

Loaves & Fishes

Issue 28



**God's Plan
of Redemption**

Poems and Stories
From Prison

**Saved From a
Life of Hell**

All Things Are New

Pain and sorrow are all I've ever known,
Sitting here wondering when I'll ever make it home.

I'm tired of being alone; I need that special love.
They tell me I can get it from my Father above.

I've fallen on my knees with no hope in sight.
Help me, dear Jesus—help me make it right.

My burdens are heavy, but You carry me through.
Touch me, Holy Spirit, and lead me through.

He must have heard my prayers when I called out His name,
Because since that moment I haven't been the same.

Blind for so long, but now I see
That the precious blood of Jesus was shed for me.

Old things are passed away, and all things are new;
I'm so glad, King Jesus, that I finally met you.

Shawn D Bunch
Bledsoe County Jail, Pikeville, TN

We publish *Loaves & Fishes* as the Lord provides. Our goal is to point those in prison to Jesus Christ and help them experience the life, hope, and freedom of a daily walk with Him.

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Loaves & Fishes

Issue 28

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All Things Are New
Love

ALERT: THIS COULD BE YOUR LAST ISSUE

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God's Plan of Redemption

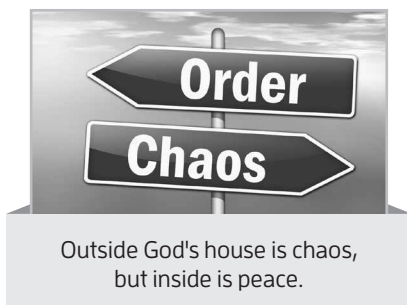
Lavern Gingerich

In ancient Middle Eastern culture, multiple generations of a family often lived as one household ruled by the father, or *patriarch*. The father controlled all of the family's assets, and it was his job to protect and provide for all the members of the family. If members of the family were captured by enemies or taken advantage of in any way, it was the father's responsibility to *redeem* them, or bring them back into the household.

Before his death, the patriarch would transfer his authority and responsibilities to the firstborn son. Thus the firstborn son carried a heavy responsibility for the ongoing safety and comfort of the extended family.

The Old Testament patriarch Abraham is one example of a *redeemer*. When his nephew Lot was captured in battle, Abraham rescued him and all his belongings from the enemy soldiers and brought him back to safety.

As the founding patriarch of a godly family, Abraham received a special mission from God: to bless all nations and to restore those who were outside God's house. Abraham took this calling seriously. When three strangers came to his desert home in the heat of the day, Abraham ran to welcome them. In this culture it was considered shameful for an old man in a robe to run, but he was willing to shame himself to welcome these strangers into his household. Abraham honored them by serving them an extravagant meal of bread, choice meat, and yogurt.



Redemption is a core principle of life and a key to God's plan for fixing our broken relationships. As the "patriarch", God is eager to bring his lost sons and daughters back into his household and to welcome strangers with His shameless and abundant grace. Outside God's house is chaos, but inside is peace and a plan for relationships that work.

* * * * *

God created Adam with a perfect mind and body. Adam was made in the image of God, with God-like qualities of love, wisdom, justice, and power. He had a close relationship with God, but he also had a free will that allowed him to choose between right and wrong. According to Genesis 3, Adam and Eve chose to believe Satan's lies and ignore God's plan for them.

Adam's sin brought death on him and all his descendants. "Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12). This choice to sin gave Satan the lawful right to rule mankind, but God had already prepared a plan to send a *redeemer* who would crush Satan's head (Genesis 3:15).

Generations passed, and evil was rampant in the world. Out of the chaos, God called a faithful man named Abram to do His will. God made a special covenant with Abram (whom God renamed *Abraham*) and his descendants, especially his grandson Jacob (renamed *Israel*).

God called the nation of Israel His *firstborn son* (Exodus 4:22) and told them, "If you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a *special treasure to Me* above all people; for all the earth is Mine. 'And you shall be to Me a *kingdom of priests* and a holy nation.'" (Exodus 19:5, 6a). As a *firstborn*, Israel was to seek the welfare of each family member and the strangers outside the household, and as a *priestly order*, Israel was to show everyone what God is like and how to have a relationship with Him.

As *patriarch*—owner and manager of all the earth (Exodus 19:5)—God wanted a partner who would represent Him, welcome outsiders, and look after the needs of His family. God was revealing His love and compassion for humanity through Israel, His "firstborn son" until the time was fulfilled for the promised redeemer to come.

For thousands of years Israel waited, until finally Jesus, the Son

of God, was born! Jesus lived a sinless life as a man and taught us how to live in His kingdom. Satan knew Jesus was the Son of God, the Creator Himself; he wanted to kill Jesus and maintain his own power over mankind.

Jesus gave His life as the ransom to set us free from the cruel bondage of sin and Satan. ⁵“There is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, ⁶“who gave Himself a ransom for all” (1 Timothy 2:5, 6). Perhaps Satan thought that once Jesus was dead, the victory would be his; but instead, Jesus rose from the dead and crushed his head! Through this heroic sacrifice on the cross and His glorious resurrection from the dead, Jesus overcame Satan and set us free. He opened the way for us to return home to God and be reconciled with Him in a way that had been impossible since Adam’s sin broke our relationship with God.

In recent issues of *Loaves & Fishes*, we’ve seen that God is light and has called us out of the darkness of our sin to walk in His wonderful light. We’ve learned that living in this light is how we follow Jesus. Walking in the light



Through His heroic sacrifice on the cross and His glorious resurrection from the dead, Jesus overcame Satan and set us free.

includes practical actions such as turning from sins you once enjoyed and living the truth you know so God can reveal more. The most wonderful thing about this new life is the way God wants to redeem our relationships.

“If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. ⁸If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.”

1 John 1:7–10

Just as sin broke our relationship with God, so the blood of Jesus restores that relationship by cleansing us from all sin.

This also makes it possible for us to have fellowship with other believers (v. 7). Reconciliation with God is the foundation of reconciliation with others.

In Luke 15, Jesus told the parable of a lost son. A son claimed his inheritance, then squandered it on wild living in a far-off heathen country. This son threw away everything his father gave him. Instead of pursuing his God-given mission of helping the lost understand God and come into His house, He *joined* the lost.

Eventually, the son came to the end of his rope and returned to his father. In Jewish culture, a son who wasted his inheritance would often be banned from his home village. They would break a jar of grain on the ground as a ritual to show the son he was no longer welcome. But this father was different! He had been anxiously waiting for his son to return, and when he finally saw the son approaching in the distance, he ran to restore him with a hug and kiss. What an expression of shameless grace and overwhelming love from the redeemer heart of God!

If your relationship with God is broken, God's love is urging you to come home! Agree with God about the darkness you've been living in and come to the

light of Jesus for mercy and healing. Confess your sin and leave the darkness behind. God "is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (v. 9). Salvation is not just a blanket of snow over a pile of manure. Jesus will not only forgive the debt of sin against you; He will also break the power of sin over you so you can begin to live a clean life.

The toxic cloud of bitterness, pride, hate, and selfishness forms a thick wall that isolates us from meaningful relationships with others. Once the filth of sin is removed from our lives, we have a solid foundation for restoring broken relationships and building new friendships. It's not always easy, and as long as we are in human flesh, we will face temptations. But nothing can equal the peace, joy, and love of living in God's house—the place we were created to belong.



God's love is urging you
to come home.

Forgiven

From a folktale, retold by J. Anthony Hertzler

As the miles and diesel fumes rolled away behind the Greyhound bus, I stared out the window, watching the power lines dip and rise, dip and rise, against a flat sunless sky the color of a cell wall. A week ago, I thought I had served my time; but I hadn't, not really. On this crowded bus I felt as lonely as if I were back in solitary. For all I knew, nobody on the outside had even missed me.

I had written my wife a letter three days before I started home. That was the first she had heard from me in two years. I didn't dare wait for a reply, and anyway there was no point; she might have moved to a new place by now. If she got the letter, that would mean she still lived where I walked out on her: in the run-down blue house with the old apple tree in the yard, right by the highway north of town.

In my letter to my wife, I came clean. I admitted I had cheated on her (not that it was news to her), and I told her I had been in

prison again, too ashamed to get in touch, until now. I told her I was free, and that I wanted to come home and start over. The bus would be passing the house at 2:30 p.m. on Thursday, and if she still loved me and wanted me back, she should give me a sign: tie something white around the trunk of the old apple tree by the house.

I'd watch when we went by, and if there was nothing on the tree, I'd know she had thrown me away like the garbage I was, and I'd leave town for good. It would be easier for both of us to say goodbye that way, with no words or tears.

Now, as the bus closed in on my hometown and I started recognizing landmarks, the guy in the next seat noticed I was chewing on my knuckles and asked where I was headed. For some reason I told him my story—I was lonely and low enough to talk to anybody, I guess. I told him about the apple tree in the next town that would hold the

key to the rest of my life. He seemed sympathetic, and he told me his name was Doug. He said if I ever needed anything, I should let him know.

I thanked him and went back to staring out the window. That apple tree—I knew it would probably be as bare as a cornfield in winter. Still, I couldn't help imagining a big fat ribbon wrapped around its trunk, the sign of a love nobody owed me anymore, a love I had no right to hope for. It got so I couldn't bear to look out the window. I couldn't wait to see that tree, but I was terrified to see it. Doug nudged my elbow.

"Man, I can't imagine how you must feel. If you want, I'll be glad to watch for that tree."

I said I'd be grateful and told him where it would be. Then I dropped my head in my arm and cried.

I had made a lot of big promises to Carla before we got married. Although she knew I had a rough past, she believed me when I said I was a changed man, and she devoted herself to me with every last piece of her heart. When we got married and moved into the little rental house north of town, our future was looking up.

We had been married six months when I got into some

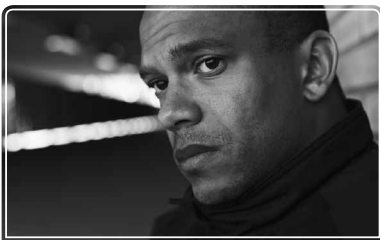


I got into some stupid fight at work and lost my job.

stupid fight at work and lost my job. I couldn't bear to tell her, so I kept leaving the house at 7 a.m. like always and hunting for work all day. Nobody was hiring, and after a few weeks, with bills coming due, I looked up some old contacts I knew could set me up to make a little money on less-legal ventures. It turned out "business" was going great for my old friends. They welcomed me back to their world, and before I knew it, I was no longer making it home every night.

It didn't take my wife long to figure out what was up. At first she cried, and later she got angry; then I got angry too, and avoided home even more. I started hanging with another girl, and before I knew it I was living 120 miles away, making big money on bad business and trying to forget what I'd left behind.

Long story short, I was caught in a drug bust and got thirteen months. My new girlfriend never



Deep down, I knew it was crazy to think she'd take me back.

came to visit me inside, and my wife didn't even know I was there, though she knew what town I had gone to and what kind of life I had been living.

Now I was done. I was on my way home to start over and try to make things right with my wife and the child I had never met. God helping me, I would be a real man, a husband and father who would earn my family's trust. But I was dreaming—deep down I knew it was crazy to think she'd take me back. What kind of fool had I been to throw her love away?

And then I heard a whoop—right there on the bus—and people started clapping. Somebody whistled through their teeth, and Doug jabbed me in the ribs, laughing—“Look, man, look at that tree, huh?”

When I raised my head I thought at first he had the wrong place. Though it was

late September, the tree was full of flowers—no, they were streamers of white ribbon, rags, plastic grocery bags, and I don't know what all. I couldn't see a bare branch anywhere. But before I got a good look at the tree, something else caught my attention.

There by the tree stood my wife, both hands above her head, waving a white sheet that fluttered and snapped in the stiff fall breeze.

And he said, “There was a man who had two sons. ¹²And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.’...¹³Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. ¹⁴And ... a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need...¹⁷But when he came to himself, he said, ...¹⁸‘I will arise and go to my father’ ... but while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. ²¹And... the father said to his servants, ‘... let us eat and celebrate. ²⁴For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found’”
(Luke 15:11–24).

God the **Just** and **Merciful**:

Why Justice and Mercy Are One

J. Anthony Hertzler

We've all heard it—the defendant is found guilty, a harsh punishment is handed down, and someone, perhaps a prosecutor or a victim, announces that “justice has been done.” The word justice is commonly used this way, with the idea that if someone has broken a law, justice is accomplished by punishing the offender—by making the offender suffer at least as much as the victim did.

There are good reasons for punishment. In the ancient nation of Israel, God Himself established punishments, some of them seemingly quite harsh, for those who disregarded the law. But is punishment the same as justice? Is justice automatically served when one who has harmed others is made to suffer equal harm?

This question often arises in murder cases, where families of murder victims sometimes forgive the killer and ask for them to be treated gently. In such cases,

the voices of the forgiving victims are usually drowned out by a chorus of demands for “justice.” It doesn't matter what the victims want, people say; what matters is that the killer gets justice.

In the next pages, we want to compare popular ideas about justice and mercy with God's justice and mercy. In the process, I hope we gain a deeper trust in the goodness of God's heart and the kindness of His fathering in our lives.

The Scriptures are perfectly clear in teaching that God is just. Justice is not a behavior God exercises now and then; it's a core attribute of His character—it's the way He is all the time. Let's look at some of the ways justice is described in the Scriptures.

“The word of the LORD is upright, and all his work is done in faithfulness. ⁵He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the steadfast love of the LORD.”

Psalm 33:4–5^{ESV}

Many popular Christian accounts of salvation imply that the sacrifice of Jesus saves us from the justice of God. God's justice, some say, would not allow Him to show love and mercy to sinners, but He satisfied His justice by punishing Jesus instead of us. By accepting Jesus' sacrifice, we escape the justice of God for ourselves and receive His mercy and kindness instead.

But is this the way God portrays His justice? Is God's justice really at odds with His kindness? Reread the passage above and notice how the writer describes justice as a virtue which God loves—and then in the same breath, he says, “The earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord.” Here there is no hint that God's heart is somehow torn between justice and kindness; instead, it implies that His justice is the source of His kindness. God's justice fills the earth with His steadfast love!

The Scriptures do not present Christ's sacrifice as a scheme

to cancel or reverse the effects of God's justice toward us. In fact, the opposite is true—according to the prophets, one of the Messiah's chief purposes in coming to Earth and dying was to establish and enforce God's perfect justice among humans. God's justice is portrayed not as a force bent on destroying us, but as a beautiful hope to be welcomed by an oppressed world. This passage from Isaiah is a good example of the way the prophets spoke of the coming Messiah:

“⁴...When the oppressor is no more, and destruction has ceased, and he who tramples underfoot has vanished from the land, ⁵then a throne will be established in steadfast love, and on it will sit in faithfulness in the tent of David one who judges and seeks justice and is swift to do righteousness.”

Isaiah 16:4–5^{ESV}

What a beautiful promise! One day all oppressors—those who use power to force their selfish will on the weak—will be gone forever, and a new King will rule “in steadfast love.” This loving king, Jesus, will “seek justice” and be “swift to do righteousness.” In this passage, it is the steadfast love that comes



first and the judgment and justice that follows—the steadfast love of King Jesus is the source of His justice!

A just and loving God, sending His only Son to restore justice on earth by filling it with His steadfast love—this is the vision of the prophets, a vision that is still unfolding today. In one of the best-known prophecies of Christ, Isaiah describes the spirit and behavior of this just Messiah:

“¹Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. ²He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; ³a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. ⁴He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth.”

Isaiah 42:1–4^{ESV}

Isaiah tells his listeners here that a Messiah is coming to bring justice on the earth, and that He will not stop until He has accomplished it. And what kind of person is this King who is so determined to bring justice? Does He thunder out His judg-

ments and destroy everyone who fails to obey His demands?

No, this King is gentle and patient. Unlike most rulers, He cares especially for the failures of society, the black sheep, and the outcasts; he does not put out the faintly burning wick or break the bruised reed. This is not the justice of the “tough cop” or the “zero-tolerance” prosecutor. This is the justice of a Father God whose heart is an ocean of pure love.

Does this mean that God is like a sugar daddy in the sky, showering blessings on His rowdy children while they live however they please? Not at all! Like any truly loving father, God is not content to leave us alone in our selfish sin, destroying His world, our neighbors, and ourselves. He hates sin because it ruins the perfect relationship He wants us to have with Him and with each other. God will do whatever it takes to destroy sin.

A loving father or mother who sees their five-year-old running toward a busy highway does not merely say, “Sweetie? Are you sure that’s a good idea?” No, a loving parent hurries after the child, catches her, and pulls her to safety quickly, even roughly if necessary. If the child insists on doing things or going places that

are harmful, a good parent will sometimes even need to punish the child—not to make the disobedient child suffer, but to save her from the harmful results of continuing in her foolish ways.

Proverbs 3:11–12 says, “My son, do not despise the Lord’s discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.”

This is why God’s justice and mercy are so closely intertwined. God’s justice is about restoring the broken, healing the sick, and bringing home the lost. He loves His children, and He knows we will be miserable until we return to Him and learn to love each other. To bring this about, He calls us, warns us, and even punishes us—not because He likes to see us suffer when we disobey, but because He knows that sometimes pain and suffering are the only path that will bring us home to our Father.

The justice of God is merciful, patiently blessing our obedience

and disciplining our rebellion, but never leaving us alone to destroy ourselves. The mercy of God is just, never ignoring or excusing the sin and selfishness that will destroy us if we continue in it. Only a God perfect in mercy and justice could come to earth, sacrifice Himself, and save the rebellious and foolish human race from the bondage of the devil.

What we humans so often call justice—vengeance against those who hurt us—is not justice at all, but merely another form of selfishness and hate. This is why the victims of crime so often fail to find the satisfaction they hoped for when the offender is punished. True and full justice comes only through reconciliation—the healing of broken relationships. And reconciliation is God’s purpose in all His work in human history.

Everything God allows to happen to you is part of His just and merciful plan to heal your relationship with Him and with others. If you have sinned and you are reaping the painful results of your failure, do not despair. God has not given up on you, and He has no wish to harm you. Let Him use your present suffering to bring you a harvest of healing and peace. ~

Sometimes,
pain and
suffering are
the only path
home.





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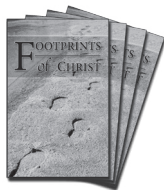
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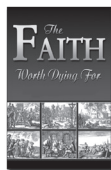
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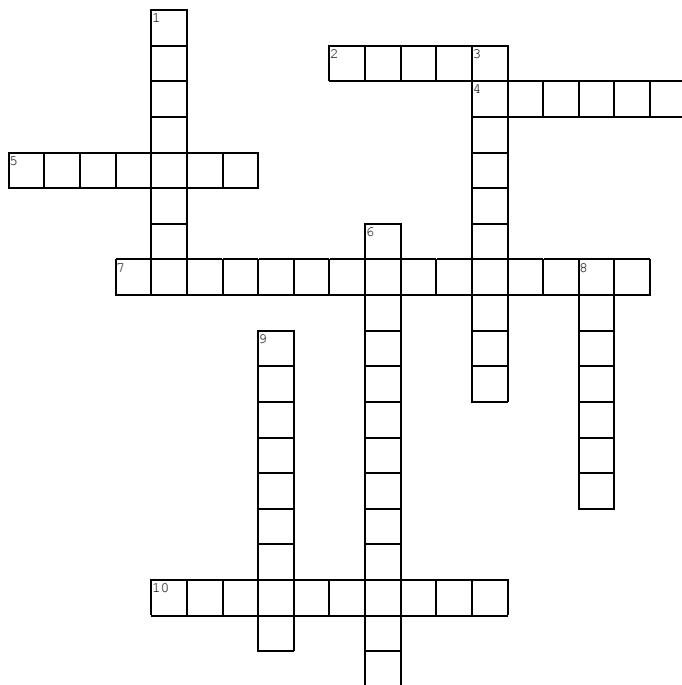
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Forgiveness

CROSSWORD PUZZLE

*Solve this puzzle to discover what the Bible has to say about forgiveness.
Taken from the NKJV.*



Down

1. Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be ____ (Luke 6:37).

3. If you forgive men their ____, your heavenly Father will also forgive you (Matthew 6:14).

6. Be kind to one another, ____, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you (Ephesians 4:32).

8. Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to ____ times seven" (Matthew 18:22).

9. On the contrary, you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be ____ up with too much sorrow (2 Corinthians 2:7).

Across

2. So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his ____, does not forgive his brother his trespasses (Matthew 18:35).

4. Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, ____ him; and if he repents, forgive him (Luke 17:3).

5. Whenever you stand ____, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses (Mark 11:25).

7. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all ____ (1 John 1:9).

10. In Him we have ____ through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace (Ephesians 1:7).

Let's Study...

Hosea



- **Hosea** is the 28th book of the Bible (and the Old Testament).
- **Author.** This book records the messages of the Jewish prophet Hosea, of the Northern Kingdom (Israel).
- **Time of writing.** Hosea ministered to God's people during the eighth century before Christ.
- **Historical context.** The nation of Israel had split into two separate nations two hundred years earlier. The Northern Kingdom (Israel) had completely forsaken God, and was now in its final dark period before being conquered by the Assyrian empire as divine punishment for its sin. Tragedy and bloodshed marked this time, as Israel persistently refused to turn from its idolatry and rebellion against God and heed the warnings of its prophets. The nation was on the brink of destruction.
- **Summary.** In order to graphically portray his love for his wayward people Israel, God asked the prophet Hosea to marry Gomer, a prostitute. Together, they had three children, each of whose names represented an aspect of God's stern warning message to the Jews.

Hosea's prophetic message weaves the story of his unfaithful wife Gomer with the story of the unfaithful Israelites. Like the Jews who rebelled against God and went after other gods, Gomer cheated on her faithful and loving husband. Just as Hosea still loved his wife and wanted her back, God still loved his people, longing to forgive their sins and receive them back into his protection again.

Hosea criticizes Israel for its immorality, forgetting God, injustice to the poor, and corruption. He also relays God's tender words of loyalty and faithfulness to Israel.

The book of Hosea is a call to repentance, showing God's love and forgiveness extended to his people. At the same time, it has an ur-

gent and ominous tone, because the door of opportunity for them to repent is closing soon.

- **Themes.** The theme of the book of Hosea is the never-ending love and forgiveness of God for his people, even when they repeatedly spurn Him and fall into sin. Judgment will certainly come for those who refuse to repent, but the door to God's heart is always open.
- **Book outline.**
 - I. Hosea's family, and the analogy with Israel (chapter 1:1–3:5).
 - II. God's indictment of Israel (chapter 4:1–7:16).
 - III. God's punishment for Israel (chapter 8:1–10:15).
 - IV. God's promise of a future restoration (chapter 11:1–14:9)
- **Key verse.** When the Lord first spoke to Hosea, He said to him: "Go and marry a promiscuous wife and have children of promiscuity, for the land is committing blatant acts of promiscuity by abandoning the Lord" (Hosea 1:2).
- **Key questions.**
 - » Why did God ask the prophet Hosea to marry a prostitute?
 - » How does God respond when His children are unfaithful to Him?
 - » What can a person expect if he continues to walk away from God?
 - » What are the idols or false gods that draw God's children away from Him?
 - » What must those who have fallen away do for God to receive them again? (Hosea 14:1-3)
 - » What will God do for those who return to Him? (Hosea 14:4-7)
- **Call to Action.** Hosea calls you to return to God now, before you experience complete destruction. God will restore you; after all, He considers you one of His family. Even if you have gone through the cycle of repentance and falling away before, it is not too late to return.

"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon" (Isaiah 55:7).

Come, and be forgiven.

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Science in Creation

Our Majestic Solar System

Andrew Zimmerman

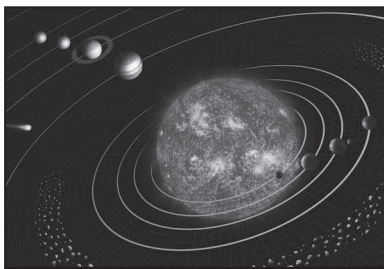
Among the billions of galaxies in the universe and the hundred-thousand galaxies of the Laniakea Supercluster, our home galaxy is the magnificent Milky Way. In astronomical terms, you could say the Milky Way is our neighborhood. Among the billions of stars within the Milky Way is the yellow dwarf star we know as the sun. Revolving around the sun are the planets, comets, asteroids, and other cosmic bits and pieces that make up our celestial backyard, the solar system.

Nearly ninety-nine percent of the solar system's mass is contained in the sun. This star is a nuclear fusion reactor, fueled by huge amounts of hydrogen transforming into helium. The

sun has the volume of about a million Earths.

The heat and light from the sun are critical for life on Earth. God gave the solar system just the right kind of star for us here on Earth—no superflares to wipe us out with radiation, no extreme ultraviolet radiation to harm us, but warm enough to give us plenty of light and heat.

Andrew has had an avid interest in science since he started studying it in his early years of school. Because of his interest in science and his belief in a literal six-day creation, he enjoys telling others about creation science. He lives in Central Pennsylvania with his wife and children.



*God gave the solar system
just the right kind of star
for us here on Earth.*

The smallest planet, and the one closest to the sun, is Mercury. Because its orbit is so close to the sun, it can be seen from Earth only at twilight, when its orbit is at the greatest *elongation*, or apparent distance from the sun. Mercury is very dense, possibly with an iron core. The part of its surface facing the sun is extremely hot—up to 800 degrees Fahrenheit—while the nighttime temperature can drop to hundreds of degrees below zero. Its orbit time around the sun is 88 earth days.

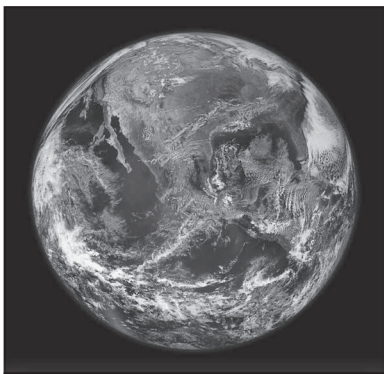
Even though it is so small, Mercury has a magnetic field, which is very nearly aligned with its axis of spin. The magnetic field strength was measured by the space probe Mariner 10 in the mid-1970s. When NASA's Messenger probe visited the planet again in 2008 to 2013,

its measurements showed that the magnetic field had weakened. This had been predicted by creationist D. Russell Humphreys. His model, based on a planetary age of about 6,000 years as described in the Bible, lines up well with the magnetic field strengths as measured by the space probes.

Venus, though it orbits farther from the sun than Mercury, is hotter. Its atmosphere acts as a greenhouse, trapping the sun's heat. A unique feature of Venus is that it spins backwards compared to most of the other planets. With an axis tilted only three degrees, Venus experiences no seasons.

Venus is about the size of Earth, and is the brightest planet as seen from Earth. Since it is closer to the sun than Earth, it's visible only in the morning and evening, and has been called both the "morning star" and "evening star." When observed with a telescope, it shows phases similar to the phases of the moon, but with longer cycles—the time from one "full" Venus to the next is about nineteen months.

Planet Earth, the one we call home, is exactly the right distance from the sun to provide us with a range of temperatures



Planet Earth is exactly the right distance from the Sun to provide us with a range of temperatures suitable for habitation.

suitable for habitation. This is only one of many indications that Earth is designed specifically for life. There is much water, covering three-fourths of the Earth's surface. The axis of spin has just the right tilt to give us changing seasons. The spin rate is perfect to give us the day and night cycle our bodies need. All these features allow Earth to support an abundance of plant and animal life, with many thousands of interdependent species.

Continuing outward from the sun, the next planet is Mars, known as the Red Planet. NASA has landed exploratory robots, called "rovers," on Mars, and these rovers have provided a

wealth of data, including excellent photos of the landscape.

Although Mars is more like Earth than any other planet, it is different in important ways. The atmosphere on Mars is very thin and composed mostly of carbon dioxide. Its distance from the sun keeps its temperatures quite chilly. Iron oxide on the Martian surface gives it a reddish appearance. Even the sky is red on Mars from dust particles in the atmosphere. However, the sky around the sun has a bluish cast. On Mars, the daytime sky is red, while sunsets are blue! A major point of interest for future Mars exploration is the appearance of salt water streaks during the summer.

The *asteroid belt* lies between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter. This region includes thousands of minor planets and innumerable particles. Since we covered asteroids in another article, we'll move right on to the next planet.

Jupiter, the largest planet in our solar system, is easy to spot in the night sky. Storms continually sweep its surface. Its bands of color, the Red Spot (a huge hurricane), and its plethora of moons makes it an unforgettable sight in a telescope. The length of a day on Jupiter is only ten hours.

Saturn, with its rings, is arguably the most majestic object in the solar system. It is the most distant of the five planets visible to the naked eye. Saturn is a “gas giant,” composed mostly of hydrogen and helium. It is large enough that ninety-five Earths could fit inside it.

Beyond Saturn’s orbit is Uranus, an oddity among the planets. The spin axis of Uranus is tilted on its side so that, instead of spinning like a top, it rolls like a ball. Furthermore, the magnetic field of Uranus is tilted and off-center from the axis of spin. Uranus has a ring system, but it is less visible than Saturn’s.

Because of Uranus’s odd orientation, each pole gets forty-two years of sunlight, then forty-two years of darkness. Imagine a winter that long! However, a small strip of the surface near the equator gets rapid day/night cycles of approximately seventeen hours,

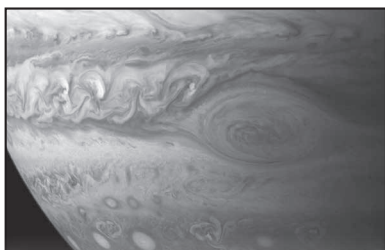
with the sun never rising far above the horizon.

Neptune is the eighth planet from the sun, and sunlight takes seven hours to reach it. Neptune is a stormy place, with wind speeds up to 1,300 MPH. The surface is changing constantly. Neptune’s magnetic field, like that of Uranus, is tilted and off-center.

*Neptune experiences
wind speeds up to 1,300 MPH.*

Uranus and Neptune are huge—fourteen to seventeen times the size of Earth. Their orbits are much farther away from the sun than that of the Earth. Secular scientists are unable to explain how these large planets could have formed so far away from the sun. The Genesis story of creation helps us explain puzzles like this. Since the planets were originally created by God, He could place them anywhere He pleased.

Of all the planets, Pluto is the farthest from the sun. But is it really a planet? When Pluto was discovered in 1930, it was considered the ninth planet. But in the 1990s, as more objects of about Pluto’s size were found nearby, astronomers



Jupiter's Spot



that gave us our first-ever good look at Pluto and collecting much other scientific data. Downloading all the data will take 16 months because of the huge distance and slow transfer rate.

There are additional minor planets beyond the orbit of Neptune. Along with Pluto, these are

began to question whether Pluto should be categorized as a planet. In 2005 the International Astronomical Union formally defined the term “planet,” and the definition excluded Pluto, which fails to meet the criteria of “clearing the neighborhood” of its orbit. Technically, Pluto is a *dwarf planet*, or minor planet.

The New Horizons spacecraft was launched in 2006, and a year later it swung by Jupiter, getting a speed boost from Jupiter’s gravity that flung New Horizons even farther out into the solar system. New Horizons flew by Pluto in July 2015, snapping hi-resolution photos

known as *Trans-Neptunian-Objects*. The New Horizons space probe is now targeting a tiny, dim, frozen world, known as 2014 MU69, for a flyby in January of 2019.

In the last fifty years we have learned a great deal about the solar system. Space probes have beamed back beautiful close-up pictures of all the planets and some of the minor planets. I feel privileged to live in a time when we are discovering the unexpected diversity and beauty in the planets and other objects of the solar system. This diversity and beauty points to a glorious and omnipotent Creator. ~



Free on the Inside

Prisoners encourage Prisoners

Why do we not progress
And enter our Savior's rest?
For Calvary has set us free
To worship and confess.

Why Do We Not Progress?

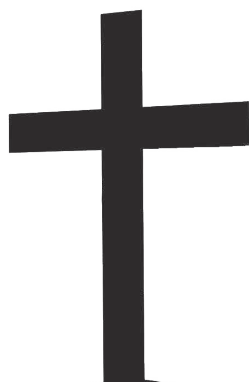
Why do we not progress
And offer our first and best?
For what's laid aside and sanctified
He will honor and will bless.

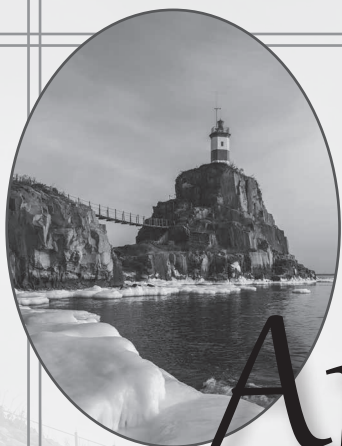
Why do we not progress
And enter our Savior's rest?
For He lived and died, was crucified
To be our righteousness.

The reason we do not progress
Is we think so much of "me";
We can't get over how great we are
And think we have no need.

When we see ourselves as we really are,
Humbly bow in our distress,
He lifts us up and helps us along;
Only then do we really progress!

Louis Peterson
FCF, Canon City, CO





Answers

Samuel Minich,
Tyger River Correctional, Enoree, SC

Staring out the barred windows of my prison cell,
Wishing to get out into heaven, but sentenced to this hell.

Wasting most of my life with the fruits of a crime,
Prayerfully holding to dreams through this bleak era of time.

Wondering if I'll survive once released from this jail,
Is there a future for me where I'm not destined to fail?

Struggling to remain sane and find some kind of norm,
Battling my angels and demons in this self-created storm.

Is there no light in this darkness called my life,
To help me hang on for myself and my wife?

Some say it's God, nature, or some omniscient power;
Opinions for answers change each minute of each hour.

But I've found truth in the One whose wisdom has sufficed;
He's my Savior, my Lord, and He's known as the Christ!

TESTIMONY OF STERLING JAMISON

Buckingham Correctional Center, Dillwyn, VA

When I was first incarcerated, I was only fourteen years old—a child in chains. One dark moment of poor judgment had placed my entire future in question. I had been indicted for first-degree murder, and I found myself facing up to fifty years in prison. I would be a senior citizen by the time I went home, if I survived that long.

Such prospects at a young age force one to age rapidly and to mature mentally and emotionally. Words like depressed, guilty, and self-loathing are not sufficient to describe what I went through. I was always dark and dreary on the inside.

I had grown up going to church, without understanding the significance of the sermons and hymns. To me, church was simply what the family did on Sundays. While I didn't understand or appreciate it then, looking back I can see the love and providence of God in my life. After I went to prison, God used my grandfather to give me a personal case study of the

unending, unconditional love of Christ.

I'd left my grandfather with every reason to despise and reject me, and I would have thought he was justified if he had done so. Instead, my grandfather drew nearer and dearer to me than ever before. He faithfully came to visit me when he could, and wrote me a letter literally every day, printing out a copy of a Garfield comic strip, folding it into a card, and writing a message to me inside.

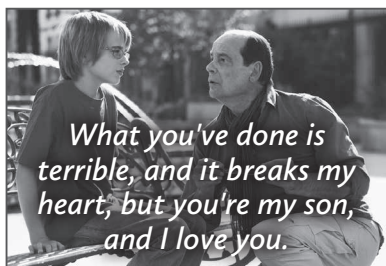
His affection confused me, then frustrated me. I knew I didn't deserve such marvelous love, so I thought perhaps he was doing it to spite me. I was



sure I deserved his hatred, and in a sick way I just wanted what I deserved. Anything seemed better than the silent reproach of his compassion.

One day I couldn't take it anymore, and I confronted him during one of his visits. I asked him how he could sit there and not hate me for what I'd done.

My grandfather gazed at me silently for a moment. I could clearly see the tears welling up in his eyes. When he finally spoke, his words were slow and deliberate. He said, "What you've done is terrible, and it breaks my heart, but that doesn't change the fact that you're my son (he raised me from infancy), and I love you. That will never change."



As shameful as it is to admit, his words were too much for me to accept at the time, and I ended the visit early, making him leave. Years later, I finally realized that my grandfather's words not only

expressed his heart, but also were inspired by the Holy Spirit to express God's heart. One day I read the Gospel story of the prodigal son, and God gave me understanding. God was telling me, covered in the filth and stench of sin, that He would call me His son if I let him. I wanted what I deserved: hatred, punishment, and death; but God wanted to show me mercy, love, forgiveness, and grace.

By the grace of God, I've gotten out of my own way. I stopped chasing self-forgiveness and gratefully received His sovereign pardon. Yielding to God and Christ as Lord is a progressive, life-long process, and with His help, I'm on my way. I know that now and forevermore He is my Savior.

God gave Abraham a son in his old age as a miraculous token, a pledge that He would fulfill His covenant promise. In a way, He's doing the same for me. God allowed me to serve a mere fifteen of the fifty years I was facing, and I'll be going home at the prime age of twenty-nine.

God is real, God is good, God is love. If He will move heaven and earth to save and bless this poor lowly sinner, imagine what He is willing to do for you if you trust Him. ~

PRISON NIGHTS

As I lay still in my prison bunk,
Am I the only one awake?
My heart is eager, oh dear Lord,
Until morning I can't wait.

I really need to talk to You
About something that's on my heart;
I have so much to say to You,
But, Lord, where do I start?

Well, let me first say thank you, Lord,
For the life you have given me;
And though I'm still in prison, Lord,
My eyes are clear to see.

This isn't the plan You had for me—
You had greater things in store;
But now I'm ready to follow You
And choose to sin no more.

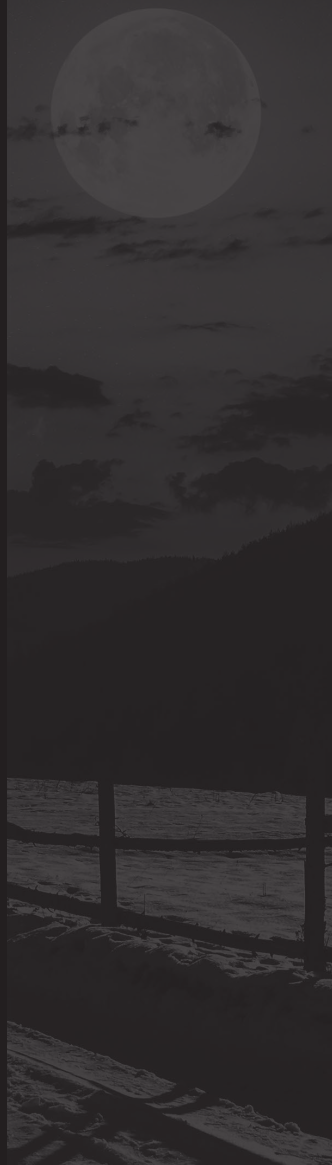
Sometimes you teach us lessons, Lord,
And they can be a little hard;
In order to see Your light, oh Lord,
We must first flee from the dark.

You spared my life so many times;
You saw the good in me;
And though I was a filthy rag,
Your blood has washed me clean.

Father, I come humbly before You;
I'm down on bended knees
Praying that You touch another life
Just as You have touched me.

For those who may not know You, Lord—
For those too blind to see;
May they see Your power and glory
Through the changes made in me.

Joy Horton
Julia Tutwiler Prison, Wetumpka, AL





Soldier for Christ

As a soldier for Christ I stand,
Battling a fight in my mind;
But clinging to the one good thing
That helps me to survive.

In faith I bow my knee
To the one who made it all;
The God of all creation—
My Father Who loves us all.

He brings me to my knees
And extends His hand of love;
Whenever I need correction,
He helps me see my wrongs.

He lifts me up in my spirit,
As He guides me every day;
He takes me through my trials,
Showing me the way.

Today I thank Him greatly
With appreciation in my heart
Because He's never left me lonely;
He's been here from the start.

Evelyn Lugo
Lowell Correctional Institution, Ocala, Florida

TESTIMONY OF STEVEN P. ARTHUR

USP Tucson, Tucson, AZ

I was raised in a household that did not discuss religion or God. I can only recall a few instances when I even attended any kind of church meeting or Bible study for children, with my neighbors' families. When I became an adult, with a family of my own, I never gave God or religious practices a second thought. Though I thanked God when my children were born healthy, my wife and I never discussed Him.

As the years went by, I became more and more cynical about life and human beings, and I tried to rely only on my own understanding and abilities. (Little did I know that all my intellect, strength, and understanding were gifts of God.) I thought

I had done well in my life. I was educated, had a great family, and was helping my fellow man in my job as a paramedic. However, none of it was built on a firm foundation with God. I became more and more lost, always looking for that state of happiness I felt I deserved.

I divorced my wife, turning my back on my healthy, beautiful family, and went on a search to fill my internal void with various forms of sinful behavior. Eventually, I just gave up on life altogether. Nothing mattered anymore.

In 2008, I was arrested and brought to the county jail. As usual, I went into overdrive, using all my abilities, intellect, education, and power to get my-



I have an unquenchable thirst to know God and His purpose for me.

self out of the mess I had fallen into. Nothing worked. Jesus was asking me, as He once asked Paul, “Why do you kick against the goads?” In all my fighting, I was only hurting myself. The void I felt was the lack of God in my life. Only through Him would I find peace and freedom.

I struggled against the truth for three more months, until one day, I literally fell to my knees and cried out to God to help me. I repented of my sins and admitted I could not truly live life without Him. I have

been growing in my relationship with Him ever since. I still feel like a novice in my walk; but I have an unquenchable thirst to know Him and His purpose for me, wherever that may lead. This is my testimony. It is probably much like many before me and many still to come; but I know that my purpose in God is unique, and I will serve Him as He leads me.

God bless you.

Because He lives,
Steven P. Arthur

It Is Finished

Inspired by John 19:30

No one but Jesus can know the cost
Of all He paid for on the cross,
For there are miracles before our eyes
We often fail to recognize.

God's silver needles and golden thread
Still mend a life as Scripture said,
For thirsty souls can still receive
That living water when they believe.

And broken bread sent from above
Is still being served with agape love,
To nourish a soul in such a way,
To raise the dead—resurrection day!



The Day My Savior Died

The skies were filled with the sound of thunder
The day my Savior died.
The veil in the temple was torn asunder
The day my Savior died.

The mountains shook and graves were opened
While lightning tore the sky.
The demons howled and the heavens scowled
The day my Savior died.

Yet He prayed for us as He was crucified
And His hands were nailed through.
“Forgive them father, they are as children
And know not what they do.”

A dying thief once believed
As he hung there at Jesus’ side
And went with Him to Paradise
The day my Savior died.

From upon the cross He lifted his voice,
And to the heavens He cried,
“Father, I commend my spirit to thee.”
And then my Savior died.

But the story doesn’t end there
As every Christian knows.
They sealed Him in a tomb,
But on the third day He arose.

From death He rose victorious,
And the grave has been denied.
But the world was changed forever
Because my Savior died.

Through His love we can know salvation—
Through His teachings, a better life.
We can conquer pain and illness;
We can laugh in the face of strife.

So let’s lift our voices in praise and worship;
Let His name be glorified.
While we were yet sinners we were bought
By His blood—the day my Savior died.

Bob Butler, Avenal State Prison, Avenal, CA



BIBLE LOGIC PUZZLE

Paul Sails to Rome

Introduction

The apostle Paul is now a prisoner, sailing from Judea to Rome, where he will stand trial before Nero, the Caesar to whom he has appealed his legal case. He is accompanied on the trip by four men, including Julius, the army officer in charge of Paul. At some point during the trip, Paul and each of the other men writes a letter to a person who is related to the writer in some way (a brother, cousin, father, friend, or son).

Each person receiving a letter lives in a different Roman province, and each province is adjacent to either one or two of the other provinces, with all five provinces appearing on Roman maps lined up in a relatively straight row running from west to east (left to right). Each letter is mailed from a different port as the party makes various stops on their way to Rome.

The question is: *Who wrote the letter to Brutus?*

From the information provided, determine the name and order of each province from west to east, who wrote each letter, who received each letter, the relationship of each letter recipient to the letter writer, and from which one of five ports each letter was mailed.

Clues

1. Gaius wrote a letter to a person in the province of Nutria.
2. Paul wrote a letter to a person named Ephras.
3. Aristarchus wrote a letter to his brother.
4. The province of Moratoria is adjacent to the left (or west side) of the province of Kratoria.
5. One of the men wrote a letter to his cousin in Moratoria.
6. The letter written to Demos was mailed from the port at Myra.
7. The letter sent to someone in the province of Lytura was mailed from the port at Fair Havens.

- 8. One man wrote a letter to his father who lives in the province in the middle.
- 9. Julius wrote a letter to a man in the province on the west (left).
- 10. The man who mailed his letter from the port at Sidon mailed it to someone in a province next to the province in which Claudus received a letter.
- 11. The province where Adrus lives is next to the province in which a man received a letter mailed from the port at Fair Havens.
- 12. The letter mailed from the port at Puteoli was sent to a friend.
- 13. Luke mailed his letter from the port at Syracuse.
- 14. Julius wrote to someone in a province that is next to the province of Opatria.
- 15. The letter that was mailed from the port at Sidon was sent to a man in a province next to the province where the son lives.

Chart for Working Puzzle

West to East	1	2	3	4	5
Province					
Writer					
Recipient					
Relationship					
Port					

Notes

Although many of the clues presented in this puzzle are fictional, some facts are biblically correct. To determine which is which, read the story of the apostle Paul’s arrest, trial, appeal to Caesar, and voyage to Rome in Acts 21–28. Although Gaius traveled with Paul on one or two missionary journeys, he is not recorded as having been on this voyage to Rome.

Taken from betterdaysarecoming.com.

There stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, saying, "Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you." Acts 27:23-24

The Fulfilled Wife

Denny Kenaston

*Who can find a virtuous wife?
For her worth is far above rubies.*

Proverbs 31:10

This verse is one of the most powerful in the Bible. Many treasures are hidden in it and the verses that follow. A war is raging for God and His Kingdom, for the souls of men, and for our families. In this war, there are winning tactics available to us, which Satan does not want us to find, because he knows if we find them, they will be his doom. The lifestyle of the powerful woman described in the opening scripture is one of those tactics. Though few realize it, her effect on the outcome of this war is staggering.

Satan knows the power of a godly woman, and he is determined to neutralize her.

As ever, he seduces her with the old question, “Has God really said...?” Many women

today, like Eve of old, have been convinced to take a bite of that fruit, with its hidden curse. Oh, the confusion that comes when we disregard God’s plan for us! When Christian women fall for Satan’s lies, their failure affects generations of children who follow them.

If we are serious about raising godly seed, we must grapple with the role of women in the home.

.....

Denny Kenaston and his wife, Jackie, were delivered by God from the drugs, drunkenness, and immorality of the 1970’s hippie culture. From that time until his death in 2012, Denny devoted much of his energy to igniting a vision for godly homes based on Christ-centered, Biblical principles. This is a selection from his book, *The Pursuit of Godly Seed*, where he shares what he learned during many years of serving as pastor and raising a godly family.

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For the next few chapters, I want to address the sisters concerning God's beautiful plan for a Christian wife. I want to raise the calling of women back up to the high, high place God intended it to occupy. The Scriptures speak so clearly and so often about this powerful woman that I feel a little like Amos the prophet, who said, "The Lord God has spoken! Who can but prophesy?" (Amos 3:8b).

The "Christian world" is changing so fast these days that I will probably seem like an alien to some for the things I'm about to say. Against the hidden forces working to bury God's glorious vision of a Christian woman forever, I plan to dig it back up, clean the dirt off it, and put it on display for all to see again.

Each time I have an opportunity to address sisters directly, a special awe and burden comes over me. It is the same whether I speak or write. I believe this is because you are very special to God. I believe it is because you are a powerful force in this holy war, and God is calling to you.

I want to inspire you and activate you in such a way that you will never again feel as though you are "just a woman." You are very important to God. He has a special work for you to do, and



I want to raise the calling of women back to the high place God intended it to occupy.

He has provided the methods for you to succeed in that work. It is true that in this life most of you will not stand in prominent places. However, eternity will reveal the power of the role God has assigned to the Christian woman.

A Paradox

In considering the influence and role of a godly woman, we must recognize from the start that we are dealing with one of the paradoxes in the Bible. You know many of these paradoxes: the way up is down; give away and you will receive; lose your life and you will find it. A paradox challenges our logic; but remember, God's ways and man's ways are very different.

Consider the New Testament path to greatness taught by Jesus; greatness comes, He said, as we live the life of a servant. Jesus led the way down this path by washing the feet of his disciples. Does this principle carry over into the life of a wife and mother? I think it does. God has called you women to a life of greatness, but this life is a paradox. Though the role of a Christian woman is often supportive, hidden, and unknown to others, her power and influence often exceed those of a man in public ministry.



**Greatness comes
as we live
the life of a servant.**

Consider the angels—their lives and work are hidden. Most of the time, people who are helped by angels don't even know it. God gets all the glory

from these magnificent heavenly creatures.

Think about this scenario—a car accident is about to happen. Invisible angels are on the scene. They grab the steering wheel and guide the car to safety. When the car stops, and we know we have been spared, we bow our heads and thank God for His care and protection. We don't say a word to the angel—God gets all the glory. Oh, purify our motives, dear Lord, and give us eternal eyes to serve You as selflessly as the angels do.

There is something beautiful hidden in this picture for you sisters. You see, your ministry is much like that of the angels. Meditate on this in your daily life, and I think you will discover some beautiful insights.

Think about the life of Joshua. For forty-two years, he served Moses faithfully. Until the death of Moses, Joshua is hardly mentioned. But do you think Moses could have accomplished as much as he did for God if he hadn't had a Joshua to serve and support him?

Earlier I mentioned the raging spiritual war around us. Every military leader knows that without a solid support unit working behind the scenes, he will not be

able to win the war. Without the support unit, there's no point in going out and fighting. This is a good picture of the role you sisters play.

My father was a medic during World War II. What if he had said, "I won't do that job." How would the battle have gone without a medic to care for the wounded? Is the soldier on the front lines more important than the medic? Of course not—we all know this, but somehow, when it comes to the roles of husband and wife, father and mother, we often forget this principle.

Our God, the Creator, has made this world and given it order according to His wisdom. He has disguised greatness as a servant and promised exaltation on the path of humility. God is calling the Christian woman to "lose her life" by focusing on the supportive roles in His order.

God's Ordained Purpose for Woman

¹⁰Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies.

¹¹The heart of her husband safely trusts her; so he will have no lack of gain. ¹²She does him good and not evil all the days of her life."

Proverbs 31:10–12



**God has promised
exaltation on the path
of humility.**

"Who can find a virtuous wife?" This is given not only as a question, but also as a call, as if to say, "Where are they?" Where do you find women willing to work in the shadows, praying for, supporting, blessing, and honoring their husbands? If you have the desire to become such a woman, I honor you. You have a high calling and a special place in God's order.

The passage at the beginning of this section pictures a woman whose life is all wrapped up in supporting her husband. His heart safely trusts in her, and because of her he has no worries. He has full confidence in her, and he knows she will not leave him. He knows she will be his loving, supportive wife and the mother to their children

“all the days of her life.” Her heart’s desire is to live for him and please him. “She will do him good, and not evil.” How long? In today’s expression, “till death do us part.”

This woman can be trusted with the family’s money. Her husband knows what her responses will be in the thick and thin of life. He knows she will guide the home according to his heart when he is away. Such a woman is a priceless jewel, a crown to any husband. A man with a wife like this can do anything. She is a hidden source of strength whose pres-

ence charges his mental and emotional batteries.

Dear sisters, this is a foundation stone that must be laid in every godly home. This is God’s revealed purpose for a married woman. You will see the godly children you long for only as you nestle down in this beautiful purpose for which you were made.

Woman: Taken Out of Man

Sisters, look at what God says about your creation in Genesis 2:18, 21–23.

“¹⁸And the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.’ ...²¹And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place.²²Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man.²³And Adam said: ‘This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.’”



**The woman of
Proverbs 31
is a priceless jewel, a
crown to her husband.**

These verses are very revealing if you believe them, as I do. This is the recorded account of the naming of woman. Adam gave you your name. His name

(as recorded in Hebrew) was “lysh” (man), and he named his wife “Ishshah” (woman) “because she was taken out of man.”

Part of meditating on Scripture is to picture what is being said. Let us picture these verses for a few moments. There are some awesome scenes before us here. God, looking over His creation and observing Adam, begins speaking to Himself: “It is not good that man should be alone. I will make him a helper comparable to him.”

Then it seems as though the scene shifts. All the animals are brought before Adam, and he gives them their names. Adam watches them pass—male, female, male, female. They come two by two. When Adam finishes reviewing the animals, he has found no compatible female. It seems God is preparing Adam for the gift he is about to receive.

God puts Adam to sleep and performs the first surgery. He removes a rib from Adam’s side and forms a female, Adam’s counterpart. He presents the newly-created woman to Adam.

Imagine how Adam must have felt that day! Here was a woman, like him, yet not like him, made from his own body and brought to him as a gift from God. How delighted he must

have been to awaken to such a revelation!

Now consider how Eve must have felt. This thought, too, is amazing. She did not exist, and then suddenly, she found herself existing. There she was, standing before Adam and God. Maybe her face held the unspoken question, “Why am I here?”

Perhaps God explained to her, “This man is Adam. He needed you, so I made you.” Imagine how that must have settled down over her heart! Do you think she had any problem finding her role before the Fall? She always knew, “I am here because of Adam!” Her role as a helper was clear. Her honored place within his authority was clear. How beautiful!

Isn’t this the true picture of marriage? Our marriages would be greatly enhanced if we would all take those two pictures and meditate deeply on them. God’s intention is for the man to say, “What a precious gift God has given me!” while the woman says, “God has made me for this man; what a joy to be his helper!” May each of you sisters who are married experience the same revelation as Eve did.

This teaching is not just an archaic idea extracted from Genesis. You will find it revealed

in the New Testament as well. God's ideal for marriage has not changed in six thousand years.

Wives, do not dismiss this teaching too quickly. Think about it. Put yourself in Eve's place for awhile. Think of how she felt and feel the same things. God wants you to drink deeply from this revelation of His purpose for creating you. As this revelation sinks into your heart, it can transform your life and your home. Your life will explode with meaning as this revelation becomes real to you.

The women who have given themselves to God's plan for marriage are the happiest, most fulfilled wives on earth.

Prayer

Dear Lord Jesus, I pray for the dear sisters who have read this chapter. Speak deeply to each of them. The devil has lied to many wives and blinded them to the greatest purpose of their lives. Open their eyes to see the power and beauty hidden in that great purpose. In Jesus' name. Amen.



Send Your Work to Loaves & Fishes!

Do you have a testimony, poem, or other inspirational writing to share with the rest of our readers? To improve your chances of being published in *Loaves & Fishes*, please keep the following in mind:

- **If your poetry uses rhyme and rhythm, the rhyme and rhythm should be consistent throughout the poem.**
- **The message of the writing should be clear and focused, not rambling from subject to subject.**
- **The writing should be consistent with the truth of the Bible.**
- **If you write your Christian testimony, it should not focus on your sinful past or your attempts at self-improvement, but on God's redemptive work in your life.**

We receive far more submissions than we can use. Thoughtful attention to these guidelines will increase your chances of having your work published.

SAVED FROM A LIFE OF HELL

Testimony of Pastor Tracy Gantt

I was brought up in the church. I had cool friends and was doing well in school and sports. The best part of life was weekends, when I traveled with my dad to places all over South Carolina. Life was great.

Then, without notice, my world fell apart in front of my eyes. One day after I came home from school, my mom sat me down and told me my dad passed away. Suddenly nothing made sense anymore. I was lost. Where was God? Why had this happened to me?

I did not need people to cry over me—I needed answers! Most of all, with my father gone, I needed someone to show me

how to become a man. I am thankful to God for the way He used my experiences to make me the person He wants me to be, but in the back of my mind I will always wonder what would have happened if a pastor had taken me under his wing instead of a drug dealer.

My mom worked all the time, leaving me with lots of time to think and explore the world. Looking for answers, I ran into a man who wore nice clothes, drove cool cars and had plenty of money. That wasn't what caught my attention, however—what impressed me most was the power and respect he had. I was hooked. How could I enjoy that lifestyle and the power and respect it seemed to bring? The answer: sell drugs.

The Bible warns us about this pitfall in Hebrews 13:5: "Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'"

Before I knew it, I was dressing nicely and had a pocketful



I needed someone to show me how to become a man.

of money, but I still felt empty inside. Trying to fill that emptiness, I started doing drugs and alcohol myself.

This is when sin really sank into my heart. Day by day it got worse. The more I thought about my dad, the more I drank. The more I drank, the more I forgot about God. Sin doesn't just come into your life and sit still—it comes into your life and destroys it.

Immersed in the life of a gang, I thought I was untouchable, and I did not mind getting in fights or shootouts with rival gang members. One night, my homeboys came upon a rival gang and a fight broke out. In the fighting, I lost one of the gold caps I was wearing over my teeth at the time.

Returning to the spot to look for the missing cap, I saw a beautiful young lady walking down the street. I still remember exactly what she was wearing. We exchanged a few words, then phone numbers, and began dating. Years passed and things began to get serious between us, even while I still lived the street life of drugs and crime.

At last I asked my girlfriend to marry me, and she gladly accepted. My fiancée and I moved in together at a new place forty

minutes away. I thought my life would change if I got away from the things that were making me sin. I was wrong; I still had myself.

My fiancée and I prepared for our wedding and married on February 14, 1999. I was twenty-two and my wife was eighteen. I had a new wife and a new job, and at first I did well. But my new job led to meeting new friends, and the sin began anew. I began selling and doing drugs again, and drinking. I neglected my home and my wife. I was hardly ever home. When I did come home, I was so drunk I could barely make it into the house.

During this time I was robbed and pistol whipped, leaving me with a broken jaw. My mouth was wired shut for six weeks. I took my anger out on my wife, which led to fights, then to criminal charges. DUIs were added to my record as well. I knew my wife couldn't put up with my street life forever, and I was right. Several years after we got married, my wife finally left me. Thinking I had nothing to lose now, I lived even more recklessly.

Once I pulled a gun on a guy, put the pistol to his head, and pulled the trigger. I know God

was watching over him and me that day, because the gun jammed and didn't go off. But for God, that man would be dead today, and I would still be in prison on murder charges.

I was a wanted man across the state, so I decided to live on the run. After years of this, I began to grow tired, physically and mentally. I was homeless and destitute, running not only from the law, but also from rival gang members and guys I had robbed. I started wondering when my homeboys would turn me in.

I decided to turn for help to my sister, a county police officer. Eventually, however, she was forced to choose between arresting me or losing her job if anyone found out she had failed to. I left, running again.

As time went by, I grew even more tired of my life. Then the

thought of suicide popped into my head. I would be better off just ending my life. I picked up my pistol, put the gun to my head and pulled the trigger. The gun jammed again! I tried to take my life by another means, but that failed too.

I remember lying and looking up at the stars in the sky. I heard God saying, "My child, I know you're tired; now it's time for you to find rest in me." Psalm 62:5-8 says, "⁵My soul, wait silently for God alone, for my expectation is from Him. ⁶He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defense; I shall not be moved. ⁷In God is my salvation and my glory; the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God. ⁸Trust in Him at all times, you people; pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us." It was hard, but I finally decided to find rest in Him.

After that night, I couldn't get drunk or high anymore. But I knew there was one more very hard step I had to take so my new life in God could begin. After some deep conversations with God, I turned myself in to the law. Since I turned myself in, the judge dropped half my charges. God was showing me favor already! He was showing me that I could trust Him. The judge gave



I heard God saying,
"My child, it's time for you
to find rest in me."



I couldn't carry my pistol.
I didn't have my homeboys
to protect me.
All I had was God!

me a two-year prison sentence with five years of probation.

I did my time in one of the roughest prisons in my area. Now I couldn't carry my pistol, and I didn't have my homeboys to protect me. All I had was God! I went to Christian classes, Bible study, and church.

Once I got upset because it seemed like everybody in my area got letters or stayed in contact with their homeboys and family. Then I heard God say, "When you were born, I was there. When your dad died, I was there. When you were in those streets, I was there protecting you. While you're here in prison, I'll be here." In spite of my addictions and crimes, in spite of the way I had blamed Him for all the bad things that happened to me, God kept telling me He would never leave me nor forsake me.

If you feel the way I did, know that God is with you. Trust Him. Seek Him whenever you're in trouble or tired. God is not like humans; He will not let you down.

God told me to prepare myself, because He was going to use me to reach people who were just like I used to be. I made a promise to God that if He protected me while I was in prison, I would do His will when I got home.

Once released from prison, I enrolled in a Christian Bible-based shelter. My wife and I had been separated for eight years. I tried my best to find her, with no luck. Finally, I turned it over to God. Then one day, out of nowhere, I received a phone call at the shelter. It was my sister telling me my wife was trying to reach me. Praise God!

God has really been good to me. My wife and I have now been reconciled for six years, and we have founded a ministry that helps people battling with the same problems we've been through. We own a ministry-based thrift store. I am the pastor of a church, and I have a Christian show that airs on a local TV station. If God can save someone like me from a life of hell, He can save anyone. ~

The Woodcutter's Wisdom

by Max Lucado

Once there was an old man who lived in a tiny village. Although poor, he was envied by all, for he owned a beautiful white horse. Even the king coveted his treasure. A horse like this had never been seen before—such was its splendor, its majesty, its strength.

People offered fabulous prices for the steed, but the old man always refused. “This horse is not a horse to me,” he would tell them. “It is a person. How could you sell a person? He is a friend, not a possession. How could you sell a friend?” The man was poor and the temptation was great. But he never sold the horse.

One morning he found that the horse was not in the stable. All the village came to see him. “You old fool,” they scoffed, “we told you that someone would steal your horse. We warned you that you would be robbed. You are so poor. How could you ever hope to protect such a valuable animal? It would have been better to have sold him. You could have gotten whatever price you

wanted. No amount would have been too high. Now the horse is gone, and you’ve been cursed with misfortune.”

The old man responded, “Don’t speak too quickly. Say only that the horse is not in the stable. That is all we know; the rest is judgment. If I’ve been cursed or not, how can you know? How can you judge?”



*The people of the village
thought the old man
was crazy.*

The people contested, “Don’t make us out to be fools! We may not be philosophers, but great philosophy is not needed. The simple fact that your horse is gone is a curse.”

The old man spoke again. “All I know is that the stable is empty, and the horse is gone. The rest I don’t know. Whether it be a curse or a blessing, I can’t say. All we can see is a fragment. Who can say what will come next?”

The people of the village laughed. They thought that the man was crazy. They had always thought he was fool; if he wasn’t, he would have sold the horse and lived off the money. But instead, he was a poor woodcutter, an old man still cutting firewood and dragging it out of the forest and selling it. He lived hand to

mouth in the misery of poverty. Now he had proven that he was, indeed, a fool.

After fifteen days, the horse returned. He hadn’t been stolen; he had run away into the forest. Not only had he returned, he had brought a dozen wild horses with him. Once again the village people gathered around the woodcutter and spoke. “Old man, you were right and we were wrong. What we thought was a curse was a blessing. Please forgive us.”

The man responded, “Once again, you go too far. Say only that the horse is back. State only that a dozen horses returned with him, but don’t judge. How do you know if this is a blessing or not? You see only a fragment. Unless you know the whole story, how can you judge? You read only one page of a book. Can you judge the whole book? You read only one word of a phrase. Can you understand the entire phrase?

“Life is so vast, yet you judge all of life with one page or one word. All you have is a fragment! Don’t say that this is a blessing. No one knows. I am content with what I know. I am not perturbed by what I don’t.”

“Maybe the old man is right,” they said to one another. So they said little. But down deep, they



*You see only a fragment.
Unless you know
the whole story,
how can you judge?*

knew he was wrong. They knew it was a blessing. Twelve wild horses had returned with one horse. With a little bit of work, the animals could be broken and trained and sold for much money.

The old man had a son, an only son. The young man began to break the wild horses. After a few days, he fell from one of the horses and broke both legs. Once again the villagers gathered around the old man and cast their judgments.

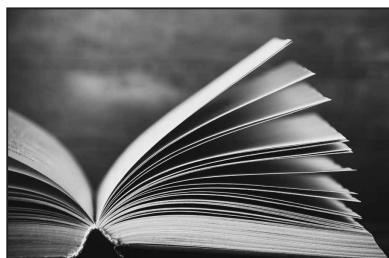
"You were right," they said. "You proved you were right. The dozen horses were not a blessing. They were a curse. Your only son has broken his legs, and now in your old age you have no one to help you. Now you are poorer than ever."

The old man spoke again. "You people are obsessed with judging. Don't go so far. Say only that my son broke his legs. Who knows if it is a blessing or a curse? No one knows. We only have a fragment. Life comes in fragments."

It so happened that a few weeks later the country engaged in war against a neighboring country. All the young men of the village were required to join the army. Only the son of the old man was excluded, because he was injured. Once again the

people gathered around the old man, crying and screaming because their sons had been taken. There was little chance that they would return. The enemy was strong, and the war would be a losing struggle. They would never see their sons again.

"You were right, old man," they wept. "God knows you were right. This proves it. Your son's accident was a blessing. His legs may be broken, but at least he is with you. Our sons are gone forever."



Life's mishaps and horrors are only a page out of a grand book.

The old man spoke again. "It is impossible to talk with you. You always draw conclusions. No one knows. Say only this: Your sons had to go to war, and mine did not. No one knows if it is a blessing or a curse. No one is wise enough to know. Only God knows."

The old man was right. We only have a fragment. Life's

mishaps and horrors are only a page out of a grand book. We must be slow about drawing conclusions. We must reserve judgment on life's storms until we know the whole story.

I don't know where the woodcutter learned his patience. Perhaps from another wood-

cutter in Galilee. For it was the Carpenter who said it best:

"Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself" (Matthew 6:34).

He should know. He is the author of our story. And he has already written the final chapter. ~

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See Somewhere in Matthew 6

Unscramble the hidden verse (NKJV).

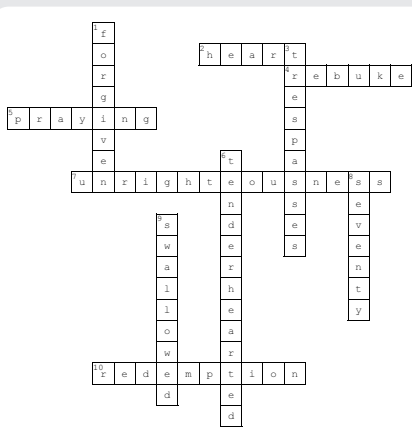
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Reference: _____

Answer Keys

Answer key to *Forgiveness* crossword puzzle on page 15 (right).

Answer to logic puzzle on pages 32-33 is Luke.



Love

Lord, help us to submit to you,
To follow and obey,
Instead of finding loopholes
To defend our sinful ways!

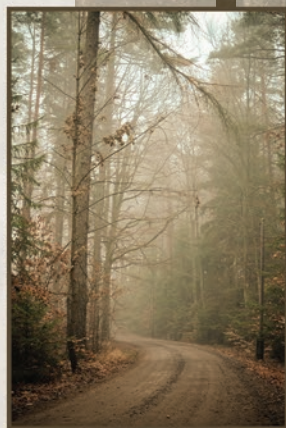
Christ takes each sin, each pain, each loss
And transforms our brokenness and shame
By the power of His blood,
So that our lives exalt His name!

In this world of sin and trouble
Where so many ills are known,
If I shun the ways of evil,
I'm kept by Him alone.

The godless and sinful are everywhere
In need of love and care;
But they will always know hopeless despair
Unless God's love with them we share!

You may be tempted to debate
To change another's point of view,
But nothing speaks more powerfully
Than Christ's cleansing work in you!

Dale Lee Smith
Ouachita River Unit, Malvern, AR



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**There is one God and one Mediator
between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus,
who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be
testified in due time." 1 Timothy 2:5, 6**