



The Christian Connection™



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A Quarterly Newsletter from Christian Resource Network, Inc.

SOARING COMMUNICATION FOR CHRIST

Obtaining "Inexpressible Joy and Full of Glory" (1 Peter 1:8)

By: Joan M. Blake



In 1 Peter 1:1, Apostle Peter addressed believers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. During the first century, Christians were experiencing persecution because of their faith in Christ (Tyndale New Bible Companion).

But Peter wanted to remind them that Jesus died and rose again to secure for them "a living hope," a hope that was not temporal, but lasting, "reserved in heaven" for them (1 Peter 1: 3-4 NKJV).

Their faith was being tested in the trials and sufferings they endured, faith that would prove "genuine" and "precious" similar to when gold was refined (1 Peter 1:7). Genuine faith in Christ would lead to a "love" for him, a belief in his mighty power, and "inexpressible joy," a joy that was overflowing and "full of glory" (1 Peter 1:8 NKJV).

Today, we too, understand the importance of loving God who first loved us and who keeps his covenant (1 John 4:19; Gal.3:17). God promises never to leave or forsake us (Joshua 1:5). When we go through the struggles of life, we could count on a Savior who will fight our battles (2 Chronicles 20:15). We have joy in knowing that we are over-comers because of His shed blood; and we have "inexpressible joy" because of our security in Christ (Rev.12:11; 1 Peter 1:8).

Turning to Jesus Christ is a great way for us to begin this holiday season; we can release our burdens to Him and believe in the One who has secured for us eternal life (John 3:16).

May God richly bless and keep you this holiday season.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Joan M. Blake".

Editor/Publisher

The Christian Connection

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Following the Christ Child



Dr. Jean Dimock

Traditionally, the Advent season is a time of reflection, anticipation, hope, and simplicity. What better thought to focus on than this: How is it that the lowly Babe of Bethlehem became the King of heaven and earth?

Soon we will celebrate the Incarnation when Jesus humbled Himself to become a helpless baby—a human being with all its limitations and temptations. As a child he was dependent on others. No doubt his earthly parents told him of the events of his mysterious birth. As he "grew in wisdom and stature" the Hebrew Scriptures unfolded and He increased in knowledge and understanding of his mission—to live in total obedience to the Father's will.

Culminating in the unthinkable—Jesus humbled himself to the obedience to the cross. But why? Born to be the Great High Priest who would present Himself as the required sacrifice, Jesus unlocked heaven's doors—reopened Eden's gates, long since shut since the Fall. In the very moment He died the temple veil was torn from top to bottom. *In that very moment*—Jesus, our High Priest entered the heavenly Most Holy Place and offered His blood. That blood, the evidence of his sacrificial death is the blood that removed every barrier into the presence of God!

We have far more than even the ancient high priests had. Our access into God's presence is anytime, day or night, not just once a year. The Jewish high priests had to offer sacrifices to atone for themselves before they could atone for the people and those sacrifices *could not cleanse the conscience* (the whole person) of the worshiper. Our sins are forgiven and our consciences are made clean. We have entered into the new covenant where God's Law is written in our hearts and minds—deep in our innermost being. Transformed by the blood of the Lamb, we are no longer enslaved to sin but freed to live in fellowship with the Lord.

Because of the blood of our Great High Priest we now have access into the Most Holy Place where the Shekinah Glory of God shines. How awesome to meditate on the eternal power of the blood of the Lamb. Being conscious and appreciative of that costly blood prepares us and purifies our worship.

As we humble ourselves in worship we find grace to say "yes" to the Father's will. Like Jesus, our desires are to please Him. During this holy season, may we take time to consider how we might "let the same mind be in us that was in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5).

Jean Dimock and Jann McMurry both received their M.A. and D.Min. degrees from CUME.

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THE STRONG FATHER AS A PEACEMAKER

Today's Universal Language of Western Societies



Gide Demosthene

The Genesis narrative explains in chapter 11:1, "Now the whole world had one language and a common speech." The tragedy resulting from this early world unity in disobedience to God's call and purpose for the human family is underlined in God's intervention in the text. The tower of Babel which would be used to establish the power of man's name on the earth came to an abrupt halt. "Because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world (Gen.11:9, NIV)," the text concluded.

Today, likewise, there is a common speech spoken by people in different organizations and institutions in western societies. It is made up of one five letter word-Abuse. The result of this vastly adopted and spoken language mainly by government authorities is the epidemic annihilation of intact families. Fathers, in general, for some decades now, have had to stand by and accept the social and cultural etiquette that fathers are the only group in the world to speak this violent language towards their own wives and children. Many intact families have suffered irreparable brokenness as a result of having not understood; neither comprehended, nor learned this distinct speech which is employed solely in regards to their existence.

Fallen humanity has experienced various forms of brokenness through the generations, but none more personally destructive as the one inflicted against one's own family. Good fathers will always love and protect their own families. Thus, there is a great dissonance and absolute inconsistency to be an "abusive" husband or father. A father figure is the portrait that God uses to paint his own loving relationship with the world: "As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him, (Psalm 103:13)." The Lord refers to himself as our Rock of refuge, our Shelter, our Shield, our Buckler and Defender, our Strength and Savior. Allegorically, these images, likewise, project a strong caring and loving Father who secures His children in His own family and in himself. A Father who "will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities (Psalm 103:9-10 NIV). Our God uses His omnipotent strength to love us beyond all understanding. Thus, strong fathers love as God loves.

Therefore, strong fathers are those who secure peace and wholeness for their own families against all odds in culture and society. They embrace and promote peace in their own homes. Strong fathers do stand against all forms of violence towards their women and children from wherever abuse has been identified. Strong fathers are better known as peacemakers!

The fundamental task of a peacemaker is to promote a culture of mutual consent for tolerance and acceptance between two opposing parties with conflicting beliefs, ideologies, values, and ethics; for the greater good of the whole on the basis of love, justice, and equity. The life of Jesus Christ in the world fits this definition perfectly. It was lived for the sole purpose of promoting peace, (not without many challenges), even to the point of being the propitiation for the salvation of the whole world of sinners (John 3:16). Jesus paid the ultimate price for love and peace. The father as a model peacemaker cultivates justice in the whole family, with his wife and children (James 3:18).

Secondly, the father as a peacemaker pursues and encourages the mutual edification of the whole family.

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(The strong father as a peacemaker from page 5)

In building a house, every material, equipment and instrument is used lovingly to affect the perfect outcome of the whole. Therefore, a father's many interventions in the household will serve the greater good of the welfare of his family and will eventually lead to a culture of love and abiding peace (Rom. 14:19).

Jesus is referred to as the Everlasting Father as well as the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). He is the model of a Father who loves so deeply for his own that He gave His life in death, so that God's children may experience God's peace.

It is in that Spirit of the Father, that all fathers are called to love and lead their own families-and eventually be recognized as sons of God (Romans 8:14).

With this understanding strong fathers can't be authoritarian chauvinistic abusers as they are often depicted by culture and society-rather they stand against violence and abuse towards those they live to love-their wives and children. They do acknowledge that the world is unsafe and highly predatory; and that violence and abuse may spring forth anytime and anywhere from many sources. For these reasons, strong fathers will stand to protect their families and denounce violence and abuse against women and children-and most especially those who are recognized to have spoken fluently the language of violence and abuse in families-while also pursuing a profit in the process.

This Christmas season and holiday, as we celebrate the love of our Omnipotent Father, who has shown this love through His commitment to the human family through Jesus Christ; let us resolve to seek and pursue peace-or wholeness for our own families. For Christ, in His death, made plain the purpose of a father's life and presence in the family as its Shepherd: "I have come that they may have life... and have it to the full, (John 10:10, NIV). May the Spirit of the Father's love dwells in our family this Christmas!

Gide Demosthene is the Registrar for Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary-CUME Campus - Boston; Member of the Academic Advisor Committee - GCTS-CUME Campus; Founder of Redeeming Grace Evangelistic Ministries Int'l—A Family Centered Church Organization. He is currently a Doctor of Ministry student. at CUME.

Christmas Memoirs from the Tunnel



Cherry Gorton

Few people would suggest that a trip through the Tip O'Neil Tunnel, aka the Big Dig, could generate any Christmas Spirit. So those of us who travel it on a daily basis must stretch our imaginations to make the journey festive.

First are the green arrows which indicate open lanes. Green is a Christmas color, associated with Advent in the Christian calendar, and often signifies eternal life. We decorate the evergreen trees with lights and decorations pulled from a lifetime of family memories.

I like to think of the green arrows as "go" signs. Christmas is the time to go visit a relative or friend you have not seen in several years. This season of the year is time to go make a cup of hot chocolate and reflect on the pleasant experiences that have happened in the past. This remembrance is especially important if this is a year in which pain has been more manifest than pleasure.

Next, I have noticed the red tail lights of all the cars ahead of me. They form a ribbon of fellowship connecting me with all the other travelers in the tunnel. So I reflect on the ribbons that connect me with fellowship -- my family, my co-workers and students at the Center for Urban Ministerial Education, my neighbors in our apartment complex, the members of my church fellowship. We are never truly alone in our daily life. However, we often feel alone. Christmas is a reminder that God has come as the baby Jesus to remind us that we need never be alone. He is Emmanuel, God With Us, and now that He has taken human flesh, been born and lived among us, He has promised to never go away.

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MORE THAN CONQUERORS

By: Jessica Hilliard

It doesn't take any special power of observation to realize the world is full of incredible suffering. Five minutes watching nightly news, or spent in a Children's Hospital is usually sufficient to cause a reflective person to wonder how a good God can possibly reconcile so much obvious pain and turmoil. It is interesting that the Bible, while whole-heartedly affirming that God is in fact good, righteous, holy, and full of loving kindness, never makes any pretenses about the state of life this side of eternity. Jesus himself said: "In this world you will have trouble. . . (John 16:33, NIV)," and Peter told Christians "do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. . . (1 Peter 4:12, NIV)"

In fact, the Bible makes it clear those who follow Christ can expect *more*, not less trouble in this life! It is apparent that God sees something more important to be gained from our time on earth than avoidance of pain. No one evidences this fact more clearly than Christ himself. The Son of God lived the ultimate example of what the Christian should expect to achieve in this lifetime. Where did that lead him? To fame, fortune and restful Sunday afternoons? No, rather to a cross where he was executed in a cruel Roman display of "justice." If God did not spare even himself an incredible amount of pain and suffering, we are wise to conclude that a trouble-free earthly life is not the goal he has in mind for his followers.

Thankfully, God did not leave us with only this rather dismal assessment of life to lean on. Immediately after Jesus told us to expect trouble, he gave us a wonderful challenge. "Take heart, for I have overcome the world" (John 16:33, NIV). And overcome he did! After the terrible cross, Jesus's story did not end if it had we would have nothing to say here at all! What God promises us is that in the same way he redeemed the tragedy of Good Friday and transformed it into the wonder of Easter morning, he can redeem the most tragic aspects of our life and our world and use them in ways we could never imagine to bring glory to Himself. For good reason, Romans 8:28 is one of the most widely quoted verses of the New Testament, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose (NIV)." It is the straightforward message of hope for those who follow Christ: when everything has gone completely bad, we *know* that God is still organizing the events of our lives into something good.

Of course in the midst of serious troubles, it is not always possible to see the good God is creating. That is why it may seem almost funny that a main characteristic of the Christian life in the middle of suffering is supposed to be joy! "Consider it pure joy" James writes, ". . . whenever you face trials of many kinds. . . (James 1:2, NIV)". When my first child was born with more than 10 serious birth defects, it was difficult to see the "joyful" aspects of her circumstances; there weren't many. When at the tender age of 16 hours she was wheeled into the first four of 25 (so far) surgical procedures, words like "good," "joy," and "triumph," seemed farthest from my mind. It would have been "normal" to wonder why this was happening, and how it fit into God's "good" plans for my life and the life of my child. The next seven months of her life were so filled with trauma, emergency, and crisis, questions about "Why" and "How does this all work out" were simply too abstract for my mind to handle. It seemed that just when I *needed* to find the joy of the Christian life, most days I couldn't even open my Bible, or pray anything more complex than "Dear Lord, please let us make it through today. . ."

Yet in the midst of all this, something incredible was happening. I couldn't draw near to God, so he drew near to me. I couldn't pray, so he appointed others- many, many others- to pray on my behalf. Their prayers became an almost tangible support holding me close to God's presence. Little by little I found that peace and real joy were returning to my daily experiences. Yes, my daughter was stabilizing, but it was much more than that. I still could not see how each and every tear had been redeemed, or to what greater good every pang of fear was being applied. What I could see was that God was near, and that he was working everywhere in our lives. What happened was that slowly I stopped looking for joy in my *circumstances*, and started looking for joy in God *himself*.

I don't know the reasons that God in his infinite wisdom allows suffering on earth. I do know that one of the main benefits suffering can bring is the realization that our circumstances and our situations don't have to determine the state of our hearts. Our lives change day by day; one day my daughter is quite healthy (for her), but the next we are rushing to the emergency room and preparing for a long hospital stay. In contrast to such fluctuating uncontrollable elements of life, *God* never changes. The Bible promises: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8, NIV). When we stop seeking peace and contentment from our lives and instead turn to the unchanging person of God, then we find joy and learn to overcome our trials.

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(More Than Conquerors continued from page 6)

God never promised us that we would be free from suffering. Just the opposite. What he promised us is that he is with us in our suffering, and that his *presence* is all we need to overcome any circumstance. This is the *only* reason that when commenting on earthly trials, the Apostle Paul can say: "...in all these things we are *more than conquerors* (Romans 8:37 NIV, italics mine). For nothing can separate us from God's love for us in Christ. The world will *not* always look at our lives and see a grand triumph. But when we learn to rely only on the presence of God, *he* will look at us and see more and more the life of his son formed in us. Then the same power that raised Christ from the dead will be working a resurrection in the midst of our struggles. When nothing but faith hope and love remain, we will see that by the power of God they remain in us too, and that we through Christ, we also will have overcome the world.

Jessica Hilliard graduated from Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary in 2006 with an MA in Theology. She currently stays home with her two children, and works part-time as the Head of Women's Ministries at All Saints Anglican Church in Attleboro, MA.

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(Memoirs from the tunnel continued from page 5)

Finally, as I emerge from the Big Dig Tunnel, I am confronted with a seven story high sign. The advertisement informs me that the spirit of the season is actually Absolute Vodka or Heinekin Beer. Sadly, they are earthly spirits, which work for a social moment, but are bound to disappoint when they stop working at the end of the party. I prefer to depend on the Spirit of the Lord which has come as comforter and companion. The Spirit of the Lord can so transform us, that we ordinary people can live truly extraordinary lives. This is the promise of Christmas. It fills me not only with eternal hope for my life, but the practical hope that my trip through the Tip O'Neil Tunnel will be swift and safe. May your journey through this season and next year of life be joyful and safe.

Merry Christmas,
Cherry Gorton 2008

Cherry R.Gorton is the co-ordinator of library services and an adjunct professor at Gordon-Conwell-Cume.

PSALM 131 (NASB)

O Lord, my heart is
not proud, nor my eyes
haughty
Nor do I involve myself in
great matters,
or in things too difficult for
me,
surely I have composed and
Quieted my soul;
like a weaned child rests
against his mother
my soul is like a weaned child
within me
O Israel hope in the from this time forth and
forever.

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of teaching, sharing, and discussion.

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