

Virtual Christian Magazine

Hope And Encouragement
For The Real World

"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me."—John 14:1

Volume 5 Number 9

October/November 2003

"Father, Please Heal My Broken Heart"

By Janet Treadway

Page 4



The emotional pain inflicted on us by others can be far worse than the physical wounds we experience. What is the right ointment for wounded hearts?

Adrift No More

By Robert Berendt

Page 7



As a boy I loved to launch little wood chip boats, but I learned I didn't want to be like them, at the mercy of the whims of the stream.

Star Trek, God's Plan and You!

By Joe Sheperd

Page 10



Even the most imaginative science fiction pales in comparison to the ultimate reality God has in store for us. This true story is for children—human children as well as all the children of God.

A Halloween Story

By Cecil Maranville

Page 14



Following is an imaginary dialogue on the reasons responsible people might wonder whether they should participate in the customs, and don the costumes, of Halloween.

Hearts of Unseen Valor and Misjudged Intentions

By Janna Thomas

Page 18



Can we truly know the struggles going on in others' hearts? Can we judge their motives and intents?

Virtual Christian Magazine Editorial

A Flick of a Switch Away From the Dark Ages?

By Mike Bennett

Page 21



In our technological Information Age, when the electrical power goes out, we are left literally in the dark. Some fear more massive blackouts will plunge us into another Dark Age. But in a figurative sense, have we already entered a Dark Age—of the spirit?

Letters to the Editor

Page 23

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“Father, Please Heal My Broken Heart”

By Janet Treadway

The emotional pain inflicted on us by others can be far worse than the physical wounds we experience. What is the right ointment for wounded hearts?



How can you mend this broken man?

How can a loser ever win?

Please help me mend my broken heart and let me live again.

THESE LYRICS FROM A POPULAR SONG of the '70s, “How Can You Mend a Broken Heart?” by the Bee Gees, can certainly make us reflect on our own broken hearts. How many of you have a broken heart now, or have had your heart broken in the past? You have this huge gaping hole in your heart that was left by someone or circumstances. How many of you feel that this hole can never be filled and that you will be left with the hollow in your heart forever?

There can be many reasons why we are left with a broken heart: the death of a loved one, divorce, loss of a job, loss of status, loss of health, betrayal by a friend, loss of a child and, yes, loss of your childhood. All of these reasons can leave you a broken man or woman.

The biggest sorrow of all was the loss of my childhood and never knowing what a loving father is like.

Along with enormous blessings, I have also had great sorrow in my life. The biggest sorrow of all was the loss of my childhood and never knowing what a loving father is like. I never heard my father say “I love you” or “I am very proud of you.” I never experienced what it is like to feel secure, with a strong father in my life, protecting me and keeping me safe. This reality in my life has left a hole in my heart—an emptiness that I once felt could never be

filled.

Even though we have these holes in our hearts, I am here to tell you that there is hope for you and me, and for all the brokenhearted. There is hope for those who sorrow, because there is a Healer who will mend our broken hearts. As David said in Psalm 147:3: “He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.” God wants to heal us of all of our wounds.

What is a wound? If you have ever had an injury or a deep cut, you know how painful it is and how it hurts to be touched. Oftentimes sorrow and loss are like deep wounds. They can be so painful that it seems no one or nothing can make the pain go away. Sometimes our heart is so broken that we can't even express the words and nothing seems to take the pain away.



People who try to encourage us can't seem to say the right thing. Like a deep wound, a broken heart will not heal overnight. Like some medicines that burn when you apply them to a skin wound, so can a well-meaning friend who says the wrong thing at the wrong time. Who wants to pour rubbing alcohol on an open wound? We search the stores to find an ointment that we can apply to our skin wound that will not burn and then cover it gently with a Band-Aid. It's the same way with our broken heart. We need the right ointment to bring about healing.

So what is the right ointment for our hearts? How do we begin to heal? How can the hole in our hearts that is gaping open begin to close?

1. Recognize the pain and understand it is OK to hurt. Sometimes we seek to cover the pain by ignoring it or through other means like the use of alcohol or drugs, which will only cause us to get infected and reverse the healing process. Like a deep skin wound, we must apply the right ointment or a Band-Aid so we can begin to heal or else it can get infected and become worse. We cannot ignore our pain and think it will go away.

Understand that it is OK to hurt. We try to push the hurt away, but we can't. The hurt isn't outside of us—it's inside. So, in our attempt to push the hurt away, we actually push the hurt deeper inside. We then can spend the rest of our life running from this suppressed hurt.

Sorrow and loss can be so painful that it seems no one or nothing can make the pain go away.

By going through our hurts, we are a part of the human race—millions of people who are going through similar pains. It is during this time that we need a lot of love, encouragement and hope restored. We realize how frail we are and see our great need for God.

It is a time to reflect on the true meaning of life and the greatest opportunity of all to draw close to God. It is an opportunity to learn empathy toward others who are going through the same things. You cannot do all of these things if you try to ignore the pain.

2. Seek the Healer. Seek God as your healer! Just like you tell a doctor your symptoms, tell God how much you were wounded and need His healing touch. He will hear the cries of the broken. God the Father wants to reach down, take your hand, and walk you through your pain. It may take weeks. For many of us it will take years, perhaps even a lifetime to close the wounds of our hearts completely. God will spend as much time and as many years as necessary to help you through it.

He wants to gently apply the daily salve or ointment of His Holy Spirit to your heart until your heart is healed. I know this because He has done it with me. When I am down, He lifts me up in many different ways. He is there for me to cry on His shoulder, so to speak, and then sends His encouraging Spirit to get me back up and going again.

King David said in Psalm 56:8, “You number my wanderings; put my tears into Your bottle; are they not in Your book?” God was so aware of David that He even collected his tears. In the same way God is involved and aware of our pain, our joys, our failures, our accomplishments.

When Hezekiah was stricken with sickness, he poured out his heart to God. God heard him and saw his tears. God was moved with compassion. “Return and tell Hezekiah the leader of My people, ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: “I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; surely I will heal you”’” (2 Kings 20:5). God saw Hezekiah’s tears. Understand that God can be closer to us when the pain is so great than at any other times in our life.

“The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit,” wrote David (Psalm 34:18, NIV). Ask and receive God’s love and encouragement, because He is very near to you. God can work with a heart that has a hole in it, because the need is so great for it to be filled.



3. Reach out to others. As God has reached out to us, so we should be an instrument of God to reach out and help others who are in pain. Solomon recognized the fact that people need to be comforted. In Ecclesiastes 4:1 it says, “Again I looked and saw all the oppression that was taking place under the sun: I saw the tears of the oppressed—and they have no comforter; power was on the side of their oppressors—and they have no comforter” (NIV).

Ask God to use you to encourage others through their pain. By your own pain you will be able to understand and help in a far greater way. Christ our Savior was in all points tested and understands all that you go through. He reached out to us by giving His life so that we would be healed.

Isaiah 61:1-3 discusses Christ’s mission: “The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor” (NIV).

This will come to pass when Christ returns, but in the meantime we should make it our mission to follow this example, and be instruments of healing by

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taking the time to care for those who are in pain and hurting. By reaching out to others, our own pain will begin to disappear; the holes in our hearts will begin to close.

Healing takes time

It takes time to heal. In my life, after 25 years, there is still a hole in my heart, but it's much smaller because of God. Every time I feel God's presence, every time I see God's intervention in my life, every time I reach out to someone else, every time God grants me blessings, the hole in my heart gets smaller and is being replaced with God's heart.

When God returns to this earth, the hole in our hearts and in mankind's hearts will be filled and mended. There will be no more tears, no more pain, no more sorrow and no more holes to fill in an empty heart—for all our hearts will be filled with God's Spirit. For as Psalm 126:5 promises, "Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy." God will heal all broken hearts. We will no longer feel sad for what we lacked in this physical life because God will fill our hearts and make us complete.

So many people suffer in so many ways. Why? Why does our loving God allow humans to hurt each other? What is He doing to end all this suffering, and what can we do? [Why Does God Allow Suffering?](#) leads you through the scriptures that reveal the meaning and solution to the ills of this world. Read or request a free copy by [clicking here](#).

Adrift No More

By Robert Berendt

As a boy I loved to launch little wood chip boats, but I learned I didn't want to be like them, at the mercy of the whims of the stream.



ONE OF MY FAVORITE SPRING ACTIVITIES as a boy was to get a chip of wood, put a makeshift sail on it made of a toothpick and a little piece of paper—and then let it float

downstream. Sometimes we would launch our chip boats onto a mud puddle and let the wind push them around. It seems a lot of boys liked to do that in those days.

You could watch the current take the little boat, twist it to and fro and do pretty much what it wanted to with the makeshift craft. I never knew where it would end up. Sometimes I would follow the boat downstream and rescue it from the many times it would be stranded in an eddy or on a little shore. There seemed something curious to my mind about the control the currents and wind had on the little boat—and the utter helplessness of the boat itself.

Drifting aimlessly has never been appealing to me. I think those experiences with the chips defined a part of my character without me realizing what was happening. I did not want to be a drifter like that little chip was. I did not want destiny to shape my life for me or the whims of others to determine what I could or could not be. I wanted to control my destiny as much as possible.

My need for a definable goal and the means to achieve that goal have always been a subconscious force in my decisions. I learned that one could shoot for the moon and perhaps land on a cloud. The cloud was much higher than the ground everyone trod on. Observing the animals preparing for the winter also helped define the need to look ahead and not just randomly make choices that suited my moods or feelings.

Wandering in the wilderness

Psalm 107 carries one of the most profound messages that includes the theme of drifting that I have seen in the Scriptures. In this Psalm we read the description of spiritual life being battered about by strong outside forces. An aimless and purposeless drifting seems to occur spiritually. Verse 2 indicates that the people are those who have been called by God. They are described as people who had been drifting.

All mankind is in this stormy sea, and we can truly say that, try as we might, we cannot get the ship we are on to sail smoothly and peacefully in the direction of happier and better times. There do seem to be periods of time in which mankind is going in the right direction. We note that by progress, strong family life and peace. The duration is short, however, and soon a wind comes up and nation after nation finds itself caught up in the swirl of world events that prove to be unsettling and often disastrous.

All mankind is in this stormy sea, and we can truly say that we cannot get the ship we are on to sail smoothly and peacefully in the direction of happier and better times.

Verses 6 through 9 describe God guiding and helping this group. However, most of the world is oblivious to the rudder God offers. The only help we could have is rejected and man sinks back into the depths of despair, frustration and anger. We simply do not want someone telling us what to do.

Actually, though, the only question is who is going to tell us what to do. If humans do not follow God, they will follow another force that pressures them, and that is the deception of Satan. We may think we are following our own plans and thoughts, but often we are subtly guided and misguided by an evil being who is far more intelligent and devious than we humans are. Verses 17 and 18 describe the foolishness of those who abhorred the truth God offers. These draw near to death and think they have found life.

The broad way

Jesus Christ tells us in Matthew 7:13-14 that the way that leads to death is wide and easy to travel. It seems like we are in control. It is like our little chip boat floating down a larger river. The currents do not draw the chip into the rocks or sand—the river is large enough that nothing seems to impede the progress of the chip boat we have built. We are oblivious to any danger.



It is like a little piece of wood that is drifting down the river towards Niagara Falls. The current is strong and seems to move the wood along with ease. But the end result was not seen or was ignored. It is only when it is too late that the ominous roar of the falls strikes fear into the heart.

Generally people don't want to die, but the direction so many choose leads to an early death. A police officer friend of mine once told me that the average life span of a teenager who starts to take drugs is about 10 years. Dead before the age of 30. What a tragedy. Jesus said that only the few find the narrower path that leads to life—the path less traveled.

Back to Psalm 107. Verse 25 tells us about the stormy seas and winds that God does control. He is the master potter and designer of our destinies (Romans 9:15-26). God is concerned about mankind and thus we know that He carefully watches each little chip that is sailing along. Those that are drifting aimlessly will one day be rescued. They will be gathered in by their Creator.

Verses 26 to 30 are very encouraging. We see that people wander into all sorts of difficulty when they are at the mercy of the storms. Good sailors know that they must fight against the storms, but even then, only with a good rudder and power from an engine or sail can they have any control. Drifting is a certain recipe for disaster. I love the words of verse 30, "He guides them to their desired haven."

Eternity in our hearts

God has placed in all humans a hope and desire to live forever. We do not always understand that, but the life of a person is so profoundly different from that of any other creatures, that we can only wonder as to how God created complex matters such as thought, learning, hope and fear.

If humans do not follow God, they will follow another force that pressures them, and that is the deception of Satan.

In Ecclesiastes 3:11 we glimpse this desire when the Bible tells us that God has placed "eternity" in their hearts. That does not mean humans live forever—it is the concept and hope of eternity that is within us all. That is in all likelihood part of the reason that every culture has religious beliefs. They are confused and wrong, but nevertheless all tend to promote the belief in life after death. God offers the gift of eternal life. That is the shore to which He will guide those who yield to His hand.

The last five verses of Psalm 107 tell of the influence of God in our lives. He will not allow the disasters that drive unbelieving mankind to such great distress to destroy His people. He does not take us out of the stormy sea, but He supplies the rudder and the power to guide His people through the storm to a safe harbor.

Sailing stormy seas is what develops skill and strength in a sailor. Calm waters never do. Sailing aimlessly and with a loss of power and rudder is the recipe for disaster and death. Verse 43 states that the wise will observe these things and understand the loving-kindness of God.



Perhaps making a little chip boat that was subject to the whims of the stream or wind was a good thing to do. It taught me the result of aimless drifting and proved the need for guidance. Truth as defined by God is the guide we all need. He promises that if we do observe, if we do seek and if we do knock, He will answer (Matthew 7:8). The Bible is the source of this truth—let's use it!

Why were you born? What is your purpose in life? Without this knowledge, our lives can seem aimless and drifting. But having an ultimate goal in mind provides real satisfaction that nothing else can. [What Is Your Destiny?](#) leads you through the scriptures that reveal this awesome meaning of your life. Read or request a free copy by [clicking here](#).

Star Trek, God's Plan and You!

By Joe Sheperd

Even the most imaginative science fiction pales in comparison to the ultimate reality God has in store for us. This true story is for children—human children as well as all the children of God.



MOST OF US KNOW OF OR HAVE VIEWED various *Star Trek* adventures. We're familiar with Mr. Spock, Captain Kirk and his successor Captain Picard, and the android Data. "Beam us up, Scotty," is understood around the world. *Star Trek* clubs, with thousands of fans holding annual conventions, abound.

In the real world, man *has* traveled at over 18,000 miles an hour, been on the moon and explored Mars via computer-robot technology. Today, science fiction is very popular. Audiences love movies showing superhumans solving incredible problems in a world where man has achieved intelligence and power to handle almost anything. But, we all know, it's only fiction!

Yet, there is an expression that "truth is stranger than fiction." When it comes to the plan of God for man, truth is indeed "stranger than fiction" to most. To God's people, however, the future that awaits far surpasses anything the Starship *Enterprise* crew experienced or accomplished. Let's make a few comparisons and see.

Warp 10 versus the speed of thought

Today, in spite of the tremendous advances in transportation, we spend many hours traveling—even days. From North America to Europe can take 10 to 12 hours. But the *Enterprise* travels at speeds of up to "warp 10." In just a few hours, with a great "whoosh" surpassing light-speed, they reach a distant star.



Now, let's compare this to the speed Christ traveled after His resurrection. "Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to Him, 'Rabboni!' (which is to say, Teacher). Jesus said to her, 'Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, "I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God." . . . Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, 'Peace be with you'" (John 20:16-17, 19).

Here, Christ traveled to the Father's throne in the third heaven and returned the same day! This is travel at the speed of *thought*. The sons and daughters of God will be able to do this—imagine it! The warp 10 speed of the *Enterprise* would be a mere "snail's pace" in comparison.

"Beam us up"

"Beam us up, Scotty," was a frequent command on the *Enterprise*. The *Star Trek* creators imagined a fictional technology that disassembles body molecules, atoms and chromosomes, then transports and reassembles them into the same person, or same matter, in split seconds.

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In the Bible, we see the reality. Christ was "beamed away" and back again, right through *solid walls*. He did not need to be dematerialized. He could simply travel right through matter. "Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He *vanished* from their sight . . . Now as they said these things, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and said to them, 'Peace to you'" (Luke 24:30-31, 36, emphasis added throughout). The disciples were terrified by the sudden appearance of Christ in the room, thinking they were seeing a ghost.

Limitless power

The incredible make-believe weapons of the *Enterprise* can stun, kill and *vaporize*. Photon torpedoes are seen to atomize a spaceship as large as an aircraft carrier.

But the reality is even more stunning. When the sixth trumpet blows, announcing the return of Jesus Christ, an army of 200 million will be assembled to resist Christ. Zechariah 14:12 tells us, "And this shall be the plague with which the Lord will strike all the people who fought against Jerusalem: Their flesh shall dissolve while they stand on their feet, their eyes shall dissolve in their sockets, and their tongues shall dissolve in their mouths." This vast, unprecedented great army . . . gone in seconds; not by a weapon but by *limitless power* used in a limited way.

Just as great a demonstration of God's limitless power is seen in Joshua 10:12-13: "On the day the LORD gave the Amorites over to Israel, Joshua said to the LORD in the presence of Israel: 'O sun, *stand still* over Gibeon, O moon, over the Valley of Aijalon.' So the *sun stood still*, and the *moon stopped*, till the nation avenged itself on its enemies" (NIV).

This power somehow, miraculously, stopped the sun and the moon's motion. God's power halted the function of our solar system. That kind of power makes the imaginary weapons of the *Enterprise* seem puny indeed.

Beyond rocket science

Mr. Spock, and his successor, Data, can solve complex problems quickly. They have computerlike minds with incredible knowledge, data and logic seemingly at their fingertips. Impressive? It surely is. But let's compare this to God's mind.

In Psalm 147:4-5 we read, "He counts the number of the stars; He calls them *all by name*. Great is our Lord, and mighty in *power*; His understanding is infinite." Try to imagine this—every star has a name!



God has an orderly universe and knows exactly each heavenly body occupying a limitless space. Let us ask, will His sons and daughters, living forever, not also come to know them?

King David thought about God's vast wisdom and power and he said in Psalm 139:17-18 that God's knowledge, wisdom and power cannot be measured in any human terms. It is a wisdom and power perfectly harmonized with love, mercy, compassion and patience—qualities which humans lack. Remember, God's family is going to be like Him.

Medical miracles

The doctors of *Star Trek* have been provided with an impressive array of imaginary medical miracle-instruments. Just touch one to a nearly expired person, and with a "beep-beep," cells are regenerated, molecules and DNA put right and the patient rises, well again.

But how about this? In Luke 22:50-51 we read, "One of them struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear. But Jesus answered, 'No more of this!' And he touched the man's ear and healed him" (NIV). A mere touch and he was healed with a whole ear!

Even more amazingly, we see an example where simply saying the words at a distance healed an illness. In Matthew 8:6-8 a centurion asked Jesus, "Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, dreadfully tormented." Christ offered to go and heal him, but the centurion replied: "Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed."

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Remember Lazarus? He had been dead for four days! The simple words of Christ were, "Lazarus, come forth!" Yes, this was Christ, but we see in Acts 9 that a man like ourselves, filled with God's Spirit, raised Tabitha from the dead. This is a power that creates life. It is God's power, in this case, shown through one of His servants.

While it's very difficult for us to envision the awesome future God is preparing for His children, He does give us inspiring glimpses that let us see it in part. "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.' But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit" (1 Corinthians 2:9-10).

Whatever we can envision about our glorious future, it will be immeasurably surpassed by its reality. Try seeing ourselves in this setting: "Those who are wise shall *shine* like the brightness of the firmament; and those who turn many to righteousness *like the stars* forever and ever" (Daniel 12:3). This was not just hyperbole—Christ Himself confirms in Matthew 13:43: "Then the righteous will shine forth *as the sun* in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"



Human technology and achievements are indeed impressive and the human imagination even more so. In the voyages of the *Enterprise*, we see the crew use powerful weapons to blast great holes through mountains, travel at awesome speeds into vast space and distant planets, heal terrible diseases and save alien civilizations. As an immortal, glorified, wise and loving son or daughter of God, *you* will be infinitely faster, more intelligent, more powerful, a much better healer, teacher, helper and problem solver than the crew of the *Enterprise*, or mankind's combined science and technology, could ever imagine.

For most of humanity, truth is “stranger than fiction.” But our destiny is indeed “to boldly go where no man has gone before” and to do that which no man has even done, as sons and daughters of God in joyous service to Him—*forever!*

In a world of troubles, where can we find hope and assurance of a better tomorrow? The pages of your Bible reveal how this world's disasters will give way to a world of true peace and happiness. A helpful publication, [You Can Understand Bible Prophecy](#), shows the biblical framework for the future that makes prophecy understandable. Read or request your free copy by [clicking here](#).

A Halloween Story

By Cecil Maranhville

Following is an imaginary dialogue on the reasons responsible people might wonder whether they should participate in the customs, and don the costumes, of Halloween.



IT'S OCT. 31. Daylight begins to surrender to dusky darkness. A biting wind blusters at windows. The doorbell rings in the home of a widowed grandmother. She swings open the door

to two young children costumed as cheerful cartoon characters, each carrying a large paper shopping bag.

“Trick or treat!” they call out in unison with sweet voices through happy smiles as they extend their bags in eager anticipation. Their weary mother, standing several steps away, shivers against the wind and chill of the approaching darkness.

The neighborhood grandmother has nothing to contribute to the already-bulging bags, but she offers the trio some hot chocolate and a comfortable place to rest from the cold for a few minutes. They are puzzled by her lack of Halloween treats, but they gladly accept her offer to come inside and warm up.

Neighborhood Grandmother: “Oh, you look so cold! This hot chocolate should warm you right up. I have to compliment you [she says to the children’s mother] on how responsible you seem about the children’s safety. It’s a good idea to accompany them. You can never know what dangers lurk even in this neighborhood.”

Mother of the children: “Oh, yes, I would never let them go out alone. The children don’t necessarily appreciate Mom’s watchful eye, but there are too many dangers to ignore. Children *are* harder for drivers to spot at this time of night, and there is also the worry of tampered candy and fruit. Even without those fears, it’s always a challenge to keep them from eating so many sweets that they get sick the next day.”



Grandmother: “Why, may I ask, did you choose those cartoon-character costumes instead of ghosts, goblins and such?”

Mother: “We don’t like the emphasis on death and violence, so we purposefully avoid those types of costumes. And we don’t want the children to remember this holiday as one in which acts of vandalism are considered fun. I have unpleasant childhood memories of children throwing rocks at cars and windows of houses, setting fires and deliberately terrorizing senior citizens.”

Grandmother: “It sounds like you’ve obviously given some thought to this.”

Mother: “Well, we go out of our way to make this a *fun* holiday for our children. Our goal is to fill their memories with good experiences. We are parents with high standards.

“May I ask *you* a question? You’re such a kind neighbor, always greeting my children cheerfully as they walk by your house on their way to and from school. I don’t know if you realize it, but you have a reputation as the neighborhood grandma.

“But you obviously haven’t decorated your home for Halloween, and you don’t have candy or treats for the children who come trick-or-treating. That seems out of character for you. Is there a reason?”

Grandmother: “I guess I must seem a bit different by not getting into the spirit of things on Halloween. I’d be happy to explain why.

“My thinking is actually quite similar to yours. Like you, I’m troubled by the vandalism and violence associated with Halloween. More than once I have seen some of those acts aimed at senior citizens. Then there is the awful emphasis on death and dying and disembodied spirits.”

“Some years ago I made a decision to withdraw from Halloween activities.”

Mother: “Oh, I know. Some of the costumes I see, along with the horror movies aired on television this time of year, are downright repulsive. I don’t know why Halloween seems to give people an excuse to set aside their normal values and to revel in things they really don’t care for at other times. That’s why our family stays clear of the horror costumes and any association with death. We make Halloween a fun time.”

Grandmother: “I am all for making life fun for the children. But, even so, some years ago I made a decision to withdraw from Halloween activities. My personal conviction is that I could not dress up—pardon the pun—the traditions of something so truly wicked in its origins to make it into a children’s holiday.

“I thought long and hard about it, and it just doesn’t make sense. People who want to teach their children values like honesty, respect for others, kindness and generosity, and who want to instill in their children a positive outlook on life, take those same children and have them disguise themselves as the dead or as evil monsters or beings so they can go from house to house to ask for treats.

“I know that ‘trick-or-treat’ has a real catchy sound to it, but it doesn’t come from pleasant roots. It’s based on the idea that a mean trick will be played on you if you don’t give treats to any stranger who approaches you. Is it too harsh to say that taking treats with threats makes me think of a kind of extortion?”

“I’m not trying to criticize you or hurt your feelings. You’re obviously a responsible mother. But this is a personal choice. I cannot in good conscience participate in something that runs so completely contrary to what I really would like to see for our children.”

Mother: “There’s no need to apologize. We’ve discussed these same things. Those are the very reasons we avoid the horrible costumes. But we chose to continue with the holiday because of its *religious* roots. You are so well informed that you must know the religious background of Halloween. Since it is closely allied with religion, we felt we could, as you put it, dress up this holiday in a way that would be in line with the values we want to instill in our children.”

Grandmother: “Yes, I’m aware that *Halloween* comes from ‘All Saints’ Eve’ and that the word itself is an abbreviation of ‘hallowed evening.’ That fact also caused me to hang onto the holiday longer than I would have otherwise. I suspect that long ago religious people attempted to dress up an ugly, uncivilized and unchristian holiday, perhaps for the same reasons that we have been discussing—to try to make it acceptable.

“In essence, God told the people not to attempt to make the unacceptable acceptable. Rather, they were to avoid evil and build their customs on a clean foundation.”

“That rationale hasn’t been enough to convince me that Halloween was healthy for my family and community for two reasons. First, I learned that the word *saint* is used in the Bible simply to mean a believer, or member of the Church. There is no biblical example of

celebrating one saint or believer above another and certainly no precedent for a holiday in honor of any supposed saint.

“The second reason—and I’ve really looked into this because I believe God and sincerely want His guidance—is that I’ve researched the history of people who honored God who were challenged with similar questions. When they came in contact with different cultures, they were confronted with unholy customs and holidays.

“How did they react? Did they dress up those offensive customs with customs of worship given them by God? I found the clearest possible answer in the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 12. It’s found in the last four verses. In essence, God told the people *not* to attempt to make the unacceptable acceptable. Rather, they were to avoid evil and build their customs on a clean foundation.

“Once I read that, my mind was settled. From then on I determined to provide fun for my children and grandchildren—and the neighborhood children—in positive ways, steering clear of Halloween.”

Mother: “Well, you’ve really piqued my curiosity. Thanks for your kind hospitality and especially for your insight. It’s time for us to be on our way. It looks like I have some reading and thinking to do.”

If you would like to read more about the subject of Halloween, go to [“Halloween: a Celebration of Darkness”](#), part of the booklet, Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Keep? [Click here](#) if you would like to order a free copy.

Hearts of Unseen Valor and Misjudged Intentions

By Janna Thomas

Can we truly know the struggles going on in others' hearts? Can we judge their motives and intents?



THE HUMAN HEART is a true and enigmatic mystery. On any teeming street corner, people ebb and flow in an earthy dance of rhythm and calm and normalcy. Meanwhile, buried deep within them are hearts of unseen valor, fighting battles of epic proportion.

Untold dramas written within human flesh play endlessly to an empty arena—visible only to the eyes of their Creator. For only God can know the true and intimate struggles of the human heart.

Hidden hearts

Innumerable volumes have been written about the heart of man and its unfathomable depths. Henry David Thoreau said, “The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.” This well-known quotation shouts of battles unchronicled and whispers of hidden tumult. Behind smiling eyes an entire universe exists of which we know nothing—a universe whose physiological makeup repels all intrusion. It is a solitary universe and can be nothing else, for it was designed to allow complete access to only one being—the Creator God.

Untold dramas written within human flesh play endlessly to an empty arena—visible only to the eyes of their Creator.

It is not given to man to truly know the heart of another. We cannot read it like words on paper. We cannot absorb it like sunshine on our skin. We cannot know it in the multitude of ways God gave us to discern the world around us. At best we can make empathetic guesses as to its content, based on similar experiences. But the wonderful complexities that shape each individual are so unique and diverse that not even identical circumstances can create identical thoughts, emotions, challenges and responses. Even our closest relationships allow us only a limited glimpse inside the heart of

another.

We can work beside someone every day for years and have no idea what wars within him or her on a daily basis. We can sleep beside our spouse for a lifetime, with little concept of their private demons, personal fears or inward struggles, unless he or she chooses to enlighten us. Even then, we may have less than a true picture. Jeremiah 17:9-10 warns us that “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? I, the Lord, search the heart.”

Reserving judgment

Is it any wonder God reserves judgment for Himself, or that we are so often warned by Scripture to avoid the temptation to take it upon ourselves? Because while we may correctly discern another’s actions, to know with certainty his heart and motivation is simply beyond us.

Yes, there are laws that govern behavior and rightly so. God’s own commandments set standards that must be upheld regardless of individual motivations or intentions. The safety, peace and ultimate welfare of mankind demand it. God has given us these laws for our good and not our harm. “You shall therefore keep His statutes and His commandments which I command you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you” (Deuteronomy 4:40).

Yes, He has set in motion absolutes both right and wrong, and instructed us in them. The danger, however, lies not in what we know, but what we cannot.

It is a human temptation to assume we know the inner thoughts and motivations of another human being. The sad fact, however, is that usually our judgment of another’s heart is a more accurate reflection of our own than of his or hers. How often have we said, or had said to us, such things as, “Oh, I know what your thinking” or “I know exactly why you did that”? But do we really? Can we ever?

Judging a friend

Suppose I called a friend and found her unresponsive and seemingly unconcerned with my feelings and problems. She quickly ends our conversation with vague platitudes that leave me with a buzzing phone and wounded feelings. My immediate assumption might be that she was either uncaring in general, or disinterested in me in particular. I might even recall that our last three phone conversations have gone more or less the same. On the basis of the only data available to me, her actions, I judge her to be a bad friend and make the decision not to call her again.

Meanwhile, my friend may well be locked in a life-or-death struggle of her own. She may be battling depression or even thoughts of suicide. Perhaps she is coping with overwhelming family problems or a health crisis that is all consuming. She may be using every ounce of fortitude and valor available to simply get through each new day. Her distance and lack of response may have everything to do with her and nothing to do with me. Yet I have judged her from the only perspective available to me, which is my own. I cannot see inside her heart.



Shine a light of compassion

This is written to shine a light of compassion into the depths of the human spirit, and remind us that all of mankind is involved in a death match, and that each human heart is a battlefield. The war is more complex and difficult because demonic spirits often enter the fray. "We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12).

Life is often hard, and our choices are seldom easy. Satan preaches his own message, and it is not one of tolerance or compassion. He is an accuser, among other things (Revelation 12:10). Satan assumes for himself a role that not even the other angels undertake. Jude 9 tells us that the archangel Michael, when contending with the devil over the body of Moses, dared not bring a reviling accusation against him. If the angels dare not accuse even Satan, then surely we ourselves should exercise great caution when tempted to assume we know another's heart.

Matthew 7:1-2 gives us a stern warning that should make the hair on our neck stand up. "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you."

Satan preaches his own message, and it is not one of tolerance or compassion. He is an accuser, among other things (Revelation 12:10).

Though normally used to illustrate forgiveness, the parable of the unforgiving servant is also an excellent example of this principle in use. In this story, a servant wanted forgiveness for his debt, and his master, moved with compassion, released him from it. However, the unforgiving servant would not extend the same courtesy to his own fellow servant, but rather judged him more harshly. The master revoked his clemency, and applied the same standard of judgment toward the unforgiving servant as he himself had applied towards the second man (Matthew 18:21-35).

Jesus is our Master. We should be very careful what standards we put into place in our own hearts, for they may well be reflected back to us.

Life demands discernment. Yet God forbids condemning judgment. This makes it imperative that we recognize the difference, and err on the side of caution. Maybe that scowl on your spouse's face is just a toothache, and not an ill-tempered gesture designed to put you in your place. Perhaps the minister really wasn't trying to avoid you last Sabbath, but merely failed to see you approaching.

Or maybe your assumption was correct, and for just that one second the person was battle weary or slipped up. As Ecclesiastes 7:21-22 warns, "Also do not take to heart everything people say, lest you hear your servant cursing you. For many times, also, your own heart has known that even you have cursed others."

Often we misjudge both the actions and intentions of others. Sometimes, we really are right. But either way, we can and should have compassion, knowing that we, too, will lose some battles in our epic struggle for eternal life. But knowing also, that with God's mercy, which triumphs over judgment, we can and must win the war.

Understanding and getting along with other people is an important key to happiness and success in life—whether in our marriages and families or on the job. [Making Life Work](#) addresses the biblical principles that promote successful human relationships. Read or request a free copy of this helpful publication by [clicking here](#).

Virtual Christian Magazine Editorial

A Flick of a Switch Away From the Dark Ages?

By Mike Bennett

In our technological Information Age, when the electrical power goes out, we are left literally in the dark. Some fear more massive blackouts will plunge us into another Dark Age. But in a figurative sense, have we already entered a Dark Age—of the spirit?



WHERE WERE YOU when the lights went out? The massive blackout that struck 50 million people in the northeastern United States and eastern Canada Aug. 14 was but one more example of the vulnerability of our electrical power grid. What if it had been worse? What if it had been in the middle of a winter storm? What if it had been terrorism or an act of war?

Without power, modern civilization comes to a standstill. Without power, most have no computer, no Internet, no E-mail, no TV. Our Information Age comes unplugged, and the work most of us do becomes impossible. Worse, many times those without power also are without water or heat. It reminds me a bit of the Dark Ages—only more serious because we have lost the skill to live off the land without our modern conveniences.

The Dark Ages—only worse

In popular history, the time between the fall of Rome and the beginning of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment is often given little attention. The term *Dark Ages* for the early part of the period conveys a sense of gloom and foreboding.

It does for me, particularly since in my formative years one of my favorite authors, science fiction legend Isaac Asimov, used the theme prominently in his *Foundation* series. The story was long and complex, but the premise was simple. The galaxy was about to enter another Dark Age of thousands of years unless knowledge was somehow preserved. Knowledge was the key to combating darkness.

*Without power,
modern civilization
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Through the years I have learned that not all knowledge is equal. I have seen it is possible for mankind to map out the entire human genome but to lose the way in charting the path to peace. In spite of our explosion of physical knowledge, could we be facing a Dark Age of the spirit?

Ignorance and apathy

What are the worst problems in today's world? "I don't know and I don't care," say the jokesters—but they hit too close to true to be really funny.

The Hebrew prophet Hosea recorded these troubling words from our Creator God: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hosea 4:6). He wasn't talking about physical knowledge. He was referring to spiritual knowledge. The Bible is the true foundation of knowledge, the framework for making life work. This true road map to peace has been neglected and often ridiculed.

*This lack of
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physically.*

"And the way of peace they have not known" (Romans 3:17). This fact is painfully evident in our modern world, where even the most noble of efforts for peace are soon twisted and left in ruins.

This lack of spiritual knowledge is destroying our world, both spiritually and physically. Violence likely will disrupt not just the power grid but the entire way of life for the United States, Canada and many other nations.

The Bible reveals this Dark Age of the spirit is, thankfully, almost over. The apostle Paul sought to enlighten the Christians in Rome, and us, about the Age of Light. In Romans 13:8-10, he showed the way of love, expounded through God's commandments, which will illuminate that new day.



"The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light" (Romans 13:12). God wants us to do what we can now to bring a little light into this dark world by our examples and love.

When God's Spirit flows freely and God's laws connect people in a network of love and caring, the Dark Age of human ignorance and apathy—of selfishness, evil and suffering—will end. The most-important knowledge—spiritual knowledge—will bring an age of true enlightenment and lasting peace on earth.

For more information on what the Bible teaches about our future, read or request a free copy of [You Can Understand Bible Prophecy](#). You may also want to request a subscription to *The Good News* magazine as a source of spiritual direction and light. It's also provided free of charge as a public service.

Letters to the Editor

The Politics of Education

Regarding the paragraph about the loss of gifted teachers—I was teaching in our local Regional Alternative Middle School for the last 1½ years. After being continually, but subtly, threatened, I quit. Safety first, mine! This program is no longer in operation because there aren't any teachers willing to work with these kids. The most recent answer being provided by the educational powers-that-be are workshops and seminars on (the newest label) Oppositional Defiant Disorder. The defining traits are also the traits of budding psycho/sociopaths.

I still teach in the alternative school system, but in the senior high level. These students are 16+ and can be booted from the program, unlike the streetwise, under-16 middle schoolers.

— Juanita Holman

Successful Parenting Begins With the Brain

Thank you for your article. It must be very encouraging to parents making a big effort to have a parent home with the small children.

I have often thought that it may be even more important to be home for teenagers than for small children. With your article, I now wonder if both are equally important.

My now 26-year-old daughter often tells me that she is so glad I am still at home and available to her now that she has her own home and child. Thank you.

— Della Von Hollen

A Wonderful Site!

This is a WONDERFUL site! I am involved in prison ministries and for those who cannot ask for the publications, I often send them a copy from the extras I receive if they're able to receive them or copy some of the articles.

Would I be able to copy sections, giving VCM full credit of course, so that I can forward some of the contents to various prisoners? I write to prisoners across the globe.

Thank you for having such a wonderful site. I have printed out many of the articles, in particular all that refer to 9/11 and have biblical insights. I love it all.

— Jeannine Robinson

Yes, please feel free to share the articles you find on our site. You may use the PDF tool on the left of the screen to print out what you need. We would ask that you keep the reference to Virtual Christian Magazine that appears on the header of any printed pages.

[Whatever Happened to Father in Children's Literature?](#)

I just read Jean Jantzen's article, "Whatever Happened to Father in Children's Literature?" Although she makes a good point—fathers are missing in children's literature—some of the examples she uses just do not prove her point.

Christian in *Pilgrim's Progress* is not supposed to be a real person, he is an allegory. An allegory is a symbolic story, and the plot often has some inconsistencies. It was never meant to be a children's story. She said it was accepted as a children's story because it is like a fairy tale? Fairy tales were never meant to be children's stories either, and I see little resemblance.

The Princess and the Goblin? In that book is the family of Curdie, the hero. His father is a miner. The two have a very strong, loving relationship. Curdie always wants to go and discuss things with his parents, especially his father. He spends a lot of time in the story trying to save his money to buy his mother a red flannel petticoat. The author of the article missed something in reading that one! Matthew Cuthbert was never a father! He never thought of himself as one. He and Marilla were brother and sister, both of whom had remained single because of character flaws, which Anne's presence when they were old went a long way in improving.

I also think the author was shortsighted in her surprise that the children in the books seem to forgive the absentee parents at the end. Could it be that forgiveness was one of the things the authors were trying to encourage in their readers? Would it be better if the children in books did not forgive their parent's mistakes?

I'm not trying to start an argument. I just couldn't let that go! God bless you.

— Elissa Kroeger



I enjoyed reading Jean's article, finding it quite enlightening. I have heard about *Pilgrim's Progress* on a number of occasions, but have never read it. I feel prompted now to read it.

I would like to recommend a follow-up article about books that DO have an involved father figure—an example to be followed by concerned parents and to be enjoyed by the current generation of children. Thanks!

— Cynthia Gordon

Some feedback messages are edited for space and/or clarity