

GEMS OF TRUTH

NUMBER 2

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FROM THE EDITOR

Sixty years ago I read the Bible for the first time and began to find that it was a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path (see Psalm 119:105). I found in its pages a resurrection Life swelling up within me that is continuing to this very day and I truly give thanks for that. When I open the Bible daily

I sense a fresh Word from God and see deeper truths as they are revealed to me by the Holy Spirit. This process isn't in the realm of *new information* but is rather *new Life* for me. As I consider what seems to me to be very plain, i.e., that God's Life is imparted through this Book in a very special way, and as I observe the widespread neglect of and in some cases even hatred towards the Bible that prevails in our world, I just simply give thanks for this Book in a renewed way and desire to seek its treasures even more than ever.

I'm aware that the Bible has been misused and badly abused over the centuries but this just gives me more motivation than ever to not allow myself to get bogged down in unfruitful disputes but to seek the face of God always for His power and Life to be revealed to me so that I can have Life to share with others.

If you wish to be on my email list to receive GEMS OF TRUTH in PDF format or send me some comments contact me as below:

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"The Bible is not an end in itself, but a means to bring men to an intimate and satisfying knowledge of God, that they may enter into Him, that they may delight in His Presence, may taste and know the inner sweetness of the very God Himself in the core and center of their hearts." (A.W. Tozer, The Pursuit of God. Christian Publications. 1948. pg. 10).

BE STRONG AND COURAGEOUS

Joshua 1:9 English Standard Version (ESV)

9 "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."

These were the words of the Lord to Joshua as he was about to lead the children of Israel into their promised land of rest (Read the entire chapter).

I believe the words of encouragement to Joshua are spoken to each of us as a wonderful promise. Just as the children of Israel took 40 years to make a journey of just a few days we may have spent many years of wandering in the wilderness, ignorant of our divine heritage as sons and daughters of God, but He hasn't forsaken us. We may have taken many detours and stumbled and fallen often but through it all His love has carried us and we are ever in His arms. If left by ourselves we would have no hope but with God's help we are always victorious.

The Israelites were chastised repeatedly during their wilderness wanderings. They suffered severe consequences for their hardness of heart and stubbornness. Their Egyptian captivity represents the bondage of sin, sickness, death, self-centeredness and the hypnotism of the world of matter that we all struggle with. The journey from matter or sense to Spirit is not an easy one and must be pursued with all diligence. Finally we will grow weary of the suffering that we bring upon ourselves and others and realize "It is time to go home. I want to enter the promised land of milk and honey. I want to receive my divine inheritance as God's child."

So take heart! *God is with us every step of the way as we journey towards our full spiritual heritage.* This gives us needed courage for our daily needs. TD



**Courage is the most important of all the virtues, because without courage you can't practice any other virtue consistently. You can practice any virtue erratically, but nothing consistently without courage.--
Maya Angelou**

THE LETTER AND THE SPIRIT

2 Corinthians 3:6 New King James Version (NKJV)

6 who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; *for the letter [the written code] kills, but the Spirit gives life.* [Emphasis and brackets supplied]

Paul wrote these words at a time of horrendous conflict among early Christians who came from a wide variety of backgrounds. There was more diversity among early Christians than has been recognized until very recently. Among those who came to accept Messiah Jesus from the Jewish faith was a sect who believed that all the Judaic laws should be followed while other Jewish converts didn't. Paul boldly preached a gospel which brought into question all the rules and regulations that not only some Jews were holding to but converts from other religions as well.

All religions have traditions both written and unwritten that are continued from one generation to another. A favorite expression with those who cling tenaciously to old ways of thinking is “We’ve always done it this way.” Some feel that they will cling to old ways even if it closes their churches and in many cases this is happening. There are many Christian believers today who simply have dropped out of the organized church entirely. New ways of “doing church” are evolving such as Internet groups, home meetings, and what is called “the emerging church” which has sought new and innovative ways of worship. The main thing to remember here is “*the Spirit gives life.*” Regardless of the outward forms of worship, whether they be old or new, unless there is room made for the Holy Spirit it will just be going through the motions and nothing more.

What is my solution to all of this? Do I claim to have the answers for the problems that face Christianity today? No, I definitely make no such claim but I believe that if leaders of these churches would be willing to sit back for a time, cease their endless committees and planning sessions and seek *God’s* guidance instead of just going on and on doing the same things that answers would come. *There is far too much talking and far too little listening to hear the voice of God.* The old time Quakers which are largely extinct today used to spend much time in silence to hear the still small voice from within and speaking only after they felt they had some guidance. I believe that such a practice today would facilitate finding answers. We can’t hear from God while our mouths are constantly running in high gear. Much of our talking is idolatrous. We like to hear ourselves talk more than we do to spend time listening for the voice of God that must come within when all the noise ceases. Our world is dominated by much noise and a flood of electronic devices to keep people occupied endlessly with trivia. Never was the counsel “Be still and know that I am God” more needed than now. TD

THE HARVEST OF LIFE

Jeremiah 8:20 New King James Version (NKJV)

**20 “ The harvest is past,
The summer is ended,
And we are not saved!”**

A person’s “harvest” can occur at any time. Every time of test is indeed a “harvest time.” “We are not saved” I believe is a term expressing a state of regret and unpreparedness. The person becomes aware of his lack of wholeness [salvation] when things get tough and he has no foundation upon which to stand. If the word

“saved” as used in the Bible and within Christianity were understood in a deeper way than just “escaping hell” and “gaining Heaven” when you die much could be gained. The “get saved” popular teaching in some circles is very shallow and often very misleading. I met a man once who said he “got saved” so many years ago and hadn’t given it much thought since. He had his “ticket to Heaven” and he felt that was sufficient. Such an idea is not taught in the Bible at all but is one of the many traditions that has been added to Christianity over the years.

Being “saved” really means *being made whole* in every area of our lives--mind, body, and spirit. A deep work of spiritual transformation needs to be ongoing. “Being saved” [made whole] is a lifetime process, not a one time thing. Unless this is happening when a time of test comes we shall say with the prophet Jeremiah, “The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.” These are very sad words indeed. TD



POPULAR BUZZWORDS

“You never know,” “life-threatening,” “something is going around” and “fixed income”-- are some of the popular buzzwords that we hear everyday. “You never know” suggests that we have no control over what happens in our lives and that everything is left up to mere chance and fate. “Life-threatening” suggests that something in the realm of matter such as a so-called accident or some disease can destroy our life. “Something is going around” says that we are subject constantly to the fear of viruses, plagues that

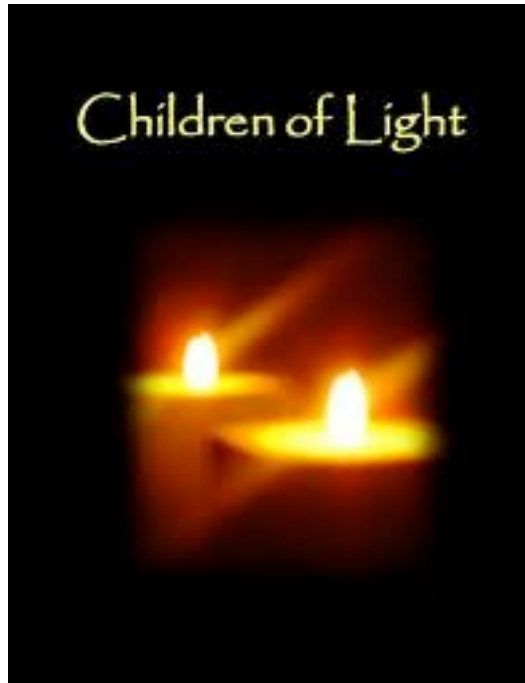
we think are contagious and we are helpless before them. Perhaps we may have been taught to believe that a vaccine or perhaps a vitamin preparation will protect us from these popular diseases that are “going around.” “Fixed income” says that our supply is dependent upon some material source and that when this amount is tied to a set dollar amount that our supply is limited to that amount and thus is “fixed.”

All of these popular beliefs are lies from the enemy pure and simple! The steps of those who trust God and walk with Him are ordered and guided by Him and never left to happenstance. God is All-in-all, fills all the universe, and we are never out of His presence. Our true *life is in and of God and nothing can ever threaten, diminish or take that away.* If our physical body ceases to be any longer functional and is laid aside *our life in God never ceases for it has no beginning and no end. Nothing can ever separate us from His love and presence* (see Romans 8:31-39). No disease or plague has any power over our life whatsoever. Such things shall not come nigh the dwelling [the spiritual Reality] of those *who abide under the shadow of the Almighty* (see Psalm 91). We never need to have any fear whatsoever of “something going around” and to resort to some material means to protect ourselves is to lay ourselves open even more to the very thing which we fear. There is no “fixed income” for God’s children for *God is Infinite supply.* There are many stories in the Bible to establish that clearly and the feeding of the 5000 (which is in all four gospels) is just one such example.

Over the years my personal income has never been high as measured in what men call money. When I was in Christian boarding academy [the 1950s] \$10 was a lot of money to me and I rarely had even that much in my billfold and yet I gave what I could to missions. There were numerous times when I would find money in my billfold that I couldn’t account for. I learned early on not to try to find out where it came from for I knew in my heart that *God has wonderful ways of providing for His children that trust in Him.* Over the years I’ve not tracked my income and expenses with any kind of budgeting and have not lived in debt. There has always been enough to pay all necessary expenses with something left over. Many times I’ve looked back on times when temporal means of supply were not apparent and asked myself, “How did I ever get through that?” I got through it because *God has always been my supply.* I learned that if I took Matthew 6:21-34 seriously and put the pursuit of the Kingdom of God *first* everything else that I needed on the temporal plane would be added to me and that has been exactly the case.

Let us not allow ourselves to be foolishly deceived by the popular beliefs and buzzwords of our very materialistic world which largely lives in ignorance of God. The

children of God are children of light and are not to be walking in darkness (see Exodus 10:21-23; Isaiah 60:1-3; Ephesians 5:8; Philippians 2:15).



THE UNIQUENESS OF THE INDIVIDUAL

I'm often reminded of the uniqueness of the individual when I attend discussion groups, retreats, and testimony meetings which are dealing with some aspects of the spiritual journey such as prayer or the devotional life and how such things are expressed. I find some folks looking for a "right way" to do it just as though there were some fixed rule that each person must follow to reach God. As I listen to people give their testimonies I see more fully *how absolutely unique and special is each person's relationship with God and calling in life*. A great deal of mischief has been done through a failure to recognize this simple principle. I think probably we have way too much "how to do it" teachings about the personal devotional life and this often lays a "guilt trip" on folks who simply don't fit into those ways. For me the most important thing is *to have a personal, consistent, and committed devotional life* but even such a statement as this must be taken with caution. Some have their devotions as they quietly walk through a woods or sit quietly in some beautiful natural environment. Others may express their devotions in music, painting, singing, or writing. The arts often are really an expression of the deep spirituality of human beings who are revealing their True Identity in God's image and likeness. The writings that have been viewed as "classics" over the centuries have very profound spiritual meanings. I remember when I was in seventh

and eighth grades I had a gifted teacher who taught us some of the classics and brought out many of the deeper interpretations and it was quite wonderful and I still remember some of these timeless works and what I learned. At the time I had no specific Christian teaching so this study of some of the long revered classics elevated my thoughts considerably. As I look back I can see that seeds were sown that bore fruit later as my thinking evolved into a Christian context.

For myself, I tend to follow a more disciplined approach to devotions although I realize “praying without ceasing” is really the constant *desire* to serve and worship God and to love others. However, I would feel very much lacking if I didn’t have my set apart times for spiritual study, prayer, and meditation. I learned this disciplined approach to the devotional life early in my spiritual journey at a Christian boarding academy and I’ve been thankful ever since for this has provided an anchor for my life now for several decades. I’m thankful for the godly teachers who emphasized the importance of having personal devotions the first thing in the morning. It was called “the morning watch” in those days in my church.

We need to be careful not to judge or try to control others in their spiritual journey. When appropriate I share with others what has worked well for me and try to leave it there. I find it best just to bless and encourage others as they find their path of life. The Holy Spirit is well able to guide everyone as is best for them at any given time. In all cases “the Spirit gives life.” TD

THE LIMITATIONS OF WORDS

In the Genesis 11 story we have the confounding of languages and the divisions that came to humanity as a result. Today there are hundreds of languages and dialects. I believe that words are, at best, still far removed from Reality.

We have many terms used in religions that are unique to that particular faith and that those outside of it don’t understand. Even within the Christian traditions there are specialized words that are not clear to those of other Christian backgrounds. I’ve made it my practice for the past 30 years to try learn more about faith traditions outside of my own and this has included all branches of Christianity as well as other world religions. My reason for doing this is not only to learn what I can from differing viewpoints but also to be able to communicate with those of other faiths in ways that will be meaningful and helpful (see 1 Corinthians 9:19-23). When I’m with Buddhists, Lutherans, Baptists, Adventists, New Age, Catholics, Methodists, Charismatics, and others I can use words that will enable me to communicate with them and build bridges

of goodwill. This has worked well and has formed bonds of love between myself and many others.

However, there is a bigger picture yet to look at and that is *true communication is really heart to heart rather than head to head*. Even though we do the best we can our words are never adequate to convey what is really on our heart. Communication comes with *understanding* the heart of another and not allowing ourselves to get too hung up on words. People often say what they really don't mean and we need to be careful not to allow ourselves to become upset over every word said. I've apologized many times because I've said something inadvertently that was misunderstood. We all need to humble ourselves and make apologies even if we think we were right.

I believe that we need to pray for wisdom daily to be able to speak in such a way that will bless others and at the same time have discernment to see their heart cry and relate with love, compassion, and forgiveness. TD

WILLFUL IGNORANCE

Hosea 4:6 New King James Version (NKJV)

6 My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.

**Because you have rejected knowledge,
I also will reject you from being priest for Me;
Because you have forgotten the law of your God,
I also will forget your children.**

Ephesians 4:18 Amplified Bible (AMP)

18 Their moral understanding is darkened and their reasoning is beclouded. [They are] alienated (estranged, self-banished) from the life of God [with no share in it; this is] because of the ignorance (the want of knowledge and perception, the willful blindness) that is deep-seated in them, due to their hardness of heart [to the insensitiveness of their moral nature].

The great masses of humanity have very little meaningful communion with God on a consistent, everyday basis. I've heard many say, "I simply don't have time for devotions. I have so much to do." Is it possible that life could be so much richer and of a much higher quality than we could ever begin to imagine if we would put communion with God as our *highest* priority in life? Is it possible that by not ordering our priorities properly that we are living in "willful ignorance" and suffering the consequences thereof? Think about it! The verse from Ephesians speaks of being darkened in

understanding, beclouded, having hardness of heart, and being insensitive to our moral nature as resulting from living in ignorance.

When I observe what is going on in the world around me I see increasingly the importance of daily communion with God, to abide in the secret place of the Most High God (see Psalm 91:1).



DOES IT HAVE A “GOD” FOUNDATION?

Matthew 15:13 Amplified Bible (AMP)

13 He answered, Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be torn up by the roots.

Sometimes we get all stressed out over various things in the world that we see going on and wonder what we should do about them. In some cases we can do something directly to bring improvement but in many others it seems very hopeless from a human point of view. I’ve noticed how some folks just keep dwelling on and on about all the “conspiracies” that are behind everything the government does and just about everything else going on in the world as well. I’ve avoided much contact with folks who are centering on “doom and gloom.”

Many people are very defensive about what they believe thinking perhaps that their beliefs are so absolutely correct. I’ve received many emails where people quote their favorite proof texts to prove what they believe and show me how wrong I am. I just smile to myself and wish them well but will not enter into any kind of debate about beliefs. We need to always remember that *everything* that is not created by God will eventually fall by the weight of its own nothingness. If we are hanging on to certain

practices in our lives or believing in things that do not have any “God foundation” we are only asking for much pain and suffering.

I would like to take this even one step further and say that *God did not plant sin, sickness and death in the world.* They are of the enemy who has sown tares among the wheat in this world. If sin, sickness, and death were not planted [created] by God I would like to submit that the less attention we give to them the better off we will. God didn't create things like anger, crime, murder, works of the flesh and other deformities of human behavior so, again, the less time we spend dwelling upon such things the better. What does the media dwell upon the most? I'll probably say more about this later but just think about this for the time being.

I see a great need in my own life to “stay on track” everyday and follow my long held disciplines of prayer and spiritual study, always with an open heart and a recognition of my human weaknesses and how much I need God's strength and help to be effective in my everyday life. I need to have *the mind of Christ to combat the evils of the world.* If I'm on track with God and daily receiving the Mind that was in Christ Jesus I don't need to waste my time and energy trying to combat all the error in the world that has no God foundation. God is faithful, He is the *only* real power, and His purposes will ultimately be fulfilled. I need to learn how to move in harmony with His will. TD

PAST MISTAKES

Do not brood over your past mistakes and failures as this will only fill your mind with grief, regret and depression. Do not repeat them in the future.--Sivananda

One of my major struggles over the years is dealing with feelings of regret over past mistakes that in some cases have cost me what I perceive as years of suffering. One of my biggest regrets is that I didn't listen to wise advice that my parents tried to give me in my younger years. I thought I knew God's will more than they did and failed to realize the simple fact that God could well have been speaking to me through them. Neither one of them was very forceful in giving advice and it was more in the realm of asking questions and throwing out some cautions for me to think about. One of my mother's favorite sayings was “Why don't you let it season a little?” She was trying to caution me against being too hasty about doing something but mostly I didn't listen. However, I do retain in my consciousness the precious memory of how much love my mom had for me and I'm thankful for that. When I went against her cautions and made mistakes she never once said, “I told you so.” She was just always there to love and accept me just as I was with all of my shortcomings.

God overrules everything in our lives for good or none of us would have any hope in life. We learn as we go along and much of this learning is what could be called learning the hard way. That seems to be the primary way that we human beings function. This is the history of humanity. Those who fail to learn by their mistakes will keep repeating them and I believe that either here or hereafter there are certain things we *must* learn about life and about our oneness with God. Our inescapable destiny is to leave behind ungodly, self-centered, unproductive ways of thinking and living and come home to the Father's house where there is indeed a special place for each of us (see John 14:1). TD



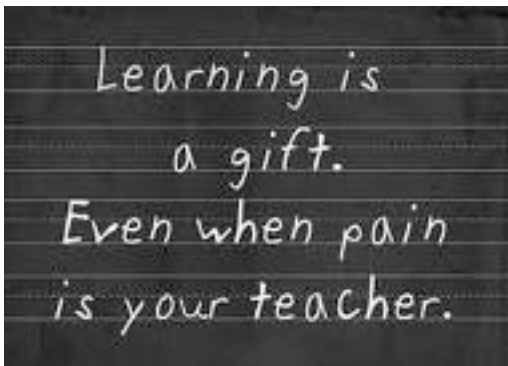
SOME CURRENT LESSONS

Recently I had a couple of conversations from which I gleaned some lessons. A young man was telling me some of his life issues and expressing how he felt the need of professional counseling. I mentioned how I had resolved some of these issues and could quickly see that this would not work for him and that he was not ready to listen. I could see that giving any kind of advice would be meddling with his learning process. A conversation with another person also helped me to see that sometimes my best intentions were still in the realm of interfering and that I need to work diligently on listening even more and not feeling that I must respond or give my opinion about the topic. This friend definitely interpreted my emails as interfering with his journey and so I've made sure that I won't keep sending them. I honor his honesty and the integrity of his calling. Both of these conversations were very helpful.

I'm also learning that if I turn something over to God and decrease trying to resolve the situation through some human effort the results are much better. There just always seems to be the desire to use some kind of force when a problem arises. Sometimes

force will stop an immediate problem but does not provide a long term healing and that should always be the goal.

I'm quick to add that there is *so much to learn and that God is patient with all of us as we learn and grow*. We make mistakes as we learn but God still holds our hand through all of them. Aren't you thankful for that? TD



**"The simplified life is a sanctified life,
Much more calm, much less strife.
Oh, what wondrous truths are unveiled -
Projects succeed which had previously failed.
Oh, how beautiful life can be,
Beautiful simplicity." --Peace Pilgrim**



Contact the Editor with comments and requests to be on the email list:

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The website below has my personal testimony and a series of articles to help you grow in your spiritual journey. Read as often as you can.

<http://www.tomdurst.com/>