

Disappearing Dreams

By Ronald L. Dart

What do you do when you wake up some morning and realize that you have run *way* too far down the wrong road? Life isn't working. You feel absolutely lost. I used to hear Billy Graham say that "Christ is the answer," and that's true enough but I couldn't help wondering what a man with a terrible hangover, who knew that his life was coming apart, would think that meant.

Johnny Cash's recording of "Sunday Mornin' Comin' Down," haunts my mind to this day. I think Kris Kristofferson wrote the song, but Johnny Cash, being a man who found some kind of redemption in his life, sang the song with a special feeling. The feeling of a man who had come to realize that everyone else in the world had a reason to be alive that Sunday morning, but he couldn't find one for himself.

In the park I saw a daddy
With a laughing little girl that he was swinging.
And I stopped beside a Sunday school
And listened to the songs they were singing.
Then I headed down the street,
And somewhere far away a lonely bell was ringing,
And it echoed through the canyon
Like the disappearing dreams of yesterday.

On a Sunday morning sidewalk,
I'm wishing, Lord, that I was stoned.
'Cause there's something in a Sunday
That makes a body feel alone.
And there's nothing short a' dying
That's half as lonesome as the sound
Of the sleeping city sidewalk
And Sunday morning coming down.

Johnny Cash said a lot in that song about the aloneness that can come on a man, a woman, when everyone else is at home or at church, when the streets are empty and

there is nothing to distract him from the simple truth that he is lost.

And I can't help but wonder. Why didn't the man in the song just go on in where they were singing those songs? I think I understand. No one intends it that

way, but a stranger entering a church feels like an outsider. He will not feel at home nor will he feel welcome no matter how hard the people try to make him welcome. If I were in a strange city and decided to visit a church, I would feel strange walking in the door.

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Giving is Good. . .

How can I substantiate that? Isn't giving only for the wealthy and not for the poor? The Bible does not exempt the poor from giving. It teaches proportional giving—10 percent for the poor and 10 percent for the wealthy. Giving gives you the opportunity to span your influence beyond yourself. Being an unselfish act, giving makes you a better person. Think about it. When you give to *Born to Win*, you're helping people around the world to read and hear the Gospel. In and of yourself, you lack the wherewithal to do that. Combining your efforts with *Born to Win's* multiplies what you can do. Giving is good because God blesses you when you give. We all covet God blessings. God loves a cheerful giver.

Thoughts on Isaiah 1:15-20

By Ronald L. Dart

“And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood” (Isaiah 1:15).

Mind you, these people had not ceased to be religious. They had their worship services, they had their religious holidays and their special days of assembly, but the whole thing had become hateful to God. It wasn't that there was anything wrong with worship. But when you hold up your hands to God, they had better be clean. All of their worship of God was vain and offensive to the God they thought they were worshipping. Jesus himself said that it is possible to worship God in vain, and Jerusalem had come to that. The remedy?

“Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed,

judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it” (Isaiah 1:16-20).

What you are doing has consequences, said God to Jerusalem. When you start rotting away from the core, you invite aggression by your enemies. Sometimes, it sounds like Isaiah has been watching our cable news. What does the Messiah's Prophet have to say to us? Order your copy of Ronald L. Dart's CD series, *Isaiah*, and find out.

Evil for the Greater Good

By Lenny Cacchio

A recent blog by Steven Woodworth exposes a fault line that can trap the best of us. Although his piece focuses on a specific presidential candidate, he exposes a universal principle that can entrap us should we become too enmeshed in an ideal, belief, or even religion. Christianity itself can be included in that formulation in spite of the New Testament offering explicit warnings about it.

Woodworth refers to a scene in George Orwell's novel *1984*. Winston and Julia, who are determined to fight the tyranny of Big Brother are in a dialogue with O'Brien, who is holding himself out as a representative of an underground rebellion known as The Brotherhood. Here is the scene:

“You are prepared to give your lives?”

“Yes.”

“You are prepared to commit murder?”

“Yes.”

“To commit acts of sabotage which may cause the death of hundreds of innocent people?”

“Yes.”

“To betray your country to foreign powers?”

“Yes.”

“You are prepared to cheat, to forge, to blackmail, to corrupt the minds of children, to distribute habit-forming drugs, to encourage prostitution, to disseminate

venereal diseases—to do anything which is likely to cause demoralization and weaken the power of the Party?”

“Yes.”

“If, for example, it would somehow serve our interests to throw sulphuric acid in a child's face—are you prepared to do that?”

“Yes.”

Woodworth notes that each succeeding question that O'Brien asks leads deeper and deeper into morally objectionable behavior and then ultimately into unspeakable cruelty. Thus the moral question is raised: how far are you willing to go in support of a good cause? Are you willing to become no better than your enemy in order to defeat him? Or, in the Apostle Paul's formulation, “Shall we do evil that good may come?” (Romans 3:8).

Study the history of mass movements and it becomes clear that revolutions against tyranny that might begin with the purest of motives so often descend into witch hunts and reigns of terror. The French Revolution, the Bolshevik Revolution, Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, Chairman Mao, Pol Pot . . . we could go on and on.

It's worth noting that Jesus faced such a temptation. Just before he began his ministry he spent 40 days in the wilderness fasting and praying (Matthew 4:1-11). At the

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What God Has to Say About Why We Volunteer

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Does the Bible encourage us to serve? What does the Bible have to say about giving of our time, talent, and treasure to serve others/volunteer? Here are a few key verses that offer some answers.

God loves and cares for those in need through us. Isaiah 58:10 declares, *“If you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then your light will rise in the darkness and your gloom will be as the noonday.”* One theme that runs all throughout the Bible is that God closely identifies with and cares for the plight of the poor, and that to serve them is to serve him.

Consequently, we volunteer with humility, knowing that we’re working with those God dearly loves.

God blessed us with gifts and talents to benefit others. Can you imagine if Lebron never left his driveway basketball hoop, or if Beethoven only wrote songs for himself and no one else got to listen? The Bible teaches that those who hoard their gifts, not only cheat others, but themselves. 1 Peter 4:10, *“As each has*

received a gift, use it to serve another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace.” You’re calling just might be found at the place where your gifting and the world’s needs meet.

God made us for his purposes way before we ever realized it. Ephesians 2:10 says, *“We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”* We serve and volunteer confidently, knowing that God has prepared the way for us!

God will reward us. A lot of people balk at the idea that a volunteer would be the one to benefit from serving, but Colossians 3:23-24 says, *“Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive an inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.”* Not only is there personal satisfaction in serving others, the Scriptures teach that we’ll be rewarded by Jesus because it’s actually him we are serving!

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end of those 40 days the Adversary himself showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world. All of their glory and all of their power were flashed before him. We have only part of the conversation, and we can wonder if the devil knew that Jesus’ ultimate purpose is to gain the whole world and set up the Kingdom of God, but doing it God’s way rather than through intimidation and force. “Jesus,” he might have said, “there is no need for you to have to go through all that suffering and pain to redeem the world and bring peace to it. I’ll just turn it all over to you right now. You can save yourself a lot of trouble. The only thing you need to do is worship me and do things my way.”

Jesus saw through this ruse and banished the Evil One from his presence. Later he reminded us that it does no good to gain the whole world if we at the same time lose our souls (Matthew 16:26). He had to be thinking about this temptation when he said that.

It’s striking that Jesus never makes the devil’s or O’Brien’s requirement of us. In spite of the fact that people claiming to be Christian have profaned the name of Christ by their actions, Jesus was explicit in what he expects of us, and it is not doing evil in the name of a

greater good.

Once when some of the disciples asked Jesus for special positions in his kingdom, he replied to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink of the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am to be baptized?” They said they would be able to do that, not realizing that the “cup” and the “baptism” of which Jesus spoke were persecution, trials, and martyrdom (Mark 10:35-39).

The requirements Jesus always gave, and which we see repeated throughout the New Testament, are not commands to push the bounds of decency beyond recognition. Are you willing to suffer poverty for the cause? Are you willing to have friends and family turn against you? Are you willing to be hunted and persecuted like common criminals? And when all that is going on, are you willing to pray for those who persecute you, forgive those who wrong you, and love those who mean you harm? Will you turn the other cheek?

Jesus made many such statements, always leavening them with reminders of the need to love our enemies, to serve others rather than dominate them. It’s a radical departure from the ways of the world. You cannot do evil and hope that good will come. It is worthless to gain the Kingdom and lose your soul.

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How much more if, like the man in the song, I had got up with a hangover, had a beer for breakfast and had put on my “cleanest dirty shirt.” I think I would feel that I had no business being in church. I think I would feel that I wasn’t clean enough, sober enough, wholesome enough to be in there with all those good people.

Now I can say one of two things here. I can tell those people in church how to reach out to this poor fellow. We could talk about having skid row missions perhaps. Or we could talk about adapting our services so he would feel more comfortable. But I am not sure that is what the man would want from us. We are not the problem. He is. And he knows it.

The other thing I can do here is talk to the broad range of people who feel that somewhere, somehow, they have taken a wrong turn. That they have run a long way down the wrong path, and now they are wondering if there is anything they can do.

When I hear a song like “Sunday Mornin’ Comin’ Down,” I wonder if someone is trying to tell us something. That they really wish they *could* do something, that things could be different, but they just don’t know how and don’t know what to do. They just hear the bells echoing the disappearing dreams of yesterday.

So today, I am going to try to tell you what you *can* do. And we are not going to take any shortcuts. I am not going to tell you it is all cotton candy in heaven if you will just say the right words, because there is something inside of you that knows better.

Nor am I going to tell you that you have to climb every mountain, ford every stream. What I am going to tell you is *much* more difficult than that. For those of you behind prison walls it will be still more difficult.

What you are going to have to do is learn to trust. It is a hard thing to do, especially when your trust has been betrayed again and again in life—sometimes so early you can’t even remember it. But your heart remembers even when your mind cannot.

Now, what do I mean when I say you have to learn to trust?

I want to start with the 130th Psalm. “Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD. Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities,

O LORD, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared. I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning. Let Israel hope in the LORD: for with the LORD there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption. And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities” (Psalm 130).

What you are going to have to do is learn to trust. It is a hard thing to do, especially when your trust has been betrayed again and again in life—sometimes so early you can’t even remember it. But your heart remembers even when your mind cannot.

Until I looked at it for this program, I hadn’t realized what a “first step” this psalm is. Listen to the sequence; Out of the depths I cried to you. There is forgiveness with you. I will wait. I will hope.

First you have to ask. You acknowledge that God can forgive if he wants to. You wait. You hope for the best. You aren’t there, but you have made a start.

Did you notice this statement: “But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared”?

If there were no possibility of forgiveness then why fear God? The fear which leads to obedience doesn’t mean a thing if there is no forgiveness.

Notice, I am not asking you at this point to trust that God will forgive you. I am only asking that you believe he *can* forgive if he wants to. Because I think we all know the feeling of being unable to forgive.

Sometimes the hurts go so deep that we can’t find forgiveness in ourselves. And it is a small step to assuming that God just can’t forgive.

So we have to take the step of saying, God is not like me. He can forgive. Then I am asking you to call on him. And that you wait and that you hope. That is probably a lot harder to do than it is to say. But it is a place to start.

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It also may be worth knowing that God's forgiveness sometimes comes in stages. There was a king once who earned the dubious reputation of being the worst of a bad line of kings. His name was Ahab. Now I bring him to your attention because, if you think you are a bad person, here is someone who was arguably a whole lot worse.

It also may be worth knowing that God's forgiveness sometimes comes in stages. There was a king once who earned the dubious reputation of being the worst of a bad line of kings.

"But there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the LORD, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up" (1 Kings 21:25).

And the exploits of this evil man are cataloged for us to consider. He was a murderer, a liar, an idolater, and a thief. So God sent a prophet to warn him of what was coming. Elijah, a tough, a hairy man who wore leather and whose demeanor fit the occasion found Ahab to speak to him.

"And Ahab said to Elijah, hast thou found me, O mine enemy? And he answered, I have found thee; because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the LORD. Behold, I will bring evil upon thee, and will take away thy posterity, and will cut off from Ahab him that pisseth against the wall, and him that is shut up and left in Israel, And will make thine house like the house of Jeroboam . . . , for the provocation wherewith thou hast provoked me to anger, and made Israel to sin. And of Jezebel also spake the LORD, saying, The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel. Him that dieth of Ahab in the city the dogs shall eat; and him that dieth in the field shall the fowls of the air eat" (1 Kings 21:20-24).

I'm sorry, but I told you Elijah was a tough customer; he was earthy and did not mince words. Most modern translations smooth him out a bit. It's a shame.

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Where Is Your Help?

By Mardy Cobb

"If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, when men rose up against us: Then they had swallowed us up quick, when their wrath was kindled against us: Then the waters had overwhelmed us, the stream had gone over our soul: Then the proud waters had gone over our soul. Blessed be the Lord, who hath not given us as a prey to their teeth. Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken, and we are escaped. Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth" (Psalm 124: 2-8).

David obviously sees God as the one who delivers. We are all tempted to walk through life impressed with our own intelligence, congratulating ourselves for our own achievements. David did not take this approach. Our selfishness makes us very slow to see God's help. Even as believers, we often wait for years before reflecting and seeing God's hand in our blessings, and deliverance. God is an ally for us if we are his children and servants. If we love him and want his goodness and his righteousness for our world, then he is on our side.

In comparison God sees evil like a fire that destroys. God is on the side of the firemen who are willing to fight against the destroying fire. He is against those who love the fire and those fools who throw gasoline on it. God is not a respecter of persons, but he knows those who love and obey him. They belong to him, and he loves his own. Let's pray that we love God more, and obey him faithfully from this day forward. And when we need help, let's remember, like David, that "Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth."

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So, what happened? Here is where the story gets interesting. “And it came to pass, when Ahab heard those words, that he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and *went softly*” (1 Kings 21:27).

You have to realize that this man was a king. He wore fine robes and strode around the palace with a retinue and made all the noise he wanted. Now he pads quietly around the place wearing sackcloth. It must have scared some of the maids to death to run into him slipping around the palace corridors.

“And the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me? because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days: but in his son’s days will I bring the evil upon his house” (1 Kings 21:28-29).

So, the evil day was put off. What if Ahab’s sons repented as he did? Well, what God has put off once, he can put off again. Maybe in a few generations the curse would pass away completely. Ahab had a bigger comedown than most.

But if God could relent in his case, he probably can in yours. But it may require a little humility, and a different approach to life. God notices things like this. I am not prepared to go so far as to say that Ahab

repented. But he took some *overt steps* that pointed that way. Sometimes, God sees that as a start and will take you from where you are.

Our fictional man in “Sunday Mornin’ Comin’ Down,” didn’t need to come down very far, because he was already most of the way down. But he probably had a hard time imagining that life for him could be any other way. And that would have made it hard for him to take the first steps.

I don’t think many people think that God won’t forgive. They just don’t think he will forgive them. Which means, they don’t trust God to do what he says he will do.

I don’t think many people think that God won’t forgive. They just don’t think he will forgive them. Which means, they don’t trust God to do what he says he will do. And that brings me squarely back to what I said earlier. God wants you to trust him. So how do you do that? Call 1-888-BIBLE-44 or return the enclosed card and request the *Disappearing Dreams* CD to hear the rest of the story. This information is so important to your Christian growth. You need these answers.

September Scriptures for Memory

Topic: Faith, Hope, and Love

Ephesians 2:8-10
Galatians 2:20
Romans 1:17
Romans 15:13
Psalm 56:3
Psalm 4:8
Hebrews 11:6
1 Peter 1:3
1 Corinthians 13:4-7
1 Corinthians 13:8
1 Corinthians 13:13

Born to Win

The Media Ministry Arm of Christian Educational Ministries

PO Box 560
Whitehouse, Texas 75791
phone: 1-888-BIBLE-44
fax: 903-839-9311
e-mail: adm@borntowin.net
website: www.borntowin.net

That the man of God may be proficient and equipped for every good work.