

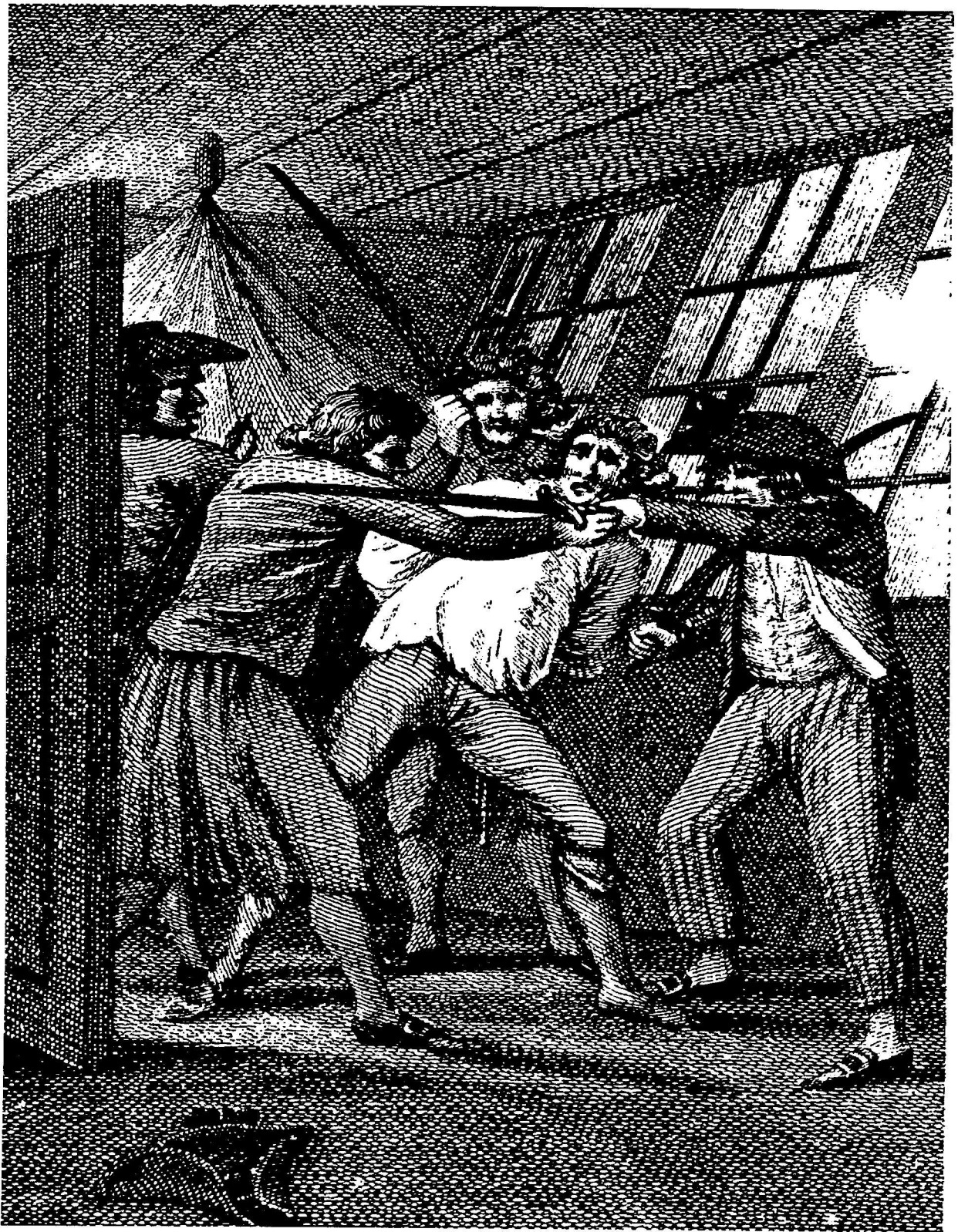
GOOD NEWS

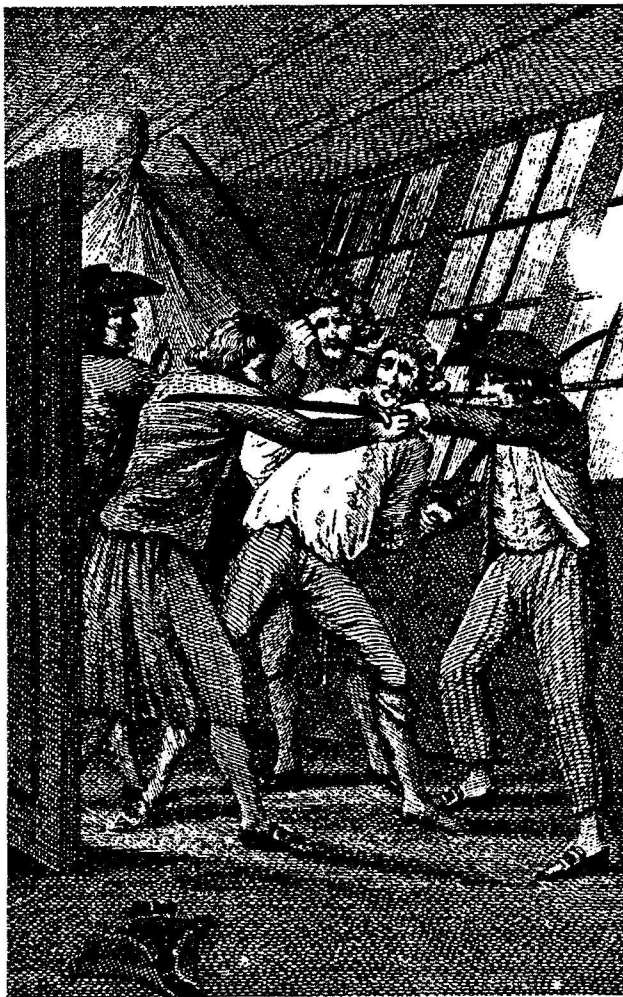
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Our cover: "The Pirates Seizing Captain Bligh" by Collings (n.d.). Engraving for the *Carlton House Magazine*. From the Rex Nan Kivell Collection. Courtesy, National Library of Australia. Reproduced with permission.

Editorial

"Breadfruit Bligh," they called him.

He was a bundle of contradictions: a man of principle, yet a tyrant; famous yet infamous; admired yet abhorred.

A brilliant navigator and natural scientist, Bligh's strong will, violent temper and foul tongue precipitated two major insurrections: the Bounty Mutiny (1789) and the Rum Rebellion (NSW, 1808).

Modern Captain Blighs are not hard to find. There is one in almost every office, every school and in many homes.

The paradox of man's conflicting endowments is celebrated in the world's great literature. Almost two millennia before Stevenson published *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, the apostle Paul penned the following words: "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing that I hate.... So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom 7:15:21-24).

Who will deliver? The question is answered in the following verse: "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Rob Cooper

Paul Porter

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THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT

Desmond Ford



Ours is a post-Christian world. Every forty years the proportion of professing Christians around the globe is 10 percent less.

Yet Christ predicted that in the last generation "this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come" (Mt 24:14). How can this be? How can the apathy of nonbelievers be stirred into conscious, clamoring need?

One entire book of Scripture is devoted to the answer. In the slim volume called *The Acts of the Apostles* lies the dynamite which will yet blast the doddering inefficiency of the church and shake the spiritual languor of the world.

A Promise and a Program

The book begins with a promise and a program. "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

This verse not only comprehends a table of contents for the book of Acts - which opens with the gospel being pro-

claimed at Jerusalem and closes with its announcement in Rome - it is also the evangelistic charter for the Christian church. The book itself is the church's missionary manual. The book of Acts is the only unfinished book of Scripture. Read the last verses and note how they leave you dangling in the air.

Why? Because the task discussed in its pages is not yet completed. The real conclusion to Acts will be written in our day in letters of fire, the fire of the Holy Spirit igniting again the gospel flame he lighted at Pentecost.

John's Last Story a Picture of Acts' Success

John's Gospel (which immediately precedes Acts) closed with the story of the apostles unprofitably fishing all night. In the morning, Christ, standing on the shore half hidden by mists, turned their failure into unprecedented success. The empty net was suddenly filled to the breaking point.

This glorious event is a fitting introduction to Acts. Henceforth, Christ would no longer be visible in the fishing vessel of the church. He would stand on heaven's shore. His

voice would be conveyed by the wind of the Spirit.

Yet as his followers would obey his instructions, success would surely come. The gospel commission would be fulfilled, and the gospel net filled to overflowing.

The Place of Luke's Acts

Luke, the Gentile physician, was God's chosen scribe for the account of Pentecost and of the early Christian church. The introduction to Luke's earlier book, the Gospel, had spoken of "all that Jesus began to do and teach" (Acts 1:1). Now the chronicle is continued, and we are told of all Jesus continued to do by the operation of his Spirit in the first believers.

What a fitting introduction to the rest of the New Testament is this second book by Luke! It describes the formation of the churches to which the epistles were written, and it introduces the chief author of the remaining part of the New Testament. It is this book which describes the conversion and missionary labors of Paul.

Luke's book shows that it was the Spirit of Christ which directed the acts of the early leaders of the church. The book, therefore, prepares us to

acknowledge the guidance of that same Spirit in the teachings of those leaders found in the epistles that follow Acts.

Flashes of Victory Light

A famous Greek play by Aeschylus gives a magnificent description of the fire signals by which the hero made known to his queen the capture of distant Troy. The victory flame flashed from mountaintop to mountaintop, leaping over the seas and plains till its radiance lighted the city of Argos. Even so does Luke portray beacon lights of Christianity flashing from Jerusalem to Antioch, from Antioch to Ephesus to Troas to Philippi - from thence to Athens and Corinth until finally the holy flame is kindled in the very palace of the Caesars.

The Light of the world has dawned in a tiny Judean village and brightened the hills of Galilee. Then apparently it has been eclipsed at Calvary. Now Acts shows that it has not gone out at all, as its friends have feared. Instead it flickers and flares and flashes till its brilliance gleams across the Aegean, and fills Asia and Greece and Italy with such a light as has never shone before on land or sea.

Message and Method

Both the message and the method by which the early church "turned the world upside down" in a single generation is presented clearly by Luke in Acts. Both comprise the pattern which, when copied, will enable the church to complete its task, and help put an end to the scandal of sin, sorrow, and death.

The Message

The message is repeatedly said to be the gospel of Jesus Christ. Not psychology, not

politics, not ethics, not good advice, but the good news that God conquered sin through the ministry, death and resurrection of his Son, Jesus. This is the theme that set the world alight. The apostles "did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ" (Acts 5:42).

But what was this preaching of Christ? Did the apostles proclaim merely the demands of the Sermon on the Mount? Did they present only Christ's holy character and matchless life?

If this had been the case, then Christ himself - in the days of his Judean ministry - should have gathered his followers by the thousands. His later preachers would have gathered only hundreds, inasmuch as the reality would have been more powerful than the mere record.

But the opposite is true. It was the disciples who won thousands, not Jesus. Why? Because the apostles preached the significance of Christ's life, death, and resurrection in a way that had not been possible before Calvary. They told of the forgiveness of sins, of the resurrection of the body, and of life everlasting all made possible by the atoning death of God's Son.

Listen to their words, words which when proclaimed afresh will recover for the church her ancient power:

"God exalted him....as Leader and Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins" (Acts 5:31).

"Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" (2:38).

"Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out" (3:19).

"Let it be known to you therefore, brethren, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him every one that believes is freed from every-

thing from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses" (13:38,39).

"To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins" (10:43).

Attained or Obtained?

The apostles saw that, objectively, Christ is all; and that subjectively, faith is all. Salvation and acceptance with God is not something we attain but something we *obtain*. Salvation is a gift to be received because of the infinite sacrifice of God on our behalf.

"One has died for all" (2 Cor 5:14). Because Christ represented all people as the second Adam, his death is counted as our death, his resurrection is counted as our resurrection. We are free from guilt and condemnation in him. We are "complete in him" (Col 2:10 KJV), "accepted in the beloved" (Eph 1:6 KJV), because "when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son" (Rom 5:10 KJV).

Therefore Paul wrote: "May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Col 1:11-14).

This was the message of the conquering church of apostolic times: God has delivered humanity. Sin has been atoned for. Our acceptance of so great salvation by the empty hand of faith brings a perfect standing with heaven, and a new heart and life.

The Method

What about the method by

which the church spread the good news? The answer is given seventy-one times in this book, for that is the number of times the Holy Spirit is referred to.

Acts is the record of One who could not be given fully to the church till Christ was glorified (see Jn 7:37-39). What someone has called "the irresistible might of weakness" is possible only through the ministry of God's Spirit. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of Hosts" (Zec 4:6).

This ascension gift of Christ, this promise of the Father, this power of the resurrection, is the secret of the progress of the Christian church.

A Record of the Activities of the Holy Spirit

Dr Scroggie says: "Thus 'the key is hanging on the door' when we read at the very commencement of Acts the significant expression 'through the Holy Spirit' (1:2). All so-called Christian work which is not 'through the Holy Spirit' falls barren and lifeless to the ground."

Receiving the Spirit

How did believers in the first century receive the Holy Spirit? What did they have to do?

The second question reminds us of the natural error of the sinful heart, thinking that the gift of God can be bought (see Acts 8:20). The Gospels warn us against this dead-end route: "Then they said to him, 'What must we do, to be doing the work of God?' Jesus answered them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent'" (Jn 6:28,29).

The teaching of Acts echoes Jesus' teaching in the Gospels.

After Peter had preached Christ in the power of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, multitudes were convinced and cried out, "What shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). This is the same emphasis on human works which tragically reverberates throughout Scripture, ever since Adam and Eve sought to hide their nakedness before their Maker by their own tailoring.

Peter's counsel rebukes the human tendency to earn righteousness.

"Peter said to them, 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off'" (Acts 2:38,39).

Word and Spirit

Only perfect obedience to God's immutable law could earn the priceless treasure of the indwelling God, but such obedience is possible only to one in whom God already swells. Thus Adam and Eve, made to be temples of the Spirit, could fulfill the law so long as they looked to God.

But not so sinners. They must receive the Spirit as a gift from Christ, who has kept the law perfectly on behalf of the guilty race. Those who believe (receive) the truth concerning Christ's atoning death are endued with the Spirit as they assent to the Word of God.

For example, Acts 10:44 declares: "The Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word." From the time of creation on (see Gn 1:2,3) the Spirit and the Word have worked together, and "what therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder" (Mt 19:6).

Would you be filled with heaven's presence and power? Study, believe, and practice the

Scriptures. This is the only way to victory for individuals and for the church as a whole.

The Spirit is Our Greatest Wish Come True

A legend tells of a boy who was assured by a super-natural visitor, "Make a wish - any wish - and your wish shall be granted." The boy responded, "My one wish is that all my later wishes might also come true." A comparison of Matthew 7:11 and Luke 11:13 shows that the gift of the Spirit is the richest treasure of heaven, bringing all other treasures in its train.

Are we surprised at the riches of the grace of God who confers upon us one unspeakable gift after another? He has given us his Son as our substitute and representative. He has given us his Spirit as our advocate and comforter. All of us who accept Christ have the Son of God as our righteousness in heaven, and the Spirit as the continual presence of God beside us on earth, sufficient for every situation.

Since Pentecost, the Spirit has been as truly present on earth in every believer as Christ was physically present in the days of his earthly ministry. When the church awakens to this glorious truth, the conquest of the world for Christ will be speedily accomplished.

Blessed is that Christian and that church which learns from the book of Acts the only effectual message and method for evangelizing the world.□

(All Scripture not otherwise noted is Revised Standard Version.)

Footnote

1. Know Your Bible, vol. 2, p.76.

Desmond Ford is founder of GNCM.



OCCUPATION: "CABBAGE"

Lynlea Rodger

The problems facing young mothers today are real and familiar to them. They have been documented elsewhere however (although not always well) and I do not want to concentrate on the problems in this article. Rather I want to look at the positive and creative opportunities that the mothering of young children can provide in terms of general insight, self-knowledge and spiritual growth.

I consider it necessary to begin by locating some of the problems before moving onto some alternatives, but invite anyone who is so inclined to skip the first section in favour of the more positive aspects of mothering developed later in this article.

Some of the problems

Many of the problems of modern motherhood have been

extensively discussed in feminist writings. The following is a litany which young mothers are already familiar with, often far too familiar. First, there is the battle against loneliness, yet never being alone. ("I want to sit on your knee!" an aggrieved two-year-old shouts outside the toilet door). Then there are the physical fatigue and boredom that accompany tiring, yet repetitious, menial tasks and the emotional strains older children and sibling rivalry bring to family living. (Occupation: "cabbage" the new mother writes on her census form). Then, too, there is low self-esteem because of low value given to mothers by others. ("What do you do?" The reply: "I'm a mother," is one of the greatest party conversation stoppers I know.)

Moreover, "being good with children" is no guarantee of stardom. Female professionals (doctors, nurses, teachers, etc.) may face particular difficulties in coming to terms with their new roles, the loss of esteem by others and the expectation by their friends that they will inevitably cope better than anyone else.

The problems facing mothers with young children at home are not only these personal and private ones. We must move and work in a social environment that places low value on the work we do (rearing the next generation) and in a workplace (i.e. the community) that is not geared to the needs of young children, nor is it especially welcoming to them.

For example, a young mother pushing a pram, and perhaps with a toddler in tow – if there are footpaths at all – has to negotiate kerbs and ob-

structions (e.g. doorways). She must travel on buses not designed to accommodate her, shop in supermarkets where there may be no space for a pram nor trolley for a baby, and undertake the family's business dealings in shopping centres where there is nowhere to sit down and no place for children to play in relative safety. Shopping centres are a good example of how the priority of planners is given to cars rather than people, and where the safety and enchantment of our children is of such little importance that it is scarcely considered at all.

What message is given to our children in all this? First I believe there is the image of the adult (i.e. the real) world as the forbidden fruit – desirable to the eyes but not to be touched. Children therefore are condemned to frustration, boredom and isolation in many contexts of our adult-oriented world.

Secondly, there is the experience of exploitation. Inasmuch as they are considered at all, children are catered for as consumers and not participants, and are actively encouraged to manipulate their parents to buy. My two-year-old son, happily munching his way through a floor-to-ceiling display of Easter eggs in Big W, is a small example of what I mean.

The community's relationships with children in terms of planning (if thought of at all) are in material terms, not spiritual. By and large these relationships are not insightful as to what children are like and what their needs are. This situation does not change as the community's children get older – witness the typical lack of activities and amenities for

adolescents in new housing areas or meaningful activity which is free for young unemployed.

On top of all these difficulties, mothers have to face these problems on their own. Few others wish to be involved for fear of the obligation for action and change which would be placed on them.

Ways of coping

While the pressures of time, fatigue, business, boredom and loneliness affect all mothers to some degree, mothering can provide certain amounts of time and flexibility. Interruptions and the unexpected notwithstanding, mothers can set their own task-goals, priorities and timing. This was a luxury which my own former professional role did not allow me to do.

Feeding time, menial time, watching and supervising time, even school time can all provide opportunities when we can practise idling with God. The frustration of the inevitable interruptions need not prevent us from the discipline of starting.

Let me give an example of what I mean. When our small son got to the age and stage when he needed my presence for a short time as he went to sleep at night, I fidgeted and wriggled and hoped he would hurry so I could get on with getting the evening meal etc., etc. Then instead I started to use this ten minutes or so to pray for his welfare or my own mothering or his future relationship with God; and this time became precious rather than resented, an opportunity rather than a frustration.

Daytime play and sleep-times can be taken up by the

inevitable washing, cleaning and tidying but some of it can be used for a quiet cup of coffee and a browse through the newspaper, a time for prayer, for reading a novel or for talking with a friend on the telephone. It is by turning one's back on the "what-could-be-done jobs," which are always there anyway, and, instead, deliberately turning attention to recreative activity so that spiritual reserves are restocked. My own experience suggests that the benefits gained far outweigh any guilt feelings about the jobs left undone.

Mothering and servanthood

By servanthood I definitely do not mean servitude. Just as Jesus in washing his disciples' feet gave us the example of humility, not servility, so at our best moments mothering is a service which frees not binds us and our children.

Childhood is a time of struggle between the drives for independence and the need for dependence, and the frustration associated with this. In the course of their growing our children embarrass us in public and in front of our friends; they humiliate our adult prejudices about the world; hurt our personal pride and exploit our fears.

Being a parent puts us in a place of stress. We are called to be an arbiter in the midst of tension, a peacemaker feeling often enough too poor in spirit to be adequate to the task. Inasmuch as we are open to learn, motherhood invites us to practise patience, tolerance and self-control – the fruits of God's Spirit.

"I hate being a mother!" a

friend of mine announced recently. "Why?" her husband asked, "You are so good at it." "It goes on and on," was the reply.

The despair of my friend was that the serving goes on and on. Being needed and needing to be available to our children is a commitment which is always there. Motherhood is not self-serving, not for self-fulfilment, but is about serving others. Parenthood is like the Gospel: its focus is outside ourselves as we are pushed to our limits and beyond.

As mothers we are often practitioners against our will and inclination for patience, gentleness and self-control, or the fruits of God's spirit. It is in coming to terms with our failures and acknowledging our strengths that we grow in our capacity to love and endure, and to become lovers more in the way that God is.

Being children of God

Jesus said: "He who has eyes to see let him see, and ears to hear let him hear." With respect to mothers this challenges me to learn what potential mothering has to offer in developing Christian insight and wisdom.

I am reminded of Jesus' analogy when he invited his followers to receive the Kingdom of Heaven like a little child. Children are open to experience, to delight, to pain, to anger and to joy. They are deeply and implicitly trusting of their care givers, easy forgivers and forgetters of hurts. If we look with seeing eyes, their example will increase our self-knowledge. Their way of living challenges us to be more like the loving parent which

God is in his relationships with us – open and tender, an easy forgiver, no respecter of persons, an even-handed dispenser of justice (ah!) – with a love which is sensitive, unconditioned and gentle.

So this stage of our lives can be a precious one for mothers, a time to explore the qualities of God – in both male and female aspects – through the eyes of children and with the insights their struggles and experience give to our own.

Children's fear of the dark, of dying or being maimed, their curiosity regarding sexuality, their thirst for knowledge ("why, Mummy, why?") are all examples of areas where parents offer direction and example to their children and where we may learn and grow at the same time.

I find the possibilities of learning through children particularly encouraging in the battlefield of the daily grind of having my patience tested to its limits, my rules and reasons constantly challenged, my plans disordered and inconvenienced to meet the needs and wishes of others. My pride is often hurt by the disobedient, aggressive or negligent actions of children. In seeing their sins and failings I am reminded again of my own. In learning to give forgiveness I am also learning to receive it for myself.

Parenting is God's calling

There is so much around us in the world today and in our churches which teaches us that it is money that makes the world go around and that paid employment is not only the road to economic survival but the only sure course to per-

sonal worth and self-esteem as well.

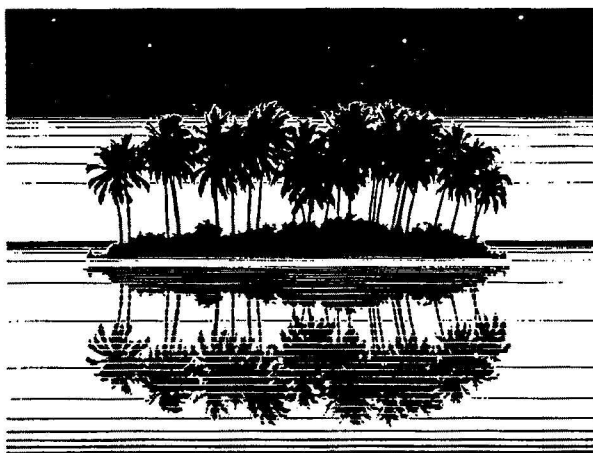
The view of the Bible is contrary to this. Its teaching is that we work to live, and do not live to work. Our calling is never expressed in terms of choices of paid employment, professional advancement or personal fulfilment: rather the Bible talks of our calling in terms of serving the believing community and *fulfilling* our family obligations and responsibilities.

The parental roles receive little recognition within the church and there is not much help to encourage us to meet this calling. The needs of mothers are especially ignored in terms of support, encouragement and Christian teaching.

The liberty we share in Christ embraces parenting also. Success is not dependent on the product and it is not fair to judge ourselves or others on the basis of how well the children perform academically or socially. We are training our children to be responsible for themselves, within society and within the care of God. In Christian terms success should be judged on children's ability to love, to seek just relationships, to make mature, independent decisions – not how well they can climb the socio-economic ladder.

In the end our calling is to accept our children with all their strengths, failings and limitations without condemnation – in the same way that God accepts us in love. □

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Eremos Newsletter*



IN OTHER PEOPLE'S SHOES

Keith Sandars

"Package Deals." Daily the media present us with an opportunity to become involved and benefit from a seemingly incredible deal. There is no more prolific area than The Travel Industry. We are invited to share and save: "Come to Hawaii - the playground of the Pacific." How often have we been enticed by this invitation of a Travel Agent's advertisement? And what is more, how many of us have been lured to go and see for ourselves? For Hawaii does conjure up a mental picture of tropical luxury, surf and sun, exotic foods and a gaiety of life and enchanting island music. In Honolulu, this image may be true, but for the greater part of the Hawaiian group of Islands life is very much different—simple, unsophisticated and peaceful. One of the quietest islands is that of Molokai, some fifty miles south-east of Oahu on which Honolulu is built.

Over a hundred years ago, disease-ridden lepers from the far-flung Pacific Islands were expelled and transported to Molokai to eke out the remaining years of a doomed life. Here there was no water, no shelter, indeed no hope. In 1867, hope came to this tragic corner of Hawaii. A young Belgian priest, Joseph de Veuster, was moved to go and minister to the needs of the six hundred lepers who were banished there. He in a Christ-like manner identified himself with the leper colony, and through his efforts and inspiration, water systems were constructed, houses were erected and a church and school were built.

Medical help was given and to many faith and hope were restored. The leper people revered their Father in God and Damien was a name to be remembered. Daily Father Damien prayed for these lepers. At the age of forty his prayer was changed to the shock of all at Molokai and abroad: "Lord have mercy on US lepers." Damien had contracted the dreaded disease himself. Now he was truly one of them. Despite the offer and the opportunity to return to Belgium and a certain cure, Father Damien declined. For the remaining eight years of his life, he laboured with those whom he loved at Molokai and eventually was buried amongst them.

The world remembers with admiration and gratitude the work and witness of Father Damien. What was the key to this man's mission, his calling to minister to the lepers? The answer is found in one word. COMPASSION. Damien was a man of Compassion.

To show compassion simply means "to suffer along with," or as someone has expressed it more aptly, "to put yourself in another person's shoes." It is in this position that one is able to experience the feelings of others. Compassion is no passive virtue for it demands not only a feeling for someone or something, but in addition, the determination to do something practical about it.

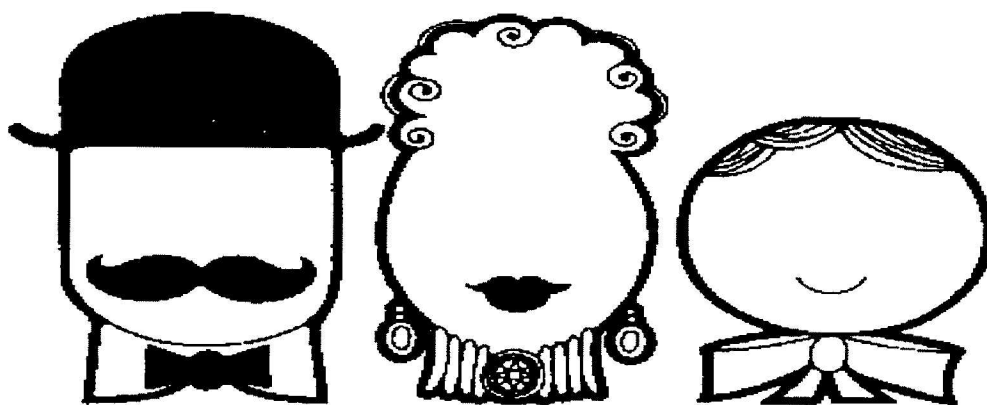
One of the great reasons behind the coming of Jesus Christ into the world as a Man was to reveal to people of all ages the

Compassion of God. God so loved mankind that His great desire was to sustain and save him. Our Lord expressed this in his acts of compassion. Christ not only felt for the sick, the handicapped, the destitute, the outcast and the needy, but He did something about assisting them in a practical and constructive way.

Compassion is one of the great needs of the world and in particular, our own community. Most of us are so busy thinking about ourselves, our own needs and problems, that we tend to lose sight of the needs of those less fortunate about us. We become oblivious of the poor and needy, the hungry and the destitute, the sick and the maimed. In fact, we rarely try to put ourselves in their shoes. Those of us who have so much and enjoy the comforts and luxuries of life have much to be thankful for. The best possible way that we can express our gratitude to God and those about us who contribute to our welfare is to be compassionate. Not just feeling sorry for those in need, but doing something practical to help them in their predicament, either by gifts, companionship, or the helping hand.

May we be forgiven for the times when we have failed to show our compassion and may we each be given wisdom and strength to reveal this Christian virtue in our daily life. □

Keith Sandars was for many years Master of Trinity Grammar Preparatory School, Strathfield, NSW.



Changing From a Nobody to a Somebody

Gordon Moyes

In my first ministry in inner Melbourne, I had a number of young criminals on probation to me. Most of them had demonstrated violent, anti-social behaviour. They had broken into homes, sold stolen property, gone for joyrides and wrecked other people's cars, and smashed up public property.

Most of them came from a large, concrete housing estate, had received little benefit from their education, possessed inadequate family support, and had the same problem: they had a low image of themselves yet at the same time wanted other people to take notice of them. So they committed very obvious crimes to draw attention to themselves. This meant they were always caught, giving them even greater public exposure, and when the local papers wrote horrifying stories of their vandalism and destruction, they were delighted!

Joe stopped at the public phone boxes outside the post

office and with his bare fist, smashed every pane of glass. Reg stole cars, stripped their parts and sold them to panel-beaters. Leigh took the mufflers from his car and drove it past the police station making the loudest of noises. Barry, at fourteen knifed a man in the stomach and ripped open his whole rib-cage leaving him dead on the floor. They would do anything to attract attention, even if they had to pay for it in gaol. They were among my first parish.

In an attempt to help rehabilitate these young men, I produced some dramas and wrote some contemporary scripts. Their concept of drama had been destroyed by their experience of school plays. I had a difficult task, until I said to Trevor, one of the leaders of the group: "I want you to play the part of a crippled boy in this drama. He has a twisted leg. It is a very important part. In fact he is the key character." "You really mean that?" "Sure, you will be the leading actor."

He suddenly turned to his mates and shouted across the church hall: "Hey everybody, I'm going to be somebody!"

Trevor never realised the implications of what he was saying. The part he played was that of a boy who was physically crippled and who let his disability twist his whole outlook upon life and destroy all his relationships. Punishment would only make his behaviour worse. That boy required healing before he could be right with the world. When his twisted disability was healed, he had a new self-image and a new sense of his personal significance. Now he was not a nobody, but a somebody. Then he made a contribution to society. When he was right inside, he became right with the world.

The parallel was close to the boys. Gradually they began to see that through faith in Jesus Christ, they could be renewed. Their twisted lives could be healed, and they could find a new self-image and sense

of personal significance. Trevor was the first of all of those boys to commit his life to Jesus Christ, and to be baptised. They were no longer nobodies. They were somebodies! They were sons of God, right with God and consequently right with the world.

So many advocate tackling the problem of destructive people in society the wrong way. They advocate more punishment, greater restriction and increased intimidation. To the person with low self-esteem these condemnations and threats only reinforce their own opinion of themselves and drive them into further attention-gaining behaviour. Ultimately we never improve society by stressing better standards of behaviour until we improve the person within. All social improvement comes from moral commitment.

That is why the two tables of the Ten Commandments are in the order they are: we are to put God first, worship Him alone, not take the name of the Lord in vain, worship Him weekly - then we will be able to honour our parents, respect human life, fulfil sexual relationships and not steal, lie or envy others. If we are right inside, we will behave correctly. If our motivation is right, our actions will be right. Jesus put them in the right order: "The most important commandment is 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second most important commandment is this: 'Love your neighbour as you love yourself.'" (Mark 12:29-30).

All attempts to put social behaviour right without first changing the hearts of people are doomed to failure. That is why atheistic communism which tries to build a society without first renewing the people spiritually is a failure,

and will always be a failure. You cannot have a better world without better people.

Hence, what we do in helping people become new in Christ, in building a new self-image and new relationships stemming from new life within, is fundamental to the future of our society.

That is why our concept of evangelism accompanying social welfare is correct. Huge amounts of Government money are wasted improving social environments then allowing the same people to go back into their world without changing them inside. This must always fail.

You can clean up a derelict alcoholic with soap and shaving cream, but he will remain an alcoholic still. You can dry out a drug addict by restricting his supply but he remains a drug addict still until his inner cravings are filled with something greater than the drugs. Cleaning people on the outside makes no difference until you deal with the inside. Jesus could have been speaking to contemporary secularists when He said: "You hypocrites! You clean the outside of your cup while the inside is full of what you have obtained by violence and selfishness. Clean what is inside the cup first, and then the outside will be clean too!" (Matthew 23:25)

We need to feel significant

People do not have equal opportunities or abilities, but they have an equal need to feel significant. You see it in children at play when each wants to be the captain, and how each boasts that his father is more important than everyone else's father; and even the child who is an orphan fantasises that his father is head of the army and overseas on an important mission!

You see it in adults who surround themselves with pos-

session as status symbols, trying to create the image of personal significance through the abundance of their possessions.

You see it in some older people who seek reassurance of their continuing significance from their adult children by saying such things as, "Never mind me, I'm only your poor old mother. You go ahead and enjoy yourselves. Nobody cares for me." That is the desperate cry of people seeking reassurance of their significance.

You see it in people suffering personal inferiority who over-compensate by grasping for power and authority. The short, failed paperhanger who never rose above an army lieutenant organised huge rallies where he could shout to the masses: "Look at me. I'm somebody!" and the crowds shouted back: "Heil Hitler! Heil Hitler!"

We try to feel significant

Our need is simple, but the methods of fulfilling it are complex. My street lads got a feeling of significance when they indulged in attention-getting behaviour. So does the woman who goes to a party in an absurdly low-cut dress. Parties are the environment where many people exaggerate their behaviour, lie about their achievements, and compete with one another over their personal significance. One woman, tired by the strain of people constantly trying to make impressions on others, sank wearily down on a couch next to a little man who looked uncomfortable as he mopped his brow. "Thank heavens I've found somebody who's a nobody!" she said.

Others feel significant when they surround themselves with social props, trying to find significance through the status symbols of our generation. Others build up their sense of personal significance while

magnifying difficulties they have overcome, or minimising resources they had at their disposal, both tactics designed to magnify their own contribution. Whatever the method, we each need to feel we are a somebody rather than a nobody.

We can be significant

It is possible to realise our own true significance, but it does not come by all our efforts to pump ourselves up. That only exhausts and makes us look ridiculous. We become frogs in danger of exploding ourselves. Significance is discovered when we realise our own inadequacy and utter dependence upon others and especially God.

Lorene was a young teenager in school who was very withdrawn from other students. She was well behaved, but completely isolated. She had bad face eczema and acne, and her English teacher found that she was indulging in heavy drinking of alcohol alone in her bedroom. The teacher, Morris Morrison, spent time with her, helping her to understand poetry. She began to respond and co-operate when she read two lines from Emily Dickinson: "I'm Nobody! Who are you? Are you - Nobody - too?" In discovering that others were lonely and feeling insignificant she found solace, and the start of recovery.

When we realise that we are in fact nobodies, we have enough room inside of ourselves for God to do His work. He made us. He loves us. And He wants us to be His very own.

Our importance lies not in our possessions, our achievements or our status. Kick away all of our props, our home, our job, our stimulants, our friendships, our status, our degrees and honors, accomplishments and awards and what is there

left? Only what we are! Only the significance that God places upon us counts.

We have become Somebody, not by what we possess, but by Who possesses us. We become a Somebody not because of our birth, but because of our re-birth. We become a Somebody, not because of what we hold, but because of Who holds us.

We are creatures of God, made by Him. But through redemption we are recreated, and born anew, so that we are no longer creatures of God but His sons. We have been adopted into the family of God and made heirs of God and joint heirs with the Son. We have been bought with a price, even the life of Jesus. We have been redeemed, not with corruptible things such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Jesus. You are no longer a nobody! You are Somebody! Jesus loves you.

What does God require of us? People make up their own lists, but centuries ago Micah faced the same issue. Did the Lord require of him sacrificial offerings, atonement for his sins, gifts to appease the Lord or bribes to win His favour? "What the Lord requires is this: to do what is just, to show constant love, and to live in humble fellowship with our God" (Micah 6:6-8). Nothing more is needed. We do not need a sacrifice for Jesus is our sacrifice. We do not need an atonement for our sins, for Christ has made atonement. All that is required is that we practise justice, show love, and live in fellowship with God.

Hear the good news: you are changed from "Nobody" into "Somebody". □

Gordon Moyes is superintendent of the Wesley Central Mission, Sydney, NSW.

The Lord's Prayer

Paul Porter

"Give us this day our daily bread"

The petition is pre-Frigidaire. It is, in fact, a widow's prayer. A first-century widow with children to feed.

According to some scholars, the text is better rendered: "Give us today tomorrow's bread." Here is a prayer for the evening hours. In his book *God's Psychiatry*, Charles L. Allen tells this story:

As World War II was drawing to a close, the Allied armies gathered up many hungry orphans. They were placed in camps where they were well-fed. Despite excellent care, they slept poorly. They seemed nervous and afraid. Finally a psychologist came up with the solution. Each child was given a piece of bread to hold after he was put to bed. This particular piece of bread was just to be held — not eaten. The piece of bread produced wonderful results. The children went to bed knowing instinctively that they would have food to eat the next day. That guarantee gave the children a restful and contented sleep.

Our Heavenly Father, whose name is chanted in the heavens and whose kingdom steadily approaches, is also Lord of the kitchen.

THE BOTTOM LINE

David Waterworth

The bottom line. The Bottom Line. Frequently invoked in this day and age when real wages are on the way down and profit margins are squeezed. The boss says, "What will it cost?" and the worker replies, "What's in it for me?"

"She'll be right" seems to have gone out the window as corporate raiders amass huge conglomerates and the unions decry the standard of living. Into each heart seems to creep a little feeling of helplessness and maybe of greed. "I want my slice of the cake, too."

What is the bottom line for the Christian? Do we have a profit and loss account mentality? Must each exertion in the name of the Lord have a corresponding result?

I wonder sometimes what God's bottom line is. Perhaps, in all reverence, we should call it a TOP LINE?

The story is told of a business man who failed financially in several enterprises. He struggled with his debts and disappointments until he hit upon a different strategy. He decided not to worry so much about the bottom line and started to work on the top line. He sought a product which would give maximum customer satisfaction and pitched his price as low as possible. His business started slowly at first – people were suspicious – but soon volume increased and he became a tremendous success. He found the power of taking the top line.

God took the top line. He gave the best for the worst. He threw down the silk purse and in exchange accepted a sow's ear. Would you push your son in front of an eighteen wheeler just to rescue a dog? That is God's top line.

God doesn't worry about profit. He is concerned about customer satisfaction. The good news of forgiveness and acceptance comes to us without fine print, interest rates or penalty clauses. God takes the top line, giving freely of the most precious asset in the universe – love.

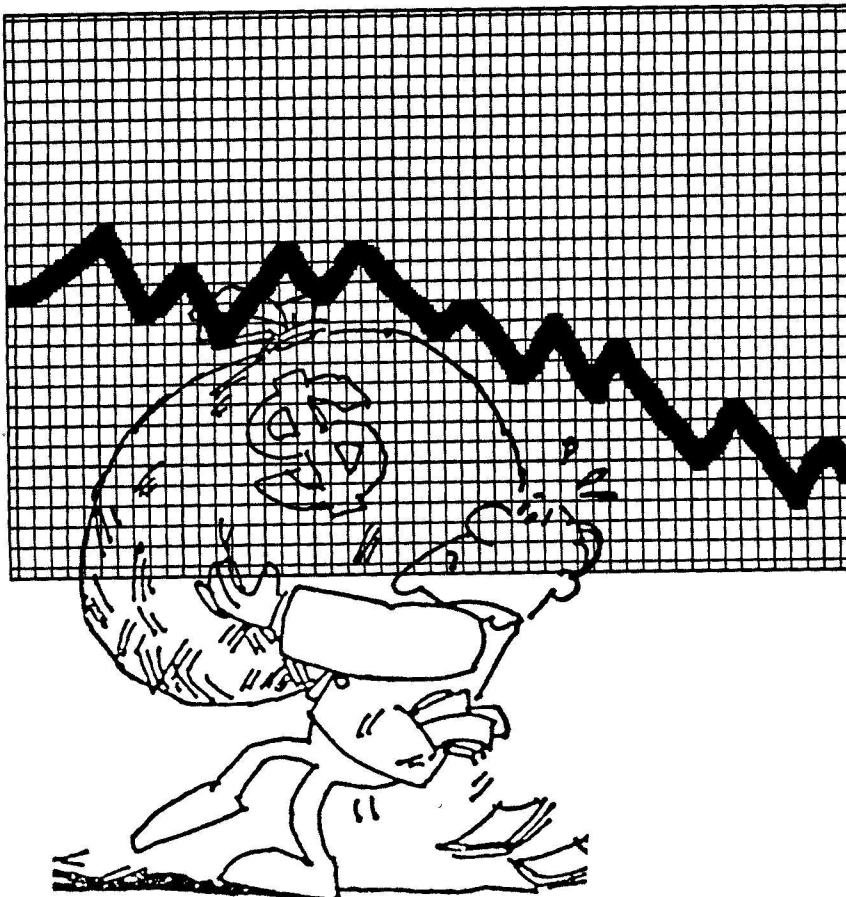
Knowing that there was nothing in it for Him save humiliation, mockery and death, the Prince came and lived amongst men that we might glimpse a three-dimensional image of God. The top line meant touching the untouchable, forgiving the unforgivable and tolerating the intolerable.

The Christian realises that God has given all. He looks at the Top Line and finds satisfaction in knowing that He is accepted and acceptable because of the death of Jesus.

More than this, things change. How can we who have seen the Top Line ever judge people or things by the bottom line? So many things in life – especially when we are dealing with people – can be destroyed by the bottom line, the ultimatum that each expense should yield a profit.

The Christian will strive to live up to the Top Line in all that he does. He will give customer satisfaction by spreading the news which has satisfied him and by treating people as Jesus did. □

David Waterworth is Teacher-in-Charge at the Charleville Special Education Unit, Queensland.



WHEN GOD CALLS HIS PROPHETS

A meditation on Isaiah 6:1-8

Paul Porter

It was my first day in England, and the train was travelling from Manchester to London. Suddenly I heard a voice from the ceiling: "This is Gawd speaking..." It was the Guard, and he had decided to use the public address system.

How would you feel if God spoke to you from the skies? What would you do?

Isaiah once heard God's voice and it changed the direction of his life. It happened the year King Uzziah died. Uzziah was the greatest King in Jerusalem since Solomon. Under his reign, people were proud to be Israelites. But he was arrogant and died a leper, the victim of Yahweh's judgement. When the king died, the hopes of the nation died with him.

"In that fateful year," Isaiah tells us, "I saw the other King. The heavenly One." More than a date is intended here. It is a contrast! In the year when Uzziah fades from the scene, King Yahweh makes himself known.

And so we are invited to make the text our own:

"In the year when all my hopes died, I SAW THE LORD."

"In the year when all my promises failed, I SAW THE LORD."

"In the year when my business fell apart and I lost my health, I SAW THE LORD."

Sorrow, frustration, disappointment and delay can quicken the eye of faith and reveal God to us.

A vision of God

What does God look like? He is BIG. Isaiah sees a huge throne and an equally huge royal cloak. "His train filled the temple," he says.

Hovering over the throne are God's servants — symbolically portrayed with numerous wings. Like the Jerusalem choirs below, they sing in antiphon: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." (For another instance of antiphonal praise, compare Psalm 24:7-10).

A vision of ourselves

Isaiah has seen God! The temple shakes and the prophet shakes too! If a modern mystic were to catch a glimpse of God in a trance he would probably feel pleased with himself. But not Isaiah. He is a Jew; and for a Jew to see God is a terrible thing. "Woe is me!" he cries. "I am lost!"

Previously Isaiah had

stood in the market place and thundered judgements such as these:

"WOE to those who join house to house..."

"WOE to those who rise early in the morning, that they may run after strong drink..."

"WOE to those who draw iniquity with cords of falsehood..."

"WOE to those who call evil good and good evil..."

"WOE to those who are wise in their own eyes..."

"WOE to those who are heroes at drinking wine..."

But when the prophet sees God he declares: "WOE is me!"

Spiritual check-ups are not hard to take. Simply ask yourself: "Am I more aware of my own shortcomings or the shortcomings of others?" When Isaiah looked beyond the market place to the skies, he said: "Woe is me." A rare utterance, in anyone's language.

I once knew some unruly neighbours. They would shout and fight into the early hours of the morning. It was hard to sleep, and so for entertainment I would peer through the dining room window and watch the family circus next door. But my wife suggested I should turn off the light. "Otherwise they will see you watching," she

warned. She was right, of course, but there was an extra bonus: with the light switched off, I could see my crooked neighbours ever so much better! An acute awareness of the sins of others is a sure sign we are standing in the dark. "Woe is me!"

A vision of grace

Having seen the glory of God, Isaiah despairs of his own prophetic calling. "My lips are unclean," he confesses. "I am not worthy to be God's mouthpiece." But then a messenger purifies his lips with a burning coal. "Behold," he says, "this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin forgiven."

Forgiven! It is the Spirit of God who reminds us of unconfessed sins: the Enemy reminds us of those already pardoned! "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9).

A vision of duty

Now the prophet is ready to volunteer service. The King is sitting in session with his council (his "min-ders"!), and the question is raised: "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Instinctively Isaiah calls out: "Here am I! Send me."



"Spiritual Check-ups are not hard to take"

Conclusion

When did you last speak a word for Christ? If you find the task difficult or disagreeable, take a look at Isaiah's vision. There were really four: a vision of God, a vision of himself, a vision of grace and a vision of duty. That is the correct order.

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim; each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" Then flew one of the seraphim to me, having in his hand a burning coal which he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth, and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin forgiven." And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me."

□

SNAKES

Flora Mia

I'm scared of snakes, aren't you? Years ago I lived in Bangladesh with some Bengali girls. They knew a lot about snakes. All kinds of snakes. Grass snakes, water snakes, tree snakes, rock snakes, cobras and kraits.

I remember when a grass snake caught a frog and began to swallow it, the poor frog would squawk and squawk. Quick as a flash, the girls would go through the long grass and get the snake by its tail. They knew that the snake could not bite with its mouth full of frog. Bringing it out into the open, they could see the big lump in the snake's long throat. They would fetch a stick and begin to push the lump back towards the snake's mouth by pressing hard on the snake's back. Gently but firmly, little by little, they would push the lump forward, then all of a

sudden the snake would open his mouth and the frog would JUMP out. It all had to be done very quickly. Clever little girls.

Long ago, there were lots of poisonous snakes in the Wilderness of Zin. For forty years, God's people lived there without being bitten. But once when the people were angry and said terrible and rude things about God, these snakes bit many of them and many died. One could hear the people screaming all around the camp because of the pain. Some tried to suck the poison out of the wound. Others cut the place of the bite and squeezed out the blood. But it was all of no use. They kept on dying. The screaming continued. The poison felt like fire in their bodies. It was terrible. Then they told Moses they were sorry for what they had said.

So God told Moses to get a silversmith to make a snake out of brass and twist it around the top of a long pole. Moses

lifted the pole up high so that all the people could see it. God said that if the sick persons looked at that serpent they would be healed. Many believed God's word, and soon there were hundreds and hundreds of people coming out of their tents. Some were running, others limping, some were crawling, others were carried out. Each one tried to have a good look at the snake. They looked and looked. Little by little they began to get better and soon they were healed.

Jesus once said that if he were lifted up high like that serpent and people believed and looked at him, they too would live in God's kingdom. (Read about this in the third chapter of the Gospel of John.) And then one sad day Jesus was really lifted up high on a cross. "Look unto me and be saved" was his message. Do you believe? Are you willing to ask?□

Flora Mia writes from Sydney, NSW.

STUDY STARTERS

Roger and Pat Jones

What does God do with our sins? Well, Psalm 130:3 (NIV) says: "If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?" Besides this,

Job 14:16,17 says

He has sealed them in a bag.

Isaiah 38:17 says

He has put them behind his back.

Micah 7:19 says

He throws them in the depth of the sea.

Jeremiah 31:33,34 says

He promises to remember our sins no more.

Hebrews 10:16,17 says

the same as Jeremiah, just reiterates it.

1 Corinthians 13:6 says

God keeps no record of wrongs.

John 3:16

guarantees everlasting life.

John 5:24 says

we do not come into judgment.

Roger and Pat write from Bemboka, NSW.