

Ephesians Sermon Illustrations 4

EPHESIANS SERMON ILLUSTRATIONS

OUR DAILY BREAD, et. al.

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What Comes Naturally?

September 30, 2000

Ephesians 4:1

The story is told about an elderly man who retired after many years in the British Army. One day a man who knew about his long and distinguished military career decided to play a prank on him. As the old soldier walked down the street with his arms full of packages, the jokester sneaked up behind him and shouted, "Attention!" Without hesitation, the military man dropped his arms to his side, and every package went tumbling to the sidewalk. Without a conscious thought, the veteran was doing what comes naturally for a soldier.

Similarly, as believers in Christ, we should respond in a manner that corresponds with our new life. Our behavior is to be more and more in line with the example of Jesus' life. We still must deal with sinful desires, so we need to discipline ourselves to be the kind of person God wants us to be. Like a soldier or athlete in training (2 Timothy 2:3, 4, 5), we need to practice repeatedly until doing what's right comes naturally.

Through faith in Christ we are children of the heavenly Father. By the power of the indwelling Spirit, therefore, let us develop the habit of submitting to God's Word. Then, in every situation of life we will increasingly find that obeying Him is "doing what comes naturally." —Richard De Haan

Lord, may our lips and lives express
The blessed gospel we profess;
So let our works and virtues shine
And speak of Him who is divine. --Anon.

When we walk with Christ, we become more like Him.

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Living Up To The Name

Ephesians 4:1

March 7, 1999

A new Christian was reading through the Gospels. After she finished, she told a friend she wanted to read a book on church history. When her friend asked why, the woman replied, "I'm curious. I've been wondering when Christians started to become so unlike Christ."

We can understand why this new convert was perplexed. There is a great disparity between the life of Christ and the lives of many who bear His name. In fact, some believers are even imitating the world instead of trying to live like Jesus.

Almost 2,000 years have passed since followers of Jesus were first called Christians (Acts 11:26). Today, we who have placed our trust in the Savior still bear that name and march under the same banner as those early believers.

The Bible says that we are God's "workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). When we call ourselves Christians, we are saying to the world that Christ is our Savior and that we are following Him.

Christians have a glorious name. It is a great privilege to be identified with Christ--and a great obligation to live up to His name! --R W De Haan

More like the Master I would live and grow,
More of His love to others I would show;
More self-denial, like His in Galilee,
More like the Master I long to ever be. --Gabriel

When you walk with Christ, you'll be out of step with the world.

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THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT--MEEKNESS

Ephesians 4:1-2

F B Meyer. Our Daily Walk

THE MEEK man, according to Luther, is the sweet-tempered man.

Meekness and lowliness are the two aspects of the same disposition, the one toward man, the other toward God. "Blessed are the meek," said our Lord, "for they shall inherit the earth." It is profoundly true, because to the meek and chastened, the sweet and tender spirit, there is an unfolding of the hidden beauty of the world which is withheld from the arrogant and proud. Here is a millionaire who has just purchased a beautiful and valuable picture, which he exhibits to all his friends, taking great care to tell them the price he has paid. To him it is written all over the canvas, "This picture cost me ten thousand pounds!" Does he really possess or inherit its beauty? In his employ is a girl with culture and keen artistic sense. Whenever she gets the chance she enters the room in order to absorb the inspiration of the picture into her soul. Does not she really own it? So it is that the meek inherit all that is good and beautiful. All is theirs, since they are God's.

One of the most exquisite gems in the Psalter is that beginning "Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty" (Psa131:1). The writer describes himself as a weaned child, which at first works itself into a passion because of the

change in its diet; but afterwards becomes soothed and quieted. This is the symbol of the meek and quiet spirit, which in the sight of God is of great Price.

To acquire this meekness of spirit, ask the Holy Spirit that He would keep your proud and vainglorious nature nailed to the Cross. Next, we must believe that the meek and lowly Jesus is in our hearts, and we must ask Him to live, think, and speak through us. Lastly, look to the Holy Spirit for His sacred fire to bum out all that is covetous, envious, proud, angry and malicious within our hearts, for these are the five elements of hell. Let us always take the low seat, confessing that we are not worthy to loose the shoe-latchet of our brethren.

PRAYER - Enable us, we beseech Thee, O God, to walk as Thy dear children. May all uncleanness, foolish talking, covetousness, bitterness, wrath and anger be put away from us, with all malice Make us meek, as our Saviour was. Deliver us from the spirit of retaliation. May we make peace, healing the strife and allaying the irritation of men, for Thy Name's sake. AMEN. (F B Meyer. Our Daily Walk)

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We Are Family

Ephesians 4:1-13

August 14, 2002

Teammates of the late Willie Stargell called him "Pops" because of his leadership both on and off the baseball field. In 1979, when Stargell led the Pittsburgh Pirates to their second World Series title, the team was nicknamed "The Family" because of their close relationship.

"We won, we lived, and we enjoyed as one," Stargell said. "We molded together dozens of different individuals into one working force. We were products of different races, were raised in different income brackets, but in the clubhouse and on the field we were one."

Does that describe us as followers of Christ? When God's family assembles in heaven, it will include believers "out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Revelation 5:9). What a wonderful gathering that will be!

Until then, we are instructed "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). How can we do that? By living "with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love" (v.2).

As Christians, we are incredibly different and diverse. But we are family. Our heavenly Father calls us to lay aside prejudice, self-interest, and pride as we work toward a supernatural unity that honors Him. —David C. McCasland

We're members of God's family
When we accept His Son;
The Spirit gives us unity
And love for everyone. —Hess

Christ creates unity in the midst of diversity.

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When We Disagree

Ephesians 4:1-6

February 23, 1995

While visiting friends who are rock collectors, I asked, "Do you believe that rock formations reveal a very old earth?" The wife answered first, saying she thinks the earth is relatively young. The husband, on the other hand, said he believes there is evidence that the earth is much older than many claim.

Before leaving, I said, "You've taught me something about the way Christians should deal with disagreements. You've been married for 30 years. You're still in love with each other, and above all, you both love the Lord. Yet you differ on when God created the earth. Your differences have not destroyed your devotion to Christ and your love for each other. That's how it should be with Christians on debatable matters."

Paul's plea for walking in unity does not suggest that believers will see eye to eye on every issue. What he does encourage, however, is an honest effort to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Christians share in one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father (Eph. 4:4-6). And when this unity is coupled with humility, gentleness, longsuffering, and loving forbearance (v.2), debatable issues are not likely to become divisive. --D J De Haan

Although we often feel the urge
To prove a point to others,
We must respect divergent views
Expressed by Christian brothers. --Murray

Our union with Christ is the basis
for unity with one another.

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What's A Church For?

Ephesians 4:1-16

October 19, 2003

Every time I hear about a church fight, I cringe. When my wife and I went out to eat with a pastor friend, he told us about some of the things that people in his church have squabbled about. Christians have been pitted against Christians over such issues as the color of the carpet, the thermostat setting, and whether the choir should wear robes.

Pastors have been run out of town during these kinds of arguments. Christians have cut off friendships. Churches have split because folks argued about such things.

Why does this happen? People who get caught up in petty squabbles have lost sight of what a church is for. The church is the place we go for worship, for reading the Word, for singing to God's glory, for serving others, and for helping one another to grow. It's supposed to be a place of love, forgiveness, and encouragement.

In Paul's letter to the Ephesian church, he described the unity of purpose (Eph 4:1-16) that should help us to work through disagreements without creating divisions. He knew all too well how selfish desires, personal agendas, and playing favorites could create havoc (1 Corinthians 3:1-9).

Let's make sure our churches are safe havens from squabbles by remembering what a church is for. —Dave Branon

O Lord, help us to turn aside
From words that spring from selfish pride,
For You would have Your children one
In praise and love for Your dear Son. —D. De Haan

Christians at war with each other cannot be at peace with their heavenly Father.

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Just Be Yourself

Ephesians 4:1-16

June 22, 2003

Some Christian groups exert pressure on their members to talk, act, or look alike. This must frustrate the people who are judged for not conforming. In trying to make them "fit," the group may be stifling their strongest and best gifts.

Here's a parable that illustrates the point: A rural village was located in an area inhabited by parrots. One day a falcon landed on a windowsill. The owner of the house caught it. The villagers had never seen such a bird. They decided to trim back its feathers, cut its talons, and file down its beak so it would be like the birds they were familiar with.

As followers of Christ, we are to imitate Him (1 Corinthians 11:1; 1 John 2:6). If we become more like Him, does that mean we all will begin to act alike? Yes and no. Yes, in that our behavior toward others and reactions to circumstances will increasingly become like those of Jesus. No, in that we are each given unique gifts and interests

and abilities to develop and use for His glory (Ephesians 4:7).

Let's not be guilty of stifling our fellow Christians. Instead, let's allow for differences. God has made them unique and gifted them to fulfill His purposes. It's a shame to turn a falcon into a parrot. —David C. Egner

God builds His church with different stones,
He makes each one belong;
All shapes and sizes fit in place
To make the structure strong. —Sper

All Christians have the same employer—they just have different jobs.

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Unity In The Faith

Ephesians 4:1-6

March 19, 2006

Aristides, a second-century apologist for the Christian faith, wrote this to the Roman emperor Hadrian about believers in his day:

"They love one another. They never fail to help widows; they save orphans from those who would hurt them. If they have something, they give freely to the man who has nothing; if they see a stranger, they take him home, and are happy, as though he were a real brother. They don't consider themselves brothers in the usual sense, but brothers instead through the Spirit, in God."

As human beings, we all belong to the same family. Even though we are divided by all sorts of barriers and differences, "under the skin" we're all the same (Acts 17:26).

As believers in Jesus Christ, then, whatever our differences—denominations, preferences, worship styles—we are one spiritual body that acknowledges the same heavenly Father (Ephesians 4:4, 5, 6). The example of our spiritual forebears can be an instructive challenge to us as disciples of Jesus in the 21st century.

Let's do all we can to demonstrate our unity in Christ. Unity in our diversity is the most effective witness to this sin-fractured world. —Vernon C Grounds

Join hands, then, brothers of the faith,
Whatever your race may be;
Who serves my Father as a son
Is surely kin to me. —Oxenham

Unity among Christians comes from their union with Christ.

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Sports & Humility

Ephesians 4:1-3

[Walk] with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love. —Ephesians 4:2

On May 2, 2003, my daughter Melissa's high school paid her a great honor by dedicating its new athletic field in her memory. At the ceremony to mark the opening of the Melissa Branon Memorial Softball Field, the school unveiled a stone marker to remind future generations of the girl who wore number 11.

On that marker is etched: "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love" (Eph. 4:2 NIV)—a verse Melissa had marked in her Bible.

So often in life, the words humble and gentle don't seem to belong. Instead, the words pride and harshness mark the way success is measured. Yet Melissa and her friends were able to compete successfully in high school athletics without displaying either of those characteristics.

One of Melissa's teammates wrote of her: "The way you never backed down, always kept going, and never gave up totally inspired me." That's how she and her teammates played for God's glory—without arrogance.

Competition, handled properly, can have its place in our lives. But we should always remember to be humble and gentle in everything we do. We must reflect the characteristics of a Christlike life. —Dave Branon

True greatness does not come to those
Who strive for worldly fame;
It lies instead with those who choose
To serve in Jesus' name. —D. De Haan

Be humble and you will not stumble.

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Seven "Ones"

Ephesians 4:3-7

November 17, 2005

Have you ever worked at a job where you felt a strong bond with your co-workers? Perhaps you were united by a sense of mission, or by a respect for your boss, or by the belief that a prosperous company will benefit everyone financially. The more points of agreement among members of a group, the more they will be unified, the better they will perform, and the less likely they will be to fight among themselves.

Christians have a built-in list of unifiers that can keep them working together with a oneness of spirit. In Ephesians 4:4-6, Paul listed seven uniting "ones." Think of how helpful they can be to any group of believers working together on the same project:

One body—we are a single family unified for one purpose

One Spirit—we all have the Spirit as our power source

One hope—we all look forward to the same future

One Lord—we all trust the same Person in charge

One faith—we all trust Jesus' sacrifice for our salvation

One baptism—we all have a single identity

One God and Father—we all share the same source of our existence

What a difference it would make if we all could dwell on those seven "ones." —Dave Branon

Blest be the tie that binds
Our hearts in Christian love!
The fellowship of kindred minds
Is like to that above. —Fawcett

Followers of Christ should focus on what unites them,
not on what divides them.

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September 4, 1997

The Only Way

Ephesians 4:1-6

A man I used to work with described his religious beliefs this way: "God and I have our own thing going. I get up on Sunday morning and enjoy the day in my own way. A pot of good coffee, the Sunday paper, a walk around my yard--it's my way of knowing that everything's right with me and my Maker."

It may sound appealing to believe that we can have our own way of making things right with God. We may like the concept of an individualized faith that is tailor-made to get us into heaven. It fits right in with this day of tolerance for everyone's personal choices.

But there is one problem: The Bible makes it clear that there's only one way of salvation--faith in Jesus Christ.

There is only one true faith (Eph. 4:5). There are not multiple paths to heaven, but one way. Our trust in Christ makes us part of a body of believers with a common faith that centers squarely in Him.

Of course, that common faith is also an individual matter. We must personally trust in Christ as our Savior from sin. Everyone must come to Him the same way--the only way--by faith in Jesus, God's Son. --D C Egener

There aren't many ways into heaven;
The Bible says there's only one:
Confessing Christ Jesus as Savior,
Believing in God's only Son. --Sper

Only one road leads to heaven--Jesus Christ is the way.

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Part Of The Crew
Ephesians 4:4-16
March 24, 1996

Have you ever watched a pit crew in action at an auto race? I had the opportunity to be in the pit area during a race, and I was impressed.

In less time than it takes for most of us to put our seatbelt on and adjust the mirror, the crew had changed four tires, filled the gas tank, washed the windshield, given the driver a drink, and made vital adjustments to the car. It happens so quickly and efficiently because each crew member knows his job and does it right.

Speaking at a chapel service before the race, chaplain Max Helton said to the drivers and their crews, "Imagine all the people it takes to put on a race. What if they all wanted to drive? It would be chaos." It's the same with the crew. If everyone wanted to change tires and no one wanted to fill the gas tank, the car wouldn't have a very long ride.

Likewise, in the body of Christ we all have been equipped with different skills to do certain tasks (Eph. 4:7-16). We can't all be pastors or teachers. Some of us have to "change the tires" and "wash the windshield." And each job is as important as the other.

For the body of Christ to fulfill its purpose, we each need to concentrate on our part and do it the best we can. --J D Branon

God builds His church and makes it strong
By using you and me;
And if we all will do our part,
The world Christ's love will see. --Sper

Teamwork divides the effort
and multiplies the effect.

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Ephesians 4:9
F B Meyer

He also descended first into the lower parts of the earth.

We fill a cup or bucket from the bottom upwards. And Jesus obeyed a universal law when, in his desire to fill all things, He first descended into the place of a servant, the death of the cross, the lowly bed of a borrowed grave, and thence into the abyss of Hades. "He descended into hell," by which we mean, of course, Hades, the place of disembodied spirits. If we would sit with Him in the heavenlies, we too must be subordinated to the same law. We must also descend.

There is the low place of contrition for sin. — We must go thither; lying in the dust before God; placing the leper's covering on our lips; smiting on our breasts. Be willing that the Spirit of God should reveal all the selfishness, the subtlety, the impurity, of your heart. Let your cry ever be that God would not spare your eyes and heart from the pain of knowing what you are in his sight. From this low place you shall ascend to the bosom of God. "Blessed are they that mourn."

There is the low place of humility. — Be willing to take the lowest place with no mock modesty, but because you have learnt to esteem others better than yourself. Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God. Be willing to perform lowly deeds of service to your brethren and sisters in Christ. Reckon that you have not attained. Ascribe all that is good in you to the grace of God. God giveth peace to the humble; He raiseth up the poor out of the dust.

There is the low place of death. — The more we are delivered to the death of Jesus the more will his life be manifested in our mortal flesh. Life through death, ascent after descent, the glory after the cross of shame. "If it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." (Meyer, F. B. Our Daily Homily)

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Clericalism an Impediment

Ephesians 4:11

J I Packer

Among the clergy, clericalism can impede body life. Clericalism is a conspiracy. It is a state of affairs in which the minister said, "You leave the spiritual ministry to me; that's my job." And the congregation says, "Yes, that's absolutely right, and so we will." Or the congregation may say to the minister, "We hired you to do the spiritual ministry. Get on with it." and the minister says what he should never consent to say: "I accept that, and so I will!" For those who serve God as clergy and pastors, it is necessary to challenge that conspiracy and decline to be a party to it—to insist on the principal of every-member ministry.

We should aim at the state of affairs reflected by a letterhead I once received. It stated first the name of the church, second, "ministers: the congregation," and third, "assistant to the ministers": the name of the pastor! That is how it should be in every church. [Packer, J I : Your Father Loves You: Daily Insights for Knowing God: Harold Shaw Publications \(June 1986\)](#)

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HOW TO GET RID OF THE PREACHER

Ephesians 4:11

What a blessing it is to have a pastor who loves the Lord, who teaches the Word, and who leads his "flock" aright. I thank God we have a man like that in the church which I attend. In these days of apostasy, when there is such a tragic departure from an emphasis on the Word, how we should praise the Lord for those who are true to the Book, who live the life, and who speak with the fire of conviction. If you have such a pastor, thank God for him, pray for him, and give him a word of encouragement. (By the way, how long has it been since you gave your pastor a good firm handshake and said, "I thank God for you, and all that you have meant in my life. I'm praying for you every day"?)

"Oh," but you say, "that may be all right for your church, but we're trying to figure out how to get rid of the pastor in ours." Is that your problem? Well, then perhaps the following article I found some time ago will be of help to you: "Not long ago, a well-meaning group of laymen came from a neighboring church to see me. They wanted me to advise them on some convenient, painless, yet successful method of getting rid of their pastor. Here's what I told them: 1. Look him straight in the eye while he is preaching and say `Amen!' once in a while. He'll preach himself to death. 2. Pat him on the back and brag on his good points. He'll soon work himself to death. 3. Re-dedicate your own life to Christ, and ask the preacher for a job to do; or tell him you plan to lead some lost soul to Christ. He'll die of heart failure. 4. Get the church to unite in prayer for the preacher and he'll soon become so effective that some large church will take him off your hands."

When your preacher is doing
The best that he can,

Pray for him, help him
He's only a man! — P. Langvand

Prayerless pews make for powerless pulpits!

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Sitting in the Stands
Ephesians 4:11-16
Sept 21, 1997

A well-known coach was once asked,

“How much does college football contribute to the national physical-fitness picture?”

“Nothing,” the coach replied abruptly.

“Why not?” the startled interviewer asked.

“Well,” said the coach, “the way I see it, you have 22 men down on the field desperately needing a rest and 40,000 people in the stands, desperately needing some exercise.”

A similar situation exists in many churches today. When you compare the members who actively participate, you often find a rather pathetic situation. It's not unusual to have a small group of diligent Christian workers struggling “down on the field” while others in the congregation are acting like spectators, “sitting on the sidelines, eating hot dogs and popcorn.”

God's strategy for the accomplishment of His program is not like a sports event. It does not call for the job to be done only by the “professionals.” In the game of life, all believers have their own positions and spiritual gifts that they must exercise “for the profit of all” (1 Cor. 12:7).

My friend, if you've been sitting in the stands, you're badly needed down on the field! - M R De Haan II

God calls into action today

All those who are children of light;

Whatever our hand finds to do,

Let's do it with all of our might. - Hess

Christians should be on the frontlines,
Not the sidelines!

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Handyman Genius
Ephesians 4:11-16
August 16, 2005

My father-in-law Pete is a genius. No, he didn't develop any scientific theories like Einstein did. His genius is that of a handyman. Just ask him about an ailing furnace or a clogged garbage disposal. He can intuitively diagnose the problem and come up with a solution. When my in-laws visit, it looks like a home repair TV show. I often take notes. In many ways, as I watch Pete, I am equipped to do the repairs on my own.

In the church, there are spiritual leaders whose job it is to equip us for ministry. In Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus, he wrote about equipping the people for service (Ephesians 4:11-12). The word used here for “equip” is the same one used to describe the disciples' mending of their nets when Jesus called them into service (Mark 1:16-20). For 3 years, Jesus “mended holes” in their “ministry nets” so they could be effective fishers of men (v.17).

If you don't know how to get started in finding and participating in a ministry, watch for people who can show you how it's done. Observe the way they use the Bible, pray, and work with people. Soon you will find that the Lord is using you more effectively in the lives of others. All you need is to be equipped. —Dennis Fisher

By God's design, there lies in wait for you
Important work that no one else can do.

Just as the planets find their paths through space,
You too must grow to fill your proper place. —Thayer

Are you following the right leader?

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It Takes Time!

Ephesians 4:11-16

August 5, 1997

The story is told of an accomplished artist who was applying the finishing touches to a bronze sculpture. He kept filing, scraping, and polishing every little surface of his masterpiece. "When will it be done?" asked an observer. "Never," came the reply. "I just keep working and working until they come and take it away."

Much the same could be said of the children of God. We are saved by grace and declared righteous in Christ. Yet when it comes to the matter of Christlikeness in our everyday living, we must keep working at it until Jesus comes and takes us away.

Someone has observed, "The acorn does not become an oak in a day ... It is not one touch of the artist's brush that produces a finished painting. There are always months between seedtime and harvest."

Whether you are a new believer or have known the Lord for many years, "Grow up in all things into Him" (Eph. 4:15). Don't let setbacks and failures discourage you. Stay in touch with God through prayer. Then, as you feed on the Word of God and obey His commands, you too will become more like Christ through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Remember, it takes time! --R W De Haan

O to be like Thee, blessed Redeemer,
This is my constant longing and prayer;
Gladly I'll forfeit all of earth's treasures,
Jesus, Thy perfect likeness to wear. --Chisholm

Salvation is the miracle of a moment; growth is the labor of a lifetime.

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"Measure Me"

Ephesians 4:11-16

October 1, 2006

Can you measure me today?" Caleb, our paperboy, asked.

It was not the first time he had made that request. A few years ago I had mentioned to him how tall he was getting. Since then, we've often measured his height on the siding of our house. After all this time, he still wants me to measure him.

Measurements can be indicators of growth. And it's a good idea to measure our spiritual growth. For instance: Do I spend time reading God's Word and talking with Him each day? Do I look forward to fellowshiping with the Lord? What "fruit of the Spirit" is apparent in my life? Do I talk about Jesus with people who don't know Him? How am I using my spiritual gift or gifts? Do I have a generous and giving spirit? How much better do I know God today than I did a year ago? These questions are good indicators of spiritual growth.

A child seems to grow up all of a sudden, but it's actually a continual process. Just as Jesus grew in both wisdom and stature, we as believers are to continue to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). We are no longer to be children, but to "grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ" (Eph. 4:14, 15). Have you measured yourself lately? —Cindy Hess Kasper

The child of God who reads the Word
And heeds the messages he's heard
Will grow in grace from day to day

And share with others on life's way. —Hess

Salvation is the miracle of a moment; growth is the labor of a lifetime.

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OUR SHEET ANCHOR!

Ephesians 4:14-15

F B Meyer. Our Daily Walk

"Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure."-- 1Jn 3:3.

OUR DESTINY is the highest possible--"We shall be like Him." For this we were created, redeemed, and sanctified, that we should be conformed to the image of God's Son, that He might be the First Born among many brethren (Ro 8:29).

The Apostle says that those who have this Hope will purify themselves. A young friend of mine once asked me if I would try to see her lover, as my train stopped at a wayside station in a far-distant western State. It was a dark night when we arrived, and a hurried conversation took place on the steps of the great Pullman car. I found that amid the many temptations of a rancher's life, this young fellow was holding on to purity and truth. He said that he had very infrequent opportunities of attending any religious services, but that the letters which came from the old country had been his sheet anchor. I understood what he meant. He realized the strong drift of circumstances, but to be loved by a sweet pure girl, who made him the object of her incessant prayer, and to receive her inspiring letters, kept him from yielding to the evil which enveloped him as an atmosphere; the thought that before long he might claim her as his bride helped to purify and steady his life. So the expectation of being with, and like Christ, should be to us as a sheet-anchor, who bear His Name.

To see Christ face to face, to be with Him in unbroken fellowship, and to be like Him--this is the threefold destiny of every Christian soul. But how little can we imagine our future life! We strive to penetrate the dense veil of mist in vain--what the resurrection body will be like; what the converse with holy beings will amount to; what ministry may be assigned to us--we know not what we shall be, but "we know that we shall be like Him"--and it is enough! All that we have ever dreamed and hoped for will find its flower and fruitage in that glad summer time.

PRAYER -O God, it is my earnest desire that I may not only live, but grow: grow in grace, and in the knowledge of my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. May I grow in patience and fortitude of soul, in humility and zeal, in spirituality and a heavenly disposition of mind. AMEN. (F B Meyer. Our Daily Walk)

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Grandpa's Tree

Ephesians 4:15

December 14, 2001

When I first saw the twisted Christmas tree, I wished Grandpa were alive to fix it. He could make any tree beautiful. No matter how bad it looked when we gave it to him, it was beautiful when he gave it back.

He would get out his saws and clippers and begin cutting and shaping. When he was done, the tree looked as if it had been grown in a greenhouse where a caring gardener had watered, pruned, and protected it from storms, drought, and nasty bugs.

Then Grandpa would turn the tree over to the rest of the family to finish the job. We added lights, ornaments, and garland, and the imperfect tree was ready for a perfect celebration. What a transformation!

Life is like that crooked conifer. Each of us comes to God bent and misshapen from the effects of sin. But when we put our faith in Christ as Savior, God lovingly begins His work in us, transforming us from the inside out (Philippians 1:6). Then He puts us into the care of His family, the church, and they continue His work by adding the lights of truth (Ephesians 4:15), the ornaments of patient rebuke (2 Timothy 4:2), and the garlands of love (1 Peter 4:8). What teamwork!

The message of Grandpa's tree is this: Under God's loving care, a life marred by sin can become beautiful! —Julie

God sees in us a masterpiece
That one day will be done;
His Spirit works in all our lives
To make us like His Son. —Sper

What sin has twisted, God's grace can straighten.

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Inseparable Twins
Ephesians 4:15
February 18, 2003

A seminary student got into a heated debate with his landlord. They were discussing the teachings of a theologian whom the landlord thought was a heretic. The student, on the other hand, considered himself a follower of the man and his doctrines.

With an attitude of superiority, the young man showed his landlord a well-marked copy of a theology book written by this man. The landlord, who had little education but was a devout Christian, was overwhelmed by the young fellow's greater knowledge. As a result, he felt frustrated and defeated.

Similarly, it's possible for us to misuse the great spiritual truths of Scripture to hurt others. Maybe we've received instruction from a prominent Bible teacher, gained special insights into the Word, or memorized key Scriptures we can quote with ease. This gives us the leverage either to put someone down or to build him up. If we misuse what we know, we may set Christians against each other and break up churches. Or we can use the truth to enlighten, edify, and enrich others when we accompany it with love.

Speaking the truth must never be separated from love (Ephesians 4:15). They're inseparable twins!—Dennis J. De Haan

Lord, I must speak the truth in love
If seeking hearts would hear it,
For speaking with self-righteous pride
May wound another's spirit. —Fasick

The truth may hurt, but love helps ease the pain.

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Ephesians 4:15
Spurgeon, C. H.
Morning and evening

Many Christians remain stunted and dwarfed in spiritual things, so as to present the same appearance year after year. No up-springing of advanced and refined feeling is manifest in them. They exist but do not “grow up into him in all things.” But should we rest content with being in the “green blade,” when we might advance to “the ear,” and eventually ripen into the “full corn in the ear?” Should we be satisfied to believe in Christ, and to say, “I am safe,” without wishing to know in our own experience more of the fulness which is to be found in him? It should not be so; we should, as good traders in heaven's market, covet to be enriched in the knowledge of Jesus. It is all very well to keep other men's vineyards, but we must not neglect our own spiritual growth and ripening. Why should it always be winter time in our hearts? We must have our seed time, it is true, but O for a spring time—yea, a summer season, which shall give promise of an early harvest. If we would ripen in grace, we must live near to Jesus—in his presence—ripened by the sunshine of his smiles. We must hold sweet communion with him. We must leave the distant view of his face and come near, as John did, and pillow our head on his breast; then shall we find ourselves advancing in holiness, in love, in faith, in hope—yea, in every precious gift. As the sun rises first on mountain-tops and gilds them with his light, and presents one of the most charming sights to the eye of the traveller; so is it one of the most delightful contemplations in the world to mark the glow of the Spirit's light on the head of some saint, who has risen up in spiritual stature, like Saul, above his fellows, till, like a mighty Alp, snow-capped, he reflects first among the chosen, the beams of the Sun of Righteousness, and bears the sheen of his effulgence high aloft for all

to see, and seeing it, to glorify his Father which is in heaven.

Are You Doing Your Part?

Ephesians 4:16

April 2, 2000

I was driving on a seldom-traveled road. Suddenly, my car slowed down, sputtered a moment, and with a final gasp, died. There I was, with only a screwdriver and a pair of pliers, miles away from a mechanic. And what I know about car engines you can put in your eye.

I lifted the hood of the car and looked around, but everything seemed in order. Then a friend came along. He jiggled the carburetor and said, "Plenty of gas." He placed the screwdriver across some electrical connections and said, "Aha—no spark!" Soon he found a loose wire. One little screw had come loose, which caused the motor to stop running.

Just as little parts of an engine are vital to keep it running, every member of the body of Christ, the church, is important. Failure to do your part may hinder the whole body from functioning properly. Your failure to pray may result in loss of power. Your failure to witness may be the reason that someone doesn't hear the gospel. Your failure to support your church financially may curtail the work of evangelism or missions. Your little part, if neglected, can result in big problems.

The work of every member of the body, however small, is needed. Are you doing your part? —M R De Haan

O Lord, help me in every way
To have a faithful heart;
Teach me to love and serve Your church,
And always do my part. —Fitzhugh

Faithfulness in little things is a great thing.

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Keep It Out!

October 3, 2000

Ephesians 4:17

Guam is crawling with snakes. Slithering brown tree snakes are killing the birds of the beautiful island nation and threatening the citizens' way of life. The people, of course, want to keep the snakes out.

These snakes are not native to Guam. They came as stowaways on airplanes from Micronesia, and they have multiplied by the thousands. Known for their voracious appetites, the snakes have wiped out 9 of the island's 11 native bird species. They also threaten other islands with which Guam trades.

Just as these deadly snakes are a danger to Guam, so our sins are a danger to us if we don't deal decisively with them. Sins such as lust, sexual impurity, covetousness, anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language, and lying can show up in the lives of Christians (Colossians 3:5-9). Like snakes, such sins can grow, multiply, and eventually dominate us. They can also destroy our effectiveness in serving Christ and damage our testimony for Him.

The solution is to say no to sin (Romans 6:12). We also need to focus on Christ and His Word, setting our minds "on things above, not on things on the earth." We must also "put to death" the sins that seek to invade our lives (Colossians 3:2,5,16). That's the way to keep sin out! —Dave Branon

We can't afford to play with fire
Nor tempt the serpent's bite;
We can't afford to think that sin
Brings any true delight. --Anon.

Sins are like weeds in a garden; keep them out or they will take over.

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Like The Master
Ephesians 4:17-24
April 29, 1997

A young boy knocked at the studio door of an Italian artist who had died. When it was opened, he explained, "Please, madam, will you give me the master's brush?"

The boy, who had a passionate longing to be an artist, wished for the great master's touch. The woman placed the brush in the boy's hand and invited him to try.

He made a supreme effort but soon found he could paint no better with that brush than with his own. The woman then said, "Remember, you cannot paint like the great master unless you have his spirit."

So too, people who have never been born again are doomed to disappointment and failure when they attempt to live in a way that pleases God. Without the indwelling Holy Spirit, they cannot do it.

Perhaps you have experienced the new birth and you have Christ's Spirit living within you, yet you feel so powerless. The reason may be that though you have all of His Spirit, His Spirit does not have all of you. All your ambitions and desires must be submitted to His control.

The greatness of the power and effectiveness of your service for Christ is in exact proportion to the measure of your surrender to Christ. --Henry G. Bosch

Oh, to be saved from myself, dear Lord!
Oh, to be lost in Thee!
Oh, that it might be no more I,
But Christ who lives in me! --Whiddington

Christ is seen most clearly when we remain in the background.

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A Wasted Life
Ephesians 4:17-29
March 6, 2004

It's frustrating to talk to some people about God, Jesus, and salvation. They shrug you off by saying, "You have your belief and I have mine." Or, "I won't tell you how to live if you won't tell me how to live."

How do we respond to that? By telling them and showing them that our belief in Christ makes sense. It gives life meaning now and for eternity.

In the book Papillon, the main character dreams that he is on trial. The judge says he is being charged with the most terrible crime that a person can possibly commit. When Papillon asks what it is, he is told, "The tragedy of a wasted life." "Guilty!" says Papillon, weeping. "Guilty."

There are people all around us whose lives have no meaning or hope. They're caught in the web of sin, living "in the futility of their mind" (Ephesians 4:17). Our role, as followers of the Lord Jesus, is to demonstrate that the life of faith does make sense. In the midst of a world of aimlessness and despair, we are to live with purpose and hope.

When we show people the difference Jesus has made in our lives, they will see that life can have meaning and purpose. Then, if they turn to Jesus, they too will avoid the tragedy of a wasted life.—David C. Egner

People searching for an answer,
Looking for a better way,
Can discover truth and meaning
If God's love we will display. —Sper

A Christlike life can be the world's Bible.

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It Takes Just One
Ephesians 4:17-32
February 19, 2003

In 1520, one person stepped off a Spanish ship in Mexico and caused the deaths of thousands of people. The man was a soldier under the leadership of Pánfilo de Narváez, and he had smallpox. The soldier didn't know it, but wherever he went he exposed the citizens to a new disease. As a result of the ensuing smallpox epidemic, many thousands of Mexican citizens died.

One man. That's all it took. His contact with the unsuspecting Mexican people led to a horrible, painful scourge. The devastating effects of that disease traveled from one person to another, infecting a large segment of the population.

The spread of any deadly disease is similar to the spread of a spiritual sickness that sometimes strikes churches—the disease of gossip and unedifying words (Ephesians 4:29, 30, 31, 32).

It's not unusual for a happy and well-adjusted congregation of people to be infected after just one person introduces gossip. Soon dissension is running rampant among people who had been eagerly working together, and the church finds itself spending more time on damage control than on ministry.

Each of us should be careful not to spread the sickness of gossip. Instead, let's use our words to strengthen and encourage one another.—Dave Branon

A careless word may kindle strife,
A cruel word may wreck a life;
A timely word may lessen stress,
A loving word may heal and bless. —Anon.

To silence gossip, refuse to repeat it.

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Control Of The Tube
Ephesians 4:17-5:7
September 13, 1997

Do you ever feel that society is whirling out of control? I feel that way sometimes when I read about what's on television. I say "read about" because I don't want to see most of what's on.

For example, TV talk shows have sunk to such depths that hosts are bringing young teenagers on to talk shamelessly about their sexual exploits. And prime-time comedy programs, which in the past would never allow even a hint of profanity, are now filled with sexual innuendo and immorality.

A group known as the Media Research Center monitored the so-called "family hour" and concluded: "The family hour's decreasing respect for parental authority and traditional values has been troubling, but the deterioration of standards has been most noticeable in two areas: language and sexual content."

We may not be able to do much about television programs from the creative end of things, but we can surely do something from a personal perspective. We can take a look at our viewing habits. We can evaluate whether we have become desensitized to what we see and hear. We can let God's Word, not the world, control what we see (Eph. 4:17). That's the best way to gain control of the tube. --J D Branon

As the flickering light shines its message each day,
Does it brighten your path or lead you astray?
Have you left any time for the Light of your soul?
Or has your TV taken too much control? --J D Branon

The Bible is the best TV guide.

MAKING A FRESH START

F B Meyer

Ephesians 4:22-24.

"Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ."-- Ro 13:14.

WE CAN all start afresh! However far we have ascended, there is something higher; and however far we have fallen, it is always possible to make a fresh start. We need to take our place in the School of Christ and be taught by Him (Eph 4:20, 21).

"The old man" which we must "put off" is clearly our former manner of life. If we have not put it entirely away, let us do so now by an immediate act of faith in the living Spirit. It does not take long for a beggar to put off his rags and take instead a new suit of clothes, and it need not take a moment longer to put away habits and thoughts, ways of speech and life which are unworthy of the children of God. Do it now, and look up to the Holy Spirit to keep renewing you in the spirit of your mind.

But more than this, let us "put on the new man," which is the life of Jesus Christ, that ideal which is in the likeness of God, and which the Lord created for us by His blessed life and death and resurrection. But to enable us to live this life we need the daily help of the Holy Spirit. He entered our hearts at the moment of regeneration, and has been with us ever since. We may not have realised His entry, but we believe it because of the assurance of 1Co 6:19; Ro 8:9; Eph 3:16. For my part, I like to begin every day, before lifting my head from the pillow, by saying, "Thou art within, O Spirit of Christ, though I feel Thee not."

If the Holy Spirit be ungrieved He will witness to our sonship; He will enthrone Christ as King of our life; will keep the self-life in the place of death; will give us a hunger for the things of God; He will give power in witness-bearing. In order to have a strong and blessed Christian experience, the one thing is to see that we do not grieve the Spirit. I do not think that we can grieve Him away, but we may greatly limit and restrain His gracious work by insincerity of speech, the nursing of an unforgiving spirit, any kind of over-reaching or fraudulent dealing, impurity of speech, or failure in love. We may be bound, so as not to be able to move our arms, by a number of cotton threads, quite as tightly as by a strong rope-thong. Let us take care not to grieve Him by such inconsistencies.

PRAYER - Fulfil in me, O God, those desires of goodness which Thou hast created in my heart, and perfect the work of faith, that Jesus Christ may be glorified in me. AMEN. (F B Meyer. Our Daily Walk)

THE ULTIMATE AIRPLANE

Ephesians 4:23

"Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. 2 Corinthians 4:16

Tremendous heat is generated on the exterior of the Concorde airplane when it flies at supersonic speeds. The temperature on the outer surface of the plane can get to 127 degrees C (261 degrees F) even though the outside air temperature is -56 degrees C (-69 degrees F).

The expansion caused by this heat makes the plane 9 inches longer at cruise speed than at rest. The cabin floor of the aircraft is built on rollers and doesn't expand, and four air conditioning systems keep the inside comfortable. While the outside of the plane is undergoing tremendous stress, the inside climate remains constant.

In today's Scripture, Paul described our "outward man" as perishing under the heat of great pressure, while our "inward man" is renewed day by day. Note the contrast:

ON THE OUTSIDE	ON THE INSIDE
Pressed on every side	Not crushed (2Co 4:8)
Perplexed	Not in despair (2Co 4:8)
Persecuted	Not forsaken (2Co 4:9)

Struck down

Not destroyed (2Co
4:9)

When faced with trials, we too can have an inner strength through Christ (v. 11). Our part is to look beyond the temporal to the eternal (v. 18) and to renew our minds daily (Eph. 4:23) through the Word of God and prayer.--
Dennis J. De Haan

Upon your own strength you cannot rely;

There's a fount of strength and grace on high;

Go to that fount, your strength renew,

And the life of Christ will shine through you.-- Hopkins.

God's Word refreshes our minds;

God's Spirit renews our strength.

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The Memory Of Our Sins

June 30, 2002

Ephesians 4:23

The memory of our sins can rob us of the joy of our salvation. Perhaps we have said, or heard others say, "If only I could forgive myself for what I have done!" Some people become obsessed with guilt for their past sins.

When Joseph made himself known to his brothers who had sold him into slavery, they were speechless and "dismayed in his presence" (Genesis 45:3). Guilt and fear reminded them of the pain they had caused their aged father Jacob and their brother Joseph. Sensing this, Joseph immediately reassured them: "Do not ... be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life" (v.5).

When we have sinned and hurt others, we may find ourselves in a position similar to that of Joseph's brothers. But if we have confessed our sins, we can be assured that we have been forgiven. Nagging guilt and self-blame are not the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Bible tells us to be "renewed in the spirit of [our] mind" (Ephesians 4:23). We must focus our thinking on Jesus our Savior, not on our past sins. We need to concentrate on what He has done—His atoning sacrifice on the cross for our sins—not on what we have done. Because He has forgiven our sin, we can learn to "forget" our sin. —Dennis J. De Haan

Blessed be the name of Jesus!
I'm so glad He took me in;
He's forgiven my transgressions,
He has cleansed my heart from sin. —Harris

Guilt is a burden our heavenly Father never intended His children to bear.

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A Christian All The Time

Ephesians 4:17-32

November 11, 1995

My nephew James had completed boot camp and had become one of the few and the proud who could say, "I'm a Marine!" His dad was showing me some graduation pictures and pointed to one of a relaxed James smiling for the camera. "I wasn't supposed to take this one," he said. "James told me he could get in trouble for having his picture taken like that while in uniform."

Apparently the Marine's code of behavior extends beyond formal functions, even to the way he is photographed. A Marine is "a new person," and this should be evident in the way he acts 24 hours a day. Of course, this doesn't mean he can never relax or smile, but there should be something different about his manner because he's a Marine.

So it is in the Christian life. The new guidelines, which apply 24 hours a day, include not lying (Eph. 4:25), not allowing our anger to lead us into sin (Eph 4:26), not giving the devil a chance to influence us (Eph 4:27), not stealing (Eph 4:28), not speaking dishonorably (Eph 4:29), not grieving the Holy Spirit (Eph 4:30), avoiding malice (Eph 4:31), and being kind (Eph 4:32).

Just as a Marine has a constant responsibility to uphold the image of the Corps, so we must remember that we represent Jesus--all the time. --J D Branon

Help me, Lord, to live my life
Free from selfishness and strife
So that others clearly see
Changes You have made in me. --Sper

Christ is not looking
for parttime followers.

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REMOVE THE "GRAVECLOTHES"!

Ephesians 4:22

The raising of Lazarus from the dead is a most striking portrayal of what occurs when one who is lost and dead in sin is given life everlasting through faith in Christ. We are told that when Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth," he who was dead emerged from the tomb "bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin" (John 11:44). Here was a wonderful miracle, and yet he who was raised had his hands and feet bound like a mummy, and his face wrapped about with a cloth. What a picture of many who in-deed have been brought to life through faith in Christ, but who still are not fit for service because certain hindering remnants of the old life must first be removed. Note that Lazarus' face was bound, implying that his mouth was covered! This is symbolic of those who, although spiritually alive, still have their mouths gagged by the "graveclothes" of worldly habits. In many ways they may be eloquent, but in spiritual things they are silent. Lazarus' hands and feet were also bound. This speaks of restricted service. Many believers do very little for the Lord because they are still inhibited by selfish attitudes and the distracting cares of this life. They are hampered in their Christian walk by those things which characterized their "former conversation." How important it is to get rid of those bindings of the world with their "deceitful lusts" (Eph. 4:22).

Removing the graveclothes means putting off the hindrances to spiritual power such as "anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, [and] filthy communication out of [our] mouth" (Col. 3:8). Only after we have thus "put off ... the old man" of sin and carnality will we be "meet for the Master's use" (2 Tim. 2:21).

Stir me, Lord, I long to serve Thee,
Know the fullness of Thy power.
Help me, Lord, to yield completely
Day by day and hour by hour. — I. G. Hallan

Removing the "bindings of sin" readies one for the "blessings of service"!—H.G.B.

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Something Has Changed

Ephesians 4:24

January 18, 1998

When some missionaries took the gospel to Vanino, a town in the far eastern part of Russia, they didn't know what effect their work would have.

A few years later, Gary Anderson, president of Baptist Mid-Missions, visited Vanino. He was met by the vice-mayor, who told him, "We have noticed that when people are associated with your church for a while, it makes a difference. It's as though they are reborn."

Anderson was then asked by the vice-mayor if his church would work with troubled families and directionless young adults in Vanino.

Without knowing it, that city official had correctly described what had happened. People in Vanino had been "reborn"--born again by faith in Jesus, who died for their sins and rose from the grave. Each of them was "a new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17).

The question we need to be asking ourselves is whether people notice that we have been reborn. Can anyone tell that there is a positive difference about our lives?

One of the greatest witnesses we can have as Christians is to leave a positive impression on others. The people of Vanino know that something has changed the churchgoers. Is it obvious to others that Someone has changed you? --J D Branon

When we're reborn--made new in Christ--
It should be plain for all to see
That God has changed us from within
And placed us in His family. --Sper

A changed life is the result of a changed heart.

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Spiritual Reupholstering

Ephesians 4:24

August 23, 2005

When we moved into our home 5 years ago, we discovered that the former owner had left us six dining room chairs. They were covered with fabric of beautiful African art—tasteful zebra stripes. We appreciated the unexpected gifts and used them frequently when entertaining guests.

When we recently moved again, those chairs needed a makeover to match our new decor. So I called an upholsterer and asked, "Shouldn't we just put the new material over the existing fabric?" He responded, "No, you'll ruin the shape of the chair if you just put new material over the old."

The work of God in our lives is similar. He's not interested in merely changing our spiritual appearance. Instead, He intends to replace our character with what is called "the new man," made in the image of Christ (Ephesians 4:24). The flesh has a tendency to perform religious activity, but this is not the work of the Holy Spirit. He will completely transform us on the inside.

But the process is a partnership (Philippians 2:12,13). As we daily lay aside our old behaviors and replace them with godly ones, the God of grace works in us through the power of the Holy Spirit.

God wants to reupholster us. —Dennis Fisher

Dear Lord, You've given new life to me—
A great and full salvation;
And may the life that others see
Display the transformation. —Hess

When you receive Christ, God's work in you has just begun

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Good Communicators

Ephesians 4:25

June 3, 2003

A young boy and his stepfather had difficulty communicating with each other. The man was outgoing; the boy was quiet. The elder loved to fish; the youngster loved to read.

The stepfather, wanting to get close to the boy, took him on a fishing trip. The boy hated it but didn't know how to tell his stepfather directly. So he wrote him a note saying he wanted to go home. The man looked at it and stuck it in his pocket.

The fishing trip continued 4 more days. When they finally returned home, the boy shared his frustration with his mother and told her that his stepfather had paid no attention to his note. His mother said to him, "Son, your father can't read." The man had never shared this with the boy.

Good communication occurs not only when we know what we want to say, but also when we know the person to whom we are speaking. And to know one another requires a willingness to let others know our weaknesses and limitations.

Paul urged us as believers to speak truthfully with each other (Ephesians 4:25). He also admonished us to be "kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another" (Eph 4:32). That's Christlike love, and it provides the security in which good communication can thrive. —Haddon W. Robinson

We ought to speak the truth we feel
With careful thought for those who hear;
For truth and love must try to sense
What others feel, what others fear. —D. De Haan

Listen to understand, then speak with love.
Words spoken in love need no interpreter.

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One Body

Ephesians 4:25

August 23, 2002

Feuds are as old as the human race and as widespread as the common cold. Like the cold, once they start they infect others. It is insidious how easily feuds begin, how long they can last, and the damage they can do. In the late 1800s, two families, one in Kentucky and another in West Virginia, fought for nearly 20 years, and 12 were killed.

Not all feuds are that blatant. They may be as subtle as a minor insult. Once they start they can gradually damage and then destroy families, churches, and lifelong relationships.

Paul knew the deadly effects that feuds could have in a congregation. So he reminded his readers in Ephesus, "We are members of one another" (Ephesians 4:25).

Is there a Christian with whom you are angry or bitter, with whom you no longer speak? Once perhaps you were friends, but have you let some offense turn your friend into an enemy? Hear what Paul said: "Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:31, 32).

Determine today that you will do everything you can, with God's help, to build bridges to other people rather than walls between you. —Haddon W. Robinson

We're members of Christ's body,
A blessed family;
So let's not fight or quarrel,
But live in harmony. —Fitzhugh

Our union with Christ is the basis for unity with one another.

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Two Pats Of Butter

Ephesians 4:25

October 7, 2002

Honesty must be woven into the fabric of our character if we are to have an effective testimony for Christ. Even the

secular world recognizes the importance of integrity.

A promising young man applied for a job at a bank. He was one of several applicants, but the president was especially impressed by his credentials. Before hiring him, the president invited the man to lunch with several of the bank executives.

As the group went through the cafeteria line, the young man put two pats of butter on his tray and slipped them beneath the outer rim of his plate so the cashier wouldn't see them. The company president, who was right behind him, observed his actions. If this fellow would be dishonest with two pats of butter, he thought, how could he be trusted at a teller's window? Right there the president decided not to hire him. Deception takes many forms, whether an outright verbal lie, or the cover-up of two pats of butter, which in this case amounted to stealing.

An 11-year-old boy who reads Our Daily Bread wrote, "I am the sort of kid who can't lie or I get tingly feelings in my stomach." Oh, that we all were that sensitive! Lord, make us people of unquestioned honesty and integrity in all things—whether large or small. —Dennis De Haan —Dennis J. De Haan

Lord, help me to be honest
In all I do and say;
God, grant me grace and power
To live for You today. —Fitzhugh

A person of integrity has nothing to hide.

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Man Eaters

Ephesians 4:25-32

June 20, 2000

Have you ever heard of one snake eating another snake? According to zookeepers, two of these reptiles will sometimes grab different ends of the same piece of food. Sooner or later their struggle for that last bite brings them nose to nose. But then comes the surprise. The snake with the widest bite will keep right on going and actually swallow the other!

Christians have been known to "consume one another" too. We may say something unkind to a fellow Christian, who then becomes defensive, and an argument develops. We know we would be better off if we held our tongue and trusted the Lord for the outcome, but we just keep going.

It's easy to assume that we're too mature to let things go too far. But the apostle Paul reminded us in Galatians 5:15 that words and emotions can get out of hand—even among Christians. When this happens, feelings get hurt, friendships are destroyed, the church becomes divided, and the body of Christ suffers.

It is crucial that we ask the Lord daily to help us to "be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another" (Eph. 4:32). Only as we rely on Him will the love of Christ in our hearts replace the man-eating impulses of a sharp tongue and a bitter spirit. —M R De Haan II

It's only a word! But a word may harm
And open a wound with its lingering smart;
And a word may heal or a word may charm
If it comes direct from a loving heart. —Anon.

It's better to bite your tongue than to make a biting remark

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Inside Out

Ephesians 4:25-32

February 18, 2006

While giving a sermon, missionary Hudson Taylor filled a glass with water and placed it on a table in front of him. As he was speaking, he pounded his fist hard enough to make the water splash onto the table. He then explained, "You

will come up against much trouble. But when you do, remember, only what's in you will spill out."

That's worth thinking about, isn't it? When we are mistreated or misunderstood, how do we respond? With loving words, patience, and kindness? Or are we inclined to retaliate in anger?

In Ephesians 4:25-32, we see the contrast between what a person is before he is saved and what he is afterward. When we live under the control of the Holy Spirit, we will show it by the way we react to the jolting trials and temptations of life. How we respond to trying, embarrassing situations that are suddenly thrust upon us is a good test of how much we have grown in grace.

It is possible to suppress frustration and anger, and to appear undisturbed to people around us. But if our heart is full of the Savior's love, we will respond to the jostling of an unexpected trial with genuine patience and kindness. Like a full glass of water, what's inside of us will spill over on the outside. —Richard De Haan

Lord, help me flee all sin and shame,
Lest I disgrace Your holy name;
And may I live so others see
The Savior's love revealed in me. —D. De Haan
When trouble grows, your character shows.

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The Best Policy

Ephesians 4:25-28

February 17, 2004

A former chairman of the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants says that ethical behavior is the foundation of business success. Speaking to an audience of business and community leaders, Marvin Strait said, "People want to do business with people they can trust. Trust is what makes business work. It is the bedrock of the free-enterprise system."

In the wake of corporate scandals and eroding public confidence, his words remind us of the value of honesty. Without it, our lives and our work fall short of God's design.

The Old Testament law says, "You shall have honest scales, honest weights, ... I am the Lord your God" (Leviticus 19:36). And the New Testament teaches that truth and honesty in all that we say and do should characterize those who have been redeemed by Christ (Ephesians 4:25, 26, 27, 28).

A good way to evaluate our daily choices is to ask ourselves: "Would I be embarrassed if I read about this in the newspaper or if my family and friends knew about it? Am I excusing or profiting by the unethical acts of other people?"

Honesty is not only the best policy, it's God's policy for every aspect of our lives. Living with integrity honors and glorifies Him.—David C. McCasland

Lord, help me to be honest
In all I do and say,
And grant me grace and power
To live for You each day. —Fitzhugh

Honesty is the best policy. —Benjamin Franklin

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HATRED'S BITTER FRUIT

Ephesians 4:26

Whoever hates his brother is a murderer.-1John 3:15

One of the worst cases of hatred I have ever come across is found in a will written in 1935 by a Mr. Donohoe. It says, "Unto my two daughters, Frances Marie and Denise Victoria, by reason of their unfilial attitude toward a dotting father, ... I leave the sum of \$1.00 to each and a father's curse. May their lives be fraught with misery,

unhappiness, and poignant sorrow. May their deaths be soon and of a lingering malignant and torturous nature." The last line of the will is so vicious I shudder to quote it. It reads, "May their souls rest in hell and suffer the torments of the condemned for eternity."

Such utter contempt didn't develop in a day. It had to grow over a long period of time. We should never allow our minds to become fertile soil for the seeds of hatred. We would do ourselves a world of good by heeding the words of Paul, "Do not let the sun go down on your wrath" (Eph. 4:26). And James gave wise counsel when he told us to "be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God" (James 1:19, 20).

Let's not forget that "whoever hates his brother is a murderer" (1John 3:15). How important it is, therefore, never to nurture hatred's bitter fruit! - Richard W. De Haan

When angry feelings go unchecked,
They'll mushroom into hate;
So don't let time feed bitterness --
Forgiveness must not wait.--Sper

Hate, like acid, damages the vessel in which it is stored
and the object on which it is poured.

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How Can You Keep the Sun from Going Down?

Ephesians 4:26

Do not let the sun go down on your anger

The story is told about a little boy who got into a fight with his older brother one morning. Somewhat outmatched, he took quite a beating. It was his pride, however, that suffered the most. The whole experience left him feeling bitter. In fact, he refused to talk to his brother all day. Bedtime came, and their mother, very much wanting to see the two make up, said to the younger,

"Don't you think you should forgive your brother before you go to sleep? Remember, the Bible says, 'Do not let the sun go down on your wrath.'"

The youngster looked perplexed. He thought for a few moments and then blurted out,

"But, Mommy, how can I keep the sun from going down?"

The boy's question revealed that he had no intention of getting rid of his grudge. (Source unknown)

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A Word From The Undertaker

Ephesians 4:26

February 25, 1999

In Thomas Lynch's popular book *The Undertaking: Life Studies From The Dismal Trade*, he reflects on his work as a funeral director in a small Michigan town. In 25 years, he has overseen some 5,000 burials. How has it shaped his thinking?

"It tends to make me want to resolve conflicts a little quicker," Mr. Lynch says, "because I've seen people go off to work who don't come home."

How many times have we huffed out of the house in the morning or turned out the light at night with anger smoldering in our hearts? Oh, we probably intend to resolve the conflict eventually, but not now. Let the other person suffer awhile in silence, we think. But if we dealt with heartbroken survivors as often as Mr. Lynch, it would change the way we think and act.

"Do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil," the Bible counsels (Eph. 4:26-27). "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you" (v.32). The issue is not

what others have done to us, but what Christ has done for us.

There's no better time than right now to apologize or offer forgiveness, and to restore a priceless relationship. The undertaker knows. --D C McCasland

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

What keeps me from taking care of anger immediately? What do I do when another person does not respond to attempts at reconciliation? See Romans 12:17, 18, 19, 20, 21.

Be slow to anger and quick to repent.

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No Grudges After Sunset

Ephesians 4:26

January 15, 2006

A little boy got into a fight with his brother and the whole experience left him feeling bitter. When his brother wanted to make things right, he refused to listen. In fact, he would not speak to his brother all day.

Bedtime came, and their mother said to the boy, "Don't you think you should forgive your brother before you go to sleep? Remember, the Bible says, 'Do not let the sun go down on your wrath'" (Ephesians 4:26). The boy looked perplexed. He thought for a few moments and then blurted out, "But how can I keep the sun from going down?"

He reminds me of some Christians. They're angry at certain people and hold grudges. When they are confronted with their unforgiving attitude and urged to make things right, they sidestep the issue and refuse to heed the clear instruction of Scripture. True, we cannot change another person's heart, but we are responsible for our own attitude. The Bible says, "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32).

No, we can't keep the sun from going down. But we can keep it from setting-on our anger. And that means we must forgive. —Richard De Haan

Anger, malice, and ill will
Can leave a stain of sorrow;
Ask forgiveness by His grace
Before it is tomorrow! -Bosch

For every minute you are angry, you lose sixty seconds of happiness.

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Holy Anger

Ephesians 4:26-27

January 21, 1997

Aristotle said, "Anybody can become angry--that is easy; but to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way--that is not easy!"

Ephesians 4:26 makes it clear that anger has a place in the Christian's life. In fact, the lack of it could indicate spiritual weakness. The Pulpit Commentary says that anger "arms the passions quickly against evil, and operates with the force and effectiveness of an instinct. If it is mingled with malice, it becomes sinful; but if it is associated with a holy disposition, it is safe and good. Jesus hated as well as loved. The two emotions hang for their life upon each other. They are but the two sides of one sublime emotion which turns life, so often insipid and dull, into a vivid, balanced, and joyful activity. So it is with anger. Under the inspiration of a holy nature, it may flash forth with a marvelous power against wickedness, untruth, and dishonor."

Becoming angry with someone because of personal resentment or envy is sinful. But a holy anger, aroused by injustice or evil, and accompanied by a sincere desire to see God's will performed, is both healthy and effective.

Lord, help us to be angry and sin not. --R W De Haan

When anger springs up in my heart, dear Lord,
Because of the evil I see,
Just help me to channel the wrath that I feel
And do something noble through me. --J D Branon

The person who's not angry at evil
lacks enthusiasm for good.

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The Common Enemy
Ephesians 4:26-27
August 1, 1998

I knew about their longstanding argument, but I had never heard them go at it like this before. There in the trees in front of my house the crows and the blue jays were quarreling again. Their war of words and wings had escalated beyond anything I had ever seen.

Then I noticed something I hadn't expected--a pair of huge brown wings making a retreat to a nearby branch. That wasn't a crow! So the commotion wasn't the usual spat between the crows and the blue jays. They had found a common enemy--an owl. Their dislike for each other was lost in a conflict of greater proportions, so they combined forces to meet the threat.

That scene impressed me as being one of nature's striking parallels to a spiritual reality that we as believers in Christ must learn. We have a common enemy, Satan, and he is reason enough to make us forget our differences. That's implied in the fourth chapter of Ephesians, where Paul urged us to put away our personal dislikes, our anger, and our self-centered interests. When we yield to these fleshly impulses, we "give place to the devil" (Eph 4:27). And he likes nothing better than to see us fighting with one another--rather than against him. --M R De Haan II

We have a common enemy
As followers of the King,
And we will gain the victory
As to the cross we cling. --Hess

Satan divides and conquers--Christians unite and conquer.

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A Way Of Life
Ephesians 4:26
September 10, 2004

"How did everything get so dirty so fast?" I grumbled as I dusted the glass tabletop. "I had the whole house clean a month ago."

"Cleaning is a way of life, not an event," my husband responded.

I know he's right, but I hate to admit it. I want to clean the house once and have it stay that way. But dirt doesn't surrender that easily. Speck by speck, the dust returns. Piece by piece, the clutter piles up.

Sin is like the dust and clutter in my house. I want to eliminate all of it with one prayer of confession and repentance. But sin doesn't surrender that easily. Thought by thought, bad attitudes return. Choice by choice, unpleasant consequences pile up.

The apostle Paul told the believers in Colosse to get rid of "anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language" (Colossians 3:8). And he told the church at Ephesus, "Be angry, and do not sin: do not let the sun go down on your wrath" (Ephesians 4:26).

Christ's death and resurrection eliminated the need for daily sacrifice. But confession and repentance are still essential to the Christian's daily life. Getting rid of such things as anger, rage, and malice is a way of life, not a one-

time event.—Julie Ackerman Link

We're thankful, Lord, that when we fall
We can begin anew
If humbly we confess our sin,
Then turn and follow You. —Sper

The best eraser in the world is an honest confession to God.

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Sinless Anger
Ephesians 4:26
October 9, 2004

When Supreme Court Justice Byron White was in Salt Lake City to give a speech, he was attacked by an angry man. The suspect said he assaulted the respected judge because of his High Court decisions. He said, "Justice White is causing four-letter words to come into my living room through the TV set." Rationalizing his attack, he continued, "The only way I know how to stop it is to go to the source."

That's where the man went wrong. Of course, he had a perfect right to voice his strong opinions. He was even justified in becoming angry if he believed a Court decision encouraged immorality. But the manner he chose to express his indignation was as bad as, if not worse than, a wrong court decision.

Today's Scripture text says, "Be angry, and do not sin" (Ephesians 4:26). What others say and do may arouse our anger and in some cases should make us angry. But we must be careful we don't overreact and lose control. The apostle Paul reminded us that "though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh" (2 Corinthians 10:3, 4).

Should Christians ever become angry? Certainly! But we should never allow our anger to erupt in a sinful response. Two wrongs don't make a right.—Richard De Haan

When anger stirs within our hearts
Because of wrongs we see,
We must with love address the fault
If helpful we would be. —Branon

It's not a sin to get angry when you get angry at sin.

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No Place For The Devil
Ephesians 4:27
April 8, 1997

A teacher in a Bible school gave his students an hour-long exam. They were to spend half their time writing about the Holy Spirit and the other half about the devil.

One student wrote steadily for the whole hour on the first subject, the Holy Spirit, and then wrote at the bottom of his manuscript, "I had no time for the devil."

That wasn't the way to get a good grade on an exam, but his comment does point us to the only way we can resist and overcome Satan. If we fill ourselves with God's Word, pray, and submit to the Holy Spirit, we will not "give place to the devil" (Eph. 4:27).

The word place in that verse is significant. The devil cannot gain a foothold in an area of our life that the Holy Spirit controls. When we are saved, we receive the Holy Spirit, yet it is possible for a true believer to "give place" to Satan. The only remedy is to be "filled with the Spirit" (5:18), which means to be completely surrendered to the will of God.

Before you launch out into the world today, have you stopped to read the Scripture suggested at the beginning of

this article? Have you prayed? Are you filled? If so, go forth to conquer with the shield of faith and quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one (Eph 6:16). --M. R. De Haan, M.D.

There's victory o'er Satan and sin's dark shame,
Look only to Jesus, there's power in His name;
The devil can't harm you nor cause you to sin,
When you trust the Savior, the victory you'll win. --Anon.

The Christian who wields the Sword of the Spirit yields no ground to Satan.

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Givers And Takers

July 15, 2003

Ephesians 4:28

Some young children were talking about what they wanted to be when they grew up. When it was Jimmy's turn to speak, he didn't mention one of the more common professions like doctor, lawyer, policeman, and fireman. What he wanted to be was a philanthropist. When the other kids asked him to explain, he replied, "I heard they're the guys who have all the money."

Jimmy was only partially right. According to the dictionary, a philanthropist is "one who loves and seeks to benefit mankind." Simply having a lot of money, then, doesn't make one a philanthropist. In fact, a poor person who "loves and seeks to benefit mankind" out of his limited resources is more of a philanthropist than a person of great wealth who is a miser and gives grudgingly—even though the amount of his charitable gifts is large.

The apostle Paul encouraged takers to become givers. He said, "Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor ... that he may have something to give him who has need" (Ephesians 4:28). That kind of giving will give joy to the giver (Proverbs 14:21).

Regardless of our income or vocation, we can all be philanthropists. —Richard De Haan

It's not what you'd do with a million
If riches should e'er be your lot,
But what you are doing at present
With the dollar and quarter you've got. —Anon.

God gives us all we need, so we can give to those in need

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Sharing The Wealth

June 10, 2002

Ephesians 4:28

One of the most popular TV programs in the US is Who Wants To Be A Millionaire? But the amount of money to be won is a mere pittance when compared with the amount suggested by the title of another contest: "I Wanna Be A Gazillionaire Geek." Since 1989, the Sloan School of Management at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology has offered a prize to students who team up to create the best plan for starting a business. And what's the incentive? Public welfare? Community service? Alleviating poverty? No, the goal is to make money simply to be rich.

Although Scripture doesn't condemn wealth, it certainly warns against the pursuit of money as an end in itself. Our Lord strongly denounced putting our confidence in riches as a source of pride and security (Matthew 6:24; Luke 12:15). Therefore, our prayer should be: "Give me neither poverty nor riches" (Proverbs 30:8).

And what if the Lord blesses us with resources beyond what we need? The apostle Paul urged believers to work with their hands and do "what is good, that [they] may have something to give him who has need" (Ephesians 4:28). That's the principle of stewardship—sharing our wealth to help others. —Vernon C Grounds

We give Thee but Thine own,
Whate'er the gift may be:
All that we have is Thine alone,

A trust, O Lord, from Thee. —How

Wealth is a double blessing when you share it with others.

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God-Honoring Work

Ephesians 4:28

September 4, 1995

Several years ago in the South African territory of Kwa-Zulu, the government dug irrigation ditches on both sides of a river. This allowed the rich land to be farmed. The Christian Zulus on one side of the river produced lush crops and prospered. The traditional animist worshipers on the other side continued to live in abject poverty, producing almost nothing on the same kind of soil.

Why? The Christians believed they were responsible before God to work hard and live soberly. Their pagan neighbors, on the other hand, viewed work as the women's responsibility, while the men spent their time drinking and fighting.

The Bible tells us that as God's image-bearers we are to "have dominion over ... every living thing that moves on the earth" (Ge 1:28). It urges us to work with our hands so that we can provide for ourselves and others (Eph. 4:28; 1Thes 4:11). Work, when performed with the right attitude, can be pleasurable and rewarding. Proverbs 27:23, 24, 25, 26, 27 portrays the beautiful interplay of diligent work on our part and faithful nurture on God's.

Whatever your job, do it diligently and gratefully. Through it you will find pleasure and experience God's blessing. --
H V Lugt

We thank You, Lord, for giving us
The opportunity
To work to earn our daily bread
And share it willingly. --Sper

When God puts work into your life,
He expects you to put life into your work.

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Meaningful Work

Ephesians 4:28

March 4, 2002

In the London Tube, England's underground rail system, one travel agent's advertisement declared: "Your work is meaningless. And you'll die having achieved comparatively little. You need a holiday." Those words do indeed describe the feeling of many who are "sick and tired" of their work.

Some people may even find their labor so wearisome that they think it must be punishment from God. This could not be further from the truth. Even before sin entered the world, God gave Adam and Eve meaningful work to do (Genesis 1:28; 2:15).

In Ephesians 4:17-32, we are given a list of actions that characterize those who belong to Christ. Included in the list is the command to work for a living (Eph 4:28).

The motivation given for work was not to accumulate wealth but to have something to share with others. From the biblical perspective, therefore, work is useful and most fulfilling when it enables us to help others. The apostle Paul said, "Let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need" (Eph 4:8).

Our work does have meaning, especially when we realize that it is God-given, and that we please Him when we share its fruit with others. —Albert Lee

Lord, teach me how to love and work,
That every deed I do

May be to someone in its turn
A service fine and true. —Anon.

We make a living by what we earn; we make a life by what we give.

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Needed: A Tender Heart

Read: Ephesians 4:17-32

August 21, 1994

Down through the centuries, calculated cruelty, murderous revenge, and even ghastly torture have made history a long tale of tragedy. Even if you and I could not see ourselves signing the death warrants of innocent victims, we must still guard against hardheartedness and pray for a spirit that is the very opposite of Stalin's depraved sadism. We must plead for divine enablement to fulfill Paul's imperative: "Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you" (Eph. 4:31, 32).

Ask Jesus to help you replace any lingering hardheartedness in your life with His tenderheartedness. And show Christlike compassion to someone today. --V C Grounds

Lord, take my life and make it wholly Thine;
Fill my poor heart with Thy great love divine.
Take all my will, my passion, self, and pride;
I now surrender, Lord--in me abide. --Orr

As long as vengeance seems sweet, there's bitterness in the heart.

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Clean Up The Environment

Ephesians 4:17-32

January 22, 1998

What a frustrating problem pollution is! Everybody suffers from it, yet everybody contributes to it.

Pollution takes many forms, but one type is often overlooked. Charles Swindoll calls it "verbal pollution," passed around by grumblers, complainers, and criticizers. "The poison of pessimism," Swindoll writes, "creates an atmosphere of wholesale negativism where nothing but the bad side of everything is emphasized."

A group of Christian friends became concerned about this form of pollution and their personal part in it. So they made a pact to avoid critical words for a whole week. They were surprised to find how little they spoke! As they continued the experiment, they actually had to relearn conversation skills.

In Ephesians 4, Paul called believers to that sort of decisive action. He said we are to "put off" the old self and its conduct that grieves the Holy Spirit (Eph 4:22,30) and "put on" the new self that builds up others (Eph 4:24). As we rely on the help of the Spirit (Gal. 5:16), we can make those changes in our conduct, our thinking, and our speaking.

If we want to be rid of verbal pollution, we must choose to change and ask for God's help. It's a great way to start cleaning up our spiritual environment. --J E Yoder

What! Never speak one evil word,
Or rash, or idle, or unkind!
O how shall I, most gracious Lord,
This mark of true perfection find? --Wesley

Help stamp out pollution--clean up your speech

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No Lying

Ephesians 4:25

October 21, 1996

A father was looking at bicycles with one of his children when a deliveryman came into the store. He didn't see a TV set perched on a stand, and with his cart stacked high with boxes he hit the television and sent it crashing to the floor. As father and son watched, the store manager said, "Don't worry. We won't make you pay for it. We'll just tell the manufacturer it was damaged in shipping, and he'll give us a new one." A lie!

The father, a believer in Christ, left the store without making a purchase. He did not want to give his business to a man who would lie without giving it a thought.

It's pretty tough not to fall into a pattern of lying. But if we give in to the temptation to lie, soon we are doing it so often that we're not even aware of it anymore. It becomes a way of life. What we don't realize is that for the few bucks we may save, we've sold out on a basic principle of the Bible (Eph. 4:25) and compromised our witness for Christ.

The standards of God's Word are high. We must not lower them for the sake of financial gain or because we fear that it's the only way our business can survive. Our rule in business and in all of life should be: "No Lying." --D C Egnor

Tell the truth and tell it right,
A lie will never do;
The Bible says that God is truth--
And He wants truth from you. --J D Branon

The ability to lie is a liability.

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Who's Telling The Truth?

Ephesians 4:25

November 26, 1994

If television commercials are telling the truth, glamorous movie stars and athletes use products that everyone ought to buy. But, as Time magazine reports (and most viewers suspect), many celebrities don't use the products they endorse.

And what about autobiographies? According to the same article, they are not always written by the individuals whose names they bear but by writers who aren't mentioned.

This dishonesty, Time suggests, is a symptom of the deception that is creeping into our society. What will civilized life become as people increasingly ignore God's commands against lying? (Ex. 20:16; Lev. 19:11; Eph. 4:25).

Jesus had strong words for those who stood in the way of the truth. He said they were children of their father the devil (Jn. 8:44), and they were incapable of speaking the truth because they refused to hear it (vv.43-47).

God's Word urges us to tell the truth (Prov. 12:17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22). Only as we obey Him can we hope to prevent our society from being consumed by suspicion and mistrust.

We are to be truth-tellers like Jesus, of whom Scripture says, "Nor was deceit found in His mouth" (1 Pet. 2:22). Let's strive for that holy standard today. --V C Grounds

Take my voice and let me sing
Always, only, for my King;
Take my lips and let them be
Filled with messages from Thee. --Havergal

All the trouble in the world began with one lie.

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SINLESS ANGER
Ephesians 4:26

It was impulsive! Dangerous! Maybe terribly foolish! But when Mrs. Sibert came upon a crime being committed on the streets of Detroit, she got angry and did something about it.

According to the newspaper story, she was driving along when she saw two muggers robbing a man at a bus stop. Immediately she began honking her horn. That brought a 12-gauge shotgun blast that made her car look like it had chickenpox. Undaunted, she sped through dark streets pursuing the thugs' car. The wild chase ended as the fugitives crashed into a parked vehicle and were arrested by the police.

Mrs. Sibert told the reporter, "I said to myself, I'm not going to let them get away with that! I just kept thinking of how that poor victim felt after being held up, and I guess I just got mad!"

The Bible strongly condemns sinful anger because it is so destructive. But under the control of the Holy Spirit, anger can expose and check evil. You can't miss the thunder of God's wrath in the Old Testament nor in the fire in Jesus' eyes when He threw the money-changers out of the temple (Mt. 21:12, 13). If we are becoming like Christ, there will be times when anger at sin is a Christlike act!-- Dennis J. De Haan

In a moment of decision,
May we find the inner grace
To choose as Jesus would have chosen,
Were He standing in our place.-- Kline

It's not a sin to get angry
when you get angry at sin.

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Purge Out The Poison
Ephesians 4:26
December 16, 1995

My friend and I were standing in the parking lot of a restaurant where we had just finished lunch. While we were discussing the damage a bitter spirit can cause, he took out his New Testament and solemnly read Hebrews 12:15 to me: "Looking carefully ... lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled."

In the six long decades since our conversation, the sad truth of that warning has been repeatedly verified by my experiences in pastoral ministry. Bitterness is a poison, and if not purged out by prayer, confession, and forgiveness, it does great emotional damage and destroys relationships. A little grudge that festers can become a devastating malignancy of soul. That's why the advice in Hebrews must be diligently heeded.

Have you been holding fast to the memory of some insult, some event, some criticism? As Paul put it in Ephesians 4:26, "Do not let the sun go down on your wrath." Take the proper steps to resolve the problem right away.

Holding a grudge poisons our spiritual lives. With the Holy Spirit's help, let's uproot any bitterness right now. It's amazing how joyful our lives will be when we allow God to purge out the poison of bitterness. --V C Grounds

Thinking It Through
What are we to do when someone sins
against us? (Lk. 17:3, 4). According to Jesus,
how many times are we to forgive? (Mt. 18:21, 22).

To get rid of weeds of anger,
dig out the bitter roots.

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The Power Of Words

Ephesians 4:29

December 30, 1998

One major area of breakdown in marriages and families today is communication. The apostle Paul used the word corrupt to describe speech that has the power to tear people down, adults and children alike (Eph. 4:29). He also stated that good communication is "necessary edification," for it has the power to build people up.

Here are examples of corrupt communication we often aim at our children: "Can't you do anything right?" "What's wrong with you?" "You'll never learn." "You're always breaking something." "Oh, let me do it." The list is endless. But so are examples of edifying communication. A list called "99 Ways To Say 'Very Good'" offers these encouraging words: "That's it!" "You're really working hard today." "I'm very proud of you." "Now you've figured it out." "You are very good at that." "That's the way!" "Now that's what I call a fine job." "Good thinking."

Paul said that when we edify others through our speech, we impart grace, or spiritual benefit, to their lives (Eph 4:29). Let's examine our speech habits for careless words, and then resolve to build up every person we meet, especially children. Remember, people need encouragers more than they need critics. Which one are you? --J E Yoder

Button up your lip securely
'Gainst the words that bring a tear,
But be swift with words of comfort,
Words of praise, and words of cheer. --Loucks

A word of encouragement can make the difference between giving up and going on.

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October 2, 2005

When We Speak Foolishly

Ephesians 4:29

When former law professor Phillip E. Johnson had a stroke, he was so afraid of being mentally and physically impaired that he wished the doctor would give him a painless death. He said, "That was a foolish thought, of course, but not the last foolish thought I was to have."

In my own pastoral ministry, I've heard some of God's children express thoughts worse than Johnson's—even rebellious words against God.

Psalm 39 offers comfort to people who regret the thoughtless things they've said in times of despair. David was gravely ill and desperate when he wrote the psalm. At first he kept silent lest he speak foolishly (Ps 39:1, 2, 3). But when he could contain himself no longer, he prayed a wonderful prayer (Ps 39:4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9).

But in Ps 39:10,11 his tone began to change. According to the British scholar Derek Kidner, David spoke foolishly when he said, "Remove Your gaze from me, ... before I go away and am no more" (Ps 39:13). David expressed a hopeless attitude toward death, and said to God, in effect, "Leave me alone." Kidner comments that God included this prayer in the Bible to reassure us that when we say things out of desperation He understands. And when we tell Him how sorry we are, He graciously forgives.—Herbert Vander Lugt

Sometimes our pain becomes so great
That we despair in deep distress;
We cry to God with foolish words
That later we to Him confess. —D. De Haan

Our tongue can be our own worst enemy.

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Genuine Love
Ephesians 4:29
July 1, 2000

Nobody likes to be criticized. It hurts even worse when it comes from someone who talks about us behind our backs. In Romans 1:29, 30, Paul called such people "whisperers" and "backbiters." He listed them among the proud, murderers, inventors of evil, God-haters, and the like.

Whisperers are gossipers who secretly spread rumors, and backbiters are those who talk spitefully about a person. Tragically, some Christians are guilty of these sins. They wouldn't run people down with their cars, but they willingly "run them down" with their words, belittling what they do or say.

People who engage in these destructive acts don't see the inconsistency of their behavior and haven't taken to heart the words of the apostle Paul: "Let love be without hypocrisy" (Romans 12:9). Or, as one translator has paraphrased it, "Don't fake love."

We need to repent of our gossip and replace it with what John Stott calls "holy gossip." That is, we need to talk enthusiastically about the transforming work that Christ is doing in people's lives. For example, "Have you noticed that Joe is a completely changed person since he gave his life to Christ?" Or, "I certainly see the Lord at work in Susan!"

How genuine is your love? —Joanie Yoder

Button up your lip securely
'Gainst the words that bring a tear,
But be swift with words of comfort,
Words of praise and words of cheer. --Loucks

Our words have the power to build up or to tear down.

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Neighborly Love
Ephesians 4:29-32
March 15, 2005

The Carnegie Foundation discovered that to be successful on the job, relational skills are far more important than knowledge. Its research found that only 15 percent of a person's success is determined by job knowledge and technical skills. Eighty-five percent is determined by an individual's attitude and ability to relate to other people.

Scripture commands us to "be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32). In fact, it tells us to love our "neighbor" as we love ourselves (Matthew 22:39). And a neighbor is not only someone who lives near us or works next to us, but anyone we meet on life's journey—especially those in need.

So having an attitude of courtesy, care, and concern for others is a basic spiritual principle. It is also the most important guideline for congenial and happy relationships. Indeed, it is even the golden key to vocational success.

Our purpose for modeling a Christlike spirit of neighborly love, though, is that we want to obey God, not just to achieve success at work. After all, our supreme vocation as believers is to embody and practice the neighbor-loving character of our Lord.—Vernon C Ground

Who measures how we've done in life
And judges our success?
Our God, who gives rewards to those
Who live in righteousness. —Branon

Those who love God will love their neighbor.

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No Unkind Words
Ephesians 4:29-32

One of the greatest honors ever offered to me came during one of life's saddest times.

I was heartbroken last year when my good friend and co-worker Kurt De Haan died suddenly while out on his regular lunchtime run. Kurt was managing editor of Our Daily Bread from 1989 until the time of his death. Losing him was a huge blow to each of us at RBC Ministries, but his wife Mary and their four children were suffering the worst pain.

A couple of days before the funeral, I got a call from Mary, who asked if I would share a eulogy of Kurt. I was overwhelmed with this bittersweet privilege.

As I reflected on Kurt's life, one trait continued to surface. It was a remarkable characteristic, and it was something that I focused on in my eulogy. In the 22 years I had known him, worked with him, and talked with him, I never once heard Kurt say a negative word about any other person.

What a remarkable legacy of a true Christian heart! Kurt lived up to the standard of Ephesians 4:29, 30, 31, 32. He sought to build up others, showing kindness and tenderheartedness instead of bitterness and malice.

Will others be able to say the same about us?—Dave Branon

Instead of hurling angry words
That wound and stir up strife,
Use words of kindness, filled with love,
That heal and nourish life. —Sper

A kind word is the oil that takes the friction out of life.

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Ephesians 4:30
Spurgeon, C. H.
Morning and evening

All that the believer has must come from Christ, but it comes solely through the channel of the Spirit of grace. Moreover, as all blessings thus flow to you through the Holy Spirit, so also no good thing can come out of you in holy thought, devout worship, or gracious act, apart from the sanctifying operation of the same Spirit. Even if the good seed be sown in you, yet it lies dormant except he worketh in you to will and to do of his own good pleasure. Do you desire to speak for Jesus—how can you unless the Holy Ghost touch your tongue? Do you desire to pray? Alas! what dull work it is unless the Spirit maketh intercession for you! Do you desire to subdue sin? Would you be holy? Would you imitate your Master? Do you desire to rise to superlative heights of spirituality? Are you wanting to be made like the angels of God, full of zeal and ardour for the Master's cause? You cannot without the Spirit—"Without me ye can do nothing." O branch of the vine, thou canst have no fruit without the sap! O child of God, thou hast no life within thee apart from the life which God gives thee through his Spirit! Then let us not grieve him or provoke him to anger by our sin. Let us not quench him in one of his faintest motions in our soul; let us foster every suggestion, and be ready to obey every prompting. If the Holy Spirit be indeed so mighty, let us attempt nothing without him; let us begin no project, and carry on no enterprise, and conclude no transaction, without imploring his blessing. Let us do him the due homage of feeling our entire weakness apart from him, and then depending alone upon him, having this for our prayer, "Open thou my heart and my whole being to thine incoming, and uphold me with thy free Spirit when I shall have received that Spirit in my inward parts."

Ephesians 4:30

Sensitivity to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, even in little things that seem harmless, marks the mature Christian. While preaching in a small church in Florida, a young evangelist noticed that his gold wristwatch sparkled in the light.

He wrote, "I saw people looking at it. The Lord said to me, 'Take it off. It's distracting.' I said, 'Lord, I can surely wear a wristwatch that my daddy gave me.' But it was sensitivity that God was teaching me—to be sensitive to the little things. I took it off and ... never wore it in the pulpit again."

It's not always easy to know when God is speaking, because inner urgings may arise from fear, selfish desire, or Satan. Yet if we learn biblical principles through reading the Word, and if we daily yield ourselves to the Holy Spirit, we will gradually come to recognize His gentle prompting. The writer of Hebrews said that mature believers have had their senses "exercised to discern both good and evil" (Heb 5:14). Whatever exalts Christ over self comes from God, and we can obey with confidence. But whatever is unkind, unloving, and self-seeking grieves the Spirit. When we do something like this, we must confess our disobedience to God at once to restore our fellowship with Him.

"Lord, make me sensitive" is a prayer that should always be on our hearts. —D. J De Haan

When we yield ourselves to the Spirit's control, we do not lose our self-control.

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A "Little" Grudge, A Huge Gap!

Ephesians 4:31

A little grudge can create a huge gap in human relationships. The Philippines Daily Express reported on a couple in England who had lived together as "silent partners" for 12 years. The wife was finally seeking a divorce.

"For 12 extraordinary years they had lived their lives so that they wouldn't have to meet each other," said lawyer Simon King, who was handling the case.

"When one would come into the house, the other would leave. And when they did communicate with each other, it was with notes."

They had lived happily together for the first 18 years of their marriage and had raised a son. For the last 12 years, however, they didn't speak to each other. Ironically, neither one could remember what the hassle had been all about. (Our Daily Bread)

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Barking At The Moon

Ephesians 4:31

April 28, 1997

A certain judge was constantly annoyed by the sneering remarks and abusive language of an attorney. Instead of cracking down on the lawyer and silencing him, the judge would only smile and chew on his pencil. People wondered how he could be so patient.

At a dinner party someone asked him, "Why don't you do something about that wise-guy lawyer?" The judge laid down his fork, and resting his chin on his hands said, "Up in our town there lives a widow who has a dog. Whenever there is a full moon, that dog barks and barks all night."

Then the judge quietly resumed his eating. One person asked, "But Judge, what about the dog and the moon?"

He replied, "Well, the moon just keeps right on shining!"

Of all sins, there is perhaps none more insidious than slander. When we are misrepresented, the natural reaction is to return evil for evil. Yet the evidence of real Christlikeness is to be able to reward evil with good and go right on living for the Lord. We are to be like our Savior, who did not retaliate even when He was horribly mistreated and slandered and led to the cross (Mark 15:3, 4, 5; 1Pet. 2:21, 22, 23).

Oh, for grace today to keep on shining for God amid all the "barking dogs" around us. --M. R. De Haan, M.D.

I want the love that always sweetly bears
Whate'er my Father's hand may choose to send;
I want the love that patiently endures
The wrongs that come from enemy or friend. --Anon.

It's not always kind to respond in kind.

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When God Feels Pain

Ephesians 4:30

That sheds some light on our Savior's statement, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (Jn. 14:15). If we willfully break those commandments, we will suffer loss. But it should also matter to us how God responds to our disobedience. Hosea 11:8 tells us that God the Father feels loving anguish. Because of Israel's sin, He said, "My heart churns within Me; My sympathy is stirred."

Jesus also experiences pain when we disobey. He wept over the city of Jerusalem when it spurned His love (Lk. 13:34). And in Ephesians 4:30, 31, Paul exhorted believers not to grieve the Holy Spirit by being hard-hearted.

If we consider how much pain God feels when we are disobedient, we will find ample motivation to shun what is wrong and pursue what is right. --V C Grounds

O help me, Lord, to be afraid
Of disobeying You;
And may I bring You highest praise
In everything I do. --Sper

The highest motive for serving God
is the desire to please Him.

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August 20, 2004

Twice Is Once Too Many

Ephesians 4:31-32

When I begin to grade the papers from the students in my college freshman writing class, I'm rather lenient about correcting their mistakes, hoping I won't see the same errors again.

But when the next paper contains the identical mistakes, I begin to get a little irritated. I expect the students to learn from their errors and avoid them the next time. Usually, though, it doesn't quite work that way.

Sounds like our Christian life. The Lord patiently reminds us through the Holy Spirit's presence, for example, that we shouldn't say negative things about others. He tells us to be kind and compassionate instead of fault-finding and vindictive (Ephesians 4:31, 32). But we sometimes slip back into our old habit of letting both "fresh" and "bitter" words come from our lips in our conversations about others (James 3:8, 9, 10, 11, 12).

With my students, I go back to the basics to erase old habits. We train. We review. We practice. We eliminate the errors.

The Lord patiently continues to work with us about the way we speak of other people. As we listen to His training, learn from our mistakes, and depend on His power, we'll grow and change.—Dave Branon

To be like Jesus—that's our goal,
Though it doesn't happen fast;
We trust the Spirit—He's our Guide,
Till we're glorified at last. —Branon

To put failure behind you, face up to it

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"A PERSISTENT PROBLEM"

Ephesians 4:32

The University of Wisconsin in its Extension Outreach catalog announced a new course on "Interpersonal Forgiveness." The catalog explained that students would be exploring "the latest approaches to forgiveness."

In a world where a spirit of getting even is all too common, it's good to learn that a major university is concerned

about forgiveness. But even though such a course may offer some valuable insights, the Bible has the best answer to the question of how to forgive: By forgiving others as God has forgiven us.

Think of God's grace and mercy in pardoning totally undeserving sinners on the basis of Christ's infinitely costly sacrifice (Ro 5:8). Think of Jesus as He prayed for His executioners, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Lk. 23:34). Think of the forgiveness extended to us when we sincerely repent and confess our sins (1 Jn. 1:9). Think of how the Holy Spirit helps us to carry out Paul's imperative, "Be kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you" (Eph. 4:32).

No new technique of forgiving is needed. This old method, God's method, really works.-- Vernon C. Grounds

God forgave my sin in Jesus' name,
I've been born again in Jesus' name;
And in Jesus' name I come to you
To share His love as He told me to.-- Owens

Since we all need forgiveness, we should always be forgiving.

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Are You Good At Forgiving?

Ephesians 4:32

April 2, 2001

Is it possible to measure a Christian's spiritual maturity? Certainly we cannot judge it by the length or even the content of one's prayers. Too much public praying is done for its effect on the "listeners" instead of the "Listener." Even the generosity of one's giving is not an infallible test of spirituality, for it too may be for personal recognition or easing of a guilty conscience.

Perhaps the surest test is the ability to forgive. Is it hard to forgive a person who has offended us? When we look to Jesus as our example, how are we doing? The more we become like Him, the easier it will be to forgive others. When we think of how much He has forgiven us, we should be willing in turn to forgive others as God in Christ has forgiven us (Ephesians 4:32).

British pastor and evangelist John Wesley (1703-1791) was traveling with General James Oglethorpe, who was angry with one of his subordinates. The man came to the general and humbly asked for forgiveness, but he was gruffly told, "I never forgive!" Wesley looked the general in the eye and said, "Then I hope, sir, that you never sin."

Would you want God to forgive you in the same way you forgive others? Think about it. —M. R. De Haan

I found a little remedy
To ease the life we live
And make each day a happier one:
It is the word "forgive." —Anon.

When it seems you can't forgive, remember

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The Power of Kindness

Ephesians 4:32

August 8, 1994

A young factory worker noticed one day that a valuable tool was missing from his toolbox. Later he recognized it in the toolbox of a fellow employee.

The young man was the only Christian in the shop, and he wanted to have a good testimony for Christ. So he went to the man and said, "I see you have one of my tools, but you may keep it if you need it." Then he went on with his work and put the incident out of his mind.

During the next 2 weeks, the person who had taken the tool tried to soothe his conscience. First he offered the young man something of equal value, then he offered to help him on some home projects, and finally he slipped

some money into his coat pocket. Eventually, the co-workers became good friends, and the one-time tool thief admitted he couldn't resist the man's kindness.

Kindness is probably the most effective tool Christians have in their kit of virtues. But even when it doesn't bring about a reconciliation, as it did with those two workers, it is still the right response. No matter how we are treated, we are to follow Christ's example (Eph. 4:32).

Oh, for grace to extend love to others, even as God for Christ's sake has loved us! --HGB

Lord, help me be kind and forgiving--

Your loving forgiveness You've shown

To me for the sins I've committed;

Lord, grant me a love like Your own. --Anon.

Need to repair a relationship? Try Kindness

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Relationship Under Repair

Ephesians 4:32

January 10, 1995

Are you easy to get along with? Do you have a good relationship with your spouse or your friends? Then you probably aren't guilty of the following behaviors:

- criticizing instead of praising
- using insensitive words
- neglecting others
- making jokes at another's expense
- not listening
- refusing to admit wrong
- being rude
- belittling others' opinions

These kinds of behavior will wreck relationships and hinder the healing of past hurts.

For a good example of the way to strengthen relationships, read the apostle Paul's short letter to Philemon, a wealthy resident of Colosse. The subject is Onesimus, Philemon's slave, who had stolen from him and fled to Rome. There Onesimus met Paul, who led him to a saving knowledge of Jesus. The letter is Paul's kind, compassionate appeal to Philemon to accept Onesimus back--now as a brother. It's a great example of love in action.

Although Onesimus deserved Philemon's punishment, Paul called him a "son" (v.10) and a "beloved brother" (v.16). He said he would repay what Onesimus had stolen.

Paul knew how to restore a relationship. Do we? --J D Branon

God of grace and God of goodness,
Teach me to be ever kind,
Always gentle and forgiving
With the Savior first in mind. --Brandt

Forgiveness is the glue

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Forgive--And Forget
Ephesians 4:32

January 28, 2002

Joe was dying, and he wanted to make everything right. He was at odds with Bill, who had been one of his best friends. They hadn't spoken to each other in years. Wanting to resolve the problem, he asked Bill to visit him.

When Bill arrived, Joe told him that he was afraid to go into eternity with bad feelings between them, and he wanted to make things right. Then he reached out for Bill's hand and said, "I forgive you. Will you forgive me?" Bill said he would, but just as he was leaving, Joe shouted, "But remember, if I get better, this doesn't count!"

We may smile at this story. Yet what a clear picture this gives of the way we sometimes treat one another. The forgiveness we profess is often superficial. It may be prompted by fear, or to gain some selfish advantage, or to clear our conscience--not out of genuine love for God and the one who has wronged us. Yes, we may say we forgive, but when the least little friction arises, we are quick to resurrect past grievances. How different is the forgiveness Jesus talked about! (Matthew 18:15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22).

The apostle Paul left no doubt about the nature of genuine forgiveness when he said we are to forgive one another just as God has forgiven us (Ephesians 4:32). That means we are to forgive—and forget. —Richard De Haan

Christ the Lord our debt has paid—
All our sins on Him were laid;
We like Him should try to live,
Always ready to forgive! —Bosch

To resent and remember brings strife; to forgive and forget brings peace.

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November 14, 2004

More Than Socializing

Ephesians 4:32

Church can be a great place to get caught up on the latest football games, golf scores, family news, health concerns, or just to visit with friends. A cup of coffee together, a warm handshake, a friendly pat on the back are all part of the social interaction we need as human beings.

All of this is good, but New Testament fellowship goes much deeper than merely socializing when we get together at church. It takes place when we consider how we can lift up, build up, and brighten up our brothers and sisters in Christ.

The Bible clearly says that we are to "serve one another" (Galatians 5:13), forgive as we are forgiven (Ephesians 4:32), and "bear one another's burdens" (Galatians 6:2). From the first century, believers have gathered in Jesus' name to "consider one another in order to stir up love and good works" and to exhort one another (Hebrews 10:24,25).

Christian fellowship takes place when we offer encouragement to our friends, pray for them, and confess our sins and weaknesses to one another. These are the elements that make fellowship genuine.

What about your church? Are you merely socializing? Or are you practicing true Christian fellowship?—David C. Egner

We Christians have a kinship with
All others who believe,
And from that bond of faith and love
A mutual strength receive. —Hess

Christian fellowship builds us up and binds us together.

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Try A Little Kindness

Ephesians 4:32

November 13, 2005

Cornelius, a first-century Roman military official, was assigned the task of maintaining order in turbulent Judea. Most Romans of that time believed in many gods—but not Cornelius. He feared the one true God, gave generously to the needy, and prayed regularly (Acts 10:2). Even though the Jewish people didn't accept him as one of their own, God recognized him as one of His. Cornelius agreed with God about what was good and he acted accordingly.

Because of Cornelius' kindness and prayers, God chose him for a special assignment and sent an angel to tell him what to do. The angel didn't explain why, and he didn't say what the outcome would be, but Cornelius followed the instructions. Because he obeyed, he and his household became the first Gentile believers to receive the Holy Spirit.

The example of Cornelius reminds us that God not only sees the good we do but is on the lookout for people who share His values. He wants to make them His partners in changing the world.

Today is World Kindness Day. If we follow the example of Cornelius, perhaps God will use our simple acts of kindness to change our world.—Julie Ackerman Link

Lord, compassion is part of Your character, and
kindness is one of the best ways to show the world what You are like.
May Your compassion fill my heart and spill over into the lives
of everyone I encounter. Amen.

Kindness is the oil that takes the friction out of life.

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Follow The Instructions
September 30, 2004
Ephesians 4:32

After a woman sued a fast-food restaurant for being burned by coffee, companies started changing their manuals and warning labels. Check out these instructions:

- On a frozen dinner: DEFROST BEFORE EATING
- On an iron: CAUTION! DO NOT IRON CLOTHES ON BODY
- On a peanut butter jar: MAY CONTAIN PEANUTS
- On a milk bottlecap: AFTER OPENING, KEEP UPRIGHT

If some people need these obvious guidelines on household items, think about how much more we need God's direction. Psalm 119 tells of the importance of His instruction manual—the Bible. On the pages of Scripture we find what God wants us to believe, to be, and to do.

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31).

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

"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15).

Ask the Lord to teach you His statutes and to direct your steps according to His Word (Psalm 119:133,135). Then read it often and follow the instructions.—Anne Cetas

Give us, O Lord, a strong desire
To look within Your Word each day;
Help us to hide it in our heart,
Lest from its truth our feet would stray. —Branon

Scripture is meant to give us protection, correction, and direction.

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A Little Kinder
Ephesians 4:32
December 3, 2003

Aldous Huxley (1894-1963), one of the world's leading intellectuals, was visiting with Houston Smith, a well-known professor of philosophy and religion. As they were driving to an engagement, Huxley said, "You know, Houston, it's rather embarrassing to have spent one's entire lifetime pondering the human condition and ... find that I really don't have anything more profound to pass on by way of advice than, 'Try to be a little kinder.'"

The apostle Paul saw kindness in a different light. In Ephesians 4:32, he linked being kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving with the way God has treated us. In Titus 3:4, he said that it was "the kindness and the love of God" that provided eternal salvation.

In a world where callous thoughtlessness and selfish indifference are all too common, kindness can make our lives fruitful when motivated by Christlike love. When our walk harmonizes with our words of witness, it will make a compelling impact on others by pointing them to the kind of love God has for them in Jesus Christ. If Huxley had learned what Paul had learned, he would have seen that trying to be a little kinder is one of the most profound truths of all.

What motivates us to try? There's no better reason than the love of God as shown to us by Jesus. —Vernon C Grounds

He saw me ruined by the fall,
Yet loved me notwithstanding all;
He saved me from my lost estate,
His lovingkindness, oh, how great! —Medley

Kindness is treating others the way God treats you

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Getting Even Ephesians 4:32

When we or someone we love has been hurt, thoughts of revenge may dominate our minds. But we won't ever be able to "get even." Dr. Lewis Smedes, a professor of theology, wrote extensively about forgiveness in *Forgive and Forget*, saying: "Revenge never evens the score, for alienated people never keep score of wrongs by the same mathematics. Forgiveness is the only way to stop the cycle of unfair pain turning in your memory."

These insights help us understand why Paul wrote with urgency: "Let all bitterness, wrath, anger ... be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, ... forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you" (Eph. 4:31, 32). Paul knew that a spirit of forgiveness was essential for the Ephesians' spiritual survival. His appeal was based on God's forgiveness of them.

Smedes said that forgiveness is not forgetting, excusing, or smoothing things over. Instead, forgiving breaks the cycle of revenge and "creates a new possibility of fairness by releasing us from the unfair past. Forgiving is love's toughest work, and love's biggest risk. To forgive is to dance to the beat of God's forgiving heart. It is to ride the crest of love's strongest wave. To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you." —David C. McCasland

Jesus came our debt to pay,
Saved our soul in grace one day,
So in love we all should live,
Ready always to forgive. —Bosch

Revenge imprisons us; forgiveness sets us free.