother-in-law have friends she could be calling instead of you? Don't feel guilty if you can't fill all your mother-in-law's needs. Knowing your own limits is a key to giving sincerely.

### **She competes with me for my husband**

Irene sums up the feelings of many women when she says, "I feel like an outsider when I'm around my mother-in-law. Even though my husband and I have been married 15 years, she still treats me as though I'm a threat, someone who wants to take her son away from her. I'm not usually a competitive person, but when I'm with my mother-in-law, I find myself comparing, keeping score and being unsure of my status in the family."

*If your mother-in-law is making too many demands on your time, be honest with her about how you feel.*

Unfortunately, there's a built-in sense of rivalry in every daughter-in-law/mother-in-law relationship. "A woman and her mother-in-law are in a triangular relationship with the same man," says Dr. Sills. "The daughter-in-law's gain is frequently the mother-in-law's loss. And when another woman has caused you a loss, no matter how intellectually understandable it is, it's hard to take."

An effective strategy for dealing with competitive feelings is to realize that part of your mother-in-law's possessiveness is a natural aspect of being a mother. "Your mother-in-law may never stop feeling it's her job to be a caretaker to your husband," Dr. Sills says. "Asking her to give up control completely and let you be the only influential woman in your husband's life is asking the impossible."

Stop comparing yourself to your mother-in-law. "A common feeling among wives is that she's not measuring up to her husband's mother," says Dr. Wish. "Remind yourself that you are not your mother-in-law. You don't have to live your life according to her terms. The earlier you establish this as a framework for your marriage, the happier you will be."

### **She won't admit her mistakes**

You may have tried talking to your mother-in-law about something she's done to hurt you and be getting nowhere. That is the situation for Brent. "My mother-in-law is totally oblivious to her faults," he says. "When I try to tell her about something she did that upset us, she either acts like she doesn't know what I'm talking about or spends an hour defending her actions. But until she starts apologizing, I don't care to be around her."

Even if your mother-in-law can't see or refuses to acknowledge how she's hurt you, you still can (and should) forgive her. Forgiveness is not a matter of you insisting your mother-in-law say she's sorry, but of you letting go of the anger you have for her. Until you bury the past, you will not be able to move on to the future.

The first step to forgiveness is to try to understand your mother-in-law's perspective. "You may come to see that she wasn't being as malicious as you once thought," Dr. Worthington says. "The second step is to realize that you may not have done the same thing to her but you've probably hurt other people. And just as you would like to have forgiveness for the times you've hurt others, you should be willing to forgive your mother-in-law."

---

*Remind yourself that having a good relationship with your mother-in-law is part of having a strong family.*

---

Although it is never too late to make peace, it will take time to reconcile with your mother-in-law. "You have to rebuild trust, and you don't just do that by saying 'I forgive you,' even if you mean it 100 percent," Dr. Worthington says. "Whereas forgiveness is granted, trust is earned, and that doesn't happen overnight."

While progress may be slow, a healthy relationship can be achieved with your mother-in-law. The more you understand what motivates her when she does things that get on your nerves, the less likely you will be to overreact or turn every little incident into a major one. Remind yourself that having a good relationship with your mother-in-law is part of having a strong family. It may take a lot of patience, love and commitment on your part to have a peaceful relationship with your mother-in-law, but it's definitely worth the effort.

### **Further reading**

For more information, request or download our free booklet [\*Marriage & Family: The Missing Dimension\*](#).

---

## The Bowl of Soup

By Kevin Ford

*Our assumptions can often cause us embarrassment, inflict hurt or get us into trouble. It is good advice to always look before we leap.*



**M**ANY YEARS AGO, in Geneva, Switzerland, a middle-aged businesswoman walked into a self-service restaurant at noon for a bowl of soup. She obtained her soup, found a table by a window and then realized that she had forgotten to get a spoon. She walked back to the cash desk, found a spoon, and returned to her table, only to find (to her amazement) that in the meantime, a young black man had seated himself on the other side of her table, helping himself to her bowl of soup.

“What a nerve!” she thought. But he didn’t seem a rough sort, and she didn’t want to be unpleasant, so she sat down, moved the bowl back to her side, and said pointedly “Do you mind?” He responded with a smile, but didn’t seem able to understand French, and when she tried to begin eating her soup, he pulled back the bowl to the middle of the table, and began to help himself to it. But he did it so gently and politely that she couldn’t bring herself to make a public scene. A kind of silent complicity was established as they both consumed the soup. When the soup was finished, he got up and motioned to the woman to stay there while he went to the counter. He returned with a large helping of French fries, which he placed in the middle of the table, indicating that she should help herself. When these too had been shared, he got up again, gave her another smile and said, “Thank you,” and left.

The woman reflected for a while on this extraordinary encounter, and she too prepared to leave. It was then that she realized that her handbag, which she had put over the back of her chair, was gone. With a sick feeling, she ran to the counter to see if someone could chase after the young man, receiving only shrugs in response. She remembered the man’s smile and the “Thank you” when he left and recalled that immigrants were said to be responsible for a high percentage of crimes, and then...she saw her handbag. It was over the back of the chair of a nearby table, and on that table was a bowl of soup—an untouched bowl of soup. Only then did she realize that it wasn’t the



young man who had helped himself to her soup. It was she, having gone back to the wrong table, who had helped herself to *his* soup—not to mention his fries. And now she remembered, with a very different emotion, how when he left, he had smiled and said “Thank you!”

## The danger of misjudging

The tone of someone’s voice may indicate to us that they are annoyed with us, or bored, or being sarcastic. Someone does a certain thing, and we interpret a motive that may not exist. It can be humorous, embarrassing, unfortunate, or tragic, leaving in its wake bad feelings and broken relationships. Jesus Christ made an important statement on judging in John 7:24. He instructed, “Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.” Notice that He doesn’t tell us we are never to judge. Judging is a part of life—a necessary part—but He also warns that appearances can often be deceptive, and we must be on our guard against judging one another.

---

*“Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.”*

---

So, how can we learn to judge in a godly way? One way we might not have considered is to take some tips from the professionals—those who judge for a living. There are many kinds of judges: high court judges, judges at sporting events, judges at artistic competitions, and so on. Of course, only long experience can equip a judge to do his work at the highest level. A referee in a Stanley Cup or World Cup final has probably officiated in hundreds of previous games, and watched or played in hundreds of others, and that experience is what enables him to make good decisions. As we mature as Christians, our ability to judge should improve in the same way, but here are three principles exercised by high court judges that may help us in our own judgments.

### 1. Get the facts

A court’s function is to establish the facts—not guesses or assumptions or hearsay.

An “opinion” can be heard, but only if it is from someone considered an authority in the matter before the court. That is why most of the time in a trial is taken up with questioning witnesses, who in turn are cross-examined by the opposing lawyer.

The Book of Proverbs has some advice for us in this regard. It says, “He who answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame to him,” and, “The first one to plead his cause seems right, until his neighbor comes and examines him” (Proverbs 18:13, 17).

The lesson is clear: Make sure you have the facts before jumping to a conclusion, and get both sides of the story.

### 2. Ignore the trivial

If I steal your candy bar, that is technically theft, but no high court judge is going to hear the case. When a situation arises that we are tempted to judge, first consider if it is something that is appropriate for us to decide.

Jesus set an example for us when “one from the crowd said to Him, ‘Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.’ But He said to him, ‘Man, who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?’” (Luke 12:13-14).

Christ was more qualified than any other human being to decide this case, yet He flatly refused to hear it. Why? It was not appropriate for the Son of God to get involved in personal disputes, especially one as petty as whether or not someone acquired a little more money. Some of the situations that get us worked up are pretty trivial too, and sometimes they are simply none of our business. In these cases, it is better to ignore them and get on with our lives.

### 3. Give the benefit of the doubt

It is the defendant who is given the benefit of the doubt—not the prosecution. Have you ever heard of a court finding a defendant “probably guilty, despite the lack of evidence”? There are several references in the Law of Moses stating the same principle—that “by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established” (Deuteronomy 19:15). If there was only one witness, the case was considered unproven. The assumption of “not guilty” when conclusive proof to the contrary is missing is another wise principle to follow in our own judgments. You may think someone snubbed you, or gossiped about you, or did something to harm you, but do you know it for certain? If not, it’s better to let it pass and consider it as never having happened, because, folks, it is just possible that it did not actually happen.

The next time a situation arises that we feel we have to judge, let us remember these points. Do we have all the facts? Is it something important, or that really involves us? And if the situation is uncertain, are we giving the benefit of the doubt? *Remember that what you think you see may not be what you are looking at!* It may be a “bowl of soup” situation!

#### Further reading

For more articles of interest, request a free subscription to [The Good News Magazine](#).



## “Wrong” Place, Right Time

By Katherine Rowland

*At certain times in our lives, circumstances seem to be turning against us even when we feel we are doing the right thing. God has a plan for every one of us. God places us where and when He wants. Sometimes, our wrong turn leads us to an opportunity to help another person.*



**M**OST OF US DON'T SET OUT TO GET LOST. Sometimes, it seems, we're walking along, making good time, trying to choose wisely and do the right thing, and then *WHAM!* Suddenly, we're in the middle of nowhere, the map seems to be completely wrong, and the GPS coordinates state, "You're in the middle of a forest. Proceed to the nearest road."

It's so easy to feel frustrated when this occurs. "What happened?" we ask, sometimes of ourselves and sometimes of God. "We were doing the right things. Why is this happening?" We retrace our steps, and we still can't figure out what is going on.

Something similar happened to my husband and me during a recent trip to Skagway, Alaska. We decided to take a hiking trail leading up a mountainside to a lake. We grabbed a trail map and had plenty of time before dusk, so we set out confidently. The first stretch of trail was somewhat difficult and took much longer than we had anticipated.

Although it did eventually lead into a cooler, easier pathway through a wooded area, we decided that instead of taking a branch leading up to a falls and back, we would take a loop that should take us past the lake and then back down to town. Accordingly, when we came to a fork in the road, we looked for a sign to guide us, but there wasn't one. One sign plainly pointed to the falls path, but the other path was unmarked. Consulting the map, this seemed like the path we should take, so despite the lack of signage, we turned right.

We hadn't gone very far before we started to have slight doubts about this particular trail. Though it was broad and appeared well-traveled, it didn't seem maintained as well as the other trail had been. We were quickly becoming tired, hot, and a little exasperated. Shouldn't there be a lake somewhere around here? Were we even headed in the right direction?

We had just finished refolding the map for a third time when a young woman appeared on the trail in front of us. "If you're trying to get to town, you don't want to go this way," she said, sounding as frustrated as we felt. "There's a lovely view, but no trail." She fell into step with us as we walked a bit further on. "See?" she said, indicating the dead end of rocks and cliffs. "The trail just ends."

We decided to retrace our steps, and she told us she had spent the day at the lake and then been unsure how to get back to town. She had no map, so had asked a fellow hiker for directions. The other hiker told her which direction to take, but she had somehow lost her way, and had been walking now for some time, not sure where she was or how to get where she was going. "I was so glad to see you guys on the trail!" she said.

Now, she would have found her way eventually. If she had retraced her steps, as we did, then she would have gotten to town all right. But, the journey was much quicker with an idea of where we were and with company to reassure her. Our own frustration melted away as we walked and talked and found our way back to civilization. My husband turned to me and said, "Isn't it amazing how sometimes you end up in the wrong place so you can help someone find their way out?"

### Wrong Turn, Right Way

This statement of his made me think of the story of Joseph. In Genesis 39, we read about Joseph in Egypt, working as a slave in Potiphar's house. This certainly isn't where Jacob's favorite son would have imagined spending his days, but we see in verses 2-4 that, despite his poor circumstances, "The LORD was with Joseph and he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. When his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD gave him success in everything he did, Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned" (New International Version).

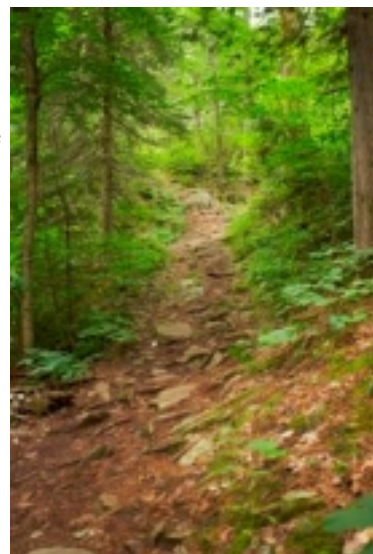
But within a few short verses, Joseph experienced another setback. Through no fault of his own, he was punished for a crime he didn't commit, and thrown into prison. It doesn't take much imagination to suppose during the long months following, Joseph must have wondered, "How did I end up here? I wasn't doing anything wrong. I did the right things! Why me?"

---

*"Isn't it amazing how sometimes you end up in the wrong place so you can help someone find their way out?"*

---

Now, if we continue to follow the rest of the story, we see even in prison, God was with Joseph and blessed him. We begin then to see God had a plan Joseph could never have imagined: from prison, he would rise directly to being the second in command of Egypt. Why? So that he could make plans to save the people of Egypt—and his own family—from starvation.



Sometimes, we end up in messes of our own making. But sometimes, we've tried so hard to do right, and still end up in an uncomfortable place. We must not think that just because we've gotten lost, God has lost track of us—He is very much aware of where we are and what is happening. And it just may be that He has something in mind for us to do. We were in the “wrong” place and helped a fellow traveler find her way out of the forest. Joseph was in the “wrong” place and saved a nation from starvation. Sometimes, our circumstances may not be as much about us as they are about those around us. Sometimes, we're in the “wrong” place so that we can show someone else the way out.

### Further reading

For more on the subject, read the article [“Profiles of Faith: Joseph...Faithfulness Brings Blessing.”](#)

---

## The Fortress

By John Elliott

*We often build up walls that cannot be penetrated. Unfortunately, they can also lock us away in our own seclusion, blinding us from what we really need to see.*



**I**MAGINE YOURSELF A MASTER MASON working tirelessly to build an important wall. The building of this wall has occupied much of your life. It has been very successful in protecting you, defending you from outside influences. In a literal sense, it has become your impenetrable fortress of defense. It is too tall to see over, too thick to penetrate and what is on the other side cannot be heard or seen.

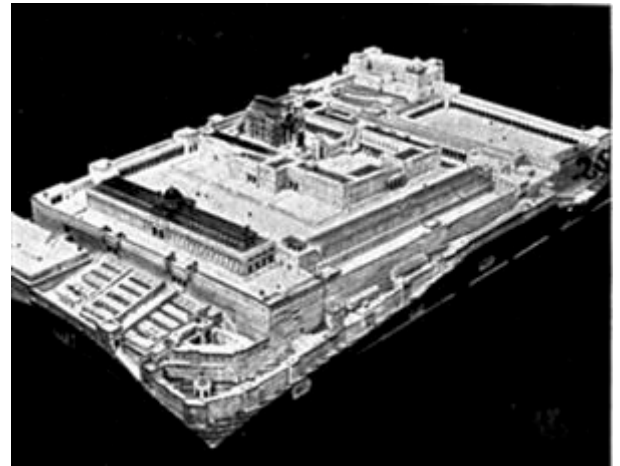
That wall isn't just a fantasy. It is a real barrier that every human spends much of his or her time erecting. Inside our wall, Jesus says that we are unable to see, hear or understand Him (Matthew 13:13).

A subtle “architect” provided humanity with the encouragement and the blueprint for our walls. Inside our personal fortress, we are safe from outside influence. Yet, the view of our situation from the light of day outside gives a very different perspective. We each unknowingly have created a little prison that cuts us off from reality and leaves us in the dark. Inside, we slave away at our work on the wall. It is what we do, and what we are. We are slaves of the wall and slaves to sin (Romans 6:16).



Our wall is constructed from our many sins. Each sin contributes its share, creating a separation between God and us, so that He will not hear or even see us. Isaiah 59:2 says, “But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.”

The Temple complex at Jerusalem stood as a visible example of the separations that our sins create. Humans tend to view the Temple as a place where Israel could approach God with sacrifices for their sin—yet it consisted of six separate layers of “walls” that effectively barred anyone approaching God while separating them from each other as well. The Apostle Paul referred to its second barrier as “the middle wall of partition between us” (Ephesians 2:14). The Temple can thus be viewed as a systematic representation of a human’s personal wall of sins, whether a foreigner, a gentile, an Israelite, a woman, a man, or a priest.

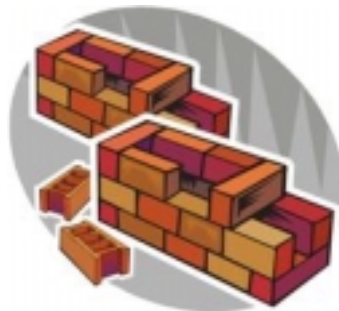


You may ask, “How can my wall come down?” The answer is through a process led by our Father and through His Son, Jesus Christ. The Holy Day called the Day of Atonement is a day that speaks to the breaking down of that wall of separation. It is a day that speaks to restoring and healing our relationships (Isaiah 58:12).

The process begins with a Savior who lovingly intervenes to destroy our wall, which separates us from God. “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation” (Ephesians 2:13-14).

*The process begins with a Savior who lovingly intervenes to destroy our wall, which separates us from God.*

“For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation” (Romans 5:10-11). Jesus set us an example of rejecting the architect of sin (John 8:44) and instead following God. Matthew 4:10 records Jesus saying, “Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.’” The process of reconciliation with God involves a personal fight against Satan’s influence. We are given the tools needed to combat Satan’s influence, but we must choose to use them (Ephesians 6:11-18).



Our reconciliation with God and man increases as we cease our old wall-building activities and pursue the harmonizing work of loving God and each other (Galatians 5:22-23). We then each become a very different kind of slave (Romans 6:16-18), one that now devotes him/herself to building a very different wall, as portrayed by Isaiah:

“I will also make your officers peace, and your magistrates righteousness... *you shall call your walls Salvation, and your gates*

*Praise.* The sun shall no longer be your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you; but the LORD will be to you an everlasting light, and your God your glory” (Isaiah 60:17-19).

This new wall is symbolized by the vision John saw of New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:10-14). It will effectively keep sin out and righteousness in, forever (Revelation 22:14-15).

Now is the time to pursue peace and harmony with God and neighbor. Our Source of help and inspiration is outside the wall that our carnal nature continually tries to build. Catch the vision and mission of the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). Ask Him to “bring down this wall” and help you to be about your new Father’s business.

### Further reading

For more information on how to bring down your wall, request or download the booklet [The Ten Commandments](#).

---

## Letters to the Editor

### [Easily Offended? Here’s How to Get Over It](#)



I really appreciated this article. It went straight to the heart of some personal struggles I’ve been having lately regarding being “touchy,” self-absorbed and quick to take offense. As I am well into the “mature” age category, you’d think I’d have overcome these tendencies by now, especially after over four decades in the church. But Satan knows our in-built weaknesses, and never stops aiming his darts at what he knows will press our buttons!

Your article was a very helpful supplement to other study I’ve been doing on this subject recently. I intend to print it out and keep it as a reference, because I know the battle is far from won.

— E. B. in Australia

### [Answered Prayer Through Opportunity](#)



I liked the article, thanks!

— T. Anderson

Some feedback messages are edited for space and/or clarity.