Virtual Christian Magazine
Hope And Encouragement For The Real World

"Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you."—John 15:13-14

Volume 10 Number 7 August 2008

Male-Female Relationships

By Robert Berendt *Page 3*



We're created to be complementary, but this secret of successful marriage relationships can get lost in the mysteries and mayhem of the modern battle of the sexes.

A Friend: "The Masterpiece of Nature"

By Sarah M. Thompson *Page 6*



God made us to need friends, and especially to need a relationship with Him.

Parent Swaps

By Lorelei Nettles *Page 8*



As parents and Christians, we have responsibilities to our children and we must make sure we don't swing too far in any direction when it comes to decision making.

Five Smooth Stones

By Glenn Harrell *Page 12*



David, the youth who would become king of Israel, faced Goliath with sling in hand and stones he selected to use as ammunition. What can we today use in handling the challenges and difficulties we come up against?

The Scarlet Cord

By Graemme Marshall *Page 17*



A colored rope hanging from a window held great meaning for a woman in Jericho thousands of years ago. It also has special significance for us as Christians.

***Virtual Christian Magazine* Staff**

Lorelei Nettles - Managing Editor
Patrick Kansa - Issue Editor
Mike Bennett - Editors
Gayle Hoefker - Editors
Jada Howell - Editors
Patrick Kansa - Editors
Jeremy Lallier - Editors
David Meidinger - Editors
Suzanne Morgan - Editors
Amy Stephens - Editors
Debbie Werner - Editors
Jack Elliott - Reviewers
Eric Evans - Reviewers
Don Henson - Reviewers
Don Hooser - Reviewers
Becky Bennett - Proofreader
Chris Rowland - Web Design

Copyright 2008 United Church of God, an International Association

---

Male-Female Relationships

By Robert Berendt

We're created to be complementary, but this secret of successful marriage relationships can get lost in the mysteries and mayhem of the modern battle of the sexes.



RECENTLY I READ A VERY FINE DESCRIPTION of how a man and woman can complement one another. It was written by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in his poem "The Song of Hiawatha":

> *As unto the bow the cord is,*
> *So unto the man is woman;*
> *Though she bends him, she obeys him,*
> *Though she draws him, yet she follows;*
> *Useless each without the other!*

It is amazing how some people are gifted in choosing words to convey such profound thoughts. As I read these lines, the proof of their veracity was confirmed in my memories, experiences and in the statements of the Bible.



The dictionary defines a bow as "a piece of elastic wood or other material for shooting arrows, bent by means of a string stretched between its ends."

When I was a boy, I made many crude bows and arrows. In summer camps, one of the favorite activities is using a bow and arrow. It fascinates boys and girls.

A friend of mine constructs fine bows and carefully chooses the wood and the cord that is required. Selection of material for both the bow and the cord is crucial for a well-made instrument. The bow is hard and tough; the cord is limp and pliable.

But when joined together, a powerful instrument is formed.

The bow and cord are two different types of materials, but they work together in a wonderful complement of each other. It is the unity of the bow and cord that makes this instrument so effective and useful.

It is the unity of the bow and cord that makes this instrument so effective and useful.

The cord is attached to the tips of the bow in such a way that enough tension is given to bend the bow. Used properly, the cord can control the amount of strength and power that the bow can provide. Pulling the cord bends the bow, and its release causes the cord to spring back into its original position, providing the power to send an arrow far.

A foundation of love

In Ephesians 5 the apostle Paul was inspired by God to write some directives for men and women in marriage. He stated that there was to be love in our relationships (verse 2) and that all people should at times submit to others. He went on to state that the wife was to submit to her husband (verse 22) and the husband was to love his wife as Jesus loves the Church (verse 25).

The relationship demands respect for the other and appreciation of the various differences.

Love is the greatest power that exists, as it is what God is (1 John 4:7-8). The relationship of man and woman is to reflect that foundation. Within that foundation, God gave the need for the wife to rely on her husband. This reliance is not a negative thing; it was a necessity since the woman was to bear and care for children and the man was to provide, protect and fill other needs.

They were to complement one another and thus provide the basis of a stable environment for children to grow in. Children need almost 20 years of this stability to fully mature. Even after becoming adults, people need the stabilizing influence of their parents and grandparents. That is part of why God made marriage for life—"until death do us part," as we so often hear in marriage vows.

Complementary companions

A woman has the ability and capacity to add immeasurably to the success of her marriage, home and even the career of her husband. The man, too, has similar abilities—but God created them with some differences. Those differences are intended to complement the other just as a cord complements the bow and the bow the cord. It is the harmonious working together that produces the results.



God stated that husband and wife become one flesh (Genesis 2:24), and so the cord and the bow to which it is attached become one instrument. Each part of that instrument plays its unique role, and both parts work in harmony, with each fulfilling different functions. So, too, the man and woman play somewhat different roles within the family, but always complementary to one another, dependent on one another and working in

harmony to produce the best results.

When a man and woman fully realize that God created both of them "in His own image" (Genesis 1:27), it is ludicrous for either one to think less of the other. A woman is no less in the image of God than the man and no less valuable. They are different in many ways, but those ways were carefully designed by God to produce the relationship He intended. The differences allow for the best possible arena for each to grow in character, grace and knowledge unto the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:13). The relationship demands respect for the other and appreciation of the various differences.

Children add greatly to this dimension of growth, but they are not the whole story. In marriage a man and woman are to grow together before children enter the picture and continue to do so after the children are grown.

Many people simply do not understand the relationship God intended for a man and a woman. In some societies women are considered of less value and are not treated with the respect and dignity that they, as children of God created in His image, should receive.



In some marriages, women are not treated as equal partners. Yet it becomes very obvious that a woman can make or break a man and make or break a marriage. She has great power. When this is understood and appreciated and when the man understands his role, then the concept God had in mind can bear fruit. Then the relationship can be based on mutual respect and love—true outgoing consideration for one another. Sadly enough, this seems to be a rare thing in our society.

"Neither male nor female"

No matter what we do, in this life our marriages are temporary. They only last as long as we live. But the effect of our spiritual development through our relationships with our mate and others is the stuff that eternity is made of. God promised a resurrection from the dead—a time when all people will live once again.

Paul wrote about this time in Galatians 3:26-28. He says: "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus…there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." What powerful words. Since this is true, it ought to be obvious that there is no room for discrimination or the concepts of superiority and inferiority. In this life we should understand the differences as God intended—but realize they were designed for working together.

Remember, the bow without the cord is useless, as is the cord without the bow.

Recommended reading

For more biblical principles for successful relationships, download or request a free copy of *Marriage and Family: The Missing Dimension*.

A Friend: "The Masterpiece of Nature"

By Sarah M. Thompson

God made us to need friends, and especially to need a relationship with Him.



"A FRIEND MAY WELL BE RECKONED the masterpiece of nature." This quote from Ralph Waldo Emerson is perhaps my favorite quotation from a literary figure.

Friendship is a wonderful gift from God, and the manner in which we interact with our friends is one of the many ways God helps us to grow in character.

I have always held the institution of friendship in high regard. From early childhood to now, in my early 20s, I have longed for the kind of bond and connection with someone that David and Jonathan shared with each other (1 Samuel 20)—a friendship filled with mental, emotional and spiritual intimacy. Perhaps being an only child, as well as having been homeschooled, has played a part in my desire for such closeness. However, I believe that as human beings, we all have a need for such bonding.

In my search for this depth of friendship, I have come across individuals who I greatly respect, admire and look up to. In the attempt to find that "best friend" to fill that void inside of me, my admiration and respect has tended to turn to idolization. This is not only unhealthy and a sin, but it is also a set up for great pain and disappointment.

True fulfillment

Friendship is a wonderful gift from God, and the manner in which we interact with our friends is one of the many ways God helps us to grow in character. No human relationship, however, can ever provide us with the lasting fulfillment we long for. It is only through a relationship with God

and His Son, Jesus Christ, that we will find the fulfillment we desperately desire. God is our ultimate friend and confidant. Unlike men, He will never leave you nor forsake you. Can the same be said about us and how we as His children interact with Him?



Regarding our human interactions, you must first be a friend before you can have a friend. The same is true in our relationship with God. If we are to truly have a healthy, fulfilling relationship with Him, we must first be an active participant, through daily prayer, meditation and Bible study. Because we are human and have yet to reach perfection, we will always have room for improvement in our relationship with our Creator. However, if we strive to keep our focus on Him and His will for our lives, we will begin to experience a true fulfillment that can only come from Him.

Since our Father did make us to be social creatures, we should not become hermits with God as our only companion. As His children and ambassadors of His Kingdom, He wants us to interact with and be friendly toward others. Doing this not only brings pleasure; but more importantly, it helps us to grow and to be a good example to others.

In conclusion, a friend is just one of many masterpieces created by God. Having a close friendship like the one David and Jonathan shared is a blessing and should not be taken for granted. We must always remember, however, that it is only God and a relationship with Him that can provide us with ultimate fulfillment. Instead of idolizing any member of His creation, we must always direct our reverence toward Him, the Creator.

Recommended reading

For more on this subject, see "The Importance of Right Friendships" from the free booklet *Making Life Work*.

Parent Swaps

By Lorelei Nettles

As parents and Christians, we have responsibilities to our children and we must make sure we don't swing too far in any direction when it comes to decision making.



IN RECENT WEEKS, I HAVE RECORDED and watched a few episodes of a series on television called *Wife Swap*. The show selects two families and has the wives/mothers of each family trade places for two weeks. For the first week, the wives must follow the written rules and directions that are given for the household they are visiting. The second week they get to change the rules to their own preferences. The family must then follow the way of life of the new wife, doing things as she thinks they should be done. Usually, this goes way overboard and is not always very fair to the household. The families chosen are, of course, total opposites in the way that they live.



In one particular episode, the first family lived as if they were in the military with very strict rules. The parents made the children do chores from sunup to sundown, only allowing them breaks for meals, school and homework. They would bounce coins on beds to check that they were made properly. They would pull entire drawers full of clothing out and onto the floor if they were not filled properly. The children would then refold and fill the drawers appropriately. The children were so programmed that, when the parents were away, the oldest daughter would assume the role of the mother with her siblings. Each of the three children felt they had no freedom to live.

The second family believed in total freedom. The children did as they pleased; they were messy to the point of food fights in the home. (And these included their father!) They were allowed to cuss

and hit each other and had no respect for their parents or any other adult. The entire family was accustomed to sleeping on mattresses in the living room, just because they could, and throwing dirty or clean clothes about the house randomly. A vacuum was rarely, if ever, used.



When the wives switch places, there is always tension—they hate the way the families in which they are placed live and must tolerate living as they do for a week. When it is their turn to change the rules, things inevitably get worse. The fathers of the household get very angry with the new mother's choices and will go so far as to call her names and/or treat her so disrespectfully that she cries or feels forced from the house. During this part of the show I find I must fast-forward through much of it, as it is just so disturbing that people would treat each other in such a way. (It always makes me wonder, why do the families sign up for the show if they are so antagonistic about change?)

When the wives switch places, there is always tension.

Usually, by the end of each show, the fathers have eased off a bit and follow some of the new rules (either because they see how the change might help their family or because they want the new mother to just back off). After the two weeks, the two couples meet together to share their experiences and complaints. They then end the show by returning two weeks later to see what changes the families have retained.

One extreme

I found the whole premise of the show disturbing, but was also intrigued by what I saw in the results. This is why I chose to record and watch more than one episode. Although, I am fully aware that no assumption is always 100 percent accurate, I felt what I had watched was a good example of how people act in general.



What I discovered was that those who were most strict in their households and had the biggest egos were pretty much unwilling to change after the swap. While they might add family time or an event, it was strictly structured and often timed or specifically scheduled in. These were also usually the families with the most wealth. They cared more about appearances and endeavored to make sure their children would be smart and wealthy as well. But this all came at costs—no room for fun or freedom of any kind.

Over the years I have known a couple of families like this and in one, the children either ran away or left home at 18 and barely spoke to the parents. It is a very sad situation, but interestingly their parents still feel that their children are ingrates and never appreciated all that they had given them. They could not see that they drove their children away. It reminded me of what it says in Proverbs 28:11, "The rich man is wise in his own eyes."

It's not that riches make people evil, but frequently the rich only seek more riches and not only strive for it, but expect their children to achieve it at all costs. Because of it, they may look down on those who are not striving for it, as was the case in most of these shows.

The other side of things

While the poorer and wilder families were willing to change some in the end, they were also the ones who fell into an idle way of life and had no real goals or guidance in their lives. The adults focused on their jobs, usually ignoring the children and leaving them to fend for themselves. Almost all ate take-out food rather than cook. They lived as they did under the guise of freedom but were, in reality, quite lazy. They thought being their child's buddy was more important than telling their kids what to do.

Both types of families usually have children who do not have close friendships in their lives.

I also know a few families like this. They are more concerned with their own daily lives than with their family. They are selfish, have no other goals and want life to just come easy without any demands outside of their jobs.

Both types of families usually have children who do not have close friendships in their lives. This occurs either because the children are too embarrassed to bring friends home or because they are not allowed to bring friends home.

The importance of balance

We as Christians must be careful not to lean too far in either of these directions. We must remember to train up our children in the way they should go (Proverbs 22:6); but at the same time, we must not drive them away. Colossians 3:21 warns us: "Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged" (King James Version).

We are told throughout the Bible, in various ways, to have balance in our lives, to be careful not to swing too far in one direction or another. We do not want to strong-arm our families, but we do not want to let them run rampant either. It can sometimes be difficult for parents to balance the love they have for their own children against the discipline that should be given. I don't think there are any of us who claim we are perfect in that area.

We are told throughout the Bible, in various ways, to have balance in our lives.

We also must not lose focus of the goal, the narrow path that leads us to the Kingdom of God. While I realize this goal was not one the families in the show held for themselves, it is the focus we as Christians should have. Along with this are the teachings we are given throughout the Word of God. All we need to know is laid out for us there.

Loving one another

The families in this TV program showed little love towards the outsider they had invited to their home. Granted, they had no choice in who would be arriving, but by signing on with the show, they had opened their door. If they had demonstrated love to each other, I am sure that they would not have a program to air at all. This type of programming thrives on the controversy.

Many of us are unwilling to accept His terms, feeling it is too much for us.

Jesus Christ told us that we are to love one another. In John 13:34-35 He states, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one to another." And in John 15:12 Christ says, "This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."

Had these families practiced just the most basic of manners toward the guest in their home, they could have breezed through the two weeks. Instead they chose to fight and antagonize one another. They stood fast in their ways and refused to change or were only willing to open up in the most simple of ways.



Does this remind you of any trait within yourself? Often when God tells us we must be different, we are unwilling to change—we become steadfast in our wrong ways. If we do choose to accept change, we often only take hold of a little bit of it. Many of us are unwilling to accept His terms, feeling it is too much for us. In reality, however, God's plan brings us more freedom than we might imagine. Living God's way and using His Holy Spirit allows us to use the conscience God gave us to guide us in a right way of thinking. We choose to treat others—including our spouse and children—as we would want to be treated, with honor and respect.

Families overall are falling apart. Parents often support their children financially long into adulthood and then may follow-up by suing them for not repaying them. Children abuse their parents physically; they swear at their so-called friends; they may even lie and cheat to get their way. When a parent is too strict, the children may leave home and abandon all the values their parents tried to instill in them. Or they may pass those strict ways onto their own children, thus repeating the cycle. When a parent is too lenient, the children may grow into free-for-all adults who end up in a life of crime or abuse—all the while feeling there is something they are missing in their lives.

We have choices in our life; let's make sure that the way we choose to follow also follows the Word of God.

Recommended reading

Request our free booklets: *Making Life Work* and *Marriage and Family: The Missing Dimension*.

Five Smooth Stones

By Glenn Harrell

David, the youth who would become king of Israel, faced Goliath with sling in hand and stones he selected to use as ammunition. What can we today use in handling the challenges and difficulties we come up against?



IN THE BOOK OF ACTS we are told that "we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). Why is it so important that we have tribulation in our life?

What is tribulation anyway? The word "tribulation" comes from the Greek word *thlipsis*, which means a "pressing, pressing together, pressure…oppression, affliction, tribulation, distress, straits" (Strong's Online Concordance #2347). According to Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary "tribulation" means "distress or suffering resulting from oppression or persecution; also a trying experience <the trials and *tribulations* of starting a new business>." It is through these trying experiences, these many trials, this pressure, that we draw closer to God and Christ, and that is why it is so important!

It requires a great deal of pressure to make a jewel.

We all face trials in our lives, and they are very different for each of us; there are some small trials that we face each day that we think we can handle by ourselves, and then there are others that tend to loom over us like giants. All of these trials serve the same purpose—to bring us closer to God. It is imperative that we keep God involved in our trials because He is the one who will ultimately bring us through them. After all, we are His jewels (Malachi 3:17), His precious stones, and it requires a great deal of pressure to make a jewel.

A giant of a trial

What do we do when we are faced with giant trials? There is a story in the Bible that illustrates the actions we need to take to reach a favorable conclusion to our major trials, and that is the story of

David and Goliath. Through this story we can learn what we must do. We must…do our part, and leave the rest in God's hands!

Take a close look at the story of David and Goliath and see how David faced this giant trial and overcame it. The story is found in 1 Samuel 17:32-51. It is an impressive story, but I would like to focus on the main things that David did in preparing to face Goliath.

In verse 32, we see David's attitude towards this trial. It is a mindset that we need to have as we face our trials. "Let no man's heart fail because of him," David said, speaking of Goliath. As we face our trials, we must do so with courage, not fearing but being confident of the outcome (verses 33-36).



The next verse shows us why David was so courageous and confident. "The LORD, who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." David knew that it was ultimately God who would deliver him from this trial, but he still had a part to play in that deliverance. King Saul attempted to supply David with what he thought he would need by offering him his armor, but David responded, "I cannot go with these; for I have not proved them" (verses 39, King James Version).

What David needed was not something that was man-made, but something that he had used before. It was tried and tested, and he knew it would be sufficient to get the job done. Next we see just what David did to prepare to face this giant trial in his life. "Then he took his staff in his hand; and he chose for himself *five smooth stones* from the brook, and put them in a shepherd's bag, in a pouch which he had, and his sling in his hand. And he drew near to the Philistine" (verse 40). I would like to take a look at these five smooth stones (in a metaphorical sense) to see what they mean for us in helping us to face our trials today.

King Saul attempted to supply David with what he thought he would need by offering him his armor, but David responded, "I cannot go with these; for I have not proved them."

David did not just pick any type of rock from the ground. He chose them carefully. He knew they would have to fly through the air towards the giant. If the stones were flat, they would resist the wind and might not strike the target at all. You will remember that these stones were taken from the brook. They were smooth and aerodynamically sound because the water was constantly moving over them. God tells us that His Holy Spirit is like water (John 7:37-39). So the five smooth stones that we pick up must be immersed in the Spirit of God. This will make them smooth and effective in dealing with our trials.

Considering David's example, let's take a look at "five smooth stones" that we can take up that will help us deal with our lives, circumstances and trials.

Prayer

The first "stone" we should consider is prayer. Prayer is so very important in facing a trial. Prayer is an opportunity to take our problems to God and ask Him for His help. Notice the actions of

King Hezekiah of Israel when he faced a giant trial. He had received a letter from another king indicating that Israel was about to be attacked and destroyed. We can read the story in 2 Kings 19:14-20:

"And Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers, and read it; and Hezekiah went up to the house of the LORD, and spread it before the LORD. Then Hezekiah prayed before the LORD, and said: 'O LORD God of Israel, the One who dwells between the cherubim, You are God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. Incline Your ear, O LORD, and hear; open Your eyes, O LORD, and see; and hear the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to reproach the living God.

"'Truly, LORD, the kings of Assyria have laid waste the nations and their lands, and have cast their gods into the fire; for they were not gods, but the work of men's hands—wood and stone. Therefore they destroyed them. Now therefore, O LORD our God, I pray, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You are the LORD God, You alone.'

Prayer is an opportunity to take our problems to God and ask Him for His help.

"Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, 'Thus says the LORD God of Israel: "Because you have prayed to Me against Sennacherib king of Assyria, I have heard."'"

We can see that Hezekiah took his problem and laid it before God, and God responded. Prayer is a way of communicating our problems to God. It shows that we recognize that we have a problem that we cannot handle on our own. We realize we need God's help. Prayer is our opportunity to humble ourselves before God and seek His help.

Fasting

The second important "stone" is fasting. This stone offers another way to demonstrate humility and show God that we need Him in our lives. At times there are problems that take more than prayer to overcome. Notice these words of Christ after the disciples had attempted unsuccessfully to cast out a demon. After Christ rebuked the demon so that it came out of the young boy, the disciples came to Jesus privately and asked, "Why could we not cast it out?" (Matthew 17:19). Jesus explained that "this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting."

Likewise, there are occasions when we will face trials that require a time of fasting. Fasting is a tool that God gives us fighting spiritual battles. It reflects an attitude that acknowledges our need for God to provide the basic necessities of life, the food and water that we need to exist. As we afflict ourselves through fasting, we show that we rely on God for all of our needs. Some trials are just that big.

As we afflict ourselves through fasting, we show that we rely on God for all of our needs.

Bible study

The third "stone" is Bible study. Every situation we face in life has already been faced by someone else. There is nothing new under the sun. The Bible tells us that Christ was tempted in all points, yet without sin. He faced all possible situations.

When we face trials, we can come up with all kinds of ways to solve the problems. But is our solution acceptable to both God and man? By diligently studying the Word of God, we can find the trial that we face and the solution to the trial, by reading the way the men and women of the Bible and Christ Himself faced their trials.

Studying the Word of God is not always easy. It's not just reading a passage and saying, "Ah, I have found the answer." No, "precept must be upon precept; precept upon precept: line upon line; line upon line; here a little, and there a little" (Isaiah 28:9-10). Very seldom will we find everything about a given subject in only one passage of the Bible. Bible study is something that also must done prayerfully, asking God to guide us by His Spirit into understanding and seeing the truth about any given situation (John 16:13; 1 Corinthians 2:9-11). By studying the Bible, we prepare ourselves to face our trial, and we just may find the answer that we seek (2 Timothy 3:14-16).

Meditation

What follows the use of the first three stones is the fourth "stone," meditation. This is not the type of meditation where one hums to try to take oneself into a spiritual consciousness. Rather, this is where one goes over a thought or idea again and again in one's mind, sort of like a ruminant animal. A ruminant animal is one that chews the cud. It takes the food into its mouth, chews it and gets nutrients from it, and swallows it into its first stomach. Later on in the day, it regurgitates it back up into its mouth in the form of the cud and chews it again. This way the animal gets all the nutrients from the food it takes in.

We should not decide in a rush, but after careful thought and consideration.

This is the way we need to approach Bible study. To meditate is to take the time to go over what you have studied to get a deeper understanding of it. Again, it is something that should be guided by the Holy Spirit of God. God's Spirit is a Spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7). When facing a trial, we need a sound mind to make wise decisions. We should not decide in a rush, but after careful thought and consideration, after going over it again and again until we gain confidence in the solution. Only then should we put into action what we have learned from the Word of God.

Service

And finally, a fifth "stone" to consider is service. Christ told us that He came to serve and not to be served. Serving should be done in balance. Notice this statement regarding Martha: "But Martha was distracted with much serving" (Luke 10:40). Service is an opportunity for us to get our mind off of ourselves and our problems and focus on someone else and their problems. Often when we see the problems that others are facing, our problem seems to pale in comparison.

"But Martha was distracted with much serving" (Luke 10:40).

We are admonished to do unto others as we would have them do unto us. At times we may need someone else to help us solve our problems or to face our trials, and we should be willing to serve our brothers when they face trials. Service, however, should not be done just so we can receive it back ourselves. We must serve with a sincere heart and mind.

Notice Luke 14:12-14: Then He also said to him who invited Him, "When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just."

The purpose of service is to reflect your character before God. It is always "better to give than to receive" and that is one aspect of the righteous character that God wants to see in our lives.

The importance of God's help



The five smooth stones that David picked up and put in his bag were tried and true. He had confidence in them. Having used them before, he knew what the outcome would be. He did not just pick up one stone; he had four in reserve. What if the first stone David threw had missed the mark? He had to be ready to reload and try again, and so must we. As Christians, we cannot just throw one stone and think our problem is solved. We must be ready to throw them all at our problem. As was said earlier, we must do our part and leave the rest in God's hands. This is so true for us, just as it was for David.

Once the stone left the sling, after David had done his part, it was God who guided that stone through the air to hit its mark. Though the stone was aerodynamically sound, cutting through the air without much resistance, a shift in the wind or a sudden move by the giant might have caused it to miss. It was God who took down Goliath. David was just a tool in God's hand, and he realized it. Notice 1 Samuel 17:45-47:

As Christians, we cannot just throw one stone and think our problem is solved. We must be ready to throw them all at our problem.

"Then David said to the Philistine, 'You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you and take your head from you. And this day I will give the carcasses of the camp of the Philistines to the birds of the air and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. Then all this assembly shall know that the LORD does not save with sword and spear, for the battle is the Lord's, and He will give you into our hands.'"

We gain our victory for all the trials we face through Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. He is the Stone that the builders rejected; he is our corner stone. Ultimately, we must take Christ into our lives to face our trials, and we will gain the victory over them, but we must do our part. So no matter what type of trial we face, we have a formula that will help us to face them. Pick up the five smooth stones of prayer, fasting, Bible study, meditation and service…and leave the rest in God's hands.

The Scarlet Cord

By Graemme Marshall

A colored rope hanging from a window held great meaning for a woman in Jericho thousands of years ago. It also has special significance for us as Christians.



TWO MEN SET OUT ON A DANGEROUS ASSIGNMENT. It was a secret mission involving a hike of two to three days. They were to ford a river, cross into enemy country and spy out military information. They were nearly captured, and they had to be lowered down a city wall to escape. A token of a scarlet cord left behind became rich symbolism for Christians ever after. The color red is powerfully significant in salvation. It holds special significance for New Testament Christians at Passover.



The men were spies Joshua sent to search the land, especially Jericho (Joshua 2:1). They apparently had no fear of mixing with the locals as they entered the city. Possibly their dress and speech was not too out of place. When they walked the streets, they may have browsed for a while before seeking somewhere to stay the night. They ended up at Rahab's inn for lodging.

However, as the story unfolds, they were nonetheless observed and identified as Israelite spies. Perhaps their dialect gave them away. Maybe others listening close by might have observed Rahab's animated conversation with them after she deduced they were Israelites. The king sought their arrest by sending Rahab instruction to deliver them up.

A woman's faith

Now a remarkable turn of events emerged. In this chance meeting, the spies discovered Rahab knew much about Israel. She was, in a way, counting the cost of leaving her polytheistic background. And her family members were similarly agreed in her newfound belief. Could God have led the spies directly to her, as He led Peter to the gentile centurion Cornelius? Did God intend to call her to the faith? We cannot say for sure from the account, but we can read how her faith is commended twice, in Hebrews 11:30-31 and James 2:25.

A token of a scarlet cord left behind became rich symbolism for Christians ever after.

Rahab in her fledgling faith was more concerned about saving the spies than about telling a misleading story to the king. By her subterfuge, the king's troops were misdirected to the fords of Jordan. Rahab instead hid the spies under drying bundles of flax on the roof. After deceiving the troops, she went to the spies in a remarkable confession. In Joshua 2:8-11, Rahab recounted her newfound faith: "I know that the LORD has given this land to you" (verse 9, New International Version throughout). This was a belief in the power of the true God.

"A great fear…has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you." This offered the military intelligence the spies were to report back to Joshua. It showed God's hand already at work to bring the overthrow of Jericho.

"We have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea…, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites." This is a remarkable statement. The defeat of these two kings was a fairly recent happening across the other side of Jordan, but the parting of the Red Sea was some 40 years previously!



How old was Rahab? When did she learn this? Did it come from her parents when she was a child? Significant awe of God's miraculous intervention had spread during Israel's wanderings, and neighboring nations were familiar with Israelite history. The defeat of the two kings suddenly brought everything into sharp focus for a city across the Jordan next on the list. Rahab believed biblical history and now converted to Israel's God.

Also remarkable is how her father, mother and brothers also believed. We know this because the spies told her all must remain in the house and not leave. It appears they obeyed. Their belief is in sharp contrast to Lot's family members who just mocked the angelic warning. In this case they were saved through Rahab.

She acknowledges, "The Lord your God is God" (verse 11). The spies now had to trust her to not tell the king of their escape until it was safe to cross the Jordan and report to Joshua.

The remarkable scarlet cord

In return for their safety they vowed to protect her when the Israelite assault began, provided she abided by two conditions. First, she and all her family must stay inside her house during the attack. Second, she must tie a piece of red cord to her window to identify her location to attacking troops.

Significant awe of God's miraculous intervention had spread during Israel's wanderings.

Where the scarlet cord came from is not revealed. It may have been in Rahab's house or with the flax bundles. But we might wonder whether the spies had it with them to tie their clothes, backpacks or sleeping gear. We also can ponder whether God intended the event to become a symbolism for all time.

The spies explained that in order to be protected she must tie the scarlet cord in the window. That way her house would be unobtrusively identified to an Israelite search party (verses 18-19). And with that Rahab lowered them down from her window in the wall.



We assume the section of the wall that enclosed her house was the only section still standing at the collapse of the city walls. But the red cord tied to the window was to be the proof of her faith. The two spies no doubt excitedly explained all these events to Joshua who, in response, accepted the vow to protect Rahab and her family.

As the Israelites approached Jericho, God explained He would collapse the walls (Joshua 6). Joshua must have wondered how the vow would be honored when the walls were to fall. Did it mean ALL the walls, or enough of the wall structure to enable the troops to rush in and take the city? It implied all the walls.

It must have been astonishing to see, when the dust settled, the section of wall where the red cord was tied to a window *still stood upright*. What amazing deliverance! What a lesson of trust and faith for not just Rahab and her family, but also Joshua and the Israelites.

Joshua immediately told the spies to take Rahab and her family outside the Israelite camp (they were gentiles). Then they burned the city. The biblical directive means it must have also included the standing wall of Rahab's house. Millennia of erosion mean there is little evidence among the archaeological Jericho sites to enhance this miraculous event.

Its meaning for us

The scarlet cord became Rahab's identification as one to be saved in a day of calamity.

Now let's consider why Christians are impressed with the scarlet cord in the window. It forces itself upon us in the light of Scriptural teaching about the blood of Christ. Red blood from slain lambs splashed over the doorposts of Israelite homes in Egypt protected them from the "slayer of the firstborn" (Exodus 12:13). The scarlet cord symbolized in type Rahab's acceptance of the "lamb's blood" in her life. What the blood on the doorposts on the first Passover night in Egypt was to the houses of Israel, so the scarlet cord in the window was to the house of Rahab. It became Rahab's identification as one to be saved in a day of calamity. It was the acting out of her

faith. Her sinful years overlooked (Acts 17:30-31) she became the ancestress of David and of Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:1, 5-6).

What the blood of the first Passover did for the Israelites, the scarlet cord did for Rahab. What Christ's poured-out blood on the stake did for mankind's sins, the red wine each Passover similarly symbolizes for believers.

Christians celebrate deliverance from the bondage of sin. Despite human weakness, God views cleansed believers as unleavened (1 Corinthians 5:7).

With that confidence we march on, as did the Israelites, towards the Promised Land.

Recommended reading

We invite you to read the following free literature: *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*, *What Is Your Destiny?* and *The Bible and Archaeology*.