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AS PURE GOLD

The making of a better you

YOU CAN OVER- COME YOUR PAST

It's not as hard as you think!

WHY FEAR THE FUTURE?

God cares for His own

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VOL 4, ISSUE 6

June 2003

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www.auroraproduction.com

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Personally speaking

"Contentment isn't getting what you want, but wanting what you've got," says David Ring, a motivational speaker who talks to more than 200 audiences and 100,000 people each year. What makes the quote and his busy schedule truly remarkable is the fact that David Ring has had cerebral palsy since birth. He can hardly walk. He can hardly talk. Yet he speaks with such positiveness, humor ("God never says 'Oops!'"), and spiritual depth that audiences flock to hear him and go away changed.

A friend recently gave me a recording of one of David Ring's talks and, like hundreds of thousands of others, I was convicted by his challenge: "I've got cerebral palsy. What's *your* problem?" His message is simple and clear. Refuse to give in to despair or self-pity. Don't gripe or become bitter over bad things that happen, but embrace life, trust that God knows what He's doing, and let Him get on with it.

"If you don't like the way I am," Ring tells his audiences, "hang in there. I'm still in the oven. God's still working on me, and when God gets finished cooking me, He's going to pull me out of the oven and say, 'Well done, good and faithful servant!'" —a pun on Matthew 25:21.

Another spiritual principle that is borne out in Ring's life is that if we can be genuinely thankful for even the seemingly bad things, He will bless us with more good things. Ring is not only successful and in high demand as a motivational speaker (his 200 audiences per year are chosen from over 700 invitations), but he is happily married and the father of four beautiful, perfectly healthy children.

David Ring leads a truly victorious life, and so can you. As he says, "Don't whine, but shine!"

Keith Phillips

For the *Activated* Family

As pure GOLD



The
making of a
better
you

NOTHING “BAD” HAPPENS to a Christian without some good reason. “All things work together for good to those who love God” (Romans 8:28). Don’t worry about the times of testing and weakness, thinking that you must have done something terribly wrong. What you feel is the Lord’s tender hand upon you, making you into the person He knows you can be. He’s not punishing you, He’s testing and refining you and making you even more beautiful in spirit. He’s making your inner beauty shine for all to see.

As hard as it is, these breakings and remakings are inevitable. He must make you weak. He must make you humble. He must make you desperate for Him and His help. But in this time of weakness, as you acknowledge your dependence on Him, He will come to your rescue, give you strength of

spirit, and shape your character in ways that would otherwise not be possible.

You’re in His hands and He will perfect that which concerns you (Psalm 138:8). So don’t be angry or bitter at the Lord for these testings, which are only for a time. You will rejoice and be grateful when you look back and see how this was necessary for Him to accomplish His good purpose.

—DAVID BRANDT BERG



IN ANCIENT TIMES, goldsmiths had a simple but sure method to determine when the refining process had purged away all the base metals and other extraneous matter from the gold ore. When a goldsmith could see his face reflected in the molten metal in his cupel, he knew that the refining fire had worked its purifying purpose; only pure gold remained.

Job said, “When God has tested me, I shall come forth as gold” (Job 23:10).

King Solomon wrote, “The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, but the Lord tests the hearts” (Proverbs 17:3).

The apostle Peter wrote, “Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you” (1 Peter 4:12).

When God sees the image of His Son reflected in our lives, He knows that His purifying fires have achieved their purpose.



No matter what happens to those called “His own,” Events that are awful or grand, Every trial of your life He sends from His Throne; Things just don’t happen; they’re planned.

—ALICE REYNOLDS FLOWER

The more we get immersed in Jesus and His Word and learn to do things His way, the more old things will pass away and the more things will become new.

you can overcome your past

BY MARIA FONTAINE



MOST OF THE UNPLEASANT THINGS that happen to us are like bruises or minor scrapes to our spirits, but at some time or another most of us experience a deep wound or serious injury to our spirit. We can't always keep ourselves from being hurt.

Like minor injuries to our bodies that leave a bruise but only hurt for a short while, most of our daily annoyances may temporarily make us “black” with negative thinking or “blue” with discouragement but are usually forgotten fairly quickly. We know they will eventually heal.

When we suffer a serious physical injury, we go immediately to a physician who can properly tend to it. We have the wound cleansed and properly bandaged so that it's protected, and sometimes need to have

it checked regularly to make sure it's healing properly. Even then, it may take some time to heal.

This is an illustration of how our spiritual wounds can heal with faith, prayer, and proper care. But if we don't allow them to be cleansed and healed in the proper way, if we try to hide our wounds or don't cooperate with those who can and want to help us, our wounds can become infected with bitterness and resentment that can spread and poison the whole body. If left untended, they can affect our spiritual life, our happiness, our faith, and our general well-being.

Bitterness doesn't usually develop immediately; it festers and grows over time, like an infection in a wound. Bitterness is like the Devil's infectious mess, festering and silently

destroying healthy areas it comes in contact with if it's not purged from the body. Therefore, just as we should immediately pay careful attention to a serious physical injury, we should immediately take care of serious spiritual wounds.

The Bible teaches that we should empty our hearts of things in the past or the present that bother us: "Let us search out and examine our ways" (Lamentations 3:40). "Watch out that no bitterness takes root among you, for as it springs up it causes deep trouble, hurting many in their spiritual lives" (Hebrews 12:15 TLB).

The Bible encourages us to seek help and support from those more mature in faith, and to confess our faults one to another and pray one for another (James 5:14,16). When it comes to getting rid of bitterness and leaving behind the negative things that are in your past, it greatly helps to get help from someone who is strong in faith and God's Word. Once you've gotten the problem out in the open and received prayer and counsel based on God's Word, you can much more easily forgive, forget, and move on.

You can overcome your past! You can experience a real freedom from the hurts and negative feelings that weigh you down. Past circumstances do not have to dictate your present outlook, because God has made a way for you to overcome the negative in your life. In fact, He intends for you to!

The Bible says, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). In other words, the more we get immersed in Jesus and His Word and learn to do things His way, the more old things will pass away

and the more things will become new. It doesn't happen all at once, but as we put our will on His side, more and more things from the past that used to plague us become less painful and less important.

It's a popular trend in the world today for people to blame all their present problems on others or events from their past—their parents, their siblings, their peers, their environment, their heredity—rather than on the personal choices they have made. A lot of people buy into this way of thinking because it is decidedly easier on their pride than accepting that they are wrong in being bitter against someone or something.

However, the Christian life is all about overcoming obstacles, rising above our circumstances, and not letting things get us down. It's about making stepping stones out of stumbling blocks. It's about being healed in body and mind through faith, becoming whole through the Lord's love, and becoming free from the bondage of bitterness and resentment through God's Word. It's about letting Jesus resolve and override problems carried over from the past by His renewing and transforming of our mind (Romans 12:2).

Some of our problems may indeed be wholly or partly the result of things that happened in our childhood or adult past. We are all products of our environment to some extent, and as such have been influenced positively in some respects and negatively in others. No one in this world has had completely positive experiences; everyone has had at least some difficulties and hurts caused by past experiences, some of which have been long lasting. But the important thing for you to remember is that you can ask the Lord for

help in overcoming any problems caused by past hurts. These things do not have to continue to control you or even influence you emotionally, mentally, or spiritually.

The Lord and His Word put the responsibility on each of us for how we react to whatever situations we find ourselves in. God has given each person a free will and free choice, and is constantly asking us to make the right decisions and to take the right steps. When we do, He is right there to see us through.

The fact that we can have some measure of control over the way we are is obvious when we look at different individuals who have experienced some big setbacks in life, perhaps even much greater than our own. Some react in one way and some in another, and as a result, turn out to be very different types of people leading very different lives. Despite their past, some are happy, healthy, successful and well adjusted, while others are just the opposite—depressed, unhappy, discontented, or disturbed.

Those who have experienced difficulties in life and have overcome them are often able to be a great influence in helping many others have the courage and faith to overcome their difficulties. Their examples are proof to those who see and hear of their struggles and victories that it is possible to overcome great difficulties in life and rise above seemingly impossible situations, to triumph in the face of despair.

Many of these “problems” in your life should be looked at as “growing pains.” Sadly, many people often don’t understand them as such, but instead blame God for things that seem to have gone wrong. Somehow, they think God’s not responsible for

all the good in their life; He’s only responsible for the bad. Their relationship with the Lord is completely contrary to how it should be: They don’t give Him praise and credit for the good times, but they complain and blame Him in bad times. But the Bible says, “In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

When God allows us to suffer hurts or trials or losses, it’s always for an important purpose. He also very carefully measures out our burdens so they are never too much for us to bear—only enough to bring out the sweetness and valuable changes and lessons in our lives.

According to God’s Word, all trials are designed to strengthen us (1 Peter 4:12–13; 5:10). Think about it. If your entire life were problem-free, you might become complacent and never build the strength of character that comes from fighting to overcome problems. And you probably wouldn’t be able to relate to and have compassion on others who have gone through the same thing (2 Corinthians 1:4).

You might miss the beautiful miracle that takes place when you discover that you really need Jesus in your life. You might never learn that you can always find strength in Him when you have no place else to turn. You might never experience the thrill of having God come through for you and supply the answers you need to carry on.

God wants “your joy to be full” (John 15:11), and He knows that the secret to that joy lies in forgiving those who have wronged you, letting go of bitterness and resentment, and forgetting the past. It is possible for you to overcome! ◇

***According
to God’s
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The promise of Romans 8:28

A message of encouragement from Jesus

“WE KNOW THAT ALL THINGS work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28). This is My promise to you: No matter what happens in your life, I can and will turn all things for your good, as much as you let Me.

I wish everyone could learn to live in love, but because people are not perfect and they often make selfish choices, I gave that promise as a safeguard to My children who love Me. In this world there will be injustice and selfishness and difficulties and pain, but I have the power to overrule all of that for your sakes. No matter what the choices of those around you, I am able to give you what’s best for you.

Sometimes what I know is best is different than what you think of as “best.” Sometimes My best means more brokenness, more compassion, more understanding of others, more humility. All of these qualities are part of My best in your life.

Of course, I’m not able to turn these bad situations for your good or to bless

and reward you in other ways unless you let Me work in your life. But the beauty of this promise is that the moment you fulfill the conditions—loving Me and yielding to Me—I begin to work on your behalf. I am able to bring good out of all that has happened before and all that happens today and all that will happen in the future, as long as you continue to fulfill the conditions of the promise. No matter what mess you find yourself in, no matter what wrongs you’ve committed or what wrongs have been committed against you, when you’re loving Me and yielded to My will, My purpose in your life, I am able to turn *all* things for your good.

The only conditions to this promise are right there in the promise: “to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.” What does it mean to be called according to God’s purpose?—It means simply being in His will, fulfilling His purpose for you. No matter what the circumstance, as you fulfill My Father’s purpose for you, I will turn all things—even seemingly bad, difficult, wrongful circumstances—for your good. This is My promise to you, and it will never fail! ◇

GIVE IT

ALL



TO JESUS

*The Lord
understands
every
situation
and the
heart of
every man.*

FORGIVING AND FORGETTING is one of the most difficult things for a person to do. But whenever we give our hurts to the Lord and tell Him, “Jesus, take this. I don’t want it anymore. I’m tired of it,” He covers the wounds and hurts and pain with His love and makes us whole again.

The Lord understands every situation and the heart of every man. We may never understand why someone acted a certain way or why they did whatever it was they did to us, but it’s not a matter of understanding, it’s a matter of forgiving. Yet forgiving is often difficult; it doesn’t come naturally. That’s why the Lord says we need His help to do it. We get the love and grace to forgive from Him.

Bad things happen to everyone. It’s how we handle troubles, problems, hurts, and disappointments that counts. When we allow ourselves to become resentful over things that hurt us, resentment will lead to bitterness. And bitterness, if it is allowed to follow its course, will make us weaker and weaker in spirit. With time, the heart and mind will be more receptive to other negative thoughts about other situations and other people. Bitterness is like a plow that prepares the heart for the seeds of dissatisfaction and discouragement. If you don’t let it all go and give it to the Lord, it will eventually destroy you and probably do a lot of damage to others in the process.

Nothing can change the fact that those bad things happened, but the effect that they have on you today can be changed.

When you have bitterness or resentment in your heart, you often don't see things clearly. Even special little things, little rewards of the Lord's love, don't mean as much because bitterness blinds you to the good. But once you give that to the Lord, you can see things better and feel and experience the Lord's love a lot more.

Nothing can change the fact that those bad things happened, but the effect that they have on you today can be changed. They can be buried, they can be left behind, they can be shed, and victory can come out of them. Good can come of it, and you can find freedom in letting those things go. It's not as though that hurt or pain never happened, but the Lord is able to take those circumstances—as dark, sad, hurtful, painful, or unjust as they may have been—and turn them into something beautiful in your life.

When you truly give it all to the Lord, *then* He's able to pour the elixir of His love, with all its healing power, into your heart in full measure. He can soothe, He can mend, He can heal any hurt, any pain, any past, and

He will. All that He asks is that you let go.

It's also good to remind yourself that *you* also need forgiveness. Jesus said that if we forgive those who have wronged us, our Father in Heaven would also forgive us (Mark 11:25–26). When you realize that you have also made mistakes or wrong decisions that have hurt others and that you also need a lot of forgiveness and mercy, it helps you to extend forgiveness and mercy to others.

And of course once you've given it all to the Lord, you need to *keep* giving it to Him. Once you have forgiven and forgotten, you need to carefully guard your spirit and fight critical thoughts that could lead to future resentment and bitterness. You must learn to resist the temptation to dwell on hurts and think bad thoughts about people who wrong you. This negative, critical attitude will eat away at you. It will make you unhappy, unfulfilled, dissatisfied, discontented, and bitter.

Keep coming to the Lord and loving Him and committing all to Him, and He will never fail you. Even if people fail or situations fail or you feel like you've failed, the Lord *never* fails! His plan never fails, His love never fails, and He has His hand on your life. If you can believe and act on that, you'll be a lot happier.

Forgive, forget, forsake bitterness, and move forward. As you do, He will fill you with His Spirit; He will give you a loving, tender, compassionate, giving heart; He will make you a stronger, better person; and He will be able to use you as a vessel of His love and a pillar that others can lean on. In other words, He will make you more like Him! ◇



WHY FEAR THE FUTURE?

I'VE TALKED TO LOTS OF PEOPLE who were afraid of the future, particularly events of the Endtime as described in the Bible's final book, Revelation. Several have said they were afraid to even read those parts of the Bible and would rather not think about it, much like a child who closes his eyes when he's afraid, hoping trouble won't see him.



I must admit that I, too, used to be fearful of coming events. Even though I had been taught all my life about God's power and plan to protect His own in the dark days to come, the mind has a way of forgetting such reassurances when it gets busy worrying. Then something happened that changed that.

Two and a half years ago I discovered that I was pregnant, and that same month God called my husband and me to be missionaries to Africa. The latter was an even bigger surprise because I had lived in Japan most of my life and was actively involved in a counseling program for university students and other charity work. I spoke Japanese, was happy and fulfilled, and felt I had settled into the place God had for me—but then He told me He had some other things to teach me, and that a change of scenery would be just the thing!

After overcoming the initial shock and having a little time to adjust to the idea, I became excited about going somewhere completely different. Within a few months we were on our way. We stopped in Europe to visit my husband's family, and while we were there we contacted some members of The Family who were already in Africa and whom we planned to team up with.

They urged us to bring everything we would need for the baby, as such things were either hard to find, poor

I started to realize that as much as I loved my child and wanted only the best for her, God cared about us even more.

quality, or prohibitively expensive in that part of Africa. Baby things were not inexpensive in Europe, either. To make matters worse, it was winter and the baby would be born in tropical East Africa. No one was selling summer baby clothes.

I started to feel the weight of what I was getting myself into. Was I crazy or being irresponsible to be going to Africa with a baby on the way? How on earth was I going to get everything I needed in such a short time and with so little money? Why me?! I broke down in tears.

I was at rock bottom, but that's not a bad place to be sometimes because then all you can do is look up. I read verses from the Bible on the subjects of encouragement and God's care, and started to realize that as much as I loved my child and wanted only the best for her, God cared about us even more. He was more than able to provide everything we needed. I had only to rest in His arms and listen when He said, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me ... and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:28–30). "Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" (Matthew 6:26).

Comforted by these thoughts but still not knowing how He was going to supply all we needed in such a short time, we decided to look at flea markets, where it is sometimes possible to find good quality used children's items. One advertisement looked perfect: "Furniture and children's clothes." Off we went with some friends, only to find that the

flea market had almost nothing but antiques and old paintings. One stall had two baby shirts—not exactly "everything we would need"!

There I stood, completely dismayed and discouraged, when our friends ran up to us, breathless and excited about something they had found. *Great*, I thought. *Two or three more baby shirts. That should cover it.* But then I reminded myself that God was my Father and He would not let me down.

What they had found was one stall I had somehow overlooked, where a man was selling his child's complete set of clothes from newborn to one year old. All of it was in near-perfect condition and most of it was for summer! There were also some toys and other baby items we would need. When the man heard we were going to Africa as missionaries, he practically gave it all to us!

Later, my sister-in-law, who works for a pharmaceutical company, gave us everything else we would need—vitamins, creams, powders, you name it. By the time we left for Africa, we didn't lack a thing!

What does that have to do with fears about the Endtime?—Now whenever I am faced with such fears, especially in regards to our little girl, I recall that experience.

If you have those fears too, think about how much you love your children and to what lengths you would go to protect and provide for them, then multiply that by a million. God is the best Father you could possibly have. We are only human, so it's inevitable that we sometimes let our children down or are less than perfect parents, but God will never fail. We are safe in His arms forever! ◇

(TINA YAMAGUCHI IS A FULL-TIME VOLUNTEER WITH THE FAMILY IN UGANDA.)

OR

BITTER BETTER?

BY DAVID PHILLIPS

EVEN AS A TEENAGER I loved babies and couldn't wait to be a father. By the time I was 20, I was married and my wife Anisa and I were expecting our first child. We were overjoyed and waited with great anticipation for the arrival of our son. (An ultrasound had revealed that our baby was a boy.)

Finally it came—the big day that we had so looked forward to for nine months. Finally we would see the face of our dear son. But the Lord had other plans. Complications developed during the delivery, and He took our dear little baby back to be with Him before he drew his first breath.

Unless you've lost a child yourself, you can't imagine the shock, the pain, and the anguish we felt. There were so many thoughts, so many regrets, so many unanswered questions. What had we done to deserve this? Where did we go wrong? Why did God allow this to happen? Was He punishing us for something? Where were we to go from here? Would we ever smile again?

All the while God said, "Trust. Trust in Me that I do all things in love." But how *could* we trust when it seemed our whole world had shattered and fallen out from under us?

As the weeks and months passed, I had to decide to either hold on to the



hurt or to let my son go, get a grip on life, and start over. Would I let this heartbreaking experience turn me bitter or make me better?

Thanks largely to my friends and family, whose prayers and words of encouragement strengthened me through each trial, I decided to trust God and give my beloved son back to Him. Even though it was still hard for me to understand why God had let such a tragic thing happen, I chose to accept by faith that He had allowed it for a good and loving reason, and that one day *I would* understand.

As time went on, Anisa and I did find peace in our hearts and we were able to smile once again. We were beginning to see the rainbow after the storm.

During my times of great trial and heartache, the same verse from the Bible had kept coming to mind: “God comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God” (2 Corinthians 1:4). I see now what I couldn’t see at the time: God broke and then mended my heart in order to give me a greater understanding of what others are faced with.

In the two and a half years since our son went home to Heaven, I have learned many priceless lessons. God used it to soften my heart, and through it He has given me a gift of being able to encourage and comfort others.

He soon brought others across my path who had also recently lost loved ones and, just as the Scripture says, I was able to comfort them with the same comfort with which God had comforted me, by leading them to Him.

I can truly say that although it was a painful experience, it has served to strengthen me and make me a better tool in God’s hands—one that is able to be a blessing to many others who don’t yet know Him and don’t have faith to lean on in their times of great trial.

I am now happily serving the Lord and others in Khon Kaen, a province of northeastern Thailand, with Anisa and our one-year-old daughter. (Yes, the Lord soon blessed us with another child.) I can honestly say with all my heart that it was well worth all the tears and heartache, because through it all I learned to trust in God’s love.

To anyone reading this who has lost a loved one or is going through other severe difficulties I would say, please hold on, no matter how difficult the trial or dark the night. There will soon be light at the end of the tunnel. Look to God and His Word for comfort and strength. He loves you and wants to see you happy again. He’s simply making a better you. ◇

(DAVID PHILLIPS IS A FULL-TIME FAMILY VOLUNTEER IN THAILAND.)

I was able to comfort them with the same comfort with which God had comforted me.

PRAYER FOR THE DAY

Help me to trust You, Lord, and never to question or criticize You for anything You send or allow to come my way. I know that You know best, even when it doesn’t seem best to me at the time. Give me the faith to let go of my own wants and wishes so You can have Your way. You have promised to always work things out for my good in the long run, because You have my best interests at heart.

Help me to not become resentful or bitter. Harboring bitterness is like holding onto a deadly infection, and who would want to do that? Rid me of any doubts or fears or hurts or resentment that could lead to bitterness. Give me faith to just let it all go, to forgive and forget and go on to better things—all the wonderful things You promise those who trust and keep their hearts right with You.

ANSWERS TO YOUR QUESTIONS

Q: My boyfriend and I broke up recently, and it turned into a messy and painful ordeal. My friends say that I should find some way to make my former boyfriend pay for the emotional hurt he caused me. I believe in God and want to please Him by doing the right thing, but at this point I may be too upset to know what is right. How should a Christian react in a situation like mine?

Jesus couldn't always control what people did to Him, but He could control His reaction.

A: IT'S UNDERSTANDABLE THAT YOU'RE SHAKEN and unsure of how to react, considering all you've just been through. You're on the right track, though, in wanting to please God by doing the right thing. How should a Christian react?—Like Christ reacted in similar circumstances. Jesus couldn't always control what people did to Him, but He could control His reaction and how it affected His spirit—and so can we. Jesus chose to overcome evil with good, and so can we (Romans 12:21).

In His famous Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in Heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you?" (Matthew 5:43–46).

Later in that same sermon Jesus also explained that we will receive only as much forgiveness and mercy as we show others: "If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:14–15).

When some of the first Christians suffered wrongdoing, the apostle Peter advised them to follow Jesus' own example. "When you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: 'Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth'; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously" (1 Peter 2:20–23).

Those who become bitter, yield to vengeful impulses, and try to make someone else "pay" for their hurt often never pull out of their own negative emotions. They take matters into their own hands instead of trusting God to right the wrongs, and usually end up making an even bigger mess of things. Instead of the satisfaction and surcease from pain they hope to gain, they wind up remorseful and in great need of forgiveness themselves. But those who put matters in God's hands and trust Him to make things right in His time, those who forgive and forget, find "the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding" (Philippians 4:7). Choose to forgive, rather than seek revenge. ◇

Bitter for sweet

THE SOUND OF MOTHER'S EGGBEATER drew me to the kitchen. There I found her at work, and began to watch. This was my chance to find out what she put into that chocolate cake of hers that made it so good. There was baking chocolate, of course. I reached for a crumb that had fallen off the bar and put it on my tongue to dissolve. It was bitter! I surveyed the other things on the table. There was a cupful of sour milk. Yuck! Surely Mother wasn't going to put that in the cake! But she did, along with some of that awful baking soda she had given me the last time I had a stomachache. What kind of cake could she possibly make out of such things? Mother smiled and told me to wait and see.

She served the cake that evening after dinner. It looked as good as usual, but I was going to be careful. I tasted a little crumb, then a larger crumb, and finally a whole bite. It couldn't have been better! I forgot all about the sour milk and baking soda, and asked for another piece.

Life is not all sweetness. There is much that is bitter, and we often cannot believe that anything good could come from it. Certainly all things are not good, but "all things *work together* for good" (Romans 8:28). This is God's promise to those who love Him. Day by day He is making you what He wants you to be, and He never puts anything into your life by mistake.

—AUTHOR UNKNOWN

The Ransom

WHEN THE CONCENTRATION CAMP at Ravensbröck, Germany, was liberated by the Allies after World War II, a piece of torn wrapping paper was found on which an unknown prisoner had scribbled these lines:

Oh Lord, remember not only the men and women of good will, but also those of ill will. But do not remember all the suffering they have inflicted on us; remember the fruits we have brought forth, thanks to this suffering—our comradeship, our loyalty, our humility, our courage, our generosity, the greatness of heart which has grown out of all this. And when they come to judgment, let all the fruits that we have borne be their forgiveness. ◇

FEEDING READING *The Bible on bitterness*

God's Word warns us against the dangers of bitterness.

Hebrews 12:15

James 3:14–16

Do not carry or keep bitterness, but replace it with love, kindness, and forgiveness.

Leviticus 19:18

Matthew 6:14–15

Matthew 18:23–35

Ephesians 4:31–32

1 Peter 4:8

Prayer and forgiving and forgetting are the cures for bitterness.

Mark 11:25

Romans 12:2

Philippians 3:13

Colossians 3:13

IF YOU HAVEN'T YET RECEIVED Jesus and His gifts of forgiveness and eternal life, you can right now by praying the following:

Thank You, Jesus, for Your wonderful love that is love enough to forgive all the wrongs I have ever committed. I open the door of my heart to You now and accept Your free gift of salvation. Help me to love and be merciful to others, even as You have loved and been merciful to me. Amen.



From Jesus with love

I am here to help

I know all about you—your gifts, your talents, your strengths. I also know your weaknesses, your idiosyncrasies, and all the funny things about you that make you an individual. I know about the nagging problems that you can't seem to overcome and all the things about yourself that bother you. I know your heart's desires and secret longings. There is nothing hidden from Me.

I care about each of your disappointments and heartbreaks. I care about how you feel. I care about what you think. I care about the difficulties and hardships that you face. I care about your health. I care about your material needs. I care about your spiritual struggles. There is not one detail of your life that does not concern Me, and I am here to help.

Every time you look up to Me, I am there. I hear your prayers and My heart is moved with compassion. I never get tired of listening to you. I am never distant. I am never too tired or too busy for you. I never turn away. I never sleep. I never hang a "Do Not Disturb" sign on My door. I always hear and answer your prayers. Sometimes I don't answer in the way you ask Me to or think I should, and sometimes you don't see the answer immediately, but I always hear and I always answer.