

Integrity

INTEGRITY, a journal published by an independent nonprofit corporation, is intended to be a ministry of reconciliation which utilizes the varied talents of a large community of believers who seek accurately to reveal God to both the church and the world so that all may become one as He is one.

(Response-Continued from page 51)

- a. Was the N.T. written collectively to give people after the year 367 A.D. a legal pattern for church organization, worship and conduct? or
- b. Was it written to provide a set of principles for the individual or church conduct? or
- c. Was it written to provide specifics and principles for dealing with the real life situations that were affecting relationships between individual Christians and God, and between two or more individual Christians?

Until, and unless, we begin to use the church to build relationships with God, and between

individual Christians, rather than devour all who are not keeping "the law" as perfectly as we wish they were, we will never be any more effective in impacting our communities than we now are. Unfortunately, Alcoholics Anonymous and the local Lion's Club do better, in many cases, at building relationships than do we.

As far as writers to address these issues, there are none better (in my opinion) than Hoy Ledbetter. Others who I know excell in this area are Bill Gresham. . .and Roy Osborne. . .

Keep up the good work.

Yours in Christ,
Joe Reeves
Monument, Colorado

(Editorial-Continued from page 38)

You *Integrity* readers are continually on our minds as we prepare each issue. Your situations and circumstances are varied. Yet we know that we share with you a common quest, which is often a struggle: to stay with our God to the end. Along the way we would like to know you better, and for you to get to know those of us on the *Integrity* Board better, in order to encourage each other on our journey. As we share

with you articles and editorials that often reflect how our lives are going, please write to us. We would be glad to hear your responses to the articles, your insights on the topics discussed, and what needs you have. May the Power of the resurrection be with you moment by moment!

Bruce and Diane Kilmer
Co-Chairpersons, Editorial Board

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Maintaining a Changed Life

We are surrounded by reflections of the power of the Resurrected Life. Spring is reflecting recreation after the long sleep of a Michigan winter. As we write this, many believers all over the world have just given special celebration at Easter. We experienced a new reminder of the power of God in life when our son was baptized Easter Sunday morning! Another generation has seen the glory of God!

For it is God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.'

II Corinthians 4:6 (RSV)

Isn't this our goal: to know and love God in all His Glory and to bring everyone we can to come live with Him and glorify Him with us!

The desire to live a new life comes in those quiet moments when we meet God. There is an immediate recognition that this is One to whom we must bow. When we are in the presence of God we become thankful that such an all-mighty, all-powerful and all-knowing Being has turned out to also be incredibly gracious and merciful, generous and tender. When we meet God our impurities dismay us and we cannot help but say to Him, "I am sorry." Once we have faced God and understood His forgiveness, we turn and face life with new heart, a kinder mind, and the resolve to live a life that reflects such intimate power.

How do we sustain such resolve after encounters alone with God? The articles in this issue approach this question from three different ways. Laquita Higgs teaches us that corporate worship can be an occasion of such deep and revitalizing experience that our lives cannot help but reflect the Resurrected Life. Mike Murphy speaks to our resolve by connecting us to the thoughts of Thomas à Kempis, a 15th century Christian who learned how to hang on to his faith during the hard times. A third approach to keeping our resolve to live a glorifying life is by listening to and living the Scriptures. Henrietta Palmer shows us how to do just that when she teaches us very practical lessons for life from Proverbs. May these articles be a feast of encouragement for you!

(Continued on page 52)

Dry Bread and Cold Potatoes?

LAQUITA M. HIGGS

Dearborn, Michigan

Most of the people walked confidently into the dining hall, but once they got inside, they were hesitant, for on the serving table were all sorts of exotic and unknown foods. "I like my meat and potatoes," huffed one, and he refused to consider the mangoes and lychees. "I've never eaten any of this, and I'm not about to start now," declared another, "I'm sure I wouldn't like it anyway," and she passed by the crisp pompadums. Another felt superior as he glanced at the Russian caviar: "They're probably trying to poison us. Give me American foods or nothing!" And he missed the delights of the Stilton soup as well as the Russian caviar. "I'm afraid to try that," commented another, as she eyed the luscious raspberry mousee gateau, "The raspberries are probably irradiated." Another's reaction was puzzling as he looked at the lentil casserole, "Yuk! Only low class people would eat that." And he missed the nutritious casserole as well as the tasty tabouleh salad. Over at the artichoke plate, one was heard to exclaim, "I'm not about to eat that; I don't even know how. It would make me look stupid!"

One by one they passed by the main serving table to go to a small one over in a dark corner. It didn't have much on it, but it was familiar food and would at least sustain them for awhile. They hurriedly ate their dry bread and cold potatoes, and drank their water so that they could get out as quickly as possible. They never knew what they had missed.

Some churches are like that. They hurriedly get through their worship, and they are content. They have done their duty, and they have just enough to sustain them. Or have they? If only those churches could know the delights of deep worship, they would not be content with dry

bread and cold potatoes. How sad it is to see churches who are in the rut of complacent and dull worship. God must get pretty tired of it, too. In fact, we can hardly call it worship if it is complacent and dull, for genuine and intense worship is not going to be dry or cold. We will rather come to it with the same zest we bring to a tasty, nutritious, and well-presented meal. What a joy it is to taste the Lord's delights and to experience the awe of His presence in worship, especially in a congregational setting. What an uplift it is to be among people who are singing to the Lord *with all their hearts* (as Paul in Ephesians 5 commands us to do). No dry bread and cold potatoes here. The Lord has promised to draw near to those who draw near to Him. What a wonderful promise, but sometimes we need help in drawing near to him. Our fellow worshippers supply that help, just as we in turn sometimes help others in drawing near to the Lord.

How can we help each other to break out of that rut of dry-bread-and-cold-potato worship? First, we have to *want* to break out of the rut, and this may be the biggest sticking point for some churches. Some may be afraid of what they will encounter, or afraid that it will get out of hand. Our enemy loves to use such fears. We'll consider some of those fears later, but the first step is to realize that God has more for us than we are taking advantage of, and to *want* it. Along with that must be a *willingness to accept* the feeling of awkwardness or discomfort that goes with making ourselves open to new experiences. Underlying both the desire and the willingness must be a *trust* that God wants and honors our sincere attempts to worship him as a congregation.

Wanting More of God

A starting point in seeing and wanting more than “dry bread and cold potatoes” might be reminding ourselves of the basics in a worship service: praise and thanksgiving. Fullness of spiritual worship is possible only when we focus on God, for the object of worship is God himself — to know him and experience him more fully. When we truly focus on God, praise comes naturally. That’s what worship is all about, of course, but sometimes we allow ourselves to get in the rut of concentrating on correct form and pattern in worship, and the praise gets left behind. A look at praise in the Bible will give us some ideas about praise in our worship. Whole worship services can be centered on any one of the three following aspects of praise.

1) **We praise God for who He is.** Perhaps the easiest way to do this is to recall his attributes. Paul did this when he was writing to Timothy. Right in the middle of urging Timothy to “run the great race of faith,” Paul reminds Timothy of the sovereignty of God (I Tim. 6:15), and then in the next sentence he breaks out into praise: “He is King of kings and Lord of lords; He alone possesses immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light. No man has ever seen or ever can see Him. To Him be honor and might for ever! Amen.” Such reminders of the greatness of God are essential to our continued faith and service, as it was for Timothy. Sometimes only the knowledge that God is in charge can keep us going.

2) **We praise God by recalling his deeds.** Over and over, God warned the Israelites not to forget what God had done for them. This is a special danger when things are going well for us, for then we become proud of ourselves and forgetful of God. Moses cautioned, “When you have plenty to eat and live in fine houses of your own building, . . . do not become proud and forget the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt” (Deut. 8:12-14). As Christians we need to recall what Jesus has done for each of us, and praise will burst forth, as it did in Peter: “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in His great mercy gave new

birth into a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead!” (I Peter 1:3). On a more mundane level, we can praise God for all the things, both big and little, that He has done in our own daily lives. I recall the time He held off the rain when we were expecting 40 people to a backyard picnic, or the time He helped me get the car started when it had stalled in bitterly cold weather. Those were very real and tangible evidences of His love for me.

3) **We praise God by giving Him thanks.** Giving thanks to God is not optional; it is a command. When in the midst of tears, start giving God thanks. You may think that impossible when you are in despair, but there is always something for which to give Him thanks—even if it is only for the handkerchief in your pocket for blowing your nose! Giving thanks to God draws us out of ourselves in a wonderful way, and it acknowledges His power and lordship in our lives.

Willingness to Accept Growth

If God is at the center of our worship, a desire to encounter Him more meaningfully will come naturally. The leaders of a church are crucial in fostering this hunger to come closer to God in worship. If they are sensitive, they will usually be ahead of the congregation in encouraging worship experiences which are spiced with a sense of the eternal newness of knowing God. If they are adamantly opposed to any attempt to go beyond certain comfortable habits in the forms of worship, it may seem that a church is hopelessly blocked from exploring more meaningful worship experiences. In these hard cases, prayer is the principal answer to the problem. Don’t just pray at a distance that the leaders will allow some changes; seek to pray *with* them in order that all of you may hear the voice of God more clearly together. Then pray that the Lord will provide opportunities for the leaders and other members of the congregation to experience a deeper worship so that they will want it for themselves and for others.

Many Christians, including leaders, just don’t *know* that worship can be much, much more meaningful. Members should deal with their

leaders openly, but respectfully and lovingly; and leaders should be open to the fact that God sometimes challenges and instructs them through the emergence of spiritual hungers that need to be channeled and fed, even when they are manifested by Christians who are unsettling in the exuberance or their intensity.

Even when people know about the positive effects of praise-worship, they may still have certain fears which are a barrier. Some are afraid of the emotion in more intense worship. Yes, emotion can get out of hand, and as a church we are to discipline ourselves so that worship is orderly and meets with the truths of God’s word. On the other hand, we must not be afraid of showing emotion in our worship if it is expressing genuine feelings toward God. We love God with our head and our will, but we also love Him with our heart. The deepest worship is going to involve our emotions. I have had to learn to allow myself to worship with my emotions. In my growing up years, I somehow acquired the idea that emotions in worship are unacceptable and perhaps even dangerous, but now the Lord has freed me to worship with my emotions. Whenever I am worshipping most intensely, tears well up (and I had always taken pride in not being the weak woman who cried frequently). But I am not ashamed of those tears and they bring me closer to God; I have even learned to sing praise in the midst of tears. Truly we make music in our hearts to the Lord! How glorious it is to praise God and to be surrounded by others who are likewise pouring out their hearts in song to the Lord.

Don’t be afraid to learn new songs. When the Spirit is working among a people, new songs will emerge and old ones will come alive. Certain songs become particularly meaningful to the congregation for a time, as they seem to express just what the congregation is feeling in its worship. Music is closely linked with the Spirit’s working in a congregation in worship (Eph. 5:19). The music of a church is a good indicator of its spirituality; a church that is alive and well in the Lord will have lively singing.

We cannot, of course, gauge our worship solely by how it makes us feel, by whether the

singing moved us or whether exciting things happened. Our worship experiences must be checked with the truth of God. But truth is not sterile or lifeless. Jesus taught that truth sets us free, and he added that if “the Son sets you free, you will indeed be free” (John 8:32, 36). Truth is not restrictive; it is liberating.

Freedom, however, is frightening to some; leaders sometimes worry that a freer worship will be too unstructured and disorderly, or that harmful elements will creep in. Freedom in worship does not preclude the planning of worship. Leaders should carefully, prayerfully, and creatively plan worship services, for we must give our best to the Lord; but worship leaders should also be willing to abandon those plans if the Lord intervenes with a better idea. Conventional decorum and human ideas of dignity must be distinguished from what is “proper” in God’s sight. David’s wife, Michal, was most unhappy when David brought the Ark of the Lord back to Jerusalem. David “danced without restraint before the Lord. . . Michal looked down through a window and saw King David leaping and capering before the Lord, and she despised him in her heart.” David defended his behavior to Michal, “Before the Lord I will dance for joy, yes, and I will earn yet more disgrace and lower myself still more in your eyes.” The writer then comments, “Michal. . . had no child to her dying day” (II Sam. 6:14, 16, 22-3). We must be careful not to look down our noses at those who are freer and less inhibited before the Lord than we are. We may end up being spiritually barren. Sometimes the less inhibited may want to use their body to express their praise, such as in clapping, raising of hands, or kneeling. We should not “despise” them, but realize that God may be wanting to use them to lead us all to a freer worship before God, using our body as well as our mind, will, and heart.

Trusting God for Good Results

If we are to step beyond our fears of growing in worship, we must *trust* that if we are truly humbling ourselves before God in adoration and praise, the effects are going to be to His glory. It might be helpful to remind ourselves of some

of the effects of praise in worship, in order to increase our desire to worship God more completely.

1) **God delights in our worship.** "The Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love" (Ps. 147:11).

2) **Praise quickens our desire for God.** In Psalm 40, David praises God for putting a new song in his mouth after God has drawn him up out of the miry bog. The effect on David is to say, "I delight to do thy will, O my God." The more frequent and the more intense our contact with God in praise, the more we will want to know him and serve him.

3) **Praise brings us into contact with truth.** God is Truth, and contact with him makes us more conscious of the need for truth in our own lives. We can more and more see our dishonesties before the God of Truth; we can see how little and ugly we are on our own before Him. True worship does not always make us feel good. On the contrary, it can make us feel truly wretched and humble, knowing that we have nothing within ourselves to give Him. Only with His help do we have any right to come before him. But thanks to his graciousness, if we acknowledge our poverty before Him and approach Him in the truth of our nothingness, our contact with Him will be even closer. David wrote, "The Lord is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth." (Ps. 145:18).

4) **Worship increases both our fear of God and our love for Him.** When we have really encountered the truth of who He is and how poor we are before Him, we can only be in awe in His presence. But the knowledge of what He has done to raise us up to be His sons and daughters makes us break out in songs of joy. Like the sinful woman who washed Jesus' feet with her tears (Luke 7), we love much because we have been forgiven much. Such intense love and joy might even make us do things that appear foolish to others, just as the woman who anointed Jesus with costly oil (Matt. 26) was thought to be wasteful. The deepest adoration grows only out of love. There are different levels of love, of course, just as there are different levels of worship. We must never feel ourselves superior to those on a different level

than we.

5) **Praise makes prayers more effective.** Praise is a natural beginning to prayer, as Jesus taught us. If your prayers seem ineffective, perhaps you first need to learn to praise Him more, to acknowledge His greatness and your poverty before Him. God "fulfills the desire of all who fear Him; He also hears their cry, and saves them" (Ps. 145:19). The Jerusalem church experienced power in prayer after Peter and John were called into court and warned never again to teach in the name of Jesus. The church began by praising God and when they ended in prayer, "the building where they were assembled rocked, and all were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness" (Acts 4:31). Look what praise and prayer can do!

6) **Worship unites the body.** After describing the prayer meeting, Luke then reports that the Jerusalem church "was united in heart and soul." Such unity means that we work to build each other up, but we must also be vulnerable before each other. Again, in David's 40th psalm which begins by his deliverance from the desolate pit and the miry clay, David tells the "glad news of deliverance in the great congregation." We need to hear of what God is doing in each other's lives; we draw on each other's faith and experience in God, and so the whole body of believers is encouraged. As we worship and experience God as a body, He feeds us and gives us the sustenance that we need, but it's not just bread and potatoes. He also gives us the deep joy which becomes our strength (Neh. 8:10).

One critic of a church with vigorous and joyful worship services was heard to say that it is not good to come out of worship "on such a high because you'll always hit such a low afterwards." If it is merely a search for a "high" experience, then it is not true worship and there will only be a let-down afterward, sometimes even a crash. But if it is true worship, centered upon God, it will be a stabilizing influence in our lives, producing the fruits of faith and loyalty to our Lord. Worship which has carried us into the presence of the Lord's glory will edify and strengthen; it will send us back into the world with a renewed sense of

mission and eagerness to serve Him.

Worship is not always the lyrical song of joy, of course. Sometimes it is silence and deep awe in His presence. Recently at the end of one of our worship services, the congregation continued sitting at the end; no one moved for several minutes. We all knew we had been in the presence of the Lord in a special way, and it was truly awesome.

We cannot manufacture moments of awe; they come only from the Lord. No matter how hard we try, our worship services are going to be barren without the Spirit of God to help us worship. You might think that we could at least worship Him in our own power, but we cannot. We need His help in loving Him; Paul says He pours out his love into our hearts (Rom. 5:5). No less do we need His help in worshipping Him. As Paul writes, "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord!' except under the influence of the Holy Spirit" (I Cor. 12:3). It is the Spirit who explores "even the depths of God's own nature" (I Cor. 2:10). It is the Spirit who guides

us into all truth (John 16:13), not just the truth of doctrine, but the truth of a relationship with God. Even in giving God our love and our worship, we must have the help of His Spirit.

If your congregation is feeding only upon dry bread and cold potatoes, have you called upon the help of the Holy Spirit in worshipping God? Pray, with others if possible, for each of your worship services. It is good to have a regular time of prayer before each service, attended by the leaders of that service and any others who want to come. When the prayer-room is full of people, the subsequent worship services are always full of the presence of God. May your congregation be willing to taste adventurously of the delights of the Lord. In David's words, "O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together!" (Ps. 34:3).

Laquita M. Higgs, along with her husband Elton, have been long time board members of *Integrity*. Laquita is a professor at the University of Michigan (Dearborn) and will be returning with Elton this summer from their second sabbatical in England.

Toughing It Out With God: Thomas à Kempis and the *Following of Christ*

MICHAEL F. MURPHY

Williamston, Michigan

"Jesus now has many lovers of His heavenly kingdom, but few bearers of His cross.

"He has many who desire consolation, but few who will endure tribulation.

"He finds many companions of His table, but few of His abstinence.

"All want to be happy in Him, but few are willing to endure anything for His sake.

"Many follow Jesus in the breaking of bread, but few in the drinking of the cup of His suffering.

"Many remember His miracles with

reverence, but few will identify with the shame of His cross.

"Many love Jesus as long as they meet with no adversity, and many praise and bless Him as long as they can feel His nearness, but if Jesus hides Himself from them and seems to leave them for a little while, they either complain or fall into depression."

What is needed among today's Christians is a spiritual fitness craze. Too many Christians are spiritually flabby, out of shape, unable to endure much for Christ or themselves or anyone

else. They let their prayer and Bible study slide. They cave in to temptation without much of a fight, presuming on His promise of forgiveness. They have no conception of voluntarily denying themselves a lawful pleasure as a love-offering to Jesus. Church for them is an oasis, a temporary refuge from the pressures of life, rather than a training school for overcoming those pressures for the glory of Jesus Christ.

Like everything else that's worth having, a relationship with Jesus Christ does not descend upon us, fully formed, at the instant of our decision to accept Him as Savior. The relationship must be cultivated, fought for, sacrificed for, sweated over. We can't have Christ as Lord of our lives on our terms, only on His: "If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me (Matthew 16:24)." To become a Christian may be easy; to remain one when life gets a little rough, to grow in Christ, to put the old life to death and transform into the new, takes work, takes determination, takes suffering, takes a willingness to expect no reward except the knowledge that one is serving God.

This call to a mature, muscular Christianity is as timely and necessary for today's church as it was when it was first issued five hundred years ago by an obscure Flemish monk. Thomas à Kempis lived into his nineties in a monastery he never left. He never took a university degree or broke new theological ground, but he knew about life and the Christian's living of it. The son of peasants, he wrote down his reflections in a commoner's language whose simplicity and clarity belie their penetrating insight. Probably because of this, his *Following of Christ* has, over five centuries, been the all-time best-selling Christian book, except for the Bible itself.

He wrote the book for a time like our own in many respects. His Church had come to think of itself as an institution to be perpetuated for its own sake, rather than a meeting place for Christians to celebrate their love for one another and their freedom in Christ. It had largely lost its sense of urgency and mission that had once made it great. Its people badly needed renewal, to exchange their pro forma piety for Spirit-led personal holiness. It was the Book of Revela-

tion's church at Sardis, writ large.

Brother Thomas' solution to the malaise of his Church lay in the commitment and holiness of the individuals that made up the Body: strong individuals constitute a strong Church. Achieving the requisite level of holiness is far from easy, and takes discipline and commitment. Thomas provides guideposts for this journey to holiness which are eminently practical, cover a wide range, and talk to us where we are.

Resisting Temptation

For instance, there are some very insightful remarks about resisting temptation:

"As long as we live in this world, we cannot be without trouble and temptation.

"Everyone, therefore, should be concerned about his temptations, and watch and pray, so that the devil, who never sleeps, and goes about seeking whom he may devour, will not find an opportunity to catch him.

"A man is never wholly secure from temptation as long as he is alive, for there is within us a source of temptation.

"Seek advice more often when in temptation, and do not deal harshly with one who is tempted; but pour your consolation into him, as you would wish for yourself." (Do you have someone—a spouse, a friend, someone—with whom you can frankly discuss your temptations, and with whom you can pray about them? If you don't, then find one. Two praying Christians are tougher than one, after all!)

"Temptations are often very profitable to a man, troublesome and grievous though they be, for in them a man is purified, humbled, and instructed.

"Fire tries iron, and temptation a just man."

Nobody, of course, positively welcomes temptation. But temptations are inevitable, and the tough-minded Christian knows how to use them to his advantage. Keeping in mind the exhortation with which James begins his epistle (1:2; "Consider it all joy!"), see temptations as opportunities to demonstrate love and loyalty to God, and to build up those spiritual qualities necessary for living the Christian life to the full.

Jesus Himself showed us how to handle and master temptation by the exercise of a little

Christian willfulness in the face of Satan. Jesus didn't try to flee temptation, but met it head on. He fought it as it first appeared, and did not give it a chance to grow in appeal in His mind. The exercises which strengthened Him in the fight were prayer, absolute trust in His heavenly Father, an eagerness to take a stand for His Father's will, and confidence in a successful ending. These same exercises are open to us as well.

Independence from Human Respect

Thomas also has some pointed things to say about the slavery of human respect:

"...if you go devoutly to the wounds and stigmas of Jesus, you will not care much for being slighted by men, and will easily bear their slanders.

"Christ, while in the world, was also despised by men, and in His greatest need he was, by His friends and followers, left alone among insults.

"Christ was willing to suffer and be despised; what do you dare complain about?

"Christ had enemies and slanderers; why should you have only friends and benefactors?

"If you refuse to suffer the reproach of men, how can you be a friend of Christ?

"If you would reign with Christ, endure with Christ, and for Christ."

The tough-minded Christian (as long as he or she is not guilty of bad example!) cannot be concerned about what others think of him or her. Regrettable but true, there will always be enemies who will not turn eventually into friends, enemies of Christ who will hate us for Whom we stand. Let's try not to make enemies—but when we wind up with a few, let's make sure we have made our enemies for the best of reasons!

It is only in suffering, Thomas points out, that we can truly identify with Jesus in this life. He suffered slanders, harrassment, ridicule, physical abuse. The servants can't expect any better than the Master received, and if we're going to be fit servants, we'd better learn to handle a little determined opposition. By allowing us to suffer, after a fashion, as He did, Christ is actually honoring us, not only in our

identification with Him in hardship, but in His confidence in our ability to endure and in His recognition of our worth in His eyes.

Handling Ego

There is no room for human ego in the Church, or in the soul of the true Christian:

"If a man give his whole substance, still it is nothing.

"And if he do great penance, it is but little.

"And if he gain all knowledge, he is still far off the mark.

"And if he practice great virtue and have very fervent devotion, there is still much lacking in him—the one thing that is supremely necessary for him.

"What is that? That having left everything else, he should also leave himself, and wholly go out of himself, and retain nothing of self-love.

"And when he has done everything which he knows he ought to have done, let him think that he has done nothing.

"...as the Truth Himself has said, 'When you have done all things commanded you, say: 'We are unprofitable servants.' ' ' "

Egoists are the curse of any congregation, drawing attention away from Jesus Christ to themselves. Too many Christians feel grossly insulted if they're not profusely and publicly thanked for doing the smallest services.

But Christians who are spiritually in shape are beyond ego. Content to remain behind the scenes, they serve purely out of love, happy in the knowledge that they're serving and pleasing God. The deep security of knowing one's place in God's scheme of things and being happy with that place is really what the egotist is unconsciously groping for. And reining in the ego is the first step of the way.

Handling Spiritual Dryness

In-shape Christians are not afraid of the spiritual "drys," either; the times in a Christian's life when God just doesn't seem to be around when we need Him. They don't get discouraged—they are too tough and too trusting:

"I have never found anyone so religious and

devout who has not experienced an occasional withdrawal of grace, or not felt a lessening of fervor.

“For a man is not worthy of the sublime contemplation of God, if he has not been exercised, for God’s sake, with some tribulation.

“At such a time there is no better remedy than patience, and denying of self according to the will of God.”

Paradoxically, the bearing up under a dry spell unites the Christian more closely to Jesus Christ than anything else, because that is exactly how Jesus atoned for our sins on the cross. The atonement suffering was not the pain and shame of crucifixion—many unfortunates suffered these and for much longer than Jesus permitted Himself. It was His becoming sin for us, which made God, Who is too holy to even look upon sin, turn away from Him (“My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?”) and leave Him totally, utterly abandoned and alone, a pain no one else ever suffered except the condemned in Hell. Spiritual aridity, far from being punishment or neglect from God, is actually a precious opportunity to carry the cross and suffer with, and like, Jesus. The strong Christian will regard it so.

A Well-ordered Life

Finally, Thomas gives some suggestions for keeping priorities straight:

“Blessed is he who understands what it is to love Jesus, and to despise himself for the sake of Jesus.

“The love of things created is deceitful and inconstant; the love of Jesus is faithful and enduring.

“He who clings to the creature shall fall with its falling.

“He who embraces Jesus shall be firmly rooted forever.

“Love Him, and keep Him for your friend who, when all forget you, will never leave you, or allow you to die finally.

“Sooner or later, you must be separated from all things, whether you wish it or not.

“In life and death, stay near to Jesus, and entrust yourself to His faithfulness, Who alone can help you when all others fail.”

The spiritually fit Christian has a healthy

sense of priorities. He or she knows that all earthly things will pass away, that nothing will remain of us or what we possess except our relationship with Jesus Christ, and therefore it is supremely important to keep up that relationship.

“If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me.” In Jesus’ time, a person condemned to crucifixion was considered legally dead the moment the wood of the cross touched his shoulder. If we are carrying our cross for Him, we are dead and reborn. “Our” possessions, reputation, standing in the world, aspirations, and acquired store of knowledge are now His, and are at His service to the extent He graciously permits us to use them. Strong, fit Christians are not bothered by this detachment, because they know that Jesus Christ is first, last, and everything in their lives. Their faith in Him to supply the needs of their earthly mission can only be acquired by spiritual exercise of the most demanding sort.

Space does not permit a complete discussion of the meditations of this simple and wise man; ninety years is a lot of Christian experience, and there is hardly any aspect of cultivating personal piety that he does not touch upon. But these are the broad themes of Thomas à Kempis’ thoughts: the mature Christian will resist temptation heroically, does not let human criticism get in the way of the relationship with Jesus, does not have an ego that needs continual feeding, is not afraid of periods of spiritual dryness, and has a solid sense of where the eternal priorities lie. It’s the kind of Christian that anyone and everyone, with God’s help, can become. It’s the kind of Christian that has done great things for Jesus Christ and the spread of His gospel throughout the ages. And it’s the kind that the Church today, if it is once again to grow great in witness to Jesus Christ, needs in the pew just as desperately as in the pulpit.

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Proverbs For Everyday Living

HENRIETTA C. PALMER

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The Book of Proverbs has been called THE BEST GUIDE BOOK TO SUCCESS THAT A PERSON CAN FOLLOW. In a world of “Do It Yourself” and “How to Improve” manuals, people often overlook the profound sayings which are found in Proverbs. These truths present statements of divine insight which God granted unto King Solomon and to other believers.

Throughout the Bible, God has given an abundance of instruction to guide us in our personal relationships and our everyday lives. Proverbs is a book of practical ethics, and it demonstrates that the Lord is interested in every aspect of our lives. God cares about our everyday struggles and no problem is too small for His concern.

God gave us the Book of Proverbs to convince us that His commandments are worth living and that our lives will be blessed if we follow His teachings. A careful study of Proverbs helps us to know the WISDOM and the WILL of God for our lives.

Although many subjects are discussed throughout the thirty-one chapters of Proverbs, the following topics have been selected to illustrate how practical and appropriate God’s teaching can be to those who are searching for a life of meaning and purpose.

Wisdom:

“For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding” (Proverbs 2:6).

In a world of rapidly expanding technology, advanced educational degrees and specialized working skills, we often desire to be smarter and wiser. But all the technical literature available, all seminars taught on the subjects

of “communications” and “human relations”, and all the manuals printed on “self-improvement” fall short of the knowledge and wisdom which can only come from God. It is only by studying God’s words and treasuring His commandments that we grow in true wisdom (Proverbs 2:1-6).

Studying the Book of Proverbs helps us to know the wisdom and the will of God, our Father in Heaven. God cares about us and He loves each one of us as if there were only one person in the world to love. As we study God’s word, He will increase our understanding and grant us the wisdom we need to live each day in accordance with His instruction. God will guide us in our personal relationships and He will help us to make the right choices and decisions which confront us each day.

Fear and Fear of the Lord

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Proverbs 1:7).

Fear of the Lord requires a healthy respect and reverence for God and for His supreme power. We fear the Lord because we also understand the consequences of turning away from God. This fear, however, brings us comfort because we know that God is a just God and He rewards those who love Him and keep His commandments.

Children learn to follow their parents’ rules and guidelines because they respect their parents and because they fear the consequences of disobedience. However, this fear does not prevent children from also loving their parents and wanting to please them by following their instruction. Children learn that rules and

guidelines from loving and caring parents are established for their own good.

Proverbs 2:1-5 teaches that we can understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God by seeking wisdom. We must store up His commandments in our mind.

Many blessings are received when we fear the Lord and turn away from evil. Proverbs 3:7-8 says, "It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones." We read from Proverbs 14:27, "The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, that one may avoid the snares of death."

When we learn to fear the Lord and respect his commandments, we are strengthened by His love and His protection. We can then turn over to the Lord all the fears we face in our everyday lives. We no longer fear job loss, poverty, sickness or death. We find comfort in Proverbs 19:23, "The fear of the Lord leads to life; and he who has it rests satisfied; he will not be visited by harm."

Living Joyfully

"Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil, but those who plan good have joy" (Proverbs 12:20).

In both the Old Testament and New Testament joy is consistently the mark of the true believer. It is a quality, and not simply an emotion, grounded upon God Himself and derived from Him. The hope of the righteous brings gladness and joy (Proverbs 19:28). Joy is an attitude, a disposition, a complete assurance and confidence that a loving God is in control of our life. Real joy comes to us when we know God and when we follow His teachings in our daily lives. Christians should be the happiest people on earth! Instead of long, pious-looking faces, true believers should be known by their joyful expressions and actions. We should be able to accept disappointments and trials because we know that God is aware of our problems. He will comfort us and grant us the strength to endure all things if we will ask Him. We know not what tomorrow holds, but we do know Who holds tomorrow!

Advice and Counsel

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5).

The Book of Proverbs is rich with verses dealing with the subject of giving and receiving advice and counsel. Proverbs 1:1-7 contrasts the attitudes of the wise and the foolish towards accepting guidance and instruction from God. In Proverbs 1:23-33 we read that God will turn away from those who refuse to listen to His advice. God will not answer when they call upon Him.

God disciplines those He loves. "My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of reproof, for the Lord reproves him who He loves, as a father the son in whom he delights" (Proverbs 3:11-12).

The Lord blesses those who heed His advice. According to Proverbs 2:1-12 these rewards include wisdom and understanding, protection to those who walk in integrity, and deliverance from evil. God corrects His children to turn them away from sin. Proverbs 5:21-23 tells us that a man can be caught up in sin and die for lack of discipline. The wise person will listen to God and follow His commandments (Proverbs 10:8).

Proverbs 12:1 states, "Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates reproof is stupid." Proverbs 12:15 teaches, "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice." Proverbs 11:14 says, "Where there is no guidance, a people falls; but in an abundance of counselors there is safety."

Experience teaches us that some of the advice we receive from friends and acquaintances is best ignored. Proverbs 12:5 warns us that we should avoid the words and counsel of the wicked. We should always be open to suggestions, however, because good counsel can bring healing and help to those who listen (Proverbs 12:18).

The Book of Proverbs teaches us that the wise person will listen to God's correction and be thankful for the discipline that comes from a

loving Heavenly Father. Likewise, a man of wisdom will listen to the advice and counsel of Godly friends who know and understand the Lord's teachings. Only a fool thinks he has all the answers!

Communicating with Others

"A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Proverbs 15:1).

As we grow in wisdom and knowledge, we also grow in our ability to "keep our tongue" and to choose our words wisely. Words of encouragement, kindness and instruction for good are pleasing to the Lord. They also bring joy to the listener. (Proverbs 15:23) "Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body" (Proverbs 16:24).

Angry words, slander and lying lips are an abomination to the Lord. (Proverbs 12:22) Gossiping, tale-bearing, quarreling and boasting are all despised by God. Our daily communication with those around us is a testimony of our beliefs and values. If we are walking in God's way and following His commandments, our words will be tempered with wisdom, truthfulness and love (Proverbs 8:1-13). People will know that our words are honest and they can depend on what we say. We will consider the answers to questions very carefully. Proverbs 15:28 states, "The mind of the righteous ponders how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things."

Good communication requires sensitivity to the other person's feelings and needs. Words of wisdom and encouragement can be uplifting to a friend in distress. But lending an empathetic ear and being a good listener may bring even greater comfort. Proverbs 10:19 says that "He who restrains his lips is prudent." The wise person knows when to hold the tongue!

Friends and Neighbors

"He who forgives an offense seeks love, but he who repeats a matter alienates a friend" (Proverbs 17:9).

Friendships grow and develop when two people show love and concern for each other. Pro-

verbs 17:17 states, "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity." True friends overlook shortcomings and failures because of their love for each other. From Proverbs 10:12 we learn, "Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses." Friendship is a strong, mutual bond between people who promote the best interests of each other. What sun, air, soil and rain are to the seed, so friendship is to man. It nurtures, develops and perfects his being.

Friends bring us joy, strengthen us in weakness and comfort us in sorrow. Friends should be chosen wisely. We read from Proverbs 18:24, "There are friends who pretend to be friends, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother." All friends are not to be trusted as true friends. Many people associate with us for their own selfish reasons. We often tell our children, "To have a friend, you must be a friend." Proverbs 22:11 describes the type of person who will win friends, "He who loves purity of heart, and whose speech is gracious, will have the king as his friend."

The same loving qualities which endear you to your friends will help you to be a good neighbor. Proverbs 3:27-28 tells us that a good neighbor is called to be extremely kind and giving. Proverbs 20:3 shows us how we can be an example of honor to our neighbors, "It is an honor for a man to keep aloof from strife; but every fool will be quarreling." Good neighbors are also cautioned to hold their tongues. Proverbs 11:12 states, "He who belittles his neighbor lacks sense, but a man of understanding remains silent." We can assure peace with our neighbors by following the words in Proverbs 16:7, "When a man's ways please the Lord, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him."

Marriage

When God created Adam, the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make him a helper fit for him" (Genesis 2:18). Then God fashioned Eve from a rib which was taken from Adam's side, and Adam had a friend and a helper to walk beside him and to share his life.

The happiest marriages are based on love and friendship, and commitment to God's commandments. In Proverbs, Chapter two, we read that one of the rewards of seeking wisdom from God is that a man will be saved from the loose woman and from the adventuress with her smooth words. This should be assurance to all believers that God will deliver them from the wicked if they will seek His wisdom. God will help one choose a suitable marriage partner if He is called upon for wisdom.

God will bless the home and the marriage of those who believe in Him. Proverbs 3:33 states, "The Lord's curse is on the home of the wicked, but he blesses the abode of the righteous."

Proverbs, Chapter five, gives instruction on marriage. Verses 1-14 warn the believer against unchastity. Verses 15-21 describe the joys and responsibilities found in the marriage relationship. These thoughts continue in Proverbs, Chapter six where the young man is warned against adultery and in Chapter seven he is cautioned against yielding to a loose woman. These chapters show God's disdain for impure lives.

The same qualities that bind good friends are also important for keeping a marriage together: love, kindness, gentleness and consideration for the other's happiness and growth God loves peace and order. Proverbs 26:21 describes a quarrelsome man, and Proverbs 27:15-16 compares a contentious wife to "a continual dripping on a rainy day." Soft words, spoken with love and gentleness, can prevent many verbal battles. Proverbs 31:10-31 lists some of the attributes of the ideal wife: she does good for her husband; she provides food and clothing for her household; she is ambitious; she helps the poor; she speaks with wisdom and she teaches kindness; she is to be praised because she fears the Lord. These same qualities could describe the ideal husband.

When both partners in a Christian marriage love the Lord and follow His commandments, their marriage will be blessed with love and respect for each other. Children who become a part of a Christian family will be nurtured by their parents' love, and they will grow in the knowledge that they are also loved and blessed by God.

Parenting

"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6).

The entire Book of Proverbs could be used by parents as a guide for instructing their children in the ways of the Lord. In Proverbs 1:8-9, children are told, "Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and reject not your mother's teaching; for they are a fair garland for your head, and pendants for your neck." Proverbs 4:20-27 lists positive instructions that a father might give to a son to help him follow God's commandments. The effects of parental teaching are described in Proverbs 6:22-23, "When you walk, they will lead you; when you lie down, they will watch over you; and when you are awake, they will talk to you."

Parents have a responsibility to teach their children to live their lives according to God's commandments. Parents have a responsibility, also, to live each day in a way that the children can see God at work in the lives of their parents. As parents we can teach a better lesson with our own actions than with our words.

Proverbs 10:17 states, "He who heeds instruction is on the path to life, but he who rejects reproof goes astray." Parents must help their children learn the importance of accepting wise instruction and counsel from others. Since parents are the child's first teachers, a positive attitude toward accepting instruction must be developed at a young age. Children must also be taught to respect authority and discipline. Throughout the Book of Proverbs the young are told to follow the instructions of their father, to listen to their mother's teaching, and to heed the commandments of God. Dishonor and death are the consequences of disobedience.

Proverbs 22:15 emphasizes the importance of discipline. "Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him." God in His wisdom knows that loving, caring parents will administer discipline which is appropriate and will not cause harm to their children. Since parents are a child's teacher and model, the lessons taught in youth

are very important. Early instruction will influence a child's decisions for the rest of life.

Parents are blessed when their children are righteous and wise. They can say the words of Proverbs 23:15-16 with praise and thanksgiving: "My son, if your heart is wise, my heart too will be glad. My soul will rejoice when your lips speak what is right."

Note: All scriptures quoted are from the Re-

vised Standard Version of the Bible.

Henrietta Palmer recently retired after thirty years in public education as a teacher and elementary school principal. She has been on the *Integrity* Board for the last eight years. Henrietta has taught Sunday School classes for the past thirty-two years and she is now involved in a new Ladies' Bible Class called "Bible Break." Her husband, Bill, is an elder at the Church of Christ in Troy, Michigan. They have two married children and four grandchildren.

Readers' Response

Dear *Integrity* Board,

I have been receiving *Integrity* for the past two years, as well as receiving fifty or so back issues. I still find it very beneficial. We simply can't have too much exchange of information about living the Christian life.

In your September/October '86 issue, you requested the readers provide topics and suggested writers for future issues. I think that is a super way to operate. Too often our periodicals reflect only the views and interest of one person, or at most a few.

Through my military travel over the past 25 years, I have been a teacher-preacher, and active member of 16 different congregations. As a result, I now understand there are many variations of thought and many problems that we must effectively deal with if we are ever to again have a viable influence on religious thought in our country or our communities.

Because of our inability to deal with the real needs of our communities and even our own congregations, we have very few "Restoration movement" congregations that are growing and none that I know of that are growing as fast as the local communities around them. It is a fact that more congregations are losing people than are growing. The people in the communities around us desperately need God, but they don't see enough of Him in "Restoration" churches

to want to be a part. We aren't even keeping the people we have, much less impacting our communities.

We in the "Restoration movement" have been so concerned with outward form and adherence to "the new law," or at least making sure that others adhere to that law before we accept (fellowship) them, that we have not properly addressed the three most fundamental concepts of Christianity.

1. What was the purpose of Christ's death?
 - a. Was it to change from one law system to another? or
 - b. Was it to change people's relationship with God, and with each other?
2. What was, and is the purpose of the church (ekklesia)?
 - a. Is it to provide a place where Christians are commanded to gather at a specific time to perform ritualistic "acts of worship" to God? or
 - b. a community of believers who **share a life** together?
3. But 1 and 2 above can't be properly addressed until we really address the question:
What was the purpose of the writing of the books of the New Testament?

(Continued on page 52)