



NON-PROFIT

# The Good News Letter

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TAX-EXEMPT

“Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” MARK 16:15

July 2024

## FROM US TO YOU

It's July, the beginning of Summer. This should be a happy, relaxing season in America! Summer has traditionally meant family vacations, cookouts, picnics, and beach activity. Somehow all that has changed! If you look at things from a secular point of view, it's downright depressing watching the news at night. There's a nervous tension that permeates the mood these days. Even if you don't watch the news you feel the stress in the air. Relationships just don't seem as easy as they used to be. Most people don't have the income they used to have for summer activities. Folks are fearful about the increase in crime, especially in the big cities. Americans don't seem to have the freedom of space that they had ten years ago. People feel crowded. In New York City it's dangerous taking the subway. People waiting for the train have been pushed onto the tracks! Unwelcome strangers from other countries, who don't share our lifestyles or respect our values, are making citizens feel pressured. We just don't have the space to move about freely anymore as we once did not that long ago.

What has happened to America in the past ten years to change the emotional landscape so much? Ten years ago the mood was so much more relaxed. Taxes have gone way up, and bank accounts are going down. The things we citizens have always depended on are now in danger. During the Herbert Hoover administration, there used to be a saying, referring to America's prosperity, "A chicken in every pot and a car in every garage." These days, fuel prices are on the rise, and utilities are being stretched. Some people are having trouble paying for food, even fast food has gone up so high! In California, people are being pressured to buy exorbitant electric cars, even though California has been on the verge of widespread rotating blackouts. Recently, when demand for electricity reached an all-time high, Governor Newsom sent 27 million alert messages to phones statewide calling for help to stave off power outages. What happened to change the American lifestyle so much in just ten years? The answer is obvious. Our leadership has changed! We got a new president with wildly unchristian views. So, if you are reading this in another country and are thinking of illegally coming to America, you should know one thing. America is not the same country anymore that it was after World War 2! The geography is the same, but the generation and the culture is not. We're no longer the land of active Christian churches, respect for God, safe schools, prosperity, and a pleasant lifestyle. So don't come.

However, if you love the Lord and are fearful of these troubled times, remember that you're not alone. God is only a prayer away! If you haven't repented of your sins yet (see Matthew 4:17), you need to do so and ask Christ to be your Savior and Lord. It's called being Born Again. Many people think of themselves as Christians due to church affiliation (Matthew 7:15), or family tradition (John 8:39). Don't trust in that alone! Read your Bible and draw closer

to God. Christ is your only salvation, nothing else (1 Timothy 2:5). So cling to Him! Lip service alone is not enough (see Mark 7:7-9). Jesus said, "...I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is **born again**" (John 3:3 NIV). Jesus also said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in Your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from Me, you evildoers!'" (Matthew 7:21-23 NIV).

If you love the Lord with all your heart, and are filled with His Spirit (John 14:26 and Galatians 5:16), through prayer, there is something of comfort you may consider. There are two godly men you should keep in mind. Daniel lived at a time that the Jews had backslidden from God. They wanted the good things God could give them, the affluence and security. But they wanted them on their own terms, without the proper obedience and respect for God that He expects. Meanwhile, as often happens when a nation backslides, a pagan nation, named Babylon, became more powerful and attacked Judah. "For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: From the north I am going to bring against Tyre Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, king of kings, with horses and chariots, with horsemen and a great army. He will ravage your settlements on the mainland with the sword; he will set up siege works against you, build a ramp up to your walls and raise his shields against you.

He will direct the blows of his battering rams against your walls and demolish your towers with his weapons. His horses will be so many that they will cover you with dust. Your walls will tremble at the noise of the war horses, wagons and chariots when he enters your gates as men enter a city whose walls have been broken through" (Ezekiel 26:7-10 NIV).

However, Daniel was a man of God. Despite everything that was destroyed around him, Daniel was not seriously hurt. He was taken to Babylon, as a prison of war, along with three other righteous men "...from Judah ...Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah" (Daniel 1:6 NIV). Their nation and most of its people were destroyed by Babylon, an evil enemy. But they were fed, educated, and treated fairly well. Daniel remained faithful to God through it all. He had his tests of faith (Daniel 6:1-28). All God's children do (see 1 Thesalonians 2:4 and Proverbs 17:3). Yet, years later, Daniel became the third ruler in the Kingdom (Daniel 5:7-29). And even when Babylon was attacked and overcome by other nations, "Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus" (Daniel 1:21 NIV). Joseph was another godly man. He was sold into slavery by his own brothers, but God was with him. Joseph went through hard times too (Genesis 39:20-22). He, like Daniel, was taken to another country run by evil foreigners. Yet, through it all, God was with him. In the end Joseph became the most important ruler in Egypt next to the pharaoh (Genesis 41:9-44).

In Christ's service, *Eric and Anne Kaestner*



# Obstacles to Faith

By Anne Kaestner

Recently I was looking over many of the “Prayer Requests” that people all over the world have sent to our website. I thought about how many ways Satan uses to block the channels between God and the people who love Him. Some of them are very serious needs, and I prayed for many of them (James 5:16). By channel blockers I mean the obstacles and attacks that the devil uses to get us to focus on so intently that they block out the serenity and joy God wants us to have. When we come to the Lord in repentance and contrition, He relieves the nervous feeling that comes along with spiritual guilt. He replaces it with peace and inner joy. However, Satan doesn’t want us to have peace with God. He wants us to stay in a perpetual state of anxiety and fear. So he puts obstacles, or stumbling blocks, in our way. We feel great when we first come to the Lord, accepting His salvation. It’s the same feeling we get when we reach a new higher level in our walk with God. The guilt is gone, and there’s a calm feeling that takes its place. That may last for months or years. Then something happens, often out of the blue. And a different emotion barges into your mind, and a worrying new anxiety is there. You think to yourself, “I was feeling so much better when I came to Christ, but I didn’t expect this to occur. What happened to all the serenity I felt?” You don’t understand why God would let this happen. Truth is, He didn’t cause it, Satan did. However, Satan can’t do anything to those who totally belong to Christ unless God allows it for our testing of faith (Luke 22:31-32).

It may be a financial anxiety, like losing your job or being robbed. It may be a sick loved one, or someone you love who is in trouble. It could be a disease or physical injury that happened to you. Or it could be a marriage problem. The obstacles come in different degrees of importance. Satan knows what will work best on each individual. He will give the stronger Christians a more severe obstacle than the weaker ones. Each of the needs is important, but some are more traumatic than others. My heart goes out especially to those who have terrifying spiritual afflictions such as demonic oppression. It depends on what it will take for you to take your eyes off of God and become overwhelmed with the situation. It’s normal to feel like things are out of control and that God, who seemed so close you before, is so far away, and you feel so alone.

Joseph probably felt that way when his brothers sold him into slavery (Genesis 37:3-37 and 39:1 to 45:19). And I know that Job felt that way because he wished that he had never been born (see Job 3:16). Nevertheless, in the midst of his misery, Job still declared, “*I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end He will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see Him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!*” (Job 19:25-27 NIV). The Bible is full of examples of strong believers who encountered bitter trials of faith and how they handled it. Some handled it well, like Abraham (Genesis 22:1-12), David (1 Samuel 17:4-50), and Daniel (Daniel 6:3-28). And others failed the test, like King Saul (1 Samuel 15:12-26), Balaam (2 Peter 2:15-16) and Judas Iscariot (Matthew 26:15 to 27:5).

One woman I had interviewed for a job years ago called me up on the phone several days later. She said she had given up on God and was angry at Him because her dog had become sick, and she did not know if he would live or die. She wanted to know why God would let this happen. Of course, she didn’t get the job. I couldn’t

calm her down. She was beyond the point of reason. She had made up her mind that if God would let this happen, she didn’t want to be a Christian anymore. She had been not just a new Christian but, undoubtedly, a very shallow one. For mature, seasoned Christians, do not take their salvation in Christ so lightly as to devalue it to the point of putting the needs of a family pet ahead of God. Jesus told His disciples a parable that illustrates this. “...saying: ‘*A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. He who has ears, let him hear*’” (Matthew 13:3-9 NIV).

Jesus spoke in parables so that the messages He taught would not be understood by those who would mock and despise His teaching (Matthew 7:6). But they would be understood by those who loved Him and had the Holy Spirit in their hearts (John 14:26, 1 Corinthians 2:14), teaching them God’s truth (Matthew 13:10-23). Then Jesus explained to them the parable of the Sower, who symbolizes the Holy Spirit. The fruit (Galatians 5:22-24) is the influence of God, through His servants, that brings lost souls to repentance. Jesus said, “*Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making*

*it unfruitful. But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown*” (Matthew 13:18-23 NIV).

Don’t believe the devil’s lies. When you go through a bitter test of faith, and you feel so alone, it doesn’t mean that God has stopped loving you or that He has left you. It’s just a test to see how strong your love is for Him (see Job 1:8-12). When I was a child, my Dad bought me a bicycle. In order to learn to ride it he had training wheels on it. But there came a time when the training wheels came off, and I had to learn to ride without them. That’s how it is with God. There comes a time when the spiritual training wheels come off, and you are tested. Will you still love and respect God when things get rough or only when good times happen? Is your faith so shallow that you will give up on Christ over your misery, like the woman I mentioned, or will you trust God through it all and prayerfully stay the course? Like the Apostle Paul said, “*Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I*





myself will not be disqualified for the prize” (1 Corinthians 9:24-27 NIV). Paul was talking to the Greeks, so he was using an analogy they would understand, like the Olympics. God hasn’t abandoned you. He just wants to see whether you really love Him or if you will fall away easily like unripe fruit from a light breeze coming between the branches of a vine (John 15:1-8).

When an athlete seriously tries to get himself in shape for the Olympics, everything else in his or her life takes a back seat to that challenge. What he eats, how long he sleeps, where he goes, what he does, all of that is carefully taken into consideration in order to achieve his goal. Nothing is more important to that person. That’s the analogy Paul is giving regarding a Christian’s walk with God. “For we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7 KJV). The Apostle Paul taught us that merely **entering** the race for salvation, the Born Again experience (John 3:3), does not automatically ensure that we, as contenders, will **finish** the course. Jesus said to His disciples, “I am the true vine, and My Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in Me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit He prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. **Remain** in Me, and I will **remain** in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must **remain** in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you **remain** in Me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man **remains** in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not **remain** in Me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and **burned**” (John 15:1-6 NIV). “For we are made partakers of Christ, **if** we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast **unto the end**” (Hebrews 3:14 KJV).

Do you love Christ enough to remain in Him, come what may? Or are you only a fair weather Christian who will only love God when life is good and there are no struggles of faith? Every year in New York many people enter a marathon. There are those who are destined to drop out before they reach the finish line, but others continue long after the race has been won. It may be many hours later that the final runners reach their goal, but those who are serious about the race will not drop out. My husband and I once saw the end of a marathon on television. The early arrivals had already reached the finish line, but there were a lot of runners who were still out there and had a long way to go. One of them was a pretty woman with short brown hair. The cameras fixed on her as she dragged herself laboriously along the track. She was stooped over toward one side, her head half downward, looking like a weeping willow tree moving along slowly. We ached for her, sensing her pain, cramping, and fatigue, but she would not give up. Everyone seemed transfixed on the woman because her determination was so great. She continued along the path even when it seemed as if she would pass out at any moment, but she kept on going despite her body’s refusal to cooperate. Her sheer force of will determined that she was going to make it to the **finish line** no matter how great the pain or how long it took! When she finally arrived at the end, there was a thunderous applause due to her strength of character that, come what may, nothing would stop her from reaching her goal! That’s the kind of perseverance God expects from us!

With all that Paul suffered for the Gospel (see 2 Corinthians 11:23-29), he still wrote encouraging the church, “...I consider my life worth nothing to me, **if only I may finish the race** and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace” (Acts 20:24 NIV). When life is easy and paths are clear anyone can reach their goal. However, that doesn’t prove anything

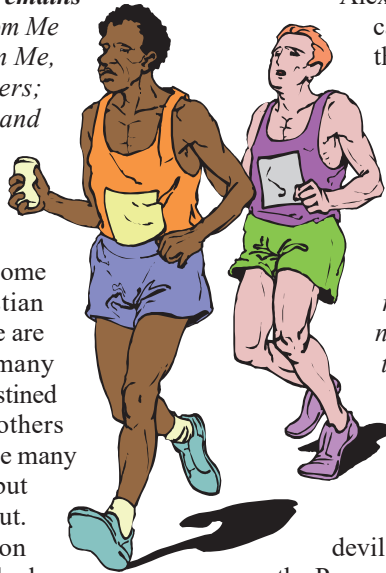
because there’s no struggle involved. Don’t make the mistake of thinking, like many pastors teach erroneously, that when you come to Christ all will be smooth sailing ahead. Many have made that mistake and when struggles and heartache came along they fell away from Christ. As Paul wrote to Timothy, a young evangelist, “*Timothy, my son, I give you this instruction in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight, holding on to faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these and so have **shipwrecked** their faith. Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme*” (1 Timothy 1:18-20 NIV).

Toward the end of his life, Paul wrote to Timothy again to encourage him he said, “*Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm. The Lord will repay him for what he has done. You too should be on your guard against him, because he strongly opposed our message. At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion’s mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory for ever and ever. Amen*” (2 Timothy 4:14-18 NIV).

Alexander had been a Christian at one time, because you can’t “shipwreck” a faith you don’t have. What was the stumbling block in Alexander’s heart that caused him to stray away from Christ, his salvation? Alexander was a coppersmith in a land where idols were made out of metal. The devil is more likely to attack you when he feels his kingdom on earth (see Ephesians 2:2) has been threatened. Paul and his companions had made such a great impact for Christ in Ephesus that, “*many of those who believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds. A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas. In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power*” (Acts 19:18-20 NIV).

Not likely to sit by and let God get the glory, the devil began to instigate an attack. Paul decided to stay in the Province of Asia a bit longer. “*About that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way. A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in no little business for the craftsmen. He called them together, along with the workmen in related trades, and said: ‘Men, you know we receive a good income from this business. And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that man-made gods are no gods at all. There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited, and the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty’*” (Acts 19:23-27 NIV).

Have you noticed how often tempers rise among people when their livelihood is threatened? Actually, it was really their affluent lifestyle that was being threatened. They were metalworkers and could easily survive making other metal products, but the making of idols was far more lucrative. “*The Jews pushed Alexander to the front, and some of the crowd shouted instructions to him. He motioned for silence in order to make a defense before the people. But when they realized he was a Jew, they all shouted in unison for about two hours: ‘Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!’*” (Acts 19:33-34 NIV). We know that Alexander, the coppersmith, **(Continued on Page 4)**



backslid away from Christ, because Paul told Timothy that he did. Undoubtedly, he must have been influenced by the crowd, and the possibility of losing income by no longer making idols to sell. Peer pressure can weigh heavily on people in a situation like this. He should have trusted God and followed the example of Paul, but his faith in Christ was weaker than his love of money. No wonder Paul said of Alexander, "...he strongly opposed our message" (2 Timothy 4:15 NIV). It conflicted with the wealth he could make forging idols, and it would make him unpopular with his coworkers, and that's hard to do when you feel such peer pressure. Of course, he died without salvation, because that's only available through Christ. Like the rich man in the anecdote Jesus told His disciples (Luke 16:19-31), I'm sure he now wishes he had been faithful to the Lord. But now it's too late! There is no purgatory. So, people, no amount of money is worth giving up your salvation. Jesus said, "*What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?*" (Matthew 16:26 NIV).

During the 1980's, a woman wrote a letter to a well-known Evangelistic Association giving her testimony. She said that when she had been expecting the birth of her third child, the Holy Spirit told her that she would have a son, and that he would be greatly instrumental in touching the hearts of thousands for Christ. She assumed that he would be a missionary or pastor, but that was not the case. When he was just a few months old, the boy became fatally sick and died. The insurance company sent his parents a check for two hundred dollars. His mother remembered what the Lord had said, and she sent the money to the Christian ministry, hoping that Jesus would put it to good use. The organization published a magazine, and they printed her letter in the correspondence section. The magazine had a large circulation, and went out all over the world. The organization was very big, with a multi-million dollar budget. Therefore, it seemed inconceivable to me that \$200 could possibly be worth a baby's life. However, God eventually gave me the answer. It wasn't the money that touched the hearts of thousands of people and brought them to Jesus. It was the faith, love, and trust of the baby's mother that did that! She took the only thing of value that was left of her son and gave it to God. If human love can be so strong for our Creator, how much greater is His love and sacrifice for us! (See John 3:16, 1 Peter 1:18-19.)

One of the most terrifying stories I have heard in my lifetime was that of some Pentecostal missionaries in Zimbabwe, Africa. It occurred on November 27th and 28th of 1987. There were different accounts of what happened because it involved more than one missionary farm. But in most cases, while their husbands were away, some African natives broke into the farms where the women and children were. They made them sit in chairs and tied them up. Then they proceeded to individually hack them to death. As horrible this is to think about, the missionaries knew they would eventually meet up with their deceased families in Heaven, and spend eternity enjoying the joy of salvation. Those who hacked them would eventually spend an eternity in Hell if they didn't repent. I know, many of you may think that their murderers deserve to suffer. But what about all the other people who read about the story in their newspapers? I don't know how many of them were so touched by the story that they repented of their sins and gave their hearts to the Lord. However, I don't believe God would have let that happen unless He knew it would bring an abundance of souls to repentance and save

them from Hell (Matt. 23:33), and the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:12-15).

The Bible tells us that no matter how small our sin is, it's enough to damn each of us (Isaiah 5:20-25, 53:6, Romans 3:23, 6:23) to an eternity without salvation unless we repent of it and accept Christ as our Savior and Lord. And with all the things that were done to Jesus after His arrest, I believe God would not allow it to happen unless He considered that even one soul that would become saved through Him would be worth it. God's Son spoke in prophecy of what He knew His suffering would be like, long before He was born into this world as baby Jesus. He said, "*I offered My back to those who beat Me, My cheeks to those who pulled out My beard; I did not hide My face from mocking and spitting*" (Isaiah 50:6 NIV). However, I've lost count of the many times people have said to me, "Why do you talk against this world? It is the only world I have to live in." However, that's not true. This world is corrupt because Satan is running it (Ephesians 2:1-3). The Apostle John, told us "*Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever*" (1 John 2:15-17 NIV).

Moreover, the Apostle Peter told us what is inevitable and what will happen to this world in the not too distant future. He said, "*The*



*Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with His promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make*

*every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with Him*" (2 Peter 3:9-14 NIV).

Our Lord is looking forward to what John saw in prophecy. He said, "*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.' He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!' Then He said, 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.' He said to me: 'It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be My son. But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death'*" (Revelation 21:1-8 NIV).