

Christian MONTHLY

DEDICATED TO THE PROCLAMATION
OF THE WORD OF GOD



Psalm 119:105
Thy word is a lamp unto my feet,
and a light unto my path.

September 2014

Called to Our Work

Gene Edward Veith

We don't choose our vocations; God chooses us for them.

When God blesses us, He almost always does it through other people. The ability to read God's Word is an inexpressibly precious blessing, but reading is an ability that did not spring fully-formed in our young minds. It required the vocation of teachers.



God protects us through the cop on the beat and the whole panoply of the legal system. He gives us beauty and meaning through artists. He lets us travel through the ministry of auto workers, mechanics, road crews and car dealers. He keeps us clean through the work of trash collectors, plumbers, sanitation

workers and the sometimes-undocumented aliens who clean our hotel rooms. He heals through doctors, nurses and pharmacists. He brings people to salvation through pastors and through anyone else who proclaims the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the lost.

The fast-food worker, the inventor, the clerical assistant, the scientist, the accountant, the musician—they are all high callings, used by God to bless and serve His people and His creation.

Not that they always seem that way from the point of view of the people in those vocations. It is easy to see how all of these kinds of work are blessings to the rest of us who receive their benefits. But from the perspective of the people slaving away in these vocations, their work is often a daily grind—a hard, boring, thankless task.

Those in any particular line of work are usually doing it not from some high ideal, but because they have to make a living. There may be some professions that are innately satisfying, but even high-paid and high-status jobs can wear down the spirit.

Work can seem meaningless

Work often seems only a means to an end—survival, but it seems we survive only to work. It consumes our time, our emotions, our after-hours preoccupations. It takes away the time we would like to spend with our families—though the vocation of family life is often a frustrating struggle as well. And, as current technology puts us on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week, our work consumes our lives.

Though work is a blessing, enjoyed even by Adam and Eve who were employed in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it (Genesis 2:15), after the fall into sin, we labor in frustration and sweat.

Charged with meaning

We live out our vocations—in the family, in the community, in the church and in the workplace. The Christian can understand the ordinary labors of life to be charged with meaning. Through our labor, no matter how humble, God is at work.

Young people today are under intense pressure to "choose" their vocation, to decide what they want to do when they grow up, to pick a major in college, to pursue that perfect job. Indeed, there are many decisions to be made in regard to our life's work. But in our choice-obsessed culture, the true meaning of "vocation" is often lost, even as we still use the word. Strictly speaking, our vocation is not something we choose for ourselves. It is something to which we are called by God.

We did not choose the family we were born into, nor did we choose the society of which we are citizens. God placed us in these relationships, in these vocations of family life and citizenship. They are "given," in the here and now.

When we started a family of our own, we might think that we chose our spouse, but the spouse also had to choose us, and looming behind all of our apparent decisions lies the providential workings of God. When it comes to our employment, our "vocation" in both the secular and the theological sense, we do not have as much choice as we think.

Personal gifts from God

Sometimes my college students, pressured as they are to find a good job so they can make lots of money, choose majors for which they have no vocation. They may do research and find that there is a good job market for accountants and decide that this is the field that can open up the life of prosperity they dream of. But if they are not good at math, they may flunk their accounting courses.

Tragically, they may tough out the math and actually get the degree, only to find themselves in a job they hate. And if they hate it, they probably are not very good at it. They may not find an employer willing to call them to that line of work.

Finding one's vocation involves recognizing one's God-given talents and abilities. It also involves recognizing one's God-given interests. It also involves recognizing God-given opportunities. Calling comes from outside ourselves—a company offering us a job, a marriage proposal made or accepted, doors closing in our face and doors opening elsewhere.

Each person's calling is unique, a part of the way God created each individual whom He loves. Not everyone is

called to go to college, and not everyone can work with their hands, or play a musical instrument, or teach in a classroom, or work the land. Those who have those abilities, interests and opportunities should see them as the personal gifts of God—part of their unique callings.

Callings often change

A young man working his way through college may get a job in a fast-food restaurant. For the time being, that's his vocation, and he is to love and serve his customers and his shift manager by flipping hamburgers. If he is fortunate enough to be going to college, he also has the vocation of being a student, which has specific obligations of its own (study!).

Eventually, he may get his computer degree and go into his life's work. That will be his vocation then. And if his "dot-com" company goes bankrupt, and he goes from vast wealth back to flipping burgers, he has a new vocation. At every stage, whether his work is humble or exalted in the world's eyes, he is serving his neighbor in a holy office.

*Reprinted with permission from the October 2001 issue of
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The Epistle to the Romans

THIS LETTER IS TRULY THE MOST IMPORTANT PIECE in the New Testament. It is purest Gospel. It is well worth a Christian's while not only to memorize it word for word but also to occupy himself with it daily, as though it were the daily bread of the soul. It is impossible to read or to meditate on this letter too much or too well. The more one deals with it, the more precious it becomes and the better it tastes. Therefore I want to carry out my service and, with this preface, provide an introduction to the letter, insofar as God gives me the ability, so that every one can gain the fullest possible understanding of it. Up to now it has been darkened by glosses [explanatory notes and comments which accompany a text] and by many a useless comment, but it is in itself a bright light, almost bright enough to illumine the entire Scripture. ~Martin Luther

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, (Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures,) Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead: By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name: Among whom are ye also the called of Jesus Christ: To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers; Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you. For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established; That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me. Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was let hitherto,) that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles. I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith. For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

Romans 1:1-25



*Apostle Paul
Rembrandt*

Training, Teaching and Transition

Pastor Orval Wirkkala
Kingston, Minnesota

¹ Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus, ² To Timothy, my dearly beloved son: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. ³ I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day; ⁴ Greatly desiring to see thee, being mindful of thy tears, that I may be filled with joy; ⁵ When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also. ⁶ Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands. ⁷ For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.

2 Timothy 1:1-7

WE RECALL IN OUR SCHOOL DAYS of relay races the baton that was carried by the runners which was handed off by the one who was finishing to the one who would be continuing the next portion of the race. In order to make the transition, it was important that they synchronize their efforts so that the baton would not be dropped in the exchange ensuring that the race would continue on smoothly.



In our text today, we could compare this example with the "passing of the Gospel" between the Apostle Paul, who was imprisoned as he wrote this, and his young co-worker, Timothy. As Paul saw the end of his ministry in the not too distant future, he wrote a letter to his beloved son in the Lord in order to leave him with some important teachings concerning the Gospel. The Apostle knew of the importance of making sure that the teamwork of preaching the Gospel was kept intact so that the power of the Gospel would not be diminished in the transition from himself to his young co-worker.

After recounting that the authority for his call into the ministry was by the will of God according to the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus, he extended the grace, mercy and peace to him from God our Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. He was thankful for Timothy, he remembered and prayed for Timothy, and wanted greatly to see him again, for it would bring him joy. Then Paul listed four influences that were instrumental in the life of Timothy which had brought him to the place where he was, a servant of the Lord.

1. He was nurtured in a Christian home (5)
2. He had been befriended by the Apostle (2-6)
3. He had been gifted by God according to the measure of grace (6)
4. He acted upon that which God had gifted him with discipline (6-7)

THE APOSTLE SETS BEFORE US the desired method of the Lord, that we would raise our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord so from generation to generation the Gospel would be "handed off" to the next servants and would not be dropped. May the example of the Apostle Paul instruct us as we consider this teaching from our place of participation in the work of the preaching and teaching of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Are we in the beginning of the race, in the middle, or are we nearing the end? May we be mindful of the privilege that is ours to be in the race as well as of the responsibility of our commitment to the continuance of the race into the future.

¹ Give ear, O my people, to my law: incline your ears to the words of my mouth. ² I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old: ³ Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. ⁴ We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done. ⁵ For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: ⁶ That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: ⁷ That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments: ⁸ And might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not stedfast with God. (Psalm 78:1-8)

Running with you in the Gospel!

Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

David and Goliath

Gwen Wilson
Ridgefield, Washington

Dear Children,

Hello and God's peace. I would like to tell you a story from the Old Testament. To some of you it is very familiar. It shows us courage and faith. The story is about David and Goliath, found in 1 Samuel, chapter 17.

THE PHILISTINE AND ISRAELITE ARMIES WERE all set to fight each other, but no one was fighting yet. Why? The Philistines had a champion named Goliath, and he was a giant. All the Israelites were so afraid of him that no one dared to go out against him. Goliath was nine and one-half feet tall, and his armor and weapons weighed over one hundred fifty pounds. Every day for forty days, Goliath came out and shouted to the Israelites to send someone to fight him, but no one would go.

Meanwhile, back in Bethlehem, the shepherd boy David was being given instructions by his father, Jesse, to take food to David's three older brothers in the battle. He was also to take a gift of cheese to the captain of the army.

David did as he was told, and when he reached the battle field, Goliath was shouting again to the Israelites to send someone to fight him. When David asked what would be done to the man who killed the Philistine, he was told that King Saul would give the man riches and his daughter in marriage.

David's oldest brother, Eliab, heard David asking questions about Goliath, and he got angry. Here was his little brother about to outdo him! Eliab was jealous of David's courage, so he falsely accused David of coming just to watch the battle.

Some of King Saul's men went and told Saul how unafraid David sounded, and the king had David brought to him. David said to King Saul: *Let no man's heart fail because of him (Goliath); thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine. (1 Samuel 17:32)*

King Saul was doubtful that David could fight the giant because David was only a boy, and the giant was a man of war from his youth. David told the king that while he was watching his father's sheep, a lion and a bear came to eat

the lambs and David killed both of them. We read in verses 37-38: *David said moreover, The LORD that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine. And Saul said unto David, Go, and the LORD be with thee.*

King Saul put his own armor on David, but David said that he was not used to them and took them off. Then he took his staff in his hand, chose five smooth stones from a brook, and went to meet Goliath.



When Goliath saw a young boy coming, he laughed and said, *Am I a dog, that thou comest to me with staves? (v. 43)* Then he cursed David by his false gods.

David answered, *Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied. (v. 45)*

David then ran to meet the giant. He put his hand in his bag and took out a stone, and put it in his sling and slung it. It hit Goliath in the forehead and he fell down on his face. David ran and drew Goliath's sword from its sheath and killed the giant with his own sword.

The battle was certainly the Lord's. The Israelites were victorious because of a boy's courage and faith in God. I pray that God will make all of our hearts faithful to Him, and that He will give us lots of courage. God will help us win in our battles, too. ~

Fill In the Blanks

1 Samuel 17:45-47: Then said David to the _____, Thou comest to me with a _____, and with a _____, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the _____ of the LORD of _____, the God of the armies of _____, whom thou hast defied. This day will the LORD _____ thee into mine hand; and I will _____ thee, and take thine head from thee; and I will give the _____ of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild _____ of the earth; that all the _____ may know that there is a _____ in Israel. And all this _____ shall know that the LORD _____ not with sword and spear: for the _____ is the LORD'S, and he will give you into our _____.

This Is the Work of God

Pastor Ken Storm
Tapiola, Michigan

Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that you believe on him whom he hath sent.

John 6:29

THIS STATEMENT BY JESUS WAS directed unto the people who had followed Him by the sea of Capernaum. They had witnessed in recent days many miracles of healing He had performed on those who were diseased, and the miracle of feeding a great multitude of people with only five barley loaves and two small fish. When they beheld these miracles they were convinced that Jesus was a prophet of God; and rightly so. For it was God, through Jacob, who prophesied: *The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.* (Genesis 49:10) Yet the people considered Him to be only a prophet; not the Messiah, the Son of God, nor the Savior of mankind.

We see however, that Jesus, who searches the hearts of men, found that unbelief was ruling their lives. The people had focused on the bread and fish they had eaten and were filled. Little did they consider the miracle by which so many were fed with so little. Even more notable was the fact they failed to observe carefully the significance of these miracles. Jesus therefore clearly redirects their minds and hearts away from that which they observed outwardly and unto the meat which He gives that is everlasting and does not perish. He tells the multitudes to expend their efforts for that which never perishes, namely the spiritual food He gives. In verse 51 of our text chapter, He said, *I am the living bread which came down from heaven*, and in verses 53 through 58 Jesus explains the need for men to eat this spiritual bread. (Read John 6:29-58.)

The people however did not comprehend these words of Jesus and therefore promptly asked, *What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?* (John 6:28) The same question is commonly found in the minds and hearts of men today because spiritual darkness rules within. The answer to this question is no different today than it was when Jesus said unto them, ***This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.***

Someone may ask, "How does one really believe?" First we must understand that the nature of man is to seek to be justified before God by his own labors and his own works. This trait is inherent in the flesh of all mankind and is motivated by pride. The natural man is determined

to effect, by his own doing, something that he thinks is acceptable and meritorious before God. Oblivious is he to the Word which teaches that there is nothing man can do of himself to achieve righteousness before God. It has already been accomplished in perfection by Christ Jesus on the cross of Calvary where He suffered, bled and died to pay our sin debt; and in the power of His resurrection He instills a lively hope of eternal salvation in all who believe in Him as the Scripture teaches. *For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.* (Ephesians 2:8-9) Here only is the true righteousness which is acceptable to God. *Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.* (Acts 4:12) We must conclude with the words of the Apostle: *For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.* (Romans 10:10) We see that human intellect must be put aside.

If, dear friend, you find that you are struggling to make yourself righteous before God by your own efforts, as did the people in our text, may God reveal to you that your struggle is against Him and rejects His perfect work of salvation for you. Dear friend, cease from your fruitless

The natural man is determined to effect, by his own doing, something that he thinks is acceptable and meritorious before God.

and futile efforts which will only lead to spiritual shipwreck. Surrender instead to the loving, entreating words of the Savior who today invites you, *Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.* (Matthew 11:28-30) Come just as you are but with a repentant, humble and contrite heart, confessing your sin and your failed efforts to make yourself righteous. Trust in Jesus, God's perfect gift to all, for your righteousness. Here, in His kingdom on earth today, the blood of Jesus continues to speak grace and forgiveness. Jesus awaits your arrival, and His children will assure you with the audible Gospel and the laying on of loving hands that this miracle of spiritual healing is indeed true. Your sins are washed away in the name and blood of Jesus Christ your Savior.

May the wonderful, saving work of God through living faith in His Son be accomplished in every heart. ~

He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end. I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice, and to do good in his life. And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labour, it is the gift of God. I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him. That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been; and God requireth that which is past.

Ecclesiastes 3:11-15

Our God Is Not Limited

Kaare Suhr

Sions Blad, August 1990

The Samaritan woman with whom Jesus conversed at Jacob's well asked Him where was the right place to worship (John 4).

The Samaritans considered Gerizim to be a holy place. God had already commanded Moses that when the people of Israel came to the land of Canaan, they should put the blessing on Mount Gerizim (Deuteronomy 11: 29).



Shechem and Mt. Gerizim

Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

THE JEWS HAD THEIR TEMPLE in Jerusalem. Therefore, the woman said: *Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. (John 4:20)* Jesus answered: *Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. (v. 21-24)*

From these words, we understand that God is not bound to any particular earthly place. Although Jesus said this to the Samaritan woman, it is also a teaching for us wherever we are or dwell. Nevertheless, there has always been this trait among those who confess to be Christians—something that seems to follow us—that we want to confine the right Christianity to certain places or areas. We often think: Do they belong to us? Are they with us? Yes, the disciples of Jesus also said: *Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followeth not us: and we forbid him, because he followeth not us. But Jesus said, Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me. For he that is not against us is on our part. (Mark 9:38-40)*

This does not mean that all who speak of Jesus are with Him, but it does mean that we should not limit the activity and power of Jesus to our person and nearest area of acquaintance. Those to whom Jesus has given His power to drive out devils are not against us, but for us, and above all else, are for Jesus.

The Catholic Church has its earthly headquarters and papal throne in Rome. They consider the pope to be

Christ's vicar (substitute) here on earth. The historian tells us that this church has excommunicated and persecuted faithful servants of Christ. This should be a reminder to us that we would not allow ourselves to be led into spiritual delusion. We should not limit the activity of the Holy Spirit—that is God's work. The Holy Spirit works at all times and in all places where God is present by His Spirit, His Word and His Gospel, which is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians that God's congregation at Corinth was holy (called to be saints and sanctified)—not only there in Corinth, but in every place they call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord (1 Corinthians 1:2).

The Samaritans also waited for the Messiah. This woman met Him, and she spoke of Him to the people in the city. Many believed on Him because of her word.

We have also heard the Gospel of Christ, and God has given us faith to believe that which we have heard. This is the gift of God. It is the power of the Gospel. Therefore, we shall not boast in the presence of men or think that we ourselves have been able to comprehend faith. God is the Author and Finisher of our faith. It is not in the power of any person to give faith or to take it away. Many dangers are found that can harm us in our lives of faith.

We see that already at the time of the apostles—when Christianity should have been the purest and uncontaminated by wrong doctrine—when John wrote to the seven congregations, there were only two of them which were not admonished to repent and correct their failures. Those who were the most self-confident had fallen the deepest. The two congregations which were pleasing to God were those who felt themselves to be *poor* and *weak*. It is a great grace of God that He has sent us His Word and given us faith in our hearts. It is only through the Spirit of God continuing to enlighten us with the knowledge of sin that we can also preserve the knowledge of grace in our hearts.

Those who will one day, by God's grace, reach home in heaven will see that the limitations or boundaries imposed by man and his judgment are not honored in heaven. There the saved multitude is gathered from the north and from the south, from east and west—yes, from all nations, people and tongues.

The keys of death and hell have not been entrusted to you or to me. These keys are retained in the possession of Him who knows each person's heart and see all of our works. As poor sinners and children of dust, we have no other refuge than the mercy seat and the throne of grace. God's grace is sufficient for salvation to all repentant sinners—yes, even the greatest sinner.

In this life our faith is tried in adversity and tribulation. Even if some would condemn us, no one can take us out of God's hand. We will hold firmly to Jesus, our salvation's solid rock and foundation, and say with Peter: *Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. (John 6:68)* Amen. ~

Contentment

Pastor Gerry Southerton
Vancouver, Washington

ONLY BY THE POWER OF GOD working through the Holy Spirit and the Word can we be content. Paul, in this text, is addressing believers and gives them some instructions that really give us thoughts on being content, knowing our future home with Jesus is secure.

Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you. But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity. Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. (Philippians 4:4-11)

Our text starts out with Paul making this statement: *Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.* In the everyday troubles and problems that we face, we many times forget all the reasons we have to rejoice in our Heavenly Father. Paul reminds us that no matter what we face, the Lord is at hand, so we have no need to be anxious. Now I know that this is easier said than done. This, to me, is the reason that Paul gives us these instructions.

Paul knew this because of all the things that he faced during his ministry, but by saying, *Be careful (anxious) for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God,* he reminds us to be thankful even when giving requests to God. Many times we go to God with our laundry list of things or outcomes that we want and forget the great blessing He has already given to us. Paul then reminds us that it is God who will take care of our faith. *And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.* Paul reminds us that God is going to take care of us even when we feel we are drowning in the troubles of this world.



Rustic Contentment, Samuel Palmer

Paul also give some practical advice to bring us out of our blues and self-pity to contentment. *Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.* Paul wants us to change our viewpoint, which in many ways is a call to repentance, a change of mind. Quit looking at life as something that is against you or that God is ignoring you and rather look at all the great things He has already blessed you with. When we complain about our terrible lives, we forget that we are not promised that life is going to be perfect but rather that we will suffer as Christ suffered. Yes, in our flesh we want more and more, but we are called to repent and look on the great blessings that we have been given in Christ Jesus. When we change our focus to these things it is much easier to know the peace of God, because we are not always looking at what we are missing but on the wonderful ways God continues to bless us. It is in this we find contentment.

Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. Paul had much to complain about in his life after his conversion, for he was arrested, beaten, imprisoned, and finally killed for the sake of Christ. Yet he tells us that he is content in all things. He is the one calling us to be content and to look to our great blessing in Christ Jesus because this is how we can learn contentment. ~

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Hallelujah!

Jill Carattini

Submitted by Alvar Helmes; Battle Ground, Washington

ON FEBRUARY 23, 1685, the man whose music would forever inspire the world was born in Halle, Germany—ironically, to parents who would have seen him become a lawyer. But George Frideric Handel would quickly grow to be a famed composer and beloved musician.

By the time he reached his twenties, Handel was the talk of all England and Italy. Queen Anne had him commissioned as official composer of music for state occasions. Seats at his performances were often fought over, and his fame was quickly spreading throughout the world.

But the glory soon passed. Audiences dropped off; his popularity was eclipsed by newer talent. Financial ruin, failed productions, and festering stress took their toll on the musical giant. Weary from the strain of overwork and disappointment, Handel suffered an attack of a paralytic disorder that left his right arm crippled. At 52, the once famed musician was now seen as invalid and obsolete. "Handel's great days are over," wrote Frederick the Great, "his inspiration is exhausted."

But sounds of the harpsichord soon reported otherwise. Not long after Handel withdrew to recuperate, his fingers were moved to play again and the artist set out to compose. Nonetheless, his next two operas were altogether unsuccessful. A charity concert he had promised to conduct in Dublin had become his only prospect for work. Yet, given a manuscript that included the opening lines from Isaiah 40, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people," Handel was stirred to write.

On August 22, 1741, at the lowest ebb of his career, George Handel enclosed himself in a room and set to composing Messiah. The entire oratorio was sketched and scored within three weeks. And on April 13th, 1742, the first audience in history resounded in applause to the stirring music of Messiah, conducted by Handel himself.

The composition would become his best known, and most beloved work, unsurpassed as sacred music. Taken from both Old and New Testament Scriptures, the work considers the entire human experience. Listeners are moved from creation and hope, to suffering and death, to redemption and resurrection. The work portrays the full range of human response to God, from holiness and hope to resignation and repentance, faith and triumph.

Ironically, the beloved Messiah enjoyed only moderate success while Handel lived, though he performed it annually each Easter for his favorite charity. In fact, he continued to conduct oratorio performances and revise his scores throughout the rest of his life, even in blindness the last 7 years. Of his lasting effect on humanity, a British historian once commented, "[Handel's] oratorios thrive abundantly—for my part, they give me an idea of heaven, where everybody is to sing whether they have voices or not."⁽¹⁾ Perhaps it is for this reason that audiences everywhere continue to stand in reverence to the last lines of his inspired work, words of inexhaustible inspiration, words befitting of a resurrected king—indeed, bone of our bone who has conquered no less than death:

Hallelujah! Hallelujah! For the Lord God, Omnipotent reigneth. Hallelujah!

"Hallelujah!" by Jill Carattini, *A Slice of Infinity*, originally printed 21 April 2014 (www.rzim.org). Used by permission of Ravi Zacharias International Ministries.
(1) Horace Walpole in *The Essential Canon of Classical Music*, Ed. David Dubal (New York: North Point Press, 2001), 35.



George Frideric Handel

And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great. And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.

Revelation 19:5-7