



A
Living
Experience
with God

Ralf Euerl

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Unless otherwise stated, all Bible references are from the

- New American Standard Bible
- New Century Version
- New International Version
- New King James Version
- New Living Translation
- Ellen G. White

Ellen G. White lived 1827-1915 and wrote many books under God's leading. She considered them as a little light which should lead to the great light of the Scriptures.

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**“A form of godliness
will not save any.
All must have a deep and
living experience.”**

Maranatha, 97.5.

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Instead of a Long Introduction

The time we live in today is remarkable for its superficiality – seldom has it been as widespread as it is now. Masses of people simply exist from one day to the next throughout their lives without ever really getting to the bottom of anything. Although it is true that some people are accomplishing amazing things, there is a trend to shallowness with many that pervades all areas of life.

Joe Average has to go to the doctor. On the way he meets a neighbor, and they exchange a few words. The easiest topic to chat about is the weather – it is something we are all affected by, and it's a safe, non-confrontational subject that's not too deep.

Joe arrives at the doctor's office, where he sits down in the waiting room and leafs through a magazine. He wants a quick overview of what's happening in the world. But there's no need to read too thoroughly – it's enough just to skim the headlines. And besides, there are such interesting pictures to

look at... Of course Joe won't find out what's really going on from a glossy magazine like this one, but that isn't what he wants, anyway. What he's really after is a superficial acquaintance with what's going on and the latest tidbits prepare him to join in on the gossip.

The appointment awaiting Joe Average is usually a short routine, and today is no exception. The doctor asks about his ailments, writes a prescription for the appropriate medication, and then bids him farewell with the formality "Get well soon". Faced with the hustle and bustle of today's reality, the doctor no longer takes time to search out the true cause of every illness. That would be both arduous for the doctor and disagreeable for the patient, who often doesn't really want to face making a lifestyle change for the sake of health. Most patients actually want superficial diagnoses – so superficial diagnoses is what they get.

Many incidents like this happen every day – superficial thoughts and conversations, superficial conclusions and suggestions, superficial judgments and messages. Although there are deep thinkers in every age, with the rise of television and mass consumerism, many today are no longer used to thinking deeply. As a result, the same superficiality that

exists in daily life also affects attitudes towards the question of life's meaning itself.

Lots of people simply live from day to day without having any definite goals in life. Others have only egotistical goals concerned merely with their own little sphere. Try asking the people around you about their goals in life. You'll be surprised at how superficial their answers often are!

When we suffer the consequences of a mistake we have made, we usually try to avoid similar circumstances that might lead to another mistake in the future. But how many of us take a deeper look at the underlying principles that actually caused the problem?

The Bible expresses this as follows: "From prophets to priests, they are all frauds. They offer superficial treatments for my people's mortal wound. They give assurances of peace when there is no peace." *Jeremiah 6:13-14 (NLT)*. In other words, they use comforting words to ease the pain, but avoid the need to dig deeper and actually get to the root of the trouble. It's easier not to make the effort to think deeply about things. But such band-aid treatment won't cure any problem.



Salmon swim against the current in order to reach their goal, achieving superb feats when they have to overcome rapids or waterfalls. But a dead fish goes with the flow, drifting further and further away from its original goal.

How About You?

You, too, can make yourself comfortable and simply go with the flow. You can float along on the shallow currents of this world's streams like a dead fish. You can even keep on drifting until you eventually die. Then the minister will preach a superficial sermon, after which you'll be buried about six feet (two meters) under... which is pretty shallow!

Would you really be satisfied with such a life? Do you want to drift along from day to day without ever getting to the bottom of things? If so, think of all the missed opportunities by the time you reach the end of your life?

Or are you someone who's looking for a fulfilling, rewarding life? Do you want more than what a shallow inconsequential lifestyle has to offer? Are you looking for more than clichéd phrases in answer to your questions? Are you fed up with being put off with empty consolations and soothing words when you ask about the deeper meaning of life? If so, then this booklet has been written just for you!

You really owe it to yourself to get to the bottom of things and not simply be content with fruitless

superficiality. After all, only someone who digs deeper will find the treasures that stay hidden from those who are content barely to scratch the surface.

An Object Lesson

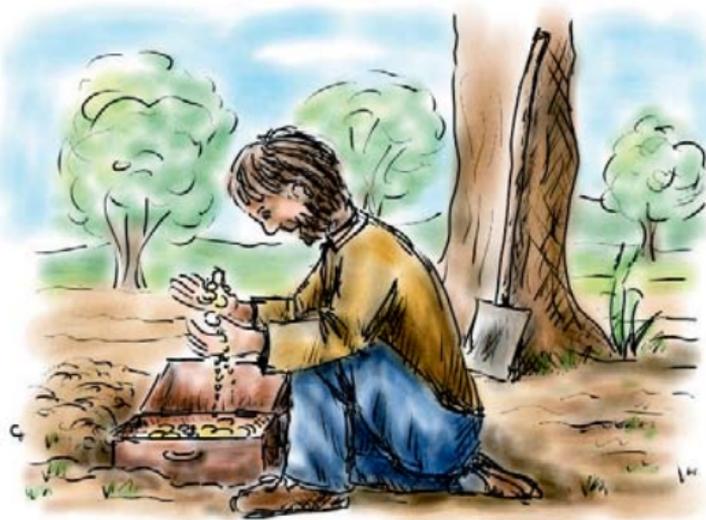
“In ancient times it was customary for men to hide their treasures in the earth. Thefts and robberies were frequent. And whenever there was a change in the ruling power, those who had large possessions were liable to be put under heavy tribute. Moreover the country was in constant danger of invasion by marauding armies. As a consequence, the rich endeavored to preserve their wealth by concealing it, and the earth was looked upon as a safe hiding place. But often the place of concealment was forgotten; death might claim the owner, imprisonment or exile might separate him from his treasure, and the wealth he had taken such pains to preserve was left for the fortunate finder. In Christ’s day it was not uncommon to discover in neglected land old coins and ornaments of gold and silver.” *Christ’s Object Lessons*, 103.2.

With this background information, you can understand why Jesus once told the following object lesson: “**The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure**

that a man discovered hidden in a field. In his excitement, he hid it again and sold everything he owned to get enough money to buy the field.” *Matthew 13:44 (NLT)*.

Jesus was telling the story of a man who found such a treasure. But the field didn't belong to him! So he piled the dirt back up over his valuable discovery and resolved to buy the field in order to come into legitimate possession of the treasure.

The field, however, was more expensive than he had thought. He quickly realized that buying it would cost him everything he owned. But the



treasure was worth it! Therefore, he decided to part with all that he had valued until this time, because he had found something much, much better. In view of the treasure, his possessions lost their previous significance, and he was ready to give them all up in order finally to buy that field.

That's just how it is in our life when we become a true Christian. We find a treasure that makes everything which previously meant a lot to us seem worthless. If we are willing to give up all our possessions, it can only be because we see a much greater value in what we have found.

We can find this treasure in a living, personal experience with God! Anyone who has found it is willing to sacrifice everything in return, because everything else pales in comparison.

When I discovered that Jesus is a living Being who answers my prayers, solves my problems, and understands me, and when I realized that religion is not mere dead formalism, but a new experience every day, I began to sell everything in order to obtain this treasure. Things I had never imagined I'd give up, suddenly lost their value when I compared them with what was being offered to me. Since then I have experienced a lot, but I have never regretted taking those steps.

True Christianity is much deeper than most people assume. A true Christian simply cannot be shallow. “I would not dishonor my Master so much as

For further thought:

Do you tend to
towards superficiality
or towards deeper
things in everyday life?

Does superficiality in
day-to-day life have an
effect on our attitude
towards spiritual things?
Have you already found
the treasure in life that
makes you happy and
content, and for which
you are willing to give up
everything?

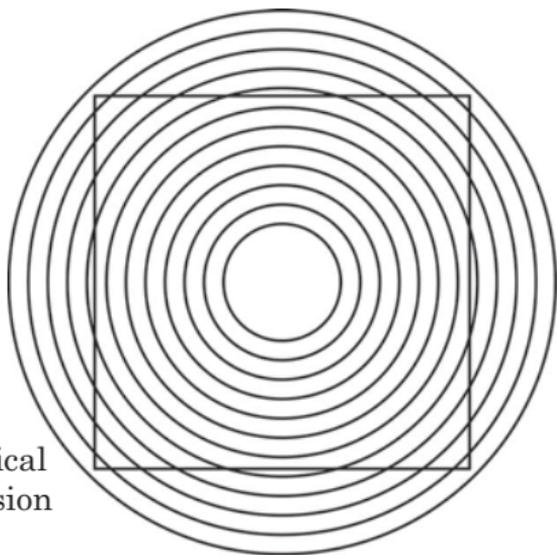
to admit that a
careless, trifling,
prayerless person
is a Christian.”
*Messages to Young
People*, 131.2.

The goal of this
booklet is to lead
you to a profound
experience with
Jesus. The fact
that you have
picked it up shows
that you desire
more than what
bland superficial-

ity has to offer. It shows that you want to go deeper. For that reason, I advise you not to read the following chapters quickly or superficially. Instead, thoroughly contemplate what you are reading and review your life while doing so. Please be honest with yourself as you do this, because if you deceive yourself, no one can help you.

Quotation:

“The soul that loves God, rises above the fog of doubt; he gains a bright, broad, deep, living experience.” *Bible Commentary* 7:907.12.



Optical
Illusion

Deception

Don't Let Yourself be Deceived!

Can you rely on your eyes, your ears, your taste, and your sense of smell and touch to give you the right impression of reality?

Let's take the eyes, for instance. You've probably seen optical illusions like the example illustrated here. We actually think that the sides of the square are bowed inward, even though the line on the two-dimensional image hasn't curved even a fraction of an inch (or millimeter). The lines seem to be bent, despite the fact that they run completely straight and parallel to each other.

Another example is the way railroad tracks seem to run together in the distance. How do such optical illusions come about?

Our eyes are not capable of making decisions. They merely deliver information to the brain,

which must then evaluate it. If we judge rashly, we can easily jump to wrong conclusions. But if our brain has been educated enough, then the grey cells will also have stored the information that this is an optical illusion. And the next time we see a railway line, we will know that the lines are parallel – even though they appear to come together in the distance.

But each new situation presents us with a fresh decision – do I believe the first impression that I have and that my eyes suggest, or is it just another illusion?

The whole thing goes even deeper. Take snow, for example.

What color is newly fallen snow?

No, that's not a stupid question. Most people answer it incorrectly!

New snow is made up of thousands of colorless crystals. But why, then, does it look white?

The sun's rays are made up of multi-colored light. They represent the entire spectrum of color – from violet to blue, green, and yellow to red. You can actually see these colors by splitting the light through a prism, because a prism will give you each hue individually. If the light waves hit an object, normally a part of them is absorbed, while the

rest are reflected. These reflected light waves then determine the color we see.

When sunlight falls on an expanse of snow, what you really see is a myriad of small “reflectors” that are spread evenly over the entire surface. But because the snow crystals reflect all of the light without absorbing even one single color, we humans perceive the snow as white when the reflected light reaches our eyes. A combination of all colors yields white light, and so you have the impression that the snow you are seeing is white.

Who determines that a certain object is red, blue, green, yellow, black, and so on, anyway?

As we know, a color-blind person would have a completely different view of the matter. We have learned to call certain shades of light one color or another. But it's all a question of education. If you were to tell children who are learning to speak that black is green and green is black, then they would learn the colors this way and also pass this information on to others, if it's not corrected in the meantime.

So can I assume that it's really red if my eyes see something red? “Olive” is characterized by one person as more of a green, by another as more of a brown. Purple and lilac also tend to cause differences of opinion, and many people say orange is yellow.

Turquoise is called blue by some people and green by others. How, then, can you know for certain that the word you're using to describe a color is correct? Maybe you belong to the category of people who see certain colors differently!

***Our Eyes are Not the Only
Senses that Deceive Us***

Our other senses can deceive us just as much as our eyes. Who hasn't heard a noise and mistakenly assumed it was something completely different from what it actually turned out to be?

I recall very well an incident when I was going from house to house selling Christian books. Once I entered a home with a big hallway, and was just looking for the person who had opened the door by the electric buzzer when a voice spoke to me. I was quite perplexed, because even after looking around very carefully I could see no one. I was addressed a second time – and not through a loudspeaker, either, but clearly and distinctly, as though in person. When the owner of the house finally materialized, she explained to me that she had a Southern Grackle – a talking bird, that is – which simply refused to quit playing this prank on new

visitors. Southern Grackles are able not only to repeat words, they can also imitate human vocal pitch and diction so well that their voice is often mistaken for a human's. Anyone who, as I did, hears these birds for the first time, will invariably fall for the trick.

Another example is people who suffer from tinnitus. They frequently hear noises that no one else perceives and which often cannot even be readily captured by technical instruments.

Likewise, our other senses can deceive or fully mislead us. You can certainly find one example after another that show how easily our senses can be fooled.

Can You Rely on Reason?

What are you supposed to rely on if you can't even trust your own senses?

That is doubtless an appropriate and important question!

If the messages coming from my senses can delude me as much as this, can't I just rely on my mind? After all, the mind is what evaluates the information and makes decisions based upon it. Surely I can trust my mind?

Indeed there are many people who put their intellect first, measuring and judging everything else according to it. But is intellect really a safe guide?

During the time of the French Revolution there was a backlash against the religion of the Dark Ages, which had sunk into formalism and superficiality, resulting in terrible persecution. For centuries the Church had cradled the masses in the false security that a lifeless, ritualistic religion can save from sin. The people had been taught to regard external displays of pomp as the substance of faith, and had searched fruitlessly within these confines for such a long time that they could no longer stand the inner emptiness. They had witnessed the mindless ceremonies of the priests for too long to continue letting themselves be deceived, and the pent-up frustration exploded with a real bang.

People did not want to keep believing in something that, despite its repeated promises, gave no satisfaction. Therefore they cast off everything that had anything to do with faith, in resolute determination. "Reason" was to take the place of God, who, up until this time, had been worshipped according to the clergy's instruction and portrayal. In order to make this decision known, a profligate woman was put on the throne and

symbolically declared to be the “Goddess of Reason”, who was to rule from that time on.

Historians have written the following: “One of the ceremonies of this insane time stands unrivaled for absurdity combined with impiety. The doors of the Convention were thrown open to a band of musicians, preceded by whom, the members of the municipal body entered in solemn procession, singing a hymn in praise of liberty, and escorting, as the object of their future worship, a veiled female, whom they termed the Goddess of Reason. Being brought within the bar, she was unveiled with great form, and placed on the right of the president, when she was generally recognized as a dancing girl of the opera. ...To this person, as the fittest representative of that reason whom they worshiped, the National Convention of France rendered public homage. ...This impious and ridiculous mummary had a certain fashion; and the installation of the Goddess of Reason was renewed and imitated throughout the nation, in such places where the inhabitants desired to show themselves equal to all the heights of the Revolution.’ – Scott, vol. 1, ch. 17.

“Said the orator who introduced the worship of Reason: ‘Legislators! Fanaticism has given way to reason. Its bleared eyes could not endure the

brilliancy of the light. This day an immense concourse has assembled beneath those gothic vaults, which, for the first time, re-echoed the truth. There the French have celebrated the only true worship, – that of Liberty, that of Reason. There we have formed wishes for the prosperity of the arms of the Republic. There we have abandoned inanimate idols for Reason, for that animated image, the masterpiece of nature.’ – M. A. Thiers, *History of the French Revolution*, vol. 2, pp. 370, 371.

“When the goddess was brought into the Convention, the orator took her by the hand, and turning to the assembly said: ‘Mortals, cease to tremble before the powerless thunders of a God whom your fears have created. Henceforth acknowledge no divinity but Reason. I offer you its noblest and purest image; if you must have idols, sacrifice only to such as this. . . . Fall before the august Senate of Freedom, oh! Veil of Reason!’ Alison, *History of Europe from the Commencement of the French Revolution in 1789 to the Restoration of the Bourbons in 1815*, vol. 1, ch. 10.” *The Great Controversy*, 275.1-276.2.

“This was followed, not long afterward, by the public burning of the Bible. And ‘the popular society of the museum entered the hall of the municipi-

pality, exclaiming, Vive la Raison! ...” *The Great Controversy* (1888), 276.3.

Anyone wanting to be convinced of the dire consequences of putting reason first need only read the history of the French Revolution. This time period is characterized by violent bloodshed, national instability, and a moral decline of unparalleled proportions. It is probably the best example of an attempt to place reason or intellect above everything else. This era is also called rationalism.¹

The problem that the French had at that time was that they believed the waywardness of a fallen church to be the true worship of God. But while they were right to throw away these lifeless forms, they didn’t actually know the real God at all! The thing they wrongly believed to be the cause of their misery was not the God of the Bible, but rather the god of the money-hungry ecclesiastics. As a result France threw out the baby with the bathwater.

Those who know the story can see how an entire nation sacrificed its economic and cultural achievements for the desire to put reason first, in the place of God. So let’s ask the question again: Can our

1 ratio (Latin) = reason

reason or intellect serve as a satisfactory authority? The answer is self-evident.

Going back to our example of snow, how do we know that snow is white – do our eyes tell us this, or does our brain?

Although our eyes are the sensory receptors that take in the information, they transfer it to our brain, which interprets this information and tells us that the snow is white. In order to come to this conclusion, our brain is influenced by what we have experienced ourselves and what we have learned from other people. So we're not actually relying on our eyes when we call snow white or other objects blue, green, or yellow; we're relying on our understanding. And this is precisely the thing that can be fooled so completely.

To realize this, just go and sleep outside in nature in a green tent. When you wake up in the morning and look outside the tent, the green grass and trees appear to be purple. You know from previous experience that they are not purple, but the brain has been temporarily fooled by the complementary color spectrum.

A tragic example of how our brain can be fooled is the true story of Jim Elliot, who with four other missionaries from America, tried to win the hearts

of the savage Auca Indians in Ecuador in the 1950's. To gain their confidence he showed these native men a photograph of a member of their tribe who had fled from their violence a number of years before. Jim pulled her photo out of his pocket to show them. They recognized her and began to talk excitedly among themselves. Two days later they returned and massacred Jim and the four missionaries with him.

The shocked survivors at the mission centre simply couldn't understand why. It wasn't until more than 30 years later that the truth came out. The naked natives had never seen a pocket before, nor a photograph. They assumed the photo was a flattened, reduced form of the person that Jim drew out of his body. Therefore he must have eaten her! The Aucas concluded that the missionaries wanted to eat the entire village, so out of fear they decided to kill them all before that could happen. Their brains could not make sense of the data their eyes were sending, so they had to find a way of understanding what they had seen. Their brains simply jumped to the wrong conclusions.

Logically then, our brain alone, is not a safe guide. So the Bible is quite up with the play when it warns us not to rely on our own understanding:

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding.” *Proverbs 3:5 (NLT)*.

This Bible verse leads us away from changeable humanity to an unchanging God; from deluded senses and an intellect that draws wrong conclusions to a Being that neither errs nor leads others astray.

The Example of Saul's Delusion²

Towards the end of his life, King Saul had an experience which can serve as another good example. Saul had strayed from God's ways and, for this reason, was fearfully and desperation looking for counsel from other sources. Although he had previously decreed that all fortune-tellers and psychics be put to death, in his hour of extremity the proud monarch sought out just such a woman. He ordered his servants: “Find a woman who is a medium, so I can go and ask her what to do.” *1 Samuel 28:7 (NLT)*.

The king was told that a woman who was able to reveal secret things was living in hiding at Endor.

2 You can read the full story in *1 Samuel 28:3-25*.

To conceal his identity, Saul disguised himself and set out under cover of darkness to Endor. This sorceress had been hiding there for quite some time. Despite his disguise, she recognized the King of Israel; but Saul calmed her fears and promised not to harm her if she would just bring Samuel, the dead prophet, back from the realm of the dead.

After she had murmured several magic spells, she told the anxiously waiting questioner, “I see a spirit coming up out of the ground... An old man wearing a robe is coming up.’ Then Saul knew it was Samuel, and he bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground.” *1 Samuel 28:13, 14 (NIV)*.

What followed, via the medium, was a short exchange of words between Saul and the supposed Samuel, who revealed Saul’s future to him



in unmistakable terms. Saul was convinced that the real prophet had appeared. His way of speaking was exactly as Saul remembered from when Samuel was alive. Even the woman thought that it was the prophet, come to life, with whom she was speaking. His appearance, his movements, his voice – everything was typical of him. Yet both were thoroughly mistaken – it was an evil angel who was impersonating Samuel.

“When Saul inquired for Samuel, the Lord did not cause Samuel to appear to Saul. He saw nothing. Satan was not allowed to disturb the rest of Samuel in the grave, and bring him up in reality to the witch of Endor. God does not give Satan power to resurrect the dead. But Satan’s angels assume the form of dead friends, and speak and act like them, that through professed dead friends he can the better carry on his work of deception. Satan knew Samuel well, and he knew how to represent him before the witch of Endor, and to utter correctly the fate of Saul and his sons.” *Bible Commentary* 2:1022.8.

Similar deceptions will recur in the last days, as Jesus warned, “For false christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the chosen ones.” *Mark* 13:22 (NKJV margin).

So What can You Rely on?

How could Saul and the woman have escaped this delusion?

By adhering closely to God's Word. It is clearly stated in the Bible that the dead know nothing and no longer have a part in anything that takes place under the sun. (See, for example, *Ecclesiastes* 9:5, 10). If they had believed the Word of God, which never lies, more than their own senses and understanding, they would not have been deceived. "The only thing in our world upon which we can rely is the word of God." *The Desire of Ages*, 121.2.

"...Feeling is not to be your criterion, for emotions are as changeable as the clouds. You must have something solid for the foundation of your faith. The word of the Lord is a word of infinite power, upon which you may rely." *Selected Messages* 1:328.2.

God's Word is absolutely reliable. Furthermore, it is inspired by a Being who only wants what is best for us. Why, then, should we not believe it more than ourselves and the unreliable impressions of our senses?

That is exactly what Solomon meant when he said, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take.” *Proverbs 3:5, 6 (NLT)*.

The principles contained in His Word are true because they come from a Being who does not lie. This fact distinguishes God from humans so much that it even says: “Let God be true but every man a liar.” *Romans 3:4 (NKJV)*. So you can absolutely depend on the statements in God’s Word – even more than on yourself.

Of course it is humiliating to have to admit that we cannot rely on ourselves and our abilities. But it’s a fact! If you ask me, I’d rather humbly admit that I can’t trust myself than run confidently into the arms of death.

Quotation:

“Are the people of God now so firmly established upon His word that they would not yield to the evidence of their senses?” *The Great Controversy*, 625.3.

Do you have this humility, too, or are you too proud for reality?

Life-threatening Deceptions

The more that's at stake, the worse the consequences of deception are. If we think we are on the right track, for instance, and don't notice we have been taken in by a delusion, we will be extremely disappointed in the end. And it could be quite embarrassing as well.

One evening I can remember I had gone to visit a client and was driving home alone after dark. Being relatively unfamiliar with the road, I was just following the signs. Since it was a freeway, I hoped to be home soon. After I had driven for quite a while and the names of the towns were looking totally foreign to me, I stopped in order to look at the map and see how much longer I had to go and to check that I was even on the right road. That's when I discovered that although I had found the right freeway, I had driven squarely in the wrong direction. Every mile (or kilometer) I thought was bringing me closer to home had actually led me farther away from it!

This is an example that involves only a material goal and a relatively small mistake that was easily

corrected. But what happens if we delude ourselves with regard to our aim in life?

In the desert there are mirages known as “Fata Morgana.” Thirsty travelers imagine they see an oasis with green trees in the distance, but in reality there are no trees, only hot sand. Because of this, many gullible travelers, in the hope of finding fresh water, turn off the road in order to reach the supposed oasis. After it turns out to be just an optical illusion, they can no longer find their way back to the road and die of thirst.

In colder countries during the winter, people have relied on their senses and assumed that the ice covering a frozen lake would hold their weight. But the sheet of ice often breaks, and people fall through into the freezing water below and die of exposure as a consequence of their misperception.

Still others have underestimated the temperature in the mountains, or not expected dangerous storm clouds to gather as rapidly as they can. Every year, many people lose their lives as a consequence.

When children see pretty, black berries, they sometimes eat them before their parents notice. They can die from the poison of deadly nightshade. And how easily the highly poisonous death cap can be confused with the commonplace button mushroom!



I'm sure you're familiar with even more examples, but these should be enough to show that information received through our senses can be illusory, with potentially fatal results.

If at the end of our lives we realize that the direction we have taken has been wrong, great will be the frustration and terrible the awakening.

The Bible describes just such people. They sincerely thought they had gone the right way, but in the end Jesus has to tell them: **"I don't know you or**

where you come from. Away from me, all you evil-doers!" *Luke 13:27* (NIV).

Many religious people are living in a delusion. In the next chapter we will take a closer look at this in order to make sure we are not deluded as well.

Quotation:

"You must have something solid for the foundation of your faith. The word of the Lord is a word of infinite power, upon which you may rely."

Selected Messages 1:328.2.

Two or Three Ways?

The Two Ways

I'm sure you're familiar with the parable of the two ways to which Jesus compares our life's path. (See *Matthew* 7:13, 14.) One of the ways is narrow and winds steeply upward, while the other is broad and leads ever downward. Accordingly, many Bible students imagine that there are only two groups of people who are traveling on either one of these two pathways.

Quotation:

“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it.” *Matthew* 7:13, 14 (NIV).

These two roads were once described by a prophet named Ellen White who had seen them in a God-given vision or dream. The astonishing thing, however, is that she did not – as

we might expect – see two groups of people on them, but rather three. This may surprise you, but let's take one thing at a time. First she described those who were walking the narrow pathway:

“Those who travel in the narrow way are talking of the joy and happiness they will have at the end of the journey. Their countenances are often sad, yet often beam with holy, sacred joy. They do not dress like the company in the broad road, nor talk like them, nor act like them. A pattern has been given them. A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief opened that road for them, and traveled it Himself. His followers see His footsteps, and are comforted and cheered. He went through safely; so can they, if they follow in His footsteps.” *Testimonies for the Church* 1:127.2.

Next, she was shown those who had chosen the opposite, broad pathway:

“In the broad road all are occupied with their persons, their dress, and the pleasures in the way. They indulge freely in hilarity and glee, and think not of their journey's end, of the certain destruction at the end of the path. Every day they approach nearer their destruction; yet they madly rush on faster and faster. Oh, how dreadful this looked to me!” *Testimonies for the Church* 1:128.1.

Then we read about the third group, which is especially interesting:

“I saw many traveling in this broad road who had the words written upon them: ‘Dead to the world. The end of all things is at hand. Be ye also ready.’ They looked just like all the vain ones around them, except a shade of sadness which I noticed upon their countenances. Their conversation was just like that of the gay, thoughtless ones around them; but they would occasionally point with great satisfaction to the letters on their garments, calling for the others to have the same upon theirs. They were in the broad way, yet they professed to be of the number who were traveling the narrow way. Those around them would say: ‘There is no distinction between us. We are alike; we dress, and talk, and act alike.’” *Testimonies for the Church* 1:128.2.

What kind of people are these?

First we are pointed to the signs they are wearing. It may remind us a little of demonstrators who have written the cause of their displeasure on banners, which they either hold up with poles or drape around their bodies. In this manner they publicly proclaim their opinions for everyone to read. On this third group the words are clearly written:

“Dead to the world. The end of all things is at hand. Be ye also ready!”

From time to time they point earnestly to these inscriptions. It seems as if they have to overcome their fears in order to do this, for they fear being ridiculed by their fellows. But nonetheless, it gives them great satisfaction time and again to overcome themselves and “witness” to others. After all, they think, they are “suffering” for Christ’s sake.



Their references to the writing on their signs, however, seem to make very little impression upon their associates, who emphasize that they cannot see any fundamental difference between themselves and the group of sign bearers. In fact, they

are right. There is actually no real difference worth mentioning.

“They looked just like all the vain ones around them... Their conversation was just like that of the gay, thoughtless ones around them... ‘There is no distinction between us. We are alike; we dress, and talk, and act alike.’” *Testimonies for the Church* 1:128.2.

On which of the two pathways are these peculiar people traveling?

On the broad path, no doubt about it!

The fact that they imagine themselves to be on the narrow path does not affect reality. It is not their imaginations that count, but the hard evidence of what they are like – and this testifies to the fact that they are walking on the broad path.

They themselves, however, would assert that they are on the narrow way and are suffering the ridicule and mockery of their fellow travelers for Christ’s sake. They would point to their good works in making others aware of the need to use the time remaining and prepare for the end of the pathway.

So what we have here is a very strange group – they are very religious and think that they are on the right narrow path and are serving the Lord; but in reality they are on the broad path and are hardly distinguishable from their fellows.

We need to ask ourselves honesty: Is it possible that we belong to this group of people, too?

We have already seen how easily we can be thoroughly deceived. We can be 100% positive that we are walking on the right path, and are absolutely convinced that it is the narrow, upward path. Others' mockery seems only to confirm this, for when we point our friends to eternal things, they just laugh scornfully or respond in a derogatory way.

But is their reaction enough to prove we are on the right way ourselves?

As the parable of the two pathways clearly shows, it's quite possible that the opposite is true!

A More Precise Look

We want to look a little more closely at the two pathways and the people on them, and think about it more deeply, because a superficial view will lead us to a wrong conclusion.

“Yet do not therefore conclude that the upward path is the hard and the downward road the easy way.” *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, 139.1.

Just a second there. What did that say?

It is incorrect to think that the upward path is the harder way and the downward road the easier

way? Are you sure that's not a typo? But the upward, winding road is much, much more strenuous than the downward one, isn't it? You have to overcome yourself constantly, fight against your own desires, and sacrifice so much! You're not allowed to do what you actually want to do, and have to make a great effort to do right. Well if that's not exhausting and difficult, what is?

But in this quote it actually says that the upward way is the easy way!

If we can't see that, it shows how very deluded we can be! Anyone who thinks the upward path is the difficult way belongs to the third group who are weighed down with gloomy signs and dragging themselves forward along a counterfeit, laborious-looking path.

Whoever finds themselves thinking like those in the third group, has never experienced the joy of true Christianity! No – the narrow pathway Jesus bids us travel is completely different. In fact He tells us quite plainly, “My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” *Matthew 11:30*. Christ's narrow way is not hard and heavy, but easy and light!

The wise man, Solomon, once expressed it like this: “The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the full light of day.” *Proverbs 4:18 (NIV)*.

What is the true Christian way compared to in this proverb?

It is compared with the first part of the day, until noon. The time period after that, during which the sun recedes again, is no longer a part of the comparison. Why not? Because the life of people who have a living experience with Jesus does not go downward, but upward; because it does not get worse, but better and better; because they do not become sadder and sadder, but happier and happier.

“But do not for a moment suppose that religion will make you sad and gloomy and will block up the way to success. The religion of Christ does not obliterate or even weaken a single faculty. It in no way incapacitates you for the enjoyment of any real happiness; it is not designed to lessen your interest in life, or to make you indifferent to the claims of friends and society. It does not mantle the life in sackcloth; it is not expressed in deep-drawn sighs and groans. No, no; those who in everything make God first and last and best, are the happiest people in the world. Smiles and sunshine are not banished from their countenance. Religion does not make the receiver coarse and rough, untidy, and uncourteous; on the contrary, it elevates and ennobles him, refines his taste, sanctifies his judgment, and fits him

for the society of heavenly angels and for the home that Jesus has gone to prepare.

“Let us never lose sight of the fact that Jesus is a wellspring of joy. He does not delight in the misery of human beings, but loves to see them happy. Christians have many sources of happiness at their command.” *Messages to Young People*, 38.1, 2.

Is that really true? Can you expect life with Jesus to be happy?

Just imagine you were in love, and your affections were eagerly reciprocated. Would you have to force yourself to meet with the person in question? Would you find it sad to be close to him/her yet again? Would you be weighed down with gloomy signs?

It's similar with spiritual things. Jesus is called the Church's groom and our husband. “For your Creator will be your husband; the Lord of Heaven's Armies is his name.” *Isaiah* 54:5. As Paul said to

Quotation:

“Those who in everything make God first and last and best, are the happiest people in the world.” *Messages to Young People*, 38.1.

the Corinthian church, “I promised you as a pure bride to one husband – Christ.” *2Corinthians* 11:2. And the Lord says, “...You will call me ‘my husband’ ... I will make you my wife forever ...” *Hosea* 2:16, 19 (NLT). You will count opportunities to spend time in close fellowship with Him as belonging to the happiest moments of your life.

“We should never give to the world the false impression that Christians are a gloomy, unhappy people. If our eyes are fixed on Jesus, we shall see a compassionate Redeemer, and shall catch light from His countenance. Wherever His Spirit reigns, there peace abides. And there will be joy also, for there is a calm, holy trust in God.” *The Desire of Ages*, 152.5.

Do you know how Jesus started His public ministry to the people on this earth?

He began it by contributing to the success of the happy celebrations at a wedding. This was no coincidence. Through this act He wanted to show us that He had come to enrich our lives, not to take something away from us. He wanted to make us happier, not take away our joy.

Let us continue with the description of the narrow pathway:

“And all the way up the steep road leading to eternal life are well-springs of joy to refresh the

weary. Those who walk in wisdom's ways are, even in tribulation, exceeding joyful; for He whom their soul loveth, walks, invisible, beside them. At each upward step they discern more distinctly the touch of His hand; at every step brighter gleamings of glory from the Unseen fall upon their path; and their songs of praise, reaching ever a higher note, ascend to join the songs of angels before the throne." *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, 140.3.

This description sounds so pleasant that you tend to think of it as being unrealistic; yet it is in perfect agreement with the biblical comparison of the rising sun. If you have a living experience with the One who knows best what is good for you, then you have every right to expect your life to go upward and forward on the positive way.

The Broad Road

Let us take another look at the broad road:

"All along the road that leads to death there are pains and penalties, there are sorrows and disappointments, there are warnings not to go on. God's love has made it hard for the heedless and headstrong to destroy themselves. It is true that Satan's path is made to appear attractive, but it is

all a deception; in the way of evil there are bitter remorse and cankering care. We may think it pleasant to follow pride and worldly ambition, but the end is pain and sorrow. Selfish plans may present flattering promises and hold out the hope of enjoyment, but we shall find that our happiness is poisoned and our life embittered by hopes that center in self. In the downward road the gateway may be bright with flowers, but thorns are in the path. The light of hope which shines from its entrance fades into the darkness of despair, and the soul who follows that path descends into the shadows of unending night." *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, 139.1.

It is true that the broad road may appear attractive at first, for Satan's deception creates the temporary impression that the consequences of sin are quite pleasant. But this supposed happiness lasts only a short while. Very soon it turns out to be a soap bubble, dangling a weightless idol in front of us, but bursting when we try to catch it.

In the previous chapter we considered the example of a Fata Morgana. Many dying of thirst in the desert have experienced this mirage, which fooled their senses into believing that water was nearby. But mirages are found not only in the desert.

What driver hasn't noticed the "puddles" that form in the middle of the street some distance ahead on hot summer days? They are nothing other than the famous "oasis in the desert" and are based upon the same principle: a ray of light is bent while traveling through layers of air with varied densities. In the case of the "wet street," the bottom layer of air is heated intensely by the hot asphalt on the dark street, to the point where the sky is reflected by it. Our eyes deceive us so much that we see water where it is actually completely dry.

Such illusions exist in the sphere of religion as well, and Satan is a master at performing one *Fata Morgana* after the other. Whoever sees the broad road as a pleasant, satisfying, and uplifting way has been tricked by a mirage.

This is not to deny that the broad road cannot bring temporary gratification. For a short time, the feelings are definitely excited, resulting in a certain sense of happiness. But it bursts as quickly as a soap bubble, leaving you more dissatisfied than you were before.

This is just what God wants to save us from. He does not want us to waste our energies on something that only disappoints us in the end. For this reason, He asks:

“Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and let your soul delight itself in abundance.” *Isaiah 55:2* (NKJV).



***F**ata Morgana have cost the lives of many who were dying of thirst, by giving the illusion that there was water where there was only arid sand.*

My Own Experience

To be quite frank, deception is a very fascinating thing. It has certainly tripped me up in the past. I remember one time when I was offered an electric hand-held planer for only a fraction of the price you would normally have to pay for it. It looked so inviting on the brochure that I wanted to have it in my hands right then and there. The thing is, when you read descriptions of unknown brands and see the colored illustrations accompanying them, the impression you usually get is that all the manufacturers of the big well-known brands just want to rip you off.

So I ordered the appliance. When it arrived, I unpacked it with eager expectancy, happy to have got such a bargain. But great was my disappointment! The fine settings were so inexact and the planing table so wobbly that I was appalled. I could never do quality work and achieve good results with such a cheap, shoddy, poorly made tool!

Sobered, I packed the planer up again in order to send it back. While doing so, I began to feel annoyed at the loss of time I had suffered. "I suppose I should have guessed," I thought to myself, "with a cheap offer like that . . ."

To be honest with myself, I really couldn't imagine how a machine like that, with a description promising so much, could at the same time be so cheap. I had allowed myself to be totally fooled.

Satan is still using the same trick with great success. He sells the broad path as "good" and "dirt cheap" at the same time. By doing so he combines two things that actually cannot occur together because they are mutually exclusive. Yet people fall for it in hoards, just because certain illusions along the broad path look as inviting as the colorful illustrations in that brochure. But if you keep walking down this path, one disappointment soon follows the next.

Asaph's Experience

Let's look at Asaph's experience now, which he describes in *Psalms* 73. For a while he had allowed himself to be deceived by Satan, and had fallen for his Fata Morgana. The great deceiver had deluded him into thinking that the wicked live better lives than the righteous.

Asaph admits, "But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked." *Psalms* 73:2, 3 (NIV).

Where did he see that?

In Satan's Fata Morgana. To Asaph it looked as if these wicked people had everything they needed, and what's more were happy and satisfied as well.

"They seem to live such painless lives; their bodies are so healthy and strong. They don't have troubles like other people; they're not plagued with problems like everyone else." *Psalms* 73:4, 5 (NLT).

It may appear like this at times, but if we're honest, it isn't difficult to see that a statement like that isn't really realistic. Are all of the wicked problem-free, well-fed, and healthy? Are they free of struggles and torment? You could only imagine such things if you had been thoroughly tricked by Satan's brightly colored "brochures".

Then Asaph goes into further detail about the lifestyle of the wicked, and closes his description with the words: "These people are wicked, always at ease, and getting richer." *Psalms* 73:12 (NCV).

Asaph contrasts the state of the wicked with his own situation and bemoans: "So why have I kept my heart pure? Why have I kept my hands from doing wrong? I have suffered all day long; I have been punished every morning. God, if I had decided to talk like this, I would have let your people down.

I tried to understand all this, but it was too hard for me to see.” *Psalms* 73:13-16 (NCV).

Poor Asaph! That sounds like the disappointed cry of a desert wanderer who has been tricked by a Fata Morgana.

But the psalm doesn't end at this point. It goes on to describe the escape Asaph found from his unhappy situation. As we read the next verse we see how abruptly his attitude changes: “Until I went into the sanctuary of God; Then I understood their end.” *Psalms* 73:17 (NKJV).

Suddenly the fog that has built up around his understanding lifts, and he can see reality more clearly again. The words that he subsequently uses to describe the wicked make it clear that he can now see things in their true light.

“Surely you place them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin. How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors! As a dream when one awakes, so when you arise, O Lord, you will despise them as fantasies. ... Those who are far from you will perish.” *Psalms* 73:18-20, 27 (NIV).

So Asaph, too, was deceived. Fortunately he was able to find the right way after all. Yet his experience shows how fast you can fall for a mirage.

The Son Who Came to his Senses in the Nick of Time

Another parable Jesus once told contains the same lesson.

“Then Jesus said, ‘A man had two sons. The younger son said to his father, “Give me my share of the property.” So the father divided the property between his two sons. Then the younger son gathered up all that was his and traveled far away to another country.’” *Luke 15:11-13 (NCV)*.

This son was sick of always being under the control of his father. He felt constrained, patronized, and robbed of his freedom. He had come to a point, he thought, where he was old enough to break free. He insisted on his rights and plunged recklessly into his supposed freedom. Finally he could live the way he wanted. He could do as he pleased. So that’s just what he did, and he enjoyed it to the full too – at least until circumstances forced him to rethink.

“There he wasted all his money in wild living. About the time his money ran out, a great famine swept over the land, and he began to starve. He persuaded a local farmer to hire him, and the man sent him into his fields to feed the pigs. The young

man became so hungry that even the pods he was feeding the pigs looked good to him. But no one gave him anything.” *Luke 15:13-16 (NLT)*.

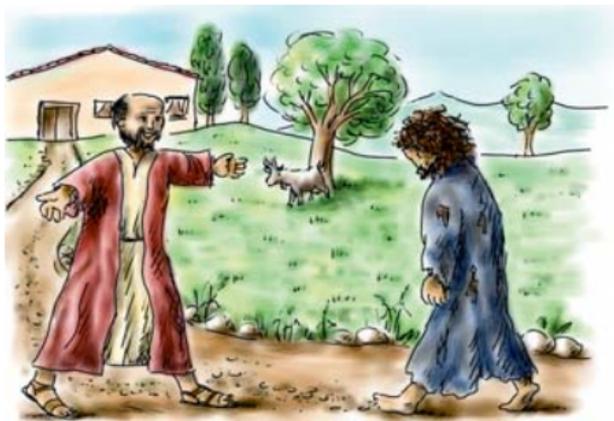
His money was soon spent, and his “friends” turned out to be opportunists only interested in what they could get. When his fortunes went from bad to worse they rudely abandoned him.

So the son, alone and friendless, finds the only work available – feeding pigs. Until one day, “When he finally came to his senses...” *Luke 15:17 (NLT)*.

What does it mean when it says he “came to his senses”?

That means God’s Spirit was able to take away the illusion, so that this son could see things the way they really were. The Fata Morgana that appeared to be dangling a carefree life in front of him burst like a colorful soap bubble and dissolved into nothing. As he sat there thinking, without a single cent in his pocket, looking at everything without any rose-tinted spectacles on, he was suddenly no longer able to understand how he could have been foolish enough to run away from his father’s care. Now Satan’s delusion had lost its attraction for him. The hard school of life’s circumstances had led him to think more deeply. God’s Spirit could work on him, and he saw things in a new light.

“In his restless youth the prodigal looked upon his father as stern and severe. How different his conception of him now! So those who are deceived by Satan look upon God as hard and exacting. They regard Him as watching to denounce and condemn, as unwilling to receive the sinner so long as there is a legal excuse for not helping him. His law they regard as a restriction upon men’s happiness, a burdensome yoke from which they are glad to escape. But he whose eyes have been opened by the love of Christ will behold God as full of compassion. He does not appear as a tyrannical, relentless being, but as a father longing to embrace his repenting son. The sinner will exclaim with the Psalmist, ‘Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him.’ Ps. 103:13.” *Christ’s Object Lessons*, 204.2.



Satan's Enchanted Ground

The experience Saul had with the witch of Endor is not only a historical fact; it also has symbolic meaning for us. Like Saul, we have been deceived by Satan. Many people believe there is life, where God's Word explicitly says there is death. We think we can get important information and gain something essential for our lives from a place God has clearly warned us against, when all He wants to do is lovingly save us from the negative consequences!

If we place ourselves on Satan's ground, then our deluded senses will regard as real just what the great deceiver is dangling in front of us; and if we do not strictly adhere to God's Word, we will be plunged into a hopeless end, just like Saul.

It is not said whether any of the deceived wanderers on the broad path realized their mistake before it was too late; but we do have the reports that Asaph and the prodigal son recognized the Fata Morgana for the deceptions they were. Although both were sorely disappointed, it helped them, and ultimately they found the right way after all.

But let's come back from history to today – could it be that you, too, are wrong about God?

Could it be That You are Wrong About God?

What is Your Concept of God?

Do you imagine God as an old man with a long, white beard, who has only dusty views on life which don't apply to you today? If you think like this, of course you'll assume He isn't capable of giving you any relevant advice that will be of help to you with your problems and burdens.

But if you see God as the Creator of all things – the intricacies of nature, the complexities of chemistry, the infallible laws of physics, the reliability of the order of astronomical bodies and the wonders of your own body and brain – you will see that He is not out-of-touch, old-fashioned, behind the times, or boring.

Instead you will recognize God for the infinite, loving Creator He is, who tells His creatures which way of living leads to true happiness and

which way does not. When you see God like this, then you'll be willing to trust Him. He won't lie to you because He's the One who created you, and He wants what's best for you. He only gives you the advice in His Word in order to warn you of the bad consequences that result from wrong actions. He wants to enable you to get the best out of life. He says, "Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well." *3John 2 (NIV)*.

We need to ask ourselves, "What is my concept of God?"

Go ahead and take a few minutes to think about just how you might express your idea of God. Of course I'm not talking about His outward appearance, but His character.

Do you think that He prohibits you from doing something because He wants to take it away from you?

Do you think you'll be missing out on something good if you follow His instructions?

Do you think His commandments impose restrictions on your happiness?

If there is still some idea of this sort lurking in the back of your mind – even only a little bit – then you've fallen for a lie and been thoroughly deceived.

I can well remember one day when I was with a group of young people who were asking what you're allowed to do and not do on the Lord's Sabbath day. If you ever find yourself asking this, you haven't yet understood the meaning of the day of rest that God has given us! You have a wrong concept about it and about God's character. Do you think that God wants to punish you by making you spend a whole day doing something you don't enjoy?

Or how about those questions your classmates like to ask – “Are you allowed to do this or that in your church...?” God is looked upon as forbidding things that He personally doesn't like, although they would bring joy to His children. Questions like these arise because your classmates assume that their (wrong) concepts of God are the same as yours.

But how far away from reality such thoughts are!

“All things in nature testify to the tender, fatherly care of our God and to His desire to make His children happy. His prohibitions and injunctions are not intended merely to display His authority, but in all that He does He has the well-being of His children in view. He does not require them to give up anything that it would be for their best interest to retain.” *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 599.4.

“We are never called upon to make a real sacrifice for God. Many things He asks us to yield to Him, but in doing this we are but giving up that which hinders us in the heavenward way.” *The Ministry of Healing*, 473.4.

If we have such an indescribably wrong concept of God’s character, we will draw wrong conclusions. Anyone who sees God as wanting to take away or withhold something good from us has totally missed the point.

In reality it is exactly the opposite. In everything He does, God has our happiness in mind. He wants us to lead fulfilled lives, and does all in His power to enable us to do so.

“I will rejoice in doing them good and will assuredly plant them in this land with all my heart and soul.” *Jeremiah* 32:41 (NIV).

The problem is that there is an opponent – someone whose greatest joy is in circulating lies about God.

“You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.” *John* 8:44 (NKJV).

This being has placed our Creator's intentions towards us in a false light, and by his lies has led us to view the One who loves us infinitely with deep distrust. In Greek, the original language of the New Testament, this being is called "Diabolos," which, literally translated, means "Confunder." He really does confound everything. He turns everything upside down and calls "good" "bad". "Being controlled by one's unbridled emotions" he calls "freedom". Anything that slowly but surely destroys us he calls "desirable", and anything that God has designed to help us he calls "danger" or "foolishness".

Quotation:

"Satan is constantly seeking to deceive men and lead them to call sin righteousness, and righteousness sin." *The Great Controversy*, 192.3.

And the worst thing about this is that so many people are fully deceived by these lies and believe them to be the truth!

He doesn't work on deceiving people all alone – he has many allies and helpers. The "sign bearers" on the broad path belong to this category, too! Among their fellows, they are known as model "Christians". How often they have pointed to the writing on their signs and called on others to wear the same inscription.

As they do so, they are closely watched by the other people on the broad path.

When they drag themselves along with sad expressions, barely managing to repress their sighs, then the watchers get the impression that the Christian life is made up of nothing but bitter sacrifice and great efforts to overcome one's own desires. They actually think that Christians are joyless people who have chosen the burden themselves of not enjoying anything any longer, and who think it a virtue to do just the opposite of their own wishes. They see Christians as people bearing heavy burdens and wearing a galling yoke.

“Christians who gather up gloom and sadness to their souls, and murmur and complain, are giving to others a false representation of God and the Christian life. They give the impression that God is not pleased to have His children happy, and in this they bear false witness against our heavenly Father.

“Satan is exultant when he can lead the children of God into unbelief and despondency. He delights to see us mistrusting God, doubting His willingness and power to save us. He loves to have us feel that the Lord will do us harm by His providences. It is the work of Satan to represent the Lord as lacking

in compassion and pity. He misstates the truth in regard to Him. He fills the imagination with false ideas concerning God; and instead of dwelling upon the truth in regard to our heavenly Father, we too often fix our minds upon the misrepresentations of Satan and dishonor God by distrusting Him and murmuring against Him. Satan ever seeks to make the religious life one of gloom. He desires it to appear toilsome and difficult; and when the Christian presents in his own life this view of religion, he is, through his unbelief, seconding the falsehood of Satan.” *Steps to Christ*, 116.1, 2.

So the third group walking on the broad path is carrying out Satan’s purposes perfectly. In them he has able helpers for his intentions to deceive and make God’s way appear gloomy, unrewarding drudgery.

What Concept do You have of Jesus?

Again, this question is not about appearances, but character. Our concept of Jesus influences our lives. How many wrong ideas people hold about Him!

“There are many who have an erroneous idea of

the life and character of Christ. They think that He was devoid of warmth and sunniness, that He was stern, severe, and joyless. In many cases the whole religious experience is colored by these gloomy views.

“It is often said that Jesus wept, but that He was never known to smile.” *Steps to Christ*, 120.2, 3.

It is true that Jesus was a Man of sorrows, as described in the Old Testament. “He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.” *Isaiah 53:3* (NKJV). But it is easy to jump to wrong conclusions about that.

“Our Saviour was indeed a Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with grief, for He opened His heart to all the woes of men. But though His life was self-denying and shadowed with pain and care, His spirit was not crushed. His countenance did not wear an expression of grief and repining, but ever one of peaceful serenity. His heart was a wellspring of life, and wherever He went He carried rest and peace, joy and gladness.

“Our Saviour was deeply serious and intensely in earnest, but never gloomy or morose. The life of those who imitate Him will be full of earnest purpose; they will have a deep sense of personal responsibility. Levity will be repressed; there will

be no boisterous merriment, no rude jesting; but the religion of Jesus gives peace like a river. It does not quench the light of joy; it does not restrain cheerfulness nor cloud the sunny, smiling face. Christ came not to be ministered unto but to minister; and when His love reigns in the heart, we shall follow His example.” *Steps to Christ*, 120.3, 4.

We can see confirmation in Jesus’ life that true religion does not make people joyless and sullen, but quite the opposite – it gives peace and positive cheerfulness. So don’t let yourself be deceived. Whenever an idea contradicts the Word of God, it cannot be right, no matter how many people on the broad path implicitly believe it and reiterate it repeatedly.

Quotation:

“At all times and in all places He manifested a loving interest in men, and shed about Him the light of a cheerful piety.” *The Desires of Ages*, 86.3.

Why are We Deceived?

There are many rumors in circulation about God's character and that of His Son. How is it that people allow themselves to be deceived so easily into believing these rumors that have no basis in biblical truth?

Well, there are several reasons. One is that it is true that many people are so shocked at the suffering they've witnessed at the hands of professed Christians, past and present, and been treated so badly themselves, that they assume God is the perpetrator of such behavior and understandably don't want anything to do with Him.

But another reason is that we are too easy on ourselves, so tend to pass the buck and blame someone else for our difficulties, when in reality it is our own beliefs and expectations that are causing the problems. We won't discover the true cause until we look at ourselves a little more closely and examine our own beliefs. Often the reason for being deceived about the character of God is in ourselves. An example will help us understand this better.

Suzy comes home from school completely distraught. Her cheeks are still wet with tears. Beside

herself with indignation, she throws her schoolbag onto the floor and is about to vanish into her room when her mother stops her. “What’s wrong with you, sweetheart?” With a questioning look she holds her arms out to her crying daughter.

“That dumb teacher was so mean!” Suzy manages to gasp. Then a heartrending sob smothered her agitated voice and the tears flow again. After patiently waiting, the mother discovers the true cause of the accusations. Suzy hadn’t studied at all for an oral test and had been caught out – yet again. Her teacher had mercifully given her a “D” when he should have scored her an “F” as she deserved. But Suzy was so furious at having been “caught” in front of her classmates that she would not let herself be comforted. In her eyes, the teacher was cruel, heartless, and mean.

Her mother, however, evaluating the circumstances without the emotional feelings of her daughter, could not agree with her assessment. She saw in the situation a clear sign that preparation for class would have to take a higher priority in Suzy’s afternoon activities.

How do such opposite views of the same incident come about?

To Suzy’s mind, there are far more interesting things to do than “sucking up,” as she somewhat

disdainfully calls learning. She thinks she has better things to spend her time on than just sitting around with her schoolbooks, so she prefers to idle away her afternoons doing things that she sees as fun. Theoretically she knows she won't get anywhere without studying; but with Suzy, the road from theory to practice is infinitely long. And in order to distract the attention away from her deficiency, she blames the teacher.

That's the way it often works. If we love a wrong habit, of course we don't want to give it up. We stick to it like a burr sticks to our clothing. And if someone shows us our mistake, or circumstances demand that we let go of something, then we are so blinded by the sin within us that we can't see things straight anymore. As a consequence, we misjudge the things around us. In our eyes, circumstances are hard and unpleasant, heavy and oppressive, and we see the person who wants what is good for us as cruel and cold, loveless and unsympathetic.

"It is natural for the wrongdoer to hold the messengers of God responsible for the calamities that come as the sure result of a departure from the way of righteousness. Those who place themselves in Satan's power are unable to see things as God sees them. When the mirror of truth is held up before

them, they become indignant at the thought of receiving reproof. Blinded by sin, they refuse to repent; they feel that God's servants have turned against them and are worthy of severest censure." *Prophets and Kings*, 139.4.

This is precisely the reason why the narrow pathway seems so joyless and difficult to many. "If you cling to any besetting sin you will find the way too narrow for you to enter." *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, 138.4.

On the narrow pathway it is necessary to give up sins and overcome mistakes. But if we love them so much that we don't want to let go of them, then we see this pathway as an enemy – as something that encumbers and restricts us. So the reason for the wrong point of view lies with us!

The following German saying expresses this principle: "If you see other people as unclean, it could be because of your own dirty glasses." As someone who wears glasses, I understand very well what this phrase means. How often I've experienced an unpleasant shadow clouding my vision until I took off my glasses and removed the spot that had somehow settled onto the inside of my lens!

In the same way, if we see God as cruel, and domineering, or cold and loveless, as Suzy sees her

teacher, then we need to take a look inside ourselves. We need to see whether some sin hasn't taken hold in our life and is clouding our view of God's true character. Most likely we will soon find a sin problem, providing we accept God's Holy Spirit as our helper.

It's a really vicious circle – the sin inside me blinds me and I have a wrong view of God and the narrow way. My wrong view leads me deeper and deeper into sin. The consequence is that I am even more deceived about God and withdraw further away from Him, and so on, until I am separated further and further from my loving Creator.

How can I Break this Vicious Cycle?

It's very simple – by believing what the Bible says about God and His Son. When I believe the Word of God more than I even believe myself, I have found the way out of the vicious circle.

And what statements do you find in this Book?

“For bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.” *1Timothy 4:8* (NASB).

In other words: if you want to have a fulfilled, happy life, then become a true Christian! True Christianity doesn't feed its followers just with hopes of a better world in the future; it also offers them true fulfillment even in this life.

“But do not for a moment suppose that religion will make you sad and gloomy and will block up the way to success. The religion of Christ does not obliterate or even weaken a single faculty. It in no way incapacitates you for the enjoyment of any real happiness; it is not designed to lessen your interest in life, or to make you indifferent to the claims of friends and society. It does not mantle the life in sackcloth; it is not expressed in deep-drawn sighs and groans. No, no; those who in everything make God first and last and best, are the happiest people in the world. Smiles and sunshine are not banished from their countenance. Religion does not make the receiver coarse and rough, untidy, and uncourteous; on the contrary, it elevates and ennobles him, refines his taste, sanctifies his judgment, and fits him for the society of heavenly angels and for the home that Jesus has gone to prepare.

“Let us never lose sight of the fact that Jesus is a wellspring of joy. He does not delight in the misery of human beings, but loves to see them happy.

Christians have many sources of happiness at their command.” *Messages to Young People*, 38.1, 2.

If you’ve had a different concept of God until now, then it’s time to be introduced to the Bible’s view and embrace that instead. Don’t let yourself be deceived like Asaph! Break through the dark curtain of wrong ideas and come out of this miserable, vicious cycle!

Do Not Talk About That!

An Unpopular Subject

Another crash! This intersection is infamous for near misses, but this time a young moped rider had to pay with his life. The ambulance has just arrived, and the teenager is pronounced dead. There was no point in attempting resuscitation. His body is covered with a white sheet and taken away in a hearse to the morgue. At the funeral the pallbearers are carrying an ordinary, wooden casket. But there is something depressing, yes, even eerie about it. Everyone knows that this is the young man's final destination.

But he was so young! Only 16 years old. To be quite frank, I wouldn't want to be the policeman who had to bring such terrible news to his parents. A very short time ago, this healthy, bright teenager was alive and as happy as a lark. But now it's all over. A modest funeral service, and soon the only

people who will remember him will be his relatives and close friends.

Was he prepared for death? Did he accept the offer of a merciful God?

“How terrible it is to stand by the coffin of one who has rejected the appeals of divine mercy! How terrible to say: Here is a life lost!” *Messages to Young People*, 89.1.

A tragic case – but is it an isolated one?

Unfortunately not! Here is just one of so many people who lose their lives each day in this or a similar way. It is not a rarity at all.

Do you think something like this would never happen to you?

I hope you have enough courage to be a realist. This is not to scare you, but I would like to ask you to think realistically.

In a magazine for young people the following story was reported: “On the morning of June 29, a brother came to the house where I was visiting. He had a conversation with the lady of the house at twelve o’clock; he ate a hearty dinner, and afterward went to work in his garden. After working for awhile, he became heated and thirsty, and drank a cup of cold water. His wife stepped out of the room, but hearing a noise, she returned. She found her

husband standing leaning against the wall, but he fell that moment on the floor, unconscious. She asked him if he knew her, as he opened his eyes, but he was unable to answer; for he gasped and died.

“How uncertain is life! Today many of you may go out in usual health, and you may be brought home lifeless.” *The Youth’s Instructor*, December 7, 1893 par. 6, 7.

Could this happen to someone you know? Or could it even happen to you? What if you were next?

This may be provokingly blunt, but I need to speak openly with young people. Is this okay?

For you don’t even need to cause the accident yourself. All you need to do is walk across the street and have a driver not see you. Or maybe you’re standing at the bus stop, unsuspecting, and a driver who’s lost control of the vehicle hurtles into the waiting crowd. Or... or... or...

It can happen so quickly. And then?

Are you ready for that?

Would your life have had a meaning?

Young people don’t usually talk about death. But why not? They talk about almost everything else, so why not discuss such an important subject as this?

I think there is a deeper reason why young people often avoid this topic – they just don’t want to

acknowledge it! They are in a state of denial, so everything connected with death in any way is blocked out. They simply assume, “That won’t happen to me.” So whatever happens, just don’t think about it!

It’s not only the young who suppress it. Just look at the way older women often color their hair and put on their makeup. Some even jokingly refer to it as their war paint. They are fighting to deceive themselves and others that they are still attractive and not growing old.

Why do they spend so much energy on it? Simply to cover up the signs of age that have gradually developed over the years. For these signs of aging remind them all too much of the fact that they’re getting older and are steadily heading for death. They want to push this fact as far away from themselves as possible.

Do you think that such repression is a satisfactory solution?

Let’s compare it to a school exam that has been scheduled to take place at a certain time. Does it make sense to simply repress the knowledge of the date because you don’t want to study? It’s possible to block the thought of it out of your memory, and you can choose to skip studying – but only until the

day of the exam. Then, at the last minute, you will bitterly regret it. The better solution is doubtless to prepare thoroughly for the exam during the time remaining. The exam will certainly come, whether you repress it or not.

It's the same way with death. You can block out the thought of it as much as you want, but you can't change it. Sooner or later, death comes to everyone – inescapably. So why not just prepare for it?

What? Prepare for death as a young person, who – generally speaking – still has their whole life ahead of them, or most of it? But hang on, isn't that just a little extreme at this early point in time?

No, not at all. It means having the courage to be a realist! It means not just pointlessly living out the day like everyone else. It means including in your life's plans the knowledge that your life on earth will one day come to an end.

In the Bible, it's expressed like this: **“Teach us how short our lives really are so that we may be wise.” *Psalm 90:12 (NCV)***. In other words, incorporate the knowledge that life on earth will end into your life's plans – only then can you be called wise.

Life With a Keel

I can promise you something. If you are a realist about death and organize your life accordingly, you will have a depth to your life that will positively distinguish you.

Have you ever spent time at a large lake or at the ocean? If so, you probably saw yachts or sailboats there. There are so many different forms and colors – just like there are many different kinds of people. But do you know that there is one thing the professional sailing boats all have in common? They have a keel, which is like a “fin” that hangs down vertically from the hull of the boat. The keel is firmly joined to the hull to ensure that the whole boat cannot be capsized when it is windy. This keel does an outstanding job of stabilizing the sailboat, even though you cannot see it from above the waterline.

Exactly the same thing applies to people who realistically include the end of life on earth as part of their life’s plans – they know why they’re alive. People like that have a real “keel” in their lives. They are equipped for the adverse winds of life. Nothing can capsize them quickly.

You need to acquire a keel like that!



Why Think About the End When You are Still Young?

What would you actually change in your life if you were aware of the fact that you have to die?

Material things take on a completely different value. There's a saying, "The burial robe has no pockets." This means you can't take anything with you. We all leave this world with as many possessions as we had when we came into it – namely with nothing at all! The fact that this is only too true leads to the sobering thought that material things cannot be as important as we often think.

Those who have had their eyes opened by this realization have the best chance of correctly evaluating the material things they have to deal with every day. Money or mammon, the god of this world, loses its attraction for them. Spiritual, invisible things, on the other hand, become more and more important.

But before we continue to think about this, I would like to ask you something else.

The Meaning of Life

Have you ever been in a cemetery?

“Yes,” you may say, “at so-and-so’s funeral.”

But that’s not what I’m asking. I mean all by yourself, without a funeral service or other distraction.

Why?

Because a cemetery is a very suitable place for thinking about the meaning of life! Yes, I know that none of your friends probably go there unless they absolutely have to. They would no doubt think you were weird for even considering such a thing. But it’s likely that none of them think deeply about the meaning of life, either. If you ask your school mates what their aim in life is, you will probably be given either a sympathetic smile or some superficial answers, like:

“To have as much fun as possible...”

“I couldn’t care less.”

“I don’t need an aim.”

Others may think a little more deeply and answer:

“Getting married and having a family” or: “Taking over my father’s business.”

But stop and think about it honestly: is that supposed to be the aim of life? If you’re in a cemetery, wandering through the long rows of graves, you cannot help but come to the conclusion that goals that relate only to this life cannot be the real meaning of life.

There they all are, lying in the same dirt. And if they’ve been lying there for a while already, they will all even look about the same!

There lies the one who had as much fun as possible.

There lies the one who couldn’t care less.

There lies the one who thought an aim in life wasn’t necessary.

There lies the father of a family, and there’s the one who took over his father’s business.

There they all lie in rank and file, laid out neatly beside one another.

Do you think that wealth makes any difference?

There is the somewhat rundown grave of a poor fellow, and the florally decorative one over there belonging to the rich owner of a company. Do you think that the money he had accumulated will improve the soil he eventually becomes? Will it be any different from the adjacent soil that was once a pauper?

No – in the cemetery, all such material successes and failures in life are reduced to the same clump of dirt.

A. T. Jones summarized it like this: “After death and decomposition the dust of the prince cannot be distinguished from the dust of the pauper, nor even from that of his dog.” *The Gospel in Creation*, 143.2.

It’s pretty strange: you go to elementary or primary school, after which you attend a higher level school, learn a trade, possibly get married and have children. You go to work, give your best and, in due time, get promoted. Perhaps you and your spouse buy your own little home. The children grow up and leave you; then you retire, and are able – if everything works out – to enjoy your retirement for a few more years; and then...? What happens then? Was that everything?

Anyone who thinks about these things realistically has to admit that all of life doesn’t add up to

any significance if everything is over at death. If this visible, earthly life is all there's supposed to be, then the whole thing is nothing but a huge flop of nature.

Can you see how you get to a very critical point here? Contemplating death inevitably makes a person think about the true meaning of life.

I can tell you that as a young person I spent hours in cemeteries. I struggled to find the meaning of life. I took the plunge and imagined that it was "my turn." I seriously asked myself the question: "If I have to die today, will my life have been worth living? What point will it have had?"

Fortunately I was not without a Bible back then. It was there that I found what I had so desperately been searching for. Not just any meaning, but the only deep, satisfying, and true meaning of life. I recognized that my life is only good for something if I occupy just the place that God has assigned to me in His providence.

In the Bible I also found that everything doesn't end with this life. Anyone who lives only for this life, anyone who looks only for material things, cannot find fulfillment in life. If we have only a good 70 or 80 years at our disposal we are really badly off.

I am extremely grateful for the realization that everything doesn't end with death, that there is an eternity that is worth living for. I am glad to know that there is a Redeemer who has broken death's power and will raise me again so that I can finally live with Him on a new earth without an end. And I am delighted that He has a purpose for me on this earth today.

Do You have Guts?

I will be quite open – I am so glad I didn't avoid those questions back then! And you, too, will be glad if you have the guts to face these facts.

Why “guts”?

Because so many people today are cowards who avoid these questions.

Have you noticed how people are often afraid of being alone when it's totally quiet?

Observe those around you. If they get up early in the morning, the radio has to be switched on. It doesn't matter what program – just as long as there's background noise. And so it continues all day long until the evening, when a constant stream of TV takes over. And it's not even so important for a good movie to be on – as long as something's happening

and the dreaded event of being confronted with deep questions in complete silence doesn't arise.

Who takes the time these days to go to a cemetery in order to think more clearly about why they are even alive?

Anyone who seriously contemplates the meaning and purpose of life has real guts.

Young people, especially, should question themselves as to the meaning and purpose of their lives. That's not just something for grandmothers and grandfathers. You see, if you don't ask yourself this question you are like a person who goes to the train station and gets on a train at random, without finding out beforehand where the train is even going! No reasonable person would do that. You only get on after making sure that the train in question is going to the destination you want.

So in case you haven't thought about the meaning of your life yet, it's definitely high time to do so now.

Quotation:

“No scheme of business or plan of life can be sound or complete that embraces only the brief years of this present life and makes no provision for the unending future.”
Education, 145.2.

Quotation:

“All God expects of us is to live each day as if it were our last on earth, surrendering ourselves to Him to do His will.” *Manuscript Releases* 18:176.4.

“Whether we have one year before us, or five, or ten, we are to be faithful to our trust today. We are to perform each day’s duties as faithfully as though that day were to be our last.” *The Review and Herald*, October 25, 1881 par. 4.

“Let us begin each day as if it were the last we should pass upon earth, and continuing in prayer let us live in such a way, that we may ask God at its close to bless our efforts and influence.” *The Bible Echo*, March 1, 1893 par. 8.

What Is a Realist?

Are You a Realist?

There are various ways to define a realist. One plausible explanation says: A realist is a person who doesn't focus on only a part of something, but who sees the complete picture.

Perhaps you know the following object lesson. Several people who had never seen an elephant in their lives were blindfolded. Then they were led to one of these pachyderms and given the task of touching the animal with their hands and then describing what they felt in their own words. The first person felt the elephant's trunk and said: An elephant is long and similar to a snake. The second person felt its fat legs and came to the conclusion that an elephant is shaped more like a round, fat fencepost. A third person felt its stomach and concluded that it was a barrel-shaped Behemoth. The fourth, who felt the ears, compared the elephant to a stingray – thin, broad, and flexible.

The point of this story is the following lesson: if you take only a small area and use it to judge the whole thing, you will automatically come to wrong conclusions. For this reason it is absolutely necessary to obtain a complete view in order to judge things accurately.

You learn the same lesson if you try to capture a complete sequence of movement in a snapshot. If you look at only a single picture, you cannot possibly get exact information about what happened before it and afterwards.

One day our dog got stuck in the bushes. He tried pitifully to get our attention, eagerly hoping that we would free him from his uncomfortable situation. Anyone who saw him at that moment had to melt in sympathy. His eyes were so imploring and his whining so piteous that you felt you had to help the poor thing at once. But snapshots can be deceptive.

He had landed in this unfortunate position only because he was chasing a young cat that didn't know her neighbor well enough yet and had dared to come too close to his territory. Loudly barking, he had pursued her, disregarding all our calls intended to hold him back. If he had caught her, his sharp teeth would have clamped down without a doubt. But at the last moment, the bushes provided

the cat with the delay she needed to save her and allow her time to escape. If you know this background story, then the outcome suddenly looks completely different. You don't feel so sorry for the dog.

This is just what happened to Asaph when he looked at the wicked people around him. He was looking at a snapshot, so to speak, which gave him a very unrealistic picture because he concluded that life must always be that way.

You could name many other examples. Take advertising for instance. No vacation spot can expect to attract visitors if its brochure features dreary pictures of a gray, rainy day. Holiday resorts are always sunny and warm, with bright blue skies, and located in the midst of flowering plant life – on the brochure, at least. Every advertising professional knows how readily people tend to judge the whole thing by a snapshot, and so they take advantage of this weakness. When the holiday makers reach the destination with this expectation they will be disappointed if they experience only rain instead of the glorious vacation sun and have to use an umbrella instead of sunglasses.

It's similar with billboard advertising. If you look at cigarette companies' advertisements, then you will see only laughing, healthy people in the middle

of scenes that appeal to the various feelings of the viewers. It's either rugged adventurers surrounded by rocky mountains, deserts, and other extreme situations, or they portray typical, smiling citizens who are enjoying life "to the full". Provision has also been made for those who want to break out of the Joe Average cliché, and the advertising figures are portrayed as challengingly different. But seldom is the whole picture shown.

In some countries, like New Zealand, the final result of lung cancer x-rays is actually published on the cigarette packets. Blatant warnings are also boldly featured. But research has shown these have little or no adverse effect on the sales. Whether this is because of the attractive little boxes that are sold to cover up the graphic pictures, or just that the users are de-sensitized to such images is not known, but the consumer obviously doesn't identify with the reality of the end result of their habit. There is an ostrich-like head-in-the-sand attitude that denies the cause and effect of cigarette smoking, so the outcome is not acknowledged. Instead, only the imagined joys of smoking are focused on.

This tendency to pull one aspect out of the whole picture, and make that the entire picture can be found everywhere.

A paradigm example of such behavior was after Elijah, through God's power, achieved a spectacular victory over idolatry on Mount Carmel. Satan was enraged by this and organized things so that the man of God would suddenly receive news that his life was in danger. Queen Jezebel sent a messenger who shook the startled prophet awake and informed him of the threat to his life. On hearing that Jezebel planned to kill him, the formerly courageous Elijah momentarily lost sight of the big picture and imagined that this small snapshot was the whole story. With this threat filling his mind, his faith failed and he ran for his life. Yet just hours before Elijah had stood alone on the mount as the victorious champion for God's truth.³

The list of examples can be extended almost endlessly, but always with the same result – if you single out and focus exclusively on just one aspect or situation, taking that to be the whole picture, you cannot help but be led astray.

3 To read the full story see *1Kings* chapters 18 and 19.

How does this Work in Practice?

Peter is groaning about his low salary. He has no prospects of a raise any time soon, and he is venting his frustrations. On the way home, he tells his friend: “The poor employees where I work get taken advantage of by the company all the time! The bosses are crooks, and cheat us, so we workers really have to fight for our rights. We must band together in order to put an end to this dreadful injustice!”

How did Peter come to this conclusion?

He, too, is looking at a snippet of reality and thinks it is the whole picture. He watches his boss come to work in a new Mercedes. Even though he, as an employee, starts at 7:00 am, the “big guy” will arrive sometime later in the morning – whenever he happens to feel like it. And instead of sweating with oil-stained hands like Peter, the boss sits at his desk with a suit and tie, on the telephone. To top it all off, he sometimes drives away again earlier than Peter, while the latter, toiling away, has to wait another half hour before fleeing the building.

What Peter doesn't see are some of the things that go on behind the scenes and "after hours." Soon after the employees have left their sphere of action and are enjoying a carefree evening at home, the boss often comes back because his day is really just beginning now. He pours over files and studies regulations, he audits invoices and plans the next day's work, he enters data into his bookkeeping program and grapples with problems of which Peter is totally unaware, and would certainly not want to worry about. After that, he might unsuccessfully try to fit an upcoming seminar into his crowded schedule. After his employee has long quit thinking about work, the company's manager finally drives home – via a detour, because he still has to take that promised item to a customer and drop his tax return into the slot at the finance office. The next day when Peter says goodbye as he leaves to start his well-earned two-week vacation, the boss gazes after him with a wistful look seeming to indicate that he'd like to be an employee again for a little while himself...

I'm sure you're imaginative enough to find more examples. This principle can be applied again and again.

All or Nothing

If we are realistic, we know that we have to gain a complete picture of reality, because getting only a piece of it will be misleading. The same principle applies to choosing a certain product from a selection.

Let's say I need a computer and have a choice of two. One computer has just what I want as far as performance is concerned – a fast processor, sufficient memory, and a built-in CD burner, many USB slots and so on. The built-in modem and the software that comes with it are further advantages. The only disadvantage is the price! It's simply way beyond a poor student's reach, no matter how enticing the computer may appear.

The other computer's price is quite affordable, but it has nothing special and the software isn't anything out of the ordinary either. Just good enough for normal work. Of course, its speed and hard-drive size as well as the other necessary elements are just right for my needs – but the latest extras aren't included.

What thoughts race through your mind when you're faced with that kind of choice?

The best thing would be if the cheaper price were written right beneath the other computer! It would-

not take you long to decide in that case. But of course life's not like that.

The same thing applies to Julia. She isn't married, but not because she can't find a husband; oh no, she just doesn't want to tie herself down. She likes being "free" so much that she absolutely hates committing herself in any way. She doesn't want to feel dependent or have to consider others in her plans. This side of the coin is so important to her that she's never actually managed to have a serious relationship. While out with her girlfriend again, however, she's not raving about these advantages – which are so important to her – at all; rather, she's filling her friend's ears with complaints about how lonely she is. Married people are so well off. They always have someone to share their thoughts with, whereas she has no one to listen to her when she comes home. She whinges on about how being alone is driving her up the wall. In whining tones, she describes the advantages of married life in glowing colors and draws a sharp contrast between them and her own "poor existence". If you listen to her for a while, you get the impression that there is not a being in the whole world to be pitied more than poor, single Julia.

How did she come to this wrong view?

Once again fallacy has found a victim who's making a whole picture out of a small snapshot. This egotistical woman is thinking only of herself when she doesn't want to be tied down and dependent. And then, when she looks at married couples' lives, she focuses only on the advantages she desires and ignores any disadvantages.

If we think like that, we are being unrealistic. If I am married, then of course I can share my thoughts with my partner; but naturally, I am also not free and unattached as before, because everything has to be sorted out with the other person. The two belong together – just like the good computer and the high price.

Yet by their behavior, people show how unrealistic they really are. The married person complains about not having enough quiet time, the single person about being lonely, the boss complains about having too much responsibility and the worker about low wages. Everyone complains because they focus on a mere part of the overall picture and are not willing to take things as a whole – the way they are.

To be realistic, I need to accept things with all that belongs to them – without any ifs or buts. If I choose to pick out only what suits me, and forget the bits I don't like, then I leave the realm of reality.

Delayed Consequences

The Bible says in definite terms: “A treacherous person is headed for destruction.” *Proverbs 13:15 (NLT)*. But why does it look as if that’s totally untrue – at least in many cases? Why do we get the exact opposite impression a lot of the time and imagine – like Asaph – that it would be advantageous to walk down the broad road of the ungodly?

If people fell over dead as soon as they took a wrong step it would be a lot easier and clearer to see what’s right and what’s wrong, wouldn’t it?

But obviously we can’t approach life’s consequences so superficially. If we had such an attitude, we would be essentially placing the whole blame on God. So we’re going to have to delve into this a little more deeply.

In our world there is a clear relationship between cause and effect. “In the laws of God in nature, effect follows cause with unerring certainty.” *Christ’s Object Lessons*, 84.1.

If I touch a bare wire that has electricity running through it, I will get an electric shock. And if, on top of that, I am unfortunately standing in a wet place, touching something that conducts

electricity well, and the electric current goes directly over my heart, then it's quite possible that that would be my last foolish mistake.

In this sort of case, effect follows cause without any delay. But the consequences don't always happen so immediately. If you put lots of cholesterol into your body, your blood vessels will constrict over time, as the cholesterol is deposited on the walls of your arteries. It may be that no outwardly recognizable damage appears for years. But the cause will not remain without effect. The deposited cholesterol diminishes the arteries' diameters more and more, blood pressure rises, and one day you will have a heart attack or a stroke. How often we hear people saying, "My father never had anything wrong with him all his life, and all of a sudden – out of the blue – he had a stroke!" That statement is typical of not seeing the relation between cause and effect.

In the Bible, it's expressed like this: "Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, the hearts of the sons of men are fully set to do evil," or, as another translation puts it, "When evil people are not punished right away, it makes others want to do evil, too." *Ecclesiastes* 8:11 (AMP, NCV). In other words, the consequences aren't always visible right away, but they are there

nonetheless and will show themselves once they have become big enough.

Karen turned the tap on in the kitchen to fill the sink for washing the dishes. Wanting to use her time more efficiently, she went away briefly to do something else. She often did this, and always made it back in time. But just then the phone rang, and a very interesting conversation ensued prompting her to go and get something important from another room, and one thing led to the next.

After some time she approached the kitchen only to be met with a stream of water. The turned-on tap suddenly came back to her mind with a vengeance. There were the watery consequences of her forgetfulness pooled on the kitchen floor. The table, with its thin legs like stilts, was standing in the midst of the flood, which was spreading by the minute as a small stream flowed unperturbed from the sink down the side of the cupboard.

Oh dear, what a mess! The sink had filled up as intended, but the overflow had become clogged by the floating dishcloth, so the water had to find another outlet. The flood had simply been caused by the laws of nature.

As we have seen, the consequences aren't always visible immediately, but they are there

nonetheless and will show themselves once they have become big enough to be seen. The problem is only that we short-sighted humans tend to imagine that there will be no consequences at all if they don't show up immediately!

In the case of the sink it took only a few minutes, but sometimes it takes months, years, or even decades until the consequences of a wrong action become visible. The master deceiver uses that time to his advantage and talks the beguiled into believing that violating the law has no serious consequences. But the passing of time changes nothing about the fact that the consequences will, with absolute certainty, become visible at some point. If you wait until then to pull the emergency brake it will be too late.

If you single a brief moment out of the whole picture and do not take in the full time period, you will draw wrong conclusions. For example, it is true that most people do not become sick immediately after eating meat, but that in no way means it isn't harmful. There is often a period of apparent calm before the storm.

“Some do not immediately feel its effects, but this is no evidence that [meat-eating] does not hurt them. It may be doing its work surely upon

the system, yet for the time being the victim may realize nothing of it.” *Christian Temperance and Bible Hygiene*, 47.3.

The Bible – a Book Full of Reality

The Bible is a very realistic book in this respect, too. It doesn't lie and tell us that one snapshot is the complete picture; it always points us to the full story so that we will be able to have the foresight we need.

Asaph saw the end of those whom he had once envied so much, and after this he was able to view everything in a new light. “When I thought how to understand this, it was too painful for me – until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I understood their end.” *Psalms* 73:16, 17 (NKJV). After he stopped just singling out the current situation, and instead began to look realistically at the whole picture, his eyes were suddenly opened.

Paul challenges his readers to do the same. “Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.” *Hebrews* 13:7 (NIV).

“For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the

enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame – who set their mind on earthly things.” *Philippians* 3:18, 19 (NKJV).

“We count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord’s dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.” *James* 5:11 (NASB).

When God, through his instrumentalities, prompts people to look at the end, then He doesn’t mean that we should focus exclusively on the end as a point in time, but rather that our overview should include the end. If we apply this advice to cigarette advertising, it would mean: “Don’t just look at the laughing people on the ads. Look at the ends of their lives as well – lung cancer, for instance. Then you’ll have the true, whole picture in front of you.”

With impartial realism, the Bible reveals a complete picture of life. In this way it gives us an absolutely realistic picture from both sides.

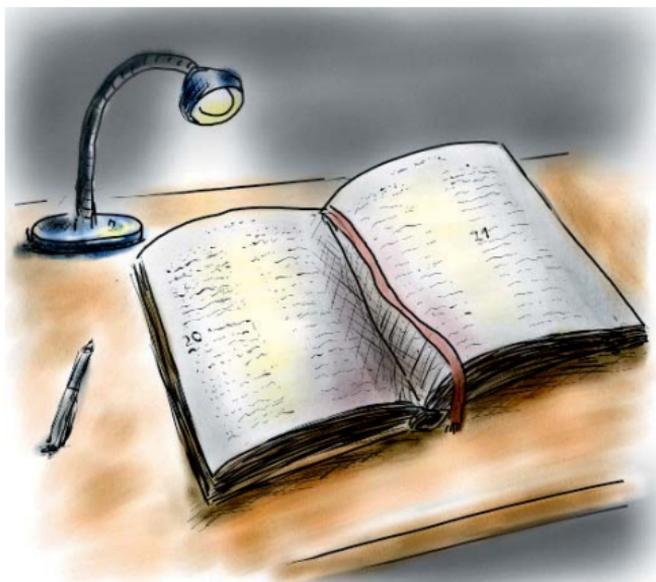
On one hand, the Bible shows that the life of a believing person will not be free from suffering, but on the other hand it also shows the help we will receive from above. It does not beautify the difficulties through which a Christian passes in this world, but it illuminates the advantage we have in being

able to give our problems to a capable Problem Solver. It draws a realistic picture of how limited and perishable all earthly things are, but it also points out the reward awaiting the believer.

Similarly, the Bible does not conceal the superficial pleasures that a worldly person has, but it also reveals how they will burst like a soap bubble in the end. It mentions the days of ease in the worldly life that are comfortable to human nature just as honestly as the terrible dismay when it becomes obvious, ultimately, that all the earthly things which this person has loved are about to be destroyed.

Do you want to be a realist?

Then you have to take account of the whole picture; you cannot single out one aspect and say it is the complete entirety. God gives us total freedom to choose whether to look at the whole picture or focus on just a part. But you need to realize that in choosing to which of the two groups you want to belong, that it's all or nothing – otherwise you're not a realist!



***D**o you want to be a realist?
Then look in the Bible and
follow its realistic counsel.*

Is the Majority Always Right?

Are Millions of Maggots Right?

An acquaintance of mine always had a bunch of smart sayings on the tip of his tongue. Once, when there was a discussion about whether the majority is right or not, he paused, then spoke in a deep voice and said, in tones of utter conviction: “Eat dung, people!” After waiting for several moments until all curious eyes were on him, he then added, by way of explanation: “Because millions of maggots can’t be wrong!”

Even if he was rather unconventional and provocative, at least he understood the principle that a widely spread practice doesn’t validate it. Of course we are not flies – or maggots – but he was simply using a well-known example from daily life in his rural surroundings. I can’t remember a pile of manure being close by at the time, but at least it made us vividly imagine thousands upon thousands of maggots hungrily gorging their way through the foul-smelling heap. It is obvious that after the flies

lay their eggs on the manure and they all hatch, the fact of zillions of maggots eating dung does not turn this practice into a virtue.

The same argument can be used about the masses of people who binge drink. Just because they might say that alcohol is a good, legal, drug which allows them to escape the trials of life, does that vindicate it? And if the thousands of smokers ignore the danger of lung cancer or arrogantly say that they might as well die smoking as any other way, does that validate their delusion? Or if most of the world eats meat, does that mean it is the healthiest diet for us?

Have you heard of Galileo Galilei?

He was a famous astronomer who lived during the dark Middle Ages. In 1609, this researcher constructed a telescope and with it discovered Jupiter's moons, Saturn's rings, the mountain ranges on the moon, and the sunspots. These discoveries were so radical and so inconsistent with the geocentric beliefs of his day, that the papal church branded them as heretical and dubbed his telescope the "devil's instrument". Despite such denunciation Galileo continued his research, confirming the heliocentric teachings of Copernicus. He had discovered that the earth was a sphere,

that the sun was the center of the solar system and that the earth revolved around the sun. Advocating such extreme theories, however, brought Galileo into fierce conflict with the inquisition. He was summoned to Rome, interrogated, and imprisoned. They threatened him with torture, and out of fear, he recanted his teachings under oath. This scientist experienced the power exercised by the majority simply because it is the majority, but not because it is right. He lived during a time when the earth was believed to be both flat and also the center of our solar system, so anyone who suggested something different was condemned by the ruling church and could count on facing the death penalty. However correct his ideas may have been, and however erroneous the commonly accepted ones were, he was fighting against the majority and he was made to feel the pressure with a vengeance.

The Majority at School

Maybe you know this phenomenon from school, too.

The students are standing in the smokers' corner and using the few minutes between lessons for a cigarette. Whoever doesn't smoke is "out", and

whoever does is “in”. Everyone is basically doing the same thing, but they vaunt their individuality while doing it. You can see one guy smoking the brand that depicts the bold hero on the billboard. Another guy only smokes an exclusive “show-off” brand. A girl prefers “light for women”, and yet another guy swears by hand-rolled. But whether light or strong, hand-rolled, bought, or borrowed, the harmful effect is always the same.

They know very well that smoking damages the lungs, but as we have seen, it’s not about the truth – it’s about joining in with the big crowd! Teenagers don’t want to be outsiders at any cost – and many even sacrifice their health in the process.

What do you think – should you do the wrong thing just because the majority is doing it?

“None should fear to be singular if the fulfillment of duty requires it. If it makes us singular to avoid sin, then our singularity is merely the distinction between purity and impurity, righteousness and unrighteousness. Because the multitude prefer the path of transgression, shall we choose the same?” *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, 63.2.

When the unpleasant consequences eventually arrive, the fact that other smokers are suffering as well won’t be of any help to you at all. The fact that

others are dying of lung cancer too will be of no comfort if you have only a short time to live due to your own smoker's lung. You will see that it doesn't pay to follow the majority blindly – too late!

***Reformers were Always in
the Minority***

The pressure of the masses is indescribably great. Every reformer feels it. Back in the Middle Ages, Wycliffe and Huss, Calvin and Zwingli, Martin Luther and many other reformers all felt this pressure. They had found the truth, accepted it wholeheartedly, and did what they could to support it. But because they stood in opposition to the vast majority of people, who clung to the established church traditions, they had an extremely hard battle to endure.

Often it wasn't even about the question of what's right or wrong, but only about the assertion that a single individual or a small group can't possibly be right because of the mere fact that they are in the minority. The majority church, on the other hand, is deemed to be on the right path solely because so many people belong to it and because that's what has been believed for so long.

However if you look carefully at history you should reach the conclusion that the truth has always been on the side of a small minority. The vast majority always takes the wide and comfortable path of least resistance.

Therefore, loving the truth means automatically being at odds with the majority. It is like a law of nature, and you have to understand this principle if you want to be a realist.

Jesus alludes to it with the words: “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.” *John 18:36 (NKJV)*.

“Don’t you realize that friendship with the world makes you an enemy of God? ... If you want to be a friend of the world, you make yourself an enemy of God.” *James 4:4 (NLT)*.

“No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.” *Luke 16:13 (NKJV)*.

Of course this does not make the reverse true – that everyone standing in opposition to the majority must be right. There are many fanatics who boast about the fact that they stand alone in their

viewpoint and take this as evidence that they are correct. But that isn't necessarily so.

The real point is not to delude ourselves by ignoring the facts. Jesus says unmistakably that the majority is on the path to destruction: “For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it.” *Matthew 7:13* (NIV).

By this He is simply explaining a principle. The great majority of humanity loves sin and not righteousness. That is a fact – you can live your life meaningfully and without disappointment only if you know and expect that.

When the Bible tells us not to run after the majority, it does so because God, in love, is pointing out to us the fact that no lasting happiness can be found on this broad path. “Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong. When you give testimony in a lawsuit, do not pervert justice by siding with the crowd.” *Exodus 23:2* (NIV).

At the beginning, we talked about how you can float along on the shallow currents of this world's streams like a dead fish, or you can choose to be like a salmon and swim upstream against the current. This metaphor was picked up in the lyrics of a German song, which especially ingrained itself into my memory. It simply says that dead fish always go

with the flow; while only living fish swim against the current. This comparison reveals the vital point – only those who have a living experience with God are capable of swimming against the current of the majority.

The Bishop of Meaux

The faith of many people is shipwrecked on this point. They don't have the guts to step out of the crowd. It is so terrible for them to be an "outsider" that they prefer to give up the truth rather than to put themselves at odds with the majority. This is as common today as in the past.

One example from history is the bishop of Meaux who lived in France, in the early 1500's. There, the reformers Lefevre and Farel had gained a living relationship with their heavenly Father and through this they became "the salt of the earth" to all those to whom they ministered. See *Matthew* 5:13.

"A dignitary of the church, the bishop of Meaux, soon after united with them. Other teachers who ranked high for their ability and learning joined in proclaiming the gospel, and it won adherents among all classes, from the homes of artisans and peasants to the palace of the king. The sister of Francis I,

then the reigning monarch, accepted the reformed faith. The king himself, and the queen mother, appeared for a time to regard it with favor, and with high hopes the Reformers looked forward to the time when France should be won to the gospel.

“...The Reformation made rapid progress. The bishop of Meaux labored zealously in his own diocese to instruct both the clergy and the people. Ignorant and immoral priests were removed, and, so far as possible, replaced by men of learning and piety. The bishop greatly desired that his people might have access to the word of God for themselves, and this was soon accomplished. Lefevre undertook the translation of the New Testament; and at the very time when Luther’s German Bible was issuing from the press in Wittenberg, the French New Testament was published at Meaux. The bishop spared no labor or expense to circulate it in his parishes, and soon the peasants of Meaux were in possession of the Holy Scriptures.

“As travelers perishing from thirst welcome with joy a living water spring, so did these souls receive the message of heaven. The laborers in the field, the artisans in the workshop, cheered their daily toil by talking of the precious truths of the Bible. At evening, instead of resorting to the wine-shops, they

assembled in one another's homes to read God's word and join in prayer and praise. A great change was soon manifest in these communities. Though belonging to the humblest class, an unlearned and hard-working peasantry, the reforming, uplifting power of divine grace was seen in their lives. Humble, loving, and holy, they stood as witnesses to what the gospel will accomplish for those who receive it in sincerity." *The Great Controversy*, 214.2-215.1.

Such is always the case when people have a living experience with God. Their religion does not remain a theory, but becomes their daily strength. Satan, God's opponent, has nothing against a formalistic faith, since it often serves his purposes even better than an open rejection of God. But he has a demonic hatred for living faith, which changes and affects daily life. That's why he spurs his servants to crack down on it with all their power.

"The light kindled at Meaux shed its beams afar. Every day the number of converts was increasing. The rage of the hierarchy was for a time held in check by the king, who despised the narrow bigotry of the monks; but the papal leaders finally prevailed. Now the stake was set up. The bishop of Meaux, forced to choose between the fire and recantation, accepted the easier path; but notwithstanding the leader's fall, his

flock remained steadfast. Many witnessed for the truth amid the flames. By their courage and fidelity at the stake, these humble Christians spoke to thousands who in days of peace had never heard their testimony.” *The Great Controversy*, 215.2.

The point here is not to sit in judgment on the poor bishop of Meaux. His life is merely to serve as an example of how the pressure of the masses can be so great that people even give up the truth for it.

Do you have the courage to stand for your faith, even if it looks as if you’re all alone?

A Double Life – Double Nonsense

So we can either stand for the truth or go with the flow. Is there another option open to us? Although many people think there is, they are making a grave mistake. These people try to do both simultaneously! They want to serve God and themselves at the same time.

They believe the spiritual truths they have learned from their parents or teachers, and when they are in the company of like-minded people, they profess it, too. It’s not hard for them to talk about spiritual things in a worship service or in

other gatherings, as long as everyone else is doing it, too. But when circumstances change, and they come into the company of unbelievers, then they change and adapt to their new friends. They don't want anyone to notice that they are different.

Therefore when they are in school or together with unbelievers, they act like them. But they change hats when they are at church or with their Christian friends. Once it's a weekday again, they flip the switch back to "everyday" and the weekly routine continues. Many have really perfected this art and play their double lives superbly, like skilful actors.



Such behavior is extremely deceptive and therefore highly dangerous. These young people fool themselves with the assumption that everything's all right. And as long as their two "worlds" stay carefully

separated, the game can be played for quite some time. Eventually an unexpected situation arises, the boundaries become unclear, and things become awkward for them. Their double life is exposed and they lose the confidence of their friends on both sides.

So what's the deal with you?

Are you playing a double life, too?

This is a direct question, but if you really want to make spiritual progress, then you can't afford to beat about the bush.

If you're not so sure about where you stand, you can find out for yourself by answering the following questions.

What would happen, for example, if a Christian friend of yours suddenly turned up in the schoolyard during a lunch break to talk to you about spiritual things? Would it be embarrassing and unpleasant for you?

If this person were to pull out a Bible in front of all your classmates and start reading it – how would you feel?

Would you rather everyone thought you didn't know each other?

If the teacher addressed you during class and said he/she had seen you going to Bible study, would you feel uncomfortable?

If a couple of your classmates, who know you well, were to accompany you to church, would they see the same person who talks with them every school day, or would they be totally surprised to see that there are two of you – one who is a good churchgoer and one who is a typical schoolmate?

Would they hear the same words coming out of your mouth as you use in school? Or would they be surprised that you express yourself in a way they've never heard before?

In short, what would happen if the distinctions between your two roles weren't so clear for once?

Anyone wanting to be a realist has to get used to the fact that standing on the side of truth almost always means being in the minority, at least as far as others are concerned. "To stand in defense of truth and righteousness when the majority forsake us, to fight the battles of the Lord when champions are few – this will be our test." *Last Day Events*, 180.4.

There is Another Reality

But isn't it horrible always to belong to the minority, always to feel the pressure of the masses, and always to be just an outsider?

To be frank, that's just what Asaph would have asked. But that's a wrong way of looking at it!

A realist is not only aware of the visible, but also of the reality of the invisible. Just as much as it's true that unbelieving people make up the majority in the visible realm, it is also true that there is an invisible realm. Then everything suddenly appears in a different light.

“In comparison with the millions of the world, God's people will be, as they have ever been, a little flock.” But “God is always a majority. ...Standing ...with God, with Christ, with the angels, ...the children of God will be far in the majority.” *The Acts of the Apostles*, 590.1.

If you consider that God has millions of angels who are all standing ready to help the faithful, then the ratio changes markedly. “Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?” *Hebrews 1:14* (NKJV). If we include the invisible world in the big picture, then an immense number stands on our side.

When Daniel caught a glimpse of the world normally invisible to men, he saw God in the midst of a great throng. “A fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him. A thousand thousands ministered to Him; ten thousand times ten thousand

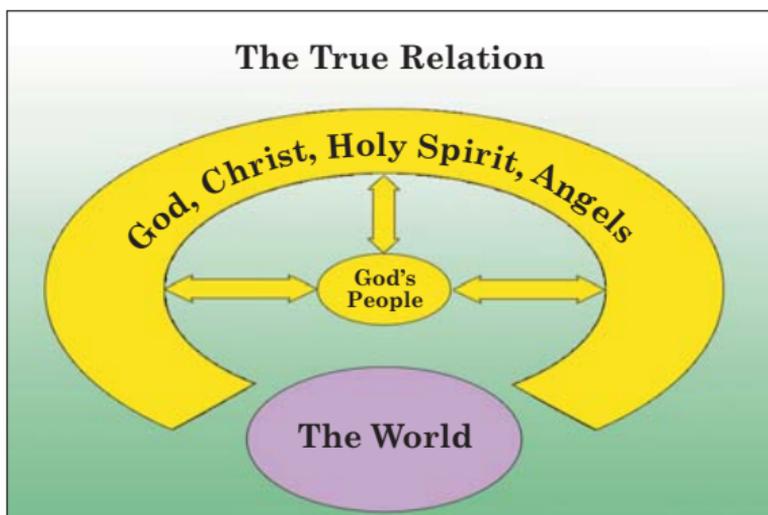
stood before Him. The court was seated, and the books were opened.” *Daniel 7:10 (NKJV)*. 10,000 times 10,000 is 100 million. That is not meant to specify the exact number of angels standing on our side, but it does give us an indication. In Daniel’s day this would have seemed a vast number, even though it doesn’t sound like a majority compared to today’s global population of nearly seven billion. But the point is that the angels excel the humans in both number and strength. If you consider that, then unbelievers and atheists are really just a minority.

“You say, We are in the minority. Is not God a majority? If we are on the side of the God who made the heaven and the earth, are we not on the side of the majority? We have the angels that excel in strength on our side. – Manuscript 27, 1893.” *Temperance, 257.7.*

Because the reformers were aware of this superior power, they could confidently stand for the truth. They realistically saw that the vast majority of people were clinging to tradition-steeped customs and were not willing to go beyond what their ancestors had believed. The reformers felt the fury of the established church against their beliefs which were dubbed “heresies”. These men of God were often apparently forsaken by all people.

But they also saw the invisible world that was standing on their side, and were aware of its superior power. This made them strong in faith and hope, enabling them to continue in God's work. That is why they could go to the stake with a song of victory on their lips and confuse their enemies with their unbroken courage.

The dignitaries of the church at that time thought that they had the majority on their side and tried to intimidate the "apostate heretics". But the ruling church saw only what is visible. The unbroken faith of the martyrs, in contrast, was based on the invisible world, which the visible church could not see.



Quotation:

“In comparison with the millions of the world, God’s people will be, as they have ever been, a little flock... God is always a majority... standing then with God, with Christ, with the angels, and with the loyal and true of all ages, the children of God will be far in the majority.”
The Acts of the Apostles, 590.1.

When one of the early Christian martyrs, Stephen, was stoned, for instance, he said, “Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!” *Acts 7:56 (NKJV)*. He was aware that he was standing on the winning side and gladly laid down his life as a testimony to his faith.

A View of the Invisible

The purpose of the following story is to illustrate the reality of the invisible⁴ (you can read it yourself in *2Kings 6:8* and following):

The king of Aram decided to go to war against Israel. But it was strange – every time he laid an

⁴ You can read it yourself in *2Kings 6:8* and following.

ambush, his opponents were forewarned, as if someone had carried the news of it to them. This happened so often that the king suspected there was a spy in his own camp who was delivering his secret plans to Israel.

Then one of the king's officers told him about Elisha, the Israelites' prophet. Despite the king of Aram's care to advise his commanders in secret, Elisha was able to pass on these plans so accurately to the king of Israel, that it was as if he had heard the enemy's strategies with his own ears. But this is no wonder – for Elisha had a living relationship with the God who knows all secrets and from whom nothing is hidden.

The king of Aram's conclusion was simple – Elisha had to be silenced. So he commenced to carry out his purposes as though he were fighting against a mere man. But God's cause was not dependent on men, and the king's problem could not be overcome by killing Elisha, just as the problem of a fever can never be solved by breaking the thermometer.

Once the king had found out that the insufferable prophet was in Dothan, he sent a great army to take him captive. They surrounded the city in order to make sure that the traitor could not escape, and they waited for daybreak, confident of victory.

“Determined to make away with the prophet, the Syrian king commanded, ‘Go and spy where he is, that I may send and fetch him.’ The prophet was in Dothan; and, learning this, the king sent thither ‘horses, and chariots, and a great host: and they came by night, and compassed the city about.’” *Prophets and Kings*, 256.2.

The Aramaic king was certain he had the mouse in the trap. Like all human beings who only see the visible world, he trusted in the superior numbers on his side. Mathematically speaking, he was correct, too. Elisha and his servant were two visible people, while the attackers were “a great army.” (See *2Kings* 6:14.) But the king hadn’t factored in the invisible reality – God’s angels, who protect His children and allow only what’s best for them.

At the beginning Elisha’s servant could see only what was visible. No wonder he almost died of fright! “When the servant of the man of God got up early the next morning and went outside, there were troops, horses, and chariots everywhere. ‘Oh, sir, what will we do now?’ the young man cried to Elisha.” *2Kings* 6:15 (NLT).

In his answer the prophet showed his full awareness of the invisible world as he summed up the sit-

uation. Being a realist, Elisha was able to see the whole picture, so after comparing both sides he came to the correct conclusion.

‘Don’t be afraid,’ the prophet answered. ‘Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.’ *2Kings 6:16 (NIV)*.

When we have the faith to take the invisible into our calculations, our maths will come up with different answers!

Elisha prayed and his fearful servant’s eyes were opened to see what the prophet had already seen by faith. “And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.” *2Kings 6:17 (NKJV)*.

“Between the servant of God and the hosts of armed foemen was an encircling band -of heavenly angels. They had come down in mighty power, not to destroy, not to exact homage, but to encamp round about and minister to the Lord’s weak and helpless ones.

“When the people of God are brought into strait places, and apparently there is no escape for them, the Lord alone must be their dependence.” *Prophets and Kings, 256.4-257.1*.

Elisha’s servant was very relieved. When the prayer of his master opened his eyes, he saw what

he should have seen the whole time – the superior might of the heavenly world ready to gain the victory for the faithful.

God offers this same faith to you, too. You don't have to withstand the majority's pressure all by yourself. You are not a lone fighter against a superior mass of godless people. All the riches of heaven are at your disposal, and a vast number of invisible angels are offering you their mighty help.

That – and nothing else – is the reality of living as a Christian. Everything else is unrealistic!

This is no exaggeration, for every Christian is capable of seeing the invisible just as Elisha did, providing us with the complete and accurate picture of what is really going on around us. True Christians base their decisions on the invisible as much as on the visible, which is why they can look fearlessly into the future. Only a true Christian can be a true realist.

Do you belong to the crowd, who acknowledge only what they see with their natural eyes? Do you understand that when you do this you are putting yourself on the side of those who see only a small part of the whole picture? Or are you a realistic Christian, able to see by faith the invisible world standing at your side to help you?

Quotation:

“We need a new and living experience in the divine life, in order to do the will of God. No amount of past experience will suffice for the present, or will strengthen us to overcome the difficulties in our path. We must have new grace and fresh strength daily in order to be victorious.”
Bible Commentary 4:1182.2.

For further thought:

Are you unsure to which group you belong? Try answering the following questions honestly, to help you find where you stand:

Did I hear Jesus' voice speaking to me today so that my heart burned? If not, when was the last time?

Do I even know this experience?

Have I grown spiritually recently?

Do I feel happy to be a Christian?

Do I find it more of a burden or a joy to be a Christian?

Do I feel that religion is restrictive?

Do I stand for my religion in front of unbelieving people, or am I perhaps embarrassed?

The Offer

A Living Experience

In order to make an informed decision, you must of course know what true religion looks like. So let's go back to the picture of the three groups on the two pathways once more and describe them as follows.

The large group on the broad path has, understandably, little or no true experience of God. These are worldly people who have either not yet heard of true religion, or have fallen away from a former experience, or who have consciously rejected God.

The small group also found walking the broad path, who occasionally point to their signs, is comprised of people who know the theory of the truth. This is a very deceptive condition to be in, but remarkably common among professed Christians and church-goers! For many people confuse theoretical knowledge with a living experience. These people may recognize God's blessings or protection at some

time, but they do not have a growing and living connection with their Creator. And anyone whose Christianity is only intellectual, has but a form of godliness, not the real thing.

“They will act religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly.” *2Timothy 3:5 (NLT)*.

“A form of godliness will not save any. All must have a deep and living experience. This alone will save them in the time of trouble.” *Maranatha, 97.5*.

Then there is the third group which is made up of those who are on the narrow path. They walk this pathway hand-in-hand with their Redeemer. They have a living relationship which translates theory into practice, transforms intellectual knowledge into heart experience, and they gain new experiences every day because they allow their faith to become action.

“The soul that loves God, rises above the fog of doubt; he gains a bright, broad, deep, living experience, and becomes meek and Christlike.” *S.D.A. Bible Commentary 7:907.12*.

What is it Like?

Such a living experience is best described in a Bible verse: “For whatever is born of God overcomes

the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith.” *1 John 5:4* (NKJV).

John is not talking about a victory that might overcome the world at some point in the distant future. No, he is using the past tense of the verb to say that our faith is a victory which has already overcome the world. That means the victory has already been gained; it is, so to speak, a historical fact!

So it's not about who will win the battle anymore. That question was settled long ago! Our “Champion” already won the victory. Jesus came to this earth as a person like you and me, and proved that it is quite possible to defeat sin altogether – even in a body that had inherited the weaknesses of so many generations of sin and was burdened with heavier trials than we have to bear. Christ already conquered Satan two thousand years ago by holding onto God's strength in faith and, as a human being like you or me, leading a sinless life in this world. This is the very victory He is offering us now.

As believers in Christ, then, we do not go out in order to get the victory. We claim the victory that has already been won, for we know that in it we have received a tool that has been tested and proven.

An experienced Christian once expressed it like this:

“Some folks look with dread upon the thought of having to wage a continual warfare with self and worldly lusts. That is because they do not as yet know anything about the joy of victory. They have experienced only defeat. But it isn’t so doleful a thing to battle constantly, when there is continual victory. The old veteran of a hundred battles, who has been victorious in every fight longs to be at the scene of conflict. Alexander’s soldiers, who under his command never knew defeat, were always impatient to be led into the fray. Each victory increased their strength, which was born only of courage... Here is the secret of strength. It is Christ, the Son of God, the One to whom all power in heaven and earth is given, Who does the work. If He lives in the heart to do the work, is it boasting to say that continual victories may be gained? Yes, it is boasting; but it is boasting in the Lord, and that is allowable.”
E. J. Waggoner, *Living By Faith*, 13.

A True Story as an Object Lesson

There is an interesting story in the Old Testament that describes what it is like to have a living relationship with God and to experience continuous

victory over sin. We can see the Christian faith pictured in this true story.

The Moabites and Ammonites, together with the Meunites came to fight against Jehoshaphat. They formed a gigantic united army that was moving against Israel. Humanly speaking, there was not the slightest chance of victory against this superior power. But King Jehoshaphat didn't let himself be intimidated. He sought the Lord in prayer and told Him, plainly and openly: "...We have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are upon You." *2Chronicles 20:12 (NKJV)*.

God heard his weak servant, communicated His will to him, and told him just what he had to do. Strengthened, the Israelites went to battle. They did not, however, go out in order to gain the victory; rather, they claimed the victory that God had promised them. For that reason, they went up against their enemies with songs of thanksgiving. It was as if they already had the victory in the bag. This is what happened:

"After consulting the people, the king appointed singers to walk ahead of the army, singing to the Lord and praising him for his holy splendor. This is what they sang: 'Give thanks to the Lord; his faithful love endures forever!' At the very moment they

began to sing and give praise, the Lord caused the armies of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir to start fighting among themselves. The armies of Moab and Ammon turned against their allies from Mount Seir and killed every one of them. After they had destroyed the army of Seir, they began attacking each other.

“So when the army of Judah arrived at the look-out point in the wilderness, all they saw were dead bodies lying on the ground as far as they could see. Not a single one of the enemy had escaped.” *2Chronicles 20:21-24 (NLT)*.

Can you picture this situation? There is an army, going to war, and before the actual battle begins, they're already singing songs of thanksgiving to God! They are praising Him for the victory over their enemies whom they are about to meet! This story shows exactly how it is with the battle against sin. It demonstrates the life of the true Christian. We go to our daily work with thankfulness, knowing that our faith is the victory that has already overcome the world.

One result of this attitude is an indescribable joy in life – not as a shallow hilarity, but as a fulfilling inner joy. “The man who fights and sees the foe give way may rejoice; nobody can keep him

from rejoicing, for joy comes spontaneously as the result of seeing the enemy give way.” E. J. Waggoner, *Lessons on Faith*, 13.

Those who know this secret don't have to be prompted to rejoice. Their joy arises spontaneously as a result of their victorious experience, and it cannot be held back.

How do I have an Experience Like That?

Do you want to have a living experience like that, too?

Do you want to conquer a sinful habit for good?

Do you want to be able to leave forever behind you things that you find to be weakening and destructive?

Do you want to be freed from a harmful addiction?

Do you want to have real victories as a permanent experience in your life?

Do you want to truly be happy and content?

If so, then you absolutely need a living experience with your Creator!

You ask, How can I get an experience like that?

Simply by putting your faith into practice!

Is this answer too brief for you? Does it disappoint you?

We need to see that the life of a Christian is not complicated. Put the faith you have into practice, and you will grow in living experience. It may well be that you don't know as much as you would like to, and that you still have a lot to learn. But if you faithfully follow the light you already have, your experience will grow.

The important thing is that you make a start and decide to apply the faith that you already have as you meet the challenges of everyday life. "A living experience is made up of daily trials, conflicts, and temptations, strong efforts and victories, and great peace and joy gained through Jesus." *Testimonies for the Church* 2:579.1.

As we apply the faith we already have, we will find that it will suddenly come alive. But we must make sure we don't store our beliefs in a separate part of our brain apart from our everyday life. Once we give up leading a double life and finally get serious about our faith, then we will have an unparalleled living experience.

"In order to have spiritual life and energy, we must have actual intercourse with our heavenly Father. Our minds may be drawn out toward Him; we may meditate upon His works, His mercies, His blessings; but this is not, in the fullest sense, communing with

Him. In order to commune with God, we must have something to say to Him concerning our actual life.” *Steps to Christ*, 93.1.

This means that if it is our aim to have close fellowship with God, then all we have to do is include Him in the affairs of our everyday life. Religion is not a gray theory that we use only at church or in a few other selected places; it is a tool that God gives us to apply in our day-to-day life. Only by doing so will it make sense and be effective. And once we make a beginning, God can lead us on. You do not need to worry yourself with “how?” or “what comes next?” as your experience grows.

It’s a bit like going for your driver’s license. Before you begin any actual lessons, you don’t have to figure out how you will learn to drive, how you can best prepare for the driving test, or what questions you will be asked on the written test. Your first task is simply to enroll at a driving school. The driving instructor then guides you through these things.

It’s the same way in spiritual life. Decide to go the right way and leave it up to your heavenly “Driving Instructor” to lead you on. He knows you even better than you know yourself.

If you have not become a new person inside through the rebirth experience, then He will lead

you to the point where you are able to take this step. If you already have this experience behind you, He will lead you to the next step, and so on. Jesus only requires your consent. He always needs your permission before He steps into your life and leads you, for He will never force you.

Although you give Him this invitation once at the start of your Christian walk, you then need to renew and confirm this daily if you want the work to continue. The Bible calls this process “consecration.” It needs to be given afresh each morning.

“But because this experience is his, the Christian is not therefore to fold his hands, content with that which has been accomplished for him. ...Each day he must renew his consecration.” *The Acts of the Apostles*, 476.3.

Friendship with God

Let's assume once more that you're in love. There's a young woman or a man you're somehow taken with. You think this person is exceptionally nice, and to top it off, they are good-looking as well. You've done a few things together and discovered you get along very well. The relationship has grown over a period of time, and eventually you intend to marry each other.

Now a friend of yours comes along and says to you: “Be careful. Once you’re married, you’ll have to do everything together with your spouse. You’ll have to talk to them about everything you want to do, and always let them know what your plans are. And above all, you will have to live with them for the rest of your life!”

Would you see this as exhausting? Or as a compulsion?

No, of course not. It’s precisely what you want to do! You intend to share your life with this person.

How does such a close friendship like this develop?

It grows by doing things together. You gradually become more acquainted and appreciate each other in the various areas of life. The more time goes by, the better you get to know each other, and the more you love each other.

The same thing happens when you really love Jesus. With all your heart, you want to share your experiences with Him and include Him in all your private affairs. He has become your best Friend, who you know without a doubt wants only what’s best for you.

“If professed Christians love Jesus better than the world, they will love to speak of Him, their

best Friend, in whom their highest affections are centered.” *Testimonies for the Church* 1:159.2.

How does such a loving friendship with Jesus come about?

In the same way as it does between couples. By getting to know Him in the many different areas of life through discussing everything with Him. In prayer, you present your plans to Him. In the course of asking for His advice in the practical decisions of everyday life, you grow to appreciate Him more and more, and your trust in Him strengthens. You live together with Him, do things together and form a closer relationship with Him by doing so.

But you cannot build up a significant relationship with Jesus if it is just intellectual or theoretical. You have to experience a real relationship with Him in practice. This is the reason God invites us to get to know Him by applying our understanding so that we come to rely on Him. “Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him!” *Psalms* 34:8 (NKJV).

What is keeping you from getting to know Him personally?

Communication with Our Creator

Getting to Know God in Prayer

An essential part of getting to know someone is through communication. And the way to communicate with Jesus is through prayer.

In order to really communicate, this has to be more than simply repeating rote words that somebody else wrote. Many people say formula prayers that don't go beyond the ceiling! If our words are nothing but mere form – a routine, dry, cold, lifeless repetition – they won't help us at all, because they won't even reach God's throne, and are in fact just a waste of our time.



But if the repeating of the Lord's Prayer or some other set prayer is the only way a person knows to pray, and it is said with thought and meaning, then God will be able to lead that person to the next step of personal prayer

“The church needs the fresh, living experience of members who have habitual communion with God. Dry, stale testimonies and prayers, without the manifestation of Christ in them, are no help to the people.” *Testimonies for the Church* 6:64.2.

Many people assume that praying means talking to God. It is true that talking is a part of prayer; but genuine praying is more than that – it is holding a real conversation with Jesus, the Person who lived here on this earth and then died for us. And a real conversation includes receiving answers from Him as well! He is no longer lying lifeless in Joseph's tomb – He is now performing a very important service for us in the heavenly sanctuary. He is busy hearing and answering our prayers!

So we can absolutely count on getting solid answers to our important questions. But when people think that praying means only speaking words to God, without ever actually hearing an answer, it is understandable if they become somewhat skeptical about prayer. It would be like always

leaving messages on people's answer phones without ever getting a reply. But in the case of calling Jesus, you can have a real conversation with Him!

Of course this isn't meant in an audible sense. You will not, as a general rule, hear an audible voice answering you in your physical ears. Nonetheless, you will be absolutely certain that the Son of God has spoken to you personally. The experience could be expressed like this: "Our hearts will often burn within us as One draws nigh to commune with us as He did with Enoch." *The Desire of Ages*, 668.4.

If you're not familiar with this burning yet, then it's time for you to have the experience.

Take, for example, a couple who have been happily married for some time already. The two of them no longer need to tell each other everything out loud. Often one glance is enough, and the other person knows, because the better you know each other, the easier wordless communication becomes.

It's the same way with Jesus. It is not necessary to hear His voice with our ears in order to understand Him. If you know Him well enough, He can communicate Himself to you solely through a nod of providence. The Bible puts it like this: "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;

I will guide you with My eye.” *Psalm 32:8 (NKJV)*.

That’s the way it works with someone we know really well. We can simply look at them and understand their viewpoint, without words ever being said. Similarly, the better we know Jesus, the better we will understand Him when He speaks to us. That can happen through the voice of conscience within us, through reading a word from the Bible, through the advice of a friend, or simply through circumstances which God allows. Regardless of the particular means He uses, in every case we can be sure of the fact that He has spoken to us, as well as of what He wants to tell us.

“...Everyone needs to have a personal experience in obtaining a knowledge of the will of God. We must individually hear Him speaking to the heart. When every other voice is hushed, and in quietness we wait before Him, the silence of the soul makes more distinct the voice of God.” *The Desire of Ages*, 363.3.

From my own personal life I can testify that this is a most uplifting experience, and one which I would not want to be without. If you’re not a “professional” at it right away, don’t be discouraged. This communication must be learned, and that doesn’t come all at once. It grows gradually with

time as you honestly seek Him and put your all into it. For if you really want to get to know Jesus, you need to learn to pray meaningfully. "...Let nothing hinder you. Make every effort to keep open the communion between Jesus and your own soul. Seek every opportunity to go where prayer is wont to be made." *Steps to Christ*, 98.1.

Once you decide to pray, you will find a thousand things trying to distract you. But if you want to establish a living fellowship with Jesus you cannot allow any room for distractions. God's infamous opponent works diligently at keeping you from having close communion with Jesus. He would rather you had never even heard His name. But when he can't change that, he will most certainly try everything in his power to prevent you from gaining anything special out of your fellowship with Jesus. If he manages to divert you from prayer, he's pretty much gained the victory. Prayer is our only safeguard.

The famous sixteenth century reformer, Martin Luther, was a very busy man. Notwithstanding this, he used the best time of the day for prayer. "During the struggle at Augsburg, Luther 'did not pass a day without devoting three hours at least to prayer, and they were hours selected from those the most favor-

able to study.” *The Great Controversy*, 210.1. Even as a young man, “he did not fail to begin each day with prayer, while his heart was continually breathing a petition for guidance and support. ‘To pray well,’ he often said, ‘is the better half of study.’ – D’Aubigne, b. 2, ch. 2.” *The Great Controversy*, 122.1.



Quotation:

“God wants us to do much more praying and much less talking.” *Testimonies for the Church* 7:183.1.

Taking Time to Pray

It is important that you take enough time to pray. The point is not just quickly to inform Jesus of what's been going on; you also want to hear His answer.

Imagine going to a maths teacher and asking for an equation you talked about in class to be explained again because you didn't understand it the first time. Your teacher agrees and starts clarifying the steps for you, turning around and writing the equation on the blackboard. Finally turning back to you, the teacher sees only your back as you leave the classroom with a quick "Bye!"

What is going on? Did you want to have an answer, or didn't you?

This is just what happens when we present a plea or a question to Jesus, and then, without waiting for the answer, we disappear after a quick "Amen."

"Many, even in their seasons of devotion, fail of receiving the blessing of real communion with God. They are in too great haste. With hurried steps they press through the circle of Christ's loving presence, pausing perhaps a moment within the sacred precincts, but not waiting for counsel. They have no time to remain with the divine

Teacher. With their burdens they return to their work.” *Education*, 260.3.

That’s just like unloading a backpack full of heavy stones you have been carrying around with you at Jesus’ feet, telling Him that you want to leave the whole burden with Him, and then packing everything back up at the end of the prayer and continuing to drag the whole weight around with you again.

No – you cannot pray like this! A real prayer consists of speaking and receiving an answer, and you should be satisfied with nothing less. Once you have recognized His answer, you will also know what you have to do.

Many people know that prayer is important, and they pray, too – as long as they have the necessary time to do so. Then when demands pile up and time becomes scarce, they quickly neglect this divine help. But if you fail to pray because you have no time, you will find that you achieve just the opposite of what you expected – you will actually end up wasting more time than you thought you were saving!

This can be illustrated with a practical example. Imagine you’re in a car with your friend, on the way to an appointment, but you left a bit late, and the time is racing by. Your friend is driving at maximum

speed round a corner when you notice that the fuel gauge is virtually on zero. Then you see that the red warning light is already flashing and you mention this to your friend. “Yeah, I’ve noticed that too,” comes the reply. “But I’m pretty sure we’ll make it – if we stop now to fill up, we’ll be late for sure.” Inevitably, about two kilometers later, the car splutters and comes to a standstill somewhere in the middle of a forest.

So what happens to the time you had “saved”?

After flagging down a passing car, getting some gas, taking it back and re-filling your tank, you find you are several hours late! It’s similar with prayer. If you don’t have time for it when it is needed, you often have to spend even more time in the end. Martin Luther’s resolve to spend more quality time in prayer the more he had to do, was no waste of time, no empty talk – it was a well tested piece of wisdom.

If you want to accomplish anything lasting and meaningful in life, you would be wise to take time for prayer. And the less available this time seems, the more urgent it is for you to take it – and simply give less time to other things. Often, the other things may be important – very important, even – but they are still not as essential as prayer.

In fact you will find that prayer enables you to accomplish more. If you put prayer in first place and plan everything else accordingly, you can be sure of victory. When prayer is the center of all your other affairs of life, then you will have a living connection to Christ who is the source of true success.

If you want to have success in life, according to God's definition, you cannot neglect prayer. It simply won't work. If you see prayer as not being so significant, then you cannot expect to make progress in God's plan for you.

We do not have the space to go into detail about how to pray successfully, but we can recommend a chapter called "The Privilege of Prayer" in the book *Steps to Christ* by E.G. White. This is full of practical assistance on how to pray effectively.

Personal Worship

Another necessary part of a growing, living relationship with God is regular personal worship, of which prayer is a component. But you also need good reading material. The book *The Desire of Ages* by E.G. White is ideal for this purpose. Take some time every morning to read it. Read prayerfully and then think about what you have read. It is sure to pay off richly.

I know no other book, apart from the Bible, that is so well-suited for helping us to know Jesus as this inspired description of His life. If you occupy your mind with how Christ lived on this earth, your trust in Him will grow and you will be able to establish a real friendship with Him.

“It would be well for us to spend a thoughtful hour each day in contemplation of the life of Christ. We should take it point by point, and let the imagination grasp each scene, especially the closing ones. As we thus dwell upon His great sacrifice for us, our confidence in Him will be more constant, our love will be quickened, and we shall be more deeply imbued with His spirit. If we would be saved at last, we must learn the lesson of penitence and humiliation at the foot of the cross.” *The Desire of Ages*, 83.4.

When we meditate on the life of Christ... “our confidence in Him will be more constant, our love will be quickened and we shall be more deeply imbued with His spirit.” *The Desire of Ages* 83.4.

Someone once told the story of an artist who wanted to paint a copy of a beautiful picture hanging in a palace. He was not allowed to copy it in the room where it was exhibited so he had to paint it from memory. For hours, he sat before the original, looking at it repeatedly until he had taken much of it in. Then he hurried to his studio and began to paint.

Every day he went back to the original and spent more time looking at it and memorizing it. As he looked and painted, looked and painted, there came to be such an exact copy of the picture on his easel that everyone who saw it wanted to see the original for comparison.

This story demonstrates how a true Christian grows. Our aim is to present the character of Jesus to others. But in order to do this we first need to spend a certain amount of time each day looking at the original in prayer and taking it in. We shouldn't think that the time used to behold Him is wasted. On the contrary, it will be richly repaid.

If we get to know Jesus as our Friend in this way, we will automatically grow into a living relationship with Him, for we will be sharing our life with Him.

A Matchless Invitation

The following comparison may sound implausible, but it does illustrate a point quite accurately. Imagine you receive a personal invitation from the president or prime minister of your country. He invites you to come to him and tell him your personal wishes. Let's assume he assures you in writing that he is willing to make sacrifices to help you, and that he has already deposited money in a bank for you so that the necessary means aren't lacking. Whenever you want, he will take time for you; he will postpone his official duties in order to be there for you. Would you refuse such an offer?

Admittedly, as far as earthly governments go, this thought is too good to be true. But the Ruler of heaven is actually making you such an offer. "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." *Matthew 11:28 (NLT)*.

"Come now, and let us reason together,' Says the LORD." *Isaiah 1:18 (NKJV)*.

God has already proven that He is willing to make sacrifices for us by sending His Son to show us His character and die for us. So the fault isn't His if an interview like this doesn't come about. It

depends solely on you, on whether you accept the offer. But this opportunity isn't just a once-only offer – it is there every day, as often as you need it!

The prophet Daniel in the Bible was actually a businessman with a huge workload. But no matter how pressing his schedule, he made it a rule to pray three times a day. The only thing his jealous contemporaries required was that he not pray for a month – only 30 days. Many a careless young person has neglected real prayer and fellowship with God for much longer than that – even though negligence and spiritual lethargy were the only “lions” standing in the way! But Daniel saw it as the highest privilege and an absolute necessity in life to enjoy deep communion with his God. His successful life as the king's assistant and a prophet proves what God can do through a person who uses the privilege of personal worship.

He left us a whole series of important prophecies about the future.

A light shone on many people that they otherwise would not have seen.

The head of the church and state at that time, King Nebuchadnezzar, was converted.

Through Daniel's prayers, it became possible for the captive Jews to return to their own country.

God wants to give us victories just as He gave to Daniel, if we will communicate with Him as Daniel did.

The Time for Personal Worship

Ephesians 6 describes the spiritual armor that helps a Christian to meet the enemy successfully. There we read about the shield of faith, the breastplate of righteousness, the helmet of salvation, and so on.

When is it necessary to put on armor – before or after the battle?

“What a stupid question” you might say! Although it is obvious that everyone engaged in a physical battle puts the armor on beforehand, how is it in the spiritual life? How often we presume to go into the fray without having communion with our Lord! We ease our conscience with the thought that we’ll have some quiet time with the Lord when we are free later on in the day. But that’s a poor excuse. A soldier needs to put his armor on before, not after the battle! If you neglect to commune with the Lord beforehand, you’re simply not prepared for the day.

Young people whose daily work is to help others sometimes allow themselves to be tricked on this point. Maybe they are working with sick or elderly people or they assist to spread the gospel in some way. Perhaps they're working in a literature department where books on spiritual topics are published, or maybe they just take over mundane jobs so that others can use their time and skill to give such service. Sometimes these youth presume that because they are doing a good work they're not in such need of personal worship. Or they think that they can at least shorten their worship time because they're not working in a worldly business, but are instead surrounded by fellow Christians. Their work day may also begin by sharing in a brief time of worship with their colleagues, which they see as a substitute for their own personal connection time.

Anyone with this way of thinking is totally mistaken! Personal worship can never be replaced with anything else – there is absolutely no substitute.

Have you ever been really hungry? So hungry that the walls of your stomach felt they were grinding together? If you were, you'd never be so foolish as to ask someone else to eat for you while you watched! It is similar with our spiritual hunger. Our souls are starving for spiritual food which can't

be supplied through someone else's worship time or helping in God's cause. You can pray for another person, but you cannot save their soul for them.

There is no formal requirement specifying a certain time you must spend in worship. On some days, selfless service to others may leave you but a very short time or only irregular times for worship. But you cannot make up for negligence by simply doing a "good" deed. No matter how important the journey, you need to take time to fill up with gas, or else you won't get to your destination.

Sometimes we may work all day long into the evening until we are so tired that we have only very little time for good quality worship. Why does this happen and what should we do about it?

There are two possible causes. If it's my own fault that it got so late, then I needn't be surprised. God won't work any miracles to substitute for a lack of communication or sleep caused by wrong planning. In this case, I need to plan my day better.

It is a different situation if I don't get much time for worship and not enough sleep because it was God's plan that I finish something that could not be postponed for true reasons of service. In that case I can be sure He will give me enough strength even from a brief worship time, and I can have con-

confidence that He will also supply my need of physical strength.

Early in the morning is normally the best time for personal worship. The advantages are obvious:

Everything is quieter, so you're not distracted as easily.

The mind is at its freshest and easiest to impress.

Jesus, our example, seemed to prefer this time.⁵

“God, the Lord, has taken my tongue into His service; He always shows me anew what I should say to encourage those who are weary. Eagerly I listen to what He has to say to me. He has opened my ear and made me ready to listen to Him.” *Isaiah* 50:4, 5 (directly translated from the German *Die Gute Nachricht* Bible).

“In the morning, O LORD, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation.” *Psalms* 5:3 (NIV).

“Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you. Show me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul.” *Psalms* 143:8 (NIV).

As well as opening each day with worship, we should also take the necessary time to close the day

⁵ See for example *Mark* 1:35.

in evening worship. In the wilderness sanctuary, a lamb was sacrificed twice a day – one in the morning and another in the evening to represent symbolically these two times of worship. The Israelites always consecrated themselves anew to God’s service during these times.

“Every morning and evening a lamb of a year old was burned upon the altar, with its appropriate meat offering, thus symbolizing the daily consecration of the nation to Jehovah, and their constant dependence upon the atoning blood of Christ.” *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 352.3.

Those who learn to speak with Jesus like this will not only experience the development of a stronger and closer relationship with their heavenly Friend; they will also be surrounded with an atmosphere of peace that positively influences others.

If you make it a daily habit to have personal worship you will realize that this is not limited to certain periods of time. When your morning worship is a quality time, you will find that during the rest of the day your thoughts will be more often directed to your best friend, Jesus, and you can commune with Him as you go about your day-to-day business. “Keep your Bible with you. As you have opportunity, read it; fix the texts in your memory. Even

while you are walking the streets you may read a passage and meditate upon it, thus fixing it in the mind.” *Steps to Christ*, 90.2.

Quotation:

“Consecrate yourself to God in the morning; make this your very first work. Let your prayer be, ‘Take me, O Lord, as wholly Thine. I lay all my plans at Thy feet. Use me today in Thy service. Abide with me, and let all my work be wrought in Thee.’ This is a daily matter. Each morning consecrate yourself to God for that day. Surrender all your plans to Him, to be carried out or given up as His providence shall indicate. Thus day by day you may be giving your life into the hands of God, and thus your life will be molded more and more after the life of Christ.” *Steps to Christ*, 70.1.

Don't Give Up!

What we've seen so far shows us that you can't get a living experience by mail order, you can't win it in the lottery, and neither can you just chance it somehow. Jesus promises it to us. He invites us to gain it through prayer, and He leads us every step of the way; but we have to put all of our strength into it. Those who are too superficial and lethargic, or give up too fast, won't obtain it. Only those who want it as badly as the man wanted the treasure in the field will get it. (See *Matthew* 13.44.)

So you need to ask yourself the question – do you really want a living experience with God?

If you do, then you'll be willing to do whatever you can until you've attained it. To make this point clear, Jesus once told a parable, which you can read in *Luke* 11:5-13.

One night a man had a surprise visit from a friend. But since he wasn't expecting his friend at all, there is no bread in the house for him to give the hungry traveler. He decides to ask his neighbor for bread. The neighbor, however, has already gone to bed; the lights have been off for a while now, and the whole house is silent. So the man wavers back

and forth in his mind – should he wake up the neighbor and ask for bread? He wouldn't if it were just for himself, that is quite clear; but this is for the sake of his guest . . .

Finally, he makes up his mind that he will ask, so he stands at the locked door of the neighbor's house and knocks. Upon hearing the loud knocking, the sleepy neighbor appears at an upstairs window. Annoyed, he reprimands the petitioner, "Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can't get up and give you anything." *Luke 11:7 (NIV)*.

What now? It'd be quite rude to keep on asking now, wouldn't it?

But the man won't take "no" for an answer. He keeps on asking. As a result, he eventually receives what he has been unselfishly requesting. "Though his neighbor is unwilling to be troubled, he will not desist his pleading; his friend must be relieved; and at last his importunity is rewarded, his wants are supplied." *Christ's Object Lessons*, 140.4.

How is it with you? Do you give up easily and take "no" for an answer, or do you hold onto your prayer even if the answer doesn't come immediately?

"Our prayers are to be as earnest and persistent as was the petition of the needy friend who asked

for the loaves at midnight. The more earnestly and steadfastly we ask, the closer will be our spiritual union with Christ. We shall receive increased blessings because we have increased faith.” *Christ’s Object Lessons*, 146.1.

In our spiritual fellowship with Christ, we will enjoy a living relationship closer to Him the more earnestly and steadfastly we ask. It is necessary to hold on and not let go in order to reach our goal. But the aim here is not an egotistical one. This doesn’t mean holding onto our mother’s skirt like a whining child and demanding things that are not good for us. It means asking for the things that Jesus has promised us.

There sits Elijah.⁶ After three and a half years of drought, God has finally promised him that it will rain. Now Elijah pleads for the fulfillment of this promise. But to all appearances, absolutely nothing is happening. The sky is just as cloudless as it has been during the long years of drought. Not the slightest indication of even a brief shower can be seen. But the prophet won’t let go. He prays again, while searching his heart to see if there is anything there to prevent God from answering him.

6 You can read this story in *1 Kings* 18:42-45.

Then he sends his servant to see if anything is happening. The servant comes back with a negative report. Again Elijah prays. Again the servant checks whether something can be seen, but he cannot give a better report than the first time.

Again, and again, and again . . .

Elijah is not discouraged, not impatient, not agitated. He simply continues praying that each obstruction he comes to see in himself will be taken out of him. Interestingly enough, his faith grows even stronger instead of weaker in the process. That is precisely what God wanted to achieve – Elijah's faith still had to develop!

After praying for the seventh time, he sees the fulfillment of his prayer in the form of a small cloud, the harbinger of great rain.

Does this mean that we have to pray seven times in order to get an answer to prayer, too?

Yes, but not literally. In the Bible, seven is the number that represents perfection and completion. The parallel to Elijah's praying seven times is for us to pray as long as it takes until our prayer can be answered.

“God does not say, Ask once, and you shall receive. He bids us ask. Unwearyingly persist in prayer. The persistent asking brings the petitioner

into a more earnest attitude, and gives him an increased desire to receive the things for which he asks." *Christ's Object Lessons*, 145.3.

If Jesus does not immediately answer our requests, then He has a purpose for not doing so. Like Elijah, we are to remove all obstructions from our lives. We must be brought into harmony with God.

The petitioner in the parable who disturbed his neighbor for bread was turned away too, but he still didn't give up his goal.

"So our prayers do not always seem to receive an immediate answer; but Christ teaches that we should not cease to pray. Prayer is not to work any change in God; it is to bring us into harmony with God. When we make request of Him, He may see that it is necessary for us to search our hearts and repent of sin. Therefore He takes us through test and trial, He brings us through humiliation, that we may see what hinders the working of His Holy Spirit through us." *Christ's Object Lessons*, 143.1.

An Essential Lesson

The significance of importunate prayer is so crucial, that Jesus tells a further parable teaching the same lesson.

“In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’ For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually wear me out with her coming!’ And the Lord said, ‘Listen to what the unjust judge says.’” *Luke 18:2-6 (NIV)*.

“The judge who is here pictured had no regard for right, nor pity for suffering. The widow who pressed her case before him was persistently repulsed. Again and again she came to him, only to be treated with contempt, and to be driven from the judgment seat. The judge knew that her cause was righteous, and he could have relieved her at once, but he would not. He wanted to show his arbitrary power, and it gratified him to let her ask and plead and entreat in vain. But she would not fail nor become discouraged. Notwithstanding his indifference and hardheartedness, she pressed her petition until the judge consented to attend to her case. ... To save his reputation, to avoid giving publicity to his partial, one-sided judgment, he

avenged the persevering woman.” *Christ’s Object Lessons*, 164.3.

The conclusion drawn here is that if even selfish people will help, then how much more will God, who loves us with total selflessness, help us! Once more, Jesus has made it clear how important it is for us to do our part and not stop asking. We are to plead with Him for the fulfillment of His promise with an earnestness that cannot be repulsed.

Jacob, too, had this experience when he wrestled with his mysterious opponent⁷. When that Angel wanted to leave, He said: “Let me go, for it is day-break.’ But Jacob replied, ‘I will not let you go unless you bless me.’” *Genesis* 32:26. While saying this he was holding onto the Angel. He spoke with the “assurance of one who confesses his own unworthiness, yet trusts the faithfulness of a covenant-keeping God.” *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 196.3.

From these examples we can learn not to give up, but to continue praying if we don’t receive the longed-for blessing immediately after our first prayer. After the obstructions in us have been removed, Jesus will be able to give us what is best for our situation.

⁷ See *Genesis* 32:23-31.

Quotation:

“All that Christ received from God we too may have. Then ask and receive. With the persevering faith of Jacob, with the unyielding persistence of Elijah, claim for yourself all that God has promised.”
Maranatha 86.3.



Jesus rose from the grave over two thousand years ago and is now ministering in the heavenly sanctuary. This is the original of the tent that

Moses had built at God's command in the wilderness. The sweet-smelling incense that rose from this tent is a symbol for our prayers, which the Lord delights to answer.

A New Beginning

Main Thing is, I'm Running! Right?

The lyrics of a particular song have always really impressed me. They include the thought: “My mother taught me that what matters most is not the speed at which I run, but that I’m running in the right direction!”

How true is this piece of advice! I can put all my energy into speeding along, and give it my all, but if the direction is wrong, then every step I take will only lead me further away from my goal. The apostle Paul expresses the same thought when he says: “Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.” *1 Corinthians 9:24 (NIV)*. So just running is not enough; it has to be goal-oriented and in compliance with the rules.

The same thing applies to spiritual life. It's not enough simply to fight against sin, even if you're fighting with all your might. It's not enough to decide to give up a bad habit – even if this decision is important and correct in itself. More than that has to happen!

When Jesus comes again, there will be some who point to their “good” works. “Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’” How astounded they will be when they hear the words: “I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!” *Matthew 7:22, 23 (NIV)*.

These unfortunate people will then experience the biggest disappointment of their lives. They thought they were on the right side; but to their horror, they will discover that they were wrong. Didn't they fight and sacrifice? Didn't they practice self-denial in their lives and champion God's cause?

What they didn't realize is that the point is not just to fight – the battle has to be goal-oriented in the right direction, and in full compliance with the rules.

The first thing you need before you can even begin the spiritual contest is the rebirth experience.

Are You Actually Reborn?

If you have Christian parents, it may be that they already claimed this experience for you in faith when you were too little to do so yourself. That is quite possible and also very good, but it is not enough once you have become older. As soon as you reach an age where you can make these kinds of decisions for yourself, the responsibility is transferred to you. You must then decide for yourself whether you want to keep the rebirth experience or not. Regardless of whether your parents did it for you back then or not, it is essential for you to make an intelligent decision for yourself.

If you're not sure whether you've had this experience or not, you can test yourself quite simply to determine it. Ask yourself the following:

Is there anything in my life forcing me to do something bad even though I don't actually want to?

Who owns my heart?

Who occupies my thoughts?

What do I like to talk about?

To whom do my warmest feelings and best energies belong?

Who rules in my life?

Do I feel the working of the Holy Spirit in my life?

Do I find myself doing things I have recognized as sin and don't actually want to do?

Are the "fruit of the Spirit" revealed in my life? (*Galatians 5:22.*)

Are there things in my life that I used to love but now hate?

By answering these simple questions, you can quickly see where you're at. If you have never consciously decided for it, or if you cannot answer the above questions to your satisfaction, then you are certainly missing this important experience.

If you are living in slavery and are not really free, you can be sure you're not fighting on the right side. "Jesus replied, 'I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave of sin.'" *John 8:34 (NLT).*

Have you had the apostle Paul's experience in your life? Relating his own past experience and telling it in the present tense, he confesses: "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice." *Romans 7:18, 19 (NKJV).*

"On the inside, I joyfully agree with God's law. But in my members, in my entire behavior, I see another

law at work. This law is at war with the law that I inwardly agree with, and makes me its prisoner. It is the law of sin that reigns in my members and dictates my behavior. What a miserable person I am! Who will save me from this deadly entanglement?" *Romans 7:22-24* (directly translated from the German *Die Gute Nachricht Bible*).

This isn't talking about the experience of a hero, but rather of a poor creature who is under the rule of a stronger mind and is forced, against its will, to do things it doesn't want to do. Anyone suffering under bondage like that is really badly off. It's a depressing experience to discover, again and again, that you just can't succeed in doing what you actually want to do! You'd certainly become discouraged after a while!

There are various ways to react to this. You can resign yourself to it and console yourself with the thought that others aren't doing any better. Furthermore you can make an alibi out of fig leaves by claiming that Paul was a good Christian, and even he had this experience. So you can excuse or justify your behavior by thinking that it could hardly be as bad as all that if Paul had a similar experience.

The other option is to admit honestly how dissatisfied you are with this state of things and look for a solution to the problem.

Quotation:

“Call you this a true Christian experience? There are some who imagine that it is. Why, then, did the apostle, in the anguish of his soul, cry out, “O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of death?” *Rom.7:24*. Is a true Christian experience a body of death so terrible that the soul is constrained to cry for deliverance? – Nay verily.” E.J. Waggoner, *Christ and his Righteousness*, 86, 1982.

Paul experienced deliverance from the condition he writes about in the 7th chapter of his *Epistle to the Romans* when he was reborn. From that time on, he no longer fought the fruitless loser’s battle, but the victorious fight of a man who had become a conqueror through Jesus. You too can have just the same experience.

An Intimate Love Affair

I’m sure you’re familiar with the well-known verse from the *Gospel of John*: “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God,

and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” *John 17:3* (NKJV).

In order to understand what this means a little better, let's compare it with other parts of the Bible. In the Old Testament we read about it quite often. Again and again it says that a man “knew” his wife and this resulted in the birth of a child. Take *Genesis 4:1*, for instance: “Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain.” (NKJV).

That this is talking about more than just a knowing with the eyes is obvious. The word is used to describe the intimate relation of two people, during which a new life is formed by the implanting of the male seed in the female body.

Now why is the same word also used to describe the knowledge of God?

There are many parallels between the conception of a natural and of a spiritual life.

First of all, there's the fact that both parties involved usually love each other very much. God loves us just the same way. In one of the letters Jesus' beloved disciple John wrote, it says: “He first loved us.” *1John 4:19* (NKJV).

If we return His love, the desire will also develop in us to love Him. We will want to have more to do with Him and be closer to Him.

If the companionship becomes intimate enough that He can implant His seed in us, then new life is born in us. This is also why the rebirth experience is compared to the implanting of a seed. “For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable.” *1Peter* 1:23 (NIV). “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” *2Corinthians* 5:17 (NKJV).

Quotation:

“It doesn’t make any difference now whether we have been circumcised or not; what counts is whether we really have been changed into new and different people.” *Galatians* 6:15 (NLV).



Joyful Obedience from the Heart?

You can find more in-depth detail about how you can obtain the rebirth experience in the references at the end of this chapter. The focus here is more on providing some of the basic explanations in connection with the rebirth experience. There are definite characteristics that accompany the experience of being reborn.

Delight in God's Laws

Freedom is something pleasant, not something restricting or negative. Likewise, deliverance from the bondage of sin will be a very pleasant experience for you, especially if you've been struggling for a while to get free from it. Indeed, it will be a real relief, and you can't help but be thrilled about it. You won't forget it again, either.

Once you have received a new life through the rebirth, you will enjoy doing God's will, which is expressed in His law. David once said: "For I delight in your commands because I love them." *Psalm 119:47 (NIV)*. If you read all of *Psalm 119*, you will see that it is really a love song – that's

how profusely David expresses his joy in God's commandments and his love of them! This will be your experience, too.

At the school I attended as a boy, there was a Bible circle. When we met, we would read a text, and then anyone who wished to could comment on it. At the end we prayed. I can't recall many details anymore, but I still remember one person as if it were yesterday. He was a student from another class who always radiated such cheerfulness that it really attracted me. He was positive, friendly, and filled with peace. Whether it was a coincidence that his name was Christian, or whether God wanted to tell me something through this, I don't know, but the atmosphere surrounding him had a great influence on me back then and helped me find the right way.

Later, when I had the rebirth experience myself, I could understand him better. I can remember one day in particular, when this experience was still fresh for me. My way to school led me past a high hedge, and I was feeling downright happy. All of a sudden, I caught myself saying out loud: "Father, you are just fantastic!" Immediately I got scared because misgivings popped into my mind as to whether you can even talk to an all-powerful God

like that. Today I know that He was probably quite pleased about this outburst of natural spontaneity, but back then I didn't understand our Saviour's character so well.

By the way, I'm not trying to say that it's mainly a question of feelings. It is true, however, that real joy is an uplifting emotion, and this joy is part of a living experience, even if it doesn't come until somewhat later. It's our job to fulfill the conditions and God's job to give happy feelings at the time He thinks is best. "Faith is ours to exercise, but joyful feeling and the blessing are God's to give." *Early Writings*, 72.1.



Quotation:

“When Christ dwells in the heart, the soul will be so filled with His love, with the joy of communion with Him, that it will cleave to Him; and in the contemplation of Him, self will be forgotten. Love to Christ will be the spring of action. Those who feel the constraining love of God, do not ask how little may be given to meet the requirements of God; they do not ask for the lowest standard, but aim at perfect conformity to the will of their Redeemer. With earnest desire they yield all and manifest an interest proportionate to the value of the object which they seek. A profession of Christ without this deep love is mere talk, dry formality, and heavy drudgery.” *Steps to Christ*, 44.2.

The Urge to Communicate

When you have had the rebirth experience, you find can't keep it to yourself. You feel you will literally burst if you can't tell anyone about it.

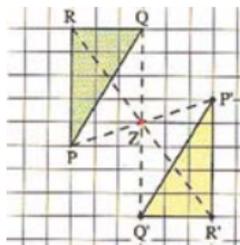
“No sooner does one come to Christ than there is born in his heart a desire to make known to others what a precious friend he has found in Jesus; the saving and sanctifying truth cannot be shut up in his heart. If we are clothed with the righteousness of Christ and are filled with the joy of His indwelling Spirit, we shall not be able to hold our peace. If we have tasted and seen that the Lord is good we shall have something to tell.” *Steps to Christ*, 78.2.

The life of a true Christian is the only one which is worth living.

Reflections

Maybe you know about mathematical reflections. A geometric shape is mirrored using a single point. The mirror image is identical to the original, but the view changes. If the shape was upside down beforehand, for instance, it will be the right way up after it is reflected.

This reflection is a fitting picture of the rebirth. Even if your



life until now has been “upside down” on many points, it can still change completely. The point that all lines of the reflection run through is the rebirth itself. Afterwards you are, in a certain sense, another person, for your life has been changed; and yet the mirror image looks a lot like the original because you still have the same human nature as before.

In your human nature, there are instincts, fears, and feelings. You have acquired habits, and behavioral patterns have emerged. All of these things do not change abruptly with the rebirth experience. Afterwards a lifelong work is still necessary, in which you are privileged to cooperate with God and can count on His help. But a fundamental beginning has been made, which is tremendously important.

If you’ve ever sat an entrance exam for a school and then receive news that you have passed, you know the feelings that arise. On the one hand, there is justified happiness at what you’ve achieved; on the other, this happiness is mixed with uncertainty about the new and unknown. Passing the exam is just the start!

It’s the same with the rebirth experience. Naturally it is a joyful thing to have a new heart and be freed so that you no longer have to sin. But this is only the beginning of school! Now follows a learning

process that will last a lifetime. During this time, there are many old things to unlearn and many new things to learn. You can expect struggles when the old habits strive for supremacy, but also victories when you allow the power of God to work. The apostle Paul compares it to a warrior's struggle in battle (see *Ephesians* 6:10-17).

Let us look briefly at a Bible verse that very aptly describes the relationship between the work of the rebirth and the subsequent reformation of the Christian life: "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him." *Colossians* 2:6 (NIV). In other words, the principle is the same! Just as you took hold of the victory at the beginning of your Christian walk, you need to keep holding onto it until the end. Every time you are confronted with a new problem where you need a new spirit to overcome it, simply apply the same procedure to it as you did when you first gained the victory over sin.

For a Better Understanding

If you do not have the new-birth experience yet, then read the first few chapters of the book *Steps to Christ*. The booklet *From Bondage to Freedom* will also be a help to you.

Only Two Possibilities

There are Only Two Possibilities

Let's think about this really soberly. There are only two possibilities to consider – either the whole story with true Christian religion is a huge bluff, or it is the best thing that ever was and ever will be. There is no third possibility – no alternative! Jesus has made too many assertions for that. For example, He claims uncompromisingly that His way is the only way to eternal life (see *John* 14:6), and He accepts no other way. Furthermore, He claims that He alone is the door to the sheepfold (see *John* 10:7-10). In so doing, He automatically calls all other religions gross deceptions. Either these statements are exceedingly presumptuous, or they are really true. So you only have the choice between two possibilities.

If what Jesus says is wrong, then don't even get involved in His religion. Turn away from it immediately,

for it is the greatest lie that ever pulled the wool over people's eyes. You should even do what you can to keep other people from being fooled by it.

But if what He says is right, then decide in favor of it with all the consequences involved and do what you can to help others get to know this way. I have found that it pays to give up everything in favor of this alternative; for there is nothing better.

When I was a teenager, I thought about these two possibilities. At that point in time, I wasn't totally clear on what I would decide, but I came to the following conclusion – either I become an atheist with all the consequences that it involves, and resolutely declare war on Christianity, or I become a total Christian, also with all the consequences this decision involves.

Danger! High Voltage!

I'm sure you've read the warning signs on power poles before. They warn against climbing the pole because if you touch a power line up there, you will be in mortal danger. The power lines themselves are suspended from insulators, which prevent any voltage from being transferred to the pole itself; but if you create a connection between the conducting

wires and the ground by touching the pole and the power lines at the same time, it's all over for you. Afterwards you would probably fit into a small urn, since you would no doubt burn up immediately.

The cheeky birds, however, don't seem to be able to read the warning signs, for they often sit on the power lines or poles in hordes. They don't fall down dead, either – in fact, they just keep chirping away, as merrily as can be. Don't nature's laws apply to them too?

The explanation is simple: as long as they come into contact with only a line or the pole, they are not in danger, because those two things are safely separated by an insulator. The problem only begins when the conducting wire and the power pole are connected or bridged. That is why someone who climbs the pole – which is connected to the ground – and touches the conducting wires is in acute danger.

It's just the same in spiritual life. The attempt to unite Christianity with the world leads to spiritual death. Anyone who tries to connect the glittering lures of the world with true, energy-loaded Christianity will perish by it. He/she cannot withstand the electric field. In true Christianity there is no halfway house. It's either everything or nothing – that is the choice!

What is often called Christianity today is such in name only. It may look like a third option, but it's really a deception. Many different forms of religion are observed. Denominations often fight among one another over who is right, and hold endless debates about it. But true faith cannot be found there.

True faith is like a live wire – loaded with energy and full of indescribable power. The moment you try to bring living faith together with worldliness, it becomes fatal.

Jesus explains it like this: “No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.” *Luke 16:13 (NKJV)*.

Jesus doesn't say we should not serve God and worldliness because that is bad; He says we “cannot”, because it's not even possible! Anyone who tries to do so will die spiritually.

An example of this is Judas, the disciple of Jesus who betrayed Him. On the one hand, he did not want to let go of his greed; on the other, he still wanted to be connected with Jesus. He could not stand in this electric field for long, and as the conflict raged within him, he finally hung himself from a tree.

We find other examples in young people today. One man told me of two friends who both made a similar statement: "I do want to go the Christian way, but with slow steps; one after the other." This had an imperceptible and fatal effect on them. The first of the two was finally pulled completely under the spell of his worldly-minded girlfriend, because he did not want to let her go. He tried to have both and lost his eternal life in the process. Fear of being ridiculed by his family led the second to become more and more worldly, so that he hardly has any sense of spiritual truths left.

You Cannot have Both!

A catastrophe of great proportions had brought the land of Israel into a miserable position. For three and a half years, not a single drop of rain had fallen, and the land looked like a desert. There was famine everywhere; people and animals were suffering terribly, and still there was no end in sight.

The whole time King Ahab and Queen Jezebel's men had been vainly searching for Elijah, on whom they blamed it all. But trying to find a single man hiding somewhere in that vast nation was like trying to find a needle in a haystack. Then suddenly,

out of the clear blue sky, he was back again. The news spread like wildfire: Elijah's inviting everyone to Mount Carmel! From all sides they came, filling the mountainside with curious people.

“Jezebel's prophets march up in imposing array. In regal pomp the king appears and takes his position at the head of the priests, and the idolaters shout his welcome. But there is apprehension in the hearts of the priests as they remember that at the word of the prophet the land of Israel for three years and a half has been destitute of dew and rain. Some fearful crisis is at hand, they feel sure. The gods in whom they have trusted have been unable to prove Elijah a false prophet. To their frantic cries, their prayers, their tears, their humiliation, their revolting ceremonies, their costly and ceaseless sacrifices, the objects of their worship have been strangely indifferent.” *Prophets and Kings*, 144.3.

Soon all eyes were riveted on Elijah, for they expected him to have something important to tell them after all these years of drought. The prophet looked first at the broken-down altar of the Lord, then at the expectant throng, and called out in a loud, clear voice: “How long are you going to sit on the fence? If God is the real God, follow him; if it's Baal, follow him.” *1 Kings 18:21 (MSG)*.

Elijah's message was: "If Baal is the living god, then why don't you follow him? If he can give you rain at the right time, then I will believe that he is a living god. But if the Lord is the true God, then decide for Him with all your hearts! You cannot serve both. Stop doing things half-heartedly and make up your minds!"

This call to decision is just as important for us today as it was back then. It is the call finally to be serious about what we believe. As we have seen, there are only two possibilities. There is no other alternative.

You can decide to let everything slide. But you won't progress spiritually by doing so. Or you can accept the invitation and establish a living relationship with Jesus. It does cost some effort – that's realistic – but the benefits are guaranteed.

Which of these two options will you choose? Will you accept the invitation to a living experience with God?

Quotation:

"We cannot be half the Lord's and half the world's. We are not God's children unless we are such entirely." *Steps to Christ*, 44.1.

Write to Sabbath Rest Advent Church for other books on this and related subjects, including the following titles:

Steps to Christ by E.G. White

The Desire of Ages by E.G. White

From Bondage to Freedom by F.T. Wright

www.sabbath-rest-advent.org

A *Living* Experience with God



Successful telephone contact can be achieved only if both lines are connected to each other through a provider. The same is true in the spiritual area.

Although God does everything He can to reach us, whether it works or not depends not only on Him but on our "phone connection" as well. In this book you can find out how to connect your "phone" to a "provider" and create a connection to the living God that really works.

