

The Young People's Magazine

**Issued by the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland
Reformed in Doctrine, Worship and Practice**

“Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them” Ecclesiastes 12:1



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Number 5

Searching with Candles

Suppose you want to search a dark cellar. You would take a torch, especially if you want to see what is in the darkest corners. Many years ago, you might have taken a candle instead.

God speaks about searching Jerusalem with candles (Zephaniah 1:12), though the Hebrew word could also be translated as *lamps*. This is, of course, to speak as we human beings would speak. For God to speak in this way makes the matter more vivid and easier to understand. He does not need candles, or any kind of lamp, to see into the most hidden corners of human life. But it means that He was going to search Jerusalem thoroughly; He was going to look in the darkest corners, where people would commit sins that they did not want anyone else to see. He would even look into people's hearts and see all the wicked desires and sinful motives that no one else imagined were there. He missed nothing.

Zephaniah lived during the reign of Josiah in the kingdom of Judah. Yes, Josiah was a godly king, but most of the people of his time were ungodly. God sent Zephaniah, as a prophet, to bring a message of warning to Jerusalem and the rest of Judah. He told the people that "a day of wrath" would come, a day when God would punish them in His anger. It would be "a day of trouble and distress".

This was fulfilled when the Babylonian armies invaded Judah and then swept into Jerusalem; they destroyed the city, burnt down the temple and sent many people away into captivity in Babylon. These would indeed have been days of trouble and distress.

God had seen their idolatry, their worship of false gods instead of Himself, who only is to be worshipped. He knew everything about their sin, in all its terrible detail, for He had searched the whole city thoroughly; He had searched every heart. And He saw many kinds of sin – against every one of His commandments.

God saw rebellion against Himself. Instead of submitting to Him and serving Him in all the ways that He had told them in the Scriptures; they were following their own ideas. He saw unbelief reigning in their hearts;

instead of believing the testimony of the Scriptures and of the prophets that God was sending to them, they were rejecting that testimony. By doing so they were dishonouring God. The rebellion and the unbelief were very serious sins, sins for which they deserved to be punished.

But God still searches cities and towns and villages today. He knows where you live; He knows how you live; He knows the most hidden thoughts of your heart. He knows if you are following idols.

Perhaps you want to deny that you are an idolater. But a good minister, W S MacDougall, once said, "An idol is anything that takes the place of Jesus in the heart, which is the throne of the King". And whatever your idols are – success in the things of the world, for instance, or worldly enjoyments (and there is much of that in late December especially) – you can be absolutely sure that God knows exactly what your idols are. And He knows the time that you are wasting when they take the place of Jesus in your heart, where He alone should reign as King.

He knows if you are still a rebel against Him, if you are refusing to submit to His commandments, if you are refusing to give Him the first place in your heart and life. And He knows if you are still living in unbelief, rejecting the call of Christ, for instance: "Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else" (Isaiah 45:22).

If you go on in disobedience, you must expect that all these things which God has searched out so carefully will meet you again on the Day of judgement. Only by faith in Jesus Christ can you expect to escape the punishment of your sins in a lost eternity. So, if you go on in unbelief, there can be no hope for you on the Day of judgement.

God's message, through Zephaniah, to the ungodly people in Jerusalem also condemned them for saying in their hearts: "The Lord will not do good, neither will He do evil". Here *good* does not mean right before God, and *evil* does not mean sinful. The idea would have been something like this: The Lord will not do anything good for us; nor will He punish us.

There were people around 1700 who were known as deists; they believed that God had created the world but, after that, He left it to go on by itself. It was something like an old-fashioned watch or clock that someone wound up and then left to run down. But that is not how God acts; He remains in control of everything. He shows kindness to people, giving them food and other good things. And He will punish sin. People may not be conscious of God acting in their lives; they may ignore the fact that all their good things come from Him. They may also ignore the fact that to neglect God is itself a great sin, which He will punish unless they repent. God does do good and He does evil – in the sense already explained.

John Brown, the noted minister of Haddington, near Edinburgh, was speaking to a man whose surname was Horn and who attended his services. Horn's father was a very godly man, but the son was not converted. Brown told him: "Well, Horn, mind these words [from the Bible]: 'He is my God, and I will prepare Him an habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt Him'". Then the minister added something like this: "We should reckon him a madman who would throw away an inheritance from his father; but he is much more foolish who throws away a father's God."

Was young Horn assuming that God was not doing him any good, and would never punish him for his sins? Or, at least, that He would not punish Him for a very long time? But he had seen a good example in his father's life – living, no doubt, with real thankfulness for the good things he was getting from God and conscious that God hated sin and was examining his heart and life carefully. Besides, his father was trusting in Christ as the One who had come into this world to suffer and die in the place of sinners like him. With such an example, how foolish for young Horn to live as if God would not do good and evil – again in the sense explained.

You may have godly people in your family; I hope you also come in contact with godly people outside your family; at least you have the example of the godly in the Bible. Theirs is the example you are to follow, not that of worldly people who claim not to believe in God – but even if they do believe that God exists, worldly people live as if He took nothing to do with their lives. Ask God so to work in your heart so that you will believe in Jesus Christ and follow Him always, saying, "He is my God". Do not foolishly ignore God.

Lame on Both His Feet

Rev K M Watkins

His name was Gwako. He was about 16 years old. He could not walk. He could not stand. He could not even sit up without help. At first he was carted around in an old wheelbarrow. Later he would be strapped to a crude, metal wheelchair. The rest of the time he would lie on his thin, old mattress.

One Sabbath morning the minister at the local Free Presbyterian Church mission was preaching about Mephibosheth, who was lame on both his feet (see 2 Samuel 9). The minister explained that Mephibosheth is a picture of sinners, who cannot walk in God's ways. Sinners are so spiritually lame that they cannot even come to the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation.

The minister also explained that King David's kindness to Mephibosheth was a picture of the Lord's gospel kindness to sinners. For David fetched

Mephibosheth from the miserable place where he was and brought him to his royal palace, where he would always eat at the King's table as one of his sons. That is what King Jesus does when He brings sinners out of the state of sin and misery. He brings them to Himself by the power of His Holy Spirit, adopts them into His family as children of the living God, and welcomes them to all the privileges and benefits of the gospel.

Unknown to the minister, Gwako had come to the church for the first time that morning. He had not been able to get inside the building because the wheelbarrow was too wide. But outside on the verandah, slumped in his wheelbarrow, Gwako could hear every word. In the months that followed, the minister often thought of the wonderful providence that drew him to preach on lame Mephibosheth the same day that lame Gwako was drawn to the service. Was it a token that the Lord would draw the youth to Himself? Often the prayer was made that Gwako would become like Mephibosheth – sitting by faith at the gospel table of Jesus, as one of the King's sons.

Gwako continued to attend the church services whenever he could, and the Catechism class and Sabbath School too. Many times he seemed most earnest in his listening, as if he knew that eternal life depended on the gospel truths he was hearing. In time the wheelbarrow was replaced by a roughly-made, metal wheelchair. His brother would push him in the wheelchair along the very bumpy mud road to the church. It was quite a distance, and hard work, especially during the rainy season.

Like many in the area, Gwako's family were Seventh Day Adventists. They are called that because they keep their "sabbath" on a Saturday. Although it uses the language of evangelical Christianity, Seventh Day Adventism is a dangerous cult, not a branch of the Christian Church. Among other things, it denies hell and points sinners to depend on their own law-keeping for salvation, not on the finished work of Christ. It accepts the writings of a woman called Ellen G White as having authority alongside Scripture.

Gwako's family were poor and they used to set a little table on the roadside near their mud hut. Here, they sold a few tomatoes and other things to supplement the family income. Gwako did not go to school, so each day the family carried him up to sit in the old wheelchair next to the table, where he would try to sell a little produce to the people passing by. There he could at least talk to people and lessen the boredom of the long, immobile days.

The family kept their "shop" open on the true Sabbath, the Lord's Day, the first day of the week. But after Gwako started attending the church, he refused to sell produce on that day. He would refuse even to be taken to the roadside where the table was. Even when he could not get to church, he

would rather spend a lonely Sabbath confined to the mud hut than be together with those who were breaking the Lord's Day. Although he was lame on both his feet, he still found a way to witness on the side of Christ.

You might feel that you can do very little for Christ. Perhaps you think you are too young, or too weak. But surely there is something you can do. Gwako did what he could – do you do what you can?

The months went by and Gwako's brother passed his primary school exams and obtained a place in a boarding school away from the village. This meant that during term time he would no longer be at home to push Gwako to the church. The congregation numbered well over 200, but no one was willing to push Gwako in the old wheelchair to hear the Word of God. He still wanted to come, but he was not able. The mission's ambulance sometimes collected him, but often it was busy taking patients to hospital. Eventually a boy was found who would push Gwako to church – provided he was paid for it. Gwako was always at church, whenever he could.

But what about you? How easy it is for most readers of this *Magazine* to get to church! Some of you have heard stories of how many miles people used to have to walk to church in all weathers. Let me ask you a question: Do you want to go to church? And more importantly, what do you do when you get there? Do you spend the time day-dreaming or thinking about your friends, or school, or your hobbies? Do you spend the time thinking about anything except the gospel?

Do you think about the words of the psalms you are singing? When the Word of God is read, do you receive it, knowing that it is able to make you wise unto salvation? Do you listen carefully to the prayers, so that you can put a hearty amen to them? Do you concentrate on the preaching of the Word, praying that the Lord would bless it to your soul, knowing that "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Romans 10:17)? I think Gwako did these things.

One day the minister received a message that Gwako was very sick in hospital. The minister and his wife went to visit him. His mother was with him. He was very weak, but it looked as if he was improving. Prayer was made for healing of body and soul. Gwako made it very clear that he thought this would be the last time that he would see the minister. Two hours after the minister left, he took a turn for the worse and quickly died, but not before he had insisted to his mother that he wanted the minister to take his funeral in accordance with the solemn practice of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland. He had always been bodily weak, but his spirit was strong – he wanted his family and neighbours to hear the gospel.

The minister went to Gwako's home and explained the true gospel to his

bereaved family. They agreed that the minister could take Gwako's funeral. It was a sad day when Gwako was buried. Many people were there. Many were Seventh Day Adventists. As they stood around Gwako's grave, some no doubt were hearing the pure gospel for the first time. A little while later the minister was given a photo of Gwako, who had asked that it be taken when he was in hospital and given to the minister. The minister still has that photo, and along with it, a hope that Gwako, who was lame on both his feet, is now with the Lord – a gospel Mephibosheth in the palace of King Jesus.

Job – Fearing God and Eschewing Evil

2. The Perfect Man (1)

Rev David Campbell

This series was originally a paper given at this year's Youth Conference. The first article provided an introduction to the subject.

Perfect. The Bible introduces Job like this: "There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright" (1:1). This does not mean that he never committed any sin. He rejects this for himself: "If I say, I am perfect, [my mouth] shall also prove me perverse" (9:20). There is only one of whom that was ever true – the Lord Jesus Christ, who is "holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners" (Hebrews 7:26). So what does it mean for Job to be a "perfect man"?

Sometimes the word is used to identify a man or woman as a believer or as a justified person. The perfect righteousness of Christ which is imputed to – that is, put to the account of – the believer is the basis on which God accepts him. And all his sin, original and actual, is wiped away and pardoned for Jesus' sake. He is justified freely by God's grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

Like all the saints of God, Job was first and foremost a believer in the Saviour promised to a ruined and lost world. He speaks of his Redeemer and of knowing that his Redeemer lives and that He will stand in the latter day on the earth (19:25-27). He depended, like all believers do, on the ransom price that was paid to deliver him from going down to the pit (33:24). His sins were pardoned, even when he wrestled with the question of whether they were or not and asked, "Why dost Thou not pardon my transgression?" (7:21). Job, like all the saints, depended on free grace and knew what it was to confess his sins and to obtain pardon. Being justified by faith he was in a state of peace with God. There was no condemnation to him. In this sense he was a perfect man – perfect in Christ's righteousness.

Do you have this perfection which alone will stand for you before the searching eye of God at last? Can you desire with Paul: to “be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness . . . but . . . the righteousness . . . of God by faith” (Philippians 3:9).

The Bible also uses the word *perfect* when it identifies the sincerity of heart that true believers have. John Calvin prefers the word *sound* as a translation. He gives the following explanation of the word that is used: “When there is no point of feigning [pretending], counterfeiting or hypocrisy in a man, but that he shows himself the same outwardly that he is inwardly, and specially . . . he layeth open his heart and all his thoughts and affections, as he desireth nothing but to consecrate and dedicate himself wholly unto God”.

Throughout the Book of Job you will see that Job is like this, even when accused of hypocrisy by his friends. This is the character of a godly person and how important it is! Hypocrisy and pretence are very common, but very evil, features of man’s fallen condition. We are to seek the grace of God to create in us the sincerity of heart that Job had.

Uprightness. The word literally means to be straight and points to his honesty or integrity in life. He is one who is guided by the rule – the law of God. That is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify God and enjoy Him, and all our actions and words and thoughts are to be measured and compared with it. The upright aim at that rule and do so with sincerity and honesty, even if never with perfection. This law-keeping (as we find later) has reference to both tables of the law – his duty to God and his duty to his fellow man.

Fearing God and eschewing evil. The title of our paper picks out these two phrases as summing up the character of Job. In one sense they just enlarge the ideas already given, of him being perfect and upright. This is what that uprightness involves – positively and negatively. But the phrases are also used to describe Job in the very areas where he will be tested and tried by Satan and accused by his friends. Does he really fear God honestly and sincerely, or for nothing, as Satan asks? Does he really avoid evil (*eschew* means to avoid), or is he a secret sinner and a hypocrite as his friends suggest and then accuse him?

The words identify what God approves and commends in His people and we are therefore to view them as His call to us. David in Psalm 34 points us in the same direction:

“What man is he that life desires, to see good would live long?

Thy lips refrain from speaking guile, and from ill words thy tongue.

Depart from ill, do good, seek peace, pursue it earnestly.

God’s eyes are on the just; His ears are open to their cry.”

Thomas Boston

1. Youth and Conversion

Frank Daubney

This is the first part of a paper given at this year's Youth Conference. It is based on the *Memoirs* that Boston wrote and also a biography, *Thomas Boston: His Life and Times*, written by Andrew Thomson. Both of these, and other works of Boston, can be obtained from the Free Presbyterian Bookroom.

Think of Scotland in the early 1700s: the Reformation had taken place 150 years before; the killing times of the Covenanter period were a recent memory; the Stuart family was still hopeful of winning back the throne of the United Kingdom; the country was almost entirely rural, and transport and communication between one part and another was very difficult. In the Church many people held to formal religion but there were some who, by the grace of God, lived lives of such outstanding holiness and gospel fervour that they shine as stars in the firmament. Now, 300 years later, they remain examples to us of righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience and meekness (1 Timothy 6:11). One of these was Thomas Boston.

Thomas Boston was born in 1676 in Duns, a town in the Scottish borders, about 50 miles from Edinburgh. He was the youngest of seven children, six of whom survived to become adults, which was unusual in those days. His mother was thought to be past child-bearing age, and the late baby, Thomas, was described as a "God's send" by a family friend. This was to be proved true in more ways than one. In his *Memoirs*, Boston describes his father as an intelligent and pious man, and his mother as prudent and virtuous.

These were times of great religious and civil disturbance. The Stuart governments tried to impose Episcopalianism on a people who sought to follow Presbyterianism. John Boston, Thomas's father, was fined and put in prison for refusing to attend Episcopal services. In later life, Thomas Boston wrote in his *Memoirs*, "When I was a little boy, I lay in the prison of Duns with him, to keep him company, the which I have often looked on as an earnest of what may be abiding me; but hitherto I have not had that trial". (He expected to have to endure persecution in the future himself. And there is a reference here to his future difficulties with the civil law in connection with the Oath of Abjuration, which we shall come to later.)

When Thomas was sent to school he was at first taught reading and spelling from the Song of Solomon and *The Shorter Catechism*. The school mistress was very fond of the gentle and attentive boy and would get him to read aloud to her. He in turn listened with wonder and delight to the many Bible stories she would tell.

At eight years of age, Thomas began to attend the grammar school, where he proved to be a clever and hard-working student. He describes himself as being “sober and harmless” and “preserved from the common vices of children in towns”. But he says he was “living without God in the world, unconcerned about the state of my soul”.

In 1687 King James II gave Presbyterians liberty to hold their own services in private houses and chapels. Very soon after that, the Presbyterians of the parish of Whitsome, four miles south-east of Duns, called Henry Erskine to be their minister; he was the father of the better-known Ebenezer and Ralph Erskine. Immediately John Boston and others from Duns started to attend the services; Thomas went with his father to hear the new minister. By means of Erskine’s preaching, he says, “it pleased the Lord to awaken me, and bring me under exercise about my soul’s state”. He was then about 12.

Two sermons in particular touched him. One was from Matthew 3:7: “O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” The second was from John 1:29: “Behold the Lamb of God”. “By these”, he says, “I was touched quickly after the first hearing, wherein I was like one amazed with some new and strange thing. Sure I am, I was in good earnest concerned for a saving interest in Jesus Christ. My soul went out after Him, and the place of His feet was glorious in mine eyes.”

Many of the company travelling to and from Whitsome were men of deep religious experience and Christian knowledge, and Boston very much benefited from their conversation. He found it so edifying and cheering that he says he did not even feel tired as they walked to and fro in all weathers.

In 1689, when Thomas was 13, he left the grammar school. He and his father both felt he should become a minister, but the Church of Scotland required all who entered the ministry to undergo university training. When John Boston looked into the cost of sending his son to university, he discovered it was beyond his means. He tried several ways of funding Thomas’s further education but to no avail. At this point, Thomas became discouraged and thought of going into a trade, but his father would not hear of it. Eventually the young Boston was employed in a lawyer’s office (probably as a kind of clerk, or secretary) which he looked back on as a favourable providence. It taught him the discipline of working and, in addition, he acquired an orderly way of working and a style of writing papers which would prove to be useful to him in later years.

Later, as a young minister, he was made Clerk to the Synod of Merse and Teviotdale. One of the members, who was a judge, said Boston was the best clerk he had ever known in any court, in church or state.

He looked back on this period of his life as one in which he was tried with

many disappointments, including the death of his mother, but in all his difficulties he was brought to lean upon the Lord. Two years later, when his father's circumstances changed for the better, he was able to begin his university studies clear of any debt.

For Junior Readers

The Sailors' Prayer

Near the southern tip of Manhattan Island in the city of New York lies Fulton Street. It is not far from Wall Street, the big new One World Trade Centre and the 9/11 Memorial. On that street, in the 1850s, stood the Old North Dutch Church. Jeremiah Lanphier was a member of that congregation and in 1857 he became a lay missionary. He was to work in that area, bringing the gospel to the needy people of that large city.

He was a man of prayer and, day after day, he prayed, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" Day after day he pled with the Lord for a blessing on the people of New York. He longed for the salvation of the perishing thousands around him. He gave out tracts. He knocked on doors to tell people about the gospel.

Then he thought it would be good to hold a midday prayer meeting. It would be held one day each week from 12 till 1pm, when most business men in the area took their lunch break. They could come when they were free and stay as long as their duties allowed. The first week 6 people came, the next week 20, the next again around 40.

From then on, the meetings were held every day and became so crowded that other rooms had to be opened up at the same time, for the same reason. Before long other churches in the city started their own daily prayer meetings. This was the beginning of times of great spiritual blessing, a time that became known as the 1858 revival.

In answer to prayer, many lives were changed; many souls were saved. This was because the Holy Spirit worked in their hearts. Many people took note of the answers to prayer they had received, both in spiritual things and in other ways. They wanted other people to praise and thank the Lord with them.

A sailor told of an amazing answer to prayer. In a storm at sea, the ship he was in began to let in water. The captain did all he could to stop the ship from sinking, but at last he realised he could not save her. He called the crew of 32 together. He told them that, as the ship was going to sink very soon, they would all drown.

Although he was not a Christian believer, he realised they were all facing death. So he then asked them, “Are you prepared?”

Two of the sailors stepped forward and said, “Captain, we believe we are prepared”.

“Then pray for me and for your shipmates,” he begged.

There and then, in the middle of the storm, they all knelt down together, and these two men prayed very earnestly. They asked God to save them if it was His will, and to make them all His children, in life or death.

Before they began to pray, someone had noticed a large ship a long way off – so far away that they thought there was no point in trying to put up a distress signal. So they just kept on praying.

While they were still on their knees praying, they heard a noise. As they looked over the side of their ship, they saw a lifeboat! The men on the distant ship had actually spotted them and realised that they were in danger. So they sent their lifeboat to help them! Captain and crew were all taken on board and on to safety.

Was that not amazing? The rescued sailors were so impressed by this clear answer to prayer that they decided to hold a daily prayer meeting for the rest of the voyage. Again God answered their prayers. By the time they landed at the port they were sailing to, it seems that all the men had been converted.

Their God is still the same. He tells us in the Bible: “I am the Lord, I change not”. The God who caused the sailors in the storm to be rescued and who also saved their souls is able to answer your prayers for ordinary things and for spiritual blessings! “Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while he is near!”

J van Kralingen

Mopani Trees and Sunflowers

Mbumba Mission Hospital in Zimbabwe is surrounded by what is known as “mopani bush”. The word *mopani* comes from the name of the medium-sized tree which is common in a dry area. Each leaf of the mopani tree is formed of two lobes which, when the sun rises in its strength, fold together and the edge of the folded leaf follows the sun in its course across the sky. The tree thus conserves moisture in an area where rain is scarce.

Early one summer we planted a row of sunflowers in front of our house. They grew to about 6 feet, each with a large bright yellow flower balancing like a small plate on top of a single stem. In contrast to the leaves of the mopani tree, these flowers tilted towards the sun as it rose in the morning.

They moved along with the sun and each other, to catch its full warmth as it crossed the sky.

Some people, like the mopani tree, close their hearts, lest the “light of the knowledge of God in the face of Jesus Christ” should fall on them. Others, like the sunflower, look for that same Jesus and constrain Him to come in. Then they say, “Did not our heart burn within us, while He talked with us by the way?”

Which do we resemble: the mopani tree or the sunflower?

JRT

For Younger Readers

A Good Man's Thoughts

Matthew Henry lived a long time ago. He was a good man. He became a minister in the city of Chester and, for the last two years of his life, he was a minister in London.

During Matthew Henry's time in Chester, he preached on every part of the Bible. Later he started to write several books. Between them, these books explain the whole Bible. Perhaps there is a set of them in your home.

One day Matthew Henry was on his way home; he did not have very far to go. Then four robbers caught up with him and took away all the money he was carrying – though it was not a huge amount.

Later he thought about what had happened. He wrote down four of his thoughts.

First, he told himself how thankful he should be to God. He had travelled a long way during his life, but he had never been robbed before. God had watched over him.

Second, Matthew Henry noted the robbers' love of money and how evil it was. If they did not repent, they would lose their souls because of their sin.

Third, he saw that Satan was working in these sinners' hearts, tempting them so that they would sin.

Fourth, Matthew Henry thought how foolish it is to be too fond of money. We may so quickly have it all taken away.

We need money to buy the things we need. But we should not love it. What we should really love is God and the good things He can do for our souls.

The Pot of Money

It was a time of war, and two rich brothers decided that they must bury their money and other valuables out of sight. They were afraid that soldiers would come and steal what they owned. Late one dark evening they went out, with spades and a lantern, into the garden behind their house, to hide their possessions away. They were sure no one would see them.

But they were wrong. A poor neighbour was still out working in his garden. He noticed the two men on the other side of the fence and at last realised what they were doing. He watched quietly as the men dug a deep hole, lowered into it the pot which contained their money, filled in the hole again, and were very careful to leave everything as if no one had ever taken a spade to the ground. Looking around carefully to see that no one was watching, they went inside and off to bed.

Of course, the poor neighbour had seen them. No sooner were the two brothers out of sight than he was ready to jump over the fence, dig up the treasure and take it for himself. Then the words came into his mind: "Thou shalt not steal". Afraid of further temptation, he rushed into his house. After praying with his wife, they went to bed. But he could not sleep. "Suppose I take only a little of it," he told himself; "I need not take it all. And yet if I did take all that the pot contains, these men would still be rich."

Yet his conscience protested, "It would be a theft after all". And he asked God to preserve him from thieving. Then he thought about his children and how the family might quite possibly end up with nothing at all to eat. But he prayed, "Lead me not into temptation", and he grasped his bedclothes as if to prevent him going outside to steal.

"No human being can possibly know", Satan whispered. Then the village clock struck one; the poor man was sure that no one would be around at that time of night to see him. "I could get the pot out in less than 10 minutes," he told himself, "and then I would be a rich man".

But conscience warned him that, even if no human eye could see him, God would, and He would one day call him before His judgement seat. "No," he now told himself firmly, "I will not do it. How often my father preached to me, 'Honesty is the best policy'." And he asked God not to forsake him.

Still the temptation continued until daylight began to shine into his room. Then a thought entered his mind. He jumped out of bed, pulled on some clothes and went quietly from the room so that he would not disturb anyone. Then he went to the next house.

Perhaps his neighbours had not slept well after the excitement of burying

their valuables; certainly they very quickly answered the poor man's loud knock on their door. "Listen," he told the men, "last night you buried a pot of money in your garden. I saw you do it and have not had one minute's sleep the whole night for thinking about it; indeed it has almost made a thief of me. And now I come to beg you to dig up the pot of money at once and bury it in some place unknown to me". He wanted to get rid of his struggles against conscience and get back his peace of mind. "God", he told the men, "will take care of me and mine in time to come, I trust, as He has done in the past."

Now let us learn some lessons from this story. *First*, it is not a sin to be tempted. But it is a sin to give in to temptation, even if we go no further than, for just a moment, to consider doing what we are tempted to do. We may have sympathy with a poor man thinking of providing for his children in an unscriptural way, but "the thought of foolishness is sin" (Proverbs 24:9), for it is foolish even to *consider* departing from the wise ways that God has shown us so that we would walk in them.

Second, we are to resist the devil and his temptations, as we read in James 4:7: "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you". Yet our own resolutions to do so are not enough; we are much too weak. We must look to God for strength, for Jesus's sake.

Third, we see the power of temptation. If we give in to it, it is not likely to go away; instead it is much more likely to return with even greater force.

Fourth, we should do all in our power to remove whatever is a source of temptation; that was why the man asked his neighbours to shift the pot of money to another place so that he would not know where to look for it. In other circumstances, it might be necessary for *us* to go away from the source of temptation, even if it costs us a lot to do so.

Fifth, assuming the poor man was converted, we should notice that God kept him from outward sin. We too should pray, like David, that God would keep us back "from presumptuous sins", and add, "Let them not have dominion over me" (Psalm 19:13). Yes, God does keep unconverted people from sinning more than they do, but every time they reject Christ and salvation through Him, they are provoking God to leave them to go further and further in the ways of sin.

Sixth, when we are tempted to sin, let us remember, as the poor man did, that we must give account to God, on the Day of judgement, for all that we have done. How much we need to have all our sins forgiven!

Seventh, above all, we need to have a holy, living principle in our hearts. We need our souls to be transformed by the saving work of the Holy Spirit. Then, by God's grace, we will want to resist temptation and sin.

The Young People's Magazine

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Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them
(Ecclesiastes 12:1)

Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland

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Looking Around Us

How Long to Live?

According to an article on the BBC website, if you ask people how long they want to live, many will answer: “As long as I have my health”.

How old is that? A recent study has suggested that the limit on human life may be 115, with perhaps some exceptions (a lady in France died in 1997 aged 122). There is no doubt that the average lifespan has been increasing. People born today are likely to live almost twice as long as those born in the nineteenth century. Among the reasons for this are: a better diet, safer places of work and progress in medical care. Thus people are less likely to die from, for instance, infections, strokes and heart attacks.

So people in the UK live, on average, for about 80 years. Obviously not everyone will live to be 80 and many people will not be blessed with good health for their whole lifetime.

And we cannot promise ourselves that we will live to the age of 80, and certainly not to 115. No matter how young we may be, we cannot promise ourselves that we will live for another year, or even for another moment. We just cannot tell how long God will spare us in this world.

So how should we live? We should want to live to God’s glory, and part of living to God’s glory is to turn from our sins and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation from sin. Those who have done so will want to follow Him for the rest of their lives.

Many people who know something about the danger of being sent to a lost eternity promise themselves that they will turn to God when death draws closer. They would not dare think of leaving repentance till they are 114; they know that very, very few people will reach that age. But perhaps 79? That would be most unwise too.

In practice people are more likely to put off salvation for just a few more months or a few more years. But when that time has passed, they will put the matter off for a few more months or years. To live in this way is the exact opposite of living to the glory of God.

Suppose you do live till you are exactly 80, are you going to live your next 60 years (or whatever it may be) in the service of sin and Satan? How much safer to seek the Lord now – not even leaving it till next Sabbath. Then you will be ready, no matter how unexpectedly death may come. What is more, if you come to Christ in faith, you will have God as your Father, watching over you, supplying all your needs, and protecting you from temptations and other dangers. And you will begin to live to God’s glory.

As another year draws to a close, think of how time is passing and how your time will, sooner or later, run out completely. Make use of your present opportunity – while, I hope, you have a good degree of health – to seek the Lord. Do so earnestly and urgently, for He is saying to you: “Seek ye the Lord *while He may be found*, call ye upon Him *while He is near*: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him” (Isaiah 55:6,7).

The Sands of Time (4)

This poem, by Anne Ross Cousin, turns into poetry some of what Samuel Rutherford (1600-1661), the godly minister of Anwoth, wrote. Here are three more verses.

I've wrestled on towards heaven,
'Gainst storm and wind and tide;
Now, like a weary traveller
That leaneth on his guide,
Amid the shades of evening,
While sinks life's lingering sand,
I hail the glory dawning
From Immanuel's land.

Deep waters crossed life's pathway,
The hedge of thorns was sharp;
Now, these lie all behind me,
O for a well-tuned harp!
O to join hallelujah
With yon triumphant band,
Who sing, where glory dwelleth,
In Immanuel's land!

With mercy and with judgement
My web of time He wove,
And aye the dews of sorrow
Were lustered with His love.
I'll bless the hand that guided,
I'll bless the heart that planned,
When throned where glory dwelleth
In Immanuel's land.

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