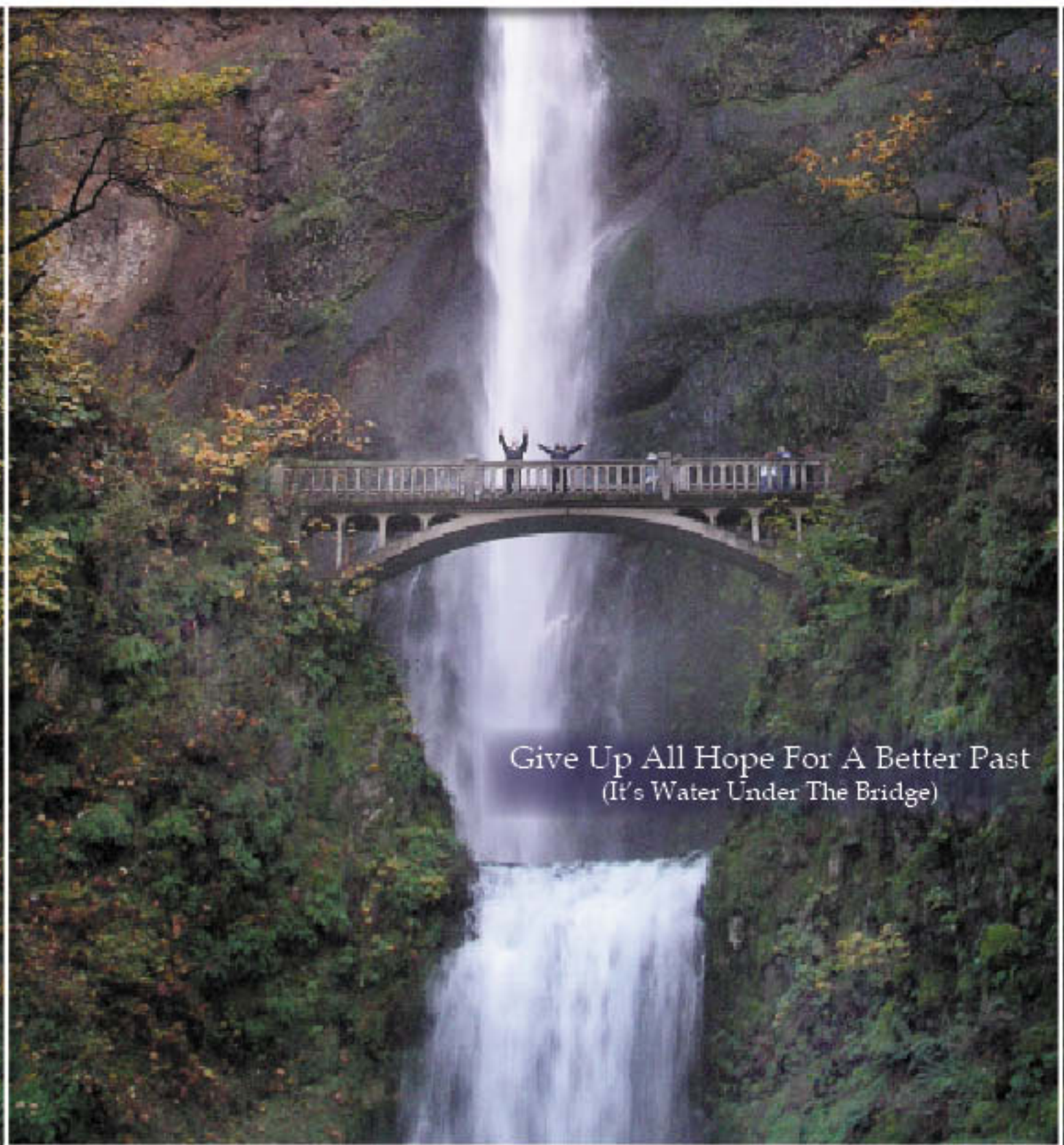


# THE SOWER

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The Sower is the bi-monthly newsletter of Spirit and Truth Fellowship International, a non-profit organization, and is published in Indianapolis, Indiana.



Give Up All Hope For A Better Past  
(It's Water Under The Bridge)

**Note:** This is a text-based version of our bimonthly magazine *The Sower*. It is primarily intended to be read by our third world folks whom can only access it online due to cost restrictions in being able to mail it to them. If you are in a non third world country and would like to receive a free copy of our magazine please fill out the request form at [www.CESonline.org](http://www.CESonline.org)

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# LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

**Mark H. Graeser**

God bless you, and Happy New Year!

My daughter, Anita, is a senior at Earlham College, and was hired by The Plowshares Project over the past two summers to help organize a conference on a theme of peace and justice. This year, one of the speakers was Landrum Bolling, former president of Earlham and an international mediator very experienced in dealing with intense national and ethnic conflicts. He told the audience that, in his experience, one of the hardest things he has to do to achieve peace is to help the conflicting parties “give up all hope of having a better past.”

A better past? Yes, it does sound silly, but all of us work hard to convey to others and ourselves the “right” view of the past. We want others to embrace our interpretation, and particularly when we feel that we have been victimized. Sometimes we want others to acknowledge our pain in the past more than we want their support to help us toward the future. Mr. Bolling rightly pointed out that not even God can do a thing about what has happened in the past, so why should we try? We need to shift our perspective toward the present and future, and not be enslaved by our past.

We need to practice the presence of God in the present, for the present is where God is. When we are out and about, we need to stay aware of God’s presence and power, and pray continually. When in conversations with others, we need to be present and listening with our hearts, ready both to learn from others and to allow God to energize us to speak words of life into the heart of another.

Living in the present fuels vision for the future as God begins to show us what is available. As we respect the law of reaping and sowing, we can make sure we are sowing toward a future worth having. When tempted to behave badly or be distracted by worldly thinking and pursuits, we can ask ourselves if what we are thinking and doing is contributing toward a better future. Generally speaking, we tend to walk into the future that we have prepared for. As the saying goes, when we fail to plan, we plan to fail.

As a ministry, we are moving toward our vision of establishing a global community of committed Christians living the truth in love. Daily we see evidence that we are on track to realize this vision “in due time,” and we greatly appreciate the support that we receive from many of you. In 2004 we saw many more people added to our mailing list, some from new countries not before represented in our community. Because we are a ministry dedicated to empowering others, we are excited about the opportunities we will have to equip the saints for service in 2005. We hope to see you at one of our events this year, or to hear from you how God is blessing your life, or how we may be of service to you.

Yesterday is history. Tomorrow is a mystery. Today is a gift—that’s why it’s called “the present.”

*Mark Graeser*

# HIS TRUTH IS MARCHING ON

2004 was a year of growth and vision for the future.

Last year was another great period of growth for our ministry, and something to celebrate before we launch into the New Year.

Our outreach took several steps forward with the advent of The Good News Class, which was run in dozens of cities for several hundred people. The feedback was very positive, and with the variety of teachers and features in the class, it seems that everyone was excited by some part of it. People loved the whole experience and said they would be inviting their friends to see it the next time, which was our goal.

2004 saw the first wave of Outreach Ambassadors for our ministry, the first four sent to Bloomington, Indiana, and the next three to Nashville, Tennessee. Though we are still working out the details of the program, we are very thankful that seven of our youth stepped up and participated. Their feedback has been very helpful in our continuing to learn how to help the program participants have the best experience they can have.

Our international outreach also continued to grow, as we added people in more than 30 new countries to our mailing list. The Philippines continues to lead our international work in terms of numbers, activities, and growth, but we have seen many other exciting indications that our community is truly becoming global. Moshe Amegashie graced us with his loving and spiritually mature presence at the Servant/Leader conference in September, and is adding much to our French translation work—a key to reaching out in many parts of Africa. Mark's visit to Sweden (in March) also helped to make contacts with a variety of internationals who had relocated there. We moved forward in our translation work, with quite a few of our booklets, some articles from the TruthOrTradition website, and excerpts from a number of our books being translated into various languages, including Arabic, Cebuano (Philippines), French, Korean, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Swahili, Swedish, and Telegu (India). We also were able to add French, Spanish, and Polish articles to our websites.

In the past year we also made many improvements to our websites, beefed up our advertising, and, because of the number of hits they receive, we got a lot of free publicity and access to the main search engines like Google, where we are now quite a presence. Our books are available on Amazon.com, and especially *One God & One Lord* is increasing in sales.

Webmaster **Ryan Maher** reports that in 2004 the BiblicalUnitarian.com site had 100,000 hits and 450,000 page views, and TruthOrTradition.com, launched only this year, ended the year with 240,000 hits and 650,000 page views. This past year, countless people have told us that they found out about us by searching for truth via the internet, and they have been lavish in their enthusiastic appreciation for our websites.

One of the easiest ways to see our growth is to visit the Home Office and try to find a place to park. We have expanded this year to 11 staff members at the Home Office, seven full time, three part time, and Dan Gallagher, who is a volunteer. **Dan and Lori Gallagher's** coming to Indiana this summer has been a big blessing to us. Dan's involvement at the Home Office has been a huge help because he brings his many years of business and management experience, plus an enthusiastic personality and the energy of a small nuclear reactor.

Dan has instituted a weekly production meeting for all the staff, which has been a real boost to office efficiency and teamwork. We have also been blessed to have **John Schoenheit** come up to the Home Office from Bloomington once a week to share in the fellowship and the brainstorming that goes on in the staff meetings.

John completed the necessary work to update and reprint Mackey's *Bible Manners & Customs*. This classic Bible reference has been out of print for years, and is now available in our bookstore. John also finished his work on a book on prophecy that will be published soon. Bob Maffit's son Brad did a great job formatting the second edition of *The Christian's Hope*, which we were able to publish in 2004.

Another wonderful volunteer who made important contributions in 2004 is **Bob Maffit**, who goes over our books and materials to bring them into uniformity of style and to verify every Scripture reference and footnote for accuracy. Bob has also helped us standardize our book format, made necessary because we have had different people helping us with them through the years. Bob particularly distinguished himself in his work on the third edition of *One God & One Lord*, which needed the kind of detailed oversight that he is capable of and loves to do.

We got back on track with the timely publication of *The Sower*, and made the decision to include in it a reduced version of *The Contender* instead of it being a stand-alone publication. We bought Adobe InDesign software that will help us improve the look and readability of all our publications (this issue is the first example of what we can now do).

In 2004 we continued to have our regular camps, conferences, and seminars, but also added some new events. **Jenivee Schoenheit** had a vision for a “Fields of Grace” festival, which occurred on Memorial Day weekend. **Adam Berwid** organized the first West Coast Live Out Loud, held at a fabulously beautiful camp near Monterey, California. We also tried something new this past summer, holding a Midwest Regional Conference the weekend before the Family Camp, but we probably won’t do that again because of the excessive administrative effort it took.

Camp Vision was used extensively in 2004—for Fields of Grace, the Spring Bible Study Conference, two Teen Camps, a Singles Conference, and two Men’s work weekends. Special thanks to those men (and **Lisa Collum!**) who came and helped us get the Camp in shape. Also special thanks and appreciation are due **Ron and Jane Bickel** for moving from Fostoria, Ohio, where they had lived all their lives, in order to help with the caretaking responsibilities at the Camp. 2004 will always be considered a red-letter year because of the wonderful generosity of a couple who gave us the money to purchase Camp Vision from Dan and Lori Gallagher.

Because of concerns about the political situation in Israel, we instead did our first tour of Greece and Rome in the footsteps of the apostle Paul, led by John Schoenheit. We visited Athens, Philippi, Corinth, Berea, Macedonia, Rome, and other sites of interest.

In the Home Office, we also made some significant improvements in our efficiency and the utility of our computer system. Computer programmer extraordinaire **Stephen Noa** overhauled our database in a way that integrated all the various areas that we need to keep track of—event registrations, fellowships, donations, bookstore purchases, etc. We are now able to better serve you and keep track of important data.

This was the year that we had our accountants conduct a complete and thorough audit, and they gave us a clean bill of financial health. 2004 was the first year that we broke the one million dollar mark for total revenues. At the end of the year we had more than 500 monthly partners, and instituted a “1,000 Partner Drive in 2005,” with the goal of doubling our Partners this year.

Many, many thanks to all who helped make 2004 the banner year that it was. Whether you prayed for us, coordinated a fellowship that was connected to us, were a financial contributor, attended one of our events, or were a part of the ministry in another way, we appreciate it. Let’s continue to work together to make 2005 our best year yet. With all of us pulling together in the grace of our Lord, we can move mountains!

# THE VINE

## THE FELLOWSHIP COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

### **Consider the Possibility Affiliates or Spirit & Truth Fellowships?**

During the past year many of the fellowships listed on our website have expressed a desire for greater connection with one another and with the ministry of Spirit and Truth at large. Presently, all the fellowships on the website are considered “Affiliates,” which, according to the designations available, is a more loose form of connecting than being a Spirit & Truth “Fellowship.” Although the Affiliate classification serves those who want that type of bond, it does not necessarily engender the close sense of community that many of us would like to have. We don’t want to discourage any fellowship from allying with us, but our priority must be to serve the needs of those who want to stand as one with Spirit and Truth Fellowship International.

With that in mind, we want to let you know how we see the difference between the two categories, and ask you to let us know whether you would like to be a Spirit and Truth Fellowship or an Affiliated fellowship. Spirit and Truth Fellowships are those that formally affirm the Statement of Beliefs and Code of Conduct. It is possible that individual Spirit and Truth Fellowships would have their own website hosted through the main ministry website. We are also currently exploring the feasibility of Spirit and Truth Fellowships being included under our tax-exempt umbrella.

Collectively, local fellowships with this designation will make up the Spirit and Truth “Fellowship Community.” When planning itineraries, classes, seminars, regional conferences, etc., we intend to focus primarily on serving the needs of the Fellowship Community. As you can see, there are numerous positive possibilities we can explore with the vision that together everyone achieves more (T.E.A.M.).

We would love to have every fellowship that values us and our work be completely at one with us, but we know that will probably not be the case. Therefore, we will continue to provide the Affiliate classification for those that wish to maintain an organizational identity not so closely aligned with us.

If you currently have a fellowship listed as an Affiliate and like the idea of becoming a Spirit and Truth Fellowship, please contact me at [dan@cesonline.org](mailto:dan@cesonline.org) or call me at the Home Office at (888) 255-6189. Please let us know your thoughts; we would really like to hear your input, either pro or con.

Standing with you in spirit and truth,

Dan Gallagher  
Fellowship Community Coordinator

### **Let’s Eat Together!**

Have you struggled with developing a sense of community in your fellowship? Consider the possibility and benefits of sharing a meal together. This may not work for everyone, nor is it something that you might be able to pull off for every gathering, but sharing a meal with others is a proven way of pulling people together. As we used to say in our fellowship, “If you serve it, they will come.”

About two years ago, Lori and I recognized that people were showing up ten minutes before fellowship and then, poof, they would vanish with-in ten minutes of the close. We began to feel a void from not knowing what was really happening in each other’s lives. When we posed the problem to the fellowship, someone suggested we start an hour earlier

and make dinner available. The logic was that this would provide everyone the time to sit and visit. Soon, however, we saw the additional advantage of people being able to save time by coming straight from work, not having to go home to eat first. The meal became a time of ministering and discussing the real problems of one another's lives. Needless to say the idea was a hit, and the fellowship blossomed.

I am always reminded that sharing a meal is following in the tradition of the first century saints in a very real way. We all sensed that we really were following the Lord's directive to "do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19b). There is some work to pulling off eating together, but I think that when you do it, you too will see the benefits.

Dan Gallagher  
Fellowship Community Coordinator

## NEWS THROUGH THE VINE

### **College Fellowship! Indiana University Fellowship Explodes!**

This past semester, Nate Graeser, along with a committed team of disciples, opened their home to the Bloomington, IN community for a weekly fellowship. It didn't take long for the word to spread and the fellowship to take off. Presently there are about 30 college age adults who faithfully attend, with the numbers swelling up to as many as fifty at times. There is hardly any room to move in the small living room of the house, but no one seems to mind.

The fellowship was founded on the idea of "Come as you are." It's a place where people are encouraged to "be real." College students recognize that they don't know it all or have all the answers and are excited to search together for a faith that makes sense.

A healthy community demonstrates diversity, which is very evident here. Those that attend include people who are athletes, fraternity members, longhair, shorthair, black, and white.

Nate reports that praise and worship has been a primary part of the fellowship's success. The entire fellowship is excited about The Good News Class that's scheduled for the later part of January. They expect as many as 25 new students to attend. The only thing that's limiting the growth of this awesome group is the size of their home.

### **Trying to Build a Fellowship? Let's Run a GNC!**

No, we're not suggesting you go into business running a General Nutrition Center in your local mall. But come to think about it, you can run a GNC, and it will give people the best nutrition they can find anywhere. After all, what is more healthy than the "bread of life" or the "meat" of the Word?

What "GNC" are we talking about? You know, The Good News Class, our basic evangelistic and outreach tool. A growing number of fellowships around the country have found it a great way to reach new people with the good news of Jesus Christ and get them involved with their local fellowship family.

If you would like to run a Good News Class in your area, all you need is five new students who are committed to participating in the whole class. Then complete the Class Request form and the Instructors form, and submit them to the Home Office for approval.

You can find the class brochure, flyer, sign-up forms, and class instructor application at our website, [www.CESonline.org](http://www.CESonline.org)

# FUEL FOR THE FIRE

*Fuel for the Fire* is the bi-monthly newsletter written by the  
Teens and Twenties of Spirit and Truth Fellowship.

As of January 1, 2005 the Spirit & Truth Fellowship Youth Council has elected three new members to replace those who are stepping down. We want to recognize those who have served diligently these last two years to ensure that the youth of our community have a voice. Suzanne Hall, Richard Priebe, & Courtney Rogers have all done an amazing job, and the Youth Council is very grateful for all they have sown into Spirit & Truth. We know that each one of them will continue to be an invaluable servant in the Body of Christ for years to come.

Our newly elected members are Jonathan & Bethany Flesher (brother and sister) from Wichita, KS, and Jenee Klotz from Indianapolis, IN. All three of these dynamic people have a desire to serve and bring their talents to the table in order to build our community. Each and every one of us on the Youth Council love you and pray for you and are always open to any feedback you have for us or for the ministry.

## Looking Ahead

Well, once again we start a new year and many of us have a new found sense of goals that we want to accomplish for this year. I (Matthew) have been spurred on by a dear friend to oversee the Teens & Twenties newsletter and make sure that our community feels connected and aware of what Spirit & Truth Fellowship International is doing around the world. As part of that goal, we have incorporated the newsletter into *The Sower*. You have probably also taken note of the fact that we have changed the title from *Alpha & Omega* to *Fuel For The Fire*. It is a title that we feel more appropriately encompasses the heart of what we are trying to accomplish through our youth conferences.

Those who have attended a Teens & Twenties Camp know the analogy that is often shared around the campfire: a stick will burn brightly when it is in the middle of the fire surrounded by other sticks, but if you remove it from the fire, within a few minutes it will cool off. It is the same way in the Body of Christ. When we are in fellowship, we can burn strong for the Lord, but when we become isolated from like-minded believers, we often find ourselves lacking the fire that is necessary to serve the lord Jesus with passion and enthusiasm. It is my hope that *Fuel For The Fire* can serve as just that: a little fuel for your own personal fire to help you in your walk between the camps and conferences that we offer.

The world tries as hard as it can to throw ungodly things our way, and I hope that in *Fuel For The Fire* you will find material that is spiritually uplifting and encourages you in your day-to-day walk. We will continue expanding it, and I encourage you to submit anything you have written or found that you believe would help to build up your fellow believers. Let's work together to build up one another.

# THE CONTENDER

## STRAINING TOWARD WHAT IS AHEAD

**Give up all hope for a better past; our future is filled with the promises of God.**

BY JOHN SCHOENHEIT

It is early on in the New Year, and we can be sure that God and His Son, the Lord Jesus, both want us to make the most of our gifts and talents in this coming year. Each of us is especially equipped by the Lord Jesus to be a blessing to God, the Lord, others, and ourselves, and to be successful (in the biblical sense of the word, not the world's). There is a new year stretching out before us, with opportunities galore, and we need to be "straining toward what is ahead" (Phil. 3:13b). What does that mean, and how can we be most effective for the Lord?

For one thing, we need to be aware that, as hard as we try to move ahead, if our past is acting like an anchor, we will not be as successful as we could be. It is interesting that the same verse saying we should be "straining toward what is ahead" tells us we should be "forgetting what is behind." Or does it? Let's take a closer look at "forgetting."

What an interesting thing memory is. Sometimes we forget things we want to remember, and sometimes we remember things we want to forget. Memory is one aspect of the mind that is not under the direct control of our will. We cannot simply decide to remember or forget certain things. When it comes to memory, it seems our minds have "a mind of their own," and if events in our past are dramatic or painful, our memories of them can be very vivid for years. We can choose not to dwell on past issues, and eventually memories will fade, but to say that we can simply "will" to forget something is not generally true. In light of that, the exhortation in Philippians to "forget" the things that are behind seems strange indeed.

### **Philippians 3:13-15 (NIV)**

(13) Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead,

(14) I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

(15) All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you.

The first key to understanding this section of Scripture is to realize that the Greek text is not translated as well as it could be. The Greek word that almost all versions translate as "forget" is "*epilanthanomai*" (Strong's #1950), which means to "forget," "neglect," "overlook," or "not care about."<sup>1</sup> Although there is no question that *epilanthanomai* can be translated "forget" in some contexts, the question is whether it should be in Philippians 3:13. I assert that it should not, because God would not tell us to do something that we as humans cannot do, i.e., "forget" the past. Thus, in Philippians 3:13, "neglect" is better (hence the CES-ASV translation<sup>2</sup>, "let go of,"), because many things in the past that cannot simply be "forgotten" can be neglected or "let go of."

### **Philippians 3:13 (CES-ASV)**

Brothers, I do not consider myself as having laid hold of *it* yet: but one thing *I do*, letting go of the things which are behind, and straining forward to the things which are before,

The Lord Jesus Christ wants us to “let go of” the past. We may not be able to “forget” what has happened to us, but we can “let go” of it to the end that we are able to stretch forward to things ahead. As the saying goes, the future is (or certainly can be) as bright as the promises of God. The past does not have to act as an anchor, hindering our present and holding us back from a fulfilling and successful future. Nor does it have to be an evil root producing bad fruit in our lives. Scripture warns us about having “roots” in our lives that may spring up and cause trouble.

### **Hebrews 12:15 (CES-ASV)**

exercising oversight, lest anyone is dropping away from the grace of God; *and* lest any root of bitterness, sprouting up, causes trouble, and by it many be defiled;

The phrase “root of bitterness” is a meaningful one. The root of a plant is underground and unseen, but produces fruit that is evident to all. Similarly, there can be things in our past, unseen by today’s onlookers, that produce fruit that not only causes trouble for us, but can also defile others with whom we are in contact.

Philippians does not tell us how to “let go” of the past. In fact, no verse says, “To let go of the past, do the following....” There is a good reason for that: different people have different pasts and different personalities, and what will work for one will not work for another. One person may let go of past hurts easily and look to what is ahead, while another may need more time, prayer, discussion, confession, etc. People are different, so God gives His Word, His wisdom, and His grace to help us utilize different means to let go of the past.

There is a strange irony to bitterness, anger, and unforgiveness, in that they are a “second hurting.” What I mean is this: we usually become bitter, angry, or unforgiving because someone or something has hurt or wronged us, but our bitterness does not help the situation at all. It produces no healing, no righting of wrongs, no justice. Instead, it just hurts us again, often taking a daily toll on our mental, spiritual, and even physical health for years after the original offence. A wise woman (my mother) once said, “Bitterness is a pill that kills the one who takes it.” Why keep it around and let it eat up our lives? No wonder God admonishes us to let go of the past, to forgive others, and to not keep a record of the wrongs done to us (1 Cor. 13:5b).

Effectively letting go of the past requires our “stretching forward to the things which are before.” Read Philippians 3:13 carefully and note the use of the word “one.”

### **Philippians 3:13 (CES-ASV)**

Brothers, I do not consider myself as having laid hold of *it* yet: but **one** thing *I do*, letting go of the things that are behind, and straining forward to the things that are before,

According to this verse, letting go of the past and stretching toward the future are not considered two things, but one. That is because no one can let go of the past and replace it with nothing. We must look to the future in order to effectively let go of the past, and the perfect example of this is Jesus. No one knew better how to let go of the past than he did, and he did it by keeping his eyes on the future and what he wanted to accomplish. He was blameless, but suffered horrible injustices throughout his life, finally being crucified. Was he bitter? No. Did he stretch forth to the future? Absolutely, as the following verse makes clear.

### **Hebrews 12:2 (CES-ASV)**

fixing our eyes on Jesus the author and finisher of the faith, who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, thinking nothing of *the* shame, and has sat down at *the* right hand of the throne of God.

Part of the reason Jesus was so effective in his earthly life was that he kept his eyes on the joy that was set before him in the future. All of us who are saved will be with Jesus, and we look forward to a joyful future in Paradise. More immediately, we can apply the knowledge that letting go of the past and stretching forward to the future are one action by becoming clear on things we want to accomplish in our immediate future. Then we will find that as we fix our eyes on our goal and move aggressively toward it, painful memories of the past, and any accompanying ungodly emotions, quickly become unimportant to us.

Dwelling on the wrongs, injustices, and hurts of the past never helps us lead godly lives. We must, as someone wisely said, “give up all hope of having a better past.” The past was what it was. Dwelling on it and wishing it were better is not the way to success. Each of us has a bright future with God, one we can make even brighter by applying ourselves to His work today.

This brings us back to where we started, that it is early on in the New Year, and that God and His Son, Jesus, both want us to make the most of our gifts and talents in this coming days. Each of us should have an idea of what we want to accomplish this year, and what it will take to get the job done.

For one thing, we must be ready to do some “straining” as we press ahead. In order to best understand this, we need to look at why Philippians 3:13 reads “straining” in some versions, while others read “reaching forth” or “stretching.” The Greek word is *epekteinomai*, and Louw Nida says it means “to reach out or stretch out toward some goal,” and in Philippians 3:13 it “is used figuratively to suggest intense effort as well as firm purpose.”<sup>3</sup> It is “to exert oneself to the uttermost, *stretch out, strain.*”<sup>4</sup> Thus, *epekteinomai*, as it is used here in Philippians, is to stretch forward with such intensity and purpose that “straining forward” (cp. RSV, NRSV) is an excellent translation that communicates both the intensity and forward direction.

The next verse, Philippians 3:14, begins by continuing the thought of “straining forward,” with Paul pressing forward to his goal. The word “press” in verse 14 is from the Greek word *dioko*, which means “persecute,” or “diligently pursue,” depending on the context. So again we see the effort that Paul was making in his life.

True Christianity is not a “comfort zone” thing, but rather going further and doing more for God than a comfortable lifestyle permits. Listen to some of the “uncomfortable” things in the life of the apostle Paul. Besides the beatings and imprisonments, he writes:

### **2 Corinthians 11:26 and 27 (CES-ASV)**

(26) *in frequent journeys, in perils of rivers, in perils of robbers, in perils from my countrymen, in perils from the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brothers; (27) in labor and hardship, in many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and without adequate clothing.*

To be sure, some of Paul’s hardships came from outside sources, but others were due to the fact that he pushed himself hard in times when he could have taken life a little easier. One example was the time at Troas when he taught all night long, and then started a journey the next day (Acts 20:7-11). Paul made his body a slave to his will rather than letting it dictate what he did.

### **1 Corinthians 9:27 (CES-ASV)**

but I treat my body harshly, and make it my slave: lest by any means, after that I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected.

That Paul treated himself harshly should be an example to us. As we start 2005, each of us should examine our lives to see if there are areas where we could stand to treat ourselves a little more “harshly” to be more effective for God.

After we make up our minds to strain forward, press on and be willing to treat our bodies harshly, it is imperative that we have a clear idea of exactly where we are heading. Paul did. He had long-term goals and short-term goals. His life-long goal is expressed in the following verse:

### **Philippians 3:14 (CES-ASV)**

I press toward the goal to *win* the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Paul diligently pursued a life-long goal, the prize of the high calling, which refers to the rewards he looked forward to in the Millennial Kingdom, and the fact that he would be there with others whom he had won for the Lord. Paul understood what each Christian should understand: salvation is by grace, but rewards are earned. The concept is simple: do nothing, get nothing; do a lot, get a lot. Paul intended to get a lot by leading a disciplined life, and even being hard on

himself. He knew that if he obeyed God and fulfilled his calling, he would have a reward. If he did not obey, he would still have the apostolic call of God on his life, because the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable (Rom. 11:29), but he would not be rewarded.

### **1 Corinthians 9:16 and 17 (CES-ASV)**

(16) For if I tell the Good News, I have nothing to boast about; for I am under compulsion; for woe is to me if I do not tell the Good News.

(17) For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if unwillingly, I *still* have an administration entrusted to me.

Each of us, like Paul, has a calling, talents, and abilities, and we get to choose how we are going to be successful and effective Christians. Because our gifts, callings, and life circumstances are different, obedience and “success” are different for each person, but the underlying principles are the same for all of us. Are we going to push ourselves to do much for the cause of Christ, or are we going to settle into a comfortable lifestyle?

Paul’s overall goal was to win rewards in the Kingdom, and by the end of his life, he had confidence that he had achieved just that.

### **2 Timothy 4:7 and 8 (CES-ASV)**

(7) I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

(8) In the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give to me at that day; and not to me only, but also to all those who have loved his appearing.

We, too, can walk for God in such a manner that we can be confident of our rewards. It takes effort, as do all great achievements, but it is well worth it.

Although Paul had a lofty lifetime goal, it is important to recognize that he also had short-term goals that made up his overall calling to take the Word of God to the Gentiles. For example, he wanted to go to Rome (Rom. 1:13-15). He made plans to visit places he had already been so he could support the believers there (Acts 15:36; 2 Cor. 1:15-17). He also set his sights on evangelizing areas not yet reached by the Gospel (2 Cor. 10:14-16). In other words, Paul did not have only the vague idea that he wanted “the prize of the high calling of God.” He had specific things he wanted to accomplish from year to year, and he strained himself to that end.

As we begin 2005, we each need to ask ourselves what we want to accomplish this year and how we are going to do it. One thing is certain, the old saying, “If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail,” is true in almost every situation. If we do not make specific plans, the chances we will get great things accomplished are slim. Do you want to pray more? Good. How are you going to get it done? Do you need more time for study? Where are you going to find the time? It may involve being “harsh” on your body and getting up earlier.

After we make plans and start to do what it takes to see them accomplished, it is important to be honest and evaluate how successful we are. We are to do this with our Christian walk in general, as well as with our specific goals.

### **2 Corinthians 13:5a (CES-ASV)**

Test yourselves *to see* if you are in the faith; prove yourselves.

Examining ourselves is simply a matter of being honest and evaluating how we are doing in our walk. If we set our goals too low, we need to be honest about that and ask more of ourselves. If our goals are too high, we may be frustrated with failure and consider giving up altogether. The proper course is to adjust what we ask of ourselves to a level that we are pushed, but can keep going day after day. After all, we are in this until the Lord returns. If we fall, we must decide to get up again.

### **Proverbs 24:16a (NIV)**

for though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again....

As Christians, we must keep in mind that we are fighting on two fronts. First, there are the ordinary difficulties that challenge every human in this fallen world. Second, there is the spiritual battle that rages around us, with Satan trying to hinder us and stop the work of God in the world. He certainly managed to derail some of Paul's plans.

### **1 Thessalonians 2:17 and 18 (CES-ASV)**

(17) But we, brothers, being orphaned from you for a period of time (in face, not in heart), were all the more eager, with great desire, to see your face:

(18) because we wanted to come to you, indeed, I, Paul, even once and again; but Satan prevented us.

Paul may have been stopped from some of the things he wanted to do, but he kept on going, and so can we. So let us set our sights high, and not settle for a comfortable life. Let us strain forward for the Lord, evaluate our progress, and get back up if we fall down. The rewards, here and hereafter, will be greatly worth it.

[For more information on rewards, The Millennial Kingdom, and Paradise Regained, visit [www.TruthOrTradition.com](http://www.TruthOrTradition.com), Topic: Christian's Hope]

### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Arndt and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1979).

<sup>2</sup> This is the official introduction of what we are currently calling the CES-ASV, the version that we of Spirit & Truth are developing, although right now almost all our effort is going into the New Testament. We call it the CES-ASV because we are using the non-copywrited American Standard Version of 1901 as the base text for our work, and modifying it when needed. The ASV is an outgrowth of the translation project that produced the Revised Version of 1881 (NT) and 1885 (OT). American revisers from nine denominations worked on the ASV: Baptist, Congregationalist, Dutch Reformed, Episcopal, Friends, Methodist, Presbyterian, Protestant Episcopal, and Unitarian. It is a literal translation, like the King James, not a "dynamic equivalent translation," such as the NIV. As with any version, the ASV had avid supporters: "The American Standard version is by far, and in every respect, the best English translation of the Bible in existence..." (Clyde Votaw, *The Biblical World*). Like every version I have ever studied, it has avid detractors, and we expect the CES-ASV will also have both supporters and detractors.

We believe that the ASV is the best choice for a base-text underlying our work, and thus have begun the task of revising and translating it, which currently is occurring at three levels. Level one: correcting the archaic uses of words and obvious mistranslations. For example, "ye" is updated to "you;" "hadst" is updated to "had;" the word "gifts" will be removed from 1 Corinthians 12:1; in many places "the Holy Spirit" will become "holy spirit." Level two: the ASV will be compared with modern Greek texts to produce what we believe is a more accurate translation than it is now. For example, instead of the ASV's "Every scripture inspired of God *is* also profitable....," which seems to say that some Scripture may not be inspired of God, the CES-ASV reads, "All scripture *is* God-breathed and profitable...." Also, there will be translations such as the ones that appear in this article. Level three: we will do new translations of many verses directly from the Greek and Hebrew texts.

Our goal is to eventually have a translation of the Bible that more closely represents biblical truth than any other translation currently on the market. Although that sounds almost like bragging, when you think that almost every version available has been produced either by orthodox Christians who believe in the Trinity, that the dead are alive, that God is in control of everything that happens on earth, etc., or produced by secular scholars who are highly educated but are not Christian, you can see that, from our point of view, it is quite possible.

For years I have stayed away from suggesting that Spirit & Truth have its own translation, being aware that it would further separate us from the mainstream Christian Church and further open us to the accusation of being a cult. However, a number of things have changed my mind. First and by far foremost, the more I concentrate on discipling others, the more convinced I become that students need to be reading from a version that is accurate theologically, rather than from a Bible that has more corrective marginal notes than biblical text. Christians should be able to read the Bible and take what it says at face value. Second, the plethora of new translations entering the market each year make producing another one not seem as drastic and partisan as it would have 30 years ago. Third, Spirit & Truth is already separated from mainstream denominational Christianity because we do not believe in the Trinity, and we are being called a cult now even though we generally use four widely accepted versions; the NIV, NASB, NRSV and KJV. Having our own translation will bless our believers immensely, and that is the most important consideration.

<sup>3</sup> Johannes Louw and Eugene Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (United Bible Societies, New York, 1989).

<sup>4</sup> Arndt and Gingrich. Op. cit., *Lexicon*.

By Carolyn Pais, Charlotte, NC

Stress, tension, anxiety and worry are pretty much household words. In fact, there are over-the-counter drugs sold just to treat stress-related symptoms (i.e., Excedrin for that tension headache; Alka-Seltzer for indigestion due to aggravation, etc.). Medicines might be able to treat symptoms, but, as always, God has the solution to the problem.

### **1 Peter 5:7 (NIV)**

Cast all your anxiety on him (God) because He cares for you

“Anxiety” is the Greek word *merimna*, which means a dividing or distracting of the mind. It’s mental overload. Have you ever been there—when the cares of this world just consume your thinking? From bills to test scores to regrets to being offended to health issues to time schedules—the list goes on and on.

God’s Word says to cast over to Him those thoughts that are causing us to become distracted. You fishermen types know what it means to cast. For the rest of us, it means to fling, to throw with a sudden motion. The idea is to get rid of the distractions quickly. Let God take care of what distracts us so we can focus on living His Word.

### **Unfruitful thinking**

The Gospel of Matthew emphasizes the reason we should fling over our worries to God.

### **Matthew 13:22 (NIV)**

The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the Word, but the worries [*merimna*] of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful.

Take note of the words “worries,” “choke,” and “unfruitful.” When we spend our time worrying or distracted over life’s “issues,” we allow these thoughts to crowd out and choke God’s Word from our minds. The end result—no fruit.

In Luke 10 there is an example of one woman who was pretty stressed out, and how Jesus responded to her. Verses 38-40 paint the picture of Martha, a woman who opened her home to Jesus and his disciples (a pretty good size crowd). As she is busy preparing for her guests, her sister, Mary, is sitting at our Lord’s feet, listening to him. This catches Martha’s attention, giving her one more thing to fuss over. She is aggravated to the point that as far as I can tell she interrupted Jesus to complain, “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me” (Yikes—she’s telling Jesus what to do!).

I can just hear the tenderness in Jesus’ voice as he responded: “Martha, Martha, you are worried [*merimna*] and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her” (vs. 41 and 42).

It is significant that the word “better” can literally be translated, “the good part,” and “part” is the root word for *merimna*. When the mind is distracted, it’s divided into “parts.” Mary chose the one thing to set her mind to what was good, what was needed. Now this is kind of hard for some of us women. It’s pretty normal for us to think that the food preparations and other comforts of home for our guests are more needed, but that’s not what Jesus was saying. At that moment in time, sitting at his feet and listening was the one good choice, and Martha could have had that pleasure also.

### **Fruitful thinking**

When I am in the process of mentally torturing myself with worry, regrets, and complaints, I have found that it is hard to just stop. I can fling my “issues” over to my Father all day long, but unless I replace the “bare spots” with other thoughts, “weeds” keep springing up. It is interesting to note that in Philippians 4:6-9 we are told to not be anxious about anything, but to pray. Then we are told what to think: thoughts that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely and admirable, whatever is excellent and praiseworthy. Verse 9 takes it a step further. We are not only to think, but to act on what we think.

To become an expert in thinking wholesome, fruitful thoughts takes practice, practice, practice. It’s just like disciplining ourselves to learn a dance routine, a musical instrument, or a program on the computer. To become adept at thinking godly thoughts takes noticing your thought processes and comparing them to The Truth, God’s Word. For example, when I start to get concerned about our finances, I can request help in prayer and then not allow my thoughts to continue to hash over our finances and the “what if’s.” Instead, I can rehearse (remember it takes practice) how God promises to care for me. I also can look for something noble to do, like encourage someone else, or use my mental capacities to pray for others. How about sinking my heart into praising God and my Lord Jesus Christ? Actually there is so much more to think about than just our problems!

So when you find yourself thinking and rethinking thoughts that distract you from what’s true, STOP. Cast them over to your heavenly Father. Replace those thoughts with the “excellent and praiseworthy.” This takes some real conscious effort, but the end result is peace. When you give your distractions to God, you will experience the peace He has promised. It is peace that stands guard over your heart and mind, peace that allows for good fruit to flourish in your life.

## **TOPIC: FOREKNOWLEDGE OF GOD— IS EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENS GOD’S WILL?**

[Taken from our book, *Don’t Blame God*]

Does God answer Job’s questions? Not in Job’s lifetime, nor throughout the Old Testament Scriptures. Jesus Christ, however, taught truths that do answer Job’s questions. Kushner has some excellent insight on the record of Job:

To try to understand the book and its answer, let us take note of three statements which everyone in the book, and most of the readers, would like to be able to believe:

- A.** God is all-powerful and causes everything that happens in the world. Nothing happens without His willing it.
- B.** God is just and fair, and stands for people getting what they deserve, so that the good prosper and the wicked are punished.

### C. Job is a good person.

As long as Job is healthy and wealthy, we can believe all three of those statements at the same time with no difficulty. When Job suffers, when he loses his possessions, his family and his health, we have a problem. We can no longer make sense of all three propositions together. We can now affirm any two only by denying the third.

If God is both just and powerful, then Job must be a sinner who deserves what is happening to him. If Job is good but God causes his suffering anyway, then God is not just. If Job deserved better and God did not send his suffering, then God is not all-powerful. We can see the argument of the Book of Job as an argument over which of the three statements we are prepared to sacrifice, so that we can keep on believing in the other two.

Job's friends are prepared to stop believing in (C), the assertion that Job is a good person. They want to believe in God as they have been taught to. They want to believe that God is good and that God is in control of things. And the only way they can do that is to convince themselves that Job deserves what is happening to him.<sup>1</sup>

Job, for his part, is unwilling to hold the world together theologically by admitting that he is a villain. He knows a lot of things intellectually, but he knows one thing more deeply. Job is absolutely sure that he is not a bad person. He may not be perfect, but he is not so much worse than others, by any intelligible moral standard, that he should deserve to lose his home, his children, his wealth and health while other people get to keep all those things. And he is not prepared to lie to save God's reputation.

Job's solution is to reject proposition (B), the affirmation of God's goodness. Job is in fact a good man, but God is so powerful that He is not limited by considerations of fairness and justice.<sup>2</sup>

Kushner correctly states that Job considered himself an innocent victim and that Job thought that God afflicts both the righteous and unrighteous. Often Job attested to his own innocence. He said, "I had not denied the words of the Holy One" (Job 6:10b); "Show me where I have been wrong" (Job 6:24); "I am blameless" (Job 9:21); "You [God] know that I am not guilty" (Job 10:7); "Can anyone bring charges against me? If so, I will be silent and die" (Job 13:19); "As surely as God lives, who has denied me justice" (Job 27:2); and "Let God weigh me in honest scales and He will know that I am blameless" (Job 31:6). Job made his case that God does whatever He pleases and afflicts both the innocent and the guilty: "...I say, He destroys both the blameless and the wicked" (Job 9:22).

Under this assumption, Job wished there were a mediator or an umpire that could help him out. "If only there were someone to arbitrate between us, to lay his hand upon us both" (Job 9:33). Of course, no umpire or mediator appears. What does appear is a storm, and God Himself speaking from it (Job 38:1). What did God say to Job in answer to his pleading questions? Well, one thing is clear— God did not give Job any reason for the problems besetting him.

Many theologians and Bible teachers rightly point out that God never gave Job an answer to the question of why he was suffering: "...God never answers question one about Job's predicament..."<sup>3</sup> "With all due respect to the many capable and godly preachers and writers who have taught that the major question as addressed in Job is why do the righteous suffer, we note that if this is the question, it is never answered in the Book of Job."<sup>4</sup>

Why not? Because the truth about the Devil as the source of human suffering was not revealed in the Old Testament. It was Jesus Christ who first openly revealed the true source of mankind's suffering.

Interestingly enough, Rabbi Kushner comes to the same conclusion we do, that proposition (A) is the proposition that is in error—“God is all-powerful and causes everything that happens in the world. Nothing happens without His willing it.” We do not, however, agree with his overall understanding of the book of Job, by which he arrives at this conclusion. We arrive at our conclusion from the teachings of Jesus and the New Testament. Nonetheless, we applaud Kushner’s insight about people’s reaction to this conclusion. He states:

There may be a sense of loss at coming to this conclusion. In a way, it was comforting to believe in an all-wise, all-powerful God who guaranteed fair treatment and happy endings, who reassured us that everything happened for a reason, even as life was easier for us when we could believe that our parents were wise enough to know what to do and strong enough to make everything turn out right. But it was comforting the way the religion of Job’s friends was comforting: it worked only as long as we did not take the problems of innocent victims seriously. When we have met Job, when we have been Job, we cannot believe in that sort of God any longer without giving up our own right to feel angry, to feel that we have been treated badly by life.<sup>5</sup>

The New Testament makes it crystal clear that not everything that happens is God’s will. For example, Jesus instructed his disciples to pray that God’s will would be done on earth (Matthew 6:10). If everything that happens is God’s will, such prayer is superfluous. In Romans 1:10, Paul said he prayed for “a prosperous journey in the will of God” to see the believers there. Another meaningless prayer? No. The will of God for an individual, whether revealed in the written Word of God or by direct revelation, generally comes to pass only when that person understands it and, by his own , acts accordingly.

Rather than sit passively by waiting for God’s will to happen, we must make a diligent effort to learn God’s Word and then aggressively obey it. God’s will, for example, is that people do not steal, but rather that they work to earn what they need (Ephesians 4:28). Very simple. We just do what He says. But are some people stealing? Yes. If everything that happens were God’s will, then nothing would be sin or disobedience. What a travesty of logic!

Going a step further then, if it is so easy for us humans to disobey God, what about the Devil and his spirit army? Can humans sin by choice while evil spirits cannot? Obviously spirit beings can sin, since sin was the reason the Devil and his hosts were thrown out of God’s presence to begin with. Via Adam’s sin, the Devil was legally given authority over the earth. The Devil did not and does not obey God. The Devil has been sinning for a long time (1 John 3:8). The Devil is a murderer (John 8:44), a liar (John 8:44), and a thief (John 10:10).

For further study, visit [www.TruthOrTradition.com](http://www.TruthOrTradition.com)

TOPIC: Foreknowledge of God

## Endnotes

1. Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen To Good People*, pages 37, 38.
2. *Ibid.*, page 40.
3. Yancey, *Disappointment With God* (Harper Paperbacks, New York NY, 1988), page 223.
4. Henry M. Morris, *The Remarkable Record of Job* (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids MI, 1988), page 22.
5. Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen To Good People*, page 44.

# Northwest Regional Conference

## “Love One Another”

The Spirit and Truth Northwest Regional Conference was held in Vancouver, WA on the mighty Columbia River October 22-24. More than 60 saints gathered to fellowship and explore what it means to love one another in a practical manner. The majority of the participants came from Washington and Oregon, with others from Alaska, Arizona, California, Nevada, and even the Midwest.

Friday evening opened with praise and worship provided by some wonderful local musicians, Michael and Melissa Bonney of Vancouver, WA, and Ed Coughlin of Portland, OR. Beverly De La Bruere of Clackamas, OR, led off the teachings with, “Love Never Fails,” an in-depth look at 1 Corinthians 13, defining God’s kind of love. She showed how applying the love of God leads to relational wholeness, and cited examples of how Jesus modeled this love for us.

On Saturday morning, the keynote speaker for the weekend, John Schoenheit, blessed everyone by expounding on “The True Meaning of Love.” He defined the various Greek words used for love and how the shades of meaning held practical significance. In English, we often use the word “love” when we mean we “like” the feelings someone or something gives to us. But true *agape* love involves us giving to others, even when feelings are not there. Following a short break, Gary Smith of Corvallis, OR, gave an encouraging teaching on “Loving Yourself,” painting for us from Scripture an enthusiastic picture of how God sees us. Loving ourselves is necessary if we are going to “love our neighbor as ourselves.”

After lunch, Young Lumsden blessed us with a worshipful, traditional Korean dance to her native Korean music. It portrayed a woman coming from her sin and pain to the cross of Jesus where she then worshipped him. Ryan Maher from the Spirit & Truth Home Office then presented the websites, [TruthOrTradition.com](http://TruthOrTradition.com) and [BiblicalUnitarian.com](http://BiblicalUnitarian.com), building our excitement for these great outreach avenues.

Dan Gallagher did a great teaching that afternoon about “Caretaking vs. Taking Care,” ably demonstrating the difference in the fruit of these two activities. As believers, we need to take care of one another, but not get trapped into caretaking and enabling our brothers in their sins. Then the participants broke up into small groups to practice the manifestations of holy spirit. After a great banquet, overlooking the Columbia River, we were treated to more of John Schoenheit’s teaching. He spoke on being “Committed in Love,” showing how love calls us to a deeper level of service and commitment. This was followed by more musical presentations from many wonderful saints, and personal ministry was made available.

Sunday morning, after more praise and worship, Gary Wilson of the Seattle, WA area, taught on “The Mark of Quality.” He cited the Greek word *huper* as it is used in 1 Cor. 12:31, where love is introduced as the “more excellent” way. *Huper* is the concept of going above and beyond what is required, so he encouraged all of us to “do the *huper*” as we love one another. This was followed by a question-and-answer time with John Schoenheit and Dan Gallagher, who set forth some of the goals, visions, and obstacles that we have as a ministry.

It was a very sweet weekend, and people’s hearts were open and sharing. The consensus was, “Let’s do this again!” So if you missed this year’s conference, look forward to next time.

# FAMILY NEWS, VIEWS, AND FEEDBACK

Dear Sower,

There I was, racing uphill, feeling light as a balloon, and then racing downhill at full speed. At the bottom of the hill I felt so heavy I could hardly move. I curved left, then right, thinking at any moment I would be thrown out of my seat. Then before I could take another breath, I was in a loop-to-loop. My hands were losing their grip, I wasn't sure how long this would go on but I had no choice. No matter how much fun or how bad it would get, I had to finish the ride. Where was I? THE DATING ROLLER COSTER! Maybe you have found yourself there.

Whatever your age, the choices you make now will affect you for the rest of your life. Why not take a little time and invest in yourself? Take advantage of the Dating, Courtship, and Engagement seminar by Adam and Nancy Berwid. We don't have to look far to see the broken relationships of friends and family that are all around us today. The amount of time, money, and hurting hearts spent due to poor choices speaks for itself. Do you know the red flags to look for in a relationship? What are some of the keys in dating, and questions you should be asking yourself? Adam and Nancy cover answers to these questions and others that I hadn't thought of.

This seminar is a great eye opener to God's heart and desire for single Christians. Adam and Nancy speak from the heart on many levels. Dating is covered in a way that will help you think about and then apply God's wisdom to any relationship. Even for us who are married, there is much to be reminded of. If you are married and not continuing to date, then get on the stick. The love of your life may be waiting for you to spend some quality time together and have some fun like you did before you got married.

I have three daughters; two are teenagers, and they have found the seminar very helpful. So pull up an easy chair, get your Bible, and relax. The time you spend will bless your life and future. Even if you have been married for thirty years, like I have, it's never too late to date.

God Bless,

Gene Douglas  
Edgewood, KY

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Dear Sower,

My name is Mina Hacker, and I have wanted to express about "One Flesh" seminar done by Gary & Karen Theisen, and the Dating, Courtship, and Engagement teaching by Adam & Nancy Berwid for long time now, but I keep put it off because my English writing is not so good. I am Korean, and English is my second language.

Let me first give you a brief overview of my marriage of 32 years to my wonderful husband Lou. First seven years of our marriage was not Christian marriage. Lou was brought up in traditional Dutch Reform Church when he was a child but his adult life was not any close to Christian life at all. On the other hand, I grew up in Buddhist culture, although I had only a vague idea of what that was all about. Actually, I have much better understanding of it now than then.

In 1979, we were invited to Bible fellowship and through that fellowship we were introduced to Bible study class, and during that class I became a Christian. Since then, we have been learn about Christian marriage but only few years ago we were invited to the Spirit & Truth couples seminar called "One Flesh." For the first time, we really tasted how sweet Christian marriage could be.

I never knew that this existed! It was like the delicious food you would never known how good it is until you taste it. I highly recommend this seminar to any married couple. It will enrich marriage relationship greatly. After 32 years of marriage, we realize there is whole lot more to learn about better and sweeter marriage than we have never known before. Oh, well, we thank God for we know that now. We still have 30 more years to strive for this marvelous marriage of God if the Lord does not return. Thank you for Gary & Karen Theisen for this wonderful seminar!

After this seminar, we realized that we can help younger people love one another in their marriage relationship by giving sound advice so that they wouldn't miss out like we did. The Lord does provide resources when your mind is prepared. My husband and I went to the Spirit & Truth Family Camp this July, and found the Dating, Courtship and Engagement teaching by Adam & Nancy Berwid in the bookstore display. What a great teaching this is! It was so good, my husband and I heard them all at once, and none stop! After that we both said to each other, "Let's divorce so that we can start dating again! I think we did everything wrong!"

This teaching is absolutely wonderful and so needed by our younger generation to reclaim sexual purity. This teaching is such a fun to listen and while you are listening, you wish you were single again so you can try it out. I lended this teaching to my single girlfriend who decided to try God's way of dating. She has now been dating a guy for few months, and she loves it. I highly recommend this teaching to everyone who is single. I wish I knew this when I was young, It would have saved me from a lots of hurts and pains that I have gone through. Thank you so much to Adam and Nancy for made such wonderful teaching!

I want to take this chance to say to all of Spirit & Truth teachers. I thank God for your lives, and pray for you everyday!

Mina Hacker  
Valatie, NY

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Dear Sower,

I was just reading your Truth article in the Ethical Reflections section of the website. Boy, you hit the nail on the head there. I finally got dead honest with myself about my own life, and it sure has been nauseating, but that is the only way to really repent and change for the better.

I used to tell people I was divorced because my husband was a drug addict and never worked, which is true. However, the other side is, I was angry, self-centered, engaging in escapism, unfaithful, and just plain mean to him for 15 years because of his cycle of drug abuse and my inability or refusal to deal with it. I am a classic enabler.

When I finally was able to admit this not ONLY to myself, but confess it to others (like you), that about killed me because of the years of waste, regret, and shame, but it is for the best. I can work on it now. Confess your sins so you may be healed, right?

So many people just “move on” to the next relationship without ever taking time to reflect and say, “Hey, what’s the matter with me?” Often they use verses about “not looking back” and “no condemnation” to just make excuses, rationalize, and go on hurting others instead of examining themselves!!

Name Withheld

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Dear Sower,

I recently became aware of your organization through Peter Drago, who I met at a church potluck supper. He mentioned his “church” was in Indianapolis and that started a discussion that ended with him giving me your website, [www.TruthOrTradition.com](http://www.TruthOrTradition.com). I am newly born again and am an avid reader. I have browsed through your online site, printed tons of stuff, and just recently received the *One God & One Lord* book. I must tell you that I am amazed at the feeling of friendship that comes from all that I read from you. I feel like you are there for me no matter what, are very nonjudgmental, and only want to educate without dictating.

I guess you would consider me a Trinitarian, although I never really understood the whole three-in-one thing. The few Christian friends I have are Trinitarian, as well as the vast majority of churches I have attended. When you are new to something (God), I guess it’s easier to go along with the standard fare than to search out what might be more of the truth.

I have decided to join the Partnership Plan as I explore all that you have to offer. I look forward to meeting you one day and will pray for you.

Jay Chambery  
Honeoye Falls, NY

# INTERNATIONAL NEWS AND FEEDBACK

Dear Co-Sowers,

It's a great privilege for me to write this short message to all of you out there who are sowing the seed and hope that you'll take a minute and consider us in your hearts and prayers.

Here are basic information and ministries we are currently doing:

- The Philippines Outreach began in 1991 when John Lynn first visited the Philippines for a teaching trip. John returned in 1992 through 1999 along with John S., Mark G., and others.
- In 1996 we set up nine elders from among those who believed and received the great truths. Those currently working hand-in-hand to oversee the outreach are Peter Alcantara, James Batao, James and Nene Butoy, Benjie Casido, Rey Delima, Leonidas Duazo, Willie Matub, and Rudy Odarve.
- Reflecting the Mission and Vision of Spirit & Truth, we have incorporated Spirit & Truth in the Philippines in compliance with the legal mandates and secure a good legal standing.
- Establishing local fellowships with many local leaders in different areas of the Philippines as represented by the geographical elders. Currently we have more than 30 local fellowships with an average membership of 40.
- Opening new areas via crusade, house-to-house evangelism, personal evangelism, community involvement services, social works like counseling, feeding programs, and sponsoring children to go to school.
- Local Leadership Trainings through small group seminars, translated Spirit & Truth materials, personal coaching by the Elders, dialogues, and visitation.
- Radio broadcasts hosted by some of the Elders in different localities.
- Translation of Spirit & Truth written materials into our Cebuano dialect.
- National Leadership Conference, Youth Camp, Elders meetings and Family Camp (we plan to do Men's and Women Conferences in the near future).

We, the nine Elders, with our families, have already decided to spend our lives for God, Jesus Christ, and service to the Church. We have gone through many attacks from the enemy, yet we stand, and we will continue the work until we are spent out leaving the legacy of the faith to our sons and daughters, sowing in their hearts our faithfulness, which will inspire them to follow our footsteps.

Sowing with you,

Benjie Casido  
Philippines

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Dear Sower,

I have some very good news. As you know, I have been doing a radio show here for a number of years. Two years ago I was asked by the radio manager to pay two thousand pesos for my radio broadcast. Then last year I was asked to pay

one thousand pesos a month, and this year I was asked to pay only five hundred peso a month! Thank God for this miracle. I believe it is a sign that the radio manager was convinced about what I teach and preach on the radio.

God bless you,

James Batao  
Philippines

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Dear Sower,

God bless you!!! May the start of year 2005 bring each one of us new hope and ecclesiastical dimension as we face its challenges.

In early December, rebel bandits broke into our house and robbed us at gunpoint. On December 31, one of them was arrested by police authorities and put in jail. We were ordered by the authorities to come to their office for an investigation, and they requested us to file a complaint against the culprit. But we opted not to do so, and asked the police if we can minister to him.

After some biblical counseling with my wife, Ely, and me, the bandit wept, asking for pardon and forgiveness. We prayed with him together, forgave him, and he committed himself to Christ. We give him the translated Cebuano version of *How to Become a Christian*. He was released from jail after 24 hours of detention.

Our coming to the police station was a gesture of God's forgiveness in action where police officers witnessed our conversation. The desk officer offered me to share with the police officers a Values Formation with Biblical basis session every Monday morning. It's a good chance for us to minister to the police officers like what I did in the past years.

The incident that happened between my household and the culprit was a blessing for us to speak the truth of God's Word and share the goodness of salvation.

Your prayers are a strong sinew of our mission endeavor. Thank you so much for your deep concern for our outreach ministry.

Peter Alcantara  
Philippines

# WEBSITE FEEDBACK

Hello, my name is Scott Perciful, and before I share my testimony, I would like to tell you about myself and where I came from. I was born again at the age of 22 in an Assembly of God Church, and about six months later started attending a large Word of Faith church. I remained there 12 years, during which I went to Bible School full time and graduated with honors at the top of my class. I also was a minister to a certain group of people designated by our church's pastor.

A big "THANK YOU," first of all to OUR GREAT AND HOLY GOD, and next to Spirit & Truth and the truth that you have shown. I found your TruthOrTradition.com site when I typed "Is tithing scriptural?" as a search string, and my life has not been the same since. I first read the article on Tithing vs. Giving, and then studied it out according to the Greek and Hebrew texts in my lexicons. I cross referenced Scripture in the New Testament, and then dissected the Mosaic Law in the Old Testament, particularly Mal. 1-3.

Once I had proven that your article was correct in the light of God's Word, I began to research other articles after I read them as well. The Trinity article was fantastic. I cannot begin to thank you enough for setting me free from the traditions and wrong teachings being proclaimed from so many pulpits, of which I myself was at one time guilty.

This one story is worth mentioning. We held a Singles Conference in our city a few years ago, and I taught that salvation is permanent, and that you could never lose it, according to Scripture. The church I was attending didn't believe that way, but you should have seen the people come forward who were set free from condemnation that day, glory to God!

Something has been at work in me for the last five years, as I would hear certain things taught to me from well-respected preachers/teachers and in my heart get a "check" – THAT IS NOT RIGHT! Needless to say, your TruthOrTradition.com website is a precious find, and we are starting our own fellowship to spread the real truth to others. We haven't even begun yet and others are already asking about coming.

It is true: "YOU SHALL KNOW THE TRUTH, AND THE TRUTH SHALL MAKE YOU FREE!!" I am beside myself with JOY, and cannot wait to get into God's Word everyday! Thank you for liberating me from much wrong doctrine. I give GOD the credit for leading me to your organization. We will spread the word about you to all we can!

Scott Perciful  
Little Rock, AR

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I was browsing your website, [www.TruthOrTradition.com](http://www.TruthOrTradition.com) to find out more about Tithing. I watch TBN, and I was getting very frustrated thinking I was supposed to send TBN my whole paycheck and not worry about how to pay my bills and rent. They made it sound like God would take care of it for me. I have not sent them any money. They stand up there saying, "We don't want your \$2.50." Well, what if that is all I have? I work as a housekeeper in a hospital at minimum wage. I have lots of deductions and barely make it as it is. They also say to give 10% or more out of my gross, not my net pay. So, I want to thank you for this site. God bless, and I shall now be a cheerful giver to the church I attend, as God supplies. Peace and love from above.

Valeri

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[Some hyperlink witnessing feedback]

Wow! That article (God's Gift of Righteousness) was completely off the chain!!!! It is truly amazing how God places things in our paths at just the right times. You sent me this message a few days ago, and I conveniently did not have time to check it out. Had I read it a few days ago, I would have still felt that it was awesome, but I have been struggling with feelings of "unrighteousness" and being undeserving of God's grace, and what I read really inspired me and lifted me up!

GOD IS SO AMAZING!!!

Thanks so much for sending that to me, I know it was completely the Lord's work that I received it when I did. God bless you!

Ana