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God's forgiveness and how to achieve it.

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When hurt by others, is it easy to walk away or is there the desire to hurt back? In Matthew 5:44 Jesus said, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." There is a word for what Jesus is telling us to do, it is long-suffering, which means sometimes we have to patiently accept a problem or hurt for a long period of time. The story of Joseph illustrates this fact very well.

As the favorite son of Jacob, Joseph was a spoiled and conceited adolescent. His attitude got him into trouble with his brothers who sold him into Egyptian slavery. The story of Joseph ends with him yielding humbly to God's control, which resulted in him becoming a powerful leader in Egypt. Joseph's story teaches that the circumstances of one's life are not nearly as important as how one reacts to the events.

Each person is responsible for bringing misfortune into his or her life through foolishness. Jacob's folly is seen in his huge errors in parenting. He favored one son over his other children, which produced the envy and hatred we read about in Genesis 37. As for Joseph, he was the man of dreams. His brothers called him "That dreamer." The dreams Joseph boasted to his brothers about encouraged the hate they had for him. As a boy Joseph was boastful. As a man he no longer flaunted his status, nor when he was reunited with his brothers did he ever say, "I told you so."

To forgive someone who has wronged us is not easy. The story of Joseph is about being forgiven and giving forgiveness. Little wonder the poet Alexander Pope wrote, "To err is human; to forgive, divine." With grace and nobility Joseph forgave his brothers. When Joseph at last revealed himself to his brothers he said, "You sold me; but God did send me" (Genesis 45:5). God used their wickedness to fulfill His will. It was apparent to Joseph God had worked His will through the men who had badly used him.

Joseph modeled genuine forgiveness. Through his brother's unfaithfulness to him, he was kidnapped, rejected enslaved and imprisoned. Yet, he forgave and shared his wealth. This is how God forgives us. He showers us with his goodness even when we sin against Him.

Each time you kneel in prayer do two important things. Show gratitude to God for His forgiveness by thanking Him and when you request forgiveness from God, ask yourself if you have forgiven the people who have wronged you. Being thankful and savoring the forgiveness granted you through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, will help you to have the strength of character to demonstrate forgiveness to others.

Noni

Noni McVey
Editor in Chief

PUBLISHED BY
The Church of God International

YOUTH MINISTER Loren M. Chamberlain

INFUSE MINISTER Mike James

EDITOR IN CHIEF Noni McVey

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS
Dr. Ab Abercrombie, Tyler Barnett,
Lloyd W. Cary, Loren M. Chamberlain,
Patricia Chamberlain, Brian
Christensen, Sarah Hoeck, George
James, Mike James, Ruth Kerr,
Margie Marang, Jeff Reed, Rory Ries,
Anika E. Sandy-Hanson, Madalitso
Siyabu

COPY EDITOR Elizabeth McVey

PROOF EDITOR Patricia Chamberlain

COVER ARTWORK Vicki Smith

DESIGN/LAYOUT Jordana McVey

The Foundation of our Journey with God

By Brian Christensen

Everyone, whom has ever lived, except one, has come short of the glory of God. If forgiveness were not possible, what would be the purpose of life, God's Plan, or Eternity? The Kingdom would be a very lonely place with only Jesus. Fortunately for us, God's forgiveness is possible and all will have an opportunity to enter the Kingdom through Jesus Christ our Savior. It is not easy and He tells us the path is very narrow, however, it is possible because of Him.

Forgiveness is the foundation and the start of our journey with God. It is always available to us, but it is not automatic. We must seek God and ask for it. The act of going to the Father to seek forgiveness is an acknowledgement by us of our sin and a desire to repent. Soon we begin to grow, gain His wisdom, and our character begins to develop. Does this mean we can do whatever we please, so long as we remember to confess afterwards? This is what some traditional organizations would have us believe. God knows all things, including our hearts and thoughts. Just as Adam and Eve found it impossible to deceive and hide from God, we too cannot escape the truth through the eyes of God. This attempt would only fail and short-circuit the growth process until we are honest with ourselves.

TO BE FORGIVEN, YOU MUST FORGIVE

Another ingredient to our forgiveness by God and the level of His forgiveness, is our ability to forgive others. Jesus makes this point throughout His teachings. "A new command I give you: Love one another." (John 13:34) He is the only one who has lived on earth, been tested, tried, and tempted without sin. So, He is the only one who can show us the way. In His example of how we should pray to the Father, He states, "Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matthew 6:12). The two are linked together and God will

judge us as we judge others.

Each day, our actions toward others are establishing the methods by which we shall be judged. Brethren, I know it is very difficult to forgive someone that has hurt you. I myself and all of us struggle with this act of "letting go." However, I know I need a lot of forgiveness, therefore, I must learn to forgive others so God's judgment will be more forgiving toward me. If we find favor in God's eye and are resurrected as Saints, will we be able to put aside our hateful thoughts while teaching someone we dislike? What if it is someone who hurt us severely or a serial killer? How would we react to Adolph Hitler? We must develop a compassion for each other as deep and encompassing as Jesus' was. The Apostles and the early Church had to deal with these fears. When Saul was chosen by God to be an Apostle, there was great concern and fear by the other Apostles. Paul (Saul) was viewed by many to be an evil man. He was responsible for the persecution and murder of numerous Christians. Imagine how we would feel if God chose a murderer to preach to us at the Feast?

God's forgiveness of our sins is never ending. We must have this same attitude toward others. There are always going to be people who mistreat us and do evil acts. We could also expect more of this because of our knowledge of the truth. The easiest things to do are to consume yourself with bitterness and walk away or avoid someone. A common phrase today is, "Fool me once shame on you, fool me twice shame on me." Another one is, "Three strikes and you're out!" These phrases are used to justify ill feeling towards another person or group. This will then lead to us talking to other people about the one who "did wrong against us." The proper term for this is gossip, and it will not help us grow.

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Understanding Forgiveness

By Loren M. Chamberlain

No matter how abundant our Faith, Hope, and Love, without "God's Forgiveness" we will never experience eternal life. How can we experience God's forgiveness?

GOD'S FORGIVENESS

If we want to experience God's forgiveness we must wholeheartedly confess our sins, our failures and then honestly repent. King David's confession to God after a notoriously sinful episode in his life is expressed in one of his Psalms. In this written confession to God, David truly expressed his sorrow for his adultery with Bathsheba and for murdering her husband to cover it up. He knew the sins he committed were against God and his actions had hurt many people. "For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight" (Psalm 51:3-4). But because David repented of those sins, God, in His great mercy forgave him. There is no sin too great to be forgiven!

We must never feel our sins are so ghastly that God cannot forgive them. God can and will forgive us of any sin, though while God forgives us, He does not always remove the consequences produced by our sins. David confessed and repented of his sin, but God's judgment was that his child born of Bathsheba would die. The consequences of David's sin were irreversible. "But

because by doing this you have made the enemies of the Lord show utter contempt, the son born to you will die" (2 Samuel 12:14). Sometimes an apology isn't enough. When God forgives us and restores our relationship with Him, He doesn't eliminate all the consequences of our wrongdoing.

FORGIVEN IN CHRIST

"Again Jesus said, 'Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.' And with that He breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone His sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them they are not forgiven'" (John 20:21-23). In these verses we see Jesus commissioning His disciples to be His representatives, even as He had been the Father's. "As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world" (John 17:18). Jesus gave the disciples the responsibility of spreading the gospel message around the world. They were given the authority to preach, teach, and do miracles (Matthew 28:16-20). No one has the power to forgive sins but God, however, Jesus gave the disciples the privilege of telling

new believers that, because they have repented of their sins and accepted Jesus as their Savior their sins are forgiven. Those who don't believe will not experience the forgiveness of sins and their sins will be retained rather than forgiven. All believers have this same privilege.

We can announce the forgiveness of sin with certainty when we find repentance of sin and faith in Jesus Christ.

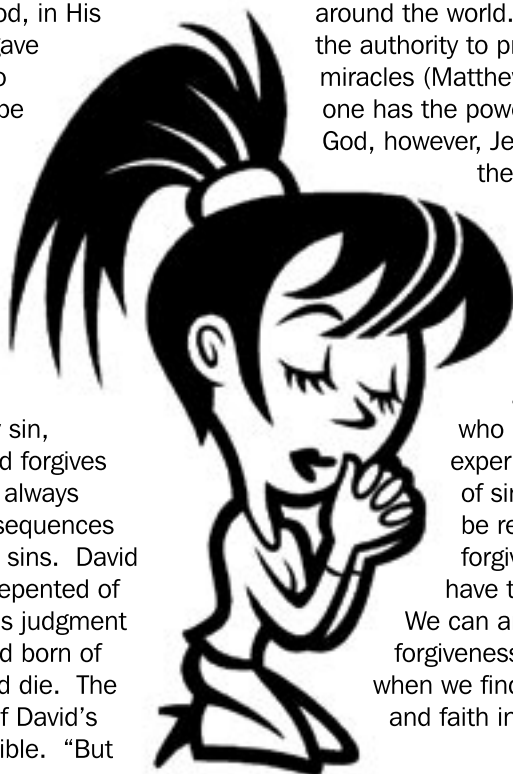
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THE CONSISTENCY OF GOD'S FORGIVENESS

Every time we ask for forgiveness in true repentance God will respond and forgive us. An example of God's love is seen in the comparison between Judas and Peter. Jesus knew exactly what was going to happen. He knew Judas would betray Him and Peter would deny Him, but He did not change the course of events, nor did He stop loving them. In the same way, Jesus knows exactly what we might do to hurt Him. Yet He still loves us unconditionally and will forgive us whenever we ask for it. Judas couldn't understand this kind of love and his life ended tragically. Peter understood, and despite his shortcomings, his life ended triumphantly because he never let go of his faith in the One who loved him. "A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (John 13:34). This command by Jesus was revolutionary because He is asking believers to love others based on His sacrificial love for them. Jesus was a living example of God's love.

COMPLETE CONFESSION

Confession will free us to enjoy fellowship with Christ. Confession eases our consciences and lightens our cares. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Just how does confession work? Are we to



confess the same sins over and over, and then wonder if we might have forgotten something? What happens to us if we die with un-confessed sins? Will we be forever lost?

First of all, God loves us and *wants* to forgive us. Remember, He allowed His beloved Son to die just so He could pardon us. When we come to Christ, He forgives all the sins we have committed or will ever commit. We do not have to confess the sins of the past all over again, and we don't need to fear that God will reject us if we don't keep our slate perfectly clean or forget about a sin and then fail to confess it. We are born sinners and "sinners sin!" Of course, we are not practicing sinners and we should continue to confess our sins, but the reason for confession of sin is to *maximize* our fellowship and joy with Him, not because failure to do so will make us lose our salvation. Our relationship with Christ is secure!

CONFESSION INCLUDES TURNING AWAY FROM SIN

True confession involves being committed to a life of turning away from sin. If we make plans to continue in sin our confession of sins to God would not be genuine. We need to pray always for strength not to sin and to defeat temptation every time it raises its ugly head whenever we face it.

What is the purpose of confessing our sins if God has forgiven us for our sins because of Christ's death? Why must we confess our sins? In admitting our sins and receiving Christ's cleansing, we are, first of all agreeing with God that our sin truly was sin and that we are willing to turn from it. Secondly, confessing ensures we don't conceal our sins from Him and consequently, from our own self. Thirdly, doing so recognizes our tendency to sin and relying on His power to overcome it.

FORGIVING OUR BROTHER

"And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you"

(Genesis 45:5). Joseph is a perfect model of genuine forgiveness. Can we possibly imagine being rejected, kidnapped, enslaved and imprisoned, and still not harbor a grudge towards our brothers? Though Joseph's brothers had been so unfaithful to him, he graciously forgave them and even shared his prosperity. Through Joseph God demonstrates how He forgives us and showers us with goodness and blessings even though we have sinned against Him. God will forgive us through Jesus if we ask Him in a repentant attitude.

As Christians we have a mark upon us, and that mark is forgiveness. If we love others the way Christ loves us, we will be willing to forgive. Just because we give an enemy a drink this does not mean we condone his actions or excuse them. It is simply away of loving him in spite of his sins, just as Christ did for us. "Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord. On the contrary: 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.' Don't be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:17-21).

It is like a fish swimming up river to be forgiving in an unforgiving world. It is contrary to the pattern of the world. Why does Paul tell us to be forgiving of our enemies? For several reasons, forgiveness is one way to break a cycle of retaliation and may possibly lead to reconciliation. It might make the enemy feel ashamed and change his or her ways. If we repay evil with evil it often hurts us just as much as it hurts our enemy. Even if our enemy never repents, being forgiving will free us of a heavy load of bitterness.

FORGIVE AND BE FORGIVEN

Jesus gives us a somewhat

FORGIVENESS IN SCRIPTURE

"Yes, if you forgive others for their sins, your Father in heaven will also forgive you for your sins. But if you don't forgive others, your Father in heaven will not forgive your sins."

Matthew 6:14-15

"Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, 'Lord, when my fellow believer sins against me, how many times must I forgive him? Should I forgive him as many as seven times?' Jesus answered, 'I tell you, you must forgive him more than seven times. You must forgive him even if he wrongs you seventy times seven.'"

Matthew 18:21-22

"When you are praying, if you are angry with someone, forgive him so that your Father in heaven will also forgive your sins."

Mark 11:25

"So be careful! If another follower sins, warn him, and if he is sorry and stops sinning, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in one day and says that he is sorry each time, forgive him."

Luke 17:3-4

"All the prophets say it is true that all who believe in Jesus will be forgiven of their sins through Jesus' name."

Acts 10:43

"In Christ we are set free by the blood of his death, and so we have forgiveness of sins. How rich is God's grace."

Ephesians 1:7

"But if we confess our sins, he will forgive our sins, because we can trust God to do what is right. He will cleanse us from all the wrongs we have done."

1 John 1:9

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In Matthew 18:21, Peter asks Jesus how many times we should forgive our brother. Jesus responds to this with a number so high as to indicate score-keeping is irrelevant. So, a healthier attitude might reflect, “490 strikes and you’re out, plus a few more, if you need them”. What if God judged us with only three strikes or allowed us to fool him only once?

JESUS LEADS BY EXAMPLE

Jesus is our guide and teacher and His actions show us how to forgive others. As Jesus was hanging from the cross and His commission here on Earth almost finished, He commits one of the most unselfish acts. In His last few breaths He says, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). Even after being persecuted, denied, and beaten, He still finds compassion to pray for these people. This forgiveness by Jesus opened up the gates and allowed us the opportunity for eternal life! We can only enter through Him and His way. When someone offends you, the most difficult and best thing to do is go to him or her. “If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault. If he listens to you, you will have won your brother” (Matthew 18:15). Matthew 5:23-25 also tells us we should not pray or worship if an offense bothers us. We should settle our differences quickly and not let them fester. We must either go to the one who sinned against us or forgive them immediately and let it go.

Ezekiel 37:23,24 and Revelation 21:3,4 portray the future Kingdom, when there will be only one God worshiped and Christ will be our perfect King. It is hard for our earthly minds to imagine how wonderful that time will be and Satan’s effect on us destroyed. Until then, we must spend our time on earth training for the perfection of God. Forgiveness is always available to us when we stumble along the way. Ask for it and give it. i

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shocking warning about forgiveness. Should we refuse to forgive others, God will also refuse to forgive us. Why? Because when we don’t forgive others, we are denying our common ground as sinners in need of God’s forgiveness. “For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins (Matthew 6:14-15). God’s forgiveness of sin is not the direct result of our forgiving others, but is based on our understanding of what forgiveness means. “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32).

SIN COUNTING?

It is not wise to keep track of offenses. The rabbis taught

We’re looking for articles, short stories, artwork, poetry, essays, personal experiences and reviews from you.

TOPIC: Drawing Close to God: Prayer, Bible Study, Meditation and Fasting.

GUIDELINES:

1. All submissions must be sent electronically as an email attachment, in the body of an email sent to noni@cgi.org, or mailed on a disc.
2. Articles should be approximately 750-1,000 words.
3. All articles should center on the topic as described above. Poetry can be on any topic.
4. If you are interested in contributing please contact Noni McVey by writing to noni@cgi.org or call 831-625-0231 to guarantee no one else is writing the same article.
5. See the Infuse website (<http://infuse.cgi.org>) for more submission guidelines and a complete list of article ideas.

DEADLINE: All submissions must be received by **February 1, 2005.**

that people should forgive those who offend them, but only three times! Compared to this, Peter was really generous when he asked Jesus if seven times was enough. However, the way of Jesus is quite different. Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times” (Matthew 18:22). So Jesus answer was “Seventy times seven” (the number of eternity), meaning that we shouldn’t even keep track of how many times we forgive someone.

Because God has forgiven us there ought to be no limit to a believer’s willingness to forgive another. Understanding how completely Christ has forgiven us should arouse a most free and generous attitude of forgiveness toward others. If we fail to forgive others we are in a sense setting ourselves outside of and above Christ’s law of love. i

Why does God forgive us?

By Sarah Hoeck

Have you ever done something really bad? Have you ever thought that praying for forgiveness just wouldn't undo what you did? Have you ever thought that God just wouldn't forgive you? Why should He? We certainly don't deserve His forgiveness.

The thing is, God doesn't want you to feel that way. He wants you to get on your knees and ask for forgiveness. And when you do, He forgives you. But why, why does He forgive you?

Psalms 86:5 says, "For you Lord are good and ready to forgive, and abundant in mercy to all those who call upon you." The Lord is 'ready to forgive' all the people who call upon Him. They repent and in doing so, hold up their part of the bargain. (And I say bargain because that's what we humans have. We have the better/easier part of the "deal.") Then, God holds up his part of the "bargain." He forgives us of our awful sins. Why?

"The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy" (Psalms 145:8). God is everything anyone wants in a person. In fact, if He were a human, He would be perfect and pure. He's loving, compassionate, merciful, slow to anger, good, kind and forgiving. All you have to do is ask Him to forgive you. You have to ask it from deep down in your heart and He will. Like it says in Acts 2:38, "Then Peter said to them, 'Repent and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'"

But still, why? We aren't like that. We sin and we act like we're just like everyone else. When someone does something wrong, we don't correct them. We copy people and usually go with the flow. But God still forgives us.

Mark 11:25, 26, "And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in Heaven may also forgive you your trespasses."

So according to this verse, God forgives us if we forgive others. But He doesn't if we don't. So, there's one reason why He forgives us; because we forgive others. But there must be another reason for his forgiveness.

First John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all

unrighteousness." Sometimes, actually most of the time, when I repent and ask God for forgiveness, I feel like He didn't. I feel that I'm a sinner, which I am. I ask myself, "How can He forgive me when I've sinned so much?" It's a question a lot of people ask themselves. And here, in 1 John, it says that He forgives us because we confess our sins to him. But wait, there's more.

In Luke 15, there is the parable of the lost son. You know how it goes. The son decides he wants to live his own life, a fun life. He asks his dad for his share of the money that he would have later inherited. He left home and after a while, his money ran out. He got a job of feeding pigs and even ate some of their food because he was so desperate. Finally, he decided to go home. He didn't expect things to be like they used to be, but he did think he could get a job as a servant. But when he was walking back to his father's house, his dad saw him. He ran out to his son and hugged him. He threw a huge party for his "lost son" that was now found.

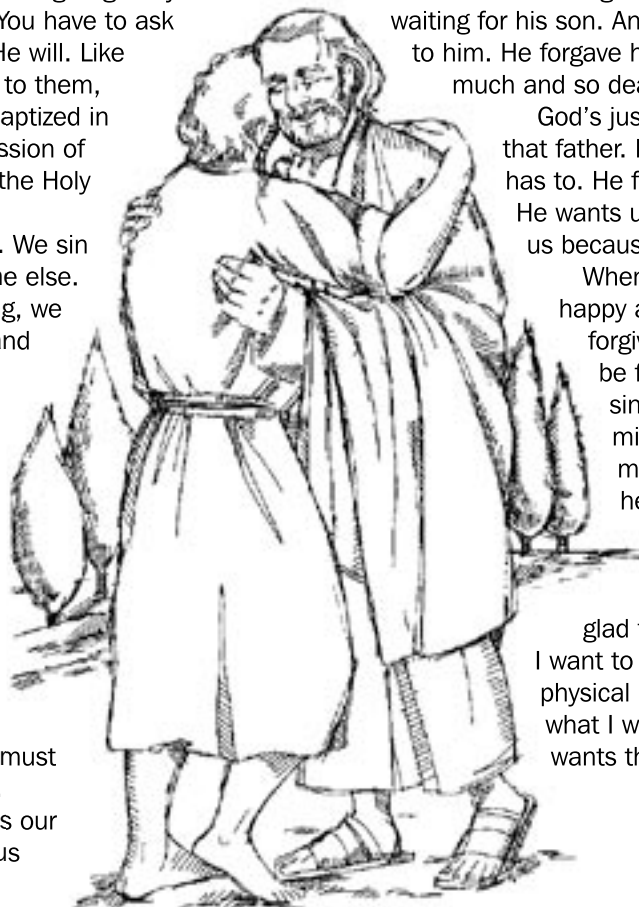
The father forgave his son of what he did, just like that. He forgave him in the blink of an eye. He forgave him because he loved him. God is like the dad of the lost son.

The dad was standing in his door, looking for his son, waiting for his son. And when he saw him, he ran out to him. He forgave his son because he loved him so much and so dearly.

God's just like that. Actually, in fact, God is that father. He doesn't forgive us because he has to. He forgives us because he wants to. He wants us to have eternal life. He forgives us because He loves us.

When I think about this, I feel so happy and excited inside. I mean God forgives me of the sins that shouldn't be forgiven. He forgives me, the sinner who doesn't deserve even a millisecond of His time. But what makes me smile the most is that he does all this because he loves me. He wants the best for me. And that is the best thing in the whole entire world. And I'm

glad that he does forgive me because I want to spend the rest of my life, both physical and spiritual, with him. That's what I want more than anything and he wants the same thing as me. I



(All verses are from the King James Version or the New KJV)



Feast of Tabernacles Gulf Shores, AL

By Tyler Barnett

The highlight of The Feast of Tabernacles this year was the many sermons and sermonettes given by the ministers. But you can get them all on CD, so I will fill you in on what happened with Infuse. If you were at Feast site other than Gulf Shores, Alabama, surely you were spiritually and physically fed, were stoked to be reunited with folks from last year, and enjoyed a little time to relax, but what you really missed out on was Infuse. Infuse is not only a quarterly magazine, but it is also an exciting program incorporated into the Feast that gives us, the youth, the power to do as we are called to do: EVANGELIZE!

An umbrella theme to this year's Feast was evangelism. It was echoed in the main services at the top of George Ramocan's lungs and seemed to get the Church of God fired up about one of their crucial duties as Christians. With Ramocan's firepower and motivation, those who attended the Infuse service were given the ammo: the Great Commission binder.

Mike James, a newly ordained minister, compiled scriptures outlining God's authority on the Sabbath, life after death, the Holy Days, Women in Ministry, His family, His laws, and His Kingdom. The binder has already proven indispensable in my own studies. I have used it as an aide to show scriptural proof of my beliefs to family and a few co-workers. The content is the truth, with no sugar coating. For many Christians it is not very easy to digest, so Infuse was careful to teach us how to use our new found knowledge. Among many other things, Mike James included a doctrinal crash course,

a personal/spiritual progress report, and a contact list of "who's who" in the Church. The Great Commission binder gives us the tools to allow God to change us so that we may, as the Infuse T-shirt says: "Go Teach All."

Some of the events sponsored by Infuse were a volleyball tourney, a ladies luncheon and Habitat for Humanity. All were a big hit, but the ladies luncheon in particular is quite memorable. A few gentlemen from Infuse and I had the opportunity to volunteer and serve the ladies their lunch. I listened in on the guest speaker Sharon Abercrombie, a Christian Counselor, as she encouraged the women to realize they were "Woven With a Purpose."

Habitat for Humanity, as always, was a big hit. We had so much FUN grouting, scraping, laying tile, shoveling dirt, laying sod, sweeping. It was almost unreal! Community service is another aspect of our duties as Christians that often times gets overlooked. "Habitat" was another opportunity to serve, but more importantly allowed us to think about serving in our own communities.

One last thing that I took from this year's Feast of Tabernacles is a sense of community. I made more friends and realized more brothers and sisters in Faith. The greatest feeling to know is that others are praying for me. Infuse is a proactive aspect of The Church of God International. It is still an active aspect of His church, transcending the boundaries of this text, remaining in our thoughts long after the Feast is over, and infusing our prayers as a daily reminder that we are obligated to "Go Teach All." i

all



Matthew 28:19

teach



go





Mike



INFUSE WELCOMES MIKE JAMES AS THE INFUSE MINISTER! Mike, ordained at the Feast of Tabernacles in Gulf Shores, AL, has accepted the position as the Infuse Minister.

Mike was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1963. Mike grew up in the Greek Orthodox church and was first interested in the Church of God movement through a Plain Truth article at age 17. While in college Mike began to order literature from the Worldwide Church of God and the Church of God, International. In 1985 he graduated from Indiana University of Pennsylvania with a degree in Criminology. Mike was also baptized in 1985. Mike also has a master's degree in Liberal Studies from Georgetown University. Mike now lives in Germantown, MD with his wife Shernet. His interests include exercise, volunteer work, reading and Bible study.

For more photos and information about Infuse at the Feast of Tabernacles in 2006, visit: <http://infuse.cgi.org>

Letter from Madalitso Siyabu

Ntcheu, Malawi, Africa

Church observes the 2005 Feast of Tabernacles

Special greetings from all of us in the warm heart of Africa, Malawi.

We hope you were much blessed just like we were at this year's Feast of Tabernacles. Days before the function began, posters advertising the function were on every corner in the district. Even though God called a low number of attendees, seventeen (17) plus five (5) visitors as compared to last year. The hospitality of Ntcheu Feast site was so wonderful.

We met old and new friends; enjoyed good food, weather, music and the presence of God's spirit made the Festival a delight.

Our visitors included Pastor Mbewe of the Agape Life Church and Captain Spider of the Salvation Army. Music was accompanied by a piano and the use of loud (speakers) made people of surrounding areas to hear "Come to the Feast"; "We Have a Story to Tell the Nations" at a radius of at least four miles.

As to many of us, life is filled with many problems. Such as natural disasters, grief, intense pain...you name them. Here in Malawi, green mangoes substituted the staple food of maize and rice. The hunger crisis is at its climax. Twenty-nine young adults else where, fell victim to wild poisonous herbs in the scramble for food. For these reasons the message concerning the coming transformation and the wonderful world tomorrow was received with much enthusiasm.

This very Festival cogitated about the future advent of Jesus restoring His rule on earth. The church reckoned during the time, that our bodies are but temporary dwellings. God

will give us permanent lives, which will never suffer death at Christ's return. Isaiah 35:1-10.

The annual holy days which, as stipulated in Leviticus 23 and Deuteronomy 16 are to be kept by all nations of the earth. In Zechariah 14:16 we see that all nations (regardless of race) shall go to Jerusalem year after year to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. The Feast of Tabernacles symbolized the restoration process, which will start with the return of Jesus, pictured by the Feast of Trumpets, and the banishment of the master deceiver Satan, depicted by the fasting Day of Atonement.

We celebrated these Festivals because Jesus celebrated the festivals. As Christ's followers we take the same path taken by Jesus our Savior. We don't follow man made holidays like Easter, Halloween or Christmas.

Other Judaeo-Christian Festivals, which reveals God's master plan for humanity, are the Passover, Days of Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, Feast of Trumpets and the Last Great Day.

The church in Malawi has survived many of Satan's attacks including schism. It also depends highly on the audio tapes, booklets, study aids, which are supplied by the home office in Tyler, Texas as it's main blood life supply route.

The church works as a team to spread the Gospel of Jesus in Malawi. We ask you to remember us in your prayers. Thank you very much and may the merciful God richly bless you.

Your Friend and in Christ's Service,

Madalitso Siyabu

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Begin with Repentance...

By Rory Ries

One of the many characteristics of our Great God is His love for His creation. "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). This plan had to be put into effect because man has sinned and has separated himself from God (Isaiah 59:2). We also know the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). All have sinned and yet God is willing to forgive and offer the gift of salvation because He loves His creation (Romans 5:8, 1 John 4:10).

We are instructed to pray for forgiveness (Matthew 6:12). We are also instructed if we want to receive forgiveness we have to be willing to forgive others (Matthew 6:14-15). God sets the example as well as Jesus Christ. God offers salvation today to those who are willing to repent of their sins and ask for forgiveness (Acts 2:37-38). God will also offer salvation to those who are resurrected as physical human beings at the great white throne judgement (Revelation 20:11-12). Everyone who has ever lived will have the opportunity to know God at one time or another according to His great plan.

It all starts with repentance and forgiveness of sins (Isaiah 1:16-18). "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding" (Ephesians 1:7-8). This walk with God begins when out of His kindness He leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4). What do we repent of? We repent of breaking His Law. We are instructed to love God with all of our heart, soul, and mind, and we are told to love our neighbor as we love ourselves (Mark

12:28-31). These are the two great commandments.

We all fall short. We cannot overcome any sin on our own. We need Christ living in us and we need God's mercy to clean us up and become more like them with each passing day (Romans 8:37). Man is basically hostile towards God until he repents and his sins are forgiven (Romans 8:6-8). Once we repent and we become baptized we become a new creation and we become the sons of God (2 Corinthians 5:17, Romans 8:13-17). Not only do we become sons of God we become heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. Now that is exciting news.

As you read this keep this in mind when you look at the people in God's church. The church is not perfect. Christ who is the head of the church is perfect but the people He is working with are not. That's why you may see people doing things that may not always make sense. Each individual God calls to Christ is a work in progress. God does not wave a magical wand that once you repent and your sins are forgiven, you automatically become perfect. Conversion is a life long process. That's why forgiveness is a key element in how we do get along with one another in the church and in the world.

We are all trying to develop more of God's character and it can be very challenging at times. God is creating in us His perfect character but being human we slip from time to time and we make mistakes. God does not wipe us out because we have sinned. He continues to work with each one of us as long as we continue to seek His forgiveness when we sin. Now if we deliberately sin against God and willfully refuse to follow Christ, we can possibly



separate ourselves from God which is a dangerous position avoid (Hebrews 10:26).

God is willing to forgive anyone. God forgave David of adultery and murder (2 Samuel 11:4-17). Even though David committed a horrible crime, God was willing to forgive him, however God did not remove the penalty. David will rule over Israel as their King when Jesus Christ returns and sets up His Kingdom (Ezekiel 37:24). This does not mean a person can just go out and do whatever they want and expect to get away with the sin. David always had a heart that was willing to repent and ask for forgiveness (Psalm 51).

God is also willing to forgive a nation if the nation is willing to ask for forgiveness (Jonah 3:10). Jonah had preached to Nineveh and warned the king their God would destroy Nineveh if they didn't seek forgiveness. The king called for the people to fast along with him and seek forgiveness. God chose to have compassion on them and their sins were forgiven. It could be God's choice to forgive any nation today if they would truly repent.

Being like God means we have to be willing to show compassion and be willing to forgive. If someone hurts us we have to be willing to forgive (Matthew 18:21-22). If they hurt us more than once we still have to be willing to forgive. Of course part

continued on page 18

Consequence

By Dr. Ab Abercrombie

Here King David records a truly remarkable promise of God. Once we are His children we are forever covered in the security of His forgiveness and mercy. As humans it is hard for us to fathom such a complete separation from sin. But according to God's Word, once our sins are confessed before the Lord, they are literally forgotten. If our confession and devotion to Jesus is genuine, then eternity with Him is assured and no act or person can ever take us from His presence. Jesus said, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:27-28).

As followers of Christ, we can find great comfort in our Savior's words. But we must be mindful of the fact that forgiveness, mercy, and salvation are terms dealing with eternity. In other words, our sins and transgressions have been made clean by the blood of Jesus and we now are saved from the condemnation of hell. As Paul wrote, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus..." (Romans 1:8).

But does freedom from condemnation also provide the believer freedom from consequence? Does faith in Christ render one invincible and oblivious to the effect of sin? Does godly conduct really matter once we are under grace? Paul asked and answered the same sort of question, "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?" (Romans 6:1-2).

Clearly the Christian is not "excused" by grace to go on with his/her previous state of living. Instead we are called to no longer live for ourselves but rather conduct our lives with honor, compelled by the love of the One who saved us (2 Corinthians 5:14-15). In this state of "love and honor" we are connected to Christ in a manner that yields conviction and sorrow when we sin, provoking repentance and restoration rather than prolonged, deliberate disobedience. Paul wrote, "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death" (2 Corinthians 7:10).

Notice that while godly sorrow "leaves no regret," worldly sorrow "brings death." As Christians our submission to

the conviction of the Holy Spirit leads us away from sinful activities, and quickly restores our relationship and protected position with the Lord. But when we, as believers, harden our hearts, continuing in repetitive, willful sin, the discipline of our Heavenly Father will be swift and just. In fact Scripture tells us that God's corrective intervention in our lives provides evidence that we are His "true sons." The writer of Hebrews encourages the believer:

Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. (Hebrews 12:7-10)

As with our earthly fathers, structure and boundaries are necessary as foundations of proper instruction. Without guidelines and limits we could never learn to function effectively in our families or in the world. It is no different with God. Here we are told that He "disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness." His response provokes restoration not rejection. His action is designed to shape and call us into His order so that we might share in His blessings. Because we are His children, He will not stand idle and allow us to dishonor our heritage and ourselves. Sin carries a natural consequence that, while painful, grows and benefits us immeasurably. Continuing in the same chapter of Hebrews the Word says, "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it" (v. 11).

The Apostle Peter is a perfect example of consequence that produced a "harvest of righteousness." After believing in Christ as the Messiah, and after promising he would "go both to prison and to death" (Luke 22:33) on His behalf, Peter turned his back on the Savior. When confronted, Peter denied knowledge and association with Jesus three times, even as they carried the Lord away to be mocked, beaten, humiliated, and crucified (Luke 22:54-63). At this point, Peter's life seemed hopelessly lost; in fact Scripture tells us

or Condemnation

that Peter wept bitterly (Matthew 26:75).

Peter's failure and shame were great. He had forsaken the Lord to whom he had professed total allegiance. But there is a short passage of Scripture that highlights the permanence of God's love and the assurance of His salvation, even in the face of our total collapse. It occurs when the women (Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James, and Salome) found the tomb empty. They were met by an angel who delivered the following message from Jesus, "But go, tell His disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see Him, just as He told you'" (Mark 16:7).

Don't overlook the significance of this message: "...go tell His disciples and Peter..." Jesus, in His message, deliberately includes Peter by name. Jesus knew that Peter truly believed; He knew his strengths and weaknesses; and He knew the suffering of Peter's heart in the wake of his denial of the Christ. Yet this tiny inclusive instruction to join Him in Galilee brings confirmation of Peter's security, just as it proves the security of all true followers of Jesus.

One can only imagine the suffering Peter endured over the course of those three days before those fateful words were spoken. The doubt he must have felt; the shame of his

failure; the sense of embarrassment before his peers; would be unspeakable. All of the bragging and empty promises had ended with the death of his Lord while Peter stood by and did nothing. Yet while the consequence was great, the condemnation was absent. Jesus called Peter to return to Him at Galilee, with all the others.

Christ went on to use Peter's fall to shape and complete his preparation for leadership. Jesus later installed Peter as one of the apostolic leaders of the early Church, challenging his love, demanding his service, and calling him to martyrdom (John 21:15-25).

While sin is part of our human existence, it is not without cost and effect. But as Christians the discipline we receive is the validation of our permanent place, our eternal position with the Lord. The discomfort we experience awakens us to the gift of His provision rather than the wrath of His judgment. From our fall we are sculpted; from our guilt we are restored; and ever so surely the character of Christ is built and shaped within us. Bruised but not burdened; chastened but not cast out; forlorn but not forsaken; growing always in the Spirit of the Lord. i



Movie Time: 50 FIRST DATES

PG-13

THEME: God forgives completely, forgetting our transgressions.

SCRIPTURE: Jeremiah 31:31-34

SYNOPSIS: Sue tells Henry about Lucy's car accident. She explains that Lucy lost her short-term memory and can't remember anything that happened after the accident. Every day is Sunday, October 13th to Lucy.

GOSPEL FILTER: We're not going to debate whether losing your short-term memory is a blessing or a curse. Instead, draw a parallel between Lucy's faulty memory and God's promise to forget our sin when we seek his forgiveness. He promises to wash the slate clean when we repent, making our spiritual life a Sunday, October 13th as often as we request.

THINK ABOUT IT:

- If you could pick one event in your life to forget, what would it be and why?
- Why is it so hard for us to forget the mistakes we've made? Does this fact make it hard to believe that your friends or family really forgive when you mess up? Why or why not?
- Do you see God as keeping score on all your sins or forgiving and forgetting? Explain. How does your view about this affect your relationship with God?
- Read Jeremiah 31:31-34. What steps must we take in order for God to forget our sin? Have you taken those steps? Why or why not?
- Why is it so hard to believe that God would forgive and forget our sin? How does the fact that God truly forgives and forgets our sin impact your relationship with God? What does it tell you about God's character?

The Natural Consequences

BLESSINGS FOR OBEDIENCE

If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. All these blessings will come upon you and accompany you if you obey the Lord your God:

You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country.

The fruit of your womb will be blessed, and the crops of your land and the young of your livestock—the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks.

Your basket and your kneading trough will be blessed.

You will be blessed when you come in and blessed when you go out.

The Lord will make you the head, not the tail. If you pay attention to the commands of the Lord your God that I give you this day and carefully follow them, you will always be at the top, never at the bottom. Do not turn aside from any of the commands I give you today, to the right or to the left, following other gods and serving them.

Deuteronomy 28:1-6, 13-14

By Jeff Reed

God assures us, if we truly are repentant, we can receive forgiveness no matter what our sins. When we initially repent and are baptized, we are washed clean by the blood of Christ. As we live our lives as Christians, still not perfect, we are continually faced with overcoming sin. We are assured in Hebrews 4:16 that we can “approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” The love of God for us is truly great.

I knew this when I was baptized over 13 years ago. I was eager to have my sins forgiven and washed away, and I assumed that now my life would also be perfect. I quickly learned I was wrong. I had received forgiveness, but I still faced the effects of my prior sins. Relationships with people I had damaged by my wrong behavior were still messed up. The effects of repeated sin on my character were still there. All the wrong television, movies, music, and twisted popular culture continued to haunt my thoughts. Eating the wrong foods for over twenty years would continue to have negative impacts on my health. The consequences of sin remained.

In Deuteronomy 28 God gives a list of blessings for obedience to Him and curses for disobedience. These were given to the nation of Israel at a national level. If they collectively obeyed His laws, great blessings would occur. If they disobeyed, there would be an opposite outcome. The outcomes are very natural and are part of the world He created. They are as natural as the law of gravity. If we toss an object into the air we know the consequence will be it will fall to the earth. Because the laws God gave Israel are natural laws, they can be applied to any nation at any time in history.

Let's imagine that everyone in our country kept God's law against murder. The consequence would be everyone would feel absolutely safe in every situation, time and location. But the reality is that even though the vast majority of people keep that law, because there are a few who don't, and our justice system has become weak and ineffective, people are often faced with situations where they are on guard or fearful. It is why we have elaborate security systems, people carry personal weapons, locations are well lit at night, and many other precautions are taken to keep people safe.

We can apply these natural consequences to a personal level as well. If someone is an alcoholic or drug addict before they become a Christian, he will still be dealing with the consequences of that sin for the rest of his life. If someone engages in illicit sexual practices, before becoming a Christian or sometimes unfortunately after becoming a Christian, the effects of disease, broken marriages, unwanted pregnancy, and other problems will remain, even after repentance and forgiveness.

*“Being a Christian
is being forgiven.”*

→ of Sin

To truly repent is to also accept the consequences of our sin. In 2 Corinthians 7 Paul writes about the attributes of Godly sorrow the Corinthian church was displaying. He writes:

“Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done.” 2 Corinthians 7:10,11

One of those attributes is “the readiness to see justice done” even if that justice is applied to ourselves. Imagine if you have stolen something and were sentenced to jail time and community service. If you have Godly sorrow that leads to true repentance you will accept your punishment willingly.

King David learned this the hard way when he was faced with his own terrible sins of adultery and murder. Nathan rebuked David for his sins and David repented:

“Then David said to Nathan, ‘I have sinned against the Lord.’ Nathan replied, ‘The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die. But because by doing this you have made the enemies of the Lord show utter contempt, the son born to you will die’ 2 Samuel 12:13,14.

One of the consequences of his sin was the death of his child born to Bathsheba. David faced this with much sorrow. He fasted and pleaded with God to save his son. Afterward David had learned a great lesson and was able to write, “Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge” (Psalm 51:4). He accepted the judgment of God and was ready to see justice done in his life. His true repentance led him to accept the consequences of his actions no matter how painful they were.

We need to be very grateful that God has and will forgive us. We need to learn the lessons of our lives and what the consequences of sin can teach us. God, by His Spirit, is creating Godly character in us by those lessons. i

C RS S FOR ISOB I NC

However, if you do not obey the LORD your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come upon you and overtake you:

You will be cursed in the city and cursed in the country.

Your basket and your kneading trough will be cursed.

The fruit of your womb will be cursed, and the crops of your land, and the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks.

You will be cursed when you come in and cursed when you go out.

The Lord will send on you curses, confusion and rebuke in everything you put your hand to, until you are destroyed and come to sudden ruin because of the evil you have done in forsaking him.

The Lord will plague you with diseases until he has destroyed you from the land you are entering to possess.

The Lord will strike you with wasting disease, with fever and inflammation, with scorching heat and drought, with blight and mildew, which will plague you until you perish.

The sky over your head will be bronze, the ground beneath you iron.

The Lord will turn the rain of your country into dust and powder; it will come down from the skies until you are destroyed.

All these curses will come upon you. They will pursue you and overtake you until you are destroyed, because you did not obey the Lord your God and observe the commands and decrees he gave you. They will be a sign and a wonder to you and your descendants forever. Because you did not serve the Lord your God joyfully and gladly in the time of prosperity, therefore in hunger and thirst, in nakedness and dire poverty, you will serve the enemies the Lord sends against you. He will put an iron yoke on your neck until he has destroyed you.

Deuteronomy 28:15-20, 45-48

LEAVING THE PAST BEHIND

Have you left the baggage of your sins and lists of offences and failures in the past—or are you struggling with them to this day? Here's how to get rid of them.

By Lloyd W. Cary

What troublous times we live in! The apostle Paul says, “But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days” (2 Timothy 3:1), and then goes on to list a whole host of “signs of the times.” When all is said and done, most of mankind’s problems are the result of wrong thinking and wrong doing, resulting in wrong choices. Such is the cyclical history of mankind.

Human nature is largely made up of vanity, jealousy, lust, and greed. Jeremiah 17:9 tells us, “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” The works of the flesh and the Fruit of the Spirit are listed in detail in Galatians 5:19-22. Read them at your leisure. Without God’s forgiving Spirit, it seems that, knowingly or unknowingly, most folks make up mental “lists” of real or imagined offences, objections, likes, dislikes, and even hatreds.

Perceptions rule! Misperceptions color our attitudes and all that we see. Attitudes affect our feelings. And feelings, in turn, affect behavior. That’s the way the carnal mind works. When an individual continuously dwells upon, deliberates, and stewes over these lists of real or perceived injustices, they become magnified out of all proportion until they finally dominate his or her thoughts. Sleepless nights, worry, distrust, frustration, anger, and retribution are usually the result. Millions of people spend billions of dollars annually on doctors and prescription drugs just because they cannot let go of the past and face a new tomorrow. Going over and over lists of accumulated offences—thus impressing them indelibly in the

mind—can lead to the destructive “root of bitterness” cautioned against in Hebrews 12:15, whereby it becomes nearly humanly impossible to forgive the alleged offender. Christians cannot afford to do this.

Jesus Christ says plainly in Matthew 6:14-15, “For if [a conditional statement] you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.” Internalize this truth! If any of us have such lists of offences or have “lines drawn in the sand,” we need to burn those lists and erase those lines! No matter how “righteous” we think we may be in some areas, the attitude of forgiveness is prerequisite. Jesus Christ says so!

The apostle Paul had a very simple way of dealing with such lists of offences. We should follow his advice.

FORGETTING THE PAST

“Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind [the past] and straining toward what is ahead [the future], I press on toward the goal to win the prize [the goal] for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13-14). What a beautiful attitude! Paul harbored no grudges or offences. He let bygones be bygones. “Great peace have they who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble” (Psalms 119:165).

Paul went on to say in Philippians 4:8, “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about

such things.” This is God’s “positive thinking course.” In other words, with God’s help, we can “reprogram” our thinking—we can erase and replace! We can leave the past behind.

We all have a journey ahead. And the goal of our life’s journey should be to win the prize—the Kingdom of God! Anyone who enters a contest of any sort does so with the goal of winning. In this “game of life,” our goal should be the same—to win the prize at the end of the race! Those who run in a marathon race must sometimes sacrifice blood, sweat, and tears. But the prize—eternal life in the Kingdom of God—is well worth it all.

If we are going to press on to obtain the prize, we’re going to have to turn our backs on the past and leave some things behind.

Hebrews 12:1 commands, “let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.”

While some weights, sins, or handicaps may be easier to recognize and overcome than others, we are to throw off every sin, which includes attitudes of unforgiveness, bitterness, hatred, worry, anxiety, and fear. All these things have to go.

First Peter 5:7 says we are to “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.” In addition to throwing off sin, the Bible tells us to throw off everything that hinders us from running our race. This lightens our load considerably, enabling us to continue and endure to the end (Matthew 24:13). There may be some things we are holding on to that aren’t necessarily sin, but they are weighing us down and

holding us back nonetheless. That's what the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread are all about: casting all our sins upon Him, casting the weighty anchor of sin out of our lives.

In the natural, it's impossible to run a good race while carrying a heavy load on your back. Runners want to be as lightweight as possible. They don't carry things with them, and some even wear specially made lightweight shoes and clothing to help them run faster.

Think for a moment. What have we been carrying around? What have you been carrying around? Have you been offended? Get over it. Have you been wronged? Take it to Jesus. In truth, one of the hardest things we have to leave behind includes the pride of our past accomplishments. Sometimes we want recognition for things we have done in the past and carry these accomplishments with us and wear them as a medal or trophy, so to speak. But the truth is, without God we could not have done anything! Conversely, Paul said, "I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13).

In the Christian life, there is no place for people to rest on their laurels. Paul is saying, in effect, that the Christian must forget all that he has done and remember only what he must still do.

No one ever accomplished anything while living in the past. "You can't drive forward while looking in the rearview mirror," a wise man once said. How true! If you want to accomplish a thing get your eyes on the prize—the goal—and strain forward to what's ahead. God has forgiven and forgotten your repented of sins. Upon our heartfelt repentance, God says, "'Come now, let us reason together' says the LORD. 'Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.'" (Isaiah 1:18). He repeats his promise of forgiveness in Isaiah 44:22, "'I have swept away your offenses like a cloud, your sins like the morning mist. Return to me, for I have redeemed you.'"

Who are we to harbor resentment over someone else's repented of sins? Although God is addressing physical Israel in context, the same promise filters down to all men individually. Do you believe God? Then take Him at His word! Forgive—and forget. When a friend—or a brother—makes a mistake, don't rub it in. Rub it out. Men with clenched fists can't shake hands.

Give that list of offences to the One who can destroy it forever.

We all need to forget the past and become focused on the future.

"DROP THAT BAGGAGE!"

Unfortunately, many Christians still carry around "baggage" from their past. It weighs them down, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. This baggage may consist of feelings of guilt for past sins, grudges, old habits, and ways of doing things, or even of an unforgiving spirit of real or imagined offences of a brother in Christ. These heavy loads hinder those who carry them in their daily actions, tiring them out and preventing them from doing what they are called to do—just as carrying an actual backpack of bricks or a suitcase full of dirt around every minute of the day would hinder them and wear them out. Plus they can never grab hold of something new because their hands are already full—holding on to the old!

What should these people do? If it were a literal suitcase they were towing around, you would probably tell them the same thing I would tell them, "Put the suitcase down! Quit lugging that thing around with you! You're wearing yourself out!" Spiritually speaking, it is the same. Contrast this with the comparatively light burden Christ asks us to bear, "'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.'" (Matthew 11:28-30).

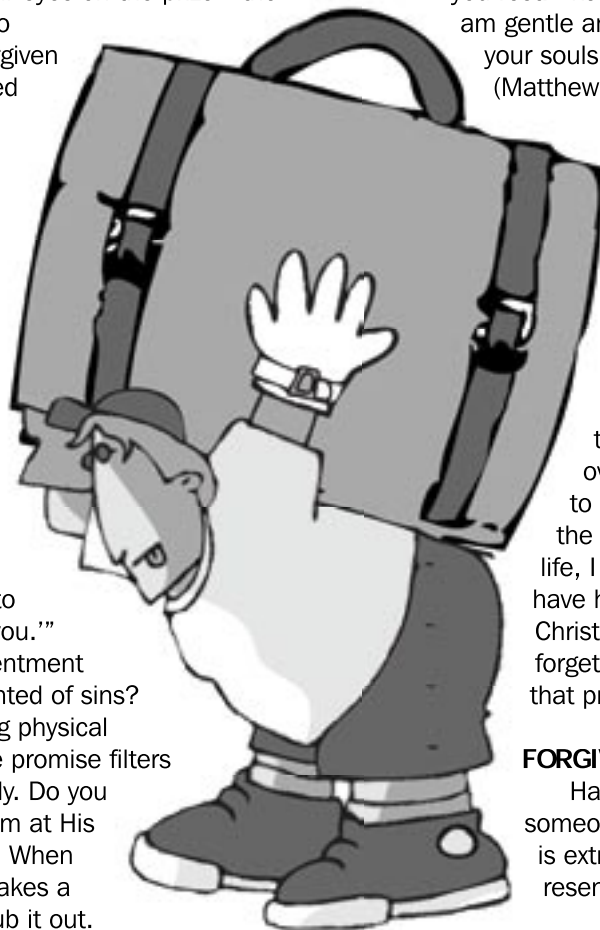
Christ died to cleanse you from your sin and set you free. You're free! Put down that baggage from the past! Throw off that weight and that sin! Forget what is behind you and strain toward what is ahead. Press on toward the goal to win the prize!

If you've been struggling with the past and want to make a fresh start, pray a straight-forward, heartfelt prayer something like this, "Heavenly Father, I want to throw off the weight I've been carrying around. I give it over to You. I confess my sin to You and ask You to forgive me according to 1 John 1:9. Now that the blood of Jesus Christ has been applied to my life, I choose to let go of sin and of all the things that have hindered my walk with You. In the name of Jesus Christ, I cast all my burdens upon You. Help me to forget the past and press on toward the prize." Pray that prayer and expect an answer!

FORGIVE AND FORGET!

Have you noticed how much easier it to forgive someone—after you have gotten even with him? It is extremely difficult to endure wrongdoing without resentment and a desire to reciprocate. In the end,

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Movie Time

PG-13 **STARSKY & HUTCH**

THEME: We must accept all apologies.

SCRIPTURE: Luke 17:3-4

SYNOPSIS: Starsky attempts to apologize, but Hutch blows him off. Willis and Huggy get on Hutch for not letting Starsky apologize, so Hutch catches up to his partner in the hall. Starsky apologizes, and Hutch forgives him for talking bad behind his back.

GOSPEL FILTER: No matter how grievous the offense, God calls us to accept the apologies of those who wrong us. Though it might feel better in the short term to maintain a grudge, in the long term forgiveness heals the soul and presents the heart of Christ to others.

THINK ABOUT IT:

- Is a person ever justified in not accepting an apology? Why or why not?
- Have you ever had someone not accept your apology? If so, why couldn't they forgive you? What happened to your relationship afterwards?
- How does forgiveness help the person who was wronged to find peace and closure?
- Read aloud Luke 17:3-4. Realistically, how many times do you think you would be able to forgive someone if he or she kept doing something hurtful over and over? Why doesn't Jesus put a limit on the number of times we must forgive?
- Does this make Christians out to be suckers? Why or why not? How can you maintain a forgiving spirit without getting taken advantage of?
- What prevents people from freely offering forgiveness to others? What must you do in order to become more forgiving?

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of the forgiveness process is being willing to sit down with the other person and discuss what is going on. Unfortunately, that's not always the case. We get upset at someone and we hold a grudge and carry around unnecessary anger because someone didn't act the way we wanted them to act. God commands us to deal with that person and deal with them in a loving way, which means being willing to forgive (Matthew 18:15, Ephesians 4:26-27, Ephesians 4:32).

It's not easy becoming like our Savior Jesus Christ. He requires it from us because of our great inheritance. All of mankind is going to be given an opportunity to know who God really is. He is working with a small number today and He will eventually work with all of mankind at another time. You can have that opportunity today and look to God and Jesus Christ for direction and guidance. There is much rejoicing in heaven when one sinner repents and his sins are forgiven (Luke 15:7). This awesome God we call Father desires to have a relationship with you and is so willing to forgive you of any sin you may have committed. Forgiveness is one of many beautiful characteristics of our loving and compassionate Father and we have the honor of being His children. i

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revenge is the sword that wounds the one who wields it. "Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, 'Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?' Jesus answered, 'I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times'" (Matthew 18:21-22). Jewish custom taught that a man was to forgive another three times, but not the fourth. Peter undoubtedly thought he was being very generous by doubling this, and asked whether forgiveness was to be exercised to so great an extent. Christ pointed out we are not to limit our forgiveness to any fixed number of times, but infinitely. Forgiving and forgetting is a hard thing to do in the natural. It seems to rankle against human nature. Yet, with God's help, that is precisely what we are called upon to do! "Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay.' says the Lord." (Romans 12:19).

All too often, when we feel we have in fact turned our list of grievances and offences over to Jesus, we take the whole list back at the next perception of offence—and add to it! At such times we need to resist this urge and cry out to God for help! "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." (James 4:7). Notice that resisting is an action—it is something you do! "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." (Ephesians 6:12).

The helmet of salvation referred to in Ephesians 6:17 is to protect the Christian warrior's head, that is, his mind! We are to have the mind of Christ, a mind of love and forgiveness (1 Corinthians 2:16). The Adversary will always do his part to try to bring memories of the past—your old list of offences—back to your mind. He wants you to pick up the baggage you have laid down. Don't entertain the thought. Don't even touch that baggage! Yes, you can resist the devil when you feel tempted! When the devil tries to bring up the past, tell him, "Get behind me, Satan! I threw that baggage—that trash—away. The blood of Jesus Christ has cleansed me from the past. I am forgetting what is behind me, and I am walking with Jesus Christ into a victorious future."

Let us examine ourselves. "Put on the full armor of God," not just those pieces you are most comfortable with, "so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes" (Ephesians 6:11).

THANK GOD for His Truth! Thank God for setting you free from the shackles of the past! i

Betrayal & Forgiveness

By Mike James



One of the best lessons I learned came from the pain of losing someone I wanted to marry. I was in my mid-twenties and this was the first time I had been in love. It reached the point that my girlfriend and I had talked about marriage and we had agreed we were going to marry someday.

Not long after we had agreed to get married, my intended started to act strangely.

We worked at the same building and used to meet regularly for

lunch. Soon after we discussed marriage she was not always available for lunch. One time when she was not available, I saw her going to lunch with her girlfriend and another guy. Yes, I know that should have been a signal to me, but at the time I was much more naive than I am now. Another indication things were not as they should be was that some of my friends were asking me if I was still dating this girl. The reason they were asking was they were seeing her going to lunch with other guys. I was stuck in the mindset that if someone tells you that they love you, then they could not lie to you. I was to learn that not everyone thinks that way.

To make a long story short, my “first love” finally told me that she thought she should see other people, but she made it seem like this was just a phase for her and that we might get back together. I told her that was okay, thinking we would soon get back together and get married. Finally, I saw her walking to lunch one day with someone she used to talk about and I finally realized she had been lying to me about wanting to start dating other people. She had been dating others while we were still together. I found out a number of things soon after this that made me realize I was the last to know what was going on. I remember that day very well because strong feelings of anger welled up inside of me and I actually had to leave the building I worked in and take a walk. I felt a lot of rage and anger at that time.

As the weeks went by I kept hoping she would come back to me. The weeks turned into months and finally, after about 6 months, I began to move on with my life. I didn’t think I would meet anyone that I would love like her. Once again I was wrong. But I finally began to accept the fact that

she was not coming back.

At some point during the first 6 months after getting dumped my housemates and I had our annual party. I decided to invite my ex-girlfriend because I remembered Jesus forgiving those who crucified him (Luke 23:34). Also, since Jesus could forgive us all our sins, the least I could do was forgive my ex-girlfriend for lying to me. She came to the party and it was difficult for me to be in the same room with her. But I fought back my feelings and talked to her at the party. What helped me was my commitment to my Christian beliefs. If I did not have my faith to spur me on I might have remained angry and bitter (Philippians 4:13). What makes forgiveness difficult for some is the fact we are often tied to our feelings and emotions. There is nothing wrong with having feelings and emotions, but they can get in the way of how we are to behave as Christians.

The following year I invited my ex-girlfriend and her new boyfriend who I had seen her with in the hall. A year later it was a bit easier to deal with, but I could still feel a little bitterness in my emotional self. Again the Holy Spirit gave me the strength to greet them and talk with them. I was happy I was able to do that because I knew it was the right thing to do.

Soon after breaking up with my girlfriend I had the opportunity through a program at work to begin working on my master’s degree. If I had remained with my girlfriend I don’t think I would have participated in this master’s program. I was able to get my degree in a few years and realized the pain I felt was focused into working on my master’s degree. I learned a lot of interesting things by getting that degree and part of it was due to the fact I no longer had a relationship with that girl. At about the same time I also got involved in volunteer work. Once again the thing that spurred me on was trying to forget about the bad experience. I have continued to volunteer and have been greatly enriched by my volunteer experiences.

What I’m driving at here is that many of the things in life that happen to us that are bad in our mind, sometimes have a way of leading us to a greater good. The key is not remaining in the bad feelings and bitterness that may ensue. Remember, Jesus teaches us we need to forgive (Matthew 18:21-35). When you can forgive after being hurt you truly begin to develop Godly character and understand what God is all about (1 John 4:16; 1 Corinthians 13:4-5). i

Forgiving Others: In Every Situation

By Anika Sandy-Hanson

“If hell is what we are taught it is, then there will be more Christians there than days in all creation” (Garvey 1923:27).

One commentator states that Marcus Garvey made this quote as an indictment of the lack of love and forgiveness shown by professed Christians. While it is true the principle of forgiveness is a central theme of Christianity, putting forgiveness into practice can be difficult... or is it? According to Jesus, we must make forgiveness one of the skills we not only acquire, but also perfect. As He always does, our Savior has also provided us with a strategy for success.

In Matthew 18:21-35 Peter asked Jesus if the typical stance on forgiveness was accurate. Harkening back to Genesis 4:24, Jewish culture believed that a good rule of thumb was to forgive between seven times and 490 times (seventy times seven) for premeditated sin. Religious leaders believed any amount of repentance above that was not genuine (therefore, we should not forgive the person past the number of times s/he is truly repentant). However, Jesus pushes the envelope and states forgiveness must be at least seventy times seven, or unlimited, and nowhere in His response does the Messiah mention repentance by the offending party as a consideration for our forgiveness.

Jesus' response to Peter's question gives us several cues to what forgiveness really means, why it is required of us, and how we can develop this ability. In order to expand on His initial response, Jesus uses a parable with several symbols (this would be a good time for you, the reader, to turn to this scripture so that you can read the word in the Bible while reading the explanation in this article). The wealthy “land owner” represents God, while the servants represent human beings, and debts owed are sins against God and others.

First, the parable reminds us one day we will be held accountable for our deeds, verse 23 states “accounts will be settled.” This caution should immediately remind us that our ultimate goal on earth must be to work towards salvation; therefore, time cannot be wasted holding grudges or allowing other people to serve as stumbling blocks in our walk with God. Think of treasure hunters of days gone by, sometimes they had to cut through thick jungles with annoying mosquitoes and other distractions on every side; yet, because they focused on their goal, these hunters simply flicked away the gnats and other creatures in order to attain the treasure they sought. Develop this attitude and forgiveness will become a little easier. When we realize the greatness of our final goal, salvation, shaking off hurtful people and forgiving them becomes easier.

The second point of this parable is made in verse 4; ten

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GOD'S LOVE IN YOU

By Margie Marang

God is known for many things, but the most important is, “God is Love.” God has an outgoing concern for everyone. “For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). God has an outward love for the people of the whole world. That's the kind of love we should have; an out going love for others.

“Then the Lord came down in the cloud and stood there with Moses and proclaimed His name, the Lord. And He passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, ‘The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness,’” (Exodus 34:5-6). Now that's what we should have, Love and Compassion for others and slow to anger.

“If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing, If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres” (1 Corinthians 13: 2-7).

This is good advice for all of us. If you want to find out more, finish reading the Love Chapter in the Bible which is 1 Corinthians 13.

In this life anything we say or do, if it's not done out of love it gains us nothing with God.

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I *ust* Can't FORGIVE Myself

By Ruth Kerr

Once upon a time, a non-Christian girl moved to our city and begged me to be her friend. She was lonely, homesick and desperate for a little compassion. I turned her away because I believed it was pointless to associate with the "unchurched."

I cringe whenever I think about that experience. Years later, I still chastise myself for being so heartless towards that girl's suffering. How could I call myself a Christian and yet be so mean-spirited? Why should God forgive me for behaving in such a way? Why should I forgive myself?

Sure, we know we're only human and God is forgiving, but what if we can't let go of something we've done? How do we forgive ourselves?

How do I move on?

MOVE ON

It's easy to be consumed with despair about our actions. But a life of inner turmoil is not what God wants for us. He has called us to live a holy life regardless of what we've done—whether good or bad (2 Timothy 1:8-9). To that end, "you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship" (Romans 8:15).

We shouldn't let fear and regret, stand between "God and us" but sometimes we do. Here are a few things to remember when regret seizes us.

Accept what has happened.

ACCEPT

Because we are human, we are all too capable of sin. To pretend we don't sin is ridiculous. The apostle John says, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8).

No one will enter the Kingdom with a spotless track record. Throughout

history, God has dealt with deeply flawed humans. He asked a murderer to lead his people out of Egypt (Moses); He called an adulterer a "man after My own heart" (David); He chose a con artist to be the father of Israel (Jacob). This does not mean God doesn't care whether we sin or not; rather, it shows God's forgiving nature. He may not like what we've done, but He still sees value in us.

You can't change the past but you can change the future. **THE FUTURE**

You can't un-ring a bell, they say, which means you can't undo what's already been done. Whether we like it or not, there are no "try-overs." But that doesn't mean you need to make the same mistakes again. You can use the past to make a better future.

Look at the apostle Peter. Jesus told him, on the eve of His crucifixion, that Peter would deny Him three times before morning (Matthew 26:4-35). Peter bristled at such a suggestion, but deny Jesus he did. We can almost feel Peter's bitter tears when he realized what he'd done (vs. 74-75).

But compare this Peter to the Peter in the book of Acts. The new Peter is bold and unafraid to preach the gospel (Acts 2:14-41). It's almost as if he said, "I slipped up once but never again." He knew he had sinned and it bothered him terribly, but he used that experience to become a dynamic apostle.

Seeing the truth about ourselves leads to repentance. **TRUTH**

It is hard for us to see ourselves as we really are, people capable of causing great suffering to themselves and others. These moments of revelation can be gut-wrenching, but

they also show us how much we need a Savior.

Only when we accept the truth about ourselves can God start to work with us. It is then He does his best work, molding and shaping us for His purposes (Isaiah 64:8). This is not always a comfortable process, but we rejoice when we see the fruit that is produced.

Paul is an excellent example. He arrested and tortured innocent people until God struck him down. One can only imagine the anguish he faced when he finally realized the evil he had done. But through his repentance, God sent him on missionary journeys all over the known world. Paul wrote, "For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am and His grace to me was not without effect" (1 Corinthians 15:9-10).

God's love for us doesn't change. **GOD'S LOVE**

No matter what we've done, nothing can make God stop loving us (Romans 8:38-39). That doesn't mean God never becomes angry or disappointed. But He is our Father who loves us despite everything. We sin, but He is always ready and willing to restore us (Isaiah 1:18).

If you are struggling to forgive yourself, you may need to seek guidance.

GUIDANCE

If you find yourself consumed with a past sin, please talk to someone you trust. We all have regrets, but if you feel almost paralyzed by your past you might want to consider Christian

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"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other" (Galatians 5: 22-26).

This tells you that God is Love, and through the Power of His Holy Spirit

He is watching over you. He wants to see His love and compassion reflected from you. If you have Godly love in you, you will have all the Fruit of the Spirit in you.

"Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him. This is love; not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love each other, God lives in us and His love is made complete in us. We know that we live in Him and He is in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his son to be the Savior of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us." 1 John 4:8-16

So remember if you do not love, then you don't know God, for God is love. If God loves us we ought to love one another.

"But if anyone obeys His word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in Him. Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did" (1 John 2:5-6). God abides in us. His love has been perfected in us. He loved us and sent His son to be the propitiation for our sins. If we love one another, God abides in us. **i**

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counseling. This does not mean you are weaker than or worse than anyone else. It just means you need some help finding your way out of this. A minister or Christian therapist can help give you the tools you need to see your way clear.

God has a purpose for you and nothing would please Him more than to see you become what you were meant to be. Don't let your past rob you of your future. **i**

Forgiving Others continued from page 20

thousand talents were owed to the "land owner," more than one hundred million days wages, an amount the servant could never repay. This verse shows us Yahweh is so generous He allows us more mercy than we could ever repay. We should forgive each other because God forgives us all.

In verse 25, the land-owner starts the process of collecting his debt by seizing all the servant owns and cares about; however, because the servant earnestly asks for mercy in the form of an extension (vs. 26), the master does not give him time to repay, but rather cancels the debt completely (vs. 27). This segment of the parable should be enough for us to realize we are always indebted to God and can never think someone else is too horrible to be forgiven. In order to quell any doubts Jesus then explains the extreme hypocrisy, foolishness, and consequences of human beings not forgiving one another. If, after we are forgiven more than a life-time of debt, we attempt to strong-arm an hours wages from our debtors, then our heavy debt will be restored with no hope of mercy (vs. 28-35). This consequence is one that we don't want to face; thus, we must forgive others in light of God's forgiveness and mercy towards us.

In fact, Jesus tells us we must not attempt to judge others and view their situations as repayment for sins. Rather, in Luke 13:1-5 Jesus tells His followers all human beings are due horrible consequences and can only avoid these judgments by focusing on their own repentance. In the Lord's Prayer, Matthew 6:9-15, Jesus tells us to pray that God, "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." This component of a simple prayer is so important that Jesus goes into more depth after the prayer. "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."

Whenever I still have a hard time forgiving someone I remember the story of Shimei and David in 2 Samuel 16:5-14, as David flees Jerusalem, from the coup of his son Absalom he is cursed by Shimei one of Saul's relatives. While the rest of the group wanted to kill Shimei, the King stated that God may be using the man and that "It may be that the Lord will see my distress and repay me with good for the cursing I am receiving today." Thus, we can also learn to endure the person who is a trial for us because Our Father may see our patience and repay us good for the bad that we receive.

In our daily walk on earth we will encounter both the best and worst of human thoughts and actions. Jesus showed us through His actions that the best way to live was by dwelling on the best in human beings, forgiving each other when we make mistakes, asking others to forgive us when we sin against them, and praying for our own forgiveness with sincere repentance. **i**

Complete Christianity Through Sound Nutrition

By George James

We, as Christians, strive to do our best in various areas of our life. Naturally, when the Christian walk is considered our thoughts become geared towards the spiritual. The Holy Days, God's wonderful law of love, the Fruit of the Spirit, and a gracious forgiving heart are all items that easily come to mind. The Mosaic dietary laws are also important for maintaining one's health.

Therefore, it is true our loving gracious Creator is concerned with our physical bodies too. My fellow brothers and sisters it is written, "Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well." (3 John 1:2). Additionally, just as it is not good enough to keep the Ten Commandments, it is also not enough to adhere to the Mosaic dietary law and expect to be at your best health. Why do I say this? Because Jesus Christ called the Pharisees a brood of vipers despite their extravagant proclamations regarding God's Ten Commandments. So much of our food today is contaminated with an abundance of sugar and preservatives, which are causing an array of problems including, obesity, diabetes, digestive disorders, cancer, attention deficit problems among children and adults, and other similar abnormalities.

Think of this. If Jesus Christ were living on Earth today which types of food selections would He make? Wouldn't Jesus Christ choose foods with the best, most wholesome, and best ingredients? Do you believe Jesus Christ of Nazareth, our Creator, Savior, and King—the one who fasted forty days and nights before He would face Satan in the wilderness—do you think He would stuff His face with cotton candy, fruity pebbles, caffeine, and processed foods filled with empty calories? To the contrary, Jesus Christ would give His temple the very best because He knows improved physical energy will translate into stronger spiritual energy to perform the Father's work. A healthier Christian can serve God with greater

abundance.

How is God's church doing in the area of dietary habits? Merely adhering to the Mosaic dietary law is not enough and it never will be. There are foods so packed with unnatural sugar and preservatives that it will kill us faster than pork. It is somewhat analogous to keeping the Ten Commandments, but not having the spiritual intent firmly rooted in our hearts.

Next, I'd like to share some nutrition information. The glycemic index chart rates foods on how quickly they elevate blood sugar level in the body. A higher number on the chart is indicative of a faster elevation of sugar in the blood. When blood sugar is raised rapidly the body releases a hormone called insulin. Insulin is a fat storage hormone therefore the rapid increase promotes obesity. Furthermore, a rapid climb in sugar in the blood will cause a crashing halt in our energy levels. Simple carbohydrates are usually the culprits. Some examples may include, white bread, bagels, pop tarts, waffles, pretzels, jellybeans, jams, mashed potatoes, rice krispies, soft drinks, and beer.

Also, whole foods or foods without additives and preservatives, the way Almighty God intended them to be, will provide the body with all the nutrients it needs. On top of this, preservatives create a toxic liver—a liver that is unable to do its job in emulsifying fat. Thus, fat will be stored throughout the body.

Some sources I recommend for God's people include, The Maker's Diet (recommended to me by Bill Watson), "Body By God," and "The Metabolic Typing Diet." As Christians we should strive for the best in every facet of our lives so we can be a complete example to the world. Remember, my fellow Brethren, our bodies are the Temple of the Holy Spirit, and we are asked to glorify God with our entire being. May we serve our Lord with the most optimal, spiritual and physical "Health." i



in the next issue:

DRAWING CLOSE TO GOD

Spring 2006

Prayer: Does God hear our prayers?

Bible Study: How to study your Bible.

Meditation: The difference between
meditation and prayer.

Fasting: The purpose of fasting.



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