

Faith Networks

A Newsletter for Cooperation in the Churches of God

February, 2007

Lessons from the Book of Esther

There are Bible characters and stories that almost every adult who ever attended Sunday School even for a short time as a child knows about—*David and Goliath*; *Daniel in the Lion's Den*; *Joseph and the Coat of Many Colors*. But there are other names that are unfamiliar to most—for instance Esther, Mordecai, and Haman. Why? I don't know about you, but for twenty years I was in churches that had a weekly worship service with a long sermon, and a weekly Bible Study meeting. Thus I can account for having listened to 2000 or more messages and lessons based on the Bible. And I can't remember even **one** that had as its theme the events or characters of the Book of Esther!

Given the relatively few female role models in the Bible, this should be somewhat surprising. Why didn't ministers take advantage of the story of Esther to inspire women, young and old, with messages emphasizing the importance of the role of a godly woman in the unfolding plan of God? I don't know, but I think they missed a great opportunity! The book of Esther has a dynamite plot, fascinating characters, and numerous built-in lessons. Yet many Christian churches pretty much ignore Esther and her book. Only in Jewish communities do both play a prominent role. The Jewish festival of **Purim** is celebrated

in late winter each year (Sunday, March 4 in 2007) in memory of the events of the Book of Esther, which tell of the great rescue of the Jewish people during the reign of King Xerxes of Persia in the fifth century BC. Plays based on the story of Esther are staged in almost every local synagogue. Members of the audience have noisemakers, and are encouraged to clatter, bang, and toot them whenever the name of the villain, Haman, is mentioned, drowning out that hated name. This is particularly exciting for the children of the congregation. Some synagogues even take a few liberties with the plot—at least one I know of re-stages it each year to be a musical parody of a famous Broadway musical. I have seen their hilarious performances of *My Scared Lady* and *Bye Bye Haman*, with the tunes from *My Fair Lady* and *Bye Bye Birdie* faithfully reproduced with new words and puns that fit the Esther story.

But back in the Christian Churches, Esther continues to be a forgotten woman. This is a shame, for there is so much to learn from her story.

What sort of actress would we choose to play the part of Esther in a movie? The idea of someone being a queen brings up for me an image of



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Elizabeth Taylor in her role as Cleopatra in the movie by that name. I picture an elegant, mature-but-youthful actress, about age 30. There is only one problem with that picture—it doesn't fit reality. At the beginning of the Book of Esther, Esther is a young virgin. In those days, this likely meant not much more than age 14! She was likely less than age 20 even by the end of the story. This sheltered young woman, barely out of girlhood, was thrust into circumstances in which she ultimately had influence with one of the most powerful men in the world. All of this was at an age when most modern young women are concerned about school dances and studying for algebra exams. What incredible qualities God must have seen in that young woman to entrust the rescue of His People to her courage, wisdom, resourcefulness, self-control, and faith!

Let's recap just the highlights of the plot:

The Jews had long been in exile in Babylon. When the Persians came to power, they were still there. At the beginning of the story, Xerxes is displeased with his queen, and removes her from her royal position. Advisors suggest that the fairest young maidens in the land be brought to the King so he can choose one as his new queen. (Yes, this may well be the origin of such elements in folk tales like *Cinderella*!)

The young Jewess Hadassah (Persian name: Esther) is among the maidens brought to the palace. At the insistence of her guardian, Uncle Mordecai, she conceals her racial identity. She wins the favor of Xerxes, and becomes Queen.

Meanwhile, Uncle Mordecai offends the evil courtier Haman, who decides in revenge to trick the King into declaring a death sentence on all Jews in the

kingdom, to be carried out at a date to be decided by lot. (The word *purim* in Hebrew means "lots," thus the name of the festival of *Purim*.) Mordecai learns of the plot, and alerts Esther. She, at great personal risk, approaches the King and begs for mercy for her people. She succeeds. Through a series of fortuitous events (no doubt orchestrated by God) and her wise handling of the situation, Haman is shown before the King to be the villain that he really is. In the end, Haman is hung on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai. And the Jews of the kingdom are saved from extinction.

The purpose of this article is to encourage readers to go back and read through the Book of Esther with a new perspective. Below are five principles/lessons which I have gleaned from the book. It is left to the reader to contemplate how these principles might apply to us as Christians!

1. God has sometimes used armies or flashy miracles in order to rescue His People. But He can just as easily use one obscure person—male, such as Joseph, or female, such as Esther—and manipulate the circumstances around them to allow them to be the agent of His salvation.
2. In modern western nations, Christians are usually free to worship according to their consciences, and free to obey God without fear that such obedience will run afoul of the government in most circumstances. But God never in the Bible destroys kingdoms **just because** they are dictatorships, so his servants could have the kind of freedoms we enjoy. Instead He enabled His people to function right within whatever system they found themselves. Even Paul notes this: *Each one should remain in the situation*

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which he was in when God called him. Were you a slave when you were called? Don't let it trouble you—although if you can gain your freedom, do so. (1 Cor 17: 20-21) Paul is not telling us to give up the freedom we have. He is saying that God can use us, just as He used Esther, wherever we find ourselves, no matter the nature of the government.

3. Serving God and fulfilling the role He called someone to was possible even in an environment where almost everyone around them was a pagan. And it could be done without attempting to change everyone around them. Joseph, Esther, and Daniel all served pagan kings and won their favor by their exemplary conduct and example. And they were thereby able to accomplish great deeds.
4. God can use delicate, gentle young women, like Esther, just as easily as muscular, brash young warriors, like David, to accomplish His plans for His people.
5. It is comforting to know that God can redeem people with unpleasant pasts and use them to advance His plans for His people—like Rahab the harlot and Paul, the persecutor of Christians. But in some cases His plans call for those who have kept themselves undefiled physically and/or spiritually. In the case of Esther, it would have been impossible for her to fulfill God's plan if she had not been a chaste young woman. This brings to mind another chaste young woman, likely as young as Esther when she began her role in an even greater plan of salvation—Mary, the mother of Jesus. Like Esther, what incredible qualities Mary must have exhibited even as a young woman barely out of girlhood, to be considered mature enough for the responsibility of raising the Messiah! 

Out of the Salt Shaker!

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Over the last 50 years portions of the Sabbatarian Church of God community have generally viewed non-Sabbatarian, mainstream Christianity as a distant cousin at best—and spiritual enemies at worst. As a result, most have not wanted to have anything to do with their Christian neighbors, and some have never darkened the door of a Protestant or Catholic Church. As a man once put it to me: “God does not want us mixing with Babylon.”

Is that the Truth? Does this man speak for God? Does he speak for you?

As Judaism is a corruption of the true Religion of the Old Testament, Mainstream Christianity is a corruption of the original religion of Jesus and the Bible. Yet the Apostle Paul did not write off his Jewish Countrymen (Romans 9,10, 11), and readers of the New Testament know that the first Christians mixed and mingled with their Jewish cousins for decades after the dawn of Christianity. When Paul wrote, “I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some” (I Cor 9:22)—he was not talking about compromise. He was talking about reaching people where they were, and leading them toward the fuller revelation of Scripture.

I believe that God wants us to engage in what I call “The Aquila-Priscilla Ministry” and do for others what Aquilla and Priscilla did for Apollos. They explained to him “the way of God more accurately.” (Acts 18:26)

This can be done through media efforts of course. And I applaud the efforts of Ron Dart and others in doing so. But it can and should also be done by mixing and mingling with other Christians who may never be reached through media efforts.

In the Spring of 2005 I joined a Pastor’s Association in Olivehurst,

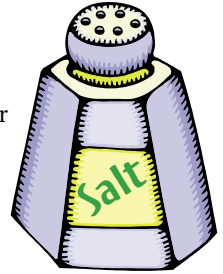
California. This association was formed to send the message to the secular community that in spite of doctrinal differences, various denominations of Christians could and should work

together on Community Projects to serve community needs. It is a ten church member group of which I am the only Sabbatarian Pastor. We meet on the first Monday Night of every month and plan for Community Service Projects to implement during the year.

1. We do a Thanksgiving Feed for the Homeless.
2. In the Spring and Fall we do a “Prayer Walk.” We divide the town up into ten geographic areas for each denomination to walk and pray for those who live in those neighborhoods.
3. In the Summer we have a public carnival where each church sets up a booth to offer the community things they need. Our congregation put together 70 backpacks with school supplies and Bibles for families who could not afford them.

These shared projects are a great way to serve the public and send the message of “caring” without discussion or compromise of denominational beliefs. Such Pastoral Associations are popping up all over the country. With a few phone calls, you could probably find one in your community.

The last day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread that same spring the Pastor of the local Assembly of God walked in through our doors. He is the chairman of our pastoral meetings mentioned above. When I saw him, I welcomed



him to our congregation and started the service. He sang with us, raised his hand in the interactive portion of our service and made some helpful comments. He listened intently to my sermon which gave background on the festival. After the service this pastor came up to me and said, "This festival you're observing is a great concept! We've had some seven day revivals, and seven day seminars—but we've never done anything like this where you focus for seven days on putting sin out of your life and putting Christ's presence in. This is great!" Then he asked me if he could get a copy of the tape from the First Day of Unleavened Bread.

At the next Pastor's meeting, this same man pulled me aside and said, "Would you be willing to come to our church next Spring and introduce this Feast to my Congregation?" I tried to mask my amazement as I responded, "Sure!" At each subsequent meeting over the next 11 months he would bring the subject up again with similar enthusiasm until it was clear that he really meant it! Sure enough, when the Spring of 2006 rolled around, this Pastor pulled me aside at one of our meetings and asked me when the Feast started. When I showed him that the first day of Unleavened Bread was on a Thursday this year, he asked me to give the sermon on the Sunday before. He also asked my family to sing Special Music.

A young mother in our congregation, Jenelle Crain, volunteered to make a program to hand out at the Service. The cover had a silhouette drawing of a man washing someone's feet. Inside was an outline of my Sermon, recipes for making Unleavened Bread, and the center section had 7 sins to put out of your life, contrasted with 7 Christ-like characteristics to put into your life.

I started the Sermon by putting a mask on and walking up to the podium. This immediately broke the ice as the whole audience of about 200 people giggled and laughed. I talked about how great

it was to be a Christian where people are always genuine, sincere, and real, and how I was sure they had never met a two-faced Christian—to which they continued to laugh. Then I took off the mask and said, "Isn't it funny—when we wear a literal mask—nobody's fooled!" I continued with, "If you've ever had a problem with hypocrisy then does God have a Festival for you!" I went through the most common texts on leavening in both Testaments and even quoted Britannica about the fact that the first Christians continued to observe the Festivals albeit in a new light with Christ as the Paschal Lamb. I said, "I think it was one of the most tragic decisions in history when the Catholic Church decided to put forth the edict that Christians should not Judaize by observing the Sabbath & Festivals."

The audience was very teachable and attentive, "amening" many of the points I made. Afterwards, they came up to me and others from our congregation and ranted and raved about what a wonderful concept this was.

A few weeks later we saw many of them at the Prayer Walk, and heard many inspiring stories about their positive Feast experience. They did not keep the first & last days holy—they have no concept of that yet—but they put leaven out of their homes for seven days and avoided eating leavened bread.

The Pastor enthusiastically said to me, "This was a good start, but next year I hope you'll come back and hit it even harder!"

I said, "I'd be glad to!"

This wonderful experience happened only because we were willing to mix and mingle with sincere people who wanted us to show them "The Way of God more accurately."

Remember, The Salt of the Earth can't season others unless placed in close proximity! [FN](#)

Book Review

Title: *Waking the Dead, The Glory of a Heart Fully Alive*

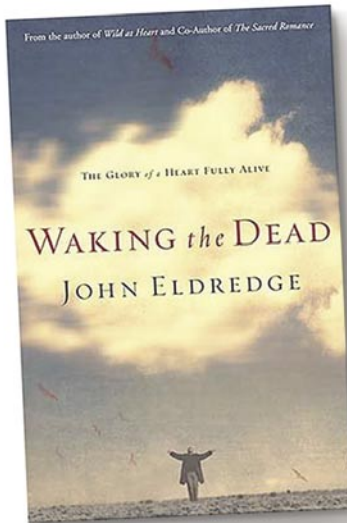
Author: John Eldredge

Publisher: Nelson Books, copyright 2003

ISBN: 0-7852-6553-8

Books written by John Eldredge are very fiery and captivating. Clearly, he is a gifted writer. *Waking the Dead* is an appealing and emotional book. His goal is to impart knowledge that he feels will make Christians come alive. Christians, he says, once had hope and life but let it become eroded. Where is the abundant life Christ promised? He hopes what he writes about will change us.

The problem I have with this book is that people can be caught up in his writing and swept along without critically analyzing whether what he is advocating is really true. I feel this book has subtleties about it that may overthrow the basic premise he is advocating. Yet some of what he says is true. The problem is that he omits other biblical teachings that seem to say the opposite. I don't like it when I have to sort between truth and error presented in a subtle way with an emotional push to buy into what is being said. I wonder what I am missing, and I wonder who else is reading and buying into everything being said.



Sixty-nine pages into the book the author comes to his point. "Our hearts have been circumcised to God. We have new hearts. Do you know what that means? Your heart is good. Let that sink in for a moment. Your heart is good."

"What would happen if you believed it, if you came to the place where you knew it were true? Your heart would never be the same.... This is the last thing the Enemy wants the world to know.... It's freedom. It's life." (p.69-70)

The author then comes back to that point again and again, for it's his basic foundation. It is his "specific purpose statement." But is it true?

The author vividly describes how we are at war whether we want to be or not. He shows that we are at war with Satan and plainly describes how some of those battles go. But is that our only enemy? We—and I mean Christians—have three enemies.

The Devil: "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." (1 Pet 5:8)

The Flesh: "So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit,



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and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.” (Gal 5:16-17)

The World: “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. (1 Joh 2:15-16)

John Eldredge omits these battles. He omits how the apostle Paul, after having a circumcised heart, still struggled with the flesh in Romans 7, and how Christ delivers us in Romans 8. There is more to it than just believing, in essence, “I am free, for Christ has made my heart good,

and any thoughts otherwise are put there by the Devil.”

When I first began reading *Waking The Dead* I found it inspiring and captivating. But as he got to his main message, all these red flags started coming up. I wonder how many people will see them?

He also quotes extensively from movies, books, and fairy tales we all know about. While that can be helpful in illustrating a point, that is only valid if the points are true. Quoting from *Lord of the Rings* is not the same as quoting from scripture.

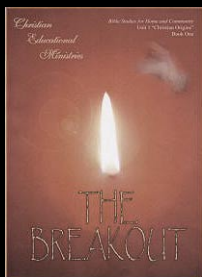
His writing is lively, but his premise has not been compared to all the scriptures on the subject—just ones that seem to fit what he is advocating. [FN](#)

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“My, how time flies!” “Kids grow up so fast!” “Where did the years go?” “It seems like only yesterday...” “Life is too short”.

How many times have you heard statements like these or said them yourself? They all have one thing in common: they refer to our perception that time has just flown by, childhood is brief, life is short, and we are all quickly moving toward old age and our final curtain in this mortal life.

This perception that the years have flown by becomes particularly acute the older one gets. When you are young, life stretches out before you like an endless stream. It seems you have all the time in the world. Then at some point the dynamic changes. You reach the midpoint of the Biblical threescore and ten, and a few years after that you realize you most likely have more years behind you than ahead, and not long after that you start wondering where all those years went. Seeing your children grow up really brings this idea home. One day your children are little and the next day, it seems, they are off to college or getting married. “Sunrise, sunset,” as the *Fiddler on the Roof* song goes. You look back and feel like the years just went by in a flash.

But they didn't really, did they? After all, we live our lives one day at a time, one hour at a time, one minute at a time. The kids didn't really grow up that fast, did they? They took their time just like all kids. Puppies grow up fast; human children take forever, it seems. There's a kernel of truth in that gag about being sentenced to 18 years to life when you have a baby. You didn't really get to that 25th or 30th or 50th wedding anniversary

overnight, did you? You lived one day at a time, just as all human beings do. You had good times and bad, you laughed and you cried one day at a time. The perception that time just flew by is an illusion, right? It didn't *really* go by that fast...

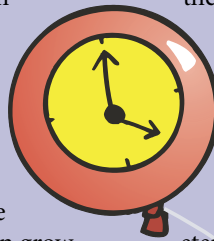
Or did it?

In Psalms 103:15-16, the psalmist writes, “As for man, his days are like grass, he flourishes like a flower in the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more.” This is a statement about the transitory nature of human life. We are compared to grass or to a flower which flourishes for a few days in the field and then is gone. Even human beings who

live relatively long lives are not here very long. When compared to geologic or astronomical time scales involving millions or billions of years, our lives are incredibly short. And when compared to God, who inhabits eternity, our lives are over in a flash.

You see, time really *does* go by that fast. We just don't realize it until we get older.

Which brings us back to that perception about where all those years went. God lives outside of time and space, and He looks at our lives quite differently than we do. Someday when we are in His kingdom, we will too. But even now when we look back and feel like the years just flew by, we are actually coming closer to seeing our life as God sees it. It really *does* go by that fast. And the rest of it will go by just as fast. So make the most of it, or as the Bible puts it, redeem the time. You really don't have very much of it at all. **FN**

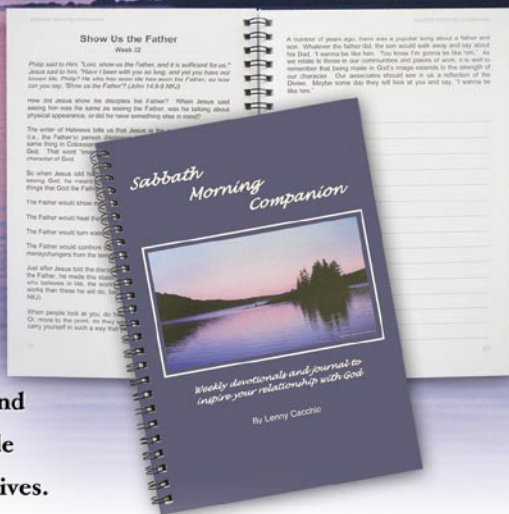


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Human Nature—Good or Bad?

In September 2006, passersby found a family murdered along an interstate highway on the Florida coast. The father, mother, and two boys, ages two and four, were lying on the ground outside their vehicle where they were murdered, indicating an execution.

What causes some people to commit such cruel, remorseless crimes? The New Testament says much about the capacity for sin caused by “carnal nature” and “the flesh.” Scripture states in Jeremiah 17: 9 that the human heart is “desperately wicked.” Some people believe that our nature was passed from Adam and Eve—that we are born evil from birth.

This idea has seeped into how we treat children. We know of an evangelical who has marketed a parenting program for Christians in which he tells us that babies are self-centered to the core. He advises parents to put them on rigid feeding schedules and let them conform to the parents instead of the parents conforming to them. Better to let them cry a while, he advises, so they get used to the idea that they are not the center of the universe right from the beginning.

However, there was something else about that media report that passes by most of us. When people are deeply angry or afraid, they tend to go into what could be termed “low mode functioning.” The intellectual systems shut down, leaving only the deep core of the brain operational. When we are terrified, pretense goes out the window. Who we truly are tends to come to the fore. In the execution-style murder, the victims knew they were about to die. They would have been terrified, and consequently, operating from their core just before they died. It was in this mental state,

that the mother, lying on the ground, tried to shield her two sons from the perpetrator’s gunfire *with her own body*.

Is that mother’s protective effort a mystery to us? No. We all understand motherly love. What is a mystery to us, instead, is the action of the perpetrator. How could he shoot anyone, let alone two little children in cold blood? The fact that we understand what the mother did and can’t connect to the actions of the perpetrator says a lot about our hearts—about our nature. The Apostle Paul tells us that in the last days people would be without natural affection. The perpetrator did not have natural affection. The mother did have it. If there is an affection that is natural



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If children were rotten to the core, why would [Jesus] use them as a model of spirituality for us?

to humans, then it follows that there is at least one aspect of human nature (what is natural to us) that is good. Maybe we could say in this case that the murderer didn’t have enough of the mother’s kind of human nature.

Going back to the idea that humans are evil from birth, let’s think about Jesus taking a little child to himself while the disciples were disputing over power as he spoke. He tells us that we all need to be like little children. If children were rotten to the core, why would He use them as a model of spirituality for us?

When an infant comes from the womb unaffected by anesthesia, it

immediately begins to search for a human face. Babies come hard-wired for connection. Who else is like that? “My father and I are one,” Jesus tells us. Babies are relational beings in the image of God. Babies seek love from parents. They have built into them the ability to attract adult love and care. When it is given, children naturally respond with love. It is only when parents don’t give them the care and love that they are wired by God to need that things begin to go awry.

I recently worked in family therapy with a mother and daughter. The mother was convinced that her twelve year old daughter had Oppositional Defiant Disorder. This “disorder” is a serious set of behaviors. The girl ran with a gang at school and would jump other girls, beating them up. She would not obey her mother’s commands unless it suited her. She was hanging out with guys who were older than she. On one occasion she stayed out all night. Her own misbehavior was putting her at risk. Children who act this way are often diagnosed, when they are older, with Anti-Social Personality Disorder. Many of the criminals filling our prisons qualify for this diagnosis. These people don’t trust others, have no conscience, and are extremely self-centered. Treatment is difficult.


Was this girl a “bad seed,” rotten from birth? Her mother thought so. She was weary with all the disrespect, and frantic with worry that her daughter would end up in prison or dead. As time passed, I saw that this child came every week to therapy without resisting her mother. She desperately wanted their relationship to work. She did everything I asked her to do. She worked more diligently in the therapy than her mother. She felt remorse for some of the bad things she had done. She was able to trust

me to help her. She was always polite and respectful to me. Sometimes she would give me hugs after our sessions were over to express her appreciation. These behaviors are not associated with Oppositional Defiant Disorder. Her mother, on the other hand, could not find anything good in her daughter,

...this child came every week to therapy without resisting her mother. She desperately wanted their relationship to work.

had difficulty expressing love to her, and resisted the respectful, consistent boundary setting I was attempting to teach her. If I had let her, our sessions would have consisted entirely of complaining about her daughter’s faults.

It wasn’t hard to see how the child grew to be so hateful. Her mother didn’t know how to treat her properly. In spite of it all, the child’s resilience enabled her to respond with love and respect when she was shown the same. Her response is a monument to the ability to love others (natural affection) that God has built into us.

Please notice that the title of this article is a question. That is because I don’t know the final answer to the question that I have posed. The more I look into it, the more complex the issue appears to me. While we do all have a carnal element to our thinking and behavior, it also seems evident that there are good things about us as well. When God created Adam and Eve, we are told he created them in His own image. He said His creation was “very good.” Because He is a good parent, God knows how to focus on the good as well as the bad. 

If I Were President

If I were President, the first thing I would do is resign, because I would probably be impeached anyway. I am sure I would be accused of combining church and state even though technically I wouldn't be.

For if I were President, one of my first acts would be to call a National Day of Prayer and Fasting. It wouldn't be just a National Day of Prayer. We have one of those, and for those few who participate, it has become an hour of prayer and music.

I would make my day a real day of prayer by doing it the old fashioned way: I would add back the fasting part. And I would make it during the week and request all non-essential services be closed so that people could devote themselves to prayer, soul-searching, repentance, and humility. I am sure this would elicit howls of derision from most corners of the nation, which is probably why I would be impeached.

The idea of a national day of fasting has a long national tradition. The Pilgrims were more inclined to call a thanksgiving fast rather than a thanksgiving feast, 1621 being one notable exception to the rule.

In 1746 the French fleet threatened the British settlements in North America. On October 16 of that year, the people of New England called for a day of fasting and prayer. That night the French fleet was destroyed by a dreadful storm at sea. Maybe that was coincidence, and maybe not.

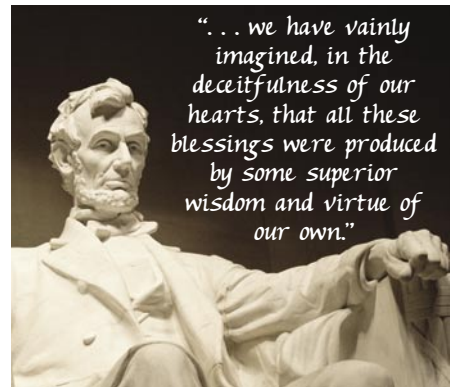
The Continental Congress passed the First Prayer Declaration in 1775, setting aside a day for the colonies to pray and fast together.

Abraham Lincoln and the U.S. Senate

called for a day of humiliation, fasting, and prayer in the proclamation of March 30, 1863. The document proclaimed, "We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of Heaven. We have been preserved, these many years, in peace and prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth and power, as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace, and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we



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have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us! "

It has been a while since the nation has been called to fasting. The proclamation of 1863 seems to describe 2006 America,

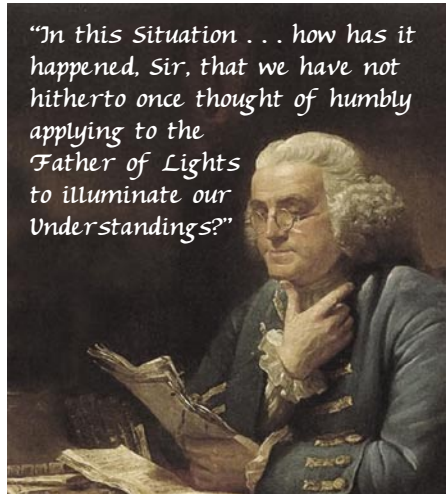
but I don't expect anyone in government today to mandate what the Senate and the President mandated back then.

That doesn't mean you and your church can't call such a day on your own, and in fact that might be the only way this type of thing can get done. It must come from the heart of the grassroots and spread upward if it is to be effective.


It is well to remember the words of Benjamin Franklin in a speech he gave before the Constitutional Convention on June 28, 1787. During the bleakest days of the Convention, when it appeared that the delegates would fail, he stood and said the following words:

"In this Situation of this Assembly, groping, as it were, in the dark to find Political Truth, and scarce able to distinguish it when presented to us, how has it happened, Sir, that we have not hitherto once thought of humbly applying to the Father of Lights to illuminate our Understandings? In the Beginning of the Contest with Britain, when we were sensible of Danger, we had daily Prayers in this Room for the Divine Protection. Our Prayers, Sir, were heard; -- and they were graciously answered. All of us, who were engag'd in the Struggle, must have observed frequent Instances of a superintending Providence in our Favour. To that kind Providence we owe this happy Opportunity of Consulting in Peace on the Means of establishing our future national Felicity. And have we now forgotten that powerful Friend? or do we imagine we no longer need its assistance? I have lived, Sir, a long time; and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this Truth, *that GOD governs in the Affairs of Men*. And if a Sparrow cannot fall to the Ground without his Notice, is it probable that an Empire can rise without his Aid? We have been assured, Sir, in the Sacred

Writings, that 'except the Lord build the House, they labour in vain that build it.' I firmly believe this; and I also believe, that, without his concurring Aid, we shall succeed in this political Building no better than the Builders of Babel; we shall be divided by our little, partial, local Interests, our Projects will be confounded, and we ourselves shall become a Reproach and a By-word down to future Ages. And, what is worse, Mankind may hereafter, from this unfortunate Instance, despair of establishing Government by human Wisdom, and leave it to Chance, War, and Conquest.



"I therefore beg leave to move, that henceforth Prayers, imploring the Assistance of Heaven and its Blessing on our Deliberations, be held in this Assembly every morning before we proceed to Business; and that one or more of the Clergy of this city be requested to officiate in that Service."

Those are good words for all time, including ours. 

We'll Cross That Bridge When We Get to It...

My all-time favorite TV show was and is *M*A*S*H*. Here was a show that did not glorify war and did not make light of it either. It was often both hilarious and dramatic. It showed that war could be “hell” for every one involved, and it also could be insane.

So perhaps my love of *M*A*S*H* prepared me to embrace the classic war movie, *The Bridge on the River Kwai*. I first watched this movie because it was from the director of *Dr. Zhivago*, and featured Alec Guinness before he was “Sir”—and twenty years before he donned the robes of Obi Wan Kenobi in



William Holden as Commander Shears

the original *Star Wars*. I was unprepared for how *Bridge* would be a film that would turn upside down as it progressed. But somehow I was fascinated with it, and liked it enough that it has remained one of my favorite classic films even after two decades.

Bridge opens up with British prisoners of war marching into a Japanese POW camp and whistling the famous “Col. Bogie March” (a hit song which was later featured in other films and commercials). The Japanese colonel, Saito (Sessue Hayakawa), announces to the prisoners that they will be building the Bridge on

the River Kwai while they are at the camp. Along with this he makes mention that all the prisoners will work, including the officers. This is a point of dispute for the British Col. Nicholson (Guinness). He explains that, according to the Geneva Conventions, officers are not to do manual labor. Nicholson will not back down on this issue, nor will Saito. Nicholson and his officers end up being placed in hot little metal boxes to “bake” in the sun until they give up. But Nicholson doesn’t back down, and finally gets his way.

Early on in the movie Col. Nicholson has a discussion with an American prisoner, Commander Shears (William Holden), who has been at the camp for some time. Their conversation sheds light on Nicholson’s state of mind at the beginning:

Commander Shears: *You mean, you intend to uphold the letter of the law, no matter what it costs?*

Colonel Nicholson: *Without law, Commander, there is no civilization.*

Commander Shears: *That’s just my point; here, there is no civilization.*

Colonel Nicholson: *Then we have the opportunity to introduce it.*

Nicholson takes his officers to inspect the work of their men on the bridge, and they find everyone in disarray. Nicholson suggests that a perfect way to instill discipline and boost morale is to actually build the best bridge that they can for the Japanese. And after this, what could have been a story of the triumph of the human spirit in deplorable conditions ends up



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becoming something quite different.

Meanwhile, Commander Shears beats all odds and escapes the POW camp. But through a series of circumstances, a reluctant Shears gets recruited by a British major, Warden (Jack Hawkins), to lead a team back to the site of the Bridge on the River Kwai and blow it up.

Through the rest of the film we watch three of these men become totally focused on their objective with the bridge (Saito: to finish the bridge on time; Nicholson: to build the bridge as a lasting monument to British ingenuity; Warden: to destroy the bridge). It is only the unlikely hero, Shears, who realizes all this is meaningless in the end. The following quote is from Shears talking to Warden:

Major Shears: *You make me sick with your heroics! There's a stench of death about you. You carry it in your pack like the plague. Explosives and L-pills—they go well together, don't they? And with you it's just one thing or the other: destroy a bridge or destroy yourself. This is just a game, this war! You and Colonel Nicholson, you're two of a kind, crazy with courage. For what? How to die like a gentleman ... how to die by the rules—when the only important thing is how to live like a human being.*

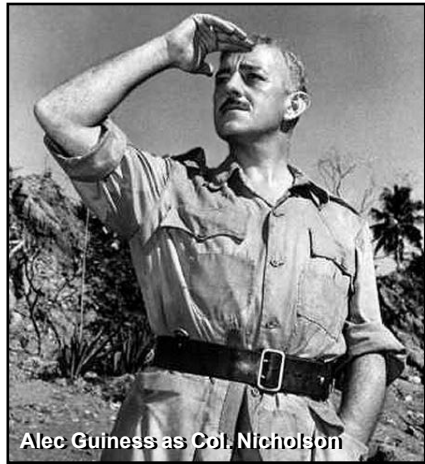
Colonel Nicholson ends up building a better bridge for the Japanese than they themselves could. And he who was so intent on following the Geneva Conventions at the beginning of the film ends up violating them himself as he encourages most of his own sick and injured men to pitch in with the work to finish the bridge. He who was so keen on following the “law” forgot the motivation behind it.

This is not unlike the Pharisees of Jesus' time: “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill

and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. (Mat 23:23 NIV)

Laws were put in place usually for a good reason. But they are useless if we lose sight of what they are there for—to protect people.

This film is epic in scale and scope. The movie's score is amazing. But it is the acting—not dated or marred by stereotype—that sticks with you. The searing performances from the whole



cast are superb. Though there is a lot of action in the latter half, the movie is a psychological drama. It is thought-provoking and worthy of discussion. And though there is some violence, it is quite minimal compared to today's films. If I could recommend one war movie, it would be this one. It shows that war is “hell” and it is insane. The movie's final piece of unforgettable dialogue, uttered by the British prisoners' doctor, sums it all up:

Major Clipton: *Madness! Madness!* [FX](#)

Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. (Rom 13:10)

One Step at a Time

As a young boy, I spent countless hours playing in and around the streams near our home. This often involved getting very wet, but at other times (especially when it was cold), the object was to stay *out* of the water, while still enjoying it. One of the activities I enjoyed was jumping from rock to rock while trying not to fall in. Years later, I would walk to a nearby river with children of my own to share this experience with them.

On one of these occasions, I was encouraging my young son to step out on the rocks and begin to cross the rather shallow river. Though it seemed simple to me, my more cautious son had a different perspective. Yes, I could see a pattern of stones that might lead to our destination, but my son saw raging currents with just a few, rather precarious-looking rocks protruding from the waters. I shouted encouragement—“Just put your foot over on that rock to your right!”—but I could not convince him to take that next step.

It occurred to me that this was a good metaphor for faith. How many times has God clearly shown me the next step I needed to take, only to watch me decline to take it because I could not *see* the entire path through to the end? How often have I focused on the rushing river instead of on the stable rocks (Rock) that God has provided for my crossing?

We remember the story of Peter

walking on water. (Mat 14:22-31) Jesus told him to walk and, focused on the Rock, he did walk—*one step at a time*. Once he

began to focus on the water however, he got wet. God is gracious to us. He has provided The Rock, and He shows us the next steps to take in our walk with Him across the rivers of life. As long as we stay focused on The Rock and take the steps that have been shown to us, we are well on our way. If, on the other hand, we

focus on a particular river and worry how we'll ever find enough rocks to cross it, we may never get started.

Since my son could not *see* his way across the river, he was unwilling to take the next step. We should expect a child to walk by sight, but a Christian is to *walk by faith*. (1 Cor 5:7) At times I have been moved by the Spirit to commit to a particular service, and I have been unwilling to get started! Why? I *see* all my obligations. I *see* the demands on my time. I

see the obstacles. How will I ever get all the way across? Even though God has provided The Rock and given me the opportunity to take a step, I have sometimes declined because I was focused on the water—*walking by sight*.

I should have looked to Abraham—a good example of *walking by faith*. “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he



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“We should expect a child to walk by sight, but a Christian is to walk by faith.”

went out, not knowing where he was going. (Heb 11:8 NKJV)

Abraham did not need to see every step of his journey before he took the first ones. This is faith. This is the faith by which a Christian should walk.

If the Spirit is leading you to do something, *get started!* Take that first, perhaps small, step! You don't have to do it all. The next steps are up to God. You may not even be the one who will take them. Look at Abraham. Think about all that resulted from his faithful life.

... Holiness Continued from page 20


*The grace of God has many facets. (I Pet 4:10) One of those facets is discipline:

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches [often translated disciplines] us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. (Tit 2:11-14)

The church in Laodicea tried "treading water." They had a good reputation in the world, but the reality of their spiritual state was stagnant and disgusting. (Rev 3:14-17)


If we want our spiritual waters to be living and flowing, clean and refreshing, we must be actively living righteous lives. This includes our motives and our attitudes, and not just whatever we are not doing, but the good we are doing. (Rom 6:15-23)

Yet, in one sense, all he did was to leave his home and have a son! Many others—including you and me—have carried on the work that he started. *The important thing was that he started.* That is what took the faith for which he is still known.

God is working in your life. He has given you talents and gifts to use in His service. Do you use them? God's will for you is accomplished *one step at a time*, so follow Abraham, walk by faith, and *take that next step!* 

"Ever-increasing wickedness" is where the currents of this world forcefully flow. If you drift, or try to tread water, you will flow with it. Obedience to the discipline of God's grace is the effort you do to resist that flow toward wickedness. Both the righteousness given by Christ and the righteous acts you do will lead to increasing holiness.

Therefore, prepare your mind for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy." (I Pet 1:13-16)

Don't just go with the flow or tread water. Swim against the currents of this world toward the holiness God commands. 

**The author wishes to acknowledge Jerry Bridges, author of the books "The Pursuit of Holiness" and "The Discipline of Grace" for insights included in this article.*

The Tip of the Iceberg—or the Cornerstone?



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***But the fruit of the Spirit is love,
joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness,
goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-
control. Against such there is no law.***

(Gal 5:22-23)

For over a year now I have been writing in *Faith Networks* about the various fruits of the spirit. It has taken me a while to work up the courage to approach the fruit of love. Love is an immense subject that could be covered in a thousand articles because it is the essence of what God Almighty is. (1 Joh 4:8) Let's look through just one window.

My son wanted a book from the public library recently, and because of his work schedule wasn't able to get there. He asked if I would be going to the library. I hadn't planned to go and right away started thinking about everything else that needed to be done. Could I spare the time and effort? I decided to make the time and the effort because, like most parents, I try to fulfill my children's requests if they are reasonable. We do this because we love them, and love is often about sacrifice.

We see this aspect of love clearly in the parable of the Good Samaritan. A man sacrifices time, resources, and perhaps even his own safety to help someone he doesn't even know. One of the amazing things about this parable is that it follows on the heels of a question to Jesus from a Jewish expert in the law. This particular expert asks what he must do to inherit eternal

life. Jesus' response is another question. "How do you read it?"

The man goes on to quote two separate scriptures.

Deuteronomy 6:5 "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength."

Leviticus 19:18 "...you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord".

Jesus told him, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live." From this illustration it becomes clear that we are to sacrifice our very lives to God and serve mankind where we see need. Paul puts it this way: "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to

"Sometimes when you sacrifice something precious, you're not really losing it. You're just passing it on to someone else."

all, especially to those who are of the household of faith. (Gal 6:10)

A line from Mitch Albom's book *The Five People You Meet in Heaven* reads this way: "Sometimes when you sacrifice something precious, you're not really losing it. You're just passing it on to someone else." This principle is pointed

out vividly by Christ's sacrifice.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (Joh 3:16)

"In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is **love**, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." (1 Joh 4:9-10)

Christ did not lose eternity by sacrificing himself for us. "But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God." (Heb 10:12) He not only lives

forever, but his death allows us the same opportunity. This sacrifice should be extended to others through our "living sacrifice." (Rom 12:1) "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." (1 Joh 4:11)

It is easy in this busy world to overlook or ignore the needs of those around us. Whether we are looking at family, fellow believers, or the world at large, we need to be looking for opportunities to sacrifice. These living sacrifices, whether big or small, are not in vain. Or as Charles Du Bos put it, "The important thing is this: to be able at any moment to sacrifice what we are for what we could become." Love. [FN](#)

2007 Spring Events

Gatlinburg Young Adult/Teen Retreat, February 16-19

Young Adults and teens are invited to a retreat in the mountains of Tennessee during Presidents Weekend beginning Friday evening February 16 and ending Monday noon February 19. You'll experience inspiring discussion groups with outstanding leaders such as Bill Jacobs, Pam Dewey, Chris and Lisa Gregor, Guy Swenson and others. In addition there will be excellent music and good fellowship. Cost is \$35 per person \$50 per couple; includes food and lodging. Sponsored by Churches of God, Cincinnati & Lexington. Check the web site at www.cogcincinnati.org or call Jim O'Brien at 513-755-0040 to reserve your place.

Knoxville Congregation hosts Dr. Bacchiocchi, April 20-21

Plans are underway for the Seventh Day Christian Assembly and Bible Sabbath Ministries to host Sabbatarian author and scholar, Dr. Samuele Bacchiocchi, in Knoxville, Tennessee. Presentations include seminars on the Sabbath and The Second Advent of Messiah.

Information at web sites:
www.seventhdaychristian.net
www.biblesabbathministries.net.

Contacts:
Pastor Ken Swiger: sdcaorg@aol.com.
Dr. Bruce Horne:
info@biblesabbathministries.com.



The Simple Faith About Holiness

Swimming lessons include learning to tread water. This technique doesn't get you anywhere, but is useful. It keeps your head above water so you can rest without drowning.

Sometimes I have felt as though I were just "treading water" in my life as a Christian. I wasn't getting anywhere; and the currents were taking me further from Christ instead of nearer.

The currents in this world are relentless. Unless we actively resist, we will be carried further away from the holiness God wants us to train and strain to achieve. The good news is we do not have to do it alone with whatever strength and will power we might possess. God gives us both the desire and strength in abundance. (Phi 2:12-13)

Continued on page 17



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