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PO Box 3572 * Oldtown, ID 83822 * www.gentleshepherd.com * March 2017

Running the Race Part 9 THE MISSION By Rayola Kelley

We would all agree that the mission of every runner is to finish the course and win the prize. The question is simple for the Christian runner: is our sole mission to win a prize? The Apostle Paul made reference to gaining the prize at the end of the race (*1 Corinthians 9:23-27*). Someone also once implied that it is not whether you win the race, but how you run the race that is really going to matter in the end. Christian runners are set to gain the prize as soon as they cross the finish line, but when it comes to how the race is run, it will determine the value we put on the prize in the end. I happen to know a prize gained without any real cost is not considered a significant or valued prize. I have seen what some would consider a lesser prize be considered the greatest prize because earning it required a great battle on the part of the recipients.

We have been talking about what it means to run the Christian race. Jesus clearly gives us the insight into what it would mean for believers to run the course set before them. There must first be self-denial on our part. That self-denial has to do with denying ourselves of the right to have life on our terms. We must daily dethrone pride, and then we must apply the cross to our flesh daily in order to become crucified to the influence of the world. Once we have applied these different disciplines, then we can focus on the One we are to follow into this Christian life, Jesus Christ (*Matthew 16:24-25; Galatians 6:14*).

To follow Jesus means we must follow after righteousness to ensure an upright life in Christ, exercise godliness to maintain integrity in all we do, and be led by the Spirit in what we do to ensure God's will is done. This walk

requires us to love the truth of who the Lord is and His Word in order to line up to His ways and ensure that our feet are firmly established on the right path. It is only as we decide to follow our Lord, be established and properly led, that we will diligently seek the Lord as we walk towards Him in faith. The reality is we must first learn how to walk by faith towards our Lord before we can run the Christian race (*2 Timothy 2:22; Titus 2:12; 1 Timothy 4:7-8; Romans 8:11-17; 2 Thessalonians 2:10; 2 Corinthians 5:7; Hebrews 3:10; 11:6; 2 Peter 1:3-4*).

The Bible is clear that if we learn to walk in the Spirit, put on the life of Christ, and exercise real godliness, we will not give way to the works of the flesh (*Romans 13:14; Galatians 5:16*). There are a lot of attractions attached to the flesh and the world that can cause us to take detours from the narrow path. Some of these attractions are not bad or wrong, but if they do not line up to our life and calling in Christ, they will become a distraction that has no eternal value. It is easy to get caught up with good activities, while missing the best in the way of our high calling. If we miss the best when it comes to our high calling, it is because we failed to properly discern the direction that would lead us to the more excellent way that is established in Christ.

I have taken many detours in my life that threw me off course. Many times these detours revealed that my heart was in the wrong place, my focus was not on the right objective, and my mind was bombarded by a cloud of confusion. It became clear to me that to effectively run and finish the race, my heart and mind had to be focused towards my ultimate prize and destination.

It is important to talk about the course we are to run and where it will take us. We know all courses are designed, and when it comes to Christians there are no exceptions. Every

Christian has his or her particular course to run. I will not run your course nor will you run mine, and the terrain we run may be different, but do not be mistaken, the mission and destination are the same for all of us.

As runners, our courses will take us through the different harvest fields of the world (*Matthew 9:37; Luke 10:2; Galatians 6:9*). We are called to work in the harvest. Jesus was clear that the harvest field was white unto harvest (*John 4:35*). We are to run through these fields with the torch of the Gospel, in the strength of the Lord. These fields could include our homes, our churches, our society, and the foreign fields, but it is vital that we learn to be faithful wherever we have been called to.



This brings me to the mission. The mission is that we become co-laborers with the Lord beginning in the field of our own hearts, and then we must be willing to be sent forth in the different harvest fields of the world to further His kingdom (*1 Corinthians 3:9*). Jeannette and I usually attend churches that are very mission minded, but we have noticed through the years that some churches have lost their fervor in another important mission area. They are becoming less and less evangelistic when it comes to their own particular mission field. There is an attitude that if people are searching for answers concerning God and their soul, they will come to church, but the command is for the church to go to the lost not the other way around. The reason is because many who are lost do not know they

are lost, those who are searching do not know what they are searching for, and those who are dissatisfied with a spiritual vacuum do not know what they are looking for or where to look for it (*Romans 10:14-15*).

As some of you know, Jeannette and I have been called to be missionaries. We received our call when we were attending a missionary school back in 1991 that was sending temporary missionaries to third world countries. These countries had been bound up in the darkness of communism. Fear was their prison, hopelessness their constant companion, and oppression their reality.

When the light of the Gospel penetrated the great darkness in these countries after the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989, many of these desperate souls flocked to evangelistic meetings and discipleship training as barred and hidden church doors were opened wide. These spiritually hungry people witnessed a powerful move of God. It was as though some faucet was being turned on and many felt as if they were under some type of deluge that brought cleansing to their souls and restoration of their spirits. Some were miraculously healed, but many were changed by something that proved greater than the darkness that had enslaved them and more far reaching than the destructive Marxist ideology and humanistic religion that had robbed them of hope, killed their initiative to excel, and destroyed their dreams.

Keep in mind, some of these communities had been without the light of God for 50 to 70 years. In some regions they did not even have a word for "God" in their language. Jeannette and I stood in awe as we witnessed a young man in Albania excitedly looking into a video recorder, begging for more people to come there to teach them about God. We were humbled as we watched people in Russia running to a stage after the invitation of salvation went forth, some being helped over iron railings and lowered to the ground so they did not have to wait for the crowded aisles to clear. We watched and we heard about a great move of God. It was not in the 18th century or the 19th century or the beginning of the 20th century, it was in the last part of the 20th century,

in my generation, a little over two decades ago.

As a team, Jeannette and I wanted to go to Russia, but God showed us He was not calling us to Russia, but to another mission field. According to figures in 1996 coming out of Teen Challenge, the mission field we were being called to was considered the third largest mission field in the world. Do you know the identity of this field? You are sitting in it: America is considered the third largest mission field in the world.

Can you imagine God calling missionaries to America? After all, why would you need missionaries when there is the church of America, or should I say many church buildings? At the time Jeannette and I attended the missionary school, we lived in a small community of over 3,000 people that had 17 Protestant Churches. Granted, some of the churches did not hold to fundamental beliefs, but nevertheless they wore the label of being "Christian."

I admit I argued with God about Him calling us to America as missionaries, but then He defined it even more when He showed me that He was not calling us to the highways and byways of America, but to the church itself. If you thought my debate with Him about being called to America as missionaries had a bit of intensity in it, you should have heard my objection when I realized He was calling us to minister to the church in America.

Granted, there is a certain amount of romanticism about going to foreign mission fields that often grabs our imagination, sentiment, and grandiose ideas, but I have been reminded occasionally that if all the believers in America simply went to foreign lands to win people to Christ, who would be left to win those in our own homes, churches and communities, and nation? And as a church if we lose our own homes, churches, and communities to Satan, what would that reveal about our own faithfulness? As long as there are lost souls wandering in darkness, desperate souls quietly crying in the dark for a solution, and seeking souls who are looking for answers in this nation and throughout the world, missionaries will always be needed to labor in the fields of the

world with their great husbandman, the Lord.

When a missionary is called to a particular place, he or she may have some consensus as to what the mission field will look like or how it will manifest itself, but I can tell you by experience no one really has a clue as to how God is going to bring forth that missionary's particular calling. As Jeannette and I considered our years of working in the mission field of America, we have been surprised as to where God called us, what our work entailed, and the different people that crossed our bow. We have prepared material that has been used nationally and abroad, worked with South Koreans and Hispanics as well as had opportunities to talk to Russians and Romanians about the Lord. We have worked also with many in different churches through teaching, discipleship, and seminars that helped people with their relationships and to establish them in ministry. We have done pioneer work, starting from a few to preparing many to work in the different harvest fields of the world, whether it be in the home, churches, communities, or internationally.

The main problem we have encountered in the church in America is that Christians do not see America as a mission field in need of missionaries. Granted, 50 to 75 years ago we could justify such an attitude because there were incredible evangelistic outreaches, but sadly evangelists called by God are becoming an endangered species when it comes to the church. There are different ministries that are trying to remedy this but sometimes their greatest obstacle is a lack of support or opposition from the church to reach lost souls within their own areas.

Now some of you might say, "Well, we support our church." If your church is spiritually feeding you, you should support it, but as Christians we must also ask ourselves, how much is the church preparing each of us to fulfill our different callings of being evangelists, missionaries, or ministers who will go out into world, including their communities and share the Gospel and the life of Jesus with others?

I think it was Finney who stated that the churches should have a revolving door, where those who come

in are trained to be sent out to work in the mission field. The real challenge for the American church is to realize that it does not matter how many church buildings you have in the community labeled Christian, the question is the same, is the work of God being done in that community. The command to each of us in regard to the Gospel is to “Go,” not find a religious niche in some church and “sit” in a state of blissful complacency. We must be about the work of the Lord which is to discern the will of the Lord, whether it involves an international outreach or to edify Christians on the home front through some type of support, training them to follow Jesus wherever He leads, and challenging them to never accept “business as usual,” in their Christian service, but to pursue that which is excellent and embraces the ultimate prize.

This brings me to another important subject, why does it appear that much of the church in America is not on fire for the Lord, and constrained by His love for souls, with an urgency to see heirs come into the Kingdom? Has He not died for us, provided us with authority, entrusted us with a message that is the power of God unto salvation, given us a commission to preach it, and sealed us until we are able to realize our redemption in the fullest? Has He not given us a blueprint to follow (the Bible) and a compass to lead us (Holy Spirit)? Has He not left us with an indelible example and instructions to glean from? Perhaps the answer to the question about why Christians lack the fire is simple: Christians are not on fire because the fire is missing. Today there is a great spiritual vacuum in America, and sadly it is being filled with the most vile, wicked, pagan, heretical, and idolatrous beliefs and practices. Sadly, many Millennials are falling into this vacuum and becoming lost in a great delusion. It is one of the greatest crises facing the church in America, but how many Christians feel any urgency about it, how many are trembling at the prospects of losing nearly one whole generation to Satan and his lies, how many are lying before their altars and crying out for forgiveness for the church’s state of indifference, unbelief, and disobedience, and asking

God to miraculously visit His people and this country once again in spite of the apathy of the church? How many people who sit in Christian churches even recognize there is a real problem and care enough to avail themselves to become co-laborers with the Lord to do something about it?

Sadly, this is the pattern the church has fallen into for the last 2,000 years. People will be people and for many people who dance around the fringes of Christianity or have simply made it a weekly duty, they settle for becoming comfortable in a religious setting and with regular rituals, allowing it to become a sick substitute for a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Rather, than insisting that people need to be born again to ensure salvation, some in the church have become politically correct as they promote a cheap grace that fails to address sin and a pseudo faith towards God that promotes the idea that God loves us and simply wants to bless us; therefore, all we need to do is give Him lip service by confessing a shallow acceptance and promises from His Word. The reason Jesus died on the cross was to provide an avenue in which man can be saved from sin, and that it is by being identified to Christ in the new birth experience that a person will not only experience salvation but an abundant life that will satisfy the soul and spirit. Because of various detours, whether it is doctrinal or “good” causes, many believers have not been prepared to accept their higher calling by becoming the living church; instead, they have allowed a lifeless building and religious affiliation to serve as their face in communities, leaving the observers skeptical and unimpressed.

The church needs to be revived. It needs to be purged from its sin of indifference (lack of love), skepticism (unbelief), intellectual arrogance (idolatry in high places--mind), religious elitism based on church affiliation and doctrine (idolatry in secret places—heart), and lack of vision for the lost. It needs to remember why it is here and know time is short. Like the days of Noah, the door to the ark (Christ’s salvation) will be shut to those who fail to take the opportunity to enter in.

Over twenty years ago when we

were in the missionary school, the missionaries were given a very important message. It was simple: the time to take the Gospel to these countries is now for the door will once again close. Guess what? According to those working in these countries the door is beginning to close to Christian missionaries and evangelists once again. In those two decades, there are many servants who have been broken by the great mission before them as tears and cries went up to God for souls. They were spilled out for the glory of God, completely consecrated for the furtherance of the kingdom of God and offered up as living sacrifices.

What about America? Can we honestly sit in our churches and declare, “All is well with the church?” If we can say that, my question is where are the youth that will take up the torch and run with it? I am not talking about those who go to church to seek some type of entertainment because that is all they have been weaned on all their life. I am not talking about those who have zeal without real knowledge of who God is because they swing from some sentimental limb of hype and silliness. I am not talking about those who have been presented a very small god that can be adjusted to the latest fads. I am not talking about those who have some type of religious background. What are they doing with Jesus? Where are they and when have they been trained to pick up the torch to run at a time such as this?

Is there a closed door in America’s future? Some believe we have missed the bullet in the latest election, but does that mean we can go back to business as usual or have we been given some extra time to do the work of the Father before the night comes when none of us can work in the harvest field?

You might be saying right now, “I would love to do the work of the Lord, but I am too old, weak, or ill-equipped.” I remember a story that took place in Russia many years ago. The KGB was trying to scout out a source that was providing typewritten Scriptures to Christians in the surrounding area. They went from house to house to discover the “culprit” to no avail. Unbeknown to them, they had

visited the house that was the outlet behind the Scriptures, but the one responsible for it was completely overlooked by them. The reason why this woman was overlooked is because she was a paraplegic who sat in a wheelchair and had only the use of one hand, but it was with that one hand and one very important index finger that she would peck out Scriptures day after day to edify other believers.

We never know what God will use when it comes to the harvest field, but He is only as limited as we make Him. If we avail ourselves without any conditions and expectations and trust Him to prepare us and use us as He sees fit, we will be amazed at the outcome. Whether He simply uses us in intercessory prayer or uses one small part of our body or a certain talent or allows us to be completely poured out, using what is left in the most surprising way, it will ultimately be His business, His work, His way, and His will.

Christians have and always will simply be the mouthpiece, the clay jar that possesses the prized treasure, or an instrument, but it is up to the Lord as to how He will use each of us, but we must avail ourselves by faith and offer ourselves on the consecrating altars to allow the Spirit of God to sanctify us for the Lord's work in these last days.

In conclusion to this article, walking the Christian walk is about living according to the life of Christ in us, but running the race has to do with our responsibility to lift up the torch of the Gospel and take it to the dark fields of the world, so the light of heaven can penetrate the lost with the liberating salvation of Christ. †

QUOTES FROM SPURGEON

“Christ did not redeem His Church with His blood that the Pope might come in and steal away the glory! He never came from Heaven to earth and poured out His very heart that He might purchase His people so that a poor sinner, a mere man, should be set upon high to be admired by all the nations and to call himself God's representative on earth!”

“It is better to preach five words of God's Word—than five million words of man's wisdom!”

THE COURAGEOUS CHRISTIAN

By Jeannette Haley

“Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD.”

—Psalm 27:14

What exciting times we live in! Maybe a little too exciting for some of us who have lived long enough to truly appreciate quiet times—you know, sitting in your comfy chair with a good book, a decent bit of dark chocolate, sipping your favorite hot drink, listening to the blessed silence that fills the room, your dog snoozing nearby, the radiant sun slowly slipping below the horizon. Ah, yes, blissful peace, all is well; that is, until you are suddenly jerked back to reality when the latest crisis hits the news on TV, or alerts of a socialist conspiracy to overthrow our capitalist system pops up on social media. So, how are we, as Christians, to live in times such as these?

The answer to that, of course, as with any such question can be found in the Bible. Christians know that *“The just shall live by faith.”* Faith is a big subject, and there is more to it than many people realize. Real faith is in a Person, Jesus Christ, as opposed to faith in faith, faith in a creed or religion, faith in experiences, faith in good works, faith in self, or faith in anyone or anything other than the triune God and who He is as revealed in the Holy Bible by the Holy Spirit.

What about the “courage of faith?” Have you thought much about courage lately? *Psalm 27:14* tells us that we are to *“be of good courage.”* That means all the time, in every situation, good or bad regardless of who you are or where you are. This verse also says to *“Wait on the LORD,”* which will be discussed, but first I want to call attention to the fact that the LORD will *“strengthen”* our hearts after we are of *“good courage.”* I confess that the part about having courage before God strengthens our heart used to baffle me. In my inadequate human reasoning I figured that if God would just supernaturally strengthen my heart first, then I could manage to be of good courage—maybe, depending on the circumstances.

Let's face it—it's so much easier

to sit and read *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* and stories of persecuted Christians of today, while trying to convince ourselves that we have what it would take to suffer and die for Christ, than to be personally tested along those lines. As for me, I must admit that I am the biggest chicken you have ever met. I would rather be chased over three mountain ranges by a Sasquatch than face a medical doctor with a fistful of toxic drugs in one hand and a knife in the other. You can't get me to climb higher than three rungs up a ladder, nor can you force me to tiptoe across a rickety swinging bridge. I have been known to pass out in both the dentist's chair and when having an eye exam. And, when it comes to snakes, even at my age I can jump higher and run faster than a spooked horse.



So, the only reason I am attempting to write about courage is because the Holy Spirit laid it on my heart, plus I am convinced that courageous Christians are badly needed in, not only our churches today, but in our out-of-control world. Are we making a difference in either one? Or, do we sit in our pew (or theater seat) and merely observe the predictable order of things, while avoiding anything contrary to our comfort zones in either the world or the church that might lead to a confrontation over the *truth*? In other words, are we challenging what needs to be challenged in the church, in our families, in our community and in our nation while being the salt and the light in a world that is succumbing to the thick darkness of lies and deception? In short, just what are we doing with Jesus? That is, the real Jesus—the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the ending, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty. Where is our courage?

There are some people “out there” who believe they have always been a Christian, and who have Jesus everywhere. They are in love with their idea of Jesus. They wear Jesus Tee-shirts, Jesus jewelry, and “I Love Jesus” hats. Their house is full of Jesus coffee cups, Jesus tea towels, Jesus plagues, Jesus refrigerator

magnets, Jesus curtains, Jesus welcome mats, Jesus stationery, Jesus pens, and they may even have a cat named "Jesus," but they live like the devil. Oh, not so much outwardly like the devil's crowd, marching in protest of everything that is good and lawful, but inwardly and privately—you know—in those dark places where nobody knows what they are really thinking and doing. But I have news for such people—the *real Jesus sees you, He knows all about it, and Judgment Day is coming*. Jesus knows all about the habits "Christians" would rather keep than kick, the attitudes behind the religious games they play, the justifications for the lies they tell, the excuses for not getting real with God, and the reasons why they refuse to separate themselves from that which is not of God, including so-called "Christian" psychobabble that has swept through Christendom along with New Age "Contemplative Prayer" and occult mysticism. We need to quit deceiving ourselves and gather up enough courage to repent, and come out and be separate. God is calling us to be a holy people, and it is His holy people that He is coming for, His glorious church, without spot or blemish, or any such thing. (See *Ephesians 5:26, 27*.) It takes the courage of our convictions to follow where the LORD leads. A.W. Tozer said it best, "The church has lost her testimony. She no longer has anything to say to the world. Her once robust shout of assurance has faded away to an apologetic whisper. She who one time went out to declare now goes out to inquire. Her dogmatic declaration has become a respectful suggestion, a word of religious advice, given with the understanding that it is after all only an option and not meant to sound bigoted..... Pure Christianity, instead of being shaped by culture, actually stands in sharp opposition to it."

How do we become courageous people? It begins by simply obeying the first part of Psalm 27:14 "*Wait on the LORD.*" First, you have to have faith to believe that God means what He says and He says what He means. So, what does it mean to "*Wait on the LORD?*" It means to calm and quiet your soul so that you can hear the voice of the Spirit. It means abiding in Him (His Spirit, Word, prayer, and

obedience). It means not "leaning on your own understanding" and jumping to your own conclusions. And, I can assure you that if you truly humbly wait on the Lord, draw nigh unto Him, and wait for His presence you will come to a place of brokenness and genuine repentance. Courage follows conviction, confession and cleansing and results in power and authority. Oswald Chambers taught, "He works where He sends us to wait. "...tarry... until..." (*Luke 24:49*). 'Wait on the Lord' and He will work (*Psalms 37:34*). But don't wait sulking spiritually and feeling sorry for yourself, just because you can't see one inch in front of you! Are we detached enough from our own spiritual fits of emotion to 'wait patiently for Him'? (*Psalms 37:7*). Waiting is not sitting with folded hands doing nothing, but it is learning to do what we are told." *James 4:10* says "*Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.*" All of this is preparation for the battle ahead.

Courage is walking in obedience, and doing what is right in the face of fear and the unknown. Take Gideon, for example. He was threshing wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites when the LORD appeared to him, and said, "*The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour*" (*Judges 6:12b*). At that moment Gideon was anything but a "*mighty man of valour*", but the LORD knew Gideon's potential, and what He would prepare Gideon to do through him because Gideon was a man of faith, a man who obeyed the Lord and his heart was strengthened for the battle.

Then there was Caleb, a mighty man of faith and courage. He was forty years old when Moses sent him with the spies into the land of the giants, and he "*wholly followed the LORD [his] God.*" (See *Joshua 14:6-15; 15:13-19*.) Forty-five years later Caleb was prepared, with the help of the LORD, and "*drove thence the three sons of Anak...*" Can you imagine waiting forty-five years on the LORD before realizing the promise, which in Caleb's case was a whole mountain full of giants to defeat? Most of us find it almost unbearable to wait on the LORD for forty-five minutes.

Who can forget the courage of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego

who bravely faced King Nebuchadnezzar, and declared "If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up" (*Daniel 3:17, 18*). Their hearts were fixed, their faith was strong, their resolve was great, and their courage unwavering for they had been prepared.

Who would have thought that a young shepherd boy, alone in mountain meadows with his father's flock would be learning how to wait on the LORD, gaining strength and courage for the challenges that lay ahead? Prepared with great confidence and courage David declared to the Philistine, "*Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied. This day will the LORD deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee; and I will give the carcasses of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. And all this assembly shall know that the LORD saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is the LORD'S, and he will give you into our hands*" (*1 Samuel 17:45-47*). As Christian soldiers we can confront the enemy in the name of Jesus, but we have to be "in Him," know what His Name involves, and stand on His Word by faith if we are to gain the victory.

Queen Esther's courageous character and faith in the Lord caused her to be prepared for the great hour of trial, and when she was informed of the edict to exterminate all the Jews in the kingdom of Babylon, she bravely declared, "*If I perish, I perish*" and "waited on the LORD" with fasting both food and drink for three days. Great faith in the LORD of Lords strengthened her heart, producing incredible courage; the type of courage that inspires and is inspiring for others. The Jews wrought a great victory at that time and destroyed their enemies, which is celebrated to this day in the Feast of Purim.

Concerning Moses, a study of his life touches on the main points of courage. There is the courage of convictions, courage of curiosity, courage to change, courage of confrontation, courage in conflict, courage to come higher, courage of character, and courage of confidence.

Beginning with *Exodus 2:11-13*, we see Moses' courage of conviction when he slew the Egyptian who was beating one of his Hebrew brethren, and again on the following day when Moses rebuked a Hebrew man who was doing wrong in hitting another Hebrew. We are living in the perilous times that the Bible warns us of. If you are a Christian who truly lives the courage of your convictions, such as standing against the evils that threaten our American way of life and freedom, you will find yourself in direct conflict with people who hate you—not just “dislike” you, but truly hate you. The lawless, lifeless, and spiritually lost throngs of what I call “The Barabbas People” are anarchists who are actively organizing and gathering in our cities since the election of Donald Trump and are determined to push their godless agendas of hate on this nation. This includes the right to murder babies, the right to same-sex marriage, and the right to silence Christians, the right to be here illegally, the right to be lewd, lawless, and destructive. They feel they have the right to burn the American flag, along with the right to be protected from legal prosecution. What is even more frightening many of them claim to be “real” Christians, believe they are “right” and that the “far right” is “wrong, stupid, and too religious.” Jesus said, *“Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you”* *Matthew 5:11, 12*.

Did you know that it takes a certain amount of courage to be curious? I feel sorry for people who have long ago given up their God-given curiosity. Curiosity stirs us up to explore the unknown, to learn new things, and to grow spiritually and intellectually. The danger is when Satan gets a hold of our curiosity and lures us into his bizarre realm of darkness and delusion.

But, sometimes God beckons to our curiosity in order to reveal Himself to us in greater ways, and ordain us for His work such as He did with Moses. After Moses fled from Egypt, he spent forty years on the backside of the desert taking care of his father-in-law's sheep. Probably nothing overly sensational took place in his daily routine. By the time he spent all those years away from Pharaoh's courts, Moses probably figured nothing exceptional would ever happen in his life; that is, until the day he spotted a bush on fire—a bush that just kept burning, but wasn't consumed. Some people might be more than a little spooked by such an unusual sight, and perhaps Moses was, but his curiosity got the best of him, and his life was forever changed. *“And when the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I”* *Exodus 3:4*. I encourage you to read the entire chapter of *Exodus 3* because it is so powerful. God introduced Himself to Moses for the first time as I AM THAT I AM. It's interesting to read Moses' arguments with the LORD why he wasn't the man for the job, but the LORD encouraged his heart. (*See chapter 4.*)

Moses' life was going to totally change, and for that he needed the courage to change. Most of us don't welcome the type of change that takes courage, for change, even though we often long for it can be frightening because of its unknown element. People in the most miserable of circumstances usually choose to remain chained to their wretched existence when a way of escape is presented to them. It takes courage to accept change, even for the better. Moses' life had already changed from the notoriety of a public prince, to that of an unknown desert dweller, and now God was sending him back to his people, the Hebrews, and to the hub of Egyptian power where God would change him into one of the mightiest leaders who ever lived—a man through whom the LORD would impart the foundation for civilization in the Ten Commandments, changing the world from that time to this, and then go on to give him the blueprint for the Tabernacle, and lay the specific laws for the nation of Israel.

Oh! How most of us hate to confront! But, if we are to serve the Lord, and serve Him well in this world, we need the courage to confront. We can read the struggle Moses had when he first spoke to the Children of Israel, and they didn't believe him. He argued with God that Pharaoh wouldn't listen to him either. Thankfully, the LORD is long-suffering and we all know the rest of the story. With each confrontation with Pharaoh, and each plague that God sent Moses gained courage for he knew God was with him. As for us, how many people fall through the cracks in our churches because they are never confronted in a biblical manner? If you cannot confront, you cannot lead. There will be no true revival until people are confronted with their sins of, not only commission, but omission. Many are the times when our LORD confronted His disciples, His family, sinners, and the Pharisees. The lack of courage to confront, hidden under the evil covering of “political correctness” has been one of Satan's most effective means to bring America to the brink of annihilation. Finally, out of God's mercy, He has given us a leader who tells it like it is instead of playing political games while “Rome burns.” Pray for our leaders, and ask God for the courage to confront the enemy, and believe me, they are many, and they are more determined than ever to overthrow and destroy our way of life. Their hardened hearts are filled with loathing and hatred. The Church needs to WAKE UP and become proactive, share the Gospel outside of the church doors, make disciples, stand against evil, and redeem the time, because we have been given a very short window of opportunity to work before the door of freedom and opportunity closes. Jesus warned, *“I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work”* *John 9:4*. Remember this warning from Edmund Burke, “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.” Wait on the Lord, and ask Him for the courage to follow Him into whatever battlefield He has for you.

The need for courage in conflict usually follows hard on the heels of courageous confrontation. None of us sheep like conflict. It's stressful, and

stress wreaks havoc with our health and peace of mind, not to mention it interferes with our plans to have a "happy day." We would rather head for the hills and crawl into a hollow log than get into any type of conflict. To be honest, there are days when some of us wonder if Scotty can really "beam us up" because conflicts are raging within, and raging without. I hate to break it to you, but there is only one planet that was specially created by God to be habitable and support life, and you and I are living on it. When you read about the life of Moses from the time he became a major problem for Pharaoh until the day he died, his life was full of conflict. It's impossible to live in this world without some type of conflict—even with yourself—and Moses had millions of frightened, angry, complaining people to oversee. Even Jesus' disciples squabbled amongst themselves at times about who was the greatest. Jesus wisely taught them about humility, washing their feet, and using a small child as an example. Paul instructed Timothy, *"Preach the word; be instant in season, and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine"* 2 Timothy 4:2. To the Galatians he wrote, *Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself lest thou also be tempted."* One of my favorite passages of Scripture reads, *"It is God that girdeth me with strength, and maketh my way perfect. He maketh my feet like hinds' feet, and setteth me upon my high places. He teacheth my hands to war, so that a bow of steel is broken by mine arms. Thou hast also given me the shield of thy salvation: and thy right hand hath holden me up, and thy gentleness hath made me great. Thou hast enlarged my steps under me, that my feet did not slip"* Psalm 18:32-36. May God grant that we be wisely and humbly courageous in conflict in the strength of the LORD.

God takes us through a process in our Christian life. You can follow that process in the spiritual life of Moses as the Lord brought him higher and higher. There is courage of coming higher in God. It takes courage to pass through the "outer court" and into the "holy place," but the highest

and holiest of all is when you are taken into the "Holy of Holies" to meet with God face to face. *"And the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend"* Exodus 33:11a. In the presence of JEHOVAH, all the human spirit can desire is for more of His glory. Moses longed to come "higher" in the LORD, to be close to Him, to know him in His fullness. His heart cried out, *"And he said, I beseech thee, shew me thy glory"* Exodus 33:18. That is the place every believer should long to be.

In Part Two, we will look at the courage of challenge, the courage of character, the courage of confidence and the courage of Christ-likeness. Hopefully you are gaining a picture of what it means to be a courageous Christian soldier, prepared and ready to advance into battle as the Commander leads. ✚

QUOTES TO CONSIDER

"Brethren, our preaching will bear its legitimate fruits. If immorality prevails in the land, the fault is ours in a great degree. If there is a decay of conscience, the pulpit is responsible for it. If the public press lacks moral discrimination, the pulpit is responsible for it. If the church is degenerate and worldly, the pulpit is responsible for it. If the world loses its interest in religion, the pulpit is responsible for it. If Satan rules in our halls of legislation, the pulpit is responsible for it. If our politics become so corrupt that the very foundations of our government are ready to fall away, the pulpit is responsible for it. Let us not ignore this fact, my dear brethren; but let us lay it to heart, and be thoroughly awake to our responsibility in respect to the morals of this nation."-C. Finney

"The church has lost her testimony. She no longer has anything to say to the world. Her once robust shout of assurance has faded away to an apologetic whisper. She who one time went out to declare now goes out to inquire. Her dogmatic declaration has become a respectful suggestion, a word of religious advice, given with the understanding that it is after all only an option and not meant to sound bigoted.....Pure Christianity, instead of being shaped by culture, actually stands in sharp opposition to it." – A. W. Tozer

FROM CREATION MOMENTS

"Mine eyes prevent the night watches, that I might meditate in thy word." – Psalm 119:148

Many people promote meditation as harmless and healthful. Of course, growing interest in meditation cannot be separated from the increased popularity of Eastern and New Age religion.

However, many don't place the claims that Eastern meditation reduces stress in the same category as the magical New Age claims made for crystals. Unfortunately, even children in public schools go through Eastern meditation exercises.

Eastern meditation has often been recommended as one treatment for hypertension. However, no one had ever studied these medical claims to see if they were true. Then the results of such a study were published in the Journal of the American Medical Association. Government researchers had studied effects of Eastern meditation on more than 2,100 men and women with high blood pressure. They concluded that it is ineffective in lowering blood pressure. Yes, it is true that there are changes in the brain waves of someone who is meditating. However, brain waves normally change when one type of mental activity replaces another. Nor is Eastern meditation a particularly good choice to produce brain waves associated with mental peace.

Eastern meditation is not harmless. It can open the mind to negative influences. And claims that it can reduce the effects of stress have been scientifically shown to be untrue. Let's return to our Bible and say with the Psalmist, *"My eyes are awake through the night watches, that I may meditate on Your word."*

CHALLENGE TO THE CHURCH - By Pastor Shahram Hadian -

"I will not vacate the clear teachings of the Bible or my faith in the One True God. Our society needs Christ desperately and true Bible believing Christians need to get out of their safe comfort zones and start boldly taking the truth into this lost culture and generation." (www.tilproject.com)

RAYOLA'S Q & A CORNER

Q: "If a Christian commits suicide, can they still go to heaven? I've read that a lot of the youth who convert to Christianity from Islam and other religions commit suicide to escape persecution and suffering in this world."

A: The subject of suicide is tough to address. My life has been affected by suicide and it is an issue that is hard to deal with. It is easy when you have not been affected by it to make it a black and white issue, but the reality is it might not be black and white, and for those who have faced it, it leaves many unanswered questions.

Jeannette and I had a dear friend who overdosed on antidepressants and sleeping pills. She was a Christian and had managed to leave an incredible witness behind her. There was no note or declaration that she wanted to escape her present life, but many considered her action as being suicidal. A mutual friend who was struggling over her death declared that she did not commit suicide; rather, her husband had killed her. Jeannette and I had no idea if our friend was grasping at straws in order to make peace with something that was overwhelming and sorrowful, or not.

As we tried to make sense of our dear friend's questionable death, we had to admit that we did not know her intent or state of mind at the time. She may have accidentally overdosed trying to silence her depressed state. If this was true, she did not set out to do herself in, and it was at this time we both conceded that we did not know the circumstances around her death nor did we know her heart. We took comfort that God, who is a just Judge, did know her heart and held her life in His hands.

However, another incident that personally touched my family left the harsh, bleak reality that can haunt those family members that come face to face with suicide. Back in the late 1980's, we received word that my father's adopted sister had not only taken her life, but her two children's lives as well via carbon monoxide poisoning. Her children were two and five

years old. We had shared Christ with her in her teenage years, and she even shared about His intervention in her life at different times. What changed and why she failed to seek help from family members are questions that haunted those left behind. There is no doubt that her soul was troubled, and I have my suspicion that life was a bit too much for her. In her mind she saw no other way out of her despair, nor did she feel she could entrust her children to those close to her. Her actions spoke of total desperation. But no matter how you might lend understanding and possibilities to such an incident as this, she, by all standards, killed her children and herself.

The only way I could deal with this tragedy was seek God for His consolation and leave the whole matter in His just hands. I found consolation in the fact that those sweet, innocent dear little souls were with Jesus, but I knew there was no way to put a spin on their mother's actions to make sense out of it or justify them.

When it comes to the young people who think about or choosing suicide to avoid persecution, it is clear they are new in Christianity and not disciples. If they had any kind of Bible knowledge, they would know it is a blessed thing to be persecuted for the sake of Christ (*Matthew 5:11-13*). Granted, unless one is facing such persecution, it is easy to quote Scriptures, but I don't declare the truth behind these declarations because of personal knowledge, but because of the great cloud of witnesses that have already gone before us (*Hebrews 12:1*). Read about the prophets of old who were persecuted and killed, the first apostles of the church who paid with their lives, the missionaries that have been martyred, their blood pour out on different hallowed grounds, and those who are presently being persecuted for their faith in Christ. They have chosen to stand in faith, withstand with truth, and continue to stand in light of future promises. They are not only my heroes, but my example that regardless of what you face God knows how to preserve His people by delivering them through it to the end. The Bible is also clear that as believers we may not get through this world without some type of perse-

cution (*2 Timothy 3:12*).

I do not kid myself that I am ready to be persecuted and martyred as some of my brothers and sisters have been and are being, but I know that God knows how to deliver me through such times and I will not need to worry about it because He will give me the means to face it when if it happens and not before.

This brings me back to Scripture. The Lord is clear: we must choose life with its blessings or death with its curses (*Deuteronomy 30:19*). Jesus made it clear that God is the God of the living, which is in reference to spiritual, eternal life (*Matthew 22:30-32*). We also live among what many would refer to as a culture of death. In such a culture people love death, speak of it because it holds some sick fascination for them, toy with it, elaborate on it in a romantic way, and prefer it as a way out of this world, but *Proverbs 8:36* states this, "But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death."

It is clear if we love God, we will love and prefer life, but if we hate God, we will prefer death and love its ways. It is clear that new converts need to be properly instructed as to God's desire for them in regard to choosing life in Him and walking in His ways. In this world, Christians need to learn what it means to live for Christ in this present age as a means to prepare them to live with Christ in His glory in the next world. †

GOOD READ!

A warning to Native and Non-Native Christian believers alike...and a call to those involved in Native Spirituality.

Is the "Great Spirit" the same as the Holy Spirit of the Bible? *

* What are Native Spirituality practices such as, vision quests, shamanism, sweat lodge ceremonies, dream catchers ** What is the Native "Renewal"? *

* Can cultures be redeemed? ** How Native Spirituality & the Emerging Church Are on the Same Path.

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