

THE SOWER

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The Sower is the bimonthly magazine of Spirit of Life Fellowship International, a non-profit organization, and is published in Los Angeles, Indiana.

ENTER INTO HIS GATES WITH
THANKSGIVING
AND INTO HIS COURTS WITH
**PRAISE: BE THANKFUL UNTO
HIM, AND BLESS HIS NAME.**

(PS.100:4)

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LETTER FROM A BOARD MEMBER

Tom Resner

Welcome to the final edition of *The Sower* for 2005. The end of the year is a great time to thank God and rejoice in all He has done and is doing on our behalf.

An important aspect of a joyful, thankful lifestyle is to set aside time each day for prayer. This has been a source of much blessing in my family. My wife, Susan, and I begin each day praying together. I believe this should be on the “Must do” list for every Christian married couple. It keeps our marriage sweet and centers us with godly priorities to meet the hectic pace that usually follows.

Another staple for our family is our breakfast Bible reading time. This 15 minute reading shared together with our three boys has spawned many questions, lively discussions, and much learning for all of us. I highly recommend it as a way to pull together your family. It reminds us of who we really are and the importance of our stand together in Christ.

If you are single, I encourage you to find a prayer partner in your fellowship. If you aren't part of a fellowship, find someone to pray with, and perhaps a fellowship will sprout from your faithful thanksgiving with a brother or sister in Christ. Certainly you will be blessed and God will be honored.

Prayer brings the greatness of our God into focus. In contrast, the Adversary seeks to draw us away and distract us from God's goodness. He desires to steal our joy and zest for living. As we remember the benefits of God in prayer, we are renewed and made whole.

Psalm 103:2-5

- (2) Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits—
- (3) who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases,
- (4) who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion,
- (5) who satisfies your desires with good things so your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

We in the United States are now entering that time of year when we celebrate the holiday known as “Thanksgiving.” Originally celebrated by the Pilgrims, Thanksgiving was proclaimed a national holiday in 1789 by President George Washington. It is fitting that the Thanksgiving holiday comes toward the end of our calendar year so we can reflect and rejoice on how God has blessed us in multifaceted ways.

I love this time of year with its cool, crisp air and the woodland leaves exploding with rich amber and crimson colors. Family gatherings are a whirr of activity and excitement. The air rings with the melody of many voices, young and old, all heeding the innate call of love and unity. Aromas of roast turkey and dressing, as well as pies of pumpkin, apple, and cherry tease the nostrils and tantalize the tongue. Our hearts, senses, and stomachs are filled to the brim.

God gives all this bounty generously for our enjoyment, yet we need to remain mindful that this is not the true feast of hope to which we are called. While some may abound, many of our brethren are abased, and so we cast our bread upon the waters. Our meat is to do the will of him who sent us. Let us join together as a community to release the sweet-smelling aroma of Christ. Our physical blessings at present may or may not be full, but we are sure that “...No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared

for those who love him” (1 Cor. 2:9). This verse is explained in the context of 1 Corinthians 2 by the next verse (10), which says that God has revealed them unto them who love Him. There, it is thus referring to the Sacred Secret and not to the future. I’d say we can rest assured of the Hope we have of a glorious everlasting life in Paradise with our God, our Lord, and all our believing brethren.

I feel thankful to serve side-by-side with the faithful and dedicated people of this ministry. I look forward to the days ahead when we shall feast together at our Father’s table and be richly rewarded. Until then, I pray that your joy may be full.

THE BENEFITS OF “THANKS-LIVING”

Living with thanksgiving is an important factor in our emotional and physical health.

BY DAN GALLAGHER

Each November here in the USA, we celebrate a very godly holiday—Thanksgiving. The goal of this article is to motivate you to make every day of the year one of “thanks-living.” Thankfulness is a refrain that is often heard in Christian circles. In fact, the theme of thankfulness is something that should be central to our daily Christian practice.¹ I can recall many teachings I’ve heard through the years about all the various things we should be thankful for. There is no doubt that God is deserving of great praise and thanksgiving for all He has done. I marvel at the creatures mentioned in the book of Revelation whose primary purpose appears to be to praise God day and night.² Now that is some *serious* thanksgiving. Yet, in spite of this, I have wondered at times why God tells us to give Him thanks. I know He deserves it, and I want to do it, but it seemed a little self-centered that He commands us to give Him thanks. I remember being told as a child that I should not give something or do something for others if my motivation is to be thanked. Knowing that God always has our best interests at heart, I reasoned that there must be a deeper meaning to the giving of thanks. Then one day I learned the answer in a very powerful way.

My dog Adam had been my companion and friend for 14 years, and had seen me through many ups and downs. During this tumultuous time of my life I went through many legal problems and much financial difficulty. Adam was always a great comfort to me, listening to many of my conversations, never demanding much from me, and always lavishing great affection my way. He was always well behaved and never one to stray more than a few feet from my side, so much so that some even referred to him as my shadow. I watched my dear friend grow older and weaker as time wore on. His eyes began to dim, his hearing lessened, and his hindquarters weakened. Long gone were the days of fetch and play. I did all I could to comfort my dog, knowing the day would soon come when I would have to say good-bye for good. If you are not a dog lover or an animal person, maybe you can relate to my story if you have lost someone near and dear to you.

Well, the day came when my wife, Lori, and I headed to the veterinarian’s to put Adam to sleep. I held my dog in my arms, tears rolling down my face, as I told him how much he had meant to me. I sobbed as he closed his eyes for the last time. Both Lori and the veterinarian respected my request to be left alone with my friend. In the solitude of the exam room, deep in my grief I cried out, “God I need your comfort.” I held on to the promise of God’s Word that He is “...the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles...” (2 Cor. 1:3b-4a). I called to Him out loud, and then spoke what I believe was an inspired thought: “God, thank you for giving me such a good dog.” I instantly felt a deep joy well up inside me. I knew God had heard and answered me. It was in the giving of thanks that I felt His comfort. I left the veterinarian’s that day still very sad, yet having great joy and comfort in my sorrow.

Afterward, I continued to reflect on the great spiritual joy I experienced that day. It was apparent to me that there was a lot more to thankfulness than I had ever seen before. Maybe God was telling us to be thankful not just because He deserves it but because of what it does for us. I noticed that there was a direct connection between joy and thankfulness in many sections of Scripture.³ In 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, God says, “Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances...” Many times I had read this passage of Scripture and wondered, “How can I always be joyful when there are times in life that do not lend themselves to joy?” Then I saw the key. I do not have to be thankful *for* every situation, but *in* every situation I can always find something to be thankful for and that is what produces joy. It is a matter of perspective, and I always have the ability of changing my perspective. That is exactly what God did for me the day my dog Adam died. I was focused on my loss, and that is what was producing my deep grief. God helped me change my perspective when He inspired me to think of what a wonderful pet Adam had been. When I thanked Him for giving me such a wonderful friend, my sadness changed to joy.

I believe thankfulness is a powerful antidote for many of the emotional and physical problems we see in our society. Thankfulness is a mindset we can choose, and one that we experience emotionally throughout our entire body. One's state of mind and his physical condition are inextricably linked, and how you feel emotionally affects how you feel physically.

The medical community has scientifically documented the mind-body connection in regard to many diseases.⁴ I read that "fear has been shown to trigger more than fourteen hundred known physical and chemical stress reactions, and activates more than thirty different hormones and neurotransmitters."⁵ Uninterrupted long-term stress has been linked to problems in the heart and vascular systems such as hypertension (high blood pressure), palpitations, and arrhythmias. Most recognize the emotional connection to ulcers, gastritis, heartburn, indigestion, and bowel irregularities. The list continues, including skin disorders (psoriasis, eczema, hives, and acne), pain, inflammation, suppressed immune systems, etc.⁶

The "psycho-somatic" connection should not surprise us. As God tells us in Proverbs 14:30, "A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones." This passage no longer seems an abstract word of wisdom, but a saying of great impact. Consider also Proverbs 15:13, "A happy heart makes the face cheerful, but heartache crushes the spirit," and Proverbs 17:22, "A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries the bones." The importance of God's references to the bones is that bones contain the red and white marrow from which come the blood's red and white cells. Red blood cells carry life-sustaining oxygen to the entire body and white blood cells are a primary defense in our immune system. God clearly directs us to the mind-body connection, establishing for us the deadly consequences of negative emotions in our hearts.

Our heavenly Father never intended for us to live in a state of unchecked stress, unresolved anger, bitterness, or unforgiveness. When we couple stress and negative emotions with poor nutrition and unhealthy environmental conditions, we have a recipe for sickness and disease. Stress, anxiety, anger, shame, guilt, bitterness, resentment, unforgiveness, and condemnation are killing us. "In the United States we consume five billion tranquilizers, five billion barbiturates, three billion amphetamines, and sixteen tons of aspirin every year."⁷ We are kidding ourselves to think that we can keep stuffing emotions year after year without paying a serious price. The medical evidence says that the price we pay is our physical and emotional well-being. One dermatologist stated that for many people, "eczema and psoriasis is the body weeping through the skin."⁸

Through the years as I have counseled and ministered to many individuals, I have noted that most physical healing is accompanied by emotional healing as well. Something happens deep inside a person when he releases his negative emotions, and forgiveness and thankfulness are two great keys to accomplishing this. After all, it's awfully hard to hold on to negative emotions when we grab hold of thankfulness also. It is almost as if there's not enough emotional strength to hold both at the same time. When someone does something that upsets me, I practice praying for them and being thankful for them. Generally, my attitude towards them shifts, and I begin to see the value they are. I am not advocating that you drop healthy boundaries and allow unsafe people into your life, or that you need to be thankful for anyone who has persecuted or abused you, but even in those cases you can still release the hold they have on you by practicing forgiveness.

Our society is designed to wreak havoc on us. After all, this world is under the control of the Devil⁹ whose aim is to steal, kill, and destroy us.¹⁰ We cannot escape the corruption of this world but God tells us that in the midst of this we can have great joy.¹¹ Hebrews 10:34 tells us that our first-century brethren "...joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions." They chose to look at life from an eternal perspective which allowed them to live in thankfulness and experience joy in spite of their persecution and loss. Another powerful example of the power of perspective is found in Acts 5. In this record the apostles have suffered a flogging at the hands of the Sanhedrin. Instead of

feeling sorry for themselves or defeated because of the persecution they chose to leave the Sanhedrin "...rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name."¹²

The Bible is filled with records of many men who practiced "thanks-living." This attitude helped David endure a life on the run, sleeping in caves and the wilderness, with a death sentence from Saul on his head.¹³ Practicing "thanks-living" is not the same as practicing denial. It is not the same as denying the pain of a situation or pretending that everything is fine when it really is not. "Thanks-living" is being able to be thankful in spite of our circumstances because we choose to take a godly perspective.

We always have much to be thankful to God for. He is worthy of praise and thanks for His wondrous works of Creation, His deeds, His righteousness (which He has given us), His good and holy name, and His unfailing love. In every situation we have the ability to change our perspective. We can choose to look at the negative of the situation, holding on to deadly emotions, or we can practice "thanks-living" and enjoy its benefits. The choice is ours.

(Endnotes)

1. Colossians 3:15; Hebrews 12:28.

2. Revelation 4:8.

3. See Colossians 1:9-12.

4. Don Colbert, M.D., *Deadly Emotions* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, TN, 2003).

5. *Ibid.*, p. 13. (Quoted in H. Dreher, *The Immune Power Personality*, (New York: Dutton, 1995), p. 55.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 25-27.

7. *Ibid.*, p. IX (D. Wayne, "Reactions to Stress," found in *Identifying Stress*, a series offered by Health-Net & Stress Management Web site, February, 1998).

8. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

9. See 1 John 5:19; Ephesians 6:11; 2 Corinthians 4:4.

10. John 10:10a, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy..."

11. James 1:2, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds."

12. Acts 5:41b.

13. See all the following verses: Psalms 7:17, 28:7, 30:12, 35:18, 75:1, 100:1, 4, 105:1, 106:1, 107: 1, 8, 15, 21, 31.

*By The President of the United States of America
A Proclamation*

Whereas it is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits, and humbly to implore His protection and favor; and Whereas both Houses of Congress have, by their joint committee, requested me "to recommend to the people of the United States a day of public thanksgiving and prayer, to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many and signal favors of Almighty God, especially by affording them an opportunity peaceably to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness:"

Now, therefore, I do recommend and assign Thursday, the 26th day of November next, to be devoted by the people of these States to the service of that great and glorious Being who is the beneficent author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be: that we may then all unite in rendering unto Him our sincere and humble thanks for His kind care and protection of the people of this country previous to their becoming a nation: —for the signal and manifold mercies and the favorable interpositions of His providence in the course and conclusion of the late war: —for the great degree of tranquillity, union, and plenty which we have since enjoyed: —for the peaceable and rational manner in which we have been enabled to establish constitutions of government for our safety and happiness, and particularly the national one now lately instituted: —for the civil and religious liberty with which we are blessed, and the means we have of acquiring and diffusing useful knowledge: —and, in general, for all the great and various favors which He has been pleased to confer upon us.

And also that we may then unite in most humbly offering our prayers and supplications to the great Lord and Ruler of Nations, and beseech Him to pardon our national and other transgressions: —to enable us all, whether in public or private stations, to perform our several and relative duties properly and punctually: —to render our National Government a blessing to all the people by constantly being a Government of wise, just, and constitutional laws, discreetly and faithfully executed and obeyed: —to protect and guide all sovereigns and nations (especially such as have shown kindness to us), and to bless them with good governments, peace, and concord: —to promote the knowledge and practice of true religion and virtue, and the increase of science among them and us: —and, generally, to grant unto all mankind such a degree of temporal prosperity as He alone knows to be best.

Given under my Hand, at the city of New York, the third day of October, in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and eighty-nine.

G. Washington (1789)

Figures of Speech: Keys to Effective Communication

Idiom

BY JOHN W. SCHOENHEIT

Figures of speech are an indispensable component of all languages, and there are some 200 varieties of figures of speech in the Bible. The figure we are going to cover in this issue of *The Sower* is “idiom.” I assert that, “An idiom is a figure of emphasis, and is the use of a word or words that is peculiar to itself in that it has a meaning that cannot be derived from the literal meaning of the word or words.” You reply, “You’re pulling my leg, right?” I say, “No way, dude! That’s pure octane, the real deal.” You say, “Word up!”

Did you understand the last few sentences? You probably did if you live in the United States of America and watch a lot of television and/or have a teenager. Idioms have to be individually learned because the meaning of the words is not literal, but assigned by the culture. When I spent a summer in Israel, some of us sometimes spoke in idioms because our Israeli hosts could not tell what we were saying—fun for us and frustrating to them (hey, I was still green in my Christian life, wet behind the ears, my bad, I would never do that today). My Jewish friends spoke “school English,” and knew the words we were using, but not the idiomatic meaning. Some idioms are common enough to human experience that they exist in many cultures. Both the Bible and English, for example, speak of the “face” of the earth.

The Bible has many idioms, and if we are going to understand it, we need to understand them. One that we have spent considerable time on is the prophetic perfect. In that idiom, a future action that is certain to occur is spoken of in the past tense. For example, speaking of the return of Jesus Christ, Jude 1:14 literally says, “...the Lord came with myriads of his holy ones.” Why put his coming in the past, when it is future? It is an idiom of the language to emphasize the certainty of Jesus’ coming.¹

Another biblical idiom is that God is called the “light,” more than just because of the light that He created, but because of the mental and spiritual light that He brings. Thus He is compared to the sun.

Psalm 84:11a

For the LORD God is a sun and shield...²

It makes perfect sense, then, that the Son of God, who revealed the Father and brought light to the world, would be idiomatically called “the sun of righteousness” and the “sunrise from on High.”

Malachi 4:2

But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall.³

I can remember reading this verse as a new Christian and knowing that it referred to Jesus Christ, but not knowing why he was called the “sun” and not the “son.” The answer is that in the biblical idiom, Jesus was the sun because he brought the light of his Father to the world. Thus he said, “...I am the light of the world.” By

calling Jesus the “sun,” the idiom reveals truth succinctly and powerfully: he brings mental and spiritual light, exposes what is done in darkness, warms the soul, and makes plain the path of righteousness. Zachariah, the father of John the Baptist, referred to Jesus as the rising sun.

Luke 1:78

because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven.

This verse makes no sense if you do not know the idiom. How can the “rising sun” come from heaven? It comes from below the horizon and rises up into heaven. Knowing the idiom makes the verse both clear and powerful. Thanks be to God our Father, who sent the Messiah, the rising sun, from heaven by creating seed inside Mary. Jesus is indeed the rising sun, bringing light and truth into the world. Have you let him rise in your heart?

(Endnotes)

1. For a much more thorough explanation of this important idiom, see “The Prophetic Perfect,” in our book by John Schoenheit, *The Christian’s Hope: The Anchor of the Soul* (Christian Educational Services, Indianapolis, IN, 2004), Appendix E, pp. 223-240.

2. This is also a use of metaphor, a comparison by representation.

3. The “wings” are actually the “borders,” and thus it was foretold that Jesus would have healing in the borders of his garments, something fulfilled in his ministry (Cp. Mark 5:27-29, 6:56).

THE VINE

Spotlight on a Fellowship

Alex and Lilian spread the Word in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Is there a formula to run a fellowship? Hardly. I have been doing it for many years, and I have found out that each group is always unique, and it is thus exciting to find the precise framework for each one. Here are the fellowships we currently have running in our area in Buenos Aires:

- A Friday evening meeting in the centre of town, at Veronica's small and cute apartment. As in all fellowships, we drink our national beverage called "mate" [pronounced "maateh"] and eat cookies, then we start the teaching. Mostly it is I who teach, but I sometimes have the invaluable help of my good friend Alicia who has a talent to share the Word with great humor.
- One Friday a month we move the fellowship to Maria and Charly Bouquet's apartment outside of town, as it is difficult for them and their two children to travel into town after work and school. We bless them that way, and they keep connected and hear the Word. The other important reason is that when we meet at their apartment, we have children's fellowship, with my daughter Mara teaching both the Bouquet children and my son Lucas. The children love it, and I have heard them pray that Mara never stops coming! Last time we met, I took five minutes to teach the kids about financial giving, and, bless their hearts, they immediately scrambled to get their coins and notes [paper money] to put into the fellowship's piggy bank, for God.
- One Saturday a month, we have what we call our Women's Tea, and we meet alternately at Anny's house and Liliana's office. A group of about 7 to 15 women of all ages come along every month: all the women from our Friday fellowship, plus others who cannot make it every Friday. This way we embrace other people whose responsibilities make it impossible for them to participate in a weekly fellowship. Some are very new to Christianity and find it more comfortable to "share tea with a bunch of friends" and then hear the Word. In this way we have generated a very warm and safe place where we can talk heart-to-heart about women's issues within the context of the Word. I have taught the "*New Life in Christ*" class (it took me nearly two years as it was only once a month) and at the end everyone was manifesting the spirit inside. Surprise! Some of the women were hearing the Word only once a month, yet their hearts were all there for the Lord, and you should see the changes in their lives! So you see, there are no set rules when the heart is willing.
- My husband Alex travels far to run a fortnightly [every two weeks] fellowship for a family of six (the parents and four kids). Everybody participates, and both the parents, Willy and Graciela (and sometimes even the kids), are gaining experience by preparing teachings and sharing them.
- This month my daughter Mara, who is 28 years old, opened up a youth fellowship that meets fortnightly. When we traveled to Indianapolis this past winter, Nate Graeser, among others, encouraged her to do it. And if you know Nate, you know his enthusiasm can move mountains! So she prepared her heart to take this step, and is so happy about it. She had three people on her first night and all of them were new, with a great thirst for the Word, full of curiosity and questions.

What do we teach? Spirit & Truth Fellowship teachings that we take from all the many books, tapes, or the web sites. Sometimes we might take a teaching from another source if it meets a need we have, and of course we first examine it in order to establish that it is the truth.

I have found, over the years, that this ministry (and thus its teachings) manifests INTEGRITY. Our ministry is very genuine, responsible, accountable, and its leaders have very, very big hearts for the Lord and his people. Their biblical research work is the best I have ever seen. Just the other day, one of the believers defined the ministry this way: “Spirit & Truth Fellowship has its feet well on the ground. It does not live in a spiritual Tupperware.” I agree!

There is a lot of work to be done, though—a whole lifetime. We are in this together, and it is my prayer that as we work together, we can all experience the greatest peace of all: Christ’s peace.

Thank you, Spirit & Truth Fellowship, for teaching us to love God and His Son so deeply!

Lilian Campbell/Oliver
Buenos Aires, Argentina

THE CONTENDER

THANKFULNESS: A Blessing For Your Life

By John W. Schoenheit

When I was a child, Mom and Dad made me and my siblings sit down after Christmas and write thank-you notes to all the people from whom we received presents (and don't think for a minute that we would have done so had they not forced us to). Mom and Dad also made sure we said "Please" and "Thank you." Years later, when I became a parent, I found myself doing the same thing for my children. Thankfulness does not come naturally. It needs to be trained in us. Our sinful nature, selfish and ungrateful, must be ruled by our will. If we are going to live godly lives, we have to first know what is right, and then make up our minds to do it. This is very true of making thankfulness a habit.

In order to be thankful in our day-to-day lives, it helps to assess why we are so often unthankful. First, life is difficult and unpredictable because we live in this fallen world, in which the Devil has made it his personal aim to make people's lives miserable. We too often have unrealistic expectations of how things are going to be, expecting things to go "right." When they do not, we become exasperated and unthankful.

Second, the world (especially advertising agencies) works very hard to create unthankfulness and dissatisfaction. What? Absolutely! No one who is satisfied with what they have replaces it, so advertising agencies work hard for their clients, convincing people that what they have is not good enough. This is not difficult to do in today's world, when almost everything we use is being improved, remodeled, or updated at least once a year, and everything we wear is outdated before we know it. We learn about "better" products and naturally want them (and may even think we deserve them). No wonder we wrestle with being unthankful for what we have.

Ah, to live in the "good old days," when your great, great, great grandfather (or grandmother) wore the same kind of clothes you did, traveled around town by the same method (on foot with a staff for stabilization and protection), and cooked on the same kind of stove (a campfire). Then you could be thankful for what you have. Sound good? Only one problem—it's a myth. Ancient people were no more thankful than modern ones. Life was difficult back then too, and people griped about it. That is why there are verses in the Old Testament telling people to give thanks to God. In fact, some 3,000 years ago people griped about life and talked about the "good old days."

Ecclesiastes 7:10a

Do not say, "Why were the old days better than these..."

Let's face it, the only "good old days" were in the Garden of Eden, and since then life has been difficult, with plenty to be unthankful about. That is why we have to make up our minds to obey God and be thankful. Did I say, "obey God"? You bet I did, because God commands us to be thankful. Hey, that sounds like my

parents—and it should. Good parents “stand in” for God until a child learns to obey the Word without parental enforcement. Scripture says, “...a child left to himself disgraces his mother” (Prov. 29:15b).

1 Thessalonians 5:18

give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.

The Greek verb that is translated “give thanks” in the above verse, *eucharisteo*, is in the imperative mood, which means it is a command. God does not “wish” that we would give thanks, He tells us to do so. We have the free will to disobey His command, of course, but not without consequences. Unthankfulness produces a host of physical and mental consequences (**for more information on this, see the lead article, The Benefits of “Thanks-Living” by Dan Gallagher**). Furthermore, it makes us hard to live with. Few people enjoy spending much time with an unthankful, sourpuss person. Lastly, there will be consequences for unthankfulness at the Judgment, in terms of the rewards for obedience that we will miss out on.

If life is so difficult, how can God command us to be thankful? The answer to that question is twofold. First, because although there is a lot in life we can be unthankful about if we so choose, there is also a lot for which we can be thankful. Second, because we can be thankful if we want to be. Many a parent has confronted an unthankful, sullen child, and said, “Go to your room and don’t come out until you change your attitude.” That is good parenting, because children, and the rest of us, need to learn that bad attitudes and unthankfulness are a choice. I am not speaking of the immediate emotional reaction to a tragedy, but if we have a continual negative and unthankful attitude about life, that is a choice.¹

The fact is, we can be thankful if we want to be. God commands us to take our thoughts captive to Christ.

2 Corinthians 10:5

We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

God has designed our thinking process to be subject to our will, but this is not such a popular subject today. We live in the generation of, “If it feels good, do it.” Slogans, songs, and countless “role models” encourage us to run our lives by our feelings. Thus we become unthankful because we are quite sure that we “deserve a break today” and did not get one. We wanted to “have it our way,” but that never materialized. But even without unrealistic expectations, the trials of life may produce feelings of unthankfulness—and the key to both obedience and a more blessed life is that we choose not to dwell on them. We can take our unthankful thoughts captive and say to ourselves: “I refuse to think like this. I am going to find something to be thankful for in this situation.” In fact, God commands us to think about “good” things.

Philippians 4:8

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

Just as we are commanded to be thankful, we are commanded how to direct our thinking to that end. The word translated “think” in the above verse is in the imperative mood, and therefore is a command. As with being thankful, thinking about excellent and praiseworthy things is not a suggestion, it is a command. Good parents know that it is unhealthy and hurtful for their children to think about ungodly things, and so they do things such as keep their small children from seeing “R” rated movies, place parental controls on the Internet, and monitor the video games they play.

With similar parental love, our heavenly Father directs us as to what we should think about and be exposed to, and we would all have a more positive attitude about life if we treated our grown-up selves like we treat our

children. Why is it suddenly okay to watch sex on the screen or play graphically violent video games just because we are old enough to do so? We dare not be naive about the consequences of ungodly thoughts. There is an ever-growing body of evidence that links watching violence on television or playing violent video games with violent behavior, and we can be assured that violent behavior does not arise out of a thankful heart.

Someone once said, “Your thoughts are the seeds of your words and deeds.” How true. If we spend a significant amount of time watching violence or sex on television or in movies (or for that matter, the cutting, sarcastic talk that is the standard fare of most sit-coms), it should not amaze us that we have a hard time being peaceful and thankful. If we constantly sow violent thought-seeds, eventually we will reap tension, anxiety, and anti-social thoughts. If we sow hours of sexually oriented thought-seeds, we will reap sexual dissatisfaction (which may show up as sexual fantasies), and not be thankful for who we are and what we have.

Scripture says, “Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows” (Gal. 6:7). That is a simple formula with a simple message. If we are going to be thankful from our hearts, we have to sow thankful thoughts, and not just once a day when we get off work. If we are going to be godly and be thankful in life, we have to be careful about the thought-seeds that we sow. We must also be aware that reaping requires consistent sowing. Just because we guard our thoughts today does not mean we will be thankful tomorrow. We need to sow godly thought-seeds over the long haul to consistently reap thankful, godly thoughts.

We need to say one more thing about controlling our thoughts, planting good seed-thoughts, and being thankful. It is simple, but not easy. Experience tells us this, and so does Scripture. First, as we pointed out earlier, we live in a world designed by the Enemy to make us dissatisfied and unthankful, and it is impossible to withdraw from every immoral influence. To do that, Corinthians says, “...you would have to leave this world” (1 Cor. 5:10b). We cannot remove every worldly influence, but we can do a lot to make sure that we are sowing godliness in our lives. We can be careful of what we watch on television, what we listen to on the radio, and what we read. Furthermore, we can battle our own fleshly desires. Galatians tells us that our sinful nature and our spirit are in conflict, which is what makes it hard to do the good we want to do.

Galatians 5:17

For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit [spirit], and the Spirit [spirit] what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.

It is not easy to master our sinful nature, which produces “...the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life... (1 John 2:16b-NASB). Our “sinful nature” is inherently selfish and unthankful, and will be part of us until we die or the Lord returns. So actually living thankful lives takes more than just being mentally aware that we should be thankful. We must be prepared to make war on our flesh and our fleshly desires by sowing good and godly thoughts.

God loves us, and He wants us to live blessed, peaceful, and thankful lives, so He commands us to be thankful, and tells us what kinds of things to think about. Now it is our turn to love Him and ourselves enough to obey. Let’s be diligent to obey God, and be thankful. I’m thankful you read this article.

(Endnote)

1. I am speaking of normal, healthy humans, not people with clinical depression, etc.

PARTNER PROFILE

Pat & Tina Sweeney

Dia dhiabh agus beannacht Dé oraibh go léir!

That means, “May God be with you and may God’s blessings be on all of you.”

Greetings from Ireland!

This is Pat and Tina Sweeney, and we live in the southeast corner of Ireland with our two boys, Jonathan (9) and Matthew (5 ½). We consider our association with Spirit & Truth Fellowship International to be one of the great blessings in our lives. Why?

Well, through the years, our hunger for the Word of God and our desire to learn how to become effective and fruit-bearing members of the Body of Christ have brought us into contact with many different groups, churches and ministries. Many have blessed us for a time, and we’ve learned something from them, but we believe this ministry is different. How?

Spirit & Truth is different firstly because of their insistence on accurate biblical teaching, and that it is the foundation for an effective Christian walk. They continually exalt the Word of God above the traditions and doctrines of men. They do not use condemnation or legalism to control people, but rather seek to empower believers by promoting grace and freedom in Christ.

Secondly, they are committed to helping Christians grow and mature through a network of locally run fellowships. Spirit & Truth is not “personality based.” It does not rest on the shoulders of just one spiritual leader, but rather on a network of Christians who are committed to a shared vision. This allows many people to contribute and ensures accountability and balance within the ministry.

Through the years we’ve come to know some of the ministry leaders quite well. We’ve seen them up close and personal when they’ve come to stay in our home, and we’ve seen how they deal with different issues and challenges in their own lives and in the ministry. We’ve witnessed first hand their integrity, their trustworthiness, and their willingness to serve. Many times we have been blessed by their encouragement and support. To us, they are wonderful examples of true servant leaders.

Just as we have been so blessed through Spirit & Truth, we want to see many more people touched by this unique ministry—and that’s where the Partnership Program comes in. We see the Partnership Program as an opportunity for us to help this work grow around the world. We believe it is biblical to financially support genuine laborers in the Gospel so that they can devote their time completely to the Lord’s work.

1 Corinthians 9:11, 13 and 14

(11) If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you?

(13) Don't you know that those who work in the temple get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar?

(14) In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.

The subject of money is another area where Spirit & Truth is different from many other ministries. We are so blessed by the truth that we, as Christians, are not obliged to tithe, but rather are urged to give what we have decided in our hearts to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor. 9:7). In all the years we have been associated with Spirit & Truth, we have never been badgered to give money or made to feel guilty if we didn't. This is another example of how the ministry emphasizes our freedom in Christ.

We are delighted to have the opportunity in the Partnership Program to give consistently to further the Lord's work. It is a way for each person to give whatever he or she is able.

2 Corinthians 8:12

For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.

We are completely confident that what we give is put to good use by this ministry, and it's a real blessing to give to the work of God, period! Being so wonderful, God has arranged it that we can't out-give Him.

2 Corinthians 9:8

And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

God bless you!

The Sweeney Family
R. OF IRELAND

"Together We Can!"

FAMILY NEWS, VIEWS, AND FEEDBACK

Dear Sower,

Here is some feedback on your new July Tape/CD of the Month – *An Overview of the Sacred Secret*.

AWESOME, FANTASTIC, INCREDIBLE, and mostly INSPIRING for all who will hear it.

Laura Albus
Gresham, OR

[Thanks to Laura, this teaching has been transcribed and is posted on www.TruthOrTradition.com Topic: Administrations 2. Please take some time to read and/or print off this powerful teaching. If you would like to buy the 80-minute audio of our July tape/CD, see page 4 of the enclosed pricelist.]

Dear Sower,

I just wanted to let you know how much I enjoyed the articles in your latest edition of *The Sower* (Jul/Aug 2005).

Having been a ministry partner for several years, I have enjoyed all the writings of John Lynn, John Schoenheit, Mark Graeser, and others, and of course still do. However, the articles that touched me most this issue were from who I would call the “up-and-coming” writers of the future.

For example, “Honor One Another,” by Carolyn Pais. As of late I have been very frustrated with my judgmental attitude of others, which I just can’t seem to overcome even though I pray for help. This article made so much sense to me that I now have hope about how to view my fellow man. I’ve read it several times in the hope of establishing its content in my heart.

In “Christ in You,” by Shawn Mercer, I was also able to identify areas in my life that have been, shall I say, less than adequate. Though I’ve read Colossians many, many times, and know what is the “Sacred Secret,” I never really tried to put it into context. Shawn did a wonderful job of doing this for me.

And finally, Dallas Estes’ “Partner Profile” re-instilled in me the need to give more of myself (not just think about it). Giving financial support has always been easy, but to give of myself, well, that was something else again. I was always looking for someone to step into my path, rather than seeking out those in need. I now have volunteered to be a driver for seniors in my area who can’t get around by themselves. My application is still pending, but when I am approved, I plan to use all the tools that have been presented in these three articles to assist me in being the best I can be for God and His precious Son, Jesus.

With Sincere Thanks,
Gary Reeve
Encinitas, CA

[To read back issues of *The Sower* online, go to www.TruthOrTradition.com Topic: News]

Dear Sower,

I hope you don't mind if I take a moment of your time to write a small message of gratitude.

As an ex-member of a denominational Church, I stopped practicing when I was about 17, but after the events of 9/11 I went to a non-denominational Church with a co-worker and got saved, confessing that Jesus is Lord and believing that God raised him from the dead (Rom. 10:9 and 10). But the whole time I was there I felt like the pastor demanded perfection, or a sinless lifestyle, something I just could not achieve. I felt a great pull away from the things of God. I would go to church but just not want to be there, or feel enmity because I thought God hated me for every single sin that I tried my best to fight. And to make it worse, the pastor said he doesn't agree with the notion of "once saved, always saved," and that just didn't feel right to me, because I thought that if I sinned I had to get saved all over again. I was about to stop going and give up on God altogether.

Then one day at work I saw a bumper sticker on a car that had your website [www.TruthOrTradition.com] on it. I read that nothing I could ever do would make me lose my salvation. I also read all the "Salvation is Permanent" sections on your site and I was so overjoyed, I was literally crying. Since then I have had this explosion of faith and have been faithful to study the Word and have read along with topics on your site. And then I realized the truth of what God said, that if you seek, you will find. I am very glad that I decided to check out this website with its logical explanations and Greek translations for difficult words.

I can't express how happy I have become in the last 2 weeks, and as such I want to find a fellowship that I feel I can agree with and start anew. I will call you soon and hopefully begin again, and fellowship with likeminded believers. Thanks for the great website. I just believe God has brought me here. Praise God!!

Nathan Kippert
Indianapolis, IN

WEBSITE FEEDBACK

www.TruthOrTradition.com www.BiblicalUnitarian.com

Dear Sower,

Hi there!

I just wanted to say thank you for this website [www.TruthOrTradition.com]. I have for a long time wrestled with the topic of tithing vs. giving, and when doing my own study on it, I came up with the same answer as you posted. The problem is that when I listen to preachers on television, or even at church, I get a very different explanation about tithing, and it confused me to say the least.

I want to give financially to the Lord, but there are times when there is very little money and then I can't, only to feel guilty because of it. It is a comfort to read your article [posted under the "Money" topic], and I printed it so that I can always have it to relate back to. This is my first time checking out your website, and I really enjoyed it. I have book marked it and will be back to read more of the topics that you have available.

Thanks again, and God bless you!

In Christ,
Barbie Anderson

Dear Sower,

I am from England, and I work with young people. I have found your article on the truth about tithing very helpful and interesting.

I am not religious but I am working with a young person who belongs to an independent church in my town. He does not earn very much but is being told by his church he should give his tithes as it says in the Bible. I have found your site [www.TruthOrTradition.com] very helpful to me because it deals with the issue whilst not going against his Christian beliefs as a whole. It shows what God wants for him and how the tithe is not pertinent to believers today. Thank you very much for something that is both clear and informative.

Nathalie Hoyland
England

Dear Sower,

FINALLY! Someone who believes like I do [www.TruthOrTradition.com]. I have been "going it alone" for 13 years. I guess the Lord knows I need help. Much like those who cry, "Lord, I'm all alone" and he keeps telling me, "I have ten thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal." Finally, I see some truth to that concept.

Theophilus Book
Plant City, FL

Dear Sower,

I don't even know where to begin. How about the words, THANK YOU and I LOVE YOU or I LOVE THAT YOU EXIST.

So far, I have agreed with every single thing I have read here on your site [www.TruthOrTradition.com], and I now feel better about the things I have already known, and have been reassured by this magnificent web site that you have.

I am still a little foggy on some topics like the Rapture, but understanding will come with study and time, I am sure. The main thing is that I cannot believe I have found a web site that is dead-on accurate about the nature of Christ and who he is, and does not try to turn him into something he is not.

With love and hope for the future kingdom, in the name of Jesus.

Your friend,
Andy C. Szewczak
New Smyrna Beach, FL

Dear Sower,

THANK YOU for the information on tithing. I have been attending a certain church for about a year, and was considering joining. Last Sunday, the pastor held a mandatory meeting after services to go over doctrine with all candidates for church membership. I agreed with everything except giving 10 percent of my income. I do give to the church, CHEERFULLY, but cannot afford to give a tenth of my income.

It seemed to me that I am able to do anything and still stay in the church as long as I give a tenth of my income. I have to let the pastor know this week if I am joining the church Sunday. Your article that I just read on tithing cleared up my confusion. THANK YOU. I am going to continue searching for the right church where I can give, FREELY and CHEERFULLY, what the Lord lays on my heart to give. I will feel no shame if I can't give a tenth. I will be checking back in on your site [www.TruthOrTradition.com], from time to time, as you people seem to have it together.

Again, thank you for helping me come out of the confusion I was in.

God bless you!!
Louise Rector

INTERNATIONAL NEWS AND FEEDBACK

Dear Sower,

For more than two years I have studied your works and books about Biblical Unitarianism, and I have come to the conclusion that your message is true and biblical.

I have been a pastor of a Church of God congregation, but resigned my position. I am interested to find here in Germany an organization like yours. I think we have a need to give the message of the SON of God to the people here in Germany.

Have a great day and God bless!

Hans J. Haeuser, D. Min.
Neckarsulm, Germany

[Hans found us via our www.BiblicalUnitarian.com web site. To all of you that send in donations to help us market this site – Thank you!]

Dear Sower,

I greet you in the wonderful name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the way to God. God bless you richly, and be open to His glory and may it overshadow you with His presence.

I am very thankful for the kind financial help you are supporting me with here in Africa. As a matter of fact, our lives are filled with poverty and troubles. What would my family life be like if you could not help me financially? What would my preaching and educating my fellow Africa would be like if you were not touched and pitied me? What would the situation be like if I had not paid the hospital and medical charges during my sickness? What would the work of God be like without your help?

I am recognized in many parts of Tanzania, and beyond, for having made substantial and exciting strides in teaching the Word of God. I have further acquired the reputation in having a strong Christian doctrinal commitment. Many church leaders try to seduce me by promising high pay and material things. They fail to buy me with good or sound doctrine but they buy me with things, earthly things.

We have seen that the leaders of many denominations, and the government, who are supposed to be protectors of biblical sound doctrine and individual rights, are in fact the first to violate them. Brothers and sisters, believers need to be protected by us where we can, and we must tell them so they may know we are called to serve God. Yesterday, I was talking to a very high official who came to listen to my lecture. He wanted to know if the government of Tanzania is in order. I told him that the president violates human's rights. The president may, without recourse to the courts, detain a person. This law is against "freedom from arbitrary arrest," and I discussed it with him at length. He eventually agreed to rely much on my upcoming lectures.

Ever since I joined with you, our United African Fellowship Church has been trying to transform its total education system, which was inherited from other denominations, in order to match it with her own new goals, aspirations, and concepts of development. The development of our ministry will bring about people who know

the Word of God. Actually, I will be very happy if I purchase a vehicle to transport me to the lost souls. I have much confidence in your teachings. Please do not grow tired.

Yours very sincerely,

Bishop Maclean Andambike (Mac) Mwakasungula
Tanzania, East Africa

Dear Sower,

It's been a very long time that we have been enjoying all the teaching materials you send to us here in the Philippines. It really helps us a lot, and also to our church members and our outreaches. Even my 8-year old daughter Grace knows and can explain about the difference of who is JESUS and who is GOD.

I really thank God for your teachings. It helps us very much to know the truth not tradition. We learned many, many things from all the books and tapes you have sent to us. Our outreach pastors accepted willingly all those teachings.

God bless you all,

Lisa Manginsay
South Cotabato, Philippines

Dear Sower,

Thank you for *The Sower* you send to me (Jul/Aug 2005 issue on "The Sacred Secret"). I really have to read it over and over again. I was delighted to see that the word I use to believe is a mystery is "Sacred Secret." I also now know what it is to "Honor One Another." I gave it to someone in my group, and tears of joy fall from his eyes and he said I have found the truth. Here is my little testimony.

I am 31 years old, single and a Christian who have been sincerely searching for the knowledge of God and Christ. I decided to study for my self. When I finally found the truth I have decided to share this truth with other people of my language who will want to get the truth in their own native language. I am trying to see how I will have a translation team here in Nigeria so that many people will hear this great truth in their own language. In appreciation to God for giving me this truth, I am determined to share it.

May the Good Lord continue to bless your efforts as you produce this truth for all truth seekers to see and hear. Thanks, and remain blessed!

In Christ's love,
Purpose Osa Iserhienrhien
Nigeria, Africa

Servant-Leadership Conference Report

About 100 people, representing many of the servant-leaders and fellowships in our Spirit & Truth community, met from Thursday, September 22 to Sunday, September 25, for our annual Servant Leadership Conference at the Airport Holiday Inn in Indianapolis, Indiana. Participants came from 17 states and 2 other countries—Walter Williams from Sweden and Rudy Odarve from the Philippines.

We had also received e-mail greetings from many saints around the world who were praying for us and believing God along with us for an exhilarating and profitable time together. We are truly becoming an international ministry. All who were at the conference can attest to the fact that these prayers were answered, because it was a high time of worship, teaching, planning, and collaborating on the work of the ministry that God has been so faithful to open up for us.

Tom Resner opened the weekend with an excellent handling of God's Word, focusing on the "Sacred Secret" and the responsibility we have as a ministry to hold forth that truth. In order to get the most out of the weekend, participants were asked to reflect upon why they had come and what they wanted from the conference. Almost all the participants were there because they were associated in some way with leading, supporting, or representing a fellowship in our community.

A "Servant-Leadership Resource Manual" was unveiled at the conference, and each participant (or couple) was given one to look at for the weekend. Many of the group discussions and presentations revolved around the contents of the manual, which helped us see that it needs more work before we introduce it to our whole community. So after everyone got excited about the manual, we asked him or her to leave it behind while we worked on it further. Thankfully, no one rioted or threw rotten vegetables at us. No, our wonderful servant-leaders acted with the grace and maturity that we would expect. The manual contains a wealth of information for our local fellowship servant-leaders to draw from, and also provides common ground for our ministry leaders to stand upon. It is a work in progress and will continue to be added to and revised.

On Friday morning, Dan Gallagher taught on "Thanks-Living" (see his article in this issue of *The Sower*), drawing the connection between our spiritual life, our emotional life, and our physical bodies. This was a perfect tee-up for a healing service that night, in which the Lord graciously provided much insight into people's physical problems that were the result of "deadly emotions" that had not been properly processed. Those who were ministered to reported much deliverance as they began to acknowledge the connection between their emotional life and their physical bodies.

We had small groups on Friday and Saturday morning, providing a space for people to share their lives with one another. The participants opened their hearts to one another intimately, and many acquaintances became friendships during the weekend. We are a ministry that encourages authentic friendship, for we are all in this work together, and we must share each other's burdens.

On Saturday morning Nate Graeser shared on "Four Keys to Changing the World," a presentation that was as insightful as it was energizing and entertaining. Nate is working on a booklet about starting a fellowship, which will soon be available in a first draft, from which we hope to get many good suggestions from you to incorporate into it.

On Saturday afternoon we held workshops and focus groups on a variety of topics, too many to itemize here, and we made much progress on a variety of fronts critical to the growth of the ministry.

Saturday night, we were treated to a wonderful processional of colorful pageantry and dance. This led up to an inspiring sharing by Rudy Odarve, who gave his testimony about his involvement in our ministry, and how he and his wife slowly became convinced of the truth of our teaching and the price they paid for committing themselves to it. They were dismissed from their denomination in the Philippines and lost their financial support. Nevertheless, God has provided for them even more abundantly since they have come on board.

The remainder of Saturday night was devoted to the ordination of Dan Gallagher, officiated by Gary Theisen. There were many moving moments, but none more than the opening of the floor for any saints who so desired to come forward to celebrate the gift that Dan has been to their lives. It is always a community event when we recognize those among us who have consistently demonstrated their calling, their commitment, their competence, and especially their Christian character, and at least 20 people spoke glowingly about how Dan has touched them. For the record, we do not believe that anything is conferred upon a person in the ordination ceremony. Rather, it is a recognition of how that person has been functioning faithfully within our community in a way that allows us to celebrate his evident gifting, calling, etc.

On Sunday morning we closed out with more discussion and a closing teaching by Mark Graeser on a model for Christian growth. He set forth four steps, or building blocks, which are conversion, discipling, ministering, and equipping others. The goal of growth is to be able to maturely minister, and then equip others to do the same. This is what we are seeing more and more as people within our community are rising up to function in their giftings and callings, providing much needed servant-leadership for our beloved people. We pray that each year we will see more and more such folks come join us for this exciting and inspiring “fellowship of the faithful.”