

GENTLE SHEPHERD MINISTRIES

CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH ~ MAKING DISCIPLES ~ EQUIPPING THE SAINTS FOR MINISTRY

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RUNNING THE RACE

Part 3

The Marathon

By Rayola Kelley

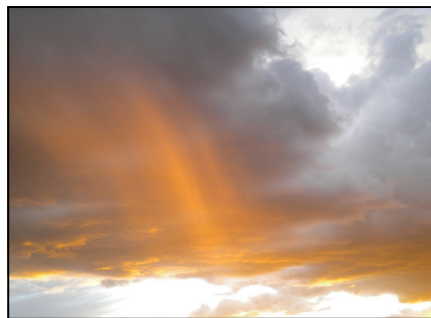
Last month I talked about the importance of vision when it comes to running the race; therefore, this article further emphasizes this fact. It is clear that the type of focus a person maintains not only defines his or her purpose but it determines the direction in which that individual is to run. That is why a disciple of Christ strives to always be within "viewing range" of where the Master is leading, while carefully walking in line with His yoke. It is Jesus alone who is able to inspire and lead us into the glory of the next world, but we must learn to follow Him by ever focusing on Him through His examples and teachings.

Solomon tells us in *Proverbs 29:18* that people without vision will perish. The problem today with many Christians is that their vision does not extend beyond this present world. Those who are caught up with the things of this world become lukewarm towards the things of God. It takes the eyes of unfeigned faith to see beyond this present world to the next. It takes the discipline of obedience to walk in light of the next world. The more Christians focus on Jesus and adjust to His way, truth, and life, the more defined their vision becomes toward the age that is yet to come.

For example, have you ever been around a saint who possesses a certain glow in their eyes? It appears as if that person is looking through the present reality into a whole new dimension. It is not that the saint is looking through you, but he or she is looking past that which is visible, and catching glimpses into the invisible, which causes his or her eyes to take on a heavenly glow. It is clear that the world to come is more real to them than the present world they live in. Instead of looking at the world through

hues of worldly influences, they are viewing matters from an eternal perspective.

Consider the above scenario. If believers possessed a heavenly perspective, it would clearly change what they value and change the impact they would leave on others. When I study the prophets and saints like the Apostle Paul, it is clear that their perspective did not find its origins or inspiration in the present world (*Ephesians 2:6*). They undoubtedly possessed a heavenly gaze that was increasingly defined as their vision was forever adjusted by the heavenly influence in their lives.



I don't know about you but one of my desires is to possess a heavenly perspective. I don't want to be bound to this present world by idolatrous dependency, limited vision, and lustful attractions. I want my countenance to glow with the heavenly light when I enter heaven, revealing that like Abraham, I have seen the city of God, my home in the far distance and run towards it in great expectation (*Hebrews 11:10*). In the past I have seen glimpses of this city's glorious light in each revelation of Jesus. I rejoiced in its promises as the world became more of a stranger to me, and the truths of God became more real to me than the reality of the present world.

The question is how do we obtain such a vision? Scripture is clear that we all start out blind, groping in the darkness of sin, deception, and

despair (*Deuteronomy 28:28-29; Isaiah 59:10*). If you consider that in many cases involving physical blindness it takes surgery or a miracle to restore sight, we must concede that the same holds true for spiritual vision. Believers have spiritual vision because of the miracle of Christ's redemption. Due to Adam and Eve falling into spiritual darkness, the sight of faith had to be restored, and thanks to redemption the real sight to see into the unseen realm has been given to each believer.

We must recognize the Christian life is about advancing forward. That is why we have been given the eyesight of faith to move forward even when the gray shadows give way to grave darkness and the looming dark clouds turn into raging storms. We must continue forward because our home is not behind us and our real prize is yet to be claimed.

There is another reason we must ever continue to move forward and that is because we have been entrusted with an urgent message. We have not only been saved from a life of vanity and destruction, but we have been saved to a life that has purpose and merit. Without purpose, there is no initiative or desire to even walk out the Christian life, let alone run the race.

The Christian race is not just any race, it is a lifetime marathon. Granted, we must learn to walk out the Christian life, but we are also called to run the race. Sadly, it seems that most American Christians have forgotten what the race is all about.

When we think of marathons, we think of long distance runners. If you are like me, you admire and marvel at dedicated runners who prepare to run a 26-mile course. But, how many of you have heard the name Philippides? I heard about this man years ago watching the history channel. Admittedly, I did not remember his name, but I remembered his feat which inspired what is known today as the "marathon race."

To get my facts right, I looked up the history associated with this man and what we now know as the “marathon race” on the Internet. This incredible feat that is associated with this run did not just entail a runner running a marathon to a certain place for some type of competition or a prize; rather, it was actually associated to a life and death situation.

Philippides (530 BC–490 BC) lived in Athens and was a professional runner. In essence, you could say he was a courier that carried vital messages to other places. Due to some of the terrain, runners, instead of horses were used to carry messages to a designated place.

In the case of Philippides, he had to carry an urgent message. The Persian army was advancing towards Athens in their attempt to conquer the known world. The army had just landed a large force just outside of Athens and was preparing to attack the city. It was clear to those of Athens that the time was short and that they needed help. The Athenian generals sent Philippides to seek help from Sparta. This professional runner ran 140 miles over rugged mountainous terrain to Sparta in 36 hours. Sparta agreed to help but they would not begin to prepare their army until noon. This would leave the people of Athens alone to fight the battle. Philippides had to run the 140 miles back to warn the people of Athens that they would be on their own to face this army.

Although the small Athenian army was outnumbered 4 to 1, the wise military leaders launched a surprise offensive at the plains of Marathon. Philippides was one of those who fought that day. At the end of the day 6,400 Persian bodies lay dead on the field while only 192 Athenians lost their lives. The surviving Persian soldiers fled to the sea, but decided to attack Athens again from a different direction. Philippides once again was instructed to run to Athens, 26 miles away, to carry the news of victory and the warning of another impending attack. He reached Athens in three hours to deliver the message, and then died shortly thereafter from exhaustion.

Eventually Sparta and other Greek polities came to the aid of Athens and kept the Eastern power from

conquering Greece and spreading into Europe. For this reason the battle that took place at Marathon is called the “battle that changed history.” Imagine, at the center of it was a runner who spent out his energy and his life to save his beloved Athens.



Centuries later the modern Olympic Games introduced a “marathon race” of 24.85 miles. The first winner was a man named Spiridion Loui, a Greek postal worker

who was a veteran of several long military marches. He ran the course in 2 hours, 58 minutes and 50 seconds. His average pace was 7:11 miles per hour. In the 1908 Olympic Games in London, the marathon distance was changed to 26 miles.

Most likely the Apostle Paul knew the history of Philippides. When we think of the Christian being a runner, we think in terms of running the race in light of our Christian walk. To some extent this is true. We are running a type of race towards heaven, but for the Christian, the real purpose for running the race is because we are carrying a most urgent message. Carrying this message is our commission.

As believers we have been given the vital message of the Gospel to carry throughout the various mission fields of the world. It is a life and death message for those who have never heard the warning or who have failed to believe they are in danger of being destroyed by the enemy of sin, which will cause them to be consumed by the lusts of the flesh and entrapped in the snares of the fowler, and ultimately cast into hell (*Mark 16:15; Psalm 91:3; 1 John 2:15-17; Matthew 25:29-30*).

We must ask ourselves if we are running this race, holding high the passion and flame of the Holy Spirit as we carry the life-and-death message of the Gospel. Romans 10:14-17 tells us, “*How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach except*

they be sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” The only reason we are carrying this message is because we love our beloved Lord and Savior and are committed to carry out our commission, showing forth our loyalty to the spiritual kingdom He is establishing. It does not matter if we are spent out, for it is a worthy and honorable cause. It does not matter if we lose all for the sake of spreading the message, for in the end we will gain the greatest prize of all.

Like every runner, Christians must go through much preparation before they can take on the terrain of this world, but how many Christians are prepared to run this incredible marathon to the finish line? Before one is prepared, there must be a desire to even run the race. What most Christians do not realize is that upon salvation, this marathon race begins. Granted, most of us start out crawling or barely walking, and if a new Christian takes off running it is out of zeal that lacks knowledge of true righteousness (*Romans 10:2-3*). Such a person will eventually burn out and abort the race because he or she is not prepared to endure the hardships of such a course.

The Apostle Paul compared the hardships of the course to that of being a soldier in *2 Timothy 2:2-4*, “*And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also. Thou therefore endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.*” Endurance is not only a product of faith in action but it is often the main tool that forges character in a person.

Remember, this long distance race is named after a major battle that changed history. As Christian runners we have a worthy foe, and it is not each other, but Satan. We also need to remember that when Jesus Christ

stepped into history in human form, it was to win the war over Satan and spiritual death, but it was also to entrust us with the torch of the Holy Spirit and the very important message of the Gospel (*1 Corinthians 2:4; 9:16; Hebrews 2:14-18*). However, the enemy has for centuries tried to wipe out the light of the Gospel and silence the messenger. This world is his world and he knows how to tempt some to abort their mission, ensnare others into traps of weariness, complacency, and indifference rendering them inept, and entice others to take detours from the course to ensure that they never victoriously finish the race (*2 Corinthians 4:2-7*). It is for this reason that we are to put on the whole armor of God which includes our feet being shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace, knowing that there are battles ahead of us that must be fought and endured (*Ephesians 6:15*).

Before running any race, Christians need to first learn the course. *Psalm 119:105* tells us this about the course, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." The Word will outline the course we are to run. As we initially begin walking in obedience to it, we will learn to stay in our specific lane in preparation to run. Most racers start out in a particular lane but if a person steps outside of his or her lane before the proper time, he or she will be disqualified. No one can run another person's race. Each person must stay within the narrow confines of the path that God has ordained for him or her in order to stay the course.

The lines for our course have been clearly drawn in the Bible, but the problem is the lines have been "fudged" by enemies of the cross and truth. The seriousness of sin has been watered down by political correctness, the Holy Spirit has been replaced with organizations and methods, the Word has been dulled-down by various corrupt versions to suffice the world, and the many saints have lost their discerning edge because of being bombarded by worldly demands.

Marvin Rosenthal gave this perspective about the Word of God, "Today, there is not so much a need to defend God's Word as there is a need to proclaim it. Perhaps Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the prince of

preachers, said it best. When asked if he defended the Word of God, Spurgeon responded, "Yes, the way I would defend a lion. I just open the cage and let it out."

The next preparation in running the marathon race entails disciplining our bodies. The Apostle Paul put this discipline in these terms of preaching the Gospel in *1 Corinthians 9:24-27*, "Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, and not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection; lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."

To discipline our bodies means to keep our appetites, lusts, and desires under control. If we can't discipline ourselves in these areas we will never be prepared to endure the race, nor will we have any credibility when it comes to those we come in contact with. In any serious competition, winners learn self-denial of those things that would not enhance their ability to win and sacrifice much in order to finetune their abilities to win.

Clearly, there is much preparation in running the race. In order to develop strength to endure a marathon, a person must start out running a reasonable distance with the intent of challenging the body to run further each time. For the Christian this means we must find our niche as to the type of evangelistic approach we adopt when it comes to carrying out our commission. Once we find that approach, we must enlarge and finetune it by gaining experience in doing it.

People who share the Gospel have various ways in which they do it. Some pass out tracts and others look for opportunities to plant a seed, while others become missionaries. There are those who ask questions, seeking some common ground or an open door. We have those who are street preachers, while some use events to bring people into earshot of the Gospel. Whatever our niche may be, we

must find it and avail ourselves to be used by God to declare the urgent message of the Gospel to a world of people who are about to go down in a sinking ship.

Next month I will deal more with the subject of personal discipline. The main thing we must consider is, are we even attempting to run this most important race? Perhaps we are struggling with the idea of running it, and if so, we must remember that we can't finish the race unless we start in the first place, and we can't get very far without personal preparation and discipline. †

A MATTER OF LIFE OR DEATH

By Andrew Murray

"We shall first of all have to set clearly before ourselves and others what is the true calling of the church and every believer. Christ expects that everyone who is made a partaker of His redemption shall yield himself, as the first object of his existence, to live for the coming of His kingdom. Christ asks and expects that just as the loyal subjects of a king are ready and eager in time of war to give their lives for the kingdom, so His redeemed ones, in the power of His Spirit and His love, shall live not for themselves but entirely for Him who died and lives for them.

As long as this standard is counted as too high, and not accepted as the very groundwork of the relation between Christ and His church and every member of it, our attempt to lift the church into the more abundant life will be in vain. Unless God's children can be brought to accept this standard and to count that kind of life their highest happiness, and to believe in the power of Christ to work and maintain it in them, there will be little hope. We will not possess that intense vitality without which the church cannot fulfill her calling. . . . We must ask why, with our faith in Christ, there has been so little love to Him and for the souls He has entrusted to us. Did we imagine that our religion was pleasing to God while all the time we were grieving our Lord by the neglect of His last and most cherished commands?"
—*The State of the Church*, pg. 26, 27

**A PERFECT HEART
IN AN IMPERFECT WORLD
Part 3**

By Jeannette Haley

*"I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. O when wilt thou come unto me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart."
-- Psalm 101:2*

Back in the early 50's a beautiful song was written called "Where Is Your Heart," which originated from the 1952 movie, *Moulin Rouge*. It is still popular with music lovers to this day. Some of the lyrics are, "Your lips may be near but where is your heart? . . . You're close to me here but where is your heart? . . . It's a sad thing to realize that you've a heart that never melts." No doubt many people, then and now can relate to the pathos of unrequited love; and, just maybe the poignancy and power of such feelings within the human breast can cause us to relate, although in a limited way, to God's heart when His love is shunned and rejected by those for whom He died. *John 1:10, 11* tell us, "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not." Jesus said, "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me" *Matthew 15:8*. Rejection, unless we are vigilant, can open the door to such temptations as anger, introspection, wounded pride, and pity. Concerning pity, here is a word of caution: beware of pity, for pity that consists of self-pity or pity for Jesus is not an acceptable, upright, or biblical response. We cannot always trust our own hearts in a matter, for the "heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it" *Jeremiah 17:9*?

There is also a type of pity for others that can be deceitful because it can open us up to experience a powerful rush of emotion that we may wrongly interpret as coming from "a loving heart." This type of pity travels the "low road" of false humility along with its companions of "sorry," "sweet sickly," and "super spiritual" while God's pity is the "high road" of compassion and measureless love. Self-serving pity, as well as any counterfeit "fruit," merely

serves to feed our pride, and propel us into a false reality along with a deluded perception of our true heart condition. In this state any impulsive decision or commitment we may make without asking the Lord for His leading usually lands us in a world of hurt. Powerful emotions of any kind that are not based on the facts of truth (reality) lead to misdirected imaginations that result in delusion.

Today the world is crawling with emotional misfits whose "socially-minded bleeding hearts" have given rise to a wicked agenda of "saving 'mother earth'" and everything on it (except human beings). Such are motivated, to a very large extent, by pride-feeding pity. As previously stated, this type of pity feeds a person's pride by making a person feel good about self because as a "little-martyr-dogooder" he or she has reached an independent point where his or her heart is hardened against any truth concerning God, His Word, and the salvation He offers through Jesus Christ. They have become little gods unto themselves following an emotional, impulsive sick "pity" for creation without the Creator, which, to them, is a greater reality to their deluded minds than the love of God. Therefore, they do not believe in the fact of sin, and feel no need to repent for anything. As a word of caution, Christians need to discern the difference between impulsive feelings of pity (which we can all feel at times) and God's will and love, based on lasting commitment.

Concerning self-pity, Oswald Chambers said, "Beware of allowing self-consciousness to continue because by slow degrees it will awaken self-pity, and self-pity is Satanic." He also taught, "The Death of Jesus Christ is the performance in history of the very Mind of God. There is no room for looking on Jesus Christ as a martyr; His death was not something that happened to Him which might have been prevented: His death was the very reason why He came.

"Never build your preaching of forgiveness on the fact that God is our Father and He will forgive us because He loves us. It is untrue to Jesus Christ's revelation of God; it makes the Cross unnecessary, and the Redemption "much ado about nothing." If

God does forgive sin, it is because of the Death of Christ. God could forgive men in no other way than by the death of His Son, and Jesus is exalted to be Saviour because of His death. "We see Jesus because of the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour." The greatest note of triumph that ever sounded in the ears of a startled universe was that sounded on the Cross of Christ – "It is finished." That is the last word in the Redemption of man.

"Anything that belittles or obliterates the holiness of God by a false view of the love of God, is untrue to the revelation of God given by Jesus Christ. Never allow the thought that Jesus Christ stands with us against God out of pity and compassion; that He became a curse for us out of sympathy with us. Jesus Christ became a curse for us by the Divine decree. Our portion of realizing the terrific meaning of the curse is conviction of sin, the gift of shame and penitence is given us – this is the great mercy of God. Jesus Christ hates the wrong in man, and Calvary is the estimate of His hatred."

Think about this: What is normal for the natural man is sin to God, for God is holy. Fallen man's disposition is in direct opposition to God, and all his thoughts, imaginations and ways originate from a self-serving, carnal state. He is a lost soul, living in conflict with his Creator, and yet, in spite of this, God reaches out, saying "I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people, which walketh in a way that was not good, after their own thoughts" *Isaiah 65:2*. "But my people would not hearken to my voice: and Israel would none of me" *Psalm 81:11*. "And now, because ye have done all these works, saith the Lord, and I spake unto you, rising up early and speaking, but ye heard not; and I called you, but ye answered not" *Jeremiah 7:13*. In *Matthew 22:3* Jesus said, "And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come." Can you "feel the sorrow" of God's heart when you read these words of Jesus, "And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life" *John 5:40*? The call is for repentance, humbling of self, turning around, and reconciliation with God through the cross of Christ, not a

call to feel pity for God. We have to come higher and deeper and get past ourselves, our way of thinking, feeling and being and come into full agreement with God. We must yield to the Holy Spirit, and surrender our hearts to the Spirit's call. After all, the first commandment is "And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might" Deuteronomy 6:5.

How can we know our own heart? One way is by the fruit that is coming out of our lives. What does our fruit, that is, our response to God's Word, our lifestyle, and walk say about us? Consider the four types of hearts in the parable of the sower and the seed in *Matthew 13*. Beginning with *verse 4*, we read of the first heart condition "And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up". The way side represents unprepared ground—fallow ground that has not been plowed or prepared to receive the good seed. Jesus said of such a heart, "When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side" *verse 19*. Notice that Jesus said the seed is "sown in his heart." This is an unprepared, hardened heart that lacks the understanding that is necessary for the Word to take root and grow.

How does a person acquire understanding? *Proverbs 9:10* gives us the answer, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the Holy is understanding." "The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple" *Psalms 119:130*. [Emphasis added.] Again in *Proverbs 28:14* we read "Happy is the man that feareth always: but he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief." A hard heart is the result of the "deceitfulness of sin" *Hebrews 3:13b*. Therefore, whenever a person refuses to humble him or herself because of pride, his or her heart becomes hardened. Thus it is easy for the "fowls," which represent the devil, or "the wicked one" to come and devour the good seed that was never received into the heart, leaving the person in greater darkness than before because

the light of the Word was rejected. Such was the fate of Pharaoh who did hear what Moses had to say, seemingly yielded, but then continually hardened his heart and reneged on his promise to let God's people go.

Another example is Nabal, the first husband of Abigail whose hard heart refused to give food that David and his men needed, and after Abigail told him of her righteous acts,



"his heart died within him, and he became as a stone. And it came to pass about ten days after, that the LORD smote Nabal, that he died" *1 Samuel 25:37b, 38*. Just as Nabal mocked David's servants who came in his name, and mocked David, the anointed of the Lord, so too are those whose hard hearts receive not the living seed of God's Word from the mouth of His witnesses, nor have respect unto the name of Jesus, the Son of God. They will die in their sins.

The second heart is the stony heart which the seed could not take root in because of the scanty earth. *Matthew 13:5* says "Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away." This is a description of the shallow heart. Jesus described it this way "But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended" *Matthew 13:20, 21*. There have been countless people through the ages who have sentimentally rejoiced in God's Word, confessing that they love it, but in reality that is as far as it ever goes. *Ezekiel 33:31, 32* says "And they come

unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness. And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not." Such people merely have a surface affection for the Lord. You could say that such people are more in love with their own perception of who they think Jesus is (and what He can do for them) than for Jesus Himself. As for His ways and His commandments, they have no burning desire to learn of them and obey them. Jesus referred to such when He said, "If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me" *John 14:24, 25*.

The stony heart is one that has not become "rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith" *Colossians 2:7a*. Stony-hearted, shallow people are looking for a type of "social club "Christianity lite" churches that are filled with fun, food, and surface fellowship where "cheap grace" and "easy believism" is the norm, and where they are never challenged to deny themselves, pick up their cross, and follow Christ. Jesus made it clear that the world will hate His disciples because it hates Him. In other words, if you are a born again sold out disciple of Christ, you will suffer persecution and offenses. Jesus said, "But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great" *Luke 6:49*. Thus we see that people who initially receive the Word outwardly, but who have never been properly disciplined upon the solid foundation of Christ are weak, having no substance, and are unstable, and unable to withstand the storms of life through testing and trials.

The Bible records the attitudes and actions of various people whose stony hearts became offended when

tribulation or persecution arose, and who were not willing to pay the price to know, follow, and serve the Lord. On one occasion after declaring Himself to be the bread of life as recorded in *John 6*, the Bible says, "From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him" vs. 66. Stony and shallow hearts have no desire to pay the price to truly become identified with Christ in their lives. A. W. Tozer wrote in his book, *The Root of the Righteous*, "Any faith that does not command the one who holds it is not a real belief; it is a pseudo belief only. And it might shock some of us profoundly if we were brought suddenly face to face with our beliefs and forced to test them in the fires of practical living."

Another example of an individual who had a stony heart is King Saul. He looked promising in the beginning, but in time he proved to be a double-minded and disobedient man with no "inner root" of righteousness. Unstable as water, he became a foolish, rebellious weakling.

The third heart condition is related to the seed that "fell among thorns: and the thorns sprung up, and choked them" *Matthew 13:7*. Jesus explained, "He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful." Anyone who has planted a garden knows that weeds are guaranteed to spring up and choke out the tender shoots that sprout up. Regardless of how well tilled and weed-free the soil may be in the beginning, you have to be vigilant in keeping the weeds out. Weeds, like the cares of this world, are a fact of life, just as food, water, clothing and shelter are basic needs for physical life. Such needs are not wrong in and of themselves, but the importance or position we give them in our lives can become "thorns" that threaten to override our spiritual life.

It is up to the individual Christian to guard his or her heart against love for the world. *Colossians 3:1-3* tells us, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in

God." Meditating upon this verse in light of the whole Word of God makes it clear that to be "risen with Christ" presupposes that one has died to the old life, and is now a new creation in Christ.

The Apostle John wrote, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" *1 John 2:15-17*. The person who plays footsies with the world while thinking he or she is too clever to become caught in its snare is as foolish as Ananias and Sapphira who lied to God. A worldly heart will always betray itself by the emphasis it maintains on the things of the world rather than showing forth a life that is steadfastly dedicated and focused on that which eternal. Another example of such a heart is that of the rich young ruler. (*Matthew 19:16-22*.) This is a simple yet poignant story of a promising young man whose heart was imperfect because he esteemed worldly treasure more than the eternal treasure of Jesus, and "he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions" *Matthew 19:22b*.

Another example of someone who started out with promise is Demas who traveled with the Apostle Paul, but then turned back to the world. "For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed" *2 Timothy 4:10a*. Jesus described the worldliness that existed before the Flood, and compared it to how the days would be prior to His coming, "For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away" *Matthew 24:38, 39*. Jesus warned, "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" *Matthew 6:24*. It is impossible to have a perfect heart if it is divided. No wonder King David prayed, "Unite my heart to fear

thy name" *Psalms 86:11b*.

Finally we come to the fourth heart condition, the perfect heart, described by Jesus thusly: "But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold" *Matthew 13:8*. Jesus explained, "But he that received seed heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty" *Matthew 13:23*. The believers at Thessalonica were Christians whose hearts were open to the Word. Paul wrote to them saying, "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe" *1 Thessalonians 2:13*.

The perfect heart brings forth fruit because why? Because the perfect heart is open to receive the seed (Word) by faith, and understands it, and acts on it. The perfect heart receives the word believing it is truth from God not men, and therefore by the power of God's Word brings forth fruit that is pleasing to God in spite of living in this present world. How is this possible? Consider *Romans 12:1, 2* "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." And, *Galatians 2:20*, "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me, and gave Himself for me."

What is a perfect heart in an imperfect world? Perhaps it can be summed up this way: The perfect heart is a heart that, when the Lord looks into it, He sees a reflection of Himself. †

"O, what joy it is to know, my Heavenly Father loves me so and gives to me my Jesus. When He looks at me, He sees not what I used to be, but He sees Jesus." — From the song: *I Am Covered Over*

RAYOLA'S Q & A CORNER

Q: *Why did Jesus say that salvation is of the Jews?*

A: From your question, I gather you are making reference to what Jesus stated to the Samaritan woman in *John 4:22*. The statement that Jesus made was in regard to worship. What He was saying to the woman is that people of other religions do not understand real worship because the Jewish Law, (testimonies, commandments, precepts, judgments, and statutes) established the right way to honor God in practices, to properly show awe in conduct towards Him and others, approach Him according to godly judgments and obey righteous doctrine, and uphold Him in light of His testimonies.

As you consider each aspect of God's Law, you realize that each virtue of it has significance in establishing a person in the right frame to worship the Lord. His testimonies deal with people's perception of Him, His judgments establish His followers in wisdom and the fear of the Lord, His commandments in regard to moral living, His precepts in proper conduct, and statutes in acceptable ordinances. All these virtues together were to establish a proper attitude of worship.

As Christians we know that the actual Law was a schoolmaster that pointed people to the need for salvation, and the tabernacle, priests, and sacrifices possessed types, shadows, and patterns of Christ and His work of redemption (*Galatians 3:24; Hebrews 8:5*). Jesus fulfilled every jot and tittle of the Law (*Matthew 5:17-18*).

Promises were given by God to the Old Testament patriarchs such as Abraham in regard to being a blessing to all nations, and to King David about a King coming from his loins who would sit on the throne of Israel forever. This pointed to the Messiah, Jesus coming to establish an everlasting kingdom (*Genesis 12:3; 2 Samuel 7:12-16*).

This brings us to the real meaning behind what Jesus was saying to the Samaritan woman. Jesus came through the Jewish nation. He was/is the Lion of the tribe of Judah, prophesied by Israel in *Genesis 49:8-12*. Since the Jewish religious practices pointed to Him as the Messiah, and

He came through Mary, a Jewish handmaiden, who provided Him with the means (body) to become the Savior of the world, it is clear why He said salvation is of the Jews.

God used the Jewish nation to bring forth the Redeemer of the world. This nation was clearly used as a valuable avenue in which to bless the world with a Savior. There have been great empires and nations who have left their mark on history, but they are no longer. Although many have rejected and persecuted the nation of Israel, it is still here and now serves as a hot potato to the nations of the world. It is clear God has preserved the people of Israel because of His promises to Abraham and David and will ultimately bring them from being the tail of this world to being the head of all nations.

The Samaritan woman knew about the Jewish Messiah. In fact, she was expecting Him. *"The woman saith unto him, I know the Messiah cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things"* (*John 4:25*). This woman had already recognized that Jesus was a Prophet. She was confident that the Messiah would answer all questions, especially the one that was on her heart about true worship that had produced great conflict between the Jews who worshipped in Jerusalem and the Samaritans who worshipped on Mount Gerizim.

Jesus clearly answered her question about worship, *"But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit; and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and truth"* (*John 4:23-24*).

When the Samaritan woman told Jesus she knew the Messiah would answer all of her questions, Jesus said to her, *"I that speak unto thee am he"* (*John 4:26*)

Jesus revealed Himself to the woman as being the Messiah. The greatest challenge that this passage of Scripture brings to each of us is, are we true worshippers of God? The first and foremost criterion of being true worshippers of God is that we must believe, know, and love the true Messiah. †

Excerpts From *FIRE BY NIGHT* By Richard & Sara Michalski

"As He was the fourth man in the fire of Shadrack, Meshach and Abednego, so let Him be a pillar of fire in the darkness of this final age, a fire that consumes the dross and refines the soul—a fire that brings forth your life and mine to shine like gold, reflecting His image in us by God's purifying fire."

"It is such a tragedy that we live today in an hour of easy "believism" where our pulpits tell us that all you have to do is "believe," but the Word of God declares that even Satan believes and trembles. Believing is not enough. In the Laodicean church today, pulpiteers tell us to close our eyes with no one looking around so as not to cause embarrassment to ourselves at the point of our conversion . . . Somehow the jargon of the day does not align itself well with the eternal Word of God. God says, 'If we confess Jesus Christ before men, He will confess us before the Father and angels that are in Heaven, but if we deny Him, He will deny us before the Father and angels of Heaven.' So-called 'seeker friendly' churches, having a form of Godliness but denying its power, find themselves powerless and ineffective.

This was not the case of generations that have gone before us. Godly sorrow had effected deep repentance in our forefathers. They did not ride the rollercoaster of up one day and down the next in their steadfast pursuit of being disciples of the Living Christ. Their unwavering, uncompromising decisions were brought forth with the birth pangs of the spirit. The result was that their hearts and minds were purged of sin, leaving a vessel that God could fill with pure gifts, so when they declared, 'Thus says the Lord,' it rang with all the resounding power of Heaven behind the prophetic.

Cities and nations were swept up by the wind of the Spirit. A generation was led by the prophetic voice of God from the ends of the earth. Oh, how we need that clarity again, and the only way to receive it is with a deep purging of every gray area of our hearts and lives to purity by the power of God that consumes us until we hear clearly the voice of the Lord." †

THE HALF-CONVERTED COWBOY

By A. W. Tozer

There is grief in my spirit when I go into the average church, for we have become a generation rapidly losing all sense of divine sacredness and reverence in our worship. God has been abridged, reduced, modified, edited, changed and amended--until He is no longer the God whom Isaiah saw, high and lifted up!

We've reduced the God of Abraham and Jacob, to a "stuffed God" that can be appealed to by anybody at any time. The religious clown on the radio can break into his fun and say, "Now we will have a minute of prayer." In the religious concert, the half-converted cowboy dressed like an idiot will say after he's twanged out some catchy numbers, "Now I'll do a holy number for you."

The God of today's Christianity is a weakling--a little cheap, palsy God that you can pal around with. He's "the man upstairs." He's the fellow that can help you when you're in difficulty--and not bother you too much when you're not.

It is a major tragedy in the life of any man, to live in a church from childhood to old age with nothing more than some synthetic God compounded of sentimentality and logic--but having no eyes to see, no ears to hear and no heart to love the holy God of Scripture!

In the majority of our church meetings, there is scarcely a trace of reverent thought, little sense of the divine Presence, no moment of stillness, no solemnity, no wonder, no holy fear. But so often there is a dull or a breezy song leader full of awkward jokes, in an effort to make everything hold together.

The most pressing need just now is that we who call ourselves Christians should frankly acknowledge to each other and to God that we are gone far astray. We should confess . . . that we are worldly, that our moral standards are low, and that we are spiritually cold and lethargic.

We need to cease our multitude of unscriptural activities, and cease trying to sanctify carnal and worldly projects by promoting them "in the name of the Lord" and "for the glory of

God."

We need to return to the message, methods and objectives of the New Testament!

We need boldly and indignantly to cleanse the temple of all who sell cattle in the holy place, and overthrow the tables of the money-changers! This must be done in our own lives first--and then in the churches of whom we are a part!

We need men and women who love the Savior, until adoration becomes the music of their soul--until they don't have to be fooled with entertainment and amusement! †

HAVE YOU BEEN WITH JESUS? By Smith Wigglesworth

Peter and John were helpless and uneducated. They had no college education: they had only some training in fishing. But they had been with Jesus. To them had come a wonderful revelation of the power of the name of Jesus. They had handed out the bread and fish after Jesus had multiplied them. They had sat at the table with Him, and John had often gazed into His face. Jesus often had had to rebuke Peter, but He had manifested His love to him through it all. Yes, He loved Peter, the wayward one. Oh, He's a loving Savior! I have been wayward and stubborn. I had an unmanageable temper at one time, but how patient He has been. I am here to tell you that there is power in Jesus and in His wondrous name to transform anyone, to heal anyone.

If only you will see Him as God's Lamb, as God's beloved Son, upon whom was laid "the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:6). If only you will see that Jesus paid the whole price for our redemption so that we might be free. Then you can enter into your purchased inheritance of salvation, of life, and of power.

Poor Peter and John! They had no money. I don't think there are many who are as poor as Peter and John were. But they had faith: they had the power of the Holy Spirit; they had God. You can have God even though you have nothing else. Even if you have lost your character, you can have God. I have seen the worst men saved by the power of God. †

EMAILS & COMMENTS

"Thank you to you and your team for rightly sharing the Word of our God, I've been and still am richly inspired and informed concerning The Truth. May our God continue to use you'll (Philippians 2:13) to advance His Kingdom (Righteousness, Peace, Joy in The Holy Ghost) here upon the earth." - So Africa

"The times are interesting and difficult, yet Jesus is overwhelming and His burden is light. I thank the LORD for that. Reminds me of the old song that says, "In times like these I need a savior." Then I find myself torn, to pray, "Come LORD, quickly", or "send labors", for now we are content with, "Thy Kingdom come Thy Will be done." So thankful for you all and the ministry you have faithfully served in for so many years." - ID

"Loved your Newsletter. I have been battling much fear lately and your NL was just the encouragement and challenge needed to stay the course and to fix my eyes and heart on God to overcome. I really loved your description of the ocean and how it relates to the heart as I have been thinking about the ocean a lot and want to go and just sit by the seashore. So true though that the waves of life can be tossing us to and fro, but when we fix our heart on Him, He is our safety net and boat where we can take refuge to have that peace and serenity." - ID

"We as the bride need to emulate His love to others. The world is so "me" centered. My belief is we need to see past ourselves to share the love of Christ. In Christ all things become new. Perhaps more people would fall in love with Christ if more could see Christ in us." - ID

BOOKS! TAKE TIME TO LEARN

The Pilgrim Church By E. H. Broadbent

God's Word to Women by Katherine C. Bushnell

50 People Every Christian Should Know by Warren Wiersbe

Burning Down 'The Shack' by James B. De Young

Answers to Your Bible Version Questions by David W. Daniels

The Way of the Cross (Beyond Humiliation) by J. Gregory Mantle