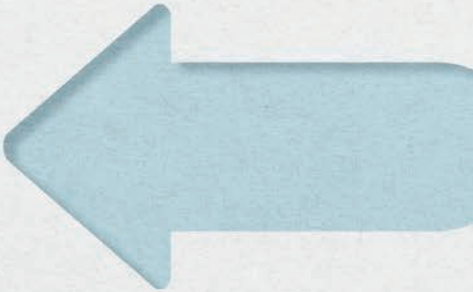


CHOOSING THE NARROW WAY

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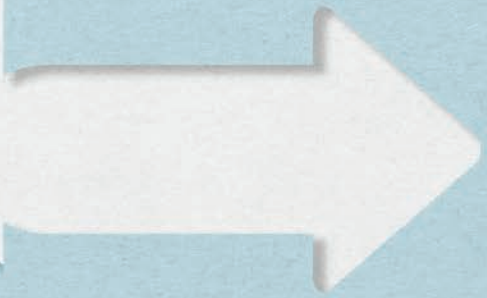
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CHOOSING PRACTICAL FAITH

Aren't you glad that you're not a robot? You have power to make your own choices. This freedom is a tremendous privilege that has been custom designed by your Creator and bestowed upon you with much love.

You can choose to rise above disappointments when things don't seem fair or don't make sense. You can choose how to respond when bombarded by bullies and brats. You can choose what path to take in molding your faith and in pursuing your education, skill set, and career goals. You don't need to latch onto codependent attachments with whatever acquaintances happen to be around, especially if they are toxic. You don't need to be a slave to hormones by "falling" in love with someone whom, deep-down, your conscience tells you would not be a good spiritual support in your life plans toward eternity.

These and other choices affect the rest of your life. In the not-so-distant future, you'll look back and be glad for having made the right choices and will likely regret the wrong ones.

Do any of us naturally have the inner strength to make consistently rational, reasonable, logical choices according to what is right? No, we don't. None of us do! We need the strength that comes only through trust in our Creator and Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. We have the power to choose and cooperate with God as He empowers us with His divine Spirit.

So, "trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Proverbs 3:5, 6). "O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him" (Psalm 34:8) That blessing can belong to each one of us. Let's take hold of it!

—Barbara Montrose



Why Suffering?

Why Do I Have to Go Through This?

BY ABRAHAM REIS

There are two ways we can face suffering in this world: As punishment (which is not the right way), or as something to instruct us. So, what can I learn from suffering during this bad phase?

Although God is not directly responsible for human suffering, we can't ignore that sometimes He allows suffering to come to each of us so that we can learn some important lesson through it. "God has a purpose in everything; there's a reason for this." Surely you have said this at some point in your life—and human suffering is no exception to this logic. Think about it, and seek to discover God's purpose, among other things, in allowing suffering to come your way. If you do so, you can be blessed by God even in hard times—and just like David the king, you will be able to say: "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes" (Psalm 119:71).

Referring to God's intent to get our attention through difficulties, the famous author C. S. Lewis observed: "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain." What is He telling you? As a tender, loving Father, what does He want to teach you? Ask yourself.

OUR DEVELOPMENT—UNDERSTANDING WHY

Suffering is all the more painful in proportion to the greater good it is to achieve. For example:

1. Human life arises out of pain—sometimes almost unbearable pain. When childbirth occurs naturally, the mother will typically undergo much pain so that her child can be born. In the final hours before the birth, for the greater good to occur (in this case the baby's arrival), the mother must face a series of repeated pains, each more intense than the previous one. There is no getting away from it. Ask any mother. All this pain was necessary, but it resulted in something good.

2. Between the 3rd and 5th day after a baby is born, there is often a test done on the newborn, the Guthrie Test. Blood is collected from the baby's heel and this test

is effective in detecting up to 29 types of diseases in the infant. Such an exam hurts. However, it's purpose is to ensure the preservation of life, so parents submit their children to this important examination.

3. Unfortunately, after the entrance of sin into this world, from time to time we get sick; this is to be expected. Since no one likes to be sick, we quickly take steps to restore our health. We go to the hospital, looking for a doctor so we can be well. On some occasions, we are prescribed some medication(s) that sometimes may be unpalatable, or worse yet, a painful injection. However, all this displeasure and pain is to aim at only one thing: To benefit us!

WHAT ABOUT WHEN WE FEEL ALONE?

Sometimes we face difficult moments. At such times, seeing someone reach out to offer some kind of assistance is encouraging, isn't it? It's a blessing when we try to support one another, and all have this need. However, we should continually seek the Lord God's support above all else, for it is His intervention that will bring true solutions to life's setbacks.

But what happens when we seek such support and feel as if God isn't listening to us? When it seems as if He is oblivious to our difficulties and pain? Yes, this is distressing. However, we are not the only ones who have experienced this feeling. As we read the stories in God's Word and carefully evaluate the background of each one, we realize that other people—even those who maintained great communion with God—sometimes spoke as if they felt God was distant from them. This happens because communion with God is not synonymous with the absence of struggles, nor did He ever make such a promise. (See John 16:33.)

Psalm 88 was written by Heman, an Ezrahite, who, according to 1 Chronicles 6:33–38, was a wise singer. It is unknown exactly when Psalm 88 was composed, but many scholars believe it dates back to the time of the Babylonian exile (b.c. 586–538), when Israel suffered under Babylonian oppression. The Psalms are poetic expressions of the Hebrew people, expressing the ongoing relationship between God and humanity. Psalm 88 differs from many psalms that end with expressions of praise or trust. This is because in it, Heman expresses human anguish and despair in a raw and honest way, making it a lament that reflects pain and a sense of abandonment, suggesting that he was going through one of the most difficult times of his life.

Let us consider what we read in Psalm 88:13, 14: "But unto thee have I cried, O Lord; and in the morning shall my prayer prevent thee. Lord, why castest thou off my soul? why hidest

thou thy face from me?" Heman felt far away from God. He felt as if he had been rejected by God, excluded from His favor, just as for one who is dead: "I am counted with them that go down into the pit: I am as a man that hath no strength: Free among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, whom thou rememberest no more: and they are cut off from thy hand" (Psalm 88:4, 5).

Heman's suffering was so great that he thought it would destroy him. He says, "I am afflicted and ready to die from my youth up: while I suffer thy terrors I am distracted" (Psalm 88:15). Yes, he says, "I am distracted." The Amplified Bible says, "I am overcome." Indeed, Heman was emotionally shaken. By saying "from my youth," Heman was indicating that he had been suffering from this difficulty for years, and it was extremely serious. Since he even said, "Thy fierce wrath goeth over me; thy terrors have cut me off" (Psalm 88:16), he was wasting away. All this was caused by a feeling of abandonment by God. The same happens with us, but regardless of how we might feel, the truth is that God does not turn away from us when we go through the difficulties that He has allowed to come our way. For "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

FAR AWAY FROM REAL HUMANS

Having friends and being well-connected does not always mean we'll have someone by our side when troubles arise. As mentioned, moral support at such moments is a blessing—but Heman bemoaned that he actually had no one: "Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness" (Psalm 88:18).

Yet, the most impactful biblical story about utter abandonment in adversity is that of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is recounted in Matthew 26:36–46; Mark 14:32–42; Luke 22:39–46; and John 18:1.

The Lord Jesus Christ was quite sad; the time was approaching when He would die in our place on the cross of Calvary. In this context, what led Him to become even more deeply saddened was the realization that by dying on the cross of Calvary for humanity, He would be momentarily separated from the Father.

At this moment of agony, faced with imminent death, Christ sought strength from God the Father through prayer. Jesus Christ had twelve disciples, three of whom were the closest: Peter, James, and John. The Lord invited them to accompany Him and keep watch with Him in the hours leading up to His crucifixion. "Keep watch" here means that the Lord Jesus Christ intended for them to remain awake by His side, providing Him with moral support. But how did He find them? Yes,



sleeping—pretty much indifferent to His pain and suffering. And note: The Lord Jesus Christ found them sleeping on two occasions, as stated in Matthew 26:43, 44.

Christ demonstrated that He was sad. The sacred text describes: "And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me. And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt. And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour?" (Matthew 26:37–40).

It is interesting to note that upon returning to the disciples, the Lord addressed the question directly to Peter. This was because it was Peter who first said that he would never be offended by Christ; by this, He meant that He would not abandon Him. This statement led the other disciples to declare the same. Peter had evidently influenced them (see Matthew 26:33–35). But the truth is that in the end, they all became guilty of turning away from their beloved Master.

The same thing that happened to the Lord Jesus Christ can happen to us in times of adversity. We may have many friends, some who even say, "I am your friend in life and in death; know that you can count on me no matter what; we're friends forever" and through this statement, they may also lead others to declare the same. Yet unexpectedly, in times of pain, we find ourselves utterly alone! Even if those closest to us—those who have experienced some of our struggles and have supported us—forget and turn away from us, yet God will not do so. The Bible assures us of this, for in it the Lord says: "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee" (Isaiah 49:15).

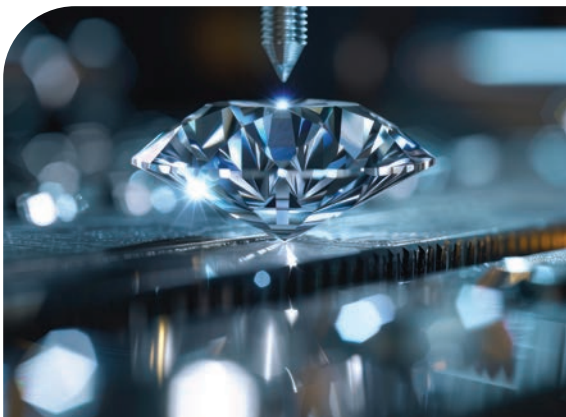
LIMITED HUMAN LOGIC

It's not uncommon for us to limit our thinking to some preconceived impression and/or conclusion we may already have about something or someone. This is also true of suffering. But that should not be the case, as God's Word contains a wide range of stories showing that our way of reflecting on the issues of this life isn't always correct. Regarding the trials God allows to assault our peace and happiness: When we think that He consents to them to harm us, such thinking is completely wrong! Finite human ideas do not express the Lord's way of thinking. God declares: "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:9). "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). The Amplified Bible explains, "to give you a future and a hope." These texts bring hope and serve as a balm of Gilead for the soul that trusts in the Lord of Scripture. Again, our thoughts are not like God's! He sees the end of trials, and we only see the suffering they are causing. But our way of thinking can change as long as we understand the spiritual meaning and application of suffering in the life of the believer, for God is a God of purpose.

"The trials of life are God's workmen, to remove the impurities and roughness from our character. Their hewing, squaring, and chiseling, their burnishing and polishing, is a painful process; it is hard to be pressed down to the grinding wheel. But the stone is brought forth prepared to fill its place in the heavenly temple. Upon no useless material does the Master bestow such careful, thorough work. Only His precious stones are polished after the similitude of a palace."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessings,* p. 10.

"All trials that are received as educators will produce joy."—*God's Amazing Grace,* p. 184.

Yes, this trial that you are going through is not meant to kill you; it is meant to strengthen you and bring you even closer to the Lord, and above all, to bring you salvation. All the adverse situations we experience have this aim. God is shaping us to be subjects of His Kingdom. It is not easy to go through trials and suffering. But He who is soon to come to take us home has declared: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matthew 28:20).





Fiery Serpents

BY PETER D. LAUSEVIC

One day, as the glistening snow was thawing with the rays of spring sunshine, a man was standing by the Niagara River observing the wonders of nature. This was a person who was intensely attracted by the marvels of nature. Looking upon the horizon, suddenly he saw an eagle swoop down upon a frozen lamb encased in a floating chunk of ice that was drifting towards the rapids leading into the tremendous falls. Realizing the near danger, the eagle would lift his head every now and then, looking around proudly, as if to say, "I'm not a fool. I know what I am doing. I will fly up and make my escape before it is too late."

As the eagle was approaching the dangerous edge of the falls, he stopped picking at the carcass, spread his powerful wings, and leaped for his escape flight. But alas! All his efforts were in vain. While he was feasting, his talons froze to the fleece of the dead animal. Shrieking and beating his wings helplessly upon the ice, he went over the falls into the thunderous abyss below.

The fate of that unfortunate eagle stands as a warning to everyone who consciously starts on the wrong track, duping himself with the thought that he will stop doing evil before going too far.

In Proverbs 14:12, the wise man said: "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." A writer back in the 1600's made a timeless observation: "Sin is first pleasing, then it grows easy, then delightful, then frequent, then habitual, then confirmed; then the man is impenitent; then he is obstinate; then he is resolved never to repent; and then, he is ruined."

In contrast to this path that leads only to destruction, "the path of the just is as the shining light

that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." Proverbs 4:18. But how can a person, so used to the path that ends in death, turn around and walk on the strait and narrow way? How is it possible that one who is accustomed to the so-called pleasures of sin turn in disdain from its constant invitations to the pure life inspired by heavenly principles?

CHANGING OUR COURSE

Jesus answered this life-giving question when speaking to those Jews who believed in Him. He said, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). Does this mean that without knowing the truth we are in slavery? Most of the Jews denied being in any kind of slavery. "They answered him, we be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, ye shall be made free?" (John 8:33).

But Jesus clarified their question by showing them the worst kind of slavery possible in this world. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin" (John 8:34). In other words, we are in the service of Satan—the father of sin—when we are not in that path which "shineth more and more unto the perfect day." The only way to leave that path is by the truth. "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." If only that eagle had realized his condition earlier, he would not have perished. Rather, if only he did not play with danger, he would not have found himself facing certain death. Too many times we play with sin till there is no hope for us.

May we take hold of the pure principles of truth today while we still have that opportunity—before we get caught in a deadly current which leads to eternal loss!

BUT WHAT IS TRUTH?

Such an important question! During the trial of Jesus, even Pilate asked Him, "What is truth?" (John 18:38). But Pilate's problem was that he did not stop to hear a reply to his question. If he had only tarried a little longer to hear Christ's reply, his history might have changed, for Christ's answer would have been the same as that given to Thomas the night before: "Jesus saith unto him, I am . . . the truth. . . . No man cometh unto the Father but by me" (John 14:6). Are you prepared to take the time to understand the answer to such an important question?

Yes, Jesus is the Truth; and when we know Jesus, He will make us free. For this reason, Paul said: "I am not ashamed of the gospel" (to announce good news, to declare, to bring glad tidings) "of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16). "The Bible . . . presents in the simplest language the mighty power of the gospel, which, received, would

cut the chains that bind men to Satan's chariot."—*Fundamentals of Christian Education,* p. 377.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN "TO KNOW?"

"The Saduccees had flattered themselves that they of all men adhered most strictly to the Scriptures. But Jesus showed that they had not known their true meaning."—*The Desire of Ages,* p. 605. We can see this clearly in one of His discussions with them. He said this "unto them, Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the scriptures, neither the power of God" (Mark 12:24)? Even if we have a great mental store of the glorious knowledge of the gospel and of the content of the Scriptures, it does not necessarily correspond to an equally great power in being free from the slavery of sin.

How then can we understand the "know" in John 8:32 so there can be a power in our knowledge of truth resulting in freedom from sin? It is not a casual acquaintance of Jesus as the Truth; but instead, as He said: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" (John 12:32). It is not Jesus in glory or Jesus the miracle worker only, but Jesus the crucified One hanging on that cross that brings such power for transformation.

Just before He spoke about the truth making men free, He said: "When ye have lifted up the son of man, then shall ye know



that I am He." John 8:28. It is the crucified and risen Saviour that has power to draw all unto Himself. Why, then, hasn't everyone been drawn unto Him as the Saviour since He was crucified on the cross and raised from the dead? Is there anything unfulfilled with this text—or do we need some further clarification to it? Is the text unconditional? No! We must compare Scripture with Scripture to obtain a complete understanding of the passage. Let us remember that we are speaking of being freed from the slavery of sin, not just any kind of freedom.

John the Baptist was clear as to our duty toward the truth (Jesus) when he said: "Behold the Lamb of God, which beareth away the sin of the world" (John 1:29, margin). Our responsibility is to behold the Lamb of God on the cross. This is what it means to "know" that results in freedom.

A LESSON FROM HISTORY

You may remember the time when the children of Israel were attacked in the wilderness by fiery serpents. These serpents were so deadly that "much people of

Israel died. Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord, and against thee; pray unto the Lord, that He take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people" (Numbers 21:6, 7). How did the Lord choose to solve the problem? "And the Lord said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that everyone that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived" (Numbers 21:8, 9). Notice the words "When he beheld." If a person refused to behold, he would die.

Jesus used this parallel when He spoke to Nicodemus about the process of the new birth. "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the son of man be lifted up. That whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:14, 15).

Jesus explained that when He is lifted up, He will draw all man unto Himself. But He is not speaking of all people on the earth unconditionally. He is speaking of all those that believe and behold. "Let the repenting sinner fix his eyes upon 'the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world;' and by beholding, he becomes changed. His fear is turned to joy, his doubts to hope. Gratitude springs up. The stony heart is broken. A tide of love sweeps into the soul. Christ is in him a well of water springing up unto everlasting life."—*The Desire of Ages,* p. 439.

The Israelites in the wilderness had to exercise faith in the power of God which that serpent on the pole represented. They were not to have faith in that serpent itself as if it had a power to heal disease. Later in the history of Israel, they actually worshipped that as an idol. For this reason, the good king Hezekiah "broke in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it" (2 Kings 18:4). But Christ did not say that if He was lifted up, those who believe what He represented would be freed from sin. Instead, He said: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me," and I will make you free for "I am the way, the truth, and the life," and "ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." It is not the cross that we are to behold or to worship, but Jesus on that cross. We have an infinitely powerful Saviour on that cross. But who is He that He has such a drawing, saving power?

WHO IS JESUS?

We know that Jesus was a good man and lived a sinless life. The record tells us that "Christ . . . did no sin, neither was guile found

in His mouth" (1 Peter 2:21, 22). But is it His goodness and sinless life alone that was responsible for that power? It cannot be, since these traits in people incur the wrath of sinners. Paul's prophecy is clear as to what the righteous can expect from the worldly minded in society. "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12). A godly life causes persecution because "this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be discovered" (John 3:19, 20, mgn). It could not be His goodness alone—or when someone is a slave, the goodness and perfection of another master is not sufficient to change his plight with a wicked slave driver.

So then, who is this Jesus that provides such an attraction? The Bible says: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." John 1:14. Jesus is the Word of God (compare Revelation 19:11–13, 16; 17:14; John 1:29).

What does the Bible say of Him as the Word? "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made" (John 1:1–3).

It is not the cross that we are to behold or to worship, but Jesus on that cross. We have an infinitely powerful Saviour on that cross.

"If Christ made all things, He existed before all things. The words spoken in regard to this are so decisive that no one need be left in doubt. Christ was God essentially, and in the highest sense. He was with God from all eternity, God over all, blessed forever more."—*Selected Messages,* bk. 1, p. 247.

Since Jesus was never created—but rather He created all things (John 1:1–3), He must be God. Among the many descriptions of the coming Messiah, the prophet Isaiah refers to Him as "the mighty God" (Isaiah 9:6). The apostle Paul says there is no controversy regarding the known fact that "God was manifest in the flesh" (1 Timothy 3:16). The serpent in the wilderness was only a piece of brass, but Christ on the cross was and still is the eternal God. For this reason, we can and must worship Christ, for in Hebrews 1:8 the Father commands us regarding Jesus: "Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever: a scepter of



righteousness is the scepter of thy kingdom." Here the Father calls Him God; thus He is the Master of all masters and can free the slaves from that wicked master, Satan and sin. Then a miracle (the Bible calls it a mystery) took place.

GOD BECAME FLESH

In John 1:14 we read: "And the word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." How was that possible for God, the Creator of heaven and earth, to become a created being. This is a question that none can fully answer. The Bible calls this act a great mystery. "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh" (1 Timothy 3:16). This mystery, this gift, and yes, this supreme sacrifice was for you and me, "for God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). This is the drawing power of Christ. It is because He is God and God became flesh that He has the ability to attract.

What does it mean that He became flesh? For Him to become like an angel would have been an infinitely great sacrifice for the Creator. "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death" (Hebrews 2:9). This is just like a created being. "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man that thou visitest him? For Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels" (Psalm 8:4, 5). This was not an imitation man. "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Hebrews 2:14).

This was not the nature of Adam before the fall but of the children of Adam, for "remember that Jesus Christ" was "of the

seed of David" (2 Timothy 2:8). He was made like unto His brethren, "for it became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." For this reason, "he is not ashamed to call them brethren. . . . Wherefore in all things it behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people" (Hebrews 2:10, 11, 17).

Jesus not only condescended to being a man, but the lowest of men in rank. He "made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:7). "Think of Christ's humiliation. He took upon Himself fallen, suffering human nature, degraded and defiled by sin. He took our sorrows, bearing our grief and shame. He endured all the temptations wherewith man is beset. He united humanity with divinity; a divine spirit dwelt in a temple of flesh."—*The SDA Bible Commentary* [E. G. White Comments], vol. 4, p. 1147.

CONCLUSION

"In consideration of this, can men have one particle of exaltation? As they trace down the life and sufferings and humiliation of Christ, can they lift their proud heads as if they were to bear no trials, no shame, no humiliation? I say to the followers of Christ, Look to Calvary, and blush for shame at your self-important ideas. All this humiliation of the Majesty of heaven was for guilty, condemned man. He went lower and lower in His humiliation, until there were no lower depths that he could reach, in order to lift man up from his moral defilement."—Ibid., vol. 5, pp. 1127, 1128.

Many would say: "But Jesus wants everything! That's not fair!" "But what do we give up, when we give all? A sin-polluted heart, for Jesus to cleanse by his own blood, and to save by his matchless love. And yet men think it hard to give up all! I am ashamed to hear it spoken of, ashamed to write it.

"God does not require us to give up anything that it is for our best interest to retain. In all that He does, He has the well-being of His children in view. Would that all who have not chosen Christ might realize that He has something vastly better to offer them than they are seeking for themselves."—*Steps to Christ,* p. 46.

So then, "Behold the Lamb of God, which beareth away the sin of the world." Keep your eyes fixed upon him and it would be impossible to resist His invitation: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28–30).



The Virtuous Woman

from *Matthew Henry's Concise Bible Commentary,* p. 660.

"Who can find a virtuous woman?
for her price is far above rubies.
The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her,
so that he shall have no need of spoil.
She will do him good and not evil
all the days of her life.
She seeketh wool, and flax,
and worketh willingly with her hands.

She is like the merchants' ships;
she bringeth her food from afar.
She riseth also while it is yet night,
and giveth meat to her household,
and a portion to her maidens.
She considereth a field, and buyeth it:
with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard.
She girdeth her loins with strength,
and strengtheneth her arms.
She perceiveth that her merchandise is good:
her candle goeth not out by night.
She layeth her hands to the spindle,
and her hands hold the distaff.
She stretcheth out her hand to the poor;
yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy.
She is not afraid of the snow for her household:
for all her household are clothed with scarlet.
She maketh herself coverings of tapestry;
her clothing is silk and purple.
Her husband is known in the gates,
when he sitteth among the elders of the land.
She maketh fine linen, and selleth it;
and delivereth girdles unto the merchant.
Strength and honour are her clothing;
and she shall rejoice in time to come.
She openeth her mouth with wisdom;
and in her tongue is the law of kindness.
She looketh well to the ways of her household,
and eateth not the bread of idleness.
Her children arise up, and call her blessed;
her husband also, and he praiseth her.
Many daughters have done virtuously,
but thou excellest them all.
Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain:
but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised.
Give her of the fruit of her hands;
and let her own works praise her in the gates" (Proverbs 31:10–31).

This is the description of a virtuous woman of those days, but the general outlines equally suit every age and nation. She is very careful to recommend herself to her husband's esteem and affection, to know his mind, and is willing that he rule over her.



1. She can be trusted, and he will leave such a wife to manage for him. He is happy in her. And she makes it her constant business to do him good.

2. She is one that takes pains in her duties, and takes pleasure in them. She is careful to fill up time, that none be lost. She rises early. She applies herself to the business proper for her, to women's business. She does what she does, with all her power, and trifles not.

3. She makes what she does turn to good account by prudent management. Many undo themselves by buying, without considering whether they can afford it. She provides well for her house. She lays up for hereafter.

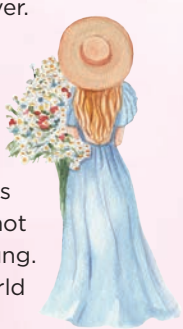


4. She looks well to the ways of her household, that she may oblige all to do their duty to God and one another, as well as to her.

5. She is intent upon giving as upon getting, and does it freely and cheerfully.

6. She is discreet and obliging; every word she says, shows she governs herself by the rules of wisdom. She not only takes prudent measures herself, but gives prudent advice to others. The law of love and kindness is written in the heart, and shows itself in the tongue. Her heart is full of another world, even when her hands are most busy about this world.

7. Above all, she fears the Lord. Beauty recommends none to God, nor is it any proof of wisdom and goodness, but it has deceived many a man who made his choice of a wife by it. But the fear of God reigning in the heart, is the beauty of the soul; it lasts for ever.



8. She has firmness to bear up under crosses and disappointments. She shall reflect with comfort when she comes to be old, that she was not idle or useless when young. She shall rejoice in a world to come. She is a great blessing to her relations. If the fruit be good, the tree must have our good word. But she leaves it to her own works to praise her.

Every one ought to desire this honour that cometh from God; and according to this standard we all ought to regulate our judgments. This description let all women daily study, who desire to be truly beloved and respected, useful and honourable. This passage is to be applied to individuals, but may it not also be applied to the church of God, which is described as a virtuous spouse? God by His grace has formed from among sinful men a church of true believers, to possess all the excellences here described.



Unrealistic Expectations

BY CSONGOR MATYAS

Have you ever scrolled through social media and felt a bit miserable because you felt like your life is not as perfect as that of your peers? Have you ever wondered how much of what is presented on social media is actually authentic, and how much is a curated version of reality?

Social media often presents an idealized version of reality, which can create unrealistic expectations for users. When we compare ourselves to the idealized versions of life presented on social media, we may feel like our own lives are inadequate or lacking. But have you ever stopped to consider how this comparison affects our mental health and self-esteem? Is it fair to judge our own lives based on what we see online, knowing that people often only share the best moments of their lives?

How do these unrealistic expectations set by social media impact our relationships with others and our purpose in life? Do they foster a culture of competition and comparison, or can they be a source of inspiration and connection?

This issue is particularly prevalent among young people who are still trying to find their place in the world. Social media can create unrealistic expectations for them, leading them to believe that success, happiness, and fulfillment are only attainable through material possessions such as luxury cars, designer clothing, beautiful homes, and exotic travel destinations. Comparing ourselves to the lives of others on social media can negatively impact our mental health and self-esteem.

The highlight reels presented on social media can lead

Let us strive to be intentional in our social media usage—not triggering jealousy in ourselves or others while looking at things on these platforms, but rather encouraging and supporting others by kind words and thoughts.

young people to believe that a perfect life consists of a flawless appearance, a picturesque home, and a constant stream of exciting experiences. This portrayal can create pressure to meet these unrealistic expectations, leading to feelings of inadequacy, low self-esteem, and even depression. The quest for external validation and the pursuit of material possessions can overshadow an otherwise more meaningful life.

IN THE BEGINNING

As we read in the Bible, humanity was originally created to live in a perfect environment. In the book of Genesis, we learn that God created Adam and Eve and placed them in a perfect garden called Eden. In this garden, they had everything they needed for their sustenance and enjoyment. The environment surrounding them was perfect, with abundant natural resources and pristine nature. Their lives were characterized by constant happiness, peace, and harmony with each other and with God.

This perfect environment that Adam and Eve experienced in Eden was not just a physical paradise but also a spiritual one. They had a direct relationship with God and were in communion with Him. They had a clear sense of purpose and were free from the worries, stress, and anxiety that plague humanity today.

Before the Fall, they enjoyed a life of giving and serving, as well as being grateful to their Creator for everything they had been given. They were given the privilege to care for the garden of Eden and all the creatures in it, thus being true to the image in which they were created: a God that gives, serves, and loves unconditionally.

TODAY'S CONTRAST

The pursuit of material possessions and external validation can lead to a focus on self-promotion and personal gain at the expense of meaningful relationships and spiritual growth. On the other hand, one of the underlying motivators for the focus on material possessions and external validation on social media is the human tendency towards selfishness. In a culture that emphasizes individual achievement and success, it's

easy to become focused on ourselves and our own desires. Social media can exacerbate this tendency by presenting a constant stream of images and messages that reinforce the idea that our worth and value are based on our possessions and accomplishments.

In this context, the pursuit of material possessions and external validation can become a means of elevating ourselves above others and satisfying our own desires for recognition and status. However, this focus on self-promotion and personal gain can come at the expense of meaningful relationships, spiritual growth, and a deeper sense of purpose and fulfilment in life.

In Genesis, we read that Satan tempts Eve with the idea that eating from the forbidden tree would make her like God, with the ability to determine what is right and wrong. This appeal to pride and self-centeredness is at the core of Satan's strategy to lead humanity astray.

Satan presented before Adam and Eve the tree of knowledge of good and evil, telling them that its fruit would open their eyes, and make them like God. Thus he declared that they would possess a knowledge that would enable them to govern the world, to control the laws of nature, and to command the obedience of all created beings.

As Christians, we are called to reject the self-centeredness that is so prevalent in our culture and instead we are presented with the opportunity to focus on serving others and living in alignment with God's will. This means recognizing that our true worth and value come from our relationship with God and our ability to reflect His love and compassion to others. It means cultivating a spirit of humility and gratitude, and seeking to use our resources and abilities to benefit others rather than just ourselves.

In this way, we can find fulfillment—not in the accumulation of possessions or the praise or likes in real life or on social media—but in the knowledge that we are living in alignment with God's plan for us and making a positive difference in the lives of those around us.

The reason people were drawn to Jesus was because of His message of hope and salvation. He spoke of a kingdom that was not of this world, a place where the meek would inherit the earth and the poor in spirit would be blessed. This message was particularly appealing to marginalized and oppressed people, such as the poor, the sick, and the outcasts of society. Jesus offered them a vision of a better life, both in this world and in the next.

People were drawn to Him because of His warmth, compassion, and humility. He was known for His healing miracles, such as curing the blind and the lame, and for His ability to reach out to those who were suffering

and in need. His words and deeds inspired hope and faith in those around Him.

Imagine if we used our platforms to uplift and inspire those who are struggling. Instead of comparing ourselves to others or showing off our own achievements, we could use social media as a tool to connect with and encourage others. Imagine the impact we could make if we focused more on reaching out to those who are hurting or lost, showing them the love and hope that can be found through faith in God.

Social media provides us with an opportunity to connect with people all over the world, and we should use this platform to share the message of God's love and salvation. We can use our own experiences and testimonies to encourage others and show them that they are not alone in their struggles.

Using our platforms to uplift and inspire those who are struggling could make a positive difference in the lives of others.

In a world where social media can often be a source of negativity and division, let us strive to use it for good. Let us focus on connecting with and uplifting those in need of love and support, and sharing the hope and joy that can be found through a life of faith in God. Let us strive to be intentional in our social media usage—not triggering jealousy in ourselves or others while looking at things on these platforms, but rather encouraging and supporting others by kind words and thoughts. By so doing, we can create a more positive and encouraging online community, and make a difference in the lives of those who may be searching for hope and support.

Remember, the purpose of social media is to connect and share with one another. Let us use this tool to spread positivity, love, and encouragement, and make a positive impact in the world around us as God would want us to.





A Letter to the Wondering

Dear Reader,

I may not know who you are, and I certainly do not know your current struggles—what is going on in the depths of your soul, what burdens you hold, or how long they have weighed you down. One thing I do know, however, is that everybody has a story, and every person has gone through—or has yet to go through—severe trials. My purpose in writing to you is to remind you of the wonderful truths found in the Word of God and how He still has the power to perform the miraculous works written therein.

Sharing my experience with God would take many pages, so I will try to be concise while providing meaningful detail. I pray that you are blessed by what I share.

When people share their experience with God, many point to a single event as the defining moment of their faith. I believe that an experience with God is more complex, and no single event tells the whole story. Therefore, my journey will begin many years ago, as a child born to parents who were part of the SDARM. I was raised identifying as an Adventist, even though I wasn't sure if I truly wanted to be one or even what it really meant to be one. I attended a Christian private school from kindergarten through eighth grade, so I wasn't around many "worldly influences." Still, I encountered moments that made me question this Adventist identity. Most of my classmates were not Adventists, and they asked me questions I didn't know how to answer—questions about being vegetarian, the Sabbath, and other practices. These beliefs were part of my upbringing, not necessarily my personal convictions so I was not sure how to address their questions/comments. A question I was

asked, for example, was whether I would decide to be a vegetarian once I was older. At that time, I couldn't imagine living any other way, as I had been fairly sheltered and did not really know what else was out there.

For those of you who have ever been to Moriah Heights in California, that's where I grew up from about the age of six. If you haven't, it's a rural property owned by the SDARM, with homes, a church, and even a school. I lived there, went to church there, and attended school there. Given that this was the early 2000's—when social media was in its infancy and smartphones were not a thing—it's clear that I had very little exposure to the world outside that little community.

NEW ENVIRONMENTS

In 2008, I graduated from Whispering Pines Christian School and since there was no Christian high school nearby, I began attending Amador High School that fall. This marked the beginning of my exposure to the broader world. Being exposed is one thing, but I quickly began making friends. Being into sports, I joined the soccer and track & field teams. I would have joined the basketball team too, if their games weren't on Friday nights. I made close friends on the soccer team, and since it was a small school—my class had about 150 students—I also connected with many others.

If your closest friends do not share your same faith, it can be a spiritually dangerous situation to be in. Even if they come from "good families," their core beliefs may not align with yours, and they will influence you, even in the subtlest ways. This was my reality for four years and unfortunately, I drifted closer to the world, becoming more of an Adventist in name only, not in spirit or truth. By the time I graduated in the spring of 2012, my mind was far from God—even though I was still in church every Sabbath.

This was my condition when I began attending California State University in Sacramento in the fall of 2012. I didn't stand apart from my peers in any spiritual way. While I still loosely aligned with my upbringing, God's Word was not the foundation of my life. That said, I can't say the Holy Spirit wasn't working on my heart. There were times I felt God calling me—even if I didn't recognize it as



such. One such moment was when a local pastor reached out to study the Bible with me. I agreed, though I had no desire or inclination to be baptized at the time.

Fast forward to the fall of 2013 and much to my surprise, I found myself getting baptized. What changed? You'd think a baptism meant a powerful encounter with God—but that wasn't the case. Not much had changed. I had simply completed my Bible studies and felt I had to get baptized. No one pressured me intentionally, but I still felt a kind of pressure. My mind, however, had not truly been transformed and so I went through the motions, not really feeling their import. The next four years were a spiritual tug-of-war—God trying to draw me closer, and me pushing Him away, unwilling to fully surrender.

CHOICES TO MAKE

In the fall of 2016, I began a new chapter—living on my own for the first time. The previous year, I had applied and been accepted to a study-abroad program in Oxford, England. I was determined to stay as close to God as I could, but without a church or family around me, I drifted. Do you **need** a church or family to be faithful to God? No, you only need "Christ in you." But having support goes a long way—and that's part of God's design. With no support system, I did whatever I wanted, whenever I wanted. From a human perspective, it was great! And if



you would have asked me at the time, I thought I was living my best life. But we are called to a more noble and elevated standard, one from which I drifted far away.

A few months later, I returned home to my family and community. On the outside, everything was back to normal—but inside, I had changed. A change, therefore had to happen, I could no longer live as a hypocritical Christian. I would either have to give myself fully to God or to a selfish lifestyle. The turning point came some months later, during the summer of 2017.

BREAKTHROUGH AT YELLOWSTONE

There was a trip to Yellowstone National Park planned for that summer and two vans were rented for the youth of Sacramento. Not knowing how this decision would change the rest of my life, I decided to go on this trip since everybody else was too. On the Sabbath of that trip, at the 11 o'clock message, a powerful testimony was given by someone who escaped the very grip of Satan. He had been completely consumed by what this world had to offer him and miraculously, the



voice of God was able to reach him in his pit of despair. This got me thinking, are there sins that a person will not be forgiven of if they genuinely repent? At realizing that the answer to that question was no, I decided to give myself fully to God and accept Jesus as my personal Savior. What struck me most was realizing the depths of God's love. It didn't matter how I had lived—nothing could separate me from His love. The only thing that could keep Him away was my pushing Him away. But what nonsense to resist the One who had loved me so fully and completely! How foolish to hold myself back from the One who gave Himself for me! I truly left that trip transformed and the verse found in Revelation 12:11 could not be more true to me at that point. It was the testimony of someone else that helped me overcome my own misconceptions of the love of God. And what came next?

Surprisingly, the following spring of 2018, I would be attending the missionary school in Sydney, Australia—Elim Missionary College (EMC). The program went well, I gained valuable knowledge and had great experiences that helped me grow in many ways. Even further to my surprise, about a month before completing the program, I received an offer to be a Bible Worker for the Northern California Conference. I had never planned to work for the church; that was never a thought that came to my mind. Most of my life, I wasn't even sure I wanted to be part of the church—let alone work for it. But after some deliberation and needed prayer, I accepted the offer, and as I write, I am about to complete my seventh year working for God.

You might think this is the happy ending that usually concludes a testimony—but my story is far from finished. Over the past seven years, I've had moments where I've felt more hopeless and sinful than ever before. It's not because I've returned to old sins, but because I now understand the higher standard to which God calls me. Yet through it all, I've come to truly understand what "Salvation by Grace Alone" means. My works can never save me. It is only the grace of God through the life of Jesus that lifts me out of darkness

and into His marvelous light. My only responsibility is to surrender to Him and allow His Spirit to transform me.

This is not an easy lesson to learn, and my learning is far from complete. I continually fall and feel discouraged to get back up. I must admit that sometimes I even consider giving up entirely on my faith. But like Paul, I keep pressing toward the goal he describes in Philippians 3:14. Bruised and beaten down though I be, I cannot give up now. I must keep fighting, I must keep pushing forward because though I am far from perfect, a holy and perfect God has called me to partake in His love. So even though I had that specific experience with God in that summer of 2017, I cannot rely solely on that, I must keep growing and gaining new experiences, as do you!

And this is where I leave you. My story is not finished—I still have much to learn. But one thing I know from my experience: though I am a sinner, He who began a good work in me will be faithful to complete it (see Philippians 1:6) because He is "the author and finisher of our faith" (Hebrews 11:2). I don't need to feel discouraged over work He hasn't asked me to do. My work is to surrender my will and trust that His Spirit will transform my life. Do I always do this? No, shamefully I must admit that I do not. But my walk with God is not defined by my personal failures; rather, it is defined by the victory Jesus has won over sin and death for us all!



So dear reader, take courage. I write this for the purpose of sharing with you that every day you must have a new experience with your Heavenly Father. Trust in His grace. He loves you beyond measure and longs to hold you in His everlasting arms. Do not keep yourself from the One who alone deserves your wholehearted allegiance. Surrender to Him completely—and He has promised, "The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace" (Exodus 14:14). Imagine, given the context of Exodus 14:14, the Israelites having no visible escape from the Egyptians. How hopeless they must have felt. But the very One that took them out of the land of their bondage would not allow His precious people to be touched by the wicked ones chasing them. Never forget, God is for you—hopeless as you might feel at times—and His omnipotence is at work for your salvation.

—Your friend and brother in Christ,

Ebert Fountain

WORDS TO THE YOUNG

BY ELLEN G. WHITE



"Ye are not your own. For ye are bought with a price." We have been bought with the precious blood of Christ as of a lamb without blemish. What a price is this, unparalleled, infinite! But though Christ has bought us, and invites us to come to him, still the world holds out its attractions to us, and strives for the mastery. Shall love for God, or love for the world, triumph in the conflict? Satan and his evil angels are watching at every avenue leading to the human heart, seeking to force souls to accept evil suggestions. The enemy presents bribes to win us to the world, as he presented bribes to Christ in the wilderness of temptation. Unless we depend upon a power out of and above ourselves, the enemy will succeed in accomplishing our ruin. But in looking to Jesus, by studying His life and character, by earnestly desiring to be like Him, our minds will be balanced in the right direction, that we may overcome selfishness, and choose a course of righteousness. Looking unto Jesus, we shall hear a voice saying, "This is the way; walk ye in it." "If any man will come after me [now the conditions], let him deny himself, and take up his cross [which cuts directly across the natural inclinations], and follow me."

Who will turn away from every worldly attraction, from earthly enterprises that promise great gain and selfish gratification, and count all things but loss if he may win Christ? Winning Christ, we win everything. Jesus says he will be in us "a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

I appeal to the youth: "Choose ye this day whom ye will serve."

There is a necessity for a decided choice; for Jesus said, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." "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."

He who is mighty in counsel speaks to you; will you hear his voice, will you obey his words? Jesus says, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." He invites you to step upon new and higher ground than that which you have occupied in the past. If your heart is filled with love to Christ, it will be demonstrated that He is stronger than the passions which have ruled you, whose indulgence have undermined noble impulses, and left the soul to the mercy of Satan's temptations.

"Ye are not your own. For ye are bought with a price." The world is under the most solemn obligation to render to the Lord Jesus his purchased possession—soul, body, and spirit. But because the people of the world ignore their responsibility to God, and refuse to accept the great gift of salvation, they are not excused from their obligation to be faithful servants of Christ. In serving their own lust, they make it manifest that they are not subject to the rule of Christ, but day by day are robbing God of that which is His due. They refuse to be the children of Christ, and choose rather to be the slaves of Satan. In astonishment at their blindness, we reiterate the words of the apostle, "Who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth?"

In looking to Jesus and studying His life and character, we may overcome selfishness, and choose a course of righteousness.

Christ invites the sinner to come to Him. With what loving entreaties He follows the sinner! When the heart of the sinner is touched, he yields his will to God's will, and selfish inclination is no longer the controlling power; for the slavery of Satan is broken, and the soul brought into subjection to Christ. Impressed with the sense of the Saviour's long-suffering, forbearance, compassion, and measureless love, the repenting soul is deeply conscious of his own unworthiness and guilt. He yields his will to the will of God, and longs to reveal his loyalty to Christ, watching for opportunities to speak forth His goodness and love. He sees in Jesus matchless charms, and his heart is captivated. He has tasted of the love of Christ, and the gratitude of his heart is expressed in speaking to those who do not know the goodness of the Lord. He becomes a partaker of the divine nature.—*The Youth's Instructor,* Vol. 40, No. 42.

Test Your Reading!

ACROSS

3. Any amusement which disqualifies for secret prayer, devotion at the altar of prayer, or taking part in the prayer meeting is not safe, but _____.
4. The trials of life are to remove the impurities and roughness from our _____.
7. In Psalm 88, the lament of the psalmist Heman reflects a sense of _____.
9. Social media can tend to reinforce the idea that our worth and value are based on our _____ and accomplishments.
12. Avoid mingling too much in the society of _____ youth.
15. A woman that fears the Lord shall be _____.

DOWN

1. The good king _____ broke the brazen serpent into pieces so the people would not worship it as an idol.
2. While engaged in folly and indulgence of the senses, some think of nothing but the _____ gratification connected with it.
5. A change needs to happen to not live as a _____ Christian.
6. Our true worth and value come from our relationship with God and our ability to reflect His love and _____ to others.
8. By no longer holding ourselves back from the One who gave Himself for us, we can be _____.
10. On our social media posts, we are to cultivate a spirit of humility and _____.
11. In the tongue of the virtuous woman is the law of _____.
13. All trials that are received as _____ will produce joy.
14. We should use our social media platforms to _____ and inspire those who are struggling.



ACROSS
3. DANGEROUS
4. CHARACTER
7. ABANDONMENT
9. POSSESSIONS
12. IRRELIGIOUS
15. PRAISED

DOWN
1. HEZEKIAH
2. MOMENTARY
5. HYPOCRITICAL
6. COMPASSION
8. TRANSFORMED
10. GRATITUDE
11. KINDNESS
13. EDUCATORS
14. UPLIFT

youth messenger



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Secret Thoughts

by Ella Wheeler Wilcox

I hold it true that thoughts are things
Endowed with being; breath, and wings;
And that we send them forth to fill
The world with good results or ill.

That which we call our secret thought
Speeds to the earth's remotest spot,
And leaves its blessings or its woes
Like Tracks behind it, as it goes.

It is God's law; remember it
In your still chamber as you sit
With thoughts you would not dare have known,
And yet make comrades when alone.

These thoughts have life, and they will fly,
And leave their impress, by and by,
Like some marsh breeze, whose poisoned breath
Breathes into homes its fevered death.

And, after you have quite forgot,
Or all outgrown some vanished thought,
Back to your mind, to make its home,
A dove or raven, it will come.

Then let your secret thoughts be fair:
They have a vital part and share
In shaping worlds and molding fate,
God's system is so intricate.