

## WHEN WE REALLY OUGHT TO BE LISTENING

By Danny Tunnell

How many times have we been speaking, or thinking about something else, when we really ought to have been listening?

When Jesus says something, we ought to be listening. In many Bibles Jesus' words are in red letters. Red letters are better than cash money, and better than gold (Psalm 119:127). You can build your life on His words. When Jesus says, "Verily, verily," that means we ought to listen more closely.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd, but it's up to the flock whether or not they will follow Him (John 10:1-5). There is no one driving the sheep. Jesus is not the "Good Cowboy," driving the herd. The sheep decide whether or not they will follow and whether or not they will listen to Jesus. His sheep know His voice (John 10:4).

Follow so close to Jesus that if He suddenly stops, you will bump into him! (Psalm 63:8). Don't follow Him from afar off! (Matthew 26:58).

A story is told about a little boy who kept falling out of bed. His concerned mother asked, "Johnny, what's the problem?" He replied, "I guess I stayed too close to where I got

in!" He was sleeping on the edge! If he had gotten closer to the center of the bed it would have solved his problem.

Mary chose to sit at Jesus' feet and listen to Him. Jesus told Martha, "There is only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has discovered it, and it will not be taken away from her (Luke 10:42, NLT).

Jesus said, "Pay attention to what you're listening to" (Mark 4:24, God's Word).

Too many Christians are living on the edge, not really focused on Christ and His word. It matters who you are around and who you listen to (Psalm 1:1,2). "My son, pay attention to what I say; turn your ear to My words" (Proverbs 4:20, NIV). God's mighty angels hearken to the voice of His word (Psalm 103:20).

Our top priority is to listen to God. But it's also important to listen to people. Someone said, "Believe that other people are quite as sincere and honest as you, and treat them with respect."

A person who thinks he knows it all will not listen. Do you know why some people never learn anything?

It's because they think they know everything. A person who knows everything can't learn anything. So keep your heart humble.

Have you ever interrupted someone to offer your opinion? And they responded, "But you didn't let me finish." It is pretty commonplace to cut people off mid-sentence to offer "expert" advice - even when it wasn't requested.

What do I prove by interrupting someone's thoughts to offer my opinion before it is even asked? that I'm smart and have all the answers? No. I'm really showing that I lack wisdom (James 1:3). Proverbs 18:13, in The Message, says, "Answering before listening is both stupid and rude." The Good News Version says, "Listen before you answer. If you don't you are being stupid and insulting."

"My beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to wrath" (James 1:19).

— Miami, OK

## I THANK GOD FOR YOU ALL

By Don Deffenbaugh

"First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all" (Romans 1:8). "I thank my God always on your behalf" (1 Corinthians 1:4). "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you" (Philippians 1:3). "We give thanks to God always for you all" (1 Thessalonians 1:2). "We are bound to thank God always for you brethren" (2 Thessalonians 1:3).

Paul loved the brethren. He thanked God for them. He did not take the brethren for granted. He did not write disparaging things to them or about them. He did not condone evil lives. He did not tolerate false teaching. He loved the brethren and by the Spirit wrote those things they most needed and at the same time thanked God for them.

We should thank God for the brethren because they have been born

again and are children of God (John 3:3-5). "And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:17).

What a privilege to be brethren in the Lord!

We should thank God for the brethren because of the advantages of fellowship. "That which we have seen and heard we declare unto you, that you may also have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3). Faithful brethren are in fellowship with one another and with God and His Son.

We should thank God for brethren because of what we mean to one another. We can exhort one another (Hebrews 10:25), pray for one another (James 5:16), love one another

(Romans 13:8), and comfort one another (1 Thessalonians 4:18).

There is no way to put a price on such valuable considerations. I thank God for you all.

— Neosho, MO

"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 John 4:7-11).

# Old Paths

Vol. 48, No. 5 May 2024

"ask for the old paths" (Jer. 6:16)

## MISTAKEN MIRRORS

By Dalton Key

My mirror is mistaken in what it shows to me,  
The me I see not even close to true;  
I'm fooled by my reflection and by what my eyes can see.  
The same pertains to how I look at you.

There's more to you than meets the eye,  
You're more than you appear;  
Beneath, behind your clear disguise,  
Lies truth I need not fear.

It matters little how you look,  
The color of your skin;  
You're not your cover, you're the book,  
You are the you within.

The poorest may be wealthy (I know it may sound odd),  
And beauty may be difficult to chart;  
How sweet would be, were we like God,  
Who sees and seeks the heart.

"The Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7).

"Oh Lord, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O Lord, You know it altogether. You have hedged me behind and before, and laid Your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it . . . For you formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well" (Psalm 139:1-6, 13,14).

## JESUS PRAYED FOR ME

By Milton Smith

One of the most intriguing chapters in the Bible is the seventeenth chapter of John. It is in this chapter that we read Jesus' magnificent prayer to the Father for his people. Over the years, this prayer has been referred to as Jesus' "High Priestly Prayer" and "The Real Lord's Prayer." I've always liked that latter title because, technically speaking, this is indeed the Lord's prayer. The other prayer that we often refer to by this title could probably be more accurately called "the disciple's prayer" or "the model prayer."

In this amazing prayer in John's seventeenth chapter, Jesus pours out His heart to the Father and includes you and me in his requests! While praying for the apostles, Jesus quickly adds, in verse 20, "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word."

What an amazing thought! It encourages me to know that Jesus prayed for me two thousand years ago. And he prayed for you as well, because our Lord prayed for all who would believe on Him through the inspired words of the apostles. I do not profess to fully understand the Divine mind, but I rejoice to know that Jesus included you and me in that wonderful prayer to the Father. Before the world began, Jesus loved us, and 2000 years before we arrived in this world, He prayed for us. This is truly an amazing thought.

You and I belong to Jesus in a very unique way via the new birth. It is a very personal relationship that we share with our Savior. Jesus loves all the world, but He has a special love for those who make the choice to become a member of His spiritual family.

How could Jesus love us before we were ever born? The same way parents who are anticipating the birth of a child already love that child before he/she is physically born into this world. When parents pick out a name for a yet-to-be-born child, they already love that child! Jesus already loves the future sheep of his fold.

As Paul pondered so many years ago in his Roman epistle, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?" (Romans 11:33, 34.)

— Tulsa, OK

## THROWING THE BIBLE AWAY

By Bobby Key

Several years ago a denominational preacher hurled his Bible across the auditorium before the eyes of his startled congregation. He then shouted, "If the study of this book is going to hide the real Jesus from me, there goes my Bible!"

I wonder what this man could possibly have known of Jesus Christ apart from the Bible? Did he have access to a more trustworthy source than the Bible itself? Could he look into his own heart and see a better Savior revealed there than he could see from the pages of the New Testament? Surely this preacher had become vain in his reasonings and his senseless heart had become darkened. Perhaps he was afraid the Bible would stand in his way of some new revelation of truth; but in throwing away the Bible he was throwing away the very thing, the only thing, that teaches one about Jesus

The Bible is certainly the word of God, the medium through which the will of God is revealed. By it the man of God is completely furnished unto every good work (2 Timothy 3:15-17). We can know nothing of the real Jesus outside of what the Bible says about him. We have no further revelation since "the faith" has been delivered "once for all" (Jude 3). The Lord has already given us all things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3).

There is not one solitary thing a man needs in religion that he cannot find in the Bible. It is indeed all sufficient.

It is true that the Bible does not flatter man, but rather condemns him as a sinner. However, the Bible does reveal a way of escape. Christ came to enable us to escape the servitude of sin and Satan. He came to make us free.

The whole duty of man is to fear God and keep His commandments (Ecclesiastes 12:13). As I see it, the only thing left for me to do is accept God's sin offering and completely submit myself to His will - and all I know about God's will is what I read in the Bible. (1929-2018).

"For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12).

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16,17).

EDITORIAL . . .

## ALL OR NOTHING

by Dalton Key

Following the Lord has always been an "all or nothing, all in or all out" enterprise. Heaven holds no crown for the occasional Christian, and Jesus is not looking for part-time help.

I remember the words of one self-conscious, nervous young man who led the closing prayer for a Sunday morning worship service many years ago. He began, "Father, as we leave Thee for another week . . ."

No doubt many lukewarm members thought they were finally hearing a prayer they could live with!

Today's church is populated by far too many spasmodic, on-again-off-again members content to leave the Lord for another week. The world points a sin-gnarled finger at such Sunday morning saints, crying out, "Hypocrite!" While not excusing the faults of the faithless, the charge, sadly, hits home.

The problem is not a new one. The Old Testament prophet Hosea, describing the corroding condition of his people, wrote, "Your faithfulness is like a morning cloud, and like the early dew it goes away" (Hosea 6:4). God's people of Hosea's day were anything but God's people. Their religion was at best barely there. In the words of Burton Coffman, "Any genuine goodness on the part of either Ephraim or of Judah was but a vanishing trace, disappearing like the dew, or the morning cloud."

Scripture encourages stability and steadfastness. Christ expects us to deny self and take up our cross daily (Luke 9:23). Paul insists that we be "steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord," and "not grow weary while doing good" (1 Corinthians 15:58; Galatians 6:9). The apostle John writes, "Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10).

How often should we do good? How often should we reject temptation? How often should we think and speak and live like Jesus? Is there time off or retirement from the Christian life?

No, when it comes to following the Lord, it's all or nothing.



## PRAYING WITH TRUST IN GOD

By Wayne Robbins

When things are going well we don't have any trouble trusting God with our prayers. However, when things are not going so well, and our situation continues for a long period of time, and especially if suffering is involved, we have the tendency to think God does not care. After all, if we were God we would have taken care of our problem long before now. But we are not God. What we must do is trust God implicitly - no matter what. Here are a few reasons why:

God has promised that He will be ever present to help us. He will never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). He is not very far from any of us (Acts 17:27). He is ever present when we need His help (Psalm 46:1). We must trust that He will be there for us.

God wants to help us. God knows what we need before we ask Him (Matthew 6:8). Every good and perfect gift comes from Him (James 1:17). God wants to give us good things

(Matthew 7:11). If we ask according to His will, He hears us and gives us our petitions (1 John 5:14,15). He asks us to cast all our cares upon Him for He cares for us (1 Peter 5:7). God really does want to help us.

God knows the best way to help us. God knows all things. (Psalm 147:5.) God is all-powerful (Genesis 17:1). He knows absolutely the right things to do with our prayers. This may not be to our liking because most of the time we want instant action and relief. But God is not limited by our human emotions and shallow thinking. Every prayer is answered with God's unlimited wisdom and on His timetable. When we pray, we are limited in our scope of vision. But God is not limited and sees the big picture that our prayers involve.

We must trust God implicitly. He will answer our prayers in the best possible way, even though it may not be to our liking or timetable (and, yes,

sometimes He says, "no").

We are not God! God is God! We must trust Him.

— Arkansas City, KS

"Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groaning which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:26-28).

## Outrageous Barbarism!

By Joe Slater

What kind of monster would slaughter all the male children two years old and under in an entire town? The paranoid Herod the Great did exactly that! A well-known song calls Bethlehem a "little town," and that's likely true - maybe a couple of thousand people at most. Boys two and under would be at least several dozen. Herod's "slaughter of the innocents" continued his extensive litany of outrageous barbarism. He ruthlessly crushed any and all political opposition and murdered his own wives, sister, and children for political gain. He would lose no sleep over a few dead babies in an obscure village.

Our hearts break when we think of the mothers whose babies were torn from their arms and murdered. "Rachel weeping for her children" (Matthew 2:18). Our blood boils as we read of this heartless tyrant butchering the most innocent of his subjects. But do we have any right to be incensed? Over the last five decades tens of millions of

innocent babies of both genders have been mercilessly dismembered in American abortuaries. We, as a nation, have made Herod the Great look like a rank amateur!

In case you're laboring under the illusion that the Supreme Court's 2022 "Dobbs" decision stopped (or at least slowed) the abortion juggernaut, be advised that it did not! In fact, there were 2200 more abortions in 2023 than in 2022!

Yet we have supposedly pro-life politicians running for cover while pro-abortion candidates are cheered when they promise to enact legislation legalizing abortion in every state.

Outrageous barbarism continues unabated. "Lord, how long will the wicked triumph? (Psalm 94:3).

"You made my whole being; you formed me in my mother's body. I praise you because you made me in an amazing and wonderful way. What you have done is wonderful. I know this very well. You saw my bones being

formed as I took shape in my mother's body. When I was put together there, you saw my body as it was being formed . . ." (Psalm 139:13-16, NCV).

### Old Paths

830 W. Fargo Drive,  
Broken Arrow, OK. 74012

On a nonprofit basis.  
Published monthly and  
supported by Churches of Christ  
and individuals.

Dalton Key Editor  
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Prayers Requested;  
Contributions Appreciated."