

GENTLE SHEPHERD MINISTRIES

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

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Choices

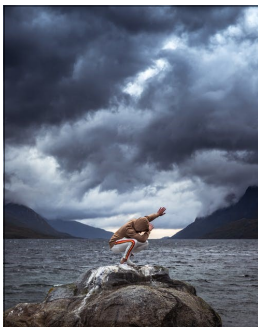
Part 11

KEEPING THE FOCUS

By Rayola Kelley

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We are entering 2021 after surviving the year 2020, which would be considered by many to be a very dark year. I am wondering how many will be making new enthusiastic resolutions as we each face the grim times that seem to be upon us. Some are hoping life goes back to what was, but I dare say that it probably will not. I am not trying to rain on people's parade but we are living in prophetic times that have been identified as a period leading up to a time of great tribulation for the whole world. It is not my goal to start any debate about whether we are in the time of great sorrows or whether we are at the door of tribulation or, as some might believe, we could be in it. We can debate about this issue without changing minds, but in light of the present challenges I think it is a moot point that will not profit anyone.



No one can debate that within the first three months of 2020 lives were turned upside down and inside out by some unseen virus that not only threatened certain parts of the population but created fear, tyrannical responses from small-minded wicked leaders, unnecessary lockdowns, shutting down our economy, and bringing utter despair to many. According to reliable information, this was a planned pandemic that became a useful tool in the hands of despotic leaders to bring about their wicked agendas of "resetting" America to make it communist, subject to Red China.

Not only did we experience a "plannedemic," but our election was blatantly stolen by these same treach-

erous people who couldn't care less about our Constitution, our rights, and what made this country stand distinct on the world stage. America is an exceptional country because of its Constitution, and preferred by many other countries who have been oppressed, but everything that made this nation unique has been targeted, misused, abused, and discarded by these ingrates who benefitted by playing the system and robbing the coffers for self-serving reasons and personal power, while plotting to deprive Americans of the same benefits and opportunities.

However, the light has come on to reveal the corruption and it has shocked many, astonished others, and caused some to go into complete despair, realizing how close we are to losing everything we hold dear in this nation. Some are wondering where are the politicians and judges that love justice, but it appears that this terrible root has corrupted many. However, the real question is where were the people who voted these wicked individuals into office? How many voted according to pocket-books, disregarding whether the person had integrity and kept their promises? Granted, there are more than a few that are probably in office due to election fraud, but how many of us have lived according to the assumption that we will always have this country? How many have asked ourselves, why get involved because our one vote does not matter, and yet the people's vote mattered in 2016 and also in 2020 when the tidal wave of votes caused the computers to crash, exposing the fraud and the extent of it taking place. Many have thought, if something is about to take this country down, we will certainly recognize it and push it back. Hence enters Covid 19. How has your life been since it has stepped on the scene? How many people are taking sides based on a mask, and some would have no problem betraying family, friends, and neighbors if they failed to comply to unconstitutional mandates and edicts.

The next question is where was the church? In some cases, certain

leaders have told us not to get involved politically, but how has that worked for us? There is also the other extreme where people with heretical beliefs have tried to usher in the Kingdom of God by electing Christians leaders, but we know only the King of kings will usher in His own kingdom.

The closing of our churches has definitely caused some who maintained the non-committal philosophy to stand up and fight. Did you ever imagine that religious freedom would come under such attack to the point that in one case the Supreme Court agreed with a state that gambling was far more important than churches? What made America great, casinos and mammon or the reality of God?

The result is that Americans are now awake and this country is on the precipice of a revolution that the politicians, their pundits and wicked judges never expected. After all, most Americans are law-abiding and peaceful even after being abused, put down, and slandered for the last two decades by the Democrats, the media and their many minions for standing in the way of their globalist agenda by holding to the right to pursue life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness (property).

I have to admit I knew there was such wickedness operating in our government, but I had no idea that it reached deep into the very throes of hell. I learned a long time ago there are only two sources that stop the extent evil reaches: God's grace and death.

The wicked end up going through a series of judgments before they end up in hell. Those who choose the ways of wickedness and evil, are eventually turned over to their first judgment: that of a reprobate mind, where they no longer retain any real knowledge of God. Their conscience has been seared so it can't be reached by conviction of the Holy Spirit and their mind has become so perverted they can't tell the difference between truth and delusion. They have been so seduced by their own narrative that they are blinded by what

is going on around them, and they end up calling good evil and evil good. They can't see the wrath coming at them or the broad path that will lead them into utter destruction (*Isaiah 5:20; Romans 1:18, 28; 1 Timothy 4:1-2 Titus 1:15-16*).

It is clear that there are great separations going on as many are forced to choose sides. Some believe they can remain neutral, but not in this type of environment. In this environment the subdued color of gray is turning into grave darkness while the light has become more defined, forcing many to choose sides. It is important to point out any indecision is a decision and any inaction is action.

When I was in the Navy, the color they used on the ships was mostly gray or occasionally green because these colors do not arouse emotions. For Christians, gray represents compromise, complacency, and indifference to spiritual matters. They are either in a state of comatose due to being exposed to that which is lifeless in religion, asleep because there is no stirring or challenge to come higher in their Christian life, or they have lost any real spark to shine. At such a time the Christian needs to be awakened but to what and for what?

Sleeping Christians need to be awakened to their sin. We can talk about what that sin is but it all starts from the same place. It comes down to the Christian leaving their first love, Jesus. How many times did Jesus state we must foremost love the Lord our God and love our neighbor as ourselves? He even gave us a third commandment to love each other as He loved the disciples, and He gave His life for each of us (*Mark 11:29-31; John 13:34-35; 1 John 3:16-19; Revelation 2:2-7*).

The reason we leave our first love is because we do not continually direct our affections heavenward. We get caught up with daily activities to such a point that our focus is more on the world than Jesus. The problem with affections is that they will naturally swing in the direction of our focus (*Colossians 2:3*).

Since the world is designed to attract our appetites, it knows how to take hold of our affections without us even realizing it. The more our affections are taken captive, the more we lose sight of the eternal, becoming apathetic towards the Lord and spiritual matters. Even though this focus

creates a leanness in our spirit towards spiritual matters, we have no real initiative to rise up and call out to God to have mercy on us and deliver us from such a state. Some of the reluctance has to do with pride that can't accept that we allowed ourselves to come to this state, and fear that often translates as uncertainty and suspicion towards God, as we find ourselves throwing defiled scraps at God to keep up a religious appearance for others and our religious conscience at bay (*2 Timothy 3:5*).

Once a Christian begins to slide down into the cesspool of worldly muck, they become vulnerable to some form of idolatry. We are made to worship God, and when we fail to do so it leaves us with a vacuum that must be filled with something, and many times it is with idolatrous pursuits that leave us feeling empty and unsatisfied.

From the base of idolatrous pursuits, we will swing into a complacent attitude where God's holiness is redefined so we can live somewhat comfortably in our complacency. When the decisiveness of God's holy attitude is brought to the forefront as a challenge to our indifferent attitudes, we can easily take offense, while hiding behind some fleshly idea of God's love. At this point God's love is used almost like an eraser where it smudges over the seriousness of sin. Hence enters the platitude, "God loves the sinner but hates the sin." However, the reality is that all sin was judged at the cross, while the sinner is yet to be judged. Jesus' blood has washed away sins of the believer and continues to do so upon confession of them, while an unrepentant sinner remains in his sins, doomed to hell.

Idolatry is the springboard where heresy gains a foothold. Since there is a spiritual vacuum, it is easy to be stirred up by deviation that is dressed up in spiritual terminology that feeds the pride. This deviation from the truth will give a person a false sense that he or she is okay or they can reach some mark with the latest insight, revelation, or knowledge. Many of these heretical beliefs will be backed up by some demonic experience that could be easily discerned, but at this point the person has been seduced into this false reality believing that it is a truth that is beyond the understanding of religious peons of the age who would dare to question it.

Whether it is indifference, idolatry or heresy, the spark of life will become dim as it is being buried by that which is contrary to all that is true, right, and holy. This is where religion will be deemed as lifeless. This individual may go through religious motions, but the smoldering flint of devotion that could be set ablaze by the simple touch of heaven is hidden by the wrong influences and agreements.

At this stage, complacency becomes quite obvious. The Lord's response is to try to awaken such an individual. He knocks on the door of the person's heart to let Him in again. The only thing that can cause that flame to once again rise up to consume everything that buries, hides, or hinders it is revival.

True revival begins with true repentance that causes the person to turn and face God so He can reveal the real state of their condition, breaking them to establish them once again as His vessel. The process is never easy but it is meant to bring the backslider back to a place of restoration where they can experience sweet communion with the Lord and worship Him in Spirit and truth.

The question brings us to how can we control our focus to ensure that we do not let the things of the flesh and world to oppress us or take us captive. The key has to do with keeping our eyes on the right master. There are only two real masters in this world, the Lord Jesus Christ and Satan. Jesus calls and we are to follow while Satan must seduce us in order to take us captive.

Jesus clearly stated that you can't serve two masters at the same time. Eventually, you will love one and hate the other (*Matthew 6:24*). Masters either demand that you do as they command or they require you to follow their leadership and example. Needless to say, masters also go in different directions and you can't follow both at the same time.

The reality is if you are not serving Christ, then you are serving Satan. The fruit of your life will reveal who your master is. When Christ is the master there is liberty in the Spirit, the fruit of the Spirit, and satisfaction. If Satan is involved in your life there is bondage, conflict, and dissatisfaction in the soul. With Christ there is clarity, but with Satan there is mainly confusion. With Christ there is faith, and with Satan there is fear. We could go

on and on as to the difference between the two, but sometimes the people are so used to their master and present environment, that even improvement can be frightening because they are about to enter into the unknown.

As we approach this new year, it would be a good time to consider what master we are preferring, following and obeying. With Jesus' leadership, there is only one Lord over His household. As Lord, He has given us everything we have need of to carry out our responsibilities. We have the Holy Spirit who enables us, His Word of truth which instructs, and gifts which can be used to effectively carry out our duties.

The other master has to be crafty to take us captive in order to make us slaves. He has to gain access through one of the avenues of our soul to begin to oppress us. The avenues are described by *1 John 2:15-17*. They are the lust of the flesh, the pride of life and the lust of the eyes. There is the lust of the flesh where our desires and our emotions can be taken captive, the pride of life where our intellect can be manipulated by the attitudes and that which are base, heretical teachings and philosophies of the world, and the lust of the eyes where the attractions of the world can entice our affections to pursue the various proverbial carrots of its many illusive promises of happiness and success.

It is easy to fall into these traps, and the only way we can avoid them is by examining our heart motives in relationship to our pursuits, emphasis, priorities, and agendas. After all, our flesh can convince us that our emphases are normal, but only the Spirit and God's Word show us whether they are honorable. Our intellect can tell us our priorities are understandable, but only God can reveal if they are acceptable and in line with His will. Our eyes can convince us that our pursuits are innocent enough, but only the Lord can show us if they will take us by way of that which ultimately profanes our calling and witness.

Since these three avenues represent what is natural to us, we are not always aware of the inroads Satan makes into our lives through them. He is subtle and is not easily discerned. What starts out as natural can turn into obsession, produce great insecurities, and grave oppression in the soul area.

This brings us back to our focus. We must discipline our focus. The key is becoming steadfast. To be steadfast in our focus, we must first fix our heart on the Lord. King David stated in *Psalms 57:7*, "My heart is fixed, O God, my hearts is fixed; I will sing and give praise."

Once the heart is fixed, the focus can become steadfast. Without our heart fixed on Christ, our focus will be fickle, causing our spirit to be unsettled before the Lord. *Psalms 78:8* talks about a stubborn and rebellious generation because their heart was not right and their spirit was not steadfast with God. *Psalms 78:37* goes on to add they were not steadfast in the covenant.

When we come to the New Testament, we find this word "steadfast" in relationship to Jesus setting His face towards Jerusalem where He would become the sacrificial Lamb of God (*Luke 9:51*). You can't finish the course unless you keep your eyes on the destination.

We are to be steadfast in our doctrine, works, our faith, and our hope to maintain our confidence in the Lord. We need to be steadfast in the pure doctrine of Christ to maintain purity in what we do. We are to abound in the work of the Lord, knowing that it is not in vain. Faith enables us to endure to the end where we can possess the promises, but we are also reminded in *1 Peter 5:8-9* that we are to steadfastly resist the devil in the faith. Our hope becomes an anchor of the soul that is both sure and steadfast because of what Jesus did on our behalf. Hebrews 3:14 summarizes this subject the best when it reminds us that we are made partakers of Christ, that is if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end. (*Acts 2:42; 1 Corinthians 15:58; Hebrews 6:12*).

As we enter 2021, let us examine our focus and see where it lands. If it does not land on the



eternal Rock of everlasting life and hope, we must ask the Lord to give us a seeking heart that will be fixed on Him, and if we can't see Him in front of us, we will not be content until we realign our eyes of faith until we once again see God's presence and glory in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. †

COURAGE FOR TODAY

The America that I grew up in is now gone. My ancestors were Irish stock that came a long time ago as hard-scrabble farmers and none of them had a life of privilege. But they all did enjoy the benefits of being a citizen of the greatest country on earth. I see a threat to that heritage so great that it will make us all proletariat serfs to the Insider's and their apparatchiks. However, I for one am not going to surrender and give away the hard-earned rewards from my grand-fathers and my nations fore-fathers before them - who built a nation based on the dignity of man and the inherent rights of liberty and property - given to us by God. I'm not going to grovel to anyone and, if hard pressed, plan on leaving this world as a fighter, defending my family and the way of life I was raised in, and protecting those who are unable to guard themselves. The decision is not mine but has been made for me, and the time for choosing sides is here. And I know where I stand. Stop the steal. Stop the Corruption. — (Posted on Facebook by Dennis Fuller)

"America will never be destroyed from the outside. If we falter and lose our freedoms, it will be because we destroyed ourselves." —Abraham Lincoln

"Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn't pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected, and handed on for them to do the same." —Ronald Reagan

"Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish." —Esther 4:16

"Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways before him." —Job 13:15

"In God I will praise his word, in God I have put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me." —Psalm 56:4

"And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them." —Revelation 14:13

STANDING By Jeannette Haley

*“Save me, O God; for the waters are come in unto my soul. I sink in deep mire, where [there is] no standing: I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me.”
– Psalm 69:1, 2*

No doubt many of us who survived this past year can relate to the above verse, and have cried out to God to save us as the waters of uncertainty, fear and change have impacted our souls. As for mire, if you’ve ever stepped into a miry mix of clay, water and sand you know how fast you sink and how hard it is to extricate yourself. It reminds me of a time, many years ago, when I went clam digging at low tide and found myself stuck in mire so thick it held my boot fast, causing me to step right out of it. Since I couldn’t put my stockinged foot into the muck, I had to try and work my foot back into the boot, so there I stood like the proverbial “stick in the mud.” Thankfully, friends wearing hip-waders saw my predicament and came to my rescue. Believe me, I learned to be more watchful for miry sand that has the appearance of solid ground.

The second part of *verse 2* illustrates the helplessness of finding yourself in deep water where it’s impossible to stand due to an onslaught of high waves. This fearful situation reminds me of how it felt all through 2020 with the “mire” of confusion, wickedness, and insane lawlessness along with wave after wave of confusing, conflicting, and devastating “news.” All of this was accompanied by endless waves of panic-producing misinformation about an “invisible enemy” from China that caused such stifling fear that it ruthlessly caused most of the world’s population to find themselves suddenly on the “bottom” with the power-hungry “elites” manifesting their “true colors” of senseless, cruel and insane totalitarian rule on the “top.” Instantly, all of us were confronted with some major decisions we had to make as to whether we would comply or resist reckless, lawless, unconstitutional “orders” that were confusing, conflicting and controlling.

Many Christians turned to God in prayer, and to the Bible for answers, because in order to be able to stand both spiritually and physically in this world, we must be prepared to first

stand spiritually; and, that begins at the cross of Christ which will forever remain “standing” when all else has fallen.

It seems appropriate to say that the “mire, where there is no standing” can be compared to false information, lies and just plain propaganda. Back in the 80’s, when in prayer, the LORD showed me in a ball of twine that represented the whole world wrapped in lies. What a fitting description of Satan’s work, and especially in these latter days where the entire world, except for a remnant, have fallen hook, line, and sinker for lies so well devised by Satan’s workers that, if it were possible (as the Bible says) even the very elect should be deceived. (See *Matthew 24:24*.)

How is it that the world can be so easily deceived? I’ve thought a lot about that as truthful facts exposing the falsehoods and propaganda of the media, eugenicist globalists, power hungry tech giants, and controlling world planners has come to light through various streams of honest reporters. For those who know biblical prophecies, those with common sense, and those who are still able to critically think in spite of the floods of misinformation that threatens to drown the whole world in unspeakable evil, it’s easy to see the “big picture” taking shape. Above all else, God’s Word still stands, and will continue to stand for all eternity, and He makes it clear what the consequences are for all those who do not love the truth. I realize I quote it often, but it is so important for us in times such as these to remember *2 Thessalonians 2:10-12* which says, “*And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.*” The time has come when the kingdom of darkness has risen up for all to see it for what it is, and how it operates in its fierce global war against the kingdom of light.

How terrifying it will be for those who refuse to receive the love of the truth unto salvation when they are sent a “strong delusion” from God Almighty that causes them to believe a lie unto damnation! The time is at hand, and you can almost hear their

cries of despair as they sink into the mire of their own delusion, unbelief, and unrighteousness. It will be too late for them to repent of their lust for the mire and muck of this world that presented itself as “safe, solid ground.” All of their ungodly, well-laid plans, compromises, secret dealings, and wealth cannot save them, neither can their fake news, fake speeches, and fake gods deliver them. *James 5:1-6* is a fitting description of the powerful, wicked, globalist corruption that has always despised God Almighty, His people, and all that is upright, pure, good and wise. James warns such evildoers, “Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days. Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth. Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter. Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you.”

How wonderful are the words of our Lord and Savior who said, “Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock” *Matthew 7:24, 25*. The question is, what are you building on today? I watch so many “good” people (by the world’s standards) and beautiful people, and well-meaning people building their lives on what may appear to be solid rock, but it is sinking sand. When a person’s emphasis is on pursuing a life filled with endless worldly pleasures, even if such pleasures are neither good nor bad in and of themselves, they can become the heart’s ultimate goal instead of the pursuit of God and holiness. Pleasure, like candy, should be enjoyed in small doses lest it become addictive, taking mastery over one’s senses, emotions, and better

judgment.

If we go back to the Old Testament and search for examples of great men and women of God who remained standing in spite of insurmountable opposition, we discover people of great faith, people who remained standing because they knew God, feared Him, loved Him, and were obedient to Him. Priceless gems of truth and wisdom that bring encouragement to our hearts and minds can be discovered by reading of their exploits, witness, and examples. One thing we have to face, as did they, and whether we want to or not, is the fact that today we are in a war that is not only against us physically, but also against us emotionally, mentally and spiritually. Therefore, in order to be able to stand and remain standing, we must first be well established on the Rock of our salvation. This means we need to possess clarity of mind and heart concerning what we believe, what we are fighting for (and against), and what price we are willing to pay. Sadly, I watch many people I deeply care for, who profess to be Christians, blindly building their "houses" on "sinking sand." Only God knows how many more days, months or years we have on this earth before the storm comes and "beats upon our house." One thing we can be assured of is this: The storms of life will come!

As Christians, we know that our enemy is Satan, and that his goal is "to steal, and to kill, and to destroy" John 10:10a. Therefore, just as God empowers His people to carry out his will in this world through faith and obedience, so too Satan uses his people to carry out his evil works. At this point in history, it is obvious that Satan's master plan for globalism, headed up by a one-world leader known as the anti-Christ, is in full swing. The question each of us must ask ourselves is, am I truly prepared to stand? Can I honestly say with the Apostle Paul, *"But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God"* (Acts 20:24)? What Paul was referring to when he said *"none of these things move me,"* is *"bonds and afflictions."* After all, it was Paul who wrote to the persecuted Christians at Rome, *"I BESEECH you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present*

your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" Romans 12:1, 2.

The year of 2020 has been a wakeup call to the sleepy church and to complacent Americans. For far too long we have taken our freedoms for granted; however, those who have been paying attention know that, little by little, we lost our right to freedom of speech, beginning with kicking God out of public schools (and other places). Then, suddenly, we lost our freedom to assemble, our freedom to gather together to worship the Lord, our freedom to pursue "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," and the right to be responsible for our own health. Are these the beginning of the days Jesus' forewarned us of when He said, *"Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken"* Luke 21:26? As for fainting, Hebrews 12:3 tells us, *"For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds."* If you've ever fainted (which I have in the past) you know how faintness develops in your head, causing you to "pass out." Ephesians 6:10-13 tells us who and what we are up against, and how to stand in this "evil day." It states, *"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand."*

Going back to the Old Testament for examples that replicate the time we are living in, we read in Exodus of the evils that had befallen God's people who lived under a wicked Pharaoh in Egypt. Now, we know that Satan is the "god of this world" who hath blinded the minds of them which believe not" (2 Corinthians 4:4) and that Pharaoh's goal, much like the wealthy politicians and globalists of our day, was

to keep control of the Israelite population so they would be forced to remain in slavery for his benefit and purposes. In Exodus 1:8-14 we read of Pharaoh's fear that the Israelites would join Egypt's enemies if there was a war, and thus escape out of Egypt. The solution? Reduce the population by ordering the Egyptian midwives to kill all of the male babies born to Israelite women. When that failed, he decreed that all of his people were to cast the Israelites' baby sons into the river. Governors Cuomo and Northam (among others) would've been proud of this Pharaoh, but what they would fail to consider is the signature judgment that befell Pharaoh and his army: meaning, the Jewish babies drowned in the Nile River, but Pharaoh and his men were drowned in the Red sea by God.

So, here we are, thousands of years later, and we still have our share of "little Pharaohs" spread throughout the land who are proud of their anti-life stand. But, just as the fierce wrath of God came upon Egypt, and great deliverance for His people, so too in these latter days we know that Jesus is coming to destroy all of His enemies, along with all of their wicked works, and set up His everlasting kingdom.

Concerning Moses. In spite of the wicked laws and edicts of Egypt's ruler, Moses' mother, Jochebed, bravely disobeyed, and through her faith and wisdom saved the life of her child. We all thrill to that timeless story, and then eighty years later we find Moses standing, barefoot at God's command on holy ground before Him. Why? Because God had heard the groanings of the children of Israel, and He had prepared a man "on the backside of the desert" to deliver them. As for us, haven't God's people in America, which nation was founded with the help of God to give freedom to His people, likewise been crying out to Him in anguish because of the oppressive and unjust, unconstitutional laws, mandates, ridiculous edicts and penalties levied against us? Furthermore, who has God prepared and raised up among us to unite true patriots while exposing the evil "covering" over America (and the world)? Who, along with a handful of upright people, has been fighting to save the Republic in spite of vile and slanderous, never-ending attacks? I think you know the answer to that.

What made the ground holy upon which Moses stood was the very presence of the holy God. This is the place of power for any believer who has consecrated his or her life to Him. If we are to indeed stand “in the power of His might” (Ephesians 6:10) and “do valiantly” (Psalm 108:12,13) in these end days, we must first be established in true humility of heart and mind with only one goal, and that is for God to be glorified. Thus, the first step in preparation for the battle is to be established in the holiness of God which comes by trusting and obeying Him daily. Sometimes great men and great leaders like Moses, who was out in the wilderness, are content with their lives and where they are when God calls them aside to Himself and reveals His plans for them. The reason Moses could stand before Pharaoh like he did is because he had stood on holy ground, and he knew his God. Nevertheless, Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, just like the insane power-hungry politicians of our day who have plotted for years to strip us of our Constitutional freedoms and make us slaves to big government, globalism, and communism. But we have also seen that God’s people, those who have stood in the holy place with Him, and who know Him, are standing up against the flood of evil that is overflowing the land.

Those of us who love our country and our Constitution grieve the erosion of our freedoms due to the fraudulent and corrupt people in positions of power who have sold America for their own personal benefit. While We the People are vexed by the overwhelming lawlessness, lack of justice, and encroaching evil on every level, should we not also reflect on what brought us to this dangerous and deplorable state? Perhaps we should look no further than Christ’s message to the churches in Revelation 2, 3. A careful reading and study of these churches will prick your heart and send shivers up your spine as the truth of where we are, why we’re where we are, and where we’re going if we fail to REPENT! (And, overcome.) Those who are without God and who live in unrighteousness are like the Egyptians who sat in thick darkness during the ninth plague. But, not so for God’s people. Exodus 10:23 tells us, “They saw not one another, neither rose any from his place for three days: but all the children of Isra-

el had light in their dwellings.”

Unlike us, God never operates in the “gray” area of compromise, and He always makes a clear distinction between light and darkness, good and evil, the saved and unsaved. “This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: 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 1:5-7. But, how many in the organized churches of today, from pulpit to pew, are “walking in darkness” because of love for the world? The Apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesian church, “*For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light*” Ephesians 5:8. And to the church at Thessalonica he warned of the last days, writing “*BUT of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness*” 1 Thessalonians 5:1-5. John wrote of Jesus, saying, “In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not” John 1:4, 5. Jesus said, “Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid” Matthew 5:14.

Thus, in Egypt, after God sent the ten plagues upon the Egyptians, He told Moses where to lead the people, and told him that Pharaoh would follow after them. Then He would be honoured and the Egyptians would know “I am the LORD.” (Exodus 14:4.) God’s will in all the terrible plagues and mighty wonders He did in Egypt was two-fold: that His people would know and believe that He had heard their cries and had sent His prophet to deliver them out of Egypt, and that the Egyptians would know that the Great I AM is the LORD. Everything that God does for our good is also for His glory!

Meanwhile, even before the children of Israel experienced the mighty miracle of the parting of the Red Sea, they began to complain and blame Moses for “taking them out of Egypt and into the wilderness to die.” How quickly they forgot God’s mighty works! And, how quickly they forgot the horrible bondage they had suffered as slaves! “And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will shew to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever. The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace” Exodus 14:13, 14. Then, after the children of Israel stood still, in the very next verse we read, “And the LORD said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto me? Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward” vs. 15. How about us? If we are to go forward in 2021, first we must stand still, and then as the Spirit leads, go forward. The question is, are we any different than they were when we whine and complain because things in America (and the world) will never go back to the way they were? When we stop and ask ourselves just what has been “lost,” and then pray, asking God for His perspective on this situation, we gain a whole different perception which should bring us down on our faces in intense mourning and repentance.

While it’s true that there has been much personal loss, suffering and sorrow on many fronts, if things continued on as they were before the “planned-demic” and insane, tyrannical lockdowns, how many people would’ve ever become aware of the depth of evil that has been plotting and planning for decades (centuries, actually) to rule the world? How many have blithely accepted one encroachment after the other on their personal freedoms, and grudgingly given in to the oppressive “status quo?” Sadly, much of the blame for this tragic state of affairs lies squarely on the Church because of its refusal to “stand,” and remain “standing” against ungodliness in every area—and, yes, that means in politics as well!

In spite of the mighty deliverance of the children of Israel in the midst of the Red Sea, and in spite of the fact that God provided them with manna, they still hit points of discontent, ingratitude, complaining, and

anger which all originated from fear and lack of faith. In *Numbers 11:5* we read, “*We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick.*” Here in America, we face the bleak fact that millions of eating and drinking establishments have gone out of business for good. None of us are happy about it, especially since all of this loss and devastation could have been avoided, but the point is, are we thankful to God for “our daily bread” (food) or are we “fainting” in our minds instead of standing on the Rock that never fails? Just as God was trying to get “Egypt” (the world) out of the children of Israel now that he had delivered them out of Egypt, so, too, He is trying to get the world out of His Church before His Church will be prepared for deliverance out of this world.

Where are the people of conviction, people who know what they believe and believe what they know? Without conviction, there can be no “standing.” A person cannot stand upon the outside until they are first standing up on the inside. We cannot worry about what other people think of us. We must not compromise truth and bend to their personal opinions, nor can we be concerned with the consequences of taking the stand God calls us to take, even though it will cost. Make no mistake, courage and sacrifice go together, there is a price to pay. But if we are to go on following the LORD, there is no turning back—back to the old ways, back to our old habits, back to our old pleasures and way of life. As soldiers of the cross, we must deny self, pick up our cross, and follow Him. After all, Jesus told us, “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?” Matthew 6:24, 25.

O Christian! In times like these are you standing on the promises of God our Savior?



WHAT IS CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER, SOAKING PRAYER, AND SOZO PRAYER?

by Lynette Hughes

If you hear this term in your church, it should serve as a red flag that something is amiss, and your church is heading down the heretical mystical pathway. Soaking prayer is rooted in the occult but wrapped in Christian terminology. It is described as resting in God's presence. This is accomplished by playing some gentle worship songs, either sitting or lying down, and praying short, simple prayers for an extended period of time, but otherwise keeping your mind free of other thoughts or, in some cases, being led in guided imagery which seeks to conjure up the presence of God. At the point when you sense God's presence through some type of manifestation like tingling skin, a sensation of heat or cold, or even a gentle wind seemingly blowing through your body, you are to just “soak” in that presence. Where do we see this practiced endorsed & recorded in the life of the NT Believer? – answer is we DON'T... However, the rule by which we measure our experiences in life is the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16-17), and when soaking prayer is examined accordingly, we find that it comes up wanting for biblical support. Nowhere in the Bible can a model of prayer be found that soaking prayer follows. It is not Biblically grounded, it is a deception and will lead us to the wrong Father - the Father of lies who is a counterfeiter, a deceiver. Pagan world religions incorporate this same model of meditation. They are instructed to wait and conjure up things. Soaking prayer is a form of self-hypnosis and quickly devolves into a trance-like meditative state.

Another type of prayer is Sozo prayer which requires the presence of a mediator / guide, who is trained to walk participants through a time of prayer and reflection that is supposed to facilitate intimacy with God. One of the goals of Sozo is to enable participants to “heal your relationship with God to enable you to fulfill your destiny.” But the Bible tells us that a Christian's destiny is death to self and obedience to Christ through faith in His power and saving grace. A Christian does not need to be led on a mystical prayer journey to attain intimacy with God; that is produced by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22).

Contemplative prayer begins with a meditative practice where the practitioner focuses on a word and repeats that word over and over for the duration of the exercise. The purpose is to clear one's mind of outside concerns so that God's voice may be more easily heard.

Before you verbally attack me and bludgeon me to death with your firmly held ideas of spirituality allow me to clarify that there is a difference between contemplative prayer and contemplating on the goodness of God and His Word. If contemplative prayer for you means meditating (thinking deeply) about God's majesty and seeking his guidance, by all means carry on! Prayer is not only bringing our petitions before God's throne but listening to the voice of God. Pondering on the inexpressible goodness and glory of God is something that we should be shocked, awed and amazed by. It's something worth thinking about. And sometimes when we pray, God helps us to hear the Holy Spirit with clarity there and then.

There is no denying that experiencing the presence of God can be powerful and life changing. It is not necessarily the goal of contemplative, soaking or Sozo prayer that is biblically errant; it is its methodology. Prayer in its simplest form in the Bible is calling on the name of the Lord (Genesis 4:26), and in each instance where it's found in Scripture, it's descriptive of communicating with God.

The Word of God clearly explains the purpose of prayer and how we are to pray. It is not a mystery. It does not need to be modernized, nor merged with other false religious practices and heretical teachings. Biblical prayer is talking to God with His will in mind (1 John 5:14). A biblically praying believer already understands that God's presence is always with him, and he doesn't need to experience any type of physical sensation to prove God's presence. The meditation in the Bible is the kind we should be practicing: Keeping God's words, deeds, and commands in our hearts and minds at all times.

“Stand in the ways and see, And ask for the old paths, where the good way is, And walk in it; Then you will find rest for your souls. But they said, ‘We will not walk in it.’” (Jeremiah 6:16). Not much has changed since Jeremiah's day. †

RAYOLA'S Q & A CORNER

Q: *"I have a question about Romans 10:9, which states that we must confess with our mouth the Lord Jesus. Can this be a 'one time' confession when one receives Christ, or is it something that becomes part of a Christian's lifestyle? I'm asking because a loved one of mine once said she believed the Gospel and was saved, but I have never heard her profess the name of Jesus to anybody she knows, and none of her friends are Christians. Some Christians say that their relationship with God is 'personal and private' so they never profess the Lord Jesus with their mouth. Are such people truly saved? Thank you."*

A: Salvation is a matter of the heart and only the Lord knows what is in the heart of a person. There have been secret followers of Christ such as Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, but Jesus' crucifixion brought them out of the closet, at which time they became identified with Him (*John 19:38-40*). The biggest reason for people being secret believers is fear, which is opposite of faith.

Fear has a tendency of making us feel embarrassed, nervous, and even ashamed of those who dare to be bold enough to stand and speak about their faith in front of us. The problem with many secret believers becomes obvious when Scripture reminds us that what is not of faith is sin and those who live in fear will not make it into the kingdom of God (*Romans 14:23; Revelation 21:8*). In some cases, these individuals have not been properly trained in what it means to confess that Jesus is Lord.

When it comes to the matter of confessing Jesus is Lord, the Bible is clear that if you do not confess Him to others, He will not confess you before the Father. We are told that such a confession is what will bring honor to the Father, and if we do not do it here, we will do it on that great day of judgment when every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of the Father. (*Matthew 10:32-33; Philippians 2:9-11*).

Confession is the way of acknowledging you have entered into a relationship with God. This relationship is founded on a contractual (covenant) agreement, secured with

the blood of Jesus and sealed by the Spirit. This seal identifies us as officially being part of His kingdom, His household, His work, and His inheritance. It is important to note that children born in the days of the Apostle Paul were born with the status of slaves. For a son to become an heir, he had to first be taken to the court and be officially adopted in order to be recognized as an heir (*Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 4:1-7*).

On the cross of Christ, the Lord has made His intention known to adopt each of us as His heirs, but it is now our turn to step into the public arena and acknowledge that the Lord Jesus has purchased us. He is now our owner, overseer over our life and we are now joint heirs with Him in His kingdom.

Confessing that Jesus is Lord is a declaration of whose household we now belong to. It is a point of identification, where we are identifying with a certain master, teacher, and leader. The significance of this identification points to position and authority. We are official representatives of the Lord's household and when we are doing His business, we do so with His authority.

Is such confession a one-time event? Let me put it this way. Water baptism is the first step of publicly identifying with our new status, but sharing our testimony is the second means to confess who Jesus is to us and must become to others. Although being born-again is a one-time event, we need to establish the new life in us by walking it out in faith and obedience, which is ongoing. The second means in which we become identified to His glorious kingdom is by sharing our testimony and imparting the life of Jesus to others. Preaching and making disciples of Jesus is our two-fold commission and remains our main calling until our departure from this world. †

A WORD FROM RAYOLA

As we approach a new year, it would be a good time to reflect on the past year, consider the present year to make sure we are on course and prepared to run the necessary race in light of that which is eternal. When I reflect on the past year, I ask myself if I am carrying any regrets forward, feel bad because of missed opportunities, or wish I had redeemed the time bet-

ter. I do this examination in order to repent and become wiser with the present. It is important to tie up any possible loose ends still left dangling that Satan could possibly use as a whip against me. When I consider my present, I do it in light of the future. The way I consider my future in relationship to disciplining my steps is according to the epitaph I would like to leave behind. Although I am very much alive, I am aware I am walking towards my demise. I ask myself what type of witness do I want to leave behind in relationship to my character, life, and convictions as a Christian.

Granted, it only matters how God sees us and epitaphs are written by those left behind. But we must acknowledge that such inscriptions are engraved on hearts according to the type of investment we make in those relationships. When I first started this little practice, my epitaph was quite elaborate revealing the high opinion of myself. It became quite clear that my arrogance wanted to still be recognized and exalted.

Through the years, as I became more aware of how wretched I was and how God's mercy had reached me in my despair, His grace had provided the way for my salvation, and His hope raised me up in a new life, I was knocked off my pinnacle and brought down to face the reality that it is and always will be God's work that endures. I am nothing more than a mere clay vessel that has no significance outside of the life of Christ I possess: a simple, worn instrument that has no worth or beauty unless in the master's hand, and a vulnerable worm in the scheme of things. It was at that time I adopted another epitaph that I read about that was left on a wooden grave marker. This marker had only one word carved on it: "Forgiven." I eventually graduated from the one word, "forgiven" to two words, "faithful servant." I must admit, I have moved on to three words and they are words that I hope will, in the end, serve as the epitaph I leave behind. They are, "FRIEND OF GOD."

"Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you." – John 15:15