Virtual Christian Magazine
Hope And Encouragement For The Real World

"And in that day it shall be that living waters shall flow from Jerusalem, half of them toward the eastern sea and half of them toward the western sea; in both summer and winter it shall occur. And the LORD shall be King over all the earth. In that day it shall be—'The LORD is one,' and His Name one."—Zechariah 14:8-9

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The Wonderful World Beyond Today!
Part 3, Refreshing News: God's Government Is Coming!

By Mike Bennett

After thousands of years of abuse, corruption and misrule, finally there will be a government that is always for the people—truly serving with everyone's best interest in mind.



THE STATISTICS, and the human stories behind them, are horrifying. Dictators, tyrants and leaders of every stripe have cheated, robbed, starved, repressed, jailed, tortured, raped and murdered their own subjects.

- Some estimates claim Kim Jong Il is responsible for the deaths of 4 million or more of his own people, an incredible statistic considering North Korea has only about 23 million people. While he required his malnourished people to watch the public executions of people caught stealing food or trying to flee the country, he continued to spend extravagantly on his own lavish lifestyle.

  According to the UN World Food Program, the average 7-year-old boy in North Korea is almost 8 inches shorter than a South Korean the same age, and more than 20 pounds lighter (David Wallechinsky, "The World's 10 Worst Dictators," *Parade,* Jan. 22, 2006).

- Saparmurat Niyazov, who named himself Turkmenistan's president for life and father of the Turkmen, also renamed the month of January after himself and April after his mother. He commissioned a revolving gold statue of himself that rotates to face the sun, and made his book the *Ruhnama* the universal textbook for his people. He considered all criticism treason and punished dissenters with imprisonment, incarceration in psychiatric facilities and torture. He ordered the doctors to give up the Hippocratic Oath and to swear allegiance to him instead (Wallechinsky).

- In Equatorial Guinea, "human-rights groups report detention without trial, torture, the disappearance of opposition activists and the plunder of the country's vast oil resources." In the 1996 election Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo received well over 100 percent of the vote in some parts of the country, and in 1994 he expelled the U.S. ambassador who was "accused of using witchcraft to try to help the opposition win elections."

  More than $700 million was funneled into accounts he controlled, while most of his people live on less than $1 a day. "On one occasion, his wife deposited a suitcase containing 30 kilograms of $100 bills at a Washington bank" ("The World's Top 10 Dictators," Sept. 4, 2006, www.newstatesman.com).

Sadly, there are many more stories like these today, as there have been throughout history. Think of Suharto, estimated to have embezzled $15 to $35 billion during his rule of Indonesia, and Stalin, who killed thousands in his purges of "enemies of the people" and starved millions more Russians with "the worst man-made famine in human history" (www.infoplease.com; www.pbs.org).

Before them were countless others—from Nimrod to Nebuchadnezzar to Nero to Napoleon—with power and the corruption that seems to inevitably ensue.

An image destroyed

Since so many leaders seem to set up idealized images of themselves, it is only fitting that a prophecy of the end of human misrule includes the toppling of a huge statue.

Since so many leaders seem to set up idealized images of themselves, it is only fitting that a prophecy of the end of human misrule includes the toppling of a huge statue.

One night God gave the great Babylonian emperor Nebuchadnezzar, a vivid dream that troubled him so much he called all his experts together to tell him the meaning. To ensure they didn't just make up an interpretation, he insisted they first tell him exactly what he had dreamed.

They knew he wasn't kidding when he threatened, "If you do not make known the dream to me, and its interpretation, you shall be cut in pieces and your houses shall be made an ash heap" (Daniel 2:5).

No one could do what the king demanded, but Daniel, a Jewish captive serving in Nebuchadnezzar's court, asked God to reveal the dream and its meaning to him.

With God's inspiration, Daniel was able to remind the king of the great image he had seen in his dream. It had a head of gold, chest and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, legs of iron and feet partly of iron and partly of clay.

Daniel explained to Nebuchadnezzar, "You are this head of gold" (verse 38). The other parts of the image were revealed to be other human empires to follow him—Medo-Persian, Greco-Macedonian and Roman—all the way up to the time of Christ's return.

"You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces… And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth" (verses 34-35).

The towering image of human government and corrupt rule will finally come to an end and "the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed" (Daniel 2:44).

It seems this vision did not squelch the pride and arrogance of Nebuchadnezzar for very long. He went on to command his people to bow down to a 90-foot gold statue or be thrown into a blazing furnace (Daniel 3:1-6, New International Version). But Daniel's prophecy has given hope to millions of oppressed people through the ages. Regime change is coming! The despots and petty bureaucrats will no longer cheat and abuse them.

A dream come true!

Jesus Christ promised to return and clean up the corruption and set up the perfect government—one that truly serves the people.



The beloved apostle John foresaw the time when the returning Christ will destroy those who destroy the earth (Revelation 11:18). He heard a loud announcement of the best news this troubled world could hear: "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever" (verse 15).

This begins the time of refreshing, the time of restoration that the apostle Peter and all the holy prophets had proclaimed (Acts 3:19-21). It was not to be a restoration of some idyllic golden age of man, but a restoration of the perfect government of God that had been lost when man rejected God in the Garden of Eden.

Actually, it seems this earth lost God's government even earlier when Lucifer arrogantly rebelled against his Creator. He started the pattern of selfish government the Bible identifies with Babylon and continues to this day (Isaiah 14:12-15; Revelation 18:1-5).

Real civil service

Why will God's government be different from all that have gone before? Christ described the contrast in a gentle rebuke to His own students, who had been themselves vying for power.

"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:25-28).

Jesus Christ led the way. He gave up all the power of the universe to come live as a humble carpenter and teacher (Philippians 2:5-8). He never took advantage of others, but freely let everyone take advantage of what He had to offer. He looked out for the poor, hungry, sick and disabled. He took the role of a slave to wash His disciples' feet and took the role of a martyr willing to die in our place (John 13:12-15; Romans 5:6-8).

Jesus Christ promised to return and clean up the corruption and set up the perfect government—one that truly serves the people.

This is certainly not to say that God's government will not exercise power when necessary to prevent people from harming each other. The difference will be that all decisions will be based on just laws that are for the real benefit of those governed (Psalm 119:172; Deuteronomy 6:24).

Love is the underlying foundation of all God's laws (Matthew 22:37-40), and these good and fair laws will be administered by perfect leaders and judges who have learned to apply justice with mercy (Matthew 12:7; 18:23-35; 23:23).

Perfect leaders

In the human realm, even the best leaders are too often stymied by red tape, corrupt bureaucracies and humanly insolvable problems. And sadly, too many of them also get trapped in the web of corruption and scandal.

But God has been working with people today to form in them His own righteous character so that He can make them incorruptible in every way at Christ's return. Those who have been faithful, some even to death as a martyr, will be changed or "raised incorruptible," with godly power and immortality (1 Corinthians 15:50-53).

Christ promised His people: "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne" (Revelation 3:21). They will assist Him in fairly, mercifully and effectively serving those who survive the catastrophes of the end of man's age.

Love is the underlying foundation of God's Laws, and these good and fair laws will be administered by perfect leaders who have learned to apply justice with mercy.

With the power and love of the Creator behind them, these resurrected servants of God will be able to clean up the corruption and cut through the Gordian knots that have humanity in a stranglehold.

Who will rule with Christ in His Kingdom? The Bible actually mentions a few people with their specific job assignments in God's future government.

For example, in Ezekiel 34 God compared His nation of Israel to a flock of sheep. (This includes both the people of Judah and the northern 10 tribes that had previously gone into captivity and become lost in history. See the booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy* for more about this fascinating part of the story.)

During this time of man's misrule, the people of Israel have been mistreated by their "shepherds" and been preyed upon by those around. But God promises to save them at Christ's return. "I will

establish one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them—My servant David" (verse 23). David will be resurrected and will again serve as king of the whole nation of Israel (Jeremiah 30:9).

Christ promised His people: "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My Throne..."

The Bible also reveals who will serve with David as leaders of each of the 12 tribes of Israel. Jesus said to His disciples, "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matthew 19:28).

The Bible doesn't tell the exact job titles of most of the saints. But it is clear that Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, Moses and Rahab, and many more heroes of faith in the Old and New Testaments and beyond, will serve with Christ in bringing a fair and compassionate government to a world that so sorely needs it (Hebrews 11).

Passing on a Legacy of Character

By Jada Howell

Passing on a legacy of character through the family is a most precious gift. Just as God has given us the opportunity to develop His character, we must pass the knowledge on to our children. Our actions can affect generations to come.



GROWING UP IN RURAL NORTHWEST MISSOURI, I witnessed the harvest cycle from beginning to end for over two decades before I married and moved away. In our community, family and succeeding generations were strongly emphasized. Knowing how many generations of a particular family resided on a parcel of land and worked the same soil was a great source of pride.

My parents built their house in 1978 on a corner of a former cornfield, and we came to live there when I was 10. My backyard was literally 40 acres of farmland. This 40 acres, was originally

purchased by my Great-Great-Grandpa Bayha shortly after the Civil War. So I grew up hearing stories of how he worked his half-section (3,200 acres) with a horse and plow. He planted 40 acres of woodlot to have enough wood to burn throughout the bitter Missouri winters. And he raised 15 children on the land.

In our community, family and succeeding generations were strongly emphasized.

I knew one of his grandchildren very well. She was my Grandma Cecile. Thankfully, before she died, I talked to her about some of her relatives from the Bayha side. She talked about her aunts and uncles and how hard they worked. (Grandma still owned 200 of the original acres.) Although my Grandma has been gone for 15 years, I still remember our conversations about how she helped, as a young girl and young woman, with the chores and how hard the family worked. The work ethic carried down through my mother (one of the hardest-working women I've ever known) and my father, who is still working after taking retirement two times.

This ethic of hard work and honesty was passed down through our ancestors on both sides of my family. I began to think about how hard they worked and how their trials and successes have helped me to become the person I am today. And I wondered what they think about what has happened to farming, especially in this part of Missouri.

After working their land for many, many years, even decades, I'm certain they felt an attachment to the soil they worked. They toiled, sweat and bled over each year's planting, cultivating and harvesting. They spent a great deal of each day, for a large portion of the year, sinking their lives into the land. They did it to ensure their family's survival through another year.



I know how much of an attachment I feel towards the land, so I can't imagine how much they would have come to love the area they lived in and wanted it preserved for the generations to come. It was with sadness last year, that my cousins finally quit farming and started leasing the land out to others to work. For over 130 years, the land had been worked by a member from the same lineage as my Grandpa Bayha. After hearing the news, I truly struggled with the fact that the land was now not in the family, as such, even though it belongs to a family member, my uncle.

Then, one evening, I was watching the Hallmark channel and saw a movie based on Janette Oke's novel *Love's Long Journey*. One of the characters was moving a long distance from her family after being married. Her father talked to her about passing down a "legacy of character." He believed in God and wanted her to live her life according to what God wanted of her, not men. It was a moving scene, which was very poignant to me due to my inner struggle.

I began thinking of what legacy I was to leave my two children. And I realized I had focused on the temporary, not the permanent. This tends to be a human characteristic, but we are told to focus on the permanent—building godly character and passing it on to our kids. My husband and I take

seriously our directive of teaching our children when we get up, when we go to bed, as we walk with them and spend time with them.

In Deuteronomy 11:19-20 we read, "You shall teach them to your children, speaking of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates." We try to take every opportunity to pass on what we've been given by God. The calling we've been given is a precious gift not to be squandered or whiled away (2 Peter 1:3-4).

I began thinking of what legacy I was to leave my two children. I realized I had focused on the temporary, not the permanent.

When we've discussed character with our children, we express delight with them when we know they've made the right decision, based on God's law, even when it was not the easiest thing to do. We tell them, "God just put a little more of His character inside you, and He's very proud of what you've done."

I can't state enough how important I believe it is to encourage godly behavior in children, even when they are very young. Children are so open to God's love. They forgive easily and don't bear grudges very long. I think they're here to humble us with their behavior and attitude so we'll become more like God and Christ. Christ Himself told us we needed the attitude of a child to enter the Kingdom of God (Mark 10:15).

Our spiritual inheritance

I feel as if I've had the best of both worlds. All those ancestors of mine were hard-working and, by most accounts, honest people. Although not perfect, they did strive to live an honorable life, passing on to their children life's hard lessons. They believed if they worked diligently, they would persevere.

God promises if we obey and follow Him, He will bless us and help us to develop His character.

In the same manner, we are admonished to do the same thing. We are to learn about God, follow His directions and our Heavenly Father, and live our lives accordingly. We are to obey God's spiritual laws. "And it shall be that if you earnestly obey My commandments which I command you today, to love the LORD your God and serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul," then God promised blessings innumerable (Deuteronomy 11:13).

We strive each day, investing our sweat, blood and tears, physically and spiritually, in our battle to develop the character of God. God promises if we obey and follow Him, He will bless us and help us to develop His character.

Even though God provided the earth for us to live upon, He gave an even greater gift of an eternal inheritance, His Kingdom (Ephesians 1:11-14). God chose us from before the beginning of the earth to provide this most precious gift. Our life now is supposed to reflect our obedience to Him. He sees how diligent we are in this life, and it shows Him whether or not we will be willing to follow Him in the future. We make decisions whether or not to obey. God has given us the opportunity to receive His gift of eternal life; we must be open to receive it (John 3:15-16).



Just as my ancestors worked and toiled over the land, we must work our spiritual inheritance. We must be willing every day to invest our time, sweat and tears in the spiritual battles we face. We must be willing to follow Christ's example in investing ourselves in producing the spiritual crop of character. In the end, God will reap His crop of firstfruits—those who are called during this age to be a part of His Church and who will lead others into God's family and His Kingdom (James 1:17-18).

I still wonder at the reason God called me at a young age to follow Him. He truly does use the "weak and base things" to confound the mighty (1 Corinthians 1:26-29), but I am humbled at what He has given me and I hope to be worthy of Him when the day comes.

It comforts me now to know that all those people, all my ancestors who worked and toiled most of their lives to pass on an inheritance for me, will in turn receive an inheritance from God one day. God has allowed me the opportunity to be one of His firstfruits; and in a way, I am paving a path for them to follow when they awake from their sleep. I look forward to meeting all the Bayhas, Roops, Colberts and Rays who settled the land I still feel such an affinity for. I do not want to waste the opportunity to be a part of the ultimate inheritance—God's Kingdom.

Further reading

Our spiritual inheritance is such a true gift from God. To find out more about your spiritual heritage, please subscribe to *The Good News* magazine.

Wagon of Rocks

By Janet Keisel

Years ago Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong admonished us to simplify our lives. I think most of us are still working on this, trying to find our rhythm.



WE LIVE IN A HECTIC WORLD where we are pulled in many directions trying "to do it all." We have to make choices every day as to where our time and energy will be spent. I've been giving a lot of thought to this subject of being "crazy busy," as Edward Hallowell describes it in his book by that title, *CrazyBusy*.

Many of us try to do two things at once or "multitask," a common phrase in our modern world. Dr. Hallowell points out that "multitasking is like playing tennis with two balls, or three or four. When what you are doing is important, multitasking is a practice to be avoided. It is a myth that you can perform two tasks simultaneously as well as you can perform one." So, if multitasking isn't the answer, what is?

I've been reading the book *Having a Mary Heart in a Martha World* by Joanna Weaver. She starts the book by putting into her own words how she thinks Martha felt when Jesus came to the door. Martha would have been thrilled to prepare a meal for Jesus and His disciples. "This must be no ordinary meal—it is for THE Messiah. So she is sending the servants here and there…kill the fatted calf, soak the lentils, knead the dough…so much to do… Where's Mary? If Mary would just help, I could have time to fashion an ark from the goat cheese and carve the fruit into little animals marching two by two" (pages 3-4).

As I find myself busy with too many things to do, I ask myself, "Am I trying to carve an ark out of goat cheese?" We need balance in our lives in order to get the important things done. Of course, there is a time for carving arks out of cheese (I'm not so sure about the animals carved from fruit), but we must be careful not to put too much emphasis on those things and not enough on the better part, as Christ told Martha.

Dragging a wagon of rocks

The book *Having a Mary Heart in a Martha World* tells a story to give a visual aid for sorting out what is important and helping us to achieve that balance:

The story is told of a man who met God one day. God asked him to take a wagon with three stones to the top of the mountain. God gave the man specific instructions, sketching a map in the dust. The man cheerfully set off pulling the wagon behind him.

As he was going through a small village, a friend stopped him and asked him what he was doing. He explained that he was taking the wagon of rocks to the top of the mountain. The friend became excited as he explained he was just thinking about how he was going to get his rock to the top of the mountain, and would the man be willing to take the rock in his wagon as well? Happily, the man with the wagon took the friend's rock and started on his way.

As he went along, more and more people asked him to take their rocks with him until the wagon grew fuller and fuller. The wagon felt huge and awkward as it lumbered and swayed over the ruts in the road. No longer was the man singing praises. Instead, resentment began to build inside. Frustrated, the man was beginning to have visions of giving up and letting the wagon roll backward.

When we are feeling overwhelmed with too much to do, we need to dump some rocks out of our wagon.

About that time God came to his side and asked what the problem was. "You gave me a job that is too hard for me," the man sobbed. God walked over to the wagon. "What is this?" He held up a big piece of shale and tossed it on the ground. The man explained about his friend who asked him to bring it up the mountain. God continued to unload the wagon, removing both light and heavy items until only the three stones God had given him were left in the wagon.

"Let others shoulder their own belongings," God said gently. "I know you were trying to help, but when you are weighted down with all these cares, you cannot do what I have asked of you" (pages 51-52).

What has God asked us to do? Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

Dump the extra rocks



When we are feeling overwhelmed with too much to do, we need to dump some rocks out of our wagon. We need to look at what we are doing and decide if we are carrying unnecessary rocks. If we are, then throw them out of the wagon.

Sometimes an extra rock we carry is our worry about a problem out of our control. Maybe you feel someone has made a wrong decision. If you aren't asked for advice, sometimes you have to just tell yourself, "That is his (or her) rock." You may be able to unload a rock by talking to your pastor and then putting the worry out of your mind. There are times those rocks are heavy and hard to get out of your wagon.

Sometimes it is a matter of prioritizing the rocks—examining what is taking your time and deciding which things are worthy of your time and which are not.

Sometimes it is a matter of prioritizing the rocks—examining what is taking your time and deciding which things are worthy of your time and which are not. Then go about dumping rocks.

After reading this wagon of rocks story, I find myself thinking, That's not my rock. Or, that rock isn't important. In my mind I toss it out. This concept helps me to let go.

Recently, we had the opportunity to have our granddaughters stay with us for several days. As the time went on, the house became messier and messier, but the time with my grandchildren was more important. As my friend pointed out, Emily, Allison and Daylin are more important rocks than a clean house.

Label your rocks

A friend of mine has labeled her three rocks Christian, Wife and Mother/Grandmother. Then she can look at what she's doing and see if it falls into those primary categories. You can use the analogy however it best fits your life.

As is the case of all analogies, it doesn't follow through completely. There are times when we do need to help our brethren and carry some of their rocks. Certainly, I'm not saying we don't need to serve. The Christian life is all about balance. "Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom" (Psalm 90:12). We have to use our time wisely.

The Christian life is all about balance. "Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom" (Psalm 90:12).

God must come first—His rocks are the most important. We've all heard the story about putting the big rocks in a jar first, then filling it with smaller rocks, sand and water. We have to put the big rocks in first or we'll never get them in later.

We are told in Romans 12 that the Body of Christ has many members, each with a different gift. This means we all have different jobs to do. Certainly, we need to be involved in service (faith without works is dead, James 2:20). But we don't have to be involved in EVERY good service or we will be so busy doing things, we won't have time for the basics: Bible study, prayer and fasting and building our relationship with God.

What's in your wagon?

There is a commercial that asks, "What's in your wallet?" I'd like to ask, "What's in your wagon?" Are you overloaded with unimportant rocks taking up your time and energy? Many times the things we are involved with are positive things. But, for instance, if you're reading so many other books (even good books) that you don't have time to read the Bible, then you have to throw out some rocks.

God must come first—His rocks are most important.

Similarly, gardening is a wonderful thing. But if gardening takes so much time and energy that you don't have time for your family, some rocks must go. Fellowship on the Sabbath is an important part of the Sabbath, but if you aren't taking time for extra prayer and Bible study on the Sabbath, unload a few rocks.

Take a look at the rocks in your wagon. I hope this analogy can help us all to choose the better part as Mary did (Luke 10:42).

Further reading

A Christian's life is often challenging and requires us to lean on God. For more information about living a Christian life, please request our sister publication *The Good News* magazine.

Generosity Is of the Heart

By Robert Berendt

God's generosity knows no bounds. We are to follow His and Christ's example in our attitude of giving. God takes our gift and multiplies it. As we learn to give, we become more like God.



RECENTLY, AN OCCASION AROSE to come to the aid of a person who was in need. I was deeply touched when, at the mention of this need, two people immediately came and offered help. The amount offered was small, and yet it was huge. It touched me greatly to see the attitudes reflecting hearts brimful and running over with the love for mankind that God Himself possesses. It is not the dollar amount that matters; it is the vast store of generosity within the heart that God measures. God says it is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35).

God expects His children to be concerned about anyone who truly is in need. There are always those who wrongly take advantage of the generosity of people; but in spite of the abuse that will occasionally occur, the hearts of true followers of Jesus Christ lean toward being generous.

God does not automatically cover all people with the blood of Christ. He offers the help and then observes our reactions and appreciation.

Jesus Christ spent much time teaching in the temple at Jerusalem. On one occasion He was watching people placing offerings into the containers and witnessed a woman with a generous heart (Luke 21:2). She would not have been the only one with such a heart, but she was the one Jesus used to teach His followers a wonderful lesson in generosity from God's point of view. Jesus stated this woman had placed more into the offering (in God's view) than those who were able and wealthy. It was not that the wealthy did not give a substantial offering. But the measurement God was looking at was not monetary—He was observing the generosity of the heart. He is able to multiply any amount we give.

Giving is part of the nature and character of Almighty God. John 3:16 states that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. There was no greater gift possible. It is interesting to note the recipients (all humanity) were not deserving of this gift and did not even know how to ask for such a precious blessing. It is also important to note this gift requires something from the

receiver. God does not automatically cover all people with the blood of Christ. He offers the help and then observes our reactions and appreciation.

When we strive to conform to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29) and when we stir up the Spirit of God (2 Timothy 1:6), then our hearts must lean toward being generous. God's Spirit imparts love, peace and joy within us and helps us reflect the character of God. His character is based upon love (1 John 4:8). Followers of Jesus Christ cannot help but have a caring and generous outlook toward others in this world. It is this heart Jesus glimpsed within the woman who gave two mites. The amount did not matter—the heart mattered a lot.

Peter and John had a generous heart, but they did not have silver or gold to give (Acts 3:6). There are other things a generous person can give besides money. When Jesus said that a rare person will lay down his life for his friends (John 15:13), He showed the way, and it is often in giving of our time, concern and care that we take from ourselves and give.

How different God's nature is from the nature of mankind. Within the nature we possess, there are glimmers of God's nature from time to time. Unconverted people can also be generous, but there are factors involved in true generosity that require conversion. To be converted from a carnal to a spiritual nature requires the Spirit of God (Romans 8:9).

Use wisdom in giving

The Holy Scriptures, which contain the words and directions from God to man, also teach us some concepts of balance even when our hearts are overflowing with generosity. It can be difficult to say "no" (even when we may need to), but the Bible teaches us that God too sometimes says no. He says no to evil, to unrepentant sinners and to all that stands against Him. That "no" is preceded by every chance for repentance from His generous heart, but the time will come when all have had a fair chance. He will separate those whose hearts He recognizes (Matthew 25: 32-35).

As God observes His children, He knows that our minds cannot grasp all the information that would allow us to make perfect decisions about who we are generous with. God never makes mistakes, but He does patiently endure the course mankind must follow as we search for Him. We may not have every fact, but we are to use wisdom as best we can in giving. Being generous does not mean giving foolishly.

God never makes mistakes, but He does patiently endure the course mankind must follow as we search for Him.

The Bible says if a person refuses to work, he should not eat (2 Thessalonians 3:10). We may find it hard to enforce this, but the meaning of the verse is much deeper when we consider the intended lesson. Generosity is not helpful if it reinforces or encourages bad habits or conduct. As well, God expects a response of thankfulness.

Sometimes we need to gather additional information before deciding to be generous. Our generosity can be abused. It is a mistake to give to a person who misuses the gifts once we see that abuse.

In all of this, though, it is still God who oversees everything and expects us to respond. Jesus related the story of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37). The Samaritan did not know anything

about the person he was helping. He went into danger to help, did not ask if the man was deserving, rich or poor or had any such qualifications. He simply gave! That is what a generous heart does. When a need is present, we give. We cannot give what we do not have, but what we have, we give.

God's gifts

We live in an age where money seems to rule and measure everything. Something precious has been lost when generosity is measured in the amount given rather than in the attitude and heart. Some of the greatest gifts we can possibly give have nothing to do with money. One such gift is comfort. In 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 we find that God is the God of comfort and He comforts us so we may comfort others.

True, godly love (referred to in the Greek New Testament by the term *agape*) is another gift that money cannot buy. There is an old saying: "The best things in life are free." It rings with truth and begins with the gift of Jesus Christ to this world. Every person can give these truly precious gifts. The generous heart will give until the cup is "pressed down, shaken together, and running over" (Luke 6:38).

As we learn the wisdom of giving, we need to remember God sees all and He makes up the difference. Jesus said that not even the seemingly small gift of a cup of water will go without reward from God (Matthew 10:42). That is enough for us. It is God we are striving to please (1 Thessalonians 2:4), and we must give for God and because of God. This is the path God wants His children to follow. When we give, it is we who also receive. God wants to share His glory with His children forever. Here on earth is where we start.

Further reading

True generosity stands in stark contrast to covetousness and greed that the Tenth Commandment forbids. Please read *The Ten Commandments*, especially the chapter on the Tenth Commandment, "True Righteousness Comes From the Heart."

Comfort Zone

By Becky Sweat

What to say and what not to say when your child is upset.



KIDS MIGHT NOT HAVE TO FACE job lay-offs, a shrinking checkbook, over-demanding bosses, ailing health or other adult-sized problems, but the negative circumstances they encounter can be just as upsetting to them. Maybe it's been three days since Buster ran away, and your son's in tears because no one has responded to any of your "Lost Dog" flyers. Your daughter might be mortified because she forgot her lines during the school play. Perhaps your child got booed during the soccer game, was teased by the school bully, did poorly on a test or suffered a back-stabbing by an up-until-now good friend. As a result, your child comes home from school, sobbing hysterically or sullen and mad. You know you need to say something to try to improve the situation, but what?

If you're like a lot of parents, the right words don't always flow naturally. Should you try to lighten things up, or should you help him talk about the ordeal? Should you downplay what happened, or should you try to solve the problem for your child? You might stutter, stick your foot in your mouth or open your mouth to speak and have no words come out.

"Oftentimes parents are uncomfortable addressing and even acknowledging their children's negative feelings and emotions. They want to protect their children. They don't want to see them suffer," observes Karen Krefman, Ph.D., a licensed marriage and family therapist at the Family Institute at Northwestern University.

One mistake is to not allow your child to fully explain what is troubling her.

According to Krefman, parents will oftentimes rush in and try to minimize the situation their child is facing. They might say, "Now, now, no need to worry." Or they might avoid talking about the situation altogether and pretend nothing's wrong. Krefman says neither of these are effective responses. "Your children need to be able to talk about what's bothering them," she says. "They need to know you understand what they're going through." This helps to give the children the support they need to deal with their problems.

Although hard and fast rules are hard to come by, you can assess the situations your children are facing and respond thoughtfully, sincerely and appropriately. Here are some suggestions for comforting a hurting child.

Let your child get it out

One mistake is to not allow your child to fully explain what is troubling her. Let your child talk out the problem. This will allow her to begin the healing process.

If you change the subject, make a joke or come up with reasons why the situation isn't that big of a deal, you send the message you don't want to hear your child's problems and it's not okay to express sadness. Responses such as "It's nothing to get upset about," "Look on the bright side," "It can't be that bad" and "Don't worry so much" place a truckload of guilt on the child who is suffering.

"Parents can get so panicky about not knowing what to do or say they unintentionally shut out the suffering child to make themselves feel more comfortable," says Sandra Burkhardt, Ph.D., ABPP, a child psychologist in Orland Park and psychology professor at Saint Xavier University. "Rather than 'Don't cry; it will be okay,'" your child needs to be told, "Go ahead and cry.'"

Calmly accept your child's situation for what it is and don't pretend things are better than they are. Responses such as, "I'm sorry to hear the bad news," "You've been through a lot," and "That sounds like a tough situation" communicate genuine concern and acceptance.

Listen carefully

Listen very attentively to your child—with interest, patience, openness and caring. Avoid any urge to judge, blame, lecture or tell your child what she should have done instead. Your child needs to know you are hearing her concerns and feelings.

Listen very attentively to your child—with interest, patience, openness and caring.

Show your child you're interested in what she's telling you by maintaining eye contact, nodding occasionally and spurring her on with expressions such as "Uh-huh," "Tell me more about it," and "I see." Don't try to finish your child's sentences for him thinking you know what he is going to say, because you may be wrong. Let your child do the talking. You may be surprised to find what is actually troubling him.

Express your understanding

Once your child is finished telling his story, comment briefly on the feelings you heard your child express. For example, you might say something like: "I can understand why you would feel that way," or "No wonder you felt upset when they wouldn't let you in the game," or "That must have felt unfair to you." Doing this shows you understand what your child felt, why he felt that way and that you care.

Try to see things from your child's perspective and express that understanding. For example, you might say, "I know you are disappointed because you worked so hard and still did not make the softball team," or "I know you are sad that your friend is moving so far away."

"Feeling understood and listened to helps your child feel connected to you, and that is especially important in times of stress," says Deerfield-based clinical psychologist, Mary Halpin, Ph.D.



In some cases, children feel as if they're the only ones to have ever had to deal with a situation they're now facing and no one will understand. Let your child know other people have also had similar problems. You might share an experience of your own similar to what he is going through. If you know of aunts, uncles or grandparents who have been through the same experiences, pass their stories along to him. Just knowing others have been in similar circumstances—and made it through okay—can be very encouraging.

Of course, you may have never experienced a situation similar to what your child is facing, and be at a loss for words. "It's okay to be silent," Halpin says. "What's most important is that you be there for your child. Be honest with her. Tell her you don't know what to say but you still want to be there. Sometimes the simple presence of a parent is all that is needed to erase feelings of anxiety in children."

Respect your child's need for space

Sometimes children don't feel like talking about what's bothering them. It's a good idea to respect this, give your child space and still make it clear you'll be there when he does feel like opening up. "Children need to be able to decide for themselves when they're ready to talk," Krefman says. "Sometimes kids need some time to think things through first."

Your child may still want you by her side though. "Even when children don't feel like talking, they usually don't want their parents to leave them alone," Burkhardt says. A lot of times you can help your children feel better just by keeping them company and spending time together. You child might want to go on a walk with you, watch a movie, or bake some cookies. "Just being by your child's side will go a long way in helping her get through her difficult situation," Burkhardt says.

Establish physical contact

There may be nothing more comforting to a hurting child than the warmth of her parent's embrace. Don't hesitate to put your arms around her shoulders, give a hug or hold your child on your lap. Go ahead and cradle your child in your arms just as you did when she was an infant.

"Considering our culture's emphasis on independence and self-reliance, we need to reassure our children that they shouldn't feel guilty when they need to be babied for a bit," Burkhardt says. Allow your child to be emotionally dependent on you for as long as it takes her to regain composure and strength.

Offer advice when your child is ready for it

For the most part, a tearful child does not want to hear a dozen solutions to his problem. Halpin says giving unsolicited advice is another way we cut off communication: "You tell yourself, 'If I can distract my child by thinking of some brilliant advice, she'll stop crying.'"

However, once your child knows you accept how she feels and she's done shedding tears, she may then be ready to talk about solutions to her predicament. Be careful though, to not "take over" the solutions stage, Krefman advises. She suggests you start by asking your child something like "Did you do anything to try to make things better?" "Is there something else you'd want to do about that?" or "How do you think you might want to handle the situation?"

If you think your child handled the situation in a constructive way, Krefman says you should positively reinforce the efforts she made. You might say, "I think that was a good idea. That makes a lot of sense."

If your child didn't handle the situation very well or doesn't know what to do next, it's okay to offer advice, but don't force your ideas on your child. You could say, "I've got a suggestion. Are you open to that?" or "This is what I'm thinking. Tell me if you think this will work." In effect, you are asking your child's permission to move forward with your advice.

What matters most is your child knows she doesn't have to face difficult times alone.

"You want to support your child's good ideas and then add to them as needed," Krefman says. "It's best if you can brainstorm ideas together. Don't do all the work yourself. You want your child to be actively involved in the solution stage. This will help your child develop problem-solving skills, and build confidence."

Give your child time

If several days go by and your child is still feeling down, this isn't necessarily reason to worry. Depending on the severity of the problem, it might take weeks or even months for your child to fully get over it.

"It takes time to work through the grief process," says Krefman. "Try to understand what your child is going through. You may wish she was her usual, cheerful self, but you shouldn't expect her to cover up her sadness just so you can feel more comfortable. Give your child all the time she needs."

Of course, limits are understandable and necessary. If your child's troubles are getting worse, are starting to affect his performance at school, or if he's no longer comforted by your listening to him or you are starting to see changes in his behavior, these are signs indicating serious depression or anxiety. That's when you need to see the help of a child psychologist, school counselor or other professional.

You may make a few mistakes along the way. No one should expect you to know what to say or how to act in every situation. Remind yourself that you're better off saying something less than ideal to your child than shutting her out because you don't know what to say. What matters most is your child knows she doesn't have to face difficult times alone.

Further reading

For more articles about family living, please read our booklet *Marriage and Family: The Missing Dimension*. And also please request your free subscription to *The Good News* magazine.

Letters to the Editor

What Do You Mean: Wise and Harmless?



Thanks much for this thoughtful article. It was refreshing this beautiful Sabbath morning to have such a thought-provoking spiritual reminder of our overall goal.

— S.S. Smith, 3rd grade teacher (ESL)

"Please, Lord, Save Me From Your Followers"



Thank you for that inspirational article. It should be read at every church throughout America. I've been on both sides of the people you are talking about, the door-knockers as well as the one having their door knocked on, and the Lord gently pointed out to me that example speaks louder than words. Right on, sister!

God showed me a few things in the Scriptures that woke me up. In one part of the Scriptures He showed me that people like the door-knockers that people have to hide from are followers that have a zeal for the things of the Lord but that they have zeal without knowledge. And the second thing He taught me is that it is not me "beating people over the head with Scripture" that will "save them," it is the Holy Spirit that does the work in an individual.

Finally, God has always said to be doers of the word and not hearers only. So, a person's life is the strongest thing that will draw people toward God, not harassment.

Thank you again.

— C. Sole

Some feedback messages are edited for space and/or clarity