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TRANSFORMED
WITH A PURPOSE

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

THE SAMARITAN WOMAN
page 3

AN EXPECTED END
HOW DO I GET THERE?
page 10

FROM PERSECUTOR TO APOSTLE: **THE TRANSFORMATION OF PAUL**
page 15

WAITING FOR THE BIGGER PICTURE...
WHY CAN I PRAISE GOD FOR A DISAPPOINTMENT?
page 20

WE THE CHURCH
page 25

PUZZLE
page 31

DEPARTING CLOUDS
page 32

Dear friends,

I've always been fascinated with the idea that all things were created by the word of God. At His word, darkness became light, the never-ending void became an adorned firmament, and the deserted planet Earth was dressed in green vegetation, colorful flowers, and delicious fruit trees.

Since the Word that said, "Let there be light" is the same Word that said, "A new heart will I give you," I wonder why everything at creation took only an instant to be created while the transformation of the human heart takes days, months, or years.

The difference is that human beings were made with free will, with the capacity and right to choose. When it comes to the spiritual transplant of human heart and mind, God doesn't just order the transformation; He asks for our consent. In Isaiah 18:1, He says, "Let us reason together;" in Deuteronomy 30:19, He says, "Choose life," and in Revelation 3:20, He says "If any man open the door, I will come in."

The greatest evidence of God's love for us is in the fact that He doesn't force His will on us—but rather gives us a choice as to whether to believe in His promises of transformation. But when we do believe, transformation will happen, our nature will change, and God's purpose in our lives will be fulfilled.

—Adrian Finaru

The Samaritan Woman

BY STEPHEN JACOBS

"For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:11).



TWO NATIONS

You may already have an idea who this article is about from reading the title. However, before we go any further, I would like to change perspectives to have a more comprehensive understanding of the scene at the well, by looking at a broader view.

In the Bible we have the accounts of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:33), the experience of Christ with ten lepers whom He healed while they were on their way to see the priests—but only one, a Samaritan, returned to thank Jesus (Luke 17:12–19). I'm sure that these stories were often repeated to us when we were children. Such stories make us believe that the Samaritans were very kind, loving people.

However, when we however read about the story of the Samaritan woman, we come to understand that there was some tension between Jews and Samaritans. "Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans" (John 4:9).

Interestingly the first mention of the Samaritans is found in 2

Kings 17:29, "Howbeit every nation made gods of their own, and put them in the houses of the high places which the Samaritans had made, every nation in their cities wherein they dwelt." From this verse, one can assume that the Samaritans were somewhat involved with other "gods." Now later in the time of Christ, would this tension have been caused by religious differences?

The Spirit of Prophecy sheds more light on the history between the Jews and Samaritans: "When the temple at Jerusalem was rebuilt in the days of Ezra, the Samaritans wished to join the Jews in its erection. This privilege was refused them, and a bitter animosity sprang up between the two peoples. The Samaritans built a rival temple on Mount Gerizim. Here they worshiped in accordance with the Mosaic ritual, though they did not wholly renounce idolatry."—*The Desire of Ages,* p.188.

"The Jews and the Samaritans were bitter enemies, and as far as possible avoided all dealing with each other. To trade with the Samaritans in case of necessity was indeed counted lawful by the rabbis; but all social intercourse with them was condemned. A Jew would not borrow from a Samaritan, nor receive a kindness, not even a morsel of bread or a cup of water."—Ibid., p.183.

What a sad history! The reality is that around the world this is still happening today in various ways. Among humanity's greatest weaknesses are prejudice and animosity.

"Prejudice is a terrible thing in the sight of God. It was prejudice that crucified the world's Redeemer. Let us as a people put away all prejudice."—*The Review and Herald,* October 24, 1893.

JESUS

Although He was a Jew, how did Jesus treat others?

In Mark 7:25–30, we read of how Jesus helped a Greek woman form Syrophenicia, much to the surprise of His disciples, giving them an example of the work they were to do for all, and with the help of fellow believers from all nations. "Those who are hid with Christ in God will become instruments in God's hands for the development of Christian virtues. All classes have a part to act."—Ibid.

THE SAMARITAN WOMAN

Returning back to the scene at Jacob's well, what do we learn about the woman?

- She came to the well at noon. (John 4:6)
- She was alone. (John 4:7)
- She did not enjoy coming to the well. (John 4:15)
- She was only concerned about herself. (John 4:15)
- She had no husband. (John 4:17)
- She had a boyfriend. (John 4:17)
- She had some knowledge of the scriptures. (John 4:19, 20)



This woman was living alone, currently not married. However, she had a "boyfriend" who likely did not live with her; therefore she had no urgency to come to the well in the morning which I would assume might have been a normal time to draw water. Since she had had a number of "boyfriends" (who possibly included married men?) the social embarrassment of past relationships had ruined her reputation among the other women. So perhaps she avoided going to the well when other people would be there. Yet she did have some knowledge of the scriptures.

THE INTERACTION

Knowing all these things about the woman and the history between the Jews and Samaritans, Jesus spoke no words of judgment nor made any prejudiced remark against her. Instead, "Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink" (John 4:7).

Her natural prejudices suddenly arose and she became defensive.

"The woman saw that Jesus was a Jew. In her surprise she forgot to grant His request, but tried to learn the reason for it. 'How is it,' she said, 'that Thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria?'

"Jesus answered, 'If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give Me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water.' You wonder that I should ask of you even so small a favor as a draught of water from the well at our feet. Had you asked of Me, I would have given you to drink of the water of everlasting life.'

"The woman had not comprehended the words of Christ, but she felt their solemn import. Her light, bantering manner began to change. Supposing that Jesus spoke of the well before them, she said, 'Sir, Thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast Thou that living

water? Art Thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself?" She saw before her only a thirsty traveler, wayworn and dusty. In her mind she compared Him with the honored patriarch Jacob. She cherished the feeling, which is so natural, that no other well could be equal to that provided by the fathers. She was looking backward to the fathers, forward to the Messiah's coming, while the Hope of the fathers, the Messiah Himself, was beside her, and she knew Him not. How many thirsting souls are today close by the living fountain, yet looking far away for the wellsprings of life!"—*The Desire of Ages,* p. 184.

"Jesus did not immediately answer the question in regard to Himself, but with solemn earnestness He said, 'Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.' "—Ibid., p. 187.

EMBARRASSMENT

"The woman saith unto him, Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw. Jesus saith unto her, Go, call thy husband, and come hither. The woman answered and said, I have no husband. Jesus said unto her, Thou hast well said, I have no husband: For thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly" (John 4:15–18).

This was the embarrassing moment. How did this Stranger know the secrets of her life? To avoid the shame, she abruptly switched the topic of conversation to religious controversy. Mere theory and Bible trivia tend to feel safe when people do not want to face the facts about their spiritual condition. Nothing wrong with theory and details, but many professed believers tend to hide there to escape the real issues standing between their own soiled souls and living a holy life.

"The woman saith unto him, Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet. Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship" (John 4:19, 20).

"In answer to the woman, Jesus said, 'Believe Me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews.' Jesus had shown that He was free from Jewish prejudice against the Samaritans. Now He sought to break down the prejudice of this Samaritan against the Jews. While referring to the fact that the faith of the Samaritans was corrupted with idolatry, He declared that the great truths of redemption had been committed to the Jews, and that from among them the Messiah was to appear. In the Sacred Writings



they had a clear presentation of the character of God and the principles of His government. Jesus classed Himself with the Jews as those to whom God had given a knowledge of Himself.

"He desired to lift the thoughts of His hearer above matters of form and ceremony, and questions of controversy. 'The hour cometh,' He said, 'and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth."—Ibid., pp. 188, 189.

"She began to have some conviction of His character. The question arose in her mind, Might not this be the long-looked-for Messiah? She said to Him, 'I know that Messias cometh, which is called Christ: when He is come, He will tell us all things.' Jesus answered, 'I that speak unto thee am He.'

"As the woman heard these words, faith sprang up in her heart. She accepted the wonderful announcement from the lips of the divine Teacher.

"This woman was in an appreciative state of mind. She was ready to receive the noblest revelation; for she was interested in the Scriptures, and the Holy Spirit had been preparing her mind to receive more light. She had studied the Old Testament promise, 'The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto Him ye shall hearken.' Deuteronomy 18:15. She longed to understand this prophecy. Light was already flashing into her mind. The water of life, the spiritual life which Christ gives to every thirsty soul, had begun to spring up in her heart. The Spirit of the Lord was working with her."—Ibid., p. 190.

THE DISCIPLES

"For his disciples were gone away unto the city to buy meat" (John 4:8). Out of necessity the

disciples went to buy some food from the Samaritans. They may have been gone for about an hour but returned without even one soul for the Kingdom. I do wonder what their conversation had been about. Had they represented Christ on their errand—or merely their culture as Jews, perpetuating ever more animosity in dealing with the Samaritans?

"And upon this came his disciples, and marvelled that he talked with the woman: yet no man said, What seekest thou? or, Why talkest thou with her?" (John 4:27).

This experience was another lesson for the disciples.

"As Jesus still sat at the well side, He looked over the fields of grain that were spread out before Him, their tender green touched by the golden sunlight. Pointing His disciples to the scene, He employed it as a symbol: 'Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.' And as He spoke, He looked on the groups that were coming to the well. It was four months to the time for harvesting the grain, but here was a harvest ready for the reaper.

" 'He that reapeth,' He said, 'receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together. And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth.' Here Christ points out the sacred service owed to God by those who receive the gospel. They are to be His living agencies. He requires their individual service. And whether we sow or reap, we are working for God. One scatters the seed; another gathers in the harvest; and both the sower and the reaper receive wages. They rejoice together in the reward of their labor."—Ibid., pp. 191, 192.



A CONVERTED WOMAN

"The woman had been filled with joy as she listened to Christ's words. The wonderful revelation was almost overpowering. Leaving her waterpot, she returned to the city, to carry the message to others. Jesus knew why she had gone. Leaving her waterpot spoke unmistakably as to the effect of His words. It was the earnest desire of her soul to obtain the living water; and she forgot her errand to the well, she forgot the Saviour's thirst, which she had purposed to supply. With heart overflowing with gladness, she hastened on her way, to impart to others the precious light she had received.

" 'Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did,' she said to the men of the city. 'Is not this the Christ?' Her words touched their hearts. There was a new expression on her face, a change in her whole appearance. They were interested to see Jesus. 'Then they went out of the city, and came unto Him.'"—Ibid., p. 191.

"Our Redeemer thirsts for recognition. He hungers for the sympathy and love of those whom He has purchased with His own blood. He longs with inexpressible desire that they should come to Him and have life. As the mother watches for the smile of recognition from her little child, which tells of the dawning of intelligence, so does Christ watch for the expression of grateful love, which shows that spiritual life is begun in the soul."—Ibid.

"The Pharisees despised the simplicity of Jesus. They ignored His miracles, and demanded a sign that He was the Son of God. But the Samaritans asked no sign, and Jesus performed no miracles among them, save in revealing the secrets of her life to the woman at the well. Yet many received Him. In their new joy they said to the woman, 'Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.' "—Ibid., pp. 192, 193.

CONCLUSION

Dear friend, right now you may be going through some of life's challenges that may be negatively impacting your life. You may be feeling alone, lost or behind in life and thinking that no one cares. "But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people. All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head" (Psalm 21:6,7). I believe the Samaritan woman felt exactly the same way that day.

Come to Jesus. "He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer" (Psalm 102:17). If the despised woman of Samaria could leave the presence of Christ as a changed person, you can, too. You can be that spark the Lord needs in your town with the help of the Holy Spirit. The harvest is ready—are you?

An Expected End

How do I get there?

BY SEPTIMIU D. MURESAN

THOUGHTS . . .

The average person has over 50,000 thoughts daily, and 95% are the same ones from the day before. That means that out of those 50,000 thoughts, only 2,500 are new.[1]

Very much of our life has to do with the way we think. Our entire being is heavily influenced by which thoughts we allow to absorb our deep affections and interests. Notice what the Bible says: "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Proverbs 23:7). Our being, our words, our actions, our habits, our characters—and finally our life—depend on which thoughts we focus upon.



WHAT DO YOU THINK—OR OVERTHINK?

Do you think about good things? How much of your time do you use to do that? Let's be open with ourselves! Statistics show that 85 percent of Americans are making a conscious effort to think positively each morning. But have you ever heard of overthinkers? That's a category into which many of us may fall. What is an overthinking person? How do I know if I am an overthinker? An overthinker is when you repetitively dwell on the same thought or situation over and over to the point that it disrupts your life. Overthinking usually falls into two categories:

1. Ruminating about the past, and

2. Worrying about the future. Much of this leads to serious feelings of worry, nervousness, uneasiness, or anxiety.

CAN WE IMPROVE OUR THOUGHTS?

In *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 491, we read that "we need a constant sense of the ennobling power of pure thoughts." Good thoughts! They are so refreshing and encouraging! Thoughts of hope, joy, calmness, etc. Please pay attention to the next sentence that follows: "The only security for any soul is in right thinking." That sounds powerful, doesn't it?

We all need to work on our thoughts. We all need to rise up above small and negative thoughts! "If we will, we may turn away from all that is cheap and inferior and rise to a high standard; we may be respected by men and beloved of God."—Ibid.

"Although there may be a tainted, corrupted atmosphere around us, we need not breathe its miasma, but may live in the pure air of heaven. We may close every door to impure imaginings and unholy thoughts by lifting the soul into the presence of God through sincere prayer. Those whose hearts are open to receive the support and blessing of God will walk in a holier atmosphere than that of earth and will have constant communion with Heaven."—*Steps to Christ,* p. 99.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE DWELL ON NEGATIVE THOUGHTS?

"Many thoughts make up the unwritten history of a single day, and these thoughts have much to do with the formation of character. Our thoughts are to be strictly guarded, for one impure thought makes a deep impression on the soul. An evil thought leaves an evil impress on the mind. If the thoughts are pure and holy, the man is better for having cherished them. By them the spiritual pulse is quickened and the power for doing good is increased. And as one drop of rain prepares the way for another in moistening the earth, so one good thought prepares the way for another."—*Messages to Young People,* p. 144.

Have you ever wondered what is the end result of dwelling upon negative thoughts, worries, or overthinking? First remember the verse we saw above in Proverbs: "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he." With that in mind, let's grasp the full meaning of the following sentence:

"Wrong habits of thought, when once accepted, become a despotic power that fastens the mind as in a grasp of steel."—*Mind Character and Personality,* vol. 1, p. 195.

Isn't that powerful and frightening in the same time? We all need to examine our thought tendencies from time to time. Just as we need to check the engine of our cars regularly, it would be wise to do a routine checkup of our thoughts sometimes as well.

HOW DID PEOPLE GET TO HAVE DEMONS?

I don't know about you, but when reading the Bible, I have often been surprised that there are recorded so many instances about people having demons or unclean spirits, or simply an evil spirit. Many cases were healed by the Lord Jesus Christ. I was so happy for those people. Now, what about the rest?

To my surprise, it seems in our times that that type of unclean spirits, evil spirits or demon possessed have all disappeared. Do you think that people had evil spirits only back then? How do you think a person ended up having an evil spirit when God "made man upright" (Ecclesiastes 7:29)? Do you think their thoughts



had to do a lot with their outcome? Oh, how I wish that every person would cultivate only good and pure thoughts! That they would have never have an evil thought—and down the road, an evil spirit, or evil spirits. . . . We can render our conscience, thoughts, words and actions to only one of the two existing powers in the Universe: either to the prince of evil, Lucifer—or to the Prince of Life and goodness, the Lord Jesus, the Almighty God!

HOW CAN ONE GET RID OF AN EVIL SPIRIT?

Darkness can be expelled only by the presence of life. Cold can be expelled only by the presence of a source of heat. Evil can be expelled only by the presence of the Good One—the Lord Jesus in our hearts.

In Mark chapter 5, we have a very unique experience of one man meeting with Jesus. Let's read next the first eight verses to grasp the picture:

"And they came over unto the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gadarenes. And when he was come out of the ship, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, Who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no man could bind him, no, not with chains: Because that he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces: neither could any man tame him. And always, night and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones. But when he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped him, and cried with a loud voice, and said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not. For he said unto him, Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit" (Mark 5:1–8)

EVEN WHEN YOU SAY "I'M FINE" – JESUS STILL REACHES OUT TO YOU!

Jesus answered the unspoken prayer of this troubled soul. The man was in great need. His thoughts were accustomed to evil, until evil spirits took full control of his mind and body. I was shocked to realize that the answer towards Jesus came from the unclean spirit, and not from the man himself, per se.

In this case, the man was hopeless. How many of us may likewise be in hopeless situations nowadays.

When you and I say "I'm fine", "I'm not so bad" or different variations of these kind of expressions, there may still be serious struggles in our minds. Real battles! Our minds are the battlefields between good and evil.

We need Jesus as much as any person in this world. The unspoken prayer of each heart sounds like this: "I need you, Lord! I'm in big trouble! I don't know what to do next."

REALLY? TO NOT PRAY FOR YOU?

Many of the youth today are saying: "Don't pray for me." "I want nothing to do with Jesus." Yet the prayer of their heart is actually, "I am desperate, I need Jesus' help." Well, the good news is that Jesus is so wonderful that He answers the unspoken prayer!

Just as our Lord healed that man possessed by evil, He is ready to heal each one of us—emotionally, physically, and spiritually. The man was transformed and wanted to follow Jesus. Such is the case of everyone who receives the divine touch.

Jesus virtually said to that man something that He would tell each one of us: "What you need is not for you to be with me but for me to be with you!"

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

"The thoughts are not to be allowed to run riot. They must be restrained, brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. Let them be placed upon holy things. Then, through the grace of Christ, they will be pure and true. We need a constant sense of the ennobling power of pure thoughts. The only security for any soul is right thinking.

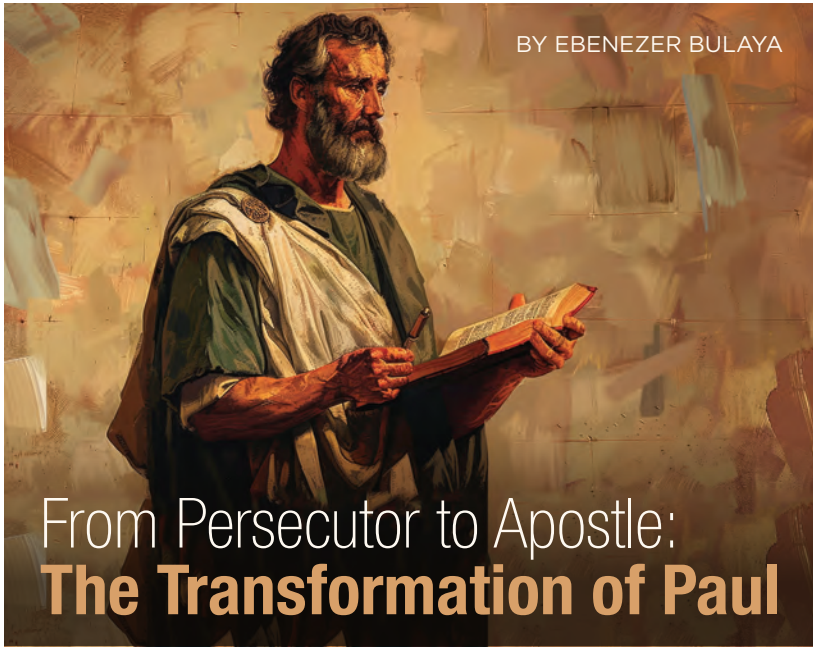
"Our minds take the level of the things on which our thoughts dwell, and if we think upon earthly things, we shall fail to take the impress of that which is heavenly. We would be greatly benefited by contemplating the mercy, goodness, and love of God; but we sustain great loss by dwelling upon those things which are earthly and temporal."—*The Faith I Live By,* p. 222.

"One day alone is ours, and during this day we are to live for God. For this one day we are to place in the hand of Christ, in solemn service, all our purposes and plans, casting all our care upon Him, for He careth for us."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing,* p. 101.

Jesus tells each one of us: "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end" (Jeremiah 29:11).

1. https://dreammakerr.com/positive-mindset-statistics/#:~:text=Key%20Positive%20Mindset%20Statistics&text=85%20percent%20of%20Americans%20are,than%20those%20who%20did%20not





BY EBENEZER BULAYA

From Persecutor to Apostle: **The Transformation of Paul**

Indeed, in all aspects of life, "Every way of a man is right in his own eyes" (Proverbs 21:2, first part). Truly, this proverb reminds us that as individuals, we often perceive our actions and decisions as right—even if by looking objectively, that might not really be the case. This reveals the subjective nature of perception, emphasizing how we tend to justify our behavior based on our own perspectives and beliefs. It is because "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9).

"No man can of himself understand his errors. . . . In one way only can a true knowledge of self be obtained. We must behold Christ. It is ignorance of Him that makes men so uplifted in their own righteousness. When we contemplate His purity and excellence, we shall see our own weakness and poverty and defects as they really are. We shall see ourselves lost and hopeless, clad in garments of self-righteousness, like every other sinner. We shall see that if we are ever saved, it will not be through our own goodness, but through God's infinite grace."—*Christ's Object Lessons,* p. 159.

UNTIL WE MEET CHRIST

The perspective of thinking that our ways are always right shifts when we encounter Christ, as it challenges us instead to align our actions and decisions with His teachings and principles.

"The mind that resists the truth will see everything in a perverted light. It will be fastened in the sure toils of the enemy, and view things in the light of the enemy."—*The SDA Bible Commentary* [E. G. White Comments], vol. 6, p. 1057. Therefore, this encounter can bring about a transformation in our perception, guiding us towards a more objective understanding of what is truly right and wrong. Absolutely, the transformation of Saul (Acts 9) of Tarsus, who became the apostle Paul after encountering Jesus on the road to Damascus, is a powerful example of this principle. Before his encounter with Christ, Saul believed he was doing the right thing by persecuting Christians. However, his encounter with Jesus challenged his perceptions and ultimately led to a radical transformation in his beliefs and behavior. This illustrates how encountering Christ can profoundly change our understanding of right and wrong, leading us to align our lives with His teachings and example.

UNTIL WE ACCEPT TO BE LED BY HIM

Accepting to be led by Christ, as Paul did, involves a profound transformation of heart and mind. "God calls after you again. He seeks to reach you, girded about with selfishness as you are, and covered with the cares of this life. He invites you to withdraw your affections from the world and place them upon heavenly things. In order to know the will of God, you must study it, rather than follow your inclinations and the natural bent of your own mind. 'What wilt Thou have me to do?' should be the earnest, anxious inquiry of your heart."—*Testimonies for the Church,* vol. 4, pp. 53, 54. In Acts 9:6, when Paul encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus, he asked, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" This moment marked the beginning of Paul's journey of surrender and obedience to Christ's leading.

Paul's willling acceptance to be led by Christ is beautifully articulated in Galatians 2:20, where he says, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" This verse illustrates Paul's complete submission to Christ's authority and guidance in his life. Moreover, in Romans 12:1, 2, Paul urges believers to present their bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, which is their true and proper worship. He emphasizes the importance of not conforming to the patterns of this world but being transformed by the renewing of our mind, so that we may discern God's will.

In following Paul's example, accepting to be led by Christ requires a daily commitment to dying to self and allowing Christ to live through us. It involves aligning our thoughts, desires, and actions with His teachings and example, as we seek to fulfill His purposes and glorify His name in all that we do.

NOT FOCUSING ON THE PAST—BUT RATHER THE FUTURE!

Paul's acceptance to be led by Christ is characterized by his relentless focus on the future rather than by dwelling on his past. Despite his past as a persecutor of Christians, Paul embraced the future with unwavering faith and determination. In Philippians 3:13, 14, Paul writes, "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Here, Paul emphasizes the importance of letting go of past mistakes and failures—and instead fixing his gaze on the future prize of eternity with Christ.

"He who would build up a strong, symmetrical character, he who would be a well-balanced Christian, must give all and do all for Christ; for the Redeemer will not accept divided service. Daily he must learn the meaning of self-surrender. He must study the word of God, learning its meaning and obeying its precepts. Thus he may reach the standard of Christian excellence. Day by day God works with him, perfecting the character that is to stand in the time of final test. And day by day the believer is working out before men and angels a sublime experiment, showing what the gospel can do for fallen human beings."—*The Acts of the Apostles,* p. 483.

Rather than allowing his past to haunt him, Paul channeled his energy and focus into advancing the kingdom of God and spreading the gospel. In 2 Corinthians 5:17, he declares, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." This profound realization enabled Paul to move forward with confidence, knowing that he was a new creation in Christ, liberated from the chains of his past. Paul's acceptance to be led by Christ propelled him to endure numerous trials and hardships for the sake of the gospel, all while keeping his eyes fixed on the ultimate hope of glory. In Romans 8:18, he explains that "the sufferings of



this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." This forward-looking perspective empowered Paul to persevere through adversity, knowing that the future glory far outweighed any present challenges.

In essence, Paul's acceptance to be led by Christ was characterized by a steadfast focus on the future hope and promise of salvation, rather than being hindered by the regrets and burdens of the past. He embraced the future with faith, zeal, and an unwavering commitment to fulfill God's purposes in his life.

TRANSFORMED FOR SERVICE

Paul's transformation for service exemplifies the power of God to change lives and use even the most unlikely individuals for His purposes. Formerly known as Saul of Tarsus, Paul was a zealous persecutor of Christians until he encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus. This encounter not only resulted in Paul's conversion but also marked the beginning of his transformation for service.

In Acts 9, we see how Paul's encounter with Jesus radically transformed his life. Blinded by a bright light, he heard Jesus speak to him, asking, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" (Acts 9:4).

This encounter left Paul physically blinded but spiritually awakened to the reality of the lordship of Christ. "Upon the soul of the stricken Jew the image of the Saviour's countenance was imprinted forever. The words spoken struck home to his heart with appalling force. Into the darkened chambers of his mind there poured a flood of light, revealing the ignorance and error of his former life and his present need of the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit."—*The Acts of the Apostles,* p. 115.

Paul's transformation for service is evident in his subsequent actions. Despite his past as a persecutor, he became one of the most influential figures in early Christianity, spreading the gospel tirelessly across the Roman Empire. He endured numerous hardships, including beatings, imprisonment, and shipwrecks, all for the sake of advancing the kingdom of God.

In his letters, Paul often referred to himself as a servant or bondslave of Christ, highlighting his complete devotion to serving God's purposes. In Romans 1:1, he introduces himself as "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God." This demonstrates how Paul's transformation for service was rooted in his understanding of his identity and calling in Christ. Moreover, Paul's transformation empowered him to become a beacon of hope and encouragement to others. In Philippians 4:13, he declares, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me," showcasing his unwavering faith in God's ability to equip him for every task, because "whenever man accomplishes

anything, whether in spiritual or in temporal lines, he should bear in mind that he does it through cooperation with his Maker. There is great necessity for us to realize our dependence on God."—*Christ's Object Lessons,* p. 82.

In sum, Paul's transformation for service serves as a powerful reminder of God's ability to transform lives and use them for His glory. It inspires believers to surrender their lives to God's transformative work, trusting that He can use them to accomplish His purposes beyond their wildest imagination.

CONCLUSION

Paul's transformation for service stands as a testament to the transformative power of God in the lives of individuals. From a zealous persecutor to a fervent apostle, Paul's journey exemplifies how God can radically change hearts and equip His servants for impactful service. As we reflect on Paul's story, let us be reminded that no one is beyond God's reach and transformation. Regardless of our past mistakes or shortcomings, God can use us for His kingdom if we are willing to surrender our lives to Him.

Therefore, dear youth, I plead with you to consider the example of Paul and allow God to transform you for service. Surrender your heart and will to Him, trusting in His ability to work through you for His glory. Let us all heed the call to action by actively seeking God's transformation in our lives. Through prayer, study of His Word, and obedience to His leading, let us open ourselves to His transformative work. May we be vessels of His love, grace, and truth in a world in need of His redeeming power. In doing so, we can indeed join Paul in proclaiming, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20). Let us embrace this truth and step boldly into the calling God has placed on our lives, trusting in His strength to guide and empower us every step of the way.





Waiting for the Bigger Picture

Why can I praise God for a disappointment?

BY BARBARA MONTROSE

The disciples had an interesting question:

"As Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?" (John 9:1, 2).

Beholding a man blind since birth, the disciples viewed his condition as a real problem. After all, who wouldn't see it that way? Immediately, they wondered about whom to blame. Was this due to sin on the part of the man himself, or a curse because of some sin on the part of his parents?

Indeed, the disciples saw a problem. But Jesus saw a bigger picture and explained it from a different perspective. The Lord knew this man was born with a purpose, that God might be glorified through his healing. It's sad to imagine the many years the man had been without sight. Now he was already a grown-up! Yet things changed when He met Jesus. It was only a matter of time. . . . "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (Psalm 30:5, last part).

Other cases are similar:

JOSEPH IN PRISON

Most of us are familiar with the history of Joseph. The drastic ups and downs in his life circumstances would cause many to become overwhelmed or even bitter if they would choose to indulge thoughts to foster such feelings. But not in the case of Joseph! Why not?

"After being sold into Egypt [Joseph] was at first favored and entrusted with great responsibilities; but suddenly, without any fault on his part, he was unjustly accused and cast into prison. But he is not discouraged. He trusts in God; and the purpose of his heart, the purity of his motive, is made manifest. The eye of God is upon him, a divine hand leads him, and soon we see him come forth from prison to share the throne of Egypt.

"Joseph's checkered life was not an accident; it was ordered of Providence. But how was he enabled to make such a record of firmness of character, uprightness, and wisdom? It was the result of careful training in his early years. He had consulted duty rather than inclination; and the purity

and simple trust of the boy bore fruit in the deeds of the man. The most brilliant talents are of no value unless they are improved; industrious habits and force of character must be gained by cultivation. A high moral character and fine mental qualities are not the result of accident. God gives opportunities; success depends upon the use made of them. The openings of Providence must be quickly discerned and eagerly seized upon.

"Young men, if you would be strong, if you would have the integrity and wisdom of a Joseph or a Daniel, study the Scriptures."—*Testimonies for the Church,* vol. 5, pp. 321, 322. That's how to turn difficult problems into opportunities to glorify God.

LAZARUS DIES

Remember the story of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus? They were close friends of Jesus, and in John chapter 11 we read that Lazarus became very sick. Human logic would assume that Christ, the Great Healer, would immediately rush to heal His friend. But He didn't go to see him, and He even reported back, "This sickness is not unto death" (John 11:4). Why did He respond that way? What can we learn from this?

"The disciples were surprised that [Jesus] did not respond to the sad message, 'He whom thou lovest is sick.' Had Christ's love changed?—No, no! and had Mary and Martha thought it had, they would have misjudged that tender, pitiful heart of human and divine love."—*The Youth's Instructor,* April 6, 1899.

"Christ's two days' delay after hearing that Lazarus was sick was not a neglect or a denial on His part. It was His purpose to remain where He was till the death of Lazarus took place, that He might give the people an evidence of His divinity, not by restoring a dying man, but by raising to life a man that had been buried.

"This should be an encouragement to us. We are sometimes tempted to think that the promise, 'Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you,' is not fulfilled unless the answer comes immediately when the request is made. It is our privilege to ask for special blessings, and to believe that they will be given us. But i**f the blessings asked for are not immediately granted, we are not**



to think that our prayers are not heard. We shall receive, even if the answer is delayed for a time."—Ibid. [Emphasis added.]

"Christ knew that as [Mary and Martha] looked on the face of their dead brother, their faith in their Redeemer would be severely tried. Thus He was pruning the branches, that they might bring forth more fruit. He knew that because of the struggle through which they were now passing, their faith would shine forth with far greater power. He suffered every pang of sorrow that they endured. He loved them no less because He tarried; but He knew that for them, for Lazarus, for Himself, and for His disciples, a victory was to be gained. This crowning miracle was to give the seal to His mission and divinity."—Ibid., April 13, 1899.

Jesus also knew that "as the result of this miracle, many souls would afterward be added to the church, the hearts of others would be steeled against Him and His work."—Ibid., May 11, 1899.

Christ gently reproves Martha (and us) for worrying: "Why should you doubt my power? You have my word. If you will believe, you shall see the glory of God. **Skepticism and unbelief are not humility. Implicit belief in Christ's word is true humility, true self-surrender.**"—Ibid., May 4, 1899. [Emphasis added.] When faced with such circumstances, do we steel our hearts against God and His providence, or do we patiently trust in His divine wisdom and guidance?

JOHN THE BAPTIST IN PRISON

How about John the Baptist? The forerunner of Christ, the first to announce and identify Him as the Lamb of God, the one who even had the privilege to baptize Him—why was he allowed to languish unjustly in prison? Let's see the bigger picture:

"Christ did not forget John. In the lonely prison He manifested himself to him, showing him that erelong He Himself was to suffer a most shameful, ignominious death. Not only that, but He was to bear the penalty of the transgression of the law of God, not to give men liberty to continue in sin, but to take away their inclination to sin, that they might not desire to transgress. Those who receive Christ are obedient to His commands; for His mind is given to them. He imbues them with His spirit of obedience, and they return to their loyalty."—Ibid., April 6, 1899.

Those who indulge in resentment against God for the leadings of His divine providence should beware:

"God never urges any one on in wickedness. He never leads man to become desperate in his rebellion. He will not that any should perish, but that all should be saved. But He forces no one to accept the light. If, after bearing long with man, God sees that he will not submit, He leaves him to work out his natural hatred. He gives him up to the worst of all tyrants—self."—Ibid., May 25, 1899. That's not the kind





of outcome we should desire! We need to trust and obey. God is looking at the bigger picture to save us.

A MODERN EXAMPLE

I have an interesting personal testimony of how sore disappointment can turn out for the best. Two years after graduating from high school, while working part-time as a professional violinist and teacher, my great dream was to attend The Juilliard School, a private performing arts conservatory in New York City. It's one of the most prestigious of such institutions in the world and would certainly launch my prospective career to be a full-time violinist in a fine orchestra. The sheer passion and intensity of my desire caused me to assume with great determination that this aim would surely come to pass, without a doubt.

So, I took the train from Washington to New York and promptly reported to Juilliard for the audition the next day.

While presenting one of the requested pieces, I was wholeheartedly absorbed in giving my very best and failed to stop playing when the main judge made a tapping noise on the table to interrupt midstream. I should have realized this was his way of telling me the sample was sufficient. Then, when he then repeated the tapping very loudly, I awakened to the serious need to stop and noticed also he had already become rather irate that I had not responded immediately the first time. From that point onward, the interview felt awkward and uneasy.

The acceptance rate to Juilliard is 8–10% from among all the applicants worldwide. In other words, 90–92% who audition simply don't get in. A few weeks later, a letter came in the mail revealing that that majority included me. . . . Oh, no! I felt crushed and absolutely devastated. How could such a thing happen? It felt as if my entire future had been shattered!

So, I requested a copy of the written comments the judges had jotted down, to see what had gone wrong. One of the judges had written that I was "Borderline for admission." Borderline!!? My

frustration was keen. So close, yet so far! How could this be?

But a few years later I could see why. Had I been admitted to that school, the level of stress and even the entire course of my life would have been quite different:

Firstly, tremendous debt. Today, it costs US$83,892/year to attend Juilliard, and that's if you live on campus. Back when I auditioned years ago, the option to live on campus and thus economize on housing did not even exist. So, besides tuition, books, and food for the 4-year program, I would have to rent a studio apartment in the city, which in that neighborhood costs today around US$2,500–$4,000/month. Of course, those costs were lower in previous years, but you get the idea. The expenses were already prohibitively high—virtually impossible for me without incurring enormous, decades-long student loan debt on a massive, overwhelming scale. Somehow, I had not really paused to consider that factor. I had been too busy—fervently, meticulously preparing for the audition with intense zeal and a one-track mind for the glory of an artistic endeavor.

Secondly, in contrast, the large university (over 600 miles away from home, in a small town in the midwestern state of Indiana) where I ended up going instead as my 2nd choice very warmly welcomed me at their audition. This place, too, had a highly prestigious music program—plus the same career goal was certainly able to be achieved through their course of study, and with far less debt.

The quieter atmosphere and surroundings were so pleasant and the people so kind, that in less than three years, my faith had blossomed to such an extent that I gave my heart to Jesus Christ. Yes, much to my surprise, there I was drawn to love Jesus—and ultimately, His seventh-day Sabbath, even more than my fervently cherished career goal. A completely new and refreshing perspective on life! My Creator and Redeemer, the Source of all gifts and strength, evidently had a different purpose for my entire existence. He knows what is best.

This personal experience had started off with a big disappointment which, of course, was rather small compared to that of the man born blind, to those unjustly cast into prison like Joseph and John the Baptist, or sick Lazarus being allowed to die. You likewise may have your own testimony to share. But whatever the case, we can all readily recognize in various people's situations the handwriting of the same Almighty One, and "we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

May we always trust in the vast wisdom of the awesome Creator who artistically designs and orchestrates with melodious lovingkindness **the bigger picture**! Amen.



WE THE CHURCH

MARCO ALONSO

THE PROBLEM

Not a week goes by that during conversations I have with people, someone will express their deep disappointment with church. Their disappointment is often expressed in phrases such as, "The church's vibe is not what it used to be" or "I remember when church used to be loving," or "I feel the church is dead, that's why I don't feel like going to church." As a result, many have left the church and eventually their faith. If you have felt this way, your not alone.

It was a cloudy Saturday morning, close to 9 a.m. and Mack was still in bed. Sabbath school was about to start in 45 minutes and he still wasn't ready. His clothes were still in the closet and he still didn't know what he was going to wear. His wife kept insisting he needed to get ready but Mack reminded her that he was not going. So to keep her off his back, he went into the bathroom to relax. But she kept insisting and telling him that he needed to go to church. By this time his wife was frustrated. And so she rushed to the bathroom door and told him, "I have three reasons why you should go to church. Reason 1, you know you need to go." This didn't convince him. "Reason 2, you'll feel better after you go." This wasn't sufficient, either. Finally she said, "Reason 3, you're the pastor. You seriously need to go!"

At some point in time we've all been there and perhaps you're currently going through something similar. Perhaps you know someone close to you that needs to come back to church. Or perhaps someone that still goes to church but is emotionally absent from church. Regardless on what group you find yourself in, there's hope. Allow me to share some statistics that will shed light behind the reason for this massive church exodus.

THE STATS

In the United States alone, we've had what historians call Great Awakenings. The first one was between 1730–1740. The Second Great Awakening—usually referred simply as The Great Awakening—lasted between 1840–1850. Did you know that more people have left churches in the last 25 years than all the people that joined a church in the 1st and 2nd Great Awakening combined plus those that became Christians during the Billy Graham crusades?

This leads us to ask ourselves "why?" It's certainly not because people are becoming less spiritual. The data suggests Americans are just as spiritual now as they were 30 years ago. Perhaps even more spiritual.

In the book of Ezekiel, God gives his prophet an amazing revelation. The Lord doesn't reveal to him a boring or slowly dying church, but rather a dead church. In fact, this is a revelation about a church that has long disappeared and by all logic, impossible to revive. Not only are they dead, but they are blatantly dead. Although some traces remain of its former glory, these are just memories of how big this army once had been.

THE BACKSTORY

Ezekiel was living in Jerusalem when the city was attacked for the first time. As a priest, nothing pained him more than seeing his hometown besieged. (2 Kings 24:8–17). While the city was left untouched, the king of Babylon took the first group of Israeli prisoners back to Babylon. Among these prisoners was Ezekiel the priest. The book of Ezekiel starts off 5 years after these events. As Ezekiel reminisces over these events, he finds himself close to an Israelite refugee camp around



his 30th birthday. Incidentally, this would have been the year that he would have been started off as a priest in Jerusalem; perhaps asking himself the question, "How did we get here?"

The answer to this question is found a few books before. God's plan for Israel had been the perfect plan. "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end" (Jeremiah 29:11). However, Israel wasn't always onboard with these plans. Their biggest challenge had been their inability to forget Egypt. Their memories of Egypt seemed to be like toxic ex-boyfriend or girlfriend. They experienced pain while they were with the Egyptians, but somehow they kept thinking on the few good memories they had together.

Regardless of the pain the Egyptians had inflicted upon them, they seemed to find a sense of security in slavery. And although God had always kept His promises, they would always lose trust in Him because they couldn't envision the God of their fathers coming through with His promises. This lack of trust evolved into a passion to become like the neighboring governments. It started off when they insisted that they wanted a king just like their neighbors. This pursuit reached its climax when God's people found themselves involved in child sacrifice and other dark rituals, exactly like their neighbor's religion. God had sent numerous warnings to His people. Yet, most of these warning passed unheeded. These warnings included the prophecies of how Babylon would invade their nation if they didn't stop their wicked behavior. But even before they were physically invaded, they had already been heavily influenced by the practices of the other nations.

Perhaps one of the most eerie visions written in the Bible is Ezekiel's vision in chapter 37. The vision starts with a scene of a huge valley covered with bones. The bones are not only scattered but dry, as they have been bleached by the sun. It is clear that these are the remains of a huge army that has been shamefully defeated. Whoever lost this war, lost big. No one has come to bury their corpses, not even out of respect for those who have died. As Ezekiel stands before this valley, God asks him a seemingly illogical question:

"Son of man, can these bones live?" The answer seemed to be quite clear. They have been clearly dead for a while! No life is left in them. However, Ezekiel knows God and answers Him, "O Lord God, You know."

Ezekiel knows that if there's anyone who could do something with these bones, that would be God. As Ezekiel is still pondering this question, God asks him to do the unexpected.

THE STRANGE REQUEST

Imagine yourself standing in the middle of a cemetery from



the 1700s and delivering God's message with a loud voice. This would certainly be considered as strange and unsettling behavior. Perhaps even foolish. And yet, God commands Ezekiel to do exactly this. In this next scene, God commands Ezekiel to speak to the dry bones. In Ezekiel 37:4 God asks him to deliver the following message, "Again he said unto me, Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord." As soon as Ezekiel speaks to the dry bones, all the bones come together, forming skeletons and then the skeletons become covered with muscle and skin tissue. But something is missing. Next, in Ezekiel 37:9 God asks him to speak to the winds, "Thus saith the Lord God; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." Immediately, the bodies are come to life and stand up and the valley became a standing army."

God was not done yet. There was one more message He had for His people. In the next verses God promises that He would open their graves and resurrect them and finally bring them back to their homeland in Israel. But the greatest promise for them is found in verse 14, "And shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the Lord have spoken it, and performed it, saith the Lord."

As I read this vision, I couldn't help but think on the words of the Lord when He said this is the condition of the house of Israel. As I prayed, I reminded the Lord that my church is active. We're consistent with the Sabbath school panel. I personally know members that put in time and money to God's cause. Why would the house of Israel be like dead bones? I'm

active myself! I do my very best . . . given the circumstances and resources. Why are we dead? Maybe if we had better lighting and an LCD screen, our church would be lively. Maybe if we chose music that was lively, our church would be enthusiastic. You can't bring life to the church by attempting to revive the church yourself. All of these great and perfect ideas are amazing. We should do our best! But nothing you and I can think about will ever give life to the church. It is only God who will breathe life into His church.

I was once told by an attendee from a large, well-known church in the busy Washington D.C. metropolitan area, "I can't deny the adrenaline rush I get after attending my church on Sunday, but I can't ignore the void I feel after I leave . . . something is missing . . . something is not right, . . . and I don't know what it is!"

WHY DID THEY DIE?

The concept of death is often used interchangeably in the Bible. It can either refer to a physical death or a spiritual death, both of which result from a physical and spiritual separation from God. To better understand the biblical concept of death, consider how Adam was created. Genesis 2:7, tells humanity's creation story, "Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being." Notice how both of these two elements are needed in order to produce a living being. Man is formed and molded out of the dust and God's breath of life makes him a living soul. If you remove God's breath out of this equation, you're left with dust. Jesus reaffirms this principle in John 15:5. Here Jesus uses the example of a vine and points out how it's impossible for the branches to be alive without being connected to the vine. "I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in Me and I in Him, the same bringeth forth much fruit, for without Me ye can do nothing." This connection to Jesus ensures life and the bearing of fruits.

As Ezekiel looks at this huge valley full of dry bones—and as depressing as it was, it was something to be expected. God's people had repeatedly been moving away from God for years. God's constant message to them was, "Stop doing whats wrong" and "return unto me." This constant refusal to do what was right and avoiding God, led to a spiritual death and indifference toward their Creator as well as a invasion from Babylon. It was very clear to Ezekiel that there was no hope for Israel to live again. There was no hope for Jerusalem to be that vibrant city again. It was over.

THE BIGGER PROBLEM

Spiritual death and Babylon's invasion triggered a problem. But these issues should have been the least of their worries. Their biggest problem was that they didn't think there was anything

wrong with their current situation. They believed they would be just fine. Not because God was going to make things right, but because there was nothing to be made right. So much so that a prophet by the name of Hananiah appears in this scenario in Jeremiah 28 and tells the people that God would break the yoke of the Babylonians. While that was partially true, the prophet went on to deceive them and he added that this would happen within 2 years. But God had already told them how long they would be in Babylon. It wasn't a brief 2 years but rather 70 years.

Israel's biggest problems were deception and rejection of the truth. Things were not okay. They had not been okay for a while. And now there was no hope. They were dead. They had been dead for a long time. They were dry bones. And in spite of their condition, they still believed they were alive. As Ezekiel looks at the valley, a sense of hopelessness sets in. And before God revealed to him what His plan was, it was vital for Ezekiel to realize Israel's hopelessness.

ONLY GOD

I love how God communicates with Ezekiel. The Lord then asks the question, "Can these bones live?" After being unrealistically optimistic, we come to realize these bones can't come back to life. The vision makes it very clear they have been dead for a while and exposed to the elements. They're dry! But Ezekiel's answer is on point. Ezekiel answers and says, "O Lord God, thou knowest." He recognizes that at this point, God was the only one who can do something about it. If God created this world out of nothing, He can certainly recreate these sun-bleached bones into living men and women.

THE LESSON

You would think that spiritual death would be something you would exclusively find outside of a church. After all, how much farther from God could you be if you're outside the church! The sad reality is that Ezekiel's vision was not specifically referring to those who are far from God, but rather those who claim to be close to Him and yet are spiritually dead or spiritually dying inside. I've heard it described it this way: "Being spiritually dead in the church is like being numb inside but hoping to experience something." Regardless of what state you currently find yourself in, it's important to remember that the first step is to accept the reality. In this case, spiritual death. The sooner we realize this, the sooner we'll realize we need God's breath of life breathed into our spiritual lives. Part of this process will involve a sense of mourning and loss of what we thought was real. But remember, God's promise is He will breathe life into you and you will become a living and thriving soul. Not only will you exist, but live with passion and purpose in His service!

Test Your Reading!

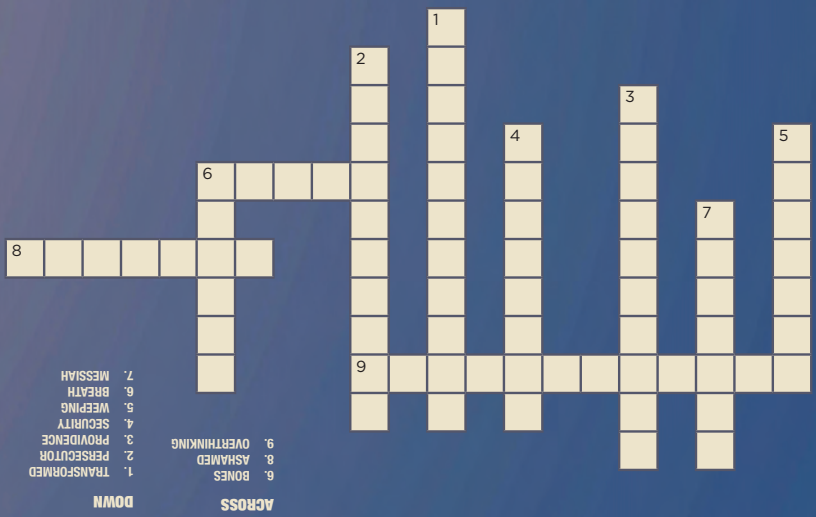
youth messenger

ACROSS

6. In vision, Ezekiel saw the church as sun-bleached _____.
8. The Samaritan woman was _____ of her lifestyle.
9. _____ often occurs when we dwell too much on the past or worry about the future.

DOWN

1. According to Romans 12:2, we are to be _____ by the renewing of our mind.
2. Paul was a zealous _____ who was transformed into a fervent apostle.
3. The challenging trials in Joseph's life were ordained by God's _____.
4. The only _____ for any soul is right thinking.
5. Psalm 30:5 assures us that _____ may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning.
6. The only way to restore the soul of the church is by the _____ of the Almighty.
7. Jesus openly acknowledged to the Samaritan woman that He was the _____.



ACROSS
6. BONES
8. ASHAMED
9. OVERTHINKING

DOWN
1. TRANSFORMED
2. PERSECUTOR
3. PROVIDENCE
4. SECURITY
5. WEEPING
6. BREATH
7. MESSIAH

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Departing Clouds

by Jonathan Spence

When clouds arise and hide from view
The golden sun and heavenly blue,
    Above the gloom the sunlight streams.
In wondrous ray, in radiant hue,
    There beauty sheds her lovely beams,
    And cheerfulness unmeasured teems;
There gladness doth its work pursue,
    And grandeur as the morning gleams.

Ah! soon the clouds shall pass away,
And brightness from the realms of day
    Light up the gloom and guild the scene.
Departing clouds in glad display
    Strew sparkling gems upon the green;
    They leave a rainbow bright, serene;
The sky glows lovely o'er the way,
    And soon no cloud shall intervene.

So thus in life; when clouds appear,
When trials come with test severe,
    By faith we may behold the prize,
And bring its beaming glories near.
    The clouds soon break; before our eyes
    The stately hills of Canaan rise
In sacred calm, in heavenly clear
    And everlasting sunlit skies.