

**PRECIOUS**

By Cecil Burch

“Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.” (Psalm 116:15.) “It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.” (Hebrews 9:27.)

Death is a subject that most of us try to avoid, but with the passing of time we must recognize its reality. Recently a group of nine year olds was giving their opinions of death. In their sweet innocence they discussed this unpleasant subject. One said, “Maybe I’ll die someday, but I hope I don’t die on my birthday because it’s no fun to celebrate your birthday if you are dead.” Another said, “When you die you don’t have to do your homework in heaven, unless your teacher is there too.” One little boy said, “When you die, they bury you in the ground and your soul goes to heaven; but your body can’t go to heaven because it’s too crowded up there already.” A little girl said, “Only good people go to

heaven. The other people go to a place where it is hot all the time, like in Florida.” We all know that death is no laughing matter, but it is refreshing to listen to our little ones as they develop their minds and begin to explore the world around them.

It makes no difference how much you try to get ready for death, the ugly shock is always there. The funeral homes and cemeteries are places of sorrow and tears. There is a feeling of hopelessness that pervades the living. Even the apostle Paul referred to death as having a “sting.” “The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Corinthians 15:56,57.) It is no wonder then that the Psalmist said long ago that, “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.”

When the apostle Paul was in prison in Rome and realizing that

death could be near, he wrote to the Christians at Philippi saying, “For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.” (Philippians 1:21.) Death no longer held a horrible chain around his neck; he was free from sin which brings death and he knew that “in Christ” he was the recipient of eternal life by the grace of God. It is God’s free gift to those in Christ. (Romans 6:23.) When a child of God nears death the words of Ecclesiastes 7:1 become real in his life: “The day of man’s death is better than the day of his birth; it is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting.” Why? Because the Christian does not go to a funeral but to a victory service.

— Amarillo, TX

“Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. Yes, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them.” (Revelation 14:13.)

**REDUCING STRESS IS A CHOICE**

By Danny Tunnell

Everyone experiences stress in their lives. There are just a lot of stressful things to contend with.

There are things we can do to lower our stress level. A sense of humor helps, as does getting enough rest and exercise, eating a healthy diet, taking a walk, and enjoying some recreation time. All of these relieve stress.

God does not want us to live stressful lives. Jesus came to give us life more abundantly. (John 10:10.) Jesus said, “Let not your heart be troubled.” (John 14:1.) That is a choice you make. You can choose whether or not your heart is troubled. Someone says, “I can’t help it; if you were going through what I’m going through, you’d be troubled too!”

Instead of looking at the problems, turn your attention to God and His word. “Casting all your care upon Him, for he cares for you.” (1 Peter 5:7.)

Many times people could get relief from stress if they would turn it over to God and let it go. That’s easier said than done! But it can be done.

The number one thing to do to

lower your stress level is to make the word of God the highest priority in your life. Those who love God’s laws have great peace of heart and mind and do not stumble. (Psalm 119:165, TLB.) Some people listen to everything but the word of God, even Christians. They listen to rumors, people’s opinions, and 24-hour-a-day news broadcasts. But filling up with the word of God is vitally important to reducing your stress level. You can’t overdose on the word of God, and there are no harmful side effects.

If you’re going to reduce your stress level, you’ve got to take control over your thought life. Stop looping the same negative thoughts over and over again in your mind. Think about things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous, and praiseworthy. (Philippians 4:4-8.) Do this while casting down the wrong kinds of thoughts. (2 Corinthians 10:5.)

Paul is telling us to do two things. First, pray and give God our cares. Second, don’t dwell on negative thoughts. What we think about can

eventually cause a problem. If we think about something that is negative over and over again it will become bigger than it actually is. That causes stress.

The devil wants us stressed out. It’s not so much that stress comes from what’s going on in your life. It has a lot to do with your thoughts about what’s going on in your life.

While I’m writing these thoughts, the PGA tournament is being held at Southern Hills in Tulsa. One of the things that makes a good golfer is if he messes up on one hole, he can come right back on the next hole with a good shot. He has learned to completely forget about the bad hole and go on with the game. He puts the bad shot out of his mind.

That mindset is biblical! Paul said, “Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 3:13,14.)

Forgetting what’s in the past helps the golfer, and the Christian.

— Miami, OK

**Old Paths**

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“ask for the old paths” (Jer. 6:16)

**KEEP PRAYING!**

By Danny Boggs

Psalm 59 may represent the first recorded prayer of David since Saul had determined to become “David’s enemy continually.” (1 Samuel 18:29.) David offered up a cry for help, honest feelings about Saul and his cronies, and expressions of deep trust in God. The immediate results were relief - for the time being - and a change in his attitude and emotions. His problem was big, but God was bigger.

Still, Saul pursued him. David told Jonathan, “But truly as the Lord lives and your soul lives, there is but a step between me and death.” (1 Samuel 20:3.) Jonathan was not convinced that his father was so bloodthirsty against David, until he saw a spear flying at him from his father’s hand just as it had at David. (1 Samuel 20:33.) With the threat so clear, David headed for protection up a path he could never have imagined only a short time ago - to Gath, the Philistine hometown of Goliath.

The superscription at Psalm 56 makes us think of this low point in David’s life. Three times in this prayer David says that his trouble was “all day long.” (vv. 1,2,5.) Misguided people made his life miserable. Yet his soul answers, “When I am afraid, I put my trust in You. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can flesh do to me?” (v. 3-4.) He knows God cares: “You have kept count of my tossing; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book . . . This I know, that God is for me. (v. 8-9.) Surely things will get better.

But it doesn’t happen fast enough for David. Temporarily blinded to God’s help, David resorted to acting like he had lost his mind when he fell into the hands of the Philistine king. (1 Samuel 21:10-15.) The king had no use for a madman. David wiggled his way out of Gath and escaped to the cave of Adullam. (1 Samuel 22:1.)

It may be from the dark cave that David walked back into the light with the words of Psalm 34. Four hundred down-and-out men had crowded around him. (1 Samuel 22:2.) Should they act like David did in Gath to escape their problems, or was there a better way? “This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him and saved him out of all his troubles.” (Psalm 34:6.) These words and more in this Psalm may be all at the same time a confession that he did wrong by his deception in Gath, a commitment to keep things in God’s hands from then on, and coaching for the disenfranchised men lining up behind him. “Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him . . . What man is there who desires life and loves many days, that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit. Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it. The eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous and his ears toward their cry.” (Psalm 34:8, 12-15.)

Saul’s unceasing animosity toward David led to more problems that would keep piling up on him for 13 years. David often felt he would crumble under their weight. But David kept praying, and God kept holding him together.

Problems don’t always just go away. Problems may persist even when we pray about them persistently. We don’t always know what God is doing, but He does. “The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.” (Psalm 34:18.) Keep praying!

— Neosho, MO

**WITH EACH TICK OF THE CLOCK**

By Dalton Key

Yes, time lost is forever lost, and enough wasted time amounts to a wasted life. In the words of Samuel Smiles, “Lost wealth may be replaced by industry, lost knowledge by study, lost health by temperance, but lost time is gone forever.” Or as A.W. Tozer once observed, “When you kill time, remember that it has no resurrection.”

From her deathbed, Elizabeth I, Queen of England sighed, “All my possessions for a moment of time.” Despite her position, despite her wealth, the queen was finally forced to admit the obvious. Time - for everybody - eventually runs out.

From the perspective of flesh, life is time and time is life. Benjamin Franklin once wisely observed, “Dost thou love life? Then do not squander time, for that is the stuff life is made of.”

What is life in the flesh but so much time? Is not life composed, comprised of increments of time? With each tick of the clock time moves forward; with each beat of the heart life grows shorter.

What really counts is not the number of hours we put in, but rather what we put into those hours! Many a slothful soul has worked twice as long to do one-half the work a more diligent worker will accomplish in short order.

That said, our concern should not be with the wasted hours and neglected opportunities of the past; we should rather focus our attention upon the here and now, upon what we should be doing and could be doing today.

Scripture places a hefty premium on the present. “See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.” (Ephesians 5:15,16.) “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” (2 Corinthians 6:2.) “But exhort one another daily, while it is called today, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” (Hebrews 3:13.) “Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time.” (Colossians 4:5.)

We must resolve to begin living each day to the fullest. The days of our years are by no means unlimited. “So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.” (Psalm 90:12.) We must do all we can, with all we have, for as long as we are able.

**FAITH THAT LIVES ON**

By Hershel Dyer

Leighton Pullen, with reference to the church in the second century, makes this observation: "As soon as men and women belonged to the Christian Church because their parents and grandparents had been Christians, and not because they had themselves to make the first break with heathen life, some enfeeblement of the Christian life almost inevitably displayed itself in certain quarters of the church." (The Church of the Fathers, P. 57.)

Almost with unerring accuracy it comes to pass. One generation goes through the battle for the truth, the next takes the truth that has been won for granted, and by the third generation the truth is no longer prized.

That enfeeblement by the third or fourth generation may be expected, but it should also be guarded against.

During the first half of the 19th century, the call for a religious reformation was heard far and wide in this land. The greatly divided protestant churches were asked along with the Roman and Eastern Catholic bodies to return to the church as it is set forth in the New Testament. The rapid growth of this plea to go back to "the old paths" and walk therein met with hostility in many quarters. However, even many within clergy gave up their denominational names and offices and doctrines in favor of Bible truth. On the part of both clergy and the common people this required agonizing choices preceded by intensive Bible study. The price they paid to walk with God knows no computation by man.

A few generations removed from these pioneers of the faith, we are losing the zeal to retain the ground they so valiantly won. Although the defense of the faith against enemy attacks will always be necessary, the faith is simply its propagation, the constant preaching of the gospel to the lost.

Every soul-winner is a defender of the faith, for every soul that is won to Christ becomes a token that the apostolic faith lives on!

— DECEASED

"But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." (2 Timothy 3:14,15.)

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." (1 Corinthians 15:58.)

## EDITORIALLY SPEAKING . . .

**SEEDTIME AND HARVEST**

By Dalton Key

The purpose of a seed? Reproduction, plain and simple. Sowing and reaping is a universal truism, validated both by Scripture and everyday observation. In the words of Mashona Dhliwayo, "Show me your seed and I'll show you your harvest."

The gospel of Christ as the seed of the kingdom follows the same pattern, wielding tremendous power upon those honest and good hearts into which it is planted. This remarkably potent seed has power to convict, to convince and to convert. It has power to transform the vilest of sinners into saved and sanctified children of God. "The seed is the word of God . . . The sower sows the word." (Luke 8:11; Mark 4:14.)

Paul felt the urgency of sowing this gospel seed, hailing its message as the very "power of God unto salvation." (Romans 1:16.)

Peter likewise described the gospel as the incorruptible seed by which God's children are begotten. (1 Peter 1:22-25.)

Centuries have passed and much in this world has changed since the time when Paul and Peter heralded the gospel's powerful message. Both men have long since left the scenes of this life.

But the seed they planted continues to live on. Wherever and whenever the gospel seed is planted in "honest and good hearts" (Luke 8:15), its life-giving effects are realized. The same seed by which Christians were begotten in the first century is alive and active and able to do the same today.

Not all hearts are honest; not all ground is good ground. But regardless the condition of the soil, the seed always retains its power.

Those who sow the kingdom's seed face times and circumstances, both "in season" and "out of season." There will be those times when hearers simply "will not endure sound doctrine." (2 Timothy 4:2,3.) But through it all, good times and bad, the word must be preached. The seed must be sown.

We may not always see the results we would like to see. We may appear to be making little progress in extending the borders of the kingdom. But we should not, we must not, lose heart. We can't possibly know all the good that may come or all the fruit that may one day develop, through the years and across the globe, from the precious seed we sow today. Our business: sowing the seed; God's business: giving the increase. (1 Corinthians 3:6,7.) In the end, when all is said and done and the dust of history has settled, God's word will not return void. (Isaiah 55:11.) The purpose of a seed? Reproduction, plain and simple.

(Men, don't forget our OLD PATHS MEN'S RETREAT, just around the corner now, September 15-17. Hope to see many of you there at the site of Flint Hills Christian Camp just north of Sedan, Kansas! )

**JESUS OF NAZARETH**

By Milton Smith

Many Christians are unaware of the fact that skeptics of the Bible have long asserted that the town of Nazareth never existed during the time when the New Testament claims Jesus spent his childhood there. Nazareth is not mentioned in the Old Testament, by the Apostle Paul, in the Jewish Talmud, nor by the first century Jewish historian, Josephus. Many critics have claimed that this absence of evidence points to the fact that Nazareth did not exist during the time of Christ.

Dr. James Strange of the University of South Florida (considered an expert in this area) describes Nazareth as being a very small, insignificant village that covered only about sixty acres. He estimates that its maximum first century population could not have exceeded more than about 500 people. He notes that when Jerusalem fell in 70 AD and priests were no longer needed in the temple because it had

been destroyed, these priests were sent out to various other locations. Archaeologists have found a list in Aramaic describing the 24 courses of priests who relocated, and one of the priests was registered as having moved to Nazareth.

Dr. Strange adds that there have been archaeological digs that have uncovered first century tombs in the vicinity of Nazareth. These tombs would establish the very limits of this tiny village because by Jewish law, burials had to take place outside the town proper. Renowned archaeologist, Jack Finegan, has written, "From the tombs, it can be concluded that Nazareth was a mainly Jewish settlement in the Roman period." Many respected archaeologists no longer doubt the first century existence of the village of Nazareth. Even the skeptical scholar, Ian Wilson, has written, "Such findings suggest that Nazareth may

have existed in Jesus' time, but there is no doubt that it must have been a very small and insignificant place."

Students of the Bible will quickly recall that when Nathanael told Philip that he had found the Messiah and that he was none other than "Jesus of Nazareth," Nathanael sarcastically replied, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:45,46.) He was obviously referring to its small, insignificant size.

Archeology continues to confirm the reliability of the Bible - even when it must do so somewhat reluctantly.

— Tulsa, OK

"The entirety of Your word is truth, and every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever . . . my heart stands in awe of Your word." (Psalm 119:160,161.)

**Wake Up!**

By Joe Slater

Paul exhorted the brethren in Rome, Corinth, and Ephesus to wake up! If he were still living in the flesh, would he tell us the same thing?

It's too easy to hit the snooze button when it comes to our responsibilities to God. He wants Christians to be the best law-abiding, tax-paying citizens any country ever had. That holds true even if the government is hostile toward us. (Romans 13:1-7). We owe it to every human being to demonstrate genuine, Biblical love. (13:8-10.) "And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep, for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed." (13:11.) In view of this, the apostle urged them to reject the "works of darkness" that characterize the world. (13:12-14.)

Corinth faced the same issues and received a similar admonition: "Do not be deceived: 'Evil companions corrupt good habits.' Awake to righteousness and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak this to

your shame." (1 Corinthians 15:33-34.)

Like Rome and Corinth, the church at Ephesus consisted largely of converted pagans. Leaving that way of life proved difficult. Paul wrote, "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret." (Ephesians 5:11-12.) In contrast to the darkness of sin and ignorance, the apostle wrote, "Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light." (5:14.)

The cares of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the pleasures of this life are distracting far too many of us. We have gone to sleep.

May God help us to wake up before it's too late!

"Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. Be sober, be vigilant; because

your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world." (1 Peter 5:6-9.)

— Justin, TX

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