

THE WISEST INVESTMENT YOU WILL EVER MAKE

by Danny Tunnell

Jesus said, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed, and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31,32).

Millions are too busy to read the Bible. Investing time in the word is the wisest move you can ever make. We need times to get quiet, turn everything off and give God's word our full attention. God's word is worthy of our undivided attention.

It is good to keep a journal of Bible verses. The Bible is replete with verses that it would be good to think about on a daily basis. As Hugo McCord would say, "We need to refresh our minds." We can do that with scriptures such as: "The Lord will give grace and glory; no good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly" (Psalm 84:11). "Blessed be the Lord, Who daily loads us with benefits" (Psalm 68:19). "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him. But

God has revealed them to us through His Spirit" (1 Corinthians 2:9,10).

If you want to get to know God you have to spend time with Him in His word. You have to hear what He has said to you in the scriptures and treasure His words in your heart. "My son, give attention to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. Let them not depart from your eyes; keep them in the midst of your heart; for they are life to those who find them, and health to all their flesh" (Proverbs 4:20-22).

Plan your schedule around the word of God. Make time in the word your top priority every day. Don't be haphazard about it. It is too easy, without discipline, to let other things crowd the word out.

Satan would rather you do anything with your time instead of spending it in the word. He would love to get God's word out of your daily schedule.

Whatever it takes to spend time in the word every day, do it. You might

have to get up earlier in the morning, or go to bed later in the night.

Spending time in the word of God can become like a treasure hunt if you make it a top priority, stay with it, and if you mix faith with it (Hebrews 4:2).

Someone may say, "It seems like I've lost my desire for the word." That may be easier to remedy than you think. Your desire follows your attention, so you can change your desire by changing where you put your attention.

Spending time in God's word is a wise investment because it is impossible for the word of God to fail (Isaiah 55:10,11; Ezekiel 12:25).

It's an immutable law of God that we reap what we have sown (Galatians 6:7,8). If we invest (sow) our time in watching tv, movies, or sports, to the exclusion of the Bible, we're not making a wise investment.

— Miami, OK

ARE WE TAKING THINGS FOR GRANTED?

By Mark Lindley

The question that serves as the title of this article is a question all should consider. I am persuaded that everyone at some point and to some degree, either has or is taking things for granted. We do not intend to, but it is so easy to take certain things for granted.

To take something for granted means "to fail to value something properly," or "to assume that you will never lose something." Usually, it is only after we have lost something of value that we can realize that we have been taking it for granted.

If the stars were to appear only once a year, most everyone would set aside time to go outside and gaze into the beautiful heavens above. However, because the stars are visible nearly every night, we hardly ever notice this wonderful display of God's power. We take such a beautiful sight for granted. The following are other things we frequently take for granted:

1) We take for granted the precious

gift of life. All life springs from the Lord, the giver of life (Acts 17:24-26). A near-death experience or failing health may cause us to realize that this life is "a vapor, that appears for a little time, and then vanishes away" (James 4:14). We should live each day to the fullest, and recognize that time is quickly passing (Psalm 90:12).

2) We take for granted friends and family. The Scriptures teach that there is to be deep, abiding love, respect, and appreciation within the family (Ephesians 5:25; Titus 2:4; Psalm 127:3-5; Ephesians 6:1-3). Nevertheless, we sometimes take our spouses and children for granted. We fail to show love and appreciation, assuming that there will always be a later time for expressing ourselves. Rather than showing love and respect, we sometimes speak to our friends and family members with harsh, angry words. What if you spoke to your spouse or child in an abrasive and rude manner, and those were the last

words he/she heard you say? Surely we would not want the last words spoken to a friend or loved-one to be bitter, angry words. We should never take for granted that there will always be "tomorrow" to apologize or express love and appreciation to friends and family.

3) We take salvation for granted. God sent His only begotten Son that we might be saved from sin (John 3:16). However, we will be saved only when we choose to obey the gospel of Christ (Romans 6:16-18; 3:4). Some put off obedience to the gospel, believing there will be a time in the future for receiving God's forgiveness. Yet there is no guarantee that such an opportunity will be available (Luke 12:16-21). Today is the day of salvation (2 Corinthians 6:2).

Let us resolve that we will always appreciate the gifts of life, friends and family, and salvation from sin. Never take such blessings for granted!

— Ripley, MS

Old Paths

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

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

By Flavil Nichols

During the War Between the States a young woman learned the truth and obeyed the gospel. Her sweetheart, J. H. Halbrook, was a confederate soldier. He was captured by the Union Army and kept a prisoner in Michigan until the war was over. He was then given a ticket to Nashville and \$2.50. From there he returned to Centerville, Tennessee, found what was left of his home and family, and was reunited with his girlfriend. Then, they were married.

Mr. Halbrook's new wife studied the Bible with him and he soon became a Christian. He thought the truth was so good and so simple that he began to teach and baptize many of his friends and neighbors. Then he began to preach, but he recognized his need for more training, so he enrolled in Mars Hill Bible School and was taught and trained by T. B. Larimore.

Upon completing his studies at Mars Hill, Mr. Halbrook and his wife chose to move farther south rather than going back to Tennessee, and they went into the counties of Walker, Marion, Fayette and Lamar counties in Alabama. Among his many converts were Charley Alexander Wheeler and his wife. Mr. Wheeler, after obeying the gospel, soon began preaching to others. He started more than 100 congregations and baptized more than 6000 people.

But wait! The story does not end there! One of those 6000 baptisms was my father, the late Gus Nichols. And under my father's preaching 12,000 people were converted to Christ! And how many of those 12,000 began to preach "the glorious gospel of Christ?" No one can know the exact number, but I personally know several who did.

I am one whom he baptized and encouraged to preach. And under my preaching about 3000 have been baptized. Among that number a few have gone on to preach the gospel.

Only eternity will reveal the total results of the teaching of that one girl over 150 years ago. But at least 21,000 people have already become Christians through this single thread in the fabric of her influence.

"Go and do likewise" (Luke 10:37), for you are important! Just one can be very influential. (1919-2018)

THE BEST EDUCATION

By Bobby Key

It was the middle of September, and I was in my mid teens. The day was bright and sunny in the heart of Texas. Along with my brother and two sisters I set out early to begin a new school year at the rural school here we had all attended from the first grade. As we arrived on the school grounds our spirits were crushed.

A stranger was standing on the steps of the three-room school. He had an official looking paper in his hand and said he had a very important announcement. We were all informed, for the first time, that all of the grades from six upward could no longer attend that school. A small squatty-looking van pulled on the school grounds to take us away to a bigger and better school. We were loaded and hauled away like a bunch of wild-eyed West Texas steers and placed with strangers in an environment unlike anything we'd ever known.

The trustees and community had no say in the matter. The decision was made for us. The stranger on the steps said this change was for our good. With better educational advantages we could expect poverty to vanish, crime to cease, and all of us would be better prepared to face life or enter college. Of course, in our little community we had no crime, and everybody was poor, but nobody knew it! Though a little rough around the edges and somewhat ignorant by today's standards, we were all as happy as could be.

The years have come and gone. That little rural school no longer exists except in memory. Driving through the community recently, we witnessed a great deal more poverty, saw evidence of crime being on the increase, and observed general deterioration all around. Statistics show an increase in lawlessness, drunkenness, immorality, thievery, vandalism, drugs, and lower test scores with each passing year.

Better educational opportunities are fine, but better education is not the answer to our problems. The only answer is the pure and simple gospel of Jesus Christ found in the Scriptures (Galatians 1:6-10).

Literary education and a greater amount of wealth are blessings only when possessed and exercised by those who are under the influence of our great Creator and Maker, God Almighty. The Lord gave the people of old His good Spirit to instruct them (Nehemiah 9:20). The Spirit's inspired message is still available to instruct those willing to listen.

We are unable to roll back the years and return to the simpler lifestyle of yesteryear, but, thank God, we still have the Book of Instruction left for us. (1929-2018)

Kill the Messenger!

by Joe Slater

A wise king seeks advisors who will tell the truth, whereas a foolish ruler wants yes men who will tell him what he wants to hear. Entirely too often the fools carry the day, as exemplified by King Jehoram of Israel.

Because of Israel's persistent idolatry under Jehoram and his predecessors, the Lord allowed the Syrian king, Ben-Hadad, to besiege Israel's capital, Samaria. The resulting famine became so severe that a donkey's head sold for 80 shekels of silver, and roughly a pint of dove droppings brought five shekels of silver. People were literally eating their own children! (See 2 Kings 6:26-29).

A wise and godly king would have been moved to repentance. But wicked Jehoram vowed to kill Elisha, God's prophet who had rebuked the king's sinfulness. Not that long ago Jehoram had witnessed God's utter defeat of the Syrians when Elisha prayed (2 Kings 6:8-23). Now, however, all he wanted was the prophet's blood. Yes, indeed, "Kill the messenger!"

Jehoram had learned well from his grandfather, Ahab, who persecuted Micaiah for foretelling his defeat in battle and ultimate demise. Many other reprobate rulers followed in their footsteps. Herod Antipas murdered John the Immerser for rebuking his adulterous marriage. The Sanhedrin murdered Jesus for exposing their hypocritical lawlessness. In all cases the evildoers thought killing the messenger would solve their problem; but it never did!

To my knowledge my life has never been seriously threatened for speaking the truth. More than one has been plenty angry with me, but not to the degree of trying to kill me! However, the concept of blaming the messenger is alive and well. Let's remember that the message is God's; the faithful messenger has no control over it, nor will being angry with the messenger cause the message to change..

— Justin, TX

"Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?" (Galatians 4:16).

"But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus sake" (2 Corinthians 4:3-5).

EDITORIAL . . .

WOULD I DIE FOR JESUS? WILL I LIVE FOR HIM?

By Dalton Key

Would you be willing to die for Jesus? Perhaps a better, more pertinent question would be, "Are you willing to live for Jesus right now?"

It is true: any religion worth living for should be worth dying for as well. The King James Version of the Bible, the translation many of us grew up learning, had it right with respect to its treatment of Revelation 2:10. "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." Many translations use the word "until" rather than "unto," yet the suffering saints of Smyrna were not being encouraged to faithfulness merely "until" they died; they were urged to persevere even "unto" death, to the exacting throes of martyrdom.

John Fox, in his Book of Martyrs, describes one such example of faithfulness which took place during the church's early years: "Agatha, a Sicilian lady, (who) was not more remarkable for her personal and acquired endowments, than her piety: her beauty was such, that Quintian, governor of Sicily, became enamored of her, and made many attempts upon her chastity without success. On her confessing that she was a Christian, he determined to gratify his revenge, as he could not his passion. Pursuant to his orders, she was scourged, burnt with red-hot irons, and torn with sharp hooks. Having borne these torments with admirable fortitude, she was next laid naked upon live coals, intermingled with glass, and then being carried back to prison, she there expired on February 5, 251."

This chaste soul ventured beyond the living for her faith - she bravely died for it. She was indeed "faithful unto death."

But I say again, for those of us blessed to live in a place and time less violent toward Christians and Christianity, the more pressing question is not, "would I die for my Lord?" but rather, "am I willing to live for Him?"

As an able-bodied child of the King, why do we find it so difficult to rouse ourselves from sleep in order to attend the assembly's services of worship? Why do we work harder at keeping our religion a secret from friends and co-workers than in actually doing the work of the kingdom? Why do we over-schedule our time so as to leave no time for Bible reading, prayer, or using our God-given talents for furthering the Lord's cause and edifying the Lord's people?

Before singing "I Surrender All," we should first take note whether we are currently willing to surrender anything at all.

Somehow it seems that Agatha, if living today, would do more in her Christian life than merely warming a pew once a week and then complaining about that.

As the song suggests, "Live for Jesus, O my brother, His disciple ever be; Render not to any other, what alone the Lord's should be."



ADMIT IT!

By Roger Johnson

You probably have not heard that phrase very frequently . . . especially among politicians. Oh, they might when they have been caught red-handed in something. It makes you wonder if they would have continued doing the wrong if they had not been caught.

I was taught that wrong is wrong, even if you are not caught.

I suppose it's human nature, but we don't like to admit that we have been wrong about anything. Consequently, we tend to rationalize and, in other ways, seek to justify ourselves. We put the best twist we can on something in order to make ourselves look good.

Admitting that we have been wrong, that we have sinned, is the most difficult challenge in becoming a Christian. Yet repentance is a requirement before one is baptized into Christ. Before repentance can take place, a person must realize that he has sinned, admit it, and have a change of

heart and mind that results in a change of life. On Pentecost, believers were told to repent and be baptized (Acts 2:38). Simon the sorcerer, a baptized believer, was told to repent and pray that the intention of his heart might be forgiven him (Acts 8:22).

A notable example of people who failed to repent, but attempted to cover up their transgression and deceive others is that of Ananias and Sapphira. The apostle Peter said that in doing so, they lied to God (Acts 5:4). They paid the ultimate penalty for doing so. You may deceive yourself and others, but you cannot deceive God. He knows what is in man (John 2:25).

Whether we ever admit it or not, wrong is still wrong. We might rationalize the wrong in our own mind and say it is okay, but just because we think something is all right doesn't make it so.

Non-Christians need to repent and be baptized. Fallen Christians need to

repent and pray..

— Columbus, GA

"This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us" (1 John 1:5-10).

DOES THE BIBLE TEACH "SOUL SLEEPING"?

By Milton Smith

There are a few dangerous cults, masquerading in the form of Christianity, that teach the false idea of "soul sleeping." Simply stated, the doctrine teaches that one is completely unconscious from death until the time of resurrection. In other words, when a person dies, he literally goes out of existence until the time he is called from the grave when the Lord returns.

One of the passages often used by those who teach the error of soul sleeping is 1 Thessalonians 4:13, where Paul writes, "But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope." But because the Bible clearly teaches that one's spirit remains conscious even when separated from the body, we must logically conclude that the figure of sleep here is simply referring to the state of one's body at death and not to his eternal spirit.

Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes 12:7, "Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it." Paul once

wrote about his desire to "depart and be with Christ" which he said "is far better" (Philippians 1:23). We find Moses and Elijah appearing on the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus, although both had departed from this world centuries earlier (Matthew 17). When Paul spoke of being taken up to the "third heaven" he admitted that he was not sure if he was in his body or out of his body when this amazing event occurred (2 Corinthians 12: 2,3). This inspired apostle obviously knew that his spirit could be removed from the physical body and still remain in a conscious state.

Of course, no clearer example could be given than the story of the rich man and Lazarus. Both died, yet their departed spirits are found to be in a conscious state in the next world (Luke 16:19-31).

Having preached many funerals, I have found that it brings great comfort to the hearts of grieving family members when they realize that their faithful loved one is fully conscious on the other side awaiting their arrival.

Like Paul, they too have found that to "depart and be with Christ" is "far better."

The false doctrine of soul sleeping is nowhere taught in the Scriptures. "Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, write: 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' Yes, says the Spirit, that they may rest from the labors, and their works follow them" (Revelation 14:13).

— Tulsa, OK

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