

# Virtual Christian Magazine

Hope And Encouragement  
For The Real World

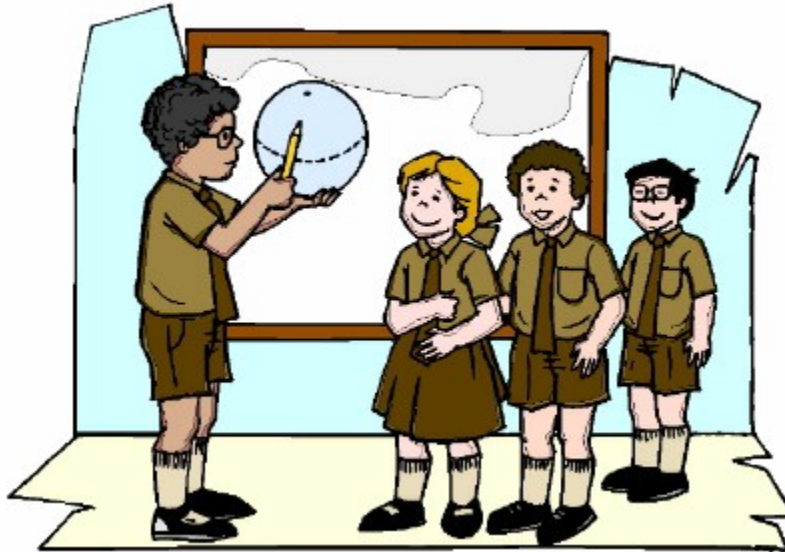
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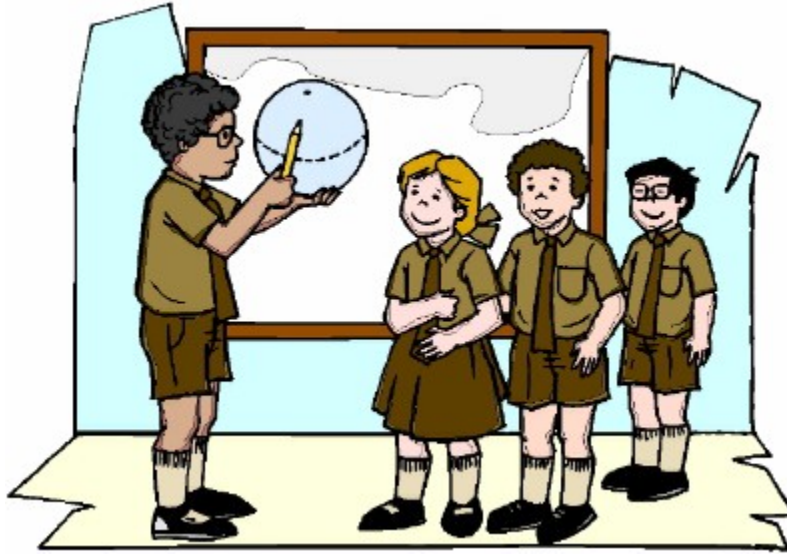
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## ...And Children Are From Pluto

By Mike Bennett

*If men are from Mars and women are from Venus, sometimes it seems children are from even farther out!*



**A** FEW YEARS BACK a popular book said men and women can't communicate very well because men are from Mars, and women are from Venus. It was an interesting concept that helped many people focus on the differences between men and women that do affect how we relate to one another. The image of aliens from different planets was a powerful one, if too stereotypical. Still, anything we can do to help us understand each other is good.

If men are from Mars and women are from Venus, sometimes it seems children are from Pluto--even harder to understand. The gross humor, the computerese, the strange music.

Sometimes kids seem too swayed by crass commercialism and materialism. (Toy makers seem to know how to speak their language and push their buttons--but they should be ashamed of themselves.) Other times young people seem to really see this world's problems and solutions more clearly than adults.

We can learn a lot from these creatures from Pluto. Jesus Christ took time for children, and even said we are to be like them. They are a gift, on loan from God. They really are out of this world!

But to learn from them, we must start by learning to communicate with them--learning their language.

The company I work for publishes information about languages and technology. My shelves at work are filled with the latest software to help people learn Spanish, Japanese, Swedish, Vietnamese--but nothing on Pluto.

*We can learn a lot from these creatures from Pluto. Jesus Christ took time for children, and even said we are to be like them.*

The software contains audio, speech-recognition playback, full motion video, interactive sessions and games. There are many ideas about the best way to learn a language. But still the biggest factors are the desire of the student and the time spent listening and speaking. If you really want to understand these aliens from Pluto, you'll make progress.

Over the years, a lot has been written about raising children. A few years back there was a good book called *How to Really Love Your Child* by Dr. Ross Campbell, which stressed the importance of giving our children love through eye contact, physical contact and focused attention.



"What is focused attention?" Dr. Campbell wrote. "Focused attention is giving a child our full, undivided attention in such a way that he feels without doubt that he is completely loved. That he is valuable enough in his own right to warrant parents' undistracted watchfulness, appreciation and uncompromising regard. In short, focused attention makes a child feel he is the most important person in the world in his parents' eyes."

More than one hundred years ago, the book *Gentle Measures* recommended: "I think there can be no doubt that the most effectual way of securing the confidence and love of children, and of acquiring control over them, is by sympathizing with them in their childlike hopes and fears, and joys and sorrows--in their ideas, their fancies, and even in their caprices," wrote Jacob Abbott.

And more than 3,000 years ago Moses wrote: "These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up" (Deuteronomy 6:6-7).

Learning a language and communicating takes time. Years ago there was a big debate about spending quality time with kids versus quantity.

The debate seems to have died down, partly, I'm afraid, because parents are too busy and burned out to feel they can do either. But sometimes we have to make changes to allow both kinds of time.

Quality time is still important. Most nights I don't get home from work till after 7 p.m., and the kids need to be in bed by 9. The time is pretty packed with getting supper on the table, eating, cleaning up, sometimes playing a short game, getting ready for bed, brushing and flossing teeth, brushing hair, reading a story and a Bible story and praying.

It goes by pretty fast, and there's not always a lot of time for talking. But if I grabbed a beer and sat in front of the TV instead of reading to the girls, I think it would widen the rift between the planets. As it is, some nights after the glass of water and tucking in comes the



deepest discussion of the day (much to my wife's chagrin as she knows they need the sleep!).

*There's a lot more to raising Plutonians than spending time, talking and listening. But it's a start.*

Quantity time is important too. I know I need it. A couple of minutes on the phone doesn't cut it when I'm on a business trip. One of the hardest times of my life was when I took a job five or six weeks before the rest of the family could join me. Maybe people from Venus and Pluto can survive that, but this Martian was at wits' end.

There's a lot more to raising Plutonians than spending time, talking and listening. But it's a start.

Every year 50,000 people in Spokane, Washington, put on jogging shoes and run about 7.5 miles in a race called Bloomsday. This year my 8-year-old daughter Heather and I will "run" it together. Over the last couple of months we've had the chance to train together a few times (not nearly as many as we wanted because of sickness, business trips and a busy life).

I'll always treasure those times. We may not do a lot of running, but walking and talking about the things on her mind gives me a much greater grasp of what things are like on Pluto.

I'm looking forward to the Bloomsday "race" itself. I don't think we'll set any speed records. Instead I hope I can do a little cosmic engineering--moving Mars and Pluto just a little closer to each other.

## Going Down for the Third Time

By Elaine Jacobs

*Trying to be superwoman didn't work for her. Are you drowning in life too?*



I WAS 38. My husband and I had been in the ministry for 16 years and had pastored small congregations in which help was limited. We did almost everything ourselves. It was my 12th year of coaching our youth group's cheerleading squad, I planned and organized most of the youth group activities, directed our women's club and attended all church functions. I was also busy caring for our home and being a wife and a mother to two teenage daughters.

At that point I realized I had experienced fevers and flu-type symptoms every month for more than a year. I was sick one week and recuperating the next two weeks. Then it would start all over again.

I also began to notice that my emotions were upside down. One time when I arrived home exhausted from a cheerleading clinic with a vanload of girls and luggage, my husband surprised me with a dozen long-stemmed red roses. How sweet, right?

But my only thought was, "What a waste of money."

I signed up to play on the women's softball team. When it came time to get up to go to practice, I cried because I was so tired. Still I went.

Then we took our youth group on a camping trip. The kids griped and complained the whole week. As we were preparing to leave, one of the girls made a negative remark about cheerleading. That was the last straw! I quickly walked away and started crying.

I couldn't seem to stop crying. But everybody was waiting for me so we could head home. I finally got myself together and climbed into the van. I wore sunglasses so no one would know I had been crying.

At home, when all the kids were finally picked up, my husband sat me down. He said if no one else would take the job as cheerleading coach, he would cancel cheerleading rather than have me burn out.

He wanted me to take a year off from all these activities. So I took a year off. I didn't go to youth activities, I didn't go to fundraisers, I didn't coach, I didn't entertain. I rested. I also went to a medical doctor who specialized in nutrition.

*If we keep pushing ourselves out of guilt or misguided zeal until we collapse, we aren't serving ourselves or others. We must learn to pace ourselves.*

After that year, I was like a new person. My immune system and emotions functioned properly again. I was even able to go back to coaching and gradually work into other projects.

There is a time to serve and there is a time to pull back and heal. Our families need us to be healthy and happy. If we keep pushing ourselves out of guilt or misguided zeal until we collapse, we aren't serving ourselves or others. We must learn to pace ourselves.

I once asked a group of women, "Are there times in your life when you feel like you are going down for the third time?" One woman said, "When do I not feel like it!" We all live in this fast-paced society. What can we do to get off the fast track? To make that determination, we have to figure out how we got on the fast track to begin with.

There are some things in life over which we have little or no control, but for the most part life is a series of choices. The choices we make determine what direction and at what pace our lives will flow.

In my case I made the choice to try to be superwoman. This is a choice many of us make without even realizing it. The job has to be done, and who else is going to do it? I had not learned to delegate and share the load.

Many of us inadvertently train those around us, including our husbands and children, not to share the load with us. By our actions, we teach them that they should leave all the work to us.



For example, a friend once told me that she was totally worn out. She couldn't get her family to help her with chores around the house. Shortly after that I witnessed this scenario. We were at a church dinner. The wife had finished eating and was on the other side of the room engaged in conversation. The husband was still at the table with the baby, who was covered head to toe with the remains of her meal. The husband rose from the table, picked up the child and was headed for the kitchen sink to repair the damages. The wife caught this action out of the corner of her eye and went tearing down the hallway after her husband. Why? She believed she could do it better. She probably had visions of the child being soaking wet, clothing and all, if the job was left to her husband. But what did she teach her husband? His help wasn't appreciated. He couldn't do it properly. So what would happen the next time the baby needed cleaning?

The woman did it to herself! What earthshaking problem would have arisen if she had let her husband take care of the baby? Probably none, but the wife could have gained a helpful husband. We need to learn to share the load, and not be control freaks!

I had another problem. I did not know how to say, "No." If I was asked to do something, the answer always had to be "yes." Why? Because I was needed and if I didn't respond positively, I felt guilty. Are we really the only one who can do that job? If we are overburdened, it is the honest thing to do to say, "No, I can't this time." This will give someone else the opportunity to serve. The world will not come to an end if we say "no."

I was so busy saying "yes" that I was not taking care of myself. I was destroying my health and in the process I drove myself to the point I couldn't say "yes" for a year. We have to learn to give ourselves a break. You can't draw water from a dry well. We have to take care of ourselves, if we are going to have anything to give to others.

I now make time to exercise every day. I like to walk. It is a big stress reliever, it gives me time to meditate and talk to God, it gets me outside in the fresh air and it is good for my back. I also take a nice long bubble bath every Friday night. It is so relaxing. I also like to watch "Walton's" reruns. What things do you enjoy doing to give yourself a break? Many of us are so busy, we can't even begin to think of a way to give ourselves a break. Following are a few suggestions that might stimulate thought.

Sit and listen to comforting music as you drink a cup of hot tea. Keep a journal. Buy yourself a rose. Go to a movie. Call a friend and chat. Watch a sunset. Realize the world is not going to end if you relax for 20 minutes. Stop and listen to the rain falling. Make a "done list" at the end of the day, rather than just another "to do" list. Subscribe to your favorite magazine and when it arrives, allow yourself an hour to sit down and enjoy it. Write a letter to a friend or loved one. Ask for a hug. Make time to communicate with your mate. Take a day off, no clocks or schedules. Check out a shop you always wanted to go to. Take yourself out to lunch. Take a nap. Don't answer the phone. Return to nature, head for the woods, the beach, the mountains, a rose garden, the top of the mesa.

Different things work for different people. The point is, give yourself a break. No need to feel guilty. It will make you a better, healthier mate, parent, friend...person!

*You can't draw water from a dry well. We have to take care of ourselves, if we are going to have anything to give to others.*

Another common choice situation which can lead to drowning I will call "Following a Dream." The following story will help to illustrate the point.

Stacy had always dreamed of owning her own dress shop. Before she could pursue her dream, however, she married and had three children in quick succession. While she was pregnant with the third child, a dress shop in her town went on the market.

Money was tight, but she just knew if she worked hard she could make a success of it. So, even though her husband was skeptical, they mortgaged their home and bought the shop.

At first, Stacy was ecstatic. She was up early every morning, getting the kids dressed and breakfast fixed. Then off to daycare and the shop they would go.



To make a long story short, as is usually the case with new businesses, success did not come right away. Stacy was exhausted, but she couldn't afford to hire help. The children were feeling neglected and were picking up bad habits and illnesses from the other day care children. The budget was stretched to the limit, they were deep in debt and this was creating a strain on the marriage. Life was a constant struggle and Stacy's dream had become a nightmare.

Following a dream is not wrong. But it is important to count the cost. Stacy should have considered the timing and the finances more closely. Perhaps if Stacy had waited until her children were grown and they were more financially stable, her dream would have been a dream come true. We should learn to look before we leap!

We have to ask ourselves, "Are there choices I have made which are causing me to feel like I am drowning in life?" Sometimes, we're in so deep, we can't see for ourselves. That's when it's time to seek help. Talk to your mate. Mine helped me. Talk to an honest and trusted friend. Seek professional advice from your minister, physician or therapist. But remember, the only way advice works is if we are willing to listen.

We have to be ready to make some changes. Change is our life preserver. Ask yourself, "Is this the way God wants me to live my life, always treading water and never getting anywhere?" Change is hard, but so is drowning!

It's our life--we're the ones who have to decide to sink or swim. We can reach for the life preserver, or we can go down. I chose life!

## The Road to Infamy

By Gary Petty

*He was a successful businessman and a war hero. But then something went terribly wrong.*



**T**HINGS LOOKED BLEAK for the fledgling American Revolution. After Bunker Hill the Continental Army seemed to lose every encounter with the British. The revolution was in need of a hero.

Ben, a Connecticut lad, was a leading merchant in the colony. He not only ran a successful mercantile, but owned a fleet of ships and was an accomplished sea captain. His sense of honor and business acumen gave him an aura of confidence. Acquaintances said he appeared arrogant, and he occasionally sought solutions through dueling.

As his business fortunes rose so did his resentment of British taxation. Smuggling was an acceptable means to evade taxation. Ben became an outspoken leader of the liberty movement. His articulate and passionate letters appeared in local newspapers.

When war broke out Ben was elected captain of the local militia. He promptly organized them into an effective fighting force and presented a bold plan for seizing the British forts at Crown Point and Ticonderoga. The plan was accepted and the expedition successful, although Ben was in constant conflict with fellow officers.

Because of the nation's lack of hard currency, Ben spent a large sum of personal money financing the campaign. Added to his financial hardships was the tragedy of his wife's sudden death. Ben contained his sorrow by dedicating himself to the revolution.

*What causes a person to betray his own ideals? For a person to betray everything he loves and believes he must first feel betrayed.*

About this time Ben caught the attention of George Washington. The General saw through Ben's bluster and tactlessness and recognized him as a leader and good tactician. Ben had

come up with a plan to invade Canada and make it a fourteenth colony. Washington gave him the pick of the army.

The hardships of the Canadian expedition were overwhelming. Upon reaching Quebec Ben's troops united with another column under General Richard Montgomery. In the ensuing battle Montgomery was killed and Ben wounded. During the harsh winter retreat, Ben's leadership held the army together.

Returning home, Ben found himself faced with charges because he had forced Canadian merchants to give food to his starving army. To his wounded pride this was a bitter pill. He demanded an inquiry, and, after an investigation, the charges were dropped.

Without a command, and on his own initiative, Ben constructed a small fleet of ships on Lake Champlain. In October 1776 he attacked and defeated a larger British fleet. A few days later Ben and a small group of men held off the British fleet from a scuttled ship while the Americans retreated.

By now Ben had been promoted to brigadier general. He was sure that he was next in line for promotion to major general. The Continental Congress, being politicians, felt that generals should be more evenly distributed from among all the colonies. New England, they felt, had more than its share. So the next major generals would have to come from the southern colonies.

Ben was livid and resigned in response to this decision. However, Washington convinced him to stay. Because Ben was instrumental in defeating a British force in battle, Congress was obliged to give him the promotion. But there was no army for him to command. Ben got into an argument with his commanding officer and was fired. He enlisted as a common soldier and was seriously wounded in the Second Battle of Saratoga.

As he recovered Ben was given command of the garrison in Philadelphia. Tired after having spent much of his personal fortune on the war effort, as well as having been wounded twice, Ben decided to enjoy the fruits of his labors. Ben lived extravagantly. It wasn't long until British sympathizers used his lifestyle to bring charges against him. He was commanded to appear before a court martial.

Ben was exonerated on all charges, given a mild reprimand to please the politicians, and given back his command. But this was the last straw. The young patriot, ablest of generals and loved by his men, became bitter, disillusioned, and it was at this point that Ben...Benedict Arnold...betrayed his country.

Mention the name of Benedict Arnold today and nobody remembers his victories and bravery, only the crime of treason.

### **The seeds of disillusionment**

What causes a person to betray his own ideals? For a person to betray everything he loves and believes he must first feel betrayed.

Benedict Arnold felt stabbed in the back by jealous fellow officers. He had



charges brought against him by British sympathizers. Congress refused to refund money he had spent out of his pocket for war expenses. Eventually, he convinced himself that the leaders of the revolution were incompetent and he lost faith in the cause of liberty.

Once we allow bitterness over another person's actions or words to set in we become consumed with self-justice. Arnold's disillusionment in the revolution was rooted in his concern with personal injustices both real and perceived. Always a prideful man, Arnold's pride became more important than his values.

Pride is a great deceiver. It makes us forget our goal and centers our attention on what we feel we deserve because of our own effort and sacrifice. It changes the focus from how we treat others to how others treat us. Issues are replaced with personalities. Character, the internal force to do right, becomes easily manipulated by a drive to be vindicated no matter what the price.

A wise man once wrote, "When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom" (Proverbs 11:2 NIV).

### When you feel betrayed

All of us have been misused or betrayed by a family member, friend, employer, organization, even a church. We can internalize the hurt caused by others until the memory of betrayal controls our thoughts and emotions. At times we allow the faults or abuse of others to weaken our commitment to our own values or even our faith in God.

*All of us have been misused or betrayed by a family member, friend, employer, organization, even a church.*

A Canaanite woman came to Jesus asking for her daughter to be healed. Imagine her surprise when Jesus ignored her. His disciples asked Jesus to send her away. Jesus finally addressed her by saying, "It is not good to take the children's bread and give it to the little dogs."

If anyone ever seemed to have the "right" to feel betrayed it was this woman. Jesus, the one many claimed was the Messiah, had ignored her. His disciples were rude and seemed prejudiced against Canaanites. She could have become disillusioned, claiming Jesus to be a fraud.

Instead, she answered, "True, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." Jesus commended her faith and healed her daughter (Matthew 15:21-28). The Canaanite woman's faith couldn't be swayed by the actions of others. She was too aware of her total dependency upon God.

If beliefs and values are based in spiritual reality, they can't be changed by the imperfections of people. Benedict Arnold felt betrayed by human beings. He responded by betraying his own values and ideals. He serves as a warning on the road to infamy.

## Comfort One Another

By Mark Mickelson

*God sends hope and comfort in powerful ways--including through us.*



**I**T IS KNOWN IN HISTORY as the Bataan Death March. As the Japanese forces overran the Philippines during World War II, about 75,000 American and Filipino soldiers were captured and brutally mistreated by their captors. Already suffering from malnutrition and disease, the exhausted captives were forced to march 65 miles across the Bataan Peninsula. As they marched, any who fell back were shot or bayoneted. Those who fell down were killed and pushed aside. The sick were left for dead. When the survivors reached the ocean they were locked up inside a stifling hot compartment on a ship. These men were not given food or water. Many died without any consideration or mercy. In Japan they were put in a prisoner of war camp and many more died there as well.

Very few actually made it. One of those who survived was Lynn Torrance. Dr. Torrance was the registrar at Ambassador College when I met him. My acquaintance with him began when I was a student and grew over the years. I came to both respect and love him. Because of this experience, Dr. Torrance lost his health. The vast majority of his fellow soldiers died. But he made it out of there and told stories that I can't bear to repeat.

When he returned home after the war, he determined as much as possible to never complain again. No matter how bad it got, he believed it couldn't possibly be any worse than what he had already been through.

Despite his trials, Dr. Torrance was able to encourage and joke. He had a light-hearted perspective on life that made him a pleasure to be around. This wasn't because life was easy. His life was hard. Few indeed have ever experienced life as he experienced it. But he took life at its best. And

*You're fighting battles. We all do. We can't pretend that these problems*

he managed with God's help to turn things around so that he--who had every reason to wallow in self-pity--became one who helped to comfort others.

*don't exist. But we can't afford to succumb to them either.*

Perhaps you, or someone close to you, are facing discouraging circumstances. You're fighting battles. We all do. We can't pretend that these problems don't exist. But we can't afford to succumb to them either. Let me share a graphic way this dilemma was once described to me. Its like holding on to a mad dog by the ears. Everybody knows you have to let go, but letting go is a traumatic thing. It's not that we don't know what we need to do. But it's hard to know how to make that transition. Life is like that. How do we deal with our problems, and yet let go?

Fortunately, we have a God who knows our plight. Christ lived this life in the flesh. He understood what we go through and what we face. Isaiah 53 describes Christ prophetically and says that He was stricken, smitten, afflicted, despised and rejected. Whatever we might possibly face is something that Christ intimately understands, because He felt it as well. But God shows us that--because He understands and because He is not weak as we are--He is there for us, on our side, and standing with us.

*As we strive to do these things, we will find that our lives are a little brighter as well.*

When Christ said to the disciples that He had to go away, He told them He wasn't going to abandon them. He promised them a comforter. Christ was saying "I am a comforter, and I know you won't see me anymore and you think you're going to miss me, but I'll send you another comforter. We will be with you" (John 14:16; 16:7).

In 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 Paul shows us more about God's perspective. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort. Who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."

God the Father is the God of all comfort. He comforts us in our tribulation. But it doesn't end there. God expects us to be able to also comfort others. Paul continues this theme in verse 7, "And our hope for you is steadfast, because we know that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also you will partake of the consolation." In effect he's saying "Look, you suffer. I understand. But God is there with you. Because you suffer, you will be able to be there with others as well."

It's interesting to analyze the meaning of the Greek word for comfort in these verses. It means technically "a calling to one's side." So when God says that He is the God of all comfort, it means that He'll be there at our side. Encouragement and comfort will flow into us from God, and they should flow back out from us to others. Is this easy? No. It is a struggle to move beyond self and show concern for others. It can be hard to do what is right. But it really isn't any easier to do what is wrong. Should we let the anger and the bitterness fester or let the frustration spew out?

Those wrong approaches won't make life better. "Oh, the weather is lousy and I haven't had a very good life and my car is a piece of junk and I really don't like what I'm doing." That's negative energy. We have to focus on the positive rather than the negative. Focus on the things that we can do. We need to look to Christ. He is a comforter to us. He eases our minds,

He lifts our burdens. And we should be striving to become like Him so that we can be comforters to others.

The society we live in, with its biting sarcasm, ruthless competition, vanity and strife, is not very comforting. But God says that we are to be different from the society around us. In Matthew 5 He calls us "lights." We need to be people who brighten other people's lives, are responsive to each other, positive, full of hope. We need to be encouragers. As we strive to do these things, we will find that our lives are a little brighter as well.



Some people have the gift of encouragement. One of those people is my elderly friend Margaret who lives in a convalescent home. When I visit Margaret, I can look out the window and see things that she can't see. I tell her about the things our church teens or others in our congregation are doing. I tell her about my family. Those are things that she can't do. And so I sit there and look at things she can't see and talk to her about things that she can't do. And yet she is still very positive and she lifts me up in the process. I can do what she cannot. Yet she is the one who encourages me. This gift of encouragement is one that we can all pursue.

The apostle Paul spoke to the Corinthian church about spiritual gifts. One of the gifts he talks about is the gift of healings.(1 Corinthians 12:9) The word "healing" here does refer to healing physical infirmities. But the word can also be used in a spiritual sense. It can refer to a healing of the heart, a healing of the mind, a healing of the emotions. Can you have the gift of healing? I believe you can, if you desire it. You can intercede on someone's behalf and help him or her to heal emotionally. You can do this by giving the person encouragement and comfort.

*Cheer* magazine once ran an article about a nurse who took care of a boy who was paraplegic. She regularly read the boy letters from "Aunt Betty" by which he vicariously lived the life of a healthy, active farm boy-- jumping fences, tearing his pants, climbing apple trees, running through the fields with his dog at his heels.

*Can you have the gift of healing? I believe you can, if you desire it. You can intercede on someone's behalf and help him or her to heal emotionally.*

One day that nurse was near the town where Aunt Betty mailed her letters. The nurse decided to stop to ask the postmaster if he knew her. He said, "Betty White mails letters every day to children in hospitals. Here she comes now." The nurse looked in the direction he pointed and saw a lady in a wheelchair, making her way slowly toward them. "Miss White's been crippled since she was 12," said the postmaster. "All she does is sit and write. I can't imagine what it is that she would have to write about." Here was someone who had so little and yet she was still contributing in a meaningful way. We all need to do that.

Hebrews 10 talks about actively supporting and encouraging others. "And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works." It's like salad dressing. A mixture of oil and vinegar, the dressing separates in the bottle. You have to shake and mix it in order to use it. Hebrews 10:24 is saying that we should stir each other up in a positive way, to love and good works. The reason we assemble (verse 25) is to encourage one another and to strengthen each other. That means we have to swallow hard sometimes and really focus on others. Are we encouraging each other? Are we lifting each other up? Are we carrying each other's burdens?

We will not always feel good. We will not always have a good day. We will have crises. We will meet disaster. And there will be times when we will emotionally hit bottom. God will comfort us. When we need comfort He may send another Aunt Betty, or Margaret, or Dr. Torrance, to give us that encouragement and comfort. But like those others we must be survivors who are able to encourage and comfort others.



## Serving From the Bench

By Jerold Aust

*When Anne's love of sports and love of God conflicted, she spent more time on the bench. Even there she inspired her team.*



**A** NNE WAS AN UNUSUAL GIRL who loved playing sports. She was good at any sport she played, and she excelled in volleyball and basketball. Anne wasn't unusual because she loved playing sports, but because--although she was good--she spent much of her time sitting the bench.



Anne wasn't tall (about 5 feet 5 inches) as basketball players go. She had a good eye for the bucket, good hands and was quick on defense. Anne also passed the ball well. Her savvy on the court was enviable; she always seemed to know where her teammates were on the court at any time.

She could thread a needle when it came to hitting the open teammate breaking for the basket. Occasionally a pass would be so right on, as she rifled the ball past her stunned defender, that her intended receiver couldn't handle it. Her teammate expected Anne's pass, but with all the defensive hands in the path of the oncoming ball, it just seemed that it wouldn't get through. But get there it did.

It was sheer pleasure to watch Anne play. She also had a heart of gold, a teachable and cooperative attitude.

But Anne didn't get to play every game. Sometimes she wasn't in the starting lineup and in some games she didn't play at all. Why? you might ask. Anne served the basketball team from the bench, and her example is a lesson for all of us.

### A higher priority

You see, Anne honored God. She always placed God ahead of her love of sports. It wasn't an easy decision. Sometimes her well-meaning coach tried to intimidate her into putting the school's basketball team ahead of her faith, at times embarrassing her in front of the team. Anne kept the Sabbath day, which seriously cut into her playing time. On top of this, the

coach felt he had to penalize her for missing games and practices, so she often had to sit on the bench even on the days she could be there. But she never quit the team, nor did she ever miss a practice that was not on the Sabbath. She worked out hard with the team, and there were times when she would obviously outplay some of the starting five players. But Anne sat on the bench, often.

Anne's senior year of basketball was at once an exciting and a disappointing one. It was exciting because her team was good enough to reach the district finals. The game was to be played in a professional basketball arena in a large city, Anne's hometown.

*Sometimes her well-meaning coach tried to intimidate her into putting the school's basketball team ahead of her faith, at times embarrassing her in front of the team.*

There was one problem: The game was scheduled to be played on a Friday night, the beginning of God's Sabbath. Before that big game, the coach began pressuring Anne, asking her if she would be able to play in the game, telling her that the team needed and wanted her support. Then her teammates took up the coach's lead and also asked Anne if she would be there for the game.

One of her teachers even got into the act and tried to embarrass her in front of the class. He publicly singled out Anne, discussing openly how she wouldn't be able to support the school team because of the Saturday Sabbath. Anne held firm. That championship game came and went, and her team won without her. Anne was happy for her team, and continued to openly support them.

Anne's team was then scheduled for the first game of the state tournament. Thankfully, it would not be played on the Sabbath. Anne could play. The team was happy. The coach was pleased. So was Anne. And Anne was glad to be with her team once again, especially during the state tournament. She realized she might sit on the bench.

The big game came. Although Anne got to play a few minutes, her team lost. The season was over for them. But what happened after the season shows that Anne enjoyed a unique success that season. It tied in directly with her serving her team from the bench. Her unique success is the kind we should want and may need; the surprise ending to her season offers a lesson that can make you successful for the rest of your life.

### **A memorable banquet**

At the end of the season, Anne's team had an awards banquet. As the evening progressed, awards were presented to those most deserving. The most valuable player award was given, and it was well deserved. Other categories were acknowledged and duly honored. One by one, many of the first five team members received their rewards for their accomplishments. It appeared that all the awards that would be given had been awarded. Or so it seemed.

Then one of the coaches stood and began to speak. His message went something like this: "We've given all of the year-end awards that we normally give out during a basketball banquet. However, there's one more award that we want to give this evening. We've never given an award like this before. In fact it didn't exist until we coaches began to reflect on one particular player who is with us tonight.

"After talking about it, we just knew the night and the end of the year would not be complete without recognizing one of our players in a very special category. The young lady I'm talking about spent a lot of time on the team bench during the season. Although she sat on the bench most of the season, she was always vocally supportive of her teammates on the floor. She always encouraged them and spurred them on to victory. We were a much better team because of this young lady. For this reason, we have created a new award to be given to the young lady who best reflects a supportive attitude toward the team."

*Anne was an inspiration to all the team, the coaches and the families and fans who attended our games.*

Holding up the award plaque for all to see, he continued: "The very first name on this award is the person who inspired its creation. I'm speaking of Anne. Anne gave her best, whether she sat on the bench or played on the court. She never complained, although a lesser person might have cause to. Anne was an inspiration to all the team, the coaches and the families and fans who attended our games. She reflects the kind of spirit and support that all team members should have. Anne, you truly are an inspiration to all the team and the coaches. Thank you for faithfully serving the team from the bench!"

There wasn't a dry eye in the room as all stood and applauded.

On that one night in particular, the character that had helped Anne succeed throughout that entire year was honored. Anne is still honored by that award because it still graces the main office of her high school. And she will continue to be honored for her serving attitude and deep commitment to honor God. Anne knew the difficulties had been worth it. She had honored God first, and God in turn had honored Anne.

### **Join Anne in the winners' circle**

Does Anne's story have meaning for you? We can put God first in our lives, overcoming all the taunts and jeers for doing the right thing. Success is not always being the first or the best. Success doesn't always have to shine to be success, nor does it have to be recognized by an adoring crowd.

True success is also acknowledged in ways that many others will never see. God sees everything; He will see your good character and reward you for honoring Him.

Like Anne, you can serve your team from the bench. Your team might be a sports team, but it can also be your family team, your brothers and sisters, your teachers, your community. Respect and encourage others, give of your best, and God will see your good attitude and bless you in ways you would never expect--like Anne was unexpectedly blessed.

*Virtual Christian Magazine Editorial*

## **A Personal View of the Kosovo Conflict**

By Victor Kubik

**W**HAT IS HAPPENING IN YUGOSLAVIA is a humanitarian disaster with tens of thousands of human beings left homeless and uncertain about their future.

What is happening in Yugoslavia is a tragedy because so much of the blame for the conflict rests with the leader of Serbia, Slobodan Milosevic, even though he represents many others sharing his long-standing and deeply rooted nationalistic views.

What is happening in Yugoslavia is a tragedy because countries calling themselves Christian countries are bombing another country where professing Christians live. But, it seems that this is the only course of action the United States, as part of NATO, can take to stop the ethnic cleansing of Albanians in Kosovo.

I just spoke with friends who came from Ukraine and they commented that they have family and friends living throughout Yugoslavia. These are people who were "fortunate" to migrate from the Soviet Union to the more prosperous areas of Europe a decade ago. They live in cities like Novi Sad which had all three of its bridges across the Danube River destroyed in the operation "Allied Force." This slows down commerce to the Black Sea. There are others living in strategic areas where bombing will likely take place in the days ahead. They are in danger.

While traveling in Ukraine and the Baltic Republics this past January and February, I found prevailing support towards Serbs and Slavic interests. The Slavs and even some of the Balts could not understand why the United States has been siding with Moslem interests both in Europe and Afghanistan and now getting involved in the internal affairs of the Balkan Peninsula. Some of the comments were quite heated and racist.

During the period of this war I've seen reports from people close to the conflict and from those who have acquaintances in the war region. Some of the reports are emotional and present points of view that are not orthodox, conventional, politically correct or even credible. But, they are the feelings and perceptions of those victimized and who go to sleep (if they can sleep) every night knowing that this may be the last day of their life.

My parents lived through World War II in Germany as slave workers after they were forced from their homes in Ukraine. They endured weeks and weeks of bombing day and night (the British by night and the Americans by day). Bombs would hit bunkers and casualties would be brought out--fellow teenage workers killed by friendly liberating bombs. In my growing-up years at home I witnessed life-long psychological and health consequences in my parents from what they experienced in the war.

The war in Kosovo is another chapter in the tragedy of human beings being unable to resolve conflict. When people choose sides they lose the full Truth.

I do not champion any side in this conflict except the victims'. Thy Kingdom Come.

## Letters to the Editor

### Whatever Happened to the Family Meal?



We all enjoy hearing our beliefs confirmed. Our family of four children enjoyed doing many of the things Becky Sweat mentioned in her article. I remember hearing of a study that found a common factor among children who excelled in school was having family meals together. The article was full of good ideas that are easy to apply. Please send our thanks to Becky.

-- Tom Peine, Indianapolis

### Kids Killing Kids: What Does It Mean?



The world is becoming a smaller and smaller community and the reverberations of what happened at Columbine High School were felt around the world. And it was not only this incident in the United States but the many happenings in the U.S. in politics, religion, education and the family are having a chilling effect on the rest of humanity.

I log on not infrequently on the web site [www.ucg.org](http://www.ucg.org). I am very much interested in the work of the United Church of God.

-- Andre Arthur, St. Lucia



What an excellent article about the tragic state of our children and our society at large. I intend to share this wonderful insight with others. Thanks again for the great work on this website.

-- John & Susie Rentz

### A Candle in the Window



I just read your article in VCM and thought I should just tell you "thanks". It was very good.

I drive around a lot (I'm a truck driver:-) ) and I see a few of the type of houses you were talking about in the article. They certainly do draw your attention to them and they do give a sense of warmth and friendliness.

