

Faith Networks

A Newsletter for Cooperation in the Churches of God

June, 2005

Godly Fear vs Natural Fear

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Fear is natural to humans. It is necessary for survival in that it makes us cautious, careful to avoid dangerous situations and things. But fear wrongly held—excessive and unrealistic worry—can lead to anxiety, panic disorders, obsessions, and rituals.

The Bible tells us that there is a godly fear or reverence. For instance, the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge (Prov. 1:7; 9:10). Noah was moved by fear to build an ark—that is a good use of fear. Fear can be a motivator. If you fear you will fail a test, you might be motivated to study more seriously. Since godly fear is a motivator, the Bible tells us, “Let us fear lest we fall short of God’s promised rest (Heb. 4:1).”

There is another fear that is not good—the fear of death. When people have this fear, they are held in its grip (Heb. 2:15). The Bible tells us to lie down and not be afraid of “sudden fear” (Prov. 3:25). It is not God’s will that we live in perpetual fear, because fear destroys faith and produces doubt.

Here’s an example of how fear produces doubt. When the disciples were in a boat and saw Jesus walking on the water, Peter said, “Lord, if it be you, bid me to come to you upon the waters.” Jesus said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat and was actually walking on the water. But, “When he saw the wind and the waves, he was afraid” and began to sink. Jesus saved him when he cried out. Then Jesus said, “Why did you doubt?” (Matt. 14:28-30.). Doubt produces fear, and fear produces doubt.

On another occasion, even though the disciples were with Jesus, they became fearful when there was a storm. Jesus was sleeping. The storm was so bad that waves were coming across the top of the boat. They cried out to Jesus, “Lord, save us, we are perishing.”



When He had calmed the storm, He asked, “Why are you fearful?” (Matt 8:26). That may seem like a strange statement. But, did you ever see a Superman movie? Do you remember how you felt when

Lois Lane was in the presence of Superman or Clark Kent? You probably felt relaxed and at ease. There was no reason to be afraid for her. But when she hardheadedly decided to go off on a dangerous mission on her own, your fears for her mounted because she was not in the presence of Superman.

Jesus was asking the disciples, “Why are you afraid?” In other words, “I am here with you. I am God’s Son and have authority over this physical world. There is no need for you to be afraid because you are with me!”

Love drives fear away. There is no fear in love (1 John 4:18). The person who lives in fear is not perfect in love. When you love, you will be brave in the presence of your fears. Suppose you were afraid of snakes but your child was about to be bit by one. Your love for your child and desire to protect him or her would cause you to ignore your fears and do whatever it took in order to save your child—because of your love. When love is your primary motivation, it drives fear out.

Fear is its own punishment. People who are trapped inside their mind with fear are experiencing punishment! God has shed His love in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, and that should give us freedom from irrational, destructive, and self-punishing fears.

But God does want us to have the godly fear that leads us to awe and reverence for Him, and a fear of sin. This godly fear brings true freedom and great happiness, along with wisdom and knowledge.

Lessons From a Neighborhood Vacation Bible School

Joe and Sandy Weicks

One Spring evening a few years ago, my wife, Sandy, and I were walking through our neighborhood discussing summer plans for our children. As we considered various Vacation Bible School (VBS) options, we also thought how nice it would be to have a neighborhood VBS where our children could learn about God with their neighborhood friends. The more we discussed the idea, the more convinced we were that we should pursue it. So, we contacted friends from our neighborhood to see what they thought. Much to our excitement, our neighbors liked the idea as well.

We were now fired up and began making preparations immediately! First, we decided that the VBS program would last five days and be held in the evenings. It would start at 6:00PM and last two hours. We developed a class schedule that included an opening prayer, a review of the daily memory verse, the lesson, a craft, music and singing, a snack, and finally a short bible video. Finally, we established a date for the VBS that would work with everyone's schedules.

But what teaching materials would we use? After looking at VBS program materials offered at various Christian stores, we decided to develop our own program and teaching materials. Because of the children's interest in "super heroes" such as Batman, Spider Man, and the Power Rangers, we decided on a Bible Super Heroes theme for our VBS, which turned out to be a hit with all of the kids. In line with our theme, we developed lessons which we titled Noah and the Great Flood, Moses Saves the Israelites, Daniel in the Lions' Den, Paul and Silas in Prison, and Jesus and You. We also developed VBS program booklets for the children that included all of the memory verses, lessons, and activities.

Our next goal was to convert our living room

into a VBS classroom. We bought various children's posters depicting bible themes such as the Ten Commandments, Golden Rule, and Beatitudes, and we hung them on the walls of our living room. We also bought music, decorations, and props to support each of the daily lessons. But the centerpiece for our VBS was a 6' high, 8' long, and 4' wide model of Noah's Ark. It was positioned on our living floor in front of our fireplace. The Ark was large enough for all (eleven) of the children who attended our VBS to sit inside of it at the same time. On an upper level of

the Noah's Ark prop, we placed 30-40 stuffed animals. Behind the Ark was a sound machine that simulated the sounds of rain, a trickling stream, a rushing river, and finally the lapping sounds of rolling ocean waves. In addition to being a hit with the kids, the Noah's Ark prop was a great teaching tool for our first lesson, Noah and the Great Flood.

It was important to us to keep our neighbors informed throughout the planning process. After all, the parents of the children who would be attending our neighborhood VBS were

of various church affiliations such as Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Church of God (our children), and non-denominational. Furthermore, we wanted this to be a neighborhood project. So, all of our neighbors were welcome to participate. And they did! One neighbor helped produce the VBS program booklet. Another neighbor took responsibility for the daily craft activity. Some provided props and supplies, while others simply provided their moral support. But regardless of parental participation, we just wanted the neighborhood children to attend our VBS. However, while our focus was clearly on the children, there was a secondary benefit for the parents that we had not considered. Because our



Faith Networks is a voluntary effort by a group of individuals interested in promoting cooperation among the Churches of God and encouraging healthy relationships both within congregations and between them. Resources have been made available for the initial stages of Faith Networks by members of the Church of God Cincinnati.

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VBS was in the evening, it provided an opportunity for parents to spend some much-needed time together –alone!

Finally, it was time for the VBS. Although both Sandy and I had previous experience teaching Sabbath school, our neighborhood VBS was unique. After all, this was the first time that we had ever personally organized any form of an outreach ministry with and for people outside of the Church of God. However, once the first VBS class started, everything seemed quite familiar. Children are children, and the Bible is the Bible. And while we did not teach classes regarding our personal beliefs on subjects such as the Sabbath, Holy Days, or the origins of Christmas and Easter, we did teach them other important lessons from the Bible—lessons that were common and important to all of us. As parents dropped off their children, we were thrilled beyond words. We truly felt blessed. After all, eleven children (including our two) from our neighborhood spent five evenings together learning about God and having a great time doing it!

The neighborhood VBS was a complete success. We were happy with the results of the program, and so were our neighbors. But something quite unexpected also happened! As a result of the VBS, our relationship with our neighbors seemed to change. We were no longer just neighborhood friends; we were Christians—fellow believers in Jesus Christ. True, there were differences in some of our doctrinal beliefs. But that didn't seem to matter to anyone. In fact, as a result of this simple VBS ministry, our neighbors seemed to develop a deeper respect for our faith. They also seemed more open and receptive to the unique aspects of what Sandy and I believed.

We learned an important lesson from the neighborhood VBS. If we are ever to be effective at ministry and evangelism in our communities, then we must knock down the walls that separate us from other Christians. We must learn to reach out to others based on service and our common belief in Jesus Christ. While this does not mean that we should disregard doctrines that we believe to be true, we certainly should not separate ourselves from others because of these beliefs. In fact, we should do just the opposite! The neighborhood VBS was a life-changing experience for Sandy and me. It has changed our views on personal ministry and local church evangelism in ways that we never would have imagined. So, if you're looking for a way to start your own personal outreach ministry, a neighborhood VBS might be a good way to start.

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Flea Powder for Itching Ears Dealing with Doctrinal Novelties



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For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.
— II Timothy 4:3 (NIV)

Rock-Solid Checklist

The fellowship environment for new believers should be a safe and stable one. A group that is being tossed to and fro on every wind of doctrine and battered by waves of new ideas is not ready to bring more people in with evangelism. Previous installments of this column have introduced the first steps of a checklist that you may use to calm the storms and make sure your group is building on the solid Rock. Step one was to sit down and discuss with your whole group just what doctrinal areas are non-negotiable—and why. Step two was to establish a committee of spiritually mature people who have gifts of discernment to deal with evaluating possible contention over doctrinal novelties that someone may wish to introduce to the group in sermons or Bible studies. The purpose is not to squelch anyone from sharing a “new perspective” on some matter. It is, rather, to avoid giving a platform to a heretic—someone who has no qualms about dividing a family of believers over non-essentials. And it is also to affirm that there are “non-negotiable” things—such as the acceptance of both Old and New Testaments of the Bible as writings inspired by God—upon which your group has its foundation. Such a committee should be empowered to do something about random doctrinal snipers.

Once you have a committee in place, you are ready for Step Three.

Step Three: Resist Spiritual Blackmail

The number of widely-spread doctrinal novelties, even those prevalent just in Sabbatarian Church of God circles, has become almost limitless since the introduction of the Internet. I have spent many thousands of hours in the past decade and a half researching unusual and controversial doctrines and

teachers and groups—and I have barely scratched the surface of even the most influential and notorious! No one can possibly take it all in and sort it all through. Be sure that all those in your group realize that your fellowship group is under no obligation from the Bible to provide an “open pulpit,” where anyone is free to spread any agenda they wish with no restraints. Nor is your group under any biblical obligation to sort through the reasoning offered for every doctrinal novelty that comes along. You will need to pray and ask for guidance, both individually and as a group, for just what topics you should investigate and which ones are a distraction rather than a necessity.

If you do so, you may find that some time, perhaps even in the near future, you will be subjected to what may be referred to as “spiritual blackmail” by someone wanting to push their own “idea baby” within your fellowship setting. They may try to tell your group, or the committee with the responsibility for making decisions on topics open for promotion, that any attempt at all to restrict anyone from pushing a doctrinal agenda (or prophetic theory or the like) makes you all evil “hierarchialists.” The history of the Sabbatarian Church of God movement of the past century and more has, indeed, been dominated at times by dictatorial leaders who imposed their own idiosyncratic doctrinal system on all those under their influence. Some have ruled with an iron fist, and squelched all attempts to even calmly discuss possible honest differences of opinion over debatable biblical topics. Some of the people in your group may actually have been involved with groups that had this sort of environment. Therefore they may be particularly emotionally sensitive to accusations that they are becoming “just like” those whose

dictatorship they have rejected.

If you know for a fact that all those who are active, committed members in your group have carefully and cooperatively worked through setting the standards by which you have agreed to gather, don't give in to this type of spiritual blackmail! Just because you don't provide a platform for every would-be preacher or prophetic speculator doesn't mean you are establishing an unhealthy dictatorship. No one is obligated to submit his own conscience to your group's standards. If he can fellowship peacefully within the parameters your group has agreed upon, even if he disagrees with some of your doctrines or customs, then he will no doubt

be welcome at your gatherings. If he cannot, and insists on aggressively pushing his own agenda, you are perfectly within your rights according to the guidance of scripture to suggest that he find somewhere else to fellowship. Someone who belligerently insists you must listen to his continued badgering on some topic, even after you have explained why his personal agenda is not welcome, is not being just a "brother in Christ" but is setting himself up as a teacher. Without direct, divine validation from God that He has, indeed, sent this person to "set you straight," you are under no obligation to give in to such spiritual bullies.

"Just say no" to spiritual blackmail!

I Want A Simple Faith. Please Don't Complicate My Faith.

Please don't complicate my faith with extra-biblical and non-biblical descriptions of God. God has described himself in the Scriptures through many people who experienced God reaching out to them. When you speak of God, please use the terminology he uses. I want to know and be reminded that God loves me enough to be interested in and concerned about whatever interests and concerns me. I want to rely on God's love, not pontifications from human reasoning about "the nature of God."

Please, when you speak of trust, encourage me to trust God through his son, Jesus. When you speak of obedience, please, encourage me to practice God's instructions given to us in the Scriptures. Please, have a genuine faith yourself. How can you teach me to trust and obey God if you don't?

When you speak of overcoming, remind me that Jesus has overcome the world and through his help now I have been freed; I am free; and will always be free to seek and do the will of God. Please remind me that through Jesus I am free of condemnation. I am forgiven. God is able to lift me up when I fall and give me strength to endure to the end of my physical life.

Give me examples, true examples, from your

relationship and interaction with our heavenly Father and our High Priest, Jesus. Don't try to impress me with your intellect and knowledge. Impress me with your humble walk with God. Impress me with your willingness to admit your human weakness whenever appropriate.

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Impress me with your genuine praise toward God for his mercy. Please don't waste my time praising your own accomplishments. If you have accomplishments, they will become evident. Praise God. Boast in Christ.

The simplicity that is in Christ is faith that God is trustworthy. Future articles will go into more detail about:

- The simple faith about the nature of God.
- The simple faith about the love of God.
- The simple faith about the trustworthiness of God.
- The simple faith about obedience toward God.
- The simple faith about overcoming through the power of God.
- The simple faith of a humble walk with God.
- The simple faith of praise and gratitude toward God.

Patent on God

Man will attempt to patent just about anything. It's a way of establishing ownership, and, as with most things, the bottom line is money. Most people view it as a natural right to receive an income from something they thought of first.

A rare exception to that was Benjamin Franklin. He invented scores of things but refused to apply for patents on them because he did not want to restrict their use. His inventions were a sort of gift he bequeathed to his fellow man. As a result, his inventions found their way into common use—the Franklin stove, bi-focal glasses, and the ability to harness electricity, to name a few.

It's hard to comprehend now, but in 1895 George Selden, a lawyer (what else) patented the automobile. What's fascinating is that he never actually made a car, but he saw the potential market, drew up a few plans, and was granted a patent by a governmental system that was in disarray. The rights to the automobile meant not only that everyone who ever built a car was required to pay him a royalty, but they also had to meet his artificially-imposed requirements. One of those was that the price would be out of reach for most people.

You see, George Selden was an elitist. He believed the automobile should only be available for the privileged class. And for over a decade Selden stymied the development of the automobile during the most critical period in its short history.

One man stood against him, because he wanted to build a car for the common man. His name was Henry Ford. Ford's Model T became the people's car. The price of the Model T reached a low of \$440, but a fine of \$1,000 could be levied against anyone who purchased one, until the patent was rescinded.

During this same time period, America flourished with other inventors who made contributions to the common man. For instance, George Eastman invented and sold, for only \$1, the Brownie Camera. The Brownie made it possible for anyone to have a personal portrait—a privilege previously reserved to only the wealthier classes. Electric lights, air travel, and banking all became the property of the masses of mankind during this period of history.



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Just as Europeans came to America to escape a feudal environment in the 18th century, the 19th century saw Americans granted equality of opportunity with aristocrats of all ages.

God did something very similar on the Day of Pentecost. He sent the Holy Spirit to the first New Testament congregation. It must have been frightening to see “tongues of fire” moving across the room “that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit...” (Acts 2:3-4 NKJV).

The Holy Spirit rested on every member, not the Pharisees, the Jews, the Sanhedrin, the Sadducees, or the priesthood.

The Apostle Peter said this was the time the Prophet Joel wrote about when God spoke through him saying, “I will pour out my spirit on all people” (Joel 2:28 NKJV). His Spirit would be poured out on young and old alike, men and women, even on servants. In verse 32 God proclaims that “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

The Pharisees believed that they had a “patent on God.” They owned Him. Like George Selden, they saw a good opportunity and believed they had the right to capitalize on their property. And probably, as with most things, money and power were at the bottom of the matter.

Like Selden, they were elitists. Only the upper class should have access to God. They thought they were spiritually superior, but they didn't respond to God, and worse, they kept the common people from responding. Jesus said, “You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's face. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.” (Matthew 23:14)

On Pentecost God overruled the elitists by sending His Spirit to the common man. It wasn't restricted to the minister, the 12 Apostles, the prophets, or leaders. The Holy Spirit came on every member of the church.

The Apostle Paul said the same in 1 Corinthians 12:7, 11: “Now to each one the manifestation of the

Spirit is given for the common good ... and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.”

It was the elitists that fought this concept. When Paul was arrested in Jerusalem, he spoke to the crowd, and they listened intently to his testimony until he said the magic word “Gentile.” Then they at-

tacked with the intent to kill him (Acts 22:22). It has ever been that some men believe they have a patent on God, and their religious duty is to block access of the common man to the Holy Spirit.

But God recognizes no such boundary. All you have to do is call on Him.

Joy – to Have and to Share

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“The scripture doesn’t really say that,” was my friend’s unbelieving response. We were working on a Bible game, but the quote of Psalm 16:11 just didn’t seem right. “You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.” (NKJV throughout) I should not have been too surprised by his reaction. On first reading, I had also found it hard to believe that God has at His right hand “pleasures forevermore.” That is exactly how the enemy wants us to think. “Pleasures forevermore?” It just couldn’t be possible.

When God saw everything he had made, it was very good (Gen 1:31). He made it all to be used and enjoyed by mankind (Gen 1:28-30). Proper use of God’s creation adds to the joy Christians experience in this life, and helps prepare us for the joys to come.

On the other hand, Satan’s desire is for us to be unhappy and in turmoil, lacking the peace and joy that come from the Holy Spirit (Rom 14:17, Gal 5:22). He may want us to be “happy” at times, for misusing God’s creation, but not for righteous reasons. Likewise, working with our carnal nature, the devil leads us to be disillusioned and discouraged by the travails of life. Our Loving Father however, uses these same circumstances to clarify our vision, strengthen our faith and to restore the joy of salvation (Ps 51:12).

Note what happens when we place God first, on a personal level: “How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your wings. They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your

house, And You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures. For with You is the fountain of life; In Your light we see light.” (Psalm 36:7-9)

“Fullness of joy...pleasures forevermore.” No one else can make such an offer, and no one else can deliver. Place God first every day and experience a steady and peaceful fullness of joy- a joy that is not only personal, but which can be shared with others. What an encouraging and empowering gift to share with others- while pointing them to the ultimate source of joy, our Heavenly Father.

When Paul wrote to the brethren at Philippi, he knew that they had weathered various trials and that there would be more. Yet, in closing, he exhorts them (not once, but twice) to rejoice! Paul also makes it clear that if we would simply leave our anxieties and problems with God, that God would respond in a way we would not even be able to fully comprehend- yet would bring us great peace. Since he was writing from prison, it is safe to assume that Paul knew whereof he spoke. “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:4-7)

Make a conscious daily decision to strengthen your personal relationship with God. Ask him to send the Comforter to lead and guard your mind, and to build the Spirit’s fruit of joy in your life.

Joy- yours to have, and to share.

Building a Dream Church

Imagine a church with young families whose children and teenagers are eager to learn about God. These young people can't wait for the Sabbath to come. They're proud of their church and what they believe. They love Sabbath School so much that they invite their friends to come. They are actively involved in the worship service. They do special music, and some even play the piano for services from time to time. They hand out songbooks and the bulletin to worshipers as they arrive. They see to it that the songbooks are picked up and properly stored after each service. Older teenage boys are called on to lead in prayer. Every young person looks forward to participating in Youth Day a couple of times a year—a worship service completely conducted by the young people of the church.

Does this sound like a dream? If so, how do we move from where we are today to being like this dream congregation? How do we become a community where all belong and participate—even the young people and teens? We might learn something from churches that have done exactly that. Not surprisingly, it turns out that churches with active groups of young people start working with these children at a very early age.

A recent article in Children's Ministry magazine featured the Saturn Church of Christ in Garland, Texas, where they start teaching babies as young as eight or nine months old. Almost all the teaching is done by singing to these little ones, because words put to music are learned faster and retained longer. These precious babies are learning about God and His creation while they are still in their diapers.

Moreover, this congregation does not stop teaching their children at age 12. Their classes run, quite literally, from the cradle to the grave. Grandma and Grandpa still attend Bible classes just as the children

do. It is no coincidence that they have a growing church of over 3000 people.

What can we learn from our friends in other churches? One of the most important things is to make systematic Bible teaching our number one priority for youth. We can also learn that there is a way to keep them coming back for more, and even bringing their friends with them. That is not accomplished by lecturing to children or teens.

It is also important to set aside the best possible time for this teaching to take place. I feel strongly that children and teenagers should attend the worship service and even participate in it.

Yet, there has to be enough time to effectively teach them. How do other churches solve this problem? They set aside about an hour before their worship service for old and young alike to attend Sunday School. This is followed by the worship service. It is so simple. Perhaps we can learn from this.

Another thing many churches clearly understand is that good Sunday Schools build churches. So can good Sabbath Schools. If we would concentrate on making Sabbath Schools so good, so effective, and so much fun that little ones cry when they can't come and teenagers want to bring their friends, we'll start seeing churches that are growing healthy. We will also be developing the next generation of leadership for the church.

This will take effort, dedication, a lot of prayer, and a willingness to change, but how can we do otherwise? The return on our investment will be well worth it.



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"If we would concentrate on making Sabbath Schools so good, so effective, and so much fun that little ones cry when they can't come and teenagers want to bring their friends, we'll start seeing churches that are growing healthy."

Are You a Vulcan or a Christian?

Remember Mr. Spock? In case you weren't a Star Trek fan, Mr. Spock came from the planet Vulcan. These folks learned long ago how to control and suppress their "dangerous" emotions and control their lives through logic. Vulcans don't smile, laugh, get angry, or in any other way demonstrate any emotion. Well, occasionally Mr. Spock would raise an eyebrow if he thought something was ironic, but that was the limit of his expressiveness. (Mr. Spock also had pointed ears, so he stood out in a crowd, which made it necessary for him to wear a hat anytime his ship visited a place that didn't know about space men.) Vulcans based all their decisions on logic and Vulcan philosophy.

Do you sometimes view your faith like a Vulcan, something you approach with logic?

Christianity does not follow conventional human wisdom or logic. Paul tells us in I Corinthians 1:18 that the message of salvation sounds foolish to people. Think about it: He was telling the Greek world, whose life philosophy was based on reason, that a dead man would save them! Furthermore, this man was not some grandiose philosopher but a humble carpenter who was crucified as a criminal. Paul understood perhaps more than anyone did what it was to forsake human philosophy, logic, and reason and head toward Jesus, whom he called a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks.

But God said we don't find Him through human reason or even through logic. He who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6). You have to believe in something you cannot see, touch, feel, smell, or hear in any conventional sense. Your life must be based on faith.

Jesus taught a way of life that was one of self-sacrifice, which He followed to its most ultimate

fulfillment. It isn't logical to pay for someone else's mistakes. But it is the pinnacle of love.

Jesus based His life on two simple but major laws: love God and love your neighbor. It is often hard to follow these laws in everyday life—especially loving your neighbor, who, according to Jesus is everyone! But Acts 10:38 tells us that Jesus went about doing good.

Loving the often "unlovely" doesn't seem logical somehow. After all, shouldn't people deserve to be helped before we help them? Haven't they gotten themselves into many of their own problem situations? But consider—did we "deserve" to be saved?

In our little church we have been learning some lessons about loving and serving. Our church building sits on a rather busy road, and people who see our sign advertising Saturday services often stop in to ask for some type of physical help. These people are sometime dirty, and often are spinning a story. They usually ask for money. We try to use wisdom in responding to them. Our policy is to not give any money, but we will buy

medication, groceries, diapers, and other things our visitors tell us the money is for. Someone in the congregation may actually go and help buy the groceries or other needs. We are trying to follow Galatians 6:10 and I John 3:17.

Jesus was not an emotionless Vulcan. He got angry, he wept, he got frustrated, and he showed tenderness, sympathy, and compassion. Jesus was our elder brother in this way of life we call Christianity.

So is your life lived as Mr. Spock, analyzing and applying logic? Or are you pursuing the life Christ led?



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In Hope of Diamonds

Evalyn McClean, a gold rush heiress of the early 1900's, had a penchant for opulent jewelry, designer clothes, and flamboyant entertaining. Her lavish dinner parties were the talk of Washington D.C. high society.

In her quest for impressive jewelry, Evalyn purchased the Hope diamond in 1911. The largest blue diamond in the world cost her \$185,000.00. She wore this 45.52-carat diamond in a setting surrounded by 16 white diamonds suspended on a chain of 45 diamonds. To this she attached the McClean diamond of 31.26 carats and the Star of the East diamond of 94.8 carats. Imagine all these gems dangling from one woman's neck and all worn together at the same time. A total of over 200 carats! -- Why, the brilliance would dazzle the eyes.

Evalyn wore the Hope diamond frequently because she believed in its mystical powers to bring her good luck. Unfortunately, her husband and children died early tragic deaths. Upon Evalyn's death, in 1947, the diamonds were sold to pay off her extravagant lifestyle debts. The Hope diamond is now the premier attraction at the Smithsonian Institute, with thousands viewing it annually.

What was Mrs. McClean's reason for wearing so many gems? We may not know for a certainty, but we can guess that she hoped to command the attention she obviously craved. However, they could never bring her lasting joy, nor could she even bequeath them to her grandchildren as she wished. Interesting isn't it, that the world's largest blue diamond is named Hope?

Let's contrast Mrs. McClean's "hope" with that of a Christian. The Bible speaks of hope as "an anchor for the soul, sure and strong." (Heb. 6:19 NCV) Proverbs 10:28 says, "The hope of the righteous shall be gladness." Why can the Christian be both anchored and happy? Because hope, the "helmet of our salvation," is not perishable matter that will pass away, but the spiritual future reserved for us in

Christ. (Eph. 6:17; I Thes. 5:8-9; Col 1:3-6)

The Apostle John saw a vision of hope in the Book of Revelation. He described a gleaming new city of gems, diamonds, gold, and pearls. Did God record this in the Bible to help us visualize our spiritual future through physical imagery? He indeed painted us a picture of brilliant light and color.

What is in this city? There are crystal blue jasper stone walls, which some scholars believe to be blue diamonds; twelve open pearl gates for abundant access; welcoming angels; streets paved in transparent gold; rainbow colors of polished gems; foundation stones bearing the names of the apostles; the presence and glory of God for light. From this city flows water to feed the Tree of Life and healing for all nations.

I encourage you to read Revelation 21 and 22 and capture a visual picture of hope. Read these passages to your children and grandchildren so they can look forward in anticipation of a splendid future. It's a place where there will be no tears, no night, no death, no sorrow, no pain, no affliction, and no suffering from the effects of sin—truly a place we can dream about.

As it turned out, Evalyn McClean's "hope" was only anchored by the chain around her neck and could not bring her good luck or happiness. But look how many jewels and blessings are in our future if we anchor ourselves in righteousness and are redeemed by our Savior.

The writer of Hebrews assured us, "Christ was faithful as a Son over His house whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end." (Heb. 3:6 NAS) Go ahead, boast on the beautiful city waiting for you—blue glorious "hope" diamonds—and maybe, just maybe, others will want to follow along and see too.



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Painting Ladders Part 2

In the first installment of this series, we recalled a friend who, upon buying a window cleaning business, spent his time in his garage painting his ladders rather than cleaning windows. He procrastinated doing that which he did not know how to do. We likened this experience to the COG habit of focusing on things less important than passing on our faith to our children, also because we don't know what to do.

How do we pass faith from one generation to another? Actually, we don't. But God does. He uses us to pass His faith to our children. We are responsible to be willing tools in His hands. This willingness is part of our baptismal commitment.

God uses two primary environments to do his miraculous work of faith transmission: the family and the congregation. I have seen a strong family's influence override weak congregational support. And, I have seen a strong congregation reclaim children from parental abdication. The process, of course, works better when both family and congregation work in concert and provide strong support for children and for each other.

Today we will focus on the family's contribution to faith transmission.

What do parents need to do to create an environment in which God can work with our children? First of all, faith is transmitted from "heart to heart." Our relationships with our children make faith transfer possible. If our children resent us, think we don't love them, etc. then they are not as inclined to respect the model we live for them and believe what we believe.

The core relationship in the family is the marriage. Imagine a mobile hanging from the ceiling. If you pull on one of the objects, the others are all affected. Family relationships work the same way. If the marriage isn't good, all other relationships are contaminated. Parents need to "take no prisoners" when it comes to resolving marital difficulties. See a counselor, fast and pray, change,



become humble, listen more — whatever it takes. When people have children, God holds them accountable to provide a loving environment for them. Make the marriage work!

Once the marriage is solid, then parents need to establish loving, affectionate, warm, relationships with their children, set in an environment of solid but flexible boundaries. We don't have time to cover all the important details about boundaries. Suffice it to say, relationships don't work without them. The best book I've seen on boundaries is listed in the book section of our LifeResource Ministries web site, www.liferesource.org. It's called *Boundaries for Kids*, by Cloud and Townsend.

Once children feel secure in their parents' love, they are more open to the example of spirituality parents set. There is no short cut here, either. We are either living it or we are not. Children are weakened spiritually by parental spiritual weakness.

Once the relationships are solid, and the example is strong, the next consideration is teaching. An excellent book about how to instill an awareness of God in small children is *A Celebration of Children* by Edith Schaeffer. This too is listed on our web site.

As children grow older, praying with them, family stories of parents' calling and other faith building moments, become an important part of their spiritual heritage.

As a pastor, I've learned to take the teens in my congregation by the hand and pray with them about their needs and hopes. It's so inspiring to lead them to Christ in this way. Parents should do this too. The key is to pray about things of importance to the family and the child or teen.

Next time we will discuss the congregation's role in faith transmission. A lot of us need to lay down our paint brushes.



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“Mindful” continued from page 16.

deep, even though it seems like a harmless error and hardly defiling or disqualifying. It may be important, though, for another reason. What the little mistake reminds us of is that we were not mindful.

We might say, “I was not thinking,” but that’s not accurate. We were thinking, we were just thinking of something else.

At the Lord’s Supper, the Christian Passover, we know that the unleavened bread signifies the Lord’s body. It is all too easy, having gone through the moment of reflection at the Lord’s supper, to then lay the matter aside and go back to life as usual. So to help us be mindful, God gives us seven days of unleavened bread to keep us mindful of the body of Christ. What the little slip of eating a piece of unleavened bread does is to tell us that we have not been mindful, we have not borne in mind the sacrifice of Christ. The leaven is not so important as the failure to bear the body of Christ in mind, not just for seven days, but for all our days.

When you grasp this little truth, a number of other things come to mind. Take for example Peter’s admonition in his second letter:

This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour (2 Peter 3:1-2 KJV).

We may have to be reminded of what we should be bearing in mind. It is not merely a recollection, brought to mind and laid aside. The translators, I think, miss this point in Genesis when, after the great flood, he puts a rainbow in the cloud as a memorial and says:

And I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of

all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh. And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth (Genesis 9:15-16 KJV).

These are no passing memories, nor a recollection of things forgotten. God will bear in mind his covenant. He will look at the rainbow in the cloud and bear in mind the everlasting covenant he has made with every living thing.

God promises that he will bear us in mind and we must learn to bear him in mind, as the psalmist: “When I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate

on thee in the night watches. Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice” (Psalms 63: 6-7 KJV). Again, this is no fleeting recollection, but a determination to bear God in mind, to always be mindful of him, even on those long night watches when we can’t sleep.

There are, I think, four significant exercises we can do to carry an awareness of God through our days. One is reading the Bible, consistently and systematically. Another is prayer. The third is meditation, and the fourth is song. Paul calls it a kind of self talk:

Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 5: 19-20 KJV).

I read nothing in the Bible to suggest that this is effortless. To “bear in mind” the God of creation, his covenant, his works, and his sacrifice is a matter of some discipline. Every one of us is different, but each can find a way to apply a spiritual discipline to his life, to bear in mind the Lord’s body, not just for seven days, but through all our days.

*And the bow
shall be in the cloud;
and I will look upon it,
that I may remember
the everlasting
covenant between
God and every living
creature of all flesh
that is upon the earth*

Genesis 9:16

Transforming Decision #2

Everything We Do As a Church Should Support the Great Commission: Evangelism

This should go without saying—but in fact, does everything we do support the Great Commission of making disciples, baptizing them, and teaching them to observe what Jesus commanded?

Having a goal is one thing—carefully aligning our resources and our actions so they help us achieve that goal is another. This is sometimes called “mission alignment”: we should do things that help us accomplish our mission, and not do things that don’t.

Speaking of the mission that Jesus said was his, the apostle Paul said in 1 Timothy 1:15:

This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.

Luke records in Luke 19:10 that Jesus spoke of his mission to “the lost”:

... for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.

The apostle Paul said of his own mission that he approached Gentiles and Jews differently “so that by all possible means I might save some” (1Corinthians 9:22).

Some congregations see their mission as a prophetic warning. Others see it as perfecting the members as the bride of Christ. Some do both. For some, “saving sinners” and “seeking and saving the lost” sounds like a false doctrine. Remember that “to save sinners” and “to seek and to save ... the “lost” are all words right from the pages of your Bible.

Remember the admonition “Don’t believe me, believe ... your Bible!” Just how comfortable and committed are we personally with the Great Commission given in Matthew 28:18-20?

A second transforming principle is that the focus of ALL our resources should be on fulfilling the mission Jesus gave his disciples. We are to save sinners that God is calling by making them disciples of Jesus Christ. We are to help them become committed Christians. And we are to teach them God’s ways.

If we are called to make disciples, why spend resources doing things that don’t help us reach that goal?



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Let’s look at some areas of focus and consider whether we are focusing all our efforts as congregations on this mission Jesus gave to his disciples.

Church services: Are our church services designed to help make new disciples? Are they like a hospital for the sinner or a spa for the righteous? When new people or visitors come, how are they greeted? Do people take an interest in them? Do we share hospitality with them?

Do we invite our friends to church services? If not, why not?

What about the speakers? We wouldn’t dream of putting someone in front of the congregation to sing special music who couldn’t carry a tune in a bucket. How do we pick our speakers? Do we allow only those who teach sound doctrine to speak, or do we let anybody speak? (Imagine a new person coming and the first sermon they hear is odd, weird, or just plain wrong. Will they come back?)

How about the music program? Is it a quality program? Would new people we are targeting be inspired or turned off with it?

Youth Programs: Are our youth programs intended to help our young people decide to be Christians, or do we think that children are too young to decide if they want to be a servant of Jesus Christ? I have asked a number of members and ministers about when they decided to become a servant of Christ. Many made that decision while they were very young. They were baptized later—but the decision was made long before they were actually baptized.

We can use the desire that young people have to socialize with their peers as a means to connect them with each other—and with Jesus Christ. I have to look back at large youth programs with sports and tournaments—we did a good job creating social opportunities, but how effective were we with connecting the participants with Jesus?

Continued on page 15

Announcements

Baptism

Randi Shanta: Congratulations to 15-year-old Randi on her recent baptism at the CEM Family Retreat in Bull Shoals, Arkansas. Welcome to the family Randi! Contact information: Randi Shanta, 903 Compton Ridge Road, Branson, MO 65616

Birth

Guy and Jennifer Swenson are very happy to announce the birth of their first granddaughter, Rachel Rene Crane, to her parents Sarah and Jason Crane. Rachel was born, Sabbath Morning, May 28, 2005, at 5:40 AM. She was 18 inches long 6 pounds 3 ounces. She has one brother, Daniel.

Prayer Requests

Sydney, Joshua, and Dillon Skaggs: Sydney, age 6, Joshua, age 7, and Dillon, age 10, are the children of Marc and Liza Skaggs, and grandchildren of Marcus and Betty Skaggs (who attend a COG congregation in Durango, Colorado). The three children all have Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome (EDS), a group of uncommon, inherited connective tissue disorders. EDS is characterized by loose, unstable joints, chronic joint pain, and mitral valve prolapse (which affects blood flow between the chambers of the heart). Joshua also has EHS, a genetic disorder inherited from his mother, who also suffers from the same disease. Sydney needs reparative surgery on her heart valve, but her blood does not clot properly, which eliminates surgery as an option. Dillon suffers from lesions in his aorta that could rupture any time. Prayers for the whole family would be appreciated.

Joel Failla: Joel is the 27-month-old son of Greg and Kris Failla, and grandson of Steve and Elin Failla. He has just been diagnosed with a large and aggressive malignant tumor under the right side of his brain. Chemo has already started, with six weeks of radiation soon upcoming at a special facility in Boston, and a treatment duration estimated at 11 months. Please pray for our Heavenly Father's intervention, that the cancer be fully destroyed; that Joel's mind and body be fully protected; and that his anticipated chemo and radia-

tion sickness be minimal. Prayers are also requested that his parents and 4-year-old brother Max be given health, strength, and peace during this ordeal; and that the Lord guide the decisions and actions of all of his caregivers (professionals, family, and friends). Contact information: Greg & Kris Failla, 53 Raft Island Drive, Gig Harbor WA 98335 greg@radiative.com

Events

CEM Summer Camp: Wewoka, Oklahoma, June 26-July 3

CEM's summer camp will be held this year at Camp Wewoka Woods, near Wewoka, Oklahoma, from June 26 to July 3. A letter will be sent to all who are on our teen mailing list, but if you or a teen you know are not on our list, be sure to call, write, or e-mail to request information about camp.

The tuition fee remains at only \$250. But we also recognize that not every one can afford to attend camp, so a special camp scholarship fund has been established. Anyone who would like to help sponsor a deserving young person to attend camp can make a contribution to CEM for this fund. This special donation will still be tax deductible, but will be used exclusively for helping a young person come to camp.

Summer camp is open to all teens who will be 13 by the time camp ends and who have not yet turned 19, regardless of church affiliation.

Activities include water skiing and tubing, swimming, horseback riding, group initiatives, ultimate Frisbee, arts & crafts, volleyball and basketball, as well as dances and the annual camp fun show. Each year we try to add something new, and we plan to continue that this year. We always have our daily cabin Bible studies and group studies, as well as the "huddle" to close the day.

If you know someone you think would enjoy camp, be sure to tell them to call, write, or e-mail for an application. Please spread the word, so that all who want to attend will know about summer camp. And, if you are able, please help a deserving young person come to camp by making a donation to CEM's camp scholarship fund.

Contact information: lsw@cemnetwork.com; Christian Educational Ministries, Attention: Summer Camp, P.O. Box 560, Whitehouse, TX 75791; phone 1-888-BIBLE-44



New Dates for Camp Outreach: July 31 – Aug. 6

Build Friendships While You Rebuild Homes!

“Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.”
—James 1:27

Due to schedule conflicts, the dates for Camp Outreach have changed to arriving on Sunday, July 31st and finishing on Sabbath, August 6th.

If you're a single young adult (17+) and have ever wanted to really make a difference, learn more about God, and share the whole experience with peers who believe as you do, Camp Outreach may be for you. If you're not afraid of hard work during the daytime, and you still have energy for friends in the evening, mark your calendar for July 31 – August 6. Pack your work clothes, your swimsuit and your Bible. You'll need them all for Camp Outreach's unique blend of community service, fun and Christian learning!

Join an intimate group of young adults, contractors,

and Bible teachers for a memorable week of service to others. Sponsored by Common Ground Christian Ministries (New Testament Evangelism) and the Lexington Church of God, Camp Outreach is set in the beautiful Bluegrass Region of Kentucky.

Your team, consisting of others like you who are committed to God and their fellow man, will work together to renovate homes in serious need of repair that belong to widows and others equally deserving. In the process, you'll learn how to share your faith with those God is calling and develop strong bonds of friendship.

Regardless of your level of experience, you will learn new skills under the leadership of award-winning builder, contractor, and church member, Jim Sexton. Each day, you will also delve into Biblical principles, and share exciting, exhilarating, and exhausting experiences with friends old and new.

To request an application to Camp Outreach, email jswenson@ntevangelism.org or send your request to: Jennifer Swenson, Common Ground Christian Ministries, PO Box 158, Plainfield, IN 46168.

Space is limited, so apply right away!

“... Transforming Decisions” continued from page 13.

This summer we are piloting a youth camp devoted to service and learning how to share one's faith with other young people. Write us at FN@NTEvangelism.org or call us at 317-707-5003 if you want to know more.

Targeted Evangelism: Do we have a target audience that we are trying to reach, or are we trying to be everything to everybody? Paul appealed to the Gentiles differently than he did to the Jews. Have we looked at who the people are that we want to reach? We have limited resources—have we picked some realistic targets?

Let's say you have members who are gifted in working with young people. Are you targeting families with young children? Is your music program appealing to a targeted community? What about the facilities you offer for little children? Is the nursery clean and sanitary? Are there Sabbath classes for the children? Is the speaking “accessible” to young minds? Do families see the congregation as a healthy place for their

children or a risky place for them to go to hear God's Word expounded?

Literature: Does our literature “talk” to the unconverted, or is it intended to reassure the believer in doctrines they already understand? Do we have a place for new people to start reading that emphasizes the need for salvation, God's grace, and forgiveness of sins?

Is our literature written by those who have a gift in communicating these truths in a manner that compels people to take action?

Fellowshipping: Do we attend Sabbath services, visit with our friends, and live our lives during the week without doing a single thing to connect new people with the message of salvation?

The conclusion of the matter is this: If our congregations are not growing, we need to ask ourselves the tough question: How much of what we spend in time, energy, and money has anything to do with evangelism? How we answer that question may give us insight as to why God is not sending more of his new children into our care.

Mindful

“Mindful” is a simple word, and it hardly needs defining. It means simply “to bear in mind.” It seems natural enough for the translators of the Bible to render the Hebrew word for it “to remember,” but to be mindful is more than that. To remember is to recall, to have something brought back to mind, however fleeting the memory.

But to “bear in mind” implies a carried recollection, one that stays with you over time. Thus, to be mindful is to carry the memory forward with you. Consider an example. At the peak of the great flood of Noah’s day, “God remembered Noah, and every living thing, and all the cattle that was with him in the ark: and God made a wind to pass over the earth, and the waters asswaged” (Genesis 8:1 KJV).

Nearly every translation follows this, but in modern English, one imagines remembering

something you had forgotten. “Oh yes,” we say, slapping the forehead. “Now I remember.” But the sense of this passage is better understood in this way: “And God was mindful of Noah and every living thing with him on the ark.” He hadn’t forgotten Noah for a moment.

It is a small distinction, but one worth bearing in mind. A lesson comes home from a common experience of those who observe the days of unleavened bread by actually abstaining from leaven (I Corinthians 5:7-8). Nearly everyone has absent-mindedly eaten leaven during those days. It may have been a slice of toast or a whole hamburger, but the chagrin that follows the error is often quite



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