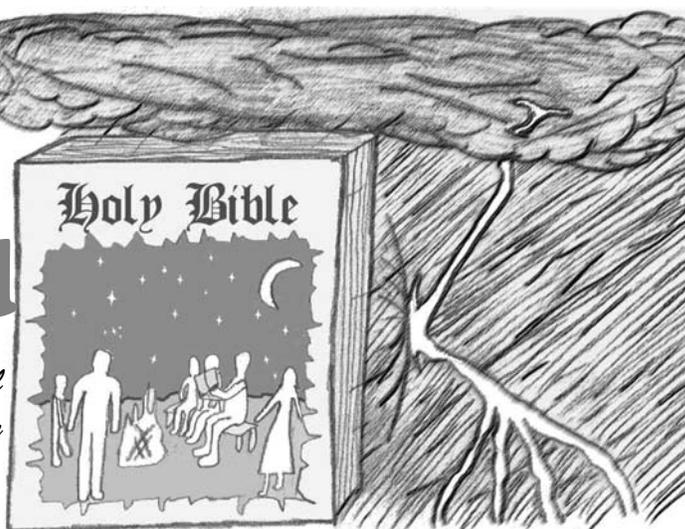


Shelter in the Word

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty... You are my refuge and shield: I have put my hope in your Word.

—Psalm 91:1, 119:114



Vol. 1, No. 5

Helping you become self-sufficient in the Word—for a lasting relationship with the Almighty

Nov/Dec 1998

Christians & Y2K

by Norman S. Edwards

If you have not yet heard of Y2K, the year-2000 computer date problem, you need to! The box on page three briefly explains it. But for the majority of us who have heard about it, the big question is, “What should a Christian do about it?”

This writer has read several articles advocating that believers simply trust God and not prepare for the difficulties that are almost certain to occur in the year 2000. They cite the power of God and his Bible promises to save His people from physical disaster.

The power of our God is awesome. He creates stars and planets, and also miraculously created food for a poor widow in a famine (1Kngs 17:16) and for 5000 people who wanted to hear Jesus (Matt 14:19-21). However, I can find no miracle in the Bible where God continually provides for the needs of people who could easily provide for themselves. There have been several times when my car or other equip-

ment has broken down and I have simply asked the Eternal to fix it—I did not want to fix it myself or pay to have someone else do it. God answered my prayers of this nature only on a few rare occasions—usually by sending someone else to help me. But the vast majority of my and other believers experience is that He lets people do for themselves what they can do for themselves—and he expects us to do things for others. Notice these verses:

Prov 22:3 A prudent man sees danger and takes refuge, but the simple keep going and suffer for it.

1 Cor 16:1 Now about the collection for God's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do.

2 On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.

God can do anything for us, but He often expects us to do much for ourselves. We will talk about exactly what we should do later on in the article, but let us first answer one other common misconception:

Just “Do Without” Computers?

“God’s people have lived without computers and electricity for thousands of years. If they were able to survive without these conveniences, so can we.” This idea may sound good, but if we think it through, it is a little foolish. Why? Because **most people** during the last several thousand years **knew how to live without modern conveniences**, but today, **most of us do not!** Historically, people knew

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how to eat the wild plants and animals that lived around them. They knew how to obtain drinkable water locally. (If a place had *no* water, nobody lived there!) They lived in small houses that could be heated with natural body heat (including the bodies of their animals) or by fires. In days gone by, people who lived in northern climates nearly always stored food in their house for the winter—that was one of their major summer activities.

Today, we rely on food processing plants, truck transportation, and stores for our food. All of these things rely on gasoline and electricity to some degree. A typical city person of today probably has only a few day's food stored at home, and nearby stores and restaurants have only a few days more. When that is gone, the city person probably has little idea where or how to obtain food. Similarly, years ago nearly all houses had wood or coal stoves and supplies of such could be found almost anywhere. In the winter of 2000, some people may freeze because their modern heating system will not work and because they do not have any ancient heating systems either.

Preparing for Y2K is not simply a greedy approach to trying to maintain our comfortable life style. It is learning to live in an environment that we are not used to—but one that is nearly certain to come. We need to learn a lot of things that “less-advanced” people take for granted: how to store water and food, cook on a fire, stay warm with no electricity, care for our unfortunate neighbors, etc.

The other part of preparing for Y2K is planning to make our modern facilities work even though some critical computers have failed. For example, it may simply be less expensive for someone to purchase a generator or a solar electric system and use his existing heating and cooking facilities, than it is to cook and heat with wood. Nearly everyone I know who is

preparing for Y2K is **not trying to maintain all their present life style**, but trying to maintain a way to live so they can continue to live and work effectively to help others.

To any who still believe that they should not prepare for Y2K, ask yourself this question: If you run out of water, food, heat, or essential supplies, and another Christian who prepared for Y2K offers to share his with you, are you going to refuse his help? Will you tell him that his preparing for Y2K was “not trusting God” and that you will have nothing to do with him? Probably not—you might feel that this person's preparing and willingness to share with you is God's way of delivering you! So what is better, to be a Christian in need, or to be a Christian ready to serve others?

Getting a Job or Preparing a Meal Is Not a Lack of Faith in God

Obviously, our relationship with God is more important than preparing for Y2K. Whether we go through Y2K with no physical discomfort, or whether we die as a result of it does not make us a more or less righteous person before God. But just as most of us have a job rather than simply relying on God to support us, and as most of us prepare a meal rather than waiting on God to serve us, so we can prepare for what is a nearly certain difficult time ahead. It would do most of us good to spend less money on entertainment and other non-essentials now, and be ready to really help ourselves and others in the future.

For some people, the idea of preparing to live without modern conveniences is just too overwhelming—where do we start? That is where some good physical advice, along with trust in the Eternal comes in. For some people, a few minimal preparations make sense. Others may need extensive preparation. Still

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PO Box 220, Charlotte, Michigan 48813-0220

517-543-5544, Fax: 517-543-8899, e-mail: shelter@youall.com

Shelter staff: Tim & Jeanice Davis, George & Pam Dewey, Norm & Marleen Edwards, Missi Lara, Lee Lisman, Jon D. Pike, Anne Wibbelsmann.

Subscription and literature requests may be sent to the following addresses. (If you decide to send funds to help defer printing and mailing costs, please make it out to the name shown below).

Australia: Dale Heslin, 9 Alice Jackson Crescent, Gilmore, ACT 2905

Canada: Cherie Zimmerman, 268 Pennswood Wy SE, Calgary, AB T2A 4T3

Europe: Guy Hodiament, Gulpen 122, 4852 Hombourg, Belgium

U.K.: Jenny Whiteman, 2 Warren Rd, Narborough, Leicester, LE9 5DR

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others, especially the elderly or infirm may need an “escape plan”—a place to go where they can live with a relative or friend until the difficult times are past.

Being close to God and developing a kind and loving spirit is one of the best preparations anybody can make for anything. Others like people of this nature and are much more likely to “want them around” and to help them. We will certainly need many peacemakers during the Y2K crisis.

This article cannot hope to answer every possible question about what could go wrong or the details of how a person can prepare. But it will give you a big picture overview of the spiritual and physical principles that are lacking in many Y2K presentations.

God Will Let It Happen To Us

1) Many people in the USA simply do not believe a large-scale disaster could happen to us. There have been local weather disasters, but virtually no Americans can remember any kind of national disaster—it has been over 100 years since a war was fought on our own soil. The long lines at gas stations created by the oil embargo of the early 1970s were the last item that created a national disturbance that affected most people. Nevertheless the scripture is plain—we, as a people, are violating the laws of God, and He has promised to punish those who do. The general prophecies of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 bear this out.

The book of Jonah also teaches this lesson in a very clear manner. The people of Nineveh, to whom Jonah was sent, were neither Christians nor Jews. They did not have much knowledge of God at all. But God told them he would punish them because they were so evil one toward another. When they repented and changed, he spared them. It was not a matter of great religious understanding, but of simple human decency.

Today it is obvious in our society, from the top leaders, down to the cheap magazines in grocery stores, that our nation is full of sin. It is also clear, that far too many people are not concerned about the sin, except when it hurts them. But will God punish those who are trying to avoid evil along with those who commit the evil?

The entire Y2K disaster was caused by many, many people who were interested in short-term benefits rather than what was good for everyone in the long term. While many people who will suffer from it had absolutely nothing to do with the cause of the problem, the historical punishments that God allowed to befall disobedient nations rarely were directly the

result of their sin, either. Often, sinful nations would be punished by other attacking nations.

We do not have room here to cover the many scriptures that show that God sometimes physically delivers the righteous from trouble, and other times allows them to also be harmed by it. We will cover that in a future article. The important thing is to realize that God will give us the confidence to be able to endure any difficulty that we come up against. We quote a few scriptures that should be an encouragement as well as aid our understanding:

Pslm 34:19 A righteous man may have

What is the Y2K Problem?

When computers were in their infancy in the 1950's, all forms of computer storage were very expensive. Rather than store all 4 digits of the year (“1952”), engineers only stored 2 digits (“52”). They saved millions of dollars this way and any possible problems were over 40 years away.

As the years went by, many more computer systems were designed, and in order for them to easily “talk” to each other, they all kept using 2-digit years. A lot of extra time and money would be required to build new systems with 4-digit years, but allow them to talk to older systems using 2-digit years. When was the “right” time for all computer designers to switch to 4-digit years? No computer industry groups or government agencies ever got together and set a policy. In the late 1990's, computer owners simply began realizing, a few at a time, that it was probably already too late.

When the year 2000 comes, many computer systems will think it is 1900. When computers calculate dates, such as bill due dates or people's ages, they may get wrong answers or simply stop working at all. Every computer system in use today has first been extensively tested to make sure it can do its job. But when the year rolls over to 2000, millions of computers will suddenly have to perform calculations for which they have not been tested. It will happen in one day, all over the world.

This problem will occur in big mainframe computers that run banks, stores and governments. It will occur in personal computers that are found almost everywhere. And, it will occur in “embedded computers” that run power plants, natural gas pipes, oil refineries, and city water systems.

The biggest problem is that nobody is sure exactly what will go wrong. The next biggest problem is that testing these systems can sometimes be more expensive than replacing them. And the third problem is that there are not enough trained people, replacement computers, or time to fix every important computer.

many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all;

Matt 16:25 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.

Matthew 10:28 And **fear not** them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

1 Cor 10:13 No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

The Important Issues of Y2K

Once we realize that God is very much aware of this problem, and has a plan for our life through it, we do not have to fear it. In the Bible, times of calamity have often been great times of turning to God, and reconciliation among those who have argued about insignificant things. A great many will probably be interested in God for the first time, and a great many will repent and turn from their sin. That is what God wants. It saddens Him that it must be done in a time of calamity, and that should sadden us also. But it seems to be the only thing that sometimes works.

The following items are significant points to keep in mind when preparing for the Y2K or year 2000 computer disaster:

1) The problem is real. Those who write optimistic “it will all work out all right” reports never base them on a massive amount of facts. They usually bring out a few examples of some group that has everything working, or some business that survived a failure, but they do not show how everything that is critical will work. On the other hand, some reports clearly show that particular governments, companies, or other entities are **not ready**.

I can give my personal testimony having worked on mainframe computer systems in the 1970’s through early 1990’s. Our managers were often not interested in spending one more dollar on a system for benefits that would not be of use until 10 to 30 years later. In our case, the company replaced all of the software I worked on with another system—which was not Y2K compliant either. Somehow, 5-10 years seemed like a very long time.

Do not be fooled by companies that claim that all is well. There is a tremendous desire on the part of most companies to try to make people believe that it is

OK. They do not want their stock-holders to sell their stock. They do not want their customers to go looking elsewhere. They somehow hope it will all turn out all right.

2) The best of efforts will not completely solve the problem! Many businesses are fervently working on the Y2K problem and may finish their computer changes in time. Others probably will not be finished—it just depends upon whose estimate you believe. But even if every computer-owner believes they are finished in time, there will still be a significant disaster. Why? **Because the process of computer programming, testing, and debugging is not perfect!**

Probably everyone remembers getting a computer bill at some time that was wrong. If you use a personal computer very much, you almost certainly have experienced a program with a “bug” in it. Certainly, the companies who produced those “buggy” programs had a system whereby they tested the programs and removed every possible bug before selling them. But these systems are never perfect. Some small fraction of the computers and software sold as “finished products” are still faulty and are not discovered until they are actually put into production. So it will be with the year 2000 bug. The best of efforts will still leave some computer bugs in place. If anything, there will be more bugs than normal because of the hurried pace which is being used to fix the many year-2000 related problems. Unfortunately, nearly all of these bugs will be discovered all at the same time: January 1, 2000. Even if only one ten-thousandth of all of the computer programs worldwide fail all at once, it will still create a major disaster.

3) Fixing the problems in January of 2000 will be much more difficult due to the “cascade effect.” The “cascade effect” is the greatly increased difficulty of solving a specific problem due to all of the other problems being solved at the same time. Let us give this hypothetical story. The Town Power Company prepared for the year 2000, but on January 1, their power plant shuts down due to the failure of an embedded computer in a temperature sensor. They have a backup unit in their spare parts inventory, but it has the same problem as the original unit—they were bought at the same time. A year-2000 compliant unit is available, and in normal times, it would be a matter of picking up the phone, ordering the equipment by credit card, and receiving it the next day via air shipment. But in January 2000, it is very difficult to place a phone call—the nation’s telephone network is operating, but it sometimes takes minutes or hours to get a dial tone because so many other peo-

ple are using telephones. When the Town Power Company finally phones XYZ Sensor Company, they inform them that air shipment is unreliable because failing FAA computers have greatly reduced the number of air flights. Ground shipment is likely to take several days longer as well. Instead, Town Power Company decides to send one of their own employees 600 miles by car to the XYZ Sensor Company. Along the way, other power failures and gas-station computer failures make the purchase of gasoline difficult. The employee runs out of gasoline and many hours go by before he is able to get any kind of help. When he arrives at XYZ Sensor Company, they are out of the sensor he needs—they have been purchased by other power plants and industries that needed to replace ones that failed. XYZ will not be able to make any more sensors until they fix a computer problem in their factory which is waiting on...

The exact extent of the “cascade effect” cannot possibly be figured ahead of time. We do not know exactly which systems will affect each other and we do not know which ones will be “broken”. We do know that the more systems that work, the less trouble we are likely to have. So we should do as much as we can, now!

4) Even if zero Y2K problems occur, we still must be prepared for the last minute rush for supplies during December 1999. No one knows exactly what will happen on January 1, 2000 until it happens. We can be certain that food will be bought off of store shelves and money will be withdrawn from banks during December of 1999, maybe even months before. Governments may implement some kind of rationing at that time. The solution is **to prepare now while supplies are still plentiful. Everyone who buys supplies now and stores them where they will be used (probably their home) is helping reduce the year 2000 problems.** At present, computers, manufacturing systems, and distribution systems are working. If people buy a lot now, these systems can gear up to meet the demand now. Most of the panic buying in December of 1999 will not be replaced on store shelves by 2000—when the manufacturing process may not be working very well.

5) It will affect nearly everyone. Many people who do not use computers have a tendency to think that it will not affect them. But since nearly everything we use today is computerized, the only people who really will not be affected are those who “live off the land” and have their own sources of water, power and heat.

6) There is no “magic formula” in how to prepare. While we highly recommend many of the

year-2000 books and magazines that are now available, do not pick out any list and say “I will do this and I will be prepared.” We all have common needs for food and water, but it ends there. People in warm climates can do without heat, but for those in cold climates, heat may be as important as food. The best way to prepare is to look at **everything** you buy and consume on a month to month basis, and ask: **“Can I do without this?” Or “Can I store this ahead of time?”**

In our next issue, we will recommend some of the best sources we have found for help in preparing for the year 2000. For now, you might try going to a library or book-store to sample some of the many things that are available and to see what best applies to your situation. If you will write us for a free copy of *Y2K News Magazine* (see back cover), it has many sources of information.

Please be aware that there are many people who are trying to “make their fortune” from the year 2000 disaster. They want to sell you things that cost much more than you would pay from some other non-Y2K source. For example, you do not need expensive freeze dried food unless you expect to have to carry it with you during the disaster (it is much lighter in weight). Inexpensive canned food and a can opener will work perfectly well. Also, canned food has water, which you may need in an emergency, and it is much more difficult for someone to carry off.

7) Know your neighbors and prepare for others as well. If you store vast quantities of food and water, and purchase a generator or some other energy source, and all those around you have none of those things, what will you do when they come ask you for help? It would be good to encourage your neighbors to prepare now. That will make life better for everyone.

If you live in a hostile environment where your neighbors would be more likely to forcibly take what you have, then you might wish to consider an escape plan. This might be as simple as storing some gasoline or keeping your car always half full so you can drive to a relative or friends house in the country where it will be safer.

Some people plan to use guns to protect their supplies, but one should think long and hard about the consequences. If you have to show a gun to keep people away from your supplies, you have made them into enemies. If you have to use a gun to protect your supplies, you have started a war. Certainly some will completely avoid you. But anyone who knows that you have shot to protect your supplies but still wants to try to get them will probably plan on shooting you

first. We cannot go into all of the Bible scriptures here on fighting wars (which David did), and “turning the other cheek”. These are issues where personal conviction from the Scriptures is required. But please do not think that the ownership of a weapon is the solution to protecting your food, water, and other supplies. Sharing can sometimes be much more helpful and go a lot further.

8) Prepare in ways that benefits others. If everyone quits their job, sells their business and investments, buys gold or silver with all of their money, and heads for a cabin in the hills, our economy will certainly be destroyed. The prevention will be worse than the cure. On the other hand, buying and storing supplies now can be a tremendous benefit. If little disaster occurs, then the supplies can simply be used in a normal fashion.

Also, if you work in a business that uses computers, spend the extra time it takes to try to make sure that everything will work in the year 2000. Too many governments and businesses are concentrating their efforts on making sure that they cannot be sued in the year 2000, not on fixing the problems.

9) The international situation will be much worse than what we have at home. Most countries outside the USA are much further behind in their preparations for Y2K. We can expect them to have far greater disasters. Many of the third-world countries use software that was “borrowed”—not purchased through normal channels and there is no-one who will help them fix it. An advantage that many of these third-world countries do have, is that most of their people still know how to live a low-technology existence. But if they revert to those things, they will not be exporting their products any more.

Anyone who relies on products that come from other countries must be especially careful to plan to work without them, or to store them ahead of time. In some cases, it may be months before international trade is established and working.

10) Realize that creative solutions will emerge during the Y2K crisis. Many of the doomsday stories we have seen about Y2K fail to consider that people will try creative solutions to help others survive and to make a profit **during** the Y2K crisis. For example, if local stores are unable to normally sell food because of computer failures, they may revert to a limited means of sales: pack food together in boxes

costing exactly 20 dollars, and simply offer to exchange a box for a 20-dollar bill. If computerized trucking systems are failing, some truck drivers may simply pick up a load of food from a supplier, and drive to where hungry people want to buy. They may charge twice as much as normal, they may have to hire an armed guard, but if they can earn enough money from a few such trips to feed their own family, it is much better than doing nothing.

We cannot begin to list all of the possible creative solutions that will be employed, but there is plenty of hope that many will come along. Creative solutions will be much more likely if there are millions of people who have prepared **now** with the essentials so that they can tackle the big problems as they come along.

11) Governments, the “wild card”. It is very clear that most governments have not been “on top” of this issue. They have not warned their people or led industry to a solution. History has shown that governments sometimes use disasters to declare martial law and to concentrate power to themselves. At other times, governments go to war in an effort to distract people from seeing their own failures. (People may demand a leader’s removal if his policies fail, but they feel they must keep him if they are at war.) On the other hand, many controlling governments may lose power during the Y2K crisis, because the computer systems that they use to maintain control will no longer function. We cannot know what will happen until it happens.

12) Pray to God for wisdom and understanding what you should do now. Encourage others to do the same. This point cannot be over emphasized. In numerous Bible stories, God provided direct guidance to His people to get out of difficult situations and to reach others with the Gospel. He wants to be the God of each and every one of us. The Y2K crisis is serious. It is a real disaster. It is worth our time and our prayers. When we come to our Father in earnest, He hears us.

Nobody knows exactly what will happen in the year 2000, but we do know that our Father wants to help us through it. Let us be glad. And to whatever degree we have ability, Let us be ready!

We will cover more specifics of what is likely to go wrong and how to be ready in our next issue. 



Natural Faith

by Ramona M. Leiter

Biblical Principles Seen In God's Creation

“Consider the lilies of the field...” —Mat. 6:28



Reaping

(Not For Farmers Only)



Tropical forests are known for their diversity as well as untapped potential. But much of this has been taken for granted by mankind. Countless irreplaceable acres are burned to the ground every day. Many of the wild plants perishing could have had beneficial medicinal uses, perhaps provided a “cure” for dread diseases. No one really knows what is being sacrificed!

The Body of Christ is like that tropical forest. Every day many lives end—each a life that was unique, full of untapped potential. How much remained untapped in this life is determined by the approach of each Christian to life.

So often, as Christians, we remain satisfied with the status quo. We may think that the love and mercy of God has covered our multitude of sins, and we continue to take advantage of this by doing whatever we please.

Or we think we are “all right” in God’s eyes as long as we don’t break any of the Ten Commandments.

You hear the familiar admonition against evil: “You’ll reap what you sow!” “That’s OK, “ you may say, “I am a decent person. No recent killings—Check! Marriage hanging in there, no graven images or idols in my bedroom—Check!”

But hold on! Let’s take a look at the full picture. Here is the full passage the above phrase comes from:

Gal 6:7 Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.

8 The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.

9 Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

“You mean I have to not only not do some things, but I have to do some things?”

Well, God already did much of the work in you. At birth, God gave you some initial gifts, skills and abilities. Then, if you have accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior, repented, and committed your life to God, He gave you spiritual gifts and abilities. There are countless experiences and individuals the Lord brought (or at least allowed) in your path to sow, water, feed and nurture you.

He does all of this because He loves you and has a plan for your life. But only you can allow the work to be completed (reaped) in you. Let God reap what He planted in you. This glorifies Him, is for our good, and will bless others. Strive to go beyond the status quo and reach your full potential.

Hosea 10:12 Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap the fruit of unflinching love, and break up your unplowed ground; for it is time to seek the LORD, until he comes and showers righteousness on you. 

A Sad Choice —Anonymous

On the table side by side;
The Holy Bible and the TV Guide.
One is well worn but cherished with pride,
(Not the Bible, but the TV Guide).
One is used daily to help folks decide,
No! It isn't the Bible; it's the TV Guide.
As pages are turned, what shall they see?
Oh, what does it matter, turn on the TV.
So they open the book in which they confide

(No, not the Bible, it's the TV Guide).
The Word of God is seldom read,
Maybe a verse ere they fall into bed.
Exhausted and sleepy and tired as can be,
Not from reading the Bible, but watching TV.
So, then back to the table, side by side,
is the Holy Bible and the TV Guide.
No time for prayer, no time for the Word;
The plan for salvation is seldom heard.
Forgiveness of sin so full and free
Is found in the BIBLE, not on TV!!!



It's About Time

Biblical Chronology Made Easy!

Moses

In our last time line study we pinpointed the life of Abraham, who lived around the period of 2000 BC, that is, 2,000 years before the time of Jesus. The stories in the Bible of Abraham and his descendants for the next 500 years are covered in chapters 11 through 50 of the book of Genesis and chapter one of Exodus.

Although Abraham's life story starts with him living in a place called "Ur of the Chaldees" (which was located in what is now modern Iraq), he moves early in chapter 12 to the land called "Canaan" which is now modern Israel. And most of the "action" in chapters 12 through 38 of Genesis, occur in that land.

In a quick synopsis of key events in these chapters: Abraham becomes the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob. Jacob's name is *changed* to "Israel". Israel becomes the father of twelve sons. One of those sons, Joseph, becomes an irritant to his brothers, and they scheme to get rid of him, selling him as a slave to merchants who take him to Egypt.

At that point, in Genesis 39, the scene shifts to Egypt, and we learn of Joseph's adventures there. You may read these famous Bible stories in Genesis 39-50. Joseph eventually wins favor with the Pharaoh of the land, and becomes a powerful ruler in his own right. By the end of the book of Genesis, the whole "extended family" of Israel is reunited in Egypt.

The book of Exodus opens with a continuation of the story of that family's sojourn there. But unlike the many details of Genesis 39-50, which covered a

time-span of only a few years, the first chapter of Exodus covers a period of 430 years. The point of the story is to get quickly from the time when Israel's family moved to Egypt, to when they were a "nation" of slaves to the native Egyptians. As you may recall, Joseph was an important official in Egypt when the Israelites moved there during a famine, but after Joseph died, later Pharaohs decided to enslave the Israelites.

All of this brings us, in Exodus chapter 2, to the birth of the next person on our timeline—Moses.

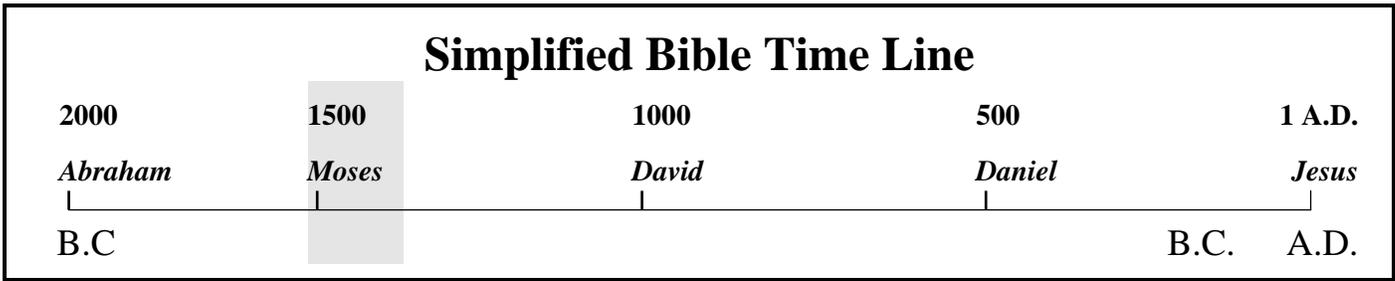
Once again we note that there are no "exact" dates which may be historically determined for either the birth or death of Moses. But most conservative Bible scholars conclude that he lived *around* the period of 1500 BC.

If you have, as suggested in our previous time line studies, committed to memory the date of 2000 BC for Abraham, you will find it very helpful now to add the date of 1500 BC for Moses. From now on, when you come across any Bible story which clearly takes place *before* the time of Moses, but *after* the birth of Abraham, you will be able to clarify the *relative* position in Bible history for such a story.

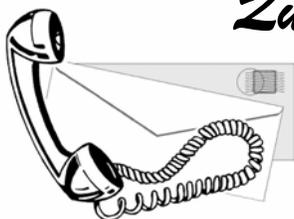
Such stories will include any having to do with the sons of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob/Israel. Even if you have not thought about this time connection before, you have likely heard a number of these stories, perhaps in childhood "Sunday School" classes. One example would be the famous scene where Abraham is stopped at the last moment by God as he prepares to sacrifice his son Isaac. Another would be the story of "Joseph and the Coat of Many Colors". And still another is the famous story of the destruction of the evil cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, where Abraham's nephew Lot lived.

All of those events happened between the two points on our timeline below labeled "Abraham" and "Moses". In our next installment we will start with one of the most well known Bible stories, that of the Exodus of the time of Moses, and work our way forward on the timeline to our next key Bible timeline figure, David.

—PSD



Questions & Comments from Our Readers



December 10, 1998

Dear SW staff:

Your publication

Shelter in the Word is great.

The design is perfect for the market intended, and the articles are all well thought out and presented in what I view as a non-threatening manner. We are distributing it in our area, and will keep you posted on any results, that is if we can measure them.

—Jerry, Nebraska

Dear Jerry,

Thank you for the encouragement. Our subscription list is growing slowly, and we are continuing to receive more letters and comments such as yours. We hope that our subscribers will continue to “share their Shelter” with others.

—Norman Edwards

February 6, 1999

[To *Shelter in the Word*]

I grew up going to Baptist churches with my grandmother. When I was 15 years old, I went to a Pentecostal church on and off until I was 21 years old. After that I stopped going to church. When I wasn't going to church I missed church very much. A few years later I ended up in church again the hard way. What I mean is 2 years and 8 months ago my 5-year old was killed in a car accident. We just moved here to [city omitted] New York. I did not know anyone here except for two people. Everyone else were just: “hi”, “bye”, “have a nice day” and “good morning” people. I ended up in church with my other 5 children and my husband (all the years I've known him he never set foot in a church with me). There were family I haven't seen in years, children from my son's classroom along with his teacher, nephews, nieces, aunts uncles, etc., etc. Most of all, and last but not least, strangers. It was my baby's funeral. After everything was over I found myself back in church a couple of times with my husband (wow!)

One day I confessed in church in front of church witnesses that I believed Jesus died on the cross and was resurrected for our sins. This was a Baptist church. I have not been going in awhile again, you see before the accident I didn't belong to any church, a pastor invited us to church and we went. I slacked up, then started feeling ashamed because I missed so many services, so I stopped going all together. I'm tired of this back and forth stuff, I want to get settled with the Lord. There's so much I have to give up in my life, I'm tired of my ways, and tired of all the negative things that are in my way. I do not know

what religion I belong to. But I believe in God.

Sincerely, Lillian, New York

Dear Lillian,

Believing in God and His Word is what is important—not belonging to a religion. The purpose of *Shelter in the Word* is to help people have a relationship with God, not join a religious group. We believe that those who believe and live by the words of God should fellowship with each other. It is not the act of attending a church that gives a person a relationship with God. Each person should read the Bible themselves, though a congregation can also be a place to learn about the Bible. You should find a congregation that involves everyone in teaching and living by the Bible. You may have to visit several before you find one like that. May the Eternal bless your search.

—Norman Edwards

December 2, 1998

[To *Shelter in the Word*]

I have just read the article *What Does It Mean to Be “Saved by Grace?”* [Sept-Oct *Shelter in the Word*], and think it is excellent. I would like to ask your opinion on something I have never heard a comment on concerning a scripture used in the article, namely:

Eph. 2:10. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

What are the “good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”?

I think that they are the Ten Commandments, which were in effect before Moses, which God had made at creation. Some of them couldn't have been understood, considering the fact that there were no neighbors at that time, nor were there children.

Also, another way that faith mentioned in Jas. 2:18 can be explained, is by comparing the reaction someone might have when the weather forecast has a tornado warning. If one believes the warning, one will do differently than if the person doesn't believe it. The faith a person has in the forecast can be seen in the actions he takes.

I don't think I need to say more. I am not very good at putting thoughts into words, and hope I have made it understandable.

—Ed Andreas

Dear Ed,

The Ten Commandments were certainly a part of

the “good works” that we are to do. The Ten Commandments were not mentioned before Moses, but there are cases in the Bible before Moses where it is clear that God expected people to understand that adultery, stealing, murder, etc. were wrong. However, I believe that these “good works” do actually exceed the Ten Commandments. When Jesus was asked about which commandments were the greatest, He said:

Matt 22:37 Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’

38 This is the first and greatest commandment.

39 And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’

40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Following the Ten Commandments are a big part of obeying Jesus, but His words go further than the Ten Commandments.

As an example, suppose that there is someone who has treated you badly—maybe they say unkind things to you, or have stolen from you, or have injured you and have never apologized. You see that person park his car next to a curb and go into a store. Unknown to him, his car begins to move and gradually rolls into the lane of traffic. It is likely to be struck by other vehicles, or it may be towed away by the police. What do you do? Do you say, “Ah-ha, God is punishing him for his evil,” and then go on about your business without telling him about his car? After all, you are not coveting his car or trying to steal it. You are not lying to him or hoping to hurt him. You are not violating any of the Ten Commandments by not telling him. But you are violating another principle of the Old Testament

Ex 23:4 “If you come across your enemy’s ox or donkey wandering off, be sure to take it back to him.

While this verse is about animals, the principle applies to cars or other valuable possessions. If you see a situation that could cause someone a major economic loss, you are to warn them about it, not simply let it happen to them. This is true even for enemies—people who do not like you.

For Christ to do all of the “good works” in us that He would like to do, we must continually study the Bible and go to Him in prayer so that we can “live by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matt 4:4).

—Norman Edwards 

The Real Value



Suppose that there was a bank that credits your account each morning with \$86,400. It carries over no balance from day to day. Every evening it deletes whatever part of the balance you failed to use during the day. What would you do? Draw out every cent, of course!

Each of us has such a bank. Its name is **time**. Every morning, it credits you with 86,400 seconds. Every night it writes off, as lost, whatever of this you have failed to invest to good purpose. It carries over no balance. It allows no overdraft. Each day it opens a new account for you. Each night it burns the remains of the day. If you fail to use the day’s deposits, the loss is yours.

There is no going back.. There is no drawing against the tomorrow. You must live in the present on today’s deposits. Invest it so as to get from it the utmost in health, happiness, and success! The clock is running. Make the most of today.

To realize the value of **one year**, ask a student who failed a grade.

To realize the value of **one month**, ask a mother who gave birth to a premature baby.

To realize the value of **one week**, ask the editor of a weekly newspaper.

To realize the value of **one hour**, ask the lovers who are waiting to meet.

To realize the value of **one minute**, ask a person who missed the train.

To realize the value of **one second**, ask a person who just avoided an accident.

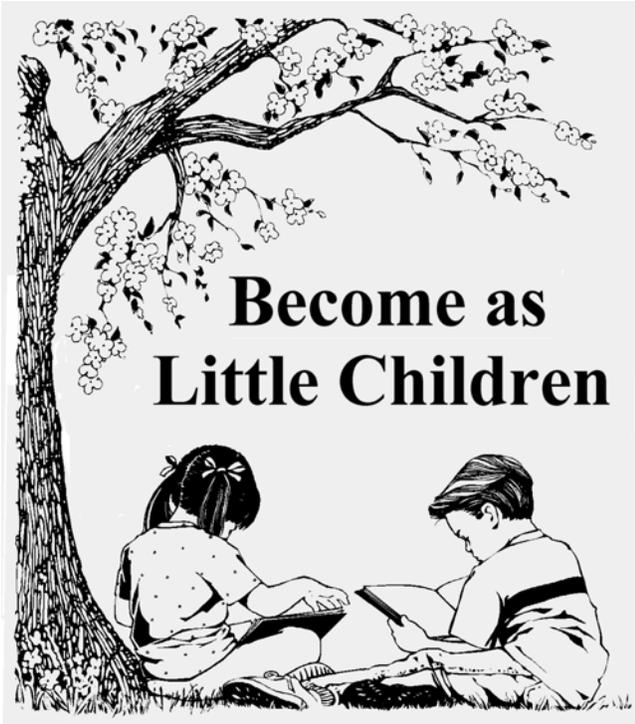
To realize the value of **one millisecond**, ask the person who won a silver medal in the Olympics.

Treasure every moment that you have! And treasure it more because you shared it with someone special, special enough to spend your time. And remember that time waits for no one. Yesterday is history. Tomorrow is a mystery.

Today is a gift. That’s why it’s called “the present”!

Friends are a very rare jewel, indeed. They make you smile and encourage you to succeed. They lend an ear, they share a word of praise, and they always want to open their heart to us. Show your friends that you care for them. Share something positive with them today, whether it be your life, a Bible verse you read or a part of this magazine!

[author unknown] 



Become as Little Children

By K. Kaye Waggoner

Matthew 18:2-5 (NKJV) states:

And Jesus called a little child to Him and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and **become as little children**, you will by no means enter the Kingdom of Heaven". Therefore whoever humbles himself as a little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. And whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me.

These verses have been interpreted many ways, from the literal to the abstract sense and scores of ways in between. I would like to add my perspective as an elementary public school teacher.

In the past 23 years I have come in contact with hundreds of little people. They have taught me as much, if not more, about life than I could possibly teach them.

One thing that stands out, is a child's ability to bring adults back to the basics. We get so caught up in the complexities of day-to-day living, that we lose sight of what's really important.

A recent incident comes to mind. A colleague of mine and her third grade class were finishing a very in-depth lesson on Princess Diana of Wales, shortly after the untimely death of the princess. As a current events lesson, the class had studied a lengthy article in *Time* magazine. After a very factual look into this

prominent lady's life and death, and thinking about what might happen in the future with land mines, Aids, leprosy, etc., a little darling raised his hand and said, "But I still don't see what Princess Diana had to do with the whales!" I guess you know that they had a very quick, impromptu lesson in geography!

One thing we can learn from children is, to be sure we **don't lose our perspective!**

Become as little children. What does that mean? How are little children?

For one thing, **children ask questions**. They keep asking questions until they are satisfied. Why? How? Where? When? They want to know! They are perfectly aware that they don't know, and they're extremely **willing to persist until they find out!** So, we too, need to persist in our quest to find answers. We find them in the Bible.

Another quality of children is trust. **Children trust us** implicitly to tell the truth. We must teach them that everyone is not to be trusted. They need to be taught who really is trustworthy and who is not; what is truth and what is not. In the same manner, we need to trust our Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, to teach us what we need to know, who we can trust and what is truth. We can turn to Him with our problems and concerns, just as children turn to us with theirs. Little ones are certain that we have all the answers, and we can be **certain that God has all the answers**.

I realize that the analogy breaks down here because we certainly don't have all the answers, but we can be sure that God does! As adults, we can turn to God to help us give proper answers to these little, precious ones.

Little **children have faith**. They are sure that if they do what we tell them, they will be safe. Of course, they test us from time to time, just as we do our Father. They learn, as should we, that we do what is best for them. So, does God! We need to have faith that God will guide us to ultimate good. Like the old TV show *Father Knows Best*—he did, and God does!

In conclusion, first, we must be sure we don't lose our perspective. Next, we need to ask questions through prayer, Bible study, meditation and fasting. We need to keep on asking until we find the answers to our questions. Then, we need to have trust in our Father to lead us on the right road, by asking for His guidance. Finally, we need to have faith that He is keeping us safe from the adversary, Satan the Devil. We need to "become as little children". 

The Curse of Perfectionism

by Richard Wiedenheft



Jesus said, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt. 5:48, KJV).

In response to this and numerous similar exhortations in the Bible, many Christians engage in a daily battle to overcome their human nature—to be more like their Heavenly Father. There is certainly nothing wrong with striving to be more like God! But for many their pursuit of perfection is a curse—a curse that hinders real spiritual growth and robs them of peace and joy. It is a curse that hangs the threat of hell fire over their heads because they haven’t overcome their inadequacies and imperfections; it makes them feel that their salvation is continually in jeopardy.

This is because many don’t understand that there is human perfectionism just like there is a human repentance; then there is Godly perfection just like there is Godly repentance. There is a major difference between our efforts and God’s efforts. Apart from God, what we do is vain and temporary. What God does is never in vain.

Consider a Christian who has a bad temper. He tries so hard to keep it under control, but from time to time the pressure mounts and he lashes out at the nearest person, perhaps his wife, a child, or the cat. Immediately he feels sorry for what he’s done. He asks for forgiveness and resolves to try harder in the future. A day or two goes by and then he explodes again. On and on it goes. Each time he feels guilty for losing his temper, more disgusted with himself for not trying hard enough, and more ashamed to approach God again to ask for forgiveness. He bears a burden of guilt. He wonders how he’ll ever make it into God’s kingdom. What if Jesus returns before he overcomes his bad temper?

For this man perfectionism has become a curse. It may even drive him away from a God he feels unable to please; it will certainly rob him of the joy that Christianity should bring. It might drive him to drugs or alcohol, possibly to a mental hospital, or even to suicide.

Bible Exhorts Overcoming

There’s no question that the Bible teaches that Christians should overcome their human nature and grow in character. Paul wrote to the Colossians of presenting them “perfect in Christ Jesus” (Col. 1:28). He wrote to the Ephesians about the “perfecting of the saints Till we all come in the unity of the faith... unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:12,13).

The Bible certainly teaches that Christians should emulate the example of their Lord and Master, that they should strive to overcome sin. But the crux of the issue is

the basis on which they strive for perfection, their motivation is based on their efforts to overcome, instead of understanding their role in the goal of perfection. This needs to be changed to yielding to God who is doing the work in creating a new creature in Christ. We must understand this takes time and while we will slip up on our part in this new walk with our Lord, just as a baby falls down and gets back up, so we too must persevere.

Ways to Seek Perfection

Many Christians seek perfection in personal character. They concentrate primarily on their moral shortcomings: greed, jealousy, envy, sexual lusts, unkindness, impatience, etc. Their daily struggles are focused mainly on eradicating these imperfections from their lives.

Other Believers struggle for control over their personal habits. They worry about eating too much, watching too much television, not getting enough exercise, not studying the Bible enough, not visiting their neighbors, not spending enough time with their children. Too many suffer from what has been called *the tyranny of the oughts*. They feel continually guilty because they don’t do all the things they *ought* or *should* do. They worry that if they don’t take their vitamins one day, they’ll get sick; if they don’t pray and study in the morning, they’ll have a bad day; if they don’t wash their hands, they’ll catch some disease. For some *the tyranny of the oughts* becomes an obsession that burdens their life—robbing their joy and even putting them in psychiatrists’ offices.

Another way Christians seek perfection is theologically. They believe they must find *the answer for* every Biblical question; they must discover and obey every Biblical law in order to be pleasing to God. Having found the truth about salvation through Jesus Christ, they want to find the truth about every theological issue. They are convinced that God’s blessings can only be with those who are in perfect compliance with all those laws, and who perfectly understand all those theological issues. While their zeal is commendable, the “truth” they find must often be based on debatable history, ancient language meaning, etc. Furthermore, all the time and energy they invest in seeking technical truth is that much less available for loving neighbors (let alone theological “enemies.”) and preaching the Gospel. Paul spoke of one group with an element of perfectionism:

Col 2:20-23 “... why... do you submit to its rules: ‘Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!’? These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings.

Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.”

To be sure, Christians seeking perfection would argue that the rules they strive to obey are not “based on human commands and teachings” but, rather, are revealed in God’s word. True. But for too many, the **motivation** can easily be the same based on a false concept of how they are to reach the perfection of Christ. Carnal perfectionism wants a lot of physical things to do on one side of the ledger to make up for the bad or to win favor with God. It is a means of validation of one’s relationship with God rather than understanding the love, mercy and grace of our Savior.

In all the various types of human perfectionism, there is a sense of **earning** or **retaining** God’s **favor** by doing what is right. There is a sense of fear of **losing** God’s favor if one does not attain a certain level of perfection. It is as if one’s salvation hangs in jeopardy every single day. In all this, where is the peace and joy Jesus promised? Where is the assurance of being a beloved child of the Eternal? Without peace and joy, without the assurance of being in the secure, loving embrace of God, this perfectionism is a curse! It is like a carrot dangled in front of a horse by its rider—it will never be reached.

A Lesson from Ancient Israel

When the people of Israel came out of Egypt, God gave them a body of laws. He gave them the Ten Commandments, the Sabbath, annual festivals, the sacrificial system, and commercial regulations. All of these laws were designed for Israel’s good. They were intended to be a blessing to the nation God chose to set apart as a special treasure for Himself.

Question: When was Israel redeemed, so to speak? When were they chosen to be God’s special people? Ezekiel 16 presents a dramatic image of Israel as the bride of God. He tells how much He loved her from infancy.

Ezk 16:6 Then I passed by and saw you kicking about in your blood, and as you lay there in your blood I said to you, “Live!”

7 I made you grow like a plant of the field. You grew up and developed and became the most beautiful of jewels....

Again the question: When was Israel redeemed? She was redeemed “prophetically” when God called Abraham. She was redeemed **in fact** when God brought her out of Egypt and made her His special people. True, the covenant between God and Israel was not formally agreed to until they were encamped before Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19-24). But Israel was redeemed the moment God brought her out of Egypt. Israel was not redeemed to

be a people considering themselves better than others because they followed rules that others did not know, but a people setting an example of God’s way of life.

Frequently they disobeyed, and frequently they were disciplined. God was very patient with them, giving them every opportunity to repent and seek Him. But finally their sins of weakness and their imperfections turned to rejection—rejection of the One who had brought them out of Egypt. They cast Him aside and went after other gods. As a last resort, He divorced them and sent them into captivity. Even then, being so patient, God brought them back and sent them the promised Messiah. God then began choosing people from all nations as a “spiritual Israel,” the Body of Christ. All of this is part of a plan to later bring all mankind (Jews and Gentiles) to a place where their hard hearts would be softened and those laws would be written on their hearts rather than on stone tablets.

What has all this to do with perfectionism being a curse? Simply this: the whole question of God’s will and our efforts to obey it should be viewed within the context of our being a **spiritually redeemed people**. Overcoming, obedience, striving for perfection should not be viewed as a **means to a relationship** with God. Our relationship is based on His bringing us out of spiritual Egypt, not on the degree of perfection we can attain in this life. Because we are redeemed, we can now go on to Godly perfection, something we could never do on our own as humans under our own will and power. Any perfection that we achieve must be that which God makes in us. He is the potter, we are the clay. He is the craftsman making his chosen ones into his Jewels.

Accepting Our Humanity

The fact is that we are imperfect beings and will be that way until the day we die. As long as we are in the flesh, we will never be able to do everything we should do—whether in the moral, personal, or theological realm. Furthermore, God made us the way we are—imperfect! He redeemed us in that state. Just as we love and accept our children, with all their imperfections, so our Father loves and accepts us with all our imperfections.

To be sure, our Father wants us to overcome and grow. He commands it! But He accepts us in our imperfect state; He knows and understands our faults and failures, just as we know and understand those of our children. After all, we were children once.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul spoke of our shortcomings in the context of being the children of God.

Rom 8:20 For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope

21 that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

Paul went on to speak of the spirit helping us in our weaknesses (v. 26).

Paul himself, an apostle through whom God worked many mighty miracles, who had personal contact with Jesus Christ, who had a vision of God's throne, cried out about his lack of perfection:

Rom 7:16 For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do

Rom 7:18 For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out ...

Rom 7:24 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?

Jms 3:2 We all stumble in many ways.

Paul admitted to the Philippians that he was less than perfect—but that this fact did not keep him from continually trying to overcome (Phil 3:12-14). Herein lies an important point. While we recognize that we are imperfect and that we will take our imperfections to the grave with us, we must continually work to overcome them. Just as a student continues to study and learn even though he knows he won't get a perfect score on every test, so we must continue to grow spiritually even while we recognize that we will never attain absolute perfection in the flesh.

Paul could accept this apparent contradiction. He fully recognized and decried his own failings, yet he pressed on toward the mark of the high calling of Jesus. So must we. Paul accepted his imperfections, yet he experienced the joy and peace of knowing that he was fully accepted as a beloved child of the Almighty. So must we. We work for perfection, not to earn God's love, but because we already have God's love, because we are already His children, and because we want Him to do His work in us. We are already translated into His kingdom and sitting with Christ in heavenly places (Eph. 2:6; Col. 1:13)

Why Human Perfectionism Is a Curse

The idea that we must attain a certain degree of human perfection in order to "make it into God's kingdom" is a curse for a number of reasons.

Perfectionism hinders the joy and peace that comes from knowing that, through accepting Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, we become one of God's children. Through Christ we stand before God just and holy, wearing a white robe of righteousness—made white by His blood, not by our deeds, which are always less than perfect.

Perfectionism hinders our acceptance of salvation through grace. It conveys a sense that nothing is free in this world, that God's forgiveness and justification can't be a gift, that we must do something in order to earn them.

Perfectionism puts the focus on self, on what I'm achieving and accomplishing "for the Lord." It fosters legalism and a "works orientation"; it downplays the magnitude of what **God** has done for me in sending His

own son to redeem me. It downplays the role of Christ in what he continues to do in us.

Perfectionism can lead to guilt, depression, mental problems, even suicide. Indeed, psychologists report that many of their patients, fundamentalist Christians in particular, suffer from mental problems brought on by feelings of failure in their struggle to overcome sin.

Perfectionism, *the tyranny of the oughts and the shoulds*, is a heavy burden that no Christian should have to carry. Indeed, Jesus came to take our heavy burden and replace it with His light one.

Other Extreme

Make no mistake, the opposite extreme, complacency, is just as much a curse. It says, because I'm saved by grace, I don't have to worry about obeying God, or searching out His will, or overcoming my faults. A person, with such an attitude, does not understand the magnitude of God's love or the price that was paid at Calvary—let alone the sureness of God's judgment. A person who does not care about their sin, does not care about the people that their sin affects. Just as ancient Israel, after centuries of sin, finally rejected God and was divorced by Him, so Christians who continue in sin may finally come to disbelieve and reject the grace of God. For them, "... no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God" (Heb. 10:26,27; cf. Heb. 6:4-6).

Christians are exhorted to overcome sin; and with the help of the Holy Spirit, they can make great changes in personal habits, in morality, in attitudes. But no one, other than Jesus, has attained absolute perfection in the flesh—not even great, spirit-led servants of God. I submit that no one ever will.

Then what hope is there? The answer is the same that Paul offered after decrying his imperfections:

Rom 7:25 Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!

There is hope only through Jesus!

Certainly, we should strive to overcome, knowing that we will not completely succeed in the flesh. Certainly, we should endeavor to follow Jesus' perfect example, knowing that we won't fully attain it in this life. Certainly, we should ask him daily to change us, because God loves us and bought us with a price, because we are His dear children, because we are already members of His family—through Christ Jesus, whose perfection *God* accepts in place of ours. We also obey for the practical reason that God's ways are good for us, as well as good for the others we meet.

Eternal life comes from the sacrifice of Jesus, the Lamb of God. He is the one who will ultimately make us perfect. Striving to overcome sin is part of what Jesus

does in us. But if our efforts to overcome turn into human fear and worry, then they are no longer of God, but be-

come “human perfectionism” and should be avoided. 

Writing

by Tommy Willis

If you don't already, have you ever thought of writing down your thoughts on a daily basis? You can call it your diary, journal, or notebook, whatever you wish. Many who have started recording their thoughts this way have found it very edifying. I've done this for years and it has really been helpful for me.

I read a story once about a Vietnam veteran who wrote in order to help deal with the stress of going through the war. He did this as a form of therapy. He kept this up for years and eventually wrote a book about the war.

Over the years I've used writing as a form of therapy also. It has helped me deal with the stress of life. It's actually been part of my prayer life, one of the ways that God counsels me. Writing my thoughts down this way eventually led to writing articles such as this one.

When confronted with a problem, there's nothing I like to do more than take it to God in prayer, and take a sheet of paper and start writing. I've done this for so long now that it has become a way of life for me. It doesn't have to be something you do every day like a diary. It can be once or twice a week. But once you start, you may find yourself as many do—looking forward to writing each day!

I ask God to guide me in the writing, and I usually learn as I write. So you can imagine how much I end up writing because I love to learn.

In Psalm 119:99 David relates how he passed his teachers up because he used his mind properly to meditate on God's Word. This reminds me of Psa. 1:2-3 where David relates that because he meditated on God's Word day and night, he was like a tree planted by the river of water—he constantly grew.

In 2 Tim 2:7 Paul told Timothy that if he would apply his mind and meditate on these things, God would give him understanding. Again we see the same principle where writing can aid in the meditation process.

The mind is a wonderful thing, and it should be going all the time. Writing stimulates your thinking. It

will help you focus your thoughts. It is an exercise in thinking and there is no growth without thinking. It may not be for everyone, but you will never know until you try.

Over the years when people have come to talk to me about their problems, I've noticed one of the things that helps them (even if I can't) is they get a chance to get a clearer picture of what's going on by discussing it. Had they written about it, sometimes it would do the same thing. **To those who have no one to talk to, try writing your thoughts down.** Of course it's not as good as having someone spiritually mature to counsel with, but you may find, as many have, that it's a wonderful form of therapy. We as believers in Jesus Christ have God to help us with the writing. What can top that?

Writing can help keep our minds sharp well into old age. A good example of this is the famous author Eric Hoffer, who had stopped writing at the age of 72 because he felt his mind was played out and growing dull because of his age. So he decided to try an experiment, to force himself to write something every day over a period of a few months. He wrote down whatever fleeting thoughts he had. He was happy to report at the end of the experiment that it worked. By writing something significant every day his mind had been revived!

If you decide to give it a try, then go at a pace that you are comfortable with. It's not something that you want to dreadfully drive yourself to do, but more of a spontaneous reaction because you are learning to enjoy it.

Ask God to guide you in the writing each day. You may find, as I have, that it becomes part of your prayer life, to where God counsels you through the writing. It can aid you in your walk with Him. It becomes part of you seeking Him diligently. 

It Never Hurts When I Laugh

By Morris Kerry, Jr.



If you can't see the humor in life's little setbacks you're probably taking yourself too seriously.

Just about everyone takes themselves too seriously. Whoever you are and whatever you do, you probably take yourself and your setbacks too seriously. You could stand to lighten up, laugh at your mistakes, smile more and let people see that beautiful face of yours.

There's a lot to be gained from brightening your outlook. If you can laugh at yourself, you'll probably cope with obstacles more effectively and rebound faster from disappointments. You'll be able to let off steam better, your self-esteem will rise and people may even like you more.

But if you insist on taking yourself too seriously, you're bound to get steamrolled by Life, with a capital "L".

No one is immune to taking him or herself too seriously. Most of us are normally narcissistic and egotistical, with all sorts of vanities, and are happy with ourselves, but still have a definite tendency to take ourselves too seriously. Maybe it would be a good idea to put a little sign under our mirror where we look at ourselves, which would say, "This person is not to be taken too seriously!"

There just isn't enough time to take everything seriously. People use humor to separate the truly threatening from what's not truly threatening. You learn to laugh at the day-to-day things and reserve seriousness for what is really tragic. We tend to blow things out of proportion.

Laughing At Self Is Healthy

But humor and threat, strangely enough, usually go together. All humor requires an element of threat. It's the terrible things that become funny when we share our fears about them with other people. We can let things either get to us or we can laugh at them. And laughing at ourselves is the best way anyone's found to deal with human frailty since Adam took the "forbidden fruit" from Eve. Humor is the way we cope with living in an imperfect world, with imperfect people--ourselves. Winning is fine, but when we can't win, the best thing to do is

find a way to laugh about it.

Humor is a great tool in our lives. Laughing at oneself provides an effective escape valve from life's pressures. Humor is also a great coping mechanism. Many times when I've worked with people who are very anxious about something, I will try to get them to break out of their anger or fear by helping them laugh at themselves. I remember one young adult who came to see me. He said, "he had never asked anyone for help like this before" (psychological help). He said, "I know I'm mixed up and need some help, but I've heard of people being destroyed by therapy." I then said to him, "Don't worry, I already destroyed my quota for this week," and we both shared a good laugh about it.

Being able to laugh at yourself means that you have a good kind of self-esteem. Good self-esteem means that you can feel O.K. about yourself without deluding yourself that you have no faults.

When we expand the limits of our laughter to include laughter at ourselves and everything we stand for, we become more perceptive, more candid and more fully self-accepting than when we take ourselves completely seriously.

The advantage of humor is that you can safely release a lot of repressed thoughts that you wouldn't ordinarily have a chance to express. And the danger of being too serious is that you will be overwhelmed by the problems that, when later seen in perspective, were not so terrible.

Three Stages of Humor

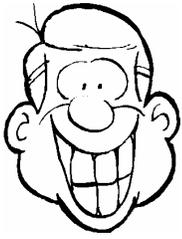
There is a link between self-esteem and humor. And people can gain peace and maturity and self-esteem when they progress through, what seems to be, three stages of humor.

In the first and least mature stage, the person usually ridicules his or her own inadequacies, often weeping as much as laughing. In the second stage, the person typically directs hostile laughter at others. In the third stage, he or she laughs at their own shortcomings, doing it in a confident but non-threatening way.

Getting to stage three will give you a balanced control over

About the Author

Morris Kerry, Jr. was a life-long Bible student. He attended several different churches, but always considered himself first a follower of Jesus Christ. He passed away on April 20, 1993. Much of his writing was not published during his lifetime, but we publish it now as we believe it will be a benefit to our readers.



your life. Those who reach the third stage can look at their own failings in a humorous fashion and no longer blame other people for their problems. It works two ways: Laughing at themselves means taking responsibility for their own lives; and when they feel in control of their lives, they are able to

laugh at themselves more easily.

When people have this ability, they start to develop a different attitude. They stop believing that life owes them certain things. They know that they have to work for what they get and they become more effective and content in life. It's a kind of paradox. Until they can really accept their shortcomings, they can't go out and do what they are capable of accomplishing.

After working with so many people over the years, I found that people become healthier and happier when they are able to turn hostility towards others into laughter at themselves.

Until they are able to make this transition, some develop a number of different ailments, headaches, fatigue and insomnia. Some who could not make this transition would even lose what humor they originally had.

One lady I counseled would take out her anxieties on the family, telling her young teenage daughter things like, "When I was your age, I was smarter than you." And when her husband would come home after a hard day's work, she would many times call him a "sweaty, stinking pig." She also experienced fear panic attacks. After talking with this lady, I found out she was frightened of growing old. Eventually, with God's help, she learned to laugh at her panic attacks and her fears. Her new attitude was, "I may be getting older, but I'm getting better!" What a change this made in her physical health and attitude of life.

Honesty and Humor

Some people I've worked with would ridicule others and make fun of loved ones, to compensate for their own social clumsiness. These persons had to come to an understanding and recognize their own inhibitions and self-consciousness. After a period of time, when they might do something like spill a drink at a social gathering, they had the ability to say, "What a klutz I am. But so what!" and go on and enjoy the party.

In my own life, I tend to joke about setbacks and disappointments. I learn from this. I try to find the humor in a bad situation. I may say to myself, "O.K., it's a letdown, but next time it won't be." I deal with disappointment by making light of it and go then on with life. Sometimes when I am teaching and sharing the

word of God with others, I will take the material too seriously. I've learned that I probably do that when I'm not as familiar with it as I should be. So I use seriousness to hide that fact. Yes, it's a cover up which God has helped me to overcome and will help me continue to work on. In this way our Father helps me to understand what He stresses in the link between humor and honesty. As our honesty with ourselves increases, the healthy kind of humor starts to increase.

Avoid Guilt

We must learn to be free, high upon the self-therapy of smiling and laughing at ourselves, and to understand guilt and unrealistic expectations. This will prevent us from taking ourselves too seriously. We should learn to often say to ourselves, "Lighten up my friend!"

Many times guilt is the result of taking oneself way too seriously. You're saying to yourself, "I did this, and therefore I'm not good forever." You may even think that you have to be perfect in everything you attempt, and this will keep you from having a sense of humor when you experience some kind of failure.

Instead of focusing on who we are supposed to be in Christ, people seem to focus on making more money, or living only for pleasure. Don't misunderstand, people should take themselves seriously, but they should not take the ego-self so seriously. We need to feel worthwhile and to feel a sense of belonging, but the puny little ego—the drop of water in the ocean—should never be taken very seriously.

Think about the things that trouble you the most. Yes, dare to think about those "impossible" people that you have to live or work with—the ones for which there is "no hope" for change. In some cases, the most difficult people may now be gone from your life, but the scars of what they did remain heavily upon you. Whether it is difficulties within yourself or from others that trouble you the most, everyone involved could probably benefit by being shocked with a little humor. Maybe the most sour-faced ones among us should be given a new name like, "Buddha of Constant Discouragement" (BCD), but adding with a smile, "Lighten up a little my friend, **life is for the living!**"

Roll With The Punches

Ultimately, humor is economical. Someone with a good sense of humor doesn't waste energy pretending to be perfect or hiding anger or feeling guilty. They don't waste energy trying to suppress their thoughts. A sense of humor helps us to roll with the punches and be

productive at the same time.

People who presently take themselves with extreme gravity might have the best opportunity, strangely enough, to get a large laugh out of their peculiar predicaments.

The more serious the subject matter, the greater the potential for a sense of humor. Subjects such as politics and religion for example, when taken too personally also have the greater potential for the bigger explosion of laughter, if we take time to think about it. The more people are involved in a subject, or the more seriously they take it, the more they will enjoy jokes about it, that is, if they can see the humor in it all.

Not taking something too seriously doesn't mean not taking it seriously at all. Far from it. You want to be serious and see the humor at the same time. You should have a kind of dual vision.

The person who can keep their sense of humor can deal more effectively with a broader range of problems. Instead of getting beaten down to the point of giving up, a person with a good sense of humor will bounce back and give it another try. "Onward and upward!"

How To Use Humor

So how do you put a little more "lightness" in your lifestyle? Here are some ideas—not set rules, just some thoughts that can help.

Select a humorous saying to repeat to yourself whenever you're disappointed. You could say something like, "Life hands me lemons, so I'll make lemonade." It will help you recover from a loss or setback you've experienced.

When you feel a family or interpersonal conflict brewing, choose a signal—like playfully putting your thumb to your chin and wiggling your fingers. Sound silly? Perhaps, but it can work to help break the tension and put things in perspective.

To put some humor into your job, whatever it may be, try what one plumber did who added a sign to his truck door: "A flush beats a full house". Or, the sales manager who calls himself the "sales mangler."

Remember that humor works better than anger. If someone's chronically late to meetings, say something like, "I'm glad you could make it" instead of shouting at them, or even not saying anything and

steaming inside yourself for hours.

Remember that very few things are sacred, and that none of your teachers or elders know all the answers. Even Ann Landers got a divorce.

It's also good to surround yourself with friends who aren't afraid to laugh with you. It is even better to have friends who think everything you say is funny than to have friends who never see the humor in anything. Keep smiling, keep your heart light, laugh a lot, and don't take yourself so seriously. 

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Christian Educational Ministries Bible Correspondence Course. Learn important Bible truth at home with this 9-lesson, 62-page (total) correspondence course by Ron Dart.

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Correction: Our last issue mistakenly said "author unknown" on the poem on page 9. The real author is Claudia Minden Weisz. We apologize for this mistake.