

THE CHRISTADELPHIAN
TIDINGS
of the Kingdom of God

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Special Issue

By Sisters and For Sisters

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The CHRISTADELPHIAN TIDINGS of the Kingdom of God

Peter Hemingray, Editor

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Note by Editor

This special issue was collected and initially edited through the kind graces of our assistant editors, who were Sisters Susie Cheetham (Moorestown, NJ) and Jan Berneau (Verduga Hills, CA). From their locations on each coast, they solicited contributions (in ways I am not privy to) and arranged for their on-time delivery. Thus I was entirely devolved of any involvement in this process, which resulted in much more material than appears in these pages. To both of the assistant editors, I must extend my thanks and appreciation. And to all the contributors, I must also extend my thanks. Without the voluntary writings of all involved, this issue would never have appeared. I hope it contributes to the body of Christadelphian literature written by or for the sisters in our midst, who of course do represent half of our whole community.

We must acknowledge the many vital ways the sisters help in the work of the truth, by instructing our children, helping their husbands if married, and in all cases the others of the ecclesia.

Peter Hemingray (Editor)

Introduction

Sisters' Writings

In the beginning

Before the beginning of the Christadelphian movement, while John Thomas was still nominally associated with Alexander Campbell, a sister wrote a letter to Alexander.¹ She was the wife of Albert Anderson, who was John Thomas' first follower and the first person baptized by him. It was no ordinary letter, at least in its effects: search on the Internet for "Lunenburg Letter" and see what I mean. It was an anonymous letter, and its writer has remained a mystery among almost all Campbellites down until almost today. But she did write again, this time to John Thomas, and I quote:

Dear brother Thomas,

I have been requested by several of the brethren to send you a copy of the letter I wrote nearly twelve months ago to brother Campbell, as it has caused such a to do among the brethren. Perhaps it may turn out to the advantage of some; therefore, I send you an exact copy. I think I made no alteration in the one I sent him; this being the first I wrote, and his a copy of this. You may do with it as you please, as brother C. has not answered half of the questions, and not one satisfactorily, I should like for them to go far and near, if they would be the means of causing any of those, who profess religion to arouse from their lethargy, and examine themselves by asking the questions and let the word of God answer them, that they may know whether they are in Christ; for many will be deceived even after Judgement shall have begun, saying Lord have we not prophesied in thy name and done many wonderful works. To whom the Lord will say, depart you workers of iniquity, for I never approved you.



Brother Campbell said in one of his numbers he did not know my motive for writing to him, but my motive is obvious if he will examine himself by those questions in connexion with the July number of the Harbinger. I had no idea when I wrote to him, that any public notice would be taken of my letter, requesting an answer, which makes the motive still more obvious.

Give my love to — — accept the same from one who wishes you well.

LOUISA A. ANDERSON.²

Eusebia Lasius

Sister Eusebia, the only daughter of John Thomas, was, and probably still is, the most prolific sister writing in Christadelphian circles. Starting in 1869, with her

account of her Father's visit to Great Britain, her writings appear regularly in *The Christadelphian* down through 1923, the year before her death. Not only in her articles, but in her books, is her presence still noted among us. I have copies several books written by her, of which "Yaweh Elohim", published in 1883, is the best known. She was a voluminous correspondent from her house in New Jersey, some part of which still survive. Her influence over the brotherhood, particularly in New Jersey, was considerable, and she was personally untroubled by the disputes and divisions around her.



Other prominent sisters

Robert Roberts was the undoubted leader of the nascent Christadelphian movement from the death of John Thomas in 1869 till his own death in 1898.

*Let us pray for one another: - that we may strengthen each to endure unto the end: - for therein we shall reap if we faint not? Gal. vi. 9. -
With love and best wishes, for your health and prosperity - Ever yours in the blessed hope of eternal life, Sisters*

For all this time, and in fact ever since their marriage in 1859 to her own death in 1919, Sis. Jane Roberts was not only a true help-meet to her husband but a great influence in her own right. When she died, Bro. At. T. Jannaway wrote:³

May we not say, without in any way detracting from your father's excellence, that we are greatly indebted to our departed sister for his invaluable work? What a true help-meet she was. How she supported, encouraged, and assisted her partner through dark and toiling hours, and this help was not restricted to her husband, but extended to many others.



Sister Jane Roberts in 1895, Age 65

Her writings in the *Christadelphian* are quite numerous, and some of her books are also still available: perhaps the best know is "To Younger Sisters". So she carried on the work of her husband in encouraging and counseling the community, particularly the sisters.

Since those days, numerous articles by sisters have appeared in all the magazines of our community, and it would be invidious to single any individuals other than the prominent ones I have discussed. They have written (naturally) on items of special concern to the sisters, but also on exposition, word studies, historical articles, and almost any topic one can imagine (apart from exhortations, I believe.)

Sisters' articles disputed

I can find no trace of anyone questioning sisters writing article to a brief exchange of correspondence in 1990. In that year, after some criticism by the editor of sisters speaking at a conference, a brother wrote as follows:⁴

Maybe you can see a difference between the teaching of a sister by writing rather than by speaking, but to me this is the sort of argument which might well have been a teaching of the Pharisees. If you accept that Paul's words literally apply to us today, then the statement "I suffer not a woman to teach" over-rides all the other statements about women keeping silence, and a sister is not permitted to teach in any way, not only in the summer school and the church, but in the Sunday School or writing for magazines, since these are all aspects of teaching.

The editor at the time wrote:

There is no more an inconsistency in condemning the decision to allow a sister to take a leading part in a study weekend while publishing an article written by a sister than exists when 1Tim 2:12, "I suffer not a woman to teach", is compared with Titus 2:3, where the Apostle encourages "aged women" to be "teachers of good things"... The question does not turn on.. a legalistic view based on the difference between writing and speaking. God has ordained that in communal worship the errors committed in Eden by both man and women should be recognized by the attitude of their sons and daughters. Woman is not to usurp the man's authority as Eve did, and man is to proclaim God's Word as Adam failed properly to do.

I endorse his analysis: in all areas of ecclesial life sisters should (and do) contribute, save only when the ecclesia is at worship. And the writings of articles is an activity that has been common n our community from its beginnings.

This special issue

The issue is written almost entirely by sisters, and we hope all of our audience will find spiritual and practical help in our collective walk towards the kingdom.

"For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal 3:27-29).

Of whatever race, color, or sex, we are all united in the one hope. We can all learn much from each other. I consider my sisters as one with me in Christ Jesus, there being neither male nor female, but each complementing the other with their special talents in the service of the Lord.

Peter Hemingray (Detroit Royal Oak, MI)

Notes:

1. Campbell, *Millennial Harbinger*, 1837, p. 411.
2. Thomas, J., *The Apostolic Advocate*, 1838 p 157.
3. *The Christadelphian*, 1919 p. 516.
4. *The Christadelphian*, 1990 p. 149.

Practical Section Introduction

Too often in life we follow the world's advice when it comes to how we respond to particular situations. These situations can range from who we value as friends, how to raise our children, how to spend money, etc. Over the next few pages, you will discover advice from fellow Sisters, who will give you a Scriptural answer to some of these topics. As Prov 12:15 states, *"The way of fools seems right to them, but the wise listen to advice."* After reading these articles, you will, Lord willing, gain an understanding about the advice that God gives to us on these practical situations in our lives.

The First Year as a Stay-at-Home Mom.



All major life changes have their joys and challenges, by which God can mold us into vessels fit for His Kingdom. These important events like getting married, moving to a new place, or getting a new job all have a period of adjustment and learning, and oftentimes a period of trial. This growing period is not always easy, and can often present us with both surprising challenges, but also joys we may never have anticipated.

Becoming a new mom is no exception. In fact, it could possibly be the greatest change you have experienced yet! A woman's expectations of what the first year of motherhood will be like does not always match its reality. She may not have anticipated the extent to which life would be different once she became a mother or the many challenges motherhood would bring upon her. This is also true for the joys and rewards that motherhood brings that she could never have imagined. It is through this transition that she finds a deeper understanding of the love that God, as our Father, has for His children. Scripture tells us that, *"As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to them that fear Him"* (Psa 103:13). Ultimately, the pains she has to endure in this first year of motherhood will help equip her for the years of parenthood to come. It will help develop her character to become a better servant of God. Motherhood is a labor of love, not always being easy, but always worth the rewards it produces.

I hope to share with you some of the possible experiences you may encounter during the first year of being a first-time mom. The first few months are potentially the most chock-full of challenges, and so I will devote the first part of this article to the first three months after the baby is born. After the first three months, a new "normal" routine starts to develop, and your experience usually becomes more predictable and manageable. Other challenges will arise, but those first few months can be the most trying.

The “fourth” trimester

The anticipation is finally over, and the baby has arrived! This is such a thrilling time for you and your husband as you begin life as parents together. God-willing the mommy and baby are doing well and are healthy, and are bonding for the first time. One of the first challenges you may encounter is heading home to start your lives together. Leaving the comforts of the nurses or midwives who have been helping you and your husband during the first 48 hours or so (if you had your baby at a hospital) can be a bit scary. You may feel that caring for your baby and nursing should be coming more “natural” and easier to you, but it doesn’t always work that way for many women. You will most likely need guidance and support during this transition. The new learning experience begins!

The following are more of the challenges you may experience in the first few weeks after giving birth:

- 1) Whether you’ve had a vaginal birth or a Cesarean section, your body will be healing. This means you need to rest as much as you can manage for the first few weeks.
- 2) Your hormones are changing constantly (especially if you are nursing) in the first few weeks after giving birth and this could leave you feeling like you are on a bit of an emotional roller coaster. You may cry more, become more easily irritable, feel anxious at times, or feel a little down in the dumps. All of these feelings are perfectly normal for a new mom as your body and mindset adjust to this new life change. If these feelings intensify or seem to last several weeks or months, you may be experiencing a more serious condition called postpartum depression. This can develop up to a year after you’ve had the baby, but most often occurs in the first few months. Thankfully, many resources are available to you to help you address and treat this illness.
- 3) Sleep deprivation. It’s amazing how someone so small can make you so tired! Newborns are usually up several times a night for the first few months, and this can be absolutely exhausting.
- 4) Being a first-time parent can be very intimidating. Not knowing why the baby is crying, wondering if he’s had enough bowel movements, or even going to the store alone for the first time with the baby can all be scary experiences! If this is your first time as a parent, every experience is new, and therefore can be daunting.
- 5) You are also adjusting to a new way of life. If you’ve had your husband or a relative staying with you during the first week or two after the baby was born, it can be quite nerve-racking when they leave! I remember crying a few days before my husband went back to work and telling him he couldn’t leave me! I was so afraid to be home alone with our daughter. I was afraid of making a mistake and not knowing what to do if I did.

General challenges:

If you have made the transition from having a career to being a stay-at-home mom, going from a familiar job to a completely unknown one can be frightening. In most professions, routine and schedule are standard. You walk into work, gener-

ally knowing what's expected of you, understanding how to handle most tasks to which you are assigned, and have a reasonable expectation of how the day will go. With a baby, you aren't quite sure what you have to do at first! Everything you experience is new, and with that comes stress. After a few months or so, you can get into a routine with your baby, but even after you've established a schedule, babies do not always follow the standard! Whether it's teething, sickness, dropping a nap, learning a new skill, or just a bad day, infants can throw you for a loop sometimes!

Another struggle you may find is the emotional adjustment of having to put the needs of your baby above your own at times. Sometimes this means not getting a shower until the evening or having to leave a cart full of groceries at the store because the baby won't stop crying. This is a major life change that can alter how you used to do a great deal of things.

Do not fret! After reading this list of possible challenges, you may feel a little more uneasy than before you read them! However, there are many healthy and spiritual ways in which you can best deal with ALL of these challenges.

Dealing with the challenges:

1. Pray.

David tells us that that God knows our thoughts even before we think them. (Psa 139:4) We are also told that He knew us as we were being created, when David says, *"For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb"* (Psa 139:13). So if God is that intricately involved in our lives, He knows the struggles and the different emotions we are dealing with at any time. As your Heavenly Father, He wants you to include Him in every experience you have, including this new experience as a mom. He will help guide you through any situation and be your strength if you rely upon Him. During those nights when you are up with your baby because she (or he) is a newborn or has a cold, instead of being frustrated that you need to be up, try to make that your time with God while you rock her to sleep. During the day when you have a break to sit down, pray to God and keep Him at the center of your mind. Trying to keep God at the forefront of your thoughts can be a challenge as a busy mother, but He will help you if you ask Him. *"Ask and it shall be given to you. Seek and ye shall find"* (Matt 7:7).

2. Get the support you need.

- 1) When people ask if they can help, say YES! Whether it's cooking a meal, getting some things at the store, take others up on their offers. This will give you more opportunities to sleep, rest, or just spend quality time with your baby. If not enough help is being offered, don't be afraid to ask! We are told in Romans to *"Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality"* (Rom 12:13). This is how we show the love of Christ to our brethren! Sometimes others are not sure how to help. However, if you ask them, most often you will find people are happy they can help in some way.
- 2) Also, experienced moms are great resources for questions on napping, feeding schedules, or anything else baby-related and can help you problem solve

any situation! It helps to know that moms have been there, done that, and it's worked for them.

- 3) In those first few months when you are up at night, you will be very tired during the day. Sleep when the baby is sleeping or take a nap when daddy comes home to get some strength back. You need to rejuvenate, so rest whenever you can.
- 4) Let things go. It can be difficult to relax with dirty dishes in the sink, or laundry to do, but try to remember that it all will eventually get done. It just may be tomorrow instead of today! You could even hire a maid service for the first month or ask a friend to help you around the house for the first while. Just try your best to be okay with lower standards than you may normally have, remembering the dishes and laundry can wait.
- 5) Talk about how you are feeling. This cannot be stressed enough. Call fellow moms on advice with nursing or naptimes. Call your mom or friends if you are having a tough day, even if all they can do is listen and tell you they have been there. Don't suffer alone or in silence...any other mom will understand what you are feeling. Prov 27:9 says, "*Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart: so doth the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel.*" Sometimes you just need the counsel or kind word of a trustworthy sister to get you through a tough day. If you think you may be suffering from postpartum depression, talk to your doctor about it. It's important that you get yourself healthy so you can be the best mom you can be.
- 6) Get out! Go for a walk, visit a friend, or window shop in town! Getting out of the house can be a good for your emotional and physical well-being. Staying inside all day can be stressful and boring, so try to get out at least a few days during the week, if not every day.
- 7) Enjoy your time with your baby.

God has given you this wonderful gift who you are not only responsible for, but with whom you can enjoy your time. Everyone will tell you (if they haven't already) that the time goes by very fast when your children are young! This is especially true in the first year because your little baby is changing every day. Don't rush her into the next stage or milestone. Just enjoy what she is doing now! Enjoy her smiles and cuddles, have fun watching her discover the world around her, and try not to let unimportant tasks take over time you could be spending with your baby in the time she is awake.

As the year goes on and you become more comfortable with your role as a mother and your routine becomes established, you can then use this opportunity of being at home to do even more in service to the Lord. Remember that raising your child with love and with Godly principles IS serving the Lord, and you can now use this time to expand those opportunities even more. Being at home with your baby gives you the gift of time, which many are not able to have because they need to work. This first year at home with only one baby is especially unique, because having more children can fill your time even more. You can use your time in between naps and meal times to visit the elderly, go to mid-day sisters class, or

maybe even start a moms-and-tots group! Also, your baby's naptimes can be a great opportunity to read God's word, study, pray, write cards to those in need, or make phone calls to those in your meeting who are having a difficult time. Since having your baby, you may find it difficult to get to Bible class or listen closely to the exhortation on Sunday because of being in the nursery. It's for these reasons that you may feel spiritually depleted at times, and therefore finding time during your week to spiritually rejuvenate becomes even more important now.

When Mary is told that she will bear the Savior of the world, she greatly rejoices. She says, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name, And His mercy is for those who fear Him from generation to generation" (Luke 1:46-50). She was told that her Son would be holy, the Son of God, and that he would reign in his Kingdom forever. We, like Mary, have been given our children for a special purpose: to "raise them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph 6:4). We should aspire to have the attitude of Mary in her praise of the Lord and the joy in her heart when given such a great and important responsibility. Our children are a "heritage to the LORD" as we are told in Psa 127:3, and it is this incredible lineage in which we strive for our children to be a part.

Sarah Robinson (Echo Lake, NJ)



Sisters Living Within Their Means



The wife can play a crucial role in the financial stability of a household. Look at the example of the wife in Prov 31: she is in control of supplying food and clothing for her family, she helps the needy outside the home, and is industrious to supplement the household income. Her activity causes praise to spring from her husband's lips. His heart trusts in her.

She never spends more than what they have, or puts the provider of the household in an awkward position.

Gift from God

God has given mankind his riches *and "hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour; this is the gift of God"* (Eccl.5:19). This gift becomes our responsibility in deciding how to use wisely what He has given us. Selfish thoughts subtly cloud this vision (Luke 12:15).

Contentment, on the other hand, banishes greed and showing off (Phil 4:11-13, Heb 13:5). Not only must we be content with our means, but we must also be generous in giving. *"Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver"* (2 Cor 9:7).

Because we acknowledge that all what we have is only possible by the power of God (Deut. 8:17-18) and not by our own hand, our financial planning will be different to those who do not share this view. We are laying up a treasure in heaven that moth and rust cannot corrupt (Matt 6:19-26).

Good stewards

"By wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established; and by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches" (Prov. 24:3-4). If the wife makes financial decisions that bring financial hardship to the family, God holds the husband accountable (Num 30:6-8, 15). A divided house falls; therefore, husband and wife need to be of one mind with their finances. Financial planning reflects the goals of their marriage.

By diligently knowing the state of the flock (income), one will usually have enough for the maintenance of one's household (Prov 27:23-27). Keep the budget simple. It makes it easy to stick to it, and takes the worry out. Focus 90% of planning time on the 90% portion of expenditure, because here the greatest savings are made. One can be more flexible with the remaining 10%. For instance, reducing the rent/mortgage payment by moving into cheaper accommodation can result in a monthly saving of hundreds of dollars, but reducing the toiletries bill with cheaper toothpaste is a relatively ineffective saving. Take the time to plan the large outflows. *"The thoughts of the diligent tend only to plenteousness; but of every one that is hasty only to want"* (Prov 21:5).

Before buying the house or any other expensive item, be sure to research it properly. By doing one's homework one can avoid unexpected and unnecessary large costs. "*She considereth a field, and buyeth it.*" (Prov 31:16). If the woman in the proverb did not look at the field thoroughly, bring an inspector in for an expert opinion, and check out the laws of the use of the land, she may find that she had bought a field that did not have any access to water, or that had the wrong type of soil unsuited for what she had hoped to plant, or that a road was going to be built through it. She would find that it was not such a good buy as she had initially thought, and would end up spending a lot more money in order to be able to use the field.

Better is a dinner of herbs

Husband and wife need to decide together on the family's priorities, both in the long term and the short term. Then the budget is projected over the year, and broken down into monthly increments, because bills tend to be paid on a monthly basis. What are our core values? Where should we compromise? If our family wants to entertain the entire ecclesia, it may make sense to have a larger home further out of town. If one wants to serve the ecclesia by being more accessible, then a smaller home closer to the ecclesial hall might be the better fit. Decide together on the best compromise of all the variables, but yield to the husband when there is an impasse and trust in God (1Pet 3:5, Eph 5:22-24).

The caregivers of God's heritage need to focus their time and energy in raising a Godly seed as Lois and Eunice had raised Timothy (2Tim 1:5 cp. 2Tim 3:15). We are instructed to be busy at home (Titus 2:3-5). God tells us to not wear ourselves out in earning money, but to be wise enough to know when to desist (Prov 23:4). Instead of feeling compelled to leave the children to make money, try to make ends meet in other ways. The same goes for our husbands; we wives may not even realize the pressure we may be placing on the breadwinner to unreasonably provide more and more. If our husbands come home too exhausted, the quality of spiritual leadership will decline not only for the family, but also for the ecclesia. Sweating to earn one's bread should not become briars and thistles in the way of studying God's word and doing His work (Matt 13:22).

A wife's willing hands can do much to augment her own household's income as well as helping others, by doing such things as buying second-hand items from thrift stores, cutting the children's hair at home, assisting families with moving house or landscaping, entertaining at home, using coupons, bringing meals to the sick and sharing over-abundant produce. This spirit encourages us all to live within our means.

Owe no man

Our only master should be our God. But as the Proverbs warn: "*The borrower is servant to the lender*" (Prov 22:7). Using credit cards or obtaining a loan comes with a price for the privilege of borrowing money. What would otherwise have needed time to accumulate, a person can use now with the expectation of having the money later to pay it off. This tempts us into ignoring our budget and into impulse buying. People go into debt with credit cards, not by using cash.

“The wicked borrows but does not pay back” (Psa 37:21). The vows to pay back our debt are before God (Prov 5:2-5). The less debt we have, the more likely we are able to pay it off, and the more options we will have in managing our budget. By being much more conservative than the bank’s assessment of a qualifying mortgage loan and waiting until one’s financial situation is stable (Prov 24:27), one is more likely to succeed in paying off the loan. Another incentive in repaying a loan is that the quicker it is paid off with just a little extra amount each month can mean considerable savings on the long-term interest charges.

Gathering her food in the harvest

The financial stability of the house rests on the ability of the married couple to save money. *“There is desirable treasure, and oil in the dwelling of the wise, but a foolish man squanders it” (Prov 21:17, 20).* Saving a bit of money every month gives the power to pay for specific items such as a car, education, Bible school, and retirement, as well as for unexpected events such as major car repairs (Prov 22:3). Financial advisors recommend putting this saved money into a separate savings account, like ants storing grain in the chambers of their nests (Prov 6:6-8).

Giving to God’s work

We show honor to God when we give back what He has given us (Prov 3:9-10). Not only did the Israelites give ten per cent of their income to God (Lev 27:32-33), but they also brought offerings. We, too, can give not only to our ecclesial funds, but give also in Sunday school supplies, refreshments, potluck meals (like Abigail — 1Sam. 25:18, 35), funding a special preaching event (like Phebe — Rom. 16:1-2), hosting the ecclesia in our home (as with Martha and Priscilla), and being hospitable to travelling brothers and sisters (as Mary, Joanna, and Susanna — Luke 8:1-3), which are some of the ways in which we can give back His bountiful blessings in thanksgiving.

Liberal soul opens her hand wide

“If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled’, and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?” (James 2:15-16). We are told to give according to how much our hearts want to give, cheerful because we want to give (2Cor 9:7).

Under the law, God expected His people to give 3% of their income to those in need (Deut 14:28-29, 15:9-11), as well as give the corners of their fields at every harvest time (Lev 19:9-10). This principle of not only giving on Sunday into the collection bag, but also giving support to those in need is a good standard by which to live (1Tim 6:17-19). This quiet giving can be in the form of meals, labor, or clothing (like Tabitha — Acts 9:36-40), as long as it is given so that the left hand does not know what the right hand is doing.

Teach our children

Just as we need to appropriately use what God has provided us, we need to train up our children how to view what God has given them and how to use it wisely.

Teaching them financial responsibility will hold them in good stead for the rest of their lives.

Children should serve the family ungrudgingly as that is what God requires of them (Col 3:20, 23). If they are given a portion of the household income they have to be taught how they should spend it. They can learn through experience in a sheltered environment what happens when one makes a good or a bad financial decision.

By teaching them to save a third, give a third to God and those in need, and spend a third on themselves they will learn more life lessons than just being financially responsible. By starting the children's savings account at a young age, the children will become used to the concept of putting some money away for a long-term goal (Prov 10:5). By giving from their allowance to the Sunday school collection bag and having opportunities to give to those in need from their own funds, they will learn what kind of a giving heart God expects of them. They can choose to save their personal spending third portion to buy a bike or they can fritter it away on candy for immediate gratification (but when the money is gone, it's gone!).

By the time the child reaches middle school they can understand the concept of being paid for a job, and could earn allowances for any jobs performed above and beyond the required family responsibilities. Giving them an annual budget for their clothes will teach them to think carefully before they buy a tempting pair of designer jeans, as that may use up their entire clothing budget!

In the teen years children can be given more opportunities for financial independence when they start earning their first pay check. If a young person chooses to live at home, then he or she can save for college, for the down payment on their first home or car, for travel to visit brethren and sisters, for participating in Bible schools and youth conferences, and for helping with the mission work.

Seek Godly counsel

If you have questions about how to use what God has given, then seek Godly counsel. Be careful asking advice from those who do not have the same spiritual outlook as you do (Psa 1:1). If we ask experienced, spiritually-minded brethren and sisters within our ecclesia for financial advice, then we can have a stronger assurance that it will be Scriptural advice (Prov 15:22).

Her price is far above rubies

By being women who look well to the ways of our households, our works will praise us in the gates of the New Jerusalem. *"Strength and honour are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come"* (Prov 31:25). The one pearl of great price is worth more to us than anything this world has to offer. Let us not be deceived or distracted. When we come before our Lord we want him to look at us and say, "This woman did cast in all that she had, even all her living. Come unto me my sister, my faithful spouse and be arrayed in fine linen clean and white."

Thamar Alexander (Seattle, WA)

Finding Faith in Kosovo



About two years ago, my husband and I made a decision to teach abroad in Pristina, Kosovo which would try our faith more than we could have imagined. The decision came at the beginning of our marriage. We were both young, working as school teachers in America and we were not ready to settle down and think about children, so, we embarked on an adventure. Along the way we prayed and asked God to put us in a place that he would agree with but we never stopped to think about how hard this experience would be on our relationship with Him

or how much we would miss being surrounded by an ecclesial family.

We agreed to move to Pristina for two years. The first year here I found it difficult to focus on God and make Him part of my every day decisions. I finished that first year of school feeling lost and without a direction. We went home over the summer to visit family and were very fortunate to attend a Bible School during this time and I realized what was missing in my life — God, every day, all day. Coming back to Kosovo at the end of the summer was very hard because I knew that I would be facing another year of having to fight the temptations of the world around me. So, I had to make a serious decision that this year would be all about dedicating myself to God. I knew it would be difficult because even by making this statement it did not make the temptations go away, and it has been a difficult commitment to keep. Some days I flat out fail but I do know that every sacrifice I make and through all of my seeking, I live with the hope of being part of the wonderful kingdom that is soon to come.

One of the hardest parts about our move has been the absence of godly friends, family, or any godly people in general. Kosovo is a Muslim country, though they are mostly secular Muslims. They also speak a different language to us, so it has been difficult to reach out to people. We have also found that most of the internationals that we have come in contact with are lacking any faith, which has made it difficult as well. We have been fortunate in that the CBM was making trips to Kosovo before we arrived and so they have done a regular job of dropping by, about three times a year. During these visits we are surrounded by Godly people and it gives us back our center that we so often lose. Through the CBM we have tried to reach out to the community to find interested people. This has not gone well and while we are constantly praying for God to show us opportunities, we do sometimes find it defeating.

My husband was raised in Christadelphia and so he had been surrounded by wonderful brothers and sisters all of his life. I, however, was newly baptized and hadn't quite grasped the importance of needing an ecclesial family. I find that I may not have been strong enough in my faith to leave the comfort and support of an ecclesia. I often would love to have people to discuss Biblical ideas and thoughts and to spend time with fellow sisters with common goals and ideals. It

is amazing how much having brothers and sisters close by helps keep your faith alive. The social scene here is very much of the world and without brothers and sisters nearby it is difficult not to be influenced by this.

As part of my commitment to God this year I have come up with ways to help with the feelings of separation. I started a weekly, Bible-based book club. Each week we Skype each other to analyze and discuss the book we are reading and how it is applicable to our faith journey. Another thing that we have done is to try to consistently travel 5-6 hours to visit our closest brothers and sisters in Macedonia. What I hope to learn from this bout of isolation is the importance of being a good sister and to apply this when we return to an ecclesia. I want to reach out and make sure no one feels left out and also play an active role in our future ecclesial family.

Another thing that I have found hard while living in isolation is holding myself accountable for having Godly actions. In America, every Sunday we had meeting, Wednesday night Bible readings, CYC activities and extra activities with our brothers and sisters but here there is no one to make sure that we attend meeting or read the Bible or even to keep our actions in check. As our lives become ever increasingly busy here in Kosovo, filling up with work and social activities, I sometimes find it easy to push my faithful duties to the next night and the next night — never to get done. This year my husband and I have set aside two times a day when we read the Bible or do Bible study. We also make it a point to have memorial every Sunday (thanks to the wonderful internet that is full of so many great talks!) We have also really tried to make the Bible mission more of a priority in our last year here. At night my husband and I do a prayer journal which also helps us focus on the mighty power of our God. All of these things have helped us stay on the faithful path but we do look forward to a time that we will be surrounded by an ecclesia to aid us on our way.

Though our time in isolation has been difficult because of the distance from our families and our ecclesial families, we have gained a lot from this experience. First, because of our nascent marriage, we were just learning how to live together, fully cooperate, and become a team. Kosovo gave us an opportunity to lean on each other for love and support. We often need strength from each other both in faith and emotional. Our marriage is stronger than ever and we have built a firm base that I cannot wait to build upon in our future together. We have also had the privilege of meeting many amazing Christadelphians and contacts all over Europe. We have met people from Macedonia, Russia, Bulgaria, Germany, and England. It is like we have a large network of family all over the world all working toward the common goal of the Kingdom. Isolation has also taught us to appreciate our ecclesia. We want to be the brother and sister that are encouraging people to come to events, meeting, and Bible studies because we want everyone to feel surrounded by family and faith. I have also learned a lot about myself and about my faith. I am never done being a Bible student and I need to make God a priority in my life. Being in isolation may have been the hardest thing in my life for many reasons, but I will also be walking away with a stronger faith than what I started with and I hope to take this into my next stages of life if the Lord stays away.

Courtney Robinson (Denver, CO)

Sunday School and a Most Inspiring Sister

The early pages of *The Christadelphian* magazine record a steady growth of Sunday schools in the brotherhood, starting in the 1860s. It is impossible to follow the story without coming to admire Sis. Mary Turney Randles and the valuable part that she played in it.

A pioneering sister

Mary came from the large Turney family of Nottingham and was baptized there by her older brother, Edward, in August, 1869.¹ She had just started teaching school at the time of her baptism and, in addition to her keen interest in teaching, came to the Truth with a great love and talent for music. While Mary's major contributions to Sunday schooling derived largely from her organizational skills as a teacher, let it be said that Sunday school and music have always gone together. "I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever" is both music and education at their best. A lesson sung is likely to be a lesson learned, and Mary was soon teaching others to sing the Lord's songs. This is clear from several entries in the Magazine.

From Birmingham shortly after Mary located there: "A singing class of the brethren and sisters, numbering over fifty members, is likely to be a success. It was started several months ago, and is taught by sister Mary Turney."² At the time this was reported to the Magazine, Mary was not yet 20 years old and had been in the Truth less than three years.

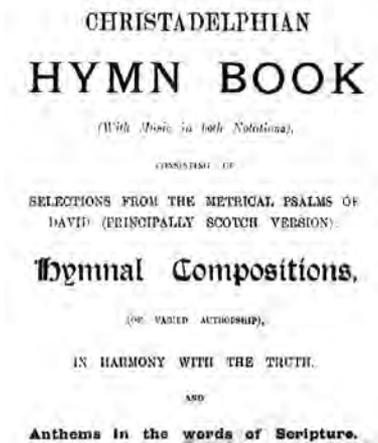
From Swansea after Mary's marriage to Bro. Randles and removal to Wales: "The brethren have, under sister Randles, commenced a course of thirteen lessons on the tonic-sol-fa method of singing, and hope to be able to use the hymn book with more pleasure and profit than they have hitherto done."³

And from the Recording Brother at Mumbles, west of Swansea: "Sister Randles, of Swansea, has commenced to give singing lessons to the brethren and sisters. Without flattery or egotism, I think I may say we are grateful for her admirable services, and are getting on well under her tuition."⁴ Sis. Mary Turney Randles was a teacher.

When music was added to the *Christadelphian Hymn Book* in 1874, Bro. Roberts included Mary on the team that was responsible for bringing it about:

"THE NEW HYMN BOOK, WITH MUSIC

We hope in a comparatively few weeks now, to be able to place in the hands of the brethren the new Hymn Book. ... The great feature of the new book will be the appearance, on the same page,



of the music to each hymn and anthem. ... For the musical feature, the brethren will be specially indebted to the industry of sister Mary Turney, Birmingham, brother A. Andrew of London, brother Rayer, of Birmingham, and one or two others.”⁵

Mary had been in the Truth about four years when Bro. Roberts tapped her for this important work on behalf of the brotherhood. She had already put her talents to work in the Birmingham Ecclesia and Bro. Roberts recognized how much she had to offer. The young sister in their midst was a capable and willing worker.

By this time Mary was a Sunday school teacher in the Birmingham Ecclesia as well: “A report from the Sunday school, read by the secretary (bro. Chatwin), represented the school to be in a thriving state, the number of scholars being 125, and the increase of Scriptural understanding among the children being marked. The teachers are, brethren Bready, Chatwin, Mitchell, Shelton (superintendent), Shemmans, Turner, and sisters Mary Ann Caldecott, Jane Dean, Mary Ann Lea, Amy Pettitt, Mrs. Roberts, and Mary Turney.”⁶

The Birmingham Sunday School was growing apace, and in short time Mary’s work received special mention: “A class of the Sunday school children (numbering about forty), is also improving rapidly, under sister Turney’s able tuition. (It meets ... on Saturday night.”⁷ Saturday night Sunday school! The Birmingham Ecclesia and Sis. Mary Turney could think outside the box. And this was taking place while Mary was leading the Birmingham singing class on Thursday nights!

Mary was soon to apply her teaching skills and energies in an even larger capacity. The Birmingham Ecclesia appointed her to the position of Sunday School Superintendent. One has to smile at the way this was reported to the Magazine: “The annual meeting was held October 6th (1875). ... The usual annual appointments were made for the various serving offices. The only changes were, — the appointment of sister Mary Turney as Superintendent of Sunday School, in place of brother Shelton, who resigned in consequence of the work being too much for him”⁸ One can almost hear the wheels turning at the ecclesial meeting: “Give the job to Mary, she can handle it!” In Bro. Shelton’s defense, he resumed the post of Sunday School Superintendent when Mary moved to Swansea five years later.

In his long-running series, “One Hundred Years Ago,” published in *The Christadelphian* from 1956 to 1963, Bro. Christmas Evans commented on Mary’s appointment as Sunday School Superintendent: “There were some who objected to a sister being the Superintendent of the Sunday School, but in spite of opposition, sis. Mary Turney (who became sis. Randles, of Swansea) filled the post for some time.”⁹ The fact is that Mary’s work as superintendent was greatly appreciated by the brothers and sisters in Birmingham. The ecclesia gave her a strong vote of confidence the year after her appointment: “The annual meeting was held Oct. 5th (1876), at which the usual appointments of serving brethren by ballot were declared. Sister Turney was elected superintendent of the Sunday School, by 124 to 34.”¹⁰ Perhaps Bro. Roberts saw fit to publish the actual vote count in Mary’s case in order to reassure those who were uncertain about the matter.

When the first edition of *The Christadelphian Instructor* came out in 1886, Bro. Roberts provided some brief guidelines for Sunday school teachers and superintendents: “A teacher is wanted for each class, and the teacher should steadily take the same class from Sunday to Sunday. There is a loss of interest to the children and power to the teachers, with frequent changes. As a rule, the boys’ classes should have male teachers, and the girls’, female teachers. But sometimes the boys’ classes are more advantageously taught by female than by male teachers. And sometimes a sister makes even a better superintendent than a brother.”¹¹ It is difficult to imagine that Bro. Roberts did not have Sis. Mary Turney Randles in mind when he wrote this.

From Birmingham to Swansea

In 1880, Sis. Mary Turney married Bro. Thomas Randles, the widowed Recording Brother of the Swansea Ecclesia in southern Wales. She moved to Swansea. Birmingham’s loss was Swansea’s great gain. Both ecclesias commented to the Magazine.

From Birmingham: “The ecclesia, and particularly the Sunday School, has suffered a great loss by the removal to Swansea of sister Mary Turney. The cause of removal is marriage to brother Randles, of that place. Brother Shelton has been appointed superintendent of the Sunday school, in sister Turney’s place.”¹²

From Swansea: “We have had a valuable addition to our number, brother Randles having been united in marriage to sister Turney (as stated in the Birmingham intelligence of last month). We hope and believe her presence amongst us will be of great service in stimulating and assisting us to push forward the work of spreading the truth in Swansea.”¹³

But Mary’s services were not entirely lost to Birmingham as a result of her removal to Swansea. She had already begun to apply herself to what we would today call curriculum development. She helped organize an early calendar of Sunday school lessons that assured orderly and comprehensive Bible instruction of the children. Bro. Francis A. Chatwin, of Birmingham, himself an early force in curriculum development for the Sunday school, had this to report to the Magazine:

“Our Programme: The following is the Time Table of the Birmingham Christadelphian Sunday School, from January to June, 1882. It has been prepared by Sister Randles, of Swansea, and may be serviceable elsewhere.”¹⁴

There follows a list of weekly lesson subjects for the first half of 1882. Shortly after this, the Magazine published the calendar of lessons that Mary prepared for the second half of the Sunday school year. As Bro. Chatwin observed, the time table might well “be serviceable elsewhere”. The mindset behind this pioneering work was one of serving the wider brotherhood; being of a mind to make one’s special talents useful to as wide a circle of brothers and sisters as possible.

Mary’s inter-ecclesial services were rendered in other ways as well. With some Sunday schools bursting with 50 or 100 or 200 students in those early days, record keeping was an important matter to be dealt with. Mary saw a need in this regard

and acted to meet it: “Sunday School Work—Sister Randles, 15, Castle Street, Swansea, (late Sister Turney, of Birmingham), has prepared a class attendance sheet that will last 12 months and greatly facilitate Sunday School work. It is the result of many years’ experience. She has had it printed, and can supply 25 copies for 4s. She has also had leather-backed cases prepared for the same, to preserve them from wear; 12 of which can be had for 3s[shillings]. Communicate to the address given.”¹⁵ Sis. Randle’s record keeping system continued to be used for several years.

Sunday school exams were an annual affair in those early days, and Sis. Mary Randles of Swansea served as one of the examiners. As such, it was her duty to evaluate completed exams (identified only by student registration number and ecclesia) and to award marks for each student’s work.¹⁶

The Sunday school exams measured a student’s mastery of basic Bible stories and principles. Bro. Robert Ashcroft, a Congregational minister who embraced the Truth in the mid-1870s, offered the following comment about Christadelphian Sunday school exams: “It would be an interesting occasion could a number of ministers or clergymen be made to take the place of the children belonging to a Christadelphian Sunday School on examination day.”¹⁷ The meaning of Bro. Ashcroft’s remark needs no explanation.

“Their deeds follow them”

Sis. Mary Turney Randles showed her exceptional qualities in other ways as well and left an example for us in the process. Her own brother, Edward, who had baptized her into Christ in 1869, led the tragic Renunciationist division that wracked the brotherhood in the 1870s. This sad affair, arising from within her own family, was a blow to Mary that hurt her ability to serve the brotherhood for a time in the early part of 1874.

Anyone who serves the brotherhood knows that it is never done without some pain and heartache. Service is never rendered without challenges that test one’s faith and measure one’s ability to rise above pain or pride or strong pressures; to persevere in service to God and to those for whom Christ died.

Mary overcame this personal setback in an exemplary way and resumed a life of service that lasted to the very end. At the end of the day, those who remain standing are those who have, with great reliance on God, steered the steady course of faith, come what may. One can only be thankful for Mary’s example of faithfulness.

Sis. Mary Turney Randles fell asleep in Christ on Sunday morning, January 12th, 1902, at the age of 49, after an extended illness. The tributes to her that poured into The Christadelphian Office filled more than three pages of the Magazine. Sis. Jane Roberts, herself but recently widowed, wrote of Mary whom she had known and loved since Birmingham days: “It was with inexpressible sorrow that I heard of the death of dear sister Randles, of Swansea. I feel that the whole household of faith has sustained an irreparable loss ... Still, there is the memory of her life left to us who remain — a golden sun-setting, as it were. She was a living example of

what a sister can accomplish by the dedication of her varied talents to the Master's service.”¹⁸

Bro. Randles, now widowed a second time, also wrote of his late wife and sister in Christ: “Continuing the mournful intelligence of last month of the death of my dear wife and sister, the funeral took place on January 16th, at the Swansea Cemetery. . . . I can truly say her life was a ‘living sacrifice,’ always trying to benefit others, and doing more than she was able or expected to do. Our loss is great; a guiding star has gone down; an intellect peculiarly bright, and intelligence of unusual breadth. ‘Her price far above rubies,’ she was a truly ‘virtuous woman.’”¹⁹

Within weeks of Mary's death, their only child, John Turney Randles, was baptized into Christ.²⁰ Dear sister Mary will only know the joy of this in the Resurrection. And another satisfying footnote to her life appeared in the pages of the Magazine shortly after that: “We have much pleasure in reporting the obedience of two more. On Wednesday, May 14th (1902), Miss Ruth Jenkins; and June 16th, Miss Lottie Lifton (daughter of brother and sister Lifton). We regret the loss of our new sister Lifton, who has taken up her residence at Bristol, where, we trust, the ‘first love’ will receive no check. *It is with confidence we recommend her to the Bristol ecclesia, she having been an apt scholar for many years under our late sister Randles in Sunday School.*”²¹ “*They may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them*” (Rev 14:13).

*“Thy kingdom come, O God,
Thy rule, O Christ, begin;
Break with thine iron rod
The tyrannies of sin.”²²*

Jim Harper (Meriden, CT)

Notes:

1. *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 6, 1869, p.282.
2. *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 9, 1872, p.188.
3. *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 17, 1880, p.238
4. *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 18, 1881, p.190
5. *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 10, 1873, pp.519-520.
6. *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 7, 1870, p.350.
7. *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 9, 1872, p.188.
8. *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 12, 1875, p.522.
9. *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 96, 1959, p.293.
10. *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 13, 1876, p.525.
11. *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 23, 1886, p.360.
12. *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 17, 1880, p.139.
13. *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 17, 1880, p.190.
14. *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 19, 1882, p.83.
15. *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 18, 1881, p.572
16. *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 19, 1882, p.426.
17. *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 14, 1877, p.401.
18. *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 39, 1902, p.86.
19. *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 39, 1902, p.140.
20. *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 39, 1902, p.189.
21. *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 39, 1902, p.472.
22. Hymn 285, First Tune, Langland Bay, *Christadelphian Hymn Book*, 2002, Music by Sister Mary Randles. (Langland Bay is a scenic place near Swansea.)

Bible Study

Bible Study Section Introduction

The topic of women in the Bible, and related matters, is enormous and full of vital interest and examples. In this section we will consider a few examples: of single women, of Deborah and Jael, of Hannah, of the Biblical characters that truly walked with God, and of the New Creation which mothers bring forth. We hope these examples will inspire our readers to study the Bible for examples, encouragement, counsel and advice as they do their daily readings, whether alone or with others of their family.

Birthing a New Heavenly Creation: Are We Up to the Challenge?

“And Adam called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all the living” (Gen 3:20 NASB).¹

Just after receiving the crushing judgment of being consigned to a life of hard labor and then death, Adam names his wife the “*mother of all living*” (Gen 3:20). The name Adam chooses for his wife is an astonishing revelation of the nature of her role for all subsequent generations of the human race. As we will explore, fallen mankind has the chance of renewing their relationship with their Father in Christ, through a process of personal transformation. This is exemplified by the natural blessings of woman as patterned after Eve. The Bible is filled with feminine imagery that we so often fail to mediate upon. Instead, we should study those patterns and be empowered to fully embrace God’s role for us as women, and celebrate our natural gifts in preparing for our Lord’s return.



Right from the beginning, women are established as a key component in the transformational process of Life. When God created man and woman, Adam was created out of dust/destruction/desolation (*‘aphar’*=dust, ashes, rubbish) (Gen 2:7). This is contrasted with Eve, who was created out of living breathing life. Adam is characterized as beginning with destruction and ending

with destruction, whereas Eve was created from life and ends producing life. As a result of their sin against God, they both received curses but the promise of Life comes through Eve.

*“To the woman He said, ‘I will greatly multiply your **pain** in childbirth [‘herown’= conception, pregnancy], In pain you will bring forth children; Yet your desire will be for your husband, And he will rule over you.’ Then to Adam He said, ‘Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat of it’: Cursed is the ground because of you; In **toil** you will eat of it All the days of your life. ...By the sweat of your face You will eat bread, Till you return to the ground, Because from it you were taken; For you are dust [‘aphar’], And to dust you shall return” (Gen. 3:16-19).*

In the passage above, “pain” and “toil” are the same Hebrew word *‘itstsabown’*, which means pain, labor, hardship, sorrow, toil, etc. So, both man and woman will suffer some sort of personal sacrifice in bringing forth the fruits of their labor. To the woman, God pronounces hardship for her in producing new life. To man, He bestows that out of hardship he will be a provider of daily sustenance and make the decisions for his family, but will ultimately return to destruction. Of course both Adam and Eve will toil in the fields and both will return to dust, but the ultimate pronouncement of death is spoken directly to Adam. Contrastingly, Eve will birth a new creation. Personal sacrifice, heartache and struggle will define yet transform ordinary flesh into new living creations after the image of God. All women, patterned after Eve, have the potential of being the spiritual mothers of the sons and daughters of God. They will give birth to God’s New Creation!

The role of woman in His plan

Again, God emphasizes the importance of the role of woman to His plan and purpose through using patterns and principles of womanhood throughout the Bible to illustrate His message to us. He uses the cycle of a woman’s life as a living object lesson of God’s process of salvation. Let us draw out this pattern:

- 1) Alone and solitary -> separate (as holy or unholy)
- 2) Betrothal -> studying, learning and making the decision to unite with God
- 3) Wedding vows -> making a public declaration to serve God alone
- 4) Pregnancy -> daily struggle in personal transformation in taking on God’s Name
- 5) Labor -> intense trials in life which ultimately yield fruit
- 6) Birth of baby -> the new creation fully formed in Christ

Looking at #1 above, why does God liken Israel’s idolatry to a prostitute? Why *that* symbolism? *“..For a spirit of harlotry has led them astray..” (Hos. 4:12)*. Why is so much Scripture dedicated to warning against ungodly women drawing away the hearts of men? Is there some strong hidden power or influence that women can exert? God even uses poor Hosea to act out His relentless and redeeming love towards His rebellious wife. Now contrast that to the importance God places on keeping oneself pure and protecting virginity. We are to be set apart in righteousness, not contaminated by the stains of the world. Think about all the times God speaks of vows and betrothal. God also speaks many times of Israel as his bride and wife.

“For your husband is your Maker, Whose name is the Lord of hosts; And your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel, Who is called the God of all the earth” (Isa 54:5).

Jerusalem is even declared our mother! God himself even expresses His nature as that of a mother.

“For thus says the Lord, ‘Behold, I extend peace to her like a river, And the glory of the nations like an overflowing stream; And you will be nursed, you will be carried on the hip and fondled on the knees. As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; And you will be comforted in Jerusalem’ ” (Isa 66:12-13).

“You neglected the Rock who begot you, And forgot the God who gave you birth” (Deut 32:18).

“For a brief moment I forsook you, But with great compassion [alternate translation: “womb”] I will gather you” (Isa 54:7).

Israel’s transformation process is likened to a woman in labor (Matt 24:8). Several passages speak of the Babylonian captivity as a type of labor for Israel’s period of transformation.

“Writhe and labor to give birth, Daughter of Zion, Like a woman in childbirth; For now you will go out of the city, Dwell in the field, And go to Babylon. There you will be rescued; There the LORD will redeem you from the hand of your enemies” (Mic 4:10).

As indicated through the consistent imagery of the woman as used by God, we see that women have a keen personal understanding and insight to the transformation process: out of suffering and distress comes New Life! Perhaps part of the letter to Timothy underscores the fact that men are taught about the path of salvation (who did God teach back in the garden?) whereas women **experience** the path of salvation and growth in godliness.

“For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. But women will be preserved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint” (1Tim 2:13-15).²

The path of motherhood is one of humble service shaped through trials and driven by love and self-sacrifice. So, perhaps the definition of a life giving, life sustaining ultimate servant is....a mother! Let us pray that God may write in the “registers of the peoples” of those under our influence, *“This one was born in Zion” (Psa 87:6).*

The role of the **godly** woman is a key to God’s plan of salvation. The virtuous woman represents God’s chosen people who have been shaped by trials and have come through unstained by the world with bountiful works of righteousness.

“For Zion’s sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest, until her vindication goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a burning torch. The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory;

and you shall be called by a new name which the mouth of the LORD will give. You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called My delight is in her, and your land Married; for the LORD delights in you, and your land shall be married. For as a young man marries a virgin, so shall your sons marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you” (Isa 62:1-5).

We are given a new name: Hephzibah, ‘*My delight is in her*’. God takes a special delight in us as cherished daughters of Zion! Let us continuously strive to please our Father.

It is also interesting to see that in the final verses of the book of Job, a timeless book of epic qualities of salvation, only daughters are named. They are specifically mentioned as being distinguished from other women, and receiving equal inheritance among their brothers. Like back in Genesis, man and woman are to be co-regents, working together in God’s kingdom bringing forth fruit.

So what do we gather from all of this? Clearly the Bible portrays that women are responsible for bringing forth a new creation and their lives are used as living object lessons for God’s people. Since their natural lives dictate that they embrace personal sacrifice, service towards others and transformation, the Bible taps into this amazing resource and at many times uses women as agents of change. Isaiah specifically calls upon women to rise up and prepare for the journey to salvation.

“Rise up, you women who are at ease, And hear my voice; Give ear to my word, You complacent daughters.... Beat your breasts for the pleasant fields, for the fruitful vine, For the land of my people in which thorns and briars shall come up; Yea, for all the joyful houses and for the jubilant city... Until the Spirit is poured out upon us from on high, And the wilderness becomes a fertile field, And the fertile field is considered as a forest” (Isa 32:9-15).

Women of strength and character in the Bible

The women of strength and character in the Bible, time and time again, rose up in a time of need and seized the opportunity (at great personal risk!) to further the glory of God. Many even changed the course of history. These acts of great faith were done with humility whilst shaping the surrounding community of God’s people. Just meditate for a few minutes upon the acts of these fellow women of great faith:

- Sarah “*whatever Sarah tells you, listen to her*” — God (Gen 21:12).
- Rebecca “*Drink...and I will also draw water for your camels to drink.*” — Rebecca (Gen. 24:17-18).
- Tamar “*She is more righteous than I*” — Judah (Gen 38:26).
- “*And his sister stood at a distance, to know what would be done to him*” (Exod 2:4).
- Zipporah “*Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son’s foreskin.*” (Ex. 4:25)
- Rahab “*By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish*” (Heb 11:31).

- Deborah *“The peasantry ceased in Israel, they ceased until you arose, Deborah, arose as a mother in Israel”* — Deborah (Jdgs 5:7).
- Jael *“Most blessed of women is Jael...Most blessed is she ...”* — Deborah (Jdgs 5:24).
- Ruth *“And now, my daughter, do not fear,... for all my fellow townsmen know that you are a woman of worth”* — Naomi (Ruth 3:11).
- Abigail *“Blessed be the LORD..., who sent you this day to meet me..”* — David (1Sam 25:32).
- Esther *“...And thus I will go in to the king, ...and if I perish, I perish.”* — Esther (Esth 4:16).
- Mary *“Blessed are you among women...”* — Elizabeth (Luke 1:42).
- Mary Magdalene *“Jesus said to her, ‘Mary!’ ”* (John 20:16).
- Syrophenician Woman *“O woman, your faith is great...”* — Jesus (Matt 15:28).
- Women at the cross *“Then they returned and prepared spices and perfumes...”* (Luke 23:56).

Given our maternal predisposition, ability to adapt, God’s promises, and in many cases our experience in childbirth, women have a unique position in the community of believers. We have a special connection to the transformation process, as patterned time and time again in the Bible. It is up to us as daughters of Zion to help prepare the hearts and minds of our community for Jesus’ return. **Now** is the time to draw upon our humble strength and lead our community in change, not through demands but through inspiration!

As we examine ourselves and our community of believers, where do we see areas in need of change? In our personal lives, what do we need to change to be a strong and more vibrant daughter of Zion? In our home ecclesias, how can we get past apathy? Often, our young people drift away: how can we inspire their passion for Christ? Can we better embrace all personality types? How can we use humble strength and wisdom to guide those around us through turbulent times? Can we help heal the divisions, factions and strife in the global body of Christ? Can we boost our efforts even more to make a difference to those in need? As individuals, are there things that we can do to encourage transformation in our community?

Are we willing to take up the challenge and birth a New Creation in Christ? Are we willing to step outside our comfort zone and “rise up” and prepare our community? God has given women a sacred influence. The Bible makes it clear that women have a strong influence on men, their community and the “land”, especially in times of need. How are we going to use that influence? Are we willing to be bold and draw upon the courage of those mothers in Israel and stand up with confidence in His Presence? Taking a stand for something is a bold statement of faith. It shows the world where we place our faith. And....it starts with YOU!

Nissa Paggi (Verdugo Hills, CA)

Notes:

1. All translations are from the NASB.
2. Note this is usually taken to refer at least partially to Jesus Christ.

Single Women in the Bible and Today

God established the practice of marriage surprisingly early on in Scripture. In Genesis 3, we read of Eve being placed under Adam's authority, and that her future seed should bruise the head of the serpent. Most women in the Bible naturally followed in this role of wife and mother as set up by God, but we have also been given the stories of some exceptions. These were single women who often struggled but yet relied strongly on God, and flourished in the absence of marital support. Many women today spend a great deal of their life single, whether it is a delaying of marriage, widowhood, or a lifelong choice. Thus, it is sensible that we should draw out lessons from those examples given to us, to apply and study in our lives as single sisters in Christ.

Widows



“And there was one Anna, a prophetess... And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years” (Luke 2:36). Anna is a wonderful sister for a role model because of her devotion to God throughout her life. It says she, “departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day” (Luke 2:37). Anna made a powerful decision to remain in her state of widowhood in the physical sense, while spiritually preparing for the marriage feast to come. Indeed, her short account does not say she meandered and gossiped, but instead, she busied herself with work in the temple and telling others of the birth of Christ. Paul warns about the idleness of widows:

“but the younger widows refuse: for when they have begun to wax wanton against Christ, they will marry; having damnation, because they have cast off their first faith. And withal they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not” (1Tim 5:11-13).

A clear problem identified in that passage, is not that the women are single and seeking companionship, but that they are *idle* and that acted as a catalyst to their poor behavior. We should not be lazy in our work; for fear that we might mold ourselves into unworthy vessels as a result. But that lifestyle can be changed; Paul writes

“If anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work. So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels” (2Tim 2:21-23 ESV).

Indeed, we can see that we should be turning aside from idleness and “youthful passion” in order to prepare ourselves for our roles as disciples. Anna's life seems

to echo the Psalms when it says, *“lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day”* (Psa 25:5). Her days were indeed spent serving God and following his ways. Eventually, her lifelong preparation and learning enabled her to be a witness and preacher, to those who believed, of Jesus. For all sisters, we can take from her example to be studious throughout our lives, reading, praying, and avoiding idleness and quarreling, so that we can also be anxiously awaiting the fulfillment of prophecy and capable of teaching others as a worthy vessel.

Hannah



There is often frustration or impatience at God's choice to withhold certain relationships, but we can relate to sisters like Hannah in 1Sam 1. Hannah was frustrated by her inability to provide children for her husband, and was continually derided for it to the point of tears over a period of many years. She did not turn away from God in her bitterness of spirit, but sought him out in heartfelt prayer. The psalmist said:

“I cried to him with my mouth, and high praise was on my tongue. If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened. But truly God has listened; he has attended to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God, because he has not rejected my prayer or removed his steadfast love from me!” (Psa 66:17-20 ESV).

Her prayer was accepted because of her faith. It is encouraging to see that her suffering did not cause her faith to waver and she must have understood that, *“for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth”* (Heb 12:6). In her thanks to God for Samuel, we can see her humility in following God's plan, *“Talk no more so very proudly, let not arrogance come from your mouth; for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed”* (1Sam 2:3 ESV). As God's children we must try to accept and enjoy the blessings he **has** given us while trying to keep our faith strong. God is always listening to the prayers of his children, but we cannot let our pride tell us that we have greater knowledge and know what is best. In 2Sam 2:21 it reads that Hannah was additionally blessed with five more children after Samuel! She must have had such joy when her patience was rewarded with more than she had asked for! As it says Hebrews, *“let us run with patience the race that is set before us”* (Heb 12: 1). Hannah was patient in her hardships but God was not done working in her life. We too cannot see the whole picture, but we must allow God's hand to work in our lives and perhaps, like Hannah, we will be granted our petition.

Examples of faithful women

Overall, the examples provided for us in the Bible show an array of faithful women from different places and times that all have had long periods in their lives without a husband or, in Hannah's case, children. For many of us, we still may hope to

be physical mothers, but we will all become spiritual mothers. Jesus said, while indicating his disciples, *“Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother”* (Matt 12:49-50). As one family in Christ, we should love and care for one another. For single women, this needs to be a time to work on your own spiritual welfare before taking on the responsibility of teaching a child of your own or in the ecclesia. In my life, I watched my mother do the readings each morning and even had her as a Sunday school teacher. Her continued study also prepared her to give me Scriptural advice throughout the various times of my life, so I have been fortunate to have such a strong mother to be an example to me. But I have also developed friendships with other women in the ecclesia, both widows and mothers, who remain active in the ecclesia, whether by sister’s classes, projects, or organization of events or meals that unknowingly become an example to myself as I help take on those responsibilities.

While being single is often an emotional struggle, there are many qualities that we should remember to work on so that we are prepared for our current roles in our spiritual family and in the kingdom to come. We should study and devote ourselves to God as Anna did. In addition, we can learn from Hannah that we must bear our burdens with patience and meekness. But also, we must remember that we are always a “mother” and “sister” in the ecclesia. Instead of seeking or mourning a relationship, we should seek wisdom as Solomon did, and remember, *“This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.”* (1John 5:14).

Mary Cheetham (Moorestown, NJ)

Walking With God



I have always been intrigued by the phrase in Jesus’ prayer that *“this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent”* (John 17:3). He’s asking for a relationship, such as he has with God, to be given to others. He desires for us to know God. If I were to ask you to think of people in the Bible who knew God, who would you think of? For me, Adam, Enoch, Abraham, Moses, and of course, Jesus resonate in my mind. When we reflect on their experiences, the enticing verses about their lives create a jealousy for a relationship we could have.

In Adam’s case, we are told that *“and they [the man and his wife] heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day”* (Gen 3:8). They knew this sound, they were familiar with it. Additionally, the narrative suggests that they typically joined the walk. At the very least, it seems to be presented as unusual that, after their sin, they chose to hide from

His walk. Then of Enoch we're told in Gen 5:24, that he *"Walked with God: and he was not; for God took him."* Though I cannot say exactly what this means, the Scripture tantalizes us with the account of his life in Heb 11:5, by telling us that *"By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God."* He pleased God, he walked with God. These are two incredible things to be remembered of any person. Indeed, in the next verse God reminds us that *"without faith, it is impossible to please Him, for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him"*. Faith puts us confidently in a place where we too can please Him, seek Him, be in relationship with Him.

God reminiscences of Abraham in this way: *"But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend"* (Isa 41:8). Jesus clarifies this friendship by revealing that we are his friends when we do whatever he commands us to do. As friends, he reveals God's thoughts to us (John 15:14-15). We remember that friendship in Abraham's life. We read in awe of how the LORD revealed to Abraham the things He had planned (Gen 18:17).

With Moses there are many remarkable interactions, and they are summed up in Exod 33:11 where we are told of how *"The LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend."* As stated by Alfred Nicholls in *The Name That is Above Every Name*, "He who had been afraid to look upon God at the bush, and indeed had been forbidden to draw nigh, was now able to live in God's presence and literally to reflect the glory from his own shining face" (p. 47). Truly, knowing God can have profound effects on our lives.

The relationship Jesus had with His Father is revealed as even deeper. We are told that God looked on him with Favor, and declared how well He is pleased with Jesus (Luke 2:52; 3:22).

Granting that it is true that Adam was with God before the fall, and Jesus was His only begotten son, His word made flesh, Enoch, Moses and Abraham were cursed with separation in the same way we are, yet here on earth, they seem to have known God. This leaves the promise, yea, even the command to know God open to us. We must know God if we want to inherit life eternal. We may wonder what this looks like now, in the days wherein we live, although it is probable we know some people who are already on this path.

People who KNOW God

It may surprise us to know that we have met people that KNOW God. In moments of reflection, can you think of anyone? We are not talking about the ones that know facts about Him, who can think of the right references, or quote the passages, but the ones who seem to KNOW Him, to be in relationship with Him. Those who choose to see Him as their loving Heavenly Father, a constant all-powerful presence directing their lives. The ones who trust Him, even when faced with trials. There must be attributes that make these Biblical and present people different, set apart, holy unto God.

In my own search, I've been amazed that some people draw closer to God in their struggles, that they speak often and openly of Him recognizing that He is their true source of strength. There are others who obey, even when their lives are in turmoil, and find, unnaturally, along the way, that their faith is stronger than when they began. They, like Jeremiah, have taken the precious truth of God, from the vile of this current life (Jer 15:19).

In their lives, I can see that knowing God is bigger than thanking Him for food, clothing or protection. It's more than spending a week centered around His word, more than doing our readings every day. It's more along the lines of being able to echo David and Hezekiah's praise, to look at our God and say, "*I know O Lord, that Thy judgements are right, and that Thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me*", to trust Him so completely that I believe it is for my good that I had great bitterness, for "*Thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for Thou hast cast all my sins behind Thy back*" (Psa 119:75 and Isa 38:17). I want to know God like that.

I need to know God like that because I don't want to hear the words echoed back at me, "*I never knew you*" (Matt 7:23). I do not have a package answer to this problem, or a tidy set of beliefs that will do the trick. What I can share with you, is an interesting concept I have come across, that helps me walk further on this path. It has been called *The Practice of the Presence of God*, by a man remembered as Brother Lawrence from recorded conversations and letters he wrote to his contemporaries in the 17th century. This idea entails having a relationship of praise to God continually, through conversation, prayer and meditation on the Word. Adding this quality to our daily interaction can transform our minds, and cultivate an openness to His revealed will. God, in the words recorded by Asaph, when summoning the earth and the heavens, that He might judge His people, declares "*Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God*" (Psa 50:23). Praise is an important step in the process of knowing God's salvation. To practice His presence then, is to spend life in constant recognition of God's nearness with the understanding that it is a great delusion to think that the times set aside for prayer are separate from the rest of our lives. This mindset enables us to "recognize God intimately present with us and address ourselves to Him every moment ...In our conversation with God we should engage in praising, adoring, and loving Him incessantly for His infinite goodness and perfection" (Lawrence). For we know that "*It is a good thing to give thanks unto the LORD, and to sing praises unto [His] name*" (Psa 92:1).

While this concept does not replace reading, studying the Word, seeking God's will or being forgiven by faith in the precious blood of Jesus Christ, it is prescribed in Scripture, in the directions we are given for prayer, and can aid us on our journey to know Him. We are told to "*Be continuing instant in prayer*" (Rom 12:12), to "*Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving*" (Col 4:2). We are comforted that we need "*Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God*" (Phil 4:6). Paul repeatedly exhorts us to participate in this relationship desiring that

“men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting” (1 Tim 2:8) and that we “Pray without ceasing” (1Thess 5:17).

The lament *“Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!”* repeated in Psa 107:8 is just one proof that God is worthy of our continuous praise. Yet, how do we get there? How do we become people who are in constant communication with God, who pray to God, and praise Him continually? Does it mean we must rush through our chores, or try to cut out as many as possible, so that we can stop and think about God? This cannot be, for we would have to cease our labors to pray, and then cease our prayers to labor. Perhaps we just need to remember to change our everyday moments and fill them with praising and glorifying God. In this way we could be doing our daily tasks without any view of pleasing men but purely for the love of God (Lawrence).



One of the ways we can remind ourselves of God's presence is by having triggers. For our purposes, we are going to define them as anything throughout our day that can refocus us with God as first in our thoughts. A couple of the triggers I have collected are thinking of the washing and cleansing we are given through Christ and the Word when washing hands, clothes or dishes (Eph 5:25-26), or using a moment stopped at a

stoplight, or waiting for the Internet to reconnect to reflect on the Sabbath idea of resting from our own work and doing the work of God.

All of us can transform these common moments in our days. They may not be long drawn out thoughts, or traditional prayers, but instead can change the onerous times and everyday activities into praise. It probably won't change our lives the first time we try it. We may still find ourselves continually departing from thoughts of God a month or a year later. It is, of course, a journey, that we stand up and start walking again. Remembering the words of the Psalmist *“So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee. Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever. For, lo, they that are far from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee. But it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all thy works” (Psa 73:22-28).* Though I may not be able to help you, personally, know God, hopefully we can motivate each other to continue to desire it, to seek Him with all of our heart, mind, soul and strength, so that when our Lord, Master and Judge returns to the earth, He will choose to know us.

Martha Monahan (Denver, CO)

The Inner Man (Hannah)

The world is very good at selling us its bill of goods — that we have certain inalienable rights. We are frequently told by the world that we have a right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. We are told that no one can take away these rights. It is asserted that as long as we aren't harming anyone that everything is acceptable. This is all very appealing to the flesh, but is it correct?

The times of Hannah

The above paragraph could easily describe the times in which Hannah lived. She lived in the time of the judges, when, Scripture tells us, *“Every man did that which was right in his own eyes”* (Jdgs 21:25). Yet that was not how God wanted them to live. He actually put in place a simple thing for them to do to prevent such a mentality. We read *“Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them that they make them fringes in the borders of their garments throughout their generations, and that they put upon the fringe of the borders a ribband of blue: and it shall be unto you for a fringe, that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the LORD, and do them; and that ye seek **not** after your own heart and your own eyes, after which ye use to go a whoring: that ye may remember, and do all my commandments, and be holy unto your God”* (Num 15:38-40). Not everything is acceptable to God, even if no one is getting hurt and/or consenting. Prov 14:12 (ESV) says *“There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.”* By the time we come to 1Sam 1 and 2 we read of the deplorable state of not just the nation in general but also of the priesthood itself. Let us take a look at Hannah and how we may be encouraged by her example to live our lives in a pleasing way unto God.

Her home life was a mixed bag. She had a husband who was a righteous man and he loved her deeply but she had no child of her own. Adding to that heartache was the fact that Elkanah had a second wife. It is possible that he married Peninnah after it became apparent that Hannah was barren. In his taking two wives, one of which had been able to bear children and one who had not, we have an echo of Leah and Rachel.

1Sam 1:6 the KJV uses the word adversary, but in the Septuagint (LXX) we read *“her rival provoked her to anger”*. This English word is used only one other time in the LXX, in Lev 18:18: *“You shall not take a wife in addition to her sister as a rival, to uncover her indecency instead of her, while she is yet living.”* Were Hannah and Peninnah actually sisters? It would not be the first time that this situation has occurred. It is very reminiscent of Leah and Rachel and all of the troubles that that family endured.

It is in this state of ‘bitterness of mind’ or as the LXX says ‘severe pain of soul’ that Hannah prays unto the Lord for a son. She doesn't just pray for a son, but makes a vow of the Nazarite for him. 1Sam 1: 11 (LXX) says: *“...then I will put him before you, dedicated until the day of his death. And an iron razor shall not ascend upon his head.”* The Nazarite vow was one of dedication, separation and consecration. Compare what the angel told Manoah's wife in Judges 13:5 (ESV): *“for behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. No razor shall come upon his head, for the child*

shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb, and he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines.” Did Hannah hope that in dedicating her son to the Lord that he would, like Samson, help to free Israel from the Philistines? In 1Sam 7:3, 8 we read of Samuel’s instructions to the house of Israel to return to the Lord and serve Him only, and their reply that Samuel “*cease not to pray for them*”. Finally, in verse 13 we are told that “*the Philistines were subdued, and they came no more into the coast of Israel: and the hand of the Lord was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel.*”

When Eli confronts Hannah her response to him is variously translated as she was in “sorrowful spirit” or “sharply pained in spirit” and it is out her “great complaint and bitter provocation” or “great anxiety and vexation” that she prayed. While the Psalms are written well after the time of Hannah, Psalm 143 seems to capture the emotions she was experiencing.

Our world

Each one of us is like Hannah. We live in a society where every man does that which is right in his own eyes. We are afflicted by our adversary, the world. It, as a rival, strives for superiority over us. Sorrowful in spirit, we turn to the LORD. Hannah didn’t let anything prevent her from going up to worship, and we have the same directive in Heb 10:25: “*Not forsaking [abandoning] the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is: but exhorting **one another**: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.*” As Hannah prayed that she might bare a son to dedicate to the LORD, we also desire that a new man may be created within us. It is this new man, born out of the waters of baptism, that we dedicate to the Lord. As with the Nazirite vow to be separated to the LORD and to keep from unclean things, we also are to do the same. It says in 2Cor. 6:17 “*Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean **thing**; and I will receive you*”. We must uphold our vow and not neglect to fulfill it, or try to minimize what we have promised to do, for the Lord Jesus instructs us: “*No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God*” (Luke 9:62). Just as Hannah prepared ahead of time to bring not just Samuel, but the bullock, the ephah of flour and the bottle of wine, we too must prepare to present our new man to the Lord with the same dedication, preparation, joy and faith that she had. “*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad*” (2Cor 5:10).

May we be among those who have given diligence to feed the inner man daily with the living bread and produce the fruits of the Spirit, rejoicing that we are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, receiving an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away. May we be among the saints who inherit the throne of glory when the adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces, and the horn of His anointed is exalted.

Carol McKelvie (Moorestown, NJ)

Medical

Medical Section Introduction

Medical issues trouble all of us, as a consequence of the mortality we all inherit. This section includes two articles, one addressing the situation of one facing cancer, the other the issues surrounding the end of life. Through faith in God and His son, and the support of our brethren and sisters, we can face these issues with a confidence that those in the world around us do not possess. But even so, these situations present daunting challenges, and we should all reflect on the importance of prayer as we consider these issues and other similar one. We acknowledge that, in all things, God's guiding hands in our lives, and we hope that these issues will be rendered irrelevant by the return of His son.

Resuscitate or Not to Resuscitate

The problem of modern medical technology



What to do! You have been told that your loved one is clinically brain dead. The doctors are recommending removing your loved one from all life support. What to do? What to do?

Today we live in a world where technology rules. Computers, cell phones, iPods, iPads, and GPS are ubiquitous. This is true in the medical arena as well. There is the ability to sustain life on breathing machines (ventilators). Patients unable to take nutrition orally can be fed intravenously and/or through gastric tubes for a prolonged indefinite period of time.

With this technology the medical profession has the ability to sustain in life those that prior to the 1960s patients would certainly have died. Before the 1930s, respiratory failure was uniformly fatal, due to the lack of equipment and techniques for airway management and ventilator support.

Those who contracted Polio before the Sabin and Salk vaccines were developed, suffered from the effects of the poliovirus, such as the inability to breathe due to paralyzed chest muscles. Some of you may have heard of an "Iron Lung". This machine was developed in 1927. It was a tank respirator used for helping those unable to breathe on their own. This, in my opinion, was the beginning of mechanical methods to assist with breathing, in order to prolong survival. In earlier times the patient would have surely passed away.

All these advances have led to the necessity of a consideration of “DNR” — Do Not Resuscitate. In the medical arena, it refers to “do not perform any life saving measures such as CPR (cardio-pulmonary resuscitation)”, in the event that the heart has stopped functioning. In other words, the individual is brain dead, there is no blood carrying oxygen to the brain, thus with no chance of brain function.

Whether or not to sustain life is an individual decision, done with the knowledge of family members as they may be the ones to make the final decision. Making the decision to continue to use life support, or to remove the patient from life support, does not subject the patient to an agonizing death. Comfort measures are in place, such as Intravenous (IV) fluids, pain medications and other nursing measures that provide comfort for any hospitalized patient.

DNR orders are written in the patient’s chart when made known by the individual and/or the family member who holds power of attorney for medical matters. This order stands firm unless the patient or one of those authorized (if the patient is unable to speak for themselves) changes the decision.

The elderly are not the only ones for whom we might face this type of decision, but the *young* as well. They may be infants (with congenital anomalies and those whose bodies are not strong and fully developed), teenagers involved in motor vehicle accidents, and children of all ages suffering with cancer. There was a set of twins for whom I was the Case Manager while working for a Health Maintenance Organization (HMO). One of the twins was healthy; the other one had multiple congenital anomalies that could not be corrected. We, (the HMO), supplied all necessary nursing care and medical supplies. The baby was frequently admitted to the hospital with infections. Eventually the parents made the decision to no longer treat, but let the baby die peacefully. She died in her parents’ arms in the hospital.

With the use of the Ventilator Life Support, people may question: Are we as individuals and the medical professions playing God?

End of life issues



My last job was as a Nurse Case Manager. It made me ponder some questions: how do my brothers and sisters in Christ handle end of life issues as mentioned above; and what does the Bible say?

As a Case Manager one of the issues I faced was discussing with families, sometimes alone and also sometimes as part of a team of physicians, social

worker, case manager, unit nursing staff and possibly their minister, whether or not to remove a patient from life support (i.e. the ventilator which was doing the breathing for them).

How long to keep a patient on a mechanical ventilator? This is a decision that the medical team must determine based on specific medical criteria. When the team determines the patient is brain dead, this, too, is based on the criteria established by hospital protocol.

What does the Bible say?

The Bible tells us: “*You shall not murder.*” (*Exod 20:13 ESV*)¹ Does removing life support from a loved one cause us to commit murder?

Disconnecting a loved one from life support should not be confused with Mercy Killing or Euthanasia. Euthanasia is defined by Taber’s Cyclopedic Medical Dictionary as “the deliberate ending of the life of people with incurable or terminal diseases or unbearable suffering.” (The term derives from the word *Eu* meaning God, and *Thanos* meaning death.)

When a patient is removed from life support, they are not sentenced to an agonizing death. This is where Hospice care enters the picture. They provide palliative care for the terminally ill, in a hospital or a hospice facility or at home. Such care is focused on providing patients with relief from the symptoms, pain, and stress of a serious illness. The goal is to improve quality of life for both the patient and their family; to relieve symptoms such as pain, shortness of breath, fatigue, loss of appetite, constipation and difficulty sleeping. Medications are given as necessary to relieve pain. Everything is done to make the remainder of their life as comfortable as possible for all that are involved. A team of health professionals provides all these services.

Questions to ask

Some questions to consider asking:

- Will CPR save the patient’s life if his or her heart stops?
- What kind/quality of a life will the patient have?
- How will the patient be kept comfortable?
- Could the patient go home or have hospice care?
- In cases that involve children — Can I hold the patient?
- Can members from our Ecclesia come?
- Can you wait to remove certain life-supporting equipment or therapies until after all family members and friends have had a chance to say good-bye?

These are questions that should be asked while individuals are healthy and competent. Complete, sign and designate someone to decide these issues as your “Power of Attorney for Medical Issues” or a “Living Will” in the event that you are unable to speak for yourself. Forms for “Power of Attorney for Medical Issues” and “Living Will” can be found on the Internet go to www.totallegal.com. The majority of adults, 18 and over, do not have a health care directive as follows: 75 % of those 18-44 and 49 % over 44.²

Everyone should make known their wishes in writing and verbally to their next of kin or one chosen to speak for them. By not doing this, an added stress is placed on loved ones who may have to make the decision.

If one of you thinks someone has made a wrong choice by having life support removed, remember what Paul told the Galatians: *“To bear and share one another’s burdens”* (Gal 6:2, *paraphrased*). For the tough decisions people make don’t be judgmental, unless their decisions go against the First Principles that we hold dear. Also show compassion as does our God and His son.

There are many passages in Scripture that can help guide one when faced with the difficult decision of whether or not to carry out a DNR order. I have cited a few of these below for you to contemplate if you are ever faced with this situation.

“Do not remember against us our former iniquities; let your compassion come speedily to meet us, for we are brought very low” (Psa 79:8).

“As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him” (Psa 103:13).

“Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth; break forth, O mountains, into singing! for the LORD has comforted his people and will have compassion on his afflicted” (Isa 49:13).

“When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Matt 9:36).

“When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick” (Matt 14:14).

Let God be the judge. He and only He knows the entire situation and the hearts of those dealing with difficult situations and having to make difficult decisions.

“Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal 6:1-2).

“We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let us be tolerant of one another” (Rom 15:1, 2).

“As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand. One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind” (Rom 14:1-5).

Mary J. Bilello, Ann Arbor, Michigan

Notes:

1. All references are from the ESV.
2. USA Today — Snapshots. Tuesday, February 26, 2013.

A Fight with Cancer

In late 2007, I got the dreaded news that I had Stage 4 cancer of the Tonsil, which had also spread to a couple of lymph nodes. None of us had ever even heard of this type of cancer. I think head and neck cancer accounts for about 5% of total cancers and tonsil cancer is about 5% of those. Research determined that it usually appears in older men who have been drinkers and smokers during their lives. I obviously didn't fit the type, but was thrown into a journey that has changed my life forever.

All of a sudden, I had a dental oncologist (responsible for saving my teeth during treatment), a Radiation Oncologist, a Chemotherapy Oncologist and an Ear, Nose and Throat Specialist. I also faced surgery, and then seven weeks of concurrent radiation and chemotherapy — every day (5 days a week) of radiation and once a week for the chemotherapy. The good news was that with treatment there was a 70-80% cure rate. I would like to share some of the things that helped me through the process and happily on to my new reality of five years now, cancer free.

The first thing I learned was to totally depend on God to help me deal with everything that was going on. I live by myself and am fairly independent I thought, but this was something I couldn't control or do anything about. A book I discovered towards the end of treatment called "The Survivors Club" by Ben Sherwood, which says this: "The desire and drive for normalcy are very powerful. When most people get sick, they want to heal quickly. Knocked down, they try to get back up. For many of us, life is supposed to operate like a seat or tray table on an airplane. On command, it should easily return to its original upright position. Unfortunately, that's not the way it works. The best survivors understand that normal is just a fleeting state of mind. Survivors accept that life probably won't ever return to the way it used to be. So they let go, adapt, and embrace the "new normal".

Depending on God

After a couple of weeks, I realized that I had to depend on God, not myself, to get me through to the end, whatever the outcome. My "seat or tray table" was not going to quickly and easily return to its upright position, and the sooner I accepted it the better. That was actually my prayer: that His will be done throughout the treatment. I read a quote at one time that said "Pain is mandatory — suffering is optional." I determined that I would be better off if I depended on God to get me through and although it wasn't easy or without pain, I didn't have to suffer and make the process more difficult on myself and others around me.

Next, you need a team to help you make it through. I am blessed by my mother and sister living in the same city as well as an aunt who was a registered nurse close by. So much information is thrown at you that sometimes it took all of us listening to understand what was being said. I took notes, and after the first doctor visit made a spreadsheet to list all of the questions that needed to be answered as I went to the various doctors before treatment began.

My sister did something special that really helped me get through each day. She bought a set of stones for herself, my Mom and I that each had a word engraved

on it. The words were: believe, courage, love, hope, friends, strength, joy, live and faith. She then cut out individual Bible verses and mixed them all up in a special box. Each day I randomly picked out a Bible verse, matched a stone to it, called them and we all prayed during the day about that word and Bible verse. I carried the one for the day in my pockets as a reminder.

My niece took seven photos of her daughter, my great niece, and wrapped them up, one for each week of chemotherapy. I could not open one until it was time to go to treatment. It went with me to treatment (which lasted several hours) and helped me to concentrate on getting through the treatment, one week at a time, to see the larger picture of seeing that precious child grow in time.

Help from others

My own Verdugo Hills ecclesia and many others who heard of my situation became a part of a bigger team. The flowers, cards and notes of encouragement were unbelievable, as those of you who have experienced something like this can attest to. The prayers are invaluable in helping you get through the process. I looked forward to the mail every day to see if there was a note or card. It is actually something you can hold on to and treasure again and again, unlike a posting on Facebook or an e-mail. But, that is just my preference. These physical things helped me be more positive about my outcome and reinforced the idea that I could get through the process.

“The Survivors Club” also mentions “a Dutch study showed that “dispositional optimism” — a positive mental attitude — improves survival rates in patients. Optimistic people live longer than pessimistic people. Another factor is the support of friends and family. There’s some correlation between the size of the crowd in the waiting room and the chances a patient recovers. It’s not a guarantee, but the impact/effects of family and friends are too powerful to discount. This is a life lesson that I learned, and I will try my best with all I come in contact with in the future. I will be positive and helpful with their difficult and personal journey of survival, whether it is from spiritual, mental or physical illness, or the trials of life.

Finally, I cannot discount how faith needed to be a factor in how I reacted to treatment and finally to recovery. When the author started writing the above referenced book he was somewhat skeptical of the role of faith in survival. As he began to interview survivors around the world, he noticed a remarkable pattern. Overwhelmingly, they shared a belief that God and faith had sustained them through their trials. Faith is a unifying force in all of their experiences. Longer life appears to be correlated with the extent to which your faith is integrated into your daily decisions and actions. For the large majority of people, faith is a potent – if not the most potent – resource that enables them to withstand and in some cases grow from the most critical traumas in their lives. “The Survivors Club” book says:

“Faith is the most universal survival tool, if not the most powerful. At a practical level, religion is a mind-set, a collection of attitudes and behaviors for coping with life. At a higher plane, it is ineffable and mysterious. That is why the faithful don’t need science or studies to support their convic-

tions. They don't require empirical proof for the power of God. They just believe. And that alone gives them strength to overcome and transcend any adversity."

I am thankful to say, that now, five years after my journey began, that so far I am cancer free, with some minor residual issues. But compared to what might have been I am so thankful to God that I am able to continue living as he would have me do, still with an opportunity to continue my walk towards the Kingdom.

Jan Berneau (Verdugo hills, CA)

In the Vestibule

MY DEAR SISTERS, — Once again, I am permitted, in the providence of God, to take up my pen to greet you in His name, and in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Not having yet been "gathered unto him," we fain would speak one to another concerning the blessed hope of the gospel into which we have been called, which is all our salvation and all our desire.

We are still on the look-out for the greatest of all the crises the world has ever witnessed, even the return of the Lord from heaven, to take over the kingdoms of the world, as his own rightful inheritance. The nearer we get to that great event, the more intent becomes our vigilance and our watching.

We are now on the eve of a new century, which in the purpose of God, is destined to see the fulfillment of His gracious promises made unto the fathers in the days of old. We look back upon the centuries that have rolled past, and see much that has been fulfilled, but the grand climax has not yet been reached. Nevertheless, the progress towards it has been steady. The times of the Gentiles have nearly run their course, and we stand, as it were, in the vestibule, on the very threshold, waiting the summons to enter into the audience chamber, where we shall be ushered into the presence of our Judge, our Lord and Master, and if accepted by Him, our much longed for Bridegroom, each one of us a constituent of His multitudinous Bride, who has in much tribulation and oftentimes in anguish of spirit made herself ready for the nuptials and marriage supper, to which the Lord had invited her by the good tidings of the gospel of the kingdom. We are looking for this. It is the hope of the gospel which in all ages has lighted the fire of faith, and kept it burning in the hearts of God's children, who have been such in deed and in truth. We compare our faith and hope with theirs and we perceive that they are identical. We need to be constantly on our guard, so that we may overcome ourselves and our surroundings.¹

Jane Roberts, The Christadelphian: 1898 p. 493.

Relationships

Relationship Section Introduction

What do all of these words have in common: God and man, husband and wife, parents and children, siblings and cousins, friends, and co-workers? These are all different types of relationships that we may encounter on a daily basis. Relationships are best associated with gardens in the sense that the more time and energy devoted to a relationship, the more profitable it may be. As our Father advises in Heb 10:24, *“Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.”* Over the next few pages, you will discover the Scriptural perspective on how to create the most fruitful relationships with those in your life.

Girl Talk

Gossip is a topic that is sometimes overlooked in our discipleship. As with all works of the flesh, we can fool ourselves into thinking that it is okay. However, Scripture clearly teaches that gossip is wrong (Lev 19:16, Exod 23:1, Rom 1:29-32). It is defined by Google Dictionary as “Casual or unconstrained conversation or reports about other people, typically involving details that are not confirmed as being true.” In my studies of gossip in Scripture, I have found over seven different Hebrew and Greek words that mean the same as our English word “gossip.” The words are nouns and verbs used to describe the act and those who do it. Some words it is translated as are: whisperer, talebearer, to accuse, to slander, slanderers, backbiters, tattlers, and busybodies. In every single instance, the act or those who do it are warned or condemned. It is pretty clear that it is a serious topic that God does not want any of His disciples to overlook.

So, why “girl talk?” Is gossip something that only women take part of? Of course not. Brothers and sisters alike can fall into the habit of gossiping and God is intolerant of anyone who does it (Prov 19:5, Eph 4:31, 2Cor 12:20, Psa 101:5). But women are warned specifically in Scripture about gossip. Paul writes *“Besides, they get into the habit of being idle and going about from house to house. And not only do they become idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying things they ought not to”* (1Tim 5:13 NKJV).¹ Here, Paul is referring to widows, and in Titus 2:3, he warns older women to not be “slanderers.” Even in the world today there is an entire gossip industry that is geared toward women including magazines, websites, and television shows. It is unfortunate that “girl talk” has become associated with gossip. The goal of this article is to explore what Scripture says about gossip so we can learn from it and be able to turn “girl talk” into a positive, uplifting aspect of our discipleship.

Starting or spreading a rumor

First, let’s dissect gossip a bit more. Gossip can be one of two things: starting a rumor or spreading one. By rumor, I mean a highly subjective or unverified account

of a person or event that is typically negative. Whether the rumor is true or not, Scripture tells us *“to speak evil of no one”* (Titus 3:2) and *“Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit,”* (Psa 34:13). Additionally, God warns us about associating with those who partake in gossip: *“Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets; therefore do not associate with a simple babler”* (Prov 20:19). We are told in Lev 19:16 to not spread slander among our people or do anything that *“endangers our neighbor’s life.”* Proverbs has a lot to say about gossip such as, *“Whoever spreads slander is a fool”* (Prov 10:18), *“A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy man keeps a secret”* (Prov 11:13 NIV), and *“A perverse person stirs up conflict, and a gossip separates close friends”* (Prov 16:28 NIV). Scripture makes it very evident that gossip should absolutely not be a part of the life of a believer.

For those who start gossip, it is usually based on an issue or an offense they have regarding a person or something that happened. When situations such as these arise, we are instructed in Matt 18:15-17 how to deal with it. Here we are told to first go directly to the person to try to resolve the issue with them. If this does not work, we are to involve one or two more people from the ecclesia to help. If it still is unresolved, then it is the whole ecclesia’s duty to fix the issue. This passage does not instruct us to first tell all of our friends about how the person offended us or to involve people from other ecclesias; first and foremost, the issue must be resolved between the two people. The next type of gossip is typically more common as it simply involves sharing the information you have heard with someone else. But once again, if the subject of the gossip is something that concerns you about a brother or sister, the answer is once again to always go directly to them, not to spread it further. In fact, God says to *“cover an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends,”* (Prov 17:9). We are also told in Prov 26:20 that *“without wood a fire goes out; without gossip a quarrel dies down.”* Therefore, the Scriptural answer is never to spread the gossip further.

Gossip comes with many consequences for all parties involved. In fact, Rom 1:29-32 warns of ungodly actions such as gossip and says, *“Though they know God’s righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.”* Not only those who partake in the ungodly deeds are condemned, but also those who are okay with other people doing them. This means that even if we do not participate in gossip when it happens in conversations around us, if we do not stop it we are just as wrong as those who do it. Scripture further warns us of gossip in James 4:11, *“Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it.”* If we condone sin when we know it is wrong, we are told in Heb 10:26-27 that *“there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.”* It is crucial that we understand the grave consequences of gossip in order to keep others and ourselves from doing it. We know that we will be held accountable for it when we are judged before Christ, *“But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken,”* (Matt 12:36).

Bear one another's burdens

So practically, how do we stop others and ourselves from gossiping? I know that sometimes I tend to gossip — many times without even realizing it. But an important concept to remember is in Gal 6:2, “*Bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.*” Bear them — don't share them! If someone comes to you with a problem they are struggling with, take it upon yourself to try to help them. If you think others could be useful in assisting with the issue as well, ask the person first if it is okay. Much of determining whether or not we are gossiping lies within the motive behind what is being said: are we saying it just to share it or are we saying it because we are concerned and actively seeking to help? Rom 12:21 states, “*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*” This principle can be applied to many aspects of our discipleship, including our conversations with one another. Consume negativity with positivity; if those around you are gossiping, simply turn the conversation from being negative to being positive. For example, if someone is gossiping about “Sister X,” say something complimentary about her like “Sister X is really great though! She always helps out at the ecclesia.” This way the gossip will die down immediately and it will help others have more positive thoughts about her. As young children, we learn to treat others the way we want to be treated. Did you know this is a Biblical principle? Yes, Luke 6:31 says “*And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.*” So another way to avoid gossip is to ask yourself how you would feel if someone was speaking about you the way you are speaking or sharing information about someone else.

James 3 expresses the power of the tongue and what it can bring forth, whether it is for good or for evil. It compares the tongue to a bit in a horse's mouth that can control where the horse walks and also to the rudder of a great ship that can turn the whole thing. What we say can also steer our walk to the kingdom and as we have learned from our gossip study, other sisters' walks as well. So let us make “girl talk” full of encouraging words that will lead one another to eternal life. Eph 4:29 reads, “*Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.*” Our conversations should be just that: helpful and beneficial to our sisters. Phil 4:8 offers perfect guidelines for what we should talk about, “*Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.*” We could tremendously improve our discipleship if we base our conversations around these principles. I already mentioned the warning to widows about gossiping in 1Tim 5:13, but the truth of the matter is: whether or not we are single or married, all of us are a part of the bride of Christ. Therefore, none of us should fall into the habit of being idle and gossiping as each of us should always be busy showing his love to the world. So sisters, girls, friends...let's stop the gossip and start the edifying and uplifting that will bring us to God's beautiful kingdom together.

Rachel Cheetham (Moorestown, NJ)

Notes:

1. All References are from the NKJV except where indicated.

Everlasting Relationships

"I will be the God of all families of Israel and they shall be my people... Yea, I have loved them with an everlasting love, therefore with loving kindness I have drawn thee" (Jer 31:1-3).

The amazing thing about the above verse is that it is set against the backdrop of Israel's bold-faced rebellion against God. God had declared, "Behold I set before you the way of life and the way of death" (Jer 21:8). Israel chose death. God warned, "Know for a certainty that I have warned you this day that you have gone astray at the cost of your lives" (Jer 42:19, 20). Israel covered their ears. Yet this is the people that God drew to Himself with the words, "I have loved you with an everlasting love." To us this seems unfathomable, incomprehensible. How can Israel so blatantly reject God's love? How does God love them with an everlasting love having been so blatantly rejected? How do we make sense of this? We stand in awe of God's love for his people.

Jesus commands us to love one another. "This is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12). We have the model not only of Jesus' love for his disciples but God's love for his people. Our charge is to emulate this love in our relationships with our brethren. The metaphor of marriage is used to describe the relationship of Jesus to the body of Christ, because love is the glue that binds together husband and wife as one flesh. Two distinct individuals are joined in marriage for life, as commanded from the beginning. As they are not bone of each other's bone as Eve was of Adam, the challenge to become one flesh is the greater. The challenge for us to become bound into the body of Christ requires not only joining us to Christ, but even more so to one another. Marriage becomes a powerful metaphor in Scripture to describe that binding of two into one.



This same metaphor is used in the vision of the redeemed: "the holy city, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a **bride** adorned for her husband" (Rev 21:2). We hope to be that New Jerusalem, but now we are called to be that city set on a hill that cannot

be hid. "You are the light of the world." (Matt 5:14). "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). This is our living preaching effort. By demonstrating our love for one another we attest to the fact that we are disciples of Jesus. We are disparate individuals, united in Christ and challenged to develop those everlasting relationships that bind us as an ecclesial family and declare us to be that bride.

How can we as flawed, sinful, imperfect creatures make this a reality in our marriages and within our ecclesial family? Our flawed nature offers us no excuse.

God created us, knows us and knows our weaknesses and struggles. Can we turn to him who created us and say, “Sorry, we are flawed and therefore not capable of this calling”; so we give up? Does this remind us of the servant in the parable who turned to his master saying, “*Lord, here is your pound which I kept laid away in a napkin; for I was afraid of you because you are a severe man*” (Luke 19:20-21 RSV)? Can we say to the one who created us, “I am not culpable, you created me thus”? God, knowing our weaknesses, gave the command. Despite our weaknesses, we are called to emulate the love we have experienced from God and His Son. Neither weakness nor our nature relieves us of the command. God sent His Son as an example to help us, to model for us this love.

Our spiritual development parallels our natural development. How does a human infant learn to love? The infant learns by experiencing the love of the parents. Infants are born both physically and emotionally dependent on the mother. We know that when infants and children are neglected and deprived of parental love, they grow up with severe emotional problems. Those who lack a stable caregiver who meets their needs, from whom they learn significance and trust, most often find themselves as adults unable to trust and unable to form lasting attachments. This is something we see all too often in our modern world. Far too many have been victimized by those who have failed to form even a basic attachment to other humans.

The importance of trust

Just as with our parents, from the secure base of trust, we have built our capacity to love. So too spiritually, “*we love because He first loved us*” (1John 4:19). God is the source of our capacity to love.

Foundational to our relationship with our heavenly Father is trust as it is in all our human relationships. This is why a violation of trust is so devastating and why rebuilding trust is essential to mending relationships. We can see this clearly with parents and errant teens (when the parent discovers their teen has lied to them, their trust is violated), but trust is just as critical to relationships within our ecclesial family.

“Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God and he who loves is born of God and knows God... in this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent His only begotten son into the world that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that He loved us and sent his son to be the expiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought to love one another” (John 4:7-11).

Three basic tools for building trust are effective communication, truthfulness and commitment. Effective communication begins with effective and empathic listening. This is a skill to be learned as much as speaking and writing. It is just more subtle. Skillful, empathic listening builds relationships. Stephen Covey’s 5th habit¹ captures the essence of this skill: “Seek first to understand, then to be understood.” That principle can be very powerful in building strong, close relationships. The sense that one has truly been heard can provide a sense of intense connection.



Honest genuine communications also foster trust. Truth telling may be at times difficult, but it is essential if we are to maintain the solid foundation of trust. Because we are members of one another, one family in Christ, speaking the truth is essential. (Eph 4:15, 25-32). However it must be partnered with the commitment to maintain and repair relationships. When conflict arises, as it will, it must be resolved with honesty, gentleness,

forgiveness and commitment. We do not let the sun go down on our anger because if it is left to fester it eludes repair. In Christ we do not have the option to walk away from our brethren; they are brethren and we are commanded to love them. Our challenge is to forgive and restore relationships. We share one another's burdens, submit to one another and esteem the other better than ourselves. This is our calling in Christ. It is far more difficult than memorizing the doctrines we hold to be essential. That is the first step; living as brethren in Christ and as brethren of Christ is the life challenge, our calling in Christ.

"But concerning love of the brethren you have no need to have anyone write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another" (1Thess 4:9).

May we continue to strive to make this so.

Dolores Sleeper (San Francisco Peninsula, CA)

Notes:

1. Covey, Stephen, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. New York, Simon & Schuster 1989.

The Water of Life

*But then we come to the Table of the Lord and we think of him who said: "I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of Life" (John 8:12). Jesus stood in the temple courts and cried: "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." This was that great day when the priest filled a golden vial from the water of the pool of Siloam and poured it out in great ceremony amidst great rejoicing. The Lord took the opportunity to say: "Ah, but if you come to me with your thirst and then drink, you will never thirst again, because I will give you of the water of life." And to that water of life, of which we have drunk, we stand related in an everlasting relationship. He who is our light and life will come to the earth and will bring order out of the chaos that is here, and gradually will set up a state of things based upon righteousness and purity and love; being helped by men and women whose hearts have been dedicated to the Lord Jesus through all life's experience, and who have looked to him for forgiveness and eventually for eternal life. We need to thank our Heavenly Father that not only are we related to things which are in the future, but that we have so much help and light and hope now in these mortal days. That help can raise our lives far above the ordinary to something higher and more lovely, if only we will take God's Word, read it, meditate upon it, and let its influence soak into us. For as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he. (R. Brandon, *The Christadelphian*, 1972 p6.)*

How to be a Help Meet to Your Husband's Work in the Truth

Care for a household

From the beginning women have been given a special role. The man that God created could not thrive alone. He needed someone to help him, a help “meet” as the Bible states in Gen 2:18. This person that was specifically created for man was a woman. The phrase “help meet” occurs only here and in verse 20: the word translated “meet” typically means a counterpart, or mate when used in this context: other translations use suitable, or fit. Their strengths were to complement each other so that together they could be stronger and better servants for God.

There are many examples in the Bible of women who had to care for a household because of their husband's service to God. This was particularly true for the household of the Kohathites. The men of that tribe were given a special role. They were responsible for bearing up the tabernacle, and while they carried the articles and the tabernacle the women bore the household and carried it and their children in the wilderness (Num 10:21). The men of that tribe must have looked upon their wives with such respect and adoration knowing how much of a burden their service to God placed upon their shoulders (literally!).

Another well-known woman of the Old Testament also bore many of the responsibilities of running her household. The virtuous woman's husband's heart trusted in her and he *“praises her”* in Prov 31:28. He knows that he will not lack for anything since she *“will do him good all the days of her life.”*

How can we do “good” for our husbands so they can be better servants of God? How can we support their work in the Lord? Most of all we want them to be fellow heirs with us according to the promise of eternal life. We are commanded by God to submit to them so that they can love us (Eph 5:22, Col 3:18). Some women may not like the word “submit.” It can elicit a feeling of being degraded or feeling less important. The word means “to obey someone else, to yield to someone else's admonition.” There is no fear when submitting to your husband. When you choose a partner who has the fear of the Lord in his heart, he will wash you with the word and love you as his own body. By respecting his role, it will allow him to trust that you will fulfill your role and let him lead. Fulfilling the role of Christ in marriage is an undertaking brothers cannot take lightly. They are to sacrifice for us, love us as their own body and allow us to find refuge in them.

Husbands and their work for the Truth

For brothers to serve in the ecclesia and to fulfill this role is like having a part-time job (at least!) in addition to their regular employment. Early on in a relationship it may be helpful to set aside specific times for Bible study to develop good habits for later in life. When you marry you would already have in place time as a couple and then time when each of you could focus on God's word. While the husband does Bible study for exhortations and Bible classes, the wife can work on lessons

for Sunday School, correspond with those who are in need in the community, work on private Bible study or prepare Bible activities for children.

Some women may find that Bible study does not come naturally to them or their spouse. Having a partner can allow you to grow together. *“Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labor” (Eccl 4:9)*. Be thinking of ways to compliment your spouse after every spiritual activity they initiate, whether it is doing the Readings or preparing a Bible class. Offer to review your husband’s talks before he gives them. A woman can offer a perspective that can help enhance a talk. Reviewing your husband’s Bible studies can also enhance your own knowledge.

Prayer can also be very unifying. Talk about those things that you privately pray for with your husband. Privately pray for your husband and his work in the truth and that your work together might bear fruit. Being married often exposes many weaknesses. In marriage you may find that your husband brings out qualities in you that you are eager to develop. This can be scary but it also gives us an opportunity to grow. *“Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:16)*. At our most vulnerable times, this is when we most often see the strengths of our spouse. This is a time of refining.

Working together

A work in the truth that cannot be overlooked is hospitality and taking care of the needy in our community of believers. Participating in service projects while you are dating and newly married is not only helpful to your ecclesia but gives you opportunities to grow and learn from the brothers and sisters in your meeting. You will also learn more about your likes and strengths. For example, maybe you relate well to older people and benefit from visiting nursing homes, and your husband is great with little children and can bring out the best qualities in children struggling with learning disabilities. Maybe you love to cook together and those in the community need help. These activities can bring you closer together and bond



you before you start to grow your own family. These things are encouraged by Paul: *“For we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother” (Philemon 1:7)*.

Preach together. Aquila and Priscilla are always mentioned together. Her being with him defined

their work in the truth. When Paul went to Syria in Acts 18 Aquila and Priscilla were said to have “*expounded the way of God more perfectly.*” For them to be able to preach together Priscilla had to have knowledge of God’s word that helped Aquila when preaching. This can inspire us to study daily and increase our own knowledge so that when the time presents itself to preach we are ready. We want to enhance our husband’s ability to preach to others. Often the wife can be particularly helpful when preaching to another woman or counseling a sister in need of guidance. To avoid any appearance of impropriety, it would be a blessing for your husband to know that he could direct any woman coming to him for spiritual guidance to his wife knowing that she could meet that person’s needs: “*Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value*” (Prov 31:11 NIV).

Allow your husband time to interact with other brothers. Although this can be a sacrifice of your time together, there are many ways that the interaction can build him up and help him be a better servant to God and to you and your family. Likewise, keep your friends, sisters in the Truth, close. Do not push them away while you are dating or during the early years of marriage. Having spiritual friends can ground you and refocus you when you get caught up in everyday worries. I am sure you can think of those sisters who will always have a word of encouragement or will have the right advice when you call. There are also women who criticize their spouses and kids. When we hear these negative words, be reminded of the wise advice from Prov 19:13: “*A foolish son is ruin to his father, and a wife’s quarreling is a continual dripping of rain*” (ESV). We must build up our house and not it tear down. In Nehemiah’s time the people each had a section of the wall to build. That was their work in the Lord — not to criticize other people’s wall or to work on other sections of the wall belonging to other families. Part of our job as a wife and mother is to support our family in our mind, words and actions.

The growing family

When children enter into your marriage it adds yet another level of service for you and your husband. Having a brother in the home to guide the upbringing of



the children is important. Although a mother often bears much of the physical and emotional demands of the children, involve your husband in ways he can lead them. Little boys and girls can learn to pray by hearing their father pray often before meals, in the evening before bedtime, on long trips, etc. Reading aloud and having the father come up with fun questions for the kids to answer on the readings challenges the kids and the

dad alike. It is the father's first duty to have his home be a small off-shoot of the meeting. *"Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table"* (Psa 128:3).

Even though the father is often very involved at home with the children, when your family is at the ecclesia often the mother is needed to watch the children while the husband serves. While the father exhorts, reads, teaches adult Sunday school, the mother will be watching the younger children. It is important to remember that this is special season of your life and all too fast it will be over. Look for opportunities to listen to exhortations at home, speak of the classes you do hear to your husband and friends. Teaching Sunday school can also give you an opportunity to trade off in responsibilities with your husband. Having your own spiritual outlet can be a great support to your husband by showing your faith in action.

Ultimately a husband's work in the truth is enhanced and strengthened by his wife. A wonderful example of a husband and wife serving together is Abraham and Sarah. Even in Abraham's times of weakness Sarah followed his lead. When she is first told that she is going have a child in her advanced age *"Sarah laughed to herself, saying, 'After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?'"* (Gen 18:11-12). She calls him "lord" in her heart. This was a respect shown in her heart and then came outward in her actions. Likewise we are supposed to be more concerned with our inner person than with the outward adorning that is promoted in every woman's magazine: *"Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands: Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement"* (1Pet 3:3-6). Sarah is remembered in the book of Hebrews by her service to her husband and trust in God's promises. *"Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised"* (Heb 11:11).

This special relationship that we have been given from God gives us the opportunity to uplift each other, strengthen one another and become the best servants to God we can be. If you are trying to strengthen a believing husband who is struggling or if you are married to an unbeliever, take comfort in the verse: *"Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives"* (1Pet 3:1).

If we show our husbands respect in our heart and in our actions than it can truly be said of us: *"Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the Lord"* (Prov 18:22).

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Marriage, the Helping Principle

The beautiful Biblical imagery of being “yoked” in marriage and of being “heirs together” conveys the idea of laboring side by side for a future together. Marriage is the divine arrangement allowing the closest possible human relationship for the greatest possible mutual help. Marriage is not a cultural convenience subject to change and alterations. It is a constant in the Father’s plan. And with our Father there *“is no variableness, neither shadow of turning”* (James 1:17). Our goal is to understand more fully the Biblical underpinnings of marriage and to consider how we as women in the ecclesia can nurture the lofty Biblical ideal in our own marriage and in our wider sphere of influence.

Scripture teaches that God, in His kindness to man, provided companionship in marriage. The devaluation and cheapening of this beautiful gift in the society around us is disheartening. It is for us an obvious death knell of civilization, sounding the end of the Gentile age. What is our reaction? Do we feel vexed, as Lot did? There is much we can do as sisters, wives, daughters and mothers to renew the emphasis on building strong marriages in the Lord. With darkness closing in around us, we are acutely aware of our own vulnerability and the challenges to faithful living for the next generation. Living faithfully begins with knowing the first principles of God’s word. Marriage is a first principle and like most first principles, it is found right there *“in the beginning”* in the early Genesis account.

“And the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him’” (Gen 2:18). Notice how beautifully the word of God conveys profound truths in simple language. The role of the woman is simply described as “help meet.” This description is often misunderstood to mean something along the lines of “support staff.” Our education in Scripture and the experiences of life teaches us that this is not so. To meet our goal of understanding the Biblical underpinnings of marriage, it is important for us to grasp the true message conveyed by the simple description, “help meet.”

Help meet

Taking the second part first, what is being described by this Old English word “meet?” The woman was created by God because man was so alone. Adam had emotions, feelings, thoughts, ideas and intellect that came from having God’s image and likeness, which he couldn’t share with the other “dust of the earth” animals, though he shared with them the same breath of life. Bro. John Thomas wrote about Adam,

“He had no companion who could reciprocate his intelligence; none who could minister to his wants, or rejoice with him in the delights of creation; and reflect the glory of his nature ... Adam ... had social feelings as well as intellectual and moral faculties, which required scope for their practical and harmonious exercise.”¹

To understand exactly how the woman was “meet” for Adam it is necessary to consider the uniqueness of the formation of woman. She was not made from the dust. She was taken from the living substance of the man. She was the counterpart,

the missing piece that made up the whole. To her were transferred “the sympathies of Adam’s nature,” said Bro. Thomas:

“Bone sympathizes with bone, and flesh with flesh, in all pleasurable, healthful, and painful feelings. Hence, to separate a portion of Adam’s living substance, and from it to build a woman, would be to transfer to her the sympathies of Adam’s nature; and though by her organization, able to maintain an independent existence, she would never lose from her nature a sympathy with his, in all its intellectual, moral, and physical manifestations.”²

In this way she was perfectly “meet.” This is an aspect of the ideal upon which our marriages are based. Marriage is unity. A good marriage is the reflection of the divine ideal of oneness.

Then what are we to understand by the idea that the woman was created a “help” to her husband? The easiest way to explain the depth of meaning in this simple epitome of the woman’s role is to see how the word is used elsewhere in Scripture. The Hebrew word *ezer* used here in Gen 2:18 is the same word used in Psa 121:1 for God’s help toward those who look to Him.

“I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth” (Psa 121:1-2).

“Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the LORD his God” (Psa 146:5).

These verses describe God as the One we look to for support and comfort. In the same way that an earnest believer in need goes to the God of Jacob for help, so a man goes to his wife. Being a help meet is a positive and influential role and one that carries both honor and responsibility. It is a role that mirrors the tender love of the Creator in heaven for those who look to Him for help. It is a role that satisfies the inner emotions, feelings, thoughts, ideas and intellect of both husband and wife. In mirroring the tenderness of God for those who look to Him for help, the role of woman is an aspect of the first principle of God manifestation. It is a chance to copy the ways of the God who cares for us.

The practical applications

This is the Biblical foundation of marriage. What then are the practical implications? How can we as women in the ecclesia nurture the lofty ideal both in our own marriages and in our wider sphere of influence? Practical advice on marriage is available from a variety of sources including the library and the internet, but we may particularly benefit from writings of brothers and sisters. Over the past year *The Tidings*³ has offered an extremely helpful series of articles on the topic of marriage and how to ensure a happy relationship. In this article, my emphasis is on the challenging obligation for women to be submissive, a topic rarely considered in popular self-help literature.

Being yoked implies being under constraint, and no one likes being under constraints. The figure of speech is used by Paul for good reason in addressing joint

ventures and relationships. Though it is not used specifically of marriage, the figure certainly applies; it is difficult to imagine a more intimate relationship where shared goals and beliefs matter. The Bible plainly teaches that *“Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor”* (Eccl 4:9). In marriage, the true labor of love is to walk in faith with the Kingdom in focus and to raise a godly seed. Two pulling together can accomplish far more than two pulling separately. Two pulling in different directions will both be harmed. Pulling together is important. It takes cooperation. It takes submission.

Submission?

Misconceptions about the meaning of a wife’s submission — for instance, that “help meet” means “support staff” — have led some to believe that the Bible relegates women to an inferior status. Throughout history women have often been vulnerable and mistreated. In Jesus’ time, the Pharisees debated whether men could put away their wives for “every cause.” The question was not whether divorce could ever be justified, but about how low the bar could be set — whether any excuse at all was good enough. It came down to a debate about the legitimacy of mistreating wives. There was no discussion about whether a woman could put away her husband for every cause. The law’s “bill of divorcement,” Jesus pointed out, was no justification for divorce but a requirement of the law that offset the hardness of men’s hearts. It was a merciful provision to keep the woman from destitution.

Bible teaching about submission is not about weakness. Women are called on to submit to their own husbands (Eph 5:22), but at the same time and in the same context, all believers are called on to submit (Eph 5:21). Submission is a major theme in the New Testament; a fundamental requirement of disciples. Peter says *“... all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble”* (1Pet 5:5). God has chosen weak things to confound the mighty (1Cor 1:27). God asks all, men and women alike, to learn the lesson of submission. Submission is the pinnacle of discipleship, at which we echo the Master saying *“not my will, but thine, be done”* (Luke 22:42). Living in a society where women are indoctrinated not to submit presents a special challenge for contemporary sisters.

Marriage is a kind of training field where we put into practice what will outfit us for the kingdom. The apostle was not mistaken or somehow less under inspiration when he instructed wives to *“submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord”* (Eph 5:22). As with all God’s commandments we know in our heart of hearts that practicing submission is altogether and completely for our good (Deut 6:24).

But it isn’t easy at the best of times. It is made easier when balanced in marriage by men who love (Eph 5:25) and give honor (1Pet 3:7) to their wives. Men don’t always meet their obligations as husbands any more than women meet their obligations as wives. The truth is, that Scripture doesn’t describe right behavior as conditional. Take for example, the attitude of slaves. *“Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward”* (1Pet 2:18). Right behavior doesn’t depend on the circumstances or on how others behave.⁴ In God’s estimation serving is the position of strength. It isn’t easy to act

the way God asks but it is the right thing to do.

Doing the right thing can have surprising, even thrilling, results. The apostle Peter, when counseling women to practice submission in their marriage, reinforced the idea as a way to win their husband's obedience to the word. "*Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives*" (1Pet 3:1). Sometimes we restrict this verse to apply to husbands not in the truth, when in fact it applies equally for sisters whose husbands are nominally in the truth or are in the truth but not acting on it in their marriage. All such cases present challenges and the guidance is clear and straightforward; win them by your ways.

Our focus has been on the challenging obligations presented to women, rather than the Scriptural counterbalance for husbands. The success of a marriage is not entirely determined by the wife, but we should not throw in the towel for lack of cooperation. The "simpatico" of mutual admiration, respect, companionship and friendship in marriage develops in fits and starts over time. Sometimes it may seem impossible, but God knows we are helped when we persevere in doing the right thing with acts of love: kindness, consideration, gentleness, forgiveness.

It is curious to think that love does not just happen naturally. We might assume that love springs up without much effort, and at times it seems to. But overall, Scripture and life's experiences teach that love needs to be cultivated into the soil of hearts and minds. It is the dominant fruit of the spirit and unlike the works of the flesh, must be cultivated in order to grow. This is why Paul instructs older women to "*teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children*" (Titus 2:4). Loving our husbands and our children would seem to be instinctual but true love needs to be nurtured. If we feel a lack of love, it is time to start improving the soil of our hearts. For older sisters, who may be widowed after long and successful marriages, the sphere of positive influence goes on through the guidance of the next generation. This is as relevant in our day as it was in the apostles': God's ways are timeless.

As a community, we support strong marriages. It is heartwarming to look around and realize that there is no shortage of beautiful marriages in our midst. Many faithful sisters have gone before to show us how it is accomplished and to them we are ever grateful. Living in the last days is taxing but "*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble*" (Psa 46:1). His word equips us in every way to be vigilant. Understanding the Biblical underpinnings of marriage will give us courage to help our husbands, help our families and help in the ecclesia in the days remaining before our heavenly bridegroom appears.

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Notes:

1. Thomas, John. *Elpis Israel, The Formation of Woman*. Fourteenth Edition p. 47.
2. Op. Cit, p. 48.
3. Now available as a book: "*Bible Guidelines for a Happy Marriage*" by John Bilello: see www.Tidings.org.
4. I state this an ideal, acknowledging that there are extreme circumstances, such as abuse, where submission is neither healthy nor appropriate.

Virtuous Women, Mighty Men

Dating

This article is about dating relationships, which can be a sensitive subject, but a subject that's extremely important in the life of a young person. As followers of Christ, this is something that we have to get right. The most important decision we make in life is baptism, but the second most important decision is who we join ourselves with in marriage, and the foundation for this decision is laid in dating relationships. Not understanding what the Bible says on this subject can lead to unwise choices that can make shipwreck of our faith! On the other hand, making wise choices in our relationships can be incredibly helpful in our walk, and can bring some of the greatest possible joy we can have on this side of the Kingdom.

Do you think this is overstated? The importance that the Bible places on wise, Godly relationships bears this out. If you look through the Old Testament, many of the times when there was a spiritual "falling away" of the people, it was accompanied by a failure in the area of relationships. For example, the first sin occurred in the Garden of Eden after Adam and Eve neglected their God-given roles in their relationship; Adam willingly followed Eve into sin instead of acting as a spiritual head, and Eve sought to include Adam in her sin instead of being a "help meet for him" (Gen 2:18). The Flood was preceded by "the sons of God" making the wrong choices when it came to relationships; they put physical qualities over spiritual ones and married outside of the Truth (note that it says that they "saw" that the daughters of men were beautiful in Gen 6:2). The result was an almost complete destruction of mankind, where only eight people survived!

During the Exodus and Israel's wilderness wanderings, we see similarly staggering odds. Only two of those who left Egypt made it to the Promised Land, and in Numbers 25 we see one of the causes: the Israelites became involved in the wrong relationships with those outside of God's covenant. The faith of kings was ruined by partnering with the wrong people: Ahab's near-conversion was thwarted by the influence of wicked Jezebel, and even wise Solomon was dragged down by his Gentile wives (1Kgs 11:4). It was unfaithfulness to their spouses and running after others that contributed to the downfall of the nations of Israel and Judah (Mal 2:15). Finally, after the Jews returned from Exile, their spiritual recovery was nearly destroyed by marriages with unbelievers (Ezra 9:2-10:3).

These are just a few examples of many. In case we're wondering whether these Old Testament stories are relevant to us today, Paul says that these things were written as examples for us, so that we won't make the same mistakes! "*Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall*" (1Cor 10:11-12 NKJV). With this in mind, it's no wonder that Paul reinforces the oft-repeated lesson of the Old Testament not to be yoked with unbelievers, which includes, of course, romantic relationships as well as other types of connections. (2Cor 6:14-18).

However, we would be wrong to think that the Bible only gives us a negative picture of what can go wrong in relationships, and just leaves it at that. Quite the contrary: the heroes of faith we read about in the Bible had lives that were transformed by Godly relationships! Think of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Boaz and Ruth, and David and Abigail, to name a few. It's fitting that the New Testament chooses to portray the ecclesia's connection with Jesus as that of a faithful bride betrothed to a bridegroom. This, more than anything else, should show us that our human relationships are closely connected with our salvation in Christ.

In addition to knowing the Bible's warnings about who *not* to partner ourselves with, we also need to know what we *should* be looking for. Knowing what not to do is only half the battle; we also need to know what *to* do! We can't go through life saying "Can't date *you*... can't date *you*... can't date *you*." Instead, we need to *put off* the worldly way of thinking about relationships and also *put on* godly thinking about what to look for in a relationship (Eph 4:22-24). In addition to telling ourselves not to yoke ourselves with unbelievers, the Bible has plenty to say about who we *should* emulate in a relationship, and what we *should* look for — the Virtuous Woman and her counterpart, the Mighty Man.

Proverbs 31 tells us about the woman we should be trying to emulate: "*Who can find a virtuous woman? For her price is far above rubies*" (Prov 31:10). The word in verse 10 translated "virtuous" comes from the Hebrew word *chayil*, a word most commonly used to describe armies or men of military valor — using this word is akin to calling her a "mighty woman", or to asking, "Who can find a soldier woman?" Only one specific woman in the Bible is described using this term when it is translated as "virtuous": Ruth, in Ruth 3:11. Appropriately, *chayil* is also used to describe Boaz in Ruth 2:1, where he is called a "mighty man of wealth". The Mighty Man, Boaz, is the fitting counterpart to the Virtuous Woman of Ruth.

Who can find a virtuous woman?

Proverbs 31:10-31 shows us what qualities a Brother should look for in a Sister to date; this is important to us as Sisters, because it shows us what we're striving to become! There is a lot in this chapter, so we're just going to focus on a few main points.

She's an active servant

Nearly every verse about the Virtuous Woman involves her doing, helping, caring, or building up someone else. She does good (vs. 12), she a willing worker (vs. 13), she is resourceful (vs. 14), and tireless (vs. 15), makes good on her obligations (vs. 15), can manage money well and doesn't waste it on frivolous things (vs. 15) and she knows how to make good, fruitful decisions (vs. 16). She is strong (vs. 17), discerning (vs. 18), yet delicate (vs.19), observant (vs. 19), and is aware of details (vs. 19), she cares for the needy (vs. 20), and notices those left on the outside (vs. 20), cares for her family (vs. 21), specifically, she's interested in making sure they are *covered*, (vs. 22); she helps others succeed (vs. 23); she's entrepreneurial, yet domestic (vs. 24); she is wise and a teacher in her home (vs. 26), she is protective and tireless (vs. 27), she is applauded by her family (vs. 28), and because of what she does she stands out from the crowd — her works speak for her (vs. 29, 31).

What do you think is the most oft-repeated word in Proverbs 31? It's "hands", which appears a total of 6 times. This woman is known by the work of her hands! She's a "doer of the word" (*James 1:22*) — an active servant to God and others.

How do you spot her today? She's that girl who is always quick to volunteer, help out in the ecclesia, assist her parents, and befriend those who are on the fringes. She's a doer; you seldom see her completely idle, and she doesn't have a lot of "down time". She's the one who goes and talks to that older brother or sister in the meeting on Sunday who sits alone, and she's the one who reaches out to the new kid or interested friend at CYC. This is the kind of young woman we should aim to be like.

She is kind in her speech

Prov 31:26 speaks of the law of kindness being on her tongue. The Virtuous Woman is not a gossip; instead, she builds others up with her words. You can tell a lot about a girl from the way she speaks! The word translated "kindness" in vs. 26 is from the Hebrew word *chesed*, and it is most often translated "mercy". Are you merciful toward others in the way you talk? How do you speak about people when they aren't present with you, or people that you might not like very much? How do you speak about your family, or your ecclesia? You can learn so much about a person's heart through their tongue, as Jesus said: "*of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh*" (*Luke 6:45*).

She understands true beauty

Note that Proverbs 31:25 says that the Virtuous Woman is clothed with strength and dignity. This girl is not obsessed with her looks, but is aiming to spiritually "clothe" herself with Christ-like qualities. This quality is connected with the words of Peter: "*Do not let your adorning be external — the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear — but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious*" (*1Pet 3:3-4 ESV*). In Proverbs 31:30, we see that she puts God above physical beauty and social charm. She the kind of girl who, no matter her physical beauty, has a character that outshines it. Verse 31 says that her own works praise her in the gates; even if she does possess natural beauty, she's not known for what she looks like, but for *who she is*.

There's a catch about this kind of girl, though — Proverbs 31:10 implies that she is difficult to find! A Brother needs to know what qualities he is searching for, as these Sisters are sometimes overlooked in favor of the more obvious, but less valuable, choices. Although there are many examples of women of noble character in the Bible, there's only one woman in Scripture who is actually called "a virtuous woman": Ruth, as described before. Boaz was able to find a woman of virtue, Ruth, because he was a "virtuous" man.

A mighty man of valor

Ruth 2:1 calls Boaz a "mighty man of wealth" or "valor", using the same Hebrew word as used in both Proverbs 31 and Ruth 3:11 for "virtuous". There are many

things to be said about Boaz as a Mighty Man, but we're going to focus on just a handful.

He's an active servant

In the book of Ruth, we see that Boaz is looking out for the people on the fringes, his day laborers and the widows, obeying the law to allow widows to glean even though it means less profit for himself (Lev 23:22). He makes a special effort to ensure that Ruth, a vulnerable woman, is not harmed (Ruth 2:9). Even though he is in a position of leadership over his workers, he personally takes on the hard tasks that others wouldn't want to do, like sleeping next to the grain all night.

Today, you'll know if you've spotted a Boaz by seeing what kinds of things he does. He's that Brother who is always quick to volunteer, who doesn't need to be asked to help. He's not concerned about whether it's his job to do something, but where he sees a need, he fills it. He's the first to jump in and set up the ecclesial hall for a potluck, as opposed to obliviously hanging out on the sidelines while the older Sisters struggle with the tables and chairs. Proverbs 20:29 says that *"the glory of young men is their strength"*, and he makes sure he uses it well in God's service! He's the one that, without being asked, cleans the table and gathers up people's plates after a meal. He's the CYC's no-charge taxi service, the Brother who will drive all over the place to make sure the young people get to Bible Class, Memorial Service, and Study Days. Look at how he is at home, and his relationship with his parents and siblings. Is he the video game slug who has to be peeled away from the big screen? Does he speak to his family with kindness, or are they lucky to pry two words out of him? Does he let his mother wait on him hand and foot, or does he try to make her life easier by helping out where he can? A Virtuous Man is a hearer *and* doer of the word; he's an active servant.

He seeks the salvation of others



—He gathered in sheaves of wheat.—Ruth 2:15

(Ruth 2:11-12). This seems to be normal behavior for Boaz; he brings God into the conversation with everyone he meets.

Sisters, look for a young Brother who does the same. Look for the one who wants to speak about his faith, and not just keep that "talent" wrapped in a napkin, buried in the ground. Look for that Brother who doesn't just attend the ecclesial

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events that he thinks he can benefit most from, but goes because of what he can give. Just showing up and being present can be so encouraging to everyone else in the ecclesia. Finally, seek a Brother who has the faithfulness to bring God into every aspect of his life, and every relationship he has; with his family, friends, and coworkers. When a man like this seeks a Sister to partner with, he will make God an inextricable part of that relationship, because that's how he has been conducting himself in every other area of his life.

He seeks true beauty

The virtuous man puts the spiritual before the physical. The world, and human nature, both make it extremely difficult for a young man to do this — our Brothers are bombarded daily with the message that their sex drives exist to be gratified and that beauty and pleasure are life's most valuable offerings. This was no different in Boaz's day, as we can see that he has to command his male employees to leave Ruth alone, in spite of her beauty and vulnerability (Ruth 2:9). When Ruth offers herself to Boaz as his wife, when they are alone together at night, he immediately sets a spiritual tone by glorifying God and following His guidelines for Ruth's redemption. Finally, when Boaz thinks of Ruth, what attracts him the most is her character — it's Boaz who, in Ruth 3:11, refers to her as a virtuous woman.

A foundation

These examples are templates to show us what we should be striving for, and what we should be *looking* for, when we consider beginning a relationship. Yoking yourself with a fellow-believer in Christ is just the bare minimum for us; after all, Elimelech, Naomi, Mahlon and Chilion were Israelite “believers”, and they fell away to Moab as soon as a famine in Israel caused their faith to waver. In contrast, Boaz remained with God's people no matter what the cost, even though his livelihood relied upon the fruit of the land! Similarly, Ruth was willing to leave her homeland and accept a life of poverty and probable widowhood, in order to cleave to the God of Israel. These are the kinds of people whose relationships bring glory to God: those who are not merely believers in name only, but active servants who put God first in everything.

But what should a Mighty Man and a Virtuous Woman do once God has brought them together? Discussing the mechanics of a Godly relationship is another subject altogether; however, you can lay the foundation for that relationship in the character you build before you even meet. What you *do* in a relationship is built upon the foundation of who you *are* in every other area of your life. Scripture has much to say to dating couples, but for now, suffice it to say by becoming a Virtuous Woman — and knowing how to recognize a Mighty Man — with God's help, you're well on your way.

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