

# Virtual Christian Magazine

Hope And Encouragement  
For The Real World

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## Wanted: Morality

By Cecil E. Maranville

*Parents must come to grip with the fact that they have a serious responsibility -- a responsibility that too many are leaving unfulfilled.*



**T**HIS GENERATION has mortgaged the morality of the next, and struggles for a way to comfort itself.

Conservative author Peggy Noonan wrote a commanding and powerful editorial for the *Wall Street Journal* of April 22, 1999 in response to the violent murders at Columbine High School. Drawing an analogy with fish that swim in deep waters without any choice about their environment, she questions if people realize that today's children exist in an "ocean" of the wrong way to live and have no more choice than the fish.

Many adults assume that because they have "turned out OK" the children of today will likewise have the good sense to throw off the evil influences of their environment. "But they never had a normal culture against which to balance the newer, sicker one. They have no reference points to normality. We assume they know what we know: 'This is not right.' But why would they know that? The water in which they swim is the only water they've known" (ibid).



For selfish reasons, the present generation has excused itself from its responsibility to adequately prepare its children for life. It has taken pride in becoming an "enlightened" society that is remarkably creative in excusing itself from individual responsibility for its actions, that hesitates to be too specific about expected

behavior lest it infringe upon "the rights" of all creatures.

Adults are able to survive the pleasure-binge mentality of the present culture because they have some foundation in the right way to live thanks to their parents or grandparents. In selfish shortsightedness, they claim that this sick culture of violence is okay, not realizing that they are mortgaging the morality of the next generation. In short, children do not know how to live right if they do not see how to live right.

Many would-be healers have come forward in the aftermath of Columbine's tragedy advising that the lesson to our society is that we need to "listen to our children." "They have something to say." "They are basically good." All true, but pabulum. No reasonable person would disagree with these suggestions. But they miss the point, and unless many get the point and do something about it, the worst it yet to come.

Children need to be led, parented. Parenting means adequately equipping children to be able to live their own lives and eventually to bring up their own families. But before they can do that, parents must come to grip with the fact that they have a serious responsibility -- responsibility that too many are leaving unfulfilled. Parents must themselves know the way of life that is right, shun the way of life that is wrong, and then teach the right to their children by their examples. Sure, it needs to be done in the context of a loving environment, in the context of listening to them, in the context of respecting them for their unique talents and abilities.

*In selfish shortsightedness, they claim that this sick culture of violence is okay*

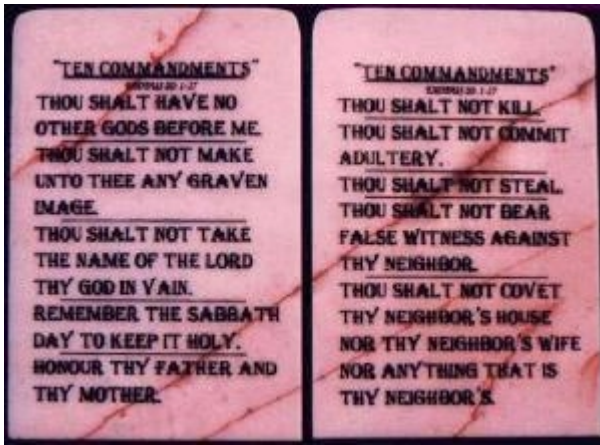
But until parents live godly lives, they will not produce children that are upstanding citizens. To the contrary, children will be swept in whatever direction the current of "the ocean" of our evil culture carries them.

Who will counter the present culture asks Noonan? "The good parents and good families of our children. They are kind enough, sensitive enough to give them religious belief, the knowledge of a God, the sense that life has coherence and purpose. They are generous enough, and loyal enough to the future, to show through their actions that doing your best to show love is good, doing your work is good, contributing is good. 'This is what we do,' they do not [only] say but [they also] show. 'This is how to live'" (ibid).

Is Noonan overly optimistic about the existence of enough "good parents" to make a difference? Perhaps, but she is certainly on the right track. In advising the people of Israel how to preserve the prosperity of their nation, God told them:

"You shall teach [My Commandments] diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates" (Deuteronomy 6:7-9).

Here is a dramatic portrayal of that "ocean," the



broad environment in which our children live. "Doorposts" is symbolic of the everyday comings and goings from one's house -- the individual family environment. Similarly, "gates" refers to the entrance to the city, and is symbolic of the comings and goings, the everyday activities of the community environment.

"Your hand" is symbolic of action, and "your eyes" a reference to the influences of thought. In other words, how parents live, as well as what they read or watch (printed material, television, and movies), is critical to their success in preparing

their children for life. It is also critical to the survival of their communities -- and their nation.

Understandably, people all over the world were horrified by the shootings that turned a pleasant, middle-class suburb of Denver into a symbol of the worst of the present culture. But will they consider their own actions, that they may well have helped to create and sustain our present evil world? More importantly, will their shock motivate them to the level of change that is needed?

A culture that excuses its disobedience to and ridicules respect for the Ten Commandments of God has mortgaged the morality of the next generation.

Until it returns to that foundation, our culture will continue to bequeath evils such as the assault on us all that took place in Littleton, Colorado -- and worse...

## Grandparents

By Lorelei Nettles

*We turned out okay, but what about our children? What foundations are set up for them and what about the recent tragedies. How can we be better parents?*



**M**Y GRANDMOTHER was originally from Sweden and spoke only Swedish until she was twelve years old. Her family came to the United States when she was a ten year old child. She danced the Mexican hat dance at parties and was an active member of the Moose Lodge for years. She lived until the day after she turned 91 and was active until the very last years of her life. She was sweet, thrifty, and loving.

Unfortunately that is all I really know about her. Even though she lived with us for a while when I was young, I never took the time to talk to her about much of anything. Later I became so involved in my own life I only acknowledged her with a card or the occasional mundane conversation while attending a family function. What I already knew of her and the fact that I loved her might be enough for some people, but oh how much I missed.

She died with out my knowing very much information, so much wisdom that I will never get a chance to tap into. After her death, (as is usually the case) I kicked myself for never letting her know how much I cared about her, how interested I was in her life and my family history. I want to ask her questions--questions that only she could honestly answer. I will forever wonder what mysteries her life held that could have helped me in mine. What could she have taught me about life? What trials had she been through?

*One way we can honor our parents is by showing more love, care and interest for their parents.*

We know we should honor our mother and father; it is the fifth commandment. What about grandparents? Don't they deserve the same honor? By extension isn't this fulfilling the fifth commandment? One way we can honor our parents is by showing more love, care and

interest for their parents. Our grandparents hold a treasure of information. They can tell us our histories, family as well as medical and how to make that favorite dish we've always adored. They hold within them true stories that can curl our toes or roll us on the floor with laughter. The information they hold about our own parents can help us to better understand them. Most of all they have a special love for us that no one else has.

So often we overlook those people closest to us, thinking that they will always be there. Some of us miss important moments because we just aren't looking at our grandparents as anyone special. I know that I, for so many different reasons, did not reach out and now I regret it. I must admit I have envied those who had or have that special relationship with their grandparents. They took the time. They make the connection. While grandparents play a part in reaching out too, I think often times they just don't find an open door. They may not believe we would be interested or feel that there is nothing outstanding in their life, but this is not the case. They hold memories of times, events, and family histories.

Learn from the mistakes I made. Reach out to your grandparents before it is too late. Make a connection; be there for them. Ask questions for you may be thrilled to find out that they are more than willing to share and open up to you. Glean their wisdom. Learn from them; they have been through more than you can imagine and seen the world change in ways we never will. Chances are they know where you are coming from even if you don't. Most of all love them; they deserve it. Remember they have made mistakes just as you have and will. Sometimes you have to look beyond the image you have built of them to find the real person you never knew.

*Our grandparents hold a treasure of information* Have your grandparents show you family photographs, telling you who each person is and maybe a little about them. Maybe they had to do laundry by hand or perhaps they worked in a mine. Maybe they were in a war somewhere or even loved to disco! Who knows what interesting things they may have done? My husband loves a good storm and I have grown to appreciate them too, all due to the interest his grandmother sparked in him. She told him to sit on the steps and watch the clouds because something was brewing. Her love of storms was passed on to him. It's a small thing, but he will always remember it.

One of my best friends once told me that the best thing she ever did was to spend time with her grandmother before she died. They were lucky because they knew what was coming and could set aside the time to be together. She learned more in that short time by just asking questions, but most of all by simply listening. It is one of her best memories. It makes her smile and brings her joy whenever she speaks of it.

I have been given a second chance through my husband's family. I have turned to my husband's grandmother and asked her questions. I heard stories and through them got to know both my mother-in-law and my husband better. It took me a little while to get through to her; she just couldn't understand why anyone would want to know some of her old stories. Once we got going though, I was thrilled. The stories she told were fascinating. We laughed and I was often amazed at what came out of her mouth, as were some of the family members occasionally listening in. We can learn a lot of things from the past that help us in the here



and now.

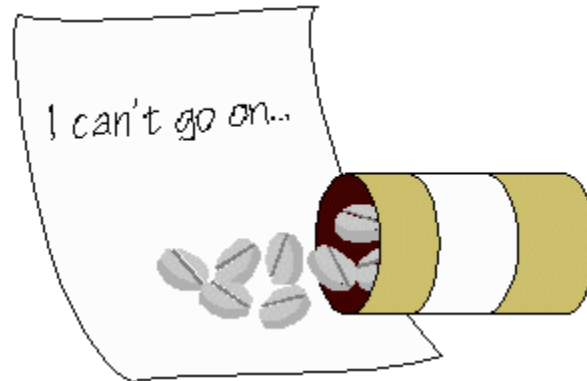
I'm glad I took the time with her before she was gone, and it taught me a good lesson. It's never too late to get to know grandparents, and grandparents can take the first step too. They just might find a captive audience. If not your own grandparents, then at least your in-laws. At the very least, teach this lesson to your children that they may experience what you never had the chance to. It is time well spent and the memories and lessons learned will last a lifetime.



## Suicide is Never the Answer

By Rainer Salomaa

*A Canadian minister's perspective on the hopeless act of taking one's life. Can you spot a suicidal person? An online source for help is included.*



**A** REPORT BY THE UNITED NATIONS Children's Emergency Fund singled out Canada as one of the countries that "head the league for suicide of young people." According to their figures, Canada's youth suicide rate of 15.8 per 100,000 people aged between fifteen and twenty-four is the world's third highest, exceeded only by the rates in Australia and Norway. In the United States, there is a reported average of sixteen teen suicides every day. Going back to Canada, statistics also reveal that among Canadians in general, more than 3,500 kill themselves every year, making the suicide rate 15.3 per 100,000. This is still well below Hungary which, according to 1992 figures, had the world's highest suicide rate of 40 suicides per 100,000. Still, although the North American rates are still cause for concern, few people like to talk about the crisis.

Suicide is the fifth most common cause of premature death among Canadians of all ages and the second leading cause of death, after accidents, among people under the age of thirty-five. Although experts estimate that one Canadian in twenty-five attempts suicide and close to eighty percent consider the idea sometime in their life, suicide statistics are often understated because many cases go unreported. Only about ten to fifteen percent of people who commit suicide leave a note. Family members often prefer to believe the cause of death as accidental rather than go through the agony of an investigation.

Doctor-assisted suicide has grabbed the attention of the Canadian news media in recent years, partly due to the case of Sue Rodriguez from British Columbia who sought to end her life and her suffering from Lou Gehrig's disease. Her highly publicized case percolated up through the Canadian court system, championed by her Member of Parliament. Similar court challenges of doctor-assisted deaths have been heard in the United States as a result of Dr. Jack Kevorkian's assistance in the suicides of terminally ill patients. Dr. Kevorkian is a retired pathologist who has acknowledged taking part in forty-five suicides since 1990 and has been acquitted in three trials covering five deaths. Recently, the Vatican condemned Australia's world-first euthanasia law as a revolt against God and a crime against life. The condemnation came after Janet Mills, 52, who had a rare form of skin cancer,

*The road to self-destruction begins with depression and ends in the grave.*

used a device driven by a laptop computer to deliver a fatal dose of drugs to end her life.

A Japanese book entitled, "The Complete Manual of Suicide" offered detailed, cartoon-illustrated, how-to instruction on methods of self-destruction ranging from pills to freezing. More graphic than an American release, "Final Exit," the Japanese best-seller even suggested "good" places to hang oneself and high buildings from which to leap.

## **A High Pressure World**

We live in a high-pressure world that often puts people over the edge. Suicide is considered to be a permanent solution to a temporary problem. The road to self-destruction begins with depression and ends in the grave. One hallmark of depression is that it causes its victims to magnify their troubles out of all proportion. Problems that commonly lead to prolonged depression include job loss, financial trouble, bad health, divorce, the death of a loved one and family difficulties. Yet there is no complete answer why someone chooses to die to escape unbearable pain. For some, it might be stress. For some, it is brain chemistry. For others, it is a despair that rots the soul. Who knows why Vince Foster, Abbie Hoffman, Marilyn Monroe, Kurt Cobain and Ernest Hemingway all chose to end their lives at the peak of their respective careers? Did they consider themselves too successful to cry for help?

Suicide rates generally increase about two years after an economic slump when unemployment benefits and hope have both run out. Even seemingly small problems such as being passed over for a promotion, losing a pet or even the onset of winter can be enough to put some over the edge. Young people are particularly vulnerable as their emotions are very fragile and they put much emphasis on what others think about them. A break up with a girlfriend can be devastating and, for some, enough cause to end it all. Warning signs are usually given. A partial list of warning signs includes:

- Depression
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Extreme mood changes
- Odd behavior
- Giving away prized possessions
- Loss of interest in work and hobbies
- Isolation from friends and family
- Loss of appetite or sexual desire
- Disturbed sleep
- Lack of interest in appearance

Here are some suggestions to anyone even contemplating suicide:

- Talk to someone.
- If you cruise the Internet, check out places like Chris Dransfelt's Suicide Help Page: <http://www.geocities.com/HotSprings/1911>
- Ask for help.
- On the above-mentioned home-page, there is a link to "45 Reasons to Say No to Suicide" and more than one hundred Chat Links.
- Consider the consequences. It's not pretty.
- Keep busy.

- Get your mind off yourself.
- Don't take yourself too seriously.
- Deal with what is making you depressed.
- Realize that time solves many problems.
- Emphasize the positive.
- Consider the worst case scenario.
- Consider other options.
- Pray for strength.
- Seek help and comfort from God's Word.

Even though prayer and going to God's Word are the last items on the list, they are really the first and most important.

There have been lonely and depressed people throughout the centuries who have found hope and comfort from the Holy Scriptures. In those pages, we discover that God loves us so deeply that He gave us the life of His only begotten Son through His voluntary death so that we might live forever and not have to die in our sins. In the Bible we find meaning and purpose to life. We find keys to happiness and successful Christian living. We find lessons and can read about mistakes that others have made - things that we don't have to repeat in our own lives.

The Bible is a book that deals with the realities of life - including the topic of suicide. The New Testament mentions the suicide of Judas Iscariot who became filled with remorse after betraying Jesus (Matthew 27:3-5 and Acts 1:16-18).

*The Bible is a book that deals with the realities of life - including the topic of suicide.*

The Old Testament states that Ahithophel hanged himself after his advice was not followed (2 Samuel 17:23). Zimri's act of arson and suicide is detailed in 1 Kings 16:18. The death of Saul and his armourbearer by suicide is covered in 1 Samuel 31:4-6. Samson killed himself in a final act of destroying a large group of Philistines (Judges 16:29-30).

In their mental and physical anguish, both Job and Solomon contemplated suicide (Job 7:14-15; Ecclesiastes 2:17-18). Jonah wanted to die (Jonah 4:3).

Back in the New Testament, the keeper of the prison in which Paul and Silas were held was about to kill himself when he thought that his prisoners had escaped (Acts 16:27).

Satan tempted Christ through suicide (Matthew 4:6). Christ responded by saying, "It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God'" (verse 7). It is too bad that nine Tanzanian pupils and a priest who tried to walk on the waters of Lake Victoria as a test of their faith did not heed Christ's statement. This incident, in which all ten drowned, received world wide coverage through an international news agency.

If you are depressed or considering suicide, please take time to read the book of Psalms. It gives hope and encouragement to help with life's difficulties. David, who wrote many of the Psalms, had more than his fair share of troubles but he successfully came through them. The Psalms will tell you, too, how you can successfully cope with your problems. Times are tough, it is true. Times will continue to be tough. In fact, the Bible says that, during a certain period

of plagues before Christ's return, many will seek relief through suicide but will not find it (Revelation 9:6).

God commands, "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13). Taking life is God's prerogative, not ours. He expects us to deal with our problems, not to try to escape from them. He advises us that there is to be a resurrection from the dead (I Corinthians 15) so we will have to face our problems down the road anyway. With this in mind, the taking of one's own life is proved to be, at best, merely a temporary solution to one's problems. Suicide is never the answer.

## An American Patriot

By Greg Thomas

*Lessons from the life of Thomas Jefferson*



**M**ANY PEOPLE THINK of Thomas Jefferson as an American patriot. His political views on individual freedom and religious liberty have greatly inspired many democratic nations around the world. We usually think of Jefferson as a man who achieved many great accomplishments in his lifetime. He was the 3rd President of the United States, and author of the American Declaration of Independence. Less known are his other lifetime achievements including Governor, Vice President, Secretary of State, Ambassador, architect, inventor, and founder of the University of Virginia. Thomas Jefferson had a lifetime of vast achievement, yet few know his life was also filled with great personal tragedy. His most significant personal achievements were accomplished during times of great personal sorrow in his life and they can provide a few valuable lessons for us.

Thomas Jefferson was not a perfect man. Like all human beings, he had a number of individual flaws and weaknesses. Recent DNA testing has established the strong possibility that he may have fathered children through a slave named Sally Hemings. However, one cannot read about his life without appreciating how much he shaped the freedoms and religious liberties many of us cherish. Throughout history, men of great governmental leadership have been rare. A study of his life shows a man who had a profound respect and belief in God and felt that basic human rights were God ordained rights. Jefferson wrote three references to God in the Declaration of Independence. Truly, Jefferson's personal faith may have embodied a reliance on God's Providence as recorded in the book of Proverbs. God states, "I have good sense and advice, and I have understanding and power. I help kings to govern and rulers to make fair laws. Princes use me to lead, and so do all important people who judge fairly. I love those who love me, and those who seek me find me" (Proverbs 8:14-17, NIV).

*Jefferson wrote*

Thomas Jefferson was born in 1743. He was the son of a Welsh farmer

*three references to God in the Declaration of Independence.* who owned a large plantation in the British American colony of Virginia. Thomas was blessed to receive a good education and strong moral teachings by loving parents. From his father and his rural surroundings he acquired a lasting interest in the sciences and in education. He also developed a love for Greek and Latin at a young age. As a young adult, he attended the College of William and Mary in the early 1760's. Jefferson eventually received his law degree in 1767.

After he began his law practice, an interest in politics led him to be selected as a delegate to the Virginia House of Burgesses. The House of Burgesses was a colonial legislative assembly under the authority of the British appointed governor. Three years later, at age 29, he married a wealthy widow named Martha Wayles Skelton.

His earliest ambitions were to study nature, manage his own farm, and complete the building of his new mountain top home he named Monticello. The word Monticello means "little mountain" in Italian. It was here that his creative talents were nurtured. One of his inventions was a clock designed with two faces. One face is inside the house, the other is on the outside wall. Jefferson connected the clock to a loud gong on the roof so that people working outside would know the time. The position of the clock weights reveal the day of the week. Another of his inventions was a lap desk. He used it to write the Declaration of Independence in Philadelphia in 1776. The desk has a hinged writing top that can be propped up at different angles. He also designed it with a drawer for storing ink, pens and paper.

Jefferson's first love was farming and he often remarked how he yearned to simply farm on his plantation, and live quietly at Monticello. However, destiny would provide other opportunities.

Jefferson was a shy person by nature and spoke in a soft voice. He was never considered eloquent in speech and gave few public speeches in his career. But, one of his earliest recognized talents was skillful writing. In his lifetime, Jefferson wrote over 18,000 letters. The American colonies felt unfairly dominated by Great Britain. Delegates from these colonies assembled as a Congress to discuss their grievances and future relationship with Great Britain. Jefferson was chosen to represent Virginia at the 2nd Continental Congress in 1775. By the time of the 2nd Continental Congress, his previously published writings on the "rights of people from tyranny" had already caught the attention of many other delegates to the Congress. Jefferson was asked to be the principle author of the American Declaration of Independence. He completed his draft in late June of 1776. For the next 5 years, he was a legislator and Governor of the state of Virginia. In 1782, Jefferson became a member of the newly formed Congress of the United States, and in 1784, he was named the American Ambassador to France.

This decade of his life was one of tremendous accomplishment. As a legislator, he had instituted many social reforms to protect individual rights and the use of private property. He played a pivotal role in the establishment of a new nation. He was influential in guaranteeing that no one church would become the official state religion of the United States or receive public state financing. This decade of his life would also bring about a number of personal tragedies.

In 1773, his father-in-law died; shortly afterward, his closest childhood

*Jefferson is not*

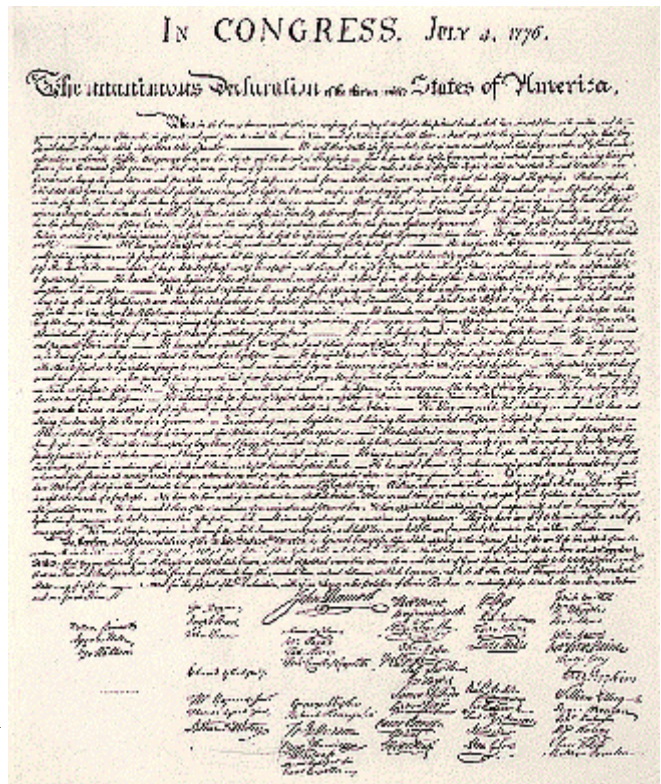
friend died suddenly leaving a wife and six children behind for Jefferson to help care for. The next year, his first daughter Jane was born, but she would die 18 months later. In 1776, his mother died unexpectedly at age 57. One year later, Jefferson's first son was born and died within a few hours of birth. *remembered for his trials, but for his accomplishments!*

The year 1781 brought more personal trials. The British army invaded Virginia and captured his beloved Monticello. Jefferson barely escaped capture by the British army. He broke his left wrist when thrown from a horse. Also during this year, his reputation was damaged when his political enemies convinced the Virginia State Assembly to investigate his conduct as Governor of Virginia. The next year, his wife Martha died just a few months after giving birth to their daughter Lucy Elizabeth. On her deathbed, she made him promise never to marry again. Jefferson was only 39 years old and although he would live another 43 years, he never did marry again.

Most of us would certainly agree that Thomas Jefferson had many distressing personal trials during this 10-year period. But, this is not all! At age 41, he experienced the death of his daughter Lucy Elizabeth who died of the whopping cough. One year later, he stumbled while walking and broke his right wrist. It was not set properly and was painful for the rest of his life. During other times of his life he also suffered from prolonged migraine headaches. Debt plagued him because while serving his country his farm deteriorated. All these events were happening while Jefferson was involved in the founding of a fragile nation. History has recorded all of his many achievements during the very years when these personal trials were occurring in his life. However, Jefferson is not remembered for his trials, but for his accomplishments!

Jefferson was a religious man. Many of his religious views were not biblical and cannot be endorsed. But, it was Jefferson who refers to God's eminence three times in the American Declaration of Independence. He is considered a "deist" by most historians, and some of his political enemies even claimed he was irreligious! In contrast to the belief of deism, we know that God plays a personal and pivotal role in the daily activities of His people and the world.

Thomas Jefferson was a firm believer of religious freedom and rejected the traditional views and doctrines of most churches that existed during his time. Feeling that some had distorted the original teachings of Christ, Jefferson assembled a personal journal consisting of only portions of the four gospels and created a book now known as the Jefferson Bible. This was the book he took to bed with him to end his day. In a letter he wrote to John Adams, he stated that he read this book for "an hour or a half's...reading of something moral



whereon to ruminate in the intervals of sleep."

Thomas Jefferson was able to endure great personal hardship in life because he was a man of purpose. He viewed life as an opportunity to explore the universe and gain knowledge about the wonderful creation around him. He wrote the following statement in 1786, which reveals his zest for life even with all of its trials. "Hence the inestimable value of intellectual pleasures...Ever in our power, always leading us to something new, never cloying, we ride, serene and sublime, above the concerns of this mortal world, contemplating truth and nature, matter and motion, the laws which bind up their existence, and the Eternal being who made and bound them up by these laws. Let this be our employ."

It is obvious from his many writings and his enthusiasm for life, that he knew "contemplating truth and nature" would be beneficial beyond this mere mortal existence.

Jefferson looked beyond the present sufferings he experienced and toward the opportunities of the future. How about us? Don't we also suffer from personal problems, trials and seemingly constant adversity? How can we overcome personal adversity and, at the same time, develop the talents God has graciously granted to us?

Trials and suffering are a natural part of life in this physical world, and a part of the human experience. We can view them in a negative way and gain very little from them, or we can view them in a positive way. The New Testament discusses the purpose of trials in an honest and productive way that can result in a more fruitful life.

Let's begin by reading a statement from the Apostle Paul. "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13, NKJV).

Sometimes when we are in the middle of a trial, we may be tempted to simply give up. The temptation to stop trusting in God can quickly develop. We may sometimes feel so alone and begin to think we are the only ones experiencing a particular trial. Or we may begin to feel that God, or no one else really cares about our problems! Paul reminds us that we experience the same adversities that befall most people at one time or another in their lives. The Greek word for temptation in verse 13 literally means "putting to proof". In our modern age, we call this experience a trial. This scripture should encourage us to understand that God will not allow us to bear a trial beyond our ability to endure it. God will provide us a way of escape because He is our refuge and fortress. God wants us to know that His divine presence in our lives will allow us to overcome any personal adversity. Our loving Father knows our strengths and our limitations. He will never leave us nor forsake us in time of need! We can have hope and faith that God will provide an answer or solution when He knows the time is best.

Paul also discusses the afflictions we individually suffer in his letter to the Romans. "The Spirit Himself [itself] bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because



the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Romans 8:16-21, NKJV).

Trials and suffering are indeed part of our human experience. Some trials we suffer are self-inflicted, and some are due to circumstances beyond our control. But all trials should remind us of our need to look beyond the limited physical world we live in and realize that every trial has the potential to produce a positive learning experience in our lives. Jesus suffered various trials so he could empathize with our suffering, and become a personal atoning sacrifice for all-human suffering and sin. As his joint heirs with Him, we should be patient as we also suffer severe problems and trials knowing that we too shall be glorified together with him!

The Apostle Paul continues in verse 20, "For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees?" As physical people, we naturally groan in frustration and discouragement as we experience suffering.

Much like Jefferson, our trials usually center around a concern for our loved ones, health problems, financial problems or other personal afflictions. However, our hope is the knowledge that these temporary sufferings, like the process of giving birth, will produce an abundant new life as a glorified child of God.

*...every trial has the potential to produce a positive learning experience in our lives.* The Apostle Peter also spoke about the trials we experience. In 1 Peter 1:6, we read the following, "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ," Peter states that the

"genuineness" of our faith is tested by fire. Other versions of Scripture translate this word as the "purity" of our faith. Peter viewed suffering as both necessary and fruitful. He uses an analogy of an artisan remolding the precious metal of gold, to the sufferings we experience through various trials.

In Peter's day, gold was remolded by subjecting it to an intense fire. This intense heat destroyed the initial shape of the gold and burned off the impurities. The molten gold could now be reshaped and become even more precious. The same is true in our personal lives and the trials we experience. Problems and difficulties will often afflict us. But these trials have the capacity to reveal and purge the impurities in our character, which hinder our own growth and service to others. When the trial is completed, our very character has often been reshaped and has become more like our Creator in compassion, patience, and spiritual maturity.

Thomas Jefferson died on July 4th, 1826, the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. His final letters to fellow patriot John Adams and many other friends reveal a man who had mellowed and changed much through a lifetime of experiences and personal suffering. Because of our precious calling and knowledge of God's Word, we can have an even deeper understanding of the purpose of trials and suffering. Your faith is more precious than gold! Remember, the next time you are tested...you are God's workmanship and he is working out His great purpose for you!

*Virtual Christian Magazine Editorial***Your Kingdom Come**

By Greg Sargent

**A** COUPLE OF YEARS AGO, I had the opportunity to hear a topic presented by General Colin L. Powell at the University of Rolla, Missouri. As former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, he served as the principal military adviser to the President, the Secretary of Defense, and the National Security Council. The delivery was an address on "Management of Crisis and Change."

Thirty-five years of military service gave General Powell a unique perspective on crisis and change in the political arena of the world. For 28 years of his career, the enemy was known. Powell's assignment was simple: contain communism. Containing the communists at the Berlin Wall, at the DMZ in Korea, at the border of Vietnam and again at the Berlin wall was his commission through 1986.

However the communist crisis changed when USSR President Gorbachev in a meeting in 1987 with then U.S. Secretary George Schultz and Colin Powell stated, "I'm ending the Cold War. You'll have to find another enemy." How does the world manage such a change?

No longer would there be "Red against Blue." Words of peace and reconciliation would gradually kiss the lips of most political leaders. Israel would strive to reconcile with Palestine. Apartheid in South Africa would disappear. Vietnam would seek a democratic government. China would begin sending 40% of its exports to the United States, thereby becoming an economic pillar in U.S. relations. Technology would establish a new political environment diminishing our world into a small, controllable political-economic unit with no one yet at the controls.

As I was listening to General Powell's address, my thoughts reverted back almost 40 years to a time when no one would have imagined that such a message would ever be delivered. The USSR no longer a threat! For a moment, I became lost in time.

"If our neighbors try to take our food, we'll have to kill them."

These were shocking words to the ears of a 15 year old. But dad was serious. The Cold War matched the frigid climate of Montana where I lived in 1958. My home town along the Canadian border was on alert. In order to observe low-flying Russian bombers, which could fly below radar detection, daytime sentries were posted in a lookout tower at our small airport. Talk of building cement underground bunkers and storing food was normal supper conversation. Even the movies were portraying cowboys dropping out of the bays of B-52's, riding on the backs of nuclear warheads towards a critical target in Russia. World annihilation seemed imminent.



However, one lone voice totally contradicted the threatening scenario of the times. The Church of God proclaimed to the world that a United States of Europe would continue to rise from the destructive ashes of WWII and become the dominant economic and military threat against the Anglo-Saxon nations. Russia would be paled into insignificance by this new European power. This would be a final resurrection of the Holy Roman Empire ushering in end-time events leading to the return of Jesus Christ. I can tell you personally that no one believed me when I repeated those predictions. I wonder what they think now?

The Church of God understood the framework of prophecy because it kept God's Holy Days which outline salvation's sequence. Within that framework God placed some details which we find in the books of Daniel and Revelation -- details which spotlight historical and future events.

This year, two very significant Holy Days fall in the month of September. Each Fall the United Church of God keeps the Feast of Trumpets and the Day of Atonement. The latter foretells final at-one-ment (unity) because of Satan's demise. The former engages us in chilling episodes of the greatest battles ever to transpire, involving the end-time powers of this world and culminating in a victorious war by Jesus Christ.

As I recollected my thoughts and focused once again on the topic under discussion, everything began to fit in place. Certainly our world was becoming a small, controllable political-economic unit with no one yet at the controls. But that will change. Time will see temporary control by a pieced-together European power, followed by worldwide conflict and then Christ's return to promote and establish world unity and peace.

No storing food. No flying cowboys. No nuclear warheads.

Let's all pray for God's kingdom to come soon (Matthew 6:10).

## Letters to the Editor

### Christian Setbacks: A Question of Perspective



It has always been interesting to me that of all the writers in the Bible, Paul is the more prolific. Yet, even given the amount of letters he wrote if you compare it to his years in Body of Christ very little is known about much of his life. He gives us all a thumbnail sketch of his life experiences and by such evidence of some of the very bad and trying times he faced.

To me that is encouraging, especially when I am down or depressed over something or the other. When looking at my lack of growth in particular areas or my relapses into areas I thought I had a better handle on it becomes very discouraging.

With Paul you see that he faced such setbacks. By inference, many setbacks, but he never QUIT! He got up each time he was knocked down, which is the lesson I (personally) need from his writings. Get up, get on with it, expect more and finish to the goal.

Thank you for this article.

-- Marcus Brown, Cypress, California

### When You and Your Parents Don't See "Eye-to-Eye"



My name's Shauna and I'm 17 and I just read the article about [When You and Your Parents Don't See Eye to Eye](#). It was good. I agree with a lot of what I read. But, I also think that we need one for the parents which would explain ways how they could react positively to situations and not discourage children so quickly when they hear something rather slight that they don't like. I'd like to an article geared to adults as this one was geared to teens.

-- Shauna, Oregon

### Is Virtual Christian Magazine Available Only Online?



Is *Virtual Christian Magazine* only online or is it also sent out in the mail? In order for me to read it on line I have to tie up my telephone line.

-- Theresa Harris

*ED: We do not publish a paper version of VCM. This saves us tremendously in production*

*and mailing costs.*

*There is a link to an Adobe Acrobat "PDF file" on the Table of Contents of each issue. You can download the Acrobat Reader from [www.adobe.com](http://www.adobe.com). This software will allow you to view or print the complete issue of VCM.*

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