



Foundation of Faith

GROWTH

Life Enables Growth

Steady Footsteps

Keep In Tune

Life:

With or Without God

Experiences With God

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FOUNDATION OF FAITH

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Editorial

Dear Reader!

In Colossians 2:3, the Apostle Paul explains to us that all treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ Jesus. Yes, everything comes from God. “For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever” (Romans 11:36).

In this edition of the “Foundation of Faith” we want to examine the topic of growth and fruitfulness, which is entirely dependant on God’s power, for it is written: “While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest . . . shall not cease” (Genesis 8:22). Seedtime and harvest, growth and development, are godly gifts that bring us to regard our wonderful Creator with amazement, wonder, and thankful reverence.

Several years ago, during our ministerial service in San Jose, California, we took some visitors to one of the Redwood Parks. At the entrance, a large slice of wood was on display. It was cut from the trunk of a giant Redwood tree. The diameter was about 8 meters, and based on the annual rings, the age of the tree was measured as over 2,000 years old. Near the middle of this slice was a dot with the date of Christ’s birth, and then other significant dates were noted, such as the coronation of Charles the Great in the year 800, Genghis Khan’s rise to power in 1206; and the year 1492 when Columbus discovered America. What an incredible example of consistent growth, and this is only one example of many that we could find in the natural world!

Growth and fruitfulness! Most importantly, we want to apply this topic spiritually. Every one of us should grow in the knowledge of God, in faith, and in grace. Let us remember Jesus’ words that He spoke to His disciples: “You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you” (John 15:16).

H. D. Nimz

To live is Christ



As the reformer Calvin lived in Geneva, after his break with the Catholic church, a large group of youth in the city who also broke with Rome, surrendered their entire lives to the Lord to spread the Gospel.

One day, in the middle of winter, a special service was held in the church. After prayers and exhortations, hands were laid upon a young man who was reverently bowing his head. Louis de Marsac was ordained as a preacher and missionary in order to travel to his homeland of France and share the Bread of Life.

Calvin preached a sermon using the text: “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves” (Matthew 10:16). In the crowded church, many were moved to tears, although none were related to him by blood, for Louis had been brought to Geneva in his early childhood by his father, who had long since passed away. Though not family by birth, they were all joined together as the family of God.

Louis de Marsac also had a very dear friend, and saying goodbye to him was very hard. Louis’ heart was very moved by leaving so many dear friends behind, but he was also very thankful for all the love shown to him by everyone.

Courageously, he traveled to France. He was driven by his greatest longing, which was to enlighten his countrymen about the heresies of the Catholic church. He was well aware that this mission carried dangers, but his heart burned with the love of God, a love that held nothing back.

When Louis arrived in Lyon, he preached secretly in a small congregation of heretics, as they were referred to by the Catholic church. He avoided his relatives at first, to prevent causing them trouble, but his cousin heard that Louis was there and got in touch with him. His heart was open to the Gospel, and before long, he accepted Jesus Christ as his personal Savior. Louis was overjoyed that one of his cousins had found the Lord.

Soon, this situation turned bad. The government discovered Louis’ mission work, and he and his cousin were put in prison. They would shortly receive their sentence if they did not give up their “heretical faith.”

When the brothers and sisters in Geneva heard this, they were very sad. Calvin’s heart was also very burdened, as he had sent this young man to the mission field, and now he was facing death. But it was not Calvin that had sent him, it was Jesus. And this Jesus would also give Louis the strength to die for Him.

Norbert, a friend of Louis, risked traveling to Lyon to see his friend one more time. He successfully entered the dark prison cell as a servant and had a few minutes to say goodbye to his friend.

As he entered the prison cell, he saw a figure lying on the floor, but he could hardly recognize his friend.

“Louis!” Norbert faltered, “Louis!”—“Whose-whose voice is that?” the tones were thin and weak, but the voice, unmistakably, was Louis de Marsac’s.—“Louis, I am Norbert de Caulaincourt, thy friend.”

First, in the darkness, a thin cold hand sought his, then two wasted arms stole around him, and the friends were locked in a close embrace.

There was a moment of tense, throbbing silence, then a sound. Louis de Marsac, the steadfast, the dauntless confessor, who feared neither sword nor dungeon, neither rack nor flame, was sobbing on the neck of his friend. Then he became somewhat energetic, yes, even cheerful, and rejoiced over the crown of life that was

awaiting him. “A crown in very deed, of thorns,” said Norbert, thinking only of the sharp pain, not of the sacred memory.—“And a communion sweet, secret, unutterable, with Him who wore that crown for me,” answered Louis.

He then continued: “I have come to love the darkness of this place,” Louis went on. It is a veil that He puts on, lest the glory should overpower me. He dwells in the thick darkness, though He is the Light . . .”—These two friends still shared a few words. And Louis’ joyful endurance of his pain in prison and even his impending death made a deep impression on his young friend.

Norbert remained in Lyon until he saw his friend die as a victorious martyr. Yes, this young man, who could have had an easy and good life and who was loved by so many, treasured the pain he was able to suffer for his Savior. His death brought him to his Savior in glory, and his example inspired his young friend, who years later also surrendered his life for the Lord.

It Depends on Growth

We have a little peach tree in our garden. It is still small and only has a thin trunk and delicate branches. It bloomed for the first time last year. This spring, it was decorated with pink blossoms once again. When I looked carefully at it after it had bloomed, to my surprise I discovered four furry green fruit buds that were nearly as large as hazelnuts. From then on, I kept a close watch on my little peaches.

I soon made a strange discovery: one of the furry buds grew and was soon the size of a walnut, but the other three remained as they were. Worried, I monitored those three little “siblings.” No, they did not want

to grow but remained as they were, and one day they dried up and fell off. Only the first peach developed healthily and normally. With time, it became large and round and had a beautiful, red, velvety appearance, until finally, one autumn day I picked it and brought it to the basement to finish ripening.

My four little peaches became a parable to me. Don’t we as humans often observe something similar? One may have experienced something inwardly—perhaps at an evangelistic meeting. You notice there is new life there, and the fruit bud is clearly identifiable. But what use is this tiny bud if healthy growth is

lacking? It depends on growth. A standstill leads to decline in one’s spiritual life. Obstacles to growth come in many forms: career ambitions, stress at work, striving for material goods as well as lifestyle, and habits that you don’t want to give up.—The “sap supply” is disrupted; the fruit does not develop normally. It remains tiny and meager, and one day it falls off.

Then you stand there sadly and think: You dear one, you were once there, you had once made a good start, and the fruit bud was clearly identifiable. And now? Nothing remains of it. You cannot produce any fruit.

Hildegard Krug



Growth and Bearing Fruit

“The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree, he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon.” (Psalm 92:12)

God often uses images to explain specific truths about salvation. Here the righteous is compared to a palm tree and a cedar in order to illustrate the privileges and state of a Christian.

The Palm Tree

Whenever we read about a palm tree in the Holy Scriptures, it is always a date palm, which has great economic value in Palestine.

Britannica tells us that the palm tree can grow to a height of 23 meters. It requires 4 – 5 years before it will bear fruit. Once it is between 10 and 15 years old, it can produce 200 pounds or more of dates. It can live approximately 150 years and bear fruit the entire time.

When we now read, “The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree,” we see before us the Christian, saved, made righteous by grace through the blood of the Lamb, a work of God, a new creature to the glory of the heavenly Master. He is not compared to an acacia tree full of thorns or a briar, where a mere touch can bring harm. He is also not a small ornamental tree which, though pretty, bears no fruit. No, he is like a palm tree, “filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God” (Php. 1:11).

The righteous is like a palm tree. He stands upright, his roots go deep, for he is planted on the foundation of

grace, yes even “planted in the house of the Lord” (Psalm 92:13). He is magnificent and strives toward heaven. He is a master in all situations and defies wind and weather. He may bend in a storm, but he remains firmly rooted. When heat and times of drought come along, other trees wither and are uprooted. He remains standing for “he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper” (Psalm 1:3).

The righteous will flourish and be a blessing. How encouraging this is! Even though we may go through adversity and difficult times when injustice and distress want to weigh us down, we have many examples in God’s Word that show us how we can be victorious.

The Cedar

The second image God’s Word uses for the righteous is the cedar. “He shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those who are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bear fruit in old age; they shall be fresh and flourishing” (Psalm 92:12–14).

The cedar grows in the mountains of Lebanon. It does not grow in a bog or marsh, but on high. The righteous has been pulled from the grime of sin and placed on



the Rock of Jesus Christ. By God's grace, he can be strong in the Lord and in the strength of divine power.

In Palestine, the cedar is the most distinguished tree and has always been an image of power and might. It is an evergreen tree, it is weatherproof and defies frost and heat, summer and winter because it has oil in its wood that keeps worms or vermin out of the trunk.

The righteous has an anointing from above. He possesses the divine element of the Holy Spirit so that his "whole spirit, soul and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (see 1 Thessalonians 5:23).

Dear reader, it says here, "He shall grow like a cedar" and "They shall still bear fruit in old age." Yes, even at an old age, they grow in understanding, in love, in faithfulness and bear fruit for eternity.

Jesus Christ tells us: the righteous bears fruit, "some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty." Dear reader, the Lord provides us with such wonderful and precious promises. I rejoice in the privilege of being a child of God, made righteous by the Almighty. Praise the Lord!

H. D. Nimz

Say, Have You Grown, My Child?

*Not far from father's workbench, there is a wooden door
And on the door are markings, embedded from before;
The lines go up in order; I know for what they stand:
The height of all his children, marked by my father's hand.*

*And if we children entered the workshop as we played,
Sometimes we'd stop and study the marks that he had made.
There we could see and marvel how much we'd grown each year.
That we were making progress was visible and clear.*

*One day I told my mother with joy: Those marks do show
In height there's not much lacking, and I'll be fully grown.
She smiled and whispered gently with words of love so mild:*

*"Spiritually, on the inside, say, have you grown, my child?"
We all are growing older; we age from day to day.
The days and months come quickly and quickly pass away.
Let us make sure we're growing in wisdom and in grace;
Eternity's approaching. It comes with rapid pace.*

*Like growing trees adorning the Kingdom of the Lord,
Let us bear fruit for Jesus, according to His Word.
Each evening, what a blessing to know you're reconciled.
When Christ, the Savior asks you: "Say, have you grown, My child?"*

*My inner life needs growth too, growth to maturity;
I often did not listen when mother spoke to me,
But I still well remember those words of love so mild,
I never will forget them: "Say, have you grown, my child?"*

*When I was grown, I travelled and moved away from home,
And many years thereafter came back to see my own.
And long into the night hours, in conversation mild,
We sat, when mother asked me: "Say, have you grown, my child?"*

Spiritual Growth

There are things that hinder spiritual growth. How can we promote growth?

I planted some shoots in our garden. I did this in the spring, after I had cut 30 cm long shoots from a grapevine and stuck them into the garden's soil. In a short time, they began to grow. That was a joy for me. But, because I did not have any experience with this, I let the shoots grow without any special care. As the year progressed, they all looked miserable.

However, the next year I spent more time looking after the grapevine shoots. I noticed that the shoot I had planted the previous year had many small new shoots. These I pruned and only let the original shoot grow. To my amazement, this pruning had a wonderful impact. The grapevine began to grow more. Despite drought and poor soil, the largest shoot grew to about 4 meters. Paying attention to the recently planted shoots paid off.

Can we see a similarity to our spiritual lives from this example? It is not enough that we have a spiritual life in which we stay static. No, we must continue growing according to God's plan, which is what God wants us to do so that we can then bear fruit. Of course, the secret to a spiritual life—the growth and energy we need—is not something we can do alone. It comes from God's grace. We are able to make use of this grace by ensuring that we do not use the power God gives us for unnecessary things. If we allow every desire to have room in our thoughts and grow in our hearts, we will miss achieving our primary goal to become like Jesus. I am not thinking of sinful desires. There is much which is not necessarily sinful. However, once these desires rule our lives, our spiritual life may be damaged more than we can imagine.

What might be examples of these desires? For our youth, it could be getting an education, physical training, or falling in love. All of these desires are not wrong as long as they do not contradict God's word. With older people, it could be questions of survival, family prob-

lems, or career and business needs. We all need to deal with these desires in our lives.

The only question is: How much of my spiritual power do I use for these desires? In the Word of God, we are given a guideline: "[T]hose who use this world as not misusing it. For the form of this world is passing away" (1 Corinthians 7:31). The children of the world often abuse the natural world so that it becomes sin to them. Children of God avoid sin, but they may also become too attached to the natural world and through that suffer spiritual damage. We must make sure that nothing like this comes to the forefront so that it overshadows and grows beyond our best spiritual interests.

Dear soul, have you ever asked yourself why your spiritual life looks so miserable and why it has not grown? Many who have much skill in natural things do not make progress in spiritual things. One reason is not looking after one's soul. If the wellbeing of our spiritual life is our main striving and everything else is in the shadows, our spiritual growth will not be restrained. However, if other desires have become more important in your life and have grown beyond your spiritual interests, then you must cut back these desires and begin caring for your soul by praying, reading the Bible, attending worship services, and thinking about spiritual and godly things. You will then experience a change so that what was weak in the past will now grow. Your spiritual life will become a tree whose crown faces the heavens. The worldly things that surround you will become like a secondary shoot. Even that will be more blessed because it now stands in the correct relation to spiritual needs. Then we can become spiritual plants that grow, bear fruit, and provide much joy for the heavenly gardener.

Heinrich Weissburger (1912-1994)

Life Enables Growth

When a Christian lives for God, he will grow. At first glance, this may seem insignificant. But just think about it a little! Our knowledge about gain, progress, and growth manifests itself in the Christian walk. Lead a true Christian life, and without question, you will grow.

Perhaps we should not primarily think of growth in and of itself,

but focus our attention more on living out a truly spiritual life. Then we would notice more significant growth all on its own. Spending time with God in prayer, reading the Bible, working in the service of God for the salvation of our fellow human beings—all this enables personal growth for us. In doing so, we work in the Kingdom of God not just because we want to grow,

but because it is simply part of the Christian life. It is part of the divine task for our lives, and these things are simply inseparable from a spiritual life.

Growth itself comes as a by-product of how we live. Living as a Christian means growing and maturing. Therefore, live your Christianity every day, and you will grow.

E. Martin (1892-1961)

Self-Satisfied or Yearning

There are people who are totally satisfied with their spiritual situation. They believe that they have reached the pinnacle of all things.

Paul wrote a wake-up call against self-assurance to the Philippian church: “Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:12-14).

If we have become content in our life, then no more progress can occur. This is also the reason why many church congregations do not

grow spiritually or in their numbers. Brothers and sisters are satisfied with their spiritual level. They think they have achieved everything.

Paul warned the Philippian church against depending upon their past progress. Paul could surely have been satisfied with his success in the work for God. However, he writes: “Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected . . .”

We all have heard brothers and sisters talk about the good old times. What was achieved in the past is good as long we do not allow this to hold us up from future work. What we achieve in the present and future in our lives depends on our attitude and our spiritual view. Can we then also say with Paul, “I forget what is behind me and reach forward to what is ahead?”

In the letter to the Philippian church, Paul shows how necessary it is to have a specific goal in mind. He placed a goal before their eyes, which they should work towards. No church will experience a revival if they do not have a positive goal. If we work without a goal and a plan, then a great proportion of our time and effort is useless. There are many churches that are very busy and active, but their work is not goal-oriented. That is why the gospel can effect so little change. The greatest influence that a church may have on its surroundings is when it directs its power and efforts towards the great goal—to win people for the Lord. God will not withhold His blessings when He sees our sincere yearnings and efforts.

A Seed

A seed is a wonderful thing. There is much majesty and grandeur in what God has created. A seed, however, is small and easily overlooked. Look at the grandeur of the open sky, the flaming sun, the vast ocean—yet the small, insignificant seed is even more awesome. The heavenly bodies are a great distance from the earth. We know comparatively little about them, yet even a child recognizes a seed and knows what it looks like.

In His parables, Jesus used everyday illustrations which everyone recognized. “The kingdom of heaven is like a seed” (Matthew 13:31). God’s seed will achieve its purpose. If you plant it in the ground, it will grow. What wonderful power! It doesn’t matter if the sower was rough or gentle with it—it grows! All that needs to be done is to sow it. The kingdom of God is the same way. Like the seed, it wants to grow.

We don’t need to put energy into the seed. Life is already in it. At creation, God endowed the seed with life. Put a seed into the ground and leave it alone, and a mysterious secretive process will occur. You don’t know how it happens, but one day you notice that where you planted the seed, a bit of green starts emerging. Through the unseen power of the seed, the plant grows until it brings forth fruit. All this happens without your help.

Should we not expect the same to be true for the kingdom of God? The kingdom of God is like a seed. God has endowed it with power. We don’t have to supply it with energy. All we need to do is to sow the seed.

Do you suppose the kingdom of God will only provide a small harvest because the seed is so small? Let Jesus give us the answer to this question. He said: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches” (Matthew 13:31-32).

You see, someone took a mustard seed—just one! It was the smallest of all the seeds. But this seed developed into such a huge plant that even the birds could nest in its branches. How small was the beginning, and how great it was in the end!

Look at the history of the kingdom of God! A Galilean carpenter was born in a manger because His parents had to bow to the Roman authorities. Now, not only Rome and Italy but the whole world bows down before this Man. No other kingdom developed in this way. What a great development from such a despised beginning!

If we consider the state of the world at the time of the Apostle Paul and compare it to today, we see a huge difference. The social networks and quality of life have greatly improved. Consider all the blessings that Christianity has brought the world and the positive influence it has had up to now, and consider how the blessings continue to spread. Surely the kingdom of God started with such a seemingly insignificant seed and grew like a tree.

This parable also applies to our personal lives. The small seed of the Word of God falls into our hearts, and its mysterious power completely transforms our lives, overshadowing all we do. A tree does not grow from above, and a person does not repent because of external pressure. It is the seed of the Word of God that works from within, which falls into the heart and takes root and grows, and a new birth takes place.

“The seed is the Word of God” (Luke 8:11). A wonderful power lies in the Word of God. We will never fully comprehend it. God Himself has given it life. Our duty is to sow the seed. We have a great responsibility to carefully and diligently sow so that the seed will bring forth fruit for the One who gave it.

Steady Footsteps

“And make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed” (Hebrews 12:13).

Most everyone knows what steady footsteps look like. A small child does not take steady steps because he is still too weak. He easily trips on small stones and falls. A sick person is often not capable of walking without support even when he exerts much effort. Illness has robbed his strength. A tired person might also go along his way with an unsteady gait. The most unstable person is one who is drunk. Alcohol causes him to lose his balance. The healthy and strong person sets his foot calmly and safely on his path. He does not worry about swaying or stumbling.

This is how it is in everyday life. The verse in Hebrews 12 however, refers to our spiritual lives. Spiritually, we can sway back and forth, and become weak and tired. We can lack inner clarity and show obvious uncertainty. When our spiritual journey is hindered by these things, our goal can fade into the distance. If we fail to take steady steps we will struggle greatly and stop moving forward.

Carelessness, negligence, or superficiality can make our steps unsteady, especially when we focus more on religious formalities than earnestly striving after righteousness. Or perhaps we are constantly looking away from the path before us, and our attention is not focused on the goal. If we are distracted by all

that is going on around us, we forget our actual calling. Or do we lack discernment and have too little conviction? Any wind of doctrine then makes us unstable, and we turn here and there, missing out on a quiet and safe journey in the light. We are unable to distinguish between wrong and right, and have even less knowledge of the actual truth. Bright lights blind us. We have no idea what the actual purpose of a Christian life is: living by faith, showing love in action, demonstrating joyous hope and faithfulness unto death. We may consider ourselves to be rich, but without discernment and conviction, we are poor, needy people.

In order to take steady steps, we need to make a definite break with the world and sin. Paul was never in danger of taking unstable steps because he turned completely from sin when he repented. With confidence, he was able to write: “forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead” (Philippians 3:13). We never find this man of faith uncertain, doubting, giving up, or weakly standing still. With secure, steady steps he moved straight ahead towards the goal of his calling. He was serious about living righteously himself and bringing others to heaven with him. With earnestness, he took steady steps. His spirit

was satisfied with the still, holy power of Christ’s Spirit. He was deeply immersed in the truth and firmly anchored in it. Even if others were tossed to and fro by lack of conviction, he knew what he believed and believed what he knew.

Some, however, lack sincere faith, discernment of truth, a deep conviction for living out the truth and an unwavering pursuit after the eternal goal. In many people, a half-hearted nature is all too evident. They lack sufficient courage to go against the currents of our time, to navigate their way through storms and waves in order to journey towards the safe haven. We desperately need to fully clothe ourselves in the strength which is made perfect in weakness!

Anyone who strives to take steady steps must also know the way. If this direction is missing, then there really is no chance for success. We learn the right way through Jesus and His Word. Anyone whose vision has been enlightened can see Jesus and clearly sees the way in God’s Word. This gives security, assurance and rest. But we must pay attention to the way.

Overzealousness is not necessary, and could even hinder us in taking steady steps. But a single-minded, earnest devotion is necessary. For whoever endures to the end will be saved.

Furthering Spiritual Growth

How exciting it is to observe spiritual growth in a person's walk with God! "We can be so pleased about him," said a brother who had just said a wholehearted "amen" at the end of a young brother's public prayer. This young brother had become a Christian six months earlier. In a testimony, he had expressed that he wanted to serve God with all of his heart and be faithful to Him. Then he asked for prayers for himself.

He demonstrated that he meant this sincerely by making things right where he was in the wrong. Now he came to the worship services regularly with a Bible in his hand. He not only listened attentively to the sermons but also took notes so that he could think more about it afterward. He enjoyed participating in the Sunday School lessons, and it was noticeable that he was studying the Word of God. His aim was to increase in the knowledge of the will of God. He was baptized at the first opportunity. Three weeks ago, he brought a friend from school with him to the worship service. Last Sunday, this friend came on his own. Prompted by the conversations with his believing friend about the privileges of serving God, he had sought God on that Sunday evening.

What believing parents wouldn't wish for a son like him! The heavenly Father looks with pleasure on a life such as his! How happy a pastor is about a person who shows such visible growth in his walk with God. Such a child of God is a blessing to the congregation and to those around him. He himself has joy in his walk with God, for his spiritual life grows continually and moves forward.

Spiritual growth is not only desirable but absolutely essential. In God's Word, we are repeatedly encouraged to grow spiritually. Paul exhorts us to "grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ" (Ephesians 4:15). "Increas[e] in the knowledge of God" (Colossians 1:10). "[G]row in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18).

The fundamental requirement for spiritual growth, of course, is spiritual life itself. If there is no life, then there can be no growth. You cannot grow into a life from God if you are spiritually dead. You cannot better yourself by imitating the example of Jesus so that you gradually become a child of God. That is impossible! Becoming a Christian requires being born again, and growth is part of being a Christian. Therefore, I ask you: Have you received life from God? Is there something there that can develop and grow? If yes, then I would like to give you a few suggestions in the following three areas:

Keep your spiritual life healthy!

Only a healthy spiritual life can produce normal spiritual growth. If a little child is healthy, then normal development of the limbs, organs, and intellect can be expected. "[S]trive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men" (Acts 24:16). Guard yourself from becoming infected by an ounce of worldliness due to carelessness. Do not allow bitterness to gnaw on your heart! Nothing should hinder your good spiritual development.

Nourish yourself regularly!

Of the young Christian congregation in Jerusalem, God's Word says: "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). God does not have a diet for His children that will work wonders within 24 hours. Changes become visible after some time. The secret to success is persistence. As growth is not visible overnight in a child, likewise spiritual growth goes hand in hand with consistently good spiritual nutrition. Be persistent in consuming good spiritual food!

Read your Bible regularly! It is the best food for your soul that I can recommend to you. Take your Bible in the morning and draw strength for the day! Read it in the evening as well to discover insight about God's will. Find



counsel and guidance for the many circumstances you face in life. Read it prayerfully! With the Psalmist, plead to the Lord: “Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law” (Psalm 119:18). Allow the Holy Spirit to illuminate the Word of God, so that you can see yourself. Ask yourself what the Word tells you about your situation and about your everyday life. Read it with faith, reverence, and eagerness, and read it studiously!

Attend worship services regularly and experience the preaching of God’s Word! If the Old Testament worshiper expressed his desire to “dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of [his] life, to behold the beauty of the Lord” (Psalm 27:4), how much more should we desire this in the New Testament age! It is not without reason that the writer of the letter to the Hebrews admonishes us not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together (Hebrews 10:25). Thomas was not present when the Lord revealed Himself as the Resurrected One, and later, he lacked in faith. Do not allow yourself to become deficient in your spiritual nutrition and care because you attend worship services irregularly! It will negatively affect your spiritual development.

Allow continual fellowship with God to nourish your soul! Studying the Word of God and praying belong together, and both contribute to good spiritual growth. Peter did not continue to pray and remain watchful, and

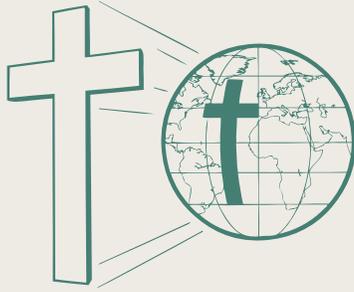
this was his downfall. “But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint” (Isaiah 40:31).

Exercise godliness!

A little child must use his limbs, or they will not develop properly. Even older people are strongly advised to be physically active. If bodily exercise profits a little, according to the words of the apostle Paul, then “godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come” (1 Timothy 4:8). Therefore, be diligent to place great worth on this.

Use your voice and speak a word for Jesus! Profess Him there where the Lord has placed you! Look for opportunities to say a word of comfort or encouragement. Use your hands to welcome someone with a firm handshake and friendly words! Use your feet to go where the Lord sends you! Restrain your feet from every evil way. You can be certain that exercising godliness will further your spiritual growth. With God’s help, it is possible to grow inwardly and to be a blessing. You will never regret it!

R. Roesler,
Toronto, ON



Radio Program Message of Salvation

Friedrich Krebs, Kitchener (ON)

Beginning and Completing

“Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.” (Philippians 1:6)

Clearly, this verse speaks of beginning and completing the work begun in us. Paul calls it a “good work,” and we can say with confidence that this is the most essential and significant work of our lives, namely the work of grace and faith. Paul continues in verse 7: “because I have you in my heart, . . . you all are partakers with me of grace.”

The work of grace is manifested in us when we are born again and saved, since salvation is only possible through grace! Our salvation comes solely by the grace of Jesus and can only be experienced through grace. This is continually presented to us in the New Testament writings. Just as Paul told the church in Philippi with joy: “you all are partakers with me of grace,” so he also told the believers in Ephesus: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8).

So the work in question is a work of God, and He not only begins it but also completes it. God does not leave any of His works unfinished, including that which He started in you and me.

In this certainty, the apostle thought of the born-again believers in Philippi and thanked his God whenever he remembered them. As a true pastor, he was naturally concerned that they persist and finish victoriously. What he could do for his part was insufficient. Therefore, he stated two things that were necessary for these believers’ spiritual preservation and fulfillment, and ours: fellowship of the gospel, and God’s continued help and strength.

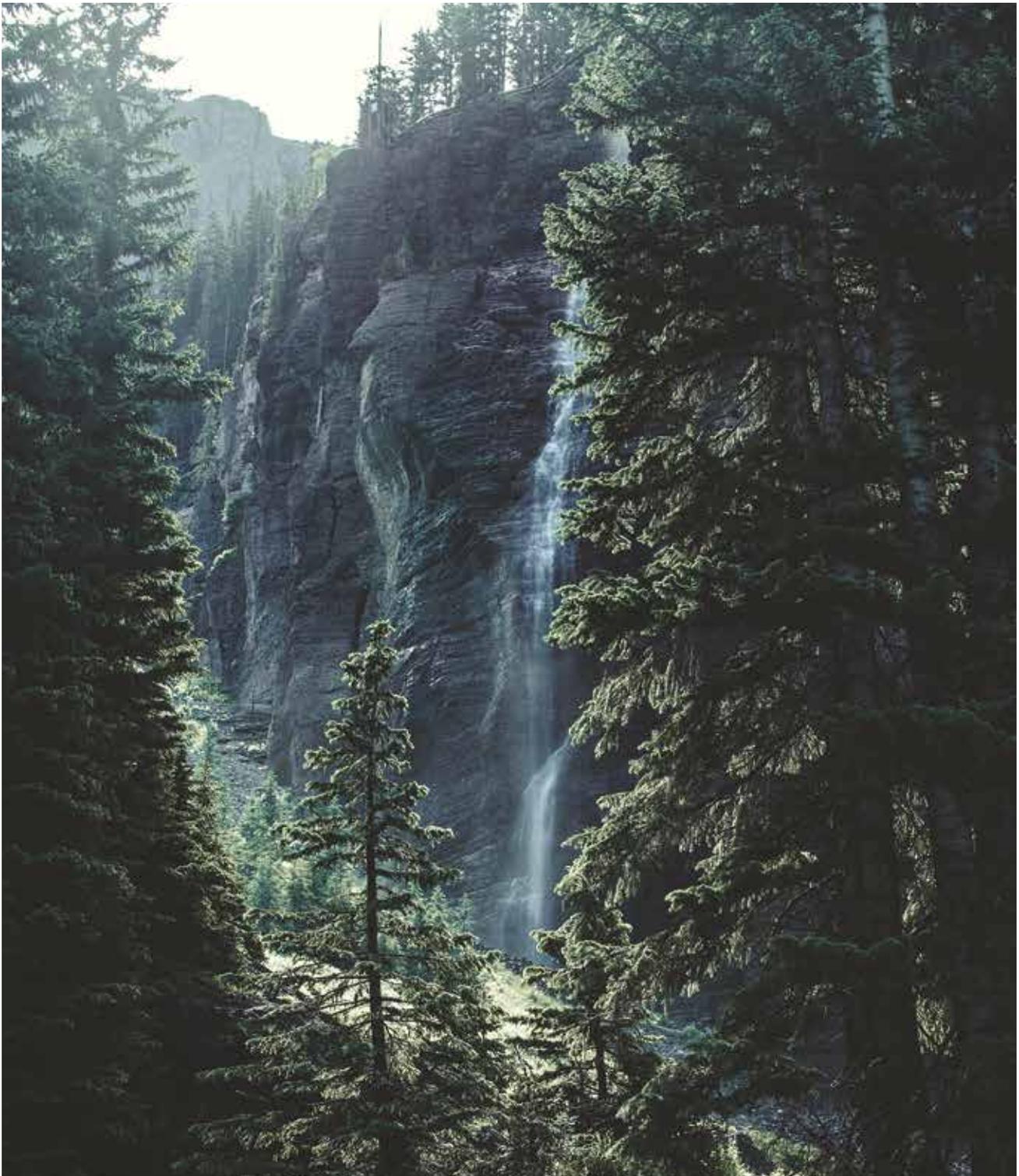
The concerned apostle made it clear that our fulfillment depends on God’s position toward us and our position toward Him. God can complete the good work in us, and He will do it, provided the believer remains in the Word and communion of the gospel.

In Philippians 2:12, the Apostle emphasizes this idea: “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” Each of us, therefore, must contribute to our fulfillment and salvation. It is comforting to know that the Lord in His goodness wants to do His part! Just as one can do little to begin this work within oneself, so can one do little to complete it.

Paul tells us that with his former sinful nature, he could not do the good that he wanted to do.

Now the important question: “Could the Lord begin the good work of grace in you? Could He sustain it? Did you give your consent? Did we all give Him the opportunity, freedom, and willingness to do so?”

Most people want to be blessed. Unfortunately, many mistakenly hope for a blessed fulfillment without the Lord having been able to begin a good work in them. Remember, dear one, that what has not begun on you and in you cannot be completed. The Lord speaks earnestly and accusingly: “I have stretched out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, according to their own thoughts” (Isaiah 65:2). And again the Lord says: “For forty years I was grieved with that generation, and said, ‘It is a people who go astray



in their hearts, and they do not know My ways” (Psalm 95:10). Jesus spoke sadly of Jerusalem’s inhabitants, saying: “How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!” (Matthew 23:37).

Carefully consider: The outstretched hands want something. They want to start and accomplish a work, but so often they are evaded. Are you one of those who

evades and does not allow this beginning? The Lord wants to start the good work in you. His goodness wants to lead you to repentance. He wants to cover all your transgressions and sins with His blood and give you forgiveness by His grace. Allow yourself to have this blessed beginning, and you will also be able to have a blessed completion, and thank your God forever for it.

David:

A Man after God's Own Heart

What can we learn from David?

1) When we read the Psalms of David, we learn that his primary objective was to consistently glorify God. It is easy to see him as a young man herding sheep in the open country, playing his harp and singing his songs. We can still enjoy the blessings of these beautiful psalms today. It was clearly his heart's desire to praise God's greatness and omnipotence. God created us humans so that we "should be to the praise of His glory" (Ephesians 1:12). Yes, God still wants to be glorified among us today. Not everyone has the talent to sing or play a musical instrument. However, God has given all of us skills and gifts that we can use to His glory. God wants us to live our lives for His glory and to exalt His name. "And whatever you do in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (Colossians 3:17). "And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men" (Colossians 3:23).

2) In his approximately 73 psalms (the exact amount cannot be determined with certainty), we gain a small insight into the heart of David. We see his deep desire for God over and over again. God was his light, his salvation, his fortress, his rock, his protection, his strength, his shepherd, and much more. The Lord was everything to him! In emergencies and battles, David clung ever closer to God. How often do people turn their backs to God in disappointment after experiencing difficulties or defeats in their spiritual lives? They decide to try mastering their lives on their own while losing their hold in the almighty God. Let us learn from David and hold on to God in all circumstances. If we consistently live in close communion with God, it will be easier for us to trust God in difficult situations.

3) For a certain period of time, David's life was in great danger. King Saul wanted to kill him. Twice, David barely escaped Saul's spear. Then, completely unexpectedly, David was presented with the opportunity to kill Saul in the mountains of En Gedi, thereby ending the threat to his own life. It seems that his companions appeared to him as "angels of light," so to speak, trying to convince him to kill Saul (1 Samuel 24:1-7). It would have allowed David

Who was David?

- The youngest of eight sons of Jesse from Bethlehem
- Great-grandson of Ruth and Boas
- Occupation: a shepherd who took his profession seriously
- As a young man God chose him to become king
- David reigned for 40 years as king of Israel - about 1055-1015 BC
- He was persecuted by King Saul and later by his own son Absalom
- He was a brave fighter

What made him special?

- David glorified God through his poems and playing the harp.
- He had a close relationship with and a firm trust in God.
- David was determined to abide by God and His instructions.
- David was ready to humble himself before God and confess the sins he committed.

to quickly become king. However, David was absolutely determined not to act against God's instructions. He resolved not to take his destiny into his own hands but rather to trust and follow God's schedule.

Our discipleship should demonstrate similar determination. We need it in almost all areas of our lives. Just think about the areas of your life in which you could use more conviction and learn to say with David: "The Lord forbid that I should do this thing" (1 Samuel 24:6).

4) David's adultery with Bathsheba marks a dark chapter in his life. We may look at David, this heroic figure, and ask ourselves: "How could he?" However, rather than looking back and judging David, let us take this as a warning for ourselves. We, too, are surrounded by a sinful world full of temptations. God already warned Cain in Genesis 4:7: "If you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it." If we are not watchful, sin, regardless of which kind, can affect you and me just as easily.

Although David would have liked to hide his sin, he was not able to do so. It was revealed. And yet, David did not give up in this moment and let go of God. Instead, he humbly sought forgiveness and help from God, bearing the consequences of his sin patiently and without resentment. In his penitential psalm (Psalm 51), we can see his desire to clear the slate with God and to regain a pure heart.

Let us learn from David to glorify God through our lives, to have a close relationship with Him, to walk decisively in His path, and to keep our hearts pure. Do you also have the desire to be a man or a woman after God's own heart?

Dina Grötzingler,
Eppingen, Germany

. . . Notes from School

December 3, 2004: The last night at home. I was supposed to leave for Corrientes, Argentina, the following day to begin my medical studies. I had never been so far away from home, nor for so long. At 17 years of age, I was going to move some 450 km (280 mi) to this city, alone. The first months of the program served to screen the medical students, with only 10% of the 1800 applicants being accepted into the study program itself after the initial exams. During my evening devotions, this unfamiliar path took on enormous proportions in my mind. I was really scared. My prayer was a cry to God to be my guide and protector on this path. Even as I was praying, I clearly sensed God's presence and His promise: I will protect you and save you. Suddenly, a deep confidence and assurance filled my heart. I knew God would take care of me.

Exactly 13 years have passed since that evening. I completed my medical studies and now have the privilege of working as a surgeon in a clinic in Germany. Looking back, I see that God did not leave my side for a single day. He truly fulfilled His promise. Yes, parts of the path were hard. Sometimes, the difficulties were so great that I did not know how to go on. However, I never doubted the path on which God was guiding me. In hindsight, I often recognized how God used the big problems as lessons for my personal development. And He held me close to Him throughout all the years. Today, I can look back on a richly-blessed and interesting time. It pays to fully trust God.

Patricia J. Günter,
Gifhorn, Germany

VERSE OF THE MONTH

*"Guard your heart above all else,
for it determines
the course of your life."*

(Proverbs 4:23)

To guard something means to protect, supervise, provide, and even defend it.

A sleeping shepherd, a safety deposit box without a proper lock, or the shipping of a fragile item without adequate packaging are all examples of faulty actions for secure protection. Our heart needs care and attention, since this determines our whole life and especially eternity. The state of our heart will be reflected outwardly in our lives. We will not be able to spread light and blessing every day if our hearts (our thoughts and minds) are filled with unclean and useless things.

Is your heart already washed clean in the blood of Jesus? If so, guard it by maintaining a constant prayer life and reading the Bible regularly. By being diligent, your heart will be aligned with the Word of God and you will be filled with its presence.

What the Professor Did Not Know

During my student days, I knew a highly educated professor. He knew much in his field. The words of Goethe applied to him: “What you do not weigh, has for you no weight; what you do not coin, that, you believe, counts for nothing.” I was impressed by how he treated the Bible. Everything was critically discussed and questioned. His thinking determined the revelation of God. There was no room left for the Holy Spirit.

After spending some time in his lectures, the worm of doubt regarding the Word of God began to gnaw also in me. First secretly, then increasing in strength. During the semester break, I went home to my parents. One evening, some neighboring farmers came over for a cozy talk in the farmhouse parlor. During the conversation, one of the farmers asked me, in the opinion of the experts, the question of the authenticity of the Scriptures. Embarrassed, I began using “if” and “but,” and many words to develop my professor’s thoughts. Although I had not yet embraced them, they had already heavily influenced my beliefs. My mother listened for a while, then I noticed her looking at me strangely. Unobtrusively, she got up and went out.

To demonstrate my wisdom, I wanted to get some scientific works out of the bookcase to read aloud to the neighbors. As I stood in the living room, already holding the books in my hand, I heard the voice of my mother through the door to my parents’ bedroom. She was praying for me, as I had just heard my name. The book in my hand started to shake. I quickly put it back in the cabinet. To the amazement of the others, I said goodbye for the evening. I lay awake for a long time. What was truly believable? I knew the life of my mother. I knew the sources from which she lived: listening to God’s Word and persistent prayer. The logic of my teacher, compelling as it was, did not leave the impression of a blessed life for him or for me. Wherein, I asked myself, lay the secret? My mother radiated peace and strength, life and certainty; the scholar—unrest and doubt.

And how was it with me? Since I listened to the professor, since I made my life dependent on his opinion, my hands did not want to fold in prayer anymore. Peace and inner strength were vanishing. A verse by Schiller came to my mind: “The rays of truth, though light-bestowing, not always warmth impart; blest he who gains the boon of knowing nor buys it with his heart!” Knowledge without love and simplicity puffs up, but reality and truth are known under the cross of Jesus Christ. My mother taught me that from an early age. She lived by this and prayed faithfully for me. She had the Holy Spirit, and her prayers were not in vain. I will ever thank her for that.

H. Kemmer



CHILDREN'S CORNER

Keep In Tune

Grandpa was tuning his guitar, and David was watching carefully. David thought the pretty cherry-wood sides of the guitar looked so shiny and clean after Grandpa polished it with a soft cloth. It was a Spanish guitar with six strings pulled tightly over the hollow base and down a narrow piece called the neck which held a screw that each of the six strings were wound around. Grandpa would pluck a string with his finger and then play a note on the piano. Then he would turn a little on the screw that held that string. He would pluck the string again and touch the same piano key again until he said they blended in tune. Finally David asked a question that was puzzling him. "Grandpa," he said, "how do you know which way to turn the screw? Sometimes you turn it in and sometimes you turn it out." Grandpa smiled. "In music, David, a note has to be exactly the note it is meant to be. If one note is too high, then it is not in tune with the other notes and it is too sharp. If the note is too low then it is flat. I have to turn the screw in if my guitar string is too sharp and I turn it out and tighten the string if it is too flat with the piano. That way when I play chords on my guitar while the piano is playing the same notes, we will make pretty music together." David's eyes sparkled as he thought about the pretty music he loved to hear as the guitar and

piano were played. Maybe this was the secret of why it sounded so pretty. Grandpa seemed to know what David was thinking. "Only instruments tuned together can make pretty music," he said. "If someone else wants to play with us, they will need to tune their instrument with ours. If a note is out of tune, it will not sound good and hurt our ears." "You know, Grandpa," David said thoughtfully, "that reminds me of a song we sing in Sunday school. It says: 'Whisper a prayer in the morning. Whisper a prayer at noon, whisper a prayer in the evening, to keep your heart in tune. God answers prayer in the morning, God answers prayer at noon, God answers prayer in the evening, He'll keep your heart in tune.'" "That is a nice song, David," said Grandpa as he strummed on his guitar strings. "If we will pray to God throughout the day, then He will make pretty music out of our lives. That is the way to keep faith singing in our hearts. Let's name the strings of our heart: faith, hope, love, joy, peace, contentment. Let's keep these strings in tune with God's Holy Spirit. Now," added Grandpa, "sing to me your song again and I will try to play the guitar with your singing." "Whisper a prayer in the morning, whisper a prayer . . ."

—Connie Sorrell from *The Beautiful Way*



FAMILY PAGE

Life: With or Without God

After twenty years of marriage, our life had not become any easier—as we had supposed it would. On the contrary, it had become more and more difficult. Labor costs had increased, so my husband had tried to work our large farm with very little or even no help. The demands of the children increased as they got older. My aging, sickly mother, who lived with us, required more and more care.

During this time, my only satisfaction came from blaming everyone else for the stress in my life. I pitied myself because my husband Hans was so busy with his work that he could not help me at all.

“If Hans would lease out one section of land, he could help me with my work,” I would often grumble. “He just does not care to help me.”

During this time, I was also disquieted by the fact that my children did not confide in me. But I blamed them for it entirely. “One can just not live with them,” I com-

plained. “They are completely spoiled. They only think of themselves.”

When my mother’s bell rang more often than I wished and tore me away from an important task, my complaining knew no bounds. I told myself: “If she would be more understanding, she would tell me everything that she wants at one time. But she has nothing better to do than to lie there and dream up what she would like next.”

When I look back now, I am amazed that I believed myself to be living according to the Word of God during that time. Was I not regularly attending worship services? Did I not tithe? The answers were “yes.” So I thought I was a good Christian.

One or more years of this dizzying, exhausting, and troublesome life passed. Then came an especially exhausting day, which I remember well. My demanding family finally went to bed and I too wanted to retire, but my strained nerves did not allow sleep to come. I wan-



dered aimlessly through the darkened house, longing for peace. I could not properly relax and did not even attempt to lie down. In the living room, a lone light shone on the Bible which was lying on the table. This light beckoned me.

I flipped through the Bible aimlessly. Suddenly I came to the Psalms. I had always enjoyed the melodic sounds of those Bible passages. So, I began to read. My eyes fell on the prayer: “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139:23-24).

When the meaning of these words became clear to me, a light went on. There, in my own living room, I understood that God, when He knew my heart, found wickedness in me. He found that I didn’t get along with others, because I was not getting along with myself. I knew what I had to do. I had to bring my thoughts in order.

That is when I started to learn to live with myself. As I first began to truly search myself to discover the kind of person I was inside, what I found was not pretty. It was not easy to examine my inner thoughts. It would have

been easier and more pleasant to flee them. For what I saw were habits that made others flee from me. I saw that I was unreasonable. I often spoke out of ignorance. Often, I was self-absorbed. Many times, I had been guilty of speaking without hearing others out and I ordered my loved ones around with no regard to their wishes.

As I was able to see my flaws, I could do something about them. I confessed and surrendered them to the Lord. This made room for new thoughts, Christlike thoughts. I let Jesus come into my heart. With Him came joy, hope, and love for those around me.

Over time, Hans and I began to talk about our work and we discovered that we could help each other by doing certain jobs together. The children began to respond to my love. They no longer did things behind my back and began pulling me into their confidence. Mother’s attitude toward her illness also changed when she noticed that we were truly concerned about her well-being. It became much easier to take care of her!

Are you in a difficult season of life? Let God search you and give you peace!

EP

The Lord's Prayer

by Gerhard Mielke - Part 10: Today *

*"In this manner, therefore, pray:
Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
And do not lead us into temptation,
But deliver us from the evil one.
For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the
glory forever. Amen."*
Matthew 6:9-13

Why did Jesus teach us to pray: "Our daily bread, give us today?" In the original Greek text "Give us today," are the last three words in this sentence. Why not leave out "today"?

1. Jesus wants us to ask in faith. We should not pray just in general, but also specifically for today. It is possible that when we pray, we are not expecting an answer today or tomorrow. Maybe not even next week, or next year? This prayer teaches us that we can count on God's help today.

2. Jesus wants us to take one day at a time. This reminds me of a gospel song written by Marijohn Wilkin: "One day at a time . . . that's all I'm asking from you. Give me the strength to do ev'ry day, what I have to do. Yesterday's gone . . . and tomorrow may never be mine. Lord, help me today, show me the way, one day at a time."

In His sermon on the mount Jesus said: Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble (Matthew 6:34).

3. Jesus taught us to pray: "Give us our daily bread, today," because He wants us to live in the present.

There are some people who live in the past, and are always talking about the good old days and wishing for times gone by. And yet the Bible says: "Do not say, 'Why were the former days better than these?' For you do not inquire wisely concerning this" (Ecclesiastes 7:10).

There are other people who always live in the future. They may still be on vacation and are already planning their next one. Or perhaps it is the weekend, and instead of enjoying the weekend, they are already worrying about their next week at work. By always living in the past, or constantly living in the future, we forget about today. We neglect to take time for our children, our friends or our spouse today. We neglect to take time for the Lord today. We neglect to enjoy the pleasures, beautiful memories, and small joys the Lord sends our way today. In the New Testament (NKJV) the word yesterday occurs only three times, the word tomorrow comes up eleven times, but today occurs 29 times. Jesus is the eternal I AM. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8).

4. By praying: Give us our daily bread, today, Jesus encourages us to pray for today's needs. Bring today's concerns to the Lord. Today, have you already asked God to give you His strength for this day? God is not only interested in the big things of life, in which you can obtain His guidance. He also wants you to bring the little things of this day to Him in prayer. Some people fret and ask themselves if they would have had the courage of the martyrs in confessing Christ even unto death. Do not worry about that. God gives strength according to the day. When I was in Grade 3, I could not have handled all the homework expected of a Grade 12 student, and if I had worried about the assignments I needed to finish during graduate school when I was still a child, that would have been



ludicrous. As I mature, I do not even realize that what I find easy today, would have been extremely difficult at an earlier stage. In like manner, God gives the strength for the work ahead, when the time comes.

In Mark 13, Jesus speaks of terrible times ahead for the disciples: “For in those days there will be tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the creation which God created until this time, nor ever shall be. And unless the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake, whom He chose, He shortened the days” (Mark 13:19-20).

Yet He still tells them not to worry: “But when they arrest you and deliver you up, do not worry beforehand, or premeditate what you will speak. But whatever is given you in that hour, speak that; for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit” (Mark 13:11).

Your duty is to live victoriously for the Lord today. What the future holds we do not know, but should times of affliction arise, it is then that the Lord will give us the strength we need in that hour.

People who do not believe in victorious living say it is impossible to live godly in this present age. Yet that is what the Bible tells us to do in Titus 2:12. Jesus Himself says: “Go and sin no more” (John 8:11b). Can you live without sin for a minute? Sure. Maybe an hour? Could you perhaps live victoriously for one day? Let us focus on today, and live the way the Lord wants us to live today, and not worry about the long term. Let God take care of that.

5. God’s time is today. In the New Testament the word today is found more than twice as often as the words yesterday and tomorrow combined. In Hebrews 3:7-8a we read: “Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: ‘Today, if you

will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.’” When Jesus met Zacchaeus in Jericho, He said to him: “Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house” (Luke 19:5b) and “Today salvation has come to this house” (Luke 19:9). You see God’s time is today. Hear the voice of God today. Don’t wait until tomorrow, Christ wants to live in your heart today. Don’t harden your heart, for salvation is here for you today. Act according to 1 John 1:9 and salvation is yours.

To the penitent thief on the cross, Jesus said: “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43). The thief on the cross knew he was saved and was going to Paradise today. He knew this even before he got to Paradise. Likewise, even if we still have years to live, we can know today that we are saved. The day of salvation is today. God’s time is today. Are you saved today? Saying I was saved yesterday, or I want to be saved tomorrow is irrelevant. You need to be certain of salvation today. “Not yet” and “too late” are ploys of the devil. It is not God who says “not yet” or “too late.” Today is His time.

“Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:33). So “Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things” (Matthew 6:34).

Don’t live in the past. Don’t live in the future. Live in the present. And don’t forget: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). Therefore you can pray for your current needs, today.

** Please note: Due to an oversight, this month’s sequence should have appeared in the previous month’s edition of the Foundation of faith. We sincerely apologize for this error.*

“PETITION FOR PARDON DENIED” . . . AND YET PARDONED!

Precisely at 9 o'clock in the evening, the prison guard unlocked a cell door. The Chief Magistrate and I, the prison chaplain, stepped into the narrow cell. The handcuffed prisoner, a sergeant, briefly acknowledged our presence as the Magistrate barked out the message with a few scant words, that the “petition for pardon was denied” and that his death sentence was confirmed. The sentenced prisoner was to be shot at 9 o'clock the next morning.

I, as chaplain, was now alone with the condemned man. Only twelve hours separated us from the moment when shots would be fired and the prisoner in this cell would enter eternity. What might possibly transpire this night?

It took some time for the announcement to register in him whose fate had just been determined. Not only the physical shock rocked him to the core, but also the thoughts that stormed through his brain. There was no more hope of a pardoning. Unavoidably the time approached; hour after hour, until the moment in which the first shots would fly. It was undeniably clear to him: “at 9:00 o'clock next morning your time on earth is over and you will stand before God, the eternal Judge.”

A turbulent conglomeration of feelings and emotions had to be dealt with this night. The bewildering and unexpected verdict sent terror pulsating through his body. The despairing attempt at self-defense, of delving into his past and the agonizing hours writing letters to his wife and child generated secretive tears in the eyes of this hardened soldier. His last reserve of energy was depleted in an attempt to defend his own perspective on life to this member of the clergy.

He came from a Christian home. His father was a city missionary; his mother, also a missionary, died shedding tears over her lost son. As a young boy, he heard a lot about Jesus, and as a thirteen-year-old made a conscious decision to follow Christ. As a young adult, Bible reading and prayer were a part of his innermost expression of a solid faith.

But then the time came in which a rush of demonic enchantment took hold of him, and eventually everything happened as it had to happen: step by step he climbed the ladder in the political scene and public life; and step by step his Christian and moral life declined.

It was well past midnight. As the seconds crept closer to the moment in which he would depart from this life and be called to stand before God, he became more willing to shed the masquerade and speak, as well as listen, to sheer and simple truths.

As I asked him if we should read out of God's Word, he answered out of his own volition: “Yes, please read the passage; you know, where the son comes back to his father.” I opened Luke 15, handed a Bible to him and read along in my own. He read quietly, word for word after me—as I slowly read word for word aloud.

When we got to the part where it says: “I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son,’” this strong man broke down in tears and for many minutes sobbed like a child. His whole body shook with tremors. The Word of God had pierced the depths of his soul.

Both of us remained silent for the next fifteen minutes or so; as human words become so futile when the Lord has spoken.

After this solemn point in time, the man who had now attained complete peace with God, said: "So, now let us pray together." Without any summons or prompting he knelt down at his stool. I knelt before my stool and before I could start to pray, he loudly poured out his heart before God. What we experienced in this hour belongs to those miracles of God that cannot be explained nor fathomed, only praised God for. There was without a doubt, "joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:10).

In the early morning hours we sat together as friends do, as if one of us was paying the other a visit. We spoke of several things; some big and some small, simple, and joyful, almost in relaxed cheerfulness. It wasn't as if at 9:00 o'clock he was headed to his execution; rather as if at 9:00 o'clock he was embarking on a continuous vacation, a place where something especially beautiful and priceless awaited him. Death was behind us. In Gethsemane, it was finished. Calvary was the "outward" process of what "inwardly" had already been conquered.

Bright sunlight filled the prison yard, as our prisoner, with hands shackled behind his back, was required to climb into the rear of a covered vehicle. I sat down beside him on the prisoner's bench of the vehicle. We were tossed to and fro for about a quarter hour, in which we remained relatively silent. There was only one more exchange of thought.

He suddenly looked at me with wide eyes: "Pastor, you have a fantastic career!" I comfortingly laid my hand on his knee, since I couldn't reach his hand. It remained shackled behind his back. I remarked: "Be of good cheer, you are heading into eternity!" After a time of further reflection he murmured: "It's true, peace surpasses all understanding." "My friend," I asked, "this must have been the most difficult night of your life?" With shining eyes he answered, "However, the greatest!"

As predetermined, I accompanied him to the pillar he was tied to, target to the barrels of rifles directed at him. His eyes bored into mine, solemnly and soulful. He had not wanted to face the rifle barrels, nor the people behind them, nor anything other than the messenger of the Gospel, who in the last night of his life was able to guide him to full salvation in Jesus Christ. And so it happened. Gunfire exploded.

The last glimpse of this man contained no fear, hopelessness, nor reproach; rather a peace which conveyed a final thought . . . "and yet, pardoned!"

Hans Dannenbaum

Unbounded Mercy Evermore

*I now have found for hope of Heaven,
An anchor-ground that firm will hold;
'Twas through the cross of Jesus given,
By God appointed from of old;
A ground that shall enduring stay,
When earth and skies have passed away,
When earth and skies have passed away.*

*'Tis God's own mercy, never ending;
Its measure all our thoughts exceeds;
While Jesus, too, His arms extending,
Whose heart for guilty sinners bleeds,
Now with compassion calls His foes
To flee from sin and endless woes,
To flee from sin and endless woes.*

*This love's a deep, our follies hiding;
The death of Christ, a matchless grace,
To life and peace our spirits guiding,
Where wrath no more shall find a place;
His blood for us is pleading still,
Let mercy all its work fulfill,
Let mercy all its work fulfill!*

*Upon this ground I rest most firmly,
Long as the earth my dwelling prove;
And wish to serve my God and Savior,
Till, dying, I shall rise above,
And there, rejoicing, shall adore
Unbounded mercy evermore,
Unbounded mercy evermore.*

Phillip Friedrich Hiller

1699-1769

Translated from German by Henry Mills, 1850



Experiences with God

I would like to share with you a very special experience I had in my life. It is my prayer that it would be an encouragement to all of you.

I was very fortunate to grow up in a loving Christian home. My parents were very concerned of the well-being of their children. We went to church on a regular basis and it was important to attend.

I remember getting saved as a child and the peace and happiness that filled my soul was amazing.

But as time went on I found it hard to live a victorious Christian life. I struggled a lot with anger and pride. I neglected reading my Bible and taking time for prayer. I remember being so tired of always falling and getting back up spiritually. I am so thankful for the patience that the Lord had with me.

As I got into my teens I realized that I was missing something in my life. Even though I was serving the Lord, the strength to serve Him victoriously just wasn't there.

One Sunday afternoon I was talking with a friend about receiving the Holy Spirit. I had often thought about this, especially after hearing different messages on this topic. I knew there was something lacking in my life, but wasn't ready to give up everything and let God totally take control of my life.

On this particular Sunday afternoon God really spoke to my heart. He opened my eyes and I realized that if I wanted to have a victorious life I needed to dedicate my life to Him.

The longing to have this was so strong that I could hardly wait until I could spend some time alone with God. I remember kneeling down by my window in my bedroom and looking out into the dark night and pleading with God and asking Him to please fill this void that was in my heart. I wanted this so badly that I was determined not to leave this place until I had experienced what I was lacking. I remember it as if it was yesterday. I was crying out to God and telling Him that I was willing to give Him everything, my whole life no matter what happened, and was willing to let go of anything that I was hanging onto if I could only have this void in my life filled with something that was worth living for.

What happened next is hard to describe. It was as if the window opened up wide and I heard God speaking to me and telling me: "I heard your prayer. I have filled this empty void in your life, you just need to believe." I hesitated for a moment and thought, "Is this for real?" But then again I heard it so clear. My heart seemed to skip a beat. And at that moment I was filled with such joy



and peace that I cannot describe. I had never in my life experienced anything like it before. And I knew it was for real. There was absolutely no doubt in my mind that the Lord had answered my prayer. The overwhelming joy and peace that filled my soul at that moment was so wonderful and so satisfying. God came so near to me it was as if He was standing right beside me. I had a hard time sleeping that night. I wanted to tell the whole world who God really was and what He had done for me.

I wish I could say that from that moment on I always had victory and that my life was easy sailing. Unfortunately, that was not the case. God never promised us an easy life if we dedicate our life to Him. But one thing was very clear to me. Giving up was never an option and I can't see it ever being one. How could I, after what He had done for me. And I realized the importance of having a close relationship with my Heavenly Father. I saw the importance of spending time with Him. After that experience I never had to face challenges and disappointments in my life on my own. It was God who helped me through it all. My life was changed forever. It would never be the same. Praise God.

I am so grateful for this experience that I had with my loving Father on that Sunday night. I don't know what I would have done in my life had I not had this experience

to look back on again and again and remind myself of Who it was that I served.

As I reflect on all this which happened over 30 years ago, I can only say that I never dreamed of how much I would gain by giving my life to God. With Him, I was able to make some very important decisions in my life. Or better yet, God made them for me. God gave me a wonderful husband, and blessed us with two wonderful children, a wonderful son-in-law, and two precious grandchildren—a family that wants to serve God. I have an amazing church family that I can worship God together with. I never want to take this for granted.

My heart goes out to those who don't have the privilege or don't know of a loving God they can depend on when they go through hard times. It is my prayer that I could continue to serve Him the way He wants me to and that this peace and joy would never leave my heart but that I could grow in Him and be an example for those around me.

I can't wait for the day when I will stand before God and see Him face-to-face.

We serve a powerful God.

Amen.

Trudy Semler,
Barrhead, Alberta

Jesus, Be My All In All!

*In my eyes let me diminish,
O, most precious Jesus mine,
That You may increase, dear Savior,
Son of God, my Lord divine.*

*Let my pride and ego vanish;
Take me, Jesus, as I am.
Let my will be Yours forever;
Make me gentle as a lamb.*

*Nothing good had I to offer,
Just a heart so full of sin.
Yet You cleansed it by Your merit,
Gave me peace and joy within.*

*O, your love and great compassion
Is for all humanity;
For us all you freely offer
Blessed hope eternally.*

*Help me to proclaim it better,
This great love so vast and true!
Steadfastly, You led and guided,
Faithfully You brought me through.*

*Now I lay my hands in Yours, Lord;
Till the end, please take my hand.
Lead me onward as I journey
Home to heaven's gloryland.*

*I will thank You; I will praise You,
Son of God, with all Your own.
Glory, glory hallelujah,
With all saints before the throne.*

*Therefore, Lord, let me diminish,
In my eyes let me be small.
Oh, may You increase, dear Jesus,
Till You are my all in all.*

FRIEDA DORNBLASER