

# Virtual Christian Magazine

Hope And Encouragement  
For The Real World

## Father in the house

by Robert Berendt



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United Church of God  
An International Association

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Being a father means much more than siring children and establishing a home. It means being involved in their training, education, work ethic and more. It is a great privilege to be a father – God planned that responsibility for men to

take up. Without women, that would be impossible,



so we never want to downplay the importance of women either.

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Most of us have been fortunate enough to have a caring and loving father in our homes and involved in our lives. There were six children in our family and the four older ones had that kind of father until they were adults, my younger two sisters were not even teenagers when our father died. There was much that was missing in their lives – that which only a father could supply. My memories of my father are many, but one I do not forget was the way in which he could read a book or draw a map with great accuracy. He could read, write and speak about five languages and it seemed he knew about all there was to know about almost anything. I recall his offer to translate musi-

cal text for a friend – from Latin into English. There was much to admire. My dad was a coal-miner and was almost killed more than once. On one occasion of a cave-in, he was buried, but his partner dug him out before he could suffocate. Miners were that way – they stood up for one another. I have often thought about the courage he showed by going back to work and into danger so the family could be fed. Fathers are that way. That does not mean he was not human in every way. He had his faults, but the good things outweighed them by a whole lot. In thinking about my dad, there is much that cannot be defined that he did to influence my life and the lives of us all.

Ever since the Garden of Eden, men and women have bungled their way through parenthood. Children are our most precious asset and yet in this wonderful land that was developed and defended by our forefathers – children have been born into circumstances they cannot control and that had good or bad impacts on their lives and on their character. When parents are incapable of providing a strong and solid basis for children to grow and develop into sta-

ble citizens, the country suffers. Some children seem to overcome all obstacles and win success in the end, but their ranks are few in number. Paul stated that through one man (Adam) sin entered the world (Romans 5:12). We need to realize that Eve was complicit along with Adam in the sin, but it seems that Adam had a greater responsibility because as the Bible states: “Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression” (I Timothy 2:14). There is a reason God seems to have placed more responsibility upon Adam. Paul went on to write in verse 15 that “she” will be saved in childbearing if “they” continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control. After their sin, God put them both out of the Garden and explained that women would have sorrow and pain in childbearing and be under the rule of her husband (Genesis 3:16). Adam was also given a hard life of providing for his wife and family. Both of them were no longer as close to God and had severe lessons to learn.

It was no accident that when Jesus came to reveal God, He revealed Him as our Father (Matthew 11:25-27). The term “father” de-

finer a position that God holds in our lives. We are to learn of Him through the concept of fatherhood. In all that is written in this article – there is no missing or forgetting that mothers are just as vital. Children have many facets of their nature and character that need to develop. Without one of the parents, something vital is missing. Fathers have an important role. There are over 40 references to those who are “fatherless” in the Bible. Many of them indicate a state of great loss. In almost every culture, the father figure is strongly upheld. One of the first strong commands God gave to the Israelites who were His people was to be sure they did not afflict the widow or the fatherless (Exodus 22:22-24). God goes so far as to say that if they did afflict the fatherless, he would make their children fatherless. War does that all too frequently and the last world war cost tens of millions of lives of men mostly, leaving many children fatherless. Among other scriptures we see the instruction: to be sure the fatherless have enough food (Deuteronomy 14:29; 16:14), that they are to be given justice in all things (Deuteronomy 27:19), that their property is to be kept safe (Isaiah 10: 1-2) and

that none are to raise their hand against the fatherless (Job 31:21). God is very concerned about the safety and wellbeing of the fatherless, because they were helpless in some instances. A father is a defender and protector of his children and grandchildren James was inspired to write that true religion included taking care of the widows and orphans (James 1:27). The father in the house is a vital part in the well-being of the family.

God is a father unto the fatherless (Psalms 68:5) and a defender of widows. This important part of His character shows how God understands what the lack of a father in the house can mean. This very important concept ought to help us all understand how important it is to really reach out to those who are without a father or husband. We are not to weaken them by doing everything for them, but we are to be merciful, understanding and helpful to them. A father doesn't do everything for a child; they want the child to be strong. I recall one day when I came home with a bloody nose and cut on my head. I had been in a fight with the older boys in our town. Not uncommon for me in those days during WWII. When I

came to my father, his first question was: "What does the other fellow look like?" or in other words – did you defend yourself? He wanted me to stand up for myself. I did not get a lot of sympathy because he wanted me to become a man. He knew that one day I would have children and I needed to be a "father" to them. The kind of father I would become had a lot to do with the manner in which my father worked with me. My brother and I learned to use a large Swede saw to cut logs for the winter. It was hard work for two young boys on the end of that huge saw-blade. But our father knew that doing that work would develop a good work ethic in us as well as build strong healthy bodies – and it did. He encouraged us, but let us do the work. All the lessons we were taught were helpful and have stayed with us both all our lives.

Some fathers do not know how to be real fathers. They have sired a child, but never learned to be a dad. It is an all too common story these days. God intended humans to have children when the parents were still young and full of energy. Fathers would romp and play with the children. Fun was part of

growing up with a father in the house. My father built us a "Tarzan swing" in the back yard – and then showed us how to use it. He could do tricks and we thought he was great. There was also a serious side to life in our home. My father worked shifts in the mine. Day shift, afternoon shift and night shifts alternated every two weeks. There were some weeks when my dad was sleeping during the afternoon or the evening. We learned to respect his need for rest. Our mother made sure we understood the need for quiet in the home. We learned to respect others through that experience and exercise. Sometimes my dad had a sore back and would sit with his rear in the oven of our wood stove, so the heat from the stove could warm his back. But he never complained and that too was part of his strength and our lessons in life.

There is a reason God commands everyone to "Honor your father and mother." Dads teach us how to live, to think and how to be responsible. Those lessons are intended to save our lives (Exodus 20:12). The command is also to teach us to respect the efforts of our father in providing a good life for

us. In a poem called “Measuring Rods” a man once wrote: “I know what father’s face is like, it’s like his whistle in the air, like his step on the stair, like his arms that take much care, and never let me fall, And so, I know

what God is like – He’s everything my father seems, but greater than all of these.”

**For more helpful reading request our free booklet: Marriage and Family The Missing Dimension.**

## Written on His Hands

By Katherine Rowland

My teenaged son has a bad habit of writing things on his hands. We'll be sitting across from each other at the dinner table, he'll reach for a napkin, and I see the telltale flash of blue ink. The ensuing conversation usually begins with my saying, "Really? Have you not been introduced to paper?"

Often, his rejoinder is this: "Mom, the teacher started assigning the homework after the bell rang and we had already put our books away. I don't have time to get things out again. I didn't want to forget."

I was thinking about this the other day, remembering similar conversations held with my own mother when I was in high school. I remember that the things I would write on my hands were usually important things: phone numbers, homework assignments, and different tasks I needed to remember. Sometimes, they would be messages from a friend. I don't know why it was so special if a friend wrote some silly word or drew a picture on

my hand, but it was. These were all things that I wanted to remember, and that I would see over and over throughout the day. My hands were always there before my eyes; that same flash of blue ink a vivid reminder of something I wanted to commit to my memory.



This little trip down memory lane reminded me of one of my favorite

scriptures. In Isaiah 49:14, we read: *But Zion said, "The LORD has forsaken me, and my Lord has forgotten me."* "Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely, they may forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands; your walls are continually before Me."

God promises throughout the Bible that He will not forget His people or forsake them, though they may be tested, tried, or even punished. When I read this particular statement of that promise, though, it is so much more vivid and personal. We are inscribed on God's hands.

It isn't as though we are a bad memory that He has to remember, that He can't forget. If we are written on His hands, then surely it is a safe conclusion that He wants to remember us; that we are indeed something He treasures and does not want to forget.

In Matthew 28:18 we read Jesus' instructions to His disciples and another promise, one that goes beyond remembering. *And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*

Not only does God remember us, but He promises to be with us always.

Along with this Paul points out that He will remember more than our names. He will remember our work. *For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises (Hebrews 6:10-12).*

We do not need to fear that God will forget us. Instead, we must take steps to remember Him, so that we are demonstrating our faith in His promises and our awareness that He is, indeed, with us. How? By doing the things He has commanded us to do, and as Paul writes, to do them with diligence, looking

ahead to the full culmination of God's promises to us. As we are written on God's hands, His words are to be written in our hearts and minds. Christ's sacrifice has made this possible, but God does not simply take a permanent marker and write His words in us, we must also do our part and put the truth we know into action, allowing God to change us inside and out. As we use our hands to minister to others and to do the work of God, let us remember that we are never in danger of being forgotten by the One who matters most. We are written on His hands.

**For more helpful reading be sure to request our free booklet: *You Can Have Living Faith***

# Living God's Way

By John Elliott

A central purpose of the Church is the provision of spiritual food to assist the development of each of its members (Ephesians 4:12-15). The physical church of old received their entire diet from God for forty years (Exodus 16:35, Joshua 5:12).



The physical church of old received their entire diet from God for forty years (Exodus 16:35, Joshua 5:12). The manna given to Israel was a type of Christ's spiritual food that He feeds his spiritual children with today (Psalms 78:23-25, John 6:31-35). Spiritual knowledge is passed along by inspiration through

those called to be teachers and preachers (Ephesians 4:11, Romans 10:14). The Holy Spirit helps remind us of what we have been taught (John 14:26). The core of this teaching takes place on the Sabbath day (Acts 15:21, Luke 4:16, Acts 18:4).

In the Church, God is taught, accomplishing a central purpose for the Church itself. Jesus' commission to Peter and the apostles can be seen as, "Feed My lambs. Tend My sheep. Feed My sheep. Teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you" (John 21:15-17,

Matthew 28:20). Feeding on Christ's doctrine facilitates our growing up to become more like Him (Ephesians 4:14-15).

The teachings of God (doctrines) constitute the true food He gives us (Acts 16:4). It is not just the receiving of that spiritual food that makes one a child in the developing Family of God (Romans 2:13). Rather, the sons of God are those being led by the Holy Spirit away from carnal mindsets and carnal deeds (Romans 8:13-14).

They behave as children, taking in the spiritual food of Christ and growing in God's character (James 1:21-22).

One's behavior demonstrates either his acceptance or his denial of God's doctrines. In times past, some who received divine food were rebellious about living by it (Nehemiah 9:13-16). Their example becomes our warning to both receive God's truth and respond to it without carnal ambitions (1 Corinthians 10:3-12). To successfully receive our part in the Kingdom, which the Sabbath day foretells, we must conduct ourselves in a godly manner (2 Peter 3:11-12).

God's children are presented with a plethora of opportunities from which to choose. Some promote godliness, others trend toward self-promotion. Those choices have been consistently placed before us since Adam and Eve were first in the Garden. Such opportunities arise constantly, tugging at each of us to embrace one or the other. There is good reason for this to happen to each of us regularly. Christ is coming soon and He must determine the genuineness of our character so He can accurately judge us and give us the appropriate reward. Consider the position that places Him in when reading this passage. "He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still. And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work" (Revelation 22:11-12).

Perfection is associated with the Kingdom of God, while the time we're in now is a time for the development and testing of future spirit-being members of the God family. Consequently, in this present age, Christ set us an example of being tested to the extreme

by Satan, Rome, and the religious leaders of His day. Accordingly, He says to us in His Body, "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law'; and 'a man's enemies will be those of his own household.' He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it" (Matthew 10:34-39).

The true sheep are focused on the Source of their food and are not distracted from their growth by others (John 10:3-

5). We also have God's Spirit to help us bring every thought into captivity to Christ, if we choose to do so (2 Corinthians 10:5). The testing of our character (James 1:12-18) produces *perseverance*, which leads to a genuine; enduring "perfection" that God is seeking from us (James 1:3-4, Matthew 5:48, Matthew 10:22).

With the Spirit inside each of us, our response to such temptations should be like that of Jesus who "made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name" (Philippians 2:7-9). And He

will do the exact same for you, if you do likewise (Revelation 3:12).

We should appreciate more fully the dynamics that are part and parcel of the Church experience (1 Peter 4:17). The path to our success is intentionally difficult and narrow (Matthew 7:14) and the spiritual fight impossible to win on our own (Ephesians 6:12-13). Do not get distracted from pursuing godliness. Rather, continue your course of praying every day, studying to receive the Bread of life, and striving to live by it in a steadfast and exemplary manner (Matthew 5:14).

**For more information on God's calling and His people, request a copy of "Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion " and also the Bible Study Course lessons .**

## Is God a Control Freak?

By Nancy Morgan

Is God like a cruel sheriff waiting for us to break His law so He can punish us? Or is He more like a caring shepherd who gives us the freedom to choose even to our own hurt?



When Mary's boss retired from his position in the company, his successor, Mr. Thomas, had a very different management style. Mr. Thomas now wanted to keep tabs on everyone in the office. He wanted reports of what

everyone was doing each week, and he wanted to make the decisions on how each project was going to be handled. He also wanted to be copied on any email or correspondence that went to anyone. He was very critical of every-

one. It seemed he was never pleased with anyone's performance. He constantly told his staff how they could do their jobs better, and rarely praised them for anything.

The employees began to dread going to work because they felt stifled and watched over like a hawk. It appeared to them their new boss was trying to control their every move and it destroyed their initiative and creativity. They feared making any move because he would jump in and change whatever they did anyway.

Mr. Thomas had a management style known as "micromanagement," but his staff just called him a "control freak" because he seemed to control every move anyone in the office made.

Many people also look at God as being a control freak. They look at His laws as being stifling and burdensome and as a means to control people and prevent them from having the freedom to do the things they would really like to do. They feel He watches over us and can't wait to condemn us when we do something wrong.

But is this true? Is God a control freak? Does He not

allow humans freedom? And does He use His laws to stifle, burden, and control us? Let's look into the Bible and find out what we can about God's management style.

Let's first go to Genesis and look at the time of the creation of humans and how God interacted with them in the beginning of their existence. Genesis 2:15-17 says, "Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.'" (NKJV throughout)

Then God goes on to create the woman and allows the serpent to tempt her to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. She and her husband chose to listen to the serpent and disobeyed God's commands, and ate of that tree anyway.

Now, let's stop right there and look at God's actions. He allowed the man and woman to eat of every tree in the garden except for one because it was bad for

them. He allowed the serpent to tempt the man and woman. And most importantly, He allowed them the right to choose which way they were going to go.

We don't see God standing over them controlling and preventing them from eating of the knowledge of good and evil. He gave them the freedom to choose. And they did choose. They chose to disobey and sin. Through their actions, sin entered the world and the penalty of death then spread to all men, because all mankind would sin (Romans 5:12). There were enormous consequences for their actions, but God still allowed them the right to choose.

Free moral agency is a gift that God has given to every human being. He allows us to make our own decisions and choices. This is something God does not control. He did not make us robots where we are just programmed to do what He wants us to do. He created billions of human beings each with their own individuality, thinking, and reasoning and the ability to make choices, even choices against Him. And this is what Adam and Eve did; they chose to disobey God.

Now, because God allows us the freedom to make choices, it does not mean there are no consequences. All of our choices have consequences. God established spiritual laws that govern our existence, and when we violate them there are repercussions. God did not establish these laws to stifle humans and control them; He established them so there would be peace, order, righteousness, and good in the earth, because that is the result of obeying them. God says in Deuteronomy 5:29, “Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!” God’s laws were established for the good of everyone. It is not a burden or oppressive to keep them. On the contrary, it produces peace and harmony.

So, when we look at God’s management style over the course of history, we can’t say He has micromanaged humans. On the contrary, He has allowed them to choose to disobey His laws and reap the unhappy results. He has allowed them to go their own way and establish their own governments and societies. And He has, for the most

part, stepped back and stayed out of mankind’s affairs.

Because God has not controlled humanity, it does not mean He is not in control. He always has been and always will be in control. His plan is being carried out in spite of humanity’s choice to go the wrong way.

A big part of God’s plan was sending Jesus Christ to die for humanity’s sins (which incurred the death penalty) and pave the way to offer eternal life to humans. Actually, this was in God’s plan before He created humans. It says in Revelation 13:8 that Christ was slain from the foundation of the world. This tells us that God’s plan included allowing humans the right to choose, and how He planned to redeem us from making the wrong choice, even from the very beginning.

If we were to try to define God’s management style, we would have to say it is “love.” I John 4:8 tells us that God is love. Everything that God does is based on love and an outgoing concern for everyone involved.

In summary:

- God has given every human being free

moral agency—the ability to make their own choices.

- God established laws that if obeyed would result in peace and happiness and good for all. God has allowed humanity the individual freedom to choose to obey or not obey His laws and reap the consequences of their actions.

- God is and always has been in control. He does not want robots, but wants individuals of their own volition to choose to go the way of good, by understanding the devastating harm he suffers when ignoring God’s life-giving laws.

- God is not a micromanager or a control freak, but has a management style of “love.”

God has created billions of human beings with their own individuality and free moral agency. He wants to share eternity with us, an eternity free from suffering and unhappiness. God has a plan for how we may achieve eternal life. He has allowed humans the freedom to choose whether to obey Him or not; to choose life or death. Which choice will you make?

**For more helpful reading request our free booklets *Who Is God?* and *Why Does God Allow Suffering?***

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