Virtual Christian MAGAZINE

hope and encouragement for the real world

Volume 2 Number 5 June 2000



In Memory
by Dale Booth

Unfortunately, when people go through periods of deep despair, they often don't realize the support system that is available to them.
Page 7



Serving as a Congregation
by Marilyn Braley

When an entire congregation bands together to serve someone, it can be very inspiring both to the congregation and to the one being served.
Page 10



Are You Missing Something?
by Phyllis Newton

There is a unique opportunity out there for you. It is an opportunity that will make you feel good about yourself while helping others.
Page 12

Who Is This Man Called Jesus?

By Hector Earle



Today, some say that Jesus Christ was a good man with good ideas. Others say he was a prophet called to proclaim the love of God to humanity.

Page 5

Editorial

Message in a Song

by Aimee Zahora

Page 3

We are pleased to announce the May/June 2000, ***Good News*** magazine...

The Abortion Quagmire: Who Will Speak for the Children?



Since the Roe vs. Wade United States Supreme Court decision in 1973, well over 30 million babies--enough to populate a small country--have been aborted in the United States alone. Figures worldwide likely run into the hundreds of millions. Many voices shout to be heard in the din of the debate. But two voices are rarely heard--that of the unborn, and that of their Creator. What would they say?

To receive your FREE subscription by mail, click here.

Virtual Christian Magazine

Victor Kubik - Managing Editor
Mike Bennett
Michelle Grovak
Lorelei Nettles
Joan Osborn
Chris Rowland
John Rutis
Aimee Zahora

Virtual Christian MAGAZINE Editorial

Message in a Song

by Aimee Zahora

Call your Dad and let him know that you love him. I remember hearing those words the summer that I turned 12 years old, while attending church camp in northern Minnesota. All the campers, counselors, and staff were in the gym for an assembly and one of the ministers there was reminding us that the next morning marked the celebration of Father's Day.

The minister spoke about the relationship between he and his father, as well as the relationship between he and his son. I can't remember all of the specifics anymore, but I do remember that he spoke of regrets. He ended his message by playing a recording of the song *In the Living Years* by Mike and the Mechanics over the gym speakers. That song combined with the minister's message remains etched in my memory today.

Being away from home and family as a young teen for a couple of weeks had a way of making me miss those things I took for granted, in particular my Dad. As I reflect on that experience from a decade ago, I sometimes wonder if I'm slipping back into that taking -what-I-have-for-granted mode. Am I truly making the most of my living years in terms of the time I spend with my Dad?

It is sometimes difficult to appreciate what we have in the present. Our level of appreciation has a tendency to increase after what we had has been taken away. The song, *In the Living Years*, urges us to make a conscious effort to stop that tendency. The words of the chorus are so poignant in reminding us to verbalize our appreciation for one another and to take the extra effort to resolve misunderstandings that may exist.

> *Say it loud; say it clear.*
> *You can listen as well as you hear.*
> *It's too late when you die,*
> *To admit you don't see eye to eye.*

As Father's Day approaches this year, the date is a reminder to me to make sure that both my words and my actions reflect the love and appreciation I feel for my Dad. Sometimes it is difficult to verbalize our feelings for someone. It may be easier to buy something which symbolizes the words we would like to say or to believe that our actions alone clearly represent our unspoken words. However, being the human creatures that we are, we need to hear the words and see the action.

The last verses of the song speak of the songwriter's regret.

> *I wasn't there that morning*

When my Father passed away
I didn't get to tell him
All the things I had to say

I think I caught his spirit
Later that same year
I'm sure I heard his echo
In my baby's new born tears
I just wish I could have told him in the living years.

My resolve for this year is to make a conscious effort to let my Dad know (not only on Father's Day but also throughout the year) that I really do love an appreciate him. Life is short and we do not know for certain what each passing day will bring. Please join me in the effort to avoid the regret that can come from not making the most of the time we have with our Dads. There is a message in the song. Sing it!

Who Is This Man Called Jesus?

Today, some say that Jesus Christ was a good man with good ideas. Others say he was a prophet called to proclaim the love of God to humanity.

By Hector Earle



DURING JESUS CHRIST'S earthly ministry, His contemporaries thought He was Elijah or John the Baptist reincarnated (Matt. 16:14), while others claimed He was a false prophet (Luke 7:39), a wino, and a friend of sinners. Many worshiped and adored Him, while the authorities hated Him.

Many people were confused as to who exactly Jesus was. Even Peter, who told Jesus face to face that He was the Son of the living God, denied ever knowing Him when the chips were down. His closest associates (His disciples) became confused and often could not understand His message (Mark 4:13); Jesus often had to explain His message to them in private. Even today, there are hundreds of different interpretations of who He is and the simple message He brought.

Despite these varying views of Jesus of Nazareth, God's Word gives us clear and eloquent descriptions of who He is both past, present, and future. There are dozens, maybe hundreds, of places in the Bible that tell us who this man from Galilee is. Scriptures explain that Jesus, acting on behalf of His Father, is the Creator of all things seen and unseen. Nothing was created or brought into existence without Jesus Christ (John 1:1-3). He is the author and finisher of our faith and the first born among the dead.

Jesus is the Savior (Luke 2:11) of mankind, the redeemer and the Lamb (John 1:29) that was slain for the foundation of the world. He is our baptizer, our cleanser from all unrighteousness. The Son of God is our healer, the great physician of our minds and bodies. He is the giver and sustainer of life for He said, "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35) and the one and only true vine.

Jesus brings us peace when life's problems come our way. He challenges us to cast all our cares on Him, for He cares for us (I Peter 5:7). He is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). Our Lord is our shelter and our hiding place when life's pressures threaten to overwhelm us. He is our master teacher for He told us to follow Him. Jesus is the servant of all human kind, challenging us to follow His example saying, "He who is the greatest among men is the servant of all" (Matt. 23:11).

The chosen one of God is our ministering force whose divine goal is to bring us into the fullness and likeness of God as resurrected sons and daughters in His soon coming Kingdom on earth. He is our counselor, our Prince of peace, our divine consultant who will give us wisdom if we lack it (James 1:5). This Nazarene is our best friend who "sticks closer than a brother" (Prov. 18:24), and promises to be with us even unto the end of the world.

Finally, Jesus Christ is our soon coming King who will take us to be with Him; where He is we will be also. Christ will come and will reign in righteousness upon this earth as Kings of Kings and Lord of Lords. He has an endless measure of joy, fellowship, and communion to give every believer for all eternity.

Jesus Christ is all of the above and much more. The description above only scratches the surface of who He is. Only when we see Him face to face will we fully comprehend the total value He gives to every living creature both in heaven and on earth.

In Memory

Unfortunately, when people go through periods of deep despair, they often don't realize the support system that is available to them.

By Dale Booth



I FIRST ENCOUNTERED Robert* when we were in a church basketball tournament. I was a short, clumsy farm kid with enthusiasm, and he was a tall, talented kid from the inner city with burning intensity. Our paths crossed numerous times during the early '70s, but we never really met.

Years later, I moved to a large city in the southwestern United States to attend a local university. Being new to town, I received an invitation a couple of weeks after my arrival to get together with the young people's group at church. Robert was there, with his wife and new baby, though I didn't remember him then. Introductions were made, and during the course of our conversation, we discovered our mutual history back in the Midwest.

We slowly built a great friendship over the years. He added another son to his family; I got married and had a family. Our families were good friends, sharing dinners out, barbecues, babysitting for each other and lots of other pleasant memories.

But things weren't perfect in Robert's world. He was struggling to make a better place for himself and his family. The local economy went through a recession, and Robert's wife started demanding that he fix their personal finance problems. Changing jobs helped, except that now Robert had less time with the family. Whatever he did, he was always behind the eight-ball, falling short of his wife's expectations.

I carefully listened to his pain and anguish, but any encouragement was usually rejected or treated with derision.

As the months of stress wore on, Robert started questioning himself and his own abilities. He also began to question why God was allowing this situation in his life to not only continue, but progressively get worse. Depression and self-doubt slowly clouded his daily thoughts and plans. He seemingly could not escape the mounting turmoil at home and work.

and challenges to his thinking were scoffed at.

Then Robert's family left him. This was devastating. Doubt and despair became Robert's constant companions. The situation deteriorated at work, and his boss let him go for his inability to perform his job properly.

Feeling that his church and God had abandoned him, Robert began to lose what hope for the future he had left. His becoming an insomniac and a heavy drinker only made the future more bleak and depressing.

Nothing I could do or say was of much help. I carefully listened to his pain and anguish, but any encouragement was usually rejected or treated with derision, and challenges to his thinking were scoffed at. The bottom of Robert's soul was rushing to the surface and the barrel of life was almost empty.

The summer of 1994 brought new problems. Robert's ex-wife was threatening to take the two children, who were his only source of joy and resolve, and move to a foreign country to live. Why she was doing this, I do not know. My friendship with her had severely eroded as I stood by Robert during his plight.

My concerns for Robert were becoming overshadowed by problems within my own family. So as our annual church convention approached, I was preoccupied with other things besides Robert's problems.

Robert and I talked for the last time only hours before I left for one of the church's convention sites in Colorado. I remember that he was hoping to see his sons and spend some time with them before their impending departure for foreign shores.

My family returned home late on that Tuesday from our travels, tired, exhausted, and not too civil; so I put off trying to call Robert that evening. One of the first things I did Wednesday morning was try to call, but Robert's phone line was busy all day. Only later did I discover that Robert had called and left messages on his kids' answering machine to say he was sorry, he loved them and good-bye.

I was shocked when I was informed on Friday of Robert's death. The sad task of helping his mother, who traveled from the Midwest, make the funeral arrangements was traumatic. At the funeral I gave the committal prayer, as flowers were placed upon his resting-place, fighting back tears and stumbling over the words. It was the most difficult prayer of my life.

Often times tragedy is required in our lives to motivate us, stirring up faith and inner resources that are too frequently unused.

Moving on with my own life after Robert's death was a challenge, but through reliance on God and friends within the church, I have been able to come to terms with the sorrow I experienced. Unfortunately, when people go through periods of deep despair, they often don't realize the support system that is available to them. The Psalms are filled with examples of David going through periods of uncertainty and crying out to God for encouragement and strength. The book of Job leads us to the fact that regardless of how dark and stormy our lives may become, God does not abandon us to

Satan, contrary to our depressed opinion. While we are tested, we become stronger for surviving the trials and tribulations of this life.

Often times tragedy is required in our lives to motivate us, stirring up faith and inner resources that are too frequently unused. An example of such is the behavior of the disciples after Christ's death. They could no longer lean on Jesus in the way in which they were accustomed. After Christ's death, God used their own abilities, enhanced by the Holy Spirit, to build the Church in an oppressive Roman society. The disciples gave their energy and lives to continue the work that Christ originated.

We need to remember that others have gone through many of the same problems, tragedies and heartaches that we may be going through. The first step in reacting to trials should be to admit to oneself his own frailty and to ask for help. When that step is not taken, tragically it often leads to the decision and action of Robert and so many others.

Like David and the disciples, we can cry out to God--our ultimate support system--for help.

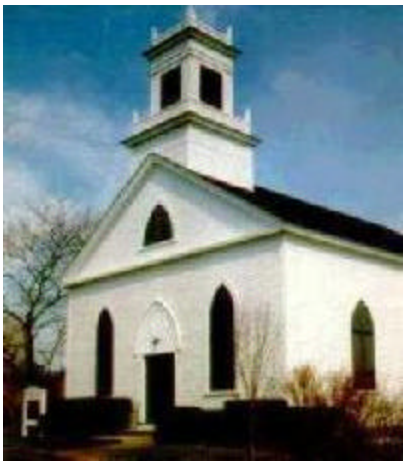
"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

**Names have been changed to protect the survivors.*

Serving as a Congregation

When an entire congregation bands together to serve someone, it can be very inspiring both to the congregation and to person being served.

By Marilyn Braley



MY SON WAS IN PRISON. He was several hundred miles away and I could only visit him on weekends. These trips took all weekend and during a four -year period, I visited him 2 or more times a month and drove a total of probably sixty thousand miles.

My son needed me during that time more than ever. I faced a possible dilemma. How could I visit my son and still attend church services? It seemed that I could only do one or the other. While visiting him I would be in a strange town, and I desperately needed some moral support. Thanks to God's mercy, two different church congregations gave me that support.

I was a stranger who desperately needed some moral support.

The first congregation I visited was in Victoria, Texas. The pastor was very supportive. Nearly every time I was there he would mention me warmly from the pulpit. This helped me to feel more comfortable in a strange place. The church members also were very welcoming, and I was always happy when I could be there for their famous potluck dinners.

During this period of time my son was moved to a facility south of Dallas. It was daunting to have to call someone that I didn't know and once again ask for directions to a place that I had never been. When I arrived in the area for church services after driving 4 1/2 hours, I was tired. The people there welcomed me warmly. They did not seem shocked that I was there to visit my son who was in prison.

The minister knew I was coming and greeted me as he went up to give church announcements. This minister often gave a brief prayer during these announcements for those who were sick or suffering other trials. On many occasions he mentioned my son and me in his prayers. I can't tell you how much that meant to me. I'd try and remember every word he said so that I could tell my son when I saw him the next day. Several people in the church there wrote to him. This meant a lot to both of us.



When the minister understood that I would be visiting my son on a regular basis he asked members of the congregation to host me on those weekends. There were some families within the congregation who lived close to both services and the prison. They were able and willing to put me up on many of those weekends. That proved to be a real blessing, the least of which was saving hundreds of dollars on motel and food bills.

These wonderful people treated me like their best friend and acted as if I was doing them a favor by staying in their homes. I got to know the people in that southern Dallas church very well and was even able to attend various church activities with my friends in the congregation. This made the weekends much more than just a 600-mile trip to visit my son in prison. These trips were part of a life lesson in asking for help--something that did not come easily for me.

There were several times during his incarceration that my son was unjustly accused. I knew that I could turn to my Dallas friends for help, and I did just that. There were several prayer requests on his behalf, and I received telephone calls and letters of concern during this troubling time.

They did not seem shocked that I was there to visit my son who was in prison.

The support didn't end when my son was released. I still correspond with some of the people from that congregation and have even gone up to visit the area just for fun. They consider me their church member who has the longest drive. I consider them the best friends I've ever had.

I learned that there are two sides to serving. We all want to serve others, but sometimes you have to be the one who is served. I was a stranger and they took me in. My son was in prison and these two congregations made it easier for me to visit him. These experiences have helped me to learn how truly wonderful and merciful God is.

Are You Missing Something?

There is a unique opportunity out there for you.
It is an opportunity that will make you
feel good about yourself while helping others.

By Phyllis Newton



WHAT DOESN'T TAKE MONEY? What isn't physically strenuous? What doesn't require a lot of time? What offers a chance to slow down and become less stressed? It is the opportunity to visit one of the ever-increasing number of nursing home residents.

Nursing home residents live in an interesting community that contains people from all walks of life, with distinctive personalities and varied experiences to share. These individuals are living life day by day, just as any other person is. They have raised families, held jobs, attended to daily needs, and have grown old. Their wealth of experience and knowledge can help us along the way in life.

The last years of the individual's life can be the most difficult. A resident, like everyone, needs reassurance, security, a sense of belonging, a sense of self, and human interaction. No matter what the physical or mental condition may be, a nursing home resident has human needs just like anyone else.

I had an aunt who was in the last stages of Alzheimers. We thought we didn't need to visit her very often because she couldn't possibly be aware of our presence. However, the aide at the home where my aunt was living said that after she had company, she was easier to feed. Human touch and the sound of a caring voice have a way of reaching one's spirit.

Personal relationships are of vital importance in this fractured world. Visiting a nursing home resident is an opportunity to gain a precious relationship! Some may be tempted to say, "I can't do that! The people are weird!" Enjoy their quirks. Sure, they may not be just like they used to be. These individuals are simply in another phase of life. Learn from them. You can gain wisdom, and they in turn can benefit from your youthfulness and energy. The whole experience will make you feel younger too. A personal relationship with a nursing home resident is a win-win situation for it benefits all who participate in it.

The following is a list of ideas and things to keep in mind when visiting a nursing home resident.

- Your visit does not have to be long. What is important is your presence. Frequent short visits are effective because they give continuous company. You might preface your visit with, "I was just on my way to the store, and thought I would stop by." Or "I had a few minutes and thought I would share them with you." These spur of the moment visits can really brighten someone's day.
- Make a realistic commitment to visit a nursing home resident. Be sure to consider whether the visits will fit your schedule and life style before you make a commitment. Let the one responsible for the resident's care know of your intentions, so they can prepare the resident for the visits accordingly.
- Be a good guest. Longer visits should be planned rather than spur of the moment. The staff are usually happy to help in arranging a private setting for a visit, as well as to give information about what the resident can and cannot do.
- Dress up for the occasion. If possible, wear bright clothes or jewelry. Taking the extra effort to look really nice will make the resident feel special.
- Be interested in the resident's environment; perhaps they can show you around the facility.
- Say hello to the other residents and staff. A simple greeting and smile can go a long way in creating a pleasant atmosphere.
- Keep your conversation pleasant and simple.
- Maintain good eye contact. Avoid changing the subject of conversation too quickly. Try to talk slowly and distinctly. Be patient in listening for a response. Talk about details of ordinary things in an effort to involve them in your life.
- Comment on pictures or decorations with a compliment. Mention the weather, or better still see, take them outside if it is permitted.
- Talk about their family, their hobbies, and compliment them on their looks. Ask their opinion or comment on some news, or a problem you have; you may be surprised at some of sharp answers you receive. Encourage reminiscence, but keep them in the present by making comparisons between the two time frames.
- Eat a meal together. Or, keep it simple with just tea or coffee and a dessert. Perhaps you can bring them an old -fashioned malt or a bowl of ice cream.
- You might time your visit with one of their favorite TV shows and watch the program together.
- You can play cards or a board game, or work a crossword or jigsaw puzzle together.
- Bring an activity to work on together. Knitting, putting together a picture album, writing a letter, or even whittling, can be fun.
- Bring a small gift. A small box of candy, a piece of fruit, a balloon with a special message, or a flower to wear for the day are all good demonstrations of your concern for the individual.

Take the opportunity to visit a nursing home resident. It is an opportunity that will bring pleasure and value to both you and the resident. It is also a way to be a light by practicing true religion as described by the disciple James (1:27).