


THESE TIMES

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CAN THE BIBLE BE
UNDERSTOOD?

THE CHRISTMAS
SAMARITAN

WALK
YOUR WAY
TO FITNESS



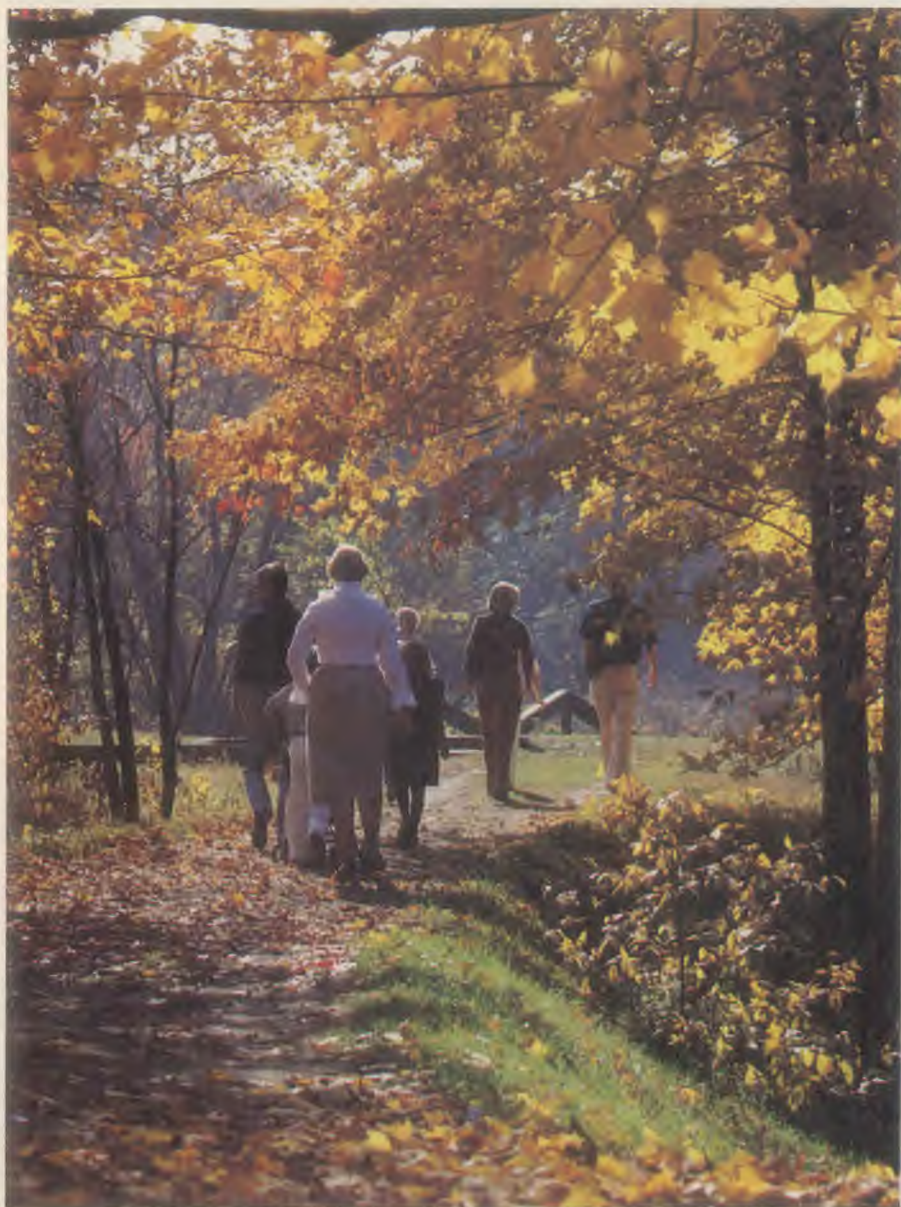
If God's Not Embarrassed, Why Are We?

by Joni Eareckson Tada
(page 8)

Walk Your Way to Fitness

Last month's issue of THESE TIMES carried an interview with Kenneth Cooper on the benefits of jogging. For those who find jogging too strenuous or unattractive, walking may be the perfect alternative.

BY JAMES L. FLY



In a popular comedy film set in the 1964 Olympic Games at Tokyo, Japan, a young American athlete persistently evades answering the question of what sport he is there to compete in.

You don't find out until the last part of the film, when you see the young American and scores of other athletes hip-swiveling and arm-swinging their way through Tokyo's streets in the almost-comical stride of the long-distance race walker.

Viewers could easily solve the young athlete's secret by the film's title, *Walk, Don't Run*, a slogan that millions of nonrunning Americans who haven't been swept into the jogging revolution and yet are concerned about fitness are adopting in the 1980s.

You might be surprised to learn that race walking has been an official Olympic event since 1906. It also might be a revelation to you that brisk walking compares favorably with jogging as an aerobic exercise, one that improves your breathing capacity and circulation.

The young athlete in the film shouldn't have been embarrassed because he wasn't a runner or a swimmer, and you don't have to be intimidated by the sound of jogging shoes slapping the pavement outside your bedroom

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window at 6:00 A.M.

As I write this article, Bill Rodgers, the incredible marathon man, has just led a record-breaking field of 14,000 runners for his third consecutive victory in the New York City Marathon. I wasn't among those intrepid road runners who huffed, puffed, and perspired 26 miles through the streets and across the bridges of the Big Apple. I admire them, but I don't envy them. I simply prefer walking. Maybe you do too. If you're a tortoise instead of a hare, this article is especially for you.

Even some of today's renowned runners recognize that their sport is not the sine qua non of fitness.

"Running is not for everyone," says Charles T. Kuntzleman, noted exercise consultant for the YMCA, and a runner for 25 years. "For some people it is too strenuous, too demanding. For some people it's a hassle. Many people take up running and soon stop. For all these ex-joggers and ex-runners, I submit that walking is the perfect exercise."—*The Complete Book of Walking*, p. 7.

Dr. George Sheehan, author of the best-selling *Running and Being*, says, "The walker can find his inner world no more than a short stroll from home. . . . The walker has found the peace that the runner still seeks."—*Dr. Sheehan on Running*, pp. 52, 53.

I guess that sums up my philosophy of exercise. To me, jogging seems to be a symptom of our accelerated society—trying to compress everything, including exercise, into the shortest time possible. Then, too, I have a suspicion that many people are taking up jogging not because they really want to, but because it is currently fashionable.

Now jogging is an excellent aerobic exercise, and I wouldn't want to deter anyone from it. It does have certain drawbacks, though, which I'll mention later. My purpose is to overcome the pervasive superstition that walking is inferior to jogging. As a matter of fact, walking has distinct advantages over jogging and other sports.

Advantages of walking. Walking

is natural. We all know how to do it from the time we're around a year old. It doesn't require any superior talent or natural endowment, such as a supple body for gymnastics or a tall frame for basketball.

You don't have to go searching for a court, a rink, a chairlift, a pool, or a playing field. And you don't have to pay dues to join an exclusive club. Good exercise is as near as your front door.

Walking requires no special or expensive equipment, except a good pair of shoes. (Interestingly enough, *Consumer Reports* recommends a quality pair of running shoes as the best footwear for walking.) Other than that, you don't need a mitt, a racket, a ball, clubs, or skis—not even a crimson-colored warm-up suit with white racing stripes down the sides!

Of course, you do need warm clothes for crunching over icy streets in winter and rain gear for sloshing through spring puddles. But you probably own these items already, and that's just the point about walking. You can successfully incorporate walking into your current life style without significantly disrupting it.

If you live near enough, why not walk to the store or to work? Besides getting good exercise, you'll keep your car's gas tank fuller for a little longer, which in these days of ever-increasing fuel prices may mean real savings.

Brisk walking (three miles per hour) four days a week for at least 40 minutes should keep you in good cardiovascular shape. A few years ago fitness expert Michael Pollock, coauthor of *Health and Fitness Through Physical Activity*, conducted detailed experiments comparing jogging and walking involving 16 sedentary men aged 40 to 57 years. Dr. Pollock, who is the director of the cardiac rehabilitation program at the Mount Sinai Medical Center in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, wanted to find out whether walking could yield the same training effects as running if the duration and frequency of walking were increased.

The men in Dr. Pollock's experiment walked briskly for 40

minutes, four days a week, over a period of 20 weeks. Their measured improvement was equal to that of similarly aged men jogging three days a week for 30 minutes. (See Michael L. Pollock, Jack H. Wilmore, and Samuel M. Foxx III, *Health and Fitness Through Physical Activity* [New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1978].)

Brigham Young University researchers recently compared the calorie-burning efficiency of walking and jogging. They had 24 young men walk, then jog, on a treadmill. The result? By walking a mile in 12 minutes, they burned up only 26 fewer calories than when they ran a mile in eight and one-half minutes.

A big difference between jogging and walking exists, however, when you compare the pressure that each activity exerts upon the knees, ankles, and feet. Suspended in air for a split second between every step, the body slams down hundreds of pounds of pressure on the lower extremities during jogging. Many beginning joggers quit when they experience sore knees, pulled tendons, and aching ankles. Since the body is not suspended in walking, walkers subject their legs and feet to about the same stress as when they are standing.

Sore knees and pulled tendons pale beside the most serious potential side effect of jogging—sudden death from ventricular fibrillation, a fatal tremor of the heart brought about by too much stress put upon it.

In an interview in 1979 in *U.S. News and World Report* entitled "Is Jogging Really Good for You?" Dr. Meyer Friedman, a cardiologist at Mount Zion Hospital in San Francisco, reported that after studying the cases of sixty persons in San Francisco who died instantaneously, he determined that the 50 percent who had died of heart disease were engaging in moderate to severe exercise, such as jogging, when they died. Autopsies showed that all of the victims had serious coronary artery disease, but it was learned that only half of them had been aware of it.—*U.S. News and World Report*, March 19, 1979.

The lesson is obvious. If you want to jog, or for that matter go on a strenuous hike in the mountains, be sure to visit your physician for a complete physical examination, including an electrocardiogram. If you do have heart problems, your doctor will probably advise you to begin a gradual exercise program by walking moderately. Generally speaking, if you're able to hold a conversation with someone while you're walking, you're not walking too fast. A moderate walk should be painless, and you should not be excessively tired afterward.

Benefits of walking. Walking is more than a physical exercise. It can enrich your life mentally, socially, and spiritually.

One day in 1973 a young man named Peter Jenkins, who was disillusioned by Vietnam, Watergate, racial strife, and his own personal identity crisis, decided that he would give himself and America one last chance. Accompanied by his half-Alaskan malamute, Cooper, Jenkins started from his small New York State college town on a walk across the country to see whether he could find anything left to love.

It took him six years, but he did find himself, and a lovely wife, and scores of friendly Americans, ranging from a black family in the South who "adopted" him, to a Colorado rancher who, during long winter nights, spun tales of the Rockies. At a revival meeting in the South he found what he regarded as the most important discovery of all—a personal faith in God. His moving account of his epic journey was published in the April, 1977, and August, 1979, editions of the *National Geographic*. It is also a book now, called *A Walk Across America*.

Most of us aren't in a position to walk across the country when we are oppressed by home and job frustrations and personal problems. What some of us don't realize, though, is that relief is only a 15-minute walk away. It's a lot more healthful than popping a tranquilizer, and a lot more satisfying.

Take time for a walk. Gaze at a flaming sunset. Listen to the counterpoint chorus of birdsong. Breathe deep the earthy spice of a park or forest. Breaking away from our routines and getting in touch with nature help us to get back in tune with ourselves and others.

A family activity. In fact, I believe that walking can even bring families closer together. "Daddy, can we take a walk?" is one of the most frequently asked questions of our 3-year-old son, Eric, in the evenings when I get home from work. My wife and I rarely say No.

After supper we go out, and taking one step to his three, we hold hands and stroll down the street toward the playground, where we become kids with Eric and slide, swing, teeter-totter, and merry-go-round for an hour. On the way home, at Eric's insistence because he is "tired," I carry him in my arms. Holding a wriggling, chattering monkey would be an easier burden.

"Daddy, there's the house where the white kitty lives! Mommy, can I throw a rock in that puddle?" he exclaims with an endless barrage of exuberant conversation.

I doubt that my red-haired son with the sparkling blue eyes would be as responsive and observant if we sat around watching television all the time.

Marriage and family counselors keep telling us today that a lack of communication is the main reason for our high divorce rate and wide generation gap. In an age of fiber optics, home computers, and giant-screen television, people have forgotten the art of personal, heart-to-heart conversation. I like to believe that the family who walks together, talks together.

Someday, when Eric and his younger brother, Ryan, are a little older, Nancy and I plan to take them backpacking into the mountains. America is a peripatetic playground for the pedestrian. Nearly every State has hundreds of miles of hiking trails in all kinds of terrain. Some towns and cities have nature paths and

historical walking tours.

You can get trail maps and information from the U.S. Forest Service, the National Park Service, local chambers of commerce, convention and visitors' bureaus, and hiking clubs. Books and magazines on hiking and backpacking available at bookstores and libraries have much of this information, as well as details on the equipment and techniques you'll need for special walking situations.

The beauty of walking is its simplicity and adaptability to people of all fitness levels, ages, and interests. You can combine walking with other hobbies and avocations such as photography, rock collecting, bird watching, and writing. Writing? Indeed! The English writer Robert Louis Stevenson was an avid walker. So was the American philosopher Henry David Thoreau. You remember Thoreau—he was the one who marched to a different drummer. Some of Thoreau's most profound insights came when he was hiking through the Massachusetts woodlands.

I have an 85-year-old uncle in California who is a retired Methodist minister. He possesses an amazing memory. He has never used notes when preaching a sermon, and he can quote entire passages of the Bible, plus hundreds of famous poems. He attributes his good health and sharp mind to his daily walks.

At a three-day conference on exercising and aging and the role of exercise in the prevention of physical decline (held at Bethesda, Maryland, in 1978) researchers from the United States, Canada, and Western Europe concluded that walking is the most efficient form of exercise and the only one we can safely follow all the years of our lives.

C. Carson Conrad, executive director of the President's Physical Fitness Program, predicts, "Within the next three years we expect that walking will become the 'in' thing that jogging is today."

So whatever your walk of life, get out there and walk for life! **TT**

Laughter in the Heart

—BY KERMIT SHELBY

I heard rich, full-throated laughter, and I turned to look. I saw a man with no hands.

He looked neat, about 30 years old, dressed in civilian clothes. Where his hands should have been I saw two steel hooks fastened to metal tubes that fitted over the stubs of his arms.

With him walked a younger man smiling broadly. On the door of the building from which they had just emerged was lettered: RECRUITING STATION. I learned later that the younger man had just signed up for service in Vietnam.

But it was the man with no hands who caused me to make inquiries of the recruiting officer. The recruiting officer, new to the area, could tell me only that the man had lost both hands in the service of his country. Yet, apparently, the man with no hands somehow had influenced the younger man to sign up for military action.

I wondered what sort of philosophy could induce such wholehearted laughter from a man who had lost both hands.

The following weekend, while coming out of the men's Bible class at church, I heard the same laughter. No one could mistake its quality. A host of 10- to 14-year-old boys flowed out of their classroom, and behind them walked their teacher—the man with no hands.

This time I made my way to him immediately. I had to wait my turn. "As soon as I find a driver for the bus," he told one of the older boys, "I'll telephone you, Ralph. Then you can get in touch with the others, and we'll get our

gear together."

He turned to me inquiringly.

I introduced myself. "I'm Kermit Shelby. I teach some of these boys math and science over at Lowell Junior High." I waved in response to a greeting or two from those who passed me. I looked straight into the kindly blue eyes, ignoring the two steel hooks, yet very much aware of their presence. "Would you consider me as a driver for your bus?"

He looked surprised. "Only if you can take a lot of noise and off-key singing." He laughed with appreciation. "They do get rowdy at times, but if you teach, I suppose you're used to what goes with boys. The thought of a weekend of camping out seems to make them spill over."

A couple of weeks later I sat side by side with David Richman, a bus full of shouting boys behind us. After we became better acquainted, I learned his story.

During a battle in Korea fragments of a shell had torn off both his hands. He had sustained minor injuries to his legs. During his weeks of recuperation, he told me, he had found two valuable aids—the hard-boiled military surgeon who had removed his mangled hands and a Christian nurse who prayed for his recovery.

"Doc Flint taught me how to get rid of self-pity," David said, and his blue eyes flashed at the memory. "His contempt for grippers and complainers helped me to hold back and bear the pain like a man.

"But it was Nurse Caldwell who read the Bible to me. One verse was special, just for me. From Proverbs. I memorized it. I made it a prayer to live by: 'The fining pot is for silver, and the furnace for

gold; but the Lord trieth the hearts' [Proverbs 17:3]."

We sat silent while the bus bumped along. We were silent, but not our passengers. Behind us the boys sang lustily, out of anticipation of the good times ahead, "Old MacDonald had a farm, e-i, e-i, o!"

"Nobody likes to be without hands." A muscle tightened in David's cheek, but it relaxed almost instantly, as if something unseen had smoothed it. "I asked the Lord to show me how not to be sorry for myself. He did a better job than I asked for. He led me to accept Christ as my Saviour. For a while I felt washed up, like all wounded vets probably feel, because I knew I couldn't help fight any more wars. Later I was led to see there are bigger battles right here on the home front."

He took a long breath. "After I found my boys—you see, I'm their scoutmaster as well as their teacher at church—we learned to help one another. Boys love using their hands for others. I try to guide their minds. Each time I lead a boy to accept Christ, I chalk it up on my invisible blackboard as a credit for Nurse Caldwell, who taught me to read the Bible. Sometimes I give a credit here and there to old Doc Flint. If Doc Flint hadn't made it plain to me how self-pity robs one of laughter, I never would have learned to laugh again."

"But yours is such genuine laughter," I said. "You may not be aware of this, but your laugh makes you sound happier than any man I know who has two good hands."

"The Lord trieth the hearts," he repeated. "If the laugh doesn't come from the heart, there might as well not be any. This may

(Continued on page 27)

TV WRITERS NOT TYPICAL AMERICANS

Recent polls of press leaders have disclosed that only a minority shares the traditional ethical and religious views of middle America. Now a study has been completed of leading television writers and Hollywood executives. Its conclusion, as you might guess, matches the other studies.

The same researchers, Robert Lichter, of George Washington University, Stanley Rothman, of Smith College, and Linda Lichter, of Columbia and GWU, conducted a poll of 104 Hollywood professionals. Among their findings:

- 80 percent do not object to homosexual relations
- 97 percent favor abortion as a private choice
- 93 percent do not attend a religious service in a typical month.

Two thirds of the group have incomes above \$200,000. The dominant religious background is Jewish (59 percent), followed by Protestant (25 percent) and Catholic (12 percent). But 45 percent of the total concede they have no present religion.

None of these figures would be crucial were it not for a final datum: 66 percent believe that TV should be a major force for social reform. Lichter, Rothman, and Lichter conclude, "According to television's

creators, they are not in it just for the money. They also seek to move their audience toward their vision of the good society."—*Eternity*.

Life in These Times

• I never look at myself as a hero. I look at myself as

someone who has been overloaded with blessings. Part of my return for that is to do as much good as I can. I try to stay active in community projects. It is imperative for me to create a good example. I could be a drinker and hell-raiser . . . but it's important to me that

I'm not. I won't go places where you'll see me talking with a bunch of women. I think of it this way: If a kid has a Mike Schmidt poster in his bedroom, I'd want his parents to be happy about it.—Philadelphia Phillies third baseman Mike Schmidt.



Many Troubled by Supreme Court's Ruling Against Bob Jones University

Experts on tax law and religion are giving mixed reviews to the U.S. Supreme Court's decision that the Internal Revenue Service may deny tax exemption to religious schools practicing racial discrimination. By an eight-to-one vote, the Supreme Court upheld the ruling of a lower court that Bob Jones University, Greenville, South Carolina, and the Goldsboro, North Carolina, Christian schools practiced racial discrimination and therefore were not entitled to tax-exempt status.

"The real issue before the court was whether Congress had delegated to the IRS full and unfettered authority to determine . . . what would or would not justify tax exemption," said Attorney General William Bradford Reynolds of the Justice Department. Many expert observers fear that a zealous IRS might some day move to strip tax exemptions from other religious groups on grounds that they violate prevailing public policies.

News items appearing in UPDATE represent current events of general interest to the readers of THESE TIMES and should not be interpreted as representing the opinions and views of the editors. Since the items come from a variety of news sources, the editors do not assume responsibility for inaccuracies beyond our control that might inadvertently be reproduced on these pages.

• Novelist Will D.

Campbell writes: "I have stumbled upon a solution to the compulsory prayer in public schools controversy. Simply make it homework. Mamas and Daddies have always helped the kiddies with their homework. That answer should make everybody happy."

British Commentator Says Television Is Fantasy

Television is "a sort of fantasy version of what's happening. You cannot through pictures—through looking at your television screen—come to grips with real life, because what you see is not life; it's a fantasy—only a picture." This statement by Malcolm Muggeridge, well-known British commentator and philosopher, appears in an interview in the June issue of *Listen* magazine.

"A great danger,"

Muggeridge adds, "is that people believe the picture more than the written or spoken word." He points out that pictures can be distorted more than people realize. And children's sense of what the world is all about is derived almost exclusively from television.

Muggeridge also states that the media have played an influential part in encouraging drug abuse of all kinds. "(People) have been persuaded that (the) visions and strange thoughts and things that come to them when they're stupefied with drugs are mystical and transcendental." This, Muggeridge suggests, is one reason why so many get involved in drug abuse. "I think," he adds, "one of the worst things Americans have ever given the world is the phrase 'the pursuit of happiness.' Many people pursue this to the point of taking and encouraging others to take destructive drugs in order to be happy."



While We Sleep in Comfort and Peace, Cambodia Bleeds, the People Suffer

Author Al Santoli ("The New Indochina War," *The New Republic*, May 30) has recently seen the horror of Cambodian refugees: "As the terrified people arrive at the shallow antitank ditch that marks the border of Thailand, and should mean safety, the ground beneath their feet explodes. They have stumbled into a Thai defensive minefield. As they stagger across it, Vietnamese artillery continues to crash in from above."

Santoli tells us that 400,000 Cambodians are in temporary United Nations-supplied camps, many hopelessly awaiting resettlement; some dream of returning to their original homes. During the recent years of their occupation, the Vietnamese have not won the Cambodian people's loyalty; resistance has grown. "Except for the terror attacks on civilian camps, this war has not gone well for the Vietnamese."

But the commitment continues. "According to both Thai and U.S. officials, Soviet military supplies continue to flow into Vietnam at an estimated rate of \$3 to \$6 million a day. The Vietnamese continue to claim that they are in Cambodia to save the people. But after four years of occupation and aggression, it is clear that their real intention is to

absorb Cambodia into Vietnam and serve as an arm of Soviet expansion in the region. . . . Today Vietnam maintains the fourth largest army in the world, but its home economy languishes as resources are channeled into the military."

Food shortages have become a critical part of life (and death) in Cambodia. One estimate places the number of starvation deaths at 700,000 during the first year of Vietnamese occupation. "Malnutrition is on the rise, and the Vietnamese troops get first crack at available food. Quantities of rice are shipped to Vietnam, where passive resistance to collectivization, and shipment of their crops to the Soviet Union, left the food production system crippled."

Santoli concludes with a last look at a refugee camp that was soon expecting devastation by Vietnamese forces: "The day I departed Nong Samet, I took a walk through the crowded camp. Children surrounded me whenever I stopped. Seeing an American gave them hope."

His last words speak of "the 'realistic' selfishness with which all the major powers in the region seem to view the suffering of the Cambodian people, and the ghastly tragedy that is befalling a gentle country."

If God's Not Embarrassed, Why Are We?

People with disabilities are God's best visual aids to demonstrate who He really is. His power shows up best in weakness.

BY JONI EARECKSON TADA,

AS TOLD TO LISA BRANDSBERG

Everybody relates to pretty things that are broken, and that's the way many people approach the disabled. Only in recent years have we seen positive images of persons with disabilities. I hope this new trend will make a big difference. But for now, people don't simply neglect the disabled—we push them away.

We all have fears about being around somebody who is disabled because it highlights our own limitations. It's a painful reminder of our weaknesses.

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There's also a social stigma involved. We like to surround ourselves with winners, not losers. The friends who make up our intimate circle indicate something about who we are.

Greg Barshaw, pastor for the handicapped at Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, California, says fear is a learned behavior. It's not natural. Little kids do not fear differences. They learn that response from adults.

Greg believes that if we can raise our kids to realize that disabilities are something to be understood, not feared, then they'll readily accept those who are different.

In the past, the media have

poorly portrayed challenged people with subtle messages like, "Pity the poor unfortunates" and "Isn't this a sad, sad story?"

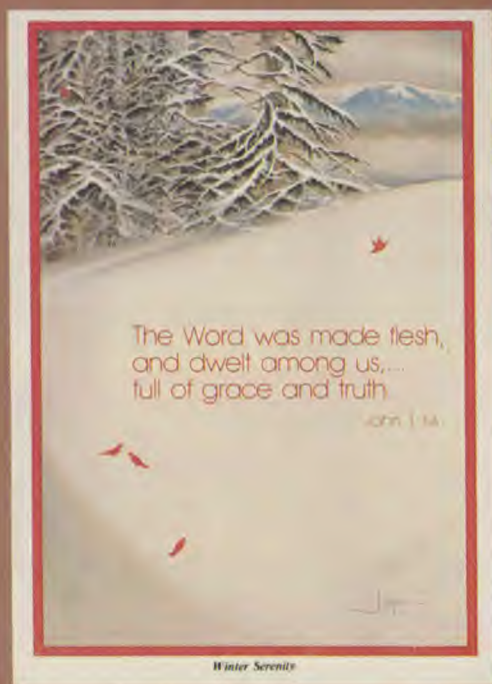
In Greg's church, they get a lot of calls from people who say, "There's a handicapped person around the corner. I saw him when I drove by. Would you talk to him?"

Those people don't even get close enough to stop the car. They zip right by and want somebody else to touch the disabled. Unfortunately, Christians are the same way.

Ten percent of our population are considered disabled. (That's a flat figure, including impairments of



Paralyzed from the neck down from a diving accident, Joni Eareckson still continued to develop her art ability. But only after someone pushed aside her fears and encouraged her.





"People with disabilities are God's best visual aids to demonstrate who He really is. His power shows up best in weakness. And who, by the world's standards, is weaker than the mentally or physically disabled? As the world watches, these people persevere. They live, love, trust, and obey Him. Eventually, the world is forced to say, 'How great their God must be to inspire this kind of loyalty.'"
 —Joni Eareckson Tada

all sorts.) So theoretically, at any given church service, a pastor ought to look out over his people and see 10 percent who are limited in some way—severely arthritic, deaf, blind, people in wheelchairs, or whatever.

If we can just get these people into our congregations, it would soften people's hearts and help them examine their own attitude barriers. The body of Christ isn't complete without the disabled.

But we're uncomfortable around them and afraid to admit it. In church, we want things perfectly packaged. We don't want to "embarrass God."

Somehow, we have to free ourselves from this thinking. We can't deny our natural responses, but we can get down on other people's level. We can ask them honest questions and then really listen to their answers.

We have to openly say to the handicapped, "I don't understand all your struggles, but I care and I want to listen. Can you just tell me a little about what you're going through?"

Although God has blessed us in our tribulations so that we are able

to comfort anybody with any trouble (2 Corinthians 1:4), I don't think we can always say, "I know exactly how you feel." I can't even say that to other quadriplegics.

I think He's saying that no matter where we fall on the scale of suffering (and all of us do have a place on that scale), we can comfort anyone in the middle of any kind of struggle or trial.

Once we understand the need, we should respond by becoming involved and committed. It's at that point where the church usually backs off.

When I was first injured, at age 17, my church didn't have any disabled people in the congregation. Our pastor had never even approached anybody in a wheelchair.

But he provided good teaching from the pulpit, and many believers were looking for new ways to use their spiritual gifts.

God soon sent a teen-ager to me who had the gift of teaching. He didn't have a sociology degree. He didn't know anything about disabled people. But he did know that I lived only two miles away

from his home and that I desperately needed answers.

So he came—in all his embarrassment, awkwardness, and nervousness—and simply said, "I don't understand this, but I would like to listen."

After we got through a couple of those sessions, he had won the right to be heard. That's when I began to ask him to teach me from God's Word.

He was only 16—just a kid in the youth group who knew that all things were working together for good in his own life. And he wanted somebody else to know the same truth.

He later told me he felt like an idiot, saying, "Joni, all things fit together into a pattern for good." His worst problem had been fighting rain on his paper route. But he cared and sought to relate. So I took that ball and ran with it.

Steve's efforts were catching. A 19-year-old girl soon noticed he and I were spending time together, and she watched how my self-image slowly began to knit.

She was attending the University of Maryland, and she

decided to help me get to school. So she organized students to transport me to and from the campus.

When she recognized my interest and ability in art, she contacted local art fairs and exhibits about entry fees and regulations. With her gift of administration, she managed, arranged, and organized opportunities for me to continue my education and use my talents.

I watched yet another friend use her gift of mercy. Betsy didn't have all the answers Steve did, but

chance to interact with others in their own age group.

- Some classes meet in ground-level rooms so the disabled can also attend.

- Interpreters using sign language minister in many classes.

Churches like Greg's illustrate the James 2:14 principle—our faith must be operative. Beliefs must be backed up with actual deeds and actions.

I love the passage in Luke where the Lord talks about inviting the poor, the lame, and

arranged their schedules to transport me.

I know it sounds simplistic, but the *Westminster Confession* is so true—"Man's chief aim [what gives him meaning] is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever." That applies to everyday things like relationships with people, the ability to think and reason, reading, growing, giving, and smiling.

Contrary to what some people think, my smile isn't put on by Pepsodent. I *am* touched by the battles others have faced. I still suffer from irritating bedsores, infections—things anybody with a severe disability sometimes struggles with.

I do feel confined by my limitations. Sometimes I'm laid up in bed for several months. It isn't fun. But I've fully accepted my situation. I believe it's by God's design.

Pastors today sometimes sidestep the issue of suffering. They neglect to emphasize God's sovereignty. I know it's touchy to preach about suffering from God's perspective. But if we focused more on God's insights, fewer people would be apprehensive about relating to the disabled.

People with disabilities are God's best visual aids to demonstrate who He really is. His power shows up best in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:10). And who, by the world's standards, is weaker than the mentally or physically disabled?

It's almost as though God delights in "hanging out His dirty laundry." He does this to silence the scorners who mock and say, "How can you believe your God would allow these kinds of things to happen to you?"

As the world watches, God's people persevere. They live, love, trust, and obey Him. Eventually, the world is forced to say, "How great their God must be to inspire this kind of loyalty."

I smile, not in spite of my trials, but because of what Christ is doing in my life. It's a kind of other-worldly thinking that few people fully comprehend. It's part of God's blessing to those who are disabled.

TT

*I smile, not in spite of my trials,
but because of what Christ is doing in my life.*

she did have a box of Kleenex. Whenever I was tired of packaged answers, I would go to her for comfort and help.

All those young people had to get past their attitude barriers toward me—natural responses, fears, prejudices, and social stigma. Once they conquered that, they became less frustrated about not having all the answers.

Another attitude barrier is the assumption that a church needs a great deal of money or a full-time staff to minister to the disabled. That assumption is false.

A ministry can begin with one or two disabled persons, a handful of compassionate people, a working knowledge of Scripture, and a willingness to help.

You don't need a bus with a mechanical lift. In our church, we have folks who use their Volkswagens to pick up disabled people for church services and special activities.

Every opportunity should be made to fit disabled individuals into everyday church life. My friend Greg cites creative ways his church has responded:

- One disabled young man passes out bulletins and greets people at the door.

- The junior high group sometimes takes several mentally retarded kids to the park or the beach. This gives all of them a

chance to interact with others in their own age group.

But for the people who are disabled, pleasures become very simple, very uncomplicated. Meaningful life stems from God's perspective. I didn't begin to fully comprehend that until my accident.

For a year and a half, I was unable to even sit up in a wheelchair. Confined to an institution, I was beginning to think I'd never again see the outside world.

So I gritted my teeth and refused to accept my injury. I told myself I'd never adjust.

But since then, I've learned what James meant when he said, "Every good and perfect gift comes down from above—from the Father of lights."

When we suffer, we gain a better appreciation for those good and perfect gifts. Our enjoyment could come from tasting a pizza, eating an ice-cream cone, enjoying a pretty color, smelling corn on the cob, or savoring a fresh tossed salad.

But I'm delighted when I can merely feed myself. It gives me a great sense of productivity when my friends don't have to worry about feeding me.

I was thrilled when I could finally drive for myself. It meant I could give something back to my friends, who beforehand had

Can the Bible Be Understood?

—Learning What the Bible Means Today

When studying the Bible, the reader must build bridges between the ancient world in which the book appeared and the modern world where we live.

BY JERRY A. GLADSON

The house where I live has a deep gully separating our backyard from the vegetable garden. In wet weather this gully flows with water, but most of the year it is dry.

Our problem has always been how to get from the backyard to the garden, particularly while carrying unwieldy garden tools or freshly picked vegetables. I remember once attempting to get a garden tiller across the ditch. Cranking the engine, I gunned it and headed down one bank, intending to climb the other side. It didn't work. The tiller lurched sharply to the right and planted itself, spinning tines and all, against a poplar tree!

After several years of such nightmarish incidents, I gave in, constructed a simple little bridge, and painted it to match the house. Now all we need to do is walk across—any time we wish.

Studying the Bible is similar. To understand it clearly, we must

build "bridges" from the ancient world of the Bible to modern life. Building these bridges is what Biblical interpretation, or "exegesis," is all about.

When engineers construct bridges, one of the most crucial operations is that of setting in the abutments, or foundations, on either side of the chasm. Concrete piles driven deep into the earth and anchored to the bedrock provide the essential stability for the entire bridge. Safety—human life—depends on these abutments.

In Biblical interpretation, putting in "abutments" corresponds to those processes, or methods, that help us see lucidly the original world of the text and, on the modern side of the "chasm," the steps necessary to apply the text to our day. When we carefully explore a Bible passage from the standpoint of its literary shape, its historical setting, its original theological meaning, we are asking: *What did it mean originally? How was its message originally understood? What did the author intend to say?* Painstakingly, we try

to reconstruct the original setting and purpose of the passage.

The opposite edge of the chasm—the modern world—demands equal care. The message of the text should emerge so dramatically that it seizes the attention of the dark-clad man frantically racing down Madison Avenue sporting an expensive leather attaché case, the journalist scurrying in her Datsun 280Z to a city press conference, or the grimy-faced steelworker punching the time clock at 5:00 P.M. No small order! Yet the text has power to speak to all these and more.

Abutments in both worlds, ancient and modern, challenge the interpreter of Scripture. "Our bridges," observes John R. W. Stott, "must be firmly anchored on both sides of the cultural chasm. . . . We have to plunge fearlessly into both worlds, ancient and modern, Biblical and contemporary, and to listen attentively to both. Only then shall we understand what each is saying, and so discern the Spirit's message to the present generation."—"Paralyzed Speakers

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and Hearers," *Christianity Today*, March 13, 1981, p. 45.

Bridging two worlds. With the abutments in place, the engineer sets about spanning the chasm. The spans, or bridges, he uses are supported by piers anchored carefully within the bedrock of the chasm. Across these spans moves the cargo passing from one side to the other.

Scholars often call the bridging aspect of Biblical interpretation "hermeneutics." The word comes from the name of the ancient Greek god Hermes, son of Zeus, who in Homer's *Odyssey* served as the herald for the gods. Hermeneutics, the "heralding" function of a passage, involves both the clarification of the text in its original meaning and its application to the modern world.

Exegesis, in contrast, refers only to the exploration of the original meaning of the text. Good interpretation does both. "Indeed, the discipline of discovering a text's original meaning," recognizes Stott, "is of little profit if we do not go on to discern its

contemporary message."

In order to see this, let me compare the Bible to the world's great literature. The Bible takes on the characteristics of all great literature, except that it does more. Great literature never dies. Some of the world's simplest stories are also the best. Ernest Hemingway's *Old Man and the Sea*, completed in 1952, represents a great piece of literature, not because it tells of a poor old Cuban fisherman by the name of Santiago who, having caught no fish in 84 days, manages to snare a fish larger than his entire boat, only to lose it in a savage battle with sharks.

It remains immortal because it portrays the common human struggle to make sense of life in the face of insuperable, tragic odds. Futilely beating away the sharks with a flimsy, broken oar, his hands bleeding and aching, Santiago shouts defiantly to the open sea, "Man is not made for defeat. . . . A man can be destroyed but not defeated."

Like great literature the Bible possesses a timelessness, a fascination with enduring themes

of humanity. The Bible, of course, puts all these great themes into a divine, redemptive framework and in this respect far overshadows all other literature.

When we ask *What does a text mean today?* we focus upon the timeless parallels, the laws, experiences, and messages that the Bible has for our world today. By tracing these parallels, we will find the Bible possesses an uncanny relevance. "The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12, R.S.V.).*

In spanning a chasm, an engineer sets in the piers, or supports for the bridge, across the gap. These piers in hermeneutics involve the reading of Scripture so that it mirrors or reflects our life today. We see ourselves, in other words, sharing the same dilemmas, joys, or challenges as

* All texts quoted in this article are taken from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyrighted 1946, 1952 © 1971, 1973.

Biblical characters.

At least three such piers help us do this.

The first bids us read the Bible as encouragement or support in our daily tasks. We might refer to this as the "supportive" way of reading. Such a way of reading is particularly valuable when we are discouraged or feel defeated.

Paul's advice "Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord and not men" (Colossians 3:23) originally referred to slaves (see verse 22). Since a ratio of one slave for every five free citizens existed in the Roman Empire at the time, it was important they be included in Christian counsel. But when we read the passage supportively—with this original meaning in mind—it encourages us to give our very best to any legitimate task. Anything worth doing at all, says an old adage, is worth doing well.

What the text means from a supportive perspective is that life's duties, however mundane or depressing, are worth doing well for Christ's sake. "You are serving the Lord Christ" (verse 24).

The diagnostic method. The second pier might be called the challenging or "diagnostic" mode of reading Scripture. Here we allow the Scripture to call our life into question, probe our motives, and evaluate our behavior in the light of the will of God. In this mode of reading, the Bible convicts and summons us to respond to God. Although not easy to accept, a diagnostic reading of any Biblical passage will challenge to a richer, more abundant life.

Colossians 3:23, read in this way, calls into question shoddy methods, inferior materials, and lackluster effort in life's duties. It stands unequivocally opposed to all laziness. "Do you see a man skillful in his work? he will stand before kings; he will not stand before obscure men" (Proverbs 22:29).

The final pier takes Scripture as "advisory." Here the emphasis lies not on the diagnostic or supportive functions, but the simple giving of counsel or advice.

No evaluation. No command or condemnation. Instead, Scripture provides suggestions that we may or may not employ as we wish.

Paul's word to the slaves, read as advice, suggests the best way to perform any task is to go about it earnestly as is fitting to those for whom "Christ is all, and in all" (Colossians 3:11). On the other hand, some tasks do not require, or merit, such diligence. In each case the reader decides.

These three modes of applying Scripture work on the basis of analogy. That means one seeks out parallels between our world and the ancient Biblical world. In these parallels we glimpse ourselves and come to understand God, the world, and our own role in His plan better. Obviously, some passages lend themselves to one way of reading more than others, but generally, almost any Biblical passage can be profitably read in these three ways.

Uses of the Bible today. Many kinds of cargo flow across the hermeneutical bridge. Most common is the personal reading and study of Scripture. Far and away the perennial best seller, the Bible attracts people who intend to read it for themselves. Private Bible study has a long tradition in Christianity, and there probably is no better way of keeping fit spiritually. But this type of Bible study, to be truly effective, needs sound exegetical principles.

The church, too, constantly requires the interpretation of Scripture. Because language and ways of thinking shift with the passage of time, theologians continually need to rethink the Bible's teachings and discover fresh ways of applying them to the new generations. To do this, they have to grapple again and again with the source of Christian faith, the Bible. They dare use nothing less than sound exegesis.

As the Palestinian archeologist sifts through the dust, broken pottery, and ruins of ancient cities, he joins hands with the historian in reconstructing the enchanting history of the Bible lands. Often he turns to the Bible—as a written record of the ancient Hebrews—to

help him fill in the details of bygone days. By throwing light on the problems and triumphs of ancient humanity, his reconstruction of the past helps make our world a better place in which to live.

Who has not resonated to a Scripture passage read forcefully as part of a worship experience! Each week I sense anew the power of the Bible when I listen to our local educational radio station broadcast the noted British actor Alexander Scourby reading Scripture. How he makes the text come alive! In the corporate worship of the church, when Scripture is read or preached properly, it speaks to our needs. And although it may scarcely be noticed, reading Scripture aloud or preaching requires modest exegetical skill.

Bridges, like all man-made products, give way with the ravages of time. Wind, rain, snow, and the blistering heat of the sun rot away the wood, blast the mortar, rust the steel spans. Eventually, without care and maintenance, the bridge collapses into the chasm it once conquered.

Methods for the interpretation of Scripture, like human bridges, perpetually challenge each generation to maintain and improve them. With the passing years new cargo, unheard of by previous generations, must pass over our hermeneutical bridges. A hundred years ago who would have thought that Christians would be turning to the Bible for guidelines to the complex modern problems of nuclear war, euthanasia, abortion, genetic engineering, and so on? No doubt a century from now—should time continue that long—new issues that would baffle our minds will appear, testing to the breaking point our hermeneutical methods.

The point is we must use sound methods in studying Scripture. The Bible is too precious, too momentous, to be handled in any other way. "Rightly handling the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15) lies within the grasp of us all. It is imperative we seize it. **TT**

(End of Series)

JUNE STRONG

SPECIAL RECIPES FOR THE HOLIDAYS

All through the year I keep a sharp lookout for very special recipes to share with you in my annual food column. At one point, I required only that these recipes be meatless and tasty, but now there are other specifications that must be met. The recipes that are passed on to you must be high in fiber, low in sugar, and, in some cases, provide a complete protein.

This month we will concentrate on breads. For years I searched for the perfect whole-wheat bread recipe. Many were edible, but too dry, or too heavy, or too bland. Then one day at the breakfast table in the home of my friend, Phyllis Peck, I sank my teeth into a piece of toast that ended my search. It was everything whole-wheat bread ought to be.

Phyllis runs a natural foods store and a small vegetarian restaurant in Fulton, New York, and spends most of her spare time helping people adopt a more healthful life style. I always visit her with anticipation, for, like me, she demands that food be tasty as well as nutritious. I've met too many health enthusiasts who seem to have lost their taste buds and would appear to enjoy zwieback and sprouts three



times a day.

Following the whole-wheat bread recipe, you'll find another specialty from Phyllis' kitchen, and I want to thank her here for sharing her expertise with us.

Whole-Wheat Bread

- 5 cups warm water (95-110° F.)
- 3 Tbs. yeast
- 1/3 cup honey
- 1/2 cup unsulphured molasses
- 1 Tbs. lecithin
- 1/2 cup oil
- 1 Tbs. salt
- 3/4 cup soy milk powder
- 12 cups whole-wheat flour

Put warm water in large bowl (check temperature

with cooking thermometer for best results). After yeast dissolves a few minutes add honey and molasses. After two or three minutes add soy powder, lecithin, oil, and salt. Mix well. Add flour gradually. Knead for eight or ten minutes on lightly floured surface. Place dough in a large oiled mixing bowl and cover with damp cloth. Let rise in a warm place until it doubles in bulk—about one hour.

Divide into 4 or 5 equal loaves. Place each loaf in a greased bread pan. Let rise again until doubled in bulk—about one hour. Bake in preheated 340° F. oven for approximately 40 minutes. Remove from pans at once and cool.

Apple and Rice Muffins

- 1 cup cooked brown rice
- 1/2 cup unbleached flour
- 3/4 cup whole-wheat flour
- 2 tsp. baking powder
- 1/2 tsp. salt
- 1/2 tsp. cinnamon (optional)
- 1/4 cup melted margarine
- 1 cup shredded, unpeeled apple
- 1/3 cup milk
- 1 egg
- 1/4 cup brown sugar

Sift together flours, baking powder, cinnamon, and salt. Add rice, margarine, apple, milk, egg, and brown sugar. Stir just to moisten (batter will be lumpy). Fill greased muffin tins about two-thirds full. Bake at 350° F. for 30 minutes or until done. Yield: 10-12 muffins.

The following recipe is one of our family favorites. It was sent to me by a lovely lady and champion cook, Kay Dower.

Whole-Wheat Breadsticks

- 1 1/2 cup whole-wheat flour
- 1 1/2 cup unbleached flour
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1 cup water
- 1/2 cup oil

Beat oil and water together to form an emulsion. Add the remaining ingredients. Mix well. Roll into 32 sticks. Bake approximately one hour at 325° F. (Bake until crisp, but do not overbake. They should be just golden in color.)

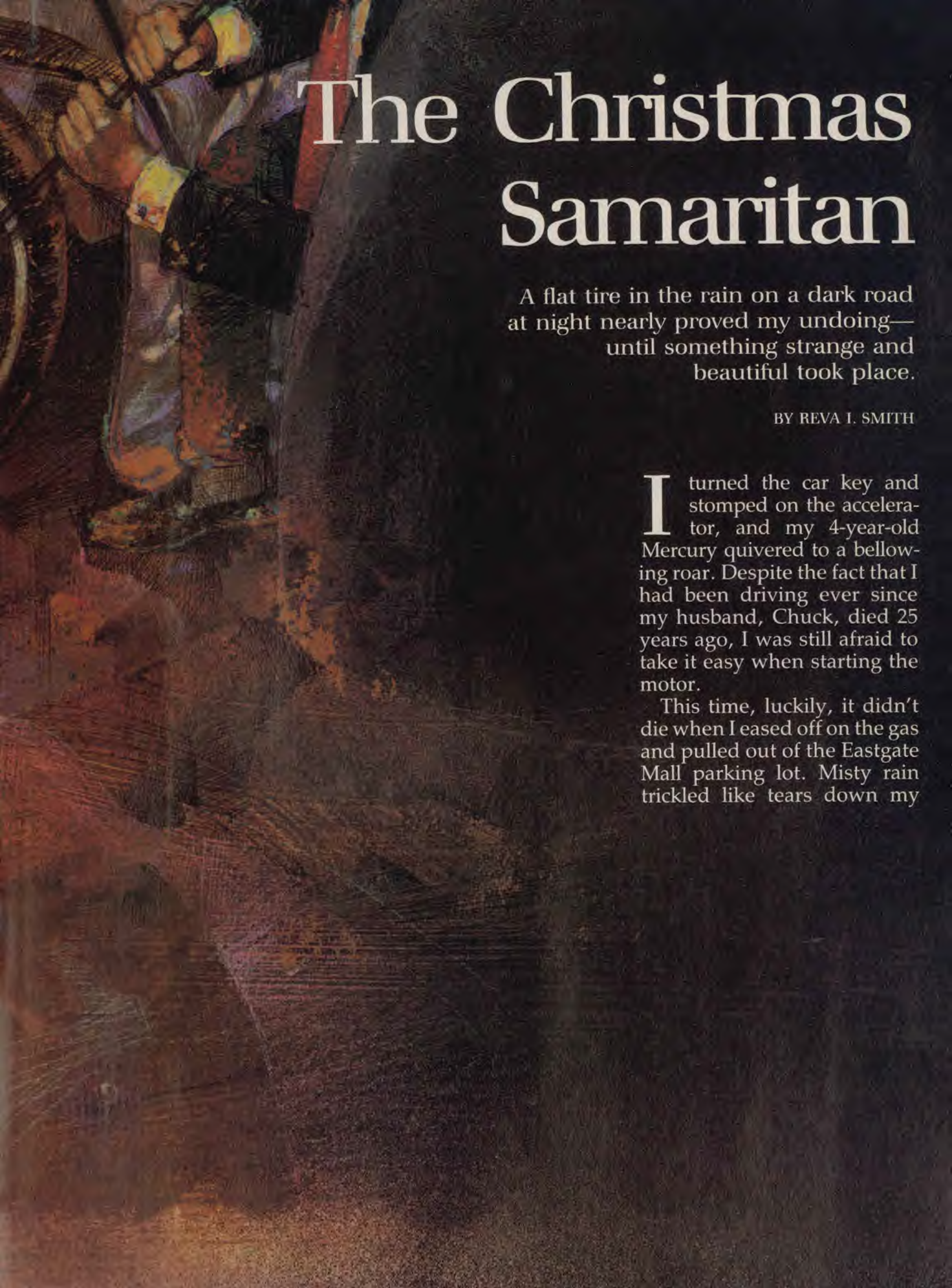
I hope these recipes send you eagerly to your kitchen, and that the aroma of baking bread brings all your favorite people to your doorstep.



June Strong, of Batavia, New York, is a lecturer and author of the books *Journal of a Happy Woman*,

Mindy, Where Are We Running? and *Project Sunlight*. She enjoys people, writing, gardening, and sewing.





The Christmas Samaritan

A flat tire in the rain on a dark road at night nearly proved my undoing—until something strange and beautiful took place.

BY REVA I. SMITH

I turned the car key and stomped on the accelerator, and my 4-year-old Mercury quivered to a bellowing roar. Despite the fact that I had been driving ever since my husband, Chuck, died 25 years ago, I was still afraid to take it easy when starting the motor.

This time, luckily, it didn't die when I eased off on the gas and pulled out of the Eastgate Mall parking lot. Misty rain trickled like tears down my

windshield. Christmas carols blaring from shop windows sounded about as cheerful as funeral dirges.

Together with hordes of other shoppers, I had stayed until the stores closed, trying to find just the right presents for my loved ones. And now, alone among the crowd, I found myself somewhere between numbers 25 and 50 in a line of vehicles waiting for a traffic light. My feet hurt, my head ached, and my cold was traveling down to my chest. But more than anything, I felt a deep ache in my heart.

As the Mercury inched along, my thoughts turned to past Christmases, and my loneliness deepened. *If only he were here now*, I thought for the umpteenth-hundredth time since that awful day 25 years ago. Why, he'd never even seen his grandchildren. How he'd have enjoyed Christmas with them!

The beauty of the traffic lights' long red and green reflections wavering on the wet pavement, and the giant Christmas tree shining into my rearview mirror from two blocks away, barely penetrated my consciousness. The Christmas spirit simply didn't exist for me. It seemed to be snugly tucked away somewhere under heavy black clouds of loneliness.

I made a feeble attempt to quell my impatience as I inched forward, the light changing from red to green and back again at least six times. Finally my car stood second in line from the light. I had planned to make a right turn, but evidently the man in the little red Datsun ahead of me did not.

His dawdling when the light changed irritated me—I was afraid I'd have to wait for yet another green light. So before the Datsun had moved completely out of my way, I tried to pull around him on the right.

I cut the corner too closely, though, for the Mercury's rear wheel struck the curb with a booming thud that jerked the car



sideways. But the car immediately righted itself, and I thought I was "home free." Then before I had gone two yards farther, a blubbery *thump-thump-thump* warned me I had blown a tire! I, who had not the slightest inkling of how to change a tire!

Cars swished past me now, and I knew I had to get off the pavement, flat tire or not. The street ahead looked as black as the inside of a cave, even though the flat occurred only a mile or so from the shopping center. I turned into the first opening I could find—a trash-littered, unpaved lot, liberally sprinkled with mud puddles from the heavy winter rains of the past two weeks.

As the car limped to a splashing stop, my mind spun with resentment and frustration. This was the last straw! I took off my shoes, rubbed my sore toes, and then grabbed for a tissue to catch a new flock of sneezes. Again I thought *If only Chuck were here!* He and I used to work out our problems together, taking to God all our joys, sorrows, and needs. And God had sent us our little adopted daughter, whom we had named Linda. But even before she had time to grow up, Chuck died. Somehow, it just didn't seem fair.

I don't think I actually blamed God for Chuck's death. Yet I wished so often that He had kept him alive for Linda and me. Through the years I had gone to church, taught Linda to pray, and prayed occasionally myself. And Linda and her children had

brought new joy into my life. But I had not taken the Lord into the inner circle of my thoughts, my fears, my loneliness. I still thought I could work out my own problems, carve out my own future—what was left of it!

But now this! It was just too much.

I knew I'd have to concentrate on a solution; I couldn't just sit in the car forever.

And then—from somewhere, or someone—an answer came to my mind: "No, you can't just sit there. Ask God for help."

I was so surprised I immediately said, aloud, "All right, I will! Please, Lord, I need help! Please do something!" All at once I felt quiet, relaxed, carefree. Tears washed my face as I sat there smiling.

Then suddenly a dark-gloved hand knocked on my car window. I froze with fear, but for only an instant. Almost immediately a smiling handsome face appeared behind the hand. I wondered if I were seeing a vision. Then the face said, "Do you need some help?"

Oh! I thought. Can this be the Lord's answer already? I felt sure that it was, and all fear left me. I quickly rolled down the window.

"It's all right. Don't be afraid," the stranger said. "I saw you hit that curb and blow your tire. Do you have a spare?"

"Wh-wh-why, yes," I stammered, taking in at a glance the immaculate appearance of this

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Illustration by Dean Williams

stranger. He had parked his Cadillac almost beside my car. From the front seat a lovely lady serenely watched his movements. Two children, a girl and a boy in their early teens, sat quietly in the back seat. They were as beautifully dressed as the man.

Coming to my senses, I said, "Oh, but you can't change my tire! Not in those clothes! Why, you're all dressed up."

"Well, my family and I are on our way to a Christmas party. But that's all right. You need help!"

He asked for my keys, opened the trunk, took out my spare tire, and found the jack. I fished frantically for my shoes, then got out to watch in amazement as he knelt there in the mud. Jacking up the car, he expertly removed the blown tire. In a few minutes he had the spare wheel tightened, and then lowered the jack. And then—horrors! A long hissing whistle, and the spare flattened out as though made of putty.

The stranger stood up, his face shiny with sweat in spite of the cool Florida evening. Now what? I wondered.

"Lady," his tone was apologetic, "I'm afraid your spare has a bad leak, and . . ."

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" I interrupted. "You've done all that dirty work for nothing! If you can just give me a ride to a telephone booth, I can probably . . ."

Now it was his turn to interrupt. "Why, I should say not. We'll just have to get you a new tire. There's a gas station up ahead a few blocks. We'll drive there and buy one, and you can be on your way."

With that he opened his trunk—his beautiful, clean trunk—and put my dirty spare into it. Then he told his children to move over and motioned for me to get into the back seat beside them.

Overwhelmed by this almost incredible kindness, I sat speechless as we rode to the gas station.

The attendant was about to close for the night when we arrived. He was in no mood to make a tire sale. But my benefactor insisted in such an authoritative yet kind tone

that the young man scurried around until he found the correct-size tire.

"Now how much will that be?" I asked, taking out my checkbook. I knew I had only some change left in my purse and less than \$100 in my checking account. But my Social Security check would arrive in a day or two. Yet I gasped when the attendant answered my question.

"That's \$126.50, and we *don't* take checks!"

"Well, of all things!" the stranger said. But he reached for his wallet and quickly pulled out several hundred-dollar bills. He handed two of them to the mechanic.

"Humph!" the mechanic complained. "I can't change this."

With a sigh the helpful stranger took back one of the hundreds and finally found two twenty-dollar bills. "All right, now, will these do?" he asked. "I want you to repair her spare tire, too. It's in my trunk. This lady can't go away without a spare."

"Oh, come on, now! I'm closing up!" the attendant sputtered. "I can't be fixing tires at this hour of the night!"

"Why, sure you can! I've great confidence in you!" my rescuer smiled. "Now you just hop right to it, and I'll bet you can be finished in nothing flat!"

Grudgingly the mechanic proceeded to repair the leaky tire, muttering imprecations all the while.

In vivid contrast was the unruffled composure of the occupants of the Cadillac. The family's Christmas party had already been delayed for more than an hour, and no doubt another hour would pass before they would reach it.

Before leaving, we wished the attendant a merry Christmas, but his only answer was a disgusted grunt.

As I watched my good Samaritan tighten the last nut on the wheel that held my new tire, the thought came to me of how much he was like Jesus. Long before Christ came as the little Stranger in Bethlehem, He well knew what it would cost Him to

rescue us. But He came anyway.

"My" stranger knew how that dirty job would ruin his clothes and how late they would be for their party, but he stopped to rescue me anyway.

"How can I ever thank you, Mr. . . . ah, what is your name, sir? I need to send you a check to cover what you have spent, as soon as my Social Security check arrives."

"That will *not* be necessary," he smiled. "It's the least I could do for a lady in distress. But here is my card."

He opened my car door and, after I got in, closed it for me. His wife and daughter waved and smiled as they drove away.

I turned on the overhead light. The card read Oliver C. Cortland, President, C & C Oil Company.

As I drove home the Christmas lights took on a fresh sparkle; the carols that had sounded so bleak and mechanical now melted my heart with their loveliness.

Something mysterious about the whole evening's episode left me numb with astonished gratitude—gratitude to God, to Mr. Cortland, and even to the harried gas-station mechanic.

In bed, I thought of the tiny prayer I had said—God must have been just waiting for me to ask. And that thought triggered a memory—a Bible verse I had learned as a child, something about God answering before we ask. I wished I could remember it.

I mailed Mr. Cortland \$140 a day or so later, with a sincere thank-you note and a copy of THESE TIMES magazine. But very soon the check came back with a letter from "my" Samaritan, saying he wanted the new tire to be my Christmas present.

"Oh, Father!" I whispered as my tears dampened Mr. Cortland's letter. "How good You've been to me!" And then I remembered it! The Bible verse. It was Isaiah 65:24: "And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear."

I knew then that I would no longer have to wish for Chuck to solve my problems! It would be God and I together from now on.

TT

"Is It Really for Me?"

Clutching the little package in his hands and looking into my face, he said earnestly, "I will never forget this day. I don't know how to thank you."

BY LOIS PECCE

No thank you, ma'am. I don't want a songbook. I will just sit here and listen. Please, you go and do what you have to do. And I will sit here because I must."

"OK," I responded cheerfully, easing away from his polite dismissal and handing the proffered book to someone else.

As I distributed the large-print hymnbooks among the other patients, I paused briefly to study this tidy, small-framed, articulate individual. I'd not seen him before, which didn't mean much. The nursing home had 120 residents, and the chapel service I volunteered for was but one of several weekly services by various denominations. Some people attended every service that took place. Others attended only those of their own church. Some preferred sports.

Pity welled within me as I perceived how out of place this well-dressed gentleman seemed to feel. I imagined him as a man who once had full control of his life but who now had become unwillingly subjected to the control of others. The downcast eyes, the narrow shoulders perfect-posture straight, the slender fingers clasped tightly in self-willed patience, conveyed a message of "Do what you must do; I shall endure."

Lois Pecce is a homemaker and writer living in Centerville, Ohio. © 1983 by Lois Pecce.



The babble of complaint and confusion in the assembly room grew as the aides wheeled in more patients. Indeed, I had to get busy doing what I needed to do. I had agreed to have a chapel service this Christmas Day for those who hadn't been able or lucky enough to go home with family or friends.

Such a ragtag assortment of people—from those who didn't know what day it was or where they were, pitifully and perhaps mercifully "out of it," to those who were all dressed up, nervously waiting for loved ones who at three o'clock in the afternoon still hadn't shown up. Their anger and fear of being forgotten created an almost tangible undercurrent in the atmosphere of the room.

What to give these dear people on such a day as this? I'd brought gifts—little dime store things, such as pretty bars of soap, socks, footsies, handkerchiefs, lotion, and bath powder. Something for their hands to open, to know that they'd not been forgotten. But what to say for those whose loneliness bit keen and hard? What words to touch the aching hearts?

We sang Christmas carols, or tried to. Some sang with me. One lady wheeled herself out of the room. The little gentleman sat stiffly on the chair, silently tolerating. Three ladies in the back of the room carried on a noisy

conversation that competed with the music. I glanced at the piano player, and she grinned back knowingly. It was just one of those days.

"Dear Lord," I prayed earnestly, inviting my audience to pray with me, "let Your Holy Spirit be with us in this room and with each person in this home. Today is Christmas. And we want to thank You for the most important Christmas gift of all—Your Son, Jesus, who came to live with us, to share our lives, and to save us . . ."

Opening my Bible, I began to read the story of the birth of Jesus in Luke 2. Audience interest and attention appeared minimal. They'd heard the words before. What message was left in the Christmas story that they'd not known for more years than I had lived? Praying silently for wisdom, I reached into my purse and pulled out a letter. Waving it over my head, I cried, "Does anybody here like to get letters?"

"Yeah!" a man named Willard replied enthusiastically, and others nodded their heads. Even the gentleman on the chair nodded and ventured a reminiscent smile. I smiled back at him and at a suddenly attentive congregation.

"I received a letter from an old friend last week, and I'm sure he won't mind if I share it with you," I said.

Dear Lois,

This letter, I hope, will be the old-fashioned type of Christmas gift to a friend. We wish you and your dear family a happy, holy, Christlike Christmas, remembering that Christmas is ours 365 days of the year.

They must have been very lonely—Mary and Joseph—that night as they were shown into the stable near the inn. This girl was so young and so far from home, frightened even with what God had given her to do—maybe even confused—asking "Why me?"

It was God's choosing to have it that way. He could so easily have arranged something much different. There could have been the security of home, family, friends, maybe even a party. There wasn't! None of the elements that make a nice holiday,

except one. Jesus was born that night. What else was needed? God had entered the world as a baby. It was a lonely night until then. God had come in His own way—a helpless baby. What is more helpless than a little baby? I remember being afraid to hold my own children. In a strange way, I thought I might hurt them! And it was frightening, each and every one of the five I had.

I paused. "Did any of you fathers feel that way about your babies?"

Tears glistened in Willard's eyes as he held out his large awkward hands. "I was scared I might drop him," he said, half laughing, half crying.

"Me, too," chuckled Elmer. The ladies smiled understandingly, and the man on the chair bobbed his head. I saw that his fingers had unknotted and that his hands now rested easily on his lap. Taking up the letter again, I continued to read:

I'm very glad that God put Mary and Joseph alone in that stable. God might have missed identifying with many, many lonely people and they with Him had He ushered in the Messiah's birth any other way—especially had He made Christmas the way it is celebrated today. What a way—office parties, school plays!

Jesus Himself is the only reason for Christmas. He is the One coming both to the family gathering and to the person alone. He is the One for the frightened or the rejected, and for those who have no place to go. Like when I was in the service. I felt so alone at Christmas, it hurt! It hurt because I was human and alone.

Looking over my audience and seeing that a delicate chord had been touched, I extended the message of the Christmas letter a little further. They had not wanted to hear the story reread from the Scriptures. They needed the story of Jesus to enter through the heart—where they were hurting. "Maybe," I said, tenderly searching the faces before me, "some of you are feeling alone today and hurting, feeling as though nobody can understand your loneliness. But Jesus can. He suffered loneliness so that you won't ever have to be alone. No

matter where you are or when it is, He comes to you. His love and His Spirit are with you to strengthen you and guide you and comfort you." From the letter I read the final words:

No matter what else we add to Christmas, Jesus came! That is the whole story. He must be both reason and focus. We are not alone in the world anymore. We cannot be. He has been born and He is God, and the day will live forever!

We prayed and sang a closing song. Several people wiped tears from their eyes, happy tears, I noticed. The room was filled with an atmosphere of joy and good will. I passed out the small gifts I'd wrapped for them and exchanged Christmas greetings as I went around to each one.

As I approached the gentleman on the chair, he seemed to draw into himself—to someplace shielded from hurt. "I know you didn't bring a gift for me," he blurted, "and it's all right."

"But I did bring you a gift." Hesitantly, he took the small parcel. "Is it really for me?"

"Yes, it's really for you," I assured him. "I brought gifts for everybody."

For a moment he seemed to struggle for words, and I wondered if I'd offended him with such an insignificant present. Then, clutching the little package in his hands and looking into my face, he said earnestly, "I will never forget this day. I will not forget the words I just heard in your sermon or that you gave me a gift. I—I don't know how to thank you." He quickly turned his head to hide the tears forming in his eyes.

"I'm just glad you came," I replied, gently touching his arm. "I hope I'll see you when I come again."

He nodded, straightening his shoulders. But this time his posture seemed to convey that "somebody cares about me." I looked back at that proud, peaceful pose as I left the room. His eyes met mine and he flashed a quick smile as I waved goodbye.

"Thank You, Lord," I whispered. Christmas had come.

TT

RESPONSE

MORE LETTERS ABOUT LAUGHTER ARTICLE

In the February issue of THESE TIMES, we ran an article by Jan Doward titled "Even the Angels Must Laugh Sometimes." In response we received about 10 letters from our readers, two or three opposing and eight favoring the article. Seven of those 10 letters appeared on the "Response" page of the July issue, along with an invitation to others who had strong feelings one way or another to tell us how they felt. This offer

I am not the type of person who writes letters, but inasmuch as you have asked for a response to the "Even the Angels Must Laugh Sometimes" article I must write this one. I enjoyed it *tremendously!* I shared it with several people.

I have always believed that "a merry heart doeth good like a medicine," more good than most medicines, I'd say.

I want to thank everyone involved in the printing of this article for I am sure many people benefited from it as I did. In fact, I have laughed many times since just from thinking of it. Thanks again.—Mrs. Elsie Wilson, Winter Park, Florida.

Hooray and three cheers for your "Even the Angels Must Laugh" article. Not only did I enjoy it *very much*, but it also helped my husband and me make amends. After an argument my husband picked up your magazine and read this article and then came in and gave it to me to read. After laughing ourselves silly we could no longer see the importance of our disagreement. Thanks.

Address all correspondence for this column to: Letters to the Editor, THESE TIMES, 55 West Oak Ridge Drive, Hagerstown, Maryland 21740.

Some Christians are so afraid to be in the world but not of the world that they lose touch with reality. It's refreshing to have a great magazine like yours that has a great balance of doctrine and reality. Keep up the good work.—Grace Jones, Los Angeles, California.

Have just read readers' response on the views about Jan Doward's article in last February's issue titled, "Even the Angels Must Laugh Sometimes." I thought the article was great. I loved it. I read and reread it. It really made my day. I had been in the hospital eleven days and when I came home there was THESE TIMES. Had a good laugh and felt better. Doesn't Proverbs say, Laughter is good medicine? It really helped.

The article was so good I felt impressed to write *Reader's Digest* and asked them to consider using it sometime. Just this week I received a letter from one of the editors thanking me for writing and saying it would be considered. So please keep up the good work. I love your magazine.—Betty White, Campbell, Texas.

Thank you for inviting reader reaction to the "Laughter" article and to the possible publication of

more articles of this type. PLEASE don't! The article was "strange fire" in a religious publication. Yes, we need to laugh at times, but not at irreverence.

Even though future humorous articles might not be presented with irreverence, the inclusion would minimize the spiritual impact of the magazine. They would bring a spirit of levity to it. At a time when people are fearful, confused about values, desperate to know God, yearning to know what is transcendent, let's not use premium space for "I laughed until I cried" articles.

Incidentally, in your "Response" column (July issue) you published five letters that approved of the article and two that disapproved. Did you receive only two that disagreed? If not, why not a fairer representation of the opposing viewpoint?—Ruth Jaeger Buntain, St. Helena, California.

See figures at top.—Editors.

We need more laughter, it's healthy and, therefore, good for us. God does *not* want us to be somber people wearing sackcloth and ashes. I prefer a "smiling-friendly" Christian any day to a sober, "sourpuss"! Give us more

stories like "Even the Angels Must Laugh." I sat here all by myself—chuckling! I've read the story a couple of times and enjoyed it each time.—Dorothy E. Bareilles, Paradise, California.

The article "Even the Angels Must Laugh Sometimes" was good medicine for me last winter. Being quite ill, I was lying on the sofa reading the February issue. I was laughing so hard (even in my pain) that my husband became curious of what I was reading. He said he had not heard me laugh so much for a long time. We shared the good laughter with friends who came to visit me. We need more laughter in our lives. There is enough to be serious about in life. God bless you, and keep up the good work.—Myrtle Foor, Edmore, Michigan.

You asked for comments on the recent laughter article. It was great and appropriate and I loved it too.

Why must being Christian and religious be considered a sour, prim, and austere way of life for many?

Please continue to print uplifting, gentle, humorous, and funny items. You're absolutely right—amusing items get read first! Thanks



for a wonderful, classy, religious publication.—Mrs. Karl Hattug, Menominee, Michigan.

Thank you for publishing the article "Even the Angels Must Laugh Sometimes." I shared the article with many friends and relatives who enjoyed it as much as I. I would like to see more articles of this kind. It came at a time when I really needed to laugh.—Mrs. Cherie Rogers, Hermiston, Oregon.

I, too, wish to thank you for printing "Even the Angels Must Laugh Sometimes," by Jan Doward. It kept our whole family smiling and happy the whole day. Such a refreshing break. We all loved it. Please continue the good work.—Arnold Christianson, Edgewater, Wisconsin.

I sent copies of "Even the Angels Must Laugh," to New Jersey, Texas, and Florida. Also showed all my neighbors here in Jesup, Georgia. Everybody thought it was wonderful and gave them a good laugh. It certainly *is not* inappropriate material as one writer said. It was all good, clean, humorous writing by Jan Doward, and every bit of it was true happenings.

Everybody I wrote to and showed the article would like to read more like it.—Anna Lou Smith, Jesup, Georgia.

I want to cast my vote in favor of "Even the Angels Must Laugh Sometimes." I had a lot of pleasure reading it and discussing it with friends. "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine," the Bible says. Who can look at a tiny pig, a giraffe, or a hippo, and not know that God Himself has a sense of humor.—L. Lucille Babienco (age 81), Loma Linda, California.

Referring to the article in THESE TIMES magazine about laughter in church. I do not think laughter is appropriate at the time of worship. There is a time and place for a sense of humor, but it is not in church.

In these perilous last days, we should "Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness" (James 4:9).—May Bourchier, Hope, British Columbia.

I thoroughly enjoyed the article "Even the Angels Must Laugh Sometimes," by Jan S. Doward. I sincerely hope you publish more like it.

I find it absurd that people actually wrote in complaining about the article. Have we, as Christians, become old "sticks-in-the-mud" or worse (dare I say it?), Christian "snobs"?

As Christians, we are called to be witnesses for our wonderful Lord. And if we are to portray His love, salvation, and peace to others, then we must also portray His spirit of joy and humor.—Karen C. Siems, Jersey City, New Jersey.

I say keep on writing articles like "Even the Angels Must Laugh Sometimes." I would like to see more related articles such as this in the future.—Frank Griffin, III, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

I am always going to write in response to various articles but never follow through; this time I am going to and immediately.

In regard to the article "Even the Angels Must Laugh Sometimes," I thoroughly enjoyed it, laughed so hard tears came. I tried to read it to my husband but couldn't read it out loud.

I had never thought of it before, but I'm sure the angels do not go around with long faces all the time. And Jesus does not want us to be somber all the time. People enjoy a happy Christian.

I gave it to the girl in our office to read (I work in a nursing home), and she laughed and laughed and passed it to all in the office, then made copies. I sent one to a friend in Indiana, who in turn sent it to her son who is a missionary doctor in the Philippines. We need this type of article; kind of a shot in the arm! Thanks to Jan for writing it and to you, the editors, for publishing it.—Louise Galloway, Forest City, Florida.

Regarding the article in the February issue, "Even the Angels Must Laugh Sometimes," our entire family thoroughly enjoyed it! Please continue the good work you are doing.—Ruth N. McEwen, Cochran, Pennsylvania.

I have been reading THESE TIMES for four years, and I read with interest the readers' views on the laughter article. I personally found it delightful and refreshing. I think it's very sad that people who are Christians feel that anything religious has to be serious.—Sally Case, Athens, Tennessee.

Yes, yes, yes! do include humor in our magazine. We all need it, and too many times Seventh-day Adventists are extremely prim, proper, dignified, and sour-faced! I cannot believe that Christ was not humorous at appropriate times and *smiled*. Children loved Him. Children laugh, smile, and enjoy.—Phyllis Gifford, Takoma Park, Maryland.

That was the most stimulating, wholesome, humorous, and just plain down-to-earth article that I have read in a long time. The more I read it, the more I "cracked-up," and what an article for any kind of therapy!

Keep up the good work and please publish something on that order every month or so—it would do a world of good for all of us.—Dorothy M. Libby, Hermiston, Oregon. **TT**

"A cheerful heart is a good medicine, but a downcast spirit dries up the bones"
(Proverbs 17:22, R.S.V.).*

*From the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyrighted 1946, 1952 © 1971, 1973.

The Lady Who Said Yes to God



Over the centuries many myths have evolved about Mary, the mother of Jesus. This article attempts to cut away the false and uncover the truth revealed in the Scriptures about this humble woman.

BY ROBERT J. WIELAND

Many Christians have neglected Mary, the mother of Jesus, a possible reaction to the feeling that she has been exploited by some who exalt her to veneration. But she deserves better treatment, for Scripture discloses a surprising wealth of information regarding her. A more realistic understanding of Mary might make possible a better appreciation of her divine Son in His

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incarnation, and thus enlarge the boundaries of our faith.

The Bible is not the source of some popular beliefs about her; for example, the idea of her immaculate conception in the womb of her mother. Scripture requires that Mary partake of the same common genes that all humans receive from their parents, for only of Christ does the inspired Word declare that He "did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth." Of the rest of mankind we read that "all have sinned, and come short of the

glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Mary herself went on record as acknowledging her personal need of a "Saviour," something no sinless person could confess (Luke 1:46, 47).

Neither does the Bible represent Mary as a "dispenser of grace." Rather, it portrays her as a unique receiver of grace (Luke 1:28, 30, 49). The idea of her perpetual virginity is likewise derived from tradition, not Scripture, and rests on a non-Biblical view of sex, which distorts the divinely ordained blessing of human

maleness and femaleness (see Genesis 1:27, 31; Proverbs 5:15-18; Matthew 1:25). Misconceptions of Mary's virginity contribute to that false piety that regards sex in marriage as inimical to true holiness.

While we do not find in Scripture even a hint of Mary's exaltation to worship or veneration by the early Christians, significant glimpses of her personality and character do exist. For example:

1. She apparently loved beautiful literature and was herself competent as a poetess. This is evident in her poem known as the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55).

2. She appears intelligent and clearheaded in crisis, calm, and self-composed. We see this in her handling of the encounter with the angel Gabriel when he announced that she had been chosen to be the mother of the Messiah (Luke 1:26-38).

3. She was distinguished as quiet, thoughtful, and tight-lipped. We gather this from Luke's remarks concerning the birth and childhood of Jesus: "Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:19). Such great secrets would be hard for most of us to keep!

4. Her childlike yet mature faith was such that God could employ her as His agent in the greatest miracle of all time. Elizabeth commended the faith of the newly pregnant Mary in words of coveted benediction: "Blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord" (Luke 1:45).

5. Probably more than any other woman, Mary had a capacity for sorrow. "Blessed" (happy) she was indeed, but her sensitive soul could also be rent with a pain that no other woman of all time could know.

"A sword shall pierce through thy own soul also," said the discerning Simeon as a surge of inspiration thrilled his soul while he held her holy Child in his arms in the Temple (Luke 2:35). That sword was to pierce her soul many times during the next 33 years; and for her to watch her Son die on a cross at last was a pain

infinitely beyond that of any ordinary mother who watches an ordinary son die in agony and abuse, for His death surpassed in magnitude all other deaths.

6. The grace of God enabled Mary to be a wise mother to her precious Son; indeed, no woman can ever be a wise mother apart from that grace. But the trust and responsibility that God reposed in this woman astounds us. "Hail, thou that art highly favoured, . . . blessed art thou among women," said the angel (Luke 1:28).

We cannot be Bible-believing Christians unless we accept the full implications of the Incarnation: Mary's Son was indeed *her* Son; the Word had become human flesh, which she gave to Him. Heaven fully entrusted the precious Infant to her care. One careless, thoughtless, selfish tantrum on Mary's part as mother could have tarnished the character of her impressionable Offspring, for His infancy and childhood were a human learning experience as are ours. We read that He "learned obedience" and that He was "subject" to His earthly parents (Hebrews 5:8; Luke 2:51). Mary's motherhood was an unspeakably marvelous accomplishment, and we justly fulfil her prophecy, "All generations shall call me blessed" (Luke 1:48).

Was Mary the ravishingly beautiful, movie actress teen-ager that artists have delighted in painting her to be? As such, did the village swains covet her? Several New Testament disclosures hint that she might have suffered painful disappointments as a girl, a condition incompatible with the popular concept of her being a beautiful teen-ager. While the Bible is indeed fully inspired, it may be that artists' paintings are less so.

In her revealing poem, Mary says that God "hath regarded the *low estate* of His handmaiden" (Luke 1:48). The Greek word is *tapeinosis*, which is translated "humiliation" in Acts 8:33. (The verb means to be "abased" in 2 Corinthians 11:7 and Luke 14:11.) It is a word that aptly pictures the scorn and dishonor suffered by

Christ in His illegal condemnation and death. The word evokes more than the ordinary lowliness of peasantry. It means painful, embarrassing humiliation, and for some reason Mary applies it to herself.

The Gospel records make it clear that Joseph must have been a widower with at least six children. The names of four boys are specified in Matthew 13:55 and Mark 6:3, and at least two girls are mentioned. The boys were obviously older than Jesus, for John tells how they tried to boss Him around, something only older boys would dare to do in Jewish culture (John 7:3-5). One could wonder what widower in his right mind with at least six motherless children would want to marry a young teen-ager to be their stepmother. (Of course, when Joseph became engaged to Mary, the thought of her becoming the mother of the Messiah could not have entered his mind.) What he needed was a mature woman to help him with his problems.

When the angel Gabriel announced Mary's pregnancy to her, she wanted to share the exciting secret with her closest friend and confidante, as any woman would. Was that confidante a teen-age friend in Nazareth? No. We find she leaves "with haste" for the mountain home of the aged Elizabeth, a woman, who, like Hannah of old, had known the bitterness of barren Jewish womanhood, and whose *tapeinosis* had also been taken away by her miraculous conception in old age of John the Baptist (Luke 1:5-24; 39-44). Why would Mary seek such companionship? Did she and Elizabeth have something in common other than a tie of family relationship?

Mary's Son is known as "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:3). Mary said she too had tasted the pain of *tapeinosis*, perhaps the humiliating rejection of being passed by, of being not desired. Her favorite heroine was obviously Hannah, the exquisitely sorrowful mother of the prophet Samuel, for Mary's Magnificat is modeled closely on

Hannah's poignant song of rejoicing at the birth of her son (cf. 1 Samuel 2:1-10; Luke 1:46-55). Hannah knew the prick at least of a "sword" piercing her soul, the apparently God-forsaken bitterness of being passed by childless while He seemed to favor the arrogant second wife Peninah (1 Samuel 1:4-10). Few radiant sought-after teen-age girls find time to identify so emotionally with Hannah.

We don't know what Mary looked like, for no artist that we know of ever had her for his model. Although her Son possessed the true beauty of a loving character, we probably would never have turned our heads to look at Him twice had we not known who He was. We read of Him, "He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men" (Isaiah 53:2, 3). He was *Mary's Son* in His incarnation.

What was *Mary's tapeinosis*? Was she also, in another sense, for some reason, "despised and rejected of men," so that she had known nights when she wet her pillow with solitary tears, apparently forever denied the chance through marriage of achieving every Jewish woman's ultimate dream—to be the mother of the long awaited Messiah? If so, imagine her heart-bursting joy when she sang her hymn, "My spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the low estate [painful humiliation] of his handmaiden."

Consider the amazing maturity of this woman's faith. Surely she was sophisticated enough to know that her mysterious pregnancy would raise eyebrows all over town, not to mention the all too-likely reaction of Joseph when he should get the news. This could be virtual suicide for a woman! Her incomparable joy of pregnancy must be marred by that other painful sorrow, social ostracism. Any ordinary woman would ask, "What will my Joseph think? Yes, what will the neighbors say?" And John records that the neighbors forever after had plenty to say, for the Jews scornfully reproached her

innocent Son with the taunt, "We be not born of fornication!" (John 8:41).

But Mary was ready; bravely she accepted the burden God would lay upon her: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word" (Luke 1:38).

When Caesar Augustus issued his imperial decree requiring Joseph to journey to Bethlehem for the "taxing" (census), it would be natural for Mary to want to go along, if only to avoid the neighbors' taunts. It is not

that was always to mingle with Mary's joy was already intruding. If her Baby was the Lord's Christ, why didn't God provide for her better?

Although Mary never gave in to that nagging doubt, the powerful temptation returned again and again. Her Boy was delightfully different from other children, but sometimes He could be painfully so as well. It was often hard to understand Him. A sinless Boy was not always welcome in Nazareth's sinful society, and family members would tend to

While we do not find in Scripture even a hint of Mary's exaltation to worship or veneration by the early Christians, significant glimpses of her personality and character do exist.

necessary to assume that she consciously wanted to stage her delivery at Bethlehem. Obviously she and Joseph had no relatives there to help them, otherwise they would not have had to seek an inn and be put up in a stable.

And perhaps Mary did not realize that the birth could be so near, or she would not have undertaken a 70-mile journey on foot or on a donkey's back. (It couldn't have been December, for such travel would be impossible in the cold, rain, and snow of that time of year, nor could shepherds have been camping out in the fields; the December birthdate is a relic of European mythology.)

Luke tells the story in a way that implies that the birth came unexpectedly soon: "And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered" (Luke 2:6). And she had no layette! The original experience could not have been as romantic as artists have painted it to be. Having a baby in a stinking cow pen and having to lay Him in a donkey's feed box is no antiseptic fun. She must have later told Him of the dangerous circumstances of His birth in such unhygienic surroundings, according to His own prophetic words (Psalm 22:9-11). The sorrow

misunderstand Him. As a devout Jew Mary would feel deeply ingrained reverence for the honored rabbis of the synagogue; why must her Son so often have different ideas than they cherished? From His childhood all the way to His cross, Jesus' failure to win their good will must have caused her a constant pang of painful perplexity. And the half-brothers who often tended to nag and despise Him only made her sorrow worse.

And then finally, there was Calvary.

The leaders' mysterious rejection of Him, the legal condemnation of the farcical trials, the cruel mockings and beatings, the phenomenal hatred heaped on Him, and the crucifixion—all seemed an inexplicable nightmare. This couldn't be real! How could this be happening to her Son, if He was the Messiah?

But there He was, stretched on a criminal's cross; and even He had reportedly confessed what implied that His enemies must be right, for He had cried out in anguish something about "My God, my God" forsaking Him! Had she been mistaken all along? Was He only a pious, naive fraud, a self-deceived megalomaniac? Had

she borne such a Son?

Under intense emotional and social pressure, good people can be tempted to doubt themselves and to confess crimes they never committed. The agony of Mary's temptation at the cross must have been horrendous. Gazing incredulously at the awful sight, she would wonder whether she had only imagined the angel Gabriel's visit at the beginning, the virgin birth, the visits of the shepherds, and their tale of angels singing in the sky, and the wise men and their gifts.

And then she would recall the unflinching love evident in her Son's character even from His childhood, His unusually thoughtful tenderness to her, His miracles, the shouts of the people acclaiming Him. How, under heaven, could this be happening if her Son was the Messiah? How could He be dying as a criminal, naked and despised? Something must be wrong somewhere. *Where was God?*

Mary would also recall the aged Simeon's cryptic prophecy of a sword piercing her own soul. Could this be what he meant?

Mary's natural mother love for a faithful Son made the "sword" rend her heart the more cruelly. But even more excruciating was an awful fear too dark to think about. Perhaps everything had been only a wild dream; perhaps there was no gospel, no good tidings of great joy to all people such as the shepherds said they heard the angels sing about. The "sword" was more than the piercing of a proud mother's dreams; it pierced humanity's hopes that transcended her mother's love and made it greater than itself. Surely no human soul other than that of her Son was ever so wrenched with agony.

That God in heaven could find such a woman on earth to bear such a personal cross is the all-time miracle of womanhood. Mary remains the human mother of our Saviour, and, as such, she deserves our eternal gratitude. And her Son deserves more appreciative worship and adoration than we have yet been able to give Him, for such is what true New Testament faith is. **TT**

(Continued from page 5)

sound like an optimist. rationalizing, but it's God's truth. We learn by contrast. If I had lived on with the use of my hands, I might never have learned to know God's love. When He came to me that day in that ether-smelling hospital, it was as if He and I made a covenant.

"I promised Him, 'If You will teach me how not to be sorry for myself, I will serve You always.'"

"And He said to me, 'If you will serve Me, I will let laughter live in

your heart.'

"So every time I laugh, that's my way of saying, 'Thank You, Lord.' It's as though I traded my hands for a far richer blessing. Hands grow old, but God's love and mercy will last forever."

I haven't learned yet to laugh as richly or as sincerely as David does. But I'm trying. As a reminder, every time I look down at my hands, I ask them: What work can you do today that will please the Lord?

How about your hands? **TT**

REFLECTIONS

by Ralph Blodgett

After reading the articles in this issue, review what you have learned by completing the statements below. If you wish to discuss your responses with someone, send us your name, address, and telephone number. One of the THESE TIMES telephone instructors will contact you personally by phone. Our address is: REFLECTIONS, 55 West Oak Ridge Drive, Hagerstown, Maryland 21740.

1. "People with disabilities are God's best _____ to demonstrate who He really is. His power shows up best in _____." (Page 11)
2. List the two primary goals, or objectives, that hermeneutics involves.
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
3. What was the ratio of slaves to free citizens in the Roman Empire during the apostle Paul's lifetime? (Page 14)
 1 to 3 1 to 5 1 to 8
4. There is no scriptural support for the popular idea of Mary's Immaculate Conception in the womb of her mother. (Page 24)
 True False
5. According to the Scriptures, how many children did Joseph presumably have? (Page 25)
 None 2 4 6
6. The idea of Christ being born in December is a relic of European mythology and does not harmonize with the facts given in Scripture. (Page 26)
 True False
7. Which text in the Bible foretold that the Messiah would be "despised and rejected of men" when He came to the world? (Page 26)

FRANK ANSWERS

DOESN'T LOVE PRECLUDE OBEDIENCE?

When Jesus was asked which was the great commandment in the law, He replied, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matthew 22:37-40). Can't you see that such a statement entirely does away with the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath?

To the contrary! You misunderstand the Saviour's intent. If His statement was intended to terminate one of the precepts of the moral law (the fourth), then it would also terminate the other nine as well! And if you construe His words to mean an abolition of all ten commandments, then you leave human society with neither God's guidance nor restraint with regard to human behavior.

By stating that the Old Testament Scriptures ("the law and the prophets")—basically an enlargement

and illumination of the Ten Commandments—hang upon the twofold principle of supreme love to God and impartial love to others Christ focuses on the basic *motivation* of acceptable obedience. The apostle Paul underscores the same point when he says: "Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law" (Romans 13:10; see also verses 8 and 9).

Love is a motive. But what kind of actions will love prompt? Here is where love needs information—the guidelines of the Ten Commandments, which express the will of the Creator for the human family on earth.

If one truly loves his neighbor as himself, he will honor and respect his parents. He will not kill, or lie about those he loves. He will not covet the goods of one he loves, neither could he steal away the affections of his friend's wife.

The negative prohibitions really imply positive injunctions as well. This means that the Christian, rather than merely refraining from harming his neighbor, will actively seek in every way to promote the well-being and happiness of those whose lives he touches. This is the intent of the second table of the Decalogue.

And if one truly loves God supremely, he will not tolerate another god in His place or worship Him improperly. If he loves God, he will not speak in a manner to dishonor Him. And if he loves his Creator

and Redeemer, he will find it a privilege to observe His Sabbath and to enter into fellowship on that special day with Him.

From a positive viewpoint the Christian's whole life style will reflect a loving respect and reverence for the Creator in whom he lives and moves and has his being (see Acts 17:28). And thus love's response fulfills the precepts of the first table of the Decalogue as well as the second.

Can the sixth commandment be properly translated "Thou shalt not murder" and be in harmony with the original Hebrew?

The answer is Yes. The Hebrew verb is *ratsach*, which means "to kill" or "to slay." However, in its various forms and in given contexts, it is commonly translated "to murder" or "murderer." For example, God challenged ancient Israel: "Will ye steal, murder [*ratsach*], and commit adultery, and swear falsely, . . . and come and stand before me in this house [temple]?" (Jeremiah 7:9, 10).

Inasmuch as the sixth precept is part of the *moral* Law of the Ten Commandments, it is dealing with killing as it relates to human beings. It has no application to the killing of plants, animals, insects, and the like. Nor does the prohibition pertain to judicial execution or capital punishment in principle (Genesis 9:6; Romans 13:4). (A deliberate miscarriage of

justice in this area would, of course, be viewed by Heaven as murder. For example, the execution of Jesus is so viewed by Stephen in his defense. See Acts 7:52.) Furthermore, since provision was made by God for the nation of Israel to protect the life of an individual who accidentally killed another (see Numbers 35 regarding the establishment of six cities of refuge for such persons), it is obvious that the sixth precept is not directed against accidental killing.

The conclusion is, therefore, that the sixth commandment prohibits premeditated murder—the deliberate, purposeful taking of the life of another human being. Jesus has shown, however, that the commandments are spiritual and much broader than their mere surface statements. Their inner intent touches on comprehensive principles. Cultivated thoughts of contempt and hate, as well as any acts of injustice, neglect, or indulgence that would tend to shorten life—another's or one's own—would be to a greater or lesser degree a violation of the principle involved in this command (cf. Matthew 5:21, 22; 1 John 3:15).

Its *positive* message is even broader. "Thou shalt not kill [murder]" means (in its positive form), Thou shalt *promote the life* of your neighbor. To encourage the well-being and to enrich the lives of those around us by acts of kindness is the positive obligation and privilege of this precept. **TT**



In this column Pastor Frank B. Holbrook answers questions about spiritual truth, ethical behavior, and Biblical understanding.

Write to him c/o THESE TIMES, 55 West Oak Ridge Drive, Hagerstown, Maryland 21740. Names are confidential. If a personal answer is desired, please send an addressed envelope. Only questions of general interest are published.



THIS TIME

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As usual, the real stars of each issue are the writers, whose talents and energies serve to inform, entertain, and inspire us all. Take Joni Eareckson Tada ("If God's Not Embarrassed, Why Are We?" page 8), for example. (Mrs. Tada, paralyzed from the neck down after a diving accident, is founder and director of Joni and Friends, Inc., Brooklyn Hills, California.) Joni, who is an accomplished artist, has got to be one of the finest practical theologians in our contemporary world. This month's piece is but a brief sampling of her genius. Who else but Joni could have written:

"People with disabilities are God's best visual aids to demonstrate who He really is. His power shows up best in weakness. And who, by the world's standards, is weaker than the mentally or physically disabled? As the world watches, these people persevere. They live, love, trust, and obey Him. Eventually, the world is forced to say, 'How great their God must be to inspire this kind of loyalty.'"

Joni's observation is reminiscent of Helen Keller's (1880-1968) memorable quote: "So much has been given to me, I have no time to ponder over that which has been denied."

Lois Pecce, whose touching Christmas piece on page 20 is likely to produce a golf ball in your throat, lists herself as a homemaker and writer living in Centerville, Ohio. Her observation is "We are all on the bumpy road of life's experience. If we can share a burden or a song along the way, our journey will be ever so much more pleasant." Her scholastic degrees include the P.H.T. (Putting Hubby Through) and the G.K.T. (Getting the Kids Through).

A newcomer to our pages is Reva Smith, librarian assistant at the Chicago Kent Law School. Her unusual encounter with a modern-day Samaritan reminds us that good guys are not extinct; there are still a few around.

Reva taught church school for 19 years in the Chicago area. She contends that although such a post may not sound important, a church school teacher has a more lasting impact on other lives than a minister or anyone else, except parents. Her greatest interest through the years has been children and their development, so her church responsibilities have always involved the younger set. Most of her writing has been for them also. Now that she works only three days a week, she also has time for painting, travel, and writing musical plays for schoolchildren.

Kenneth J. Holland

Trouble at the Inn

For years now whenever Christmas pageants are talked about in a certain little town in the Midwest, someone is sure to mention the name of Wallace Purling.

Wally's performance in one annual production of the Nativity play has slipped into the realm of legend. But the old-timers present in the audience that night never tire of recalling exactly what happened.

Wally was 9 that year and in the second grade, though he should have been in the fourth. Most people in town knew that he had difficulty in keeping up. He was big and clumsy, slow in movement and mind.

Still, Wally was well liked by the other children in his class, all of whom were smaller than he, though the boys had trouble hiding their irritation when Wally would ask to play ball with them or any game, for that matter, in which winning was important.

Most often they'd find a way to keep him out, but Wally would hang around anyway—not sulking, just hoping. He was always a helpful boy, a willing and smiling one, and the natural protector, paradoxically, of the underdog. Sometimes if the older boys chased the younger ones away, it would always be Wally who'd say, "Can't they stay?"

They're no bother."

Wally fancied the idea of being a shepherd with a flute in the Christmas pageant that year, but the play's director, Miss Lumbard, assigned him to a more important role. After all, she reasoned, the innkeeper did not have too many lines, and Wally's size would make his refusal of lodging to Joseph more forceful.

And so it happened that the usual large, partisan audience gathered for the town's yearly extravaganza of crooks and crèches, of beards, crowns, halos, and a whole stageful of squeaky voices. No one on stage or off was more caught up in the magic of the night than Wallace Purling. They said later that he stood in the wings and watched the performance with such fascination that from time to time Miss Lumbard had to make sure he didn't wander onstage before his cue.

Then the time came when Joseph appeared, slowly, tenderly guiding Mary to the door of the inn. Joseph knocked hard on the wooden door set into the painted backdrop. Wally the innkeeper stood inside, waiting.

"What do you want?" Wally said, swinging the door open with a brusque gesture.

"We seek lodging."

"Seek it elsewhere." Wally looked straight ahead but spoke vigorously. "The inn is filled."

"Sir, we have asked everywhere in vain. We have traveled far and

are very weary."

"There is no room in this inn for you." Wally looked properly stern.

"Please, good innkeeper, this is my wife, Mary. She is heavy with child and needs a place to rest. Surely you must have some small corner for her. She is so tired."

Now, for the first time, the innkeeper relaxed his stiff stance and looked down at Mary. With that, there was a long pause, long enough to make the audience a bit tense with embarrassment.

"No! Begone!" the prompter whispered from the wings.

"No!" Wally repeated automatically. "Begone!"

Joseph sadly placed his arm around Mary and Mary laid her head upon her husband's shoulder and the two of them started to move away. The innkeeper did not return inside his inn, however. Wally stood there in the doorway, watching the forlorn couple. His mouth was open, his brow creased with concern, his eyes filling unmistakably with tears.

And suddenly this Christmas pageant became different from all others.

"Wait, don't go, Joseph," Wally called out. "Bring Mary back." And Wallace Purling's face grew into a bright smile. "You can have my room."

Some people in town thought that the pageant had been ruined. Yet others—many, many others—considered it the most Christmas of all Christmas pageants they had ever seen. **TT**





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