

Look! There's Potential Behind the Problems!

By Hannah Whitall Smith

***"Thou has turned for me my mourning into dancing: Thou hast
put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness."***

Psalm 30:11

Many times in my life in practical affairs I have had my "mourning turned into dancing," because I have found that the trial I mourned was really a gateway into the good things I longed for. And I cannot help suspecting that this is far more often the case than we are inclined to think.

I knew a man who had both his feet frozen off and was thwarted in all his plans by the lameness that ensued. He thought his life was ruined and mourned with unspeakable anguish. But this very trial opened out for him another career, which proved finally to be the thing of all others he would have chosen and which brought him a success far beyond the wildest dreams of his early aspirations. His greatest trouble became his greatest triumph.

Instances of this are innumerable. Every life has some.

Since we have so often experienced our deserts to be turned into the garden of the Lord and have found fir trees and myrtle trees coming up where we thought there were only thorns and briars, the marvelous thing is that we should ever let ourselves be so utterly cast down and overwhelmed when fresh trouble comes.

I think it would be a good exercise of soul for us to write out a little record for our own use of all the times when this marvelous transformation has happened in our experience. It might make us less ready to despair under our next trial.

His Wheel = His Will

By Lorrie Flem

When I was a girl, my family used to spend a lot of time at the beach. Adding treasures to our collections was always fun for my sisters and me. One thing our friend, Janet, taught us about was "beach glass." These little beach treasures are made from broken pieces of glass that have been left on the seashore as trash. Someone finishes with their bottle of beer, soda pop, wine, or Snapple and hurls it up against a rock. From these sharp, potentially hurtful shards of shiny glass, a perfectly smooth, opaque piece of beach glass is eventually made by the sand, waves, and water thrashing alongside it.

Isn't that just like our lives? God takes us, imperfect as we are, and through the trials and tribulations of life He shapes, smoothes, and remakes us into people after Him. The Bible compares this process to a potter and his clay. Have you ever taken a pottery class or watched a potter at work?

Have Thine Own Way

"...*Thou hast made me as the clay...*" Job 10:9. It begins with clay. So common it is almost without value. It is the artist's skillful work which gives a pot its value—not the material. Left to itself, clay would remain clay, but yielded to the potter's hand there are endless possibilities.

Geologists tell us there are infinite varieties of clay, each locality having its own peculiar distinctives. Each is unique and must be treated individually. Just like we humans of His creation are unique, He gives us each His exclusive attention, and like clay, makes us into much more.

A potter takes a lifeless blob of clay and cuts it into smaller pieces. Then, he mashes it together again and again, kneading it, until all the bubbles and lumps are worked out. After he has it to his liking, he throws it so it sticks in the center of his revolving wheel. Just like we want to be in the center of His will for us, in order for Him to symmetrically shape us we must be placed on and remain in the center of His wheel.

As the spinning wheel turns the clay, his skilled fingers poke, pat, and mold it. He works first on the outside, and then the inside, until you begin to see a shapely pot. *"This is the Word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: 'Go down to the potter's house, and there I will give you my message.' So I went down to the potter's house, and I saw him working at the wheel. But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him. Then the Word of the LORD came to me: 'O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter does?' declares the LORD. 'Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel.'"* Jeremiah 18: 1-6

There is an old hymn that interprets those Bible verses like this: "Have Thine Own way, Lord, have Thine Own way. Thou are the Potter, I am the clay. Mold me and make me, after Thy will. While I am waiting, yielded and still." Isaiah 64:8 says it like this, *"But now, O LORD, Thou art our Father; we are the clay, and Thou are the potter; and w all are the work of Thy hand."*

Learning Obedience

Despite the rapidly changing scientific, medical, art, or technological fields, the art of pottery making is relatively unchanged and remains very similar to what it was in ancient days. Just as the pottery making closely resembles that art of long ago, trials and tribulations are not new to our generation. As always, life is made up of circumstances that are all a part of our Master's design.

Why do we have to go through the hard times? These are what drive us to our knees and cause us to approach the throne of God when we are most teachable, fully realizing our humanness and His glory. The troubles we encounter might cause us to ask God to change our circumstances. We must remember trials refine our faith. For us to be growing in the Lord is to be faced with greater challenges.

Think of the disciples. First, they had Jesus in the boat when they were in the storm. The next storm found them without Jesus. They were doing exactly what Jesus told them to, and yet they were encountering severe difficulties. When it was time, the Lord came to them, yet they did not know Him. Maybe their fear was the reason they did not recognize Christ. I wonder if they were crying out to Him. I bet they were. I always remember to pray when I am in the midst of a storm, so then why am I, like the disciples, surprised to see Him? We should not be surprised when we come across tests; we should expect problems. Jesus, Himself, here on earth suffered.

"Who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him Who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered," Hebrews 5: 7-8.

Death, poverty, sickness, calamity, and disappointments all contribute to the perfect vessel He is making. These may seem to us to be random acts of bad luck, when in reality they are the perfecting process of His handiwork and we are learning obedience. Romans 8: 28-29 says, *"Everything that happens fits into a pattern for good to them that love God, to them that are called according to His purpose."* Of course, God has the power to change our circumstances, but if He doesn't, the next verse tells us His purpose. It is for holiness, for us to be shaped into the image of His Son.

Reflecting Jesus

"Can I not do with you as this potter," says the Lord. God can do as He wishes to form us in His loving hands. He is making us into the image of His Son. *"But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to Him Who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'"* Romans 9:20. Does the clay talk back to the potter? The clay alone is powerless to improve itself. All it does is receive and retain the potter's design. God wants us to be this pliable. He wants us to accept and keep hold of the work of His fingers so that when He is done, we are so beautiful we don't even recognize ourselves.

For the potter's work, begun on the wheel, to be completed, it must be fired so the work becomes permanent. The fire is essential since this is where hardness and strength and color are added to the pot. The fire also shows which pots are weak when the heat breaks them. Fire is often used as

an analogy of life's difficult circumstances.

"These trials have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold...refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed,"
1 Peter 1:7.

When King George visited a factory making some royal china for Buckingham Palace, he saw some of the cups being painted black inside. This puzzled him, since he did not recall ordering them this way. When he asked about it, a worker explained that underneath the black was gold, and when the cup came through the fire, the black paint would be burnt off and the gold would be burnt into the china. In order for us to more clearly reflect Jesus, we must go through the refining fire.

Think of Shadrach, Meshak, and Abednego. They were literally, rather than only figuratively, thrown into a fire. These three young men were not alone. There was a fourth person who walked in the fiery furnace with them, Christ Jesus. And even a clay pot that is going to be fired is not put inside the fire alone. The pot is carefully sealed in a stronger material first.

Marred Vessels

"The vessel...was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again..." Jeremiah 18:4.

Let's talk about messed up pots now. While Jeremiah watched the nearly done pot, he saw it was marred. After all that work, the pot was almost done, yet then a flaw appeared and it collapsed back into a shapeless blob of clay. Because of some foreign material hidden in the clay, the potter's plan was thwarted.

It's interesting that instead of throwing the worthless pot away and starting over with a new lump of clay, the potter took the broken pieces of clay, found the offending substance, and out of the old clay made a new vessel. God sees what we can be, not only what we are. He takes our horrid sinful souls, and rather than pitch it in for a better model, He takes the extra time to carefully work with us. A marred pot might seem to be flawless to our eye and yet to Him, the Potter Who made it, a flaw makes it unfit for use. The marring was not because of the Potter, He would not mess up His own handiwork. We sin of our own accord, yet He takes us into His hands into His hands and slowly fashions us over again.

No matter how messed up our lives may be, we can still be transformed by Him into useful vessels. If we have unconfessed sin, it will mar the pot. We need to recognize that He knows. Often, just an awareness of this is enough to bring us to confession. We need to say "No" to temptations, make restitution for stolen goods, confess our sins to others we have wronged, forgive anyone we hold a grudge against, stop robbing God and give Him His portion, etc. Once this is done, we are ready to become a valuable vessel.

Not long ago an old friend called crying and asked for forgiveness. She had become convicted of a lie told long ago. This lie was on no significance to me, it had not in any way negatively affected my life and she knew that I would never know the truth unless she told it. Yet she wanted to completely break free from her sin, she wanted to become clean and useful for His service. I want to

be that sensitive to the Holy Spirit's conviction. I need to understand that one little seemingly inconsequential sin is enough to make me unusable for His service. I want to find any area of pride, resistance, or self-sufficiency in my life that hinders Jesus from showing through me.

Releasing the Beauty Inside

Another principle that becomes obvious with this potter/clay analogy is "even though we may not be all we could have been, we are not stuck where we are. He has a plan to cover our lives and make our vessels or pots into something He decides is good. The pot does not get to decide whether it is going to be of use in the parlor as a fine teacup or as a humble chamber pot. God's plan is to make the clay useful again. Every touch has a purpose and is part of His pattern.

When you put your mind to it, you will be surprised at the number of things God created that are fine-tuned through adversities. River rocks are smooth and shiny as a result of enduring years of rushing, swirling water. Have you ever heard of anyone who built a fireplace hearth out of pond rocks?

Michelangelo once said about his work that what he had carved was already concealed inside the slab of marble just waiting for him to release it. He could see in the rock an angel or the figure of David. And God, with His omnipotent eye, can see within our unlovely and unpromising lives magnificent possibilities where the world around us sees only failure. By carefully chopping, chipping, scraping, and smoothing away the superfluous material, He releases the beauty inside.

The objective of the artist may be obscure to us, but it is plain to Him. This is where trust comes in. God is in the business of transformation. He has sketched the image of His Son on us. Just like an expert seamstress does not need a pattern to sew a beautiful gown that fits perfectly, and Michelangelo did not use a step-by-step system to do his incredible work, God does not use a pattern. He has a plan all worked out and it is only visible to Him. We cannot see the reflection of Jesus in our lives as we want, so let Him chip away our sins and corruptions until the image of Jesus is obvious to all.

To a Place of Abundance

In Psalm 66: 10-12 we read, *"For you, O God, tested us; You refined us like silver. You brought us into prison and laid burdens on our backs. You let men ride over our heads; we went through fire and water, but you brought us to a place of abundance."* The last verse in that psalm says, *"Praise be to God, Who has not rejected my prayer or withheld His love from me."*

We are so willful and so often insist on being the potter. We want to mold our families, friends, environment, and circumstances to our liking. Notice I didn't say we want to mold ourselves, we see others' need for improvement so much more readily than our own. The truth is, we need to let God take the potter's seat and remember that the foot that controls the spinning wheel and the hands that hold and shape us still bear the scars of nails. He intimately knows what we are going through and is in the fire with us.

Thou Hast Enlarged Me

By Amy Carmichael

"Thou has enlarged me when I was in distress" (Psalm 4:1).

The more one thinks of these words, the more they reveal their wonderful meaning. Darby renders it, "In pressure, Thou has enlarged me," and Kay, "In straits Thou madest wide room for me." Whatever pressure be, in that pressure—think of it—enlargement; the very opposite of what the word "pressure" suggests. And room, plenty of room, in a strait place.

We may sometimes feel distressed. Here, then, is a word of pure hope and strong consolation. No distress need cramp us, crowd us into ourselves, or make us smaller and poorer in anything that matters. Largeness, like the largeness of the sea, is His gift to us. We shall not be flattened in spirit by pressure, but enlarged. In the narrow ways of pain or of temptation He will make wide room for us.

"Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness: Thou has enlarged me when I was in distress; have mercy upon me, and hear my prayer"

To My Child *Author Unknown*

- ⇒ Just for this morning, I am going to smile when I see your face and laugh when I feel like crying.
- ⇒ Just for this morning, I will let you choose what you want to wear and smile and say how perfect it is.
- ⇒ Just for this morning, I am going to step over the laundry and pick you up and take you to the park to play.
- ⇒ Just for this morning, I will leave the dishes in the sink and let you teach me how to put that puzzle of yours together.
- ⇒ Just for this afternoon, I will unplug the telephone and keep the computer off and sit with you in the backyard and blow bubbles.
- ⇒ Just for this afternoon, I will not yell once, not even a tiny grumble when you scream and whine for the ice cream truck, and I will buy you one if he comes by.
- ⇒ Just for this afternoon, I won't worry about what you are going to be when you grow up, or second guess every decision I have made where you are concerned.
- ⇒ Just for this afternoon, I will let you help me bake cookies, and I won't stand over you trying to fix them.
- ⇒ Just for this afternoon, I will take us to McDonald's and buy us both a Happy Meal so you can have both toys.
- ⇒ Just for this afternoon, I will hold you in my arms and tell you story about how you were born and how much I love you.
- ⇒ Just for this evening, I will let you splash in the tub and not get angry.
- ⇒ Just for this evening, I will let you stay up late while we sit on the porch and count all the stars.
- ⇒ Just for this evening, I will snuggle beside you and miss my favorite TV shows.
- ⇒ Just for this evening, when I run my finger through your hair as you pray, I will simply be grateful that God has given me such a great gift. I will think about the mothers and fathers who are searching for their missing children, the mothers who are visiting their children's graves instead of their bedrooms, and mothers and fathers, who are in hospital rooms watching their children suffer, and screaming inside that they can't handle it anymore.
- ⇒ And...when I kiss you good night, I will hold you a little tighter, a little longer. It is then that I will thank God for you, and ask Him for nothing, except for one more day.

"Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is His reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them; they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate."—Psalm 127: 3-5

The Necessity of Discipleship: Hand-to-Hand Combat!

By Steve Beck

We are a nation which clamors for instant results and nowhere is this more apparent than in our churches. We offer a six-week discipleship course designed to bring the new Christian up to full speed, as if that were enough time to get the job done. Most churches do not even have this and new believers are lucky if they have an orientation lasting two Sundays after they have joined the church. "But, we have a wonderful pastor who preaches the Word faithfully. Won't the new believers come to maturity through this?" A pastor can preach a strong, convicting message from the pulpit and most will go away thinking about others who should have heard the message. It is an altogether different matter to sit across the table from a man, guiding him in the Word, and then asking him how he is applying those truths in his day-to-day life.

Perhaps an illustration would help. World War II and the many wars that have followed have proven that we cannot conquer a nation by conventional bombing. There are just too many places for the enemy to hide. Foreign soil has to be taken city-by-city and house-by-house. Even with the most technologically advanced smart bombs and guided missiles, the infantry is still required to take and hold territory. Similarly, we cannot lob Scripture from afar at new believers in our churches. We must take the fight to them and engage in hand-to-hand combat for the maturity of young believers.

This same principle is required for unbelievers as well. We cannot bring unbelievers to church so the "professional hired gun" (pastor) can win them for Jesus. We must train the believers in our churches to be able to articulate the gospel to their unbelieving friends and then, bring them to maturity in Christ.

That is why church programs will not get the job done. A program is not equipped to cut through the layers of defensiveness and ignorance that plague our new believers today.

Remember the woman at the well? No amount of literature, stirring messages or church programs would have brought her to saving belief. She had too many smoke screens and red herrings. Someone had to engage her personally, parry every counter argument and answer her questions, while relentlessly bringing her back to the main issue.

Am I saying that we should not have pastors or preaching from the pulpit? Certainly not! I am saying, however, that there is no substitute for a mature believer pouring his life into another believer and this is God's revealed design for bringing the church to maturity. Above all, we are not to fall into the trap of modern efficiency. If one-on-one is good, then one on thirty is better. Better yet, why not tape a discipleship program and play it to an auditorium full of people? Or a stadium? Both Christ and Paul modeled discipleship as an intensely personal endeavor.

Perhaps this is best illustrated by a quote from another good book on discipleship entitled *The Lost Art of Disciple Making* by Leroy Eims.

During one of our moves we bought a new house that had no lawn; the front and back yards were just bare earth. A friend of ours bought some sod for us, and at the same time our neighbor bought his sod from the same company. When they were both laid, they looked beautiful (so much so that the landscaping company used our two lawns in some of their promotional advertising).

Our neighbor decided to water his lawn with an automatic underground sprinkler system, which he had installed before the lawn was laid. I chose to buy a hose and turn it over to my wife, Virginia. So I had a blonde out there with a hose watering my lawn while my neighbor would merely turn his controls on and off.

After four years my neighbor's lawn returned to its original state—just bare earth covered with weeds. Our lawn was still green and beautiful. What made the difference? Personal care. Whenever Virginia would see a brown spot on the grass, she would give it special attention and more water. With the mechanical system, there was no way to give individual care and attention to the grass; as holes in the sprinklers were clogged by dirt and small stones, certain portions of the lawn received no water. Soon the lawn dried up and was destroyed, while ours remained lush and green.

You cannot turn over a lawn to a mechanical system in a dry climate such as ours and expect success. Each blade of grass needs special care. That is much more true with people. Each of us has specific needs and these can only be met by other people. No system or program will automatically meet and cure the needs of human beings. Because we are individuals, we have specific needs which people alone can meet.

Another mistake to avoid is what I call the buffet approach to spiritual maturity. Even when a church makes good material available to its members for spiritual growth, there is no guarantee the members will use it. What if I took my children to a buffet and found them loading their plates from the dessert end of the food bar, while having nothing nutritious from the other end? I would not be much of a father if I said, "At least I have given them the opportunity to eat a nutritious meal, even if they choose not to!" Immature believers are naturally immature. By definition, they will not naturally gravitate towards things that cause temporary discomfort or require self-control. We need to come alongside and help them choose items that contribute to a well-balanced meal. We need to encourage and even rebuke when they try to pile on their plates things that do harm to themselves and to others. Above all, we need to teach them how to feed themselves and eventually, be able to teach others to do the same. As leaders and elders, we must be shepherds and not merely administrators.

The Price For Not Discipling Others

At risk of beating a dead horse, may I give one final encouragement to be involved in the leading of men and women to true maturity in Christ?

"For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire."

To understand this passage, it is imperative that we understand who is doing what. Paul is describing himself as a wise master builder and the Corinthians as his building. He laid the foundation, which is Jesus Christ, but there are others who are continuing to build on the Corinthians.

I had always taken this passage as a warning to be careful how I build into myself. But the context indicates that Paul is warning others to be careful how they build into other men. In fact, we will be judged at the Judgment Seat of Christ as to how we have built into other men's lives. We should be building in such a way and using such material that our work will endure God's purifying fire, for then we will receive a reward. Can this passage have more than one meaning? Could it be describing our own sanctification as well as our involvement in another's sanctification? Most certainly. But if you come to the Judgment Seat of Christ and you are missing one of the main criteria by which you will be judged (building in other men's lives), then you will not experience a very pleasant judgment and it is doubtful you will hear, **"Well, done good and faithful servant."** (Matthew 25: 23)

Shore up the Home Front

Now is the time for battle! But before you go out to fight, make sure you have properly prepared your defenses at home, lest the enemy find a weakness while you are away at battle. Our first priority, as fathers, should be to disciple our wives and children. In fact, 2 Timothy 3:5 tells us that a man who cannot rule his own house has no business running the house of God. Although this is in the context of elders and church leaders, the principle still applies to discipleship. How can you export what you do not have? If your children are disobedient or ignorant of the Scriptures, follow God's priorities and deal with them first.

Having said this, I am not espousing neglecting disciple-making until after your kids have grown and left the house. One of the best ways to disciple your own kids is to let them see you disciple younger believers. Having seen your ministry first hand, they will assume this is normative behavior and will be more likely to follow the pattern you have set. However, we must remember the order of God's priorities. We have no business discipling other men unless we have first begun to disciple our children. If you cannot afford the time to train your children and other men, then your children take top priority.

Father, Why Barren Places???

By Amy Carmichael

"O God, Thou art my God; early will I seek thee...my flesh longeth for Thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is."

Psalm 63:1

The son found himself in a barren place.

His Father said, "In this place I will give you the peace you are longing for. Here I will give you spiritual food that will nourish you. You are always with Me—no matter what the circumstances—and all that I have is yours."

Then the Father, with great gentleness, drew the son to himself. Quietly, He said, "I am the One Who allowed you to come into these humbling circumstances, and allowed you to hunger. I did this so that I might feed you with manna—My bread from heaven! Only in this way could I help you to know that you cannot live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from My mouth."

The son said, "Give me this bread always!"

And when he grew thirsty, he learned to cry, "The light of Your face is my life!"

Later still, the son wondered why one like himself, who is so richly fed and cared for at times, should at other times feel so poor and needy and thirsty.

His Father replied, "Can someone who has never discovered rivers of these living waters flowing on barren heights—can he ever lead his thirsty friend to those rivers?"

"Can someone who has never seen burning sands in the wilderness turn into a refreshing pool—can he speak in praise of My marvels, or My power?"

Great Days Ahead!

By Lucia M. Elaborn

What a great way to start a new year!!

Just think about how far we have come this past year. Think about the way we are beginning the new year...out of debt...out of bondage...healthy, prosperous...excited about heading for the promised land!!

We have achieved much growth this past year in our spiritual, mental, and physical bodies; however, now is not the time to glory in past accomplishments. Now is the time to set new goals, record new visions (Habakuk 2:3), and continue running the race and pressing toward the goals God has set before us (Philippians 3:14).

God tells us that a man without vision will perish. He also tells us that we should wait upon Him and He shall renew our strength...we will mount up with wings of eagles...we will run and not be weary...we will walk and not faint. (Isaiah 40:31)

We must learn to be "now" people, aggressively standing our ground for what Jesus has already given us. We can think about it, dream about it, talk about it; but it is time to actually have and enjoy all that Jesus had in mind for each of us.

Now is the time to have an aggressive faith toward the covenant blessings God has promised us. Confess today that you are blessed of the Lord and that the good things God has for you are flowing to you in abundance.

The Greater One lives in you! You can do whatever you need to do by His power. Believe it! Don't wait to believe it later on. Believe now. You'll be experiencing those ***"Great Days Ahead!"***

Remaking Martha

By Betty Dickerson

Lately, I've felt a lot like Martha in the Bible. With the addition of our new baby, Amelia-Beth, things have become a little more hard to juggle. This past week, I was all ready to get back to school with the kids. I had planned our week to the hour and I thought I had things down to a reasonable schedule. I was feeling pretty good about myself!

The children had finished their chores and had their breakfast and Bible time with Daddy. Now they were ready for schoolwork. Keep in mind that the attention span of the boys is almost nil at times and, if I lose momentum for even one second, it is extremely difficult to get it back. Well, just as we all sat at our kitchen table with their little phonics workbooks, Amelia started fussing. She had just been fed so I figured she was probably tired needing some Mommy time. No problem! I scooped up the grinning little sweat pea and headed back to the table, while I had the boys getting their pencils. We went through the first two questions of their workbooks and Kabamb!!! Amelia exploded in her diaper! I'm talking head to toe!

I ran to my room and set her on the changing table. Forget the wipes, this one required a bath! Meanwhile the boys were roaring with laughter and awe at the capabilities of our newest Dickerson. I was quite frustrated. How was I going to finish everything I had set out to do? This was NOT on my schedule! The frustration showed itself in my strained voice as my children questioned me about this event. I could feel an anxious little tick start inside me. Even though we finished our phonics that day, it didn't happen like I had planned. There were other things left undone, but the whole experience taught me so much.

Martha could have probably related. Jesus and His twelve disciples show up unexpectedly for dinner. Martha is delighted and a little anxious. She wanted everything just right. Then things started to go wrong. Her barley loaf was not rising like it should. She wasn't sure she would have enough fish for all those men. You know how men eat! Then she couldn't find her wooden spoon. Water sloshed out of her bucket wetting her clothes as she tried to hurry back from the well. Her back hurt. The last straw was realizing that Mary had eaten all the figs she had planned for dessert! This was just like Mary—leaving her with all the work! Where was Mary anyway? (This is all just speculation!). That was it! Martha would set things straight. She went to Jesus and as soon as she opened her mouth, complaining and bitterness spilled out.

Many times we end the story there. Jesus tells Martha that she is worried about too many things and that Mary had chosen what was better. Is Jesus telling Martha that she needs to be just like Mary? Does God want us to always be at His feet instead of working? How could Martha have handled things differently?

I believe Jesus was trying to teach Martha many things, one being priorities. When we begin our day at Jesus' feet, we get our focus straight. We put God in His place and He puts us in ours. Life is so much easier when we realize that He is God and we are not. That's worship. It allows God to get at our hearts purging things out like bitterness, and filling us with peace that things will turn

~~and making some way to share. Share therefore, making your words get about~~

out alright. We are now "armored" and equipped to face our day.

For me, not five minutes after I've closed my Bible, I start feeling frustrated. What makes us frustrated? It's usually the fact that things are not going as we think they should. We have an agenda, and many times a Godly one. But God isn't as interested in our agenda as in building our character and faith. His most effective lessons occur when He tweaks with our expectations. How are we to respond? How should Martha have responded?

If Martha would have come to Jesus with her frustration and tears in *humility*, things would have been very different. She could have said, "Lord, I'm so frustrated. Nothing is going right and I feel so overwhelmed. I wanted things to be perfect for You but I just can't do it all. Please help me." The Bible tells us that God treasures a humble and contrite heart. He can do so much with that. Many times He uses frustration to drive us to Him and finally allow Him to do a special work not only in our situation, but in our hearts.

I'm slowly learning and working to respond this way when I'm frustrated. I'm working to not cling to my agenda so tightly that I start to see even my family as a hindrance or annoyance. It is painful and many times I feel like a 2yr. old, kicking and screaming through the process. But praise God, He doesn't let me go. He's promised to gently lead those that have young (Isaiah 41:10). I pray that you will allow God to take you through this process. His goal is to possess more and more of your heart with more of Himself. It's worth it.

and making none any to shame. Shame therefore, making your sins get down

Unconditional Love

By Elisabeth Rushton

Unconditional love.

What do you think of when you hear that? Do you think of a friend? A family member? A sibling? Or maybe you think of all of them?

What about strangers? People different from you? People you do not normally befriend. Have you ever thought that you may need to have unconditional love for someone who isn't in your family or a friend? For people you may normally look past?

God wants us to have unconditional love. He wants for us to love others just as much as we love our family, friends or even ourselves. He says in the Bible, "Love your neighbor as yourself." That in our language means treat and love someone as you would like to be treated. There is nothing tougher than others being rude to you or not taking the time to care about how you might feel. It doesn't feel very good at all.

So, what are we to do? Why not take the time to get to know what that new kid in Sunday School? They might just be a very nice person. Why not sit down with that person you see all the time at the coffee shop? Take the time to get to know them better and to get to understand their problems. Take the time to see past the outside appearances. You never know. They may become your very best friend and when you are down and out, they may give you unconditional love just like you gave them when they were down and out. What about that new neighbor or new kid in your support group that you have just passed by dozens of times? You may be the very person who leads them to Jesus.

Now what or WHO do you think of when I say, "Unconditional love?" Is it your new neighbor across the road? Or the new person in your church that no one talks to? Or maybe even your new preacher? So, why not commit now to help someone who is in need of a little or a lot of love...

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking. It is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does NOT delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails... And now these three remain: Faith, Hope and Love.

But the greatest of these is LOVE.

1st Corinthians 13: 4-13

and nothing done any to shame. Shame therefore, marking your sins get down

What is Love?

From The Internet...

A group of professional people posed this question to a group of 4 to 8 year-olds, "What does love mean?" The answers they got were broader and deeper than anyone could have imagined. See what you think:

- ♥ "When my grandmother got arthritis, she couldn't bend over and paint her toenails anymore. So my grandfather does it for her all the time, even when his hands got arthritis too. That's love." Rebecca - age 8
- ♥ "Love is when a girl puts on perfume and a boy puts on shaving cologne and they go out and smell each other." Karl - age 5
- ♥ "Love is when you go out to eat and give somebody most of your French fries without making them give you any of theirs." Chrissy - age 6
- ♥ "Love is what makes you smile when you're tired." Terri - age 4
- ♥ "Love is when my mommy makes coffee for my daddy and she takes a sip before giving it to him, to make sure the taste is OK." Danny - age 7
- ♥ "Love is what's in the room with you at Christmas if you stop opening presents and listen." Bobby - age 7 (Wow!)
- ♥ "If you want to learn to love better, you should start with a friend who you hate," Nikka - age 6
- ♥ "There are two kinds of love. Our love. God's love. But God makes both kinds of them." Jenny - age 8
- ♥ "Love is when you tell a guy you like his shirt, then he wears it everyday." Noelle - age 7
- ♥ "Love is like a little old woman and a little old man who are still friends even after they know each other so well." Tommy - age 6
- ♥ "During my piano recital, I was on a stage and I was scared. I looked at all the people watching me and saw my daddy waving and smiling. He was the only one doing that. I wasn't scared anymore." Cindy - age 8
- ♥ Love is when Mommy gives Daddy the best piece of chicken." Elaine-age 5
- ♥ "You really shouldn't say 'I love you' unless you mean it. But if you mean it, you should say it a lot. People forget." Jessica - age 8
- ♥ And the final one -- Author and lecturer Leo Buscaglia once talked about a contest he was asked to judge. The purpose of the contest was to find the most caring child. The winner was a four year old child whose next door neighbor was an elderly gentleman who had recently lost his wife. Upon seeing the man cry, the little boy went into the old gentleman's yard, climbed onto his lap, and just sat there. When his Mother asked him what he had said to the neighbor, the little boy said, "Nothing, I just helped him cry."

~~and making love and to share. Share therefore, making your love get about~~

Your Attitude Determines Your Altitude!

By Lorrie Flem

She was a petite, well-poised proud lady, fully dressed each morning by 8:00, with her hair fixed and makeup on, even though she was legally blind and 92-years-old. Recently, her husband of 70 years had passed away, so a move to a nursing home was necessary.

After many hours of waiting patiently in the lobby of the nursing home, she smiled sweetly when told her room was ready. As she maneuvered her walker to the elevator, the nurse provided a visual description of her tiny room, including the eyelet sheets that had been hung on her window. "I love it," she stated with enthusiasm.

When the nurse questioned her about her attitude she said, "That doesn't have anything to do with it. Happiness is something you decide on ahead of time. Whether I like my room or not doesn't depend on how the furniture is arranged...it's how I arrange my mind. I already decided to love it. It's a decision I make every morning when I wake up. I have a choice. I can spend the day in bed recounting the difficulty I have with the parts of my body that no longer work, or get out of bed and be thankful for the ones that do. Each day is a gift, and as long as my eyes open, I'll focus on the new day and all of the happy memories I've stored away."

Choose Your Attitude

The good news is we can choose our attitude, but it is going to cost us something. Giving up your right to yourself is a painful price to pay. The Bible says that except for His conception, Jesus entered the world the same way that every other child has. We are told God is the Most High—higher than the highest heaven. He became a tiny, helpless infant. Think of what it cost Him. It is going to cost us something to be willing to choose our attitude, when everything in us cries out against it.

When He was a man, He became tired. He needed food. He slept. He sat down weary by the well. Imagine, the Lord of the Universe—tired. He had to get away from the crowds at times because He needed rest. He needed peace and quiet. Mary and Martha and Lazarus must have been great blessings in His life, because theirs was a peaceful home where He was always welcomed. He allowed them to do things for Him. Think of all those things, and then readjust your own attitude toward your place on this planet, and what God has you here for, and what He wants you to do. Choose your attitude.

Hitler Teaches Attitude

A very famous Viennese psychiatrist wrote a book about his experience in a Nazi concentration camp. He says that man can be deprived of every freedom, with one exception—and that is he may never be deprived of the freedom to choose his attitude.

The whole book describes the way in which he learned to choose his own attitude. And other peo-

ple taught him. He said they received one piece of bread per week; they got watery soup all the other days. But on one day a week they got soup and bread. There were always a few people in the concentration camp who would walk around with that piece of bread to try to find somebody else who needed it worse than they did—people who chose their attitude instead of wolfing it down as they were tempted to do. Man can be deprived of every freedom, except the freedom to choose his own attitude. It is possible to choose your attitude.

Few of us have endured something so inhumane, so unjust, or so brutal as those who suffered through the Holocaust in Hitler's death camps. But they can teach us something—that while you often cannot choose your circumstances, you can choose your attitude in the midst of those circumstances. Hugh Downs said, "A happy person is not a person in a certain set of circumstances, but rather a certain set of attitudes."

A Fan of Fanny's Attitude

If you have read my book *Welcome Home Daddy*, you are familiar with Fanny Crosby. She wrote thousands of hymns. This alone is remarkable, but when you understand that she was blinded when she was six-weeks-old by a doctor's mistake, then her cheerful attitude is truly amazing. Here is a poem she wrote when she was nine-years-old:

Oh, what a happy soul am I, although I cannot see; I am resolved that in this world contented I will be. How many blessings I enjoy that other people don't; to weep and sigh because I'm blind, I cannot or I won't.

Our attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus (Philippians 2:5). You think you've got troubles? Think about His. Think about that little nine-year-old Fanny Crosby. Either you control your attitude or it controls you.

For The Garden of Your Daily Living...
Author Unknown

PLANT THREE ROWS OF PEAS:

1. Peace of mind
2. Peace of heart
3. Peace of soul

PLANT FOUR ROWS OF SQUASH:

1. Squash gossip
2. Squash indifference
3. Squash grumbling
4. Squash selfishness

PLANT FOUR ROWS OF LETTUCE:

1. Lettuce be faithful
2. Lettuce be kind
3. Lettuce be patient
4. Lettuce really love one another

NO GARDEN IS PERFECT WITHOUT TURNIPS:

1. Turnip for meetings
2. Turnip for service
3. Turnip to help one another

TO CONCLUDE OUR GARDEN WE MUST HAVE THYME:

1. Thyme for each other
2. Thyme for family
3. Thyme for friends

WATER FREELY WITH PATIENCE.

CULTIVATE WITH LOVE.

GET READY FOR MUCH FRUIT IN YOUR GARDEN BECAUSE YOU REAP WHAT YOU SOW!

In Pursuit of Destiny

By Larry D. Wright

Salmons begin their lives in the fresh water rivers of the frigid Northwest.

Not long after they are born they begin a long swim down stream. Their destination is determined by their destiny.

Then, something strange happens. Scientists don't understand this phenomenon, but at some point the adult salmon begins to swim back home. Though they have journeyed thousands of miles from that original river location, they head back home. They swim upstream fighting extreme currents and in the face of incredible obstacles.

I have seen programs on the Discovery Channel that show the astonishing fish leaping out of the water to overcome waterfalls and other barriers impeding their progress. They face predators, obstacles, and death because they are driven by purpose. Incredibly, though some of them have been gone for years, many return to the exact spot where they were born.

A documentary that tracked the journey of one determined salmon discovered that the fish swam through a maze of pipes and nudged open a grate to re-enter the hatchery where it was born. After an unbelievable effort the fish spawn and then die.

New salmon are soon born and the process is repeated.

Although no one can adequately explain this amazing feat, I think it has something to do with destiny.

Destiny is what God has pre-ordained for your future. It is what He determined that you are placed here on this earth to accomplish. It is the inner purpose for your life. It is the real reason for breathing. It is a condition fore-ordained by God for you. It is the plan and program of God for your life. It is the success you are really meant to achieve. It is what you have been called and shaped to be and to do. It is the real you. It is why you were born and the fulfillment of the expectations of heaven for your life. It is what is written in the heavenly records concerning you. It is what God has in mind when He thinks of you. In fact, it is God's original intention before you were created.

Unfortunately, destiny can be forfeited when selfish and sinful people make bad choices. There is nothing more tragic than the forsaking of one's divine destiny. It is a disaster to forfeit the reason why you were born because there is no one that is exactly like you. Your DNA and fingerprints are unique to you. Likewise, so is your destiny.

Elijah was a great prophet who experienced God's unique will for his life. However, even a giant like Elijah was not always in his place of destiny. One day he prayed and the Lord did not answer. When

the Lord spoke, He simply asked him a piercing question: "Elijah, what are you doing here?" Like with Adam and Eve in the garden, God knew that Elijah was sitting on the roadside having abandoned his walk toward destiny.

Suppose God were to ask you that question, "What are you doing here?" How would you answer? Does your life have a destination? Are you moving in a specific direction? Are you willing to face all of the obstacles to get there? Are you controlled by one overriding passion and purpose in life?

Jellyfish are born in the ocean and die there as well. They have limited movement, but never really use that ability to go to any particular destination. They move along primarily by the wind, waves, and tides. They drift about stinging and surviving. They are not purpose driven. They prefer to drift.

Drifting can be fun. It doesn't require much energy. The problem with that kind of life is that you don't accomplish anything of significance. Sooner or later you ask, "What was it all for anyway?"

Life has meaning! Discover the reason for which you are created. Begin the exciting discovery of your purpose in life.

The Race

Anonymous

"Quit!" "Give up, you're beaten," they shout and plead.
There's just too much against you now, this time you can't succeed.
And as I start to hang my head in front of failure's face,
My downward fall is broken by the memory of a race.

And hope refills my weakened will as I recall that scene,
For just the thought of that short race rejuvenates my being.
A children's race, young boys, young men; how I remember well,
Excitement sure, but also fear, it wasn't hard to tell.

They all lined up so full of hope, each though to win the race
Or tie for first, or if not that, at least take second place.
Their fathers watched from off the side, each cheering for his son,
And each boy hoped to show his dad that he would be the one.

The whistle blew and off they went, young hearts and hope of fire,
To win, to be the hero there, was each young boy's desire.
One boy in particular, his dad was in the crowd,
Was running near the lead and thought, "My dad will be so proud."

But as he speeded down the field across a shallow dip,
The little boy who thought to win, lost his step and slipped.
Trying hard to catch himself, his hands flew out to brace,
And mid the laughter of the crowd, he fell flat on his face.

So, down he fell and with him hope, he couldn't win it now.
Embarrassed, sad, he only wished to disappear somehow.
But as he fell his dad stood up and showed his anxious face,
Which to the boy so clearly said, "Get up and win that race!"

He quickly rose, no damage done, behind a bit that's all,
And ran with all his mind and might to make up for his fall.
So anxious to restore himself, to catch up and to win,
His mind went faster than his legs, he slipped and fell again.

He wished that he had quit before with one disgrace.
"I'm hopeless as a runner now, I shouldn't try to race."
But, in the laughing crowd he searched and found his father's face,
That steady look that said again, "Get up and win that race!"
So he jumped up to try again, ten yards behind the last,

If I'm going to gain those yards, he thought, "I've got to run real fast."
Exceeding everything he had, he regained eight or ten,
But trying so hard to catch the lead, he slipped and fell again.

Defeat! He lay there silently, a tear dropped from his eye,
There's no sense running anymore—three strikes I'm out—why try?
The will to rise had disappeared, all hope had fled away,
So far behind, so error prone, closer all the way.

I've lost, so what's the use," he thought, "I'll live with my disgrace."
But then he thought about his dad, who soon he'd have to face.
"Get up," an echo sounded low, "Get up and take your place.
You were not meant for failure here, get up and win that race!"

With borrowed will, "Get up," it said, "You haven't lost it all,"
"For winning in not more than this; to rise each time you fall."
So, up he rose to run once more, and with a new commit,
He resolved that win or lose, at least he wouldn't quit.

So far behind the others now, the most he'd ever been,
Still he gave it all he had and ran as though to win.
Three times he'd fallen stumbling, three times he rose again,
Too far behind to hope to win, he still ran to the end.

They cheered the winning runner as he crossed first place;
Head high and proud and happy—no falling, no disgrace.
But when the fallen youngster crossed the line, last place,
The crowd gave him the greatest cheer for finishing the race.

And even though he came in last with head bowed low, unproud,
You would have thought he'd won that race, to listen to the crowd.
And to his dad he sadly said, "I didn't do so well."
"To me, you won," his father said. "You rose each time you fell."

And now when things seem dark and hard and difficult to face,
The memory of that little boy helps me in my own race.
For all of life is like that race, with ups and downs and all.
And all you have to do to win is rise each time you fall.

"Quit!" "Give up, you're beaten," they still shout in my face,
But another voice within me says, "Get up and WIN THAT RACE!"

A Heart for Home

By Julie Druck

It's a grey and rainy day outside - kind of reminds me of spring, except for the fact that there are still inches and inches of snowflakes piled on the ground! I have yet to utter the words, "I can't WAIT for spring!" I'm trying to hold off and wring every single moment out of winter yet. We're still enjoying sledding after schoolwork each morning, laying on my bed in the afternoon and reading chapter after chapter of great books, and eating snow snowcones. But soon, very soon, I feel that I will be begging for spring. I'm starting to think about daffodils, robins, Easter plans, early morning walks and that wonderful fragrance in the air called Spring. In the meantime, enjoy the last few weeks of winter - drink some more cocoa, go moonlight sledding and snuggle into those flannel sheets. No matter how you feel about it, winter will be gone before we know it!

TIPS AND TIDBITS

Over the past few months, my folder has started to bulge with odds and ends of tips and tidbits. So, I decided to empty the folder and just give you a big list of fun and practical ideas.

- ⇒ I've enjoyed decorating the boys' rooms by using plastic stencils and stenciling various things in paint on their walls. But I recently saw a neat idea that would probably take less time than stenciling yet looks just as great. You could paint your child's palms and have them press hand-prints in a line around the room. Use all one color or alternate colors. And don't forget to explain to your children that we only paint walls WITH Mommy!!!!
- ⇒ When I was given a baby shower by my co-workers before Ben was born, my supervisor saved the wrapping paper from each gift that I opened. She then cut out a small piece from each sheet and told me to arrange all the pieces into a collage in the back of my child's baby book. The collage looks sweet and reminds me of my shower and my thoughtful supervisor.
- ⇒ Speaking of baby showers, here's a tip I liked from a *Family Circle Magazine*: "One of my favorite baby shower gifts was a beautifully wrapped box containing six smaller boxes, each labeled for when it was to be opened. For example: The box labeled ONE MONTH was for when my son turned one month old; the box labeled THREE MONTHS was for when he turned three months and so on. Each tiny gift was age appropriate: teething ring, bib, rattle, etc. I loved opening the boxes and celebrating another milestone with my child. - Angie Monk"
- ⇒ In my freezer, I keep a large container that's labeled: "Veggies for Soup." After a meal, if there is a small portion of vegetables left over, I simply open the container and pour them in. When the container is full, I make vegetable soup!
- ⇒ I prefer my homemade cookies soft and chewy versus crispy. However, sometimes they don't come out of the oven that way! To soften them up, I put a slice of bread in the container with

the cookies. (I also do this with brown sugar to keep it soft.)

- ⇒ When entertaining, line your walkway or steps with Mason jars and fill them with votive and/or pillar candles. This also makes a lovely centerpiece.
- ⇒ Here's a tip for when those spring flowers bloom: Line a windowsill with pretty little bottles, vases and glasses. Then pop a single bloom into each. I love the look of this!
- ⇒ I like this fun twist for peanut butter cookies. After your cookies have cooled, mix together 1 cup of chocolate chips and 1/2 tsp. of vegetable oil. Spoon this over your peanut butter cookies and allow to set. Mmmm . . . good!
- ⇒ Check out www.holidays.net. On this website is a recipe to make Hamantaschen Cookies (supposedly shaped like Haman's hat). Also on the site are simple masks of Queen Esther, King Ahasuerus and Haman to print out. The boys colored, cut out and taped the masks to popsicle sticks. We then had fun acting out the story of Esther.
- ⇒ I tucked this next idea in my file for a future birthday gift for a child or an adult who enjoys baking. Buy a small cupcake cookbook, select one recipe, and fill a box or basket with the ingredients for that recipe. Your box or basket might contain cake mix, fun cupcake liners, canned frosting, sprinkles and other decorating items. What a fun gift!