Virtual Christian Magazine
Hope And Encouragement For The Real World

Volume 1 Number 5 May 1999

Kids Killing Kids: What Does It Mean?

By Scott Ashley

Page 3



WHY? Couldn't God have stopped this senseless murder? Good News editor Scott Ashley helps us come to grips with some of the tough questions.

A Candle in the Window

By Aimee Zahora

Page 10



As a candle shines through darkness can our lives do the same? Here's how.

When God Says No

By Gregory Dullum

Page 13



We aren't always prepared for what life deals us or why God allows it. Here is one family's struggle to cope with loss.

The Rock Which Followed Them

By Greg Sargent

Page 19



What does the "rock" symbolize in scripture and did a rock really follow the children of Israel?

Whatever Happened to the Family Meal?

By Becky Sweat

Page 23



Can eating together improve relationships in your family? With a little effort and planning our mealtimes...it just might.

Tapping, Tapping, Tapping

By Jack R. Elliott

Page 27



If we know where our future paths shall take us, should anything get in the way?

Virtual Christian Magazine Editorial

Memorial Day to Remember

By Jerald Aust

Page 29

Letters to the Editor

Page 31

***Virtual Christian Magazine* Staff**

Victor Kubik - Managing Editor
Mike Bennett - Staff
Lorelei Nettles - Staff
Joan Osborn - Staff
John Rutis - Staff
Aimee Zahora - Staff
Chris Rowland - Web Design

Copyright 1999 United Church of God, an International Association

Kids Killing Kids: What Does It Mean?

By Scott Ashley

WHY? Couldn't God have stopped this senseless murder? Good News editor Scott Ashley helps us come to grips with some of the tough questions.



"TURN ON THE TV" said my wife Connie over the phone. "There's been a shooting at one of the high schools." Her anxiety came through loud and clear.



All the Denver stations here were broadcasting reports from near Columbine High School in Littleton, a local suburb. Over the following hours a parade of surreal images painted a ghastly and horrifying story: Two students, aged 17 and 18, brought an arsenal of four guns and more than 60 homemade bombs to the school at lunchtime, then indiscriminately opened fire on students and faculty who crossed their paths.

A final tally wasn't available until the next day. The gunmen had killed 12 of their fellow students and a teacher/coach and wounded 23 others before taking their own lives. Authorities hadn't been able to give a definite count of casualties--initial estimates ranged as high as 25--simply because the carnage was so great. Victims had to be dispersed among six different hospitals.

In a parting touch of madness, the teenage gunmen scattered bombs around the school and among the bodies, some with timers set to go off several hours after the shooting stopped. Some grief-stricken families had to wait more than a day for their children's bodies to be removed while officers painstakingly searched for and disarmed unexploded bombs.

One of the dead was the girls' volleyball team captain, a senior who many thought would be

the class valedictorian at graduation a few weeks later.

Media and memorials

When I visited the area the next day, black-uniformed SWAT teams and other officers were keeping visitors and the press several hundred yards from the battered school. One told me it would take at least several days to investigate and clear the building before visitors would be allowed in; they feared other unexploded bombs might have been stashed in other students' cars in the school parking lot. (The following day authorities found a powerful bomb in the school kitchen; apparently the pair intended to blow up the cafeteria and burn down the 2,000-student school.)



Members of the news media, unable to get near the school, swarmed over the huge adjacent public park. The tragedy had entranced the whole world. A forest of satellite dishes and antennas sprouted from a growing thicket of news vans and trucks. Technicians strung cables and phone lines. Several carpenters hammered away, building a small sound stage for one of the major news networks. Around me I heard reporters speaking in Spanish, German, French and other languages.

And everywhere there were students. Some crying, some sobbing, many simply dazed. Hundreds brought flowers, cards and the occasional stuffed animal for the several makeshift memorials springing up in the park. Many students embraced, holding hands and clinging to each other as though afraid of losing another friend. Students from other area schools, reaching out in the only way they knew how, added cards and posters to the growing mounds of flowers.

From baseball to bombs

Slowly details of the background of the suspected killers began to leak out. Both were from outwardly stable homes; one family was noticeably wealthy. The boys, both seniors, were described as bright and intelligent. One had played baseball in Little League. The other had been a Boy Scout.

But somewhere along the way something happened. Their interests changed from baseball and Boy Scouts to homemade bombs and Adolf Hitler. They became part of a school clique known as the "trench coat mafia," whose members wore long black coats and sometimes exchanged stiff-armed salutes and decorated their clothing with Nazi symbols.

Their interests changed from baseball and Boy Scouts to homemade bombs and Adolf Hitler.

Some of the group's members prided themselves on being social outcasts. In the 1998 school yearbook, the caption accompanying a photo of the black-garbed group reads: "Who says we're different? Insanity's healthy!"

Other warning signs were evident. The pair developed a passion for violent video and computer games. One reportedly created his own Web site on which he discussed how to formulate napalm, construct pipe bombs and store explosives. A hand-drawn image on the

site showed a gun-and-sword-wielding figure atop a mound of burning skulls and another figure gunning down a bloody victim.

"We do not hold anyone else responsible for our actions. This is the way we want to go out."

--suicide note from Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold

The duo had juvenile criminal records for having broken into and stolen electronic equipment from a van. One had been suspended from school for hacking into a school computer. One had been reported to authorities for threatening to kill another student. A classmate in a video-production class reported that the pair made a video in which they fantasized about walking down the school's hallways firing weapons at other students.

A neighbor heard the two breaking glass in the garage on the morning before the massacre. "I assumed it was some weird art project," he said. Police later told him the two were likely creating deadly glass shrapnel for their bombs.

Why such horror?

When confronted with such horror, we naturally wonder what could lead to two teenage boys cold-heartedly and calculatingly inflicting such pain and suffering on others.

It's also natural that we wonder why a God who claims to be both almighty and all-loving could allow such a tragedy to take place.

Both questions have the same answer. But our thinking is so far from our Creator's mind that we have difficulty understanding the answer, much less accepting it. His perspective is much different from ours. "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways." (Isaiah 55:8).

The problem is that we simply fail to understand God's purpose, plan, method and timetable for dealing with humanity. Without that understanding, we are at a loss to understand why such horror exists and why God seems unwilling to stop it. Many have been so bewildered by such seeming contradictions that they completely lose faith in God.

"I live in Denver, and I would love to kill almost all of its residents. You all better hide in your houses because I'm coming for everyone and I will shoot to kill and I will kill everything."

--Internet message attributed to Eric Harris

The horror of two world wars, in which two generations of European manhood and countless civilians were slaughtered in the trenches, killing fields and death camps, greatly eroded religious faith throughout Europe. Belief in God perished along with millions of young fighting men. To this day much of that continent is agnostic, unsure whether God exists or whether He cares what happens among His human children.

A matter of choice

Could God intervene to prevent such tragedies? Certainly. "The Lord's arm is not too short to

save nor his ear too dull to hear," He tells us (Isaiah 59:1, Revised English Bible).

Could God intervene to prevent such tragedies?

Why, then, doesn't He intervene to put an end to suffering? In the next verse He points out the reason: There is a wall between humans and God. *He* didn't create the barrier. *We* did--individually and collectively. We've been adding to it, brick by brick, for thousands of years.

God, you see, gives us all freedom of choice. He has dealt with mankind this way from the beginning. He offered Adam and Eve a paradise in which to live and an opportunity to build a relationship with Him that would lead to eternal life. But He didn't *force* them to make that choice.

Given this opportunity, what decision did they make? Rejecting God's explicit instruction regarding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they opted to do things their own way. They believed they could find a better way--that they could, through their own experimentation and human reasoning, choose for themselves the best way to live.

They set a pattern that all but a handful have chosen to follow ever since.

A history of wrong choices

Within a few generations after Adam and Eve, conditions had grown so bad that God chose to start over again with Noah and his family. For a time the world experienced peace through this righteous man. But it was not to last. Man again descended into barbarity.



Later God chose an entire nation, the Israelites, and brought them out of slavery to establish them as a role model for the nations around them. Concerning the laws God gave them, Moses told them: "Observe them carefully, for thereby you will display your wisdom and understanding to other peoples. When they hear about all these statutes, they will say, ?What a wise and understanding people this great nation is!'...

"What great nation is there whose statutes and laws are so just, as is all this code of laws which I am setting before you today? ...do not let them pass from your minds as long as you live, but teach them to your children and to your children's children" (Deuteronomy 4:6-9, Revised English Bible).

God urged Israel to make the right choice, to "choose life, that both you and your descendants may live" (Deuteronomy 30:19). But like Adam and Eve, and like Noah's descendants, Israel also chose their own way.

God tells us: "...I gave them my rules and made clear to them my orders, which, if a man keeps them, will be life to him... But the children would not be controlled by me; they were not guided by my rules, and they did not keep and do my orders" (Ezekiel 20:11, 21, REB). They brought on themselves devastating consequences: foreign invaders, massacres and exile into faraway lands.

Later God sent His own Son, Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah. What did those who heard Him choose to do? They murdered not only Him, but many of His followers. Christ warned the disciples that the world would hate them because it hated Him (John 15:18-19). God's way would never be easy or popular (Matthew 7:13-14).

The Bible shows that God rarely interferes with man's ability to make choices. And mankind has a long history of making bad decisions. Truly, as God's Word tells us, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25).

Choices bring consequences

Tragically, humanity has lost sight of the connection between actions and their consequences. God warned ancient Israel--and by extension, all nations--of the consequences that result from obeying or disobeying His laws (Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28). He tells us plainly, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap" (Galatians 6:7).

What kind of seed have we as a society been sowing?

The entertainment industry glorifies guns and gore in movies such as *Natural Born Killers* and *The Basketball Diaries*--the latter in which a black-coated teen brutally shotguns students in a classroom.

Studies indicate that by the time the average American teen graduates from high school, he or she will have seen some 16,000 violent deaths and thousands more illicit sexual relationships on television. The music industry chips in with songs that glorify masochism, violence, premarital and perverted sex and, at times, even the murder of policemen.

God rarely interferes with man's ability to make choices.

The teenage gunmen reportedly were enthralled with *Doom*, a computer game. Notice how *Doom* and its variations are advertised on the company's Internet Web page: "The ever addictive and frighteningly realistic world of *Doom* is back. It's bloodier. And it's deadlier than ever... You're a space marine armed with a mere pistol. Your mission is to locate more substantial firepower [and] blow your way through an onslaught of undead marines and mutant demons from hell..."

When teens--and those even younger--are fed such a diet of violence and filth, what should we expect? Why should we think they will react differently when trying to deal with conflicts with others?

We find it convenient to blame youth for bad decisions and choices they make. But *adults*--even national leaders--shoulder a big share of the blame. After all, it is often leaders--including our legislators and judges--who have initiated and upheld such actions as banning

prayer from schools and firing teachers for keeping a Bible openly displayed in the classroom.

We are the ones who have set the moral tone and direction of modern societies. And then we wonder why things can go so horribly wrong at a quiet suburban school.

An end to sorrow and suffering

God allows us to choose--and to make decisions that often are an affront to Him. He has allowed us to build our own societies and civilizations, choose our leaders, write our own laws and choose for ourselves what we consider to be good and what we think is evil. And He allows us to suffer the consequences when those choices turn out to be horribly wrong. Regrettably, bad decisions have a way of often devastating innocent bystanders, as happened to the dozens of victims and hundreds of family members and friends affected by the Columbine High School shooting.



But the world will not always be this way. The time is drawing nearer when human choices and decisions will bring mankind to the brink of annihilation (Matthew 24:21-22). Like the teenage gunmen who shattered the lives of dozens of families, world leaders will seek to solve their problems through a chain of events that will bring unparalleled anguish, violence and destruction on humanity (Revelation 9, 13, 17). Not until then will Jesus Christ intervene to save us from ourselves (Revelation 19:11-16; Matthew 24:21-33).

Regrettably, God's Word makes it plain that it will take such earth-shattering events to humble humans to the point that they will turn to God. Mankind will repent only when forced to admit that thousands of years of going our own way has only brought us face to face with human extinction.

Jesus Christ will usher in a new world, the Kingdom of God. Then, and only then, will mankind find lasting peace and safety. "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain," God promises, "for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:9).

In that transformed world, the grief and pain of tragedies such as the events at Columbine High will become a distant and fading memory. No wonder Christ tells us to earnestly pray for the time when that kingdom will become a reality (Matthew 6:9-10).

Recommended reading

What is God's overall timetable for dealing with humanity? Does He tell us what lies ahead for our troubled world? You'll find many eye-opening answers in *The Gospel of the Kingdom* and *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*. [Click on the titles to order]. Be sure to also request your free copy of *What Happens After Death?* In it you'll discover the reassuring truth of what God has in store both for the two troubled gunmen as well as their victims in this tragedy. You'll be amazed at what the Bible *really* says.

A Candle in the Window

By Aimee Zahora

As a candle shines through darkness can our lives do the same? Here's how.



There are two ways of spreading light:
to be the candle or the mirror that reflects it.
--Edith Wharton

A FEW MILES DOWN THE ROAD from me is a beautiful Victorian house that I love to drive by on my way to the little town of Zionsville. The house is soft teal in color with a creamy beige trim. A wraparound porch decorates both the upper and lower levels of the house. The porch on the first level has a wicker swing and matching wicker chairs to relax in.

All these details contribute to making the house memorable, but the most remarkable part of the house is the windows--not the actual windows themselves, but what can be seen through them. Each window of the house has a single lit candle shining in it. I can see the candles whether I drive by the house during the day or night. These candles exude a feeling of warmth and joy as they effortlessly illuminate the large home.

When the rest of the house is completely dark, the candles transform what could be an empty, lonely atmosphere into one of peace and comfort. No matter how hurried I am, this house never fails to draw my attention as I pass by.

As I reflect upon the candles in the windows of the Victorian house, I am reminded of Christ's instruction in Matthew 5:16 to let our light shine. What exactly does this instruction entail? What, specifically, can we do to shine?

Let's take a closer look at the candle. In a well-lit room, a little candle is just that--little. In

fact, it's so small, that we can almost do without it.



However, consider how the candle looks when the room is dark. Set against darkness, the light from a candle becomes important. When it is the only source of light, a candle tends to draw our attention. It also provides warmth or comfort when we are close to it, and amidst darkness, light serves as a source of hope.

Before we look at how to let our light shine, it is important to identify our source of light. In John 8:12 Christ says, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life." Earlier in this gospel we learn that John the Baptist came "to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe" (John 1:7). The next verse clearly defines the light, "He [speaking of John] was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light" (John 1:8). The light then is Jesus Christ. Once our source of light is in mind, our task to let our light shine becomes evident.

The light that is reflected from the candle can serve as a metaphor for our Christian duty. Like the candlelight, we have the opportunity to draw attention to Jesus Christ and His way of life by setting a positive example. Christ encourages us saying, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

We can set this positive example by ensuring that our day-to-day actions support, rather than diminish, the beliefs we say we adhere to. We've all heard the well-known cliche that actions speak louder than words, and they really do. What people see has a greater impact on them compared with what they hear. People need to see that we treat our family and our friends with kindness, showing respect to those we interact with on a daily basis. Seeing this positive light is so much more effective than simply professing this to be a belief that we value. Though there is a time and place for explaining our beliefs, seeing our beliefs as a tangible action is what will draw people to our metaphorical candle.

Once people are attracted to our candlelight, they should be able to feel warmth and comfort the closer they come to us. In a world of darkness, there are a great number of people who are confused and disillusioned. Paul tells us that in the middle of a crooked and perverse generation we need to shine as lights in the world (Philippians 2:15).



We can project the warmth and comfort of our candle by not being confrontational, and by respecting the choices and decisions of others though they may directly oppose our own. Though it may be tempting to immediately begin a thoroughly organized, proof-filled discussion of the logic behind our beliefs, such a discussion may initially smother an individual. As Luke 8:16 instructs, we should not hide our light from anyone. At the same time, our approach should be balanced so that those with whom we interact are left feeling warmed rather than burned.

In addition to being an instrument that brings warmth and comfort, our candlelight should provide hope to those who come in contact with us.

As one who offers hope, we can "give light to those who sit in darkness" (Luke 1:79).

Those people who offer hope are easy to spot. They are the ones who have a positive outlook on life despite the misfortunes that they experience. They are the ones who have a purpose in life, and are not discouraged by the sordid events that appear in the news around us. They are the ones who make us feel stronger and better after being in their company for a few moments. These are the attributes we should internalize as we endeavor to be like Jesus Christ.

We, as Christians, can strive toward the metaphorical candle by remembering its purpose to attract attention to Christ and His way of life, to offer warmth and comfort, and to serve as a source of hope. When we see a candle shining brightly in a window, remember the effect it has on us. We can mirror that image by striving to follow Christ's lead. If we allow Him to shine through us, we will reflect His light.

When God Says No

By Gregory Dullum

We aren't always prepared for what life deals us or why God allows it. Here is one family's struggle to cope with loss.



I WAS ON TOP OF THE WORLD. Everything was going my way and God was right there with me. What a wonderful time to be alive!

My wife, Marie, and I had been married for six marvelous years. Our 3-year-old daughter, Kristi, was the apple of her Daddy's eye. She was smart, beautiful, talented and rambunctious--everything you could ask for in a little girl.

God was part of our small family, too. We had started saying daily family prayers, following the admonition of our minister. It was awkward at first but we soon got into the routine of kneeling beside our bed every evening and praying aloud. I began, Marie followed and then Kristi prayed. I then concluded our prayer.

For some time, Kristi had mentioned that she wanted a little brother or sister to play with. We told her to pray for one and she did.

God answered prayers and blessed us in many ways that year. I took Kristi to a park to fly a kite for the first time that spring. Everything went fine until the kite took a dip and wrapped itself around numerous branches high in a giant oak tree. The tree was not even in the park. It was in the front yard across the street from the park. Everything I tried from my end of the string did nothing to set it free. I was sure we'd have to cut the string and lose the kite. I told Kristi if she wanted her kite back, she had better pray because it was stuck for good. We prayed a silent prayer and a gust of wind took the kite, unwrapped it and set it gently on the street.

Not long after that Kristi and I were playing with a large ball in her grandmother's back yard. We got the ball stuck high in a young tree. The ball was too high to reach and the tree was too small to climb. Again, we prayed. God knocked the ball out of the tree for us.

God answered our prayers for a little brother or sister for Kristi.

Later, when we were heading home, Kristi began crying in the back seat. My wife and I turned

to see that her arm was stuck in an uncomfortable position in her car seat. My wife told her to pray for help getting it free and in no time the situation was resolved.

I, too, had been greatly blessed. God had answered my prayers and healed me of a hernia that had bothered me for eight years. It had completely vanished one day and had not come back.

My job also was going well. I was promoted from the production department to become editor of my hometown newspaper. With the promotion I received a raise and a gas allowance which helped with the family budget. At the Minnesota Newspaper Association awards banquet I received a second-place award that year for best editorial cartoon.

We were able to purchase a second car from a friend for only $125 and were blessed with free food and toys at Thanksgiving time through a community program that helps low-income families.

And then there was the greatest blessing of all. God answered our prayers for a little brother or sister for Kristi. Marie noticed one day that she felt funny and we soon realized a little brother or sister was on its way.

We asked Kristi if she wanted a little brother or a little sister. She replied that she wanted a brother AND a sister. She was barely 3 years old, but she drew pictures of Marie and said, "Mommy's tummy's getting bigger" and drew a little brother and sister inside Marie's tummy.

Marie did not have health insurance. I could not afford to pay for family coverage on my meager salary.

We also were very unhappy with the doctor who had delivered Kristi. Three years before, Marie's water had broken in the middle of the night. It was early on a Monday morning when we rushed to the hospital. Then nothing happened all day. There were IVs and fetal monitors and drugs used to induce labor. There were cramps and contractions but little dilation. The doctor told Marie she would have the baby by 5 p.m. or he would take it by Caesarean section. Kristi didn't come by the deadline and the doctor kept his word.

Marie was scared to death to go under the knife for the first time. She did not breathe deeply enough of the gas that was supposed to put her asleep. She felt the knife cutting open her belly and she tried to scream but she couldn't. She heard the doctor say it was a girl before she went completely out.

We wondered why the doctor was so insistent that the C-section happen Monday night until we heard that he left for a ski trip in Colorado the next day.

We did not want to go through that experience again. We were determined to have our second child naturally.



Every day we prayed to God that our child would be healthy and that delivery could be natural. We went to a midwife, but we were not completely satisfied with her service either. She told us she charged $700 whether she could make it to the delivery or not. There had been times when she didn't make it to some of her patients' birthings.

We decided we were not going to pay someone $700 (that we did not have) if she might not even make it to the birth. Instead, we read everything we could about natural childbirth. We prepared in every way we could. Then we waited and prayed.

We were sure God would answer our prayers. He had gotten Kristi's ball and kite out of trees. He had blessed us with jobs and awards and raises. Surely the healthy birth of this baby was more important than those things. Since God had granted those small favors, we were absolutely confident that He would grant us the healthy birth of our second baby.

Others around us became worried, but we were not. Family members and even our minister told us we should go to a doctor, but we told them we had seen a midwife and everything was OK.

Marie and I eagerly anticipated the new baby and we picked out names. If it were a boy, we'd name him Steven after my best friend. We thought of Misty Lynn for a girl's name. Kristi and Misty sounded good at first. But the child growing in Marie's womb was not a Misty. It was far more active than Kristi had ever been. It was continually on the move, hitting and kicking its mother and me. Marie said she could move her hand across her belly and our baby would follow right along, bopping her as her hand moved.

No, she was not a Misty. We named her Deborah Dee, Deborah meaning "busy as a bee" and Dee meaning "dark" because we imagined her to have very dark hair as Kristi had when she was born.

Debbi's due date came and went but she did not arrive. We didn't worry for two reasons. First, everyone had told us the baby comes when it's ready, not when we think it should. And second, we had absolute faith that God would answer our prayers and deliver to us a healthy, happy baby.

One Sunday, Marie began several days and nights of labor. The labor pains increased and then went away. We called the midwife for advice. She said the baby would come when it was ready.

On Wednesday, Marie became scared.

She told me she had not felt the baby move. In fact, she was not sure when the baby had last moved. She poked at her belly, but there was no response as there had been in the past.

Others consoled us, saying the baby was probably sleeping. The midwife told us the baby gets still right before the birth.

By noon on Thursday there was still no movement. We decided to go to a doctor and listen to the heartbeat. I was so confident that everything was OK I made Marie wait until I had that week's edition of the newspaper ready to go to the printer. I figured we would hear the heartbeat and everything would be fine.

I was wrong.

I first knew something was wrong when the doctor, in his cramped little

I first knew something was wrong when the doctor, in his cramped little examining room, began putting his stethoscope in many different positions on Marie's round belly.

examining room, began putting his stethoscope in many different positions on Marie's round belly. He then told us he could not hear the baby's heart. I felt faint and had to force myself to breathe.

The next step was ultrasound. The doctor and I searched the little TV screen for movement behind the baby's rib cage. The only movement we could see was some fluid.

Our baby was dead.

God had let us down.

The doctor sent us to a hospital in downtown Minneapolis. He told us it had better ultrasound equipment and maybe the doctors there could find a heartbeat. This hospital also had to accept patients no matter what their financial situation.

We went but we were not nearly so confident. Our prayers on that half-hour drive seemed to fall on the deaf ears of God.

Doctors in the downtown hospital confirmed the death of Deborah Dee. They wanted Marie to deliver the baby naturally; that would enhance the chance of delivering naturally the next time she was pregnant. I spent the night lying on cushions on the floor of Marie's hospital room. I could not sleep for the grief and tears. I kept asking God why He had let our baby die. I kept wishing we had done something differently. If only we had gone to a doctor sooner!

The next day the doctor gave Marie drugs intravenously to induce labor. She protested. Now that the baby was dead, she wanted it out of her body as quickly as possible. Finally, at 8:56 p.m. the doctors gave in and took Deborah Dee by Caesarean section. This time Marie took deeper breaths of the gas, and the doctor was in no hurry to cut because the baby was already dead.

We don't know when Deborah Dee died. We don't know why she died. But we do know she was a pretty little girl. The nurse told me so when the baby was taken from Marie's womb.

We both became angry at God and at nothing at all

Debbi had been part of our family for nine months. I couldn't say good-bye without seeing her. And after seeing photos of her I had enough courage to hold her. Her body was still warm when the nurse brought her to me, wrapped in a small blanket. I wanted so bad to just breathe life into her little body but I knew it was hopeless.

Marie saw Debbi for the first time the next morning. I held her one last time but this time her body felt ice cold. I said no verbal good-byes. It was no use. She couldn't hear me. But something deep inside said farewell to our daughter.

It's hard to believe, but Deborah Dee would have recently marked her 14th birthday. We never heard Debbi cry or say her first word. We never saw her get her first tooth, take her first step or get on the school bus for the first time. We have been unable to watch her grow up and enter her teenage years. But she is not gone from our lives.

We still have, in a yellowed folder, a lock of her hair. We still have the little cap the nurse put on her head. The folder still contains the plastic straps Debbi wore on her wrists and the souvenir birth certificate with her footprints on it. And there are still the Polaroid photos the nurse had taken.

Fourteen years ago, I thought the nightmares of that week would fade. They haven't. As I dredged them up to write this article, they are as fresh as ever. But we no longer think about her as much as we used to.

Debbi left us more than a lock of hair, a cap, some pieces of plastic and some paper. Her legacy is that she changed the hearts of her dad and mom. It didn't happen all at once. It took time.

As we worked through our grief, we went from sorrow to anger. We both became angry at God and at nothing at all. While jogging one day, I gripped my keys tightly in my fist and flung them with all my might at a stop sign. The keys slammed into the red and white metal. The metal key ring sprang apart and my keys flew all over someone's yard.

It took a long time to trust God again. It took a long time to pray intimately with God again. We still had family prayer every night but it was a meaningless ritual, just a routine for the sake of our daughter who was still alive.

As time passed our grief and anger diminished. But how could we ever trust God again?

We received the answer as we read through the Bible's book of Job. We realized as we read through this unusual book, that only those suffering from severe trials could truly understand what Job went through. He (unlike us) was righteous and blameless, yet he lost nearly everything he had when Satan afflicted him. Job blamed God. In the end of the book, the Almighty God told Job he was not right to blame God.

We learned from our experience that the true God is all powerful. He is not a genie in a bottle to give us our every wish or a trained dog that obeys our every command.

"Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better."

Why did God allow Debbi to die? I believe one reason was to show us that He is so powerful He does not have to give us our request. He doesn't have to answer "Yes" to all our prayers. Sometimes He answers our prayers with "No."

And why did He tell us "No" when we asked for a healthy, happy baby?

The answer to this is found in another book of the Bible: "A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth. It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart. Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better" (Ecclesiastes 7:1-4).

Out of the sorrow and loss we felt 14 years ago, Debbi, in her short life, gave her mom and dad a gift that strengthened our hearts. She added compassion and sympathy to hearts that, up to that time, could not fully understand grief and sorrow in others. Through the years we have

been able to show compassion and to help many others through their trials, because we had been through similar trials ourselves.

Fourteen years ago we asked God for a happy, healthy baby. He said, "No, I have a better idea." Instead of a living baby He gave us compassion, love, mercy and a vision of His greatness that far exceeded our limited concept of God.

And then, seven years and a miscarriage after Debbi, when we were sure we would never have another baby, God said "Yes." He blessed us with another beautiful baby girl whom we called our "miracle baby."

This time we went to another doctor whom we trusted and liked. We planned a Caesarean section from the beginning. We had no agenda, no ax to grind. We did everything we could on our part to ensure that Marie would give birth to a healthy, happy baby. And we prayed that God would take care of the rest.

This time God said "Yes." Everything went well and today we have a beautiful 6-year-old girl named Melissa.

Looking back, we have been doubly blessed by God. He made us into much better people by giving us the awful experience of losing Deborah Dee. We now listen compassionately and try to comfort others who tell us of their problems. "Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better." And then He turned around and gave us a second wonderful daughter.

The Rock Which Followed Them

By Greg Sargent

What does the "rock" symbolize in scripture and did a rock really follow the children of Israel?



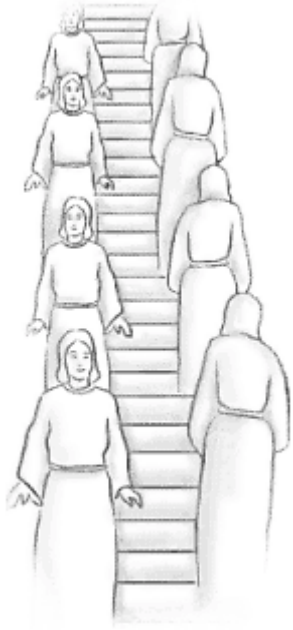
TODAY, (JANUARY 27, 1999) THE POPE is visiting the city of St. Louis. Television commentators noted that the Pope is "Peter among us," referring to Matthew 16:18 where Christ seemed to name Peter as the rock upon which God's church would be built. According to the theology of the Catholic (which means "universal") Church, the Popes have succeeded Peter. This assertion brings to mind some questions. Is Christ building His church on a man? Did Christ really mean that Peter was the rock on which God's church would be built? Is God depending on a succession of men from the apostle Peter on whom He will build His church?

The symbol of a rock has important meaning in God's Word. God often uses analogies to help us understand truth. Sometimes the analogies are literal; sometimes they are figurative. Nevertheless, when we read about many of the Biblical references concerning the "rock," we can easily understand who the "rock" of Matthew 16:18 truly is.

The symbol of a rock has important meaning in God's Word.

The first reference to a rock on which God places any significance can be found in Genesis 28 when Jacob was near the city of Bethel (formerly Luz). He had stopped there for the night. Instead of placing a soft pillow under his head, he used a rock. That night, Jacob had a dream in which he saw angels ascending and descending on a ladder, which led to heaven. When he awakened, he realized he was in a special place. Perhaps Jacob had not initially realized that his grandfather Abraham had camped just to the east of this site, had built an altar and had called on the name of God (Genesis 12:8). After visiting Egypt, Abraham had returned to this same site (Genesis 13:3). Jacob was clearly moved by this nocturnal experience. Scripture tells us: "And Jacob awakened out of his sleep, and he said, ? Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew it not.' And he was afraid, and said, ?How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.' And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it. And he called the name of that

place Bethel: but the name of that city was called Luz at the first" (Genesis 28:16-19).



Notice that Jacob claimed this place was "the house of God." He gave it the name "Bethel," which in the Hebrew language literally means, house of God. He also recognized the location as "the gate of heaven." Finally, he anointed the stone he had used as his pillow and set it up for a pillar. Inspired by God, Jacob was summoned to Bethel on his return from Harran and both built an altar and set up a pillar, reiterating the name he had given before (Genesis 35:1-15). It was also on this occasion when God said that Jacob's name would be changed to "Israel" and pronounced the blessing that a nation and company of nations would come from his loins. But Genesis 28:22 makes an even more direct statement, "And this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that you shall give me I will surely give the tenth unto you." Jacob called the stone, "God's house." You can find the name "house of God" used in the Old Testament books of Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Psalms, Ecclesiastes and Zechariah. Whether speaking of the tabernacle containing the Ark of the Covenant, Solomon's temple or the restored temple, all were the "house of God."

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul described the house of God as the "church of the living God" (1 Timothy 3:15). Since Jacob equated the rock with the house of God, the rock would also be equated with the church of the living God. There is more interesting history to this unique rock. Israel (Jacob) blessed his twelve sons before he died. Genesis 49:24 relates this blessing given to Joseph, the father of Ephraim and Manasseh. During this blessing, Israel prophesied, "But his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob; (from thence [Hebrew-- out of that place] is the shepherd, the stone of Israel)." The only stone of Israel, or Jacob, referred to up to this point is the stone which Jacob anointed at Bethel. Here the stone is called "the shepherd."

Who is the shepherd? Jesus Christ is the "good shepherd," the "great shepherd," and the "chief shepherd" (John 10:11,14; Hebrews 13:20; 1 Peter 5:4). He is also the shepherd who was prophesied to be smitten (Zechariah 13:7; Matthew 26:31). It's also very meaningful to realize that living water (the Holy Spirit) would come through our shepherd Jesus Christ, once He was crucified and resurrected to ascend next to God the Father (Acts 2:23,33).

Some have speculated as to whether or not the Bethel rock followed the children of Israel through the wilderness into the promised land. "Moreover, brethren, I would not that you should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and did all eat the same spiritual meat, and did all drink the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ" (1 Corinthians 10:1-4). In other words Israel was under a cloud by day; they passed through the sea; they ate manna; they drank water from the rock. Since the early analogies can be proven to be literal, why not the last one? Is it possible that the rock from which Israel drank was the Bethel rock? It was not a stationary rock. It was a rock which followed them. Furthermore, the language used by God in both Exodus 17:6 and Numbers 20:8 indicates Moses did not smite just any rock. Rather, in both instances he was told by God to smite "the" rock.

For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ

Upholding this possibility that Moses struck the Bethel rock, is the story of Israel desiring to go through the land of Edom, using the King's Highway?"[t]he name given to the direct road running from the Gulf of Aqabah to Damascus in Syria, East of the Dead Sea and Jordan valley." It is interesting to note that Moses promised the King of Edom that Israel would not "drink water from wells" (Numbers 20:17). If Moses knew Israel had access to water from the Bethel rock, no water would have been required from the King of Edom's land. Whatever the case, there is no doubt that the rock Moses struck symbolized Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 10:4).

When the children of Israel possessed the promised land, the prophecy of Israel (Jacob) concerning Joseph came true. Bethel was allotted to the tribes of Joseph, who captured it, but particularly to Ephraim (1Chronicles. 7:28). One interesting tradition maintains that during the building of Solomon's Temple, Jacob's pillar stone was rejected by the builders. In reality there was a pillar stone upon which the kings of Israel were coronated, thereby literally signifying the "head of the corner". (See 2 Kings 11:13-14 & 2 Chronicles 23:13? Companion Bible renders the wording "upon the pillar" rather than "at the pillar.") Whether Psalm 118:22, ("The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner"), was literal and prophetic, or simply prophetic, it confirms that Jesus Christ is the rock on which the church is built.

Regarding Christ, Peter stated, "This is the stone which was rejected by you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:11-12). Christ was raised up to sit on the very throne of David (Acts 2:30) and will be the King of all kings (Revelation 17:14). God's church is not being built by or on any man. The literal Greek translation states the following: "Also I but to you say that you are Peter, and on this the rock I will build of me the assembly and the gates of Hades will not be strong against it" (Matthew 16:18). The Greek word for Peter is "petros" which means small pebble. But Christ was going to build His church on "the rock" (from the Greek "petra" which means a large rock). "The rock" is Christ.

Christ proceeded to tell Peter that He (Christ) would give Peter the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Remember how Jacob called Bethel, "the gate of heaven"? The Bethel stone signified the way by which mankind would eventually enter the kingdom from heaven. Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6). No one can come to the Father but by Him. Jesus Christ represents "the house of God"-- Bethel, since we were "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom [Christ] you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit" (Ephesians 2:20? 22). Christ is called "an high priest over the house of God" (Hebrews 10:21). When we review the Biblical analogies concerning the rock, we see Jesus Christ:

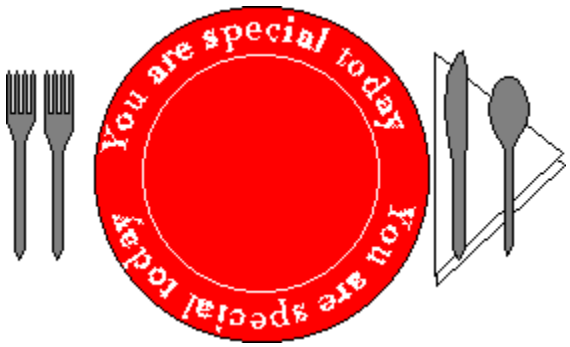
- Representing the house of God (Bethel)
- Being the Anointed One (just as the Bethel stone was anointed)
- Holding the keys to the gate of heaven (as the Bethel stone was "the gateway to heaven")
- Being the shepherd of Israel (as the "stone of Israel" was called)
- Giving the Holy Spirit (just as water flowed from "the rock" in the wilderness)
- Being the rejected stone, who became the cornerstone and headstone of God's church in whom the whole church will be built. The church of God is not being built on Peter or any other man.

The church of God is being built on Jesus Christ?our rock, our stone, and our pillar.

Whatever Happened to the Family Meal?

By Becky Sweat

Can eating together improve relationships in your family? With a little effort and planning our mealtimes...it just might.



I CAN REMEMBER few evenings growing up when we didn't eat dinner together as a family. Our 6 p.m. gathering was the "glue" that bonded five very different people together. Dinner was the time for slowing down, sharing stories, discussing the day's events and talking about tomorrow. We'd laugh, we'd listen, we'd encourage each other.

For many years it was like that for most American families. Today moms and dads both spend full days at the office, take night classes to get their M.B.A.s, and work weekends to meet deadlines. Kids have after-school jobs, go to cheerleading practice and play in soccer matches. We rarely eat at home and even if we do, our meals are the microwave kind, eaten alone and in shifts.

Just 40 percent of American families eat meals together, and then, no more than two or three times a week.

According to the Food Marketing Institute, just 40 percent of American families eat meals together, and then, no more than two or three times a week. Is that bad? Is the family meal worth saving? Or is it destined to become a thing of the past, something left for "Leave it to Beaver" and "Waltons" reruns?

Nutritional reasons alone make the family meal worth saving. Kids left to themselves to find something to eat are likely to choose a diet of toaster pastries, potato chips and frozen pizza. When parents present kids with a variety of foods at regular mealtimes, they better their chances of developing good eating habits in their children.

The family dinner gives family members a chance to reconnect with each other after a long day at school or work.

But perhaps most important, the family dinner gives family members a chance to reconnect with each other after a long day at school or work. "Families need good, quality time together and shared meals are a great way to accomplish that goal," says Barbara James, an associate professor of Family and Consumer Sciences at Ohio State University Extension. "If you don't spend regular time together, family members grow apart. They begin to feel more like roommates sharing a house together rather than members of the same family."

Clifton Saper Ph.D., a family psychologist in Evanston, Illinois, says family dinners are very worthwhile, as long as the interaction is kept positive. "The family dinner is the place to report on what you're doing, what you've been up to, what you're thinking. But sometimes the whole focus is on manners and 'Eat your vegetables' and then the meal becomes a negative experience for both the parents and the kids," he says.

"But if parents can get beyond that, if their focus instead is on open communication and creating an atmosphere that's relaxed and comfortable, then the meal is going to help strengthen family ties."

Here are some suggestions for restoring this endangered tradition and making mealtime a positive family experience:

Get everyone involved

After a long day at work, making dinner may be the last thing Mom wants to do. James says a solution is to make dinner a family project. "The whole family can be in the kitchen together, one person setting the table, someone else doing the stir-fry, another making a salad, and everyone can help clean-up afterwards," she says. Not only does this take the load off Mom's shoulders, it's also a good opportunity for communication and for teaching children how to cook.

If your child is a fussy eater, getting him or her involved with cooking has an additional benefit. "Trying new foods is more palatable for the child if the child has helped prepare that food. A child is more likely to try creamed spinach if he had a part in stirring the sauce," James says.

You may want to set aside one day a month when your teenage children are totally in charge of the meal. Let them plan the menu, put together a shopping list, go to the grocery store and cook the food. Your kitchen may get messier than you like, but remind yourself this is a good way to get your teens excited about family meals.

Turn off the television

You may think your kids will hate you if you tell them there will be no t.v. during dinner, but assure them you are going to abide by the same rules yourself. If there is a favorite television show which comes on during the dinner hour, be willing to tape it with your VCR to watch later, maybe while the family eats dessert.

It's not bad to watch t.v. during dinner "on occasion," just don't make it a part of your routine, James says. "You could make it a family tradition that one night a month you rent a movie and eat dinner in front of the television," she suggests. "Afterwards, you discuss the movie as a family. "What did you think of the ending? "How do you feel that family could have handled the situation better?" Choose movies appropriate for family discussions such as "Fiddler on the Roof," "Little House on the Prairie" and "Our Town."

Take phone messages

It never seems to fail, but the minute you sit down for dinner is when the phone starts

ringing. If you have an answering machine, let it record messages for you during mealtimes so you can eat your dinner without interruptions. Or you may want to assign one family member each meal to answer the phone if it rings during dinner. That person's job would be to say something like, "We're eating dinner right now. Would you mind calling back in about an hour?"

Create a warm atmosphere

The family meal is not the time for disciplining, lecturing, putting pressure on family members or discussing controversial issues. Conversation should be light, happy and upbeat. Some families have a different person each meal be responsible for bringing in a funny joke, story or cartoon to keep the atmosphere light.

"Family meals are a good time for telling your children how much you appreciate and care about them. Bring up your kids' positive qualities and let them know you think they're neat," James says. Show your children you're proud of their accomplishments. "Boy, you really did a nice job on that science project," you might say. "Wow, your report card was really great this time."

Don't think you have to fill every moment with conversation. Your children are bound to have days now and then when they don't feel like talking. If you try to force them to talk by playing "20 Questions," you will make the atmosphere tense. Let conversation come naturally and give your children time to open up when they feel comfortable.

Give everyone a chance to talk

"What happens in a lot of families is one or two people dominate the dinner conversation, typically the oldest child," Saper says. "This person feels really good because he has all these listeners, but for the others who can't get a word in edgewise, it's not fun."

He says a solution is to have one family member each meal be designated as the chairperson. The chairperson makes sure everyone has a chance to get their "two cents" in. If someone has been talking too much, the chairperson might say something like, "Look, you've had your chance. Now let's hear from somebody else." If the conversation topic is something only a couple people are familiar with, leaving most of the people out, the chairperson's job would be to steer the talk to broader issues.

Be creative

Prime rib and baked potatoes may sound wonderful to you and your spouse, but your children may be less than excited. Be creative with your menus. Get some input from your kids to see what they'd like to eat.

Backyard cookouts and picnics in the park are enjoyable meal alternatives for the summer months. Try ethnic food themes. One night everything you serve might be German and another night might be Italian or Chinese. Fondues, making mini pizzas together and Mexican dinners with plenty of tortilla chips and salsa are also fun, and they slow mealtime down, allowing for more time to talk.

If your evenings are booked solid, get together with the family for after-school snacks, late-night desserts or Sunday brunches instead of dinners. If you're not much for cooking, pick up a giant submarine sandwich at the sub shop and a ready-made tossed salad at the grocery store. Or buy some croissants, sliced meats and cheese, lettuce and tomatoes, and arrange everything on the table assembly-line style. What matters most is that the family gets together, not that it has to be at dinnertime or everything you serve has to be homemade.

Use family meetings

If an occasional mealtime is the only time you see your kids, you may be tempted to unload your frustrations at the dinner table. But if you jump on your teen with something like, "I've been angry at you all week for not taking the laundry down," you will put your child on the defensive and turn the family meal into a big gripe session.

"Save problem-solving and serious family discussions for family meetings," Saper says. "If one of the kids brings up some kind of complaint during dinner, maybe he can't sleep because there's too much noise coming from his brother's bedroom every night, this is a good time for him to be heard but then tell him you'll discuss the problem later on at a family meeting."

Build family traditions

By creating family traditions, you give your child a sense of unity and stability for the present, and memories he'll carry with him the rest of his life. Traditions can be simple, like every Saturday morning you have blueberry pancakes or on Friday nights you have banana splits for dessert. Maybe after church your family always has a formal dinner with the good china, candles and a fresh flower centerpiece. Some families begin their dinners by going around the table, each person choosing a poem or verse from the Bible to read.

By creating family traditions, you give your child a sense of unity and stability for the present, and memories he'll carry with him the rest of his life.

Another enjoyable mealtime activity is called the "Red Plate" tradition. "This is an early American custom in which a red plate (or any specially-colored plate) is set at the place of the family member who has had a very special day, such as a birthday or good grade in school," James says. "You do not need to do it every meal. Maybe you'd just do it on a weekly or monthly basis or whenever something exciting happens to someone in the family."

Lifestyles may have changed a lot in the last generation, but the importance of the family meal is one thing that has remained constant. Make shared meals a tradition in your household. Give your children warm, family memories that hopefully someday, they can pass on to their own children.

Tapping, Tapping, Tapping

By Jack R. Elliott

If we know where our future paths shall take us, should anything get in the way?



LIFE IN THIS WORLD could be likened to a blind man walking down a country road, tapping his wooden cane as he goes. He can only imagine what surrounds his way and the significance of his passing.

He feels the moving of the wind and hears the rustle of the leaves, the swishing of the grass, even birds on the wing. He does not know what lies ahead, but he feels his way as he goes, tapping, tapping, tapping.

From long traveling down this long winding road, he learns its bends and turns. Its flat surface, though sometimes marred and rutty, is his only safe place to walk. Cautiously, he feels his way between the ditches that threaten on either side.

Life is like that for all of us. We cannot see what awaits us on our future path, but can only imagine what lies ahead. Tapping our way through the rough and rutty places, we move on in hope of good things ahead.



It is not until we encounter a ditch that we become wise. The pain of falling into one ditch and then the other teaches us to stay in the middle.

Falling into the ditches of error and sin is a cruel teacher. It brings many pains and heartaches. God's compassionate word teaches us how to stay out of the ditches and in the middle. Few heed and must suffer many sorrows as we go tapping, tapping, tapping down the road of life.

The highway of the upright is to depart from evil: he that keepeth his way

preserveth his soul. -- Proverbs 16:17.

Virtual Christian Magazine Editorial

Memorial Day to Remember

By Jerald Aust

EACH YEAR IN LATE MAY, the United States of America observes Memorial Day. It was instituted in 1868 to honor the Civil War dead, but now it commemorates all war dead. Nations often honor their patriots, especially those who gave their lives for their countries.



Is the act of dying for one's country the greatest sacrifice a human can make? And is a national memorial day commemorating the war dead the greatest memorial day humans will experience?

There are many notable war heroes in U.S. history. One such hero was Marine Sergeant Jimmie Howard. In his book *Vietnam* Kent DeLong describes an experience that occurred on June 16, 1966. Sergeant Howard helped save his decimated platoon by engaging in good old fashioned horse laughing. Howard's patrol was given a mission to establish a position on Hill 488, a barren, rocky elevation overlooking the Hiep Duc Valley some 20 mile northwest of Chu Lai.

During that long frightening night, the North Vietnamese besieged the gallant marines relentlessly. Enemy soldiers advanced on them like an army of ants. It looked as if they would all surely die. Staring death in the face, Sergeant Howard continued shouting encouragement to his Marine platoon.

Suddenly, in the darkest of night, there was a lull in the battle. The North Vietnamese began chanting in singsong English: "Marine, you will die. It's all over for you. You will die, Marine." Unexpectedly, Sergeant Howard instructed his men to give the enemy the old horse laugh. With no hope of reinforcements until morning, badly wounded and hopelessly outnumbered, they laughed at their attackers, laughed at their danger, and laughed at their death. They laughed as loud as they could for several minutes. Then there was complete silence from both sides.

Later, captured enemy soldiers admitted that they had been unnerved by the laughter. "How could these Marines laugh at us? What did they know that we didn't?"

Incredibly, 12 wounded Marines survived out of the original 18. All 18 Marines received purple hearts, 13 received Silver Stars, four were awarded the Navy Cross, and in addition, Sergeant Jimmie Howard received the Medal of Honor. His platoon became the most decorated Marines in the 200 years of U.S. military history. These men offered a great sacrifice for their country.

Though such human sacrifice is great, the sacrifices of God's saints, Christ's disciples, are much greater than those made by national heroes. Christ's true disciples honor God based on His requirements, not their desires. They learn early in their spirit-led lives that they must be

living sacrifices for Him (Romans 12:1). This daily process of denying the natural lusts of the flesh, whether in peace or in war, is true sacrifice. Christians replace self-centered thoughts and actions with God's thoughts and commands. This is never an easy task.

By choice, some of God's disciples have suffered martyrdom. They looked for a better resurrection: "And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better (Greek: "greater; nobler) resurrection" (Hebrews 11:35). Even common logic recognizes that Christian martyrdom is the ultimate sacrifice. God remembers those who sacrifice their lives, their thoughts, words, and deeds for Him.

God has perfect memory. He takes no chances to forget those who sacrifice their lives for Him: "Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another, and the Lord listened and heard them; So a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the Lord and who meditate on (esteem) His name. 'They shall be Mine,' says the Lord of hosts, 'on the day that I make them My jewels (special treasure). And I will spare them (from tribulation) as a man spares his own son who serves him" (Malachi 3:16-17).

God's book of remembrance is the same as the Book of Life, found in Revelation 20:12. It commemorates those who sacrificed their desires for God's ways (Malachi 3:16) with the gift of everlasting life (Romans 6:23).

All nations acknowledge the sacrifice human beings make for their country. But for those who know the true God, there is a Memorial Day that supersedes all national ones. Better than that of heroic Sergeant Howard, God reassures His disciples that He will not forget their sacrifices. He will remember them at Jesus Christ 's glorious return to this earth. That special day will be a much greater Memorial Day to remember, one in which you can take part! Are you taking the right steps to ensure you will be acknowledged on that greater Memorial Day?

Is the act of dying for one's country the greatest sacrifice a human can make? God remembers those who sacrifice their lives, their thoughts, words, and deeds for Him, in a big way.

Letters to the Editor

Love It Every Time



Just back for a return visit to read the virtual magazine and catch up on the news. I rarely find the time to visit, but love it every time!

-- Margaret Forster, Hamilton, Bermuda

Should Help Reach People All Over the World



I have been very impressed with the *Virtual Christian Magazine* and wanted to thank you for all your efforts in getting this together for the Internet. It should certainly help reach people all over the world. We go to your web site often and always find it interesting and informative.

-- Joyce Coffey, Louisville, Kentucky

May Reach Some People Who Would Never Crack an Ordinary Bible



Virtual Christian Magazine is a great idea. You may reach some people who would never crack an ordinary Bible! This was the first time I had seen it. I read all three articles and will go back when I have time to read the back issues. I feel that the Internet is a great tool from God. Thanks for all the information you provide.

-- Sue Robbins

Happy to See Articles with Real Life Stories



I had to stay home from services today with a sick child so I took the opportunity to read a few articles in VCM. Thanks so much for putting this on-line magazine together. I am especially happy to see articles with real life stories included. James Dobson of *Focus on the Family* said years ago that he had discovered the way to "get to" the reader was to use stories of real people and the real experiences they have had. He has successfully used that method for over 25 years now and it is the reason I usually pick up *Focus on the Family* magazine. I know it will touch my heart and not just my intellect.

Dr. Dobson commented that he had found that going for the heart was effective with both men and women. I pray the Work can use this more often in all our publications. I especially commend your VCM writers for the following articles which grabbed my attention: "The Most Important Thing" by Mike Bennett. His description of Drew brought to mind my own similar experiences. "The Foster Child" by Josepth Camerata was also good in this regard.

Keep up the good work. Appreciate your heart for God and for people.

-- Debbie Bates, Bakersfield, California

Printing Your Articles and I Am Going to Share Them with Others



Thanks for making *Virtual Christian Magazine* available on the Internet!

I was a member of the church and stopped attending sabbath services for a couple of years because I was confused. Recently I met your representative here in the Philippines and I gladly join the United Church of God. Thank God!

I am printing your articles and I am going to share them to others.

-- James V. Presbitero, Philippines

Virtual Reality of Literature



Boy did I miss a lot! Ever since you became part of the "virtual reality" of literature, I have been trying to log on! Keep up the good work. I may be a "late bloomer baby boomer," but this makes all the problems I have with AOL billing well worth the effort!

-- Lynda Sollars

Miss the Point



Regarding the article "The Most Important Thing" by Mike Bennett, I believe that we focus on information, facts, figures so much, that we miss the point with respect to the big, big picture of God's love. Because we do, we think we have to cover every unique and important doctrine in every converstation we have.

In reality we need only focus on the crux of the issue; God exists, has a plan for mankind, Christ died for our sins as part of that plan and He loves all and desires us to be part of his family.

-- Marcus Brown, Garden Grove, California