



“The Vine”

Growing Together in Christ

Newsletter for New Hope Christian Fellowship

A Closer Look At:



**Magnifying the Lord
A Bible Contradiction?
Why I Need to Pray?
Sin and Grace**

Plus

**A Personal Testimony &
An Unremarkable Person?**

From Pastor Dennis

Why Do I Need to Pray?

Is it necessary to pray? Isn't that like asking "is it necessary for husband and a wife to touch one another or talk to each other?" Talking and touching are the ways we build a marriage. Without communication, there is no relationship. Recently, I had a reunion with an old college roommate. I hadn't seen him for 40 years. We hadn't talked for 36 years. Many times over the years, I was sorry that I lost touch with him. But just two weeks ago, a good friend of mine in church located him with an Internet search. His gift to me was to bring me back into relationship with my old college buddy - what a meaningful gift that was!

Oswald Chambers once said, "Every time we pray, our horizon is altered, our attitude to things is altered, not sometimes but every time, and the amazing thing is that we don't pray more."

Why do I need to pray?

Isn't that just as foolish as asking, "why do I need love" or "why do I need to eat or sleep?" God created each of us with a need for love; it's the greatest human need. And yet no human love can replace God's love for us; his love is perfect and complete.

When we pray, we talk to a God who loves to walk and talk with us; who wants an intimate relationship with us. Philip Yancey, in his recent book, *Prayer: Does It Make Any Difference?* Zondervan, c. 2006 said, "We are invited to pray to a God who wants to interact with us, even to the extent of giving us influence over what happens."

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Throughout Scripture, God says if we call out to him, he will answer (Jer. 33:3) 'Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.'

Often we pray with too much emphasis on the "gim-mes" - "God, please give all these things to ME; please take care of ME. God, please give ME this job promotion. God, please give ME someone to marry. God,

please, please heal ME. God, please bless ME and MY family." If we were to treat our spouse or best friend that way - always asking them to give us things - they would think we were pretty selfish, wouldn't they? God always answers our prayers, but not always in the way we expect or want. What we want is not always what is best for us, and God knows what is best for us, since he is God. Let me close with an anonymous reading, which gives some examples of unexpected answers to prayer.

He prayed for strength that he might achieve; He was made weak that he might obey.

He prayed for health that he might do greater things; He was given infirmity that he might do better things.

He prayed for riches that he might be happy; He was given poverty that he might be wise.

He prayed for power that he might have the praise of men; He was given weakness that he might feel the need of God.

He prayed for all things that he might enjoy life He was given life that he might enjoy all things. He received nothing that he asked for -- but all that he hoped for.

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Looking More Closely

A Bible Contradiction?

At one point Jesus said, "He who is not with Me is against Me." (Matt. 12:30) Yet at another time He told His disciples, "He who is not against you is for you." (Luke 9:50) Is this a contradiction, an inconsistency, or what? Well, it is a "what." There is a distinctive difference between the two statements.



Look at the first one closely. Clearly its meaning might be to say that if one is not with Jesus in all aspects of his life and being, he is against Jesus. With God allegiance is a black and white matter. As good as we thought we were, before He called and converted us, we were His enemies. One can only be a servant of God and righteousness or a servant of Satan and sin. There is no middle ground or third way.

Now look at the second passage. It is not directed toward Jesus, but toward his disciples. John had seen someone, not in the disciples' number, casting out demons in Jesus' name. The natural human inclination in that situation is to believe that only we, his closest (and, we "humbly" suspect, "best") disciples can do that. The other person must therefore be against us and must then also be against God. But Jesus tells this is not so. Christians, as Jesus' disciples, must consider those who are not against us as being for us.

What a load of worrying about, meddling in, and oppression of others' lives is lifted with this realization. And it is right in line with the New Testament's teaching to not judge one another's servant, to bear with and not judge the "weak" or "strong" consciences of others [Romans 14:3-8], and Gamaliel's advice in Acts 5. (Don't worry, if they do "works" and are not known by Jesus; He will judge. We don't need to.) And that should be the end of the matter, shouldn't it?

Sadly, the painful truth is that when our faith-led conscience (or is it a conscience-led faith?) tells us that something is right or wrong, we so want everyone else to conform to that belief. We can easily gravitate

towards the following erroneous formulation: They aren't with US; therefore, they must be against Christ; and so WE must act or resist them. In going this natural way, we have suddenly and sneakily elevated ourselves above Christ! In our zeal we can easily overlook that fact.

So, even if we think that there is already too much to do in fighting the old selves, here's another battle: We must regard those who are not against us as being for us. Or maybe by casting off the weight of condemnatory judgment each of us may better bear the cross that he is called to bear. -By Allen Andrews

Sin and Grace (Part 2)

Sin and grace are really part of the same story. Thus, both elements of the story must be told. Sin needs grace, and true grace can only be offered in the presence of sin.



The risk is in telling only half the story. In part one, we told the story of grace. Now we must tell the story of sin.

Seeing our sinfulness helps us grasp the immensity of God's grace. But we can only bear to see our sin when we can anticipate the possibility of grace.

Normally our fears drive us into hiding when we mess up. We cover up our sins because we realize no one will really be merciful to us. Most people will either ridicule us or use our sins against us to their advantage or both. So before most of us are willing to admit our sins and mistakes, we need an environment that offers grace.

It is only in the presence of grace that can we have the courage to open our eyes that have been blinded to our brokenness and honestly confront our sin. Christian author and clinical psychologist Mark McMinn writes, "Sometimes we assume that places of grace begin with open and frank confession. Maybe open confession begins with the promise of grace" (*Why Sin Matters*, p.48).

He also makes this observation, "A place of grace needs to be a place of open
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exploration and acceptance, where both sin and its consequences can be named and grieved" (p. 49).

The ultimate story of your life and mine, whether we realize it or not, is about resting in God's grace. God extends grace to us despite our unworthiness and our woundedness. Jesus urges everyone one of us to, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matt. 11:28-29).

In the context of our human story that involves sin and grace, we need to understand how much God loves each and every one of us. The apostle John tells us, "This is how God showed his love for us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us first and sent his Son as to be the Savior of the world" (1 John 4:9-10). We need to realize that there is no risk in admitting how sinful and broken we are once we learn about God's love for us.

That's the lesson of the Prodigal Son. He finally faced up to his sins after he had squandered his inheritance and had nothing to eat. Jesus said, "He finally came to his senses." Looking at this story from this side of Pentecost, we would probably conclude that it was the Holy Spirit that gave him this insight. Once he could face his sinfulness head on, he was able to realize that the only place he could go to find mercy and grace, was from his father, the very person he had so much disrespected. There was only one reason why he could go back to his father. He knew that his father loved him so very much.

We wrongly assume that once we acknowledge our sin it will lead to self-hate, discouragement, & depression. Just the opposite is true. In the safety of God's love, we can honestly afford to look at our selves, experience sorrow, and confess our wrongdoing.

Once we admit that we are sinners, we can stop trying to earn God's favor; we can stop that feeling of discouragement of never being able to measure up to God's standards.

Seeing ourselves as sinners means we can stop trying to prove we are 'good enough' to be blessed by God. We need to realize that we can never be 'good enough' to earn God's blessings or his grace. But we can truly know that we are loved by God and that his love ushers in every good thing that we could ever desire, if we are only willing to accept it.

The apostle Paul summed up the results of admitting our sinfulness this way. "This is a true saying, and everyone should believe it: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners--and I was the worst of them all. But that is why God had mercy on me, so that Christ Jesus could use me as a prime example of his great patience with even the worst sinners. Then others will realize that they, too, can believe in him and receive eternal life" (1 Tim. 1:15-17 NLT).

In the conclusion of this subject, we'll talk about the role of guilt, pride and self-justification as it relates to our sinfulness and our need for God's grace. - *By Larry Omasta*

Personal Testimony and ReBaptism

I began attending Glen Ellen Bible Church three years ago today. Before that time, most of my religious instruction was in a legalistic cult-like church for about 35 years. Since eight years of age I was taught a confusing and fear-based theology.

During some of that time, however, I was blessed with a dear friend and housemate who understood God's loving nature in the person of Jesus and she never stopped trying to point me to Him.

I resisted, thinking I knew enough but instead I transferred my allegiance to her even though she never courted it. I was conditioned to follow after man.

One day, 3 1/2 years ago, I told her that I didn't know what I would ever do without her and she replied, "I hope you come to the place where you realize you don't know what you would ever do without God". She died suddenly of a heart attack three weeks later. At the hospital our Lord met me and

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Magnify the Lord, O My Soul



Most kids learn about magnifying lenses in science class and have fun using them to magnify everything. Insects look like science fiction monsters. Bits of dirt and sand look like a giant river bed or a desert. Turning a magnifying glass on a friend's face is always good for a laugh.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, didn't know anything about magnifying lenses. But she did know what she was saying in Luke 1:46 when she felt praise well up inside her at the news she would be blessed to be the mother of the Messiah. "And Mary said: 'My soul magnifies the Lord.'" The Greek verb literally means to make large or big and then, by extension, to make great, to exalt, glorify, praise, extol, magnify. One commentary says: "Mary is magnifying the Lord by telling others how great she thinks he is. With the phrase (in Greek) Mary indicates that her praise for God comes from deep inside her. Her worship is deeply personal; it comes from her heart."

The song Mary sang is called The Magnificat, which is Latin "to magnify." Mary said her soul magnified the Lord (King James, New King James, New Living Translation). The NIV uses the word glorify, while NASB says exalt. The Amplified and NLT use magnify and extol. The Contemporary English Version says, "With all my heart I praise the Lord."

How does a person magnify the Lord? Perhaps the dictionary can give us some clues. One meaning is to make greater in size. When we magnify the Lord, he becomes bigger. J.B. Phillips said, "Your God is too small." To magnify the Lord helps us and others understand how much bigger he is than we thought or imagined. Another meaning is to cause to seem greater or more important. Thinking and talking about how great the Lord is helps us understand who we are in relation to him. God's ways and thoughts are so much higher and greater than ours, and we sometimes have to remind ourselves and each other of this. We can become bigger than him in our own eyes if we're not careful.

Joe Stowell says, "The purpose of our lives is to let others see what God is like as they watch and experience his love through us." You could say our lives are like a window through which others see Christ living in us. Others have said we are like mirrors, reflecting him and his love. We could add a magnifying glass to the list. As we live, his character, will and ways become clearer and larger to those watching.

As we live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness (1 Timothy 2:2), we keep the window clean, show a clear reflection and magnify the life and love of Jesus in us. Magnify the Lord, O my soul!
- By Tammy Tkach



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filled me with such peace. I confessed to the doctor that even though she was gone we had faith. I never had had faith before. I went to where she lay and said good-bye. I told her "Well done good and faithful servant but where I'm going you can't come". I didn't know where I was going but I knew this was a monumental shift in my life.

Over the next several weeks God began to show me His faithfulness when we "come home" to Him and my life has not been the same since.

I know now that through the life, death and resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, I am a new creation and like Paul I want to share in His sufferings including His death and resurrection which baptism symbolizes.

One year after my friend died, I found a note she wrote to me during the week before she passed. In it she says, "Please stay close to God and trust Him to take care of you day by day. He will!" He did and He does!

I am here today to be baptized to affirm and confirm that I have passed from death to newness of life in Jesus. I have come to love Him more and more every day and with Him upholding me I will until my last day.- By Pat Jones, Pat is a former WCG member who is giving her testimony and being rebaptised today (June 10th, 2007) at her church in the Chicago area.

Profile

Nana Insa

Nana Insa was a unique individual who lived her entire life serving only one family. She started serving when the head of the family and his wife were raising their children. She had very little schooling, rarely went outside her local environs, and had very few friends of her own. The only people she got in contact with most of the time were members of the family and their friends who frequented the house. She rarely did anything beyond her duties in the kitchen and in the grounds around the house.



But there were times when she was asked to stay with a young child while his parents were away. She always welcomed such opportunities to do something different. She would carry the child around, hugging him fondly, and make him sit on her lap and talk to him animatedly as if he understood everything she was telling him. At the end of the day if his parents weren't home yet, she would tuck him to bed and stay with him and tell him that he was a good boy because he did not cry for his mother and had finished his food and drunk his milk. She would keep on talking to him in a droning voice until the child fell asleep.

Nana Insa also enjoyed watching the older children play during the daytime even if they just ignored her. Yet she was quick to come to their rescue when they fell and hurt themselves.

She was privy to the times when the teen-aged boys in the family would sneak out of the house undetected and would sneak back in after dark by passing through the kitchen window. Nana Insa would just keep quiet about it and say nothing. The errant boys would love her for this but she would shun away from them in silent disapproval.

Nana Insa seemed to be entertained watching the adult members of the family discussing, arguing and debating about politics. She did not understand what they

were talking about, but she was amused at the changing expressions on their faces: sometimes excited, sometimes angry, and sometimes challenging.

She showed visible signs of apprehension when my grandfather, irritated by the noise and confusion around, would explode and set everyone seeking refuge in their rooms. She knew him better than anybody else when he was mad.

Other than these occasional feelings of elation and fear caused by members of the family, Nana Insa was calm and quiet most of the time. She was usually unconcerned about everything except her cooking and her washing and her cleaning up the kitchen mess.

Nana Insa never got seriously ill. She never went to the doctor or to any hospital for that matter. When my grandmother got sick, it was Nana Insa who took care of her needs up to the end since my aunts and uncles were not around most of the time as they were busy living their own lives.

Nana Insa had a very long life. She outlived many of my aunts and uncles. When it was her turn to go, she just got weaker and weaker and eventually withered away. Her quiet demise was as obscure as her humble beginnings when she first entered the threshold of my grandfather at a very young age, the daughter of a poverty-stricken farmer and his wife who lived in a remote barrio of a Philippine rural community.

Nana Insa lived a full life of service without remuneration, with total disregard to her own personal well-being. She never owned significant possessions save her clothes and the like;

never had any personal ambition; and never seemed to know pride in any form. In her own small world, she was a paragon of



selflessness, humility and service, something that a true disciple of Christ, would aim at.

- By *Divina A. Castillo*