

Virtual Christian Magazine

Hope And Encouragement For The Real World

Volume 3 Number 4

April/May 2001



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We are pleased to announce the [March/April 2001, *Good News* magazine...](#)

Right and Wrong: Who Decides?



Recent events have shown the United States and other countries to be deeply divided over such issues as abortion, homosexual rights, drug use, censorship and a host of other problems. When it comes down to issues of morality and individual rights, who should decide wrong or right? Are we able to decide such matters for ourselves? History doesn't provide much encouragement...

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Virtual Christian MAGAZINE Editorial

The Big Cover Up

Trying to cover up our faults may be a human tendency, but some cover ups are just too strange to believe.

By Mike Bennett

WE COULDN'T BELIEVE IT when we saw it in the newspaper. It wasn't an article about a FBI agent spying for the Russians for 20 years. No, it was a different kind of cover up that caught our attention. Here it is, as we saw it in the *Spokane Spokesman-Review*:

Road crews pave over a dead deer

Andreas, Pa.: State transportation officials are trying to find out why workers repairing a stretch of road paved straight over a dead deer.

A gooey spread of oil and rocks was left covering the deer's head, neck and shoulders along Route 895.

"The deer was lying there dead for three to four weeks," said Keith Billig, the mayor of nearby Bowmanstown, about 65 miles northwest of Philadelphia. "I never saw anything like that before in my life."

It is against state policy to pave over a deer, said Walter Bortree, an engineer for the state Transportation Department.

What about me?

What were they thinking? Or maybe the question should be, What were they drinking? Did they think no one would notice? But as I considered it, I began to think about the times I've tried to hide my mistakes and sins when they were painfully obvious to those around me--like a dead deer smack-dab in the road.

It's a human tendency to cover up our mistakes, weaknesses and sins. But when, if ever, does it pay? Adam and Eve tried to hide in the Garden of Eden after taking the forbidden fruit. After killing Abel, Cain tried to pretend he didn't know where his brother was. King David's attempt to hide his adultery with Bathsheba snowballed into murder.

Did they really think they could fool God? Sometimes, subconsciously, I must think that too. But Proverbs 5:21 gives a "God's eye view": "For the ways of a man are before the eyes of the Lord, and He ponders all his paths."

David, for one, learned that covering up does not pay. He suffered the loss of a child and great family trauma. But he did find the real solution to the problem of human failings. We don't have to continually trip over our "dead deer." We can be forgiven!

David understood the need for repentance and change, and for God's forgiveness. He wrote: "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. He will not always strive with us, nor will He keep His anger forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; as far as east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:8-12).

In this issue of *Virtual Christian Magazine*, several articles explore this theme of hidden sins, repentance and the incredible blessing of God's forgiveness. Becky Bennett (yes, she's my wife) writes about the lessons we learned in our "Trial by Tile." Originally she wanted to use the dead deer story in her article, but I don't think she'll mind that I used it here.

The lead article also looks at the awesome blessing of forgiveness made possible by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. "Are We Missing God's Message?" explores the day Christ died and the meaningful symbols He gave the Church in the New Testament Passover. This often overlooked festival has largely been replaced by holidays of nonbiblical origin, but there is incredible meaning in the festivals of the Bible. Don't let them remain covered up. Besides reading through this issue of *Virtual Christian Magazine*, I hope you'll take the time to request copies of the resource material that is offered, such as *God's Holy Day Plan* and *Transforming Your Life*. They are free in the public interest, and all you have to do is [click here](#) to request them.

Let us know what you think of this issue, and be sure to watch out for dead deer!



Are We Missing God's Message?

How much do we understand about the meaning behind Christ's sufferings? Do we really appreciate the sacrifice of Jesus Christ?

By John Ross Schroeder



WHAT WAS THE PURPOSE of Jesus Christ's first coming? He entered our world for more than one reason--but perhaps His chief purpose was to save us from our sins, reconciling us to God the Father.

How much do we grasp the nature of His sacrifice for our sins? Do we deeply comprehend the sufferings and the agonies He endured for our sake?

Most believers comprehend something of Christ's sacrifice. But often real depth of understanding is missing. We can be thankful that the biblical writers can help us fill this gap.

Jesus Christ wants every Christian to fully appreciate what He went through so our sins could be forgiven. To help us grasp the supreme importance of His sacrifice, we are going to take Christ's journey to Jerusalem with Him. Not in a geographical or chronological sense, but mentally and emotionally, as He approached the time when He would fulfill the basic purpose of His humanity.

Subject to the human condition

But we should first understand one important principle derived primarily from the four Gospels, the biographical accounts of Christ's life. When Jesus entered our world as a human being, He did not rearrange the lives of others for His own convenience. Nor did He do so to suit His purposes, great and important though they were. True, certain Old Testament prophecies had to

be fulfilled, but beyond these necessary occurrences He subjected Himself to the rough and tumble of "this present evil world."

He certainly possessed the divine power to constantly intervene in circumstances on His own behalf. But He did not, except for a few occasions when He miraculously escaped being seized and harmed because His time was not yet. The biblical record clearly shows that temptations, frustrations and obstacles regularly punctuated His ministry.

One of the most destructive first-century heresies was the false teaching that Jesus "did not come in the flesh" (1 John 4:1-3). Many adopted the belief that He was not really a human being in the fullest sense, that He didn't suffer the same temptations to sin that we all experience, that He was not really one of us.

Although the apostle John condemned this heresy in the strongest of terms and the biblical record repudiates it, sadly it persists to this day.

While clearly affirming His divinity, the Gospels also present a very human Jesus who continually had to cope with the frailties of other human beings. Time and time again Christ asked people whom He had healed not to say anything so as to avoid focusing attention on Himself in a nation where the religious establishment was hostile to His message. The Bible shows that in most instances their excitement and enthusiasm got the better of them and, against His wishes, they quickly spread the news of what had happened.

At times Jesus needed periods alone or with the 12 disciples, but the crowds usually managed to find Him. Again Jesus did not use His supernatural powers to manipulate people and events for His own purposes, however important they were. He generally responded to the needs of the people. Christ did not please Himself (Romans 15:3).

A strong sense of mission

From early on Jesus had a strong sense of mission (Luke 2:49-52). By age 12 He was speaking of God as His Father, and also showing a strong inward tendency to occupy Himself with His Father's will and desires. He knew He had a great purpose to fulfill.

Some 20 years later He was with His 12 disciples and Mark recorded that "He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again" (Mark 8:31).

Christ soon discovered that the 12 were not fully able to grasp this knowledge. They were not yet converted; they apparently still looked to Him as the Messiah whom they thought would deliver the nation from Roman rule. In any event Jesus had to sternly rebuke Peter for unwittingly letting himself be used by Satan to try to divert the true Anointed One from His ultimate purpose (verses 32-33).

Jesus faced near-total rejection from the religious establishment of His day. "He came unto His own and His own did not receive Him" (John 1:11). Humanly, He would have liked to receive some empathy from those closest to Him.

Jesus repeated the certain prophecy of His upcoming death in Mark 9:31, "but the disciples *did not understand* this saying, and were afraid to ask Him" (verse 32, emphasis added throughout). In terms of understanding the purpose of His last visit to Jerusalem, He had to make that final journey to His beloved city virtually alone.

The last journey to Jerusalem

"Now it came to pass that when the [general] time had come for Him to be received up [crucified], that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51). Jesus was absolutely determined to carry out His mission. Nothing and no one would deter or deflect Him from that purpose.

Satan had already tried and failed (Matthew 4:7-11), but now the pressures would increase. It would be in this city that Christ would allow Himself to be put to death for our many sins--making it possible for us to be reconciled to God the Father.

From fairly early in His ministry, several passages in the book of John reveal that His final date with destiny as a human being was very much on His mind.



Consider the account of Christ's very first miracle, when He turned water into wine. When His mother told Him that they had run out of wine at the wedding feast, He replied: "What does your concern have to do with Me? *My hour has not come*" (John 2:4). Even while attending a wedding in Galilee, His great purpose at Jerusalem would suddenly surface in a conversation with His mother about wine. Along with His own disciples, she, too, did not fully grasp what He would do for mankind.

Neither did His brothers. At the very time when He was in mortal danger from the religious authorities, they foolishly advised Him to "show Himself openly to the world" (John 7:4). Then John noted that "even His brothers did not believe in Him" (verse 5).

Jesus' reply to them is very instructive. "*My time has not yet come*, but your time is always ready. The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil" (verses 6-7). This world, He said, breaks God's holy law with impunity and does not like to be reminded of its sins.

Yet this Gospel account tells us that no one up to that time had been successful in arresting or harming Him "for His hour had not yet come" (John 8:20). But Jesus knew full well that when the appointed time did arrive, He would experience a violent, premature death--and yet one that had great purpose and meaning for all mankind.

A fate known well in advance

Humanly, Jesus was no different from the rest of us. He didn't want to die (Matthew 26:39). But unlike most of us, He knew well in advance the time and circumstances that would surround His

death. He knew the exact mode of execution—one of the most cruel and painful methods ever devised by men—the Roman crucifixion (John 12:32-33). In His travels He had no doubt seen the gruesome spectacle of men dying by crucifixion. Such executions were intended to be a public deterrent to challenging Roman authority.

Psychologically, this advance knowledge was no comfort at all. In fact, it was the opposite. He lamented: "*Now My soul is troubled*, and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour?' But for this purpose I came to this hour" (verse 27).

Do we, some 2,000 years later, truly grasp the depth of Christ's sufferings for our sake? Do we realize what our sins, collectively and individually, did to this sinless and vibrant young man, our Savior, in the prime of His human life?

Not only the humiliation, the terrible beatings and the crucifixion itself, but also the mental anguish He suffered were agonizing. This was to be no ordinary death. Jesus Christ knew He had to take the sins of the whole world—past, present and future—on Himself. He did for us what we could never do for ourselves.

Christ's agony at Gethsemane

Arriving at the garden of Gethsemane and taking Peter, James and John with Him, He asked the other disciples to wait while He prayed. "Then He said to them: 'My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death. Stay here and watch.' He went a little farther, and fell on the ground, and prayed that if it were possible, the hour might pass from Him. And He said, 'Abba Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will'" (Mark 14:34-36).

At the time of His greatest agony to date, His most trusted friends could not even stay awake. They were not much help, but the Father strengthened Him by sending an angel (Luke 22:43). Then, with fixed determination and renewed resolve, He said to the disciples, "Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer [Judas Iscariot] is at hand" (Mark 14:42). The humiliation, scourging and suffering soon followed.

Later, in the last few moments of His human life, "Jesus cried out with a loud voice . . . , 'My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?'" (Matthew 27:46). Though personally sinless, Jesus at His death took on Himself all the sin of all humanity for all time. Christ had to bear the weight of our sins *absolutely alone*. This He did completely by Himself!

It was an act of total selflessness done under the most difficult of circumstances. It was true heroism to the highest degree possible. That is why Christians must never take His sacrifice for granted. We must never forget that ultimate price Jesus paid in order to blot out our sins.

Our appreciation for that sacrifice must endure for a lifetime!

An annual reminder of Christ's sacrifice

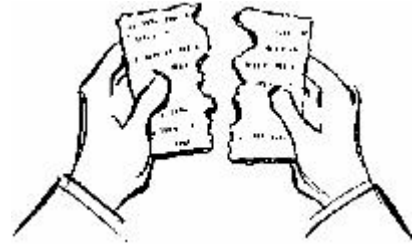
Does God think Jesus Christ's sacrifice is important? He certainly does. In fact, He has worked

out a marvelous plan to remind us year by year of that most important act in all human history. The annual Passover is a vitally significant date on the calendar for Christ's followers. When we observe it, we "proclaim the Lord's death till He comes" Paul wrote (1 Corinthians 11:26).

In a figurative and spiritual sense, to a small degree, Christians have to walk that path to Jerusalem with Jesus every single year. We are reminded of our own part in His death by crucifixion.

Paul tells us that, before we participate in this annual reminder, we must examine ourselves (1 Corinthians 11:28; 2 Corinthians 13:5), knowing we must grapple with "the sin which so easily ensnares us" (Hebrews 12:1).

Following Christ's example and instructions, Christians partake of a small piece of unleavened bread, followed by a tiny cup of wine--the symbols Christ gave us to remind us of His sacrificed body and shed blood, respectively (Matthew 26:26-28; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25).



The annual Passover observance is also a reminder of our sacred covenant with God--that as He willingly gave His only Son as a sacrifice for our sins (John 3:16-17), so we willingly have surrendered our lives to Him, to carry out His will in our lives (Romans 6:6-13). For another year we can proceed to observe the other festivals of God that portray the succeeding steps in God's plan. But the reminder of and acceptance of Christ's sacrifice, marked by the annual Passover, will always be the first and most important step.

Recommended Reading:

Many of our readers may not have heard much about the Passover and its enormous significance. If you would like to learn more, we offer the free booklet *God's Holy Day Plan: the Promise of Hope for All Mankind* to any who are interested. It includes a comprehensive chapter about the Passover, followed by other chapters thoroughly explaining all God's other annual festivals.

The United Church of God also offers two supplementary booklets, *Transforming Your Life* and *The Road to Eternal Life*, that discuss the significance of Christ's sacrifice and what it means for you. All three publications are free, and you may request them by clicking here. You can also find them in the "Booklets" section of our Web site at www.gnmagazine.org.



The Suitcase

I was 4 when I had to leave my home with a suitcase packed with all my possessions. Throughout the painful journey, someone was there to help me through.

By Janet Treadway



I LOOK AT THE SUITCASE and memories well up inside. I should have thought about vacations and positive times with family and friends. I should have been excited about getting that suitcase out and trying to figure out what to put in it or what to take out so I could shut it. But instead my mind wanders back to a time when my suitcase had a different meaning. A time when my suitcase took me on a completely different journey...

My journey begins

I was a little girl of 4 standing there watching my mother as she hurried about gathering things and placing them in an open suitcase on the couch. My mother carefully buttoned up my coat then took my tiny, little hand into hers.

She picked up the suitcase with her other hand and walked me out to a strange car where a strange lady waited. My mother placed the suitcase in the car and then slowly bent down with tears in her eyes and placed me in the car and walked away.

As we drove away I looked back to see my mother fading into the distance. I was not to see her for another 10 years. I sat there looking at the suitcase beside me, thinking about how my mother carefully packed my favorite dress and even placed my favorite stuffed monkey, Curious George, in it. Then I glared ahead at this strange woman driving me away to the strange

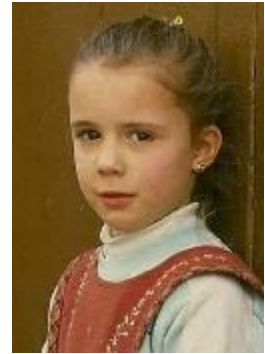
unknown.

My painful and difficult journeys with my suitcase had begun. For no fault of my own, my twin brother and I, along with one sister and two other brothers, were taken from our natural parents and placed in a children's home.

From there my suitcase carried all my belongings from one family to another. It was hard and difficult and I would always cry the night before, knowing that I would be leaving one family that I had gotten used to and head to another home, another family and another school.

The only stabilizing things throughout my childhood and teenage years were my twin brother and God. They were the two who remained with me as I traveled from home to home. My entire journey would include 11 families and two children's homes before I became adult. I used my suitcase a lot!

I cannot describe how it felt to go into a very strange home, complete with new parents, sisters and brothers. Faces I had never seen before were to become my new mom and dad. Each time I would face a brand-new school to try to make new friends. When difficulties came or the foster parents got tired, they would pack my suitcase and send me on my way. For you see, I did not belong to them. The foster parents had no lifetime commitment to love me, care for me and be concerned for me. The hardest part was just getting used to calling them mom and dad when it would be time to go.



That is how I lived along with my twin brother Jim for the next 14 years. Everything was temporary--the home, the parents, my friends. Everything except God. It was God who saw my tears at night and heard my cries. He understood my fear and my great sense of not belonging anywhere, with no parents to call my own. He knew especially the emptiness I felt not having a dad.

That's what I missed more than anything--not having a dad--someone strong I could look up to and who would protect me from harm. I longed for a father to wipe away my tears and fill my lonely heart with love. I missed being tucked in at night and told how much I meant to him and how special I was. But there was someone special who somehow got me through all of that, someone who never left me. God was there to pick me up and keep me going through each change of my life. He became my greatest Dad of all who said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." My greatest Dad kept that promise.

God was there when I walked down the halls of a new school alone. He was there when I sat down for dinner for the very first time with a new family. He was there when I left with my packed suitcase and said good-bye to the family I had gotten used to. My greatest Dad never let me walk alone when I carried my suitcase in to greet my new set of parents and siblings. He was there to fill my loneliness. I knew He was there because I never would have survived it had He not been.

When you feel lost and alone

Some of you might feel some of the same things that I felt back then. Maybe you have suffered the death of a parent or been through a divorce. Or maybe it just seems like you are going through a tough time with your parents and they just don't understand. You feel lost, alone and that no one understands your pain and sorrow. But you are never without love and support from the greatest Dad of all.

God is someone to whom you can always talk and pour out your soul. He will listen and give you strength to go on when you feel there is no way out. God wants to be your greatest Dad because He knows you better than anyone else. He knows your hurts, perhaps from broken friendships, the things you love, the foods you like and dislike and, yes, even the number of hairs on your head. He knows your frustrations and is willing to step in to encourage you, love you and help you through the most difficult times. He will always be there and never send you packing! No matter how much you mess up.

Look what God says to you in Luke 11:9. "So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you." What do you seek? What do you need? Ask you Father in heaven.

If you have been blessed with parents, love them. Thank your greatest Dad for them. Be thankful that they love you and will not send you packing. If you are without a father or mother, or if your parents are separated and you have to pack a suitcase every weekend, know and remember who goes with you. God will always be there to help you through it. Love your parents even if they are not together, and understand it is not your fault. Talk to God about it and remember He has the power and the will to help you through everything, for He is the father of us all and especially of the fatherless. Take time to read the Psalms and you will see David's need for his greatest Dad and how God responded to his every need.

I was able to get through those very difficult years in my childhood only because God, my spiritual Dad, was there every step of the way. Now when I get out my suitcase I do reflect back for a moment to the time when packing my suitcase was a very painful experience--but no more! For you see, now when I reach for my suitcase, I also have my memories of joyous journeys to spend time learning about and worshiping my heavenly Father at the religious festival the Bible calls the Feast of Tabernacles. These have become high points of the year, and a picture of the time when we can have an even closer relationship with our Father who has always been there for us.

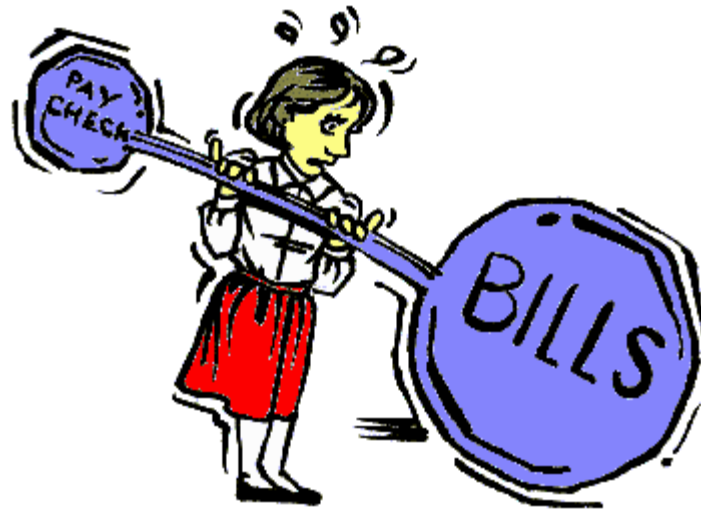
Other things may be temporary, but our relationship with God is eternal. I never have to say good-bye to my greatest Dad!



Money Problems

It's so easy to slide on the slippery slope of borrowing and credit card debt without really realizing it. When we wake up to a debt disaster, what can we do to take control of our finances?

By Jay Turner



IT'S BEEN ABOUT 10 YEARS NOW that my grandparents have been gone. In retirement, they lived outside of Emery Mills, a small town in rural Maine, in a tiny cottage that had been their summer getaway for many years. They both worked hard during their prime years, and saved carefully. After they retired, they sold the house in town and moved permanently to their little cottage on Muddy Lane. (Yes, it was a dirt road. I still remember how to get there--even the sound of the gravel grinding under my car's tires, and the sound of the wind whispering through the pine forest.)

My grandparents were very active, and enjoyed life, but they lived within their means. They saved prudently, and had a little something left over to give to their children. That's the way it really should be. "A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children" (Proverbs 13:22).

But that's not the way most of us live in the 21st century. About 18 months ago I woke up to my own personal debt disaster and have been digging out ever since. I kick myself when I look back on 20 years of missed opportunity. I've studied and thought long and hard about this, and want to encourage everyone to escape debt slavery and become an investor--living sensibly and living well, rather than getting the dessert first and then discovering the hard truth about the price later.

This past summer I heard an astonishing fact on National Public Radio. They reported that the average household owed, on their short-term credit arrangements, 97 percent of a year's disposable income. That means that the typical American household owes very nearly a whole

year's after-tax income. And it's getting worse every year.

The same news report also said that the average savings rate was a negative 0.2 percent. That is, even accounting for the folks who do save, the average household is saving *nothing* and above their income on an ongoing basis. The bankruptcy rate is at an all-time high, and going higher. In the midst of the greatest economic times in 30 years, more and more Americans found their finances wrecked beyond repair.

Taking a look

As a first step, we need to take a look at where our money is going each month. How much of it is interest? What kind of lifestyle could our families enjoy if we had that money to spend? If we owe the typical one-year's take home pay, then the interest burden we are carrying can easily be more than we now have left after our basic expenses.

That discretionary income is what drives the fun part of our lifestyle. When interest crowds out our discretionary income we *feel poor*. Life becomes a dreary grind of working and paying bills. It's maddening to have a good job, but not be able to enjoy it. We can lose the benefit of the most productive years of our lives if our livelihood is being siphoned off to line investors' pockets. The stress, anger and frustration can destroy our health and tear our families apart. We can feel like a slave and not a free person. "The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender" (Proverbs 22:7).

Taking control

A key to turning our financial life around is to become a saver--an investor. Instead of paying interest, we want to be earning it. First, and foremost, that entails living within our means--and not just barely within, but far enough below our current lifestyle to really start putting away savings.

Today the typical American household is not quite paying their interest obligations, and paying no principal on their short-term debts. Consider this example. If you borrowed \$10,000 at 12 percent, and you just barely pay the interest for 25 years, you will have paid \$30,000 in interest, and you'd still owe the \$10,000. If you had invested the same money at the same rate of return, you would have \$40,000 at the end of the 25 years, plus use of the \$30,000 you didn't have to spend on interest. Even if you didn't save money, if you hadn't borrowed the \$10,000, you would have had \$30,000 more to spend during that 25 years.

Living on borrowed money is a quick way to a lower standard of living. Having more now comes at the terrible price of carrying the insidious burden of interest payments. Those who are currently carrying a huge debt load are already painfully aware of this fact.



I know through hard experience that the answer is to cut even more deeply into our lifestyle to free up income to pay down our debt. If there's nothing left to cut, we may need to consider bankruptcy. Professional counsel is important in this situation. There are alternatives--a credit counselor may be able to arrange

a lower interest rate. (Any lender with an ounce of sense will accept a lower profit rather than suffer a total loss due to a bankruptcy.)

The sooner we free our finances of the ball and chain of debt, the sooner we can really enjoy the fruits of our labors. Draconian cuts in our standard of living can be a hard thing to sell to our families. Counselors suggest that we be open and honest. Be sure that everyone understands is expected of them, and why we are stepping back temporarily from our accustomed lifestyle--we will be able to live better in the long run. Someday, our grandchildren will be *proud* of us!

I'd like to recommend *Managing Your Finances*, a useful resource with sound, biblical information on this important subject. It's provided free of charge as a public service by the United Church of God. To request a free copy of the booklet, *Managing Your Finances*, click [here](#).



Trial by Tile

A small cleaning job turned into a big repair job...and a reminder of something deeper.

By Becky Bennett



THE TILED WALL ABOVE THE BATHTUB wasn't exceptionally dirty, I was just in the mood to see things a little bit brighter. So, cleaner in one hand, scrub pad in the other, I set to work. I hadn't even rinsed off the first section before I encountered an unpleasant surprise. A tile at the bottom pushed in a bit more and the top part popped out away from the wall! Whoops! Quickly I pushed it back in position--I was hoping for a cleaner bathroom, not a home repair project!

More than anything I wanted to ignore that problem tile! If I pretended I hadn't noticed it, it would go away, right? I had all sorts of projects on my mental list of desired home improvements, and tilework wasn't even at the bottom! I started to continue to clean and then gave up! Who was I kidding? This problem wasn't going to go away. I might as well take a closer look. Perhaps it would be a simple case for glue and caulk.

The tile came off easily, exposing damp wallboard that was black with mildew. It wasn't looking good, so I called in reinforcements--my husband, Mike, who was at that time on the phone with his father, who's experienced with a wide variety of home repair projects. One tile after another peeled away with hardly any effort. The problem, we discovered, was that the proper "substrate" for the tile had not been used. Ordinary drywall just isn't suitable in a shower. The problem must have been ongoing for a long time! The more we checked surrounding tiles, the more tiles we found that were loose. As more tiles were pried away, more wet, smelly wall was exposed.

Family discussion

I didn't even want to think about the whole repair process! And yet, as much as I dreaded the long arduous job ahead of us, it provided much food for thought and discussion at our family's dinner table. That evening we considered how Christ compared the Pharisees to whitewashed tombs. They look beautiful on the outside, He said, but "inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness" (Matthew 23:27). Yuck! Sounded like the ugliness we were beginning to uncover in our bathroom.

My daughters were quick to notice that the problem had been revealed by cleaning. I complained and griped, recalling the old saying that "no good deed (like trying to make your bathroom cleaner!!) goes unpunished." But it wasn't long before my family was helping me remember that this is what God wants us to do in our individual lives!

I've always wondered if spring cleaning might have its origins in the Bible. God commanded His people to clean out their homes of leavening every spring before the Days of Unleavened Bread. My children have been involved in this deleavening process since they were tiny, and they could answer in an instant what leavening represents during that time! Christ and the apostle Paul told us that leavening pictures sin!

We considered how God wants us to do some housework in our lives especially before the Passover in the spring each year. We have to get up close, in the corners and check out what lies behind. When we do that cleaning, we just might find a problem area (or two or three!). There's no point in ignoring it. It only gets worse through neglect. Before dinner was over our discussion had led to the need for repentance and the forgiveness that comes from our Passover sacrifice, Jesus Christ.

The deeper lesson

As the days passed (this was not going to be a quick job--we had to fit it in around work and other obligations), it became clear that our project was much more than a "simple" home repair. Our tile project was becoming a lesson about dealing with sin. After getting off the old tile, we were finally able to get rid of that old, rotten, mildewy wallboard. It just wasn't the right material to tile over. We needed concrete backer board. We ate hurried dinners, eager to make some progress. Still there was time to consider how we must have the correct foundation on which to build in our lives--Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 3:11).

We also needed guidance and direction for our tile project--Mike's dad couldn't do the work for us over the phone, thousands of miles away. But he gave us help and encouragement. He told us we could do it when we felt overwhelmed. We felt more confident at dinner that evening and considered the blessing of being able to turn to our heavenly Father for help. We still have work to do, but through His Spirit He encourages and strengthens us and helps us to overcome.



As we got deeper into the project, we turned to books for step-by-step directions for putting on the tile. We needed to know the best materials to use, the best way to start, how to get the tile straight and level. Heather and Erica thought this part, with the mud-like mastic adhesive, trowel and tiles, looked like the most fun. They couldn't really understand why we were nervous and

apprehensive.

We read, we worked, we looked back at the books again. Finally, tired but pleased with the progress, we rested while we had a simple dinner. Those books and the instructions on the adhesive were certainly important, we agreed. As weary as we might have been, the analogy was obvious. The Bible is God's how-to book in overcoming. We can't do the job correctly without reading, studying and applying what we've learned.

Tiling, we discovered, was a long process with many steps. Time was required--first, to let the adhesive dry and then to let the grouting cure. Even the coat of sealer for the grout wasn't the final step. We still had to install the fixtures and do the final caulking. But finally it was done.

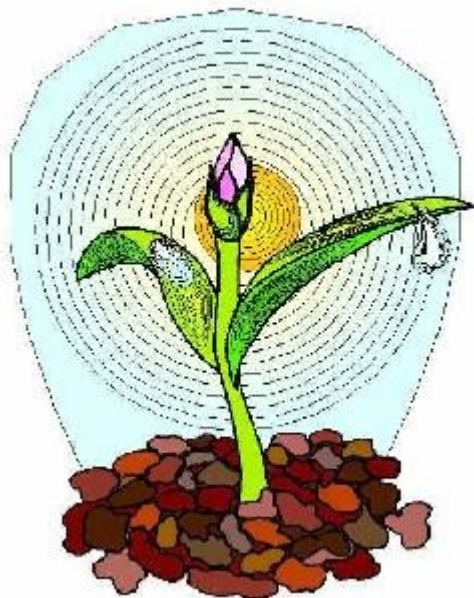
Our bathroom became the "family room," as the four of us gathered round to admire our work. The tiles were in their neat, orderly rows, all shiny, sparkling clean. Wow! I had to admit it was far cleaner than I had ever hoped when I started it all, scrub pad and cleaner in hand. And, even more importantly, we knew it wasn't like some whitewashed tomb. What was underneath was sound, strong and good. And on an even deeper level, we knew we had gained from the experience as well.



Becoming “All Weather” Christians

Bad times drive some away from God, and good times draw others away. God wants us to stay with Him, through thick and thin.

By Larry J. Walker



WE ARE PROBABLY ALL FAMILIAR with the expression "fair weather friends." These are people who are friendly only during good times. Their loyalty melts during times of adversity.

Some people could be classified as "fair weather Christians" for the same reason. Their commitment to God does not withstand hard times. Years ago, a man in a congregation I pastored told me, "I am in this church because things have always gone well for me. But if that ever changes, I am out of here." This is a classic example of a fair weather Christian. His loyalty was conditional upon things going well for him.

Vanishing commitment

On the other hand, there are those who cry out to God during times of trouble. But when the storm passes, their commitment vanishes. These people often seek to bargain with God. "Oh God, if you will only get me out of this, I will always do what you want me to do," they profess. But when things in their life return to normal, they forget God and continue going their own way.

Over the years I have experienced examples of individuals burning up the phone lines pleading for spiritual guidance to steer them through severe trials. But when the circumstances changed and their lives became relatively trouble free, I never heard from them again. Their former zeal for God was apparently motivated primarily by their need for help. It has been said that there is no such thing as an atheist lost in the middle of the ocean. Those who look to God only during times of trouble could be classified as "foul weather Christians."



Both types, though opposite in terms of reasons for appealing to God, are examples of conditional commitment. Jesus describes these in the parable of the sower, found in Matthew 13. In the story, a man sows grain in a field. Some seeds land in rocky areas. Others fall among thorns or weeds. The rest settle into good soil.

The seeds in the rocky areas grow for a while, but the rocks prevent them from sinking deep roots. So the heat of the sun causes them to wither and die. Jesus likens this to someone who "who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy." But when troubles come, his commitment falters. In other words, a fair weather Christian.

The deceitfulness of riches

The seeds that germinate among thorns ultimately become choked out by the weeds. Anyone who has ever had a garden is familiar with this scenario. Jesus explains that this represents someone who allows the cares of this life and "the deceitfulness of riches" to "choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful."

The term "deceitfulness of riches" suggests that foul weather Christians fail to realize their ever-present need for God. Material comforts and easy times offer the illusion that they no longer need Him in their lives. The "cares of life" distract them to the point of becoming spiritually unresponsive and unproductive.

The seeds in the good soil grow and produce fruit despite the extremes of weather. The lesson is that God wants us to maintain our commitment, loyalty and obedience to Him through good times and bad times. We must be "all weather Christians."



A Child's Worth

That hat meant a lot to me, but what was I saying to the kid who crushed it?

By W. Fred Crow



I WAS IN OAKHURST, CALIFORNIA, working at a United Youth Camp during my vacation the last week of June.

I was the water supervisor and lifeguard down at Bass Lake and every one of the 174 campers visited "Fred's World" at least twice during the week. Speed boats, skiing, inner tubes and great water--being located at the lake all day was nice duty...long hours but nice duty.

In the hot seat

When I returned to my lifeguard station after one lunch break I found that one of the young fellows had grabbed my seat. I chased the little rascal away with a good-natured grin. I had one of the best locations for visibility, and seemingly the only comfortable chair on the lake front. It figured that one of the fellows would try to snatch it from me.

Being in my chair was not really a problem. That was, until I looked down and saw that the young man had sat without looking, and had crushed my Panama Jack straw hat and my sun glasses.

Arrgh! That hat had been with me for years and years. It had traveled with me everywhere--Alaska, Hawaii, the West Coast, the East Coast, down the Florida Keys and aboard cruise ships... I loved that hat!

Why, I took that little #\$%^& aside and beat him sens... well, no. That may have been an immediate impulse, but instead I grumbled loudly for a bit letting everyone know I wasn't the happiest of souls. Then, putting emotion aside, my sanity took over.

I did take the young fellow aside. Having seen his face fall while I was emotionally grouching over his mistake, I wanted him to know that he was worth more than the hat ever would be, and I apologized for my error. I wanted him to know that sitting on my hat was a mistake, but the hat was "just a thing" (my favorite phrase) and I valued him more than any old twisted and formed straw fedora. We make mistakes, we learn from mistakes, we grow from mistakes, but we are not our mistakes.

I also realized it's similar to driving defensively. I should have expected someone might sit in my chair, so I should have placed the hat and glasses out of harm's way. Lesson learned.

What's it worth?

Another lesson learned: By our reactions we sometimes give children the message that they are not worth a glass of spilled milk, a misplaced sock, a broken window or a crushed hat. Very quickly they pick up the message about their worth compared to what's important to their parents and other adults. If we act as if the world came to an end when milk is spilled, what do we do for an encore if something serious were to occur?

Kids make mistakes--that's a simple fact. After guiding two young people to age 22, I can rightly attest this to be true. It happens. Kids goof up. It's normal. But that doesn't remove them from the list of the most valued resources on the planet!

A misplaced sock, broken window, spilled milk or crushed hat *is not* the end of the world. What is important is that the child knows that he or she is valued unconditionally.

This was a lesson in perspective and understanding. I have a usable but damaged hat (yep, I'm still wearing it) that enjoys a deeper history, and, in spite of the mistake, that young fellow knows I value him--more than just a hat.

We need always to keep in mind that mistakes of young people may inconvenience us, distract us and disappoint us, but their mistakes should not diminish their value in our lives.

Our response to their mistakes needs to be in tune with what's needed to help them understand and grow. Our young people need to know, through our words and deeds, that they are worth all the time and energy it takes to work with them and encourage them. They should know through our unconditional love that they are worth more than an old, well-worn, well-traveled hat.

