

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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The Young People's Magazine

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The Young People's Magazine

Volume 90

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Number 1

Cleansing One's Way

Probably you are reading this around the time when 2024 gives place to 2025. A new year is a marker of time passing. We will never again see the months and days and hours of 2024. We will never have an opportunity to try to put right the mistakes that we have made and to reverse the sins that we have committed.

We cannot know how long we will live in this world; it is impossible to find out how many days or years we have left before we must pass into eternity. We would do well to assume that these days or years will be few and seek God's grace so that we may make the best possible use of them. To make a good use of the rest of our time in this world, we should seek direction from the Bible.

If you are young, you may assume you have the right to imagine that death is far away and that you will be spared for much longer than many other people around you. But you may be completely wrong. Most importantly, you need to be prepared now to enter eternity: to have your sins forgiven and to have at least the beginnings of holiness.

Let us go to the Bible and consider a verse that is highly relevant to what has just been said: "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to [God's] word" (Psalm 119:9). The question is being asked: How shall a young person cleanse his way through life, as it goes on towards death and eternity?

But why does a young person's way need cleansing? Because it is a sinful way, unless his way has already been cleansed; even then it will need further cleansing. Sin is filthy in the sight of God, who is perfectly pure and holy. And we should see *our* sins to be filthy; they are liable to defile whoever they touch – to make them filthy too. The Bible tells us that "there shall in no wise enter into [heaven] any thing that defileth" (Revelation 21:27). So no sin can enter heaven; this means that unless our sins are forgiven and we have been cleansed from our sins, we cannot enter heaven.

But how should young people cleanse their way? The verse quoted in the second-last paragraph tells us that they are to pay attention to their way in

the light of the Bible. The first step is for them to shine the light of Bible truth on the way they are taking through life. It is to make use of all the means of grace that are available to them. (And older people too need to cleanse their way, and they must do so in exactly the same manner as those who are younger.)

If young people are to cleanse their way in the light of God's Word, they should be like the Psalmist, who said to God: "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee" (Psalm 119:11). If they are to hide God's Word in their heart, it would be good for them to learn by heart as much of it as they can. They should ask God to help them grasp the principles of the Bible – the main themes of its teaching. And they should ask Him to apply these truths to themselves, to make these truths part of their own thinking. How good and helpful it would be if, by God's grace, all of our thinking was moulded by God's Word!

Not only should young people read the Bible and memorise it, but they should listen to it as it is preached, and they should ask God the Holy Spirit to apply the preaching to their souls – as the minister seeks to explain particular verses in the Bible and to point out the response that these parts of God's Word call for.

What are the main truths of the Bible which young people (and others) are to take heed to? One is that we very much need to be "born again". That is what Jesus taught Nicodemus when he came to the Saviour by night. Although he knew a lot about the Old Testament – the only part of the Bible that had then been written – he needed a complete cleansing of his soul. He needed the power of sin in his soul to be brought down; he needed to be made holy. And if his soul was cleansed, his way through life would be clean and he would live a godly life. At last he would be fit to enter heaven.

Another truth young people must pay attention to is their need to believe in Jesus, as the One who came into the world to save sinners. That is what the jailer in Philippi was told when he asked Paul and Silas, his prisoners, what he must do to be saved (see Acts 16:30). He needed to trust in Jesus Christ as the One who died for sinners like him. The jailer did trust in Jesus; the Holy Spirit changed his heart and he began to walk in the paths of new obedience – which is to say, he began to cleanse his way.

David Steven was a godly man in Caithness who died about 150 years ago. He once told some young people: "Don't keep away from Christ. Satan is deceiving you with sinful pleasures." Beware of Satan going about now trying to deceive you with today's entertainments, in the hope of keeping you away for ever from Christ and His salvation.

In particular, young people are to pay attention to the Ten Commandments,

which God in His kindness has given them so that they might take the right way through life. He tells them in the First Commandment: "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me". Young people are to take Him as their God and to worship and obey Him accordingly. They are not to treat anyone else as their god, looking on him or her as the most important person in existence; they are not to give their hearts to anyone else. Similarly they are not to treat possessions or money or some high position in life or some great achievement as what is most desirable. Their main aim must be to seek God and to find Him.

God tells young people in the Fifth Commandment: "Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee". He is telling young people to give their parents all proper respect and obedience.

A young man was sentenced to four years in prison. Before the sentence was passed, he acknowledged that his downward way began with disobeying his parents; he imagined that he knew as much about the world as his father did and did not need his help or his advice – and no doubt his opinion of his mother's knowledge was similar. When he left home, temptations came around him, he said, like a "drove of hyenas" and "carried him on to ruin". By speaking like this he acknowledged that his way needed cleansing, but whether he sought to cleanse his way in the light of God's Word we do not know. How sad if he did not!

It is the duty of young people everywhere to cleanse their way; especially it is the duty of those who have easy access to the Bible. And it is their duty to do so *at once*. Probably you have had many opportunities to hear the gospel, many opportunities to respond to the gospel call – as when Christ commands you: "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).

You may think that it does not matter if you do not listen to such calls, that there will be no serious consequences to worry about. You may imagine you will have plenty more opportunities to hear the gospel and to come to Christ. But you may be completely wrong. You cannot promise yourself one more Sabbath opportunity to go to church to hear Christ calling you – through the preacher – to believe in Him.

If you refuse Him now, you are hardening your heart against Him. How can you expect to be more ready, more willing, to believe in Him at another time? Will you be willing to listen to the Word of God at that future time in which, you are promising yourself, you will seek the Lord and believe on Him? Christ calls you to believe on Him *now*. The passing away of another year should remind you of the real urgency of cleansing your way.

Thomas and His Daughter

A minister heard that Thomas, a man who lived in his parish, was unwell. This man had lived a thoroughly ungodly life; he did not hide his sins; he never came to church; in fact, he despised church services. Other people who thought as he did used to gather in his house.

The minister decided he must go to visit Thomas; he acted on the principle that no one needs a doctor so much as the person who is ready to perish. He knocked on the door of Thomas's house, knowing full well, given Thomas's reputation, that he might not be allowed in.

He got no answer, so he let himself in. There was no one in the kitchen, so he went into the next room, where he found Thomas lying on a mattress. The expression on Thomas's face was friendlier than usual and he told the minister that it was very kind of him to come to see him. He did not deserve that kindness, Thomas confessed.

The minister was no doubt surprised to see an open Bible on a table near the bed. He said to Thomas as he picked it up: "This book teaches us that, having received freely, we must freely give". The minister had freely received salvation; so he felt obliged to be kind to Thomas and point him to the spiritual blessings he needed. The minister then asked, "Have you been reading?"

"No, I am no reader," Thomas answered, and acknowledged that he could have learned to read. "But", he added, "I neglected my school as well as every other duty".

The minister was glad that Thomas saw that his past conduct was wrong. He went on: "If the Holy Spirit has convinced you of your sinfulness, I trust you will be drawn to the Saviour of sinners".

It was obvious that Thomas must have had a visitor, someone who had been reading the Bible. The minister asked who it was.

"My own dear child", Thomas told him, with tears in his eyes. Her name was Charlotte. He explained, "She prays by my side, reads the Bible to me".

"Well, at least you have the satisfaction of having given your child learning and are now, I hope, reaping the benefit of it."

Thomas became very upset and explained, "I am very guilty in that respect. I did all I could to prevent her receiving instruction." He had tried to stop Charlotte going to the Sabbath school she attended. He threatened to punish her for going. He did carry out his threat; he beat her and told her that he would turn her out of their home if she went again.

At the age of only 12, she left home and went to act as a nurse in a neighbour's home. Only then was Thomas told that Charlotte often got up in the morning before her father and left for school without taking any break-

fast so that she would get out of the house without being noticed. Thomas confessed that his heart was so hard that he felt no shame at what he had just been told. He did not see Charlotte again for 11 years.

“How was that?” the minister asked.

Thomas explained that he had got into difficulty with the rent for his house. He went into hiding and earned some money in sinful ways. It was then that he came to live in the minister’s parish.

When he fell ill, Thomas believed that it was God’s judgement for his sins. He trembled because of God’s power and that his life especially was in God’s power; he knew that God might call him into eternity at any moment. “How could I meet Him?” he asked himself. He confessed that his proud spirit did not allow him to call for the minister. But he thought of Charlotte. He sent for her, and she came at once.

“And now”, he told the minister, “she is the very joy of my heart. She teaches me what I did not know before. And when I grieve over my past wicked life, she will, with the greatest tenderness, read out of that blessed book words that tell of a Saviour able and willing to save to the uttermost.”

“But that is her footstep”, Thomas said. “I love the very sound of her tread.” Charlotte came into the room holding some medicine in her hand and told the minister that she was pleased to see him.

“How long has your father been ill?” the minister asked her.

“Some months”, she told him, adding that she had not heard about his illness until three weeks before, as she was working some distance away. The minister was afraid that she would lose her job if she stayed too long with her father. But her employer – a Christian woman – had promised to keep the job for her until she was able to return to work. In fact, that promise was made in a letter she received that very morning,

Charlotte began to cry and her father too became upset. He took his daughter’s hand and wished that he “had been a better father to you! But I humbly trust that the Father of the fatherless will be your protector when I am gone – yes, the God whom you have served will never forsake you.” Then he asked the minister to pray for him and Charlotte.

She showed the minister to the door and asked him to come again. She told him that she felt relieved that he had come. Though her father was very anxious to be taught, she felt shy answering his questions on religious subjects and found it difficult to teach someone who was so much older than herself, especially because he was her father. So she read aloud – probably she meant from the Bible – and prayed silently that “a merciful God” would give “a blessing on His own Word”. Then she added, “My whole dependence is upon Him”.

The minister assured her: "God 'will fulfill the desire of them that fear Him', and I trust that the Lord will make you to abound in this and in every good work. How long have you chosen the better part?" – meaning, the way of salvation.

Charlotte told him that she had received her first religious impressions in childhood, and she had spent her happiest hours in a Sabbath school. She went on: "There I was kindly directed to the Saviour of sinners, to the Friend of little children, and taught to look up to God as [One] who would guide and protect me while I continued to pray to Him". The truths she was taught were, she said, like medicine to her soul when, just 12, she "was sent in a friendless state among strangers". God provided for Charlotte; He gave her somewhere to stay; He gave her work. And, above all, He saved her soul. Besides, He reconciled her father to her and, hopefully, He saved his soul also.

John Welsh: a Man of Prayer

3. An End to His Ministry in Ayr

This is a further section of a longer version of a paper which was read at last year's Youth Conference. The last part dealt with Welsh's ministries in Kirkcudbright and Ayr.

Welsh was again a member of the Church of Scotland's General Assembly of November 1602, when King James was still manoeuvring with a view to setting up bishops once more in the Scottish Church. It was the King who obtained the consent of the Assembly to the appointment of commissioners to visit certain parts of the country. Welsh was chosen as a commissioner, and it would have pleased the King no end had he been able to flatter Welsh into accepting the see of Galloway or indeed any of the richer bishoprics which he was repeatedly offered. The King knew how to get men over to his side; but with men of John Welsh's principles it was much more difficult, indeed impossible.

It was only in April 1604, on the death of his colleague, John Porterfield, that the way became open for Welsh to become fully responsible for the pastoral charge of Ayr. While Welsh had no automatic right to succeed Porterfield, no one else was considered for the vacancy.

Later that year, the plague broke out in the east of Scotland and was spreading westwards with great loss of life. Welsh probably used the occasion repeatedly to call his people to repentance, but one such exhortation is recorded: "As the ark of Noah was an example and preacher of righteousness to the Jews, even so the pest [the plague] in Glasgow and Edinburgh and in

other parts of the land is now a preacher good enough to you, for it cries, Repent, repent, or else it shall be so with you as it was with them. Now therefore, seeing you have so many means of repentance offered to you, and so many preachers proclaiming repentance in your ears, I beseech you, my dear hearers, delay no longer, but return to the Lord in time, before the judgement overtake you.”

What of spiritual fruit following Welsh’s labours in Ayr? David Dickson, who was inducted to the neighbouring parish of Irvine in 1618, reaped a rich harvest of souls during his ministry there. But he bore the humble testimony that Welsh’s time in Ayr brought about more fruit than his own time in Irvine. Welsh wrote of the latter part of his time in Ayr, when the population was only around 3000, that he could have spoken to many hundreds about his spiritual experiences – implying that they would have been able to understand them. And one suspects that it was not every believer to whom Welsh would thus have opened his heart. But these days of great spiritual blessing were to come to a sudden end.

From 1603 King James was also King of England and pursued even more earnestly his policy of attacking the Presbyterianism of the Church of Scotland, and likewise his vendetta against those who were most prominent in seeking to protect the purity of the Church. The General Assembly of November 1602 had agreed, with the King’s consent, that they should meet at least once every year. However, only three weeks before the date of the Assembly appointed for July 1604 in Aberdeen, the King ordered that it be postponed till July of the following year. In the interval he made a second round of appointments to bishoprics.

Welsh warned his people, “Prepare you for crosses; you cannot tell how soon they will come . . . and that these golden apples (the revenues of the bishoprics) are offered to ministers, and men are become earthly-minded that were wont to be capable of spiritual things. As the Lord lives, I think there must be a fiery trial to follow.”

At short notice it was made known that the King wished the 1605 Assembly also not to meet. But Welsh and two other commissioners from Ayrshire made their way to Aberdeen, five others arriving with them on July 4. Having reached Aberdeen, they discovered that some of their northern brethren had met two days before, and in their own words, “sanctified the meeting with prayer”. With John Forbes of Alford as moderator, the Assembly handled no business except to appoint another meeting for the end of September.

Up to this point Sir Alexander Straiton, the King’s commissioner for church affairs, had offered no opposition, but he now ordered them to dissolve the Assembly; otherwise they would be outlawed. After prayer, the

18 members present obeyed. They had made their point: to make sure that the meeting of Assembly was actually held. Those who arrived late took steps to identify themselves with what had been done. But Straiton, afraid for his own position, made his way to Edinburgh and falsely claimed that a proclamation had been made at the market cross in Aberdeen forbidding the meeting of Assembly. And he persuaded the Government to denounce as rebels all who had been present at the Assembly, Welsh among them.

Welsh arrived home exhausted from the meeting of the 1605 General Assembly in Aberdeen, but his days in Ayr were almost over. The next Sabbath he preached on the Day of Judgement, and gave his people his reflections on what had happened in Aberdeen: "I know there were many among you that sent up your prayers to God for the maintenance of our liberty. I am sure the Lord heard you. In every step I took I felt the Lord was with me, and confirmed me in believing that all was well and acceptable to Him."

Before this he must have heard that John Forbes had been denounced as a rebel. One night he got up to pray as usual. In another room he cried long and earnestly to God. When he returned, his wife gently spoke to him about the danger to his health through being out of bed for so long. But he told her that he had been deeply disturbed because of the troubles threatening the Church, and the two of themselves in particular, and by his fear that his work in Ayr was already finished. Before he wakened in the morning, there was a messenger from the King on his doorstep summoning him before the Privy Council, a government body, in Edinburgh. He was never to return to Ayr.

His ministry in Ayr – brief but marvellously blessed – was indeed at an end, except for one final sermon that morning. Towards the end of it he told his people: "To thee who art in Christ . . . I open the gates of the kingdom of heaven; but to thee who art not in Christ, but in the flesh, I testify that, as long as thou art in the flesh, the gates of heaven are closed on thee and the gates of hell are open to thee I will judge none of you. I would have you to judge yourselves that ye be not judged

"Suppose you had never gotten more warning than this one day's preaching, I take heaven and earth and this house to be witnesses that I am free of your blood Such of you as were never in Christ . . . I beseech you to come to Jesus and say, Sweet Lord, give me a drink of Thy blood to quench the thirst of my scorched soul and to save me from the wrath to come; give me a fill of Thy flesh that I die not eternally." He is telling the unconverted to ask for faith in Christ (see John 6).

He told believers to be thankful and "forget not the poor Church of God but, thou that art a member of that body, I beseech thee to care for the rest

of the members of that body. Pray for it, for I crave nothing of you but prayer, and we have no other weapons but prayer. Pray that the Lord would arise and manifest Himself from heaven and defend His poor Church and overthrow His enemies.”

For Junior Readers

Samuel Medley (2)

As a young man, Samuel was a sailor in the navy. In a battle, he was badly injured in his leg. The leg was not healing and the surgeon told him that part of his leg would have to be cut off. Samuel prayed about the matter, and his leg healed. But then he forgot about religion.

After the injury to Samuel’s leg, he was forced to have time off from the navy to recover. He went to stay with his godly grandfather in London to give his leg time to heal. He had every comfort but, sadly, he did not appreciate the old man’s company. This was because his grandfather was continually speaking to him about spiritual things and warning him about his danger as an unsaved sinner.

Then, one Sabbath evening the Lord met with his soul! His grandfather was out of the room and Samuel really hoped he had gone to church and would be away for some time. He then asked one of the servants, “Have you any idea what my grandfather is doing? Has he gone out to worship?”

To Samuel’s dismay he replied, “No, sir, he is looking for a sermon to read to you!” The sermon he chose was on the words from Isaiah 42:6,7: “I the Lord have called Thee in righteousness . . . to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house”. Samuel was spiritually blind and he was also the prisoner!

You can imagine the scene: the old man standing there solemnly reading aloud; the young, proud sailor annoyed, yet politely showing outward respect. Then the Holy Spirit began to apply the truth powerfully to his heart! He realised how blind he was. His sins rose up before him and he realised what a sinner he was. He felt condemned.

As soon as his grandfather left the room, Samuel fell on his knees, begging the Lord to have mercy upon him. As we read of the publican at the temple who prayed, “God be merciful to me a sinner”, and “went down to his house justified”, so it was with Samuel. He was now brought to trust in Christ and His finished work, as the only foundation of his hope for eternity.

What a difference could now be seen in the young man’s life! There were no more thoughts of going back to the navy and becoming an admiral. Day

by day he studied good books in his grandfather's library. As he waited for his leg to heal he prayerfully studied the Bible, learned to read both Hebrew and Greek and had opportunities to hear godly ministers preach. So God used this time of enforced quietness for his spiritual good and to prepare him for his future.

Later he was called to the work of the ministry and wished to speak to sinners about the glories of the Saviour. He was first a minister in Watford (north of London), and then in Liverpool, where he ministered with the Lord's blessing and much success.

He met with many trials in his life and work. One of his children died as a baby, when the pram ran down the steep street outside their home; the pram had not been left in a safe way. The baby was thrown out and killed at once. In the face of this severe sorrow, his reaction was summed up in the verse he wrote:

“God shall alone the refuge be and comfort of my mind,
Too wise to be mistaken, He, too good to be unkind.”

At the end of his life, in 1799, he had to say, “I die a poor sinner saved by sovereign, rich and free mercy . . . I am now a poor shattered bark [that is, ship], just about to enter the blissful [that is, full of happiness] harbour [of heaven]; and O how sweet will be the port after the storm!” *J van Kralingen*

Talk Between the Bible and a Sinner (2)

This is the last part of a conversation where questions or objections are stated that someone unconverted might bring forward. These are followed by a suitable reply from the Bible. The first part appeared last month. The article is taken from *The Christian Treasury* for 1852.

Sinner. What must I do to be saved?

Bible. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31).

Sinner. Is Christ able to save me?

Bible. “He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Hebrews 7:25).

Sinner. But I am so unworthy. I am afraid He will not accept me.

Bible. “Him that cometh to Me, I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37).

Sinner. Why then am I not saved?

Bible. “Ye will not come to Me, that ye might have life” (John 5:40).

Sinner. I think I am willing; I cannot believe that I am unwilling to come to Christ.

Bible. “He that believeth not God hath made Him a liar; because he believeth

not the record that God gave of His Son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life; and this life is in His Son” (1 John 5:10,11)

Sinner. I will believe, but cannot now.

Bible. “God now commandeth all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30).

Sinner. I must wait God’s time.

Bible. “The Holy Ghost saith, Today if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts” (Hebrews 3:7,8). “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2). “Come, for all things are now ready” (Luke 14:17).

Sinner. How can I come now?

Bible. “Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Revelation 22:17).

Sinner. If I am spared, I will try soon, perhaps tomorrow.

Bible. “Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee” (Luke 12:20). “Ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour” (James 4:14).

Sinner. What would you have me do?

Bible. “Be ye reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:20).

Sinner. But do I hate him?

Bible. “The carnal mind is enmity against God” (Romans 8:7). “Now have they both seen and hated both Me and My Father” (John 15:24).

Sinner. I never thought I hated God.

Bible. “The heart is deceitful above all things” (Jeremiah 17:9.) “He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool” (Proverbs 28:26).

Sinner. Well, what must I do?

Bible. “Repent ye, and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:15). “Except ye repent, ye shall all . . . perish” (Luke 13:3). “He that believeth . . . shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:16).

Sinner. What can I do more? I have done all I can.

Bible. “Ye shall . . . find Me, when ye shall search for Me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:13). “Let him take hold of My strength, that he may make peace with Me; and he shall make peace with Me” (Isaiah 27:5).

Sinner. But may I be saved now?

Bible. “If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart . . . thou shalt be saved” (Romans 10:9).

Sinner. Is this promise for me?

Bible. “The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely” (Revelation 22:17).

Sinner. I do believe with all my heart.

Bible. "Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee". (Matthew 8:13). "Return to thine own house, and show how great things God hath done unto thee" (Luke 8:39). "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory, for Thy mercy, and for Thy truth's sake" (Ps 115:1).

Using Time Well

Rev Alexander McPherson

This article was first printed as "The Editor's Page" in *The Young People's Magazine* for January 1973, when Mr McPherson was the Editor. It has been edited.

Have you ever thought what a mysterious thing time is? It is easy to measure, yet our experience of it can vary tremendously with the measurement of it. For some purposes, time can be measured in very small units. The photograph of a happy family group, taken on a bright summer day, can be done with a camera shutter opening for only one hundredth of a second. For other purposes, history for example, the unit of measurement may be a millennium, 1000 years.

For one purpose or another, we are continually measuring time, either in seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, years, centuries or even millennia. God arranged for our measurement of time when He created the sun, moon and stars. "And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years" (Genesis 1:14). Time is quite easy to measure; yet, as I said, we so often feel in complete disagreement with these measurements. That is what I mean by saying that time is mysterious.

For instance, your watch tells you that an hour is 60 minutes, and that each hour is the same length as every other. But suppose you had to stand for an hour on a cold January morning waiting for a bus. What a long time it would seem! The longest hour of my life! you might say afterwards when telling someone about your unpleasant experience. How slowly the hands of your watch crept round.

Suppose, on the other hand, that during a very dull week in school, the class is given an hour's complete freedom in the playground. Everyone is engaged in games and enjoying every moment of the great relief from subjects like sums and history. After exactly one hour, the bell goes. O no, it cannot be that time already! is the cry on every hand. But it is, which shows that an hour spent happily, doing something we enjoy doing, seems much shorter than others spent in less agreeable activities. The watch hands went round very quickly this time, or so it seemed.

Perhaps you remember a well-known instance in God's Word of time seeming very short. It is in Genesis 29:20: "Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her". And for an example of time seeming very long, what about Psalm 130:6: "My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning"?

How long the night can seem to sentries, or those who are ill in bed! In Gethsemane too, when the Saviour told the disciples to stay and watch while He prayed. It was only one hour, in circumstances of awful solemnity, yet the time seemed long, and they slept.

We are at the beginning of another year; has time for you been passing quickly or hanging heavily? A little of the one, and much of the other, is your reply, perhaps. When busy, or doing what you enjoyed, time flew; but for the most part it dragged. And you wish that you were finished with school and free to suit yourself and spend time as you please.

I know how you feel, although I am doubtful about this freedom you are dreaming about. But I would say this to you, Do not be so anxious for time to pass rapidly. It will not be very long before you feel it passing quicker and quicker until, if you are spared to get older, the day will come when you will realise that most of your time has gone.

Even the longest life runs out very quickly. Listen to Jacob; "The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been". One hundred and thirty years; almost double the seventy years we call the allotted span! Yet Jacob, an old, old man who has become wise under the instruction of his Maker and Saviour, calls these years a few days! Time is far too valuable for anyone to wish it away.

Why are we here at all? Why has God given us any time, seeing we are sinners who deserve only a lost eternity? A portion of time has been given to us in which God requires us to repent of our sins and believe in His Son, the Saviour. Whoever does this, and enters in this way into a state of peace with God, finds out that time is precious. Such a person discovers also that too much has been wasted in the past.

It is now time "to awake out of sleep", as it were, and give ourselves over to serving the Lord in the various ways He requires. That way, time will not hang on our hands. How good to spend our time on earth serving God and helping our fellow creatures! We may do this in some measure through God's grace.

So let Christless boys and girls seek salvation now and begin to redeem time in an evil day. And may those readers, who know Christ already as

Saviour and Lord, know also the blessedness of filling time with activities that will at last lead to them hearing the wonderfully gracious words, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" (Matthew 25:21).

Now then, since you know what I mean by happiness, or blessedness, let me wish you all, A very happy New Year.

For Younger Readers

Looking for a Little Hook

Perhaps he was a boy or he may have been a grown-up; I do not know. He enjoyed fishing, perhaps from the side of a big river.

One day, he was sorting out his kit on the dining room table. Among it all, there were some hooks that he used to catch fish. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw one of the hooks sliding off the table onto the carpet on the floor. It was a small hook, and it was very difficult to see it against the colours of the carpet.

What should he do? If he crawled over the floor trying to find it, the hook might catch his hand or his knee. It might then be very difficult to get the hook out of his flesh.

But he could not leave the hook where it was on the floor. It could be dangerous to other people as well as to himself.

Then he thought: Could he pray about it? And then he wondered if it would be sinful to pray to God about something so small.

He realised that the answer to his questions is: Nothing is too small to pray about. And we should realise that nothing is too big to pray about; nothing is too difficult for God.

So he prayed; he asked God to help him find the fish hook. After he prayed, he looked again over the brown patterned carpet. And what did he see? He saw the little fish hook. He picked it up and put it back on the table.

How thankful he was to find it! He knew it was God who had helped him find it. God had answered his prayer. God knows where everything is. We should always ask Him to help us, whatever it is we need. He is always able to help us.

Where Did the Wallet Come from?

“Tom Jackson says he does not believe there is a God; he says he never saw Him. And I don’t know that I believe; I never saw Him,” said John Clary to his mother; he had just come in from being with Tom.

“I do [believe],” said his mother; and she said nothing more.

A week or more after this, John burst into the kitchen with Tom at his heels.

“See, mother,” he cried, “what I have found – such a nice wallet!”

“Where did you find it?” asked his mother.

“In Pine Grove. Now who do you think it belongs to?”

“I dare say it grew there,” said his mother. She wanted to give the boys something to think about; she believed that God created everything.

“Grew there!” exclaimed John, lifting up his eyebrows with great surprise; “A wallet grow in the wood! Who ever heard of such a thing? It could not be.”

“Why not?” she asked.

“Why not!” replied the boy; “the wallet was made on purpose. Look here!” opening it; “here is a place for bank notes, and here is a hidden place with a snug fastening for special things, and a memo book, and a pencil and case, and a beautiful gold pencil; it was made for a man to use, mother.”

“Some thought went into it certainly,” said his mother, putting down her work and taking it into her hands for further examination. “It is one of the most useful wallets I ever saw; if it did not grow there perhaps it made itself.”

“Why, mother, you talk foolishly,” said John, with a sober and puzzled look; “there must have been a man with a mind to have made this.”

“A man that knew how – a pretty neat workman,” added Tom.

“How do you know?” asked Mrs Clary; “You never saw him.”

“No, but I am just as certain that somebody made it as if I saw him.”

“You are! How so?”

“Why, mother,” said John, very much in earnest, “you see the wallet had to be planned to answer a certain purpose. Now it must have had a planner, that’s the long and short of it; and I know it just as well as if I saw it planned and done by the man himself.”

“That is,” said his mother, “it shows wise design and it must have had a wise maker. Somebody must have made it, and thought beforehand how to make it.”

“Just so!” exclaimed both boys at once. “It would be foolish to think otherwise,” added John.

“I think so,” said his mother. “And it is just as foolish,” she continued,

with a great deal of meaning in her eye, as she looked into the boys' eyes, "when you see the wonderful design in the beings and things around you, the end for which they were made, and the skill with which they were put together, for you to doubt or deny that there is a God who made them.

"Who planned your eyes to see with, your ears to hear with? Can eyes make themselves? Can a man make a bird? Who created the sun, and planned night and day? Did your mother and father plan your fingers and make them grow? You never saw who does all these things, but you know perfectly well that a great Somebody thought beforehand, designed and contrived the eye and the ear and the sun and your fingers – all things and all beings which are around you. And that great Somebody is God, the eternal Mind and great Maker of us all."

The boys did not expect to be condemned from their own mouths in this way.

Adapted from *Cheering Words* for 1980

Comment. 1. See the influence that one young person can have on another. It seems that John was strongly influenced by Tom. It is important, for young people in particular, to hold on to the truths that they have learned from the Bible.

2. To say that God does not exist because I have never seen Him is just as nonsensical as to claim that someone in Korea, say, does not exist because I have not seen him, or even seen a photograph of him. After all, the Bible tells us that God is a Spirit (John 4:24); so no one in this world can see Him with their bodily eyes. No one should be influenced by other people's unbelief; nor should they be influenced by the unbelief that is so prominent in the media or on the internet.

3. God answers prayer (see the *Younger Readers* article just before this one). Many people might say that God does not answer their prayers, but the answer to that objection may be that they do not really believe in God. There are lots of people who go to Him with their difficulties, big and small, and He gives them what they ask for. God really exists and He really does answer prayer.

4. It is obvious that the nice wallet, or any other wallet, was made by somebody; it could not make itself. It should be far more obvious that human beings did not come into existence by some long series of little changes – no matter how many there might be and no matter how much time the process might have taken – as people claim who believe in evolution.

5. Many people do not want to believe in God as the Creator because they would then have to submit to His Commandments. They want to live as they please, without submitting to any god, and perhaps especially to submit to the God of the Bible.

Scripture and Catechism Exercises 2024-25

Names for Exercise 1

Senior Section. *Aberdeen:* Julia Macleod. *Barnoldswick:* Isaac and Jael Fisher, Bethan Middleton. *Edinburgh:* Fraser Campbell. *Glasgow:* Shona Ross. *Inverness:* Callum Morrison.

Intermediate Section. *Barnoldswick:* Ruth Fisher, Susie Middleton. Sam van Essen. *Beaulieu:* Rebecca Fraser, Hudson Maclean. *Dingwall:* D A MacColl, Neil Campbell. *Edinburgh:* Anna Cameron-Macintosh, Beth Dickie. *Glasgow:* Evan Marr. *Halkirk:* Catriona Maclean. *Inverness:* Murray Dickie, James Maton. *North Tolsta:* Rebecca Morrison. *North Uist:* Katie M Macdonald.

Junior Section. *Aberdeen:* Kenneth Macleod, Cassia Soni. *Barnoldswick:* Talitha Fisher, Alexia van Essen. *Dingwall:* Iain MacColl. *Edinburgh:* Alec and Julia Cameron-Mackintosh, Anderson Dickie, Darcy and Joella Esson, Alice Hicklin. *Inverness:* Campbell Dickie. *London:* Ernest Campbell. *Halkirk:* Angus Hymers-Mackintosh. *North Harris:* Finlay Jardine. *North Tolsta:* James Morrison. **Upper Primary Section.** *Barnoldswick:* Matilda Fisher. *Dingwall:* Heather Campbell, Mairi MacColl. *Edinburgh:* Leah Hicklin. *Gairloch:* Penny Mackenzie. *Glasgow:* Joel Marr. *Inverness:* Harvey Dickie, Molly Campbell. *London:* Lydia Campbell. *North Harris:* Margaret Jardine.

Lower Primary Section. *Aberdeen:* Kate Macleod. *Barnoldswick:* Micah and Jemima Fisher. *Dingwall:* Charlotte, Seumas and Chirsty MacColl. *Dornoch:* Hugo and Elspeth Schouten. *Edinburgh:* Edward and Arthur Cameron-MacKintosh, Alasdair Campbell, James Dickie, Teddy and Jessica Esson, Matthew Hicklin, Genevieve and Alexander MacLean. *Gairloch:* Esther MacKenzie. *Glasgow:* Susanna Gillies, Magnus and Archie van Kralingen. *Inverness:* Emily and Alfie Campbell, Grace Campbell, Rose Dickie, Annalise Schouten. *London:* William Campbell, Peter Macleod. *North Harris:* George Jardine. *Stornoway:* Murdo Maclean.

Looking Around Us

Asking for God's Blessing

The Chancellor is the head of the Government in Germany. Olaf Scholz became Chancellor three years ago. We noted then that it seems the custom for new chancellors, when they take their oath of office, to add the words, "So help me God". The previous Chancellor, Angela Merkel, did so, but sadly Mr Scholz did not.

Mr Scholz is said to have no religion; so he does not acknowledge God, who is able to assist chancellors, prime ministers, presidents and others, in positions of responsibility, who ask Him to help them in their heavy duties. They have many difficult decisions to make, and many serious problems come their way. How can they expect to succeed without God's help? And sadly also the British Prime Minister is an atheist. The problem of having atheist leaders is by no means confined to Germany,

By refusing to acknowledge God and ask for His help, such leaders are denying themselves the blessings that God can give to those who ask for it. The Bible tells us of men like David and Solomon, who asked for God's blessing in their heavy responsibilities in running their country. These

responsibilities are no lighter today; indeed the opposite is the case. All the more need for the leaders of every country to feel their dependence on God so that they will decide wisely in the various matters that come before them.

Clearly Mr Scholz did not have that blessing. He refused to ask for it. He was the leader of a coalition government; it was made up of three different political parties. But around two months ago, the coalition collapsed; they could not agree on the policies they should follow, which left the chancellor leading a minority government. This meant that it was very difficult for Mr Scholz to get any new laws passed in parliament.

Recently he called for a vote of confidence, asking members of the parliament to state they had confidence in him continuing as head of the Government. The vote has now been taken and he has lost; so there will be fresh elections on February 23. Opinion polls show that Mr Scholz is likely to lose these elections, with another party becoming the largest in the new parliament. It would be good if he would now begin to ask for God's help.

It is not only people like government leaders who ought to acknowledge God and ask Him for help. All of us should do so. They may be pupils still in primary school. Whatever task they have been given, they should ask God to help them do it well. So should pupils in secondary school – not least when it comes to the major exams they sit in their last years in school.

The same holds true at university and college: students need God's help to learn well, to remember what they have been taught so that they can answer clearly the questions they face in their exams. Again those who have begun employment need God's help in whatever particular work they are to carry out. And whatever stage of life any of us has reached, we need God's help and care in everything we may have to do. We need Him especially to keep us from sinning in every situation.

How much we who are in ordinary situations in life – not only those who have very important positions and duties – need to ask, "So help me God"!

2025 UK Youth Conference

This year's Youth Conference has been arranged for Wednesday, April 9, to Friday, April 11, God willing, at Strathallan School, Forgandenny, Perth, PH2 9EG. More information to follow. Please note that the days of the week for the Conference are different for this year.

Price £1.50