

Newsletter Date

February 2012

Virtual Christian Magazine

Hope And Encouragement For The Real World

Enjoying God's creation brings peace

The Restorative Powers of Camping - Suzanne Miller

Every year for the past thirty years, except for the summer our daughter got married, our family has gone camping in the High Sierras of California. Sometimes there were four of us, but frequently we took on an extra grandparent or child. For the last few years, it has mostly been my husband and me.



Amazingly, every year the same feelings fill my heart and mind: those of excitement mixed with the feeling you get when returning home after a long absence. As we turn on the long straight road that leads out of the desert floor of Bishop and then winds its way up the mountain through the stark moonscape terrain, there is an eagerness to see if our campsite will be available. It is not that there aren't a number of camping areas, but there are only a select few that meet the criteria of being next to the creek and within the coolness of the pines. The anticipation makes me think, "What if someone is

in our spot? What if it is crowded with people who don't appreciate it like we do?" This reasoning is silly since God has always provided a beautiful place for us. We just have to be thankful for what He gives and look for the blessing, which makes all the difference in our perception.

As you rise up to the 9000-foot level, pine trees begin to dot the landscape and then to fill the gorge where the creek pours down among granite boulders. Rushing and tumbling, the creek makes its way to the floor of the Owens Valley below.

Last year we had an extended family of eight people, which included our two grandchildren. Sharing our campsite and fishing holes with all of them for the first time was a joy. But this year it was only my husband and I, and that brings a calm peace that we appreciate more with age. We don't have to hike up to the upper lakes, visit the mine, or eat a different dinner each night. We can fish, read, eat fish, and fish more if we want.

There is no cell phone reception where we camp. The whole world could pass away and we

would be unaware. The concerns or worries of this present life seem to roll away as we set up our tent and arrange our familiar camp supplies. There is the old battered granite pot that we collect water in and the camp kit of pots, plates and pans that have been around for over 50 years. It is as if they say, "Thank you for letting me out of that box so we can once again be of service to you."

This year I had been suffering from pain in my hip and knee and wondered how I was going to be able to get off the air mattress in the tent. The first few days my husband pulled me up and out. Then as I relaxed and soaked in the peace and calm, the pain seemed to pass away. The scripture came to mind that Christ said in Matthew 11:28, 30, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." The release from the pain allowed me to thoroughly take in the healing benefits of God's creation.

We like trout, both catching and eating them. We also like watching the lake change from mirroring the surrounding snowcapped mountains to sparkling with thousands of diamonds as the wind picks up.

Inside This Issue...

The Restorative Powers of Camping
by Suzanne Miller ..1

Here Comes the Judge
by Katherine Rowland.....2

Then it hit me
by Malcolm Murray.....3

Surviving the Serpent - Part One
by John Elliott.....5

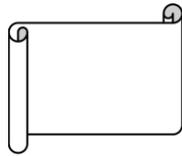
The first couple of days we fished in some beautiful lakes, but they were not my fishing hole. Someone was in that spot and not catching anything.

Of course, we weren't either, but I just knew if they would let me sit there, I would have had fish. Then we went to my favorite spot, North Lake. As we rounded the corner and took in the expanse of the lake, I could see that no one was in my place among the bushes. As soon as we were set up and I cast out, there was that familiar tug on the line. What followed was my limit, then I let my husband have my spot, and he had his limit. See, I do share my special fishing hole!

We caught so many fish that we ate trout for four nights and brought some home. This reminded me of the story of Christ with the disciples on the Sea of Tiberias. Simon had said, "I am going fishing" in John 21:3, but they caught nothing. We began like this the first day or two. We were going through the actions, but our hearts were not yet in it. Christ told the disciples to "cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some" (John 21:6). Christ gave them all fish. He wants to be part of our lives and give us good things. All we need to do is let go of our worries of this life and put our cares on Him. I can just imagine Christ looking down at us fishing and with a smile saying to

His Father, "There are two of Your children enjoying Our creation, let's send some trout their way."

To read more about God's creation and how it affects human perspective, request a free copy of *Creation or Evolution—Does It Really Matter What You Believe*.



When are Christians required to judge?

Here Comes the Judge by Katherine Rowland



The verb "to judge" has become a word with a loaded meaning to many of us today. For example, I've seen many people "confess" to something and then add, "Don't judge." "I enjoy beans on toast: don't judge." "I have never read *Pride and Prejudice*: don't judge." To judge something—or worse, *someone*—has taken on the meaning of condemnation.

Now, literally speaking, that isn't what the word means. According to Webster's dictionary, to judge means *to form an opinion about through careful weighing of evidence and testing of premises* or *to determine or*

pronounce after inquiry or deliberation.

It is this definition that we should keep in mind when we read Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 2:15. "*But he who is spiritual judges all things...*"

Paul isn't telling us that the Christian goes around condemning everything. Not at all! Instead, he is telling us that we, as Christians, must look at everything with an examining attitude and an inquiring mind. We must hold the choices we encounter up to what we know of Christ and evaluate them.

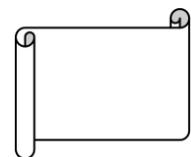
I think that this goes beyond deciding between good and bad, though we certainly must do that. We must indeed ask, "Is this something that I, *as a Christian*, should spend time on?" But we must also ask, "Is this the best thing I could be doing?" Being Christian and having Godly goals means that we must use our time carefully and with intention. There are all kinds of choices that aren't bad, *per se*, but that are not the best use of our time and resources.

An example from my life would be the changes brought on by my going to school. Having looked at the situation, we decided that it was important for me to pursue my degree. Therefore, I have a lot of work that must be done week-to-week. That means that all other activities are evaluated in

light of that necessary work. The schoolwork is a priority, because it must get done. Sometimes, it means that other things must be ignored and not pursued.

In the same way, our Christian vocation is a light by which to evaluate everything around us. It allows us to ask, "Is this good? Is this bad? Is this something that I have time for? Is this something that is worth my time?" Paul does not tell us to condemn everything; instead, he tells us to use our understanding of God's laws to make judgments about the world around us.

Request the booklet, *You Can Have Living Faith*



It couldn't happen to my family, could it?

Then it hit me by Malcolm Murray

Last August my 6-year-old grandson was diagnosed with leukemia. I took the low road to acceptance of his final diagnosis, like so many of us would in that situation; I just denied that it was possible. It could not happen to one of my grandchildren. It was a disease for someone else, not someone I love dearly.

There were several weeks of tests and blood work that preceded this. There

were daily ups and downs in my grandson's normal abilities to function as a 6-year-old while this testing continued. Some days he could not eat. He was losing weight every day; you could see it in his face, and his bones were now bulging. Some days all his joints would ache so acutely he could not walk. His siblings would lift him into a baby stroller to visit us next door.

During that time it was easy to reassure myself that God would not allow this to be true; my grandson could not have leukemia. I had known one other child of a very close friend who had died at the age of three with leukemia; again this problem could not affect our family, could it?

Then the day came when the blood work confirmed the reality of what our family had feared most. Our grandson had a cancer known as Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia. Yet, I did not have a sense of doom or ownership over the issue. It was still in someone else's world, wasn't it?

Reality sets in, but so does hope

A few days had gone by and I was still quite sure I would handle this without too much emotion. After all, our God was with us. That was when the phone

rang rang and the person on the other end said, "Would you like to donate to the Children's Leukemia Foundation?" Then it hit me.

I tried my best to stop sobbing over the phone, but I had to put it down as I tried to hold back the flood of emotion. I wanted to talk to this young lady and tell her, yes, I not only wanted to contribute, I *needed* to contribute. It was all I could do to finish the phone call; she was patient and could sense my anguish. It hit me with that phone call; it now seemed all so real for the first time. I would have to come face to face with the cancer raging inside my grandson's body.

I needed help. I felt blessed to know where to find that help. Christ said these words for us to hear in Matthew 11:28, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." I was sure that Christ meant exactly what He said. I felt compelled to come to Him in a way I had not come to Him and our Father in a long time. I needed a trusted source to help ease this pain that brought me to my knees. What I knew in my heart was this: Christ had promised to help any who would seek Him. This was also one of those times when I knew I would need help no matter the outcome of the cancer that was assaulting my grandson.

The next verse tells us this, "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" (Matthew 11:29). It was essential for me to assess this verse with renewed understanding. Christ said if I would yoke myself with Him, just like a team of oxen must work in unison, then we have the ability to accomplish much together. If I were to pull this plow alone, I would not make much headway; I would not get around the wall that I was hitting. I needed to remember Christ was with me; we were yoked together and pulling this plow.

I am quite sure that I have read these verses in Matthew a dozen, if not a hundred, times. In times of crises, we often feel like we are hitting a wall that will not let us pass. I wanted to get around this wall that had hit me. I also wanted my grandson to know he was not alone. Not only did he have his siblings to lift him into a stroller, not only did he have his parents and grandparents to lift him and carry him, he had a Savior who would make his life have purpose, no matter what his future held. How do you tell a 6-year-old with leukemia his life has purpose when he cannot stand up or even feed himself?

Hope can be encouraged in others

I needed help to deal with reality. My grandson

needed help much more than I. He was coping with reality in a much more permanent way. I wanted him to have hope. Can eternal hope fill a 6-year-old? That is a hard concept for even adults to grasp. I now realize that sometimes we must have hope for others like him too young to understand what hope really is.

Christ gives hope for all mankind, not just those who are well. All have access to this hope for which Christ came to the earth—to remove the power that death has over us. We have this promise from Titus 1:2, "In hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began." I know we can be assured of that promise, a promise the scriptures tell us God put into motion before men have a record of time.

My grandson needed us to share that with him by our words and conviction. We had to hold hope for him, the hope that Christ would offer to him, no matter how the battle with leukemia might end. He would have a future one day. He would be released from the pain that he felt today.



Then it hit me. This is what I can do. I could not stop his pain, I could not cure his

VIRTUAL CHRISTIAN MAGAZINE STAFF

Managing Editor:
Lorelei Nettles

Editors:
Angela Cardoz
Gayle Hoefker
Patrick Kansa
David Meidinger
Amy Stephens
Debbie Werner

Reviewers:
Don Hooser
William Miller
Malcolm Murray
Gerald Seelig

Proofreaders:
Sylvia Kennedy

Virtual Christian Magazine
is published by the
United Church of God, *an
International Association*,
555 Technecenter Dr.,
Millford, OH 45150.

©2011 United Church of
God, *an International
Association*.
All rights reserved.
Reproduction in any form
without written permission is
prohibited.

Although the staff strives for
truth and accuracy in its
reporting, analysis and Bible
commentary, *Virtual
Christian Magazine* is not a
doctrinal publication.
Articles do undergo both an
editorial and a review
process.

Scriptural references are
from the New King James
Version (© 1988 Thomas
Nelson, Inc., publishers)
unless otherwise noted.

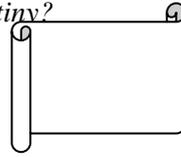
disease, but I could assure him he would be rid of this conflict one day. That was something I could do to help him battle the cancer that sought to engulf him. This is the hope that we all can hold for those who battle diseases like this. We can reach out and offer that same hope of a better future to all who need to understand the purpose for which Christ came. This is what faith looks like.

Christ said in John 10:10, “The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.” No matter what may attempt to destroy my grandson or anyone else who encounters pain or disease, we are assured that Christ did come to offer a more abundant life for all mankind.

My grandson has passed a one-year milestone since the leukemia was confirmed. Today he rides his bicycle down our street as I look out my office window. He still has some bad days, but most of his days are just the average days of a 7-year-old youngster. He has four more years before we will know whether the battle has been won. But I am not alone. My grandson is not alone. Our family is not alone. There is a yoke that binds us to a Messiah who holds the keys to a future for my grandson, for me, and for all mankind.

To understand the

miraculous future available to all mankind, request a free copy of our booklet, *What is Your Destiny?*



Many people have a natural fear of snakes, but what lessons can we learn from the serpent?

Surviving the Serpent - Part One by John Elliott



It was exhilarating for the young mother to be out in nature enjoying creation with her toddler daughter. The blue waters of Lake Havasu were punctuated with small white crests mirroring a blue sky with white clouds sailing by overhead. New life pushed out from the gritty desert landscape erupting with small wildflowers atop wispy green stems. She pointed out to her small child the contrasts of life about them as they navigated the narrow path that meandered along the shoreline. A movement in the gravel near a tangle of weeds provided the very thing she had hoped to show her daughter—baby animal life.

Reaching down to pick up the juvenile serpent, she was a bit surprised when it nipped at her finger, barely grazing it. Resolute to show her

child the young of another species, she bent down again and snatched it up in her hand only to be instantly injected with the full load of venom contained in the young diamondback. The young mother survived, but not without being airlifted to a hospital in Phoenix, Arizona to begin extensive treatment for the rattlesnake bites. There is something cute about the infant stages of most species, even baby reptiles. The size, coloring and undeveloped behavior belie their being an instant source of pain and death.

Eve, the first woman, encountered an early serpent that seemed harmless, even helpful. He convincingly painted God as unfair and restrictive.

Genesis 3:4-5

And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. (KJV throughout)

In scarcely a minute, Eve went from curious to intrigued and from intrigued to being bitten by deceit and suddenly confined to death. *But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. (Genesis 3:3) and Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have*

sinned. (Romans 5:12)

Just as a hatred of snakes was instilled in Eve, so the spiritual Woman (the Church) is in a struggle with Satan. We must walk forward on high alert, for Satan's deceit is a major threat to our eternal lives.

2 Corinthians 11:3 *But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.*

The sins of the Israelites resulted in God sending stinging/deadly serpents among them as a plague of pain and death. Their suffering can be seen as symbolic of the consequences of man's sinful state (Numbers 21:5-9). Their agony halted only after the raising of a bronze replica of a serpent on a pole. Similarly, the source of our pain—sin—is removed as the blood of Christ cleanses us from our past sins and sets us free from slavery to it (1 John 1:7).

John 3:14-15 *And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life*

Human encounters with snakes typically occur when we uncover or intrude upon their obscured hiding places and catch them unawares. A viper bit the Apostle

Paul; it was hiding among the firewood Paul was gathering (Acts 28:3). The potential for harm is present from any snake, whether or not it is a poisonous variety. Defense responses of nearly all snakes include striking or biting the offender. Poisonous snakes inject their venom with their fangs and the unsanitary mouth of even non-poisonous snakes can easily result in infection from snakebite. When sensing a danger to its well-being, the poor-sighted snake lashes out in a vicious defense, sometimes inflicting multiple wounds on its presumed enemy.

As a mere human being, you resemble no threat to Satan or his demonic cohorts. They are spirit beings living in an eternal, permanent spirit world. While you are no match for the power and prowess they possess, you are provided assistance by a Power infinitely greater than theirs.

(1 John 4:4) You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

It is important to be in a close relationship with Christ, like of one engaged to be married to Him. His protections of you from the perils of the Serpent are necessary in the day of trouble just ahead.

In the Dark

One inky black night

while in Kenya, my bare white feet glided through the cool, tender stretch of grass between the cottage and the car parked a short distance away. Surely, such a short stroll just to retrieve something from the nearby car did not require the use of a flashlight. But with every step, my fear of stepping on a black mamba increased. One of Africa's most lethal snakes, the black mamba has the fastest recorded kill of a human, just two and a half minutes. While reaching into the car through its open door, I felt a creepy perception of my feet and legs being exposed to whatever might be lurking under there. I increased my speed as I returned to the cottage and quickly bolted the door shut. Was the fear credible or merely fanciful, I pondered. Early the next morning, a black mamba lay dead close by, crushed by a car's tire during the night. That experience shows that "people of the day" should not walk in darkness without a Light to safely guide them. Jesus gave Himself for this purpose...

Luke 1:79 *"To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."*

Snakes often prowl for food at night, a time given to humans for sleep. Even if a snake were to slither up to you during sleep, it would likely present no danger if you didn't move and startle it. It's cold-

blooded body would merely relish your warmth. The prey they seek is no larger than what they can swallow, thus you and I are of no interest to snakes. They meander amongst the cracks and crevices of undisturbed out-of-sight places that are populated by the small, reclusive mammals and reptiles, which make up their diet: mice, rats, moles, gophers, lizards, etc. We, in contrast, live very different lives as children of the day.

1 Thessalonians 5:5 *You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness.* (NKJV)

Since poisonous snakes typically slither through dark out-of-sight places, your body should never collide with one if you wisely respect the danger they pose. Neither should the devices of Satan impact you when you are walking in the Light of Life.

John 8:12 *Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."* (NKJV)

In the next issue part two. For more information on influence of Satan, request our free booklet, "Is There Really a Devil?"

