GENTLE SHEPHERD MINISTRIES

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Choices
Part 10
CHOOSING DARKNESS
By Rayola Kelley

Right now, I am writing this article in the middle of November. We should be entering a season of celebration, but instead we are wrestling with a great darkness that has laid seige to this nation. I am not talking about celebration in light of commercialism and presents; rather, I am talking about set times where families and friends can gather together to celebrate blessings, share memories, and establish greater bonds. Granted, some celebrations prove to be anything but celebrations for some families, but without a doubt there is one practice that can somewhat bind families and people together. They are called traditions.

We can argue the merit of traditions, and even though they are often are established for the right reasons, they are often hijacked by that which is radical, profane, and useless. Oftentimes people don't even know why they celebrate what they do because there is no background or foundation established.

The question is what will we do in this time of darkness? Will we allow it to define our mood and practices or will we realize that we must maintain a bit of tradition as we keep in mind that it is in great darkness that true lights can shine the brightest?

For the Christian, darkness should be the greatest opportunity to let their light shine. However, our lamps (lives) must be full of the oil (Holy Spirit), and our wick (devotion) must be trimmed of all corruption if our light is going to shine in this darkness.

It is also in darkness that our light can become more defined. One of the greatest threats to our light is quasi environments where nothing is reality. There is no light or darkness, right or wrong, and no absolutes in which to rightly judge a matter. Such an environment can dull you down, make you complacent, and render you ineffective. Sadly, these environments happen because of choices that involve compromise at some level. Such choices lack clarity, sobriety, and discretion.

I have been talking about choices for the last nine newsletters. For the most part we make choices without thinking about them because they are based on that which has been conditioned or indoctrinated in us. These choices are naturally made according to habits and preferences. It is only when we find ourselves shipwrecked in some way that we might even consider that the failure rests not in circumstances, but in personal character that points to the "carnal disposition" that always sets us up for a fall.

We are living in exciting times. Granted, our minds are astonished at the insanity taking place, our emotions frayed because of the unabated injustice, hypocrisy, lies, and corruption that is clearly raising its tyrannical head, and our spirits vexed with great heaviness, while fighting utter despair at the blindness of the wicked as they scheme, threaten, flaunt, tout, and brag about bringing forth their wicked plans of destruction. These deluded individuals feel the path is clear and that they are going to execute their wickedness without any opposition.

Meanwhile, as Psalms 2 declares, God laughs at them. If the pattern remains true to God's ways, they will hear some rumblings on the horizon, but they are too deluded to realize it is a warning to them. They may have some on the outside fringes try to warn them of the possible repercussions, but the momentum behind them will be too great for them to stop. There may be a few that will try to speak reason with them, but the hook of judgment is in their mouth and they are being compelled to run as fast as they can towards the abyss.

This republic is teetering on the precipice of total destruction because various frauds have been leveled against it, but I believe people are finally seeing the wicked face of Communism (progressiveness) that has been at work behind closed doors and in dark rooms as people sell their wretched soul while making a deal with the devil. I am beginning to see people fall on their face in prayer, while others stand up with a determination that it is time for them to fight for this country. I see a certain righteous indignation taking hold that will not be silenced. In fact, the light has been turned on to expose this great darkness, revealing the extent and inroads this godless ideology has gained by capturing the minds of the foolish "ignorant" and "elite".

It is not that those who point to Socialism are truly Communists, but they see this wicked ideology as a means to secure greed and power for themselves to carry out their evil agendas of globalism. The truth is, America was never meant to be Communist, but a sovereign country that believes capitalism is what would prevent aristocratic societies where only a few prosper and the rest are treated as mere serfs. It was founded by people seeking religious freedom and it has operated for over the last two centuries within the safe boundaries of an inspired Constitution. These foolish, wicked infidels have greatly benefitted from the freedoms and capitalism of this country, but they are unthankful, indoctrinated, vain, and greedy people that only see what will benefit their dynasties and their kingdoms to gain complete control. In fact, there is proof that they are utterly corrupt through and through and many have been behind a coup to overthrow this presidency. Two words that are linked to a political coup are sedition and treason.

What these people fail to realize is if they have their way, they will not end up in control. In fact, all they will manage to do is create vacuum that will be filled by those who are more corrupt and powerful then they. They will open the door for real Communism to come in. At first, a few of these leaders may be used as a puppet government, but they are slated for destruction. Even the Communists know you can't trust a traitor. If they will sell their own country out for greed and power, they likewise will turn on them if given the means to do so. The Communists will take all the wealth from every one of us including the "useful idiots" that supported the wicked coup, and render them peons that will have to work a whole day for a loaf of bread, live under the constant threat of being put in a gulag or indoctrination camp, or they will simply come up missing.

This is the nightmare that some of our leaders and radical voices are trying to put on us. They do not realize that if this nation falls, they will fall with it. Granted, they only want to bring it to the brink of destruction in order to gain control while stealing from the people, silencing any opposition, and completely controlling the narrative, but ultimately their judgment on others will cause them to end up tasting the bitterness of their own wicked gall.

For years I have watched the various attempts of these people to take over America. They have played according to certain popular playbooks such as Saul Alinsky without realizing that the other side was reading it as well, while watching them play according to the rules and preparing for the time they would make an all-out, frontal attempt to gain control. In order to gain control, they must do away with history and traditions. These wicked individuals even had a timeline to take complete control, and the same year came up each time, 2020. If you haven't notice they are sticking to their time-line.

Meanwhile God laughs at them because the wicked will never inherit the earth. God is a great chess player and He already has in place the tools to cause them to fall into their own pits, get caught in their own traps, and taste the bitterness of their own wicked judgments. The struggle that many believers have is believing that God would actually spare this country from utter judgment, because as a nation, righteous people know it deserves to be harshly judged for aborting generations of children, trashing the sanctity of marriage and the family, and turning a blind eye to the wickedness being touted in the media and entertainment industries and by godless government officials.

I believe God will show this nation mercy for the sake of those who have done His bidding, cried before His throne, carried out His will, and stood for righteousness, but I also believe it will never go back to what was. The face that is being revealed is that of pure evil, and Christians must choose to stand for what is right if they are going to endure to the end.

The question is what can we learn from those who choose darkness? We already know their greatest point of darkness is their delusion. Delusion keeps this type of person from seeing the consequences. Jesus mentioned this in different ways, but one of my favorites, is, "The blind leading the blind and they both fall into the ditch". (My paraphrase.) He stated that the same judgment they measure out to others is the same judgment that would eventually come back on them. Clearly, these deluded individuals established their own case and indictment against themselves, while eventually ending up blindly falling into their own ditch of destruction (*Matthew 7:1-4; 15:14*).

These people will use darkness to create a smokescreen as to their activities. Obviously, if a person must hide any activities under cloaks and ploys, then they are aware that they are wrong. Jesus also said in *John 15:22*, "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin." We know that God's holy Law was given to show the sinner he was a transgressor of the Law and strip away any cloak of religious pretense that is adorned with man's best to reveal man's true spiritual state of darkness (*John 3:19,20; Romans 3:19-21*). These individuals believe no one can see them, and therefore; they will either deny these activities, claim ignorance about them, or blame others, but Jesus is clear that they love and prefer this darkness because their deeds are evil.

To think that sin is hidden from the light of heaven is ludicrous. God sees all things and one day these people will face the day of reckoning. For some, they might miss paying the consequences in this life, but they will not miss it when they stand before the great Judge of the universe at the Great White Throne Judgment (Revelation 20:11-15).

Delusion clearly serves as a light to these people. They believe that whatever lie they proclaim or evil method they use, will prove okay, justifiable, and beneficial to everyone, especially them. However, this delusion is blinding them to the reality that one day everything done in darkness will be declared in the light and that in the end they will stand in the transparent light of God's holiness and everything will be laid bare and consumed in the judgment of His wrath.

An important part of any delusion is **ignorance**. There are different types of ignorance. There is the ignorance of immaturity, the ignorance of innocence, and the ignorance of preference. We all begin in a state of ignorance. As babies we are ignorant about everything, as children we are ignorant about life, as teenagers we are ignorant about limitations, and as adults we are brought to places where we choose wisdom or ignorance towards a matter.

This brings me to the ignorance of innocence. Ignorance in this sense serves as a cloak to hide the real truth. These are the individuals who play innocent when it comes to matters where they want to control the narrative. They will act surprised when it is pointed out to them that they should have known about the matter at hand, giving the impression that in their innocent state they would never have imagined such a thing happening when all the while they knew what was happening. This is a shrewd ploy on their part to avoid being called to accountability.

And, finally these are the individuals that prefer ignorance, and will resist the truth of the matter with a willful obstinance that insists their ignorance is truth. These individuals are blinded by their preferred ignorance that is often backed up by fear that will not be moved from its position.

Fear is also another type of darkness that plagues the people who belong to wicked-generations. Regardless, of how people might make a matter right in their own eyes, fear will eventually torment them. Since they live according to wishful thinking or in

a state of denial, they have no assurance that they are standing on sturdy ground. In order to remedy this uncertainty, they will do one of three things. 1) they will go into delusion that will cause their reality to become very fragile, and when reality nips at their heels, this fragile state will cause them to lose all reason and sanity. 2) They will live is a small insipid world where they are doing all they can to control their personal reality to avoid colliding with what they perceive to be overwhelming and defeating failures. They are often paralyzed by a wall of fear that is made up of scary possibilities that are reinforced by lies that makes them cower in some corner, while life passes them by. And, 3) fear will often turn into anger. If this anger is not directed inwardly, ending in depression, it is aggressively directed outwardly to anyone who might stand in the way of it.

The other aspect of darkness for these people is that they do not have the means to see where they are heading. In *John 12:35*, Jesus said this, "*Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you; for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth. While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be children of light."* People of darkness will naturally choose the darkness of **unbelief** towards God.

Unbelief is a state. When man chooses this state, he must make two decisive decisions. The first one is he must resist truth, and then reject it. The first time he does this it might prove a bit difficult because his conscience should bother him, but if he continues to reject the truth instead of repenting, he will begin to sear his conscience as his heart becomes hard towards the essence of truth: God. In fact, he will become hardened towards truth so that truth can't penetrate his understanding and his mind will become darkened.

Secondly, in the state of unbelief, a person will erect a god to his or her own liking. The more that these individuals reject the true knowledge of God, the more the mind will become reprobate where all truth is cast off. This mind will be made obvious by the wicked actions and lifestyle this individual adopts (*Romans 1:21-32*).

The choice of darkness becomes obvious because of the **fruits** it produces. You might ask what are these fruits. The first one is **isolation.** Darkness separates a person from the light with lies and isolates him or her into a spiritual vacuum that will eventually consume the individual in some way.

The next thing it produces is **spiritual decay** that begins to develop an unclean stench in the nostrils of the person. These children of darkness often accredit the unbecoming stench as coming from their outward environment, but it comes from within. Without the light of God, there is no fresh air to dissipate the stench, no water to cleanse the soul, and no real hope to give direction.

This brings us to the next fruit of darkness. It is **death.** Darkness creates the environment of death. It causes any semblance of life to become dormant in such an environment and without the light it will rot away. As death takes hold, the darkness of the soul will entomb the person until the light of God's wrath parts it to bring forth judgment.

As believers we are told to walk in the light of Jesus and abide in it. This requires us to walk circumspectly, in line with God's Word (*Ephesians 5:8-17*). Granted, we will encounter darkness along the way, but such darkness is a tool of God to enlarge our faith through testing, establish our character through pressure, and bring forth a greater testimony of His abiding care in our lives. It is important to note that when we encounter the darkness, we need to remember we are still in the light and one day the light will part the darkness and illuminate the way we need to walk in.

As a Christian our choice is clear, our preference sure, and our way prepared, and what is our choice: To walk in the light. What is our preference: To seek the light and the way we are to walk: The way will always lead us to the truth of Jesus to experience His resurrected life in greater measure. †

VANCE HAVNER QUOTES

"God uses broken things. It takes broken soil to produce a crop, broken clouds to give rain, broken grain to give bread, broken bread to give strength. It is the broken alabaster box that gives forth perfume. It is Peter, weeping bitterly, who returns to greater power than ever."

"Worry is like a rocking chair. It will give you something to do, but it won't get you anywhere."

LET GOD HAVE HIS WAY

By A. W. Tozer

People will pray and ask God to be filled—but all the while there is that strange ingenuity, that contradiction within which prevents our wills from stirring to the point of letting God have His way.

It is for this reason that I do not like to ask congregations to sing one of the old songs, "Fill Me Now." I think it is one of the most hopeless songs ever written—gloomy and hopeless. I have yet to find anyone who was ever filled while singing "Fill me now, fill me now, fill me now." It just doesn't work that way—for if you are resisting God, you can sing all four verses and repeat the last one in a mournful melody but God will still have to wait for your decision on that part of yourself that you are saving from the cross.

Those who live in this state of perpetual contradiction cannot be happy Christians. A man who is always on the cross, just piece after piece, cannot be happy in that process. But when that man takes his place on the cross with Jesus Christ once and for all, and commends his spirit to God, lets go of everything and ceases to defend himself—sure, he has died, but there is a resurrection that follows!

If we are willing to go this route of victory with Jesus Christ, we cannot continue to be mediocre Christians, stopped halfway to the peak. Until we give up our own interests, there will never be enough stirring within our beings to find His highest will.

Why, then, does it take so long? Whose fault is it that we do not have the intents of our heart so cleansed that we may perpetually love Him and worthily serve Him, and that we may be filled with His Spirit and walk in victory?

I hope I have made it plain that it is our fault—and not God's! "This work asketh no long time before it be truly done, as some men think, for it is the shortest work of all that men may imagine, according to the stirring that is within thee, even thy will." If you are one of the fellows who is convinced it has to take a long time, you are wrong. It may be one of the quickest, shortest works that a man may know—just as short or as long as your own will decrees.

From I Talk Back to the Devil, pg. 84

THE MOST BLESSED
By Jeannette Haley

"I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive." – Acts 20:35

It seems like just yesterday, but it was many years ago—well over half a century actually— that I was a child and completely overjoyed each year as Christmas day grew closer. My beautiful and talented mother never failed to choose the most splendid tree on the Christmas tree lot for our spacious living room. To qualify as the "perfect" tree, its branches had to be long and full, with just the right amount of space in between limbs, but definitely not scrawny, crooked, or out of place in any way. Its top had to almost touch the ceiling and, of course, the needles had to be fresh and green.

Once it was firmly established in a secure base, my parents began the tedious task of putting the lights on it. Back in those days we had big, multicolored lights. No miniature lights back then, and no twinkling or obnoxious flashing lights either, but real "honest" light bulbs. My grade school teacher one year had helped my class make sturdy colored tin "stars" that fit behind each bulb (on the socket), and they were indeed beautiful. I remember my mother commenting on how grateful she was to my teacher for having us kids "make something useful for a change."

Our beautiful heirloom decorations were then carefully removed from their protective tissue paper and storage boxes, and hung on the tree while a record from a Christmas album played "O Tannenbaum" in the background. After all the fragile shiny glass ornaments were in "just the right places," out came the sheets of cotton that we tore into thin strips. Beginning at the top of the tree and working our way down we patiently covered each limb, branch, and twig with "snow." It took a lot of time to press that cotton onto those prickly green needles to give the very real appearance of fresh snowfall.

Then came the fourth and final finishing touch which was applying, one at a time, long strands of heavy tinsel. (It was made from lead back then.) And, it was gorgeous! I realize that there are many beautiful variations of Christmas tree decorations and ornaments nowadays, but in my mind's eye I still think my childhood Christmas trees were the best. And, how could they not be, what with all the happy memories attached to them?

Christmas stockings were stuffed with many small surprises, each carefully wrapped by my grandmother who used miles of Scotch tape. I knew the plan was to give me a time-consuming challenge, which they did.

Under the tree lay beautifully wrapped gifts, all done with real ribbon which displayed the hearts of those who worked so hard to make Christmas special. There were bowls of mixed nuts which my dad patiently cracked open, a variety of homemade butter Christmas cookies, and, of course, a big turkey dinner with all the trimmings, topped off with homemade pies and real whipped cream. There were some old traditional English dishes too, as well as fruit cake, but I have to admit that my personal "tradition" only went as far as "traditional American." Some old English delicacies looked inedible to me back then, and I have no doubt still would!

You might be wondering where Jesus was in all this. Looking back, I can see that He was in our minds and hearts; He was in all the joy and love; He was in the selflessness of those who sacrificed so much to make Christmas special; He was with us when we gathered around the baby grand piano to sing Christmas carols; He was with us when we bowed our heads and said "grace," and His Spirit sealed the story of God's great gift to the world in our hearts. And, through it all, the blessing was in the giving, which I realized later in life.

Were we a perfect family, and did we walk all the days of our lives in the paths of righteousness? No. But, that is why God sent His Son. No one can go through a day in this life without falling short of God's glory in some way. Not every thought, word and deed that we have is going to be without a shadow or shade of something that is not pleasing to the Lord. But we have a wonderful Savior, who is closer to us than we can begin to imagine, and who is ready to receive us with open arms when we turn to Him for forgiveness, restoration and reconciliation.

As a child, and an "only" one at that, giving and sharing had to be worked into my character by obedience to the Word, and as I was taught by others, and the Holy Spirit. Now, when I look back on the beautiful Christmas trees we used to have, which I was so proud of, the real blessing has come with precious spiritual insights. For example, to me now the tree represents the tree upon which our Lord shed His blood and died for us. When it is set up, straight and tall, pointing towards not just the ceiling, but heaven itself, I am reminded of Jesus' words, *"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" John 12:32.*

The beautiful lights, which come next, remind me that Jesus is the Light of the world, and that this great Light was born one dark night into a world that struggled under the darkness of sin and hopelessness. Every single light on the tree represents individual lives that have received Him into their hearts and who now reflect His light in a world that desperately needs Him. *John 1:9* says, *"That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world."* Jesus said, *"I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness" John 12:46.*

Each unique ornament that decorates the tree reminds me of the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives as we yield to Him, for *"He hath made every thing beautiful in his time" Ecclesiastes 3:11.* Our God is a personal God and He gives to each of His children their own calling, ministry (service), talents, abilities and power to carry out His work in the earth for His glory. *"Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men." Ephesians 4:8.*
(See *Romans 12*, *1 Corinthians 12, 14.*)

Applying all the beautiful white "snow" reminds me of the cleansing power of the blood of Christ. *"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" Isaiah 1:18. "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" 1 John 1:7; "And almost*

all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission" Hebrews 9:22.

Finally, the "crowning glory" of the long, shiny strands of tinsel symbolizes heavenly glory, streaming down from up above. *"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" John 1:14.*
"He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all" John 3:31.

The gifts under the tree are a testimony of love. Blessed are those who give out of a pure heart.

And now, as I write this, much of the world is thinking about Christmas, 2020. What is happening to our traditions as individuals, as families, as a country whose very foundations are based on Judeo-Christian principles, and the Sovereignty of God? We have gone through a tremendous shaking, a time of great fear, sorrow, loss and hopelessness. We have watched our history, traditions and precious freedoms come under attack and be systematically taken from us by evil forces too great to comprehend. We have been subjected to the tyranny of unreasoning, inhumane oppression, insanity and lies of powerful eugenicists and despisers of God and His people, as well as America and the Constitution. The question is, who cannot see Satan behind all of this? I'm afraid many people who do not know the Lord, or His Word, do not. Others have subjected themselves to insidious methods of brainwashing and propaganda and have succumbed to paralyzing fear. Demon possession is becoming the "norm."

Meanwhile, organized religion has compromised with the world (and the devil) in the hope of acquiring some sort of "peace." The slightest whimper of disagreement from a concerned Bible-believer is met with condescending and pious accolades such as, "God's will be done" which, being interpreted, means "Go back to sleep and don't get involved in patriotism or politics." But the truth is the battle lines are being drawn between the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light, and there is no more middle ground. Secondly, God works through people to accomplish His will for His people, and the world. (The Bible is clear about this.) Yes, we are citizens of heaven, just "passing through." But that does not excuse the Church from any involvement in, not only spiritual warfare, but if need be, physical involvement in combating evil. There really is a vast difference between lounging in your easy chair, and sitting in a concentration camp! What happened to "Onward Christian Soldiers" and "The Battle Hymn of the Republic"?

Thomas Paine's famous words are timely for our present situation. He said, "THESE are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands by it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph. What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly: it is dearness only that gives every thing its value. Heaven knows how to put a proper price upon its goods; and it would be strange indeed if so celestial an article as FREEDOM should not be highly rated."

One part of his great statement that stands out to me is, "What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly: it is dearness only that gives every thing its value." How true it is if we are handed everything, never work hard for anything or learn how to earn what we need or want, and if we have never sacrificed the best we have for a higher purpose than ourselves, then most likely, we start off thinking that the world owes us a living, that other people are here to serve our purposes, and that includes the government. If such a "bless-me" person claims to be a Christian, then God is the One whom they believe should be blessing their socks off—not just occasionally, but every day in every way. This is why man-centered churches and movements that preach "cheap grace," "positive confession," "possibility thinking," and "how to live your best life now" etc. create a spiritual vacuum within the starving souls of those who continue to "feed" on their vain heresies. None of these aberrant and addictive teachings and philosophies, along with the plethora of cults and occult soul-damning lies being peddled today have a thing to do with real Christianity. The point is, real solid, true, biblical Christianity requires sacrifice on our part, cross-bearing, self-denial and obedience to Christ's claim of Lordship. But all of this has been rejected by those who refuse to "count the cost" in favor of cheap counterfeits that damn the soul to a Christless eternity.

Hell is where self-serving and selfish people end up. (Thinking of Scrouge this time of the year!) You see, the heart of a true Christian values the great price God paid in giving us the gift of His Son. God gave His very best, and Jesus gave His all when He became the ultimate sacrifice on the Cross for all who would believe and receive. The automatic response of a truly born-again Christian to the needs of others is to give, and if he or she is unable to give, then to fervently pray and hope to find some way to help lift burdens. We are not saved to sit, saved to secure financial blessings, or saved to serve ourselves!

Some Christians learn early about the joy and blessings of giving, that it is more blessed to give than to receive. As for myself, thank God for His longsuffering, and faithfulness in bringing mature Christians through the years into my life that helped me understand the importance of giving with a cheerful heart. I love what Jesus taught, *"And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living" Mark 12:41-44.*

Jesus is still watching us, just as He watched the people on that day long ago. For the rich, casting in much was, and is, no personal sacrifice, but for the poor widow, she gave *"all her living."* The question is, what does the LORD require of us? Jesus said, *"And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment" Mark 12:30.* This poor widow woman's sacrifice was a testimony to the love she had for God. But

what else does God require of us? *Hebrews 11:6* tells us, *"But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."* Therefore, the poor widow gave all her living because she not only loved God with all her being; she had great faith; she wanted to please Him; and she was righteous and knew by faith that He would meet her needs. Of course, this widow did not have a New Testament to read, but she knew the laws, commandments, statutes and precepts of the Old Testament. She knew the first and great commandment, and she probably knew *Proverbs 21:26* which says, *"He coveteth greedily all the day long: but the righteous giveth and spareth not"* and *"The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself" Proverbs 11:25.* And, who could forget the powerful words of King David, who said, *"neither will I offer burnt-offerings unto the LORD my God of that which doth cost me nothing" 2 Samuel 24:24b.*

On the subject of giving, A.W. Tozer said it well: "Not by its size is my gift judged, but by how much of me there is in it. No man gives at all until he has given all. No man gives anything acceptable to God until he has first given himself in love and sacrifice. The hero is cited by his country not for the number of persons he has saved only, but for the degree of danger to himself present in his act. Service that can be done without peril, that carries no loss, no sacrifice, does not rate high in the sight of men or God. In the work of the Church the amount one man must do to accomplish a given task is determined by how much or how little the rest of the company is willing to do. It is a rare church whose members all put their shoulder to the wheel. The typical church is composed of the few whose shoulders are bruised by their faithful labors and the many who are unwilling to raise a blister in the service of God and their fellow men. There may be a bit of wry humor in all this, but it is quite certain that there will be no laughter when each of us gives account to God of the deeds done in the body."

Charles Spurgeon said, "In all of my years of service to my Lord, I have discovered a truth that has never failed and has never been compromised. That truth is that it is beyond the realm of possibilities that one has the ability to out give God. Even if I give the whole of my worth to Him, He will find a way to give back to me much more than I gave."

Missionary Jim Elliott wisely concluded, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose." Murray J. Harris taught, "All too often we regard stewardship simply as a matter of our giving to God, but this aspect is secondary. Before we can give, we must possess, and before we possess we must receive. Therefore, stewardship is, in the first place, receiving God's good and bounteous gifts. And once received, those gifts are not to be used solely for our own good. They must also be used for the benefit of others, and ultimately for the glory of God the giver. The steward needs an open hand to receive from God and then an active hand to give to God and to others."

One of my favorite teachers, Oswald Chambers, said, "With Christ, it is not how much we give, but what we do not give that is the real test." F. B. Meyer said, "He is the richest man in the esteem of the world who has gotten the most. He is the richest man in the esteem of Heaven who has given the most." And, finally, Amy Carmichael said, "You can give without loving, but you cannot love without giving."

Sometimes, through these turbulent times of sorrow and uncertainty, it can be hard to mentally and emotionally "keep our bearings," focus and continue doing what we need to do. All of the foundations are being shaken, but as believers we know that the Rock of our salvation will never be moved, nor will truth ever diminish or be destroyed, for God's Word is truth (*John 17:17*). How true is the chorus of a Gaither song, "Because He lives, I can face tomorrow, Because He lives, all fear is gone, Because I know He holds the future, And life is worth the living, just because He lives."

American believers are in a life and death battle against the kingdom of darkness and great evil in the form of communism. We have been brought to a place where a decision must be made. This decision is no longer an option, but it is an absolute necessity. As Christians, we must humbly go before the LORD, seek His will, and pray for the strength to make the decision. You may be asking, "What is the decision?" The decision each of us must make, for once and for all, is whether or not we are willing to lay down our lives, if need be, for God and country. We can no longer lightly esteem our blood-bought freedoms that have enabled us to freely live, love and worship our God. Are we ready and willing, to declare as Queen Esther did, *"If I perish, I perish"*? Remember Jesus' warning, *"For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it." Matthew 16:25.* Thomas Jefferson summed up my sentiments when he said, "I prefer dangerous freedom over peaceful slavery."

As I write this, and we find ourselves entering another Christmas season, but instead of the usual Holiday cheer of bright lights, celebrations, social events, shopping, gift exchanges, music, and Christmas cantatas, we find ourselves in the midst of the oppressing darkness of uncertainty, confusion, fear and communist control of nearly every aspect of our lives. The question is, are we going to faint? I have to admit, as a human being, fainting is a real possibility. I've even had some fainting experiences myself when I was young, but to the faint of heart, Jesus *"spake a parable unto them to this end*, *that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;" Luke 18:1*. Our Lord knew we would experience overwhelming situations that could cause our hearts to faint, but He told us to pray. In *John 14:1* He told His own, *"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me."* Thus, if we are to trust and obey, we will pray, and believe to the end that we "let not our hearts be troubled."

It is in God we find our hiding place (*Thou art my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance" Psalm 32:7*). He is our consolation (*"That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us" Hebrews 6:18.*). He is our high tower, our bulwark against the forces that are determined to destroy us, (*"The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower" Psalms 18:2.*

Psalm 2 is prophetic of the days we live in and reveals God's response to His enemies, and in calamity I go to *Psalm 46*.

Through it all, wherever we are, we can still rejoice because "God gave," and because He gave, we have something to give too, the greatest gift of all, and that is to share the life of Christ with others. Vance Havner summed up the secret of how to "keep Christmas" when he said, "Christmas is based on an exchange of gifts: the gift of God to man – His unspeakable gift of His son Jesus; and the gift of man to God – when we present our bodies as a living sacrifice and, like the Macedonians (2 Corinthians 8:5), first give ourselves to God. No one has kept or can keep Christmas until he has had a part in this two-way transaction."

Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again" Luke 6:38. May God's manifold blessings bring you joy this Christmas season! †

THE WISDOM OF OSWALD CHAMBERS

The great thing about faith in God is that it keeps a man undisturbed in the midst of disturbance.

The greatest competitor of devotion to Jesus is service to Him. It is never 'Do, do' with the Lord, but 'Be, be' and He will 'do' through you. The only way to keep true to God is by a steady persistent refusal to be interested in Christian work and to be interested alone in Jesus Christ.

There is no need to get to a place of prayer; pray wherever you are.

God speaks in the language you know best - not through your ears, but through your circumstances.

The peace that Jesus gives is never engineered by circumstances on the outside.

Spiritual maturity is not reached by the passing of the years, but by obedience to the will of God. Some people mature into an understanding of God's will more quickly than others because they obey more readily; they more readily sacrifice the life of nature to the will of God. †

NOT A CHANCE!
By Paul Bartz

"Praise the LORD from the earth, You great sea creatures and all the depths; fire and hail, snow and clouds; stormy wind, fulfilling His word…" Ps. 148:7-8

Is there any such thing as chance or luck? Does anything ever happen randomly? Many people don't realize that the Bible speaks to these questions.

In late August 1992 a tornado swept through a small Wisconsin town and caused a great deal of destruction. That made it newsworthy enough. However, the destruction it wrought on one church in town received special notice on some national newscasts. Pictures showed the church in ruins. But the altar still stood, barely visible in the rubble. Most astonishing was the fact that the Bible still stood on its stand in its customary place on the altar. The undamaged Bible was open to where Psalm 77 reads, *"The clouds poured out water, the skies sent out a sound; your arrows also flashed about. The voice of your thunder was in the whirlwind; the lightnings lit up the world; the earth trembled and shook."*

Does that sound like chance?

In Matthew 10 Jesus tells us that God is so involved in His creation that not one of the billions of sparrows in the world falls to the ground without His knowledge. Psalm 148 tells us that the entire creation praises God in everything that happens. God is so personally involved in the creation that He even instructs each wind about the speed and direction to take.

Was it simply luck that the altar was spared and the Bible was open to Psalm 77? God is involved in every detail of the creation. Let's praise God that there is no such thing as luck!

Dear Father, I thank You that there is no such thing as luck because You are so intimately involved in the creation. Help me to cleanse my mind and speech of the pagan ideas of chance and luck. In Jesus' Name. Amen. †

JESUS LOVES YOU
By Lynette Hughes

"Jesus loves you" is not the gospel; it is not sufficient information for genuine conversion. Furthermore, Jesus loves you is not a part of the apostolic preaching found in the New Testament. The love of God is never mentioned a single time in the entire book of Acts. In the first sermon found in the Bible in Acts chapter 2, Peter's message left his hearers "cut to the heart" and asking themselves the question, "what must we do" to be saved? Peter called upon them to repent and believe in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins; he did not preach on the love of God. Nowhere in Scripture can we find any apostle or disciple gathering a crowd to tell them God loves them. Never, Ever. "God Loves You" is NOT the Gospel. Could it be simply because 'God loves you' is NOT the best way to convey the Gospel? I think so. Focusing on God's love alone makes us forget that we were by nature children of wrath and deserving of eternal punishment. Does that mean we should conclude that God is unloving? Of course not. A simple and clear presentation of the gospel message of man's sin and God's grace will reveal the amazing and magnificent love of God. †

COURAGE IN THE FACE OF EVIL

"During an outbreak of the bubonic plague in Wittenberg, Germany, Martin Luther weighed in on it even after his wife and him had been sick and his daughter, Elizabeth died from it. Here is what he said, 'We die at our posts. Christian doctors cannot flee their districts. Christian pastors cannot abandon their congregations. The plague does not dissolve our duties: It turns them to crosses, on which we must be prepared to die.'"

Florence Nightingale Quotes:

"I am of certain convinced that the greatest heroes are those who do their duty in the daily grind of domestic affairs whilst the world whirls as a maddening dreidel." -

"To be a fellow worker with God is the highest aspiration of which we can conceive man capable."

"How very little can be done under the spirit of fear." †

RAYOLA'S Q & A CORNER

Q: ***"****It makes me uneasy when Christians claim God's promises, that He specifically gave to Israel such as Genesis 12:3, "I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee; and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." And, 2 Chronicles 7:14, "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." Also, Psalm 91:7, "A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee." Is it presumptuous to claim God's promises to Israel for ourselves?*

A: The answer is YES. Due to false teachings such as "Replacement Theology," and wrong attitudes about the nation of Israel, some advocate that all of the blessings and promises made to Israel are now the Church's to claim. It is true, both have been set apart to be a special people and a royal priesthood, but the promises vary because one inheritance is earthly and the other spiritual (*Genesis 13:14-17; Deuteronomy 14:2; Ephesians 1:3; 1 Peter 2:9*). God does not rescind promises or gifts. It is important to note that many of these promises to Israel are part of the covenant God made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in relationship to their biological descendants, as well as being extended to King David. Covenants are ongoing and passed down from generation to generation until they are fulfilled, and the promises made regarding the nation of Israel have not yet been fulfilled; therefore, they still stand.

The Apostle Paul brings this out in *Romans 11*. Israel serves as the natural branches of the olive tree, while the church (Gentiles) came from a wild olive tree, but its members were grafted into the olive tree to partake of the spiritual legacy and future promises that come down through Abraham to all who believe. A slumbering spirit was put on national Israel so the church could be brought forth, but one day the slumbering spirit will be removed and national Israel restored; therefore, the grafted in branches must never become high minded because they can likewise be cut off from the olive tree. Keep in mind, the olive tree was where the oil came from. Oil points to the Holy Spirit and anointing. In Scripture, the oil to both Jews and Gentiles comes from the same source.

The promises and covenants of God to Abraham and his biological descendants were in relationship to land. Notice in *2 Chronicles 7:14,* God is speaking about healing the land of Israel because it was defiled. Granted, there are principles within such instructions that we, as a body, can glean. If we want our homes, churches, societies and nation truly healed, we must repent and humble ourselves, while seeking the Lord in prayer. True repentance is a pre-prerequisite to ensure God's forgiveness, healing, and restoration in all matters concerning His work and presence among His people. However, when it comes to the nation of Israel these promises and covenants are still very much in place, and the prophets of old such as Zechariah clearly stipulated that the main covenant surrounding national Israel will not be fully realized until their King, the Messiah, is reigning in Jerusalem.

The problem is that many people do not realize that Israel was set apart to be a nation among the pagan nations and the church was and continues to be set apart in this world to be a spiritual kingdom on earth (*John 18:36*). The physical land given by God to the people of Israel was/is an earthly inheritance from God to enable them to carry out their calling and purpose to bring forth the Messiah, while spiritual blessings from above is the church's calling card which is necessary for the body to carry out its commission to proclaim the person, work of redemption, and ministry of the Anointed One, Jesus Christ.

The people of Israel are Abraham's biological descendants who have a spiritual legacy, where believers are spiritual heirs of heaven and are to serve as a visible witness and representative on earth (*2 Corinthians 3:2-3; 5:18-20*). The people of Israel are identified to Abraham through lineage and believers are identified to Abraham through faith (*John 4:22; Romans 4:12-18*).

The Jewish practices are nothing but beggarly elements and shadows that all pointed to Jesus Christ (*Galatians 4:7-10; Colossians 2:14-18*). I shake my head at the thought that Christians would rather get caught up with the beggarly elements and shadows of the Jewish religion, than to be caught up with the fulfillment of all things Jewish and prophetic, Jesus Christ.

Recently, I accepted the request of a "Christian" man to be my friend on Facebook. However, when I was trying to encourage believers in one of my posts by lifting up Christ, he inserted himself by pointing people to the beggarly elements and shadows of the practices of Judaism. I immediately deleted his insertion and unfriended him.

We are never to stray from the narrow path of truth in order to explore detours that lead us away from what is real and eternal. Abraham understood that God was his real portion and we as believers must realize that Jesus in all of His glory is the total sum of our inheritance and blessings. Jesus was clear as to our commission to preach the Gospel and to make followers of Him in Matthew 28:18-20 and Mark 16:15-18, and Paul summarized the simplicity of it in 1 Corinthians 2:2, "For I determined not to know any thing among you, saved Jesus Christ and him crucified." †

THE BIBLE: The Holy Bible is a perfect Book from our perfect God. It is His love letter to us. Here the Father plans, the Son executes, the Spirit operates. The way of salvation is given; Heaven is revealed; Hell is described. The cross is its center, eternal life its fruition, and God's glory its end. By it the soul is cultured, the mind enlightened, the memory enriched, and the heart established.

The Bible is the traveler's guide, the pilgrim's staff, the warrior's sword, and the fighter's shield. It is the telescope of faith, the microscope of conscience, the mirror of Christ's face, and the jewelry of God's grace. It is food for the heart-hungry, drink for the soul-thirsty, medicine for the sin-sick, and life for the spiritually dead.

Read it to be godly; use it to be fruitful; believe it to be faithful; trust it to have peace. God has magnified His Word above His great name, and has commanded that it be preached and practiced. It is His standard of judgment. By it all are wooed and waned, saved or doomed. Read it in the company of the Author. Be a Bible-read, Bible-fed Christian. It covers the course of time between two eternities and will live forever. †