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WORDS FOR LIVING MINISTRIES

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Dear Ones,

In order to save room for the notice about the special meeting at June and Jerry's home, and an exciting new discovery, I will keep this greeting brief. Although it seemed that Winter would never give up, Spring, always welcome, has finally arrived with its warm weather, crocuses, daffodils and new green things--a time of new beginnings. Now, we have much to share with you!

Where it All Began

In 1976, after a Lay Witness Mission where my family met Jerry and June Thomas, they asked me if I would come to their home and teach the exciting things they had learned on the mission, and I said "Sure--glad to!" I arrived, and soon three other couples came, and the eight of us gathered in the living room. I don't remember what I taught--probably an introduction to life in the Spirit--things Jerry and June had just learned. Those eight people drank it in and wanted more; so they asked me if I would come back the next Monday, and I did, but to a larger group.

Unknown to me, that first Monday night was the birth of my teaching ministry. I continued to go back on Monday nights as the group became so large that we had to move to increasingly larger buildings. After five years, as demands for teaching in other places grew, we turned the Monday Night Bible Study over to another teacher, and it continued as a vibrant ministry as I was forced to travel elsewhere.

On Monday night June 6th at 7:00 we will gather again in Jerry and June's living room at 485 Burrus Rd., Union City, TN (731-885-9655), with the survivors of the original eight, where it all began, 48 years ago, to the amazement of us all.

You are all invited! --Tom

This newsletter's excerpt from Tom's *Study Guide to the Entire Bible* is the **Introduction to I Peter**

The New Testament, Book 21: I Peter

The epistle of I Peter is one of the "general epistles" whose message is not addressed to a specific church or person. I Peter is a letter dealing with hope in the midst of suffering; its content is more practical than doctrinal, and it seems to have been written against the background of the persecutions under Nero. This epistle is addressed to "the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia," those Christians facing persecution in Asia Minor.

There were groups of believers scattered throughout Asia Minor which had their Christian beginnings as Jews who were present in the crowd in Jerusalem, when Peter preached his great message at Pentecost. After he preached, they had received the Messiah Jesus and the baptism with the Holy Spirit, and returned to their homes, carrying the good news of the gospel message with them. Although Peter had played a key role in opening the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 10 and 11), his primary ministry was as apostle to the Jews¹. It is natural that he should feel a pastoral responsibility for the scattered Jewish Christians in Asia Minor.

As is the case with the general epistle of James, I Peter is so densely packed with significance and revelation that much of it is slow going. As a result, and again like the epistle of James, many highlights will consist of only two or three verses, for we cannot hurry past things so rich in meaning. I Peter requires, and deserves, much chewing. **A. Author.** The author identifies himself as "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ..." in the first verse.

Since the time of writing, there has been almost unanimous agreement concerning Peter's authorship of this epistle. No other book in the canon has stronger attestation of authenticity by the Church Fathers, including Papias (60-130 AD), friend of Polycarp (ca 70-ca 160 AD) and, like Polycarp, a disciple of the apostle John².

B. Place and Date. The time of writing is generally considered to be ca 65 AD, while Paul was a prisoner for two years in Rome (his first, "house arrest," imprisonment)³. The writer shows acquaintance with early epistles, such as James, I Thessalonians, Romans, Colossians, Ephesians and Philippians. At the time of the writing of this epistle, John Mark and Silas (Silvanus) were with Peter; and Silas would carry the letter to the churches.

The place of writing, however, is another matter indeed. Peter says that he is writing from "the church that is at Babylon." Commentators are divided over this; did he mean literal Babylon, or was it a symbolic reference to Rome and its ungodly rulers? This question may never be answered until the Lord returns to answer all questions. Literal Babylon still existed at the time, had a large Jewish population, and it was not very far from Israel⁴. Rome could be compared, symbolically to the earlier, oppressive Babylon; yet Paul, for his part, had written a letter to the church at Rome about ten years earlier, and called Rome by its actual name; and there is no mention, in Acts or in the epistles of Paul, of Peter's having been in Rome. I am inclined to believe that the place of writing was the city of Babylon; but no one knows, and we definitely will not settle the "Babylon" question here.

C. Occasion. With growing persecution of Christians in Asia Minor, Peter wished to warn the churches to expect suffering, and to prepare them to

endure it victoriously. Suffering is mentioned 16 times in the book's five chapters.

Something Fresh

Never Ignore a Hunch

Before I actually met the Lord at age 40 and learned to live in daily communication with Him, I lived by lessons that I had learned the hard way--from just living. One such rule that I followed was "Never ignore a hunch."

Since I now can listen for His voice, I know that such "hunches" are often promptings from God. Recently, in fine-tuning my Study Guide to Galatians, I received one--to stop and save everything to the D drive (my backup). I shrugged it off, and went on; but I thought about it and stopped. I went back, and when I tried to save it to D-Drive I discovered that, all the while, I was writing in some strange place! I quickly stopped and did a "save as" to My Documents (where I should have been working) and heaved a sigh of relief. Had I ignored God's prompting I could have lost all of my work on Galatians! So I urge you to "never ignore a hunch"--it could be God!

Paul the Man—A Discovery

Most of us have a mental picture of the apostle Paul. His enemies are said to have called him a cock sparrow. To use a phrase common in the South when I was growing up, I have thought of him as "small but wound up tight." On this subject, however, the Bible is **completely silent**, except for his name. Born Saul, Jesus renamed him Paul, which is a Latin name meaning "small."

Recently in my studies I came across a gem--a physical description of Paul by Church Father Onesiphorus, who lived in the early-mid 2nd Century, and was contemporary with many who had known Paul. He described him as "a man of small stature, with a bald head and crooked [bowed] legs, in a good state of body [health and strength], with eyebrows meeting [one continuous eyebrow], and nose somewhat hooked, full of friendliness; for now [and at other times] he had the face of an angel."

I have given all of this to Joe McCormick who is working on a drawing which I hope to show you in the Summer edition.

¹ Galatians 2:7-9.

² ANF, Vol 1, Fragments of Papias, VI, p 155.

³ This statement is based upon the generally accepted belief that Paul was imprisoned in Rome twice: first for two years of humane house arrest, released by Nero for approximately three years, and then re-arrested, imprisoned in the terrible Mamartine prison with Peter, after which they were both martyred.

⁴ Josephus wrote of literal Babylon at about the same time, concerning a great slaughter of the Jews there. (Josephus, Antiquities, 18. 9. 1)

Food for Thought—The Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon on the Plain

Strangely, many Christians seem to be comfortable in the epistles but shy away from the words of, well, Jesus Himself. This is an odd thing since He is our Lord and the Author and Finisher of our faith. People are especially inclined to turn away from or ignore (or pretend we forgot) what he said in His Sermon on the Mount and in Luke's Sermon on the Plain and other Lukan passages recording equivalent teachings (Luke 6, Luke 12, etc.). It is very likely that the ideas in these two sermons are ones which were—with some variation—shared throughout his ministry. They were likely spoken often—in the many different places where Jesus (or his disciples) taught. They showed what the Father's heart is like, they show what our priorities should be, and they show what sets Jesus apart and what sets His Kingdom apart. Why, then, do Christians, of all people, sometimes run away from these teachings?

I think one reason for this is based on a very common misunderstanding regarding English expression. At one point in the midst of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells us (perhaps even pleads with us) to "be perfect, even as your Father in Heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). Here many people come to a screeching and panicked halt and often jump overboard. What they are thinking is something like, "I can't be as perfect as God! That's impossible! The Sermon on the Mount must be saying something different from what it appears to say!" And they then work hard to come up with the something else it must be saying or perhaps just stop reading it and try to stay away from it in future. Some think that the Sermon on the Mount's purpose is simply showing us how far from perfect we are and thus in need of Christ. It is true that it shows those things, but if we stopped there and said "case closed," we've missed much that Jesus wanted us to hear. Jesus is NOT saying "be as perfect as God is" (notice that to say "be as perfect as God is" would require using the word "as" twice, not once). He is saying "be perfect in the way that God is. (The word translated "perfect" here, by the way, also means "complete," so another way to put it is, "be complete in the manner in which God's goodness is complete." What manner of love or goodness is God demonstrating? That is made clear in the verses immediately preceding verse 48. God, Jesus tells us,

does many good things—like sending the sunshine and rain, which are both essential for life—to both the just and the unjust, to the thankful and unthankful. We are to behave in a manner that goes beyond the natural way of things. We are to be kind not only to nice people or not merely to those who will be kind in return. We are to be generous to people who have nothing to give us, to people who cannot repay us. We are called to try to follow in our Father's footsteps in this distinctive part of his character.

A second reason, I think, why people want to run away from the Sermons on the Mount and Plain comes from a second set of misunderstandings. We hear Jesus telling us to do more than love our friends (every halfway decent person does that); He tells us to love our "enemies." He also says "resist not evil" and speaks of turning the other cheek. These things, in English, sound repellent, repugnant, and naive. If we suddenly stop and think of Jesus dying on the cross to make eternal life possible even for the people who put Him there, that helps. But, even so, one of our next thoughts is likely to be something like, "You mean, I'm supposed to be nice to Hitler?!" The short answer is "No, we are not supposed to be Hitler's buddy." (And, anyway, being good to Hitler would mean seeking what is good for him, which would include doing all in our power to stop him from committing atrocities.) But we are still asked to do something that is not in the normal way of things. Greek has enough words to handle this difficult topic, but English doesn't. The Greek word translated "evil" in "resist not evil" is *poneros*, and it means "things or people that are hurtful in effect but not in essential character." This "evil" is not all-caps EVIL (there is a different Greek word for all-caps EVIL, and it is *kakos*).

So, when Jesus is telling us to love our enemies or resist not evil, he is not talking about child traffickers or demons. He is talking about people who are hurtful to us personally, people who are jerks to us, people who are our political opponents, people who show off around us, people who probably gossip about us. And he is not asking us to encourage them in their "jerk" behaviors. He is calling us not to respond to them in kind. He is calling us to not dump our trash in their yard; He is challenging us to maybe pick up the beer can someone else threw in the jerk's yard; He is calling us to greet them politely, to perhaps offer them a place to stay if a tornado took their house.

But, have no fear, God is the defender of the fatherless and exploited, and we are to follow in His footsteps in that way too. He is not asking us to bake cookies for child traffickers. God expects us to do whatever we can to stop traffickers from destroying the lives of children as well as their own souls. And he expects us to intervene when we see someone being mistreated. But He is asking us to pray for the person who just cut us off in traffic instead of to curse them (or at least, after the curse, remember to pray). We don't know what the driver's back story is. We don't know the circumstances of his day. We don't know why he is in such a hurry or so distracted. Also, we are good at forgetting about our own traffic errors immediately after committing them. Remembering such things can help us pray for others.

Jesus's teachings, it is true, set the bar high, but if we run away from the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon on the Plain and his other teachings, what we miss out on is inestimable. It is in these teachings that we see the heart of God. We see what the Father values, and we hear what our priorities should be. Aren't we glad that Jesus made these things clear? It is in these teachings that we see clearly that God is not interested merely in our outward actions but in our inward motivations. We see that not only does He not want the actions of adultery or rape, but that He doesn't even want men to do such things in their imagination. What a relief! Aren't we glad to know that God sees caring for our needy family members as of much more value than a showy gift to the church? Aren't we thankful that he tells us to mend our relationships with our brothers and sisters and to make them a high priority? Aren't we glad to know that there is such a thing as treasure in heaven which leaves all that earth has to offer in the dust? Aren't we glad to know that God doesn't want people to show off when they pray or fast? Aren't we glad He wants to expose and remove our blindness to our own pride? We discover that with His help, we can be more generous than the world expects, not less generous. We see the assurance that He cares about the sparrows and lilies of the field and that He cares about us. We see that we are indeed to keep trying, knocking, and seeking. Aren't we glad that God notices and values mercy? Aren't we glad that the meek will one day inherit the earth? We may not know exactly how or in what manner that will happen, but we can tell that such a promise heralds a Kingdom so much better than the world as it is

now. If we do not run away from Jesus's teachings, we are rewarded with the gift of this great revelation of God's heart. --Sally

Welcoming Debbie McKinney

We are thankful to report that we have a new bookkeeper / office manager at WFLM, Debbie McKinney (no relation except somewhere in the mists of long-ago Scotland). She is an answer to prayer!

A FINAL WORD

Treasure and use each day as if it were your last, and never give up hope: God has a limitless supply of new beginnings, and He makes beautiful things out of broken pieces.

