

infuse

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The development of “good character” isn’t done in a day. Character requires developing a full range of virtues over a lifetime. It is the acting upon those virtues, which over time builds strength of character.

God has a plan for each of us and He will go to great lengths to be sure both men and women develop the character of steel He is looking for. God will never give up on anyone. A perfect example for forging character of steel into somebody is found in Peter’s real life example.

Peter, along with all the disciples, observed the Passover with Jesus. Afterward, Jesus predicted Peter’s denial. “This very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times” (Matthew 26:34). Peter did indeed disown Jesus, as we read in Matthew 26:69-75. Once Peter heard that rooster crow, he wept bitterly realizing what a failure he was.

Three days after Jesus’ crucifixion and burial, Jesus is raised from the dead. A very personal conversation transpires between Jesus and Peter. One can only imagine how

difficult this conversation must have been for Peter. You can read about it in John 21:15-19. Have you ever felt like a failure and to ashamed to get on your knees and ask for forgiveness? Or, have you had the feeling that because of your failures God would never use you?

Just as Peter denied Jesus three times, he now affirmed his love for Jesus three times. As we read in John 21:17 Peter becomes somewhat hurt that Jesus keeps asking him the same question. Peter finally says, “Lord, you know all things, you know that I love you.” Did Jesus need to know Peter’s answer to the question? I don’t think so, but Peter certainly needed to know. Peter needed to come to grips with the fact he was not a failure. He did love Christ and Jesus was not going to give up on him.

No matter what your failure(s) in life have been or are, do not be afraid to go to God in prayer and ask for forgiveness. It is through your repeated effort to obey Christ’s commands that builds up the character God is looking for. Christ will help you cope with the burdens and challenges of life. He will help you develop the character needed to prepare you to be a leader in His Kingdom.

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By Dianne Sain

During trials our true character is determined. God does not cause these trials, but He allows them, and through them we are refined.

Godly character comes from God. It is a change from human natural instincts. We are changed creatures once we have repented, been baptized and received the Holy Spirit. We communicate with God through prayer and meditation. It is with this closeness that we start exhibiting more of His characteristics. We build Godly character.

A MAN OF INTEGRITY

Let's consider Job. He was a man of integrity. His character was pure. He himself tells about his relationship to God before this trial. Job 29:4-6, "Oh, for the days when I was in my prime, when God's intimate friendship blessed my house, when the Almighty was still with me and my children were around me, when my path was drenched with cream and the rock poured out for me streams of olive oil." Job knew he was doing what God wanted and knew God was blessing him for it. He was very productive and was making a good living. His family was well and happy.

Job's voice counted in the community. He was respected. People stopped and listened because they knew Job had something worthwhile to hear. It was not filth, hearsay, or slander. They knew he was a Godly man by the way he lived and the things he said. Read Job 29:7-17. Job sounds like he was a lot like Christ. Read 29:21-25.

Wouldn't we all like to be like this? Rescuing the poor, helping the fatherless, holding the dying person's hand and praying for him, helping the widow with the chores her husband used to do, doing everything I do with a clean heart and not taking advantage of others, making just decisions between people no matter the color of their skin or whether they have a lot of money or none, rolling a wheel chair for the legless man or woman, giving clothes to the poor, finding money to help a needy family. I sure would like to be like this!

A TEST OF CHARACTER

Satan brought Job's case to God. He wanted to prove the only reason Job was righteous and faithful was because of the blessings God had bestowed on him. Notice Satan had to get God's permission before he could do anything regarding Job. God allowed it, but God did not do the testing.

Job had two choices; 1) he could curse God and give up, or 2) keep trusting God and draw strength from Him to continue. Job's character stood up! Job lost all of his family, health and home, but he did not curse God. He stuck up for God, even though three friends badgered him every day, accusing him of sinning. How many of us would have sat there and listened to our friends accuse us of something we were not guilty of? I am afraid I would have sent them on their way. Job, on the other hand, was trying to figure out why God had deserted him and would not rescue him from this great trial. Consequently Job would listen to anyone who thought they knew the answer. Instead of answers Job had many accusations thrown at him, and he listened to them all without going ballistic!

God, at last, answered Job. God let Job know He was God and he could do whatever he wanted in order to accomplish His plan. He was purifying Job. There was still something lacking in Job's life. He was perfecting him. God told Job He created him, and knew all about him. Job was tried to the maximum, and he came through with flying colors!

Although God loves us, believing and obeying Him does not shelter us from calamities, setbacks, tragedies, or sorrows. These things strike Christians and non-Christians alike. But in our tests and trials, God expects us to express our faith to the world. How do you respond to your troubles? Do you ask God, why me, or do you say, "Use me"?

HOW IS YOUR CHARACTER?

How would people describe you? Are you a hot head? A

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know it all? Stubborn? Troublemaker? Do you do good work for your employer? Do you waste time? Do you tell little white lies to benefit yourself? Do you bring home items from work for your personal use (stealing)? Do you talk about people behind their backs? Can people depend upon you when you promise them something? Are you a miser...people know you won't help the needy, so they don't even ask? Are you lazy? Do you respect your mate, or do you point out your mate's faults in front of others? Do you arrive when you are supposed to or are you ALWAYS 5 minutes late wherever you go? Are you a clean person? Well groomed or sloppy? Do you smile a lot or frown a lot? Do you spend more time hollering at your children than you do hugging and teaching them? Are you a thrifty

shopper, or do you splurge often, putting your household finances in disarray? What sorts of words come out of your mouth? Do they build up or tear down? Where do you go when you get off work? What sort of things do you watch on TV or what sites do you enter on the Internet?

Your character is who you are when no one is looking! It is what God sees, not what you want Him to see. Do you have two lives; one that God sees and one that the world sees?

Your character DOES matter to God. Let's read I Corinthians 6:9-10, "Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of

God."

Paul, in II Corinthians 12:20-21, told the church, "For I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear that there may be quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder. I am afraid that when I come again my God will humble me before you, and I will be grieved over many who have sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual sin and debauchery in which they have indulged." For further study, read Galatians 5:19-21 and Colossians 3:8.

In I John 2:8 we are told the darkness is past, the true light shines, it dispels darkness. He is cleansing our hearts and our spirits, and showing us what truth is all about. He is relating the character of God himself. We are a work in progress, like clay pots. We get messed up, but God picks up the pieces and works on us. He doesn't throw the clay away. What a wonderful thought!

BE COMBAT READY

Romans 13:12 tells us to put on the whole armor of God so we stand ready to go the everyday battles and struggles as God fearing men and women. Everyone sins, even if we say we don't. Don't practice sin, repent and get back on track. If you think God won't forgive you read the story of David. This always helps me when I think I have blown it all.

Satan goes around seeking whoever he can devour, just like a lion hunting water buffalo. Lions are kings of the beasts; they protect the pride. The pride goes out on a hunt. They circle the water buffalo group and attack the herd. The herd pushes them back. They attack again and get pushed back again. This happens over and over, until a lion makes a mistake. In other words the lions put the pressure on the herd, and eventually they mess up. That's when one gets destroyed. Satan is the pressure cooker in this world. He is alluring us into the ways of the world. Once he has our attention, he relies on our human nature to help him capture us.

There are several ways to build character that will last for this lifetime and will take you into the new world God is preparing for you.

1 Read God's Word as much as possible. Remember, God inspired the scriptures. He left them for us because they contain His instructions, provide motivation, build us up and bring us down when we think we are #1. The Bible is powerful because God's Holy Spirit comes with the reading of the scriptures. Feed the Spirit, not the flesh to get the right result. Flesh has no hope and no future, but you are born of the Spirit and you have hope!

2 Pray as much and as often as you can. The more the better. Talk to God just like you are talking to your best friend. You can say whatever is on your mind. God knows your thoughts anyway, so vocalize them. Ask for what you want and need in order to build better character. His wisdom and knowledge will guide you in building His character.

3 Be careful of what you see and hear. Select TV, movies and Internet by making choices that will build God's character in you. Murders, adulteries, fornications, jealousies, wrath, filthy language, and disobedient children, are not viable shows. Satan starts with a thought and explodes it. Satan wants us to become lethargic. He will tell you it is okay to watch anything, but once he gets a wedge into your mind, he can destroy your heart, unless you repent.

4 Be careful of the company you keep. Hang around those who have good character and ones that build you up and give good advice when you need it.

5 Watch the places you go to and the worldly things you participate in. Are they places and things you don't mind sharing with a child? Remember, you are representing God to the world. God has his name on you. You were bought with a price.

6 Set goals to overcome specific problems. Pray for forgiveness each time you catch yourself. Thank God for His Holy Spirit that helps and guides you along. Analyze your problem as to why it occurs, under what circumstances it occurs, and organize your life and meet the problem head on, so that it doesn't occur.

CHARACTER vs. COMPETENCY

By Mike James

What would you rather have more of, character or competency? Before you make a choice, it would be a good idea to find out which of those items is more important to God. Let's first define what we mean by these terms. In this article we will define character as moral constitution of a person. Competency is fitting, suitable, or sufficient for the purpose. So in other words, who do you want on your team or leading you? The competent guy who does the job better than anyone or the character guy who is an all around good guy? Well, what we decide is not what matters. We need to base our decisions on what God would want or do. Looking at scripture I think the answer is very obvious.

One example of this character versus competency debate can be found in the story of Moses. Was Moses the most competent person God could choose to lead Israel out of Egypt? For one thing Moses was not a very eloquent speaker (Exodus 4:10). Moses also had doubt in his own ability to lead Israel (Exodus 4:13). But none of that mattered to God, He chose Moses despite his competency issues. God was able to find a way to overcome the issues Moses had with competence. God used Aaron, Moses' brother, to help Moses overcome his competency issue in speaking (Exodus 4:14-16). What was it that led God to choose Moses? Notice what it says in Hebrews 11:24-28. Here we read that Moses was a man of faith. He chose to be mistreated rather than enjoy the pleasures of sin. He was faithful and true to God and that is what character is all about. As we can see in the example of Moses, God chose

character over competence.

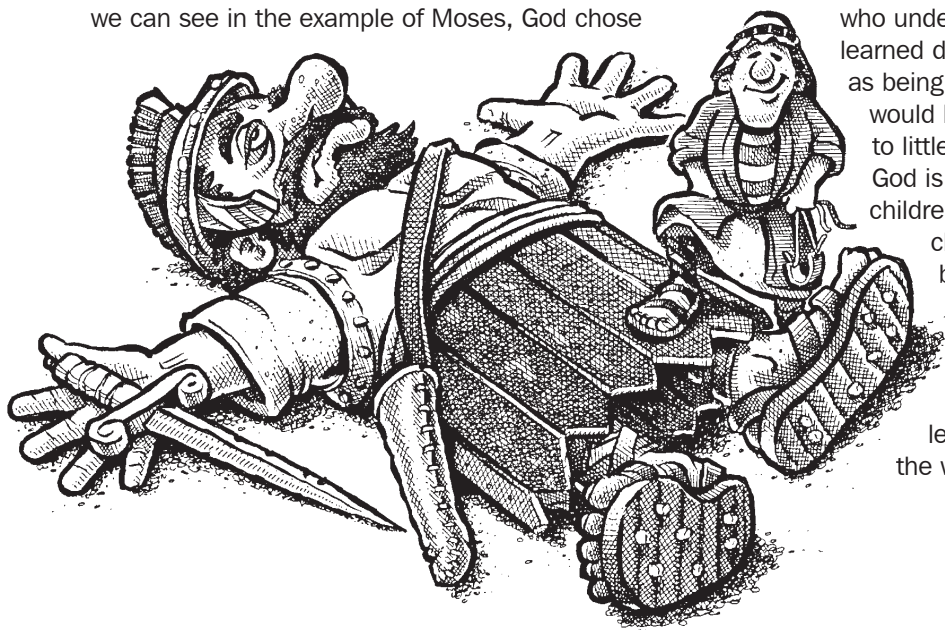
Another example to look at is the struggle between David and Goliath. Goliath was much more competent for hand-to-hand conflict than David. He was bigger and mightier than David and he had more experience in fighting. But David was able to prevail over him because David had faith and character. David knew God had the power to overcome Goliath (I Samuel 17:45). David overcame Goliath with a sling and a stone. He didn't fight Goliath with a sword and armor. Once again God was able to use someone who was not the most competent person available for the task at hand. God was able to use David's skill (sling and stones) to overcome a greater opponent. What was it about David that led God to choose him as King? Once again it was David's character. Notice in I Samuel 13:14, Samuel tells Saul his kingship will not endure. God had decided to choose another (David) to take over the throne from Saul. As this scripture tells us, it was because David was a man after God's own heart.

There are other examples in the Old Testament that show how God used the less competent to reveal His power. We can cite the nation of Israel as an example. God began to work with them when they were a slave nation living in Egypt (Exodus 1:10-11). God chose Gideon to lead even though his clan was the weakest in Manasseh and Gideon was the least in his family (Judges 6:15). As we can see the evidence is in your Bible that God is not most interested in choosing the most competent. Let's try to understand why.

Notice in Matthew 11:25 what Jesus says about those who understand God's truth. He tells us that the wise and learned do not understand. He likens those who understand as being little children. Once again the wise and learned would be considered competent if we are comparing them to little children. But what is it about little children that God is choosing them over the wise and learned. Little children will trust you, believe you and follow you. Little children are morally pure. They have not learned or been exposed to the ways of the world yet. The wise and learned can often be too full of themselves to listen.

Another scripture that needs to be part of this discussion is I Corinthians 1:26-31. Here we learn that God chooses more of the less competent in the world to confound the competent. This is because

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Hey, It's Your Reflection!

What are you going to do about it?

By Stan Lewis

I remember being a midshipman in college during the fall of 1987. It was homecoming and I thought it would be fun to be on the homecoming court in my last year of college. I

remember expressing this to a civilian staff member of the Navy ROTC staff. He told me to forget about trying, and that people like me could never be part of the homecoming court at such a major university. What he said rocked me to my core. I could have let this have a negative impact on me, but I ran for homecoming court anyway. I believed I could be part of the homecoming court and did. I saw my reflection as a homecoming court member and much more. I became what I believed I could be. I became the positive image I saw in my reflection.

In life, we will always act like the person we believe we are. The person we see in our reflection. The decision is always left up to us as to what that reflection will show us. In Judges 6:14-15, God called Gideon to save His people but Gideon believed he was too small, too insignificant and too unworthy to be of much use to anyone. "The LORD turned to him and said, 'Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?' 'But Lord,' Gideon asked, 'how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.'" As long as Gideon believed he was too small, too insignificant and too unworthy to be of much use to anyone – Gideon was absolutely correct. When Gideon finally believed he wasn't too

small, not too insignificant nor unworthy to be of much use to anyone, Gideon was absolutely correct. Gideon saw his reflection and it was the reflection of leadership and success.

Do not allow yourself to become a hostage to negative influences upon your life. Whoever told you that you can't, showed no belief in you, called you worthless, told you that you are unacceptable or that others are brighter than you, is absolutely correct, if and only if you allow it to be so. The decision is yours, so make the decision not to be influenced by such negativity.

Put what they said in the past away because it is in the past. You are what you believe you are, right now. God never looks at your past to decide your future. God only wants the best for you. Who are you to embrace the negative of your past? God wants you to let it go, accept Him, and see your reflection for what it can be. You know more now than you did in the past. Because of that fact, you have more going for you today than you did in your past.

Stop advertising your flaws with yourself and others. Too often we discuss our flaws and failings with anyone who will hear it. We pass out invitations to our "masked pity-party ball" and there we unmask our disbelief in ourselves. Just stop it. Decide what you want to be, make goals to get there, create action steps to accomplish your goals and find a mentor, coach, or accountability partner to assist you.

So what are you going to believe? Will you seek reflection of yourself that is framed by the negative influences in your past? Or are you going to dismiss the past as something that is past and done and believe the reflection that is your future? Remember, it is your reflection. So, what are you going to do about it? Reflect on a grim past or reflect on how awesome you can be? It is your call. **i**

Stan Lewis is a Christian Leadership & Life Coach. He has a Christian coaching site at www.realcoach.org.

THE ADVENTURES OF RACHEL & JACOB

What a Character

By Anika Sandy-Hanson

Having a twin brother can sometimes be a pain. Don't get me wrong, I love him, but Jacob can really test my patience. Mom insists God doesn't differentiate between little sins and big sins. In my book, though, Jacob has little offenses and then he has big ones. The little offenses only rub my nerves, like when he hogs the shower before school. For me, the big offense is when he treats me really great at home and really lousy when we're out in public. The even bigger aggravation is when he acts all sweet and respectable at home, but then puts on the bad boy image away from our parents. I keep telling him that Dr. Jekyll will catch up with Mr. Hyde, but he won't listen. I think it's finally getting through to him after the episode with our final assignment.

Everything started as we were sitting in the cafeteria with Sarah and John. Jacob and Sarah decided that our project would be a photo journal on two sets of twins growing up together. At first I wasn't too enthusiastic, mainly because I didn't want the whole school seeing pictures of us splashing around wearing nothing but two teeth a-piece. By the time the lunch bell rang, however, the four of us were laughing at some of our classic exploits and had decided we would work on the project at the Roberts' house.

At four p.m. John, Sarah, and I were waiting by their car eager to get to work. We made small-talk until Jacob showed up 30-minutes later.

"Well look who decided to grace us with his presence" snorted John.

"Hey guys" said Jacob sheepishly "I know we were going to work on the project tonight..." and as he trailed off three of the schools' fashionistas walked out the door and yelled they'd be waiting for Jacob in their convertible.

"So, we're being blown off for them" Sarah said with anger and an undertone of offense. Jacob tried to look defensive.

"They invited me to hang out and I couldn't turn them down" he said.

"Great, you can't say no to Amy, Jo, and Nick, but you can renege on your promise to work on the final project we have due for class. So when are we supposed to finish our photo journal?" asked John.

Jacob finally looked at the three of us, "Actually, the guys invited me to work on a mock fashion magazine with them

and I think I prefer that project. You know, work on the future instead of revisiting the past. I mean, it's not like we can do the twin thing forever, right? Anyway, I'll see you guys later." And with that, Jacob took off for the sleek car waiting to take him somewhere more desirable than where we were going.

I didn't know what to say; my brother had just, in one fell swoop, stomped on Sarah's idea, belittled his long-time friendship with John, and blown off his promise to finish the biggest project of our freshman year. This time there was nothing I could say to defend Jacob. After all, he had hurt my feelings worst of all.

For the next two weeks, John, Sarah, and I worked on the project after school and on Sundays. We saw little of Jacob, except the back of his head as he left school with his new friends. As the deadline approached, I was never so glad to see the sun setting on Friday; at least I could get a 24-hour reprieve.

As I was preparing for church one Saturday Jacob poked his head in my room, "Can I talk with you?" he asked.

"It's a free county" I quipped, but I turned my head to indicate that I wasn't going to completely ignore him.

"Look" he started, "I know it was really rotten of me to ditch you guys when we had agreed to work together and I'm sorry for that; it turns out that Amy and her crew really don't care what grade they get, so they haven't been spending any time on the final project."

I took a minute to consider what he was saying. "So now that your little friends aren't working out, you want us to take you back and let you ride on the work we put in?" I asked. Jacob could only look at his shoes and for that moment I felt a twinge of sympathy. "Hey, you've been my brother for 15 years and if it were up to me, I'd let you work hard tomorrow and get equal credit on Monday, but it's not up to me, so you'll have to make your case to John and Sarah." With that, I turned and finished fixing my hair.

I knew it would take some time for Jacob to show he could be trusted and would honor his word. On the other hand, the four of us had been friends for a long time, and John and Sarah were big on giving people another chance. I imagined Jacob would be no exception. I only hoped we would be able to salvage Jacob's grade, and our friendship, before summer came. **i**

BARNABAS

SON OF ENCOURAGEMENT

By Loren M. Chamberlain

The name “Barnabas” means Son of Encouragement. Over and over again faithful Barnabas would prove that he was appropriately named.

Most everyone has watched marathon races and cheered for the runners who not necessarily won the race, but for those who never gave up and continued on to the finish. As the runners near the finish line their legs are aching, throats are on fire, and their whole body is crying out to stop, and give up. This is when friends and fans are most valuable. Their encouragement helps would be losers to push through the pain and to persevere to the finish. In the same way, Christians are to encourage one another. A word of encouragement offered at the right moment can be the difference between finishing well and collapsing along the way. Barnabas was just such an encourager. He was sensitive to the needs of others and he supported them by encouraging words, actions and his own faithful life.

INVESTING IN THE FUTURE

We are first introduced to Barnabas in Acts 4: 36 where we find him engaged in an act of generosity. “Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet.”

The actions of Barnabas were crucial to the early church. Most are surprised when it is brought to their attention that Barnabas was responsible for making possible a large part of the New Testament. God used the relationship Barnabas had developed with Paul and also Mark to keep these two men going when either might have failed. Barnabas performed wonders with his encouragement. It should not be surprising the apostles were all afraid of Paul (formerly Saul). But Barnabas stepped out in faith making a big investment in Paul introducing him to the Church. He took the time to explain to the apostles Paul’s experience with Christ and that Paul was now one of them. Barnabas laid his reputation

and credibility on the line. Paul was a big risk, he could have been lying and Barnabas could have lost his friends, brothers and sisters in Christ, along with his reputation.

Look at the dividends that we have from this investment. Barnabas looked at the potential of Paul, took the risk, invested courageously in him, and now we have 13 books in the New Testament that Paul wrote. The Book of Romans is probably the greatest theological treatise of all time. Paul accomplished three of the greatest missionary journeys of all time. He introduced Jesus Christ and planted churches in the five major areas of the ancient world, all across the ancient world, in less than ten years. He went from Syria to Italy, and many believe on to Spain as well. He explained as well the doctrines of repentance, faith, baptism, laying on of hands, resurrection, eternal judgment, and the meaning of going on to perfection. If it had not been for Paul we probably would not understand Grace either. Did Barnabas make a wise investment? Indeed he did.

INVEST IN THE BODY

“Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews. Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord’s hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord. News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch” (Acts 11:19-22).

Barnabas’ trip to Antioch was possibly the most important moment in the history of the church. The reason for its importance was because when Barnabas came back to Jerusalem he could have said yes or no to the Gentiles coming into the church.

When Barnabas arrived, which was after a 325-mile trip, probably on a mule with a

Why is the Body of Christ the Best Investment? Because it is a stable investment, and it has been around for 2000 years. It is a long, long term investment. This investment will last for Eternity.

wooden saddle, he encouraged the people and sent word to Jerusalem that there was nothing to worry about; people were learning about Jesus Christ. Barnabas made another investment; to stay and invest his time. He also set off on another 100-mile trip to Tarsus to get Paul. When he found Paul he took him to Antioch and they invested a whole year of their lives turning people to Christ. It was at Antioch the followers of Jesus were first called Christians.

Why is the Body of Christ the Best Investment? Because it is a stable investment, and it has been around for 2000 years. It is a long, long term investment. This investment will last for Eternity.

MARK THE UNDERSTUDY

“When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark” (Acts 12:25). You might say that Mark was Barnabas’ second understudy, Paul being his first. When we first meet Mark it is not exactly an auspicious introduction. “A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, was following Jesus. When they seized him, he fled naked, leaving his garment behind” (Mark 14: 51).

Mark was a church member and when the angel rescued Peter out of prison Peter went to Mark’s house. “When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying” (Acts 12: 12). Mark was one of the kids that grew up in the church, just like all our young people today. He was a follower of Jesus and a member of the church.

We are a little taken aback when we find out Mark was a quitter. No details are given, but this is not the end of the story. “From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John (Mark) left them to return to Jerusalem” (Acts 13: 13). Whatever happened, Paul was

very angry.

Paul decided they should visit all the brethren in every city in which they preached. Paul and Barnabas had a bitter battle over Mark, because Mark had deserted them. But in the end, they put together two teams, opening up two missionary endeavors instead of one. Barnabas wanted to “invest” in this young man, and he chose Mark over Paul. After Mark became an investment of Barnabas, they went together to Cyprus on a missionary journey and Mark became a worker. “She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark” (1 Peter 5:13). Mark had been brought back into the apostles’ group and worked with them. Mark also became a contributor. Even the apostle Paul changed his mind about Mark. Paul admitted Mark was helpful. “Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry” (2 Timothy 4: 11). Mark also became an author. He wrote the Book of Mark, thanks to Barnabas investing in him and giving him another chance.

GUIDANCE FOR GROWING CHRISTIANS

Barnabas, besides being an encourager and an investor in people, was a growing Christian just as we are. The power to lead a godly life comes from God. Barnabas did not gain the resources to be truly godly by himself. We of ourselves do not have the resources to be truly godly. However,

God allows us to “share in His divine nature” in order to keep us from sin and help us live for Him.

Barnabas must have really applied himself and put forth the effort to get to know Jesus Christ through prayer and study, and drawing upon the Holy Spirit. We also, if we want to enjoy the privileges Jesus Christ offers us freely, must “come to know Jesus,” our God, Lord and Savior, better and better.

The faith Barnabas exhibited was more than belief in certain facts. Faith must result in action, growth in Christian character and the practice of moral discipline, or it will die. We must be willing to live a life of faith because it will lead to learning to know God better. We will gain the virtues such as self-control, patient endurance, godliness, and loving others. “For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness, and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:5-8). Barnabas possessed these qualities. He was a generous, loving, caring person, who encouraged people wherever he went. He invested in people and in the body of Christ. He invested in the future and his investments will last for Eternity. **i**

YOU'RE NOT FAMOUS YET?

By Ruth Kerr

Our society has a weird obsession with fame. In fact, when a celebrity artist declared everyone in the future will be famous for 15 minutes, we accept it without question. Of course we can all be famous! Why not? If you can't gain fame on a reality TV show, you can turn yourself into a domain name and become a celebrity on your own website.

It could be argued that if you haven't been famous yet, you're not trying very hard.

FAME'S THE NAME OF THE GAME

My only brush with fame was when I worked at a local television station in our city. It was a boring desk job; I never interviewed movie stars or professional athletes.

But I worked with people who did, and sometimes these people behaved like the celebrities they interviewed. They put hairspray on their expense accounts. They jumped the line at the cafeteria. They rolled their eyes if you couldn't answer their questions.

The message was clear: A Celebrity Is Important.

This is not to say all television employees had super-size egos; some were easy-going, down-to-earth people. One person was actually kind of inspiring.

SOMETHING ABOUT BETTY

Betty was a stocky, middle-aged woman who worked in the cafeteria. She washed dishes, filled coffee urns

and cleaned tables. She was probably the lowest-paid employee and was treated like a servant.

Betty was not an educated woman but she wasn't stupid. She knew her "place" at the station. Yet that did not change her attitude or her actions. She was still determined to help others to the best of her ability.

She didn't seem to complain about her co-workers. She would ask a cameraman if his cold was better and wouldn't flinch at his curt response. She would shake her head good naturedly, if someone demanded a larger piece of cake and run to help someone who spilled his coffee.

Even though Betty would never be famous, or even appreciated, she still loved and served those around her.

ARE CELEBRITIES MORE VALUABLE?

Our society sends conflicting messages. We say we value people like Betty but we don't really give them the respect they deserve. By contrast, we treat celebrities with undue reverence.

This is not to say that famous people are bad people; many celebrities lend their talents to worthy causes. However, as much as our society likes those who are kind and hardworking, we adore those who are famous. We worship someone just because they were in a movie or on a magazine.

Why do we insist a celebrity is more worthy than someone who cleans tables in a cafeteria?

"I'M NOT LIKE EVERYONE ELSE!"

A famous young actress allegedly snapped at one of her assistants, "Don't talk to me like I'm some kind of normal person!" In a way, she is right. Because she is famous, she is not a normal person. We have set celebrities apart from the rest of us and we are not surprised to hear stories about their behavior: trashing hotel rooms; bringing large entourages to a simple photo shoot; verbally abusing restaurant staff.

If we knew "regular" people who behaved this way we would avoid them. We would wonder who they thought they were, to act in such a manner. But we've come to expect it of celebrities.

Fame in itself isn't wrong, it's everything that comes with it: the self-adulation, the self-importance the self-centeredness. Too often fame leads a person to glorify self, not others. Rare is the person who can keep a balanced perspective when everyone around them has been hired to look after their every need or feed flattering stories to the media.

WHAT IS FAME WORTH?

King Solomon, an A-list celebrity in his day, had a rather dim view of fame and fortune: "I undertook great projects... I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me... Yet, when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless" (Ecclesiastes 2:4-11).

Was Solomon right? Quick—who was the highest-paid actress in 2004? Who hit the most runs in the 2002 World Series? Who had the #1 album four months ago?

You may not remember, but here are some people you'll never forget: a teacher who inspired you; a friend who comforted you; a relative who spent a memorable day with you.

The people who touch your life are people who want to invest in you. A celebrity in a movie can make you forget your problems for a few hours but he or

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GROWING IN CHARACTER

By June Rush

Jesus desires that we never shirk from doing any task that is set before us, no matter how lowly. As I read John 15:2-17 and John 13:2, I am caught up in the drama of what is happening. The time is just before the Passover Feast. The evening meal was being served and Jesus, alone with His disciples, quietly arose and removed his robe. His followers, reclining on couches at the meal table, looked on, mystified, as he wrapped a towel around his waist, and knelt to wash their feet; gently drying them on the towel.

When Jesus came to Peter, that impetuous disciple, vehemently protested. "No, Lord, you are not going to wash my feet". Peter could not bear the thought of his beloved Master doing a slave's work. But Jesus softly answered, "If I don't wash your feet, you have no part with me Listen, and you will understand what I am doing."

I can visualize the look of compassion Jesus faced his disciples with after He completed the task and put on His robe. Then He explained, "Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you

the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him" (John 13:14-16).

Thus in this moving, dramatic moment, Jesus gave His followers a lesson in humility and character development, showing them the extent of His great love for mankind. Knowing His hour of suffering and death was near, Jesus wanted them to know in what ways, and how much, they were to love and serve one another, as He loved and served them.

By our Lord's actions, in today's world, we are all taught that to be leaders for Christ, we must first have the attitude of a servant, which develops Godly character. Like Jesus Christ we are to serve one another humbly and willingly.

We may be reluctant to go out into the world as Jesus did. We hesitate at the idea of taking care of those who are lonely, forgotten, shunned by society, or those who have lost their spiritual way. Most of us possess a vanity that recoils at any kind of servitude, which helps us to grow in the character of God.

But how we love to be served. Jim stretches out in lazy abandon on the sofa and calls to his wife, who is struggling to care for the baby, while also preparing dinner "Bring me a cup of coffee, will you, hon?" Or, Lisa, late for a date, after wasting time talking on the phone to her best friend, says, "Iron my blouse, please Mom."

It is human nature to think only of ourselves, our comfort zone, and to want things done for us. We are inclined to believe that being a servant is somehow belittling. We wrinkle our noses in disdain at the idea of kneeling to wash someone else's feet, especially, dusty, unwashed, callused sandal clad feet.

In order to grow in Godly character, it is important to remember in great detail the night Jesus took on a servant's heart. Jesus desires that we never shirk from any task He sets before us, no matter how lowly. Instead we are to make the most of any opportunity to serve, as one woman in Northern California did. Concerned about the plight of women drug addicts, who wanted to be rid of the evil habit, but had no place to go, she took her own money to establish and maintain a halfway house for them. It entailed hardship and deprivation, but this woman had the satisfaction of fulfilling a need, and growing in character as she did so.

Many people feel uncomfortable around those with mental disabilities, but one woman in a northern California church cares for such groups each week. Although

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THE NATIONS' APPEAL

Chorus

Calling all ambassadors of God's Kingdom
It's time you address the struggles of all humans
The Nations of this World have questions for your King
And no one seems to know anything

(1)

The Creator of this World and of all mankind
Must have known man's authority would decline
Our disobedience of God's Laws
Has brought us so much pain
We need answers to this sin and shame

(2)

The struggles of poverty, hunger and sickness
In Third-World Nations have been a total mess
These issues you must address
And give us nothing less
Than the plan that your King has put in place

Composed and written by:
Beverlie Woodland -Baltimore, Maryland U.S.A
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God does not want anyone to boast before Him. God is in charge and in control. Being caught up in wisdom and position in this world can become an idol taking us away from God. In I Corinthians 3:18 the same thoughts are repeated.

In Ezekiel 28:1-10 we read a prophecy against the King of Tyre. The King thought of himself as a god because of his wisdom and understanding. Through his competence in worldly matters he was able to amass great wealth. This led to him becoming prideful about himself. Because of this God brought a violent death upon him.

What matters most to God is not how competent you are, but how much character you have. God wants to bring people into His kingdom that will follow Him and His ways. It is sometimes difficult for those with great competence to follow. It is not wrong or bad to be competent, but on our priority list character should be higher than competence. **i**

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she can't give you anything lasting. A friend or relative can. And if they can make a difference, how much more can your heavenly Father who created you with loving care?

As dazzling as the trappings of fame seem, God is offering you something far greater. He has prepared an eternal reward more glorious than anything we can imagine on earth (1 Corinthians 2:9), and certainly far better than 15 minutes of media scrutiny. Let us strive to value the Bettys of this world and to reflect the selfless love of God. **i**

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she is no longer young, she has undertaken a task that no one else wishes to assume. She has weekly luncheons for twenty to thirty or more individuals of varying stages of restoration. Although it is difficult taking care of such a group, the woman feels rewarded by their responses.

In another example, a woman left her well to do lifestyle to become a nurse and spent the next forty years on the lower eastside of New York City, caring for the poor. A dedicated doctor left a thriving practice to serve in a third world country mission's hospital.

These are just a few examples of people who grow in character by humbling themselves to serve others who are less fortunate.

Our own acts of service may be as far reaching. They may be quiet simple deeds. We may do more than baby-sit for a new mother who has no one to help her or scrub the floors of a homebound elderly person. It is in such ways that we clothe ourselves in humility. Humility develops character.

First Peter 5:5, "Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, 'God opposes the proud but gives

grace to the humble.'" Proverbs 3:34, "He mocks proud mockers, but gives grace to the humble."

Christ did not fear to mingle with prostitutes and other outcasts of society, or to be with the sick and diseased. Why then should we shrink back when we should be reaching out in whatever way we can to comfort the ill and hurting? Befriend those who are scorned and forgotten by society? Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9:19, "Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone to win as many as possible to Christ Jesus."

Are we growing in the character of God today by fulfilling our duties of carrying someone else's burdens? Galatians 6:2 says, "Carry each others burdens and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."

Jesus expects us to humbly, yet vigorously follow the course He has laid out for us in His days on earth. As we read and obey the Word of God with a servant's heart, we demonstrate how Christ, through us, washes the feet of those the world washes it's hands of. By humbling ourselves to do the things that seem lowly, we are growing into the character God wants us to have for eternity. **i**



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THE CONCLUSION OF

The Whole Matter

*“Let us hear the conclusion
of the whole matter:
Fear God and keep His
commandments,
for this is man’s all.”*

By Rory Ries

was torn away from him and given to his servant (1 Kings 11:11). Thankfully, Solomon did repent and as you read the last chapter in Ecclesiastes you can see a major change in this man’s attitude.

What about you? Does the world look appealing to you? Is there something out there that you feel like you will do anything to get it? These are questions you have to ask yourself. Is there something out there that you are willing to give up everything for no matter what it costs? Sometimes there are things out there in the world that entice us and we feel like we can’t live without, yet in all honesty it is God we cannot live without.

God says He will provide us with everything we need (Philippians 4:19). We are told, “He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the Lord” (Proverbs 18:22). When we are looking for a mate we need to look to our Father to bring that person into our lives. If we try to do it on our own without His help we can find ourselves in a complete mess. “For the Lord gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding” (Proverbs 2:6).

Whenever we rely on God to provide for us He will always provide something of great value. Solomon did do some marvelous works and those works were very pleasing in God’s eyes. He had the temple built and the people were blessed because of his obedience to God (1 Kings 8:55). He also wrote some inspiring messages that can help us with the struggles we may face. The one thing he had to still deal with, as we do, is the human nature that is in us. That human nature may cause us to struggle with doing things our way or totally submitting to doing things God’s way (Romans 7:23).

We fight against the fleshly lusts (Galatians 5:17). The challenge we have is to overcome the fleshly lusts because those lusts will keep us out of the kingdom of God (Galatians 5:21). It is a lifelong battle, but the rewards that are waiting for us are far greater than the losses we may have to suffer in this physical life (Philippians 3:8-9). There is nothing this world has to offer that compares to the inheritance that is locked up and sealed waiting for us to claim it (1 Peter 1:4).

“Therefore, we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1). Solomon had his race to run and so do we. The story of Solomon’s life has been given to us as a gift so we may learn from the good things he did and from the mistakes he made. We don’t have to learn the hard way. If we apply our heart to understanding and seek Godly counsel there is nothing we cannot accomplish and overcome in this life (Proverbs 2:1-5). i

These are famous words that conclude a well-known book. This book we know as Ecclesiastes, was written by one of the wisest men that ever lived. Solomon was that man and his fall is living proof of our weakness as human beings.

Solomon had it all. He was wise which was a gift from God (1 Kings 3:12-13). Solomon was also given riches and honor. Royal majesty had been bestowed upon Solomon (1 Chronicles 29:25). He was also granted great peace in the land because God had made a promise and God always keeps His promises.

Unfortunately the tragedy is Solomon sought after things that were not good for him. The world has a way of attracting us to things that are not good for us. John wrote about it in 1 John 2:16, “For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.” The bright lights and the excitement the world has to offer can be very appealing to the eyes, but in the end it only brings pain and misery.

Solomon learned a valuable lesson the hard way. God had instructed Solomon to walk in His ways and to keep His statutes and commandments. Obeying God brings love, joy, and peace (Galatians 5:22). David, Solomon’s father, wrote how nothing shall offend those who keep the law (Psalm 119:165). He also said, “Great peace have those who love your law.” Solomon did come to repentance, however, he suffered greatly which could have been avoided had he listened to God and obeyed Him.

What was Solomon’s sin? He loved many foreign women (1 Kings 11:1-2). Solomon ignored God’s instructions by marrying women from other nations. When we seek after women who follow a false god or who are involved in worldly practices, we can become caught up in the world and our hearts will seek after their gods. The problem we may run into when we seek our own desires and lusts is separation from God (Isaiah 59:2). On the other hand, when we allow God to guide us and we lean on Him it will work out every time and the blessings are without end (Proverbs 3:5-6).

Solomon ended up with 700 wives and 300 concubines. We are told his wives turned his heart away from God (1 Kings 11:3). The tragedy behind all of this is his kingdom



infuse

Bath, Ohio
June 2006

By Rebecca Bowman

The Infuse Retreat was a huge hit! This fabulous weekend brought people to Bath, Ohio from places as near as Georgia, and as far away as California. Each day there were around twenty-six young adults in attendance.

The weekend was a time for the younger generations in our churches to come together and gain a better understanding of God's Word. Ken from Georgia stated, "My favorite part about this weekend is that everything is broken down so that it is easy for me to understand." Which is exactly what was accomplished.

The theme for the weekend, "Keeping Your Inside Clean," was inspired by Mark 7:18-23, which states, "...whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him...evil things come from within and defile a man." Each message focused on a different area of this theme; from food laws and nutrition to controlling one's actions, thoughts and language.

Mr. Mike James started the weekend off Friday evening with a message on the food laws. He explained that the food laws were around even before Moses (Genesis 7:2,3,8). Most notably, he proved to us that the food laws haven't been done away with (Isaiah 66:17). Mr. James discussed many parts to the food laws including why it's wrong to eat blood and animals that are found already dead and why clean meat is

permitted.

Saturday morning began with another message by Mr. Mike James on "Controlling Your Language." He used examples from psychological experiments to show us the power words have. He discussed what the Bible says about lying, gossip and body language and even cautioned us about just joking around with friends.

Later we took a break from the retreat to have church services with the Bath congregation. Mr. James gave a sermon about how heaven is not where you go when you die. He stated, "the concept of going to heaven did not originate in Christianity." He talked about how Enoch died, but God had taken him away so that no one would know (Genesis 5: 21). He covered things such as how all men die, (1 Corinthians 15:22) and how when we die we are no more. He talked to us about what scriptures some people will use in an attempt to tell us that heaven is our destination when we die, and how when we die we are not really dead. Mr. James did a fabulous job on all the sermons that he gave. I can tell you that while I was sitting there listening to him I felt as



e Retreat

though he was talking to me personally. So thanks Mr. James for giving us a better understanding of these important issues.

After a wonderful lunch and great fellowship the Infuse group came back together for a message by Mr. Jeff Reed on "Controlling Your Actions." He used Galatians 5:22 where it speaks of self-control. He also instructed us about emotional sins, substance sins and sexual sins. He told us how sexual sins are predominant in God's church today. We read in 1 Thessalonians that when we take part in these sins we do not reject man, but we reject God who has given us His holy spirit. Not only did Mr. Reed help us to understand why it is important to have self-control for ourselves, but he also helped us learn why God wants us to have self-control.

Next, Bill Watson gave a sermon on the arguments used against the food laws. He gave us the seven premises that substantiate the Bible's authority on the matter of food laws. He explained to us what we get out of following God's food laws. It opened our eyes, giving us a new outlook on the reasons why we don't eat certain foods.

Saturday night was full of fun and laughter. After taking a short break, we all met for dinner. The food was delicious. Just having the opportunity to talk with everyone and get to know one another better was so much fun.

After dinner we went to Rinky Dink where we had a blast playing put-put golf, driving go-carts and bumper boats and playing in the arcade. It was a good experience because it gave everyone a chance to get to know each individual on a more personal level, and freely enjoy ourselves.

Sunday morning was full of exciting things to talk about and discuss. First off, the ladies of Bath prepared a beautiful breakfast, as they did so nicely every morning. We sat down with lots of food in our stomachs and prepared to listen to a few wonderful messages.

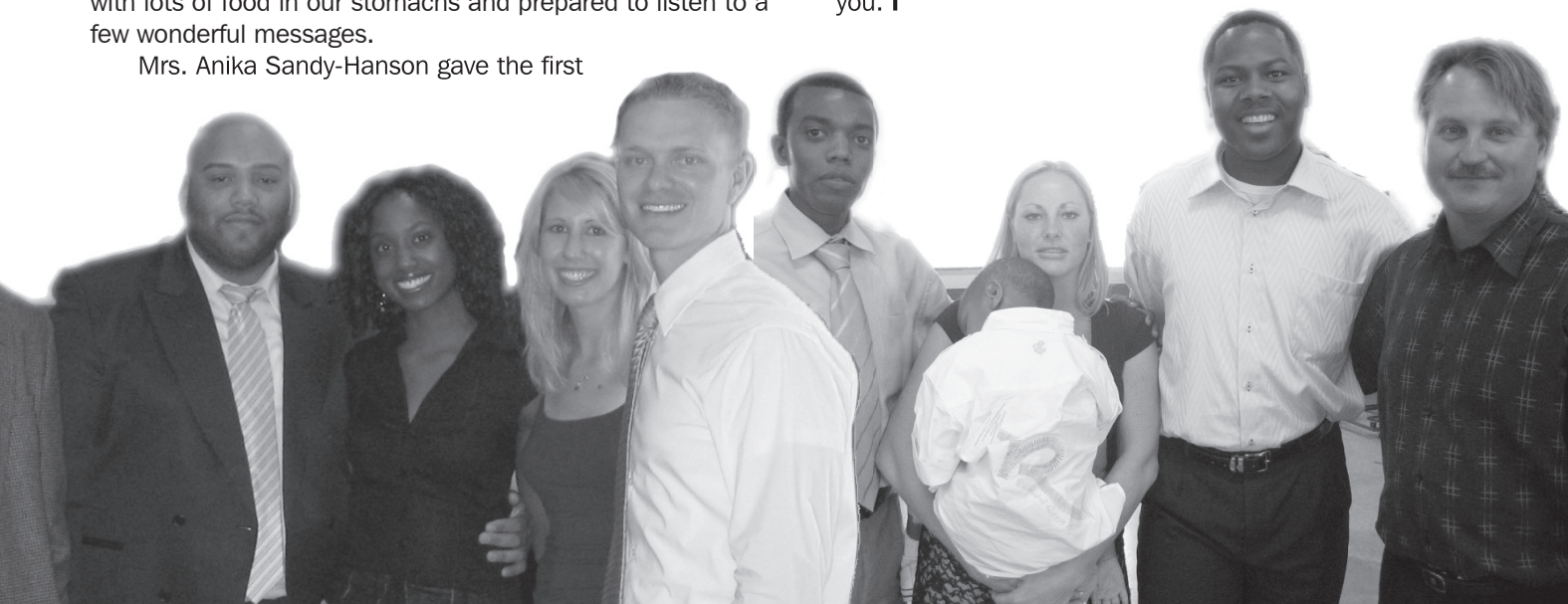
Mrs. Anika Sandy-Hanson gave the first

message on "Controlling Your Thoughts." She talked to us about how our hearts control our thoughts, which in turn control our actions. We read in our Bible that when we face a problem we should always take it to the Lord. We also read in Romans 2:8 that if we do wrong and continuously sin, we will receive anger and wrath from God. Mrs. Sandy-Hanson talked to us on a very personal level and was able to relate to us how to apply the messages in our Bible to our everyday lives.

Next Mr. George James gave a sermon on "Health and Nutrition." Mr. James explained how unhealthy foods can affect different parts of our body. He told us to consider what we feed the animals that we eat, and to remember that even though we can digest things, some stuff still gets into our system. He also gave us some helpful hints about how we should avoid genetically modified or engineered foods. He told us that the longer food lasts on the shelf the worse it is for us. Thank you Mr. James for helping us to choose more wisely what we put into our bodies.

We finished the retreat by breaking into two teams to play a Jeopardy-like game with questions based on the messages from the weekend. After all the fun and laughter we discovered two things. First, we're a competitive group! And second, we had learned a lot. This weekend opened everyone's eyes to important information we as a younger generation may not have known about.

I would sincerely like to thank everyone who spoke, participated and worked so hard to put the retreat together. Special thanks to Mike James who coordinated the weekend, Amy Frenchick for keeping us fed and the Bath congregation for opening their doors and welcoming us in. All of your hard work was greatly appreciated, and I am sure everyone walked away with more knowledge than before. So once again, thank you. **i**



“And besides this giving all added to your faith virtue and to virtue knowledge”
2 Peter 1

SIMON SAYS

By Sean Goldburn

Simon Peter a servant of God expressed in II Peter 1:5-8 a series of measures which will assist in attaining a reputable and Christian character. Most will agree Simon Peter’s suggestions were based on good intentions, but are these measures, which were recorded years ago, still applicable today in the 21st century?

In today’s world we are all encouraged to “work smarter and not harder” when aspiring to reach a goal. Would it be a smart thing to play the game of Simon says? And to try to attain Faith accompanied by Virtue and Temperance guided by Patience and Godliness and Brotherly kindness tied in together with Love?

This Article will examine these tools individually and show the practicality of them and how they can be implemented in our daily lives.

FAITH ACCOMPANIED BY VIRTUE AND KNOWLEDGE

2 Peter 1:5 states, “And besides this giving all diligence added to your faith virtue and to virtue knowledge.”

I encourage you to read this verse once again before moving on. Now that you have done so, we will start our critique of the verse. One of the world’s leading psychologists in the field of Positive thinking, Norman Vincent Peale, has spent a lot time observing human behavior, and has come to the conclusion that faith is an important attitude to have. Medical physicians also support Peale’s thesis. Some have even gone as far as to say the attitude of faith has been a critical factor that contributed to the successes of some of the most complicated operations. These non-believers have only reconfirmed our belief in God and the credibility of the Holy Bible. Hebrews 11:5-6 exposes what it is about faith that Peale stumbled upon. Peale has also recorded eight practical and Biblical grounded steps to follow in order to attain faith.

- Start by reprogramming our thinking, shifting from negative thoughts; to positive thoughts. This is no new concept as the apostle Paul also urged us to be transformed by the renewing of our mind.
- Utilize the learning method of repetition, by copy and pasting all scriptures about faith from your Bible to plac-

es you are likely to see on a daily basis. For example, posters on your car dashboard, and desk at work.

- We must change our perception of problems; see them as things to make us stronger; instead of visualizing the worst imagine the best.
- Learn the secret of guidance, which is to believe God directs your life and leads you down the right path. Romans 8:28-30
- Think, act and talk faith in God.
- Recite to yourself, “I believe.” Then, write down exactly what you believe.
- Last but not least, believe God loves you and wants the best for you.

Simon prescribed faith accompanied by virtue. Now keep in mind that Virtue is short for good works. We all would prefer to do good rather than bad, but before we can determine how we will adopt Virtue, it is important we make a decision. We must decide to make the necessary changes in our lives that are conducive to Virtue.

The Bible says two cannot walk together unless they agree. It is impossible to strive for virtue when your friends and associates who you spend most of your time with do not see the importance of virtue and are content with acting on emotions. It’s what the psychologist refers to as the law of association. Who you associate with is who you become. Ephesians 4:17 supports this theory.

Another obstacle to overcome in order to attain this virtue is our intake of negative messages. We must be careful of what we read, watch and listen to via the various mediums. Dr. Denise E. Waltley, another leading psychologist once said, “What we think is determined by what we experience, and what we experience is determined by what we expose our self to.” Don’t expose yourself to negative ungodly things.

A complete understanding of II Peter 1: 5 will allow us to come to the realization that faith and virtue would be useless without knowledge. The knowledge that Simon Peter urges us to get is the knowledge of Jesus Christ. But we must be aware of the knowledge that puffs up which is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 8:1. It brings pride and arrogance. So let us pray without ceasing asking God to bless us with the Faith backed up by virtue and knowledge.

besides this
diligence
our faith
o virtue
ge.”
:5

TEMPERANCE GUIDED BY PATIENCE AND GODLINESS

Simon Peter mentions temperance, which is also known as moderation in verse six of II Peter 1. This is really a nice suggestion. Developing some self-control and self-denial would help us to develop good Christian character. But how do we incorporate temperance in our daily lives. How do we ensure that our actions and speech is done in moderation every day? Each person needs to examine himself and know his weakness (II Corinthians 13:5). If your weakness is alcohol, try not to find yourself in a bar. Don't associate with friends who have a drinking problem as well.

Most people do not even remember they possess one of the most deadly weapons around, the tongue. They treat it so casually, James 3:6 speaks of it. We must all pray like David in Psalm 34:13, that God might “keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies.” Now with prayer we must take certain actions.

- We must think before we speak. What am I going to say? Is it acceptable to God?
- Retreat from certain conversations. Here the law of association comes up again. Do not associate with persons who have a reputation of speaking words of perversion.

Simon Peter again gives a follow up dosage in the way of patience, which happens to be a virtue. As stated in James 1:3, without patience it is impossible to have faith in God and we saw how important faith is. How do we develop patience in our daily lives? By putting our faith and trust in God, and never failing to pray and study God's Word, the Bible. **i**



A Season of Beauty

By June Rush

As I awoke this morning I could feel the fresh smelling air as it blew gently through the curtains of my bedroom window. I heard the birds singing, and the leaves rustling as small animals ran to fetch nuts for their nests storing them for the winter's cold, as they do every year at this time. I got out of bed and opened the door to the patio and saw a squirrel scampering from tree limb to tree limb in search of any small seeds or nuts that still clung to the leaves. What a beautiful sight to gaze upon this early in the morning while most people are still sleeping. I spend some precious quiet moments alone and amazed as always at the marvelous creation God has given us to enjoy, if we only take the time to do so.

I especially enjoy sitting on the patio and looking up at the trees in all their splendor and color at this time of year. Each tree is adorned with different colors of leaves and I take this time to thank God for giving me eyes to see such splendor.

There is no way that man can come close to imitating the colors God has created. The maple trees are glowing with beautiful yellow leaves and I notice none of the trees have the same colored leaves. As I sit there in the stillness and peace that early morning brings, I talk to God and thank Him for life and all the blessings He has given mankind, not because of anything we have done to deserve it, but instead I see the awe-inspiring love and

mercy He holds in His hands, and the blessings He gives us that so many times we take for granted.

Have you ever watched a small squirrel gather food for winter? Have you seen the hard work that goes into such a somewhat, small task? They scamper back and forth for hours on end, gathering hickory nuts, acorns, buckeyes, and seeds that have been left in the fields after harvesting has taken place. Each nut they pick up is inspected very carefully for any imperfections and if any are found, it is discarded. It never ceases to amaze me that God in His infinite wisdom has formed this small animal and programmed its brain as instinct, and each animal does his job every season, making certain there is enough food stored for it and its family.

Psalm 104:10-28 praises God for His creation and the care He gives to sustaining it. Like Psalm 104, the book of Psalm is full of wondrous things that God has done. This fall sit down and read it for yourself, and maybe it will take on a whole different meaning than before to you.

Fall is a season of special beauty and activity, just as each season that our Heavenly Father has given us. Why not make it a commitment to look at the four seasons and study each small animal and how hard they work for the food that God so delicately provides for them.

May we fall before you Lord! **i**



GROW:

In Wisdom and Stature, and in Favor with God and Men.

By Jeff Reed

Luke 2 records an interesting incident when Jesus was only twelve years old. This is the only place in scripture that gives an account during His childhood. He went with His parents and family to observe the feast of Passover. Afterward, everyone went home but Jesus remained behind. On the journey home they realized He was missing and went back after Him. Three days later they found Him in the temple in deep conversation with the teachers. He displayed great maturity and understanding with His ability to discuss with them and answer their questions. When Joseph and Mary found Him they were distressed but Jesus gave them an interesting explanation, “Why were you searching for me?” he asked. ‘Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?’”(Luke 2:49).

This account seems to be the beginning of Jesus’ preparation for His eventual ministry and inevitable crucifixion and resurrection. After this Luke 2:52 states, “Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.” So at the age of only twelve, Jesus began a process of becoming physically and spiritually ready for His mission. It was the greatest mission anyone would ever undertake.

Jesus is our example and we should follow in His footsteps (1 Peter 2:21). Christ has a mission for each of us and an eventual place in His Kingdom if we put our faith in and live our life serving Him. We should each strive to grow in the four areas listed in Luke 2:52; Wisdom, Stature, Favor with God, and Favor with Men.

WISDOM
wisdom Wisdom is the ability to use our experiences and the knowledge we have gained to make righteous decisions and perform the right actions. True wisdom can only come from God. “For the LORD gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding” (Proverbs 2:6). God gives us wisdom through different sources.

We can gain incredible wisdom from daily Bible reading. The Bible gives us direct access into the mind of God. We shouldn’t take this source of wisdom for granted but daily ask God to open our hearts and minds to the rich storehouse of knowledge that He created for us.

God will give us wisdom if we ask Him. “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him” (James 1:5). He gives us wisdom through the presence of His Holy Spirit dwelling in us.

Wisdom is also given by the experiences God allows us to go through. Sometimes we may not understand at the time why we have to experience certain trials, but God is molding us for what he has designed. The apostle Paul put it this way, “That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” I know personally from when I suffered with cancer a few years ago the amount of wisdom I received from living through that affliction. I praise God that He is willing to teach me through hardships.

STATURE
stature Stature is synonymous with maturity. We must become mature in our walk with Christ. 1 Corinthians 13:11 states, “When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me.” Just as Jesus was demonstrating to His par-

ents that He was no longer a child by His actions in the temple, so we must begin our maturing after we are baptized. Paul stated this idea clearly to the Ephesians.

“So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the head, that is, Christ” (Ephesians 4: 11-15).

FAVOR WITH GOD *favor with God* God's favor is given to us when we turn to Him in repentance and are baptized. He removes all the penalties for any wrong thing we have ever done. That's an amazing amount of favor. To grow in this favor we must strive daily to obey God and live according to His commandments. "As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. For he says, 'In the time of my favor I heard you and in the day of salvation I helped you.' I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:1-2). Now that we have God's favor we must live our lives in service to Him so that it grows. The only way to lose it would be to turn away and we certainly don't want to do that!

FAVOR WITH MEN *favor with men* "Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart, Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man" (Proverbs 3:3-4). By simply being good Christians we will earn favor with men. If we show love and are faithful to God's instructions those characteristics will excel us in our dealings with everyone. We will surely stand out and be noticed by our actions.

God has a tremendous mission for each of us. He is preparing us now for what He has ultimately designed us. By growing in Wisdom, Stature, Favor with God, and Favor with Men, we are being equipped for our final use in His plan. i

By June Rush

Greetings,

Allow me to introduce myself. "I am wisdom." In order to find me you must seek me. I don't come to you all at once, but a little at a time. You must start seeking me at a very young age, you must discover the source by which I am attained, how valuable I am, and the tremendous benefits I bring with me. When you find me, I strongly exhort you to embrace me, bind me about your neck, let me become a garland for your head. If you don't search for me, find me, and use me, you will become morally deficient, and a fool full of folly.

Please read about me in the Holy Bible, which is God's Word, and the only source for true and lasting wisdom. Proverbs 1:7 states, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom, and discipline." Notice that knowledge is my friend, but without using the two of us together, and applying what you know, we become useless.

In order for me to grow inside you, you must live a Godly life. This life comes with some very important guidelines, which include, seeking God and getting to know Him on a personal basis through Bible study, personal prayer, fasting, meditation, church attendance, and stewardship. You will learn that when all of these things become a daily habit the key to having me is through your closeness and dedication to God.

I will grow with you as you become more mature in Christ. If you reject Him, I will leave you.

In Proverbs 1:20-22 it plainly says, "Wisdom calls aloud in the streets, she raises her voice in the public squares, at the head of the noisy streets, she cries out, in the gateways of the city, she makes her speech. 'How long will you simple ones love your simple ways, how long will mockers delight in mockery, and fools hate knowledge.'"

I, wisdom am reaching out my hand to you. Will you accept it or reject it? "For the Lord gives wisdom, and from His mouth comes knowledge and understanding...Wisdom will save you from wicked men, from those whose words are perverse" (Proverbs 2:6, 12).

"Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, and understanding" (Proverbs 3:13). I, wisdom, will be a tree of life to those who seek me, for by me the Lord laid the foundations of the earth.

Am I worth searching for? I will bring you a long and prosperous life, success, health, vitality, riches, and honor, pleasure, peace, protection, righteousness and most important of all, God's favor.

I, wisdom implore you to find me, love me and live by my ways, which comes from knowing and living a Godly life. Am I worth the effort? I have told you about myself and made myself known to you, now the choice is up to you. i

Invisible Eyes

By Sarah Hoeck

It takes you a couple minutes to get out of bed this morning. You feel so tired; you decide to have your morning cup of coffee early today. But before you can make your steaming hot cup of caffeine, you just must have your morning paper to read. You walk outside into the cool, brisk air and down your long driveway. As you pick up the newspaper, the headline catches your eye. "Main Street Serial Killer Strikes Again!" it screams. Chills run down your spine and they're definitely not from the cold breeze rushing around you. You quickly turn around and rush inside. The terror is even worse for you. You live on Main Street.

Without realizing what you're doing, you have made your pot of coffee. As you take your first sip, the soothing aroma runs through you. You feel better almost instantly, less jumpy and afraid. You calmly sit down and drink some more of your "stress-relieving" coffee. You start reading the actual article, but stop practically right away. You saw a name. A name you recognized. You continue to read and the reality and terror creep back into you. The lady eight houses down from you is dead. The article says a thief broke into her house, tied her up and raped her. Then, after she thought it all was over, he killed her.

You stop reading to find you can't move. Even though you weren't friends with her, you knew her. You can't believe this has happened so close to your home. Before, when the murders were committed in a different subdivision, you always thought it would never affect you, never mind happen so close. You skip some of the article to look for the time it happened. "It figures," you think, trying to make a joke out of it. "Those criminals always commit their crimes during that time. I mean they have imagination in every other aspect but not this one. Ha!" But, in all truth, you are more frightened than ever before. You're most vulnerable when it's the darkest and when you're asleep.

Now, I'm not saying that crimes are only committed at night. But have you noticed, most do happen when it's dark out? And why is that? It's because practically no one is out. No one is around. No one can be a witness. There will be no consequences as long as the police don't solve the case. And they won't, because nobody was there to witness it. No one was watching. Or at least, that's what they think.

Now, imagine this. Somewhere, there is someone who knows everything about you. This someone can see every single thing you do. He watches every move you make. He can hear everything you say. And, even more amazingly, he knows every single thought that ever enters your mind, even if it's for only a millisecond. When you tell your friend you love her new haircut, he knows if you're lying. He knows everything about your life. And before you laugh this off, know that it's true, all of it. Of course, no human, man or woman,

would be able to read your mind. But I'm not talking about a human. I'm talking about God.

God watches every move you make. He sees every step you take. He knows everything you've ever thought. He knows more about you than you do. For instance, do you know how many hairs are on your head? God does. In Matthew 10:30, Jesus says, "But the very hairs on your head are all numbered."

And in Jeremiah 1:4-5(a) it says, "The word of the LORD came to me, saying, 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you...'" I'm practically certain that no one on the face of the earth can say that about himself or herself, not even you. Most people can't remember what they were like before three years old, without someone telling them, never mind not even being created yet.

Okay, so we know that God is watching us every second of every day. But who cares if he can read our minds? So what if he watches our every move? Why should we care?

Now, let's assume that somewhere out there, there was someone who's job was to be your judge. This judge would watch you constantly and listen to every word you said or thought. And then, he would determine whether you should live or die. The choice is all up to him. His punishments are so horrifying you would faint if you knew you would have to go through it. There would be extreme pain, more than you could ever imagine, and then, there would be death. But this judge wasn't all harsh. He was actually very merciful. If you asked Him for forgiveness and then walked righteously, you would live.

God is your judge. He decides if you live or die. He decides if you will have eternal life or not. He's really the only one who can actually judge us. But so what if He thinks we are absolutely wicked? Who cares if He thinks we are self-centered, sick in the head, dirty mouthed, lazy, temperamental complainers? Why should we care if what He thinks is what He knows is true? Why should we care? Maybe, it's because God's judgment is the only judgment that matters.

In the end, God is the only real judge. He alone decides what happens to that criminal and what happens to you. He determines if you'll have eternal life or not. So, maybe, instead of asking, "why should we care," we should ask, "why shouldn't we?"

*What do
you do
when
no one is
looking?*



We Must Develop The Character of *Self-Control*

By Emmanuel Donkor

We often hear how the world is gradually becoming a dangerous place to live. Young men and women disobey their parents, as self-centeredness has become a common phenomenon. People tend to seek their own interests more than that of other people in society. Courtesy is important to have, but often enough, it is rather neglected. The current conflict between Israel and Lebanon is an example of what has come to symbolize the current state of the world.

There are fundamental factors that govern the world in which we live in. Considering the current state of the world, it is clear to see that people have turned away from God. They have rejected the truth and knowledge of the Word of God.

The world was founded on the Word of God, and Genesis chapter one makes reference to it. In this chapter, God fashioned what was a 'formless and empty' world by His Word (Genesis 1:2).

In the same way, God through the prophets and the apostles laid down principles on how to conduct our lives on earth. In Galatians 5 verses 16-26, Paul emphasized the importance of living by the spirit and

overcoming the desires of the flesh. By doing so, it will inevitably have a positive effect on people in the world and thus fulfill God's plan for mankind.

The spirit of self-control is one of the many virtues that must be encouraged among believers and the world as a whole. The Bible describes self-control as one of the Fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23). Do you ever wonder whether the situation between Israel and Lebanon would have been different if they had exercised self-control? What would it be like if all the "Terrorists" exercised self-control? What would the world be like if everyone else did the same too?

The story of Dinah and Shechem, found in Genesis 34:1-31, is a good example of the consequences of not having self-control. The story also shows us how easily a person's blessings are forfeited due to lack of self-control.

In the story Dinah, "the only daughter born to the patriarch Jacob is raped by Shechem." The outcome of this incident is violence, as it leads to the deaths of many Hivites. Even though Shechem loved Dinah for "his heart was drawn to Dinah and spoke tenderly to her" (Genesis 34:3), he went about it the wrong way. It was only after he had 'violated' her that he asked his father, Hamor to ask Jacob for Dinah's hand in marriage.

Levi and Simon also showed lack of self-control by taking revenge. There are other characters in the Bible who have missed out on God's promises by showing a lack of self-control. Usurping the priestly function, a function performed by Samuel as the prophet of God, Saul lost what could have been an opportunity to establish a dynasty in Israel.

On the other hand, David showed restraint and as a result, established a

dynasty with the reign of Solomon (1 Samuel 23-25). Even when he had the opportunity to kill Saul, he acknowledged Saul as the Lord's anointed; refusing to kill him. The world needs people with strong character, who would not bend the rules to satisfy their own selfish goals.

At this point, I would like to ask the following questions:

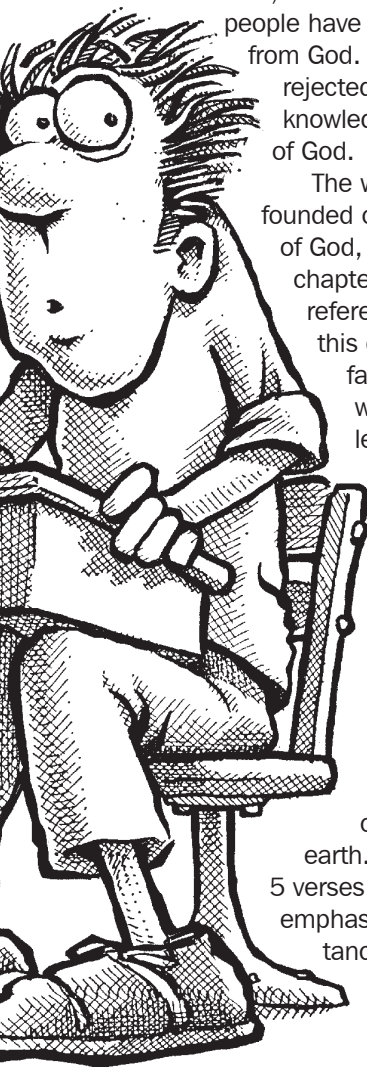
- What do you do in secret, when nobody is around?
- What is your first reaction when somebody offends you?
- Do you allow God to take control because vengeance is His?
- For the brothers and sisters who are dating; are you determined to live pure and holy lives until you are ready to marry?
- Are you patient enough to wait for God's direction?

There is no doubt that when we develop self-control, we would be in tune with God's spirit, and it then becomes easy for Him to pour out His blessings on us.

We can show the Fruit of the Spirit by surrendering our lives to God. We need to entrust our decisions and burdens to God, as He is the one who gives us peace in the midst of our storms for "He creates everything beautiful in its time and also sets eternity in the hearts of men" (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

Self-control would enable the leaders of our nations, to make our world a strife and violent free world.

We would be glorifying God if we live a life that is pleasing unto Him. We ought to put away the 'Shechem', 'Levi' and 'Simon' spirit that deprives the world and ourselves the peace and blessings that God has already given to us. God is a good God and would not withhold anything good from us. The ball is now in our court. **i**



“When he assured his parents that he was not neglecting his studies, he was telling the truth. Indeed, he got through prodigious quantities of work. Iron self-discipline had become a habit with him, and he plotted every day with the Methodism of a Wesleyan minister. The amount of time he spent at his desk was comparatively small—rarely more than a quarter of the day—but his concentration was so intense, and his reading so rapid, that he could afford more time off than most. Even these ‘free’ periods were packed with mental, physical, or social activity. ‘He was forever at it,’ said one classmate. Another marveled: ‘Never have I seen or read of a man with such an amazing array of interests.’ Tumbling into bed at midnight or in the small hours, Theodore could luxuriate in healthy tiredness, satisfied that he had wasted not one minute of his waking hours. His regimen was flexible, but balanced. Any overindulgence in sport or flirtation would be immediately compensated for by extra study.”

The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt-Edmund Morris

Remem

By Bryan Whitlow

Have you ever had this “problem”? Theodore Roosevelt did, and loved it. I think most would agree he lived a life that was full. At one time he was the foremost ornithologist (one who studies birds) in the country. He was a cattle rancher. He authored many books, on different subjects. He was an original member of the Rough Riders. (The 1st US Volunteer Cavalry) He was an avid hunter, fighter/boxer, gentleman, statesman, and diplomat. He was definitely a unique man. Oh yea, he became President of the United States, too!

Have you ever been labeled by someone as “being forever at it?” Do you manage your time almost every day? My Grandmother once said, “Bryan, you go too much.” (I’m pretty sure she wasn’t putting me in the same category with Teddy!) She was implying that I was too busy always “doing,” and should chill out a little. But, I think every person knows his or her limit. There

are some, though, who never find time to slow down and enjoy anything, then wonder where all the time went. I’m pretty sure I haven’t done that.

For one thing, the Sabbath reminds me weekly of my obligations to God, and in return, His gift to me is a physical and mental renewal. The second half of that commandment says; “Six days shall you labor, and do all your work...” (Exodus 20:9). The question that arises is this, What IS God’s opinion of our commitment to the other half of this commandment? Did He really mean what it says? If so, does He see productive, goal-driven people with initiative whose lights shine out from our neighborhood, our job, and our family? Is He proud that our boss at work knows we will be at work every day, and that we don’t have to be babied to do the job we got hired to do? Or, does He see couch potatoes getting calluses on their hands from using the remote so much every day? Or, maybe He sees us whining at every turn, ungrateful for the rich and abundant way of life we have today, compared to what our ancestors had to endure? Think that last sentence is silly? Then how did Theodore Roosevelt come up with this, “The things that will destroy America are prosperity at any price, peace at any price, safety first instead of duty first, the love of soft living, and the get-rich theory of life”? We’re talking about a man who was born in the 1800’s! No TV, no cell phones, no Internet, no lottery, and on and on! Was he a prophet? Probably not, but it sounds pretty prophetic doesn’t it? Did God put him there as the leader of the United States?

Do you know anyone like this? Honest? Besides, did He really mean that we had to work? Let’s look at the many examples the Word gives us to answer this question.

Personally, I like getting things in order, or at least trying to get them in order. Whether it is

Remember the Second Half?

trying to straighten up my out-building, my attic, or cleaning out something for my Mom, I feel good getting things done. Maybe if I didn't, Ecclesiastes 10:18 would hit me a little harder, "Because of laziness the building decays, and through idleness of hands the house leaks." How about II Thessalonians 3: 8 "...nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, not because we do not have the authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us. For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies." Notice verse 14 and 15 on your own time. There are folks out there who are very capable people who could easily find and keep a job, but instead would settle for handouts. Some, on the other hand, just don't want to be told what to do. And who hasn't read Proverbs 31:27, "She watches over the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness."

I work forty hours a week or more. That time is planned for me. What I accomplish otherwise is up to me. So, it would help to plan the rest of my time if I'm to be productive. (Being productive is almost a curse word to some folks where I work. I work with people who will go out of their way to make processes harder for others, who are always resisting change, or teamwork and improved-ways of doing things. They seem to think the company owes them something; it's their right to be ignorant and belligerent. But, doesn't scripture tell us to live peaceably with all men (Romans 12:18)? (But I digress) Should people, especially in God's church, have any of these characteristics where they work? But, let's be fair, there are so many things out there that can make us be idle, or just plain lazy. Are you idle too much, or just plain lazy?

We have video games, ESPN, soap operas, Idol, (you name the version), sports bars, MTV, VH1, BET, Ellen, Oprah, the movies, and the list goes on and on. Notice that the one-eyed monster is involved in most of these "distractions."

(We really know its "choices" though) I didn't even mention the Internet! I know it's not a sin to watch TV, or use the Web, but when we know more about the lives of Simon and Paula, than we do about Paul or Jesus, there just might be a problem. Who hasn't gotten on the web and accidentally hit a porn site? It happens, and maybe that "window" doesn't close as fast as it should! Remember that survey of "church goers" about going to porn sites on the Internet? It was a pretty high number! Has anybody in God's Church got this "problem?" Who was it that said, "Character is how one behaves when no one is watching?" Back in my more idle days I could tell you more things about the USTA, NFL, NBA, etc, than most people cared to think about. Back then, I wasted so much of my time with this stuff, it still gets on my nerves thinking about it!

Obviously from scripture we are admonished to "stay at it," somewhat. How do we balance it out? It's found included with the fruit of the Spirit known as temperance. Definitions include self-restrained, moderate, without extremes, etc. Galatians 5:23.

Another excellent word is "diligence." Similar words are industrious, conscientious, hardworking, meticulous, thorough, or careful. Proverbs 10:4, "He who deals with a slack hand becomes poor, but the hand of the diligent makes one rich." Proverbs 12:24, "The hand of the diligent will rule..." Proverbs 12:27, 13:4, 21:5, 22:29, or 27:23. Will you be "thorough" and take the time to look up these scriptures? Notice the results promised from an honest effort?

What person doesn't enjoy a sense of accomplishment? Who doesn't enjoy lying down at night after a day full of achievements? If you are drawing a blank on that one, maybe another fire needs to be lit under you. The first step is to ask God for more initiative, or desire. (Proverbs 6:6-11) The next step is to put down that remote for a while, cancel your cable/satellite subscription, get out of the house, whatever you need to do, and get after it! But, don't forget that important word: balance. **i**

in the next issue:

GOD'S PROMISES

Winter 2006/2007

What we learn from God's promises.

Marriage: When is it okay to break one's wedding vow?

Salvation: God's promise of eternal life.

Waiting patiently for God's promises.



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