

# 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 2012

## God's Plan for Me

Pastor Don Salo  
New York Mills, Minnesota

**H**ow often do you ask yourself: "What is God's plan for me?" Many have prayed to God that He would reveal His plan for them. Isaiah, the prophet, speaks about God's ways and thoughts:

**For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.**

Isaiah 55:8-9

God knows each of us better than we know ourselves. It is good that we would seek His advice for our lives. Too often we think we know it all; as a result, we do not always follow God's plan. This will always lead to sorrow and grief. However, when God through His Spirit speaks we are to listen to what He has to say.

First of all, He calls us to repentance and living faith; then He will show us what He wants to do. The most important thing is that we would be obedient to the voice of the Spirit. God who knows us will give us gifts by which we can serve Him so that His name would be glorified.

God has given us an example by His foreordained plans for mankind. As we study God's Word, we can see His perfect plan because He already knew that man would fall into sin. He promised the Savior to Adam and Eve and all the world when they fell into sin. *And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel. (Genesis 3:15)* God showed mercy and grace to them by this promise. They believed God and He carried them in His arms of grace. God through His prophets spoke of this coming event, His plan for salvation.

Isaiah speaks of His birth through the womb of a virgin. He also speaks of Him as the Mighty Counselor and Prince of Peace. Then he describes in the 53rd chapter the suffering and death that the Savior would have to go through. In chapter 55, he tells us that this salvation could not be bought, but it will be a free gift of

God. Micah tells us exactly where the Savior will be born. David in the Psalms speaks of the betrayal and suffering also. Then Malachi speaks of the end when God will make up His jewels.

The Apostles make many references to this foreordained plan. Peter, on the day of Pentecost, while he reminded the people of what they had done, said, *Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain. (Acts 2:23)* Peter no doubt remembered what Isaiah had written in the 53rd chapter. In his own epistle, Peter later makes reference to the plan of God and how it would be accomplished. *Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied. (1 Peter 1:2)*

Again in the epistle to the Romans we see God's plan for fallen mankind. *For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. (Romans 8:29)* And in the letter to Timothy: *Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began. (2 Timothy 1:9)*

God has ordained His Church on earth to proclaim the mystery of His kingdom and plan. *But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory. (1 Corinthians 2:7)*

In conclusion to God's plan, He promises eternal life. *In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began. (Titus 1:2)*

God has a plan for each of us. When God speaks to us through His Word and Spirit, let us be obedient. God who is all knowing will lead us according to His promise to the promised land. In all things we must say, "Thy will be done." Pray to God for His guiding Spirit. He who is faithful will hear your prayer. ~

# The Apostles' Creed: Part 2

from Martin Luther's Catechetical Writings

Submitted by Rhoda Olin; Vanderhoof, British Columbia, Canada

(For "The Apostles' Creed: Part 1" please see the August 2012 edition.)

## The Second Article of the Creed

**"I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord."**

This means that I believe not only that Jesus Christ is eternal and divine by nature, being begotten in eternity as God's true and only Son, but also that He has received power over all things from the Father in that, according to His divine nature, He has created with the Father.

I confess that no one can believe in the Father and find access to Him through science, works, reason or anything that may be named in heaven and upon earth, except in and through Jesus Christ, His Son—through faith in His name and dominion.

**"Conceived by the Holy Spirit."**

I believe firmly that He was conceived by the Holy Spirit for my good, without the agency of man or of the flesh, without a natural father or seed; and that He was so conceived for the purpose of purifying and making spiritual, through His and the Almighty Father's gracious will, the sinful, carnal, impure and damnable conception of all those who believe in Him.

**"Born of the Virgin Mary."**

I believe that He was born for me from Mary the pure virgin, without defilement of her bodily and spiritual virginity, to the end that He, according to the Father's merciful purpose, might render blessed, harmless and pure my birth, through which I became subject to sin and condemnation.

**"Suffered under Pontius Pilate."**

I believe that He has borne His sufferings and cross for my sins and the sins of all believers, whereby He has blessed every tribulation and every cross, thus rendering them beneficial and profitable.

**"Was crucified, dead and buried."**

I believe that He suffered death and burial in order to destroy and to bury my sins and those of all believers, and that thereby temporal death has been rendered harmless, profitable and salutary.

**"He descended into hell."**

I believe that He descended into hell in order to quench and to crush, for my good and that of all believers, the devil and all his might, wiles and wickedness, thus breaking his power henceforth to harm me; and I believe that He has redeemed me from the torments of hell rendering them harmless and profitable for me.

**"The third day He rose again from the dead."**

I believe that on the third day He rose from the dead in order to give me and all believers newness of life, thus awakening me by His grace and Spirit to a life in which I ever shun what is sinful and serve Him in every grace and every virtue.

**"He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty."**

I believe that He ascended into heaven and has received from the Father power and honor above all angels and creatures, that He accordingly sits at the right hand of God; that is, He is King and Lord over all that belongs to God, whether it be in heaven, in hell or on earth. For this reason He can help me and all believers in every need, in defiance of all our adversaries and enemies.

**"From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead."**

Thence, from heaven, He shall return on the last day, to judge the living that shall then be found on the earth, and the dead who meanwhile have passed away; I believe that all men, all angels and devils shall be haled before His judgment-seat and behold Him face to face; and I believe that He shall deliver my body and those of all believers from death and every infirmity, that He shall mete out eternal punishment to our foes and adversaries and deliver us from their power forever.~

("The Creed: Part 3" coming next month!)

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# *Our Blessed Heritage*

## **The History of the Apostolic Lutheran Church of New York Mills, Minnesota**

Louise Amberg

**I**n search of a new home in a new land, the Antti Puupera and Tuomas Autio families arrived in the New York Mills area in 1874. Here they homesteaded and built shelters to live in while they made clearings to plant crops and provide food. These early pioneers began to hold prayer meetings in each other's homes with Matti Ronkainen preaching. Leaving from Michigan, Israel Hagel also came to New York Mills. His first intention was to travel to Astoria, Oregon, but for some reason, he got off the train in Duluth and walked to New York Mills to homestead.

On June 19, 1877, the first formal worship service of the Apostolic Lutheran faith was held in Antti Puupera's log cabin, with Israel Hagel preaching the sermon. Present at this first service were Mr. & Mrs. Tuomas Autio, Mr. & Mrs. Antti Puupera, Mr. & Mrs. Alex Nykanen, Mr. & Mrs. Matt Ronkainen and Isaac Westola.

The pioneers decided they needed a designated place to gather and worship. In 1882 they built a small frame church on wooden pillars on the edge of a ravine about seven miles south of New York Mills. By 1903 this church building became too small for the increased membership. The church was taken down and replaced with a larger building.

There were 85 families as members in 1898 when the congregation was legalized. The worship services were held in the Finnish language, and not until the late 1940's was the English language added.

In 1945 the church was moved by Art Falls and Art Moebius from the ravine in the country where it had been built. It was relocated on the south edge of New York Mills, the present location of the church today. This location made it more accessible for the older members who had moved into the village. It also provided more parking for the automobiles which had taken the place of the horse-drawn vehicles.

The building was enlarged with the addition of the sacristy and the front entrance. A basement under the church provided a place for serving meals.

Rev. Israel Hagel donated forty acres to the church, part of which was called Hagel Cemetery. Later the name was changed to Woodland Cemetery. The two and one-fourth acres known as the Prairie Cemetery were donated by Alex Pikkarainen, and two acres were donated by Ollie Tervola for the Leaf Lake Cemetery.

In 1998 the congregation decided to add an addition onto the church to house a new dining area, kitchen and handicap accessible facilities. Construction began with a ground breaking ceremony held on May 9, 1999. The basement was remodeled to accommodate Sunday School rooms.

Over the years several pastors have served the congregation: Johan Mursu, Aatu Kela, Peter Raattama, Andrew Wirkkala, Matt Erkkila, Emil Kulla, Emil Kallinen, Walter Mursu, and George Wilson. Rev. Wilson served the congregation from 1950 to 1986. Interim pastors have been Oscar Wilson and Ralph Davidson. In 1986 Rev. Donald Salo from Tower, Minnesota, was called to serve the congregation.

Rev. Salo currently serves as pastor in New York Mills, but he has recently informed the congregation



that he wishes to retire. With much prayer, we are asking God to send forth another servant to serve our congregation.

**T**he original founders of the congregation have gone to their reward and new generations have followed in their footsteps, believing in the same doctrine and professing their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We give thanks to God for all of our forefathers who have labored tirelessly preserving the faith and the furtherance of our church. They left a precious inheritance; they preserved the living faith for the present generation. To God be the glory forever and ever. Amen!

~If you enjoyed this article and would like to see the history of your home congregation featured in an upcoming *Christian Monthly*, please email [cm@apostoliclutheran.org](mailto:cm@apostoliclutheran.org) or call Lois Matson (360) 904-6951.

# Adam and Eve

Gwen Wilson  
Ridgefield, Washington

Dear Children,

Hello and God's peace to you today. I pray that you will always have that peace in your hearts. It is the best peace you can have. The Bible tells us it is a peace that is beyond our understanding. By faith we believe it abides in our hearts when we believe in Jesus.

I was thinking about when God created the earth and all that is in it. I wanted to take a closer look at the people He created. You can find this in *Genesis, chapters 1-3*.

**In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. (Genesis 1:1-2)**

The earth did not even have a shape, and there was no place for anything to live. There was no living thing—nothing—but God Himself. God was always there. He wanted to make something. He knew He wanted to make it very good and very beautiful. He spoke and said, "Let there be..." and when He spoke, things happened and the world came to be all that it was meant to be.

After it was created, God looked at His handiwork. He saw that it was VERY GOOD, but there was no one to till the ground and take care of it.

**And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. (Genesis 1:26)**

God wanted people to enjoy His earth, to tend it and have it like a gift.

**And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. (Genesis 2:7)**

God just used dirt from the ground and turned it into the form of a man. I imagine this dirt man lying there looking like a sand sculpture, not alive. God looked at the man and He made His breath go into the man's nose and he became real and alive. Isn't this so beautiful, to know what God can do? God is amazing in His power. He named this first man Adam.

God saw that all the animals were made male and female to be mates as we know they do, but there was no one for Adam. God did not like Adam to be alone so He wanted to make a helper—a wife—for him.

One day God made Adam fall into a very deep sleep, and as he slept, God opened up his side and took out a rib bone. (You kids can feel your rib bones.) This is what God used. The Bible does not say in certain words but I am sure that what God did to Adam, He did to make the woman. He breathed onto that bone, and, yes, it turned into a woman.

What was Adam doing during this time? He was still sleeping. When he awoke, God had a surprise for him, for He had brought the woman to him.

**And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. (Genesis 2:23)**

You may be wondering about when she got her real name. It was not until they had eaten of the fruit of the forbidden tree that the Bible mentions her name.

**And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living. (Genesis 3:20)**

God made the first man and woman in such special ways that only He could do, and from them children were born and the world began. God has created many more people in their mother's wombs to come and still enjoy what God has made.



I am thankful that God has made each of you and I pray that you will always follow God, your Creator, and Jesus, Who lived and died for you and for all who believe on Him. We have a beautiful home waiting for us in heaven. We have a home up in heaven Jesus has gone to prepare, and He is coming back to take us to Him—forever. Blessings to you. ~



# Fellowship and Unity

Pastor Chuck Bylkas  
South Range, Michigan

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.

Psalm 133

**U**pon returning from our annual church convention, I cannot help but think about the blessings of being a member of the body of Christ. David speaks passionately of this fellowship in Psalm 133. However, there is a tendency to think of unity as something for which we must strive, as if this fellowship is achieved by human effort. David teaches us otherwise. He speaks of unity as something that comes from outside of us, as a gift.

**It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard... the dew of Hermon... the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion...**

The fellowship we have in Christ Jesus has been bestowed upon us by God, because of His Fatherly kindness. God has given us His Son so that we might be joined together with Him and with one another. *And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. (Colossians 1:20)* In his book *Life Together*, the German pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer says it well: "Christian community is founded solely on Jesus Christ and in fact, it already exists in Christ. It is not an ideal which we must realize, it is rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate."

Others may say that because we still have differences of opinion, there is no unity. God's Word says otherwise. There is a unity that transcends our human frailties. The Apostle Paul asserts that even though we may be different we are still one in Christ Jesus: *For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:12-13)* We as God's children enjoy fellowship together because of the One who shed His blood at Calvary's cross to give us the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. May God grant us grace to celebrate the unity we have through the person and work of His Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

**And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.**

Ephesians 4:11-16  
Yours in Christ! ~

**Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.**

Proverbs 22:6

At all times and in all places education is a matter of first-rate importance. This verse of the Bible goes to the point at once. We find in it three clearly distinguished yet closely related parts:

1. Whom we should educate:  
The material — "a child"
2. How we should educate:  
The process — "train up"
3. Into what we should educate:  
The aim and issue — "in the way he should go"



In education, the *material* should be pliable, the *method* skillful, and the *pattern* divine. Childhood is the proper period for education. You may, within certain limits, determine the direction of a river, a tree, a man if you touch them near their sources, where they are tiny and tender; but none of the three when full-grown can be bent, except in very minute degrees, and at the expense of labor greatly disproportionate to the result.

William Arnot

# God is Greater Than Our Heart

L. L. Laestadius

And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him. For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.

1 John 3:19-21

**N**ow says Apostle John, ...if our heart condemn us, God is greater... With these words he indicates that no Christian should believe his own heart when it condemns him; rather he must believe more the gracious promises of God, which indicate that Christ has come to save the sinners and not the righteous. A Christian must ever flee to the great Cross-bearer as a sinner and must believe he will become saved by grace and not by merit. If a Christian were judged according to his merit he would be lost entirely. But by grace will he become saved, if he believes firmly upon Him who is greater than self-righteousness, which preaches condemnation through one's own heart. That is why Luther also preaches that he fears his own heart more than the Sultan of Turkey. Every Christian whose conscience is awake indeed feels his heart to be evil, wicked and foul; namely, the carnal heart which is in the old man, which Paul names the "outward man." The soul, or the spiritual heart, which Paul calls the "inward man," is purified with the blood of Christ; now it remains for a Christian to be able to make a distinction, so that the enemy could not confuse the effects of the "outward" and the "inward," the "old man" and the "new man" in his nature. May the great Judge of Hearts grant us the light of His Holy Spirit that we could explain this matter!

*For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin... (Romans 7:22-23)* Here Paul must be a sinner according to the flesh, but holy in spirit. The intellect cannot comprehend this: that a sinner is holy, the unclean is pure, and how the unrighteous is righteous. We possess the belief that when sins have been forgiven, we must believe also that the sinner is holy, the unclean is pure, and the unrighteous is righteous. A Christian is indeed, according to the flesh, unclean and unrighteous as the devil; but through grace he is holy and righteous, although the devil of self-righteousness preaches: "You are not holy and righteous, but you are sinful, unrighteous, unclean and like the devil." Now that self-righteousness becomes an accuser and begins to

condemn; and when this condemnation is proclaimed in the heart, and in his mind seemingly condemning a Christian, then John says: "If our heart condemn us, God is greater than self-righteousness;" and if self-righteousness condemns, God will release one from that condemnation. God has forgiven the sins of the penitent. The Son of God has paid for their unrighteousness, which He carried from the Garden to the hill of Golgotha and through Himself brought it down into the grave; and thereby He has made them holy and righteous. Believe now, you penitent, that you are by God's grace holy and righteous!

**Be comforted now, you precious redeemed souls, for the accuser of God's children has been cast down upon the earth. He has no more power over those who have taken the great Cross-bearer and thorn-crowned King, Him who has conquered for their Advocate before the Father.**

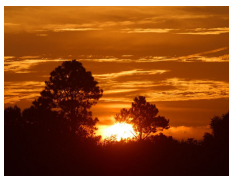
John heard a loud voice from heaven say: *Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death. Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time. (Revelation 12:10-12)*

Therefore rejoice and be exceedingly glad, you precious redeemed souls, for great is your reward in heaven! Rejoice, you elect, for your accuser has been cast out from heaven! He has no more power to accuse you before God. You have an Advocate before the Father and He prays for you and speaks well of you. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, all you God's children, and cry with a loud voice that you have overcome by the blood of the Lamb and by the testimony of His Word! If you strive in your most precious faith until death, you too shall soon sing, together with the angels and all the precious redeemed souls. You shall soon sing the new hymn upon Mount Zion: *Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony.*

Amen. ~

**If you are stuck in the rut of self-unforgiveness, I encourage you to get up, shake yourself off, and get back into your life and fulfill the destiny that God has for you. Always remember that our God is a God of second chances. Repent and ask for His forgiveness.**

*Ifeoma Odunukwe; The Congo, Africa  
Submitted by Alvar Helmes; Battle Ground, Washington*



# Waiting on God: The Keynote Of Life

Andrew Murray

**I have waited for thy salvation, O LORD.**

**Genesis 49:18**

**I**t is not easy to say exactly in what sense Jacob used these words, in the midst of his prophecies in regard to the future of his sons. But they do certainly indicate that both for himself and for them his expectation was from God alone. It was God's salvation he waited for: a salvation which God had promised and which God Himself alone could work out. He knew himself and his sons to be under God's charge. Jehovah the Everlasting God would show in them what His saving power is and does. The words point forward to that wonderful history of redemption which is not yet finished, and to the glorious future in eternity. They suggest to us how there is no salvation but God's salvation, and how waiting on God for that, whether for our personal experience, or in wider circles, is our first duty, our true blessedness.

Let us think of ourselves, and the inconceivably glorious salvation God has wrought for us in Christ, and is now purposing to work out and to perfect in us by His Spirit. Let us meditate until we somewhat realize that every participation of this great salvation, from moment to moment, must be the work of God Himself. God cannot part with His grace, or goodness, or strength, as an external thing that He gives us, as He gives the raindrops from heaven. No; He can only give it, and we can only enjoy it, as He works it Himself directly and unceasingly. And the only reason that He does not work it more effectively and continuously in us is that we are not willing. We oppose Him either by our indifference or by our self-effort, so that He does not do what He would. What He asks of us, in the way of surrender, and obedience, and desire, and trust, is all comprised in this one word: waiting on Him, waiting for His salvation. It combines the deep sense of our entire helplessness of ourselves to work what is divinely good, and the perfect confidence that our God will work it all in His divine power.

Again, I say, let us meditate on the divine glory of the salvation God purposes working out in us, until we know the truth it implies. Our heart is the scene of a divine operation more wonderful than creation. We can do as little toward the work as toward creating the world, except as God works in us to will and to do. God only asks of us to yield, to consent, to wait upon Him, and He will do it all. Let us meditate and be still, until we see how appropriate and right and blessed it is that God alone do all, and our soul will of itself sink down in deep humility to say *I have waited for thy salvation, O LORD*. And the deep blessed background of all our praying and working will be: "Truly my soul waits upon God."

The application of the truth to wider circles, to those we labor among or intercede for, to the Church of Christ around us, or throughout the world, is not difficult. There can be no good but what God works; to wait upon God, and have the heart filled with faith in His working, and in that faith to pray for His mighty power to come down, is our only wisdom. Oh, for the eyes of our heart to be opened to see God working in ourselves and in others, and to see how blessed it is to worship and just to wait for His salvation!

Our private and public prayer are our chief expression of our relation to God; it is in them chiefly that our waiting upon God must be exercised. If our waiting begins by quieting the activities of nature, and being still before God; if it bows and seeks to see God in His universal and almighty operation, alone able and always ready to work all good; if it yields itself to Him in the assurance that He is working and will work in us; if it maintains the place of humility and stillness and surrender, until God's Spirit has quickened the faith that He will perfect His work: it will indeed become the strength and the joy of the soul. Life will become one deep blessed cry: *I have waited for thy salvation, O LORD*.

**My soul, wait thou only upon God...**

**Psalms 62:5 ~**

**The best argument that there is a God—and it often moved me deeply—is this one that He proves from the generation of species: A cow always bears a cow, a horse a horse, etc. No goldfinch produces a siskin. Therefore, it is necessary to conclude that there is something that directs everything thus.**

*Martin Luther (350 years before Darwin)*

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## Watch and Pray

Pastor Ken Storm  
Tapiola, Michigan

**T**hese are the words of Jesus, spoken to His disciples in the garden of Gethsemane. He had asked them to watch with Him while He went further into the garden to pray and when He returned He found them asleep. Jesus said to Peter, *What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. (Matthew 26:40-41)* Do we find this question of Jesus needful for us today? Do we, like the disciples, often grow tired and sleepy? Shamefully, and yet truthfully, we must admit that it is no different with us.

Satan, our archenemy, knows how to lull the unwatchful into spiritual sleepiness in many devious ways. One of the most common is the pursuit of happiness in worldly possessions. In some measure it is close to all of us.

In America, we live in a world of affluence. Material things abound and the hearts of men are drawn to them. The nature of man delights in the material goods he accumulates. These things are treasured and can become the centerpiece of our lives. Where there is an abundance of material wealth, there often enters a desire for recognition and the acclaim of men. Soon only those things which bring pleasure to the flesh are sought after. Jesus reminds us, *For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. (Luke 12:34)* Matters that bring spiritual joy and thanksgiving to God lose their appeal. We become drowsy and spiritual sleep follows. Satan has accomplished his mission.

The Lord reminds us in His Holy Word that pleasure derived from material wealth, which brings joy to our carnal nature, is temporal. It will soon pass away. What, then, will be the reason for joy in the hearts of those who live their lives for fleshly fulfillment when all must be left behind and the moment of departure from this life is at hand? Tragic and eternal are the results. For this reason Jesus exhorts us to watch and pray lest we also are tempted.

Where, we may ask, should we watch and pray? We, of ourselves, cannot see clearly to watch; our vision

is so often darkened by the frailty of our flesh. The Lord illuminates as He leads us to the words of the psalmist, *Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. (Psalm 119:105)* It is in the Word, then, that we watch for the safety of our souls. The Word directs us, *Pray without ceasing. (1 Thessalonians 5:17)* It is the will of God that we commune with Him wherever we may be.

The Word also reminds us specifically that we should be found *not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. (Hebrews 10:25)* Dear friend, let us remember that the assembly of God's children is extremely important. Christian fellowship is one way that God has afforded us the opportunity to

encourage one another. John, in his epistle, says, *That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. (1 John 1:3)* God has made possible for us the weekly worship services and Bible studies. Here we are drawn more closely to Him and to one another, and here

we learn together more of His wonderful Word of Life. God has so lovingly provided everything needed for the salvation of our souls. Do we love Him enough to make every effort to attend these gatherings to honor and glorify Him? Dear friend, we must honestly answer this question in our own hearts, but God knows.

**W**e will find that time spent around God's Word is the most wholesome and edifying time we have in this life and it pays the greatest dividends in terms of peace and joy in our lives. Let us, therefore, never take these opportunities for granted or treat them with indifference. They can be taken away. We see, even in America, there is a growing intolerance for Christianity. Let us earnestly watch and pray, dear brother and sister. We cannot become complacent and waste our time in things that are spiritually unprofitable. Jesus is coming soon. ~

