

Virtual Christian MAGAZINE

hope and encouragement for the real world

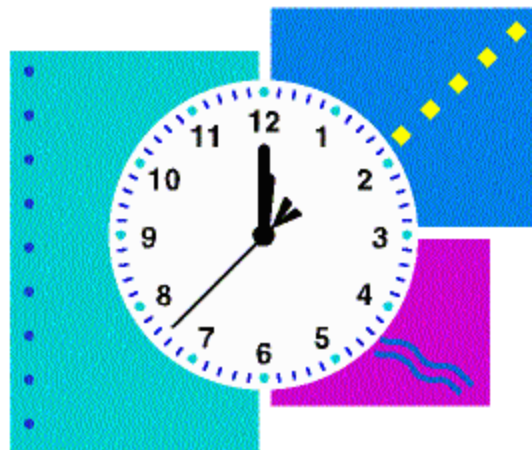
Volume 2 Number 1

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by John Rutis



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We are pleased to announce the [January/February 2000, *Good News* magazine...](#)

Are We on the Threshold of a New Age?



As we enter the year 2000, what can we expect in the years ahead? Will we see a man-made utopia courtesy of wonderful new technological marvels, or a time of great crisis? Or might we see something entirely different and unexpected on the world scene--the dawn of a new age unlike anything mankind has ever experienced? Only the Bible can give us the right answer.

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Virtual Christian Magazine

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Virtual Christian MAGAZINE Editorial

Choosing to Suffer...



Photo by Victor Kubik

by Sue Johns

Franz Klassen is the pastor of a group of Sabbatarians who had to flee Tajikistan in 1997. Franz is an extremely happy and positive individual who trusts God to see him through difficult situations. He shared his story with me when I was in Ukraine in February 1999, telling me of the frightening circumstances which developed in Tajikistan in 1996-1997, which evolved into the necessary evacuation of about 200 Sabbatarians to Ukraine.



There are two Islamic factions in Tajikistan, the Sunnis and the Shiites. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, civil war broke out in Tajikistan almost immediately. The leaders of each faction would conduct a prayer and then tell their followers: "we need to kill our enemies." This meant anyone who did not hold to their beliefs. So they would pray and go out and start killing. About one hundred people per day were being killed in guerilla activity.

Among the Christian sects in Tajikistan, the Sabbatarians were particularly disliked by the Muslims. The windows in their meeting place were broken and they heard the threat that "one grenade will take care of all of them." Many atrocities were taking place, and the Sabbatarians found it necessary to flee Tajikistan in order to live and worship without threats to their lives. So it was in this climate that they began the exodus to Ukraine.

The Exodus

Some of the Sabbatarians were able to sell their homes before leaving Tajikistan for between \$1,200 and \$2,500. Some of them just had to walk away from their homes and most could only take on the trip what they could carry. A large percentage of what they did have went to pay for their transportation to Ukraine--more than a three thousand-mile journey. In the winter, Dushanbe, the city of their exodus is accessible only by train or plane, being surrounded by mountains. Most of the refugees left by train, though taking the train is very dangerous--the refugees had to blockade the doors to the cars they were in to keep out criminals.

All of us know of people who have sacrificed something in order to live as God instructs us to live.

We all know the story of Moses and how he chose to recognize his Hebrew heritage at the expense of being rejected by Egyptian royalty. He could have chosen the opposite and rejected his Hebrew heritage. Down through the centuries, many of God's people have had to make choices regarding lifestyle, employment opportunities, and sometimes more encompassing situations. Often these choices mean they have given up more luxurious lifestyles and lucrative careers, or have had to flee for their lives. These choices have been made willingly in order to serve God and His people, rather than to serve self.

Franz and his wife and eight children, ranging in age from eight months to 20, were the last to leave. They remained until all the others had safely departed. He sold his home on a Friday and went to the airport ticket office to buy tickets for a Sunday flight as conditions were becoming very dangerous.

The person at the ticket office took his phone number--something they do not usually do. When Franz arrived home he received a call that he had left two of the children's birth certificates at the ticket office. If the person hadn't taken his phone number, they would not have been able to reach him by phone on Friday, and then they would have had to try to track him down another way. They would not have been able to locate him on the Sabbath because he was at church. The ticket office is not open on Sunday, so they would not have been able to board their flight without the two birth certificates. They left with only some suitcases, which contained mostly food for their trip, and some extra clothes.

Shortly after they departed, the rebels took over the airport.

The Choice Is Made

Despite all the trials and persecution that Franz and his congregation have gone through, Franz always has a ready smile and places all his trust in God to see them through. The most amazing thing to me about Franz Klassen is that he could be living in any one of several other countries, including the United States, but he feels an obligation and commitment to his friends whom God has given to him to serve. He is there to genuinely serve these people, even at the expense of this level of sacrifice. He does this gladly and cheerfully. Their resettlement in Ukraine has not been easy. Employment opportunities are very limited and only by donations sent from the United States and other places, as well as the work brigades that they organize, have they been able to survive.

How many of us, who live in much more abundance, would choose "rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward" (Hebrews 11: 25-26)?

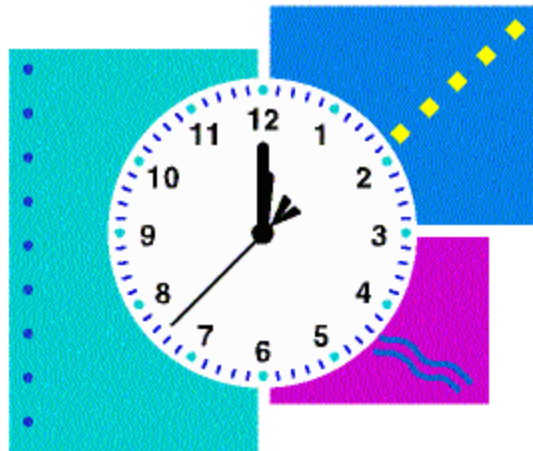


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The Real Millennium

At the dawning of a new millennium, is it time to consider what we should do to prepare for the real utopian Millennium promised in the Bible?

By John Rutis



THE YEAR 2000 IS HERE. It's the beginning of what most people consider a new millennium. We know now who was properly prepared for the consequences of the Y2K bug. Have planes fallen out of the air? Did you lose your water and electricity? Are government checks late or garbled? Are businesses collapsing? Is the Internet still here so you can read this?

No one writing programs 20 or 30 years ago believed that those programs would still be used in the year 2000. Since computer memory was very expensive then and it would be many long years before the century changed, almost everyone used the last two digits of the year in programs, just as we do when writing the date on paper. If programmers even thought about possible problems in the future, they couldn't imagine their programs lasting that long when computers were advancing so fast.

But some of those programs are still in use--just grown enormous in size and complexity.

In the past two or three years, billions of dollars and thousands of man-years have been spent by the computer industry, banks, insurance companies, government agencies, the military, large corporations and many others to correct the Y2K problems. Most felt they were well-prepared.

In spite of all this work, some thought the Y2K problem would devastate the world. Power would go off, banks and insurance companies would fail, cars would stop in the middle of freeways,

planes would fall from the air and large government agencies and the military would be in gridlock. These people stocked up on food and water, and bought generators and guns to defend themselves from those who weren't as prudent. They thought they were prepared while all these large organizations were not.

Others thought there would be little trouble. They felt that all the major problems would have been fixed and the minor problems that did occur would be quickly repaired. So they ignored the whole thing.

There were many opinions between the two extremes.

Now that the year 2000 is here, we know who was prepared and who was not.

Except for the Y2K problem, the change from 1999 to 2000 brought no problems of itself. This transition was completely arbitrary. Our calendar was supposedly based on the birth of Christ, but it's well known that the date was wrong and that the 2000th anniversary of Christ's birth was several years ago.

There is another Millennium coming--the thousand-year reign of Jesus Christ on this earth, also called the Kingdom of God. We knew exactly when the Y2K bug would strike, but we don't know exactly when Christ's Millennium will arrive. However, comparing world conditions with the prophecies of the Bible leads us to believe it will be soon.

As important as it was to be prepared for the Y2K millennium problems, it is far more important to be prepared for the Kingdom of God. There are even more opinions about this than the Y2K bug.

There are those who believe the Millennium is already here--that the church is the Kingdom of God. Within this group are all kinds of opinions about when it started, what church or churches are included and whether Christ came at the beginning or will come at the end or won't come at all.

There are others who don't believe in the Millennium, who feel that you can't understand or rely on the book of Revelation.

Then there's the vast majority who don't know about the Kingdom of God or don't believe it.

None of these people are preparing for the Kingdom because they think it's already here or will never come or they don't even know about it. But it will come--and soon. We need to be preparing for the coming Kingdom with even more diligence than the computer industry, the government and big industries prepared for the Y2K bug.

If no one had prepared for the Y2K bug, the world's governments and industries would have collapsed (and some may anyway). Every one of us in the industrialized world would have been facing a world where nothing worked any more.

Those who are truly preparing for the Kingdom of God will reign as kings and priests with Christ

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for a thousand years. This does not mean they will be despots who cruelly oppress people for their own gain as have large numbers of kings and priests throughout man's history. They will be righteous kings and priests serving under Christ.

Righteous kings care for their people. They promote peace with their people's neighbors, and harmony and productivity in every aspect of civil life.

Righteous priests teach the uncompromising truth of God. They show how keeping God's laws leads to true happiness. They explain that God's laws are not there to limit people's freedom, but to keep people from harm and to give them true freedom.

As important as it was to be prepared for the Y2K millennium problems, it is far more important to be prepared for the Kingdom of God.

Just before the biblical Millennium, though, is a time called the Great Tribulation. This will be the most horrible time humanity will ever go through. Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 24:21-22, "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened." The Great Tribulation will be so bad that mankind would destroy all life on earth if God did not stop us.

But God promises to stop that destruction, and to protect and train those who are willing to serve in the Kingdom of God.

If it were not for this small number of people preparing for the Kingdom, a group Jesus called the elect, God would not save the rest of humanity, as Jesus showed in Matthew 24:22 (quoted above).

How then should we be preparing for the Kingdom of God? Everyone must prepare individually. We cannot depend on governments or corporations or even churches. Families and churches can be a help, but they can even be a hindrance. There are four areas in which each of us must be preparing:

We Must Believe the Gospel of the Kingdom of God

Gospel means good news--the good news that tells us that the Kingdom of God is coming, how it will come and what it will be like. Knowing the Kingdom is coming and how it is coming will provide us with understanding of what we should be doing to prepare. Knowing what the Kingdom will be like gives us great incentive to prepare to be a part of it. A helpful resource about this subject is "The Gospel of the Kingdom" which you can download ([PDF](#), [HTML](#)), or [receive free of charge](#).

We Must Accept Christ as Savior

Once we understand and know that the Kingdom of God is coming, we must accept the salvation offered by its King, Jesus Christ: "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

We Must Give our Lives Totally to God

We must work toward becoming totally obedient to God: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:1-2).

We Must Live by the Spirit

In this human life we are not able to live a completely sinless life, but it must be our intent to live through the Spirit of God, not after the flesh: "For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live" (Romans 8:13).

As we prepare for the coming Kingdom of God, we know that God is preparing things for us so wonderful that we cannot even imagine them: "But as it is written: 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him'" (1 Corinthians 2:9). But God gives us some understanding of these things through the Holy Spirit, as Paul continues in verse 10: "But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God."

With such a fantastic future in store, let us, with God's help, prepare for the real Millennium as God prepares His Kingdom for us.



God's Plan For Eternity

*God has a better plan for eternity than most realize;
and it's available to everyone.*

By Larry J. Walker



SOME BELIEVE THAT ALL who seek God with a sincere heart will be admitted to heaven, even if their quest is via a non-Christian religion. Others vehemently protest that no one can be saved apart from Christ.

This controversy reflects a major philosophical dilemma in mainstream Christian theology. Only a minority of the world's population even claims to be a Christian. Are all non-Christians lost and condemned to hell? If so, how does this fit the Bible description of an all-powerful God of love who does not want anyone to perish? But to suggest that someone can attain salvation without Christ contradicts the teachings of the Scriptures.

The Bible lays down conditions for salvation:

- Acceptance of Jesus Christ as Savior: "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).
- Obedience to God: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven" (Matthew 7:21).
- And living according to the Spirit: "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit" (Romans 8:1) and, "For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live" (Romans 8:13).

Some non-Christian religions involve human sacrifice, temple prostitution and even bestiality as part of their worship. Could a sincere adherent of such a religion be welcomed into eternal life with God? Jesus said following human tradition is vain worship: "And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." (Matthew 15:9) How much more so if those traditions violate the law of God?

It is not even enough to confess Jesus as Lord (Matthew 7:21 quoted above). Peter wrote, "Now If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and sinner appear?" (1 Peter 4:18). Jesus concluded, "Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matthew 7:14).

What is the fate of non-Christians? Eternal life with God or condemnation to the fires of hell?

Few have considered a third option that can be demonstrated from the Scriptures. Most Christians assume that God is trying to save everyone in this life. What if He isn't? If God is allowing most of mankind to live life without the knowledge of His plan, He could forgive them for their ignorance. This is precisely what Paul taught in Romans 11:32, "For God has committed them all in disobedience, that He might have mercy on all." He explained in Romans chapters 9 through 11 that the failure of most of Israel is only temporary. All Israel will yet have an opportunity for salvation "So all Israel will be saved, as it is written: 'The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins'" (Romans 11:26-27). God will resurrect them to physical life to allow them to learn His ways (Ezekiel 37:1-14). They will have an entire lifetime to live God's way and compare the results with how they lived in their previous lifetime. Most will repent and be saved.

Most Christians assume that God is trying to save everyone in this life. What if He isn't?

Since God is not a respecter of persons, this opportunity will be available to all who never had a chance for salvation in this life. They are neither destined for bliss nor doomed to destruction. Their fate is yet to be determined. God has a better plan for eternity than most realize.

One more point should be made regarding the eternal destiny of any person--Christian or non-Christian. Our fate does not lie in the hands of any human being. Nor is it determined by rulings or doctrines of any church organization. Only God can make that determination. Instead of arguing over who God will let into heaven, we need to let God decide who will spend eternity with Him and do all we can to make sure that includes us.



A Lesson From Tony

*What can we do to help direct our children on the right path--
the path that leads to happiness, instead of self-destruction?*

By Joanne Rutis



S EVERAL YEARS AGO we moved into what we knew could be a temporary home. The house we had been renting had been sold out from under us and the landlord wanted us out as soon as possible. It was, at that time, the holiday season and most people were more concerned with celebrating than they were with renting homes. We found it very difficult to find a place within our price range in the area we wanted to live in.

At last we found what we thought would do. This place had a few drawbacks. It, too, was up for sale, and could be sold out from under us. It was smaller than we wanted, and in an area that was a little too close to the rough part of town for our liking, but we didn't feel we had much choice at the time. And, on the plus side, the house was close to the children's dance studio, and near a bus stop so my husband could ride to work when I needed the car. So we rented the house and settled in and began to meet the neighbors. That's when I first met Tony.

Tony was an outgoing, yet at the same time shy young man of 12 when we first met. He came over because he knew we had kids and he wanted to meet them. His younger brother, Andy, trailed along behind his big brother. Tony was a normal looking kid--sandy hair, glasses slightly too big for his face and a lean frame upon which his old jeans and baggy shirts hung loosely.

Some kids you just take a liking to--Tony was one of those kids for me. He was sweet when he wanted to be, but he had a habit of getting into trouble. He was suspended from school a number of times, mostly for fighting. He always seemed to have his reasons. One of the times he was suspended he had gotten into a fight with a boy who had broken his

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glasses. His parents weren't wealthy, quite the opposite, so to him, having his glasses broken was a big deal.

boy. Tony had died because he hadn't chosen the right path.

Tony lived two houses down and across the road from us with his mother and step-dad. They both worked, and, as a result, had little time or energy for their boys; although I do think they dearly loved their children and tried their best with what they had.

I remember the day Tony brought over a school project and asked for my help with it. His mother couldn't sew, he said, and he knew I could. Could I help him with this stuffed bat that he was supposed to make? He seemed both surprised and pleased when I took the time to show him how to lay out the material, cut out the pattern and sew it together. I'll never forget how happy he was as he carried the finished product out the front door. He was going to go show his mother what he had made, he told me proudly, and I realized then how much he loved his mother and how badly he longed for her approval.

In the six months or so that we lived in that house, Tony and my daughter, who was two years older, spent a lot of time talking. Tony and my son, who was a year younger, spent a lot of time rough housing. They both liked Tony very much. In fact the whole family liked Tony.

But the house we were renting did sell. And once more we had to move. When we packed our things and got ready to move into a house on the other side of town, Tony declared his intentions of biking over to visit. But it was far away, and along narrow streets that weren't safe for bikers. Tony only made the trip a few times and then he stopped coming.

It wasn't long until we lost touch with Tony.

The family was pleased when, a few years later, we ran into Tony in the local grocery store where he had taken the job of bag boy. Older, taller, and more grown up, Tony still had the same shy smile I remembered so well.

Over the next three years we'd see him now and again at the store. I'd say hi as I hurried about my busy schedule. I didn't take the time to stand still and say, "How are you doing, Tony?" or, "Why don't you drop by and pay us a visit?" I wish now that I had. For Tony, you see, took his own life last week.

Of course we were all shocked. He'd seemed like such a hard working, nice young man. What could have gone wrong? What had driven Tony to do something so desperate? Was there something we could have done to prevent it? Feelings of guilt began to plague me.

Our daughter discovered that a young man with whom she worked also knew Tony. He wasn't really surprised by what had happened. Tony had been sucked into a culture that thrived on the negative. He said he had once gone to visit Tony and the music he had been listening to had been so loud and the lyrics so depressing that he had had to leave. He said that Tony also had his room painted black, and decorated with skulls and candles.

I was shocked. Tony was a sweet young man, wasn't he? How could he have become involved in anything so hurtful?

Then I remembered that few had had time for Tony. Was it possible that when he had needed help and guidance the most that there had been no one to steer him on the right path? He had found friends who had time for him, but they had directed him on the wrong paths--the paths that led him to his death.

Tony hadn't been born a 'bad' boy. He hadn't died, I believe, a 'bad' boy. Tony had died because he hadn't chosen the right path. He had allowed negative sounds, ideas and attitudes to enter his mind.

How many other young people have suffered the same fate as Tony? How many more will suffer the same fate if nothing is done? Perhaps not committing the extreme self-destructive act Tony did, but allowing their lives to become less than they could be; filled with doubts, fears and negative emotions.

And most importantly, we can set the right example. We can be positive ourselves.

It's so easy to do. We live in a negative world. Every day we hear negative things reported in the news. Disaster movies flood the entertainment media. Violence on the big screen, as well as television, is commonplace. Horror movies seem popular with the younger generation nowadays. The more blood, gore and fear they experience the better they seem to like it. Many of the computer games our children play are filled with violence.

But what is this sort of input doing to our children? What seeds are being planted in their minds? What attitudes and choices will those seeds produce later on?

What can we do to help direct our children on the right path--the path that leads to happiness, instead of self-destruction?

What can we do to ensure that the young men and women we know don't end up being like Tony? We can't police their every move, going in and switching off their radio every time a song comes on we don't approve of. But we can talk to them. We can explain the consequences of too much negative input. We can encourage good, clean, healthy fun. Young people are instructed in God's Word to enjoy being young. "Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth; walk in the ways of your heart, and in the sight of your eyes" (Ecclesiastes 11:9, first part). That doesn't mean young people should go out and smoke pot, engage in sexual activities and drink beer or hard liquor. God's way of fun is much better and doesn't hit you with a penalty later in life. "But know that for all these God will bring you into judgment" (Ecclesiastes 11:9, the rest of the verse).

And most importantly, we can set the right example. We can be positive ourselves. We can avoid constantly finding fault and picking apart everything wrong. That just makes children resentful anyway. The old saying is true, that the best defense is a good offense. We can defeat the negative by being positive ourselves.

Being positive in a negative world isn't easy. If necessary we need to ask God to renew in us and our family a right spirit--a spirit of joy and peace. This world is full of negative influences, but with

God's help we can combat them.

Let's remember Tony--and reach out toward all the young men and women who battle this world's negative influence. Let's show them that life is worth living.



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The Christian Battle

A good soldier knows many battles are always looming on the horizon, so he prepares to handle them one by one.

By Hector M. Earle



OUR SUCCESS, GROWTH AND REWARDS depend on our desire to become good, effective Christians and to continuously guard and maintain our stand for Christ. 2 Timothy 2:3-4 states, "You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier." Here, the apostle Paul challenged Timothy to be on guard against the affairs of this world lest he become influenced and confused. This Christian duty is what Jesus referred to in the parable of the sower.

The key here is growth. God wants each and every one of us to take the seed that was planted in us (some planted many years ago, some more recently) to grow and produce good fruits and be on guard against anything and everything that may stop that growth.

The Bible is very clear in presenting our three enemies.

First, we have the desires of our human nature (which God's Word refers to as "the works of the flesh"). Second, we experience the pulls of a sinful society (often referred to in the Bible as "the world"). Finally, we face daily battles against Satan and his ever-deceiving tactics (he is referred to in the Bible as the "god of this world"). If we allow them, these deadly foes can come between us

and God and separate us from Him. They will tend to put wedges in our minds and gradually cause us to drift from the guidance and power of God's Holy Spirit and our faith in Christ.

Scriptures show these three enemies wearing and tearing away at God's work and His workers time and time again. If we fail as good Christian soldiers, we will fail to live and uphold the doctrines of Christ in this world of sin and darkness. If we don't recognize the enemy and prepare to meet him, he will move in and defeat us on various fronts. If we don't learn to use our weapons of Bible study and prayer, we will allow the storms of life to overwhelm us.

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A good soldier knows many battles are always looming on the horizon, so he prepares to handle them one by one. He doesn't get confused and wonder why he must go into battle, for he is aware of his calling and expects to face the foe. The battles in which Christians are involved are a calling, and just like a soldier is proud to defend his country, we likewise should be proud to defend the cause of Christ in this age of "anything goes" and moral relativism.

We are told in Ephesians 6:10 "to be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might." Further in this passage, verse 13, it tells us, "Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day."

There are clear instructions as to what we are to do when the works of the flesh, the world and Satan come against us. We must keep up the good work of faith, for "we shall reap if we do not lose heart" (Galatians 6:9).

God has tremendous promises for the good Christians who endure hardship. They are referred to by Christ as overcomers--those who endure until the end (the end of their physical life or until Christ's return). We are told by Christ in Matthew 5 to rejoice in persecution, "for great is your reward in heaven." In Revelation 3:5 we are told that "He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name out from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels." We are promised to sit with Christ on His throne in Revelation 3:21. Furthermore, we are given the ultimate promise in Revelation 21:7, "he who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son." Other scriptures in Revelation tell us we are to "reign with Christ," and "eat of the tree of life which is in the paradise of God."

Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15 that our bodies will be changed and made like His glorified body. Finally we are assured in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 that "we shall always be with the Lord."

The price of being a good steward for Christ may be difficult at times, but the price is worth it (compare the wide and narrow roads in Matthew 7:13-14). Also, in 1 Thessalonians 5:16, Paul tells us to "rejoice always," "hold fast what is good" (verse 21) and "may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (verse 23).

These scriptures accentuate the positive and encourage us to "stick to it" and not "throw in the towel" and allow the cares of this life to overtake us. Instead we are to focus on whatever is true, honest, pure, lovely and of good report (Philippians 4:8).

Effective Christians are alert and ready. They know the drums of battle are always on the horizon. Therefore, it is incumbent upon each and every one of us to continue the fight for righteousness and heed the promise of Christ when He said, "Behold I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work" (Revelation 22:12). There is no room for complacency or "to be at ease in Zion" in these perilous times in which we live. May the Holy Sprit continue to help and inspire us to always keep our sense of urgency right through to the end of this age when we shall be changed from mortal to immortal in God's glorious Kingdom.



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Meditation

*A vital purpose of meditation is to cleanse our hearts
and minds from the evils of this world.*

By Harvey Werner



ALL OF US could benefit from it. It only takes half a mind to do it. You may not think you have time to do it, but if you take the time, you will be blessed in the long run. It will enrich your life and give you more contentment and peace of mind. What is it? What could possibly provide so many rewards? It's the little-practiced art of meditation.

Let's look at our lives a bit. It's no surprise we live in a hectic world filled with all kinds of sins and distractions. The glitter is seemingly everywhere. On TV, in movies and now even here on the Internet. If we allow it, this present evil world, so full of sins and distractions, can preoccupy our lives to the extent of drawing our eyes off the Kingdom of God. And if we take our eyes off the prize, we are exposed, vulnerable and easier prey for Satan the devil. We need to make meditation a part of each day.

What is meditation? What is its purpose? What benefits will it bring us? Let's look at each of these questions one by one.

What Is It?

Here's a definition: Meditation is a concerted mental effort to contemplate a single theme in its many facets. In other words, it's mental work that takes effort pondering a subject to the extent of becoming intimately familiar with it.

Here's another definition: Meditation is the private devotion to deep, continuous, purposeful reflection of the mind on a single theme. As we are reminded in Colossians 3:2, we need to set our minds "on things above, not on things on the earth."

What Is the Purpose of Meditation?

A vital purpose of meditation is to cleanse our hearts and minds from the evils of this world. Our thinking processes can be clearer and more focused. We can literally do as it says in 2 Corinthians 10:5 in "bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."

What Benefits Will it Bring Us?

Quite simply, it will bring our minds closer to God's own mind. As we study the Bible, we need to meditate on what we study and read. This is where we really profit from Bible study. By thinking deeply about and meditating on what we read in the Bible, we gain the added benefit of more deeply understanding the intended meaning and see more clearly how to apply God's Word in all aspects of our lives. By digesting the Bible through meditation, it literally becomes a part of us.

Society around us tries to keep our minds and thinking shallow, operating only on a superficial level with very little depth. We can allow ourselves to gain false values and standards and literally keep ourselves from the Kingdom of God! Instead of distraction, we need concerted concentration and spiritual depth in our minds. We will be blessed by God if we are diligent in our meditative efforts.

An excellent example from the Bible on meditation and its benefits is found in the Psalms. They are filled with David's thoughts and meditations on many subjects.

"Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night" (Psalm 1:1-2).

David was a man after God's own heart who meditated on the laws of God again and again. Let's look at another example.

"Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day. You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; for they are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers for Your testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep Your precepts. I have restrained my feet from every evil way, that I may keep Your word. I have not departed from Your judgments, for You Yourself have taught me. How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Through Your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way" (Psalm 119:97-104).

Meditation will give us new perspective and understanding on why things are the way they are.

"My mouth shall speak wisdom, and the meditation of my heart shall give understanding" (Psalm 49:3).

In always seeking to please God, David wanted more than anything to do what was right in God's eyes. As a result, God granted him great wisdom and understanding.

"Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD,

my strength and my Redeemer" (Psalm 19:14).

Meditating on Future Events

We have a wonderful future in the Kingdom of God. It bears meditating about that future. Do we picture ourselves there and think what it will be like? We should. The Kingdom will become much more real to us over time as we ponder what it will be like and picture ourselves there.

Other Areas of Meditation

What are some other things that we can meditate on?

Philippians 4:8 says "whatever things are true...noble...just...pure...lovely...of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy -- meditate on these things."

What comes under these categories? We talked briefly about meditating on what the Kingdom of God will be like on this earth. Here are others:

Think about the wonders of God's creation. Psalm 19:1 says, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork." Think about what it must have taken for God to plan out and design the universe! How much discussion God and the Word must have had. They must have discussed it in great detail with the angels because they shouted for joy at the creation of the earth.

Another area that bears thinking about is how certain characters lived in the Bible. Think about what it must have been like for Moses to first see the burning bush or for the apostles to witness the miracle of Christ walking on the water. Imagine the emotion they experienced during the crucifixion as their Friend and Savior was dying! You can make the Scriptures come alive and they will become much more meaningful!

When to Meditate

When should you meditate? Every day we should orient our thoughts on good and righteous things when we study God's word. Remember Deuteronomy 6 where we are instructed to teach God's principles diligently to our children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down and when you rise up." In other words, all the time!

How about when we pray? That's a good time to think through private matters with God and discuss various ways to handle difficult situations and trials.

Meditation can bring us peace of mind and comfort. It can build our faith. It certainly will increase our understanding as we ponder what the Bible says and how we should live by every word of God.

