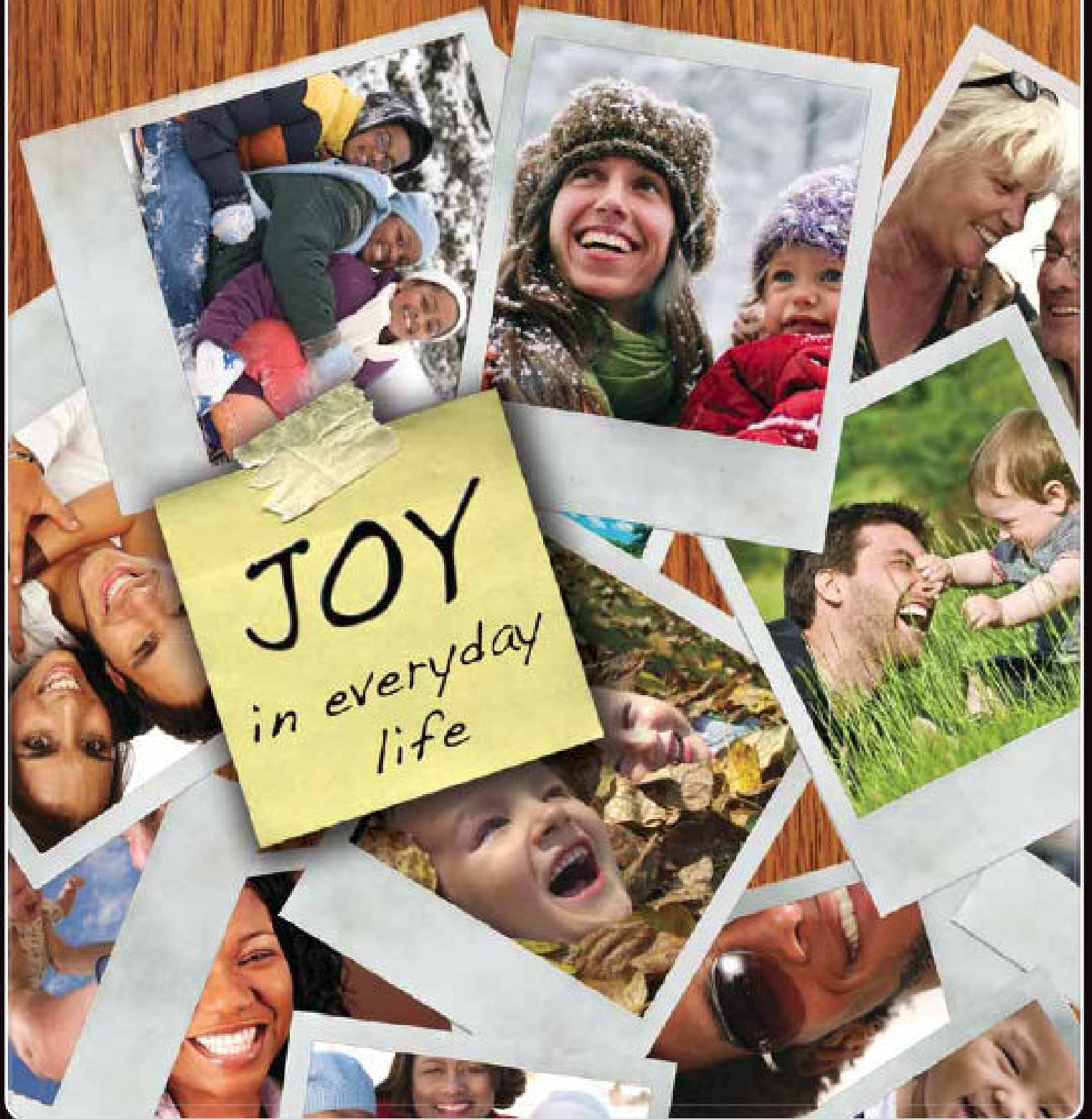


Living in the Yes! | Discipleship Basics | Retelling the Christmas Story | Finding True Happiness

# THE SOWER

The Sower is the bimonthly magazine of Spirit & Truth Fellowship International™

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# Face the Son

by John W. Schoenheit

It is appropriate that our last *Sower* of 2008 has JOY as its theme. We live in uncertain and dangerous times, when many people are weighed down with anxiety and stress, and in the holiday season there can be more stress than ever because of the obligations it brings. About 2000 years ago Jesus said to his followers, "...do not worry about your life..." (Matt. 6:25), but that lesson is hard to learn. Furthermore, it seems the more we care about something, the more we are tempted to become worried and anxious. Thankfully, joy is one thing that can help us in difficult times.

Biblically, joy has two meanings. The first is the definition the world knows, which is a feeling or emotion of great happiness we get when something wonderful happens to us. That kind of joy is what the Magi felt when they saw the star in the southern sky (Matt. 2:10), and what the man felt when he found hidden treasure (Matt. 13:44). However, the problem with that kind of joy is that we cannot feel it whenever we want to. It must happen to us, and it does not happen very often.

Thankfully, there is a second kind of joy the Bible speaks of, which is not an emotion, although it can be accompanied by emotion. This joy is an inner light and lightness, an inner effervescence. It comes from absolutely knowing that one day God will make all things right and that we will live forever in Paradise. It also comes from our personal relationship with Jesus Christ, who is always with us, and the interactions we have with him. Our wonderful future is guaranteed, so no matter what happens to us, we can have joy and draw strength from it. Around 2500 years ago, Nehemiah told the people of Jerusalem, "...the joy of the LORD is your strength" (Neh. 8:10), and that is still true today. Even in horrific circumstances we can have the joy of the Lord.

God expects us to learn lessons from the world around us, and the moon teaches us a great "joy lesson." When the moon looks fully at the sun (a full moon), it is lit up with light, and shines brilliantly in the night sky. But when the moon looks at the earth (a lunar eclipse), it is dark, depressing, and usually has a red tint to it as if it were angry. Likewise, when we look at the earth and focus our attention on the things of this life, we become dark-minded, depressed and/or angry. But when we look at the Son, and focus our attention on the things of God, we become full of light and shine into the lives of those around us. Let us learn from the moon to focus our attention on the Son. We will have an inner joy that gives us strength for life in this difficult world, and we will shine blessings upon those around us.

May joy fill your life,

*John*

# Living in the Yes!

by John A. Lynn

## Make the Choice to Rejoice

Do you think that people who know you would describe you as a joyful person? I guess you could answer that question by thinking about what joy is and whether or not you show it. I assert that laughter is a sound of joy, so another way to measure your joy is by how much you laugh, or at least by how much you smile, for a smile is a mini-laugh, a manifestation of joy held in your heart (Prov. 15:13).

As has been said, joy is “an inside job” or, as per the July/August 2008 *Sower* on *The Fruit of the Spirit*, “an inner effervescence or bubbling.” That makes it much different than “happiness,” which, by definition, is dependent upon circumstances. The root of the word “happy” is “hap,” which means “one’s luck or lot; an occurrence, happening, or accident.”

For most people, life, both present and future, is a giant MAYBE, as in *perhaps*. *Perhaps* I’ll win the lottery, and if I do, I’ll be *happy*. Oh no, I had a *mishap*, my dog ate the winning lottery ticket! In today’s crazy world, it seems that the majority of people are *un-happy*, and that is because their thinking is conditioned by circumstances rather than by the truth of God’s Word. No matter what *happens*, circumstances need not extinguish your joy.

True joy comes from within, and it is up to you. You can make the choice to rejoice. Joy is rooted in your knowing the truth about who God is, who Jesus Christ is, and who you are in Christ because of what he did for you. In large part, it is also based upon your absolute assurance of your future destiny. As Jesus is our supreme example, let us consider how he dealt with the worst of circumstances, not allowing them to steal his joy. The following verses hold a great key:

### Hebrews 12:1-3

- (1) Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.
- (2) Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for **the joy set before him** endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.
- (3) Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

## The Joy Set Before Us

The “...race marked out for us...” is what God has set forth for us to do, and we are to do it with the same passion and compassion Jesus had as he obeyed his Father, even if we must follow him into harm’s way. What will sustain us is, of course, his abiding presence, but also that which sustained him: the JOY set before us. The Cross, that is, all the agony Jesus went through in the last days of his life, was the ultimate trauma a human could face. How vivid did his vision of the joy have to be to carry him through the horror of the Cross? How did Jesus conquer it? He resolutely focused upon and trusted the *promises* God had given him: that he would get to raise all believers to everlasting life, destroy all evil, and be King of a new and perfect world.

As Christians, each of us has great joy set before us: the Lord Jesus will come to rescue us from this fallen world, reward us for our service to him, and return with us to destroy evil on the earth, where we will help him rule for a thousand years. After that he will create a new heaven and earth, Paradise regained, where we will

live forever with all believers of all time. Given our Father's infinite resourcefulness and love, surely it will be beyond what we can now imagine.

Why does Scripture exhort us to "consider" Jesus? The Greek word thus translated indicates a depth of thought, a reflection, a counting and recounting. One reason we should consider Jesus is because he is the image of the invisible God (Col. 1:15), God's ultimate revelation of Himself. Anyone who wants to know God can do so by looking at Jesus, who perfectly reflected His heart to the world.<sup>1</sup> The following verses make that clear:

### **2 Corinthians 1:18-22**

(18) But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not "Yes" and "No."

(19) For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by me and Silas and Timothy, was not "Yes" and "No," but in him it has always been "Yes."

(20) For **no matter how many promises God has made**, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God.

(21) Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us,

(22) set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit [spirit] in our hearts as **a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.**

### **Just Say "YES!"**

Those are some of my favorite verses in the Bible. When we focus on the risen Lord Jesus Christ and trust him, life is no longer a giant MAYBE. It becomes an even more giant **YES!** Verse 22 tells us that the gift of holy spirit is our guarantee that all God's promises about our future will come true. The Greek word translated "deposit" is *arrabon*, which means a token, a down-payment, like "earnest" money is put down on a house. It is used in two other places in the Bible, both in the Church Epistles. Ephesians 1:14 says that the holy spirit is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until our future redemption. 2 Corinthians 5:5 says this spirit is the guarantee of our new body that the Lord Jesus will give us at his appearing, when our salvation is consummated. In fact, that new body is the "house" on which Jesus has put a down-payment.

Now, you and I are living between the Grave and the Glory, between the Cross and the Coming, between the Empty Tomb and the Everlasting Triumph. As we look back to Jesus' victory over death and his finished work on our behalf, and look forward to the guarantee of our future victory, we are anchored on resurrection ground. As we look back to "It is finished" and ahead to his glorious appearing, we can live in the now by living in the "**YES!**" We do that by saying "**YES!**" to God moment-by-moment, knowing that He will never lead us where His grace cannot keep us.

One way to describe the mission of Spirit & Truth Fellowship International is: *Building an Enduring Work of Truth*. As those who by God's grace understand the Sacred Secret and other little known biblical truths vital to everyday life, we are re-building the wall of truth that religious tradition has torn down. If we are going to build an enduring work of truth, we ourselves must endure whatever opposition the Enemy throws at us, just like Jesus did. To do so, we must have a clear vision of the joy that is set before us. As the following verses show, our joy is directly proportional to our understanding of what God's Word says about who we are and what we are doing.

### **Nehemiah 8:8-12**

(8) They read from the Book of the Law of God, **making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read.**

(9) Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, "This day is sacred to the LORD your God. Do not mourn or weep." For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law.

(10) Nehemiah said, “Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve, for **the joy of the LORD is your strength.**”

(11) The Levites calmed all the people, saying, “Be still, for this is a sacred day. Do not grieve.”

(12) Then all the people went away to eat and drink, to send portions of food and **to celebrate with great joy, because they now understood the words that had been made known to them.**

### **Finding Joy in Service**

Remember what it was like when you first heard the Word of God set forth accurately. The lights came on. The veil was lifted. Your heart burned within you. A weight was lifted off your shoulders. The problems in your life didn't seem as overwhelming. And you were excited about telling others the Good News. Do you know a verse that says we cannot maintain that mindset throughout our Christian lives? I guess it could even become more and more real, don't you think? As someone once said, “a merry heart is a holiday.”

There is also joy in realizing what you are a part of as someone partaking of the resources and activities available through Spirit & Truth Fellowship International and sharing them with others. Together, we are a growing worldwide movement that is vividly making known the truth of God's Word. Even if you are isolated geographically from others who believe like you do, you are not alone. We know people like you all over the world. Just keep sowing the good seed of the Word into your own heart and taking advantage of opportunities to share it with others. That is how we will “connect the dots” and develop a network of thriving local fellowships.

We can see that joy is based upon believing *truth*. How many people do you meet who know the Word of God that you know? Millions of people are unsaved, and millions of Christians are unsure of their salvation, which greatly dilutes their joy. What should we do about that? Jesus said that if one is to find his true life, he must “lose it” in service to others. That means that reaching out to others is the best way to develop great joy. There are a myriad of ways to reach out, and the Lord Jesus will lead you in his personal curriculum of growth for you. I daresay that his vision of you is far greater than your vision of yourself.

The Lord's vision for you includes your standing before him at the Judgment Seat of Christ, and his rewarding you for your service in his Name. He longs for an intimate walk with you now so that he can lavish great rewards upon you then. “Royalties,” as it were. Remember, you are a part of his Body, and as such his heart beats with yours, moment by moment. As per Galatians 6:9 and 10 and Ephesians 5:16, he will help you make the most of each moment of opportunity that comes your way, and as you sow, you will reap.

### **Hebrews 6:10-12**

(10) God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.

(11) We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure.

(12) We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.

Our love for God is directly proportional to our understanding of what He has done for us by way of His Son. We show our love for our Father and our Lord by helping *people*. In verse 11, “making our hope sure” means to lay up future rewards by our labor of love for others in this life. Those rewards are the inheritance of which verse 12 speaks.

Yes, we live in a war zone, and life is filled with the horrors of war. Amidst it all, however, we are to shine as lights, manifesting the heart of our Savior. Jesus always said “**YES!**” to His Father, and that is how he prevailed in every situation. Let us walk with him through this dark world, and let our “**YES!**” resound in the hearts and lives of those we touch with the joy of the Lord.

**Note:**

**1.** The written Word of God and the Living Word of God (Jesus Christ) are always in agreement. Thus, any verse of Scripture that is not in concert with the character and life of Jesus is not being understood correctly, and must be re-evaluated. This is an important key in resolving “difficult” verses.

**Read online at  
TruthOrTradition.com/yes**

# Pure Joy

by Rachel Darr

The morning my daughter was born, when I first saw her beautiful face and at last experienced that long-awaited first moment of holding her in my arms, I felt such an inexpressible, overwhelming feeling of joy. My heart was racing, and tears of happiness were threatening to explode down my face. It was the greatest feeling in the world to finally get to see her, to touch her, to know that she had finally arrived and was in our lives. I couldn't explain it. All I could do was look lovingly at my husband and smile as a few tears rolled down my face, and kiss my precious daughter's face.

I think God feels the same way about us when we choose to believe in Him and make Jesus our Lord and Savior. I bet He jumps for joy in the heavenlies that another one of His children has chosen Him as their Father! In his article, "What is Joy?" placed on his website January 10, 2006, Mike Ratliff states, "Joy is both an outcome of our relationship with the Lord and our source of strength for our obedience of Him." How true! When we adhere to Romans 10:9-10, confessing with our mouths that Jesus is Lord and believing in our hearts that God raised him from the dead, we are surely saved! It is through our continued relationship with God and Jesus, and our focus on the Hope, that we can have great joy in our lives, and that joy gives us the strength to continue to be obedient in this often difficult world. As Jesus stated:

### **John 15:9-11(NKJV)<sup>1</sup>**

(9) "As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love.

(10) "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.

(11) "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and *that* your joy may be full.

Daily I find great encouragement in my belief in my heavenly Father, and in my Lord and Savior, knowing that one day I will live forever with them. Often times during worship, I find myself choked up and unable to speak because my joy in God and Jesus is so very great that I am emotionally overcome. I have faced many hardships in life, yet I keep reminding myself that I need to live the way Jesus lived, and that one day I will be with my Creator and my Savior. This adds daily to my joy!

We know from the Bible that joy is both an inner strength we get from knowing the Hope and also a powerful emotion caused by something exceptionally good or satisfying. We get both inner strength and a feeling of great joy from our relationship with God and Jesus Christ.

I pray that through your belief in and relationship with them you too may have this great, inexpressible joy!

God bless you!

### **Note:**

1. Scripture quotations marked (NKJV) are taken from the New King James Version®. © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

# The Vine

## Discipleship Basics

by Dan Gallagher

**Discipleship Basics** are the core fundamental disciplines and practices of every Christian.

The other day I was thinking about what it means to be a disciple of Christ, and was reminded of my martial arts experience. For a number of years I studied several martial arts styles, and no matter how much I knew, or how long I had studied, or how proficient I became, we always started each training session with a warm up where we practiced the basics of blocking, kicking, punching, and other fundamental moves. Similarly, no matter how long we have stood for Christ, no matter how much we know, or how proficient we become in our calling, we should stay grounded in the basics of discipleship.

So what are some of the basic disciplines of discipleship? Well, it just so happened that a few days after thinking about the basics, I was having a conversation with my friend John Lynn, when he rattled off a rapid salvo of five things every Christian should do: pray, study, give, witness, and fellowship. “Now really,” I thought, “how simple and fundamental is that?” Yet I asked myself, “How many believers really do those?” My real personal conviction came when I reflected on how I am too often neglectful of these simple practices, and I doubt that I am the only one who allows the pressures or pleasures of life to distract me from these spiritual disciplines.

Although, for instance, I may be strong in prayer or study, I find that I am not consistently strong in all five areas. Every athlete, musician, craftsman, or artist knows you can never get far from the basics if you are to maintain or increase your level of expertise. The more proficient one is in the fundamentals, the more skillful he becomes in the advanced techniques. My self-conviction came when I realized I needed to continue rehearsing the basics with greater zeal, that is, with the same zeal and consistency that I once practiced martial arts. I do not believe that discipleship is only a matter of practicing these five things, but I do believe God desires we excel in these five areas, so let’s briefly look at each one.

### **Prayer**

Our best example of a vibrant prayer life is, of course, Jesus, who counted prayer as an indispensable priority. He rose early to pray, sought out solitude to pray, and prayed before every major life decision, like praying all night before he chose his Apostles. He also prayed in times of great need, like in the Garden of Gethsemane before he was taken captive. He also told us to pray until we get our answer.<sup>1</sup> There are even four places in the Church Epistles where we are directed to pray constantly.<sup>2</sup> And when we are tired and don’t feel like praying with our understanding, we can always speak in tongues and know we are communing with God perfectly.<sup>3</sup> Undoubtedly, prayer is a fundamental discipline that is vital to our relationship with God and the Lord Jesus.

### **Study**

Sometimes I am mentally tired and just don’t feel like reading my Bible, but when I exercise discipline and force myself to do so, I find myself greatly encouraged and strengthened. I often feel deeply satisfied, like Ezekiel, who said the Word of God “...tasted as sweet as honey....”<sup>4</sup> God tells us that His Word is the sword of the spirit, so if I am neglecting it, I have to wonder how sharp my sword is. If neglected, my sword won’t cut well and could do more harm than good. How so? Neglecting the Word could lead to using verses out of context or wrongly applying what God says, and if we do that, we really do not have God’s Word. I believe one

of the principal reasons we should study is stated in Psalm 119:11, “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.” Christianity is all about a relationship with God and the Lord Jesus, and allowing them to speak to us through the Written Word is integral to that. No one can be much of a disciple if he doesn’t know his master’s will.

### **Giving**

The other day a close friend confessed that he has a tendency to hold back in his giving, and sometimes gives so others won’t think he is not a giver. Sad to say, I can relate to him. How often does that little voice in our head say, “But what about me, what about me, what about me?” One of the greatest paradoxes of Christianity is found in self-sacrifice, because it is only when we lose ourselves that we find ourselves. We cannot be genuine followers of Christ without being givers, for the two are inseparable. Although our giving should include money if we have it to give, it is more about having a lifestyle of preferring others before ourselves. Discipleship demands that we develop a giving heart.

### **Witnessing**

At one time or another I have participated in many different types of sharing my faith with others. For one year I even went door-to-door in an attempt to reach every person within a set distance from my home. While there is nothing wrong with going out to share the Word like that, I have come to believe that my whole life, who I really am, is the best way to witness. At one time I had to fill in for my wife, Lori, who usually did all the banking for our business. When I began to take care of the deposit with the teller she connected my name with Lori’s and realized I was her husband. Every teller then came over and introduced themselves to me while lavishing praise about what a wonderful and godly woman my wife was. Lori would be the first to tell you that she is not good at “witnessing,” but her life tells another story. I left the bank that day with a new lesson on what it means to be a witness for Christ. We are all supposed to be prepared to speak of Christ at every opportunity, and should do so, but a good disciple goes beyond words by having his actions also proclaim Christ.

### **Fellowship**

The Church Epistles use the metaphor of a body to describe the relationship Christians are to have to each other. When a body is healthy, each part is in communication with the other parts. It is when parts of the body miscommunicate or become out of sync with the rest of the body that illness and disease take over. Christianity is “a team sport,” and we are to develop intimate relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ. How can we fulfill all the commands to love one another, submit to each other, or serve one another if we are not in relationship with one another? Isolation often leads to deception, so we must fight to stay connected. Sometimes I hear people who do not fellowship with others use the excuse that there is no one near them with similar beliefs. I too love to fellowship with people who are like-minded on doctrine and practice, but when that is not available we should still seek out others who at least love Christ. Discipleship demands that we seek out relationship with other saints.

Those who practice the basics of Christian discipleship will often find areas in which they excel. Anyone gifted as a teacher has discovered that because he has practiced teaching. How will you know if your gifting is in encouragement if you are not fellowshipping with others where you can provide encouragement? In the same way that my karate skills improved when I faithfully practiced the basics, your quality of discipleship will improve when you concentrate on these five fundamental areas. Consider focusing on one of the basic disciplines each week for the next five weeks and see how it changes your life.

#### **Notes:**

1. Luke 18:1-5
2. Ephesians 6:18; Colossians 1:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; 2 Thessalonians 1:11
3. For more on speaking in tongues visit [TruthOrTradition.com/tongues](http://TruthOrTradition.com/tongues)
4. Ezekiel 3:3

# The Contender

## Retelling the Christmas Story

by John W. Schoenheit

### A Tradition Develops

An old and familiar part of the Christmas story goes like this: Mary and Joseph traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem shortly before the birth of Jesus.<sup>1</sup> The night they arrived in Bethlehem there were no rooms available in the local inns, and so Joseph and Mary had to make a place for themselves in a local stable, where Mary gave birth to Jesus and then laid him in a manger, a feeding trough for the animals.

The picture painted by the above part of the Christmas story is not a pretty one. It paints a cold and selfish picture of the people of Bethlehem. Most people of every age and culture go out of their way to help women in need, but somehow the people of Bethlehem closed their doors to this young woman about to give birth. Is that really the picture of the birth of Christ that the Word of God paints for us? We will see that there is a joyful picture of giving in the Christmas story that has been hidden from the eyes of many Christians, but which shows the true heart of Christmas: giving to others from a joyful heart.

The modern Christian understanding of the birth of Jesus comes largely from extra-biblical works and traditions imported into the Gospels, rather than the biblical record itself. Much misinformation came from a document that was widely circulated in the early centuries of the Christian era. It is referred to by scholars as the *Protevangelium of James*, and was likely written in the third century A.D.<sup>2</sup> The *Protevangelium* is the first document scholars are aware of that refers to Jesus being born close to Mary's arrival in Bethlehem, though it says Jesus was born in a cave before Joseph and Mary even reached Bethlehem. Sadly, in ancient times as well as today, people seem to pay more attention to what people say about the Bible than what the Bible itself says.

We do not know how large a part the *Protevangelium* played in developing the tradition that Mary gave birth to Jesus the night she and Joseph arrived in Bethlehem. However, we do know that the traditional belief became easier to sustain as the center of Christian culture moved to Europe, where day-to-day life was quite different from life in Palestine.

### Arrival in Bethlehem

When we read the Bible carefully, even in most English versions, we see that Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem for an unspecified number of days before Mary gave birth.

#### Luke 2:6 (KJV)

And so it was, that, **while they were there**, the **days** were accomplished that she should be delivered.

It is clear from Luke 2:6 that Joseph and Mary did not arrive in Bethlehem the night she gave birth, but days earlier. Mary gave birth “while they [she and Joseph] were there [in Bethlehem],” and the verse specifically says “days.” When the word “days” is used in the plural in the New Testament, it always refers to “days” literally or a period of time. Had Joseph and Mary arrived the day Mary gave birth, the text would have used “day” or “hours,” not the plural “days.” New Testament scholars know this. For example, R. C. H. Lenski writes: “This [the day Jesus was born] was not the day of Joseph’s and Mary’s arrival....”<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, as usual, scholarship does not often have the power to overturn tradition, with its well-entrenched stories, songs, and paintings.

If Joseph and Mary had been staying in Bethlehem before Jesus was born, how is it that they had not found adequate lodging? Why give birth in a stable and lay Jesus in a manger? Oops, the Bible never says the birth was in a stable—that is *tradition*. If for some reason Bethlehem was so totally filled with guests and visitors that no one would open their homes to Joseph and Mary, their relatives Zechariah and Elizabeth lived only a short distance away, in the hill country of Judah (Luke 1:39 - NASB)<sup>4</sup>, and Joseph and Mary could have gone there with only a little effort. In fact, Mary had visited Elizabeth early in her pregnancy (Luke 1:40). So Joseph and Mary could have found adequate housing and care if they needed it.

### **Getting the Story Straight**

The story of the night of Christ's birth needs to be retaught and relearned in Christian circles, not only because truth matters and what actually happened is important, but because it shows the love and sacrifice that people make to help each other, and the true joy of giving so that others may be blessed. That is a much more redemptive rendition of the Christmas story than townspeople closing their hearts and shutting their doors to a pregnant woman in need.

In order to see what really happened around the season of the birth of Christ we will need to glean facts from both the Greek text and the culture of the ancient Near East (which, by the way, existed in many parts there until quite recently). Too often the Greek text alone has been used to try to reveal biblical truth. The Greek text alone is not enough to rebuild the truth of the biblical events for a very simple reason: when something in a culture is usual, well known, normal, or "standard operating procedure," it is not written about in detail. For example, if I write a letter to a friend about my months of being with my son as he recovered from being wounded in battle, I might say, "I drove to the hospital every day." I would never write: "I went to the hospital in my car, which is a large metal and plastic mobility device on wheels, with a gasoline engine that starts when an ignition key is turned, and I made it move by pedals on the floor, (etc)." It would be ridiculous to write that. Why? Because everyone in today's culture knows exactly what I mean when I say "I drove to the hospital." Perhaps 2000 years from now, if culture has changed so much that only a few historians know what a car is, they might wish we described our driving in more detail, but that is not necessary today. In the same way, things that were part of the everyday culture of the Bible times were not described in detail in their writings. We have to learn about the ordinary things of ancient life by piecing together details from many texts and writings, by using archaeology to study the material culture left to us, and by studying any cultures that still live the same way.

What we will see as we examine the biblical record from both the Greek text and the culture of the times is that Joseph and Mary arrived in Bethlehem some time before she gave birth and were taken into the home of a local resident, likely a relative who was also of the family of David, in whose home Mary gave birth. Although most English versions have the phrase, "there was no room for them in the inn," we will see that phrase has been both mistranslated and misinterpreted.

### **Welcomed into a Private Home**

Before we look at the mistranslations of "room" and "inn," however, let us look at some reasons Joseph and Mary could have found a place to stay.<sup>5</sup> First, Joseph was returning to his town of origin. Historical memories are long in the Middle East, and family support is very strong. For example, Paul knew he was a descendant of Benjamin (Phil. 3:5), even though Benjamin lived more than 1500 years earlier than he did. Given the long family memories in Hebrew culture, once Joseph told people that both he and Mary were descendants of families from Bethlehem, many homes would be open to them. In fact, it is likely that Joseph and Mary already knew of relatives in Bethlehem and may well have gone to those homes first to find lodging. As we see the true story of Christ's birth develop, that seems like a very strong possibility.

Second, not just one, but both Joseph and Mary were "royals," because they were both from the royal line of David. David is so famous in Bethlehem that it is called, "the city of David" (Luke 2:4 - KJV). Being from that famous family would have meant that most homes would open their doors to them if only for that fact alone.

Being able to host a couple that were direct descendants of David would have been an honor and privilege.

Third, in every culture women about to give birth are given special help, and the village of Bethlehem would be no different. The New Testament scholar Kenneth Bailey, who has spent his life living in the East and teaching in Universities in Egypt and Lebanon, properly understands the heart of village life in Palestine and points out that Joseph and Mary would never have been turned away in their hour of need. He says: “Was there no sense of honor in Bethlehem? Surely the community would have sensed its responsibility to help Joseph find adequate shelter for Mary and provide the care she needed. To turn away a descendent of David in the city of David would be an unspeakable shame to the entire village.”<sup>6</sup>

It is important that we properly understand the record of the birth of Christ. The night that Joseph and Mary arrived in Bethlehem they were not rejected by a local hotel that had its “No Vacancy” sign turned on. Instead, they were taken into the private home of a caring family, who let them stay in the family living quarters. This type of giving and joy of service demonstrates the true meaning of Christmas.

### **There was No Space in the Guestroom**

Let’s read, properly translate, and correctly understand what happened when Jesus was born.

#### **Luke 2:7**

and she [Mary] gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

The phrase “no room for them in the inn” is a mistranslation that continues to support the misunderstanding about the birth of Christ. Two words we must understand to properly interpret the biblical account are *topos*, which most versions translate as “room,” and *kataluma*, which most versions translate as “inn.” The word *topos* occurs more than ninety times in the New Testament. It does not refer to “a room,” like we think of a hotel room, or a bedroom, but simply to a place, or a space in a given area. The text is not saying there was no “room” for Joseph and Mary as in the sense of a hotel room, but rather that there was no “space” for them. Space where? Not in the “inn,” but in the *kataluma*. What is a *kataluma*? In the Gospel record it is a “lodging place” or “guestroom,” not a commercial lodge, or inn. There was no space for Joseph and Mary in the guestroom because it was already full. It is noteworthy that even *Bauer’s Greek-English Lexicon* notes that if Luke 2:7 had meant to say “inn” in the sense of a hotel, there is a better Greek word that is used elsewhere in Luke.<sup>7</sup>

The normal Greek word for “inn” is *pandocheion*, and it refers to a public house for the reception of strangers (caravansary, khan, inn; we would say hotel or motel). The word *pandocheion* was used not only by the Greeks, but also as a loan-word for “inn” or a commercial lodging place in Hebrew, Arabic, Armenian, Coptic, and Turkish. Luke uses the word *pandocheion* in the parable of the Good Samaritan when the Samaritan took the man who was mugged to a public inn (Luke 10:34).

In contrast to the public inn (*pandocheion*), both Mark and Luke use *kataluma* in their Gospels as a “guest room” in someone’s house (Mark 14:14; Luke 22:11). When finding a place to eat the Last Supper with his disciples, Jesus tells them to say to the owner of the house, “...The Teacher asks: Where is the **guest room** [*kataluma*], where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?” (Luke 22:11). So in both Mark and Luke, the *kataluma* is a guest room in a house, not an inn or hotel.

The gospel of Luke also uses the verb form of *kataluma*, which is *kataluo*, “to find rest or lodging.” When Zacchaeus the tax collector brings Jesus home for a meal, the Bible says that Jesus goes “to be the guest” [*kataluo*] at Zacchaeus’ house (Luke 19:7). So Luke uses both the noun *kataluma* and the verb *kataluo* to refer to a room in someone’s house.<sup>8</sup> The fact that *pandocheion* is a better word for “inn” than *kataluma*, along with the fact that Luke used *pandocheion* for an “inn” and *kataluma* for a guest room, is very solid evidence that

Luke is telling us the family who took in Joseph and Mary had “no space” in their “guestroom.” Thus the Bible should not be translated to say there was no room for them in the inn, but rather there was “no space for them in the guestroom.” It is noteworthy that *Young’s Literal Translation of the Bible*, done by Robert Young, the same man who produced *Young’s Concordance to the Bible*, translates Luke 2:7 as follows: “...there was not for them a place in the guest-chamber.”

One thing that is left out of the biblical record is why the guest room was full. Although we will never know for sure, there are a couple possibilities. First, if Jesus was born when we of Spirit & Truth Fellowship think he was, the first day of Tishri, it is possible that Jerusalem and the surrounding region was already experiencing a large influx of people for the season of the year, because it had the largest number of sacred days and feasts. The month of Tishri (usually around our September) had the Feast of Trumpets (Tishri 1), the Day of Atonement (Tishri 10), and the Feast of Tabernacles (Tishri 15-22), and anyone who was traveling a very long distance to be at Jerusalem for any of them might have wanted to be there for the entire festival season. Also, Luke tells us the reason that Joseph traveled to Bethlehem was due to Caesar’s tax registration (Luke 2:1-4), and it is possible that other family members besides Joseph had decided to travel to Bethlehem at that time, when they could both register for the tax and be part of the celebrations at Jerusalem.<sup>9</sup>

### **Common Features of an Eastern Life**

There are a few things about ordinary houses and ordinary life in first century Palestine that we must know in order to understand the birth of Jesus. One is that it was quite common for houses in the Middle East to have a guest room where guests, and even strangers, could stay. Showing hospitality to strangers has always been a huge part of Eastern life, and is written about in the Bible and in many books on the customs of the Bible. Several biblical records show strangers being given hospitality, including the record of Lot (Gen. 19:1-4), the man in Gibeah (Judg. 19:19-21), and the Shunamite woman, who showed hospitality to Elisha by building a guest room just for him (2 Kings 4:10). Giving hospitality is a command for Christian leaders as well (1 Tim. 3:2).

Even poor people could have a guest room because it did not have to be furnished or have an adjoining bathroom and shower. People did not generally sleep on beds, but traveled with their own blankets that they slept on at night, so sleeping arrangements were no problem. Tables and chairs were not used in the common homes of first century Palestinians, and the bathroom was a pot, or a place outside. So the average guest room was simply a small, empty room, offering shelter and a place of safety. The guest room provided privacy for the guests as well as the family, because one-room homes were common. Our modern houses with many rooms were simply not the norm in a village of the first century. Quite often a family lived in a one-room house, in which all family activities occurred. They pulled their bedrolls out at night and slept on the floor, and simply rolled them up again in the morning.

Another thing we must understand about houses in the East is that it was common for people to bring their animals (the family donkey or a couple of milk goats, for example) into them at night. Such animals were very valuable, and the people brought them into the home at night to keep them from being stolen and to protect them from harm. Of course, if the family were shepherds or herdsman, they would not bring the whole flock or herd into the house, but would have a family member or hired guard watch them in the field.

It was a common practice to raise the floor of the part of the house where the family lived, and keep the animals in an area that was a little lower.<sup>10</sup> Knowing this helps us understand Luke 2:6 and also where that idea that Jesus was born in a stable came from. Jesus was laid in a manger, which is an open trough, box, or bin, where the animal food was placed so the animals could feed easily. In Western society, mangers are in barns or stables, so if Jesus was laid in a manger it made sense he was born in a stable. However, in Eastern society, where the animals grazed outside during the day and were brought into the house at night, the manger was in the house. Thus when the Bible says that Jesus was laid in a manger “because” there was no space in the guest room, any Easterner would understand perfectly that the guest room was full so Jesus was born in the main part

of the house where the family and animals were, and then safely placed in the manger, which would have been filled with clean hay or straw and would have been the perfect size for him. This was not to demean him in any way, but to care for him. The protective walls of the manger kept him safely guarded and away from busy feet and a bustling household, as well as warm and protected from any drafts or cold air in the home.

Another thing that helps us understand the Christmas story is understanding Eastern hospitality. In the East, guests were given special treatment of all kinds, including behavior that seems very extreme to us. For example, in the record of Lot and the two strangers, Lot would have handed over his own daughters to the mob before surrendering his guests (Gen. 19:8). Similarly, the people with whom Joseph and Mary stayed would never displace their guests from the guest room, but instead would inconvenience themselves, graciously bringing the couple into their living space.

Another thing we need to know is that Mary and Joseph would not have been alone when Jesus was born. The women of the household, along with the women of the family staying in the guestroom, most likely the village midwife, and perhaps even wise and experienced women from the neighborhood, would have been present, and would have shooed Joseph and the rest of the men out of the house some time during Mary's labor (actually, the men would have graciously left on their own, which was also standard procedure in that culture). The husband and any sons (along with Joseph), would have left their own house, spending their late evening and night hours with other families or just resting out under the stars, so that Mary would have the privacy she needed during the birth of Jesus.<sup>11</sup> Of course they would be allowed back in the house after the baby was born and there had been adequate time to get things in the house back in proper order and make sure Jesus and Mary were comfortable.

Baby Jesus would have been born in normal circumstances, with Mary being helped and cared for by the women around her. Although the Bible does not mention that there was a midwife and other women present with Mary, it would be quite unthinkable that they would not be there to help. No details of the birth would be given in the Bible because births were a "normal" part of life, and no first-century reader in Palestine would expect anything different than what usually happens with a village birth. In fact, if the women of the household had not been there to help, that would have been so unusual (and seemingly coldhearted) that it would probably be written about in the Bible. Also, the shepherds who came to see Jesus knew that he was the promised Messiah. When they found Joseph, Mary, and their Savior, if they in any way felt that he was not being treated well, they would have been scandalized and outraged, and immediately taken them home to their own houses. The fact that they did no such thing, but rather left the new family where they were and went to tell the good news to the whole area, indicates they felt Joseph, Mary, and the baby were being well cared for.

## **The Christmas Story**

So we see that the way the birth of Jesus actually happened is considerably different than what is commonly taught. It is not that Bethlehem was full of cold-hearted townspeople who would not take special care of a young woman about to have her first child.

Joseph and Mary arrived in Bethlehem at least a few days before Mary gave birth, and were taken in by one of the local homes, most likely that of a relative. The host family already had guests in the *kataluma*, the guest room, so there was no space (*topos*) for them there. Therefore, the homeowners graciously made room for Joseph and Mary in their own living quarters, treating them like family. When Mary went into labor, the men left their own home to give her privacy, and the women of the household, likely along with the village midwife, came to Mary's side for help and support. Shortly after Mary gave birth to our Lord and Savior late in the evening (after sunset) or at night, Joseph and the men would have been called back into the house to see the new baby boy, and there would have been much jubilation and revelry, which was always a traditional part of the birth of a baby boy, particularly if it was a first child.<sup>12</sup>

Not too long after Jesus was born, he was wrapped in swaddling clothes, dedicated to God, and placed in a

perfect spot, the manger in the family home, which would have been cleaned and made up with fresh straw. No doubt the news soon spread around the village that a baby boy had been born (the music and shouting would have helped that happen), and that both the mother and baby were doing well, but soon there was to be news of a different kind. Shepherds showed up from a nearby field and told the village that a great light had shined around them, that they had seen an army of angels on the hillsides, and that an angel had told them that this baby was no ordinary baby, but the Messiah, the Savior. Their report caused great wonder all over the region, and resulted in glory and praise to God.

Thus the story of the birth of Christ reveals something that demonstrates the true spirit of Christmas: people opening their homes and their hearts, joyfully giving to others in need, and helping where they can.

#### Notes:

1. I use “Christmas story” in this article because of its familiarity in our culture, but it is important to know that Jesus was born in the Fall of the year, likely September, and not in December. For further study visit [TruthOrTradition.com/birth](http://TruthOrTradition.com/birth).
2. Wilhelm Schneemelcher, editor, *New Testament Apocrypha* (The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1963), “The Protevangelium of James,” pp. 370-388. It is possible, but not likely, that it dates as early as 150 A.D.
3. R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Luke’s Gospel*, (Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, MN, 1946), p. 126.
4. Some versions, such as the NASB, say Judah, while some say “Judea.” The correct translation is Judah, and it refers to the ancient tribal area of Judah, not the Roman province of Judea. The Greek is *iouda*, which Luke uses for Judah, usually the name of a man and here the tribal area named after the man, Judah, the son of Jacob. If Luke had meant Roman Judea, he would have used *ioudaia* as he did 10 times in Luke and 12 times in Acts. Scripture quotations marked (NASB) are taken from the New American Standard Bible®, © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.
5. These reasons are enumerated in Kenneth Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, (IVP Academic, Downers Grove, IL, 2008), pp. 25 and 26. Credit must go to him for enlightening me to the basic truth in this article and for making many of the points I have covered; that Jesus was born in the home of a loving family in Bethlehem, who opened their home to Joseph and Mary.
6. Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, p. 26.
7. *Bauer’s Greek-English Lexicon* says of *kataluma*: “lodging place. The sense inn is possible in Lk 2:7, but in 10:34 Luke uses *pandocheion*, the more specific term for inn. *Kataluma* is therefore best understood here as lodging or guest-room.”
8. In the New Testament, the only other use of the verb *kataluo* is also in Luke, and occurs in Luke 9:12 in the record of the feeding of the 5,000. The disciples wanted Jesus to send away the multitude so they could “find lodging” and get something to eat. Although the disciples spoke in a general sense, in the culture of the East, where showing hospitality was an important part of family life, they would have had in mind that these 5,000 would find lodging with other people, and not that they would find local hotels to stay in. Public inns have been around a long time, and much could be written about them. In the first place, there were not many of them. Certainly not enough for 5,000 men and their families to stay. Beyond that, however, both those inns that were modeled after the inns of the Greco-Roman culture and those with roots in the Eastern culture were not wonderful places to stay, like the hotels we have today. They were loud and dirty places, and often filled with riff-raff and ruffians. They were centers of prostitution and drunken parties (often the inn provided food for sale and prostitutes for rent), and the rooms were not rented privately, as in our modern hotels. Instead, guests rented a space on the floor to sleep (there were no beds), and it was anyone’s guess who might be in the room with you, renting the space on the floor next to you (and anyone’s guess if they would actually sleep or stay up all night engaged in activities with friends or prostitutes). In contrast to staying in a public inn, taking in travelers for the night was a long established biblical custom, going back to Genesis (cp. Gen. 19:1-3), and that is what the disciples would have thought about when they knew Jesus’ audience needed to find a place to stay.
9. Caesar wanted everyone to be registered for taxation, so some versions read “enrolled,” some “registered,” some “taxed,” some refer to a “census,” etc. It was a registration, or enrollment, for taxation.
10. Fred Wight, *Manners and Customs of Bible Lands* (Moody Press, Chicago, 1953), p. 34; Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, pp. 28-33. The New Testament scholar John Nolland also mentions the area for animals being somewhat lower than where the people ate and slept: “...it is best to think of an overcrowded Palestinian peasant home: a single-roomed home with an animal stall under the same roof (frequently to be distinguished from the family living quarters by the raised platform floor of the latter).” John Nolland, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Nelson Reference and Electronic, Columbia, 1989), p. 105.
11. We know Jesus’ birth was late in the evening, after sunset, or at night, because the shepherds were in the fields at night when the angel appeared to them (Luke 2:8 - KJV), and told them the Christ was born “this day.” Since “this day” started at sunset, as all Jewish days do, then the Messiah was born after sunset.
12. We Westerners are used to thinking of Mary’s birth night as being silent and peaceful (note the song, “Silent Night”), but the birth of a boy is always the time for a party in village life.

Available online at [TruthOrTradition.com/retelling](http://TruthOrTradition.com/retelling)

# Partner Profile

## Mike & Becky Fisher

### **1 Corinthians 3:8 and 9 (KJV)**

(8) Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour.

(9) For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, *ye are* God's building.

Greetings and blessings from the Hi-Plains of West Texas and Mike and Becky Fisher, fellow-laborers with Spirit & Truth Fellowship International.

The Hi-Plains of Texas are located in the Panhandle of Texas: a flat, dry, sparsely populated land that comes to life in abundance when the fields are planted and watered (the water coming from hundreds of feet below the ground), producing much of the world's cotton supply. Becky and I live here on the family farm (having been in the family for 83 years.) And our five children and six (soon to be seven) grandchildren have their roots still planted here though they are now scattered across many states.

As I look out this morning, I see farmers hard at work preparing their fields for planting. I know that each of these farmers, as he works hard, is looking forward to his day of harvest to receive the reward for his labor. For me, this sight is a perfect picture of our partnership with this ministry. Becky and I (Mike) have been blessed to be partners with this ministry since its inception and see ourselves as fellow-laborers with the ministry in "making known the written Word of God so as to proclaim the Good News of the Lord Jesus Christ."

Having retired from farming and other business interests, I have spent the past ten years as a Volunteer Chaplain for the Texas Department of Criminal Justice. This "field" for ministry is truly ripe to harvest, and the laborers are few. Becky and I have counted it a privilege and a joy to share God's matchless Word and His Good News of hope with countless numbers of the incarcerated across the state of Texas in Sunday morning services, weekly Bible studies, and weekend seminars. And in addition, for the last two years, we have traveled the state teaching fellow Christian laborers the ins and outs of entering the prisons, and reaping and harvesting in this ministry field.

As you can well imagine, preparing our teachings and lessons and forming our instructional events involves many hours of study and planning. The websites, TruthOrTradition.com and BiblicalUnitarian.com, are great, accurate sources of the truth and instructions for life in the Word, and we go to them often in making our own preparations. We are thankful for the men and women at Spirit & Truth Fellowship International: men and women who heard God's call and have remained true to that call to study and research His Word and to make its truth available to all who hunger and thirst for it.

We are blessed to partner with them financially, as they partner with us in sharing His Love and Word across the world. And as we labor together, we too, like the farmers I view today, look forward to His Return and to our reward.

Until then, be blessed and keep on *laboring*, for truly the harvest is great and the laborers are few.

Mike & Becky Fisher  
Hale Center, TX

**To become a partner, go to [STFonline.org/partnership](http://STFonline.org/partnership)**

# Figures of Speech

## Ellipsis

by John W. Schoenheit

The ability to communicate by words is one thing that sets mankind apart from all other creatures. God is the Author of language, and no one has ever used language as precisely as God does in the Bible, including His use of figures of speech. When most people say, “a figure of speech,” they are speaking in general terms of something that is not true to fact. However, genuine “figures of speech” are legitimate grammatical and lexical forms that add emphasis and feeling to what we say and write. Recognizing and properly interpreting the figures of speech in the Bible has many advantages. It helps us to understand the true meaning of Scripture and enables us to more fully enjoy the richness of the Word of God. It is important that we become at least somewhat familiar with the figures of speech in Scripture, of which there are more than 200 varieties.<sup>1</sup>

The figure we are going to cover in this issue of *The Sower* is **Ellipsis**. The English dictionary correctly defines Ellipsis as the omission of a word or words that are obviously understood but must be supplied to make the sentence grammatically correct. What the English Dictionary does not say is what is important about the figure Ellipsis and why God uses it. Ellipsis leaves out part of the sentence, and in doing so places special emphasis on the remaining part. What God leaves out of the text is de-emphasized, while what is left in gets extra emphasis.

The figure of speech Ellipsis is a very good reason why English versions of the Bible should use *italics* when they supply words to the Hebrew and Greek text. Sadly, most English versions do not *italicize* the words they add, and so when it comes to Ellipsis, the translators have painted themselves into a corner. If they translate the verse literally and leave out the Ellipsis, the reader may not understand the verse at all, but if they supply the Ellipsis, the English reader has no hope of seeing the emphasis that God has put in the text. Thus, the use of *italicized* words in the text is a great argument for reading versions such as the KJV, ASV, Darby, HCSB<sup>2</sup> or the NASB.<sup>3</sup>

### Emphasizing what is in the verse

#### 2 Kings 25:4a (KJV)

And the city was broken up, and all the men of war *fled* by night...

In this case, the verb “*fled*” (or “ran away,” or “tried to escape”) is, by the figure Ellipsis, left out of the verse and thus de-emphasized. What is emphasized is that the **men of war**, who were supposed to be so brave, ran away **at night**.

#### Psalm 103:9 (KJV)

He will not always chide: neither will he keep *his anger* for ever.

By the figure Ellipsis, the words, “*his anger*,” are left out of this verse, thus de-emphasizing God’s anger at us when we sin, and emphasizing the fact that He will **not keep**, or harbor, anger against those He loves.

#### 1 Corinthians 10:24 (KJV)

Let no man seek his own, but every man another’s *wealth*.

In this case the translators correctly see the need for an object to complete the sense of what a person is and is not supposed to seek, and the KJV supplies “*wealth*.” Modern versions say “good” or “advantage,” as does the Holman Christian Standard Bible: “No one should seek his own *good*, but *the good* of the other person.” By leaving out the object, “good,” in the Greek by Ellipsis, God emphasizes “**his own**” and “**the other person.**”

### **Galatians 5:13 (KJV)**

For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only *use* not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.

The KJV supplies the Ellipsis with the verb “*use*,” which is de-emphasized by its omission. What is emphasized is that Christians do **not use liberty** as an opportunity for the flesh.

### **Problems with Ellipsis**

One of the problems people have with the figure of speech Ellipsis is that it may not be clear exactly what should be supplied to complete the sense. For example, the Hebrew text of Psalm 137:5 reads, “If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget.” Translators realize that the verb “forget” in the second phrase has an object, but what is it? The *King James* and many other versions suggest “skill,” “*cunning*,” or “ability,” as if the right hand would forget how to move and work. Some versions, such as the NRSV<sup>4</sup>, have taken “forget” as some sense of “be forgotten,” and thus read that the right hand should be forgotten, withered, or crippled. The most likely way to supply the Ellipsis was suggested by E. W. Bullinger, who noticed that the obvious counterpart of a person’s forgetting Jerusalem, i.e., forgetting to support and defend it, was that his hand would forget the person himself, i.e., would refuse to work for, defend, or feed the person. Thus the most likely translation completing the Ellipsis is, “If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget *me*.”

Another problem people have is thinking something is an Ellipsis when it is not. For example:

### **1 Corinthians 15:53 (KJV)**

For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality.

It seems that “corruptible” and “mortal” need a noun to fulfill their sense. Thus, some translators think this verse is an Ellipsis, and, like the ESV<sup>5</sup> and NRSV, supply the word “body,” making the verse read, “For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality” (ESV). However, the context and Greek grammar indicates this verse is not an Ellipsis. In both English and Greek, an adjective may be given “substance” and used as a noun if the implied nominal object of the adjective is clear. That is not the figure of speech Ellipsis, but a common idiom of the language that grammarians call a “substantive.” A good example in English is the well-known Clint Eastwood movie, *The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly*. We know from our cultural context that “good,” “bad,” and “ugly” refer to people, but the title, “The Good People, the Bad People, and the Ugly People” would be superfluous and lack punch.

It is common in both Greek and English to use an adjective as a noun if the subject is understood, although sometimes Bible translators add the noun for clarity. For example, Psalm 71:22 (KJV) uses the phrase “...O thou Holy **One** of Israel.” But there is no “One” in Hebrew, it is understood. The word “Holy” is a substantive, not an Ellipsis of the word “One.” Another example is Colossians 3:12 (ESV), which has the phrase, “Put on then, as God’s chosen **ones**, holy and beloved, compassion...” Again, there is no “ones” in the Greek text; it is understood. Grammatically, the verse has a substantive, not an Ellipsis.

In the case of 1 Corinthians 15:53 (KJV), “For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality,” the context is speaking of “we,” the people, not just our bodies. Therefore, rather than being an Ellipsis supplied with the word “body,” the verse is a substantive, supplied, if we must, by the word “one” or “person,” thusly: For this corruptible *one* must put on incorruption, and this mortal *one must* put on immortality.<sup>6</sup>

Knowledge of Hebrew and Greek grammar is necessary to accurately determine if an Ellipsis is present. For example, Hebrew has no present tense verb, “to be” (our word “is”). A noun in the nominative accompanied by an object of that noun is a simple Hebrew sentence. A Hebrew would say, “The dog big,” and it is equivalent to our saying, “The dog is big.” The fact that there is a missing verb is not an Ellipsis, but a regular part of Hebrew grammar. Greek does have a present tense “to be” verb, but like Hebrew, does not need it to make a sentence. So in Greek, like Hebrew, a missing “is” is not an Ellipsis. For further study on figures of speech used in the Bible please visit [TruthOrTradition.com/figures](http://TruthOrTradition.com/figures).

**Notes:**

1. E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, reprinted 1968).
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5. Scripture quotations marked (ESV) are taken from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version™, © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. All rights reserved.
6. Translations that supply the word “body” might do so because of the translator’s belief that the soul is already immortal, and therefore only the body needs to put on immortality, however that is not the case. See our book, “*Is There Death After Life?*” Read key sections online at [TruthOrTradition.com/dal](http://TruthOrTradition.com/dal)

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# Finding True Happiness

by John W. Schoenheit

If you took a poll of everyone on earth and asked them what they want out of life, a large percentage would say, “I just want to be happy.” That is not astounding in itself, but what is astounding is that only a small percentage of them *are* happy. You would think that with so many people seeking a specific goal, a large percentage of them would achieve it, but that is not the case with happiness.

Before we go further, we must note that “happiness” is different than “joy.” Biblically, there are two primary ways “joy” is used. It is used in the sense of the fruit of the spirit “joy,” the joy inside us from which we draw strength to continue. This joy is rooted in the knowledge that everything will be wonderful in the end: goodness will prevail; hunger, war, sickness, crime, and injustice will all come to an end; evil people will get the justice they deserve, and the saved will live in everlasting bliss. That good ending is guaranteed, so God commands us to rejoice, which comes from looking away from this life and mentally focusing on our glorious future.<sup>1</sup> The Bible records many instances of people rejoicing in difficult circumstances. Paul rejoiced in the midst of his affliction (2 Cor. 7:4) and Jesus drew strength from joy to endure the shame and pain of being crucified (Heb. 12:2). However, the Bible never says either of them was “happy” about what they were going through.

We need to know that biblically, “joy” can also refer to a feeling, an emotion that wells up within us when something wonderful happens to us. The Bible has many examples of that “feeling of joy,” the emotion that can accompany something good happening to us.<sup>2</sup> In this fallen world, however, it is not always possible to have such feelings of joy or happiness. For many people in difficult circumstances, inner joy derived from the hope of a better future is the best they can do. Thus, while God commands us to be joyful, as we saw above, there is no verse that commands us to be happy.

In spite of the fact that many people are living in dire circumstances in which it is unreasonable to expect them to be happy, many others could easily be happy (or certainly happier) if they did not do so much to make themselves miserable. Many people are neither sick nor in pain, persecuted nor enslaved, financially nor materially destitute, and in fact have many advantages in life, but are still unhappy.

Satan, the “god of this age” (2 Cor. 4:4 KJV), is an expert in stealing the value from people’s lives so that they are unhappy. He does it in so many ways that the fields of self-help, psychology, and counseling are in large part dedicated to helping people help themselves to live life more graciously and positively. It is outside the scope of this short article to deal with the different problems people cause themselves that keep them from being happy in their day-to-day life, such as the hurt caused by alcohol or drug abuse, the pain caused by an uncontrolled temper, or the misery of living a life with no boundaries.

What I do want to cover in this article is the unhappiness people cause themselves by trying to be happy. Despite what the world around us propounds, God never designed happiness as a goal that we set out to achieve, like losing 20 pounds [9 kilograms], adding monthly to a retirement account, or learning more about computers. When we examine the Bible and ponder its teachings, we find no verse saying that happiness is a goal we should seek. What we learn from both the Bible and life is that happiness is a bi-product, the result of a godly life that is focused on obeying the Word of God and making wise decisions.

Happiness is like a house cat (I learned this from a book I read, but it was long ago and I cannot remember the title or author). If you make it your goal to have the cat sit on your lap when it is unwilling, you only end up

frustrated, because it will run from you, hide from you, and even scratch you if you grab it and try to hold it. However, if you stop worrying about the cat and get about productive life in the house, then the cat shows up, rubs itself against your leg, and jumps up on your lap when you sit down for a break.

If we try to design our lives to be happy, it seems that no matter what we do we are not happy. We get upset when life makes demands on our time; we are discontented with what we own, and want newer or better stuff; we become overly concerned or even worried about our image, finances, or interpersonal relations. Even if we go on vacation, we cannot seem to relax (or the opposite happens, we get bored because we are not “having fun”). On the other hand, if we forget about our happiness and focus on God and His will for our lives, such as loving and serving others, we may notice at some point that we are not unhappy. In fact, we may notice that we are very content with our lives and are actually happy.

We cannot just “be happy” because God did not design us to just “be happy.” God designed us to be content in our godly work, not just content, period. When God put Adam and Eve in the Garden, He designed them for meaningful activity, and told them to “...work it and take care of it” (Gen. 2:15). That productive work would fill their lives (which were supposed to last a loooooong time, as in forever), and keep them contented and blessed. Think about it. If anyone could have been “just happy” anywhere, it would have been in the Garden of Eden. But God did not say to Adam and Eve, “OK, you’re in Eden, now go and be happy.” No, He told them to go work, knowing that if they did they would be happy.

Because God designed us to get enjoyment out of productive work, it is no wonder the Devil has mounted such an aggressive campaign against work (when is the last time you heard a positive comment about work on a television sitcom?) and instead promotes “just having fun,” “chilling out,” “kicking back,” etc. Abandoning the wisdom of godly work and service is a sure-fire recipe for unhappiness. Of course, if a person has never learned to work, it may not be enjoyable at first, but since God designed us to do godly work and service, even those who never have learned how to enjoy it will quickly find themselves being content, yes, even happy and fulfilled, in godly work and service to others.

**Ecclesiastes 3:22a**

So I saw that there is nothing better for a man than to enjoy his work, because that is his lot....

**Ecclesiastes 5:19**

Moreover, when God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work—this is a gift of God.

Even the New Testament tells us that we were created “to do good works” (Eph. 2:10), and when we focus on that, we will find that we are indeed happy.

We live in a time and culture that has placed a special emphasis on being happy and enjoying life. But the Devil subtly promotes the lie that no matter how much one does, or has, it is never quite enough to be truly happy. Multitudes of corporations spend billions of dollars on advertising to call our attention to what we lack—and they are effective. So now we are unhappy or uncomfortable when our clothes, though certainly adequate for what clothing is supposed to do, are a little worn, have a small spot on them, or are “out of style.” Though our car runs well, if it is somewhat rusty, or lacks new conveniences that supposedly make our lives easier and “more fun,” we are dissatisfied with it. We are not content with the furniture in our house, even though it is comfortable and safe, because of the way it looks. And so our lives go, until in general we are unhappy and discontented.

The Satanic system in which we live changes styles, models, and colors every year, even if they do not need to be changed. But that is not the worst part. The worst part is that the system then works very hard to make us feel inadequate if we do not keep up. Eventually people “buy in” to the pressure, and then it’s not just the

television or magazine ads that create a feeling of discontent, but family members, friends, and neighbors who make comments about how we look, what we drive, etc. The Satanic vice squeezes us from both ends: we are tricked into thinking happiness is a proper goal, and yet what we have is never good enough to make us happy. Then we make unwise decisions, like spending money we do not have (usually via credit cards), supposedly so that our lives will be easier and we will be happier. But that backfires too, and people soon find that debt creates its own pressures and unhappiness.

Is there a way out of the cycle of unhappiness and discontentment? Sure there is, but not in “the system.” The Bible tells us, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world...” (Rom. 12:2). In *The Message*,<sup>3</sup> Eugene Peterson renders it as, “Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture....” While it may not be practical to completely divorce ourselves from the cultural system we live in, we actually can do so to a large extent.

A lot of people’s unhappiness and discontent is due to not using wisdom in their decisions, as Scripture repeatedly exhorts us to do.

**Proverbs 4:7**

Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding.

We Christians need to use wisdom in all aspects of our lives, starting with what we hold in our minds and think about, and then how we spend our lives and our money. Often we make unwise choices that land us in unhappy circumstances or unhappiness in general, when we should have taken God’s advice and used wisdom. Part of wisdom is realizing that the Devil is creating a system that fosters covetousness, i.e., passionately wanting things we do not have. Both the Devil and God know that coveting is a formula for unhappiness and even a first step to crime, so the Devil promotes it, while God gave one of the Ten Commandments to help us avoid it, summarized as “You shall not covet” (Exod. 20:17; Deut. 5:21). Much of the advertising we see is specifically designed to make us dissatisfied with what we have and to covet what we do not have. Jesus reminded us to guard ourselves against covetousness, because contentment in life does not depend on what we own.

**Luke 12:15 (ESV)<sup>4</sup>**

And he said to them, “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”

Actually, having a lot of “stuff” to take care of can hurt us. It can complicate our lives, rob us of valuable time, and distract us from God and service to others.

**Ecclesiastes 5:13**

I have seen a grievous evil under the sun: wealth hoarded to the harm of its owner,

Some people would find themselves much happier if they would simplify their lives. Others need to learn to stop coveting. Some need to learn to make wise choices with their time and money, and still others need to learn the joy of service rather than the heartache and unhappiness of self-service. The book of Timothy contains a simple truth:

**1 Timothy 6:6**

But godliness with contentment is great gain.

Godliness with contentment is great gain, great profit, and we will achieve it when we live God’s way. Let’s not be fooled into thinking that happiness is a viable goal in life, and that having “better stuff” will actually get us there. If we follow God’s way, living a disciplined life based on wisdom and serving others before ourselves, we will find that, if we ever get around to thinking about it, that we are indeed happy.

**Notes:**

1. God's commands for Christians to rejoice include Philippians 3:1, 4:4 and 1 Thessalonians 5:16, in which "rejoice" is in the imperative mood in the Greek text, which makes it a command.
2. Examples include Matthew 2:10, 13:44; Luke 15:7, 24:52; John 16:21; Acts 12:14; 2 Corinthians 7:13 (KJV); 2 Timothy 1:4; Philemon 1:7; and 3 John 1:4.
3. Scripture quotations marked (The Message) are taken from The Message by Eugene H. Peterson, © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group. All rights reserved.
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TruthOrTradition.com/happiness**

# The Daily Grind

## Joy: God's Energy Drink

by Charlotte Dugan

There are two things you are sure to get from grinding grain manually: flour and sweat. Even in winter. Grinding around and around makes you plain old tired. Many people today live very tight schedules with little time to sit and rest. Sleep problems are common; chronic fatigue is not rare. Enter the manufacturers of energy drinks! They sell get-up-and-go. But the older I get, I find that the work of living, with its ups and downs and rounds and rounds, also produces a different type of fatigue, one that can make moving forward more difficult with each passing year. While energy drinks boost one's blood sugar and pour on the caffeine or vitamins, there is a tiredness born of the heart that they cannot energize.

### **Proverbs 17:22b**

...a crushed spirit dries up the bones.

It is in the bones that new blood cells, new life, is made (Lev. 17:11: "For the life of a creature is in the blood..."). Were that to totally dry up, that body would die. Of course, this verse speaks of the psychosomatic connection between one's mental attitude and physical health.

When my daughter was only 8 weeks old, doctors discovered a cyst in her abdomen. As I write this, I remember that moment with vivid clarity though it occurred 16 years ago. I remember the look on the face of the nurse giving the preliminary examination, and her unassuring smile as she asked me to wait while she went to get the doctor. I also remember the intense rush of emotion, the crushing sense of despair to the point that I nearly vomited. A moment before, life had a continuity and forward flow that I wasn't consciously aware of, but when I heard that horrible news it came crashing to a halt. Often when people receive difficult news, their legs physically give out and they fall into the nearest chair for support. They do not have the energy to even stand, let alone move. It's like one's soul is drained. For me, this was one of life's moments in which I experienced the above verse. It was only one of many, and I know that most everyone reading this has their own list of moments that we would quickly erase if we could. Before we get any more depressed, let's look at the first half of Proverbs 17:22:

### **Proverbs 17:22a**

A cheerful heart is good medicine...

Cheerful! I like that word. Let's look at a few more verses:

### **Proverbs 14:30a**

A heart at peace gives life to the body...

### **Proverbs 15:13a**

A happy heart makes the face cheerful...

### **Proverbs 15:30a**

A cheerful look brings joy to the heart...

While we are all well aware of the debilitating power of fear and despair, there is an equally motivating quality to **joy** that gives a human being the endurance and energy to go on. Joy is intricately connected with a sense of hope. Joy energizes and motivates. It swells the soul into action, and moves one forward. My daughter's condition was correctable, and she is now a beautiful 16-year-old. My joy about her healing was even greater than my previous sense of despair for she is, after all, my daughter.

At the time of this writing, the Olympics have just ended. I was on my way to bed one evening when the women's beach volleyball team was in the throes of striving for gold against the Chinese, who were proving to be formidable opponents. The competition was intense, and I found myself riveted, unable to go off to bed even after a long day. It was cool and rainy on the "beach," the stands full with people in colorful rain gear and holding umbrellas, but the teammates were flushed and warm because of the heat of the competition. I watched with amazement as both sides literally hurled their bodies airborne in attempts to win each point, landing face-first in the sand, taking a beating. Victory lay ahead for one side as the score climbed in a waddle: Chinese ahead, Americans ahead, Chinese ahead, Americans ahead. At each break the women would go off to their respective sides and rest for just a moment, wiping their brows, taking a refreshing drink of water, encouraging one another, but no big smiles. Not yet. They pushed onward, pressing their minds and bodies into the competition for the hope of winning, the hope of the medal—for the joy that was set before them, if you will.

When the winning shot hit the sand, there was a momentary pause, a pause in which the brains of both players and observers made the connection, and then the burst of joy! Misty May-Treanor and Kerri Walsh fell to their knees with shouts, hugging each other and laughing. They paraded around with American flags over their shoulders, kissed and greeted people on the sidelines and in the stands, and even announced, "This is for you, Mr. Bush!" The joy of victory that had been set before them and had motivated them was now exploding in the moment, and they spent time en-joy-ing (in joy) what they had worked so hard for in the competition. Like those athletes, Jesus pushed through difficult moments because of the joy before him. Hebrews 12 comes to mind:

### **Hebrews 12:1-3**

(1) Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

(2) Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the **joy** set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

(3) Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

I imagine it was incredibly difficult for Jesus to make the walk up the hill to Calvary. Bloody and severely beaten, his physical condition added enormous stress to the battle raging in his mind. He knew his death was coming—death, the horrible end to life that humans fear intensely. This was the culmination of Jesus' earthly ministry, both physically and mentally. What gave him the boost to get through? JOY. Descriptive joy, vivid joy, which he was able to hold in his mind about the future. His was a practiced joy that he could call upon in trial.

This verse speaks not only of Jesus' struggle during a difficult time in life, but also of our own continuance through the trials we face. Our greatest energy will come from a deep understanding of where Jesus is now—at the finish line, encouraging us to look at him and where he is, a place of joy and re-joy-cing. How about you? Certainly you face times of debilitating despair. The very real, very practical side of using joy as God's energy drink is to see in your mind in vivid detail your future destiny. And it begins with the following:

### **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**

(13) Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope.

(14) We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.

(15) According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.

(16) For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

(17) After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

(18) Therefore encourage each other with these words.

*Feelings* of joy, or happiness, are not always attainable in this life, such as in those moments when you receive horrible news, suffer pain, etc. Like May-Treanor and Walsh, we are now in the competition, and must keep our minds on the goal of winning gold. The only way out of a dark tunnel is to keep moving, and the best motivation to keep moving is to see the proverbial "light" at the end. For us, that light is Jesus, and the future glory he gained for us. Knowing that the joy of hope energized Jesus to walk the full length of the valley of human need and conquer death can help us attain the mind set of the Apostle Paul, as evidenced in the following verses:

### **Philippians 3:12-14**

(12) Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

(13) Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead,

(14) I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Practice joy. Study the Word of God to know what lies in store. God did not leave us with a nebulous idea of our floating around in "heaven." Rather, we will partake of Christ's Millennial Kingdom, with food, animals, and people, including those we have lost, who we will hold and laugh with again! On a personal note, I've often thought how strange it will be to see my grandmother, not as the old woman I knew, but as a young woman who in her youth looked much like me. I think that's cool. Drink deeply of God's Hope, seeing the joy before you, and you will find the motivation to persevere through whatever circumstances you face.

### **Psalm 16:11 (KJV)**

Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence *is* fulness of joy; at thy right hand *there are* pleasures for evermore.

**To read Charlotte's Daily Grind series,  
visit [TruthOrTradition.com/grind](http://TruthOrTradition.com/grind)**

# Fuel for the Fire

## Power and Joy in the Body of Christ

by Hannah Branch

Hello, all my highly esteemed brothers and sisters in Christ! Here I am with yet another prayer answered: I am able to contribute something to The Sower. The reason I say “yet another” is because I have seen prayer request after prayer request being taken care of since I arrived at the Twenties Conference on Labor Day weekend. Even hearing about the conference was a prayer answered, since I’d been wondering for quite some time where in the world I could find some like-minded followers of Christ who are in my age bracket. I have yet to encounter a single one outside of my immediate family and this past conference.

Needless to say, I’ve been thanking God for a good two months for John Lynn’s enthusiasm and his servant heart, because it was his suggestion that landed me at that conference. I also need to give full credit, however, to my Papa who generously and joyfully paid for the entire trip! These wonderful men changed the course of my life forever by encouraging me to head off to Camp Vision in Indianapolis, Indiana for the Twenties Conference weekend.

Going to the conference was something completely out of character for me, considering I wouldn’t know anyone who would be there, nor had I ever been to Indiana (not to mention that I have never been much of an adventurous girl in the past). Nevertheless, God gave me huge excitement and joy about the thought of finally meeting people with the same biblical beliefs as my own.

I arrived at Camp Vision with the most confidence I’d ever mustered up, and after only four days, it was multiplied a great many times. That is because I found myself with men and women who loved me immediately, with absolute acceptance and warmth. After this conference, I believe God has shown me that ministry work is what I’m made for, and it is so exciting!

What a blessing it was to meet the forty radiant believers who were in attendance and see the Body of Christ in action. I struggle to put it all into words, but what I experienced was the power and love of Jesus knitting us together, Ephesians 4:16 style. He was there building us up and healing us as we sampled a little bit of Paradise for a weekend.

I would like to note the striking gender ratio: 22 men and 8 women. No, I didn’t fail kindergarten math; there were five couples there as well. I was so blessed to see such a rare abundance of strong, male leaders. I urge you, ladies, hold out for a guy like these! Your life will reflect God’s grace and beauty to such a higher degree if you can wait and partner up with a man who knows his stuff spiritually.

If I had to pick the most important lesson I learned at Camp Vision, it would be how absolutely essential it is for each of us to connect deeply with other believers. Let us not allow ourselves to be cornered into isolation by the Enemy, because that is when we are most easily robbed of our power as daughters and sons of the Most High. I’ve learned that we must choose strong believers to be our closest friends, as that way we can build each other up and better function as active members of the Body.

When it was time to go, I had the privilege of being escorted into the airport by three of my dear brothers. We sat down at the airport Starbucks for some parting fellowship, and my heart began to break when I considered the thought of being separated from them and all the others who had already departed. A huge emptiness in my heart had been filled during those four days, and as I write this, I am strongly aware of the

absence of my new loved ones. But I am also filled with a humongous hope for Christ's appearing, when we can all worship together again. In the meantime, it is a great joy to know that I am not, and will not ever be fighting alone!

God bless you, and God bless this wonderful ministry. It is so wonderful to know I am standing alongside so many amazing people.

**Teens and 20s needed!**  
**If you would like to write a short article for Fuel for the Fire,**  
**please contact us at [STF@STFonline.org](mailto:STF@STFonline.org)**

# Dear Sower

## **Audio Podcast**

You do not know me but I have been fortunate enough to come across your TruthOrTradition.com site and have been overwhelmingly blessed by you guys for 2.5 years.

I was listening to your podcast [STFonline.org/podcast] the other day about “Nehemiah: A Man of Vision” (July 2008). I was very blessed by that particular message as I have just started my own recruitment company and the timing of that message was just Divine!!!

My lack of vision for the business meant I had been dabbling in all sorts without really focusing on one area. Dan Gallagher’s message helped me to see how to go about getting a written and clear vision for my business and despite the trials I now feel more confident in what I am doing and should start to reap the rewards.

You guys are just amazing and I cherish your steadfastness despite the opposition I can only imagine you have come across over the years.

Tim Hull, UK

### **Editor’s Note:**

Please check out our free audio podcast teachings at [STFonline.org/podcast](http://STFonline.org/podcast)

## **What happens if you die?**

God bless you! Thank you for the October 2008 CD of the month (Death and Resurrection to Life) and *Sower* magazine (What Happens If You Die? Sep / Oct 2008).

It was wonderful to hear and read the teachings about death and the grave. There was so much knowledge and heart in them.

As I get older, I see and know more people who have died. It was comforting to hear the truth.

Linda (and Andy) Bell  
Fort Wayne, IN

### **Editor’s Note:**

To read / share all the articles in the Sep/Oct 2008 *Sower* and to listen to the October audio teaching, visit [TruthOrTradition.com/death](http://TruthOrTradition.com/death)

## **Get Code for your Website**

Thank you very much for making the TruthOrTradition.com website available. Thank you especially for making your teachings available for free on Podcast. It came to my rescue last Sunday at fellowship as I was intending to play the October Teaching of the Month, Death and Resurrection to Life. But I had misplaced that CD. I had only to punch it up on the computer.

Thanks for what you are doing to get these amazing teachings out. In an effort to extend the reach of the website, I am placing links to it in various emails, online discussions, and my own blog.

Once again, thank you very much for what you are doing.

Charles Radliff  
Raleigh, NC

**Editor's Note:**

To get banners, blocks, and buttons for your MySpace profile or website visit [TruthOrTradition.com/code](http://TruthOrTradition.com/code)

**Now on Facebook**

I have to say, I still remember when TruthOrTradition.com was just a thought. It is amazing to me to see how many people have been blessed by this site. Now, it's on Facebook and I have to admit, the first time I heard it I shrugged it off thinking who isn't.

But, already I am starting to see the change on this website, it's amazing!! So I just want to say thank you to all the staff! God Bless!!

Jason Amato  
Jersey City, NJ

**Editor's Note:**

Check us out on Facebook and become a fan. Visit [TruthOrTradition.com/facebook](http://TruthOrTradition.com/facebook)

**Article on Drugs & Alcohol**

Thank you so much! (for our article titled "What Does the Bible Say about Drugs and Drinking Alcohol?") We just had a discussion about this topic at our recent Christian Motorcyclists Assoc. Bible study.

A few decided that Jesus did not drink real wine. And on and on it went. Interesting!!! Thanks for this teaching.

Jetta Inskeep  
Lima, Ohio

**Editor's Note:**

To read "What Does the Bible Say about Drugs and Drinking Alcohol?" visit [TruthOrTradition.com/drugs](http://TruthOrTradition.com/drugs)

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