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Hope, Despite a Failing World

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Editorial

Christians see some things differently from non-believers. One of the outstanding convictions that sets Christians apart is their firm belief that the world will have a catastrophic conclusion to it, but that those who believe in Jesus Christ will be personally rescued by God.

Many Christians err on the side of an extremely specific, programmatic view of the end of the world. I remember that when I was in college I felt it necessary to purchase the latest chart of last day events — a masterful production that could be pinned on a wall, and from a distance could pass for a diagram of the electronic circuitry of a computer. It had literally hundreds of details and references outlining the sequence of events up to, at, and beyond the second coming. I remember being impressed at how much the author of the chart knew about exactly what God was going to do, when he was going to do it, and to whom! I had an equally strong sense of guilt for never getting around to putting it up on the wall.

Perhaps its biggest fault, which even frustrated me when I bought it, was that it left out almost all details concerning the present. There were references to the nineteenth century and to the future, but an obvious gap regarding the present. This meant that the ideas expressed could hardly be verified, and in fact left one wondering just what use the whole thing was.

On the other hand, non-believers have tended to ignore the future totally. They seem to be able to live without any program for the future, without any sense of ultimate direction, except perhaps the doubtful prognostications of horoscopes.

The profound existentialist writer, Albert Camus, expressed the hopelessness of this view most lucidly in his novel *The Outsider.* In it Meursault, a French-Algerian, is unjustly accused and tried for murder. He is misunderstood and lacks the expressive emotions and reactions that society seems to expect of him. He views the facts of life, even his own impending death, as an outsider.

The book closes with these haunting words from Meursault: "Gazing up at the dark sky spangled with its signs and stars, for the first time, the first, I laid my heart open to the benign indifference of the universe. For all to be accomplished, for me to feel less lonely, all that remained was to hope that on the day of my execution there should be a huge crowd of spectators and that they should greet me with howls of execration" (p. 120).

Christians don't view things that way. We confess that at the heart of the universe is a loving, personal God — one who sees the sparrow fall and numbers the hairs on our head — not one who is benignly indifferent to our needs, fears and hopes. Our final hope is not for a spectacular execution accompanied by cries and curses, but for a joyful "welcome home" from the One who loved us and gave himself for us.

We surely see things differently. The gospel brings hope (Col 1:23) as a gift from the Father (2 Thess 2:16). We confidently await the moment when God will intervene in human affairs and accomplish his ultimate purposes for his creation. There is a glorious day coming when God will bring salvation, righteousness, resurrection, eternity, glory, and fellowship with God. Our troubled world will be changed. We earnestly await that great day!

Calvin W. Edwards.

You
Can Hope Again

Noel Mason

"The world belongs," wrote Pierre de Chardin, the French priest-scientist, "to those who offer it the greater hope." Chardin's statement receives ample testimony from the history of many religio-political movements which have had at their center a hope of a coming new world. The reason why these movements with their millennial dreams have succeeded in the past, and will continue to succeed in the future, is that human beings cannot live without hope. Hope, like water, oxygen, and food is one of those elemental things that is essential for life.

The Necessity of Hope

In Myra Friedman's biography of Janis Joplin, *Buried Alive,* Mr. Joplin recalls one problem that haunted his daughter. "She just felt that nothing was good and she wanted to know, 'Is this all there's gonna be?' And I explained. 'Yes, that's all and you've got to find out how to live with it. This is life and you've got it.' Of course that didn't make her any happier, but she was a brooding type, and had to come to the conclusion that if this was all there was, why, it wasn't worth it" (p. 63). What Janis desperately needed was hope, some great cause for which to live.

"What Janis desperately needed was hope, some great cause for which to live."

That human beings cannot live without hope, without some degree of faith in the future, is poignantly illustrated in Victor Frankl's experiences in the Nazi prison camps. According to Frankl, the unprecedented high death rate in the camp between Christmas 1944 and New Year 1945 was due to the fact that many prisoners had pinned their hopes on being home for Christmas. The devastating effects of the loss of faith and hope is illustrated in the following incident recorded in his book *Man's Search For Meaning:*

> *F---, my senior block warden, a fairly well known composer and librettist, confided in me one day: "I would like to tell you something, Doctor. I have had a strange dream. A voice told me that I could wish for something, that I should only say what I wanted to know, and all my questions would be answered. What do you think I asked? That I would like to know when the war would be over for me. You know what I mean, Doctor — for me! I wanted to know when we, when our camp, would be liberated and our sufferings come to an end."*
> *"And when did you have this dream?" I asked.*
> *"In February, 1945," he answered. It was then the beginning of March.*
> *"What did your dream voice answer?"*
> *Furtively he whispered to me, "March thirtieth."*
> *When F---- told me about his dream, he was still full of hope and convinced that the voice of his dream would be right. But as the promised day drew nearer, the war news which reached our camp made it appear very unlikely that we would be free on the promised date. On March twenty-ninth, F----suddenly became very ill and ran a high temperature. On March thirtieth, the day his prophecy had told him that the war and suffering would be over for him, he became delirious and lost consciousness. On March thirty-first, he was dead. To all outward appearances he had died of Typhus" (pp.119-120).*

The prisoner had lost all hope of freedom. His will had become passive and consequently his vital forces were diminished, undermining the efficiency of his immune system to cope with disease.

In his *Critique of Pure Reason,* Immanuel Kant stated: "The whole interest of reason, speculative as well as practical, is centered in the three following questions: (1) What can I know? (2) What ought I do? (3) What may I hope? Hope is at the center of human existence. We live by hope. Hope has been planted into the fibres of our being, into the center of our psyche, into every cell of our bodies.

False Hopes - Political and Religious

Sadly, down through the centuries religious and political dreamers have exploited the human capacity to hope. For many, the thirst for something better, something more enduring, has been fed by a vision of a future classless society where all people are equal and

"We live by hope. Hope has been planted into the fibres of our being, into the center of our psyche, into every cell of our bodies."

all needs are met. Meanwhile, as the world economy teeters on the brink of bankruptcy, millions have lost their freedom and are shut in behind "iron curtains," barbed wire fences, guard dogs and machine guns.

The history of Judaism is strewn with the wreckage of fanatical, messianic prophets who won an easy following by appealing to man's hope for a better world. In his book *A History of Messianic Speculation in Israel,* Abba Hillel Silver analyzes more than seventy

messianic movements from the time of the destruction of Jerusalem (AD 70) to the tragic Shabbeta Zebi movement of the seventeenth century. Most of these movements were obsessed with calculating the end of world history by the use of the apocalyptic numbers in the book of Daniel. This messianic calculation did not go unchallenged. "The opposition" writes Silver, "was largely inspired by the fear that such calculations might awaken false hopes, which if defeated, would tend to demoralize the people" (p. 195).

The book of Daniel with its cryptic allusions to time has been the happy hunting ground for these calculators of the end. The time, times, and half a time; 2,300 evenings and mornings; seventy weeks; season, seasons, and half a season — these have provided ample mystery and incentive for scores of apocalyptic theorists. The questions these calculators discussed are now familiar to many Christians who are captivated by the mysterious numbers of Daniel. What are the terminals of these cryptic dates? Do the days mean years? Do the weeks mean seven years? How long is a "time"? Is "times" the same as "seasons"? Such questions have been asked and debated by all Jewish messianic movements since the second century.

"The history of Jewish and Christian 'date-setters' with all its bitter disappointment and disillusionment has not curbed the desire of many Christians to calculate the end."

Some Examples

Unfortunately, the history of Christianity fares no better. In every century apocalyptic movements have arisen and announced that the end of the world was near. Paul had to remind the church at Thessalonica that the end was not as near as some had believed (2 Thess 2:2). In the second century Montanus came to the conviction that the end was near and announced to his followers that the New Jerusalem was about to come down from heaven on Asia Minor. Hundreds abandoned their possessions and broke family ties in order to be ready for this great event — only to be disappointed. Cyprian of the third century wrote: "The day of pressure is even over our heads, and the consummation of all things and the coming of Antichrist approaches." In the sixth century, Gregory the Great preached a fiery sermon in which he declared:

> *Of all the signs described by our Lord as presaging the end of the world, some we see already accomplished. . . . For we now see that nation arises against nation . . . . Earthquakes overwhelm countless cities. . . . Pestilence we endure without interruption. It is true that we do not behold signs in the sun and moon and stars; but these are not far off we may infer from the changes in the atmosphere.*

In the twelfth century, an Apocalyptic monk named Joachim of Fiore calculated that the present age would end between 1200 and 1260. His prediction received some support when Frederick 2 became Emperor and recaptured Jerusalem. Many expected the end to come in 1260. When Frederick 2 suddenly died in 1250 the prophetic scheme received a fatal setback.

J.A. Bengel (1687-1752) wrote several apocalyptic works in which he tried to fix the number of the beast and set the date of the beginning of the millennium at 1836. Many like Bengel did not live long enough to

"Faith must learn to live with this uncertainty. We must counteract the 'lust for certitude' and, like Abraham, accept the challenge of the unknown."

experience the embarrassment and disappointment of their errors. William Miller (1782-1849), founder of the American Adventists was not so fortunate. By taking 457 BC as starting point, and interpreting the 2,300 days of Daniel as years, Miller and his associates fixed 1843 as the year for the second advent. Many were extremely disappointed and psychologically demoralized when the predicted end did not come.

A similar nineteenth century movement was led by Claus Epp, Jr., a Russian Mennonite farmer-preacher. He was influenced by German mysticism and the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation. Threatened by the Russian political situation, Epp led a group of 600 Mennonites by wagon train from Southern Russia and the Volga River region eastward to the wilderness of Asiatic Russia. They expected to meet their Lord there in 1889. During the period from 1880 to 1884 this visionary band of people travelled about 1,780 miles to the wild, unknown land of Turkestan. Believing that the great tribulation was imminent, they endured unbelievable suffering. Finally they broke into quarrelsome factions. Many came to the United States to escape continued problems in Turkestan. Their story of hardship and disappointment can be found in F.R. Belk's book *The Great Trek* (Herald Press, 1976).

The twentieth century has seen the rise of a number of "prophets" who have predicted the end.

The history of Jewish and Christian "date-setters" with all its bitter disappointment and disillusionment has not curbed the desire of many Christians to calculate the end. Some groups continue to cling to their dates in spite of the embarrassment created by the continuation of history. Rather than acknowledging their interpretation of Daniel and Revelation as wrong, many simply avoid the embarrassment by reinterpreting the supposed "fulfillment."

The Antichrist and the End

For many Christians the appearance of the Antichrist was a sign of the end. In every age well-meaning but over-confident Christians have denounced others as the Antichrist. In the second century Justus labelled Trypho the Jew as the Antichrist (c. AD 160). The anonymous Gnostic leaders (c. AD 180) were similarly branded by Irenaeus. Tertullian alleged that Marcion was the Antichrist (c. 210). Jerome made similar accusations to Bishop John of Jerusalem (415) and Origen suffered a similar fate in the decrees of Justinian (542).

In every century Christians have detected the Antichrist and believed that the end was near. Not only have infidels, Jews, and Muhammedans been called the

Antichrist, but Popes and Emperors also were not exempt from this term of denunciation. St. Bernard believed the Antipope Anaket 2 to be the Antichrist. Frederick 1 (c. 1122-1190) was excommunicated in 1152 as the Antichrist. Gregory IX called Frederick 2 (1239) the "evil monster from the sea," the precursor of the Antichrist.

Dante believed that Pope Boniface VIII (1294-1303) was to be the high priest of wickedness and fit to rot in hell. Savonarola branded Alexander VI as Antichrist, the scourge of God.

Since the days of Wycliffe and Luther who condemned the popes as Antichrist, there has been a prolifferation of Antichrists. John Wesley followed the Pietist Johann Bengel in expecting the overthrow of the "Beast" in 1836. In more recent times Napoleon, the Kaiser, Hitler, Mussolini, Roosevelt, the National Council of Churches, Henry Kissinger and Anwar Sadat, to name only a few, have been identified as Revelation's 666!

Jesus Against the Date-setters

There were many calculators of the end in the days of Jesus. Some of their works have been preserved. According to D.S. Russell, starting from the second century BC seventeen apocalyptic books were circulated in Judaism (see *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic,* London, 1964, pp. 37f.). All of these writings are indebted to the book of Daniel.

In his sermon on the last days, Jesus spoke out against those who were using the book of Daniel to calculate the time of the coming kingdom. His words are unmistakeably clear and their significance can only be appreciated when it is remembered that he was addressing those who spent much time and ingenuity fitting the time periods of Daniel into a scheme that would provide a date for the end. Note his words: "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Mk 13:32).

It must also be remembered, that these words are said in a sermon that borrows the major themes of Daniel. In other words, while Jesus borrows freely from the book of Daniel in constructing a New Covenant eschatology, he warns against the literal use of Daniel's timetables by Christians. H.R. Ridderbos has written that "the soberness of the New Testament picture of the end time and the absence of all calculations of the day of the Son of Man are totally different from what is found in some Jewish apocalypses" (*Studies in Scripture and Its Authority,* p. 107).

Some will respond by saying that Jesus only forbids predicting the "hour" and the "day" but not the year! But this is an excessively literalistic interpretation of Mark 13:32, and furthermore, such a loophole is closed with Luke's record of the final words of Jesus to his disciples. Consider Acts 1:6-8:

> *So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority."*

His words are very clear and those who persist in using the books of Daniel and Revelation to establish prophetic dates are simply disobedient to Jesus.

Some writers have gone to extraordinary lengths to find support for their prophetic dates. One scholar, L.E. Froom in *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers* amasses a great number of interpreters who used the time periods of Daniel and Revelation to establish specific dates in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. But while historicism with its concern for proving dates may be part of the prophetic faith of the fathers of nineteenth century Adventism it is certainly not part of the faith of Jesus. Jesus repudiated all such apocalyptic speculation.

Imminence and Delay

Sermons on the Second Advent that are wholly devoted to the supposed "signs" of the imminent return of Jesus overlook the fact that Jesus thought it possible that the "bridegroom" could be a long time in coming (Mt 25:5). Again it was after "a long time" that the master of the servants returned (Mt 25:19). Jesus left the future open — open to the possibility of his imminent return and open to the possibility of a long delay. Rather than losing ourselves in apocalyptic calculations about the time of the end we are to keep watch, because we do not know the day or the hour of his return (Mt 25:13). Faith must learn to live with this uncertainty. We must counteract the "lust for certitude" and, like Abraham, accept the challenge of the unknown (Heb 11:8).

Many who engage in predictions about the end do not think of what happens to those who place their trust in their prophetic interpretations. Little do they realize they create a pastoral problem of serious proportions. How many of them live to see their faithful supporters utterly demoralized by the fact that their predictions have not come to pass? Many find it psychologically impossible to believe again. Will Hal Lindsey be able to mend the broken hearts of his followers if the 1980's pass without a thermonuclear war in the Middle East — a supposed sign of the end?

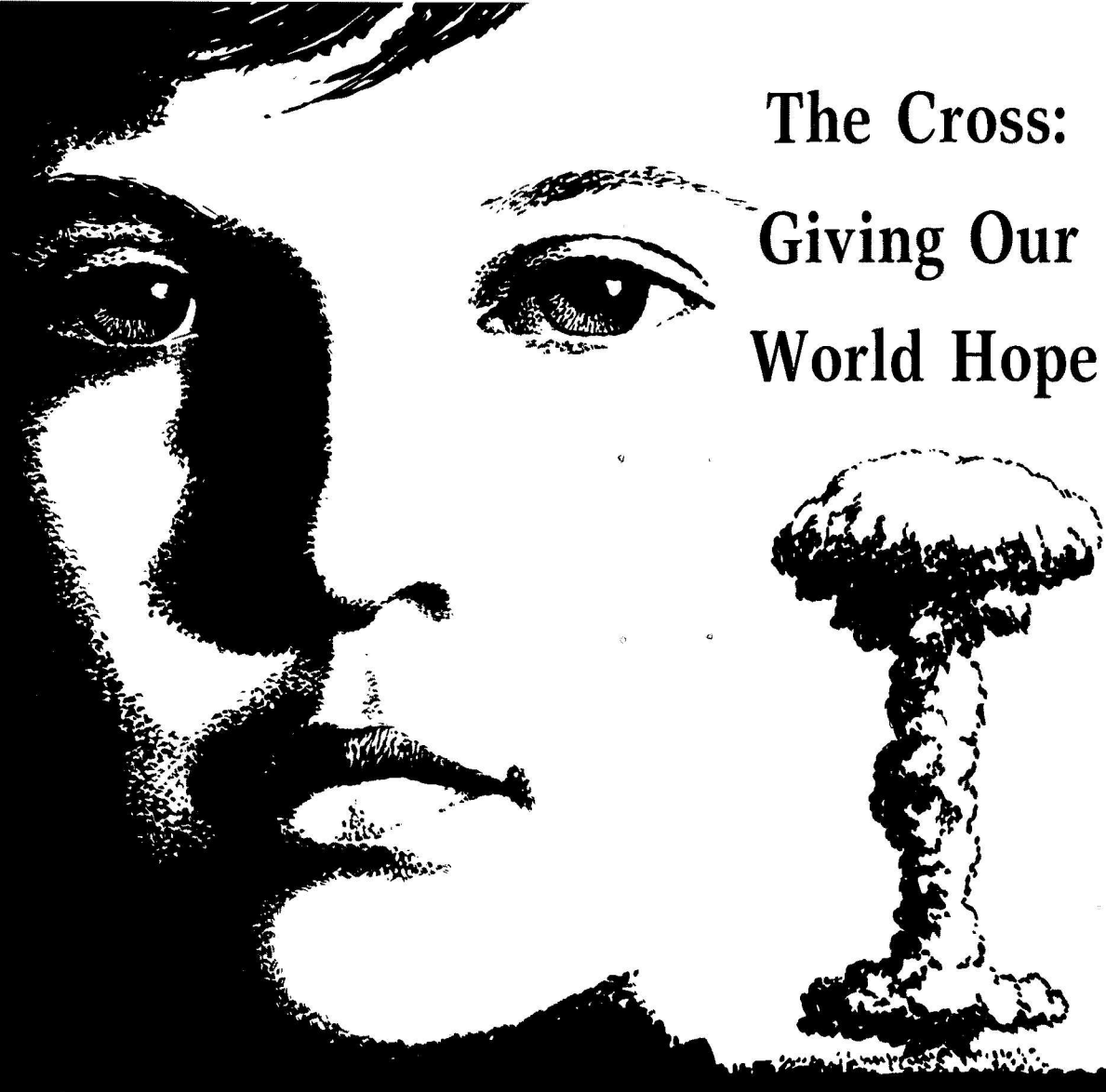
"Christians are to appreciate that they do not know everything about the future, that some things are hidden and left to the sovereignty of God. We must let God be God and trust him with our future."

You Can Hope Again

There is only one way for those who have been through such a disappointment to find hope again. It is to simply go back to the words of Jesus (Mk 13:32; Acts 1:6-8) and realize that right at the very beginning he warned against the practice of constructing eschatological timetables. Christians are to appreciate that they do not know everything about the future, that some things are hidden and left to the sovereignty of God. We must let God be God and trust him with our future.

Why hasn't God revealed more of the future to us? There are no doubt many answers to this question. Perhaps one reason why God reserves the future in silence is that we are thereby enabled to greet it freshly, to taste his grace in the new dawn of every day. After all, hope that is seen is not hope! □

The Cross: Giving Our World Hope



"The Sign of the nuclear age is the Bomb. The sign of Christ is the Cross. The Bomb in the countersign to the Cross; it arrogantly threatens to undo the work that the Cross has done. In the Cross, all things are reconciled; in the Bomb, all things are destroyed. In the Cross, violence is defeated; in the Bomb, violence is victorious. In the Cross, evil has been overcome; in the Bomb, evil has dominion. In the Cross, death is swallowed up; in the Bomb, death reigns supreme. Which will hold sway in our times?"

(Jim Wallis, *Call to Conversion,* p. 88.)

THE TAIL OF A DOG, A CAT'S WAIL AND THE WHALE OF A TALE

Gillian Ford

Romans 5:3,4

I went down to the yard yesterday to empty the food trash and while there I said a few words to Licky our dog. I told her that she'd always been such a good girl and how I loved her and missed her since she was gone. You see, Licky died a few months ago and now she is buried down in the yard.

Licky was the most affectionate and friendly dog we ever had. One morning she was out running with my husband and wandered on the road. A car hit her and she died instantly. Maybe you have lost a pet that you loved deeply. You will understand just how sad we felt.

But don't you be sad for Licky, for she had a wonderful life — she ran many miles a day, and the only sadness she ever knew was when we went away. Once when we left her for a week she didn't eat and wouldn't for another week after we returned. Neither would she run and play.

The day before she died, I was with her on our deck, rubbing her nose. Licky had a grunt machine — the more you rubbed, the more she grunted and wagged her tail. That day she squeaked such high notes I called her my little black canary. Oh Licky, how sweet and good you were, little dog — except of course in the matter of the couch and the cat.

You see, before I learned to lock Licky in the laundry at night, she was never satisfied to sleep on the soft carpet. Each morning would find her lying like a human on the couch, with her head on a cushion at one end. I don't think she realized she was a dog because sometimes she would sneak on the bed and sleep just like you would with her head on the pillow. She would even try to get under the sheets. Wicked Licky — you never learned.

There there was the matter of the cat. Licky never learned to suffer the cat, so the cat **really** suffered. Licky ignored all cats except ours. Why? We petted it and she was very jealous. Poor Brutus the cat couldn't even get to the house to eat. I had to lock the dog in the laundry at night and then feed the cat. One night I forgot to put Licky in the laundry, and the cat yowled to get in. As I opened the back door, in he walked and disappeared around the kitchen bench. Suddenly, having heard the cat wail, the dog rode out through the kitchen like the cavalry

after the Indians. Durum, durum — exit Licky through the back door. Slam, bang — the cat was safe. In the end though, Brutus left home. Well, wouldn't you if every time you ventured near the house your sister chased you up a tree?

I told you a little bit about Licky because today's text has to do with suffering. It says in Romans 5:3,4 that "We can rejoice. . . when we run into problems and trials for we know that they are good for us — they help us to learn to be patient. And patience develops strength of character in us and helps us to trust God more each time we use it until finally our hope and faith are strong and steady" (Living Bible).

Why do we suffer in this life? That's one of the biggest questions in the world and there is nobody wise enough to explain it so that everyone feels better. The only people who try to answer that question are the ones who have never really suffered themselves. The only thing we know is that a long time ago at the beginning of this world, something went terribly wrong and evil came into men's hearts — there are droughts and famines, earthquakes and disease, tidal waves and terrible cold. God never meant that this should happen in a perfect world. Sin has spoiled life. It's as though it has taken all the toys from all the smiling babies and made them cry.

You know that often when you have trouble it's your own fault. But many times bad things happen and it is nobody's fault. I have some friends who have a little girl who has had a long battle with cancer. Since I wrote this she has died. They are all very fine people who have lived well and tried to do everything right. But sometimes awful sicknesses strike even little children and it certainly isn't their fault. Grown-ups gradually learn that while they should do all they can to follow the advice God gives on how to be happy, it doesn't mean they won't have trouble. You should try and learn that early.

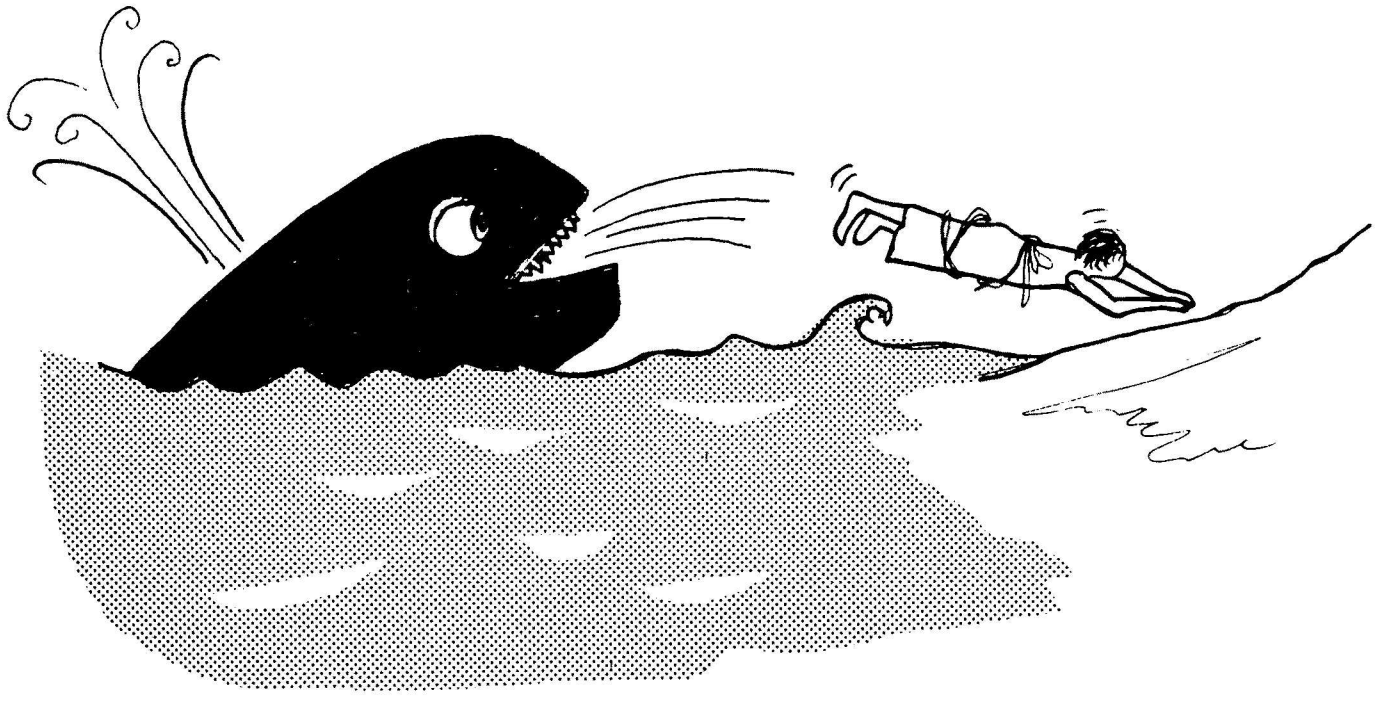
Maybe you have heard of insurance. Insurance means your parents give money to a company to protect different things they own in case these things get stolen or broken. A friend of mine just had her clothes stolen and the insurance company paid for new ones. Daddies often insure themselves so that if they should die, their families will have some money from the insurance company to live on when daddy is gone. But, boys and girls, there is no insurance policy in this world that can guarantee you won't have trouble and pain sometimes. Everybody does. It's part of life.

Our text says we can be happy about trials because they are good for us. They make us patient and give us character. Do you know, it's true that some people seem to smile wider and wider as they hurt more and more. Maybe you are like that. But it's a special gift and many of us don't seem to get it. Jonah certainly didn't.

God asked Jonah to set off in one direction to help the Ninevites. They were the meanest people on the earth at the time and Jonah had grown up to hate them because they were foreigners who didn't serve the same God as he did. God loved them and wanted to warn them that if they didn't change their evil ways they would all have to die. But Jonah didn't like the job, so he took a ticket for a boat that went in the opposite direction. However, God was there watching and as Jonah rode on that boat going the wrong way, a huge storm came up. If you read the story in the Bible, you'll find out that the sailors thought that someone on the boat had done something wrong and caused the storm. Jonah, they found out, was "it." So he told them to throw him into the sea.

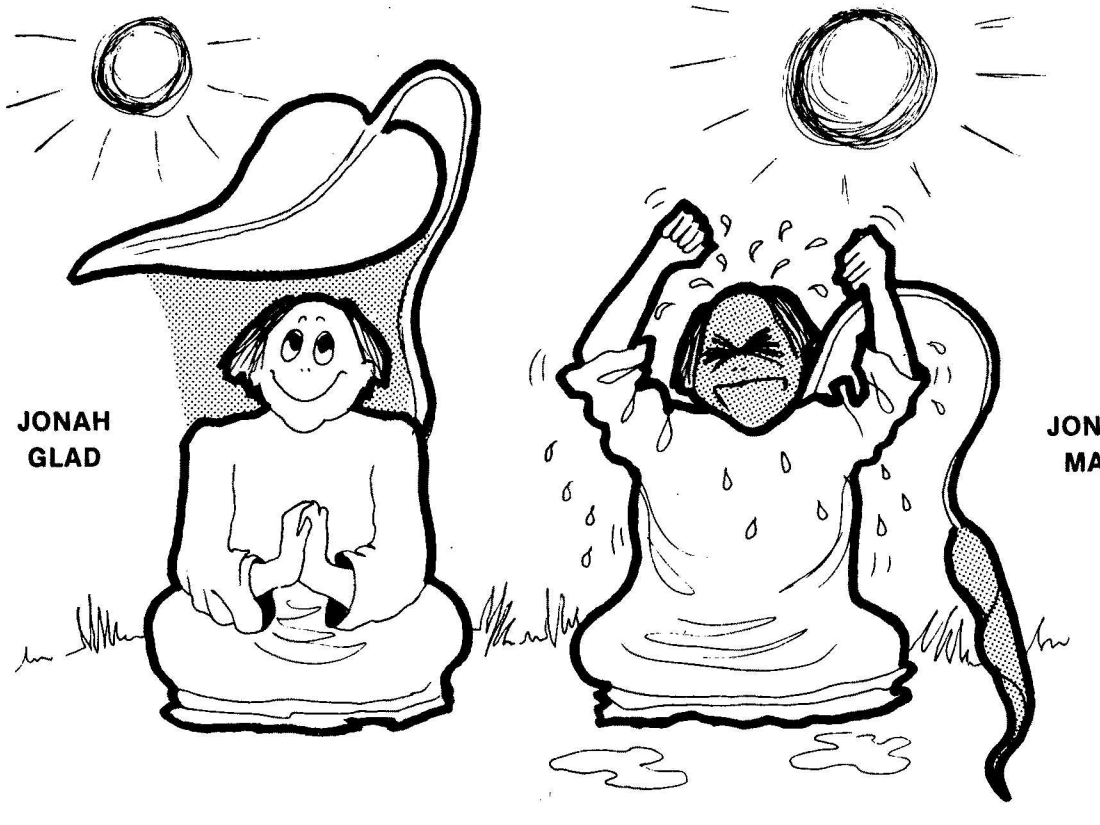
Can you imagine, boys and girls, that Jonah would rather have drowned in that cruel sea than go and save a city full of people from dying.

There were 120,000 babies there, without counting their parents. You would think that



God would have been so mad with Jonah's selfishness that he would have left him there. Instead he calmed the sea and caused a great fish, a whale, to come up and swallow Jonah. It says he spent three days and nights in its stomach. Imagine him covered with seaweed and surrounded by rotting fish. Phew — how it must have smelled! You'd think that Jonah would have thrown up, but the whale did instead. What a good shot he was, for Jonah landed on the beach.

After that he did what he was told, but very reluctantly. He told those Ninevites that they'd better shape up or else! To his amazement they did. But Jonah's suffering had not made him patient or kind — in fact he was as mad as a tack with God for saving them. "I knew you were a softy," he said. "I knew you'd change your mind." Then he went and sulked in the desert. How kind it was of God to cause a large plant to come up in the night to give him shade. How shrewd it was of God to let it wither, for it showed Jonah that he



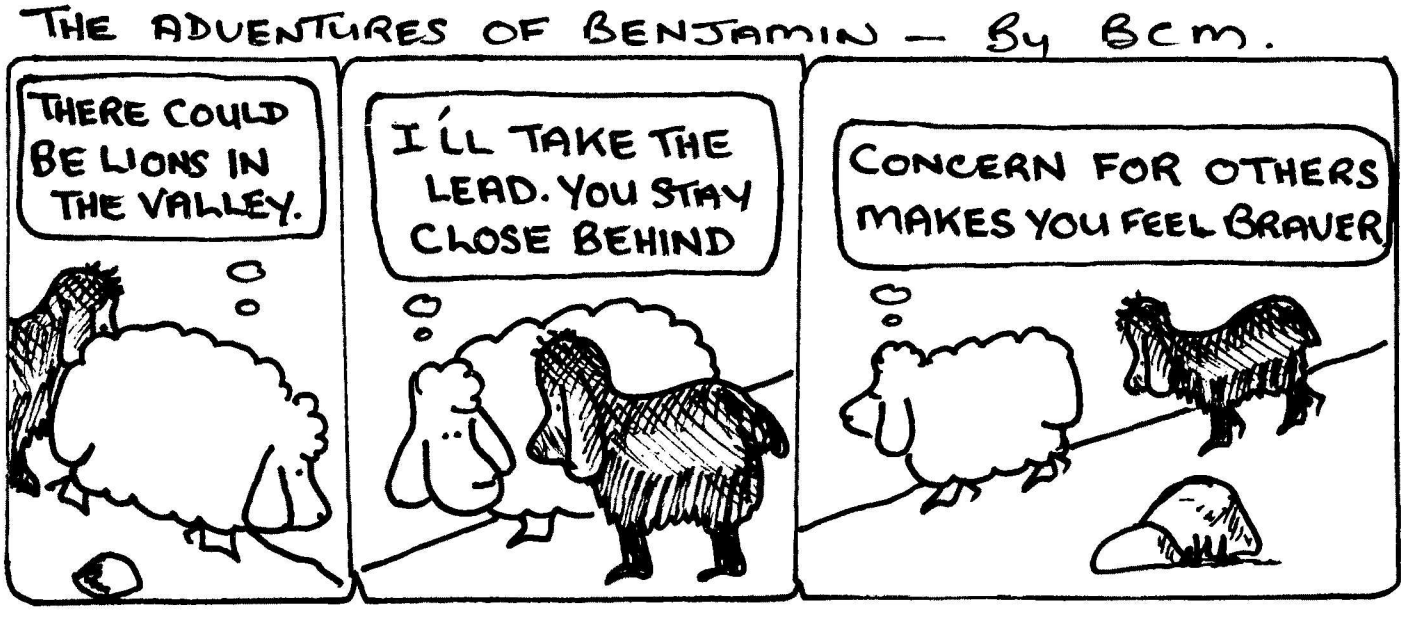
cared more for a plant than all those people.

Now, think of the text we were discussing — problems and trials help us learn to be patient. Patience develops strength of character. Let me ask you a few questions. Did Jonah's trials make him patient and produce character in him? Do yours? I find that I am very like Jonah — angry and impatient when I'm in trouble. Maybe you're the same. Do you think that if you are very patient in trouble, you will be saved? Do you think that Jonah was lost because he was impatient?

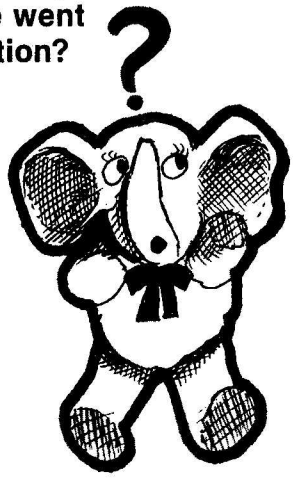
These are important questions because when we fail to be patient and kind, it is so easy to think that we are lost. In fact, though it seems hard to grasp, we are not saved by being patient and kind. We are saved by the life and death of Jesus.

But how God hopes that when we read that verse and think of Jesus' suffering so patiently for us, we will long to be like him. How much simpler Jonah's life would have been if he had gone in the right direction right away. How much better if he had been kind to the Ninevites, for true character is loving despite your feelings.

Yet that's the problem — fighting our own will is the hardest battle in the world. Jesus has to help us. So next time you feel like a wail, not like wagging your tail, remember the tale of the whale. What would God have you do today?



Q. What did the Elephant say when he went on vacation?



***A.* Did I forget to pack my trunk?**

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Editor: Gillian Ford

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Questions and Answers

Q. I am single, have travelled the world and for the last ten years have really "lived it up," but lately life seems to be boring. Can you make any suggestions without all that religious stuff? I am not a Christian.

A. You remind me of what I read some time ago in Robert Heinlein's book *The Glory Road:* "Ever look at a male lion in a zoo? Fresh meat on time, females supplied, no hunter to worry about — he's got it made, hasn't he? Then why does he look bored?" It's time you started to wonder about life — its mystery, its enormity, its transitoriness. You need to concern yourself with some of life's final questions. Where did we come from? Where are we going? What is the meaning and significance of life?

In spite of some similarities, we are not animals. Victor Frankl once said that "Man's concern about a meaning of life is the truest expression of the state of being human."

It seems to me that you lack a philosophy of life. You need a great cause for which to live. It is good that you have become bored with the pleasures of self-gratification. You were made for more than that. Your boredom may be the birth pangs of a new beginning. It may be time to analyze some of the prejudices you have against Christianity. Remember, what a piece of bread looks like depends on whether you are hungry or not.

—*Noel Mason*

Q. How can I tell whether or not I have an open mind?

A. You can measure your open-mindedness by your ability to *listen* to someone else's viewpoint. Our ability to listen is often hampered by the temptation to think that we have "the truth." Marchette Chute once said, "You will never succeed in getting at the truth if you think you know, ahead of time, what the truth ought to be."

The tragedy is that our egotistical human nature and our educational system quite often persuade us to esteem more highly those who think alike than those who think differently. Any religion which teaches a person to be satisfied, to be smug and content, to have arrived is not the religion of Christ.

It is a sobering thought that those who were really responsible for the death of Christ were those who were blinded by their own traditions. That is a temptation to us all.

A simple test to see if your mind is open or not: have you changed your point-of-view on something important recently?

—*Noel Mason*

Q. Do you think that one day the scientific method will be able to explain in a natural way all that mystifies us now?

A. I doubt it. Not all the dimensions of life are susceptible to the scientific method. This does not necessarily mean that therefore those dimensions are in the realm of the supernatural. The limitations of the scientific method are quite apparent even in the natural realm.

According to Hiesenberg, the modern physicist must be content to use four different mathematical systems if he would deal adequately with all his data, and must admit that these four do not seem mutually consistent. In almost every area of science today the old dogmatism of the nineteenth century is a thing of the past.

Science tends to reduce things to their quantifiable, measurable elements and in doing so fails to get the "big picture." Remember what A.N. Whitehead said: "when you understand all about the sun. . . and all about the rotation of the earth you may still miss the radiance of the sunset" (*Science and the Modern World,* p. 178).

—*Noel Mason*

Q. In your article on "Compassion" I notice your call to show sympathy to homosexuals. I have this problem and long for a solution. I feel a total failure, and have seriously considered suicide. I believe it best for me to sublimate my urges and live a celebate existence — but this is difficult. Can you help?

A. I wish that there was something I could do more than just write. I really feel for you and long that you might have peace, hope and happiness.

I feel so incompetent to really counsel in a professional way. But let me just say a few things that are the best that I can offer.

Regarding sublimation, it is generally recognized that the best ways are to simply have yourself involved actively, busily, regularly in some pursuit of worth and significance to you. If you are preoccupied with other matters such as your work, community involvement, helping others, missionary outreach, Bible study, etc., these things can often greatly help you to sublimate a sex drive.

I believe that when the struggle is tough it would be wonderful to have someone close at hand with whom you could talk. I will pray that the Lord will lead you to such a person. It is a difficult thing and involves a certain risk as you look for a confidant. However, I would encourage you to put it high on your list of priorities. Is there a pastor, friend, father figure, relative, psychologist, counselor, doctor, etc., someone with whom you could share your problem?

You stress that you have failed in so many ways, but there is a sense in which you have not failed. You have held on to life; you have held on to Jesus Christ; you seek new and better things; you have a self-esteem which drives you to refrain from committing yourself to a lifestyle you don't really believe in. It seems to me you have many admirable qualities.

No, you are not a failure, and certainly in God's eyes you are no more of a failure than any of the rest of us. We have all erred, sinned and fallen short of God's ideal. But Jesus Christ has gathered us up in his arms, paid the penalty for those sins and mistakes that we have made, and presented us as sinless and wholly acceptable to God. In his sight, because of Jesus Christ, there is no failure for you whatsoever. I would love you to grasp and to live with that acceptance which God freely offers you. It alone can change your life. I would also urge you to contact Quest, an excellent Christian center committed to helping homosexuals through use of gospel principles. The address is Box 7881, Reading, PA 19603.

I fully realize that this is a very complex problem, and that the few principles expressed here are but a start to a thorough treatment of the issue.

—*Calvin Edwards*

Our Call: To Prediction or Proclamation?

Charles H. Spurgeon

"So when they had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority. But 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 1:6-8).

We have three things to talk about; first, some things which are not for us; secondly, some things for us to receive; and thirdly, something for us to be.

Things Not Known

First, let us consider some things which are not for us. It is not for us to know the times and the seasons, and to be able to make a map of the future. There are some great events of the future very clearly revealed. Prophecy is not at all indistinct about the facts that will occur; but as to when they will occur, we have no data.

I pass no censure upon brethren who think that, by elaborate calculations, they can find out what is to be in the future. But time has passed censure of the strongest kind upon all their predecessors. I forget how many miles of books interpreting prophecy there are in the British Museum, but I believe it amounts to miles, all of which has been disproved by the lapse of time. Some of the writers were wonderfully definite, they knew within half-an-hour when the Lord would come. Some of them were very distinct about all the events, they had mapped them all within a few years.

"It is enough for your mind to dwell upon the cross and the coming glory of your Lord. Keep these two things distinctly before you, and you need not puzzle your brains about the future."

The men who wrote the books, happily for themselves, had mostly died before the appointed time came. It is always wise to pitch on a long period of prophecy, that you may be out of the way if the thing does not come off. There are very few of them who lived to suffer the disappointment which would certainly have come to them through having fixed the wrong date. I let time censure their mistake. God forgave it, for they did it with a desire for his glory. The bulk of them were most sincere students of the Word, and herein is a lesson for us: it is not for you to know the times and seasons.

Not Proper

First, it is not proper for you. It is not your work. You are not sent into the world to be prophets, you are sent into the world to be witnesses. You do not come here to be prognosticators of the events of tomorrow about yourself, or about your children, or about your friends, or about the nations of the earth. A veil hangs between you and the future. Your prayer is to be, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." You are told to look for the coming of your Lord, and to stand in perpetual expectation of his return; but to know the time when he will come, is no part of your office. You are servants who are to look for your Lord, who may come at cock-crowing, or at midday, or at midnight. Always keep on the tiptoe of expectation. It would be wrong for you to profess that you need not watch until such and such a time, for he would not come until such a date arrived.

Not Profitable

As it is not proper for you, so it is not profitable for you. Would you be the better if you could make a map of all that is yet to be? Suppose it were revealed to you tonight, by an angel, in what respect would it alter your conduct for tomorrow? In what way would it help you to perform the duties which your Master has enjoined upon you? I believe that it would be to

you a very dangerous gift, you would be tempted to set yourself up as an interpreter of the future. If men believed in you, you would become eminent and notable, and you would be looked upon with awe. The temptation would be to become a prophet on your own account, to head a new sect, to lead a new company of men to believe in yourself.

Neither would it ensure your salvation to be able to foretell the future, for Balaam was a great prophet, but he was a great sinner. He was an arch-rebel although he was an arch-divine. Nor do I know that, by foretelling the future, you would convince your fellow-men. Noah told the world that they would be destroyed by flood, he could give them a very accurate account of the time when the rain would descend, and yet they were not converted by his preaching, neither did they come into the ark.

Not Good

Notice also that it is not good for you to know the times and the seasons. That is what the Savior means when he says, "It is not for you to know." For it would distract your attention from the great things of which you have to think. It is enough for your mind to dwell upon the cross and the coming glory of your Lord. Keep these two things distinctly before you, and you need not puzzle your brains about the future.

If you did know that something important was going to happen very speedily, you might be full of consternation, and do your work in a great hurry. You might be worked up in a frenzy that would spoil all your service. Or, if there was a long time to elapse

"It is for our good to stand ever in this condition, knowing that he is coming, knowing that he will reign, knowing that certain great events will certainly transpire, but not knowing the exact times and seasons when those events are to be expected."

before the great event, you might feel the indifference of distance. If our Lord were not to come for another hundred years — and he may not, we cannot tell — we might say, "My Lord delayeth his coming," and so we might begin to sleep, or to play the wanton.

The Gift of the Spirit

And now, secondly, there are some things for us to receive. The Savior said to the eleven that they were to wait at Jerusalem till they had received power by the Holy Spirit coming upon them. This is what we want, the Holy Spirit. We often speak about this, but truly it is unspeakable — the power of the Holy Spirit is mysterious, divine. When it comes upon a man he is bathed in the very essence of the Deity. Many a man has become quick of understanding in the fear of the Lord, who was very slow of understanding in other respects. The Holy Spirit takes the fool, and makes him know the wonders of redeeming love. It is amazing how persons of very scanty gifts, and very small attainments, have nevertheless, become wise toward God, their mental faculties being quickened with regard to heavenly things in a very remarkable manner.

The power of the Spirit is also, in part, moral power. He gives to men qualities that make them strong and influential over their fellow-men. He imparts dauntless courage, calm confidence, intense affection, burning zeal, deep patience, much-enduring perseverence. Many other hallowed influences besides these are graces of the Spirit of God, which form in men a moral power exceedingly useful and exceedingly forcible. I have known men to be slow of speech, and

"There is in the name of Jesus a balm for every mental wound, a relief for all the agony of a tortured spirit."

who have exhibited very few gifts, who have, nevertheless, been very strong men in our assemblies, true pillars of the church, for piety is power, and grace is power.

Witnesses Rather than Prophets

Now we pass on the third point, which is a very important practical one, something for us to be. If you are a disciple of Christ, you are not to look into the times and seasons which the Father hath put in his own power. You are to receive the Spirit of God, and then there is something for you to be. Did you expect me to say that then there is something for you to do? Well, there is a great deal for you to do, but the text says, "You shall be my witnesses," not, "You shall act as my witnesses."

We are to be witnesses of what Christ has done. You are to witness what you have seen, and tasted, and handled, concerning your Lord. You are to witness to what he has revealed, to make known to others the doctrine that he preached, and his apostles taught. Mind that you do not tell any other. You are not sent to be an original thinker, to make up a gospel as you go along, you are a witness, that is all, a retailer of Christ's truth, and you miss the end of your life unless you perpetually witness, and witness to what you know of him, to what you have learnt from him.

The Lord Jesus Christ can remove despair, and every form of spiritual distress. He did so to me. I was full of darkness, the shadow of death was upon me, and I found no comfort till I heard that blessed text, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." I looked unto him, and was lightened, and my face was not ashamed. I can bear witness that a load was taken from me, which I could not get rid of in any other way, and my midnight was in a single moment, turned into the blaze of midday. There is in the name of Jesus a balm for every mental wound, a relief for all the agony of a tortured spirit.

The Christian's calling is to gospel proclamation, not future prediction. May the Spirit of God rest upon you, beloved in the Lord, and may you hear your Master say to you, "You shall be my witnesses"! □

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892) was one of the most successful preachers in England last century. This article is adapted from one of his sermons based on Acts 1:6-8.

The Dark Tormentor

by Ron Allen

According to the Neil Diamond song, everyone gets the blues now and then. He's right! At least all my friends have their ups and downs. It's quite normal.

Many factors make a difference to how people feel about themselves and life in general. Things such as, how much sleep one gets, or the kinds of food we eat and how much exercise we get and so on. The emotional equipment of any human being is constantly being impacted by all sorts of internal and external causes. The "blues" are part of life for everyone.

But there are some whose lives are darkened by deep and constant gloom. These people are numerous and they are not queer. Among them are some of society's most fruitful individuals. They do not oscillate between **up** and **down** like others. They move between **down** and **way down**. They struggle against depression. It grips them, throttling their optimism and squeezing joy away. They are anxious and afraid. A strange sense of foreboding shadows them. In the morning they wake up and dread the day.

In her marvellous little book, "Why Am I Crying", Martha Maughon records her own experience in a poem:

> Who knows the dark tormentor?
> That one who wrecks the plans of man
> And slays the joys of life.
> Who stalks his prey throughout the day
> And hovers in the night.
> He sits heavy on my chest.
> Relentless.
> Robbing.
> Mocking me.
> His name is fear
> And I know him well.

Serious emotional illness is suffered by people in all walks of life. Abraham Lincoln was a melancholy man. He had his "Black Moods". Winston Churchill once described his depression by saying, "It follows me like a black dog". Christians are not safe from depression. Some of the Bible's greatest saints languished in despair. Job and Jeremiah are examples. Charles Spurgeon, one of the great preachers of England, spent much of his working life in grim melancholy. Martin Luther and John Bunyan were similarly afflicted.

Unfortunately there is a dimension to a Christian's depression, which an unbeliever may not experience. This is because it has long been considered unchristian to get depressed. Too often Christians assess themselves and one another by their "Christian" performance. They expect each other to remain so full of faith as to remain undaunted even in the most trying of circumstances.. They must always be hopeful. But a depressed person is anything but hopeful. And he judges himself a failure because of it. On top of this he often finds his fellows unable to deal with him. They either regard him reproachfully for not having enough faith or they, through embarassment, avoid any contact with the sufferer. So the misery of the depressed is aggravated rather than assuaged by its contact with religion.

This article is written by one who is not expert on emotional illness. But he has known depression and he does know others who struggle with it. He has made many mistakes in dealing with them. He offers the following suggestions to friends of depressed people in the hope that it may help to ease some of their suffering.

"It takes more trust for some people to drag themselves out of bed in the morning than others would exercise in a year."

1. Do not assume that a depressed person is spiritually ill, although that may well be. The individual might have more faith than you. It takes more trust for some people to drag themselves out of bed in the morning, than others would exercise in a year.
2. Know that the reasons for the depression may be things over which your friend has no control. In his book, "Why Am I Afraid to Love", John Powell observes that, "We are, each of us, the product of those who have loved us or refused to love us".
   A child who has been kept under control by its parent's threats to withdraw their favour, will hungrily seek approval from everyone, in later years. He will be very depressed too, if he fails to obtain it. Much depression is biochemically caused. It simply cannot be turned off because of the presence of certain chemicals in the brain.
3. Be very patient. At times you may be very annoyed and frustrated. You will be tempted to say things like, "It's time you stopped feeling sorry for yourself" or "What you need is a swift kick in the behind". Such advice results from the mistaken notion that the person is able to think things through as fast as you. Depression doesn't come into being overnight. That which has resulted from the events of many years will not quickly disappear. You may not be a professional counsellor but you can be a listening friend. You may have to listen for long periods without hearing anything. Sometimes your friend may withdraw from you and say hurtful things to you. You must realise that his thoughts and feelings are erratic and changeable. Don't allow feelings of rejection to cause you to abandon him.

"It is our task and privilege to meet our stricken friends only with good news. Our dealings with them must be all of grace else we cannot help them."

4. Recognise the possiblity that spiritual encouragement that you might give may be useless. Your ministry may need to be replaced or supplemented by someone else. If so, you need not blame yourself as an ineffective Christian. It could well be that the problem requires the advice of a trained and skilled psychologist.
5. Recognise that the pit into which the depressed person has fallen, is a bottomless one with extremely slippery sides. Hopelessness and helplessness along with a host of other negative feelings, are the daily lot of the afflicted. What they need is not good advice but good news. It is our task and privilege to meet our stricken friends **only** with good news. Our dealings with them must be all of grace else we cannot help them. When a friend in our community has cancer there is always a procession of friends and aquaintances, who will come and visit. Not so when the friend has emotional illness. But it must be so! We cannot bring hope to people by keeping away from them. We must not allow their gaping emotional wounds to fill us with disgust. We must apply the hope of the Gospel to their darkened spirits through our persistant acceptance of them; through our refusal to abandon them or to regard them as being in the slightest degree, unworthy of our tenderest care; our most loyal devotion.
6. Remember Jesus. His mission was to seek and save the lost. He came to help, not those who were well, but those who were sick. He had a special word of invitation for those who were weary and heavy laden. He was sent to comfort all who mourn. No one in the world understands the plight of the depressed soul, as does Jesus. He was sorrowful even unto death. His heart was broken for the brokenhearted.

Those who suffer from the dark tormentor are fellows of Jesus. They are brothers for whom he died. 1The challenge of service remains for we who are his other brothers. Perhaps there is someone we know right now, who the Lord would have us so love that he will be led to exclaim:

> "He lifted me out of the pit of despair, out from the bog and mire, and set my feet on a hard firm path, and steadied me as I walked along."
>
> Psalm 40:2 LB

Odds and Ends

N.Z. Visit

During August, Ron allen flew to New Zealand for a ten day itinerary in the North and South Islands. Excellent meetings were enjoyed at Moeraki and Christchurch in the South and at Palmerston, Auckland and Whangarei in the North. Profitable discussions between the board and Ron also took place. One result of these was the decision to pay the Director in N.Z. a salary for his excellent work. The N.Z. Director for GNU is Brian Murphy who has hitherto been working on a voluntary basis only.

Radio Schedule

Some of our friends have requested that we publish our broadcast schedule with station dial positions included. So here we are:

2NSB FM Sydney 91.5	8:45 AM Sunday
2CHY FM Coff's Harbour 104	9:30 AM Sunday
2BS Bathurst 1503	9:00 PM Sunday
2RG Griffith 963	8:30 PM Sunday
2BE Bega 765	6:05 AM Sunday
3HA Hamilton 980	8:15 PM Sunday
3CV Bendigo 1071	8:15 AM Sunday
5PBA FM Adelaide 89.7	9:00 AM Sunday

Anonymous

We acknowledge receipt of the following anonymous donations:

$99.00
$10.00

Desmond Ford Publications

Good News Unlimited is an agent in Australia for Desmond Ford's books. Here are some titles that you may order through the GNU office in Sydney.

Daniel 8:14 and the Day of Atonement.
Price: $15.00 Postage $4.80

The Adventist Crisis of Spiritual
Identity. Price: $10.50 Postage $4.00

Sydney Rally

October 20 at 2.30 p.m. is the date for the next GNU fellowship in Sydney. The venue is Thornleigh West Public School, Giblett Avenue, Thornleigh. Guest Speaker will be **Des Hale**, experienced Pastor and preacher. An activity is planned for children.

Letters

Sirs:

Thank you once again for the periodical and tapes that keep coming. They contain a lot of valuable direction and information. Of course we thank the good Lord in matters such as this.

M. Zammit
Hillsdale N.S.W.

Sirs:

Please find enclosed a cheque. I am sending it on behalf of a blind lady, who has heard some of the GNU tapes and really appreciated the messages she heard. Thanking you very much, and also thanks for the messages printed and recorded, that we receive to fill our needs in the Gospel.

L. & M. Topperwein
Collie W.A.

Sirs:

We enjoy the magazine each month and look foward to its coming. May God continue to guide you all and bless you.

G. & B. Richter
Maryborough QLD.

Sirs:

Thank you very much for your magazine each month, which we enjoy very much. We have appreciated many articles and we think the August issue is really outstanding. Especially the Editorial and Desmond Ford article, "Nuclear Holocaust. What is the real Threat?"

Reader
VIC. Australia

Sirs:

We have decided to cancel a secular periodical and request instead that you place us on the regular Tape of the Month list.

I thoroughly enjoy Good News Unlimited and believe that it has been instrumental is assisting me to "come of age" spiritually. It seems to fill that void existing in the church I was brought up in and which I still love.

May the Lord continue to richly bless you in your powerful ministry.

Roberts
Tas.

Sirs:

Please thank Calvin Edwards for his most thought provoking, down to earth honest and truthful evaluation of man's nature in his article, 'Flexibility or Rigidity', in the July issue. I could feel my own heart melt as I pictured myslef in every phase of doctrinal legalism etc. Actually this article has more or less tied up all the loose ends for me. I feel that GNU is trying to bring people to reunite and come together in love and acceptance. Thank you.

Reader
ACT. Australia

Sirs:

Recently I had the pleasure of listening to a tape entitled, "The Answer to handicaps" by Desmond Ford. I was so moved by it that I listened to it several times. It was from the tape that I got your address and I was hoping that there was some Club I could join.

Hoping you can assist me.

Listener
N.S.W. Australia

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