

July/August 1996
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Integrity

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Laquita and Elton Higgs' new feature column on parenting, "Bending the Twig," offers very practical, spiritual advice regarding parenting teens and younger children. Be sure to pass this on, too.

We hear from all ages in this summer issue so that "all may learn and all be encouraged" (1 Cor. 14:3b). This occurrence of care and concern between generations is made possible by the work of Jesus: "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself" (John 12:32). May God open up opportunities for you to share the solid hopefulness and optimism of Christ through the articles in this journal!

Diane G. H. Kilmer

Co-Editor

Readers' Response

(continued from page 79)

I have read with great interest your book review on Harold Shank's book, *Loosening Your Grip*. Thanks for your time and effort. Your paper has blessed my life!

E. Dreyer

California

Your journal has been a breath of fresh air over the years. As a matter of fact, I can't remember how I started receiving it, but it has followed me from Ohio to Michigan to Arkansas...I think I've been reading *Integrity* since my twenties; I'm now 41. Thanks for the thought-provoking articles and thoughtful, questioning spirit that have helped me in my own spiritual journey.

Randy Pulley, Arkansas

Integrity

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INTEGRITY, a journal published bimonthly by an independent nonprofit corporation, is intended to be a ministry of reconciliation which utilizes the varied talents of a large community of believers. These believers, united in faith but divergent in opinions, seek to accurately reveal God to both the church and the world so that all may become one as He is one. Accordingly, it should not be assumed that the views expressed by individual authors necessarily represent the opinions of either the editors or the Board as a whole.

NEW INTEGRITY HOME PAGE!

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Encourage the Young

I'm particularly excited about this issue's "pass it on" potential for encouraging those young people who are soon to be on their own and for encouraging their parents and grandparents "in the Lord!"

The article "Can I Lose My Salvation?" by Lyndon C. Latham, reprinted by permission from *The Christian Appeal*, addressed this aspect of salvation so clearly that we wanted to pass it on to you readers. We think you'll find it encouraging and something you may want to share.

Karen Pearson's testimony in her article "Light Can Shine Through Brokenness!" is very uplifting! I know Karen personally and can verify that when you meet her, you sense the joy and peace and light of Jesus shining out of her. Only recently did I learn of her story. She wants you to tell others.

"Welcome to the 'We've Got It Right' Society" is a gentle, fictional satire written by Nathan Green, a student at David Lipscomb University. His grandfather, C.D. Bailey, is an *Integrity* reader and submitted the manuscript with Nathan's approval. We'll be hearing more from this innovative thinker!

"College Bound: A Primer for Parents" offers such practical, positive advice that you may think of several families to send photocopies to. We are grateful to author Matt Schantz for his wise, clear instructions on how to encourage our children who attend state colleges. Matt is the campus minister for His House, the Christian Church ministry to Central Michigan University in Mt. Pleasant, Michigan.

Henrietta Palmer writes encouraging advice to young people from a grandmother's point of view, and at the same time provides teaching for all of us. The *Integrity* Board has benefitted from Henrietta's practical service and encouragement for more than 15 years.

(continued on the back page)

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Can I Lose My Salvation?

LYNDON C. LATHAM

Is it possible for a Christian to lose his or her salvation? Believing people have argued over this question for many years. Before we talk about the answer, let me share with you an illustration Gordon E. Donaldson contributed to *Leadership* magazine recently. He says, "Perhaps we should compare our situation to riding in the back of a pickup truck. All true believers are on board. Some Christians believe the tailgate is closed and locked; others believe it is left open. In either case, the logical thing to do is not to see how daring we can be in leaning out the back, but to ride as close to the cab as possible." Surely we would agree!

But although this illustration may help us keep things in perspective, it doesn't really answer the question, does it? Is the tailgate shut, or is it possible for a Christian to lose his or her salvation?

It's an important question. In fact, it is the question a member of our church put to me recently following our morning worship. I'd been doing a lot of teaching emphasizing the fullness of forgiveness in Christ and the security of the believer in him. I was not surprised when this person asked me, very sincerely, "Do you believe that once a person is saved, he or she is always saved?" The question deserves an answer, so here goes!

My Answer

Do I believe that once we're saved we are always saved? No, I don't. But having said that, I am happy to say that I do believe very strongly in the security of the redeemed in Christ—very strongly. Let me make several important points from Scripture concerning the security of the redeemed.

1) Neither Satan nor any of his demonic or human agents can cause us to be lost without our consent. Jesus speaks of the people who have placed their trust in him, when he says, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me, and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand." He goes on to say, "My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand" (John 10:27-29).

I am fully aware that those who believe that once a person is saved, he is always saved use this passage to prove that it is impossible for one of Christ's sheep to be removed from the fold in any fashion. Most of us, I think, would hold that as Christ's sheep we still have free will and can walk away from the Shepherd if we so choose. God did not force us to come to him; he will not force us to remain with him. But the point here is that if we *choose* to remain with him, then no one, not even Satan himself, has the power to take away our salvation. Why? Because no one is greater than the Father. So we can feel very secure about our salvation in this respect. Let's go on.

2) We cannot be lost through weakness. This point is a little harder to buy, isn't it? Most of us know our own frailties pretty well, and we worry that somehow we are not measuring up to God's standard. We're not! The word of God is pretty clear about that, but the marvelous truth of the Gospel is that God has provided another way of salvation.

Look at Romans 7:14-25. (You might want to read it several times.) Paul is saying, "In my heart, I want to do what's right, and I've resolved to do just that, but I can't seem to do it. I find myself, because of weakness, doing things that I ought not to do. As hard as I try, with all my good intentions and resolutions, I still find myself slipping and doing the wrong things."

If we could lose our salvation because of personal weakness, Paul and the rest of us would be in a hopeless predicament. But Paul asks, "Who's going to deliver me from this awful dilemma?" and he answers, "I thank God! Jesus Christ!" Paul obviously did not allow his very real personal weaknesses to make him despair of his salvation. Neither should we.

If we could lose our salvation because of personal weakness, Paul and the rest of us would be in a hopeless predicament.

I know how tempting it is to play games and say, "Well, Paul's weaknesses were not as bad as mine. He was really a good man." The point is that he was a man. Perhaps he was more committed than most of us, but the degree is not an issue here. What is an issue is that forgiveness for all of our weakness is found in Jesus Christ, and so we cannot be lost because of personal weakness. Of course, like Paul, we wish we weren't weak, but that we are is obvious. That Christ died to save us in spite of our weakness, because of our weakness, is marvelous! And that leads me to the next conclusion.

3) We cannot lose our salvation by failure to amass enough good deeds. We know this, if we understand the Gospel at all, but each of us is still tempted to think, "I

just know God's not going to like me enough to let me into heaven unless I stack up enough merit. I've got to do enough good deeds so that God will think I deserve to get in." But we know that can't be true. We can never be good enough to deserve heaven, and only a backhanded sort of pride would make us imagine that we could.

Paul tells us in Ephesians 2 that God has saved us in order to show how rich is his grace in Christ Jesus. He says point blank, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works, lest any man should boast" (2:8-9). And, yes, I know very well what the next verse says, but it in no way negates what Paul has just said here: salvation is not ours because of works. Though we obviously should be engaged in doing good deeds, we are not going to lose our salvation by a failure to amass enough of them.

4) We are not going to lose our salvation by some kind of last-minute slip. Recently I heard an elderly Christian gentleman explaining that he had always believed that when you prayed for forgiveness God would forgive everything that had happened up until then, but the very next time you sinned, God put down a mark in his book. One mark, then two, then three, and so on, until you again prayed asking for forgiveness, and then God would wipe it off and start all over. This man had been pretty nervous about this system because he was afraid that some of those marks might be there when he died.

The Apostle John set my mind at rest concerning this. John says, "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). The tense of the Greek verb here signifies an on-going action. In other words, we could say, "The blood of Jesus

Christ his Son is in the process of keeping us clean." That's the promise we enjoy through the blessed covenant relationship we have with God through Christ. Our sins are atoned for and the goodness of Christ is credited to us as our sins are credited to him. As long as we're in Christ, we stand justified.

Now, I don't recommend that you go out and test this by committing a quick sin just before you die, but neither do I want you to go through life worrying, "I might sin and then die before I could pray and thus lose my salvation." Not so. In Christ we are self-confessed sinners living in an attitude of penitence expressed in thanksgiving to God. If you're in Christ Jesus, walking in the light (and that does not mean living perfectly; it can't), in fellowship with him, then you have nothing to fear.

5) Finally, you cannot lose your salvation through some "accidental foul-up." I don't know what else you might be thinking might cause you to lose your salvation. Maybe somebody fouled up in the record-keeping or something! No, don't worry. Instead, listen to Jude when he says in verses 24-25 of his little book, "Now to him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you without blemish before the presence of his glory with rejoicing, to the only God, our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and for ever. Amen." And I would say, "Amen!"

How Might We Be Lost?

Now, if all I've written heretofore is true, then you might well ask, "How, then, can a saved person become lost?" Basically, I would answer by saying that a person who is in Christ Jesus may lose his soul only by a deliberate, willful rejecting of Jesus, the only Savior.

As Christians, we made a choice to come to Jesus. So far as I know, coming to Jesus does not remove from us the free will that allowed us to come in the first place, and it is possible, through various hardnesses of heart and lusts of the flesh that are not caught in check that we might reach the point of willfully rejecting the Christ. Let's briefly look at a few of the scriptures which seem to indicate that a person can lose his soul after coming to Christ. In each case it has to do with willfully rejecting Jesus.

Look, for example, at Galatians 5 where Paul writes concerning those who want to be saved by observing the Law of Moses: "You are severed from Christ; you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace" (5:4). Notice that the person is described as being "severed from Christ." That will cause you to lose your soul because there is salvation in no other. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life," Jesus taught. "No one comes to the Father but by me" (John 14:6). These people had willfully rejected the salvation offered in Christ, choosing instead to try to be justified by their own efforts. To reject Christ is to be lost.

Another scripture we should notice is in Hebrews 3 where the writer warns, "Take care, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God" (3:12). The writer goes on to assure us that if only we hold on to our confidence in Christ to the end, then we share in Christ. But if we let an unbelieving heart displace our trusting heart so that we cease to have faith in God through Christ, then we fall away from the living God.

Let's look also at 2 Peter 2:20-22. Peter writes concerning false prophets and says:

For if after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our

Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overpowered, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than, after knowing it, to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. It has happened to them according to the true proverb, the dog turns back to his own vomit, and the sow is washed only to wallow in the mire.

Here, again, when you look at the context you see a very deliberate turning away from Jesus Christ to depend on some other means of salvation.

One other important scripture is Hebrews 10:26, which deals with very willful sin. It concerns a person who has obviously been saved at one time because that person is described as having once been sanctified, but now has “profaned the blood of the covenant,” “spurned the Son of God,” and “outraged the Spirit of grace.” Apparently, that is possible to do. Why else would the Bible speak so severely about it? But notice—again the person being described is one who very willfully turns away from God by rejecting Christ. Yes, if you “spurn the Son of God” you are in a great deal of trouble. You have rejected the only sacrifice that can take away sin, and you are lost.

But after we acknowledge all of this, why should we make ourselves miserable by giving undue emphasis to these things and not appreciating the marvelous blessings and security provided for those who abide in Christ?

Till I die, I will not deny my integrity.

Job 27:5

What If . . . ?

I participated in a discussion along these lines some time ago and someone came up with a rather bizarre “what if” scenario to try to put all of this into more concrete terms. He asked me, “What if a Christian man came up to you, shot you dead, and then was immediately gunned down by policemen just arriving on the scene? Would he lose his soul?” It is a bizarre situation, I grant you, but here we have a man who has placed his faith in Christ and has entered into a covenant with God through Christ, and yet, for whatever reason, he commits a murderous act and then dies on the scene in a hail of bullets. Would he lose his soul?

Twenty years ago I would have answered quickly, “Yes, indeed!” Now, though, I’m not nearly so quick to answer. There are too many things I don’t know and can’t know. Why did he gun me down? Did he perceive me to be a real threat to someone God had given him to protect? Was he sane or insane? Had he not been gunned down, was he the sort of person Peter was when he cut off a man’s ear very deliberately intending to split the fellow’s head open, the sort of man who would later have repented bitterly and prayed to God for forgiveness? Or was this man the kind of person who was defiantly committing murder saying, “I don’t care what God says, I hate that man, and I intend to kill him!”?

You see, we don’t know. And we didn’t have time to find out because he died so quickly.

So, what do we have to do? We have to leave all of this kind of thing in the hands of God where it belongs. We must let him

make the righteous judgments, and we must stay out of the business of determining who is going to be saved and who is to be lost.

Rejoice in Your Salvation!

Essentially, what I am telling you is to rejoice in your salvation! I believe it is very secure indeed in Jesus Christ. Oh, I don’t think it is impossible for you to lose it. You could, if you wish, become evil, hard-hearted

and turn away from Christ, and lose it. But I’ll assure you that you will never lose your salvation because of a little careless act, because of the weakness that we all have, or because of some little slip-up along the way. You see, the loving God who sent his Son to die to take care of all of these things has purchased your salvation, and in him all of his children are completely secure as they abide in Christ. And so, with Paul, we rejoice: “Thanks be to God!”

This article is a reprint from the May 1996 issue of *The Christian Appeal*, an upbeat, encouraging magazine based at 2310 Anna Street, Amarillo, Texas 79106; \$7 per year sub. Lyndon Latham, the author of “Can I Lose My Salvation?”, is a well-respected teacher and preacher currently serving as a shepherd of God’s people in Amarillo, Texas.

Light Can Shine Through Brokenness

KAREN PEARSON

In her book entitled *God Uses Cracked Pots*, Patsy Clairmont speaks about our brokenness here on earth:

Picture an empty pot with a network of cracks down the front. Now imagine that pot filled with light and a lid put on top. Where does the light shine through? The cracks. That is the same way the Lord’s light shines through our lives. Not so much by what we do naturally, but by what he must do in us supernaturally for it to be so . . . My prayer for myself is that his light shines through my cracks!”

I agree with Patsy. I hope God’s light will shine through the cracks in my life. I was born with a very obvious crack in my “pot.”

I was the second of five children. My mother had no significant difficulties with

the pregnancy, but when I was born, there was a lump on the calf of my right leg. My mom pointed it out to the doctor, who said, “It’s probably just birth trauma; don’t worry about it unless it grows.” By the time I had been home from the hospital a few weeks, the lump had grown to the size of an egg. A biopsy found the lump to be malignant cancerous sarcoma.

The doctors told my parents they must amputate my leg to save my life. My dad remembers being told I had a 20% chance of survival. On Halloween Day, October 31, 1961, at just seven weeks old, my right leg was amputated above the knee. My mom says I cried for what seemed like a week. She also remembers that I responded to one particular nurse who would hold me and sing to me. I am thankful that my childhood memory doesn’t go back far enough to remember that traumatic time in my life.

My parents brought me home and we tried to continue on with our lives. The doctors told them the first three years were critical—if they had not gotten all the cancer, it could show up somewhere else. But I grew, and smiled, and crawled and soon they had to fit me for a prosthesis because I wanted to walk. After three years there were no signs of cancer.

Living With Disability

Now came the hard part: learning to live with a physical disability. As the years went by the life and death concern was replaced with learning how to cope with being “different.” I remember the first day of kindergarten. Somehow in my five-year-old mind, I had it figured out, even though my sister and brothers all had two legs—I convinced myself that everyone my age (born in 1961) had only one leg. I was looking forward to meeting others who were like me. Imagine my surprise (and disappointment) when I got to school and realized I was the only one! My growing up years were filled with ups and downs. I wrestled with “Why?” and then “Why me?”

High school was especially frustrating since I was an average teenage girl who wanted to date. Boys were too scared of or misinformed about me. I went through times of wishing I hadn’t survived the surgery, of wishing I could be like everyone else. I told God about all the great things I could have done if I only had two legs!

When it was time to go to college, I decided to go into a helping profession, since that was something I could do. I majored in occupational therapy at Western Michigan University. One of the courses recommended to me was a “Death & Dying” class, because some time or other I might have to deal with a dying patient. I

had no idea that this class would help my own personal growth.

Dealing With Loss

We studied the five stages of grief/loss theorized by Dr. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, who worked extensively with terminally ill patients. She explained that there are stages a person goes through when faced with the knowledge that death will be soon. My instructor said these stages could be applied generally to almost any loss in life. The stages are:

1. Denial — A buffer from reality.
2. Anger — Feelings of rage, envy, or resentment.
3. Bargaining — Trying to enter into an agreement with God to postpone the inevitable.
4. Depression — Stress caused by the added difficulties and realization of the inevitable.
5. Acceptance — Coming to terms with reality and no more struggle.

A light bulb went off in my head! I had been experiencing these stages in my life as an amputee! I was grieving over the loss of my leg. Just knowing this and being able to express it to others really helped me into the acceptance stage. But during those years I would easily fall back into one of the other four stages when something—some event or problem—suddenly came up. How I wanted to stay in the acceptance stage!

Living In The Sixth Stage

Today I would challenge Dr. Kubler-Ross to add one more stage to her list and that would be: Surrender to Jesus Christ. It wasn’t until after I became a Christian in 1988—when I made a commitment to Jesus and made him Lord of my life—that I found I was staying in the acceptance stage for a

long time. When I committed my life, I also committed everything I am—including my broken, cracked “pot”—to Jesus. He helped me to see, as I grew in knowledge of him, that he loves me just this way! I didn’t have to have two legs or be a beauty queen or an “A” student or a highly-paid professional for him to love me.

I continue to be in the “surrender” stage. There are still times of frustration—both physically and emotionally. Life is not a bed of roses. For example: Seeing myself on video tape for the first time was difficult. I watched myself on video limping down the aisle at my wedding, and I thought: “I look so handicapped! Is that what people see first? If the inside of me could only show on the outside!” In my head I walk with the most beautiful, proper gait. But the Lord quietly teaches me humility and not to judge others by their outward appearances.

Another example of frustration has been in trying to care for a newborn infant using crutches for the first few weeks. Since my prosthesis fits so high on my leg, it was necessary for me to wait to wear it until my body was healed up. It was so frustrating not being able to carry my baby from place to place. I learned to ask for help. The Lord

showed me that it’s OK to let others serve us and that we are all interdependent. My mom and mother-in-law were a terrific help.

Recently doctors have told me that the odds of having cancer at such a young age and surviving it are extremely small. Isn’t God’s plan for me truly miraculous? He doesn’t care about odds or percentages! I no longer struggle inside about why this has happened to me. After surrendering it to the Lord, I now have inner peace and no bitterness.

What crack is there in your life? It may be physical or emotional or spiritual. It may be a back injury or a divorce or a strong-willed child. It may be an addiction or a seemingly irreconcilable disagreement with your spouse. Wherever you experience loss or the lack of strength to cope with a problem, there is a crack.

The Lord wants us to surrender these cracks to him so that he can shine brightly through them. I’ve learned that if we surrender these things to him, day by day, we will be able to look back and see how he has shone through them. I encourage you to “stay in the surrender stage” and allow God to shine through the cracks in your life.

Karen Pearson continues to work part-time as an occupational therapist. She lives in Mt. Pleasant, Michigan, with her husband Steve and two daughters, Heidi and Sarah.

Welcome To The “We’ve Got It Right” Society*

NATHAN GREEN

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to take this opportunity to welcome you to the 102,076th weekly meeting of the We’ve Got It Right Society. For those of you who are new and just visiting

or looking around, I thought I would give you a brief history of our organization. I do ask that those of you who are already members carefully watch the visitors to make sure that they are following all the rules.

*All names are fictitious and are not intended to describe any specific person.

“OK, now, where was I? Ah yes, that’s it—History. This organization was founded some 2,000 years ago. Give or take a few years, of course. The gentleman who founded this society based it on love and grace—his own love and also the love of those around us, and the grace of his forgiving power.

“Now, of course, early Leaders of the Society have added some small guidelines here and there to the policy to help guide us in our path. But that was for our own good. If you will notice, there is a small pamphlet located at each seat. In it is the word-for-word translation of what our founding father said and set forth for us. The large ten-volume set located upon the cart next to each table is, of course, our revised version, which we lovingly call the Traditions Volumes. They are much easier to follow, and there are a lot fewer (if any) holes.

“Hold on one second, folks, I just saw somebody I used to know walk in . . . John, John McDuffy, well I’ll be . . . it is you! Where have you been? It’s had to have been at least two months since I’ve seen you!”

“Well, Mr. Goodheart, my family and I have had a really hard time of it lately. With me losing my job and all. It’s really . . .”

“Sorry to hear that, John. I’ll have to write that on the ‘don’t forget’ list. Nice seeing you, though. Oh, well, now where was I again? The books . . . I remember now. These books are the most important thing in our organization. So important, in fact, that the large volumes in the carts are the only ones there are. Needless to say, you won’t get a copy. Those of us in charge can take care of letting you know what the rules are. Besides, the rules in the revised version are just automatically known. They have been for generations.

“Now, don’t worry, we will give you a copy of the pamphlet, but then, of course, there is no need to study that either. We

have some very learned men who have dedicated their lives to studying it and they can take care of telling you what it all means. So even though we are giving you a copy, don’t waste your time reading outside the meetings. You might learn something different, and then we would have to waste our time telling you how wrong you are and how right we are. The Founder did, after all, give us all the answers.”

“Excuse . . . Excuse me, Mr. Goodheart. The reason I came tonight was to ask for some help. Ever since I lost my job my wife and I have been having some marital problems. She’s starting to say that she no longer loves me, and I just don’t know . . .”

“Like I said already, John, I’m sorry to hear that. But thank you, that brings up a good subject for us to talk about: Love. That is what this organization is all about. Love for each other is the cornerstone for us here at the **We’ve Got It Right Society**. The Founder based his whole ministry upon that single concept, as if it would be enough, though. That is, of course, why we have the Traditions Volumes. Love is too broad a thing to give without guidelines. There are just too many differences in opinion to let everything rest on love.”

“Mr. Goodheart, please. I really need . . .”

“Excuse me, folks. Now, John, I know that you are having some problems and I can appreciate that. But we are kind of busy telling these people about love and what we are all about. If you wouldn’t mind, please come back tomorrow. Now you take care, John, and may the Founder bless you. That’s a good man.

“Well, sorry about that, folks. Mr. McDuffy came to us about five months ago, and he seems to have more problems than anyone I’ve ever met. Don’t get me wrong, now, I’m not upset that he is here or that he is one of us. At least now he has a chance

to reap the final benefits of the Founder.”

“Mr. Goodheart, I don’t mean to interrupt, but didn’t John belong to the organization before he came here?”

“No, Lindsey, no he didn’t. He belonged to one of those other groups that like to consider themselves an organization.”

“But Mr. Goodheart, don’t they use the same pamphlet there as we do here? And don’t they follow it word for word?”

“Now, Lindsey, you must learn to be careful, you are letting your questioning youth get the best of you. They might claim to follow the Founder, but that is just not true. They have all of these strange ideas as to how to direct their meetings and how to thank the Founder. They don’t follow the Traditions Volumes, and they most certainly do not do what the Founder says!”

“But Mr. Goodheart . . .”

“Now, Lindsey, I’m trying to talk to these guests, not you. Just trust in me that

these other groups do things that they should not and they don’t live in the proper fear of the Founder.”

“Excuse me, sir, my name is Thomas, and I know that I’m just a visitor, but didn’t you say that the Founder also preached of grace? Wouldn’t living in fear be contradictory to the promise of grace?”

“Well, Tom, I can see that you must have been talking to young Lindsey here. We in charge of the organization take the ‘better safe than sorry’ approach. If the Founder didn’t say it, then we just don’t do it. It’s that simple.”

“If that is the case, then what about the Traditions Volumes? You yourself said that you made those up. I just can’t understand the difference.”

“Well, Tom, that’s why we are here. To help those like you see the difference. To help the whole world understand what the Founder’s love and grace are really all about.”

Nathan Green, a third-year student at David Lipscomb University in Nashville, Tennessee, assists in editing for the school newspaper.

College Bound: A Primer for Parents

MATT SCHANTZ

In just a few short weeks, your child will be off to college. I know it’s hard to believe. How fast the years have gone! You remember when they weren’t old enough to cook their own Pop Tart! Can they make it on their own now? How will they ever manage without you?

But as a Christian parent another question may linger in your mind. At least I hope it does. And that is, “How can I help my child in her or his Christian faith

while they are in the midst of a very secular environment?”

Many Christian parents are asking that same question these days. In fact, the overwhelming majority of Christian students will decide to attend secular colleges and universities. How can we better prepare them for the challenges they are going to face? I want to give four very practical suggestions that you can utilize as a parent or youth minister to help your child succeed spiritually in college.

1. Develop Great Relationships

As you know, teenagers are extremely perceptive. They can spot a fake ten miles away. They need to have modeled for them a genuine, dynamic relationship with Jesus. This is foundational, of course, to the rest of the ideas discussed in this article.

College preparation must not begin the summer after their senior year. It must start eighteen years earlier. Your child's spiritual success in college is determined long before they arrive on campus. First, our children need to know we are truly committed to Christ and that he is Lord of our life. Our own relationship with Christ will flow into our son or daughter through the honest, fun-loving friendship that we have developed with them. A great friendship with our kids is vital because this generation tends to learn more about God through relationships than facts. We can teach them Bible stories until we are blue in the face but if we don't live a life committed to Christ, they will simply shrug them off as moral platitudes.

Several articles could be written on this point alone, but let us simply ask a few key questions of ourselves:

- Do we demonstrate consistency in our walk with God?
- Are we committed to Christ wholeheartedly, no pretense?
- Do we enjoy the Christian life? If the Christian life is nothing but a boring drudgery of rule-keeping, we should not expect our children to continue in the faith when they leave home.
- Do our children see a dynamic faith lived out in our home throughout the week? (Or is Christianity just an event reserved for Sunday morning?)
- Are we willing to admit fault when we blow it in front of our kids?

It is important to note that even if we answer affirmatively to all of the above

questions, it does not guarantee that our child will stay close to God. Each of us makes our own choices and sometimes peers have more influence on kids than parents. But if our aim is to answer "yes" to the above questions, there is a good possibility that our faith will be contagious and our children will want to be followers of Christ as well.

2. Follow-Through

Write them. I wish I had saved the weekly letters my mom wrote me when I was in college. I'm sure I could compile them into quite a book. They were a constant reminder that I was loved and prayed for; and the wisdom they contained helped keep me on the right path.

You may also want to get an E-mail account. One of the best investments you could make as a parent is to get a computer and get hooked up to America On-Line or another of the many on-line services. E-mail is the rave on campus and it doesn't look like it is going away any time soon. Use this technology to stay in touch with today's college student, and they might even write you back. :)

Go visit a campus ministry and introduce them to the campus minister. I get calls often from parents who say, "Could you go visit my son or daughter, but don't tell them who sent you?" So I go and stand at the student's door, feeling much more like the Hoover vacuum cleaner man than somebody endorsed by their parents, and say, "Hi! I'm Matt. You have no idea who I am or how I got your name. Won't you come to one of our Bible studies?" How much better it would be to simply be up front, saying, "I'm not trying to force you into anything, you can make your own choices about where to get involved spiritually, but I mentioned your name to the campus minister so he may drop by to pay

you a visit." Or better yet, take the campus minister out to lunch with your son or daughter before school starts in the fall (hint, hint). I've never met a campus minister who didn't like to eat; and that would provide a casual atmosphere for him or her to get to know your teen.

Support a campus ministry where they attend. We invest thousands of dollars in youth ministers, youth programs, youth camps and then often when they turn eighteen we say, "See ya!" and somehow expect them to make it on their own. We need to stay involved by supporting a campus ministry both prayerfully and financially.

3. Discuss Upcoming Decisions

Discuss with them some of the decisions they may face at college. There are several major decisions that college students face.

Friendship Decisions

So much has to do with proper peer relationships. Those who find godly friends tend to thrive spiritually. Those who don't, won't. The right peer relationships seem to make all the difference. If we can get our college student connected with other students who are followers of Christ, there is a great possibility that they will grow spiritually as well. On the other hand, if their closest friends are involved in partying, there is a great possibility that eventually they will be, too. As the scripture says, "Do not be misled: Bad company corrupts good character."

Faith Decisions

I still remember coming into college, freshman year, all that freedom. It was decision time. I asked myself a hard question, "Do I really believe in God personally or is it just something my parents believe?" An interesting phenomenon began to occur.

No one woke me up for church anymore. No one seemed to care if I was a part of Christian fellowship anymore. I soon realized that this "God Thing," as I called it, was mine to pursue or neglect. We need to help our kids wrestle through these decisions.

One way to do this is to *help our future college students know why they believe what they believe*. As John Thybault, campus minister at Western Michigan University, has said, "For too long the home has been used as the entertainment center rather than the equipping center." If they don't leave our home with a genuine and competent faith, it will be very difficult for them spiritually while in college. The response "Because my church says so" doesn't cut the mustard on the college campus. We need to equip our son or daughter with some basic answers to the most asked questions. This might involve taking your son or daughter through a short, informal lesson on apologetics (defending the faith), teaching them the basics of why they believe what they believe. Ask them why they believe in God? Why do they believe the Bible is God's Word? Why do they believe that Jesus rose from the dead? Help them formulate responses to some of those questions. There are several good resources at Christian bookstores on this subject.

Financial Decisions

Students are often easy targets for credit card companies. Almost every day on campus there is someone representing a credit card company trying to give you a free tee shirt or mug if you sign up for their credit card. And many students sign up only to find out they can't overcome the temptation to spend beyond their means. Students need to be taught to manage credit cards. I have counseled with students on several occasions who carry credit card balances of

over \$5,000. Many of them seem to think they are doing fine if they can just make the minimum payment, but they don't understand all the interest this incurs over time.

Gambling is also a temptation that students will face. InterVarsity Press reports, "The fastest growing addiction among college students today is gambling." And it is not hard to understand why. Students are natural risk takers. They love to do something difficult, to step out of comfort zones. This can be used positively in that they love challenges. If we challenge them with regard to their faith in Christ, there is no telling what might be accomplished for the Kingdom. But there is a negative side to risk taking. When it is coupled with greed, it can lead to a very dangerous addiction.

Freedom Decisions

The greatest thrill for the college student will be the tremendous amount of freedom they will experience. If they have not learned to handle little freedoms up to this point, the tremendous freedom they have in college may overwhelm them.

In order to help students handle freedom, I would encourage parents to involve their son or daughter in a **short term mission experience**. These experiences will stretch the teen and help them to see a world beyond themselves. A mission experience will help them understand what it means to be different in another culture and still honor Christ, a lesson well learned for standing strong amidst the culture of the college campus. There are a number of exceptional organizations that offer short term, cross-cultural experiences that will deeply challenge them in their faith and give them a taste of responsibly handling significant freedom.

Focus Decisions

Usually the life of a man or woman is

brought into focus during the college years. Prior to college it is difficult to see what this person might become, but after college there is much more of a clarity in life focus. This is primarily because college students stand on the threshold of the most major decisions they will ever make. There are three vital decisions that will put into concrete what their lives are going to be about. They will decide what to do:

- 1) Occupationally — vocation or career.
- 2) Relationally — to remain single or to marry and, if so, whom to marry, as well as the type of friends they will associate with.
- 3) Spiritually — how they will live, for whom and for what purpose.

I like to put these three decisions into three words: Mission, Mate and Master. And these are pretty heavy decisions. Discuss with your teen your personal experiences as well as giving some guidelines for making these types of decisions.

One great focus decision that a student can make even before they arrive at college is to decide to be a **missionary on the college campus**. Stuart Briscoe once asked a lady in his congregation what she did for a living. She leaned over to him and thoughtfully responded, "I am a disciple of Jesus Christ cleverly disguised as a machine shop operator." I really believe a great focus for a college student would be to go to college not just to study or grow socially, but to go to college as a missionary, saying "I am a disciple of Jesus Christ cleverly disguised as a college student."

Fraternity and Sorority Decisions

Many students have to make decisions about joining a fraternity or sorority. Let me be blunt. There are much better ways to make close friends than to pay for them. Not only that, but most of the activities in fraternities and sororities involve immoral-

ity. It is very, very difficult to be a Christian witness from within. Only a few have the fortitude to do it. A better source of friendships is an active campus ministry. We have a little saying at His House Christian Fellowship around Rush time when everyone is making pledges to fraternities. We say, come join the "Fraternity for Eternity."

Faculty Decisions

Help students understand that just because people have a Ph.D. by their name doesn't mean they are always right. I had a class where the professor said in a lecture that "God is the ultimate child abuser because he allowed his son to be killed when he could have stopped it, and that is why we have child abuse problems in this country." I was in shock as the rest of the class gullibly wrote the statement in their notes.

If there is one thing I have learned in the last ten years on campus it is that intelli-

gence and wisdom are not synonymous. There are professors who make absurdly foolish statements, but because they are respected, students believe what they say. Students need to have a critical ear when it comes to the education they receive.

4. Pray for them.

John Robenault, campus minister at Northern Michigan University, surveyed over 30 college students, asking them: "If you were a parent, what is the most important thing you would do to prepare your teenage son or daughter to not only survive, but to make an impact for Christ in college?" Their overwhelming number one response was: "pray for them." We dare not underestimate the power of a loving God to take care of our children. After all, he is the only one who wants them to succeed spiritually even more than we do.

Matt Schantz and his wife, Bethany, reside in Mt. Pleasant, Michigan, where he has served as Campus Minister at Central Michigan University for the last five years.

"Are you still holding on to your Integrity?!"

-Job 2:9

Job's wife couldn't believe her husband's tenacity. But with Job, holding on was a good thing. With you, dear reader, it's *not!*

Please pass on your issue of *Integrity* to someone you know who would benefit from this ministry. Or, if you just can't bear to part with it, photocopy it! Or write us—or e-mail us (see back cover for our address) and tell us your friend's name. We'll be happy to add them to our subscription list.

**So let go of your Integrity.
Pass it on!**



Rejoice in the Lord

HENRIETTA C. PALMER

As a grandmother of four teens who will soon be approaching college age, I have prayerfully considered the enormous pressures and temptations they face.

Christian values are under daily attack in the world around us. Bible study, church attendance and prayer are considered foolish by unbelievers. Faith in God's promises, belief in Jesus, and the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives are all ridiculed by the agnostic. Honesty, patience and brotherly kindness are often confused with "wimpiness" instead of Christ-likeness. In many schools and neighborhoods young Christians are taunted because they refuse to smoke, drink alcohol and "do drugs."

Life styles that appear attractive and exciting are often flaunted on television, in movies and songs, and in sex-exploitive advertising. Young people are bombarded with messages of "live for the moment," "do your own thing," and "if it feels good, do it!", encouraging them to ignore their parents' concern and reject standards that seem to inhibit their quest for personal freedom.

In a recent article, "Preaching Morality in an Amoral Age," Tim Keller asks, "How can you blow the whistle when people don't believe there are rules?" He explains that we no longer live in an *immoral* society — one in which right and wrong are clearly understood and wrong behavior is chosen. Instead, we live in an *amoral* society where "right" and "wrong" are categories with no universal meaning, and everyone "does what is right in his or her own eyes."¹

C.S. Lewis is quoted in Keller's article as saying, "You see, until you decide if there is a God, if Jesus is the Son, and other matters, how can you make an intelligent decision about what is right and wrong about sex? Christians believe what they do about sex *not* because they are old-fashioned, or because they are prudish, but because Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life."

I have taught my grandchildren, who live nearby, in Sunday School. By daily example, their parents have taught them Christian values and the joy of living in Christ. Yet, as my grandchildren go forth to college and to the world of work beyond, I know they'll encounter new friends and new situations. My prayer continues to be: . . . that God keep them close to him, . . . that the Truth in Jesus will always influence their decisions, . . . that their choices in life will reflect their love for God and his Word, . . . and that their lives touch others who are searching for a closer relationship with the God of all creation.

I challenge my grandchildren, and God's children all over the world, to remember the promises of God and hold fast to your faith! Encourage yourselves with the words of these songs as you face each new day.²

Sing and Rejoice in the Lord!

Seek Ye First The Kingdom of God

And his righteousness;
And all these things shall be added unto you;

Allelu, alleluia!

(Matt. 6:33) (Words and music by K. Lafferty)

The Steadfast Love of the Lord Never Ceases,

His mercies never come to an end;
They are new every morning;
Great is thy faithfulness.

"The Lord is my portion," says my soul,
Therefore I will hope in him."

(Lamentations 3:22-24)

(Words and music by Amy Bessire)

There is No Condemnation,

For those who are in Christ Jesus.

There is no condemnation

For those who are in Christ Jesus.

For the law of the spirit of life in Christ
Has set me free from the law of sin and death.

There is no condemnation

For those who are in Christ Jesus.

(Arranged by Gary Mabry)

Praise the Name of Jesus

Praise the name of Jesus!

He's my rock; he's my fortress;

He's my deliverer, In him will I trust.

Praise the name of Jesus!

(Words and music by Roy Hicks, arranged by Reid Lancaster)

Endnotes

1. Tim Keller, "Preaching Morality in an Amoral Age," in *Leadership Journal*, 465 Gundersen Drive, Carol Stream, IL 60188, Winter 1996, p.112-14.
2. *Rejoice and Sing* (Paperback Songbook), Sweet Publishing Co., Fort Worth, TX 76137, copyright 1984, 63 pp.

Henrietta C. Palmer teaches Bible classes at the Troy Church of Christ in Troy, MI, where her husband, Bill, is an elder. They have both served on *Integrity's* Board for over fifteen years. Henrietta is a retired elementary school principal who has a genuine love for young people—including her four grandchildren and all the students she has taught in the past 40 years.

Bending the Twig

BY LAQUITA AND ELTON HIGGS

A close friend at church, a single mother, was telling us about her difficulties with her 15-year-old daughter. Nothing too serious yet, but the mother was feeling very hurt and scared by the loud, unruly defiance. She related how she had told her daughter not to dye her hair, and the daughter proceeded to do it that very night. Such stories are all too familiar to parents of teenagers.

We endured several years with a rebellious teenage daughter, and one thing that sticks out in our minds was that we had to learn to lower our expectation of what we could control in her life. We had to let some things go—I, her mother, used to close my eyes as she went out the door to school each morning with that heavy eye makeup on. We realized that it was pointless to be quarreling with her over everything that

bothered us, and that we had to save our "battles" for what we considered to be the most important issues, such as a reasonable curfew time. Making such distinctions may require lots of prayer, but prayer is an essential for us parents anyway. Pray for direction for each of these problems as they occur, pray about your talks with your child, pray about your own attitude (it's not always easy to feel kindly toward a rebellious, ungrateful child). And, of course, pray for your child, remembering that the Devil, not your child, is the real adversary, and that the child needs you as intercessor and defender when he or she is spiritually disabled.

We hope that some of you will write and tell us how you have handled problems with teenagers, or give us titles of books that you have found helpful. One that we would like to recommend is *Parents in Pain* by John White (\$11.99; InterVarsity Press). You may wonder about the title, but if you have a teenager who is in serious trouble, then you know how real the pain can be. The author is a Christian psychiatrist and a parent who has "tasted the bitterness of despair" about a teenager who is out of control. White notes that Christian parents sometimes suffer the most, as they tend to measure their own failure or success by how their children turn out. Even the best of Christian homes can produce wayward children, because, as White emphasizes, children make their own choices. As much as we would like to, we can't make those right choices for them. White offers help to parents to learn how to cope with their guilt and their pain, and he offers helpful suggestions as to how to relate to, and how to pray for, our children. One Christian friend of ours said that at one time in her life, White's book was so valuable to her that she almost memorized it. Highly recommended.

On the general subject of parenting, here are two ideas from missionary friends in Taipei, David and Vicky Finch. A number of young couples among the Christians in Taipei are expecting babies, so David and Vicky have had the whole group into their home to pray especially for them and the coming babies. After the children are born, they will all meet again for prayer and pictures. What a good ministry, and one which many of us could do in our local congregation. For couples with young children, the Finches have also started a parenting support group which is studying a book by Lynn Clark, *SOS! Help for Parents*. David and Vicky report that they are learning more effective methods of discipline for their children, and, consequently, each of the families has seen an improvement in the behavior of the children and a decrease of tension in the home.

The Beginner's Bible

For the younger children, we recommend Karyn Henley's *The Beginner's Bible*. At first I thought its size, about that of a "big person's" Bible, was too large for a little child, but our 2-year-old Rachel loves it. We keep it on our bedroom table, beside our own Bibles, so Rachel gets a story from it on many mornings and often wants to look at it at other times. It is written in simple language, so that beginning readers can read from it, and the illustrations on every page are most attractive. Rachel has given her own titles to her favorite stories: "Giant" (translation: David and Goliath) and "Helper" (the Good Samaritan). Would be a wonderful gift for any young child.

Enough for now. Remember that this is supposed to be your column. Write and give us your suggestions and comments (9 Adams Lane, Dearborn, Michigan 48120 or e-mail "Ehiggs@umich.edu"). Thanks in advance for your contributions!

Readers' Response

I was fascinated by your recent essay in which you related your "experience" of hearing God speak to you. God hasn't said a word to me in seventy-three years. After your "revelation," I'm wondering why. I've made many requests, as I'm sure other Christians have. Are you saying that if we nag long enough, God will get aggravated with our foolish requests and speak to us?

In the past, I thought if I didn't get an affirmative response to my prayers, it apparently was not God's will to grant my requests (I John 5:14). Where did I go wrong?

However, I am not concerned that God has not spoken to me—I think I'm in pretty good company. According to their own testimony, God never spoke to Luther, Calvin, Wesley, Booth, Barnes, McKnight, Strong, Warfield, Hodge, Campbell, Scott, Lard, McGarvey, Lipscomb, Woods, Ketcherside, Warren or Garrett. In addition to these august leaders, another cloud of witnesses would include hundreds of other dedicated Christian leaders, as well as thousands who have given their lives for faith in Jesus; yet they heard not a single word of comfort from Jehovah himself. Strange and remarkable, isn't it?

Conversely, according to their own testimony, God has spoken to the Gnostics, the Popes, Joseph Smith, Mary Baker Eddy, Charles Taze Russell, Aimee McPherson, Jim Jones, Jim Bakker, Jim Swaggart, Oral Roberts, Kenneth Copeland, Kenneth Hagin, and David Koresh, and now you. How comfortable are you to include your name with this group?

Some of us (your readers) have a few questions: was it necessary that God speak to you individually? If yes, why? If not, can you cite scriptural examples of things done by God that were not necessary? If we

direct our prayers with the same persistence as you, will God speak to us the same as he did you? If not, why not?

G. H. Roux
Illinois

Why do we who study the Bible and know what it says have so much difficulty in seeing that baptism is necessary for salvation? From Jesus' statements in Mt. 28:19, 20 and Mark 16:15 through the book of Acts to Peter's statement in I Peter 3:21, baptism is constantly commanded, obeyed and taught as necessary to be saved. Why did Peter answer the Jews as he did on the day of Pentecost? If it wasn't necessary to be baptized, why not tell them so at that time?

I understand that "salvation is by grace through faith" and that we cannot earn our salvation. However, God's grace is conditional upon our willingness to do his will. If it is "legalism" to insist on obedience to the commands of God, then I confess that I am a "legalist."

Instead of trying to explain why we don't need to do what the Bible tells us, wouldn't it be better to just obey from the heart and know we have done the will of the Lord?

Dwight P. Mowrer
Oklahoma

I was thoroughly disgusted with the "Is Baptism Necessary for Salvation?" article. There was absolutely nothing in the article that was of an enlightening nature relative to baptism.

Roy A. Crutcher
California

(letters continued on back cover)