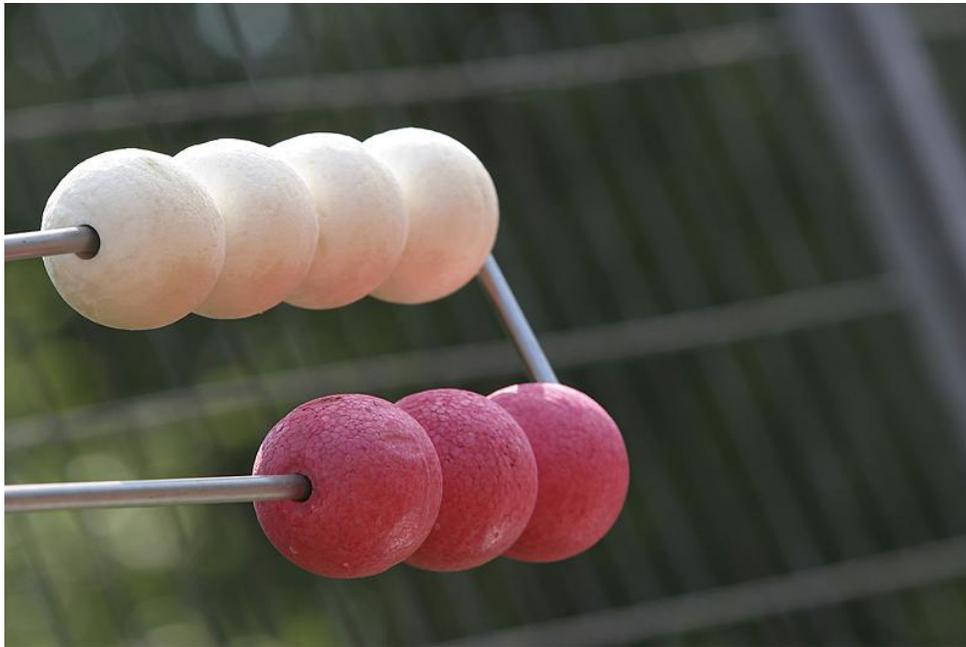




Scorekeeping



By Robert Berendt

**Who's keeping score? Does God keep score?
Are you winning or losing?**



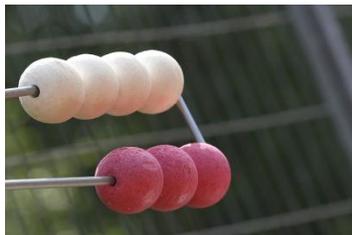
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Many games we humans play involve keeping score. Our sport activities such as hockey, baseball, basketball, and football often have an official scorekeeper to track the points. Our family enjoys many card games such as cribbage, bridge, hearts, or whist—all of which require keeping score. Another dynamic game that we all seem to enjoy is Scrabble. There, too, the score must be carefully kept. We usually choose somebody who is quick

with numbers and good at being meticulous. My youngest grandson is a ferocious Scrabble player and, although we don't let him be the scorekeeper, he really knows how to add up the numbers on each word and is very hard to beat.

Keeping score

There are other ways in which “keeping score” is understood. In criminal activities or even in our interactions with one another, we often remember favors that others do for us—or we for them—and keep “score” as to whether or not they are repaid. We keep “score” of all the hurts and insults that are thrown at us, and we keep

“score” of the nice things people say and do. Somehow, we have the need to “settle the score” by repaying some of the favors or by seeking revenge (justice) against those who hurt us.

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In the Wild West, people kept “score” by cutting notches on their pistol handles or by gathering scalps. Airplane fighters in WWI and WWII kept score of the “kills” they had in various ways. There are other ways in which an ordinary, unconverted human keeps score. Did you know that God is also a scorekeeper? The concept has always existed.

Jesus stated something very encouraging as recorded in Matthew 10:42: “And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward.” It seems Jesus is keeping score of the good deeds we do here on earth.” Those deeds need to be done from the heart and without the hope of a reward, but God does plan to reward those who serve Him in sincerity and truth.

Reward for good deeds

Matthew 5 and 6 mention a reward quite often. In Matthew 5:11-12, Jesus said that there was a reward in heaven (that is where God resides and keeps score). Matthew 6:1-4 cautions us not to do our good deeds so that others will see, and so God can one day give us

a reward. Verses 5 and 6 even tell us there is a reward for praying correctly. That is more than the peace of mind that prayer gives us; it is something reserved to a future time where God will be giving out rewards.

Jesus said that He will come in the glory of His Father and will reward each according to their works. It is clear that God sees what we do on this earth and that He is keeping score so that He can reward each person in a manner suitable to what they have done. Luke 6:35, 38 mention that the reward will be great and it will be dependent upon the same measure we have used.

Paul noted that God is rewarding all who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6). It seems God loves to give gifts and blessings here during this life, but also rewards or gifts that will last for eternity. It is hard for us to realize just how carefully and closely we are being observed. Every hair on our head is numbered (Luke 12:7). We wonder at those statements and when we consider His majesty, our minds find it hard to believe He really cares that much. He is a “scorekeeper” who is totally reliable.

God is interested in all humans and has the desire that all should be saved. That is why He sent His only begotten Son to die for our sins. He would like humans to have a clean slate to start from. God does this because just as He is meticulous and just in rewarding our good deeds, He must also be meticulous and just in rewarding evil deeds.

“Rewards” for evil deeds

Although we can rejoice in the blessings God wants to impart to us, we need to be just as aware of how carefully He notes the things we say and do that He hates or that are sinful. Jesus wanted His followers to remember the complete justice that God represents. In Matthew 12:35-37, Jesus reminds us that just as a good man brings forth good things, so too an evil man brings forth evil things. Verses 36 and 37 state, “But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.” That is getting down to details.

There are a number of caution signs that the Bible brings to our attention. It

seems God keeps score of the evil deeds men do as well as the good deeds. It is for this reason that every person is in need of repentance and the gift of cleansing through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. God wants to erase and remove every reason to “reward” us for evil, and He wants to add wherever He can to reward us for good.

Paul caught the fullness of the future God offers. There is no end to eternity, and therefore the rewards or gifts God gives become important. It is such a tragedy when we are careless with the potential God grants us. Paul knew that the deeds of each person are known to God and will be made known—the good as well as the bad (unless the bad are erased by Jesus’ blood). He knew that each person has choices to make in his/her service to God.

Our deeds are tested

Our devotion and respect towards our Almighty Heavenly Father is reflected in all we say and do. Paul knew that each person would be tested and their works would be tested. God wants to know if there

is truth and sincerity in what we are doing. He rejects those who say they are followers of Jesus, but have a hidden agenda or motive (Matthew 7:21-23).

Paul tells us, “If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire” (1 Corinthians 3:14-15). We are enjoined to be sure nobody takes our crown (Revelation 3:11). There is great constancy in God. It is precisely because He is the ultimate authority that He must reward evil just as carefully as He rewards good. That is the character trait that makes Him Perfect and Almighty.

How grateful we can be to know the wonderful character that God possesses. He is not a God of uncontrolled emotions. He is not vengeful, hard to please, or unaware of all the challenges we face. “He is easy to please, but hard to satisfy” (C. S. Lewis).

He knows that many humans have been terribly affected during their childhood and are carrying

heavy loads of inner scars. For some, there is no inner strength or ability to make thoughtful decisions. Nothing escapes the watchful eye of God. He works with great mercy, and it is not possible to fool God with phony credentials. But He is patient, kind, loving, and understanding towards every person on earth. He demands complete surrender to Him, but that surrender is the position of ultimate joy, peace, and happiness for all who find it.

His scorekeeping pencil is sharpened and poised. It is we who make Him write on the positive or the negative side of our ledger. He rejoices in writing the score that results in His giving good gifts (John 4:10; 2 Corinthians 9:8-15). Luke 6:23, 35 are verses in which Jesus says “your reward will be great.” These are instances when we suffer for our beliefs. Rejoice and leap for joy when you are suffering for Christ.

For more information on how to live a life pleasing to God, request a free subscription to the *Good News*.

It's Not Fair!

By Janet Treadway

Does life seem unfair to you? Would you like to know one sure way to overcome problems and trials?

Wow! How many of us have struggled with those words and said them? As a child, we uttered them often when we felt our siblings were getting the better end of the deal. "It's not fair!"

Those words became all too clear for my daughter, Michelle, several years ago. Michelle left her car parked in a very nice neighborhood, but when she returned, the glass had been smashed in. All her photos from her recent trip to the Feast of Tabernacles were taken and everything else of value.

And then, not a week later, the car was stolen from right in front of her house! The police called after a week saying they had found her car, but she would have to pay \$100.00 to get it out of the impound. The thief had taken her car for a joy ride, trashed it, burned out the clutch and now she had to pay to get it out of the impound! What made matters worse was that the insur-

ance company would not cover the damage. Michelle spent over \$1,000 out of her own pocket to repair the damage and, because of the robbery, she felt she had to move to a higher rent area.



Where are the crooks? Probably free and stealing from someone else. Is life fair? Ask my daughter.

But while despairing and feeling life definitely was not fair, Michelle found her most prized possession. While cleaning the trash out of her car, she reached underneath the front seat. All scrunched up and with

its pages twisted, she pulled out her Bible, which she thought had been also stolen. The thief took the valuable pen clipped to its pages, but kicked the Bible up under the seat.

Of all the things she thought she had lost, her Bible was the one thing she wanted back the most. It turned out the thief had left the most valuable item of all; the Bible, which holds the truth that will keep her focused and pressing on when things are just not fair.

Life is not always fair; but my daughter's Bible helped put everything in focus for her—and for me. God has given us something that no one can take from us—His valuable truth and promises.

I have had to reflect on God's promises during difficult times when life seems so unfair. One is found in the third chapter of Proverbs: "Do not envy the oppressor, and choose

none of his ways; For the perverse person is an abomination to the LORD, But His secret counsel is with the upright” (Proverbs 3:31-32). God’s truth—God’s word—will always stay with us! The thief leaving Michelle’s Bible is a physical example that God will not allow His truth to be taken from us.

God is just! He sees everything that you and I are going through. He does not forget! Hebrews 10:30-31 says, “For we know Him who said, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. And again, ‘The LORD will judge His people.’ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

Life is not always fair and we do get kicked in the stomach from time to time, but we must get back up and press on toward the mark. For God will make it all come out okay in His time. In the meantime, just as my daughter forgot the unfairness by reflecting on the unexpected return of her Bible, we too must put everything in perspective and place great value on His promises. We must always remember that no one can take the promises and truth that God holds out to all of us who love Him and keep His commandments! No one can take our crowns unless we let them!

We may not have control over everything that hap-

pens to us, and we all will suffer many unfair things before it is all over, but we do have control over whether we get discouraged and quit!

So press on! For there is a world coming where life will be fair and you will have the opportunity to use those unfair situations that have happened to you for the good of mankind.

For more information on getting help from the words of the Bible, request a free copy of *Is the Bible True?, Transforming Your Life: the Process of Conversion, Why Does God Allow Suffering, and Making Life Work.*

Work to Say Thank You.

By Katherine Rowland

Sometimes the best gifts are those that are unexpected and undeserved.



When I was in 10th grade, my family moved across the United States from Tennessee

to Oregon. In the process of this move, I missed a lot of the first semester of school. I was a reasonably good student, so I more-or-less landed on my feet, with the exception of one class: Algebra II. Math did not come easily to me (and still doesn't). I had to real-

ly work at it in order to get good grades. No matter how hard I worked that semester, though, I couldn't overcome the missing instruction. I approached the semester exam with a sinking heart, and I left the classroom knowing that I had failed

it. When report card time came, I hardly dared look at my grade for Algebra II—but when I did, I was stunned! Instead of the dreaded F...or maybe, *maybe*, D that I expected, I saw a C.

I remember standing there in the hallway for a minute, puzzled. How could that have happened? I knew I hadn't earned a C. I hadn't had time to establish enough good grades to counteract that awful exam. The next day, when I walked into the math classroom, I happened to be the first student in the room. I approached the teacher and said, "Uhm...you gave me a C."

His response confirmed that there had been something beyond my work involved. He said, "I believe 'gave' is the operative term here."

I had been given an immense gift; a gift I hadn't earned. Instead of the failing grade I deserved, I had been given a reprieve; a passing grade. What would I do with it? If I had simply shrugged, accepted it, and then coasted along, that would have been no thanks at all to the teacher. Worse yet, if I had accepted it and then goofed off in class, expecting him to ad-

just my grade somehow, I would have thrown that gift in his face. I did the only thing a thankful student could do. I worked hard in that class. I paid attention. I did the homework. I did everything I could do to demonstrate that I was aware of his grace and kindness and that I would not waste that precious gift.

Likewise, our salvation has been given to us without our having earned it. The grade we all earn is a big, fat F. As Paul said in Romans 3:22-24, "*There is no difference, ²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus...*" All of us have stumbled. All of us have failed perfection. There's not a thing we can do to make up now for all the things that have come before. And God has taken that report card, that clear reflection of our errors, and torn it up and thrown it away. Like my math grade, "gave" is the operative term. He gave us redemption. He extended His grace, not because we earned it, nor because we are amazing individuals, but because He took pity on us.

So what are we going to do with this gift? If we keep on doing all the things we had done before—if there is no change in our behavior—then we deny the awesomeness of the gift. We can't earn it. We can't make up for it. There is nothing we can give that would be commensurate.

What we can do, though, is work. We can turn around and show God that we appreciate the gift He has given. We can demonstrate that we are not shrugging it off or taking it for granted. We can search out His word. We can learn to do good instead of evil. We can show our thanks by our earnest effort to bring every thought, every deed, into line with God and His ways. Let today be the day that we realize again what a great gift we have been given, and let that realization motivate us to strive for perfection, as Paul encouraged the Corinthians: "*Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you*" (2 Cor. 13:11 NIV 84).

For more helpful information request the free study guide, *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*

Build an Ark!

By Robert Berendt

God teaches us how to stay afloat in troubled times



One of the best known accounts in scripture is the story of Noah's ark. The Creator had seen the depravity, wickedness, and evil that pervaded mankind and regretted creating humans (Genesis 6:6). It was not that He had made a mistake. When He made Adam and Eve, He delighted in what He had done and called it "very good" (Genesis 1:31). He decided to allow freedom of choice in the hope that mankind would come to realize His love and goodness as the only way to eternity and would then consistently choose to do as He instructed (Deuteronomy 30:19).

God had already experienced Lucifer and a third of the angels rising up in rebellion against Him, but

that seems to have been the first and only bad experience on such a large scale God had up to the time of Noah. But then He faced an Earth on which people had chosen to follow Satan, and thus every evil of their imaginations was taking place. He realized that mankind would suffer untold agony and distress through their actions. He preferred people would heed His warning and return to Him, but they did not.

God's answer was to bring about a worldwide flood that would drown all air-breathing land animals and birds, with the exception of those He would save by instructing Noah to build an ark. God knew the extent of flooding that would come and the exact dimensions of the ark that was needed. He gave the plan to Noah, and Noah followed the blueprint. A total of eight humans were saved along with the animals and birds that God brought into the ark. The creatures came at God's

bidding and God shut the door (Genesis 7:16).

Parallel experiences in our lives today

Life presents us all with storms from time to time. They can be storms within the economy or desires of the nations and world; they can be storms within our personal lives; or they can be storms of finances, health, marital stress, warfare, or something within our communities that cause distress and danger. We can stand by and just watch what is going on, or we can build an ark that will carry us through the storm until the sun begins to shine again and we are on dry ground.

In Noah's time, God allowed 120 years for people to do something about their condition (Genesis 6:3). During that time, Noah was preaching about repentance and the flood to come and building the ark. No doubt his work was the talk of the town. When a man builds a huge ark on

dry land, the story makes headlines. But it seems that watching the spectacle is all that happened. People may have come to see this “wonder of the world” at the time, but went back to living their lives as though nothing was going to happen—right up until the time the flood came and took them all away (Matthew 24:38-39).

Are you preparing for tough times ahead?

A wise person learns to “make hay while the sun shines,” but he also knows that he needs to prepare for the time the sun might not shine. Bad weather has always been a farmer’s fear. Wise farmers plan well and have a backup plan, if needed. Wise people in all walks of life do that too. Not many are wise, it seems. Wise creatures (programmed to be so by God) are intended to help us humans (who have been given the ability to think) to learn lessons. Ants prepare their winter supply of food in the summer. Badgers make their homes in crags for protection. Locusts have no apparent leader, but march in an orderly fashion. Spiders work hard and are successful anywhere through their work (Proverbs 30:24-28). There are many other creatures who take needed

steps before a serious threat arises. There are some who “build an ark” in anticipation of a flood. Some heed the red flags and warning signs.

The economic picture on the earth looks bad for people. Some have seen the downturn coming and are taking steps to protect themselves. Many have seen the downturn coming, but are not heeding the warning signs or they are finding reasons to carry on as though nothing will happen (Proverbs 22:3). Winston Churchill once made one of his profound remarks when he said that some people can stumble over a great truth, get up and dust themselves off and go on as though nothing has happened. We ought not to be that way, but various forces from within often push us in the direction of doing only what needs to be done at that time.

Interestingly enough, God did not build the ark for Noah and his family. He gave the warning and the instructions, but it was Noah who had to do the work. God allows us to do the things that are good for us. A wise parent will realize that they must not do everything for the child. Children need to learn to think

and plan. They need to learn how to work. All of that is designed to build character. God is a faithful and wise parent. In His wisdom, He wants us to build our arks.

What red flags and warning signs do you see in your life? Is your marriage losing some of its wonder and luster? Are you letting greed make you borrow far beyond that which you are able to repay? Are your grades in school as good as you can make them? Do you look after your health by not carrying excess weight or developing habits that will hurt and disable you? Do you relegate prayer and study to the back-burner of your life? Are God and His laws important to you?

We live in a dangerous age

We are living at a time that is similar to the time of Noah. This earth is full of violence, greed, and evil attitudes and actions. The Bible is often relegated to the bookshelf and there are few that humbly and truly seek God (Psalm 10:4). Human suffering is growing throughout the world, and if God does not step in, we will obliterate ourselves (Matthew 24:22).

God *is* about to step in and rescue this world. Jesus Christ is about to return, but with great power and might. He will come with great wrath (Revelation 6:17). John wrote about the seven bowls of the wrath of God in the last book in the Bible (Revelation 16:1). He also notes that some will be blessed because they will be watching and striving to please God. They are building an ark for the day of His wrath.

Peter wrote for all who wanted to listen and encouraged them to think about the day of the wrath of God (2 Peter 3:9). God does not want any to perish, but those who refuse to repent and conform to His laws will die. The good news is that Christ will return and take full control of this world. The caution is that His return will be met with anger and resistance. There will be war, famine, and disease all over the world.

Until the very last moment, God will provide people with the opportunity to enter an ark. Just as the ark

Noah built was standing with doors open until it began to rain, so, too, God offers entrance into His grace and favor. God will provide two witnesses in Jerusalem whom the whole world will see and know about (Revelation 11:2-4). According to prophecy, the world will reject and kill them, but the wise will act. They will be able to assess the situation and turn to God in deep humility and repentance.

The Day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night with fire and fervent heat. What kind of ark are we building for that day? Our ark is not made of wood as was Noah's. It is a spiritual ark—made up of the holy righteous character and holy conduct that God has taught us (2 Peter 3:10-12). Build your ark and come aboard for God's protection.

To learn more about the dangerous times to come, and how you can build a relationship with God that will see you through, request a free subscription to *The Good News Magazine*.

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