

LIGHT FROM TZELTAL LAMPS

M E S S A G E S O F F A I T H
F R O M I N D I G E N O U S
B E L I E V E R S I N C H I A P A S



SAM & HELEN
HOFMAN

ILLUSTRATIONS BY LOUISE BASS

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Words of Hope's mission is to proclaim Jesus Christ by radio and literature in the world's languages, seeking with our partners in ministry to win the uncommitted everywhere to faith in Christ and to encourage Christians in the life of discipleship.

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PREFACE

Words of Hope's mission is to proclaim Jesus Christ in the languages of the world's peoples. While our primary means of carrying out that mission is by producing radio programs (currently in approximately 40 languages throughout the world), we have also used literature to share the good news of the gospel with people everywhere. Over the years Words of Hope has published millions of copies of Christian books, devotionals and sermons and distributed them worldwide. Increasingly today our literature is shared electronically via the Internet and email.

The mainstay of our literature ministry is the Words of Hope devotional booklet. These brief daily messages based on the Scriptures reach many thousands of people each month. Among the most down-to-earth and popular devotionals we have ever published are the collections written by members of the Tzeltal churches in Chiapas, Mexico. Thanks to the efforts of missionaries Sam and Helen Hofman and artist Louise Bass, these colorful messages have been gathered, translated, illustrated and now published in this book. Words of Hope is happy to be able to share them now with you. May the Lord bless you as you read them and may the Holy Spirit use these simple expressions of biblical truth to build your faith and increase your obedience.

—David Bast

Words of Hope President and Broadcast Minister

INTRODUCTION

The Tzeltal Indians live in the rugged central highlands of the state of Chiapas in southern Mexico. Fifty years ago their population numbered about 50,000. They were subsistence “slash and burn” farmers, struggling to harvest enough corn and beans from their hillside plots to feed their growing families. Today this Mayan tribal people group numbers 240,000.

They suffered from hunger, poverty and a variety of deadly diseases. Nearly half of their children died in infancy. Fear of the earth spirits, illness and death filled their days and nights. They received little help from tribal shamans, most of whom claimed not only the power to cure illnesses and cast out evil spirits, but also to control evil spirits and to curse people with misfortune, illness and death. The one escape the Tzeltals had from their misery was alcohol abuse which intensified their suffering and poverty.

In 1942 a missionary of the Wycliffe Bible Translators, Marianna Slocum, entered the highland Tzeltal region. She learned the language, gave it a written form and began to translate the New Testament. In 1947 she was joined by Florence Gerdel who began a medical ministry. One year later in a small valley called Corralito the first Tzeltal families became believers through hearing evangelical messages and hymns played on a victrola. They shared the good news about Jesus Christ with their neighbors. Before long they invited the two missionaries to come and live with them. From that moment the number of Tzeltal believers grew rapidly. Translation of the New Testament was completed and distributed to the 2000 believers in 1954.

The Wycliffe missionaries then moved to the lowland region of the tribe. They translated the New Testament into that dialect and continued to develop the medical work.

At the request of the Presbyterian Church of Mexico, which was providing pastoral care for these Tzeltal new believers, missionaries of the Reformed Church in America arrived to help the

FOREWORD

Since 1925 the Reformed Church in America has worked together with the National Presbyterian Church of Mexico to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with the Spanish and Mayan Indian people of the state of Chiapas. Through the dedicated work of missionaries like Sam and Helen Hofman, the Bible has been translated and taught, people have been evangelized, and the sick have been healed through prayer and medical clinics. God's Spirit has moved mightily in these short seventy-six years. Today, the evangelical believers in Chiapas, including all language groups with whom we have worked, number some 160,000 and the church is still rapidly growing in spite of persecution and dire poverty.

These stories of faith and devotion provide us with fresh insights as we learn how the Tzeltal believers read the Bible with new eyes. They also remind us of what a great privilege and joy it is to work together with brothers and sisters in Christ from around the world. We are most grateful to the Tzeltal authors, to Sam and Helen Hofman for translating these stories into English, and to Words of Hope for making them available in book form. May God receive the glory for the hope and encouragement their words inspire within us.

–Roger De Young

Coordinator of RCA mission programs in Mexico

emerging Tzeltal church develop a leadership training program. A cattle ranch was purchased and turned into a Bible school and leadership training center. There Paul and Dorothy Meyerink, Sam and Helen Hofman, and Jim and Sharon Heneveld participated in itineration, teaching, textbook writing, Bible translation, medical administration and an audio-visual ministry.

Tzeltal believers have been fervent and effective evangelists among their own people and neighboring tribes. Their church membership now numbers over 60,000, one fourth of the Tzeltal population.

During many years while he taught preaching, Sam Hofman listened to the Tzeltals preach in class and to their people. He gathered some of their sermon illustrations. Some were recorded on cassette tapes for evangelistic activities. Upon invitation from Words of Hope, two sets of meditations were prepared using these illustrations of the Tzeltal preachers. These meditations were published in October 1978 and February 1981. Their popularity resulted in reprints in November 1988 and July 1999.

We are excited that Words of Hope is once again publishing 48 of these meditations in a special book illustrated with 48 accompanying attractive and authentic drawings done by Mrs. Louise Bass of Traverse City, Michigan.

May the Lord continue to use the light from Tzeltal lamps to brighten their world and to brighten your days!

*–Sam and Helen Hofman
Retired Reformed Church Missionaries*

BECOMING A CHRISTIAN

So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.

1 Peter 4:19

A CLAY POT

1 Peter 4:12-19

The baking of a clay cooking pot takes a great deal of care and skill.

After the moist clay has been molded into a clay pot, the potter gently places it in the shade where it will dry slowly. Later when it is nearly dry and hard, he will put it in the direct sunlight to dry completely.

Then it is burned in an oven. It is crucial that just the right amount of heat be applied. If the fire is inadequate, only the outside of the pot will be burned, and it will turn out soft and easily broken. On the other hand, if the fire is too hot, the clay will crumble and only a lump of melted dirt will be left. But the right amount of fire will produce a clay pot that can be placed in the middle of the kitchen fire and it will serve there for years.

This is a picture of us when we became Christians. We were like the worthless clay that the potter took and made into something useful. The Lord took us in his gentle hands and formed us into new people.

Trials, temptations and persecution followed, but the Lord did not permit us to be tempted above what we were able to bear. He took us from the shade and placed us in the sun and then in the fire only when we were ready to endure them.

He is looking forward to the result of his work. May we not disappoint him! May we be strong, useful, dependable, faithful servants!

–Mariano Guillen

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, help us to accept our trials and suffering as a source of blessing to us. Help us to be courageous and faithful followers.*

You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood. . . .

1 Peter 2:5

ANY KIND OF STONE

1 Peter 2:4-10

Our village decided to build a permanent bridge across a nearby stream. We went to the city of San Cristobal to look for a stone mason who would oversee the work, for we wanted it to be done well. We found a man who consented to do the work, and he told us to get all the materials ready—to gather stone, carry sand and buy cement. “What size and shape stones will you need?” we asked. He responded, “Any size or shape. They will all be needed and useful.” So we gathered all kinds of stones—big stones, small stones, flat stones, round stones—until we had a huge pile.

The work began. We first dug deep trenches for the foundations of the wall. Then the biggest stones were dropped in as a solid base for the wall. On top of them went more stones bound together with cement and sand.

Just as the stone mason said, all the stones were useful. Square ones for the outside of the walls, round ones for the center, thin ones as wedges, flat ones for the top. Some had to be improved before they were useful—a bulge broken off with a rap of the hammer. Some had to be shattered completely and the pieces were used.

This is a picture of how Christ builds his church. He gathers all kinds of people. All are invited; all are useful. He himself serves as their foundation stone. Then, as the master builder, he unites them all into one building. They serve in different ways according to their different talents. But they are united into one church by God’s Spirit, interdependent on each other, assisting one another.

–Samuel Cruz

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, we thank you for establishing your church here on earth, and for making us a part of it.*

He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; he seats them with princes, with the princes of their people.

Psalm 113:7-8

FROM THE GARBAGE PILE

Psalm 113:4-9

On the outskirts of every town are places where the people dump their garbage: tin cans, bottles, broken tools, old cardboard boxes, all kinds of junk.

One day as a friend and I were leaving town, he saw an unbroken bottle on the pile. He picked it up and looked at it. It was filthy dirty. The owner had obviously lost hope of ever getting it clean enough to use again. It looked hopeless to me too. But he put it in his bag.

I said to him, "What do you want with that dirty old bottle? You will never get it clean."

"Maybe not, but I'm going to try. It looks like a very useful bottle," he replied.

A couple of days later I met my friend on the trail. He was going to work in his cornfield. "Look at this," he said, as he pulled a beautiful, clean bottle out of his bag. It was hard to believe that it was the same bottle he had picked off the garbage pile. Now it was going to supply him drinking water as he worked in the field.

As I continued down the trail, I thought of how God does this with his people. No one is so bad that they cannot be redeemed by Jesus Christ. With his persistence and power he can cleanse us and make us useful servants in his kingdom's work.

—Daniel Lopez

Prayer: *Our God, we praise you for your great work of redemption, rescuing people and making their lives good and useful.*

I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

Luke 5:32

CROOKED TREES

Luke 5:27-32

A man needed some lumber to build a house. So he picked up his axe and went to the woods to look for trees. When we look for trees for lumber we choose the straight, tall ones that are easy to trim into square logs. But this man was a skilled woodsman and he was not choosy. He cut trees that were crooked and twisted. If we had seen them we would have said that they were no good. But he cut them down and marked the ends of the log, using his ruler and level. He then made a straight line on the log and began chipping away with his axe. Soon the crooked trees were changed into straight, square logs, ready to be sawed into lumber. He then slid them up on the sawing platform and with great skill sawed the logs into beautiful boards. What an attractive house he made from those crooked trees!

This is what God does. As Christ once said, “I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” He does not select just good people to be his. He also chooses twisted and crooked people. Then in his wisdom and power he chips away their sinfulness and makes them straight and beautiful. We need not fear that God will pass us by because of our sinfulness. The joyful news is that God will choose any and all of us, and then make us new and useful.

–Mariano Guillen

Prayer: *Thank you, God, for choosing me in spite of my sinfulness. Work in my heart, so that I will become more like you.*

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household. . . .

Ephesians 2:19

FROM MUD HOLE TO HIGHWAY

Ephesians 2:11-22

Four months of continual rain had turned our highway into a long trail of mud holes. The slides and washouts had narrowed it to one-way traffic. In many places buses and trucks had taken turns getting stuck in the deepest holes. Now, finally, no vehicle was getting through. As I cautiously picked my way along the side of the road on my way to visit a congregation, I said to myself, "This road is a complete disaster. It will never be useable again."

Then suddenly it stopped raining. The sun came out. The mud dried up. The government sent a bulldozer to open the road, dump trucks to carry stone and gravel to fill the holes, and a grader to level it out.

Two weeks later, I boarded a bus, and its wheels carried me quickly over that same road. What a change!

Later, as I looked over our congregation, the same sense of amazement came to me. Five years ago these men and women were drunkards, murderers, adulterers, liars and thieves. But the sunshine of God's love shone on them. God's Spirit began to work powerfully in them. Now the church building fills with people whose lives glow with peace, hope, love and joy. They have become a smooth path over which God's blessing flows to their neighbors and friends. What a change! Who could have believed it was possible!

–Mariano Guillen

Prayer: *Our God, your miracles continue to amaze us. You alone can transform people and make them new again.*

For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves

Colossians 1:13

FROM CHICKEN COOP TO KITCHEN TABLE

Colossians 1:9-14, 21-23

We had enjoyed a good breakfast and I was about to leave for work in the cornfield when I saw our young son playing under the chicken coop. He was gathering chicken droppings into a pile, scooping them up with the cup he had been drinking from at the breakfast table! I took the cup, telling him that was not an appropriate use for a drinking cup. I laid the cup under a bush and told my wife to wash it with soap and boil it before putting it with the other dishes. At the next meal the cup was back on the table. Our son was drinking from it again.

God's Word says that we were laid aside by God because of our sin. When God created Adam and Eve, they were both good and useful. They worked in God's garden, caring for the plants and animals. God appreciated their good work and visited them. But when Adam and Eve sinned, everything changed. The bond of fellowship was broken. They were banished from living in God's garden. Since that time all people have been alienated from God because of their evil behavior.

Just like the cup, we need cleansing before we can become good and useful again. When we stand beneath the cross of Christ and place our faith in him, his blood cleanses us from all our sin. This is how God receives us and makes us useful again.

–Daniel Lopez

Prayer: *Thank you, God, for giving us the joy of being clean and useful again.*

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

John 14:6

THE BRIDGE

John 14:1-11

My village is on the bank of a river. Its current is strong, and after a rain it becomes too deep to cross on foot. Several people have drowned trying to cross it.

We decided to build a swinging bridge. There were two large oak trees across the river from each other. We strung cables from these and wired a board walkway to the cables. Now even children and elderly people can cross.

Last year a man decided to wade across the river rather than spend the extra time walking to the bridge. The water was deep and the current was swift. His foot slipped and he was swept away. We never found his body.

In many ways Jesus is like that swinging bridge. "I am the way," he said. He is the bridge between earth and heaven. He is a secure bridge, like the two sturdy oak trees and the strong cables. And all who trust in him, young and old, strong and weak, will safely cross.

Yet so many try to enter heaven some other way. They trust in other gods. They put confidence in their own goodness and their own wisdom. But this is to be swept away to disaster and death.

Our faith is in Jesus alone. We walk humbly with him just as we treat the swinging bridge with respect. We walk across it slowly. We do not run; we do not stomp across it arrogantly. If we do, it will bounce, and we may lose our balance and fall into the river. In the same way our walk of faith must be one of respect for Jesus who is our bridge between earth and heaven.

–Pedro Vasquez

Prayer: *Thank you, Lord Jesus, for providing for us a safe and sure way to heaven.*

But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities. . . .

Isaiah 53:5

OUR BRIDGE

Isaiah 53:4-6

For three days we had been on the trail leading to our new home in the eastern jungle. It had been raining much of the time and the rivers were rising. When we came to the bank of the last river that separated us from our home, we saw that it was too deep and dangerous for us to be able to cross it.

We sat down and wondered what we should do. We could wait for the river to subside, but that would take a couple of days, and our food supply was nearly gone. We could return on the trail to the nearest village, but we had little money for food. We were reluctant to turn back when we were so close to home.

Then we spotted a towering tree on the edge of the river. If we cut it down, perhaps it would be long enough to reach the other side.

One of the men had an axe, and we started to work at once. The tree fell with a great crash, and the top of the tree did reach the other side! Joyfully we crossed over it and continued on our way home.

This is what Jesus has done for us. We were helpless and hopeless. No matter how much we desired to continue on the trail to heaven, our sinfulness made it impossible. But just as the death of the tree permitted us to cross over the raging river, so also the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ permits us to cross over the river of sin and death and to continue on our homeward way to heaven.

–Martin Hernandez

Prayer: *We thank you, Jesus, for dying for us and for providing for us a path into the presence of God.*

But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

Matthew 7:14

THE NARROW DOOR

Matthew 7:13-14

I was still three hours walking distance from home and everything was going wrong. The full moon was now hidden by black clouds, and I had no flashlight. The cold drizzle was chilling me to the bone and was making the steep, rocky trail dangerously slippery. As I felt my way along, my heavy pack became heavier as exhaustion set in.

Finally I reached the house of a friend. Perhaps he would let me stay in his home for the rest of the night. As I neared his house I could see the fire flickering warmly inside. I called out: "Hello, my brother. Are you home?"

He answered immediately, "Yes, I am home. Come in! Come in!" He untied the two boards that served as a door to his house and greeted me with a warm hand, "Come in quickly before you die from the cold!"

I eagerly stepped through the narrow door, and suddenly could go no farther. My pack was too wide! Although I saw the cheerful fire and the smiling face of my friend welcoming me, because of the pack on my back I could not get in.

Laughing, my friend came outside and helped me remove my pack. Leaning it against the house, we went in to enjoy his warm home.

So it is on our trip to heaven. Our load of sin must be left at the foot of Jesus' cross before we can enter into the presence of God to enjoy his welcome.

—Pedro Vasquez

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, thank you for the enormous relief of being able to unload my sins at the cross and to have fellowship with you.*

In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Romans 6:11

DEAD OR ALIVE?

Romans 6:5-14

For the first 25 years of my life, I lived on a cattle and coffee ranch. A lot of liquor was sold there. The owner of the ranch brought it out from the nearest town. Tzeltals and Chols would come from long distances to buy the liquor. Some would carry it home and others would drink it there at the ranch. I grew accustomed to their drunken shouts and their fighting with one another.

There were two men who came nearly every week from the distant village of Yalaxex (yalasháysh). They always drank a lot and often had wild fights, sometimes with one another. Then some weeks went by and they did not return. We said to each other, “They must be dead. They probably killed each other on the way home.”

Several years later I became a Christian. When our pastor traveled through our area, I went with him to visit other congregations. When we came to Yalaxex, I was startled to see the two men sitting in the church. They were not dead, but alive and well—and sober.

Yet in a sense they had died. They had died to their old way of life. When they became followers of Jesus Christ, the drunkenness, the fighting, the cursing, and the suffering of the old life suddenly was left behind. They had “died” as far as their old life of sin was concerned. Christ had given them a new life of joy and peace, of hope and love. Have you received the new life that Jesus gives? Have you died? And are you alive again?

–Rafael Gutierrez

Prayer: *Thank you, Lord Jesus, for the new life you offer to all people.*

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

Matthew 11:28

WHAT KIND OF DEER ARE YOU?

Matthew 11:25-30

When the Spaniards came from across the ocean, they brought many domesticated animals with them. One was the sheep. When our ancestors first saw the sheep, they had no name for them in our language. Since sheep looked a bit like the wild red deer, and since it had hair that resembled cotton, they named the sheep “the cotton deer.”

So now we have two kinds of deer: the wild deer and our “cotton deer.” Which kind are you like?

The wild deer have to take care of themselves. They search for their own food and often go hungry. They have no safe and secure place they can call home. They live in constant fear and are often pursued by dogs and killed by hunters. It is a lonely and fear-filled life.

The sheep, in contrast, have a shepherd. The shepherd provides them with pasture, water and protection. They live a life of peace and security.

There are many of us who are still living the life of a wild deer. We have not placed ourselves in the care of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd. Our lives are filled with loneliness and fear.

To all of us the Good Shepherd stretches out his hand and says: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”

–Martin Gomez

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, you are our faithful and loving shepherd. We eagerly give ourselves into your care and protection.*

DANGERS AND TEMPTATIONS

Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

1 Peter 5:8

WATCH OUT FOR THE TIGER!

1 Peter 5:8-11

A new settlement of our people was being established in the jungle. Many new families had arrived from the hill country and were building their houses.

The leader of the new colony was experienced in jungle living. He warned the new settlers about the dangers of the jungle, especially about the man-eating tigers. He urged them never to travel alone on the jungle trails or to work alone in their cornfields. He said, “You must be alert at all times and help protect each other. Otherwise the tiger will sneak up on you and kill you before you know what has happened.”

However, one man responded, “I’m not afraid. Tigers are good to eat. Let them come. I’ll take care of them.”

A few weeks later this man did not return from his cornfield. The villagers searched for him, but all they found were pieces of his clothing and huge tiger tracks.

God warns us clearly about the power and craftiness of the devil, and of the strong attraction of temptation and sin. If we in our pride respond, “I can take care of myself, don’t worry about me,” then disaster is near. Our recklessness will destroy us. We must place ourselves in God’s care and in the protective fellowship of other believers. Only then can we be secure.

–Mariano Guillen

Prayer: *Our Lord Jesus, deliver us from foolish pride. Keep us from the delusion that we can take care of ourselves. Grant us the protection of your presence and the support of your people today and always.*

Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.

Matthew 26:41a

DON'T GO TO SLEEP!

Matthew 26:36-46

He was a good driver with years of experience and without a single accident. But while driving his busload of passengers one night, he became sleepy. His eyes closed for a moment. The bus missed the next turn and went crashing down the hillside. Many were injured, including the driver.

This could be you; this could be me. We have been believers for years—faithful and fervent. But little by little the devil lulls us to sleep, and we say:

“It is raining and there is a lot of mud on the trail. I won’t go to the church service today.”

“They won’t miss me at the church council meeting.”

“I have done my share. Let someone else carry the load for awhile. I deserve a long rest.”

“Prayer meeting? I’ll send my wife.”

So sleep comes. Our spiritual appetite disappears. We drift away. Disaster awaits us at the next curve. It can happen to any of us, even the most dedicated person.

If only the bus driver had realized the danger, and had stopped the bus to awaken and refresh himself, he would have avoided the tragic accident. When we begin to go to sleep spiritually, we must become aware of our dangerous condition and ask God to renew our dedication and enthusiasm.

–Juan Gutierrez

Prayer: *Our Father in heaven, keep us spiritually alert at all times so our love and dedication may never diminish or disappear.*

Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

1 Peter 5:8

WATCH OUT!

1 Peter 5:1-11

In my sugar cane patch was a small flock of doves. They seemed very tame every time I walked by.

One day I decided to try to shoot a couple for supper. I said to myself, “This should be easy. They are so tame and unsuspecting.”

Confidently I walked out of the house and carefully walked toward the sugar cane patch. The doves were there all right. But when I started to raise my gun to my shoulder, they all suddenly flew away before I had a chance to pull the trigger. I was amazed at their being so sensitive to danger and so quick to flee to safety.

We would save ourselves from a lot of temptation and a lot of problems if we were more sensitive to danger. The devil is clever and subtle, and he is dedicated to our downfall. He is constantly sneaking up on us and placing traps in our pathway. How often we blunder blindly into them! He prepares attractive temptations, and how quickly we grasp them!

God warns us to be alert, to be on guard. He counsels us to flee from temptation and to resist the devil. We can see the disastrous results of the devil’s success in the lives of so many people. Let us listen to the Lord’s urging that we watch and pray, so that we will not enter into temptation.

–*Nicolas Mendez*

Prayer: *Holy Spirit, help us to be alert always to spiritual dangers so that we will avoid temptation and sin.*

Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

James 4:7b

THE DEVIL AND THE FLY

James 4:1-10

The devil and the fly have much in common. They both pollute everything they touch.

The fly first lands on the mud and filth of the back yard. Then it enters the house, and wherever it lands it leaves the germs and filth it carries on its feet.

This in turn brings sickness and death. The fly leaves microbes on our tortillas to cause typhoid, worm eggs in our cups and amoeba on our plates to cause intestinal problems, and fungus on our bread to hasten its spoiling.

So also the devil brings suffering and misery to our lives. He plants anger in the heart of one, jealousy in the heart of another, lust in the eyes of another, envy in the eyes of another. He plants gossip that destroys the peace of our communities. Drunkenness, stealing, lying and murder are all evidence of the devil's presence and evil work. What can we do against this enemy? We must resist him.

The health officer counsels us to put screens on our doors and windows to keep the flies out, to spray them with insecticide, and to always have a fly swatter handy. We must wage war with them!

So also the Bible counsels us about how to free ourselves from the devil's evil influence: Be aware of his existence, be awake to his influence, and be sensitive to his presence. And wage war with him! And in the power of the Lord Jesus and with his help you will win, and the devil will flee from you!

–Martin Lopez

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, help us to overcome all temptation and to live victorious lives.*

Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.

Ephesians 6:11

THE SCREW-WORM FLY

Ephesians 6:10-17

I watched a screw-worm fly land on a cow. It hunted for a wound or a sore where it could lay some eggs. But it found none and flew off disappointed.

But another cow was not so fortunate. It had a cut on its shoulder from a barbed-wire fence. The fly came and laid eggs in the wound. The eggs hatched into screw-worms and soon the cut was a deep festering wound, filled with screw-worms.

The devil works that way too. He is constantly looking for an opening in our protective armor—a little quarrel, a misunderstanding, a bit of envy, a feeling of insecurity, a bit of jealousy. In these little wounds he lays his screw-worm eggs, and the little quarrel becomes an angry conflict, the misunderstanding becomes animosity, the bit of envy becomes a deep dislike, the feeling of insecurity becomes depression, the bit of jealousy becomes a haunting suspicion. If these deep “wounds” are not dealt with, the person is in danger of spiritual death.

How crucial it is that our armor be complete and our spiritual defense be strong. How important is the daily reading of God's Word, and our constant communication with God through prayer. How important it is that we quickly submit our little cuts and hurts to the Great Physician before our enemy arrives like the screw-worm fly.

—Juan Gutierrez

Prayer: *Holy Spirit, help us to build strong defenses against the devil. Protect us and heal our hurts, we pray.*

But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. “Get behind me, Satan!” he said.

Mark 8:33

WHERE IS THE DEVIL?

Mark 8:27-37

Before God’s Word came to our tribe, the devil ruled our area. We were very aware of his power and influence. However, we were mistaken as to where the devil was. We thought he was outside, roaming around. When we heard a noise—the call of a wild animal in the woods, the scream of a hawk, or the moan of the wind—we would stiffen with fear and say, “Be quiet! The devil is out there!” We did not dare to go out of our houses at night because “the devil is out there in the dark!” We were afraid that he would seize our souls and cause us to get sick and die.

But we were mistaken. The devil was not out there. He was inside of us. He was filling us with fear. We were already in his hands. We were his prisoners—prisoners of fear.

If someone had asked Peter where the devil was, he too probably would have said: “The devil is out there. He is in those demon-possessed people and he is in the hearts of the Pharisees who want to kill our Lord.” Little did Peter realize that the devil was also inside of him and very soon would be speaking through his mouth.

So when you wonder where the devil is, look within your own heart and life. You may find him there, working quietly, seeking for a way to deceive, dominate and destroy you.

–Manuel Perez

Prayer: *Deliver us, Lord, from the presence and power of the devil.*

As it is written: "God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."

Romans 2:24

OUR FATHER'S REPUTATION

Romans 2:17-24

The president of our congregation was a good man. He did not steal from his neighbors or start gossip. He was not proud. He did not become angry quickly. He helped the poor and orphans. He preached God's Word clearly and gave good counsel to the believers.

However, his sons did not follow his path. They were arrogant. They became drunk often and fought with each other and with others. They stole from others, and their conversation was always filthy. Their father urged them to straighten out their lives, but they would not listen to him. He prayed for them and counseled them, but they continued on their sinful, rebellious way.

Eventually the neighbors became tired of the behavior of his sons. They began talking and complaining to one another. And they not only talked about the sons but also about the father. They said: "He seems to be a good man, but look at his sons! Where did they learn to talk that way and to do those things? They must have learned it from their father!" Soon the gossip became so widespread that it reached the ears of this man. He was greatly embarrassed and eventually resigned his position as president of the congregation and discontinued his preaching. His reputation had been ruined by the behavior of his sons.

Often God's reputation is ruined by our bad behavior. How often the non-Christians have said: "It is useless to believe in God. Just look at those who do!"

–Nicolas Mendez

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, forgive us for our poor testimony. Help us to reflect more clearly your goodness.*

If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.

Luke 13:9

THE UNFRUITFUL TREE

Luke 13:1-9

A man in my village planted many orange, grapefruit and lime trees on his piece of land. They grew well, and he looked forward to eating their fruit.

How pleased he was with the delicious fruit they produced. He had more than enough for himself and his family, so he gave the fruit as gifts to his relatives and sold it to others in the village.

However, two trees did not produce fruit when the others did. So the man decided to fertilize them and wait a couple more years for them to produce.

Two years later they still had not produced any fruit. So the man said: "This is a waste of good ground." And he cut the worthless trees down.

God has more patience with us than this man had with his trees. God patiently speaks to us and pleads with us, waiting for our response. But he does not wait forever. The day comes when he leaves us in our stubborn unfruitfulness, and the word of judgment is spoken: "Cut this unfruitful tree down!"

–Martin Hernandez

Prayer: *Our Father in heaven, we thank you for your patience with us. Forgive us for so often being unfruitful servants. Help us to serve you more faithfully.*

Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail.

Luke 22:31-32a

THE TALL TREES

Luke 22:24-34

While studying at the Tzeltal Bible Center, I have watched how the strong winds beat against the pine trees. I have noticed that the taller the tree is, the more the wind pushes against it. If the tall trees have shallow roots or are on soft ground, they come crashing down.

In our churches I have noticed a similar situation. The devil concentrates his temptations on the church leaders. Perhaps he realizes that if the leader falls, the whole group will be weakened. Consequently, when a person is chosen to be an elder or a minister, he can expect hardship and temptation. Jesus said to the leader of his disciples: “Satan demanded to have you that he might sift you like wheat.” And Satan still is concentrating on church leaders today.

I have also noticed that the tall trees that are surrounded by short trees receive much protection from them. Although the top of the tree is exposed to the wind’s fury, the lower part is protected as the other trees join their branches to break the power of the wind.

So also the church leaders’ source of strength is the supportive prayers of the people. Christ comforted Simon Peter by assuring him, “I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail.” We must pray faithfully for our church leaders!

–Daniel Lopez

Prayer: *Holy Spirit, strengthen and protect the leaders of our church. Help them to be faithful, fervent and effective.*

Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.

1 Corinthians 1:31b

HERE TODAY, GONE TOMORROW

1 Corinthians 1:20-31

The towering pine tree had stood on the hill for over one hundred years. It looked like it would last forever.

But one day the lumbermen arrived. Their chainsaws roared for a few minutes, and the tree came crashing down. The chainsaws roared again, and soon the tall tree was a few short logs being loaded on the logging truck. The branches were put on a pile and later burned. Nothing was left of the giant tree but a short stump.

So also the mighty and powerful people of the world are here today and suddenly gone tomorrow. The arrogant dictator, the popular president, the rich landowner, the wealthy merchant have their day of glory, and then are lowered into their graves. The grave puts an end to all human pride.

Yet we still hear the old men bragging about their age and wisdom. We hear the wealthy bragging about their possessions. We hear the local political leaders brag about their power and influence. We hear those who have land brag about how many acres of land they own.

At the moment of death all of this bragging ceases. Suddenly we realize the wisdom of God's Word that tells us that whoever wants to boast should boast only about what the Lord has done.

–Mariano Lopez

Prayer: *Our Father in heaven, we give all honor to you because of all you have done for us and through us.*

. . . clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

1 Peter 5:5b

IT IS DANGEROUS TO CROW

1 Peter 5:1-7

One day a proud rooster was crowing loudly. A fox in a nearby woods heard the rooster crow and came near him. But the rooster was alert and was ready to fly into a nearby tree.

So the clever fox said, "You crow in a very strange way. You don't crow right at all. The roosters from my area all crow with their eyes closed, but you crow with your eyes open."

The rooster responded, "I can crow that way too." And he closed his eyes and began to crow. The fox immediately leaped on the rooster and ate him for dinner.

Like the fox, the devil is very clever. We need always to be alert or we will become victims of his scheming. Our constant prayer must be: "Deliver us from the Evil One."

How often our pride becomes the doorway through which the devil gains entrance into our lives. You can be sure that whenever we begin crowing about how wise we are, about how well we preach and teach, or about how well we sing, or about how much faith we have, or about how many people we have converted, then, like the fox, the devil will hear our boasting and will eagerly come to test us. He knows that: "A man's pride brings him low." Proverbs 29:23

–Francisco Gomez

Prayer: Deliver us, Lord, from our pride.

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.

Revelation 3:20

WHAT IS INSIDE?

Revelation 3:14-22

Recently I visited a Christian brother who had built himself a new house. He invited me to sit on the porch where we talked for awhile. Later, I asked if I could see inside his new house. He said he did not have the key. The truth was that he did not want me to see the inside because he operated a small store in one room. Among the items he sold were beer and cigarettes, several shelves full. So he was ashamed to show me the inside of his house.

What my Christian brother did not realize is that it would have been to his advantage if he had let me into his house. I would not have criticized him. I would have complimented him on having constructed such a fine house, and I would have suggested that he take out what spoiled its appearance—the beer and the cigarettes. Then his house would look even better!

In the same manner Christ is asking entrance into our hearts and lives. He will not force his way in, but politely asks permission to come in. It certainly is to our advantage to invite him in. We need not fear that he will criticize and condemn all that we are. He wants to come into our lives so that he can make them better, cleaner and happier.

—Daniel Lopez

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, forgive us for excluding you from our lives. We realize that you are eager to fill our lives with beauty and happiness.*

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?

1 Corinthians 6:19

THE BEE TREE

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

Insects and animals are often wiser than we are. They sometimes show more intelligence than we who are supposed to be the crown of God's creation.

The other day I saw a man getting honey out of a bee tree. He had drilled a hole in the bottom of the hollow tree and was blowing cigarette smoke into it. Bothered by the smoke, the bees fled from the top of the hollow tree. The man was then free to take the honey out of the tree. He felt pretty smart.

However, it was the bees that were wiser than the man. When the cigarette smoke began filling their nest, they realized how harmful it was. They fled into the clean pure air. Meanwhile, the man was breathing in the smoke of his cigarette, which was blackening his lungs with soot and tar. The clean lungs that God had given him now resembled the ceilings of our kitchens which get covered with the soot of our cooking fires. His constant coughing was evidence of the damage that had already been done.

The man thought he was smarter than the bees. He did not realize that his body is a special creation of God, and that he was making a mess of God's temple.

–Domingo Mendez

Prayer: *Forgive us, Lord, for our careless and destructive habits that hurt and destroy what you have created. Help us to place ourselves, body and soul, into your hands.*

. . . *I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. . . .*

Philippians 3:8a

THE LOST TREASURE

Matthew 13:44-46; Philippians 3:7-9

Cristobal's son came running to my house. "My father is dying! Come pray for him!" We ran down the trail to Cristobal's house.

Cristobal had been a believer years ago, but had slipped back into alcoholism. This time, too drunk to tell the difference, he grabbed the wrong bottle and drank a big mouthful of kerosene. His stomach was now protesting violently.

We asked God to spare his life, and then we carried him to the clinic. I remember clearly his moans of pain, and the terrible smell of alcohol and kerosene. At the clinic our brother Mariano quickly gave Cristobal an injection for the pain and medicine to calm his stomach. Again we prayed and his pain began to subside.

Cristobal did recover. Later I visited him and told him this story: "A man put his money in his bag and went to town. But when he arrived there, the money was gone. It had slipped out through a hole in the bag. The man hurried back over the trail on which he had traveled, searching for the money."

Then I said to Cristobal: "You have lost your treasure; and your drunkenness, fears and superstitions have returned. Don't you remember how happy you were when you first believed? How clean you felt inside? How free you felt from fear? That is your treasure that you lost on the trail. Go back and search for it! God will help you find it!"

—*Martin Gomez*

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, you are the precious treasure, the pearl of great price. Help us to desire you and the new life you bring to us.*

Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done.

Romans 1:28

POOR DUMB ANTS

Romans 1:28-32

The leaf-cutting ants were beginning to damage our cornfield. Their huge nest was now three feet high, and they had worn a smooth path through the grass and brush all the way to the cornfield. I squatted down and watched as they hurried along, carrying small pieces of corn leaves to the nest.

Then I poured a cup of Mirex into their trail. It looked like pieces of brown sugar. The ants immediately began picking up the small pieces of Mirex and carried them into the nest. Many ants laid aside the pieces of corn leaf they had been carrying and picked up a piece of Mirex instead. They worked with great eagerness and enthusiasm until every piece of Mirex was inside the nest. The poor ignorant ants. What they did not realize was that Mirex is a strong poison that would destroy them all. Two weeks later the ants were all dead and their trail was empty.

This past weekend a similar scene passed before me. I went to town to purchase some items. Later, as I stood at the edge of town waiting for the bus, I saw many of my people returning home from their weekly shopping trips. Many were already drunk and were being led home by their wives or children. Others staggered by with half-empty bottles in their hands. Others hurried by with liquor and beer in their bags, eager to get home so they could begin their parties. Like the ants, they didn't know—or didn't care—that what they were carrying was a deadly poison that would destroy them.

—Martin Gomez

Prayer: *Father, forgive us for our foolish rebellion that leads to our destruction. Thank you for patiently and persistently calling us to repentance.*

The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person. . . .

James 3:6a

LANCING THE BOIL

James 3:3-12

As a paramedic I have treated a lot of people with boils. Boils are painful, and often cause fever and aching in the whole body. As long as a boil stays deep under the surface of the skin, it is hard to treat. But God has made our bodies marvelously so that the infection is forced to the surface of the skin. Then it is possible for the medical worker to lance the boil and drain off the infection. Then healing can take place.

Gossip and slander among Christians are like a boil. Undercover they do their damage, causing many symptoms of spiritual illness in the church. They produce hurt feelings, resentments, misunderstanding, anger and frustration. So when believers gather for worship, some do not greet each other. There is no joy. New believers and visitors sense the disharmony. The following week they do not attend the worship service.

Relief comes only if the gossip and slander are brought to the surface, into the open. That is one of the difficult tasks of pastors and elders in maintaining the health of their churches. They must sit down with people, carefully and gently identify offensive remarks, isolate resentment and bring reconciliation.

–Mariano Lopez

Prayer: *Our Father in heaven, so often our untruthful and uncharitable words hurt our Christian brothers and sisters and bring sadness to your heart. Forgive us, and help us to control our tongues.*

Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently.

Galatians 6:1a

CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Galatians 6:1-10

Strong winds can do a lot of damage to our cornfields. It is sad to see a field of corn that the wind has turned into a twisted mess of corn stalks. However, in our area we do not give up hope. We do what we can with that tangled mess. We gather a large pile of sticks to prop up the bent corn stalks. Many times a propped-up corn stalk will repay our efforts with an unusually large ear of corn!

This is what we church leaders seek to do in our discipline of a church member who, overcome by temptation, stumbles and falls. To overlook or ignore the sin the person has committed would be like leaving a blown-over corn stalk lying on the ground. No! That person needs to be lifted up, restored and encouraged. So the elders meet with him and seek to bring confession, repentance and restoration.

Often our restored members become the most fervent and fruitful people in the congregation. They have experienced the pain of separation from God because of their sin. Embarrassment and shame have hindered their fellowship with other Christians. Then they experience the joy and freedom that God's forgiveness brings. They are lifted up and restored by their Christian brothers and sisters. Is it any wonder that they give themselves generously and joyfully to the Lord's service?

—Daniel Lopez

Prayer: *Father, help us to lift the fallen and restore to your fold those who have wandered away from you.*

No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

Hebrews 12:11

A REACTION TO GOOD MEDICINE

Hebrews 12:4-13

One of my neighbors slowly limped up the trail toward the clinic. It was obvious that walking was causing him severe pain. I unwrapped his leg to find that a cut was seriously infected. After cleaning and dressing the wound, I prepared a shot of penicillin to help his body fight the infection. Shortly after receiving the injection, he complained of feeling itchy and dizzy. Suddenly he fainted! His body was having a bad reaction to the penicillin! I quickly gave him an injection of adrenaline. In a few minutes he came out of his coma and began to recover. It was a frightening experience for both of us. The penicillin was a good medicine, but it nearly killed him.

In God's Word we read that God sends hardships to us for our good—to strengthen our faith, to develop our patience and endurance, to keep us humble, to make us sympathetic toward others. Sometimes we react against God's medicine. When difficulties come, we can become angry at God, bitter and depressed. We accuse God of not caring. Because of our bad reaction to God's good medicine, we begin to die spiritually.

That is the moment when we desperately need the counsel and comfort of Christian friends. Like an injection of adrenaline, their words of wisdom and encouragement will renew our hope, faith and joy.

—Antonio Moreno

Prayer: *Our Father in heaven, help us always to remember how much you love us. Keep us from reacting badly to any hardships you send to us.*

Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.

Luke 21:36

THE WISDOM OF THE ANTS

Luke 21:25-36

Have you ever noticed the wisdom of the leaf-carrying ants? They may be small, but they are smart. In dry season they work hard to gather their food. On sunny days they hurry along their trails, carrying large pieces of green leaves, filling their nest with food. They realize that when rainy season comes, they will not be able to gather food because their trails will be flooded and there will be mud everywhere. But the ants will not starve because they will have their underground home filled with food. Although they have no spirit, God has given them the foresight to provide for the days ahead.

Often we do not have the wisdom of the ants. In dry season we notice that there are holes in the roof, but we do not repair them. Suddenly rainy season arrives and the thundershower comes splashing through the holes.

Even when it is obvious at harvest that we do not have enough corn to last the year, we do not buy more until we are out of corn and the price is expensive.

Very few of us have money set aside in case of a serious illness.

So also many people are unprepared for Christ's return. They do not heed God's warning of the coming judgment. He counsels us to prepare for the day when we will have to give an account to him of our life on earth. But many go on living every day as if it will never happen.

Let us learn from the tiny, wise ant and prepare for tomorrow. Let us heed God's invitation and warning, and yield ourselves to him right now.

–Andres Hernandez

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I give myself to you and eagerly await your coming.

Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.

Matthew 25:46

JUDGMENT DAY

Matthew 25:31-46

Iwent to the city of San Cristobal with a group of students who had graduated from our village school. They were eager to continue their education, and were hoping to enroll in the government school there. We arrived early at the school auditorium, but it was already crowded with young people. There were hundreds of them, all eager to be enrolled in the school.

The director of the school arrived. He had the students line up by size. Then he told all the taller ones to leave. "You are too old to be taught in this school," he said. Some of the students pleaded with the director, and others bent their knees to make themselves appear shorter. But to no avail!

Then the very young were eliminated. They were told: "Go back and complete your studies in your village. You are too young to be away from home." Again there was pleading, but they too were crowded out the door and into the street.

Those who remained were given entrance exams. The next day they gathered to hear the results. The names of the students who had passed the exam were read. Each was given a blanket and book and let through the door that led to the dormitory.

Suddenly the door was closed and the director said, "That is all who will be accepted. The rest of you did not pass." There was pleading and crying. Some rushed to the door to try to get in, but it had been locked. As I saw their anguish, I thought to myself: "This is what it will be like on Judgment Day."

–Pedro Vasquez

Prayer: *Our Father in heaven, we thank you for providing for us an open door to heaven through your Son, so that we will not experience anguish and sorrow on the day of judgment.*

You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.

Hebrews 10:36

NO TURNING BACK!

Hebrews 10:32-39

There was a great celebration in town. A man who lived a few miles away decided to go and take part in the festivities. He dressed himself in his best set of clothes and started out.

However, it had rained and the trail was very treacherous. He had not gone far before his foot slipped and he fell, getting mud on his trousers.

He got up and looked at his soiled trousers. “What shall I do now?” he said to himself. “Should I just go back home, or continue on my way?”

Because of his eagerness to go to town for the celebration, he decided to continue on his way. When he came to a stream, he washed the mud off his trousers the best he could and continued on.

This happened several times on his way. But each time he picked himself up, washed the mud off his clothing and continued on the trail to town. Arriving there, he thoroughly enjoyed the celebration.

We need this type of persistence in our pilgrimage to heaven. Often when we slip and fall spiritually or morally, we decide to turn back, saying: “Well, that proves it. I just haven’t got what it takes to be a Christian.” Instead, we need to confess our sin—wash the mud off—and continue on the path to heaven. May the anticipation of our joyful arrival there lift us up and spur us on!

–Daniel Lopez

Prayer: *Our God, we thank you that our daily defeats and failures do not disqualify us from sharing in the ultimate victory and the joy of heaven.*

And the final condition of that man is worse than the first.

Matthew 12:45b

KEEP YOUR LAMP BURNING

Matthew 12:43-45

In our village there are many rats. They do not show themselves during the day. They hide in the brush and under the firewood and in their holes.

When it gets dark in the evening, we light our kerosene lamp and put it on the table. Often my wife and I sit and read at the table after the children are all asleep. As long as the lamp is lit, our house is peaceful and quiet.

But soon we become sleepy and get ready for bed. I blow out the lamp and begin to cover myself with the blanket. Immediately the rats come, clawing up the outside walls, scampering across the poles, scrambling over the table, jumping on our bed and running over us. They search for scraps of food on the floor. They eat our corn and chew holes in our clothes. Nothing escapes them.

This is what happens to us when we turn away from God—when we blow out the lamp of faith in our lives and turn away from Jesus Christ. The devil comes immediately and takes control of our lives. Our days become filled with misery and suffering.

My brother-in-law became a Christian the same time I did. But a couple of years later he turned back. He is a pathetic sight to see now: skin and bones, dressed in rags, begging from door to door for a few pesos to buy some more liquor. His wife and children are wretchedly poor, living on what we can share with them.

Don't let your light go out! Let Jesus be your companion and Lord all the days of your life.

—Juan Lopez

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, may we never lose our love for you and our faith in you.*

In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

Matthew 5:16

THE KEROSENE LAMP

Matthew 5:13-16

The other day I visited my younger brother. He invited me to stay for supper, so I did.

When it became dark he brought in a kerosene lamp. “Oh, you have purchased a kerosene lamp,” I said.

“Yes, I bought it in town two weeks ago,” he responded. He removed the globe, lit the wick, and replaced the globe. I was surprised that the room was nearly as dark as it was before.

I asked, “What is the matter with your lamp? It doesn’t give any light.” I looked at the lamp. The wick was burning well, but the globe was so blackened with soot that the light couldn’t get through it. So we washed the globe with soap and water. What a change that made! The whole room was full of light!

As we sat at the table and looked at our brightly burning lamp, we talked about how we Christians are often like that globe. So often our bad example and poor witness obscure and darken the light of God’s Word before those around us. The light itself is burning well, but we, the glass around it, smother the light with our unclean activities and inconsistent lives. How disappointing that must be to the Lord, who wants all of us to be the light of the world.

–Rafael Gutierrez

Prayer: *Forgive us, Lord, for the poor witness of our lives. Cleanse us so that your light will shine brightly and clearly through us.*

The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him.

Matthew 12:35

RED THREAD

Matthew 12:33-37

There are two kinds of red thread available that our wives can use for weaving when making our clothing. The one has a good quality color that does not spread into the white cloth when the garment is washed. It is a bright red color that gives beauty to the garment and enjoyment to the one who wears it. It pleases the eye of those who see it, and they say: "I wish I had a garment like that one."

The other kind of thread is a darker red that does not hold its color. When the garment is washed, its dye runs into the white cloth, spoiling its appearance so that the owner becomes almost embarrassed to wear it.

So it is with our speech. Our words can delight and they can destroy. They can bring joy or they can cause harm.

A word of encouragement, a wise word of counsel and expressions of concern and love can brighten the day, bringing happiness both to the one who speaks and to the one who listens.

But an unthoughtful word, an unkind word, an untruthful word can do much harm to both us and the ones around us. What anguish, what sadness, what anger and what bitterness have resulted from our words! Like an ugly stain they spoil our days.

Our wives choose the thread they use very carefully so that they will be sure to get the good red thread. Let us use that same caution as we choose the words we speak!

—Pedro Vasquez

Prayer: Holy Spirit, control my thoughts and my words today.

But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.

Matthew 5:44-45

THE MANGO TREE

Matthew 5:38-48

On a much-traveled trail was a mango tree. It gave a shady place to rest for weary travelers. Once a year it gave juicy mangos for them to enjoy as they rested.

One would expect that the travelers would care for the mango tree, but they did not. When the mangos were ripe, instead of climbing the tree and picking the fruit carefully, they threw sticks and stones at the tree to knock the mangos down. Leaves were torn off and branches were broken. If they were not successful, they would climb the tree and cut down its branches to get at the mangos.

Now I have a question for you: Did the tree quit giving shade and mangos to the travelers who mistreated it? No. In fact, the more it was mistreated the greener were its leaves the following year and the more fruit it bore on its branches.

God's Word says that this is true of us also. Often his people are mistreated even though they do only good to others. Many of us have suffered ridicule and persecution from our neighbors and relatives because we have become followers of Christ.

What are we to do in return? Our Lord says: "Love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you." Like the mango tree we are to continue to show compassion and love to those who mistreat us. In fact, God's Word says that the suffering we endure will increase our patience and our endurance. That is why Christ says we can be happy when persecution comes our way.

—Juan Gutierrez

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, help us to love those who mistreat us. Help us to pray for those who persecute us.*

That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weakness, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

2 Corinthians 12:10

A SPOONFUL OF SUGAR

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

I was fascinated by the great sugar factory of Pujiltic (poo-heel-teek). The whole area around it is planted in sugar cane. When the cane matures, the workers burn the fields before cutting the cane. This makes the cane look black and worthless. But the workers fill large wagons with this cane and haul it to the factory. There the cane is squeezed and processed. At the other end of the factory, an endless stream of white sugar is bagged and stored.

How do they transform blackened sugar cane into pure white sugar? It is a long process of squeezing, boiling and refining that separates and purifies the sugar.

So also God assures us that our trials are meant to strengthen our faith, not to destroy it. The hardships and tragedies and suffering that come to us are to purify us so that we will be more useful to God and to others.

The apostle Paul had difficulty accepting his physical suffering. But eventually he realized it had been given to him by God to make him more humble and more useful in the Lord's work.

When you are questioning why difficulties and hardships have come to you, remember the stalk of sugar cane that was burned, slashed, squashed and boiled. And now it has become the spoonful of sugar that sweetens your cup of coffee.

–Daniel Lopez

Prayer: *Father in heaven, help us to rise from our hardships and suffering to bring joy and sweetness to the lives of others.*

. . . but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

John 4:14

A SPRING OF WATER

John 4:6-15; 7:37-39

Our highland area has hundreds of springs of water. They come gushing out of the hillsides and into the little valleys. These springs bring clear, clean, cold water that refreshes all the people and animals of the area.

How marvelous it would be if all these springs gave their water all year long! But as the dry season progresses, one by one the springs dry up. The people and animals then have to walk to a larger and more distant spring for their water. For many this becomes a great hardship, since they must walk for one or two hours to find water. After arriving, they must stand in line and wait their turn to fill their jars and buckets. If the dry season is severe and long, even the large springs begin to dry up as the huge pools in the caves of the hills empty out.

We are like those springs. People are constantly depending on us to give counsel, teaching and encouragement. We share God's Word with them, and they leave refreshed and renewed.

But just as the springs are dependent on the rain to replenish their supply, so also we must constantly be receiving from God. If we neglect our own Bible study and prayer, we will have nothing to give those who come to us, and they will go away still thirsty.

–Francisco Mendez

Prayer: *Lord, you are a refreshing spring that satisfies the thirst of all who come to you. Help us to share with others all that we receive from you.*

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons . . . nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:38-39

ROOTS

Romans 8:31-39

From where I am sitting I can see a tall tree in the middle of the pasture. This tree has been buffeted by the wind ever since it began to grow. Even now its branches are being whipped back and forth, and the tall trunk is bending.

What keeps it from yielding to the wind? What keeps it from blowing over? Its roots. From the very beginning it began to send its roots down deep into the soil. The taller it became, and the more the wind blew against it, the deeper it put its roots down. Consequently, it has never been overcome by its enemy, the wind.

The moment we become Christians the devil comes like the wind. Unseen, secretly, powerfully he tries to overcome us. Through deception, through temptation, through persecution he strives to take away our courage and to destroy our faith. Often he nearly succeeds.

But if our faith in Jesus Christ is firm, we will not be overcome. If our spiritual roots are deeply rooted in God's Word and in his promises, we shall be victorious. In fact, each temptation and every trial will only force us to hold on tighter to our Lord and send our roots deeper into his Word.

—Daniel Lopez

Prayer: *We thank you, God, that no one can take us from your loving care.*

One of them, when he saw that he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. . . .

Luke 17:15-16

THE PIGEON AND THE BEE

Luke 17:11-19

One day a bee fell into a pond. He was about to drown when a pigeon saw his plight. The pigeon quickly picked up a leaf and dropped it next to the bee. The bee climbed up on the leaf until its wings were dry. Then it flew safely away.

The bee never forgot how it had been rescued by the pigeon. Its heart was always full of gratitude and wherever the bee traveled it always had the hope of meeting the pigeon again.

One day the pigeon was perched up in a tree, not realizing that a hunter was sneaking up to shoot it. The hunter raised his gun to his shoulder and took aim. At that moment the bee flew by. The bee saw the hunter and the pigeon that had once saved its life. Like a flash of lightning the bee darted across and stung the hunter. With a cry of pain he dropped his gun, and the pigeon flew safely away.

We need to have the attitude of that bee. We must never forget our Savior. We should always have gratitude in our hearts that he has saved us from death and has given us new life. We can show our love and gratitude by seeking ways to serve him every day.

–Daniel Lopez

Prayer: *We thank you, Lord Jesus, for saving us. Help us to serve you faithfully each day because of our gratitude to you.*

The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace.

Romans 8:6

WHO IS YOUR DRIVER?

Romans 8:5-14

With all the new roads in our tribal area, we have all seen cars drive by. It looks as if the cars are alive and are steering themselves; but no, each one has a person inside steering it.

If the driver is experienced and careful, the car will continue safely down the road and will arrive safely at its destination. But if the driver is inexperienced or careless, there will soon be an accident that will destroy car, driver and passengers.

We all need a good driver in our daily life. The Holy Spirit offers to be our driver. He is an experienced, wise and careful driver who will guide us well on the road of life. There will be no wandering off the road, no fatal accident on the way. Instead, there will be a joyful arrival at our destination, where the Holy Spirit will present us to our Father in heaven.

The devil also would like to be our driver. But to put ourselves in his hands is like getting into a car driven by an inexperienced or intoxicated driver who will deliver himself and all his passengers into the hands of death.

Who is your driver? And where is that driver taking you?

–Daniel Lopez

Prayer: *Holy Spirit, we thank you for your guiding hand in our life: delivering us from disaster, protecting us from harm and directing us on the road of eternal life.*

Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God. . . .

Psalm 42:5a

HAVE YOU CRIED LATELY?

Psalm 42:1-11

My wife decided she would raise some chickens and turkeys so that we would have some extra money for clothes for our children. How pleased and excited she was when the eggs hatched and there were dozens of little chicks and turkeys in the yard. She cared for them well so they grew rapidly. In a few months they would be ready to take to market. Then she could shop for the children's clothing.

But a fox discovered the young chickens and turkeys, so one by one they began to disappear. We tried to trap the fox, without success. We waited in hiding with our guns, but he would not appear. Then one evening the fox killed six young turkeys. My wife cried.

Seeing her distress, I thought to myself, "God is concerned about our little problems too. Surely he sees her tears." So I said, "Let's pray and ask God to keep the fox away."

The fox never returned. God saw my wife's tears and heard our prayers.

Then I realized that we need to have this same concern for people around us—a neighbor who is not a Christian, a believer who has strayed away from God. Surely, if God sees our tears and hears our fervent prayers, he will answer our prayers for them too.

—Mariano Collazo

Prayer: *Forgive us, Lord, for being more concerned about our chickens and turkeys than about our neighbors. Thank you for always hearing and answering our prayers.*

When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, "So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life."

Acts 11:18

WHO KNOWS?

Acts 11:1-18

The other day I looked at a handful of corn seed. I tried to predict which kernels would grow if I planted them and which would not. I soon gave up and laid them aside, for it was impossible for me to tell which ones were alive and which were dead.

But we assume we can do this with people. How often we have been guilty of saying: "He will never become a Christian," or "She is so bad that she couldn't repent and change even if she wanted to," or "The people in that village are so hard-hearted that they will not listen to the good news about Jesus."

How do we know this? How can we be sure?

The only way to tell if seeds of corn are dead or alive is to plant them and see which ones sprout and grow and which ones do not. And we may be very surprised. Some that we thought were dead may be very much alive.

So also in witnessing for Jesus Christ. We must share the good news with all people and never assume that they will not respond. Who would have imagined that Saul on his way to Damascus would become a follower of Jesus Christ? The Jewish Christians of Jerusalem also had difficulty believing that a Roman soldier and his family had become Christians.

God knows who will respond and who will not, but he does not share that information with us. All he does is to command us to share his good news of salvation with all people.

–Pedro Vasquez

Prayer: *Our Father in heaven, help me to be alert to all the opportunities to speak to others about you. Help me to be faithful and fervent in my witness.*

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self . . . and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Ephesians 4:22-24

SHEDDING YOUR SKIN

Ephesians 4:20-32

The other day I came upon a snake's skin in the grass. The snake had been crawling along in its old skin when suddenly it slipped out of the skin and continued on its way with a sleek, shiny, new skin.

This is what happens to us when we are converted. When we respond to God's call to become his people, through his power we leave our old life behind and begin a new and beautiful life. Even our attitudes and the ways we think are changed. We become more and more like God because he is living in us.

Notice that the snake never returns for his old dry skin. Neither should we return to our old life of sin and selfishness. Once and for all we have left our former way of life behind us.

The snake sheds his skin more than once. And we too have one more transformation to look forward to. That happens when we slip out of our old bodies and leave them behind. Christ then gives us a new body to enjoy.

Then we will go to be with him who says: "I am making everything new!" Revelation 21:5

–Sebastian Gomez

Prayer: *We thank you, our Father, that your Spirit is at work all over the world, making people new and good. Through your power we can exchange our sinful nature for your goodness.*

So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable.

1 Corinthians 15:42

A NEW BODY

1 Corinthians 15:35-49

Does a kernel of corn have a beautiful green leaf and a stalk when we plant it? No. But plant it in the ground and come back to see it two weeks later. You will find a tender stem and a lush green leaf have appeared.

This is what happened when Christ was buried. His body was placed in the tomb—wounded, bloody, helpless. On Easter morning he arose with a new body that could enter rooms without opening the door, a body that could appear and disappear, a body that would ascend into heaven into the presence of God the Father.

This is the kind of body that God promises us. Our present bodies are weak and fragile. We experience illness, weariness, injury and pain. We have handicaps; our bodies are not complete.

But when we die, God promises us a new life in heaven. This new life includes a new body. Our old, tired, aching bodies will be replaced with a new glorious body like the body of the Lord Jesus.

Before we were Christians, we were very afraid of death. Every illness was a time of anxiety. We feared the witch doctors because we believed they could cause illness and death. But now we can welcome death with peace in our hearts because we know that death is the doorway to a better life in heaven.

–Pedro Diaz

Prayer: *Thank you, Lord Jesus, that you not only make our lives new and beautiful here on earth, but you will also give us new and beautiful bodies in the world to come.*

We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

1 John 1:3

TAKE THE LEFTOVERS HOME

1 John 1:1-4; John 7:37-38

In the highland Tzeltal area when we are invited to a celebration, we are given a lot of food—often more than we can eat. When that happens, we take the extra food out of our bowls, squeeze it dry, wrap it in tortillas, and put it in our bags. Any extra sweetbread, cookies and candy also go into the bag. We then take this food home to share with our children.

Our children eagerly anticipate our return, often looking up the trail to see if we are coming. They know that we will share the good food we have been given. When we arrive, their eyes are on our bags, waiting to see what good things we will give them.

This is a picture of our responsibility when we go to school to receive special training. This teaching is not for ourselves alone. We are to receive it gratefully, apply it to our lives, and then take it home to share with others.

Whenever we attend a church service, God always gives us more than we need so that we will have something to share. It is not how much you have received that really counts, but how much you have passed on to others. Jesus invites us to drink deeply from the living water he offers us. His desire is that we then become a spring of refreshing water for the renewal and blessing of others.

–Miguel Mendez

***Prayer:** Lord Jesus, help me to be as generous as you are. Help me to share with others all the blessings you give to me.*

While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

Acts 13:2

NOT MY WILL

Acts 13:1-5

When I became a believer, I said to my wife, "It would be good if I became a medical worker to serve our Christian brothers and sisters."

I went to the church consistory and volunteered to serve as a medical worker. They thanked me and said that they would think about that possibility. Months went by and nothing happened. Later, the consistory called me into their meeting and said: "We would like you to serve as a deacon." So I worked as a deacon, carrying water and firewood, and cooking and serving food at the special celebrations.

I had tried to choose the job I wanted. I probably would have made a very poor medical worker. God had other plans for me. A couple of years later, the consistory asked me to become an elder. "God will help you," they said. And he did. Some years passed, and they asked me to be their pastor. Now God is helping me to fulfill that responsibility.

In the church of Antioch, God placed his hands on Barnabas and Saul and said, "I want them to be my missionaries." God continues to select his servants and he assigns them tasks to do today. This has taught me that our part is not to choose what we want to do, but rather to be willing to do what God and his people ask us to do.

—Juan Gutierrez

Prayer: *Lord, help me to be willing to do whatever you want me to do, to respond whenever you call, and to go wherever you send me.*

We have different gifts, according to the grace given us.

Romans 12:6

OUR CHURCH IS A BEEHIVE

Romans 12:3-8

Have you ever seen the inside of a beehive? It is a fascinating sight. I was amazed at the number of bees, hundreds and thousands of them. They all have one mother, the queen bee. She lays all the eggs that later hatch and become full-grown bees.

All of the bees look alike, but they have various responsibilities. Some fly far away to gather nectar from the flowers. Some bring water to the hive. Others keep the hive clean. Others remove the bees that die in the hive. Still others guard the entrance to the beehive. Some are responsible to feed the queen bee.

There is no evidence of quarreling or competition or boasting among them. All do their job for the good of all.

So it is to be in the church of Jesus Christ. He, like the queen bee, is the head of the church; we are all his children. He gives all of us work to do. Like the bees, each of us has our own job to do. And he has prepared us to do the job. It pleases him when we do it eagerly and enthusiastically.

We are to serve without quarreling, boasting or competing with the other members of our Christian beehive. Everyone is to work for the good of all and for the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Does your church really resemble a beehive?

What is your job in the church of Jesus Christ?

—*Nicolas Mendez*

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, we thank you for the privilege of being members of your great family. Help us to serve you and others with all our heart, strength and mind.*

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