

Virtual Christian Magazine

Hope And Encouragement
For The Real World

"And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."—Mark 12:30-31

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The Leveling Field: What Does God Want Us to Learn?

By Jean Jantzen

After years of education, experience and achievements, why do so many of God's servants end up facing a "wilderness" phase?

WE CAN IMAGINE A SCENE that may have taken place long ago: Hot, exhausted, discouraged, Moses sat on the hard ground, his shadow stark and black against the thirsty sand, listening to the deep, dead stillness. Alone in the silence he sat. His gaze was lost in horizons of emptiness.

Where had he gone wrong? He had been catapulted off the treadmill of human endeavor and smashed into a motionless, mute wall with an earth-shattering jolt. He couldn't help thinking about the past—all the grandeur and excitement of Pharaoh's court.

His fame had spread throughout the land, especially after he brought Egypt a stunning victory over Ethiopia (as Josephus, a Jewish historian from the first century, records). He thus assumed the Israelites would automatically recognize him as their leader (Acts 7:25).

Prepared for greater things?

Like Moses, have we thought we were prepared and ready to be used in some powerful way by God? Maybe we've had a first-rate education, with many degrees like punctuation marks after our name.

Or maybe we've worked for a highly successful company and held a prestigious position with much responsibility. Or maybe we've been decorated with medals of honor for bravery and heroism. And among our other impressive credentials, we've faithfully followed God's way, living as an exemplary role model for others.



And then suddenly we find ourselves flung back into a mundane existence, receiving a demotion, so to speak—maybe with a life-threatening illness, a disabling accident, a job loss or the loss of a mate—and then asking, “What’s going on? Where do I go from here?”

Why could God not use Moses just as he was in Egypt with all his experience and expertise and leadership qualifications (Acts 7:22)? Why this huge setback? Why was he downgraded to a lowly shepherd (an abominable job to the Egyptian way of thinking, much like a CEO being reduced to janitor)? Moses loved God's way of life so much he had willingly given up his privileged way of life in the courts (Hebrews 11:23-27).

After achieving two university degrees, I thought I must be ready for something big. Wouldn't God open a major door?

What was it that God wanted from Moses besides his excellent resume? I, too, thought after being in the Church for many years and getting two degrees later in life, that God could use me in a more meaningful, powerful way. Hadn't I been a light to both students and instructors? Hadn't I done well to have graduated with honors? I smile now when I read this excerpt from my cover letter that went along with my list of degrees and wonderful qualifications:

"The major business venture of my life has been raising a large family of seven children over a time span of 35 years. I viewed my position as equivalent to an executive of a large corporation. Taking care of a large family demands an efficient structured schedule, where I was on call 24 hours a day. Managing crisis situations was a daily or weekly occurrence.

"Organization, effective communication skills, time management, problem solving and budgeting were all-important aspects of my job. A good working relationship with all these young people required much diplomacy, love and tact. How many of us have enjoyed and endured 25 years of working with teenagers and lived to tell the tale? I also found time for hobbies such as reading, gardening, canning, sewing, camping, crocheting, ceramics and knitting sweaters a half-dozen at a time."

I thought I was ready, well-equipped for the world or anything God could throw at me. After achieving two university degrees, I thought I must be ready for something big. Wouldn't God open a major door? Where would He lead me to let my light shine?

"What exactly did God want me to learn?"

Imagine my surprise when nothing happened. Big doors did not open. I found myself looking after the elderly and their daily needs, even to bathing and toiletry requirements, helping my ailing husband and from time to time my aging mother. These were lowly, subservient endeavors according to the world's standards. Was this a demotion? What exactly did God want me to learn? Even though I loved and was content with my labor, yet I wondered.

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I looked at Moses' example. God had trained him to deliver His chosen people out of slavery. Here in the stark, lonely wilderness, beautiful clothes, talent and rank didn't matter. It didn't matter how many troops he might have led into battle in the past. It didn't matter how smart he was or that he might have hobnobbed with the rich and famous of Egypt. It was all gone and Moses was naked before the Lord.

Recognizing our weaknesses leads to true strength

We must learn to look to God for strength, and in order to do that we have to recognize how weak we are without Him. No matter Moses' life experience, education and appeal, Moses was a much different man after 40 years in the wilderness. So sooner or later in our Christian lives, we need to spend that time in a "wilderness" with God. Herbert W. Armstrong, the man who led God's Church during most of the 20th century, had to.

Mr. Armstrong states in his autobiography: “But I had been beaten down. God had brought that about... Repeated business reverses, failure after failure, had destroyed self-confidence. I was broken in spirit. The *self* in me didn’t want to die. It wanted to try to get up from ignominious defeat and try once again to tread the broad and popular way of vanity and of this world... It was truly a battle for *life*... In the end, I lost that battle... From then on, this defeated no-good life of mine was God’s... it was His to use as His instrument, if He thought he could use it” (1986, Volume 1, pp. 311-312).

Quality time in the wilderness with God



I have often wondered why, after many years in the Church and as we grow older, we or our loved ones suffer devastating illness or disability, a dramatic drop in income or mobility. What do we learn from it?

Maybe it’s the final lesson. Perhaps in our physical weakness, our dependence, our powerlessness to change things, we finally realize we are wholly in God’s hand. There is no one but God. It’s a time of humility, a time of reflection, a time of

solitude, a time to spend with God.

Any major player in God’s plan spent quality time in a “wilderness”—Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, Nebuchadnezzar, Job, David, the apostle Paul and even Christ, to name a few. So we, too, must endure that wilderness phase.

When we enter the wilderness stage of learning, there is a leveling out. Our life of busyness, achieving and fulfilling our dreams, is put on hold. God had certainly trained Moses his whole life to do a particular job, just like He trained the apostle Paul and others. But their training was not finished. He needed to add the final touch—just like we need the final touch to make us ready for God’s Kingdom.

Any major player in God’s plan spent quality time in a “wilderness”. So we, too, must endure that wilderness phase.

God allows disappointments and sometimes allows us to go backwards or come to a standstill so we can get our eyes fixed firmly on Him, preparing to serve with Him for all eternity!

For more about this lifelong journey of change and transformation, please tune in to our media program *Beyond Today*, available on our Web site www.beyondtoday.tv.

Don't Judge a Book by Its Cover

By Jim Columbia

If you have ever “judged a book by its cover,” you have let the first impression of someone become a lasting one. This story of two hunters pictures the importance of looking deeper into the pages of others’ lives, into the heart of the matter.



MANY YEARS AGO, four people I knew planned a mountain goat and moose hunting trip to Alaska. They hired a bush pilot to fly them into the unforgiving Alaskan wilderness to leave them for an unguided drop-off hunt. For 14 days there was to be no means of communication with the civilized world.

This story concerns two of the hunters, one young man who had just turned 18 and a 64-year-old man who was filling in for one who couldn't make the trip.

The young hunter was absolutely livid when he found out that one of the hunters had backed out. Instead of being happy about the hunting trip of a lifetime, he complained at length. The alternate was an accomplished hunter and the two men had only met once. Yet the young man felt he was too old for the Alaskan wilderness and certainly too old to keep up with a spry teen in top physical condition. Any wilderness can be dangerous, and a mistake can be fatal. Safety was the reason they planned to hunt in pairs. The men drew straws. To the teen's disdain, he was paired with the older man. When I went to wish them well on the day of their trip, the young man called his partner a relic, over-the-hill, an antique, useless, ready for the rocking chair.

When I went to wish them well on the day of their trip, the young man called his partner a relic, over-the-hill, an antique, useless, ready for the rocking chair.

The bush pilot dropped the two off, and they set up camp. The young hunter was rude, hardly speaking to his partner. These two scriptures came to mind as this story was relayed to me:

Matthew 7:1-2, which says, “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.”

And Luke 6:37, which says, “Never criticize or condemn—or it will all come back on you. Go easy on others; then they will do the same for you” (Living Bible).

A hard way to learn a lesson



They left the camp that morning in pursuit of a mountain goat. After about a five-mile hike from camp, the old man spotted some goats on the side of a steep mountain. He allowed the young man to try for a goat, while he guided him to it with hand signals as he made the stalk.

He climbed high, fired one shot and bagged his trophy. The mountain was steep and the goat fell down the mountain a couple of hundred yards, coming to rest on an area of snow. The young hunter pursued his quarry, traversing down the steep slope. His partner frantically signaled him to stop. Ignoring the warning, he

walked out on the snow.

The patch of snow gave way. Dropping 80 to 100 feet off the false ledge, he crashed into rocks and ice. By the time the old man made his way to him, things were pretty bleak. If only he would have heeded the advice to stop. One of his ears was almost torn off, and he had broken multiple bones, including ten ribs. He was hemorrhaging from his ears, nose and mouth and was laboring to breathe because of a punctured lung. As he drifted in and out of consciousness, he cried for the old man not to leave him. He didn't want to die alone. His partner showed compassion on the man who treated him badly, following Jesus' words in Matthew 5:43-44: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you."

The patch of snow gave way. Dropping 80 to 100 feet off the false ledge, he crashed into rocks and ice.

The older man took all his gear from both packs and wrapped the injured man to keep him warm. To pass the time, he removed the goat's head. It was too late in the day to make it back to camp, so he huddled with the injured young man all night. A grizzly bear made his way up to within 30 or 40 feet of them and claimed the rest of the goat. The old man said later he thought the injured man would never live through the night. But in the morning he was still alive.

A change of heart

He begged not to be left alone, so the old man made the decision to carry the 192-pound man, the gear and the goat head to camp. The trek included crossing a glacial stream. This was not only a tremendous physical accomplishment, but required unwavering determination on the part of the older man. He carried his partner into camp at 3 p.m. on the third day of the hunt. Never once did the rescuer complain, whimper or murmur. He followed the lesson of Philippians 2:14-15, which says:

"Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world."

Six minutes after their arrival in camp, the bush pilot made an unexpected stop after dropping off some other hunters in the area. The rescue was complete.

Recuperating in an Anchorage hospital for the next 2 1/2 months, the judgmental young hunter spent his time thinking how he had acted toward the man who had saved his life.



In the beginning, the 18-year-old hadn't looked beyond the cover of the pages of the book. He instead chose to complain, criticize and condemn. He had resented the other man, found fault with him and believed he was unfit to be on the hunt. Being distracted by the cover of this man of 64 years, the young hunter missed the content and character of the pages within. It took a nearly fatal fall in the Alaskan wilderness for him to learn this important spiritual lesson. Never form an opinion based on outward appearances, but instead look to the inward man.

Additional reading

God gave mankind the Ten Commandments thousands of years ago so that we would know how to treat both Him and our fellow humans. To learn more about these laws of love, please request our free booklet [The Ten Commandments](#).

Poverty Is Personal

By Phyllis Newton

Poverty has been a constant presence throughout human history, but each of us has the opportunity to personally combat poverty every day while we look forward to a time when poverty will be a distant memory.

POVERTY HITS US IN THE FACE from many angles. The media bombards us with pictures of the world's poor; we can also see it in our day-to-day lives. Pleas for help are constant. Our hearts go out to them. Poverty is a forest of sorrow. We see this forest and get discouraged. However, caring for individual trees one at a time is possible. The poverty solution is an individual matter.

Jesus said that the poor would always be with us (Matthew 26:11). Their presence tests our individual Christianity. James explained what true Christianity is when he said, "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world" (James 1:27). Does this sound personal? Yes!

You can provide for another's physical needs when you see their poverty.

What can each of us do to fight poverty?

God will put before you opportunities to help. Do not let them pass by. Watch, be aware of your neighborhood, and be available. Keep in mind the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-

37). God put before him someone in need of medical help and care, and the Samaritan provided that need according to his means. You also can provide for another's physical needs when you see his or her poverty. Make yourself aware of the background of the situation so you can help compassionately in ways that preserve dignity.



Charity begins at home. It is from the home that it is produced. During the Great Depression when there was much homelessness, sharing bread with the hungry was accompanied by loving hospitality. Often food was given to the poor in exchange for some chores, thus promoting self-worth. We can now do the same. We can ask someone to share a friendly meal, or we can help stock food pantries.

It was common then to bring the poor into homes by doubling up families. In this economy there are still needs for sharing homes with relatives, temporarily or even permanently. With the proper attitude, this can be a win-win situation. It is a tangible presence that is supportive.

Do we cover the naked? Giving clothing to organizations like Good Will are ways to help clothe the naked. Jesus said that whatever you do for the least, you do for Him (Matthew 25:40).

The greatest tool to fight poverty is love

Charity means love. There is always time for love. Love is free and should be freely given. Love can be shown in many ways. We can share our talents, our experience and, above all, our example. Joel Schwartz, editor of *Philanthropy*, in his book *Fighting Poverty With Virtue: Moral Reform and America's Urban Poor, 1825-2000*, explains this well: "The promotion of virtue is not exclusively (perhaps not even primarily) a matter for public policy and charity. To some extent, it may be easier to encourage virtues like diligence and thrift (and sobriety and familial responsibility) by means of personal example than by government edict. If we want to encourage the poor to practice these virtues (as we should and must), it would be no small thing for us to act as if we believed in them by practicing them ourselves."



God will put before you opportunities to help. Do not let them pass by. Watch, be aware of your neighborhood, and be available.

Here are some basic ideas of what you can do to fight poverty (there are many ways to expand on these ideas): Teach virtues at all times to your children (Deuteronomy 11:19); promote the virtue of responsibility for one's actions; show wise use of money. If you have means, give wisely, personally and from the heart. It is the responsibility of the giver to see that the money goes where it is supposed to go. One should not give *for* profit. That is, not for a tax break or for interest. There is nothing wrong in receiving a tax

benefit for charitable contributions, but that benefit should not be our primary motive while we are giving aid. We are told in Exodus 22:25, “If you lend money to any of My people who are poor among you, you shall not be like a moneylender to him; you shall not charge him interest.” Following this admonition would help prevent some bankruptcies, one cause of poverty.

We can only give what we have at hand. Peter told the beggar at the temple in Acts 3:6, “Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.” And the beggar did. We cannot give such a great gift, but we can always pray for the needy, and spread the gospel of hope. Hope is the first step in helping the poor to rise above their state in life.

A time when poverty will cease

When Jesus Christ returns to earth, peoples’ minds will be changed, and we will have all the right answers to combat poverty.

In the meantime, wisely share your blessings:

1. Know your neighbor and be a true friend.
2. Think of your abilities and share them wholeheartedly.
3. Provide relief for the stressed.
4. Visit nursing home residents, the ill and handicapped persons.
5. Take an active part in some of the organizations that you feel are making true progress.
6. Be hospitable to strangers. (Of course, size up every situation wisely. Don’t make yourself vulnerable and unprotected to a potentially dangerous person. If a stranger needs temporary housing, you can refer him to a local shelter.)
7. Spread the gospel to bring hope and encouragement to persevere.
8. Be a good example to counter the bad examples of today’s celebrities.

“But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased” (Hebrews 13:16).

For additional ideas on managing money and reaching out to those in need, please request our free booklets [Managing Your Finances](#) and [Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion](#).

Foul Language

By Robert Berendt

The world around us is full of filthy language, and it’s easy to become indifferent to it all, but God wants us to take a different viewpoint toward the words that come out of our mouths.

GIRLS DON’T SWEAR! That is what I believed when I was a boy. Even boys rarely swore, and I cannot recall one girl saying a swear word. Come to think of it, I do not recall people swearing and cursing in public. Of course, I did not frequent the bars or places that “seedy”

characters usually hung out. I imagined a lot of swearing going on in those places. I'm not sure when I heard the first swear word other than "damn," and I do not recall anyone taking the Lord's name in vain.

Some will say I have a selective memory and some may wonder if I have a memory at all. I am sure people did curse and swear when I was a boy, but rarely in public. Children were taught to express themselves in proper, accurate statements; and English was an important subject in school. Maybe after living for 60-plus years, people can say I've grown up to reality, but I do think that old-timers will agree that 40 years ago cursing and swearing was nowhere near as prevalent as it is today. It would never have been tolerated to wear T-shirts with profanity written on them. Movies and the music of the day did not contain foul language. I will concede my recollection of people and events of childhood may not be as accurate. It may even be colored by naivete and a forgiving memory. However, I am positive that what I see and hear as a common thing today was most certainly not common then. I know I would have remembered that!

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The Bible's input on swearing

The Bible has many references regarding cursing. There are different types of curses, but I will stick with the discussion of profanity. One very strong scripture is in Romans 3:9-18. Paul writes that both Jews and Greeks are under sin, and then defines that sin. In verse 14 he states that their "mouth is full of cursing and bitterness." Verse 18 states, "There is no fear of God before their eyes." Some say we are living in a nation that is no longer Christian. If that is the case, I wonder why so many use the name of Jesus Christ or God in their language. Of course, it is not used with reverence or respect. It is used as an expletive or a way of expressing emotion. Proverbs 30:11 states, "There is a generation that curses its father and does not bless its mother." Proverbs 30:17 tells us this displeases our Creator. The Fifth Commandment is broken in this case. This is all very serious to our Creator, so we need to give heed to this problem.



Swearing and cursing may be defined in different ways. From the mild epithet and an expletive word (usually four letters—why four?), to out-and-out filth, the cursing of another and swear words have become part of daily speech. People who are under pressure or great fear sometimes slip into cursing without realizing what words are coming out of their mouths. Matthew 26:74 relates the story of Peter's denial of Jesus Christ. Peter was shocked at the events he was witnessing, and he had reason to fear in the political and military climate of his time. He began to curse and swear as he stated he did not know Jesus. It is not easy to guard our mouths. The book of James has much to say about that. But that does not mean we cannot or should not fight for control. It is possible for us to learn to speak with words that edify and show respect to others.

How should we speak in an environment where filthy language is commonplace?

It is possible for us to learn to speak with words that edify and show respect to others.

Proverbs 25:11 tells us that “a word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver.” Colossians 4:6 states: “Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.” Language is an art and speaking with grace and dignity takes effort and training. It also reflects character. It is from the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks (Matthew 12:34). Sadly enough, many have not been trained to control their speech, and many greatly lack the abundance of heart that would result in an inner desire and wish to edify and add grace to a conversation or statement. My ears tell me that it has become a rare treat to hear a gifted speaker—one who appreciates and understands the English language. I sometimes feel surrounded by many who seem to relish the use of expletives and shocking words. They are becoming so common they no longer shock anyone.

A few months ago while working out on a treadmill in a large gym full of people, two attractive young ladies were standing near me. Their voices were loud enough to hear, even if I did not want to. Their filthy language removed any benefit of doubt I’d have given them to be ladies. Ladies have always been those who express themselves with dignity and grace. There is a dearth of such women in our society. On a vacation, I was about to use a public barbecue and as I came near, four men who were on vacation with their wives (or girlfriends) were standing and using the barbecue, but their language was so filthy that I turned around and waited until they left before I approached. I have asked a man sitting at a table in a restaurant next to us to please refrain from using foul language as my wife and I were trying to enjoy a meal there. He asked his friend if he had actually been swearing. He did not even realize what was coming out of his mouth.



In public, the camera often turns to an NHL, NBA or NFL coach who is shouting at his players—or more often than not, at the referee or umpire. You do not have to be a lip-reader to know what that public figure is saying. Some are standing in the midst of many people. The great lack of control and disregard for the public is evident. The problem is the public has accepted more and more of this kind of behavior so those conducting themselves in this way have lost most, if not all, restraint. Public opinion does count a great deal, but public opinion has also slipped into the gutter. I do gladly admit not all people are like this. A large number are offended by this kind of filth and there are many people who have a wonderful vocabulary. English is a tremendous language. Our poets and writers are to be complimented in the way they use words.

They say with time a language changes. English has changed over the last 600 years. Maybe that which was once considered crass, ignorant, uneducated and boorish will be considered normal, stylish, noble and correct. Maybe we will all become so accustomed to filth in our language that our brains will overlook or cancel it out. Maybe we will devolve back into being apes and grunting instead of talking (that was written with tongue in cheek). Or maybe we will start inventing new four-letter words to shock people; words like good, kind, true, hope and such. Maybe more of us will learn the beauty of words “fitly spoken.” Maybe we will think about the Proverbs 31 woman who speaks with words of wisdom and kindness (verse 26). Language does reflect the heart of a people. Many of our fellow citizens have a serious “heart problem.” However, these “heart problems” can be healed, if only we will try.

Language is an art and speaking with grace and dignity takes effort and training. It also reflects character.

Living in an environment of profanity means it is all too easy to slip into a habit of swearing. But God, through the conversion process, can help our minds and mouths have cleaner habits. Interested in learning more? Please request our free booklet [Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion](#).

A Network of Love

By Jean Jantzen

God designed us with the need to form relationships with others. Through this network of companionship, we learn the importance of giving and receiving love.

“EACH MORNING WHEN GARBAGE COLLECTORS of Calcutta made their rounds they faced a grisly task. On average, they carted away the bodies of thirty people who died on the streets during the night. These people died alone and without anyone to care for them.

“One morning as Teresa walked to the hospital, she saw in an alley a heap of rags gathered around the still form of a woman’s body. Teresa walked closer. Large rats looked up at her with beady eyes. Reluctantly, they scurried away. Teresa brushed aside the sackcloth. She pulled in her breath, shocked at the awful sight. Rats had gnawed away the woman’s feet. Ants and other insects crawled on festering sores all over her body. The smell of death became almost overpowering.



“Nevertheless, the woman was still breathing. How did she survive the night Teresa wondered? Then a more horrible thought struck her. The woman could not have crawled into the alley by herself. Someone carried her here and left her in the trash to die. Teresa picked up the woman and carried her to the hospital. When the nurse saw the sad bundle of rags, she began shaking her head. This woman cannot be admitted, the nurse said. We have no room for hopeless cases.

“Teresa was aghast. She asked, Do you want me to take her back outside to die in the street? Teresa refused to move. As Teresa waited, she saw the hospital turn others away, especially poor and dying people.



“To be in pain, destitute, without friends is pathetic. But to die in anguish and despair on the streets must be the cruelest blow of all” (excerpt from *Teresa of Calcutta: Serving the Poorest of the Poor* by Jeanene Watson).

Maybe you recognized the young woman in the story as Mother Teresa, a woman known for her good works. However, she didn't start out as Mother Teresa. She simply started out as a young woman seeing a need, who did not turn away. We can learn a lot from her example of love and concern for others.

Building the connections

I have been pondering a statement a minister said in his sermon a few years back: “Help people around you grow,” he said. “It is not a chain of command, but a network of love.” I liked the sound of those words. The words make me feel safe, secure and loved. I believe that is what young Teresa began—a network of love.

Think of a spider's web or the neuron network within our brains or even a computer with its many intertwined connections. Only look at each connection as members of a network of love. Each connection affects the state of the other connection and vice versa. When one moves, they all move, but in ways that reflect their relationship to one another.

How do we build a network of love within the Church and within our community, especially now when love seems to be growing cold and people are bustling about in busy lives, hardly having time for their own families let alone anyone else? How do you and I fit into that schematic network? What is our responsibility in building that network of love?

Within our network, you and I would have to be tuned in and be sensitive to others within that network. We can make it happen! What did Christ say? “Come, you who are blessed by my Father... For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me” (Matthew 25:34-36, New International Version throughout).



Security and comfort in the net

When my daughter was diagnosed with thyroid cancer and my husband a few months later was diagnosed with prostate cancer, we felt vulnerable, defenseless and exposed. We started thinking

about the things that really count, like our relationships, especially with our family and Church family.

Our network went into action, and we experienced the compassion and encouragement of our family. My daughter and husband received cards and encouraging notes and knew that brethren they had never met cared about them and were praying for them, bringing their concerns before the very throne of God. The network of love was a lifeline to my husband, my daughter and me; and it enveloped us, giving strength and courage to go through life-threatening trials.

The network of love was a lifeline to my husband, my daughter and me, and it enveloped us, giving strength and courage to go through life-threatening trials.

Making connections

It is good to heed Paul's admonition from Galatians 6:10: "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers."

Those who are critically ill, aging or struggling are especially sensitive to the help and support—or the lack of it—from those around them. They are especially appreciative of others' concern. We should never take it for granted that other brethren or family will rally around those in need. It is our job to see to it that no one falls between the netting.



When someone in your family is ill, you have to focus on them and their needs. Sometimes there is no time or energy left to do the necessary things. For instance, when my husband had to go to the cancer clinic for treatment in another city five days a week for seven weeks and we were only home on weekends, we had no firewood for the season. One of our brethren saw our need and went out to the forest, chopped logs, delivered them, chopped it into the proper size for the stove and piled them on the porch for us. He did this when we were not home. It meant a lot to us. It wasn't just the physical act of serving, it was his selfless love that warmed us. It was love in action.

Another, an 85-year-old woman who lived 90 minutes away, offered to give me a ride to Sabbath services. She said she would get up at six in the morning if necessary and swing by my way. Now that's love!

We read in James 2:15-18: "Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, 'Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead."

We should be ready, willing and able to extend our hands to assist, encourage, support in any way we can even if it is just writing a note or making a phone call.

In our network of love, we should feel the vibration—the need—and should be ready, willing and able to extend our hands to assist, encourage, support in any way we can even if it is just writing a note or making a phone call. “If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence” (1 John 3:17-19).

We need to be in tune, to be perceptive to what’s happening in our network.

When it is your turn to be on the receiving end of that love and concern, you will be most grateful. When you or I fall into various trials, we need to know someone cares.

Additional reading

If you’re interested in learning about this network of love please request our free booklet [*This Is the United Church of God.*](#)

Letters to the Editor

First time!

This was my first time here (VCM). I liked all the articles and I love the magazine I know I will go online more. Thank you.

— Shirley

Eagles (Volume 8, Issue 5)

Excellent article on the eagles. I have linked it in our Biblical Perspective section.

— R. Mills

The Feast of Unleavened Bread (Volume 4, Issue 3)

Your article is wonderful! Please send me the booklet [*God’s Holy Day: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind.*](#) Thank you again!

— A. Crull

Some feedback messages are edited for space and/or clarity