
◆ THE EDIFIER ◆

Volume 16

CHURCH of GOD 7th DAY - AUSTRALIA

JANUARY 2010



Finding A Church Home

Joe was a regular family man. He loved his wife and adored their three children. He was good at his work and respected in his community.

Growing up in the suburbs, Joe attended the local high school and played soccer for the local team. He met Sally in their fourth year of college, and they married the following January.

Joe hadn't attended church regularly, but he came to understand that there must be a God - someone incredibly powerful and creative. In Joe's thinking, scientific hypothesis still couldn't adequately answer life's big questions - like, for example, when his eight-year-old daughter, Sarah, recently asked, "How do I know if heaven is real or not?"

Joe and Sally agreed it might be time to start attending church; it would be good for the kids anyway. But then, to them, the next step seemed more imposing than ever. "Which church should we go to?" asked Sally.

On the following weekend, Joe, Sally, and their three children visited the biggest church in town. It was a huge, heritage-listed sandstone building with gothic-shaped stained glass windows. Inside were wooden seats, burning candles, religious statues, and a rich layer of liturgical practice. Songs were sung, people came forward to receive a bread wafer, a priest waved a smoke censor. And throughout that service Joe and his family felt as if they were in unfamiliar territory.

A good fit means we serve better and stay longer.

The next weekend, Joe decided on something more modern. This time church was in a warehouse in a business precinct. The people (thousands of them) were casually dressed and looked relaxed. The reception area looked bright and breezy, and the auditorium featured three large projector screens.

But, oh, how different that service was. The music was loud - I mean very loud - with lots of young people crowding close to the front to be near, for all intents and purposes, a rock band. The preacher seemed nice and his message friendly and light. As soon as the service finished, the thousands of worshippers quickly vacated - to make way for the next service. Despite the noise and activity and people, Joe and Sally couldn't ignore their inner disquiet.

The experience was again different on another visit to yet another church. The preacher (whose reputation had preceded him via the media) explained a moral from a recent movie. Among other things, he said that the Ten Commandments were done away with and that Jesus didn't really walk on water - beliefs that to Joe didn't compute with what his grandmother had taught him

A magazine dedicated to uplifting and transforming peoples lives through the uncompromised word of God.

many years ago.

Finding a church home may not be an issue for some, but for many within the Christian community, a stable church can sometimes seem remote.

The facts speak for themselves. Churches are great at moving people around within the Christian community, when the greatest growth ought to come instead from those who don't yet know God and whom God may be calling. This is a reality that must be faced.

Considerations

So, if you're looking for a church home, you may want to consider three important areas:

1. Can you generally agree on the basic theological tenets - that is, is what is spoken and taught based on the Bible alone?
2. Can you genuinely worship there?
3. Does your participation in church life allow you to effectively serve?

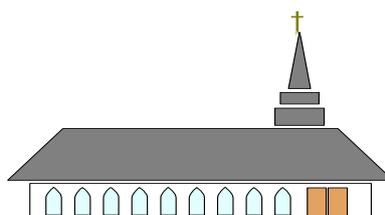
If you can say yes to each of these three, then you've found your church home. Give it your best and in humility thank God for a place of nurture, growth, and service.

But if you cannot see eye to eye on core theological underpinnings - if a church's doctrines and practice fall short of God's Word - then over time this will probably impede your ability to worship or effectively serve.

If your worship of God is hindered, either by form or setting, then think deeply whether the spiritual distraction is worth it. In sincere prayer, ask God to guide you.

If you cannot effectively serve or share your gifts for whatever reasons, be they culture or authoritarianism, then you may just have to find a place where you can serve.

Unfortunately these realities do exist. The three criteria may, however, help you in your walk with God.



Community in Christ

Remember, there are no healthy "solo" Christians; we all need community in Christ. And, of course, in becoming an active member of any church fellowship, you naturally sacrifice some sovereignty. You are no longer your own; you are now Christ's.

One last tip: There's no such thing as the perfect church. Rather than excluding those who fail in their struggle against sin, churches will cater to the genuinely repentant who seek healing, help, and community.

In becoming an active member of any church fellowship, you naturally sacrifice some sovereignty. You are no longer your own; you are now Christ's.

The story for Joe, Sally, and their children does have a "happily ever after" ending. They're now attending a small, faithful community church whose motto is to "keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Revelation 12 : 17)

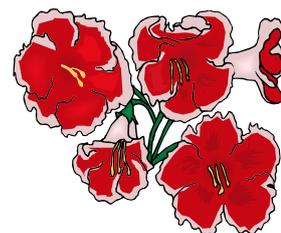
And daughter Sarah not only knows that the kingdom of heaven exists but also tells her school friends that Jesus is truly the Son of God - and that they too can come to know Him.

This article was taken from the Bible Advocate Magazine, edition January-February 2010 written by John Klassek.

Continued from page five

Dwelling on offences, real or imagined, from other people leads to the bitterness that defiles us and causes us to neglect our calling.

*Treena Tier (NSW)
(Quotes from NIV)*





Go Again

By David Kidd
(NKJV used throughout)

The book of Hosea opens our eyes to the heart of God and the heartbreak of God, especially when His people are unfaithful to Him. You shouldn't be surprised to hear that God has strong feelings. After all, where do you think we humans, made in God's image, got some of our strong emotions from?

A theologian once wrote a book called 'The Impassive God' in which he tried to prove that God is incapable of real suffering. This God is not the God revealed in the book of Hosea, or revealed through Christ at the cross of Calvary. And this is not the God who said to Noah, 'I will destroy man for I am sorry that I made him', or to Moses, 'I have seen this people and indeed it is a stiff necked people – now let me alone that my wrath may burn hot against them and consume them. In Hosea, we not only learn about how God suffers and how His heart breaks when His people sin against Him, we also learn about the strength of God's love for all mankind.

Hosea's story is a very interesting one. He was a prophet of Israel living about 750 B.C. whom God told to take a 'wife of harlotry' because the land had committed great harlotry by departing from their God (1:2).

The commonly accepted interpretation of this is that God told Hosea to marry a prostitute. Others say that Hosea was told to marry a woman who later became a prostitute. What ever is the correct interpretation, it is clear that Gomer, Hosea's wife, if she wasn't a harlot in the first place, became one, since verses one and two of chapter three explain how God commands Hosea to go again and love a woman who is committing adultery. This woman Hosea was commanded to love must have been his estranged wife Gomer, since God would not have commanded Hosea to share in the sin of adultery which the woman had been committing. Hosea paid 15 shekels of silver and one and a half homers of barley to buy back his enslaved prostitute wife.



Why would God command Hosea to take such a woman back? Why should Hosea take her back? It seems as if God is giving Hosea first hand experience of the pain He Himself was experiencing because of the unfaithfulness of Israel who were loving false gods and the 'raisin cakes of the pagans' (3:1-2).

Consider how degraded and devalued Gomer had become. The life she had strayed into had utterly polluted and defiled her. Like an animal or a piece of meat she could be bought and sold. Why would God command Hosea to 'go again' and love

her? Consider how Hosea must have been feeling towards her.

In chapter one we see from verses 3-8 that she had become the mother of three of his children, and they weren't triplets, so they had been married for at least two years before she strayed into harlotry. Their relationship had developed. All kinds of horrible feelings would have been in Hosea's bones like rottenness. How could she betray his love and the children and leave them alone? What kind of mother does this? How could she bring him, a prophet of God, such dishonour by her betrayal, and how could his beloved wife even degrade herself so? Just think of the worst thing a loved one could ever do to you emotionally, or has done, and whether you could forgive them. This would closely resemble what Hosea was feeling.

God is clearly opening Hosea's eyes and heart to His own heart break and the position He was in as regards forgiving Israel. God's torment is amply revealed in His following statements recorded in Hosea about Israel:

- . *She is not my wife. Let her put away her harlotries lest I strip her naked and expose her and slay her with thirst (2:2-3)*
- . *I will not have mercy on her children, for they are children of harlotry. (2:4)*
- . *She went after her lovers and forgot me (2:13)*
- . *They shall seek the Lord, but He has withdrawn Himself (5:6)*
- . *I will pour out my wrath on them like water (5:10)*
- . *I will be to them like a moth and rottenness (5:12)*

. There glory shall fly away like a bird, no birth, no pregnancy, no conception. I will bereave them to the last man (9:11-12)

. All their wickedness in Gilgal. For there I hated them, because of the evil of their deeds. I will drive them from my house. I will love them no more (9:15).

God, nevertheless, commands Hosea who was similarly vexed to 'Go again, love a woman who is loved by a lover and is committing adultery'. At first it seems that God Himself is not so willing to 'go again' as regards Israel. But here we see the unfathomable depths of God's love. He was willing to go again, for later, in the book of Hosea, God says:

. How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? ... My heart churns within Me; My sympathy is stirred. I will not execute the fierceness of my anger ... For I am God, and not man, the Holy One within your midst ... (11:8-9)

. I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely, for my anger has turned away from him. I will be like the dew to Israel; he shall grow like the lily, and lengthen his roots like Lebanon. His branches shall spread; his beauty shall be like an olive tree, and his fragrance like Lebanon (14:5-6).

What a wonderful picture of the nature of God's love for us. He is God, and not man, and if the Spirit of God dwells in us we can go again too, even in the worst of situations.

Then hundreds of years after Hosea lived, God's people do the worst thing to Him one could ever imagine, far worse even than being unfaithful by worshipping false

gods. They deliver up His only begotten Son to be horribly tortured and killed, crucifying Him on a torture stake.

I want to suggest to you that way back in Hosea's day, when God wanted to cast Israel off for their unfaithfulness, that God fully knew then what they were going to do to His Son many years later on the cross. Knowing this, however, God was still willing to go again, as Hosea did by having Gomer back. Hosea only had to pay 15 shekels of silver and one and a half homers of barley to go again, but God demonstrated His own love toward us in that while we were still sinners Christ, His only begotten Son, died for us. God was willing to pay the highest price - the blood of His Son - to go again. Oh praise the Lord!



Through God's, Hosea's, and our own betrayal experiences may we better appreciate the importance of remaining faithful to God and better understand the sting of unfaithfulness. Knowing the vast depths of the love of God, knowing the great price God was willing to pay for His creation despite its treachery, knowing the strong, strong emotions of God including His great love for us I urge us all to let it impact on our attitude toward sinning against God.

Further, may Hosea's story not only encourage us to be more vigilant against betraying God through sin, but may it also encourage us to share God's love with others even to the point of making sacrifices to do so. Will we sacrifice our time for doing good works in love? Will we sacrifice our pride and everything else to show kindness, love and mercy to, not only the people we like, but also to those who may be hurting us?

May Hosea's story also spur us on to restore those who are living in unfaithfulness to us and to God. Let us be ready to forgive and ready to reach out to the sheep that have strayed, no matter how much it hurts.

Finally, let us be reminded, as hard as it all seems, of the strength God had to go again in the most incredible way at the cross. This same strength is in us through the Holy Spirit if we have surrendered to God and let Him into our heart, or it can be, if we will only surrender our lives to Him even today.

Is there anything we need to 'go again' in? Let us take heed to the Word of the Lord.

"For the love of Christ compels us, and we judge thus: that if one died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him, who died for them and rose again". (2 Corinthians 5:14-15)

David Kidd



When Offences Come

My mother-in-law passed away recently aged ninety-five. Since her passing, I sometimes think about all the things I learned from her all the years that I knew her. One thing that keeps coming back to my mind is a piece of advice she repeated to me on a number of occasions. It was something her own mother used to say to her. She'd say "*Don't let them see that they have hurt your feelings*" when she had been upset by someone else's thoughtlessness. It may have been that she had not been asked to a friend's party, or had been overlooked when some selection was being made, or perhaps she had been the only child not to receive an award in her class.

We have all experienced sadness when we have been left out of some activity, especially when we know that it was done intentionally because we were not as popular as others. Sometimes, we feel as though we are never thought of when

invitations to enjoyable functions are given out but are soon remembered when there is some work to be done. Even more hurtful perhaps is when we ourselves have sent out invitations and made preparations for expected guests, but only a few of them bothered to come and others made feeble excuses. This is like the parable in Matthew 22 : 1-14. The wedding was ready but those invited by the king would not come. The king did not just sit around feeling offended. Rather he moved on with his plans and called others in their place.

Over the years my mother-in-law repeated to me and my children her wise advice when our feelings were hurt and I noticed that she lived her life shrugging off any offences that came her way, and although I can't find my mother-in-law's exact advice set out in the Bible, I can see the wisdom of not letting other people's actions and words affect us too much. Proverbs 12:25 says "An anxious heart weighs a

man down..." 15:13 says, "A happy heart makes the face cheerful, but heart-ache crushes the spirit" and 17:22 says, "A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones." Proverbs 19:11 also states, "A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense."

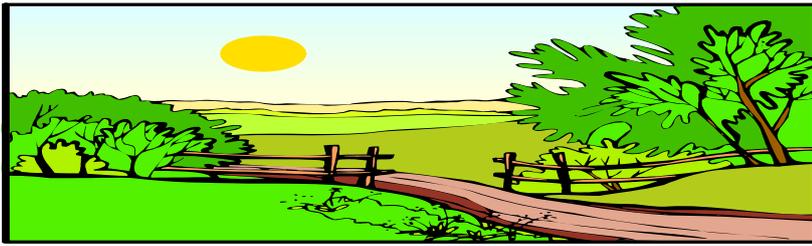
Why is it wise to be patient and overlook offences? Hebrews 12:15 warns,

"See to it that no one *misses the grace of God* and that no *bitter root grows up* to cause trouble and *defile* many." (Emphasis added)

It is *by God's grace* that we have received the best invitation ever given, a call to the marriage supper of the Lamb. For our part we have to make sure we keep ourselves *undefiled* and clothed in suitable garments. (Matthew 22:11-14).

"...For the wedding of the Lamb has come and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear. (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints)" Revelation 19:7-8

Continued on page two



NEW YEARS PRAYER

*Dear Lord,
 In the new year, we pray
 that You will guide us each new day
 in paths that are pleasing to You.
 Lord, the new year gives us another chance
 to rededicate our lives to You,
 to study Your Word
 so that we know right from wrong
 and to act in accordance with Your
 commands.
 Thank you for the sense of direction,
 purpose and peace we get from
 aligning our lives with Your Holy will.
 We pray for the strength and the will to obey
 You each and every day of the new year,
 And when we fail, we pray for Your mercy,
 Your compassion, Your grace and Your love.
 Help us in the new year to be Your faithful
 servants.
 In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

By Joanna Fuchs — www.poemsource.com



Just Like Me

Dear Lord, forgive our yielding
 to temptation;

Forgive our pride, our love of
 worldly things.

Have mercy on our love of sen-
 sual pleasure,

Compassion on the sins that self
 love brings.

It must be hard to understand us
 sometimes;

So very different is your heart
 and mind.

But wait, I just remembered that
 you do know

What it's like to be a part of hu-
 mankind.

You suffered just like we do, and
 you were tempted.

You lived with us so you could
 comprehend

The things that we go through
 each trying day,

So you could give us mercy, and
 be our friend.

Thank you for compassion and
 forgiveness;

Thank you for your love and
 empathy.

Thank you, Lord, for coming
 down from heaven

To experience life's trials, just
 like me.

By Joanna Fuchs

The Youth Section

Kids Bible Wordsearch

*Resurrection
of Jesus Christ*
Puzzle #3

Fit the words in the list into the diagram below reading forward, backward, up, down, diagonally, always in a straight line.

ALIVE
ANGEL
BETRAYED
BLOOD
BODY
CHRIST
CRUCIFIED
DISCIPLES
FEET
FORSAKEN
FULFILLED
GOLGOTHA
JESUS
JOY
JUDAS

C	G	A	T	H	O	R	N	S	A	D	U	J
D	R	O	L	H	X	D	O	O	L	B	K	O
X	F	U	L	F	I	L	L	E	D	D	E	Y
Y	J	Y	C	G	D	R	T	P	I	E	O	R
T	E	E	F	I	O	W	T	S	N	Y	N	A
O	S	B	E	F	F	T	C	Y	I	A	C	M
M	U	R	O	O	O	I	H	M	G	R	T	L
B	S	P	F	R	P	R	E	A	H	T	H	H
N	E	V	I	L	A	T	S	D	T	E	K	C
B	E	N	E	L	A	D	G	A	M	B	B	T
N	O	S	E	L	E	G	N	A	K	S	F	A
U	R	D	I	S	C	O	U	R	G	E	D	W
L	I	P	Y	R	X	R	A	I	M	E	N	T



LORD
MAGDALENE
MARY
NIGHT
PILATE
RAIMENT
RISEN
ROBE
SCOURGED
SOLDIERS
SON
THIRTY
THORNS
TOMB
WATCH



Insights From the Past



TRUTH IN THE HEAD AND IN THE HEART

Some years ago, at a drawing room function, one of England's leading actors was asked to recite for the pleasure of his fellow guests. He consented and asked if there was anything special that his audience would like to hear. After a moment's pause an aged minister arose and said, "Could you, sir, recite to us the Twenty-third Psalm?"

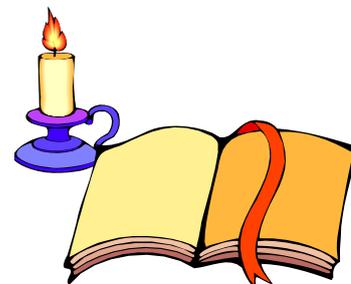
A strange look passed over the great actor's face. He paused for a moment, and then said, "I can, and I will upon one condition : After I have recited it, you, my friend, will do the same." Impressively, the great actor began the Psalm. His voice and his intonation were perfect. He held the audience spellbound. As he finished, a great burst of applause broke from the guests assembled.

Then, as it died away, the aged minister arose and began to recite. His voice was not remarkable; his intonation was not faultless. When he had finished, no sound of applause broke the silence, but there was not a dry eye in the room, and many heads and hearts were bowed in reverential awe!

The great actor rose to his feet again. His voice shook with uncontrollable emotion as he laid his hand upon the shoulder of the aged minister, and said to the audience, " I have reached your eyes and ears, my friends. This man has reached your hearts. The difference is just this : I know the Twenty-third Psalm, but he knows the Shepherd."

EDITOR'S NOTE: The above story appeared as a selected article in the December 23, 1957 issue of The Bible Advocate and Herald of the Coming Kingdom. The name of the magazine was shortened to Bible Advocate in 1972.

Two-Year Daily Bible Reading Schedule



Your word is a lamp to my
feet and a light to
my path.

Ps 119: 105

This two-year Bible reading plan has been designed with today's busy schedules in mind. The daily readings are shorter than most other plans, so if you fall behind it's easier to catch up without becoming discouraged and dropping out.

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