

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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Cover Picture: Near Sengera, Kisii, Kenya. See page 171.

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Good Advice for a Worldly Man

John Newton had been a ship's captain and later worked in the port of Liverpool. He went on to become a minister in Olney, north of London, before moving to a church in central London. After he reached the age of 80, some of his friends suggested that it was time for him to stop preaching. But he answered, "I cannot stop". He wanted to go on preaching while he was still able to speak. He was so conscious of the ungodly life he once led and, no doubt, just as anxious to do good to the souls of the people who came to hear him in his church.

Yet perhaps more important than his sermons – especially for future generations – were the letters that Newton wrote to a large number of people. They are full of wise, scriptural advice and are well worth reading today, over 200 years after he died. One of these letters was written to a man who did not believe the Bible and lived for his worldly pleasures. Let us summarise what Newton had to say to him.

He made the point that he had an obvious advantage over the other man: he had seen both sides of life. He meant that he had experienced the ungodly side of life in his unconverted days *and* he had experienced life as a believer – while the other man had *only* experienced ungodliness. If the worldly man was to send Newton a list of his pleasures, he might speak of how he enjoyed going to the theatre, playing cards, drinking in a tavern, dancing and listening to concerts. But Newton could answer that he had tried most of these again and again; he knew the most that could be gained from them; so he had no desire at all to spend time on them any more. He would prefer, he said, to be a worm crawling on the ground than to be a man whiling away his life on such insignificant trifles.

Newton pointed out that his friend, while he seemed to be a sensible man, was wasting his abilities, as he had no higher purpose in life than these childish ways of wasting his time. One can believe that Newton was sad at heart because his friend was not beginning to live to the glory of God, which should be man's chief purpose in life. Yes, he got up early and went late to bed, but only to gather in more money so that he would have more to spend.

When Newton used to live that kind of life, he found these things, as he now recalled, “unsatisfying and empty to the last degree”. The only benefit he had from them – as he then thought – was that they relieved him “from the trouble and burden of thinking”. Newton added, “You know all that a life of pleasure can give, and I know it likewise”.

But Newton now knew better pleasures, and he listed some of them. He felt the comfort of being assured that his sins were pardoned; he was in the habit of having “communion with the God who made heaven and earth”; he could calmly rely on God’s providence; he was cheered by the “prospect of a better life in a better world”. He spoke too of the pleasure he often found in reading the Bible and praying, “and in the sort of preaching and conversation which you despise”. But he was afraid that his friend would think as little of such happiness as he [Newton] did of his friend’s happiness.

Then he pointed out where the difference between them lay: “You condemn that which you have never tried. You know no more of these things than a blind man does of colours.” He did not begin to understand the happiness that converted people may experience when, for instance, they are engaged in worshipping God.

And readers today may think that they could not be happy if they were converted – that they could not be happy without their worldly pleasures. But when people are converted, God gives them a new nature. That was why Newton was able to enjoy reading his Bible and praying to God.

Newton assumed that the other man rather pitied him for living as he did. He asked, “What do I lose upon my plan that should make me so worthy of your pity?” Newton assumed that he ate his “food with as much pleasure as you can do, though perhaps with less cost and variety”. He asked, “Is your sleep sounder than mine?” And did Newton not enjoy company as much as the other man? He did not spend his days “in laugh and sing-song”, but that was not the kind of way he wanted to spend his time; besides, it was his *duty* to make a good use of his time.

He knew that his friend was thinking of getting married. But did the man think that, by following his godless ideas, he could be happier than Newton as a married man? He wished that the man would be as happy as he was in his marriage to Mary, but he reminded his friend that he did not need to reject the Bible to enjoy “the best and the most that this life can afford”.

Newton went on to say that “the present life is not made up of pleasurable incidents only”. He was thinking of pain, sickness, disappointment, injury, among other things. “And”, he asked, “can you bear these trials better than I?” Of course he could not. One main reason was: “You cannot view these trials as appointed by a wise and heavenly Father [for] your good; you can-

not taste the sweetness of His promises, nor feel the secret supports of His strength in an hour of affliction”.

This man, who was unconverted – and, indeed, completely careless about his soul – could not entrust his cares to God, and then be conscious of a sense of relief for his spirit; he could not recognise *God* bringing about his deliverance from such troubles. He knew no more about these things than he did of being able to fly. But what about Newton? He found these spiritual matters to be realities: “When my worldly concerns have been most thorny and discouraging, I have once and again felt the most of that peace which the world can neither give nor take away”.

Then Newton asked more questions: “How do you like being alone? Would you not give something for that happy secret which could enable you to pass a rainy day pleasantly” – if he was on his own, without having work to do, or some entertainment to enjoy? “What a poor scheme of pleasure is yours,” Newton asked, if his friend would not give some time to thinking?

His friend needed to think seriously about himself, about his life, about his soul and about eternity – not to ignore them, as Newton too once did. And we are all in danger of acting like this. But we must all die. We cannot afford to give all our attention to the things of this life, which we must leave behind. We must think seriously, not least about the fact that we are sinners and that we need to be saved from our sins, so that we will be ready to die, whenever that may be. And we dare not assume that death is still very far away; indeed it may quite possibly be unexpectedly near.

In particular, we ought to think over these words: “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; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon” (Isaiah 55:6,7).

Newton drew towards a conclusion by saying, “May He who has opened my eyes open yours! He only can do it. I do not expect to convince you by anything I can say as of myself; but if He be pleased to make use of me as His instrument, then you will be convinced. How should I then rejoice! . . . May God show you your true self and your true taste; then you will attentively listen to what you disdain [despise] to hear of – His goodness in providing redemption and pardon for the chief of sinners, through Him who died upon the cross for sins not His own.”

This article is addressed particularly to those who do not think seriously about life and death, about sin and salvation, who still have worldly attitudes and who seek their enjoyment in worldly pleasures. May this gracious God make the article an instrument of good to those who read it!

Samuel the Prophet

4. The Israelites Ask for a King

Rev Neil M Ross

This is another part of a paper given at the 2019 Youth Conference. Part 3 was about Samuel's work in leading the people back to God and so bringing about a reformation.

Israel now enjoyed a lengthy period of peace under the rule of Samuel, who continued living in his native town of Ramah. "There he judged Israel;" we are told. He judged the people at other locations also – once a year at Bethel, Gilgal and Mizpeh.

In his work of judging he not only gave judgement on disputes, but also, as one commentator says, he "governed them, reformed all abuses against God or man, took care that the laws of God should be observed and executed, and willful transgressors punished". Also, as another commentator observes, "he assured them, in God's name, of the pardon of their sins, upon their repentance". Today the call of the gospel to sinners, however great and many their sins, still is: "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; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon" (Isaiah 55:7).

At Ramah, Samuel also "built an altar unto the Lord", we are told, which may seem strange when it was forbidden by God to build an altar in any place apart from the tabernacle. "It was done by prophetic inspiration and Divine permission," says one commentator, "as appears by God's acceptance of the sacrifices offered on it."

Samuel also conducted what we may call a college at Naioth beside Ramah, over which he was appointed (1 Samuel 19:19,20), and in which young men studied to be teachers and preachers of the word of God and were trained in sacred song. His college was the forerunner of the schools of the prophets run by Elijah and Elisha, and even of modern universities which were founded on Christian principles and included tuition in divinity (although sadly most of these have become liberal).

As Samuel continued with his work he began to feel the burden of old age. So he appointed his sons, Joel and Abiah, to be deputy judges. They did not follow the good example of their father but took bribes and were unjust (1 Samuel 8:1-3). In their love of money they ignored God's requirement that judges be, as Exodus 18:21 says, "such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness". This reminds us of the Scripture saying, "The love of money is the root of all evil" (1 Timothy 6:10). We must beware of this snare and

comply with the words of Christ, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33).

The result of the corruption of Samuel’s sons was that the people wanted another form of government and therefore asked Samuel to appoint a king over them. Although Samuel was displeased with the request – no doubt because God was their King – he took the matter to God in prayer. God instructed Samuel to listen to the people but also to tell them the kind of king they would have. God also informed Samuel, “They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them” (1 Samuel 8:7). God was justly displeased with them.

Let us learn that God is the same God still. His holy anger is against those who reject Christ the King and say, “We will not have this man to reign over us” (Luke 19:14).

Samuel faithfully relayed God’s message to the people, leaving them in no doubt that the king they would get would tax them heavily and deprive them of much of their freedom and property. They turned a deaf ear to these warnings and insisted, “Nay; but we will have a king over us; that we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles” (1 Samuel 8:19,20).

Again, Samuel spread the matter before God in prayer. God’s answer was, “Hearken unto their voice, and make them a king” (1 Samuel 8:22). So God gave them a king in His anger. This shows us that it is a judgement from God when ungodly people are given ungodly rulers. It reminds us of the saying, Every country has the government it deserves. May God raise up rulers who will give the first place to Him who is “King of kings and Lord of lords”.

Samuel was now to meet the man whom he was to anoint as King of Israel. That man was Saul, of the tribe of Benjamin, who came to Ramah when searching for his father’s missing asses. When Samuel met Saul, he knew that this was the man he was to anoint as king, for God had told him so the previous day, and confirmed it to him when they met.

Next day, Samuel accompanied Saul out of Ramah, and then told him to stand still for a while. “Then Samuel took a vial of oil,” we are told, “and poured it upon his [Saul’s] head, and kissed him, and said, Is it not because the Lord hath anointed thee to be captain over His inheritance?” (1 Samuel 10:1). Although Samuel had been displeased when the people asked for a king, he sincerely accepted the will of God that they should have a king.

Here is an example for us to follow when we meet with happenings in God’s providence which are contrary to our wishes. We ought to consent humbly at such times and say to God, “Thy will be done”, and, “Good Thou art, and good Thou doest”.

Samuel then summoned another national gathering of Israel before God at Mizpeh. He recounted occasions when God had saved them from their enemies, and reminded them that they had rejected God by asking for a king. He then chose the tribe of Benjamin by lot (and therefore by God's providential leading) and out of that tribe he chose Saul.

Samuel presented Saul to the people and asked, "See ye him whom the Lord hath chosen, that there is none like him among all the people?" Then all the people shouted, "God save the king" (1 Samuel 10:24). Some time after Saul was proclaimed as king-elect, he delivered the city of Jabesh-gilead from being besieged by the Ammonites and attributed the victory to God. (See 1 Samuel 11:1-13.)

Samuel now publicly confirmed Saul as king at Gilgal. There, we are told, "they made Saul king before the Lord". They sealed the event by sacrificing "peace offerings before the Lord" (1 Samuel 11:15). Here was a promising start to the new monarchy – but, as we shall soon see, it was not long before Samuel was sorely disappointed in Saul.

Similarly, it is disappointing when someone, having begun to seek the Lord or run the Christian race, grows careless, neglects worship, and indulges in sinful pleasures – when, for example, that person leaves home to begin work or studying. This question confronts such a person, "Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?" (Galatians 5:7). Remember Lot's wife.

John Calvin – His Life and Work

3. Minister in Geneva

Mr F R Daubney

Last month's section of this Youth Conference paper told about Calvin helping the newly-elected Rector of the University in Paris with his address to the University. The speech contained Protestant ideas, with the result that the Rector had to flee and so did Calvin.

In August, 1536, having settled some family affairs, Calvin was on his way from Noyon to Basel and passed through Geneva. He was recognised, and someone told William Farel, the Protestant religious leader in the city. There had been many difficulties in introducing the pure doctrine to Geneva, and Farel, a strong-headed man, at once concluded that Calvin was the man he needed, and that he must secure his services at once. Calvin insisted that he was staying in Geneva for only one night and that he was on his way to Basel where he intended to serve God with a life devoted to writing.

Farel would take no refusal, accused Calvin of refusing God's call, and went so far as to call God's curse upon his head if he should persist in his refusal. Timid and averse to public life, Calvin was overcome by the protests and urgent appeals of the older Reformer and consented. After paying a short visit to Basel, he settled in Geneva as Farel's colleague. Their friendship lasted for the rest of their lives, with Calvin's influence being more prominent, both in matters of theology, and in the practical affairs of the Church.

For two years Farel and Calvin worked together for the spread of the gospel, the reform of morals, and the strengthening of the Church in the city of Geneva. In the autumn of 1536, the two ministers attended a conference in Lausanne, on the opposite shore of Lake Geneva. They disputed successfully with the supporters of the Papacy, with the result that this important city adhered to the cause of the Reformation.

But in Geneva the work that Farel and Calvin had to do was no easy matter. They had an intelligent population to instruct but one that was largely ignorant of the truth. They had, on the one hand, to guard against the efforts of Romanists who were ever ready to re-introduce the old faith and, on the other hand, false teachers rising from the newly-formed Protestant communities. In addition, the teaching of pure morals was crucial to the Reformers, and this was even more offensive to the people than their teaching of other truths.

For a time, all seemed to go well. A confession of faith was drawn up which was accepted by the City Council; a catechism was prepared for the use of the young; public teaching and preaching were maintained and the citizens attended well. Education was promoted, marriage customs were reformed, and the amusements of the people were regulated. On 29 July 1537, as arranged by Farel and Calvin, and commanded by the Government, the people of the city assembled in the cathedral, and solemnly committed themselves to the Reformed faith. Although some objected to this – either on the grounds of religious liberty, or because it imposed a moral yoke that they could not bear – it is evident that the people generally acted sincerely and heartily. But the Genevan Government proposed that those who would not give their commitment should be banished from the city.

Farel and Calvin were determined to establish the Church in Geneva according to the pattern required of Christians in the New Testament. Accordingly, they were not satisfied with only teaching; they also felt they must maintain discipline. They regarded the Lord's Supper as an ordinance to be observed only by the holy and upright and refused to permit the wicked or worldly to sit at the Lord's table. These restrictions were unpopular, and at the next city election the Libertine party came into power. They opposed

Farel, and argued that he and Calvin were French, not Swiss, and wanted to take away the Genevans' ancient liberties.

The newly-elected Council, knowing the two ministers would object, resolved that the Lord's Supper should be celebrated as it was in the city of Berne, with unleavened bread. The Reformers regarded this practice as savouring of Roman Catholicism and Judaism. The Roman Catholics favoured unleavened bread, or the wafer, because they believed that the consecrated bread was now the actual flesh of Christ and feared that crumbs from what was still ordinary bread could fall and be lost.

At the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which begins the day after the Passover, Jewish families remove all leaven from their homes and eat only unleavened bread. While Calvin had said he had no strong views on leavened or unleavened bread, Farel had decreed previously that leavened bread should be used. The two ministers were unwilling simply to follow the lead of the Bernese church and preferred to wait for a decision to be made by the forthcoming Synod; they did not want to permit the civil authorities in Geneva to decide church practices.

In early 1538, the two ministers seriously considered whether they could profitably observe the usual communion service. If the Supper was observed, a scene of confusion and disorder was very likely, so they decided it was best to omit the Lord's Supper from the service. But the Council decided that, if the ministers would not observe the sacrament, they should not be allowed to preach. Farel and Calvin both resolved that they would not administer the Supper but that they would preach.

Farel appeared in the pulpit of St Gervais' church, which was crowded and in a state of excitement. And when he boldly asserted that the Supper would not be celebrated, and denounced disorder and sinful behaviour, the hatred of his enemies broke every restraint and they shouted abuse. Farel weathered the storm and finished his sermon and, under the protection of his friends, got away in safety.

Calvin preached that morning at St Peter's without interference. But in the evening, at the church of St Francis, a disturbance broke out and swords were drawn by the rival parties in the congregation, though no blood was shed. The Council acted without delay. Sentence was passed dismissing the ministers, and banishing them from the city within three days. They received the sentence with calmness and dignity. Farel simply answered, "Well and good; it is well; it is from God". And Calvin remarked, "Had we been serving men, our reward would indeed have been poor. But we serve a great Master, who, far from failing to reward His servants, pays them what He does not owe them!"

The Arrows of the King

Rev K M Watkins

They were showing us their arrows. They were homemade, but it was frightening to think of them hitting someone. One arrowhead looked worse than the rest – it was sharper and more jagged. They were quick to explain. If anyone was hit by that arrow and survived, no local hospital or doctor would be able to remove it. The victim, afraid for his life and feeling that he had the sentence of death in his body, would have to be transported all the way to the country's main hospital in the capital city, six hours away. Only there, with all its resources and equipment, could a doctor be found with the skill needed to perform what would be a difficult and complicated operation.

The men that were speaking to us were the “arrowmen” at the Church's former Kenya Mission, in Sengera, Kisii. They worked through the night as security guards, to defend the mission compound, property and people. Robberies in Kenya would almost always be armed, and the guards would be the first to suffer the violence of any attack. Back in April 1998 that had actually happened. So, to deter any repeat of that, and in self-defence, all the night guards were armed, some of them with bows and arrows. If they had been forced to use their weapons, anyone hit by that particular arrow would have faced a long and painful road journey to Kenyatta National Hospital in Nairobi.

It made us think of the arrows in Psalm 45:5. We often sing of them in the metrical version:

“Thine arrows sharply pierce the heart of th’ en’mies of the King;
And under Thy subjection the people down do bring”.

These are the arrows of King Jesus, when by His Word and Spirit He convinces sinners of their guilt. The psalmist himself had been hit by these arrows, as we sing in Psalm 38:2:

“For in me fast Thine arrows stick, Thine hand doth press me sore”.

In Jerusalem, when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Day of Pentecost, 3000 souls were pierced by the King's arrows through the preaching of Peter, for “when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37).

They had been pricked by the arrows of conviction of sin, especially the sin of crucifying Jesus. They had not only broken the King's laws, but there in Jerusalem they had rejected the King Himself. Our unbelief has done the same. It is not only that we have failed to keep God's commandments. We

have also rejected King Jesus, refusing to have Him save us or reign over us. This is a great sin, and it should pain us in our conscience when we consider the evil we have done.

The arrows of conviction went deep into the hearts of Peter's guilty hearers, tearing to shreds their self-righteousness and putting them into confusion. In desperation they asked, "What shall we do?" How could they ever get these arrows out again? How could they be healed of these painful wounds? They had sinned. They had destroyed themselves. What could they do? Where could they go for help? Who could help them? What could be done to bind up these gashes of guilt? They felt death in these wounds – how could they be saved?

Peter directed them to the promise of the gospel, to Jesus Christ and to conversion: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation" (Acts 2:38-40). By the saving grace of God, the result was wonderful: 3000 souls "gladly received his word" (verse 41).

Returning to the guards' arrow, there was no hospital in the whole of Kenya that could help except that one in Nairobi. Some might have tried hospitals closer to home, but they would always be disappointed. So it is spiritually. When convicted of sin, sinners are tempted to try other hospitals rather than going to the only one that can actually help them.

Some go to the *Worldly Diversions* hospital. This is the first resort for many, being nearest to home and the easiest to get to. Frightened by a sight of their sin, and feeling the arrow in their hearts, they try to shrug it off, by immersing themselves in the world, with all its pursuits, pleasures and profits, hoping that the pain will wear off and the fears will subside. But this hospital does not heal anyone. All its patients are on the broad way that leads to destruction. It may help sinners to forget about the arrows for a time, but it cannot remove them. One day, they will be felt again, but then it will be the pains of hell tormenting them for ever.

Some go to the *Good Works* hospital. Having been wounded by the law, which showed them their sin, they return to the same law, trying to keep the very commandments that they had previously broken. Have they done many evil works? Well, they will try to do good works, and hopefully that will gradually ease these arrows out of their conscience. Have they displeased the King by their sins? Well, they will try to please Him from now on. This hospital is very busy, with its patients going about to establish their own

righteousness. But it is impossible to keep God's laws perfectly. No one can remove the arrow of conviction for sin by good works. Their works will never be good enough to remove the arrow.

Some try the *Religious Duties* hospital, where the patients turn to a constant round of religious activities to remove the painful arrows. The patients, filled with zeal, are busy all day long – and during the night sometimes too – praying, reading the Bible, attending church and hearing sermons. They may even be found fasting and denying their bodies many lawful things, for the sake of getting their souls healed. This is still a long way from the hospital that can really help. The King's arrows cannot be removed by our religious efforts. Only the King Himself can do that. Those who remain at this hospital will never be healed.

Some go no further than the *False Peace* hospital. It promises quick and easy healing to its patients. Sinners are told that they can be saved without repentance, that they can believe in Jesus and be forgiven whilst going on in a life of sin, and that they do not need to be separate from the world. They are told that their arrow wounds are not as serious as first thought, and they just need a bandage put over the surface. No surgery is needed, the sinner is told. This hospital is full of doctors preaching their false gospel, but they are all "physicians of no value" (Job 13:4). "They have healed . . . the hurt of the . . . people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace" (Jeremiah 6:14). No mere surface treatments will do any good at all. Sin should not be treated lightly, in a shallow way. That may soothe the pain of conviction temporarily, but it does not go to the heart of the matter, and it leaves the arrows in the heart, festering away, beneath the surface.

Only at the *True Gospel* hospital can sinners find real relief from the pain of sin's guilt. Only in the good news, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, can forgiveness be found. Only the gospel of Christ deals with sin and provides atonement for sin, thus removing the arrow of conviction and healing the wound it caused.

There is no doctor that can help, apart from the Great Physician of the gospel, Jesus Christ, the King Himself. The spiritually sick need a physician, and this is the Physician they need. Only He has the skill and the compassion to handle the arrow wounds that have pierced the hearts of His enemies. He is the only Physician that can heal the hurt of the people.

Never does a case arrive at His gospel hospital that is too hard or too complicated for Him to handle. The wounds might be infected with much poison, the patient may have tried all the other hospitals, the soul might be ready to perish, the arrows may have penetrated very deep indeed. But Christ does all things well. He helped the leper by curing all his

infectious wounds. How deeply the arrows wounded Saul's heart when he heard on the Damascus road that he had been persecuting the Lord of glory! But the Gospel Physician soon removed the arrow of conviction and healed the wounds, so that this enemy of the King became His servant, falling at His feet.

The operation to remove the guards' special arrow could be done only at the big central hospital. Only there would a surgeon be found able to conduct the operation with success. So it is with sinners. Nothing less than open heart surgery is needed. And that is what King Jesus does. That is what He did with Lydia – He opened her heart. This was a true conversion from sin to God. In a true conversion, sin's wounds are probed very deeply. The work of the Spirit of the King goes to the very heart of the matter, and He that wounded with the law is the One who tenderly binds up with His gospel of free grace, as He forgives sin through His death on the cross. Only He can remove His own arrows. So we should all be going to Him.

For Younger Readers

Who Should We Love?

Mr Herring was a minister. Everyone knew that he loved even his worst enemies.

There was another man called Dr Lamb, who treated the minister very badly. One day, Dr Lamb was on a journey. But something happened and Dr Lamb broke his leg. Some men kindly carried him to a hotel.

Mr Herring was also on a journey and he was staying in the same hotel for the night. At family worship that evening, Mr Herring prayed very earnestly and kindly for Dr Lamb. Everyone who heard the minister praying like this was very surprised.

Afterwards, someone asked Mr Herring why he prayed like this for a man who did not deserve it. He explained, "The greater enemy he is, the more he needs our prayers".

Mr Herring was a disciple of Christ, following Christ and learning from Him. So the minister went on to speak of one way that we can prove we are Christ's disciples: it is by loving such people and praying for them.

It is not easy to love those who do bad things to us. So we must

ask God to help us to do so; we must ask Him to give us new hearts so that we will act in a right way to those who are not nice to us. When you feel angry against someone, remember Mr Herring and how he loved his enemies.

For Junior Readers

Just One Tree

Do you know where China is? It is the fourth largest country in the world (after Russia, Canada and the USA). Many Christian missionaries over the years have spent their lives bringing the gospel to the Chinese people. One of these was Dan Smith.

Dan was born in the north of England in 1907. His mother came from a godly, Scottish Covenanter background. When he was young, the Presbyterian ministers he heard made deep impressions on him. When he was 17 another young man from his work invited him to a service in his church. As a result he was converted; he came to know the Lord Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God who had purchased salvation for sinners such as he felt himself to be.

Before very long he felt that the Lord was calling him to be a missionary and gave him a special interest in China. He arrived there in 1934 when Mao Zedong and his Communist Party were beginning their rise to power. In later years, this was to make life very difficult for all Christian missionaries there.

The area he spent most of his time in was called Yunnan Province. It is in the south-west of the country and borders Myanmar (Burma) on the west and Tibet to the north-east. It is a mountainous area where different tribes lived in poverty and separated from others because their homes were difficult to get to. Much of the landscape was steep mountainsides with no roads, only narrow mountain tracks which had to be climbed to reach the people. He spent most of his time ministering to the Nosu tribe, and the Lord blessed his work to many of these heathen people.

One year he set off with some of the Nosu tribesmen across the Yangtze River into the wild countryside which led up to Tibet. He hoped to bring the gospel to some of the Tibetan people. The landscape was dramatic, steep mountains and vertical cliffs.

There were very few trees because of how high it was; those that survived were scrawny and thin. After walking for days, the missionary was exhausted. Although the path was so narrow and there was a deep, dangerous canyon to the right of it, Dan decided that he would try to go on horseback. The

other men all walked on in single file on the very narrow path, and Dan rode very carefully, praying that the Lord would keep him.

Before long the horse tripped on a tree root, and both horse and rider fell over the side of the cliff to what looked like certain death. Dan threw himself off the horse but could not stop himself from rolling down the mountainside after his horse.

And then, in a most amazing providence, on this empty mountainside there was one tree, and only one, with a wide enough base to break their fall. It was this tree that that was now in their path as the horse and Dan rolled pell-mell down the canyon. Nothing could have saved them from certain death except such a tree. And here it was, planted long years ago, as if specially placed in that spot for this emergency! Was that not a wonderful providence!

The horse hit the tree first and Dan landed on top of it. In the Lord's kind providence, his life was spared. The poor horse's leg was broken and it had to be killed to put it out of its misery. His Nosu companions then stripped off some of their garments and tied them together to make a rope and pulled Dan out of the canyon. They then prayed and gave thanks to the Lord for His deliverance.

Perhaps you could revise Answer 11 in *The Shorter Catechism*, which explains about God's providence: "God's works of providence are His most holy, wise and powerful preserving and governing all His creatures, and all their actions". Truly this was a clear example of God's providential care!

J van Kralingen

How Near to Danger?

C H Spurgeon

This is the last part of a sermon, as edited, on "Will ye also go away?" (John 6:67).

Why should we not go away as others have gone? If we were left to ourselves, I cannot tell you any reason why we should not go as they have gone. Nor indeed could I tell you why the best man here should not be the worst before tomorrow morning, if the grace of God left him. As John Bradford, one of the English Reformers, saw poor criminals taken away to be executed, used to say, "There goes John Bradford but for the grace of God". Each one of us might say the same.

To abide with Christ is our only security, and we trust we shall never depart from Him. But how can we make sure of this? The great thing is to have a real foundation in Christ to begin with – genuine faith, vital godliness.

The foundation is the first matter to be attended to in building a house.

With a bad foundation there cannot be a substantial house. You need a firm bottom, sound groundworks, before you go on to the upper part. Do pray God that, if your religion is a sham, you may find it out now. Unless your hearts are deeply ploughed with genuine repentance, and unless you are thoroughly rooted and grounded in the faith, you may have some cause to suspect the reality of your conversion and of the Holy Spirit's work in you. May the Lord work in you a good beginning, and then you may rely upon it that He will carry it on to the day of Jesus Christ.

Remember that if you wish to be preserved from falling, you must be schooled in humility and keep very low before the Lord. When you are half an inch above the ground, you are that half inch too high. Your place is to be nothing. Trust Christ, but do not trust yourself. Rely on the Spirit of God, but do not rely on anything that is in yourself – no, not on a grace you have received, or on a gift you possess.

Those do not slide away that walk humbly with God. They are always safe who depend entirely on the dear Redeemer. Be careful about your obedience; take heed to yourselves; you cannot be too cautious about your way of life. Many are lost through being too careless, but no one through being too careful. The statutes of the Lord are so right that you cannot neglect them without diverging from the right path. Watch and pray. God help you to watch, or else you will get drowsy. Never neglect prayer. That is at the root of every departing from God.

Going back commonly begins with prayer; to restrain prayer is to deaden the very pulse of life. "Watch unto prayer." And I beseech you, friends, do shun the company which has led other people astray. Do not be friends with those whose jokes are ungodly. Keep right away from them. It is not for you to be seen standing – much less to be found sitting down – with people of filthy talk. They can do you no good, but it would not be easy to estimate the harm they can bring upon you.

You may have heard the story (but it is so good it will bear repeating) of the lady who advertised for a coachman and had three men apply for the situation. She put this question to the first one: "I want a really good coachman to drive my pair of horses, and therefore I ask you how near to danger you can drive and yet be safe?"

"Well," he said, "I could drive very near indeed; I could go within a foot of a precipice, without fear of any accident so long as I held the reins." She sent him away with the remark that he would not do.

To the next one who came she put the same question. "How near to danger could you drive?" Being determined to get the place, he said, "I could drive within a hairsbreadth, and yet skilfully avoid any mishap".

"You will not do", said she.

When the third one came in, his mind was cast in another mould. So when the question was put to him, "How near could you drive to danger?" he said, "Madam, I never tried. It has always been a rule with me to drive as far from danger as I possibly can."

The lady took him on at once. In the same way I believe that the man who is careful to run no risks and to hold back from all doubtful conduct, having the fear of God in his heart, is most to be relied on. If you are really built upon the Rock of Ages, you may without dismay meet the question, "Will ye also go away?" And you can reply without presumption, No, Lord, I cannot and I will not leave Thee; for to whom should I go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.

So may it be. "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it."

God Provided

Sally Carter lived in a tiny red-brick cottage. One night her neighbour put her children to bed and then went outside. Passing Sally's cottage, she heard Sally praying, "Lord, Thou knowest I've nothing in the house to eat, and Thou hast promised that those that trust in Thee shan't be ashamed. Please send me something to eat, for Jesus' sake. Amen."

The neighbour did not know what to do; she had no food to spare. Yet she knew that she must do something; so she decided to go at once to Mr Farmer at the big house.

As she went towards the big house, the neighbour became rather afraid of what he might say. She found him leaning over his gate. She told him about Sally and her desperate situation and he invited her in. Soon he asked his cook to fill a basket with food for Sally.

It was getting dark when the neighbour went home. The next morning she got up early and placed the basket on Sally's doorstep. She watched as Sally came out soon afterwards and saw the basket. She heard Sally cry out: "Praise the Lord; bless His dear name. I knew He wouldn't forget me."

Notice how she praised God for providing the food, though she must have known that a man or woman had to be involved too. Notice too how God provides for those who trust in Him, whatever their need. And Mr Farmer always made sure that Sally never went hungry again.

Scripture and Catechism Exercises

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Looking Around Us

Addicted to Death

Recently it was reported that drug-related deaths in Scotland were spiralling out of control. They had risen by 27% in just one year and in 20 years had multiplied sixfold. The number of deaths was the highest in Europe and higher than the USA, taking into account the size of the population. It is a terrible tragedy for families when they are ripped apart by such deaths.

It is clear to everyone that, whatever approaches are being used, they are not working. Often the emphasis is on helping people to take drugs safely.

Education, for instance, is often focused on harm reduction rather than abstinence. The problem is that these drugs shorten lives and so their use is against the Sixth Commandment, which forbids us from doing anything that tends towards destroying life.

Sin itself is like a narcotic drug. We are addicted to it by nature, but it will kill us. An addict's greatest pleasure and desire is their greatest enemy. These drugs stop the body's central nervous system from working as it should, and sin likewise stops the conscience from responding as it should.

Just like substance abuse leads to other crimes to feed the habit, sin seeks more sin. An addict becomes an enemy to all that is good in their life; sin also is destructive even to those we love. When someone has a drug addiction they have a different perception of the world. They escape reality and pursue a disordered and confused world. Sin deceives us with a distorted view of the world and reality, in order to draw us to everlasting destruction (Romans 7:11, Hebrews 3:13). When it has finished, it brings forth death (James 1:15). This is why Christ says, "All they that hate Me love death" (Proverbs 8:36). To be addicted to sin is to be addicted to death. We are warned about a way that seems right to us but ends in death (Proverbs 16:25).

But the gracious message of the gospel cries to us loudly, "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die?" (Ezekiel 33:11). There is deliverance through trusting in Christ and His finished work. "Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom" (Job 33:24).

Matthew Vogan

School Success

"School Success Isn't Just a Set of Straight A's" was the heading of an article in *The Herald* newspaper on the day when the results of Scottish school certificate exams for this year were released. It was written by the Scottish Government minister in charge of education, who made some sensible points.

But one very important point was missed, and no one need wonder at that, in today's spiritual climate. The point was the vital importance of finding Christ as the Saviour from sin. You may be surprised that I would speak about salvation in the context of school. But even 100 years ago there were many teachers who would set the issues of spiritual life and death before their pupils. But however opposed the spiritual climate in schools is to the gospel, and to God's law, there is nothing more vital to school pupils (and to everyone else) than to begin to learn the way to heaven. Christ says to everyone, school pupils included: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness" (Matthew 6:33).

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