

Virtual Christian Magazine

Hope And Encouragement
For The Real World

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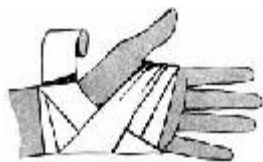
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The Windmill Mystery

By Janet Treadway

I knew God was concerned about the critically important things in my life. But why would He care about the little things?



MANY YEARS AGO my family lived in a home with a windmill in the front yard. I loved that windmill, especially in the springtime when the wind would force the blades to twirl. The beautiful flowers that surrounded its base only enhanced its beauty. Watching its movements while sipping on a hot cup of coffee was so tranquil. I started many of my days that way.

After a few years had passed, its appearance began to fade. The windmill badly needed to be painted. We had four small children at the time, so between time and money, the windmill took a backseat in priorities.

One morning, while sipping on my coffee and looking out the window, I silently mentioned to God that I wished I had the money to paint that windmill. It just brought me so much pleasure.

A mystery

I did not give it much thought after that, but a few days later I looked out the window and noticed something profoundly different. Were my eyes deceiving me? The windmill seemed brighter and looked like new!

I ran outside to get a closer look and, to my disbelief, it had a brand-new coat of paint! It was even painted in the color that I had wanted to paint it. I knew no one in my family had painted it. It had not been painted when I went to bed



the night before.

I ran in to tell my husband, and he thought I had gone crazy until he took a look and saw for himself the newly painted windmill. How did this happen? We racked our brains, but couldn't figure it out.

We went about our business that day, still wondering about this mystery. When I returned home that evening, a young neighbor kid came over with a confession. He told me that during the night he had painted the windmill red. But why? How? He said he had wanted to do something nice. But I had never mentioned to this kid about wanting to paint the windmill. In fact I really did not know him.

Whenever I see a windmill, I am reminded of God's great love for me many years ago, how much He cared about my feelings concerning our windmill.

I was far too happy to be angry with him. I knew who inspired this young kid to paint my windmill. God heard my request and the prayer was answered. Needless to say, God made me feel very special that day.

Sometimes we think that God is only interested in the big things that occur in our lives--that we should only ask Him for things that are critical. But the fact is, as the windmill showed me, God wants us to be happy. God wants to build a personal relationship with us and to show us how much He loves us.

Not one, but two...



On another occasion, my little girl, who was 4 years old at the time, wanted a Cabbage Patch doll. The doll was very popular, which made it very expensive. All of her friends had one, but we could not afford to buy her one. I wanted so much to buy that doll for her. I told my daughter to pray about it, and she did.

The very next weekend, my daughter had not one, but two Cabbage Patch dolls given to her! One doll was given to her at church by her friend's mom, and the next day she received one from her grandmother. Now, 21 years later, my daughter still has those dolls. The dolls symbolize how much God cared about her request.

It is true that God does not give us everything we want, but just like a loving parent, He wants to love us and please us.

An urgent plea

God does hear our prayers about big things too, and He answers those that are urgent and critical. I'll never forget one occasion when God did just that for me! He answered a very urgent plea for help from a very frightened teen. Had God not intervened, I would not be here today.

I was only 14 at the time when my father, in one of his fits of rage, placed a loaded gun to my head and told me he was going to kill me. All I could do was stay completely still for fear that the gun would go off and pray silently that

God would spare my life.

Even though no one else heard that urgent plea for help, my great Father in heaven did and came to my rescue. My dad just put the gun down and walked away.



God is there to help us in the times of urgency, but He also cares for the little things that matter to us. In John 15:7 Jesus tells us, "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you." God wants to give us the good things in life. Do we see a loving God who wants the best for us? Or do we see a harsh, uncaring God?

How we see God

Some people think of God as being something like a lady I once heard about. This lady had a bird named Peppy. One day she was busy vacuuming out the bottom of his cage when the phone rang. She grabbed the phone at the same time and, OOPS! Peppy was sucked up in the vacuum. She raced to turn off the vacuum and pull out the dazed and shocked bird. Realizing how dirty he was, she ran to the kitchen with Peppy to wash off the dust with cold water. Now poor Peppy was shivering from the cold water that was drenching him. Realizing what she had done, the lady ran to get the blow dryer and blasted the poor bird with hot air. Needless to say, Peppy never sang again.

Sometimes we view God as harsh and unkind, as a Father who is ready to suck us up at any infraction, dump cold water on us if we begin to enjoy life and then blast us with heat if we mess up. No wonder many of us lack confidence in asking God for the good things in life. Have we stopped singing like Peppy? Or do we see God the way He really is, a God who loves us even more than we love our own children? It is our Father's good pleasure to give us what we desire. My earthly father was harsh and unkind, but my heavenly Father has gone out of His way to prove to me how much He cares for me.

Whenever I see a windmill, I am reminded of God's great love for me many years ago, how much He cared about my feelings concerning our windmill. Was painting the windmill an urgently important request? No! But like a good parent, God wanted to make me happy.

When I talk to God, I can remember how good and loving He is. God is there to hear my urgent requests, but He also cares about the smallest things that matter in my life. I just have to ask.

"Would You Believe...?"

By Robert Berendt

Rumors have kept many from Jesus Christ and His Church. Sometimes you have to get past the rumors to get to the truth.



HE IS A DRUNK! HE IS ILLEGITIMATE! He is a glutton! He talks to sinners! All these were accusations laid against Jesus Christ (Luke 7:34; John 8:19, 41). He was accused of deceiving people (John 7:12) and was barred from entering some cities (Matthew 8:34).

An intriguing question comes to mind. How many believed the rumors and lies that were spread about Jesus? How many people who were on the verge of trying to find Him, turned back because of these rumors?

Enemies know that people will believe rumors without checking them out. Propaganda is a tool that does work. I have no doubt that all of us could give an example in which we accepted someone's word about someone else and perhaps avoided that person or found ourselves building some sort of resistance to him or her.

Just think of the people Jesus could have helped, but who continued in their illnesses or sorrow because they turned away. Some, perhaps influenced by the rumors, did not see the need to come to Jesus for help. But others went so far as to cut holes in a roof in order to lower a paralytic for healing (Mark 2:4)!

Stories went around about Jesus that were untrue, indicating that it was not wise to associate with Him. His work and ministry still touched countless thousands in spite of the lies.

Many who are Matthew 4:23 tells us that Jesus went all about Galilee preaching and

seeking God turn away before they actually investigate enough to know if accusations are true. healing diseases and sicknesses. He brought hope and taught of a wonderful future for mankind. Though Jesus went to many towns and villages, not all accepted Him. In some towns the people refused to believe and, in those places, Jesus could do very little.

Jesus was disappointed in the cities that easily forgot the deeds He had done. In Matthew 11:20-24, Jesus warned them because so few went on to repent after they saw the miracles and heard His message. It is quite surprising that this most remarkable Man could do miracles that were unheard of--such as healing the blind and the lame and raising the dead--and yet not have more people cling to Him with all their might. It does seem that there were suspicions that lingered and caused people to turn away.

A parallel for today

In the spiritual realm, we can see a parallel. We too have to go to Jesus. We are told to go forth to Him (Hebrews 13:13-14). We are to seek and we will find, knock and the door will be opened (Luke 11:9). Luke 13:22-35 tells the story of those who have heard and have been helped, but who did not strive to enter in at the narrow gate.

If the friends of the paralytic had not made a great effort to bring him to Christ, the man would in all likelihood not have been healed. We must also make that effort. We must not allow ourselves to be led astray by rumors about Christ or about the Body of Christ, which is His Church. The Bible is the guideline God gives to finding His children.

A skeptical world

Jesus died for mankind almost 2,000 years ago. It is not easy to believe something that happened so long ago. It has never really been easy to believe--even the disciples who saw the resurrected Christ had a hard time believing (Matthew 28:16-17). We live in a skeptical world. We are bombarded with religions of all kinds, all purporting to have the answer to all our problems and cares. Some religions are so hypocritical and weak, they only succeed in turning people off religion altogether. Some fall woefully short of giving the guidelines that lead to the hope offered in the Bible.

The true followers of Jesus Christ have been labeled with various accusations as Christ Himself was. They have been called fanatics, legalists, cults, antichrists and worse. Many who are seeking God turn away before they actually investigate enough to know if the accusations are true. Negative rumors can be one of the ways "the wicked one" snatches away the seeds God is sowing (Matthew 13:19).



Large groups today sometimes try to protect their "flocks" by throwing stones at anyone who seems to be stirring up an interest. It is sad, but true, that many people who throw rocks are very insecure, feel threatened and unsure of their own positions. Rather than having confidence in their teachings and actions and letting the facts speak for themselves, they feel compelled to discredit those who represent other groups. If a person had supreme confidence in what he was doing, nothing would deter or upset him. Jesus Christ reflected that confidence. He was forsaken and deserted by all His followers--for a while (Matthew 26:56). Rather than being resentful and spiteful, Jesus could have pity on the very ones who were the

cause of all His pain and suffering. That is true confidence and strength.

Jesus tells us that people speak well of false prophets and misleading guides (Luke 6:26). Peter knew that people who strive to follow Jesus Christ and to do good will have tales told about them. They would be spoken of as evil people (1 Peter 3:13-17). In the book of Luke we also read of people who will hate the followers of Jesus (Luke 6:22-23). Jesus said they hated Him and would also hate His followers (John 15:18-23).

The real loser

The loser in all of these examples is the person who turns away because of a rumor he or she has heard. In Jesus' day, many who could have been healed did not come because of a rumor. They did not have a chance to take the next step of repentance and baptism, which leads to eternal life (Acts 2:38-39).

There is a promise to all whom God will call today, just as there was a possibility of help directly from Jesus for those who pushed the accusations aside and did seek Him out. We must go to Him of our own free will. God will not force anyone. John 6:44 reveals that God must first call a person. Many are called, but only a few are chosen (Matthew 20:16). It seems only a few are responding to the call. People are just too busy right now!

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The decision is yours and mine. We can be duped and stay in the dark where it seems comfortable, but really is not, or we can be determined to find the truth and find God. If we seek Him, the call will come. God wants every person on earth to be saved. Jesus would have helped others if they had come to Him. The ones who received no help were those who did not come. It is the same today. If we do not become active in this wonderful search and adventure, we will be left in the dust until another day. The choice is yours and mine. God says come!

For more on this subject, request a free copy of a booklet that strives to look at what the Bible says about [The Church Jesus Built](#). Examine what Jesus and the apostles said about the Church, and check it out for yourself. Would you believe, after 2,000 years, the answers can still be surprising?

Prayers for a Prisoner

This young man made an impression on me, from his first day in prison to his last.



I WAS POSTED AS SALLY PORT OFFICER, which meant that anything and everything that came in or out of the institution had to go through me.

It was toward the end of the shift when the transportation team arrived at my gates with five new inmates. I secured the weapons, locked down the yard and cleaned the sally port for their entrance. The transporting officers brought them out one by one, in leg irons and belly chains with precise verbal instructions. They lined them up as the lieutenant, sergeant and I supervised the movement.

The fourth inmate was a tall, 6-foot-2-inch, stocky boy, and today was his 18th birthday. As he walked to get in line, tears filled his eyes and ran down his cheeks. He tried to wipe them off with his hands, but they didn't get far because the chains kept them close to his body. So he stared down at the ground to hide them, because in this place, tears are the most dangerous things to have.

I walked beside them, hoping my words were calm and gentle, as I tried to ease them from the fear in their minds at the same time as I introduced them to the reality of their confinement. I could hear my voice as I spoke the processing instructions, but my eyes wandered back to the boy who was trembling with fear. He would join others who cried all night and no one would hear him.

Everything was taken away. Now he would be told what to do, when he could do it and exactly how it was to be done. He would be forced to stay here. Losing his freedom, wasting his time and given no choices.

I wondered what terrible crime he could have committed to deserve such punishment. So, before I left work, I checked his escape flier. He had been sentenced to two years for aggravated assault. Two years would be taken from his life for losing control. Two years to be corrected. Soon I

Whether he has learned his lesson the hard way and takes advantage of

would hear all the details of his story and, in time, I would get to know him. It was the usual beginning of an unusual relationship.

The next day I was posted in his unit as dorm officer. I received shift briefing and went to work. Little did I know that the five beds I had chosen placed the boy right in front of the control room. I thanked God for hearing my prayers. The boy would be safe there, at least while he slept. I slipped into a chair behind the desk and pretended to read, to write a report, a journal--anything. I had to look away; I was crying.

The week slowly turned into months and the months into a year. I watched him 10 hours a day, six days a week; and he watched me.

A young man of extraordinary character

He was quiet, gentle, kind, giving and forgiving. Since he was physically stronger, the other inmates were at a disadvantage and left him alone. Yet, he was meek and humble. He spoke softly, worked hard at whatever task he was given to do, and late at night, when everyone was asleep, he knelt down between his locker and his bunk and prayed.

My heart was filled with sadness, knowing he was someone's son. But no mother or father came to visit him on the weekends, to share a story or to offer a few words of encouragement and strength. There was no brother or sister to call, to remind him of their childhood and the lessons they had learned.

At noon, when the mail was called out, he listened from a distance and hoped--as they all hoped--but none of the few letters that came was for him. The innocence of his youth had been thrown away and nobody cared. He was lost and alone, never hearing the messages and promises from God, never learning how to overcome the deceptions of Satan.

During the last six months of the sentence, a prisoner is referred to as a "short timer," implying a foreseeable end is drawing near--both to the sentence and to the inevitable hardships he has had to endure. His character's true colors emerge as freedom becomes a reality. Fear of harm from others diminishes.

The inmate who has not learned from his mistakes becomes his own worst enemy, and we will meet again in these familiar surroundings. But for the courageous one willing to confront his mistakes squarely and admit he was wrong, the gate will be opened and he will be set free with a better understanding of his purpose in life.

Has he learned his lesson?

Whether he has learned his lesson the hard way and takes advantage of his bitter experience to turn from the behavior that landed him in jail, diligently seeking a different course for his life, only time will tell.

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I met this young man in one of the most negative environments, locked inside physical prison walls, and even time was against him. He was tried and tested, and he was triumphant over adversity.

Hard times can motivate him to make lasting changes, and it's important that he does. I'm reminded of Paul's encouragement to take advantage of opportunities God provides us to be rescued from our destructive deeds. "Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (Romans 2:4-5).

I met this young man in one of the most negative environments, locked inside physical prison walls, and even time was against him. He was tried and tested, and he was triumphant over adversity. I can only hope I had as much positive influence on his life as he had on mine.



It's an old custom for a prisoner to take a piece of clothing with him, when he is released from prison, to remind himself of what he went through--so that he will never return. On the day this young man was released, he carried out with him a small box containing his possessions. In it I placed a pair of white socks on top of an old manila envelope in which he kept a few copies of [The Good News](#), a magazine of hope and understanding published by the United Church of God.

I keep this young man in my prayers, and I long for the day when we will have no more tears to wipe away. For now, the hug I wanted to give him that day in the sally port will have to wait--hopefully, only for a short time, when God's promised Kingdom will bring peace to this earth.

This article was written by a corrections officer in Arizona who wishes to remain anonymous.

To My Loving Children (To Be Opened If I Die)

A father shares advice he wrote to his children when he was at death's door.



TO MY LOVING CHILDREN,

I am writing you this letter, knowing by the fact you are now reading it that I am no longer part of your physical lives. I am now to be buried, beyond your touch, unable to reach you with my spoken words. And yet there is still so much to say. I ask that you will honor my memory by honoring the wishes and requests of this letter.

First of all, please know and understand that we are not just physical human beings. I now lay asleep awaiting the resurrection. My first and most fervent hope is that I can see each of you there at that glorious resurrection. Please, please, please, protect your lives to do your best to live purely before God, that we may share the joy of that resurrection together. Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. We will be together again at that glorious resurrection if you remain committed to God and His way of life.

Remain pure before God and Jesus Christ. This does not mean you need to be perfect--only God and Jesus Christ are perfect. I was not perfect. But I tried to do my best to follow the walk, to live the way of life set before me by the perfect example of Jesus Christ. I fell short many times. And yet I always turned to God, asking for forgiveness, asking for the saving grace of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to cover my sins. And God never said no. God will always forgive. Please remember to do the same--when you come up short, when you stumble, when you fall, reach out to God in prayer, asking for forgiveness. He will hear your prayer, just as He has always heard my prayers.

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What would Jesus Christ do?

*by honoring the
wishes and requests
of this letter.*

You will face many, many times when you will need to make important decisions in your life. Always ask, "What would Jesus Christ do?" And ask, "What would Dad have wanted me to do?" And the answer is to do justly, love mercy and walk humbly in the sight of God. Seek His will first in everything you do. And when (not if, for you most certainly will) you stumble, seek God's forgiveness. He will always forgive you.

Stay close to God by reaching out in daily prayer--always make it the first activity of your day. Even if it is a small prayer, start by committing your day into God's hands. And strive to learn more about God through His Word, the Bible. There will be many different people with many different ideas of what the Bible says. There will be times when you will probably get confused about it. But if you do, just ask the questions: "What did Jesus Christ do?" and "How did He live His life?" So should you live yours.

Jesus Christ lived His life as an example for me and for you. He lived His life perfectly. He lived the Ten Commandments, as did His apostles after His death. Don't let anyone try to convince you otherwise--if they say you don't have to keep any of the Ten Commandments, the truth is not in them. Live your life as Jesus Christ lived His.

I look forward to seeing you at that day of His glorious return. I am only gone a short season and then we will be together again for eternity. Life may seem so long, and I am so far away. And yet it's just a short time and we will be together again for all time.

Take care of Mom

Please take care of Mom--she needs each of you to help her and support her. Mom and I have grown in our marriage to become as one person. And now that I am gone, Mom will feel half-empty for quite a while. Please do your best to comfort her and encourage her. Life will go on, and Mom's heart will recover. But she will need each of you to fill her heart with your love. Her heart will ache for my love, but I am not there to give it anew, only as a memory of times past. Give her your love to help fill that void. Give her your love as you have never given it before. Hold her, kiss her, touch her, love her every chance you get. And not just for a short time, but for the rest of your lives.

As you honor Mom, you also honor me. She (like me) is not perfect. She will make mistakes. But please never ridicule or make fun of her mistakes. She might make a decision you don't like. But you still need to honor and support her. Please understand how hard it will be for her. She had been used to relying on me to make many of the decisions--and now she's alone. And yet she is not alone, because she has Jesus Christ and God the Father and her loving children to support her.

I know that life is not perfect, and I know there will be times when you likely will come up short in honoring your mother. But please remember what I always asked you to do when you did or said something disrespectful to Mom. I had you take time out, think about what you did or said and how it dishonored her, and then go to her to ask for her forgiveness. And she always forgave you. Just as she will continue to forgive you now. Just as God will always forgive you of your shortcomings, so will Mom forgive you. Sometimes there may be greater trials, and it will seem that things are not going to be right between you and Mom; but give it

time and always make sure you go back to Mom to ask for forgiveness. And never let the sun go down on your wrath--don't go to bed angry. Talk it out. Take your love for me and give it to your mother, doubling your love for her.

Strive to maintain peace in your life and your relationship with others, especially with your brother and sisters. By maintaining peace in the family, you will make Mom that much happier. I know there will be times when peacefulness may seem difficult to maintain. But I ask that you learn to recognize the moment when you cease being peaceful. You will need to learn how to practice self-control in your lives. Learn to control your emotions. Do your best to keep negative words or actions from coming out. But if they do, recognize them, change and ask for forgiveness if you have hurt anyone. Each time you do this, you honor Mom and you honor me. And most of all, you honor God.

Negative pulls

As you get into your teenage years, there will be many more pulls toward sin in your life. The time will come when someone will ask you if you want to drink some beer, smoke cigarettes, smoke pot or do other drugs. Do not give in to these people. They are not your true friends--steer far from them. Seek purity in your life. You will honor me and honor yourself and honor God in doing so. We always provided you with an opportunity to drink a small amount of wine at our Sabbath meal as a way to instruct you on the proper use and moderation. When you are fully of age to buy and consume alcohol on your own, you will need to take personal responsibility for exercising self-control.

It is all too easy to drink more than one drink, especially during the high school and college years. If there is a party and the main activity taking place is drinking (or smoking or drugs, or anything else that you should not be doing), please don't go. Learn to say no to your friends when they ask you to come with them to parties like these. Spend time with Mom instead. Maybe that doesn't sound cool to your friends, but it is the thing that makes me infinitely happier, knowing that you are spending time with Mom, rather than putting yourself in a situation where you could have trouble. Do not follow after anyone who entices you to do evil. Avoid these people at all costs.

Dating and marriage

When you begin dating, please, please, please only date others who are of like mind about God and His way. Any others can and will cause problems. Your hearts are tender and need to be cared for by others of like mind. That doesn't mean you won't be attracted to others outside the Church. But hold yourself back from dating them or being alone with them. Give a polite but firm "No" when asked.

And when you are dating, keep your actions holy, just and pure. Remember that your body is not your own--it is reserved for your future mate. Mom and I had such a wonderful marriage because we knew that we wholly belonged to each other. Don't ever give away your body to another, either before marriage or after. And don't be afraid to say "No!" when a good, firm "No!" is needed! You will most certainly develop a reputation, be it a good one or a bad one. Make it a reputation of chastity, honesty and purity. Reserve your body for the full expression of your love after marriage. And don't kid yourself with, "Oh, it's OK, because this is the person I'm going to marry anyway." If you really want to marry that person, he or she will not

mind waiting. In fact, you will be deeply respected for that. Wait and remain pure.

Grades, college and career

You know that I placed a lot of emphasis on education and doing your best in school. It is important and I do want you to succeed in school. Getting an A is great, but also allow some room in your life for the B's that will come along. If your best was a C, that's OK too. Just do your best.



It is important that you do your best, especially in high school, since your grades in high school will have a large impact on where you go to college. And when it comes time to choose a college after high school, seek out not only the best school, but the best school for the money.

College can be extremely expensive, so make sure the money is spent wisely. Go to the classes with the intent to really learn from your professors. Ask around before taking a class so that you can find the best professors. But also learn to be patient with the less than outstanding as well and look for the best in them. Always try to sit in the front row center of any class. It will help you to focus on the teacher/professor and concentrate on the subject.

Keep in mind that you don't have to choose a career (or even a major) right away your freshman year of college. Start out by learning more about yourself by taking career-planning tests in high school and early in college. And you should also seek to learn more about how your aptitudes and values affect your career selection.

But after you take all the tests and get all the input and explore all the options, don't let anyone else choose your career for you. Listen to the career counseling and learn as much as you can about different career possibilities. Then in the end choose a job you will love. Find work in your true passion, if at all possible. Don't worry about the money. The money will be enough if you are doing what you love. Along the way in your career and your life, be ready to make changes to further seek out fulfilling work in your life. And no matter what you do for a living, do your best to give back to others.

Happiness

In seeking happiness in life, remember that the happiest of people don't necessarily *have* the best of everything, but they do *make* the best of everything that comes along their way. Make the best of life and its challenges in a godly way and you will find true happiness. Always look for the positive in any situation. And always look for ways that you can give to others, rather than serving your own needs. It is by giving away to others that you will be personally enriched and blessed.

Remember, it's not where you start out in life, or where you are at any particular point in life. It's where you end up. Make each day a continuation of that journey on the path to the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. Always seek that as your end goal and all other things will follow.

I am now asleep in the ground, awaiting the resurrection. I can't



speak to you anymore to give you all of the instructions of life that I want to give; I wish I could. I can't hold you close and comfort you in your times of need; I wish I could. I can't give you the confidence to face the trials in life that you will surely face; I wish I could. But I do know that we all have the promise of the resurrection and that we all will have the chance to be together once again in the future. There is a very special crown that has been laid up for you. Protect that crown. Polish it daily. Keep it holy and pure that we may once again share our joys in the world tomorrow.

I love you. And I look forward to the time when we will be together again, for all time, as joint heirs in the family of God. I will see you then...

This article was written by a father who wishes to remain anonymous.

Virtual Christian Magazine Editorial
Taking Responsibility

By W. Fred Crow

They were 3,000 miles away and I'd been on my own for years, but I still found myself blaming my parents. Until...



A WHILE BACK I READ OF TWO MEN who were sent to the hospital for using a lawn mower as a hedge trimmer. No, I wrote that correctly. Two men picked up a power mower and tried to use it to trim a hedge. As one might suspect, they suffered serious damage to exposed digits and appendages.

What is striking about these two individuals is that rather than feel accountable for their own actions, they sued the manufacturer of the lawn mower for not posting proper warnings. Interesting. Their injuries were the result of improper warning labels. Rather than take responsibility for their behavior, however inane, they chose to blame someone else.

In our society too often the responsibility for "who I am" and "how I act" is shifted to someone else. If I mess up, someone else is to blame--I'm not at fault. It's so convenient to feel good about the self when others can be blamed for wrong choices and decisions and mistakes.

But what really occurs is that excuses hamper our personal growth and, without growth, we can't fulfill our potential.

Paying the price--an admission

I'll make an admission here. For years I blamed certain personality flaws and character traits on my family--they were to blame for actions and attitudes that I wished I didn't display. That was, until a friend asked me if I was still living at home.

My family was 3,000 miles away and I'd been on my own for years, but I still carried that crutch of "my family made me this way." It was a convenient catchall for my poor behavior. It

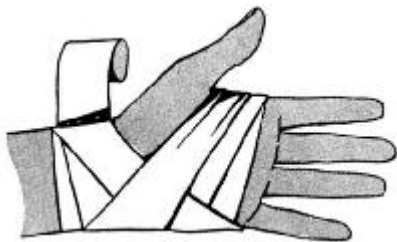
was handy to blame them for my poor conduct. They were an easy target--until that question from my friend.

I had to admit that, no, I was not living at home. I made the day-to-day decisions of how I would act and what I would say. The family influence really wasn't there any longer and hadn't been there for several years.

So, I was asked, if the negative influence of my family wasn't in my life, how could I continue to blame them if I knew better? My friend implied that I must want to be this way. It really must be my choice. I was choosing to say and do those things which I didn't want to do, not because of family, but because I chose to do so.

What an eye-opener!

I realized I was completely responsible for myself at all times, as we all are responsible for who we are and how we act, even under stress and duress.



Some want to blame poor personal performance on the actions and attitudes of others. Does the poor performance of someone else warrant a similar action and reaction on my part? Does someone calling me names make his or her opinion of me valid? And should I react in kind? Of course not!

The point in all this is that it is so easy to blame someone else and not take responsibility. But when you don't take responsibility for your actions, you have no reason for, nor do you see any possibility of, making a change in your life. If you're not responsible for yourself, how is there any hope of change? It's those others. They need to change their attitudes and actions. But they don't change, so why should you?

Taking control

When we claim responsibility for our actions, we actually take control over our lives. We can now make positive changes about who we are and who we will be. I discovered that it is only when we're taking responsibility for our actions, ceasing to blame others, that we have the means, focus and wherewithal to make personal changes.

I learned that it's OK to make mistakes. I learn from them. I don't try to hide them or hide from them anymore. I don't try to justify them. I made them. I accept them. I can go forward not wanting to make the same mistakes again. This is especially important in the spiritual area of life. When our mistakes break God's laws, we can seek God's forgiveness and His help to overcome them (Acts 3:19). In God's book, repenting and changing are the name of the game.

Just like the statement that those who forget the lessons of history are bound to repeat them, those who blame others for their mistakes will never change from making them over and over and over again.

When we claim responsibility for our actions, we actually take control over our lives. We can now make positive changes about who we are and who we will be.

Taking responsibility secures power over the self and provides positive energy toward

achieving our God-intended potential. I've never seen a successful Christian blaming others for his or her setbacks and mistakes. The real successes claim responsibility for their actions and then let God take control of their lives and their futures.