

Virtual Christian Magazine

Hope And Encouragement
For The Real World

*"Do not be afraid of sudden terror, Nor of trouble from the wicked when it comes;
For the LORD will be your confidence, And will keep your foot from being caught."*—Proverbs 3:25-26

Volume 7 Number 1

January 2005

Peter: From Fisherman to Faithful Fisher of Men

By Jerold Aust

Page 3



What can we learn from this man who almost walked on water?

Defeating Our Fears

By Robert Nettles

Page 9



At one time or another each of us have experienced fear. When we were children, some of us had a night-light or could not sleep with the door closed. Fear is at the root of many human failures. But God has a solution.

When Things God Does Just Don't Make Sense

By Gary Petty

Page 13



Why can it seem that God is ignoring us when we're trapped in the pit of despair? What do we do when God just doesn't seem to make sense?

Fear Factor

By Hector M. Earle

Page 17



We live in an age of fear, but God promises relief from worry and despair for those who follow Him.

Don't Dare Throw in Your Towel

By Jean Jantzen

Page 20



What might Joseph have been feeling after being sold into slavery and then locked away in prison for something he had not done? How did he get through his many trials?

Letters to the Editor

Page 22

Virtual Christian Magazine Staff

Lorelei Nettles - Managing Editor

Lorelei Nettles - Issue Editor

Becky Bennett - Staff

Mike Bennett - Staff

Tom Damour - Staff

Jack Elliott - Staff

Michelle Grovak - Staff

Don Henson - Staff

Don Hooser - Staff

Jada Howell - Staff

Patrick Kansa - Staff

John Rutis - Staff

Chris Rowland - Web Design

[Copyright 2005 United Church of God, an International Association](http://www.uchua.org)

Peter: From Fisherman to Faithful Fisher of Men

By Jerold Aust

What can we learn from this man who almost walked on water?



THE NIGHT SKY GREW DARK AND FRIGHTENING as the boisterous winds whipped up the waves that pounded mercilessly against Peter's fishing boat. The men in the boat, all disciples of Jesus Christ, rowed frantically against the ferocious winds, making little headway. In spite of the dangerous circumstances, they clung to the hope they would make it to shore and safety.

The people who lived around or made their living from the Sea of Galilee knew the capriciousness of this usually tranquil body of water. Strong winds could arise suddenly and without warning. The sailors on the Sea of Galilee had no opportunity to check the latest weather report. But they were accustomed to observing the sky, watching for familiar signs that could foretell the possibility of strong weather.



In the fourth watch of the night Jesus' followers found themselves in a serious situation, fighting a strong headwind and hammering waves. Between the fear of losing their lives at sea—always a possibility in such a storm—and the arduous, painful task of rowing to safety, they were suddenly shocked. Abruptly, and with no warning, they saw the figure of a man walking on the water near them.

In surprise and fear they cried out, “It’s a ghost!” But the “ghost” was none other than their Master, Jesus. Immediately He reassured them: “Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid” (Mark 6:50).

Characteristically, the ever-impulsive Peter spoke first: “Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water” (Matthew 14:28). Jesus told him to come ahead.

What followed depicts both the weaknesses of human beings and the spiritual strength of God. Much to his credit, Peter showed a willingness to try the humanly impossible—to actually walk on water.

Hearing Jesus’ reassuring voice and encouragement, Peter stepped overboard while none of the others dared leave the safety of the boat. He began walking toward his Master, seemingly doing the impossible with ease.

But the howling wind and crashing waves soon diverted his attention. He began to sink into the raging sea, and panic set in. With fright in his eyes he looked up to Jesus and cried, “Lord, save me!” (verse 30). Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him in a firm grip. Reassuringly, He offered a few words of instruction and comfort: “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” (verse 31).

This drama, one of many told in a few verses in the Gospels, provides us a powerful lesson in faith. This kind of trusting relationship is a gift from God but a gift that must be nurtured and used.

Peter’s life is filled with inspiring lessons; only a few are explored here. In this article we consider several that can help us compare some of our life experiences with Peter’s, with the hope that these lessons can help us grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ (2 Peter 3:18).

These lessons can help us grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ (2 Peter 3:18).

Though the Bible reveals little about Peter’s life before he met Jesus, we can learn some of his background from anecdotal accounts and factual history. Peter’s name was also Simeon, which was shortened to Simon. In the Scriptures he is also called Simon Bar-Jonah (meaning Simon, the son of Jonah).

Before Simon Peter met Jesus, he lived in the Galilean town of Capernaum and was married (Matthew 8:14). It was here that he and Andrew went into partnership with James and John, the sons of Zebedee (Luke 5:10).

Peter’s calling

Andrew and John expected the appearance of the Messiah, for they had traveled down the Jordan River valley to hear the prophet John the Baptist, cousin of Jesus of Nazareth. John the Baptist preached the coming of the Messiah, calling for his countrymen to repent.

Andrew and John had even become disciples of John the Baptist. When their teacher pointed out Jesus to them as the Lamb of God, Andrew told Simon Peter, “We have found the Messiah” (John

1:41). Andrew brought his brother to Jesus, and when Jesus looked at him He said: “You are Simon the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas” (verse 42).

Cephas is the Aramaic word for “stone”—as is the Greek name *Petros*, translated into English as *Peter*. This is how Simon bar Jona came to be known as Peter.

Some Bible scholars say Peter was called in three stages, the first stage mentioned above when he met Jesus for the first time. The second stage of his calling is identified by scholars as the time when Jesus, walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, saw Peter and Andrew casting a fishing net into the sea. Jesus said to them, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19).

The third stage of Peter’s calling is said to be when Jesus “called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles: Simon, whom He also named Peter...” (Luke 6:13-14).

The fisherman surrenders to God

Jesus taught people by the Sea of Galilee. When the crowd increased and pressed closer, He looked around and saw two boats nearby. Stepping into Peter’s boat, Jesus then asked him to put out a little from the shore so He could better teach the growing crowd. The water surface would help amplify His voice, making it easier for them to hear Him.

When Jesus finished speaking, He told Simon to go further out into the lake where the water was deeper and to lower his fishing nets (Luke 5:4). At first Simon protested that he had fished all night and caught nothing, but then said, “Nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net” (verse 5).

It’s a good thing he did. Suddenly the net was so filled with fish that it was stretched to the point of breaking. Immediately Peter signaled to his partners, James and John, to bring the other boat. Soon both boats were so weighed down with fish that they were in danger of sinking.

Surprised and humbled by this supernatural event, Simon Peter fell at Jesus’ knees saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!” (verse 8). Jesus reassured the shaken fisherman: “Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men” (verse 10). From this point on, the fisherman Peter became Peter, the fisher of men. “So when they had brought their boats to land, they forsook all and followed Him” (verse 11).



Peter witnesses the transfiguration

Peter was also a witness, along with his former fishing partners James and John, to another miracle—the apparent transfiguration of Jesus into His glorified state.

“Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him” (Matthew 17:1-3).

God showed these apostles a preview of things to come. When Jesus returns to earth, He will resurrect both the lawgiver Moses and Elijah the prophet, and they will reign forever with Christ in His Kingdom.

Perhaps the most significant lesson here is something that probably had never occurred to the disciples: Their master, the rabbi from Nazareth, was greater than Moses and Elijah, two of the greatest teachers in all of Israel’s history. “...A bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!’” (verse 5).

This momentous event strengthened the apostle Peter throughout His ministry. Just before his martyrdom, he reminded his readers of the wondrous occasion in his second epistle: “For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, *but were eyewitnesses of His majesty*. For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’ And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain” (2 Peter 1:16-18).

Peter denies Christ and a rooster crows

After Jesus and His apostles observed the Passover on the night before His crucifixion, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

“Then Jesus said to them, ‘All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: ‘I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered...’

“Peter answered and said to Him, ‘Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.’ Peter said to Him, ‘Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!’ And so said all the disciples” (Matthew 26:31-35).

Jesus understood the weaknesses of our flesh and minds—that we lack the willpower and conviction to do what we know we should. He also well understood that the apostles didn’t have the power of God’s Spirit within them, so they couldn’t as yet understand their weaknesses. They wanted to be perceived as credible, faithful and stalwart, just like we want to be perceived. They wanted to do right, as shown by their promises of loyalty, but Jesus knew better.

Peter’s denial shows the weakness of our human frame. Had we stood in Peter’s sandals at this frightening and tumultuous time, we, too, would have denied Christ.

Later, through the ability to perceive provided by God’s Spirit, they would understand. They would come to see what Jesus knew: that the fear of other people can overwhelm our best-laid plans and professions of loyalty. All the disciples would flee when their lives were at risk.

Peter would deny Jesus publicly even as his Master was being beaten and humiliated in the high priest's residence.

“Now Peter sat outside in the courtyard. And a servant girl came to him, saying ‘You also were with Jesus of Galilee.’ But he denied it before them all, saying, ‘I do not know what you are saying.’ And when he had gone out to the gateway, another girl saw him and said to those who were there, ‘This fellow also was with Jesus of Nazareth.’ But again he denied with an oath, ‘I do not know the Man!’



“And a little later those who stood by came up and said to Peter, ‘Surely you also are one of them, for your speech betrays you.’ Then he began to curse and swear, saying, ‘I do not know the Man!’ Immediately a rooster crowed. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus who had said to him, ‘Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.’ So he went out and wept bitterly” (Matthew 26:69-75).

Peter's denial shows the weakness of our human frame. Had we stood in Peter's sandals at this frightening and tumultuous time, we, too, would have denied Christ. Peter denied Jesus three times, and it wasn't a seasoned Roman soldier who confronted Peter; his first two denials were to young women who questioned him about his association with Jesus.

No doubt Peter showed some courage by following, at a distance, the arresting party into the courtyard of the high priest. Yet he panicked when bystanders questioned him. The rooster that crowed at the precise point of Peter's third denial brought Jesus' loving and patient words to mind, and Peter wept bitterly because he had betrayed His Master and friend.

Peter's restoration

Later, after Jesus was crucified, buried and resurrected, seven of the apostles went fishing with Peter (John 21). All night long they fished but caught nothing. When the sun rose the next morning they saw a man on the shore. It was Christ, although the disciples didn't know it.

“Then Jesus said to them: ‘Children, have you any food?’” (verse 5). They told Him they hadn't caught anything. “Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some” (verse 6).

They did as He suggested, and their net was so loaded with fish they couldn't draw it in. Suddenly the apostle John recognized Jesus: “It is the Lord!” (verse 7).

Peter, still impulsive, plunged into the water and swam for shore. The other apostles followed in the boat, dragging the net full of fish. When they came to land they saw a fire bed of coals and fish spread out on it, along with some freshly baked bread. Jesus had prepared a meal for them. “Come and eat breakfast,” He invited (verses 7-12).

After they had eaten, Jesus asked Peter a question: “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?” Peter answered that he did. “Feed My lambs,”

Do we see a parallel in standing for God and His truths—truths that often go against the grain of our societies', neighbors' and families' beliefs?

Jesus replied. Again He asked Peter if he loved Him. Peter again said, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” “Tend My sheep,” Jesus responded (verses 15-16).

For the third time Jesus asked Peter, “Do you love Me?” Peter was grieved that Jesus would ask him a similar question three times: “Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.” Jesus again said, “Feed My sheep” (verse 17).

This exchange reminds us of the time when Peter was questioned for his professed loyalty to Jesus. Three times bystanders questioned Peter’s association with the Master. Now Jesus questioned Peter three times about his love for and loyalty to Him. Christ’s gentle rebuke no doubt made a huge impression on the disciple.

Jesus then told Peter where his loyalty and faithfulness would lead: “Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish.’ This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, ‘Follow Me’” (verses 18-19).

A tool for God

On that last remarkable morning by the Sea of Galilee, Simon Peter had not yet received the Holy Spirit—that divine power that would transform this take-action apostle into a faithful servant.

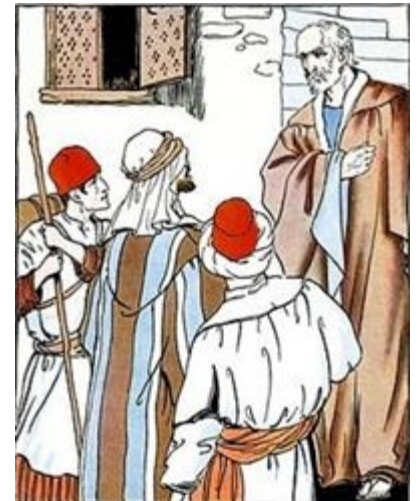
Not long after, on the Day of Pentecost, God gave His disciples the promise of the ages—the gift of His Spirit (Acts 2). From that day on the apostles were transformed men, willing to risk their lives for the sake of Jesus the Messiah (2 Corinthians 1:9). Peter would faithfully feed and tend Christ’s sheep and lambs, those whom God would call.

Peter delivered his sermon on that Pentecost boldly and with conviction. For the first time Peter truly realized the power of God’s Spirit. That sermon characterized the remainder of Peter’s life, a life dedicated to God and mankind.

Following Peter’s example

What does Peter’s example mean for us? Can we see ourselves in Peter’s experience on the windswept Sea of Galilee as he stepped out of his boat onto the waves of a roiling sea to walk toward His Master? Do we see a parallel in standing for God and His truths—truths that often go against the grain of our societies’, neighbors’ and families’ beliefs?

Peter was a fisherman whom God remade into a fisher of men. Today Jesus encourages us to feed His sheep and tend His lambs. We are called to spread the gospel to the world and help prepare a people for the family of God. We are to become fishers of men and women. There is no greater work or privilege on the face of the earth, as a man called Peter learned.



Recommended reading

Like Peter, we daily face tests of our faith. How can we follow the examples of living faith shown in the Bible? The United Church of God has prepared a free biblical booklet on this subject, [You Can Have Living Faith](#). Request your free copy or read it online—we hope you will find it helpful and inspiring.

Defeating Our Fears

By Robert Nettles

At one time or another each of us have experienced fear. When we were children, some of us had a night-light or could not sleep with the door closed. Fear is at the root of many human failures. But God has a solution.



AS WE BEGIN TO LOOK AT THE WORD *FEAR*, we can see fear comes in many different flavors, shapes and sizes. Fear can be subtle; fear can be obvious. Fear, as we know it, can be an intense motivator. Fear can also be equally destructive. We have all heard of examples of very unassuming individuals who have lifted cars off of loved ones who would otherwise have died. We have also heard of people who have run into burning buildings to help those trapped inside. These are obviously examples of motivating fear.

The fear mentioned in Deuteronomy 6:2 is obviously the kind of fear we need more of. “That you may fear the LORD your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments, which I command you, you and your son and your grandson, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged.”

This is not the kind of fear I am talking about here. The fear I am speaking of is the kind of fear we all face today, which will increase as we approach the end times—a fear that can keep us from obeying God. None of us is immune to fear, and many of those who came before us were just as susceptible to the effects of fear.

Definition of fear

According to the *Webster's Dictionary*, fear is “a painful emotion or passion excited by the expectation of evil, or the apprehension of impending danger.”

My first example of fear does not come from the Bible but from my own life. In our early years when my wife and I came into the Church, we did not have a lot of money. There were times when tithing seemed difficult, and we were afraid. We ultimately fell behind in our tithes, and we realized things were going poorly for us. (You see, God does not send bill collectors to the door.) So, after some discussion and prayer, we bit the bullet and put our tithe check in the mail. The next day we checked our incoming mail and, lo and behold, a check we were not expecting was there. Was this just a coincidence or did God bless us for exercising faith?

None of us is immune to fear, and many of those who came before us were just as susceptible to the effects of fear.

A second example is found in Proverbs 3:25-26 where we see, “Do not be afraid of sudden terror, nor of trouble from the wicked when it comes; for the LORD will be your confidence, and will keep your foot from being caught.” The fear mentioned here in Proverbs is the kind of fear that we can fall prey to if we don't prepare now and strengthen our defenses.

Speaking for myself, in the days after September 11, 2001, I experienced tremendous fear, and as the Bible tells us, this is only the beginning. In Daniel and the book of Revelation we see that fear will begin to dominate the world we know.

It could be the fear of sending in your tithes because you have started to struggle with finances.

Fears always come up, such as the fear that if we don't work on the Sabbath we may lose our job. It could be the fear of sending in your tithes because you have started to struggle with finances. I consider these obvious examples of fear. Less obvious or subtle examples would be working 15 or 20 minutes past sunset on Friday night to finish a project your boss gave you earlier in the week. Yes, this may be a subtle example, but I would consider it a form of fear. This is the kind of fear that pulls us away from God and the things we know to be true. If we allow these fears to persist in our lives, they will soon develop into habits.

Now, let's look at some examples of fear from the Bible.

Peter's denial of Christ

In Matthew 26:34-35 we read, “Jesus said to him [Peter], ‘Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.’ Peter said to Him, ‘Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!’ And so said all the disciples.” So, all the disciples, beginning with Peter, declared their undying loyalty to Christ. They said they would rather die than deny Christ.

But then what happened?

Reading further in Matthew 26:69-75, “Now Peter sat outside in the courtyard. And a servant girl came to him, saying, ‘You also were with Jesus of Galilee.’ But he denied before them all, saying, ‘I do not know what you are saying.’ And when he had gone out to the gateway, another girl saw him and said to those who were there, ‘This fellow also was with Jesus of Nazareth.’ But again he denied with an oath, ‘I do not know the Man!’ And a little later those who stood by came up and said to Peter, ‘Surely you also are one of them; for your speech betrays you.’ Then he began to curse and swear, saying, ‘I do not know the Man!’ Immediately a rooster crowed. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus who had said to him, ‘Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.’ So he went out and wept bitterly.”

Why did Peter deny Christ? It was his fear—the deep-down human fear we can have when we feel concerned. He didn’t have the faith he needed to overcome. Peter was defeated by his fear. He should have remembered Psalm 118:6 where it states, “The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?”

Peter walks on the water

In Matthew 14 we read of Jesus walking out to the disciples on the water. “And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, ‘It is a ghost!’ And they cried out for fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid’” (verse 26). Christ reassures them in their fear.

Peter, as usual, was the most impetuous of the group—if it was Jesus, Peter wanted to come to Him. After Jesus told him to come, Peter walked straight out onto the water. Now look at verses 30-31, “But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, ‘Lord, save me!’ And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, ‘O you of little faith, why did you doubt?’”

*Again and again,
we read of fear
interfering with
faith in God.*

Again, we see it was fear causing Peter’s failure.

Christ in Gethsemane

In Matthew 26:36 we find Christ and the disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane, and once again, we read of fear. But this time Jesus Himself, being in human form, felt fear. His fear was of His impending death. We see this in His plea to God in verse 39. “He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, ‘My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.’” What allowed Jesus to move forward was not His (Christ’s) will, but God’s.

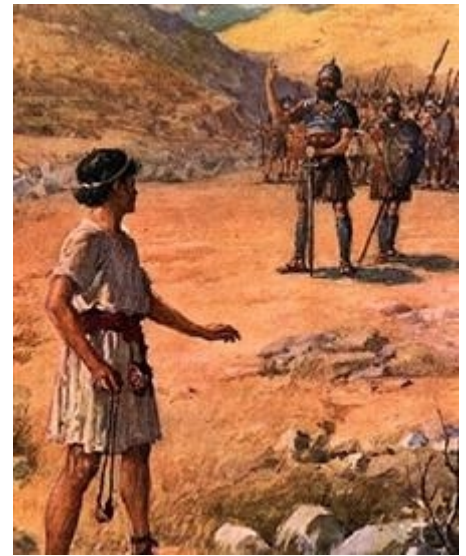
Again and again, we read of fear interfering with faith in God. Another example is in Mark 4:37 where Jesus slept on a ship while the disciples feared for their lives in a storm. Again, Jesus chided them for their lack of faith.

In Daniel 3 Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego were to be burned alive for their refusal to bow to Nebuchadnezzar’s idol. Seriously, could you put yourself in their position and have no fear at all?

Not likely. Yet what was it that gave them the courage to say what they said and stand by their words (verses 16-18)? It was their strong and abiding faith in God.

Faith can overcome fear

Probably the two most well-known examples of strong faith are the stories of Abraham and Isaac in Genesis 22 and David and Goliath in 1 Samuel 17. In the first, we have Abraham faithfully going up the mountain to sacrifice his son. And in the second we have the teen David coming face to face with a giant. Again, what gave these people their strength against the most powerful of fears man has, that of death itself?



In every one of these cases the answer is faith! Fear can stop us from doing what is right. It can stop us in our tracks. We cannot let it invade our lives. We are to put it away from us and lean on God when we get into fearful situations. The examples that come from the Bible of extreme faith exhibited by Abraham, Isaac, Moses, Noah, David, Daniel (I could go on and on) should be inspirations to all of us.

As we pray, we need to ask God to give us the strength to defeat our fears by the power of His Holy Spirit and our faith in God. *This is our armor and these are our weapons. We need to strengthen them, so our fear does not overcome and defeat us.*

We are continually reminded in Scripture to avoid fear and find our faith.

In Psalm 34:4 we read, “I sought the LORD, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears.” In 2 Timothy 1:7 we read, “For God has not given us a spirit of fear; but of power and of love and of a sound mind.”

And in Matthew 17:19-20, “Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, ‘Why could we not cast [the demon] out?’ So Jesus said to them, ‘Because of your unbelief; for assuredly I say to you, If you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there; and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.’”



The faith of a mustard seed! This is something tangible. We can visualize it and see how small it is. If we have this kind of faith within us, we can conquer all of our fears—we can move mountains! We have to believe it and use the Spirit God gave us. Romans 10:17 states, “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”

As we see the fears around us increasing on a daily basis, we need to pick up our slings, sharpen our swords and, like David, find the faith we need to slay our giants.

When Things God Does Just Don't Make Sense

By Gary Petty

Why can it seem that God is ignoring us when we're trapped in the pit of despair? What do we do when God just doesn't seem to make sense?



HOW CAN I TRUST GOD when many times I just don't understand what He's doing? Have you ever felt that way?

Most people claim to believe in a Supreme Being, and in the United States ideas about God are traditionally shaped by the Christian Bible. The Bible teaches that God is loving, all-powerful and able to be everywhere at the same time. Yet many times those who believe in God find themselves in situations that don't seem to make sense. Why doesn't God intervene in a personal crisis? Why is a young person allowed to suffer an untimely death? Have we been left here on planet earth to sort of work this out for ourselves?

Every human being desires a purpose in his or her life...a reason for existence. All of us possess an emotional necessity to believe that we have value and that there is meaning in suffering. These needs originate in an inherent deep-seated hunger for God. We try to fill that hunger with careers, wealth, sex, drugs, social crusades, the newest pop psychology theory, but the hunger stills exists. This hunger can't be satisfied until we recognize that we were created to have a relationship with the Creator.

Why doesn't God always answer prayer?

One of the remarkable gifts the Creator has given human beings is free will. We have self-consciousness, creativity, emotions and the ability to reason and make choices.

This ability to make choices is why the world is in such a mess. Human history is a catalog of failed experiments involving governments, religions and philosophies that promise happiness, peace and prosperity for everyone. The missing ingredient in all of these experiments is the way of life designed by the Creator of life.

It's not that God doesn't want to be involved, it's that most of the time we don't invite Him to be involved. Each of us labors under the belief that "I can do it my way" and make life work. Unfortunately, we seldom stop and ask, "Is this really working?"

We can talk with God anytime, but a quirk of human nature is that if we don't get an immediate and positive answer we conclude God didn't respond to our prayer.

When God doesn't seem to respond to our prayers, we need to ask, "Have I been cut off from God because I've been living in rebellion against Him?" The prophet Isaiah says, "Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save...but your iniquities have separated you from your God" (Isaiah 59:1-2)

Sometimes we need to evaluate our own humility before the Creator of the universe. He's not the proverbial genie in a bottle granting wishes to those who perform the right incantations. It is easy to approach God with a flippant, disrespectful attitude and wonder why He doesn't respond to us.

Jesus said that if we have faith then we can ask God to move mountains and He will cast them into the sea. It's safe to say that God doesn't want Christians going around throwing all the mountains into the sea. One of the most difficult aspects of having free will is having enough trust in God to say, "Your will be done." We must have confidence that God has our best interests at heart.

Sometimes God's answer isn't what we want

Sometimes we have to accept that God's answer is "no" or "wait." Any adult understands that "wait" is a wise response to a five-year-old boy's request for a pocketknife even though "wait" seems arbitrary, even cruel, to the child because of his limited reasoning ability.

Anyone who works with children has tried to explain a simple concept only to be asked repeatedly, "Why?" No matter how many times you change your wording, talk slower or raise your voice, sometimes a child just can't understand the reality of an adult.

It's the same way between God and us. He sees a bigger picture of life. He understands our personalities, our weakness, our anxieties; and He cares about our ultimate good. Unfortunately, with our limited minds we keep asking, "But why, Daddy?" At some point we have to trust that Daddy knows what He's doing.

Due to our limitations as human beings, there are going to be times when God seems beyond our reach. It is haunting to consider Jesus' exclamation, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46). It's hard to imagine the Son of God experiencing that level of despair. Yet, in that statement we can find comfort. Christ, who sits in heaven at the right hand of the Father,



knows what it's like to feel estranged from the Majesty and Power of the universe. He experienced what it is to be human.

In that way Christ's intercession is more than a legal action of taking our sins upon Himself. It is a personal relationship. Because of Christ's intercession, we can ask God for what the apostle Paul calls the "peace of God, which surpasses all understanding" (Philippians 4:7). We may not always be able to understand what God is doing, but we can experience inner peace and confidence in what He is doing.

People confused by Jesus

Jesus had a special relationship with a man from Bethany named Lazarus. John 11 records how Jesus was preaching in a nearby town when messengers arrived to inform Him that Lazarus was very ill. Jesus then does something that seems to make no sense—instead of rushing to the side of his sick friend He stays where He was for two days. In fact, He deliberately waits until Lazarus dies before going to Bethany.

Imagine the thoughts that went through the minds of Christ's disciples. He performed miracles wherever He went but now He deliberately delays going to His seriously ill friend.

It's not that God doesn't want to be involved, it's that most of the time we don't invite Him to be involved.

Jesus arrives in Bethany and is confronted by Martha, Lazarus sister. She is perplexed by Jesus' delay. His actions towards His friend just don't make any sense. Martha says to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died" (John 11:21).

Mary, Lazarus' other sister, is also perplexed by Jesus' delay and asks Him why He didn't come sooner. Jesus becomes so overwhelmed by the grief of those around Him that John records that He wept with them.

Jesus then goes to Lazarus' tomb and prays for God to resurrect Lazarus from the dead as proof that He is the Messiah. Lazarus comes walking from the tomb, wrapped in his burial clothes, like some mummy in a horror film.

Lazarus' death had been allowed by God as part of a greater plan to reveal His Son. Of course, there was no way for friends and family to understand that during the crisis. God's picture was much bigger than their immediate difficulties. And there lies the dilemma, human beings must trust in God's bigger plan even though we can't always see it.

Life is like putting together a 1,000-piece jigsaw puzzle. You have to trust that eventually all the pieces will fit together to create the picture on the cover of the box.

God's help in times of despair

Our predicament originates in a simple concept. Human beings were made in the image of God. Sin is any action, thought or emotion that is the opposite of how the Creator designed life. Once sin enters into our experience our emotions and thoughts become twisted. The result is suffering, broken relationships, meaningless lives and eventual death.

The gospel is the message of how God sent His Son to take our sins upon Himself and receive the penalty we deserve. But that isn't all there is to the gospel. Human beings are the only incomplete creation on earth. We have to be prepared for eternity. Eternity arrives when Christ returns a second time to resurrect the dead and establish His Father's Kingdom on this earth.

Understanding why our lives got into such a mess and how God has a plan to get us out of the mess is the beginning of seeing that bigger picture. We have to accept that our emotions and thought processes are damaged. Then we can begin to seek the help of God in being healed. This includes living the way of life outlined in the Bible. Healing is more than going to a physician. You must also put into action the changes needed for getting well.



This healing includes accepting God's love and the incredible future He has in store for those who are willing to let Him be involved in their lives. Today we can, in a very limited way, begin to view our present sufferings in the tapestry of the Creator's plan for His creation including Christ's Second Coming to fix the world we live in.

Many times it is easier to heal human illness than damaged human emotions. When faced with terrible loss, or a difficult time of life, first accept that it's OK to be human. Emotions like grief are a natural response to intense loss not a lack of faith.

We have to accept that our emotions and thought processes are damaged.

It's important to have a support group in times of crises. You don't want to end up isolated. Most importantly, we need to be able to pour out our emotions to God. Write down what you are experiencing and read these intimate thoughts and feelings to God in prayer.

God isn't the cause of suffering, but He is the only solution. As beings with free will, we have the opportunity to explore every possible solution to the human condition. We continue to come up woefully short.

When most of us are suffering, the outcome isn't as dramatic or immediate as it was for Lazarus, Martha and Mary, but during the dark days of Lazarus' illness and death they did not know what the outcome would be. All they had during those times of despair was a faith that God had not abandoned them and that Lazarus would some day be resurrected from the dead. Faith is more than belief in God. It is the trust that He is always acting for the ultimate, eternal good for every human being. It is the basis for hope in the future.

This article is based on the transcript of a Good News radio broadcast. Good News Radio is heard on stations across the country. For an Internet listing of stations and times or to download radio programs, go to <http://www.ucg.org/radio>. You can also download or request the free booklet offered on this program, [You Can Have Living Faith](#).

Fear Factor

By Hector M. Earle

We live in an age of fear, but God promises relief from worry and despair for those who follow Him.



IT SEEMS THAT PEOPLE EVERYWHERE TODAY are suffering from some sort of mental strain. Millions worry about family problems, business pressures, the economy and the state of their nation. Others experience anxiety and nervous strain over health problems and financial woes. Someone once said that this is no longer the nuclear age, but rather the age of fear of the unknown and the unexpected. Certainly since 9/11, fear seems to be more prevalent. Needless to say, fear robs us of contentment, injects negative emotions into our personality and creates a toxic effect on our individual and collective health. In extreme cases it can even ruin our entire lives.



Of course, not all fears are harmful. Without normal healthy fears none of us would be alive. Proper fear is merely the drive for self-protection. Without this kind of fear, we would not exercise proper caution against accidents, disease and injuries. Helpful fears, when properly managed, protect us from a host of potential hazards and dangers. However, when the mind is plagued with unhealthy fear, that fear works against us internally to sabotage healthy living.

The disabling effects of fear

When we're assailed by threats from the outside, we sometimes disable ourselves with fears from within that can turn obsessive. This sabotaging fear distorts our perception of ourselves and the reality of the dangers we face. It erodes confidence that we can handle a particular threatening relationship or situation and come out of it intact. This form of anxiety undermines even the best of plans with insecurity, inadequacy and self-doubt, which lead to a loss of heart that is crippling

and increase our vulnerability to danger. Consequently, numerous phobias torment us and rob us of happiness and our well being.

When destructive fear is entrenched in our lives, we must remember that the eternal God is greater than all our fears. Fear comes when we ignore God's word or walk contrary to Him, but carnal, uninformed people do not even know enough to fear Him, and often even deny His existence. He desires to empower us to dismantle and demolish fear's strongholds in our lives (2 Corinthians 10:4). Fear must be uprooted and the truth implanted so that we are freed not merely to survive but to thrive in a dangerous world (John 8:32). Life is never risk-free. But freedom from overwhelming fear empowers us to enjoy all that God offers us in a fallen world.

When we're assailed by threats from the outside, we sometimes disable ourselves with fears from within that can turn obsessive.

God's antidote

Indeed fear is torment, especially if it consumes us with worry and despair. That is why our Creator in other places in Scripture, gives us direction as to what to do when unhealthy fears overwhelm us. Speaking through the prophet Isaiah, God tells us not to fear for He will always be there for us in time of trouble. "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you" (Isaiah 41:10).

Freedom from overwhelming fear empowers us to enjoy all that God offers us in a fallen world.

Jesus tells us not to allow fear to overcome us. When speaking to His disciples in the book of John, He tells them to "let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me" (John 14:1). On another occasion He challenges us to come to Him with all our cares and worries. "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

The psalmist David also promises us God's divine deliverance from troubles and fear. He writes: "The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their cry...The righteous cry out and the LORD hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles" (Psalm 34:15-17).

According to the Scriptures, the greatest antidote for fear is love. The apostle Paul writes, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18). The worries and stresses we encounter come from the fear we have when our love for God and our fellow man has not been perfected. (See Luke 10:27.) Love is doing what God commands. "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3). Love, then, is the perfect fulfillment of God's law according to the spirit and intent. It is the summation of all that is good and right.

It is God's commandments (summed up in the two greatest commandments—love for God first and neighbor second), which define right and wrong. By loving and obeying God's commandments, we avoid the dangers and pitfalls of unhealthy fears. God has promised us that instead of being plagued by fear, He will fill us with love, power and a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7). This kind of mind enables us to put our trust in God in time of trouble instead of being consumed with the fears and cares of this world. Allowing God's Spirit to dwell in us can indeed give us that kind of faith that brings a soundness of mind to confidently deal with the storms of life. It is no wonder that the early Church of God had peace and contentment when "walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 9:31).



There is no better life than living according to, and safely within, the laws of God. Life outside of God's divine laws causes people to run the enormous risk of becoming victims to the multitude of fears and phobias of this world. Our Creator has set dynamic spiritual laws in motion. If we choose to violate God's laws, we will eventually suffer and succumb to the torments of this age. We should choose rather to develop the greatest healthy fear of all—the fear of God. Fear in this sense means a healthy respect and adoration for our bountiful Father in heaven who supplies our every need.

How different this kind of fear is from the fears and torments of this world. Instead of allowing Satan to fill our minds with doubts and fears, let us focus on all that is good, true, noble, right, pure, lovely and honorable (Philippians 4:8).

With this kind of mindset, God enables us to follow Him into battle against the forces of evil in the midst of our fears. As we strap on our spiritual armor and prepare for war (Ephesians 6:10-18), we must not pretend that fear of the enemy doesn't exist. But we must move forward with conviction and resolve in spite of the genuine threat posed by the flaming arrows of the evil one or the opposition we face from the adversaries in this world. What must preoccupy our thoughts are the reassuring words of Paul: "The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it" (1 Thessalonians 5:24 New International Version), and "The Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one" (2 Thessalonians 3:3, NIV).

We should choose to develop the greatest healthy fear of all... a healthy respect and adoration for our bountiful Father in heaven who supplies our every need.

When we are faced with difficulty, anxiety and sorrow, let us lay everything out before the very Son of God, and listen to Him say, "Let not your heart be troubled..." (John 14:27). For in doing so, we will allow God's soothing Spirit to keep our hearts and minds safe in union with Christ Jesus and eliminate fear as a controlling factor in our lives.

Don't Dare Throw in Your Towel

By Jean Jantzen

What might Joseph have been feeling after being sold into slavery and then locked away in prison for something he had not done? How did he get through his many trials?



SLUMPED AGAINST THE DANK COARSE STONE WALL, his sleep shallow and troubled, Joseph shook himself awake when something rubbed against his hand. Protectively yanking his hand towards him, he glimpsed a gaunt rat as it scurried to the prisoner sleeping a stone's throw away. Rubbing the sleep from his eyes, Joseph wondered why: "If God is working in my life, and I am trying with all my heart to obey His laws, why have I been thrown into this dungeon in Egypt?"

Hadn't he made the best of a nightmarish series of events that kept him from family and friends? Certainly, it had been a frightful time when his brothers sold him into slavery for 20 pieces of silver. Still, he believed God had great things in store for him. In his youthful zeal, Joseph thought his position of increasing authority in Potiphar's household could be the great adventure of his life. He took courage in the challenges presented him, worked hard, made the best of a bad situation, knowing God was for him and would bless his efforts.

God took careful note of Joseph's growing godly character and conduct. In time, his boss did become a very rich man and Joseph was a great man in his household (Genesis 39:2-4). Joseph must have been flying high. God decided to test Joseph further. It must have been like an unexpected punch in the gut when Potiphar's wife falsely accused him of attempted rape.



Lessons for us today

What if we, too, like Joseph, have worked hard over the years to serve God, faithful in obeying His commandments, faithful in tithing, in prayer, in our Christian conduct and in helping the fatherless and widow—and done all this in spite of minor setbacks and trials? So, what if after years of faithfulness, when we believe we are in the homestretch, instead of achieving health and

prosperity, we find hard financial times besetting us, or our bodies are wracked by some deadly malady? Or perhaps without cause we're persecuted and punished. Will we take it patiently like Joseph?

In the belly of the earth he'd been thrown into, Joseph knew he'd done the best he could. He called out to God for deliverance daily. He might have wondered "why me?" after serving God with all his might in Potiphar's household. But God answered his prayers according to what God wanted Joseph to learn—and what God wanted to learn about Joseph—not what Joseph thought he deserved. He was not quickly liberated; nevertheless the jailer favored him because he saw the virtue and integrity that shone in his eyes. He gave Joseph privileges and responsibilities others did not have (Genesis 39:22-23).

He might have wondered "why me?" after serving God with all his might in Potiphar's household.



And then it looked like God at last would release him from his chains. Joseph undoubtedly wondered: "Hadn't God sent the Pharaoh's butler and the cook to prison for that very reason? Hadn't God shown him the meaning of their dreams?" His heart beat fast in anticipation of God's next move. He could taste his impending reward. He was sure to be freed soon from this abyss. But days passed slowly. The drudgery of prison life engulfed him once again. It would be 730 days of wondering, "When is God going to answer my prayer?"

On the journey toward our promised greatness, will we wonder "why" if we end up in dungeon-like, black-hole situations—finding ourselves emotionally, spiritually and physically drained? Do we on occasion wonder if maybe God doesn't hear our prayers after all? Or do we grasp this: it is only when we have been disciplined by God over a long period that we are indeed, only ready for that last and most difficult testing period? Do we understand that those last few grueling meters before the end of the race refine the character of endurance He demands of us? Our Father knew what He was saying when He inspired the apostle Paul to write that all things work together for good (Romans 8:28).

What else can we learn from Joseph's story? We could wonder, "How come we're not all rolling in dough?" because people misunderstand Malachi 3:10. "Bring all the tithes into the storehouse...and try Me now in this," says the LORD of hosts, "if I will not open for you the windows of heaven, and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it."

God took careful note of Joseph's growing godly character and conduct.

But we might realize as Joseph probably did: If God poured great riches and/or power on each of us too soon, wouldn't that defeat His own great purpose for us? Christ is preparing us for an office, a responsibility in which we *will be* well trained—as He was preparing Joseph for great things, great things He had shown Joseph in a dream as a very young man (Genesis 37:6-11). When we were called, God showed us a glimpse of great things to come (Revelation 2:26-28). But most of us could not presently handle being wealthy, as Joseph was not yet ready for great responsibilities (Luke 18:24-25).

Look toward the ultimate goal

As God's people, our eyes should be on the ultimate goal—the true riches of the Kingdom rather than on present distresses. Of course, it is nice to know where the next meal is coming from, or the mortgage payment, or if that relationship will work out or if our sick bodies will recover. But no matter the circumstances, we need not worry. God has never left us for long with our bellies empty or without shelter when we earnestly prayed to Him. When life is a grind, we know in our hearts that God means the best for us. Just as He never let go of Joseph's hand, but tried and tested him until He could give him the promised greatness, He will not let go of ours either.

Christ is preparing us for an office, a responsibility in which we will be well trained.

Our Creator doesn't always pour out physical blessings because we give Him what belongs to him. But He does bless us in other ways, often after hardship, trial and tribulation.

If we can be like Joseph, God will eventually open up the windows of heaven and pour down overflowing blessings.

We are to be looking for spiritual riches. If we can be like Joseph, God will eventually open up the windows of heaven and pour down overflowing blessings. Like the psalmist says: "He sent a man before them, Joseph, sold as a slave. They bruised his feet with shackles, his neck was put in irons, till what he foretold came to pass, till the word of the LORD proved him true" (Psalm 105:18-20, NIV).

So let's walk through the tedious and tough situations life throws our way knowing that we, too, need to be proved true. And know that "...God was with [Joseph] and rescued him from all his troubles. He gave Joseph wisdom and enabled him to gain the goodwill of Pharaoh king of Egypt..." (Acts 7:9-10). God will do the same for us, so never throw in the towel! Stay true to God especially when times are most difficult. Never compromise your commitment to our Father, and He will give you the promised crown of righteousness.

Letters to the Editor

Searching for gossip!

I came across your magazine online when I was searching for a good article on [gossip](#). It was fabulous, and your magazine looks it too! Is it possible to get your newsletter via e-mail? Oh I hope so! I have shared it with those I work with and it blessed us. Thank you so much.

— Wendy

We are sorry, but at this time we do not have an e-mail alert system for VCM, but you are more than welcome to print it out to share with your friends. New issues are posted the first of each month if you want to bookmark our page. We do, however, offer a free print magazine called The Good News that can be mailed directly to your home. Just e-mail info@ucg.org or [click here](#) and request it. There is no obligation and no one will contact you beyond sending you the magazine.

Some feedback messages are edited for space and/or clarity