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Success in life begins with a sound personal relationship with the Creator of life, followed closely by sound relationships with those around us. In fact, it's impossible to be truly happy without either of those. Jesus gave us the key to both when He said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37-39).

The wonderful thing about the first is that you can't love God without experiencing His love in return. And when you do, you can't help but get excited about life. Knowing that you are His special creation whom He loves puts everything else into perspective, including those nagging little things about yourself that tend to bring you down. He made you exactly the way He wanted you, flaws and all, but He's not done yet. You're a work in progress, and you can and should make a little progress every day with His help. Every day is a new challenge, a new chance, a new adventure, and anything is possible, because nothing is impossible for God!

When you take that approach to life, the second part—getting along well with others—follows naturally. You won't have trouble winning or keeping friends, because your love, faith, and positiveness will draw others like a magnet.

That special closeness to Him will also help you through the problems you face. He has everything you need—love, happiness, purpose, answers, and much more—and loving Him puts you in tune and in step with Him, right where you need to be to receive all He has for you. He's not way off in the blue, beyond your comprehension or reach. Jesus said, "The Kingdom of Heaven is within you." Enjoy it and spread it around!

KEITH PHILLIPS

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"Glafaf"

BY JESSICA ROBERTS

"GLAFAF!" ONE-AND-A-HALF-YEAR-OLD GRACIE EXCLAIMED, tugging at Miguel's pants leg. "Please glafaf!" she repeated in her sweetest tone. Miguel looked baffled. It was his first morning helping me to care for a group of toddlers, and he hadn't yet learned to decipher their preschool dialect.

Gracie's pleading became more insistent. "Please glafaf, Miguel!"

Puzzled, Miguel asked me, "What is she saying?"

"She wants a flannelgraph," I said with a laugh. "That's story time using cutout figures on that flannel board over there." I bent down to Gracie's level and asked, "Which story would you like, honey?"

"Flowcake!" came the contented reply.

"Snowflake," I told Miguel. Gracie smiled happily, and she and the others got in their chairs as I took out the Snowflake figures and story outline and handed them to Miguel. "It's a story about a wayward lamb named Snowflake that learns it doesn't pay to stray from the shepherd's side," I explained. "I need to take care of a couple of things, but I'll be back in a few minutes. You can do this!"

Miguel wasn't so sure. "How do you understand them? Most of it sounds like gibberish to me."

"You just have to have patience and care enough to listen for what they're really trying to tell you, not just the words they say," I answered as I bounded out the door.

Miguel did just fine, but a few hours later my day took a turn for the worse. I'd had another disagreement with my boyfriend, and I was ready to call it quits. I was still fuming when Rebecca, the mother of one of my young students, asked what was wrong.

"Men!" I said, releasing a torrent of pent-up frustration. "They're impossible! My boyfriend can be wonderful, but sometimes I just don't understand him! Half the time it's great, but the other half



it seems like we don't speak the same language! What *does* he want?!"

Rebecca nodded sympathetically while I vented, and as my tirade was winding down she said, "I know how you feel. Sometimes I feel the same way about my husband."

I stared at her. Rebecca is one of those gentle, calm people who seem impossible to upset. I couldn't imagine her getting angry or frustrated with anyone. "What's the secret?" I asked. "How do you deal with it and stay so unruffled?"

She thought for a minute. "Well, I've learned to just have patience and care enough to listen for what my husband is really trying to tell me, not just the words he says."

Hearing my own words directed back at me started me thinking. How many times had I failed to show my boyfriend or others the same love and patience that I had learned to show the children? That day I determined to be a better listener. Instead of being put off by annoyed tones or words spoken in frustration, I would listen for what the heart was trying to say. And I found that it works with grown-ups too! □

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BY MARIA FONTAINE



Good communications

WHEN YOU'RE TALKING TO PEOPLE AND YOU'RE NOT SURE THAT YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT THEY'RE TRYING TO TELL YOU OR HOW THEY REALLY FEEL ABOUT THE MATTER YOU'RE DISCUSSING, YOU SHOULD ASK THEM. It probably sounds obvious, but you'd be surprised how many people don't do that. It's usually either because they think they're supposed to understand but don't and are afraid to admit it, or they're afraid that their asking might embarrass the other person. It really does help to ask, though, because some people aren't always quick to open up and give their honest feelings.

I learned a lesson along that line when I was in my first year of college. I had always been very shy, but in college I started to have more interaction with others my age, and I started going out with a boy named Wayne. He was a real sweet guy, and we went places together

and had good times. At that time it never dawned on me that we didn't communicate well with each other, or that we never talked about matters of the heart. I liked him very much and I think he felt the same way about me, but I have to say "I *think* he liked me very much," because we never communicated our feelings to each other.

I didn't realize that there was a problem until I began to get serious about him. He was shy, too, and probably afraid of getting too serious, so he cooled off toward me and that broke my little heart. I thought and prayed about what had gone wrong, and it finally dawned on me that I didn't really know *what* he thought, and that he didn't know what *I* thought. I realized that we hadn't had any kind of deep communication at all.

Why hadn't I asked him? I wondered. *Why hadn't we talked about the things we felt and thought?* That would have been so simple, and then I would have known. If we had just honestly talked, it would have prevented the whole problem of my not knowing how he felt. He was the quiet type and hardly ever talked, but he could have if I would have helped him by priming the pump. With a little bit of conversation and a little bit of trying to open up to each other, we could have taken care of the problem or at least known what was going on with each other.

**THERE WOULD BE FAR FEWER MISUNDER-
STANDINGS IF PEOPLE WOULD HONESTLY AND
OPENLY COMMUNICATE WITH ONE ANOTHER.**

Even if the other person is very withdrawn, it's usually possible to help them open up. Most people who are that way don't want to be, but they need help. Because they have a difficult time baring their heart and exposing their feelings, they need to be helped along with gentle, tactful questions such as "What do you mean by that?" or "Could you explain that to me?"

Most people, if you go about it right, will eventually open up. They usually know they need to be more outgoing, they want to communicate with other people, they don't really want to stay behind their walls, but they need somebody to be understanding and to draw them out. If you're interested in people and you love them, then you need to learn how to get them to come out of themselves and try to respond and to communicate.

I learned a good lesson from my experience with Wayne. I learned the importance of honest, open, humble communication. I learned that when I don't understand someone, I need to try to get the other person to be honest, and that I need to be honest about my feelings as well.

Some people are naturally very open. They can talk a blue streak, and before long you know everything about them. But other people don't expect you to be that interested in or concerned about them—especially not enough to want

to listen to their worries or woes. They keep things in and suffer in silence. Well, you can admire them for being able to take it and not drag others down, but wouldn't it be better if they would be honest so they could get some sympathy and prayer and help?

Suffering in silence just makes everybody miserable, because others can usually tell that something is wrong, so they worry too. They don't know if you're angry at them or upset about something else, so they don't know how to try to help. Spilling it all out can prevent misunderstandings and help the person get prayer and sympathy and encouragement—everything you appreciate yourself when you're down.

When you're down or having a problem, it doesn't help matters to complain about it, but it doesn't hurt to tell somebody so they can pray for you and possibly give you some advice or help. It often helps to talk about the problem even if the person you're talking to doesn't have the solution. Sometimes the Lord will give the solution to you as you talk about it. Of course, you should try to find someone who is wise and mature, because you don't want to bring anyone else down. You can at least ask for prayer, and that in itself does a lot of good!

There would be far fewer misunderstandings if people would honestly and openly communicate with one another. It may be a little difficult in the beginning, but as you work at it, it becomes easier. The Lord blesses honesty and good communication. □



“Children are a heritage from the Lord” (Psalm 127:3).

One of the most precious gifts any of us could ever receive is to become a parent and receive God’s love in the form of a little child, so sweet and beautiful. They’re all *His* children, really, but He entrusts them to our care and wants us to love and train them. They’re a gift of God but, like flowers in our garden, we’ve got to take care of them. It’s a case of God’s gift also being God’s work.

God Himself has set the example of how He wants us to be with our children. He is just and merciful and loving and patient, but He also deals with us firmly when He sees that we’re getting off the track. Like a shepherd with an errant sheep, He sometimes has to let us feel His shepherd’s rod in order to turn us off the wrong path. He is a loving God, but He’s also a very good Father who knows how to correct us when we need it.

If we teach, train, and lead our children right and set the right example, they will carry that all through life. “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6). “All your children shall be taught by the Lord, and great shall be the peace of your children” (Isaiah 54:13).

—DAVID BRANDT BERG



BY DASHA
EREMEEVA

WHEN MY DAUGHTER KARINA WAS PRESCHOOL AGE, I wondered what I could do to help her learn to not misbehave. She would often make a big scene, whining and crying when being corrected, which left me frustrated.

Then I had an idea that helped Karina over this hurdle. When she acted unkindly to her little sister, or was disrespectful to her father or me, or fussed or cried without reason, I would take her by the hand and explain that what she was doing was not very nice. Then I would lead her to a quiet adjacent room, where I would explain that she needed to stay there for a while in order to think and pray about her actions, as well as how she could

remedy the situation if it involved someone else.

It was difficult for both of us in the beginning. Her crying would usually become more dramatic, but I would leave her there for several minutes, after which I would return and talk to her about her behavior. I would then say a prayer with her for her to do better and close our little lesson-learning session with hugs and kisses of understanding and forgiveness. If her misbehavior had hurt, offended, or annoyed someone else, I would have her go to the person and apologize. After several months of doing this consistently, I saw a noticeable change for the better in Karina's behavior.

When I began using this tactic, I was concerned that Karina would resent having to go to another room and be alone, even for a few minutes, so I used it carefully and in moderation. I always said a short prayer first, asking the Lord if it was warranted or not, and I think that was a key. Praying first helped me keep my composure and follow through lovingly, and it helped Karina to be more accepting of this course of action. Despite some initial protests, it worked well and still does. That was a relief, as other disciplinary measures had not been effective with Karina.

I still use this method with Karina, and it has helped her to have a more mature attitude and she learns from the discipline, as opposed to only fearing it. Having a little time alone in the room where she can collect her thoughts and calm down, and then following that up with a simple talk and prayer with me, where I verbalize the reasons she needs to be loving to her little sister, obey her parents, or adhere to the rules helps her grasp the reason behind the discipline.



At the end of each of these little sessions, I express how proud Jesus and I are that she learns so much, and I encourage her to do good things for others so she can continue to make Jesus and me and others happy. During these little discussions, I also shower her with extra affection so she knows that her mistakes are forgiven. Receiving correction in this way has given Karina a sense of security and makes her willing and happy to try to do better.

We parents are often so busy that we think we don't have time for long, drawn-out discussions with our little ones. I've found, though, that even if it takes longer to pray and discuss problems on the spot, so that my children understand the lesson, it saves time in the long run. But most important, it implants important life principles in their hearts and minds, and is a wonderful means for them to develop a better personal relationship with Jesus. It may take a little more time, but it will pay off later when they are more obedient and learn to make the right choices for themselves. □

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**PRAYING
FIRST
HELPED ME
KEEP MY
COMPOSURE
AND FOLLOW
THROUGH
LOVINGLY**



THE TONGUE

IN HER POEM “AN EVENING PRAYER,” C. MAUD BATTERSBY CAPTURED WHAT SHOULD BE THE PRAYER OF EACH OF US EVERY DAY.

If I have wounded any soul today,
If I have caused one foot to go astray,
If I have walked in my own willful way,
Good Lord, forgive.

If I have uttered idle words or vain,
If I have turned aside from want or pain,
Lest I offend some other through the strain,
Good Lord, forgive.

Forgive the sins I have confessed to Thee.
Forgive the secret sins I do not see.
That which I know not, Father, teach Thou me—
Help me to live.

The Bible has a lot to say about the power of the tongue for good or evil. “We all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body. Indeed, we put bits in horses’ mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kin-

BY VIRGINIA BRANDT BERG

WHY DO THOUGHTLESS, UNKIND WORDS

LEAP FROM OUR LIPS LIKE THEY DO?

IS THERE ANY REMEDY?

YES, THERE IS!

dles! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body” (James 3:2–6).

Also, in the book of Proverbs it tells us, “Death and life are in the power of the tongue” (Proverbs 18:21), “There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword, but the tongue of the wise promotes health” (Proverbs 12:18), and, “A wholesome tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit” (Proverbs 15:4). So if you want a long, useful, healthy life, “keep your tongue from evil” (Psalm 34:13). For your own sake and everyone else’s, watch your words!

How often we wound someone with an unkind word—maybe unintentionally, but unkind just the same! Some of us carry scars on our bodies from wounds and cuts. Usually they don’t bother us, but they remind us of something that happened perhaps years ago. But how different it is with the scars left on the heart by a bitter, angry tongue!

Here’s another poem that continues that thought:

If I knew that a word of mine,
A word not kind and true,
Might leave its trace on a loved one’s face,
I don’t think I’d speak it, would you?

If I knew the sting of a word
Might linger and leave its mark
With a deep dark scar on a loved one’s heart,
I don’t think I’d speak that word, would you?

—George Matthas Adams

You’ve probably heard or said yourself some time, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never harm me.” Well, that isn’t true! Sticks and stones can make surface wounds, but words can wound even deeper and take a long time to heal. Wounds to the heart are hidden deep, and often no one but the one who carries them knows—no one, that is, except the heavenly Father. He sees them and understands, but what a shame that we should ever be the one to inflict that wound and cause that ugly scar!

Why do thoughtless, unkind words leap from our lips like they do? Is there any remedy? Yes, there is! Thank God, there is! The remedy begins with a change in the heart—our heart—because “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matthew 12:34). There’s only one way to change the unruly tongue, and that is to transform the heart, the spirit that controls it. The remedy begins with praying to be filled with the Holy Spirit. When we live in the Spirit, every word will be loving and true, for God is love (1 John 4:8).

So open your heart to Him. Ask Him to fill you with His Spirit. Then as you make a habit of reading and absorbing God’s Word, you’ll come into a deep, abiding relationship with Him, and that relationship will manifest itself in your words and actions. When His Word abides in you, you can’t gossip or say unkind or bitter words. We can never control our tongue ourselves. “No man can tame the tongue” (James 3:8), but God can! “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26).

Trust God to change you! Believe that His Word will not fail. He can come in with His Spirit, and cause kindness to flow through you because He possesses your tongue and your life. You’ll become a stream of blessing to all about you. God bless you and help you in this. He will bring you through to victory, because God is still on His throne and prayer changes things! □

After 28 Years of Loneliness,



REAL LOVE!

BY SARA SEMANA

YEARS AGO, A YOUNG WOMAN OF 21 STARTED ON THE MOST TERRIBLE ODYSSEY. She had just begun to live when everything collapsed. She wouldn't go out, wouldn't go swimming, and wouldn't take a bus. She couldn't stand to be alone, and she couldn't stand to be with others. She was lonely, and loneliness was her worst enemy.

About a year later she married and then soon became a mother, but she couldn't enjoy either because of the way she felt. Years passed and she had another child, but her suffering continued. Her whole family tried to help, but nothing worked. She went to doctors, psychologists, and psychiatrists, but the sadness and agony continued. When her third child was about to be born, she started suffering panic attacks. She remained in this state until she was 49.

This woman was me. I was empty, sad, depressed, and disillusioned.

But then a very special Person came into my life. My brother began talking to me about this Person and all the good things that He had for me—mainly His immense love, which was something that had never before been expressed to me, as well as something that I had never before experienced, even in my marriage.

This love was wonderful! It gave me back the will to live, after 28 years. It was Jesus! I thank Him every day and want to give my life back to Him every day—He who died in a most cruel way so that I could be freed from loneliness and live in His love. He took me by the hand and led me to a new world to live as I had never lived, and He's given me the promise of eternal life in the world to come. For this I want to say, "Thank You, thank You, Jesus, for my salvation!" □

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Jesus waits humbly for you to invite Him into your life. He says, "Behold, I stand at the door [of your heart] and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in" (Revelation 3:20). You can receive Him right now by sincerely praying the following:

Dear Jesus, thank You for dying for me so I can have eternal life. Please forgive me now for every wrong and unloving thing I have ever done. Wash away all that, and help me to do better. I need Your love to fill and satisfy my heart. I want the life of heavenly happiness You have for me—here and now, and in Heaven hereafter. I open the door of my heart and ask You, Jesus, to come in. Thank You for hearing and answering my prayer, and thank You for helping me share Your love and be a force for good in the lives of others. Amen.

LOVING PRESENTATION

The same food can taste quite different, depending on how it is prepared. There are hundreds of ways to prepare potatoes, for example. Some foods I like when served one way, but I absolutely dislike them when served another way. Eating a raw vegetable or piece of fruit is a totally different experience than eating it cooked.

Different presentations affect our reactions. That's true of food, and it's also true of our communications and interactions with others. It's our presentation that counts. Two people may be trying to get across the same idea, but they may do it in completely different ways. One presentation may have negative overtones, carry with it a whole range of negative emotions, and incite negative reactions, whereas the other may be just the opposite. Almost without exception, the one who does it in a loving, considerate way will have the greater success. Loving presentation makes people feel good, it makes them feel loved, it makes them feel that you like and respect and have confidence in them, and that nearly always wins their cooperation.

Actually, the words we say are not always as important as how we say them. Sometimes we do need to point out problems or say things that we know will be difficult for the other person to accept, and even be direct in doing so. But people can overlook our being frank if they see that we sincerely care about them. Even if we fail to say exactly the right thing in exactly the right way, if people feel that you care, that's what will matter most to them and go the farthest in strengthening your relationship. Let love and trust come through. □

BY MARIA FONTAINE

TRY A LITTLE TACT

A word that seems out of place or is said at the wrong time or to the wrong person is often thought of as a lack of tact. The dictionary defines tact as “the ability to say and do the right things; skill in handling difficult situations or dealing with difficult people without giving offense; delicacy; diplomacy.” Delicacy means “fineness of feeling for small differences.” The word “tact” is taken from the Latin *tactus*, which means “touching.”

So the art of having tact and saying the right things to people at the right time is really just to be sensitive to the way they feel, to have that personal touch that helps us to be aware of what might hurt their feelings and to avoid doing so.

How do we learn to be more tactful? By praying for it, first of all. Pray to be more sensitive to people's feelings, and cultivate the habit of being more prayerful before you speak. □

Q: I'm an honest and frank person. I speak my mind, but sometimes I end up hurting people, including those who are especially important to me—family, friends, and coworkers. I don't want to do that, of course, but at the same time I don't want to be dishonest or stop being "me." What to do?

ANSWERS TO YOUR QUESTIONS

THIS IS A COMMON DILEMMA, AND IT REFLECTS A TREND IN CERTAIN SOCIETIES TODAY: a compulsion to be very honest, direct, and outspoken about one's own feelings and opinions. In many cases it stems from a sincere desire to not be phony or hypocritical, which is good, but it also has its downside. As you've found out, it can lead to strained relationships and grief on both sides.

It comes down to what's most important—being "you" or being loving. If the two were always one and the same, there wouldn't be any problem. But the fact of the matter is that by nature we *aren't* always loving. We aren't, but God *is*, for "God is love" (1 John 4:8). So it's really a choice between being ourselves and being more godly, more Christlike. When our natural reaction is to say something that could hurt or offend others, we shouldn't speak our mind but rather pray for the Holy Spirit to give us the right words—loving words—to speak instead. "The love of Christ compels us" (2 Corinthians 5:14). In other words, it restrains us from "letting it all hang out" and compels us to do the loving thing instead.

Making the decision to want to do the loving thing—choosing that over self—is the first step.

Praying for God's help is the second. Next comes making it a habit, and for most people that's the hardest part and takes the longest. That new habit will come quicker if you practice the following:

- Ask yourself, "Is it loving?"
- Put yourself in the other person's shoes.
- Choose your words carefully. "Pray before you say."
- Be courteous.
- Respect others' views, preferences, and feelings.
- Respond to problems constructively.
- Read, absorb, and apply God's Word. "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good ... for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks" (Luke 6:45).

Here's a great passage to help you get started: "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:3–5). Happy transformation! □

LOVE, LOVE, LOVE!

FROM THE BIBLE'S "LOVE CHAPTER"

—1 CORINTHIANS 13

"Love suffers long and is kind." That means when you've suffered, when others have maligned you and spoken ill of you, you're still kind and willing to forgive.

"Love does not envy." Love is not jealous of others' happiness. Love is not jealous of the good things they have or the problems that they don't have. Love is happy for others when they are blessed.

"Love does not parade itself, is not puffed up." Love is humble and self-effacing. It's not "puffed up" in pride, and it doesn't put others down.

"Love does not behave rudely." If you love others, you'll be courteous and considerate of their feelings.

"Love does not seek its own." Real love is unselfish and giving.

"Love is not provoked, thinks no evil." If your spirit is ruled by God's Spirit, you won't be easily angered or keep a record of wrongs committed against you, but you'll look for and find the best in people.

"Love does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth." Love stays focused on what is right and good, and casts a veil over others' faults and mistakes.

"Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails."

FEEDING READING

GOOD CONVERSATION

Loving, wholesome, wise speech has a positive effect.

Proverbs 10:11a

Proverbs 12:18b

Proverbs 15:1a

Proverbs 15:4a

Proverbs 15:23

If we are living close to the Lord, our speech will show it.

Psalms 37:30

Proverbs 10:31a

Malachi 2:6

Our conversation should set a good example for others.

Philippians 1:27a

1 Timothy 4:12

Titus 2:7-8

Speak the right things at the right time.

Proverbs 10:32

Proverbs 25:11

Ecclesiastes 8:5b

Speaking encouraging words will inspire and help others.

Job 4:4

Job 16:5

Proverbs 12:25

Isaiah 35:3-4a

Isaiah 50:4a

Good conversation is based on God's Word.

Deuteronomy 6:6-7

Psalms 119:172

John 6:63

Ephesians 5:19

Speak of the great things God has done.

Psalms 9:11b

Psalms 35:28

Psalms 66:16

Psalms 107:2

Psalms 119:24

Psalms 145:4,7

Philemon 6

When does the mark of the Beast begin?

BY JOSEPH CANDEL

T

he book of Revelation predicts that before Jesus' return a world dictator known as the Antichrist will

rise to power and rule for seven years. He will abolish all religions and insist that the world worship him. He and his chief minister, whom the book of Revelation refers to as the "false prophet," will also institute the "mark of the Beast" in an effort to exercise total economic and political control.

The mark of the Beast will begin to be enforced halfway through the Antichrist's seven-year rule, at the beginning of the Great Tribulation. That conclusion is based on the following Bible passages:

"He [the false prophet] causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on [or "in," as in the King James translation] their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or

sell except one who has the mark or the name of the Beast, or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the Beast, for it is the number of a man: His number is 666" (Revelation 13:16–18).

We also know that the Antichrist will sign a seven-year pact or covenant, which he will break at the halfway mark: "Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week [seven years]; but in the middle of the week [3½ years] he shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering" (Daniel 9:27).

Next, we know that after the Antichrist breaks the covenant his false prophet will erect something called the "abomination of desolation" in the "holy place"—presumably in or near the soon-to-be-rebuilt Jewish temple on Mount Moriah, in Jerusalem. "Forces shall be mustered by him, and they shall defile the sanctuary fortress; then they shall take away the daily sacrifices, and place there the abomination of desolation" (Daniel 11:31).

Five hundred years after Daniel gave that prophecy, Jesus' disciples asked Him what would be the sign of His return and of the end of the world, and Jesus cited this development, among others. "When you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place ... then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. ... Immediately after the tribulation of those

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days ... they will see the Son of Man [Jesus] coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matthew 24:15,21,29–30).

This brings us back to our opening passage, Revelation 13:16–18, about the false prophet enforcing the mark of the Beast economic system, under which no one will be able to buy or sell without the mark. Again, it seems fairly certain that this will begin to be enforced halfway through the Antichrist’s seven-year rule, at the beginning of the Great Tribulation.

At this point we can only speculate what form this mark will take, but it could very well be a tiny computer chip or radio frequency identification tag (RFID) that is implanted under the skin and linked to a database containing the bearer’s personal and financial information.

How far away is this? It’s impossible to say just yet, but considering the present rate at which technology is advancing, it could happen soon. For nearly 2,000 years, ever since the apostle John wrote this passage about the Antichrist’s worldwide economic system, such a thing had been inconceivable. Now, with computers and the Internet, electronic banking, and the increasing globalization of the world’s markets and economies, it’s not so inconceivable after all! In fact, it looks like the logical next step—and that’s what the Antichrist is counting on.

With the VeriChip¹ and RFIDs receiving more widespread use and publicity, the campaign to sell the world on the chip implant idea is underway. The technology needed to carry out the Antichrist’s plan for worldwide economic control, however, is not yet in place. He cannot control the buying and selling of the entire world until there is an integrated electronic banking network with common, universal standards. That’s in the future, but considering how rapidly things are moving in that direction, it may be the relatively near future. □

¹ VeriChip is a rice-size injectable microchip. It is a product of the U.S.-based company Applied Digital Solutions, and is already being used to monitor children, convicts, pets, Alzheimer’s patients, and others, as well as to provide ID in government agencies and trendy nightclubs and resorts. Other applications are sure to follow.

After the darkest night in world history, we are going to have the brightest dawn! The fast-approaching night is going to be the nightmare of the Great Tribulation, and the day, the coming of Christ.

Things have got to get worse before they can get better, but in spite of the horrors of the growing darkness of this world, we know that it’s all going to work out right in the end. The darkest hour is just before dawn!—And the faster it gets worse, the sooner it’s going to get better! So keep looking up!

We have to go through a dark place of trials and tribulations, but then we’re going to come out into the sunshine on the other side and all these things will be blotted out like an evil dream! One of these days Jesus is going to stop the world and we’re going to get off, away from all this worldly confusion and into the peace and the quiet and the beauty and the love and the wonder of that wonderland beyond in heavenly places with Him! Just a little longer, then dawns His glorious morning!

—DAVID BRANDT BERG



FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

Your billboard

Your face is your billboard by the highway of life. It's your means of unspoken communication, your first and most powerful "advertisement."

Many people don't put enough emphasis on making sure their billboard is displaying the right message. They walk around with their worries or woes or whatever else is on their mind written all over their face. Their introspection and stress can't help but show and are bound to affect others negatively. That sort of message is enough to repel all but their most understanding and loyal friends. But other people have a knack for staying cheerful no matter what they are going through. They have a bright countenance that attracts others.

So if you want to make and keep friends, let your face send a positive message that will lift others' hearts. Concentrate on having a pleasant facial expression that conveys faith, optimism, kindness, approachability, concern for others, and a joy for living—not one that changes with circumstances or how you happen to feel at the moment.

That's easier said than done, you say, especially when troubles loom large. This is one more good reason to bring your problems to Me in prayer—so I can help you see things from My perspective, give you solutions, and replace your fears with faith and your laments with praises. Then your face will reflect those positive inner feelings.