

Virtual Christian Magazine

Hope And Encouragement
For The Real World

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Christian Setbacks: A Question of Perspective

By Hector M. Earle

Every Christian has his or her bad days; the apostle Paul had his share as well. Amazingly, Paul was able to persevere. What enabled him to do so?



IT HAS BEEN SAID that depression is the common cold of mental illness. That is to say that depression is just as common to the mind as the common cold is to the body.

Everyone (Christians included) has had their blue days. Depression is our common response to losses and setbacks. "Hope deferred makes the heart sick," declares the scripture in Proverbs 13:12.

Some of us can bounce back from depressive setbacks while others seems to carry the dark cloud of hopelessness and despair until they are consumed by their own feeling of sadness. It seems that depressive moods are a matter of one's perspective toward stress factors. What may be a major roadblock to one person may just be a small hurdle to another.

It's interesting to note how Paul, the most prolific contributor to the New Testament, handled setbacks and disappointments. If there was anyone, who had reason to be depressed because of life's adversity, it would be Paul.

Let's examine the apostle Paul's reaction to setbacks and disappointments. If you view this man's life from a human perspective, he had it hard. Some would probably argue that he endured more physical and mental challenges than Job himself, if that's possible. Yet he came through with flying colors, and when it was all said and done, he considered his so-called life problems to be nothing compared with the inheritance that awaited him in heaven.

On reflecting upon his life, this man claimed that he had endured far more labors for the cause of Christ than you and I can ever imagine and many of them were far from trivial. In II Corinthians 11:23-27, we find Paul stating that he received jail terms on many occasions for his commitment and belief in Christian principles; he was beaten, almost to death, so many times by the authorities that he nearly lost count. Apparently these beatings involved cruel

punishment with lashes and rods. On one occasion, he was stoned by an angry mob but managed to escape. On three separate occasions he was involved in a shipwreck that nearly cost him his life. As a matter of fact he said he spent a whole day and night exposed in the open ocean at the mercies of the elements.

He embarked on endless journeys bringing the love of Christ to countless people, not knowing what to expect or where he was going. On these journeys he faced dangers from raging rivers and the ever-present threat of being accosted by robbers. There were terrors from everywhere, the country, the city, and the water. His enemies were many, including his own countrymen and foreigners. He labored hard and encountered many hardships, spending many sleepless nights in constant hunger and thirst. He suffered cold and exposure that would make cowards of lesser men. But Paul was on a mission for Christ, and he allowed neither man nor beast to stop him.

Apart from all these daily and nightly terrors, this man had to assume almost total leadership for perhaps hundreds of churches and groups who depended upon him for their spiritual growth and maturity. After all, most of these recent converts were mere babes in Christ. Paul was so deeply concerned for the Church of God that he made every attempt to be there with every group, in person, to help them grow and mature in Christ. Those groups to whom he could not visit he wrote God-inspired letters of instruction, teaching and encouraging them in the way of Christ.

"I have learned, in whatever state I am in to be content"

What did all these stress factors do to Paul? Did they make him a depressed, discouraged, defeated individual? By no means! As we see in other scriptures, this man was a thoroughly positive person--the kind that excelled in difficult times with a triumphant spirit.

"I have learned," he wrote, "in whatever state I am in to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need." (Philippians 4:11-12).

What was his secret? Did the apostle Paul consider himself far superior to all of us. By no means! He considered himself least among the all apostles. It appears that Paul had the right perspective. He had the proper relationship with his creator. Beginning with the experience in Damascus, God directed his life. Paul actively sought divine guidance in everyday affairs. He sought God's help in difficult times; when things didn't go as planned he could still maintain a positive attitude because he knew God would make all things work together for good (Romans 8:28).

We can strive toward the kind of absolute faith, trust, and determination that the apostle Paul displayed, relying on that wonderful promise of Christ when he said, "And you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free (John 8:32). God's precious word is loaded with truth and divine guidance, which enables us to cope with the worries of life. By following the example of Paul given in God's word, the dark cloud will pass by. We will experience the kind of hope and joy that is free from unresolved fears and setbacks, for we will have a proper perspective.

How to Find the Right Church

By John Ross Schroeder

The choice of churches and denominations has never been greater. How can you decide which is best?



Many prospective churchgoers really do desire to do a work in the world. They would like to find a Church that is actively fulfilling Christ's command to spread the true gospel in this modern age. But they may need some vital background knowledge in order to rightly evaluate which groups and organizations are obediently following Christ's command. What are some key factors one should consider?

THE CHOICE OF CHURCHES and denominations has never been greater. A virtual supermarket of dizzying "brands" awaits the potential churchgoer, particularly in America.

To put the puzzling choices in secular terminology, people's present actions reflect the market. According to *The Southern California Christian Times*, "More than one out of seven adults change their church each year, and another one out of six attends a carefully chosen handful of selected churches on a rotating basis rather than sticking with the same church week after week" (December 1998).

"Brand loyalty" simply does not carry the weight as in former times. Yet surprisingly many churchgoers do base their choices on some fairly fundamental points.

Last year the George Barna research group surveyed American churchgoers about the qualities they looked for in a church. The top three factors were:

- Beliefs and doctrines
- Mutual care and concern among the members
- The quality of the sermons

Mentioned first were beliefs and doctrines. That is a very good place to begin. From a biblical standpoint, certainly few if any other points could be as important. But we are getting a little ahead of ourselves. The first thing to establish is: Should we attend church at all?

What the Bible says

Most of our readers presumably have a great deal of respect for the Scriptures, or they probably wouldn't be reading this magazine. But if you are not yet quite sure about the authority of the Bible over our individual and collective lives, we invite you to request our two free booklets, [Is the Bible True?](#) and [How to Understand the Bible](#).

Actually the New Testament teaching strongly advises regular church attendance. The letter to Hebrew Christians specifically says: "And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, *not* forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:24-25, emphasis added).

The Old Testament expresses the same thought in the form of a command: "Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation [or commanded assembly], you shall do no work on it, it is the Sabbath of the LORD in all your dwellings" (Leviticus 23:3).

In terms of choosing a church based on fundamental beliefs, observing the Sabbath is one of the most basic--so basic that it is enshrined as one of the Ten Commandments. (If you do not understand which day is the Christian Sabbath, or are unclear on its purpose and intent, please write for our free booklet [Sunset to Sunset--God's Sabbath Rest](#).)

To sum up the importance of beliefs and doctrines, we simply say God's Church keeps God's Law. It is described prophetically as a group of people "who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Revelation 12:17).

Its members do not try to get around or do away with the requirements of the biblical way of life. They follow the straight, narrow and often unpopular way mentioned by Jesus Christ, *not* the broad easy path that eventually leads to destruction (Matthew 7:13). Those who really want eternal life are pictured as living God's way (verse 14).

What is the Church?

From early on we should understand what the church *is* and *is not*. We must first understand that the church is *not* a *building*. The glossary of the *Translator's New Testament* plainly tells us: "'Church' in NT never means 'building.' It always represents either a group of committed Christians in any given locality [who] met to practice their religion, or the totality of these groups scattered throughout the world" (pages 557-558).

The apostle Paul simply defines the Church as "the body of Christ" (1 Corinthians 12:12, 27). Clearly it is a *spiritual* organism, not a physical edifice or organization. The Church goes to the building where it meets, not the other way around. Or the congregation meets in someone's house in the case of small numbers, but it is still the spiritual body of Christ.



By way of an analogy, Paul likens the Church to the various physical members of the human body (verses 12-27 inclusive). He shows how each member is dependent on all the others. Yet

"by one spirit [the Holy Spirit] we were all baptized into one body... and have been made to drink into one spirit" (verse 13). So it doesn't make much sense for portions of the membership to be separated from the rest of the body, sitting alone at home while the rest of the body worships together.

"The same care one for another"

The apostle Paul urged the Corinthian members to "have the same care one for another" (1 Corinthians 12:25). This is the second point mentioned by the Barna survey-mutual comfort and care.

This mutual care for one another is biblical. But it should always be remembered that our relationships with other members of the Church both begin and end in our fellowship with God the Father and His son Jesus Christ (1 John 1:3).

We have fellowship with each other only in and through our spiritual relationship with the Father and Jesus Christ. The first four of the Ten Commandments express our love for God, the last six our love for humankind. The apostle John points out the folly of trying to have one without the other (1 John 4:20).

The Ten Commandments are a cohesive body of basic spiritual law. If you break one, spiritually speaking you have broken them all (James 2:10). We express the love of God by keeping every one of the Ten Commandments (1 John 5:3).

Expressing proper love for the membership of the Church is an awesome responsibility on the shoulders of each member. After all Jesus Christ, the Founder of the Christian Church (Matthew 16:28), did say: "By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, that you have love one for another." It is important that we extend warmth and friendliness to other members of that spiritual body that is the Church, especially to visitors and new members.

Quality of the sermons

The quality of the sermons is mentioned as the third most-looked-for quality in the George Barna survey.

In the broadest sense it is also a supremely important point. The membership of the Church has a right to expect certain fundamental qualities from the ministerial leadership. First and foremost is loyalty to the Bible and to the teachings and practices of Jesus which He taught the apostles--"the apostles' doctrine and fellowship" (Acts 2:42).

In his preaching each minister is "to rightly divide the word of truth" (1 Timothy 2:15). Most other versions say "rightly handling" which is a better rendering, but perhaps the Revised English Bible has best grasped the basic sense of this passage with "keep strictly to the true gospel."

Many false gospels are taught in the world (Galatians 1:6-7; 2 Corinthians 11:4; Matthew 24:4-5). One famous British novelist had this comment concerning much of the 20th-century ministry. "The modern clergyman has acquired in his study of the science which I believe is called exegesis an astonishing facility for explaining things away."

That is *not* a part of the preaching of a true minister of God. The ministry of the word and prayer are his true priorities (Acts 6:4).

The apostle Paul urged Timothy: "Preach the Word; ...correct, rebuke and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction." Why? "For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear"(2 Timothy 4:2-3, New International Version).

A faithful minister will preach the truth of God's Word, not his own ideas. A true minister "has a boundary set for him," explained one long time teacher. "When he enters the pulpit, he is not an entirely free man... He is not at liberty to invent or choose his message: it has been committed to him, and it is for him to declare, expound and commend it to his hearers."

Faithfulness to the Word of God cannot be over emphasized. Much less important is the minister's particular style of preaching or even his basic ability as a speaker. Most who have received a genuine call to the ministry strive to improve their effectiveness as the years go by.

Yet another important factor

One more factor is simply the ability of one's church to make a difference. Said George Barna: "They want substance from their church; they want to make a difference in the world through their church."

Broadly speaking, this is another way of saying the Church is commissioned to take the good news of the Kingdom of God to the world and to faithfully teach others God's way of life as Jesus commanded (Matthew 24:24; 28:18-20). Any church that is not dedicated to performing this task is seriously falling down on the job. Jesus Christ said, "You shall know them by their fruits" (Matthew 7:20).

According to George Barna the sad truth is that "The Christian Church has stagnated, largely due to its comfort with routines and rituals that are neither challenging nor relevant for millions of people."

Many prospective churchgoers really do desire to do a work in the world. They would like to find a Church that is actively fulfilling Christ's command to spread the true gospel in this modern age. But they may need some vital background knowledge in order to rightly evaluate which groups and organizations are obediently following Christ's command.

Of course there is a great deal more to the overall story. The Church is a big subject well worth studying in much greater detail than can be done in any single Virtual Christian Magazine article. That is why the United Church of God has published an extensively researched booklet simply titled, [*The Church Jesus Built*](#).

To understand the message Jesus taught, and which He commanded His Church to proclaim, please request your free copy of [*The Gospel of the Kingdom*](#). Both booklets are available free of charge by contacting our office nearest you.

How to find the right Church will entail some serious Bible study on your part. You should

search out a church that really fits the true biblical model. This is not a decision either to be taken lightly or too quickly.

Time and Chance

By John Miller

We live in a world where tragedies abound. We read of them in the newspaper and see them reported on television. But we think they happen to other people.



IT WAS A WARM, summer morning in New Bedford, Ohio. Soft breezes gently swayed the leaves on the maple tree in the front yard of our home. It was July 17, 1986. I had the day off work and it was promising to be an enjoyable day with my family.

The children woke up and Jonathan, our one year old, was bouncing on my knee. My wife enjoyed one of those peak moments in life that morning. He said "Mama" for the first time that morning.

Later that same morning, Daniel and Mary Ann, our two older children, went with me as I adjusted the brakes on our Pontiac. In spite of busy fingers, dirty faces and countless questions, we completed the job in record time.

Sometimes no matter how careful you are, accidents can and will happen

Then the children stepped back so I could test the brakes. I got in the car, shifted to reverse and slowly began to back up--when suddenly I felt an unusual bump.

The children screamed! "What toy," I thought, "did I run over now?" So I continued to back up expecting to see a smashed little red wagon. But instead I saw, there in the driveway, the lifeless body of my youngest son--Jonathan.

I jumped out of the car and as I ran up to Jonathan many questions raced through my mind: How could this have happened? I thought Jonathan was in the house. How would I tell my wife? How would I comfort the children when I had just killed their brother and our son?

My wife came running, as the children looked on stunned. We all stood in unspoken grief as we realized that Jonathan was dead. What could we do? Where could we go for help?

"Seek God," I thought. But then I wondered, would God support me when I had just killed my son?

We called the paramedics and took our children to the house. A day that had begun so pleasantly had suddenly turned into a nightmare.

Tragedy becomes real

We live in a world where tragedies abound. We read of them in the newspaper and see them reported on television. But we think they happen to *other* people. I realize now, and the police reminded me that day, that these things can happen to anyone. The grim reality is that, even as you are reading this article, someone somewhere is experiencing a tragedy similar to ours.

How can we deal with such devastating situations? How do you pull through without having your life totally disintegrate? Can you enjoy life after such a tragedy, or is it an endless series of nightmares?

From experience I can say that, yes, life can be enjoyed even after the worst of tragedies. Eventually the pain subsides, and if handled properly, it can become a motivation that will bring some very positive changes in your life. Perhaps this article--a message from one who has been there--will bring hope and encouragement to those who are even now experiencing similar tragedies.

Time and chance

The first thing that usually comes to mind in the aftermath of a tragedy is the big question *why?* Why did this happen? Why did it happen to me? And on the heels of those thoughts and emotions come the "if only"s. If only I had done this, or not done that. In my case it was, "If only I would have known that my baby was around"--but the reality is that I did not know. If I had known, then it certainly would never have occurred.

Even King Solomon pondered these questions when he set his heart "to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven" (Ecclesiastes 1:13). But after all his research into human experience, he concluded that "time and chance happen to them all" (Ecclesiastes 9:11).

Time and chance had called on us. Jonathan, whom I had last seen as a bouncing baby in the house, was lured by curiosity and had crept underneath the car. Why didn't he come to the side of the car I was working where I would have seen him? Why did he crawl underneath the car where I couldn't see him? How did he get there in the first place? Why did he have to be located by the tire the moment I had backed up?

Of course, God intervenes powerfully for His people on many occasions. But, as Solomon pointed out, time and chance do affect us all.

Help is promised

When time and chance happen to His people, God sometimes chooses *not* to intervene if He sees that it will be to our *ultimate good*. Nevertheless, He promises that "all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28).

But then I wondered, would God support me when I had just killed my son?

Furthermore, God promises that we will not suffer anything that is not common to man, or above what we are able to bear. And most importantly, He always provides a way of escape to endure such trials (1 Corinthians 10:13).

These promises are true, and my family found great comfort in them. Yes, God allows trials for our ultimate good, but He always provides a way out. Often in the aftermath of a tragedy we are in a state of shock. We need something as solid as a rock to which we can anchor--and that rock is Christ (1 Corinthians 10:4). Friends can help, but ultimately it is God who sees us through and heals our wounds.

Jesus Christ knew that it is a natural human emotion to be grief-stricken and to mourn when a loved one dies unexpectedly. During the last hours before His crucifixion He told his disciples that He would be "going away"--He would die. He said, "because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart" (John 16:5-6).

Then He said, "Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away..." Can you imagine how the disciples must have felt about this statement? But next He gives the key to overcoming any tragedy without having long-term mental distress: "for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you" (John 16:7).

Jesus was sending help--help that would guide, strengthen, comfort and empower His people at all times, but especially in times of trouble. This helper is none other than the very *power* of God--the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:19). Luke wrote that the brethren in the early Church, after having experienced great persecution and the tragic death of Stephen, "had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the *comfort* of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied" (Acts 9:31, see also Acts 4:1-31; 5:17-42; 6:8-7:60).

Paul wrote to Timothy urging him "to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind" (2 Timothy 1:6-7).

During a time of tragedy we need more than anything else love, comfort, and a good strong sound mind filled with wisdom to maneuver through the emotional jungle ahead. And it is available! God promises His Spirit and a liberal supply of wisdom to all those who ask Him (Luke 11:13, James 1:5).

Accepting reality

The first step toward a healthy recovery is to accept the reality of what happened. This is a very necessary step, even though it may seem easier, at first, not to face it.

Reality can be very painful, even nightmarish, but it is necessary to get things in the open and discuss what happened, especially with your immediate family or your close friends. You need not be ashamed of the emotions that are sure to be present. I remember recounting the event to a close friend of mine and finding great comfort in doing so.

During a time of tragedy we need more than anything else love...

In our case the whole family was at the scene of the accident. Both children saw their younger

brother, whom they loved, die. It was a traumatic experience for them to face, but children have an amazing ability to cope with abnormal circumstances if they are simply told the truth. They accept reality and God's promises with an inspiring childlike faith that adults would do well to develop. Our children immediately accepted and were soothed by God's promise to resurrect their little brother in the future.

Knowing the truth about life after death was of great comfort to us and gave us hope knowing that our son would live again. It helped us all to accept the reality of what had happened.

Pitfalls to avoid

In charting your way through the emotional jungle, there are some things that you will want to avoid. Otherwise you may cause yourself untold additional pain and grief.

The first thing our minister told my family when he arrived at our home was, "Whatever you do, don't start blaming each other or God." I will be forever grateful for his wise counsel--it helped us avoid many pitfalls.

It is only natural to want to blame something or someone for what happened, but it is a useless, unproductive waste of time. No matter how much blame or accusation is leveled against something or someone, it will not change the reality of what occurred. It will only extend the emotional anguish and prolong the process of accepting what happened. This, of course, does not mean that if there was some criminal activity involved that appropriate legal action should not be pursued, but leave that to the lawyers and the courts. Don't allow a court of accusers to be in session in your mind. It will only perpetuate the misery.

It is especially important to not accuse or lay blame if a member of the family appears to have been the cause of the accident. In our case this was true. This could have been a spawning ground for accusations, blame and painful arguments. However, we realized that we needed each other's encouragement and comfort, not accusations. It saved us untold grief and greatly strengthened our relationship.

The grim reality was that our situation was exactly what Solomon described--a product of time and chance. And, as the officer told me that day, sometimes no matter how careful you are, accidents can and will happen.

Dealing with emotions

At times like this many strong emotions come forth, ranging from anger to guilt, from anxiety to utter despair. All these are quite normal during bereavement. The important thing is to bring and keep them out in the open until healing is complete. Make sure communication stays strong in the family. Discuss the tragedy as often as necessary to allow each family member to come to terms with it.

This is especially important with children--they may be little, but their minds have an amazing capacity to discern fact from fiction. They find comfort in facts, but feel insecure and distressed when they are given vague answers.

All these emotions are a natural reaction to human experience. They help us develop

sensitivity and compassion for others. We begin to understand why and how God is sensitive to our needs, especially at times such as these.

Allowing tragic experiences to change you

After you have accepted what has occurred, it is important to ask yourself some questions: "How can this help me make positive changes in my life? What could I possibly learn from this experience that would improve my life and the lives of others? What could be the reasons that God allowed me to suffer like this?"

Notice the words of Paul in his letter to the Corinthians: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort" (2 Corinthians 1:3). This is certainly true, and in the next verse he gives the reason why God allows us to suffer: He "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*" (2 Corinthians 1:4).

Insightful words indeed! God expects us to use our experiences to comfort others in the same way that He comforted us. And in the process of doing so we find yet the greatest comfort of all--*joy*. You will find joy as you reach out to others--comforting and encouraging them with the sensitivity you have to their circumstance because of your own experience. The amazing thing is, you will find that this will speed your healing process like ointment in an open wound. This is why Paul could say: "I am exceedingly joyful in all our tribulation" (2 Corinthians 7:4).

God expects us to use our experiences to comfort others The second great benefit that can come from a tragic experience is an unrelenting motivation to be in God's Kingdom. The death of a loved one should naturally fill us with a sense of obligation and responsibility to seek that Kingdom--if not for your own benefit, certainly for the benefit of the deceased.

For me, the death of our son has been the single biggest motivation in my life. It has helped me focus on what is truly important--seeking first the Kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33). When we do that, God promises a truly abundant and prosperous life (John 10:10). A better and more meaningful family life is sure to result when you focus on the Kingdom of God and use your experiences to help others by having compassion and giving encouragement to them.

Looking to the future

The final step is to look to the future. The Bible is replete with promises of a future life for the deceased. Jesus himself said, "He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live . . . for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth" (John 11:25; 5:28-29). The prophet Ezekiel saw the resurrection of the dead in a vision from God and graphically recorded it for us in Ezekiel 37.

I remember the very first thought in my mind when I saw my son dead in the driveway. "He *will* live again, he *will* be resurrected to life."

It is important to talk about the deceased as years go by, to keep them a part of the family. We

have had many inspiring discussions with our children about our son and their brother and what it will be like in the new life. They know and understand God's promise of a much better life in this world to come. *(Be sure to read the author's article on [The Resurrection](#) in the July 1999 edition of VCM)*

Zechariah prophesied a time when "Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each one with his staff in his hand because of great age. The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets" (Zechariah 8:4-5). This is certainly not a description of Jerusalem today, but it is the sure reality of the world tomorrow.

Time and chance is a reality that we all face in this world today. All of us have experienced its repercussions to a greater or lesser degree. It is a reality that we must accept. With God's loving help and comfort we can actually allow tragic experiences to motivate us to a more positive and abundant life--one that is focused on the Kingdom of God.

When You and Your Parents Don't See "Eye-To-Eye"

By Becky Sweat

The battle between parents and teens has existed through many generations for many centuries. How can such a trend be changed?



ERIN WAS FURIOUS WITH HER PARENTS because she thinks they're too strict. "They get on my case when I wear makeup. I'm 14 but they think that's too young," she says. "But I love the way makeup looks. Why can't my parents understand how I feel?"

Cassandra hasn't spoken to her Mom and Dad in two days. "They're making my life miserable with an ultra-early curfew," she says. "I can't even go to 7:30 p.m. movie showings because my parents want me home by 9 p.m.--it's totally ridiculous."

Erin and Cassandra are hardly the first teens to clash with their parents. You, the teen, are fighting for independence. Your parents are fighting to guide and protect you, and it's hard for them to deal with the fact that their son or daughter doesn't need them as much as they used to.

"In some ways teens and parents almost have mutually exclusive agendas," says Kathleen Galvin, Ph.D., associate professor of communication studies at Northwestern University. "Parents are probably still focused inward in terms of what's going on with the family, and most teens are beginning to focus outward, paying a great deal more attention to their peer groups as sources of influence." As a result, teens clash with their parents about everything from parties and grades, to how neat their bedrooms need to be and their choice of friends.

Although you may think your parents are unreasonable when they tell you to get off the phone after you've "only" been talking two hours, it doesn't have to turn into a big blow-up. Here are some suggestions for working out your differences.

Get to know your parents. You can put an end to a lot of misunderstandings with your parents just by learning more about them. "I thought my Dad was horrible for not letting me go ice skating on the pond," admits 15-year-old Ashley. "But then my Dad told me

the story of how his best friend almost died when they were teens, playing hockey on a pond that hadn't frozen over completely. My Dad's friend skated over a thin patch of ice and fell in. Now I understand why my Dad was so concerned about me."



Take some time to talk with your parents and get to know them better. Ask what it was like when they were teens. What did they do for fun? Did they have a lot of friends? What was school like? See if there are any past experiences that contribute to the way your parents deal with conflicts and rules. Try to find out where they're coming from and why they react the way they do. Any effort you make to learn more about how your parent's life will be helpful in how you interact with them in the future.

Give your parents a chance to get to know you better. Picture yourself at the dinner table. Your mom asks how school was today and you respond "fine." Your dad asks what plans you have for the weekend and you say, "I don't know." Your mom tries again by asking how your friend is doing and you say "all right." While you may be tempted to respond to your parent's questions in this way, doing so "closes your parents out in terms of being able to make any kind of predictions about your behavior," Dr. Galvin says. "Your parents will be much less likely to grant certain privileges or permission to do something, because they don't have much to go on to help them make a decision: they don't know your friends, they don't know how you feel about various issues or how you interact with your peers." It is important to be open and honest, trying not to hide questionable or wrong actions from parents. Teens who do best with their parents are those willing to talk about every day happenings, so their parents have some sense of what their child's life is like.

Tell your parents about school activities. Introduce them to your friends. Let them know what you think about current events on the news. You may not share the most private details of your life, but at least your parents have some idea about what you're thinking and will feel as though you can be trusted.

Try to see things from your parents' perspective

Discuss concerns before they turn into catastrophes. Set aside a time and place to talk when both you and your parents feel relaxed and stress-free. You may want to plan weekly or monthly meetings with your parents to share your concerns, discuss social activities you'd like to go to, privileges you'd like to work towards, what you'd like to do on summer vacation, etc. Don't tell your Dad Saturday afternoon that you want a later curfew that night and expect a positive response.

"The key is to give your parents as much advance notice as possible," says Mary Halpin, Ph.D., an adolescent psychologist in Deerfield, Illinois. "If you spring things on your parents at the last minute, you will probably get a flat "no" with no compromises. Give your parents a reasonable amount of time, several days or longer depending on what the event is, to think about your request."

Try to see things from your parents' perspective and anticipate what questions they're going to ask. Think your proposal through ahead of time. You're going to have a better chance of receiving a "yes" if your parents are comfortable with your plans. If there are a lot of gaps and "I'm not so sure," you'll be less-likely to ease your parent's concerns.



Be willing to negotiate. "After I got my driver's license, I asked to use my mom's car so I could drive some friends to the school dance," says 16-year-old Jennifer. "When my mom asked which friends I planned to take, I didn't feel like telling her, so she wouldn't let me take the car and I didn't go to the dance. The next day at school, everyone was talking about how much fun the dance was and I wished I'd been willing to give in a little with my mom." Most parents try to make wise decisions for their teens by considering their safety as well as their future happiness. The more information a parent has, the more likely it is that he/she will respond positively to a request.

You will be setting yourself up for disappointment if you expect things to always go exactly the way you want it. Learn to compromise and negotiate. "That means sometimes you may get most of what you want, sometimes you get some of what you want and other times you get very little of what you want," Dr. Halpin says. Seek a compromise where both you and your parents come away feeling satisfied. Remind yourself that a partial solution is better than nothing at all.

Pick your battles carefully. What are the issues most important to you? Use of the family car? Going on a ski trip with your friends? Extending curfew? A raise in your allowance? Dropping piano lessons? Not everything is worth fighting for. If you are constantly approaching your mom and dad with complaints, life at home won't be pleasant for you or your parents.

"Some teens go to the wall, even on issues really not that important to them--it's like something triggers and the teen thinks to himself, I have a right, and the issue seems more important than it is," Dr. Galvin says. Save your confrontations for the things that really matter and learn to put up with minor inconveniences and disappointments. Then when you do confront your parents about a problem, they'll know this is something which means a lot to you.

Don't think of your parents as the enemy. "When I told my Mother about *Your parents are on your side* the party I wanted to go to, she instantly jumped on me with questions like who's going to be at the party? Will a parent be there? How late will the party go? It's like she doesn't want me to go and doesn't care if I have any fun. But I'm just trying to be like everyone else and have a good time," says Lana, age 16.

While it may not feel that way right now, your parents are on your side. They're looking out for you and aren't getting thrills about telling you "no." Says Dr. Halpin: "Teens tend to think their parents grew up in the stone age, back in the 50s and 60s. Yes, things are different in the 90s in the sense that it's probably a faster-paced world, and there are less strict guidelines about what's appropriate behavior and what isn't. But teens are still teens, and even though they may seem more sophisticated on the surface, they're still not adults."

Your parents are the people responsible for helping you make decisions until you're 18. They want you to enjoy your teenage years. They want you to grow up and become well-adjusted, successful adults. It's just that sometimes, their way of helping you reach that point of success may be different than the avenue that you'd like to take. Remind yourself that they are your parents, they do deserve your respect, and they do care about you--even if the two of you don't always see eye-to-eye!

*Virtual Christian Magazine Editorial***Lesson in Wisdom**

By Aaron Dean

"You're the King; you can make these hill people do what is best for them" said the generals to Thailand's King Bhumibol. "It may be best," replied the king, "but we must find a better way and not offend these people. Aren't there enough enemies?"

That was the way the king related this story in a private conversation some years ago, and it has stuck with me ever since. It was one of many conversations I had with him and his queen during a 12-year relationship, which I recently renewed after a 11-year rest from travel. Many pearls of wisdom came from these talks.

The Bible says the children of this world are often wiser than the children of light. Yet it doesn't say we shouldn't be wise. The Proverbs are full of words of wisdom that we are implored to use. God wants us to keep our eyes open for pearls of wisdom that we can use. Indeed He says, "become perfect even as our father in heaven is perfect". This would imply building a great deal of wisdom.



The Thai king faced a dilemma. This hill tribe lived in a dry climate where water was unpredictable. Their meager farming methods meant clearing land, usually with destructive slash and burn methods, and then moving on to new land after a season or two. Even then the tribe often went hungry as streams dried up.

The king had surveyed this land extensively and had decided to help the people. He was going to build a dam that would provide a steady source of water year round. It was a great plan and one of the few places suited for a sizable dam.

This tribe, unfortunately, had cleared its land exactly in the area that would be covered by water behind the dam! The chief was afraid and upset because the water would cover their fields. He didn't want a dam. He didn't want to move. Perhaps there were some superstitions involved regarding the gods, along with his own fear.

The generals were right. The king's plan was best for the people. It would give them water year round. They could irrigate and not have to move so often. And, yes, the king did have the power to enforce his building plans.

"I asked my aides to look upstream for another place," he told me. They found a place where a small dam could be built. "It wouldn't be as good, but the tribe could see how it worked," he explained. So they built it there and no fields were flooded and no one was afraid.

A year later he went back. The tribe was at peace, and very appreciative of the dam. The tribal chief apologized for stopping the larger dam. "I was wrong," he said. "Could you build the bigger dam?" And the king did.

At a time when the communists were trying to stir unrest in Thailand among these hill tribes, the king made an ally. Instead of allowing a seed of discord to be sowed, he found another way and ended up building both trust and loyalty. This tribe could never be swayed against their trusted benefactor.

How often do we, when we are in a position of power, lack wisdom in using authority? How often do we make specific demands about the what, when, and how of something that probably really does not need to be done?

How do our children, our spouses, or our employees react to our demands? Do the "dams" we build provide nourishment and trust to those we love, or do they "drown" the people we wish to help with fear? How does Christ treat us in His leadership role?

It is very rewarding to help people in a way that gently brings them along. As Christians, when we think of the power God has in store for us, it is our duty to do as this wise king did-- that is to "find a better way," even when we know the answer and have the power.

Letters to the Editor

Extending Our Hand to the Grieving



I was doing a search for Joan Osborn, the singer, and I found your magazine.

I think it is a nice magazine. I'm a Christian myself. I believe in God and the Bible. I thought Joan's article (in the February issue of VCM) on the loss of a loved one, somebody close to you, a friend, and what not, was very good. It will help me a lot. I had a very good friend named Adam. He lost his mother almost a year and a half ago in a car accident. It was because of bad weather. There was a fire call and his dad lost control of the truck. I didn't know what to say to Adam when he came back to school. I was at a loss for words. I knew his mother; she was real nice. I didn't know what to say to him. He went on like normal, but I know it has to hurt to lose someone in your family, especially a parent. He was only 16.

Joan's article has helped me feel better and know what to say and how to say it a little bit better when I write Adam and talk to him. We've moved since the accident and I felt uncomfortable around him. I was afraid that I was going to say something wrong. As time went by, it got easier to talk to him again.

I just thought I would express my thanks. I have just one question. Is the Joan Osborn that wrote that article the same as the singer who sings "One of Us?" I love that song to pieces. I hardly ever hear it anymore. I heard it a couple nights ago and recorded it....

Thanks for taking the time to read this message,

-- Christopher Eldredge

The Resurrection: The Astounding Biblical Truth



Just read this article in *The Good News Magazine* this week. It is an excellent article. I am thrilled to see this on the Internet. Keep up the good work. Thank you for developing this *Virtual Christian Magazine*. It is very encouraging to see the progress of the work in this media with so much potential for growth.

-- Cambridge, OH



I was moved and encouraged by John Miller's article in July's VCM entitled "The Resurrection: Astounding Biblical Truth" After recently losing my father, it so reassuring to

know that I will see him someday in the resurrection.

-- Hector Earle

Thoughts From Dad



Just wanted you to know you're doing a great job. I really enjoyed Don Hooser's "Thoughts From Dad." All of the articles that I have read have been very good.

-- Gary and Sue Evans