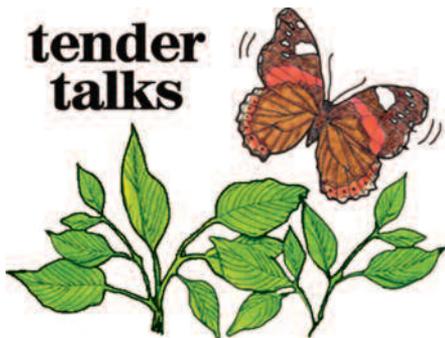


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WISE STEWARDSHIP

In the past, simple thrift habits have helped folks stretch family dollars. “Waste not; want not” has been good advice. Some households have defined this rule more clearly. “Eat what is on your plate.” “Take care of your personal belongings.”

What does the Bible say? On several occasions our Lord saved leftover food for a future meal. Do you recall the young lad who gave his lunch to Jesus to feed a hungry multitude? Having blessed the food, our Lord multiplied those two small fish and five barley loaves and fed over five thousand men, as well as women and children. Then He told His disciples to gather the remaining fragments so that nothing would be wasted. That leftover food filled twelve baskets for a future meal.

What about our surplus bounty? Perhaps we can share food with the hungry. There may be times when we can donate extra furniture, clothing, or books to charity. In summer we may have excess garden produce that is about to go to waste. Our pantries may be overstocked with canned goods. These are opportunities to give.

What about our spare time? Perhaps some can volunteer a few hours each week to serve at a hospital or nursing home. If not, a visit or a phone call can spread cheer.

We should also consider another aspect of giving. There is a difference between sharing extras with the needy and giving sacrificially to the Lord.

That young lad of Bible fame gave his entire lunch to God. He did not offer Jesus a few crumbs. Today this same Lord deserves our best.

On the cross our dear Saviour gave His all for us. How can we fully express our love and gratitude?

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Rom. 12:1).

Our leftovers can bless humanity, but sacrificial giving can bless *both* the Lord and others. May an unselfish lifestyle reflect our true appreciation. May our works match our words. God sees each heart; He keeps the books!

May we not waste our Lord’s gifts or squander time, talents, and resources on worthless, selfish activities. May we practice wise stewardship. “Waste not; want not.” ★

—Mary Kristoff.

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REDEEM THE TIME

Yesterday is but a memory; tomorrow is cloaked in mystery; only today holds the opportunity to serve God. It is important to redeem the time.

The following story illustrates this truth. As a mother of two small sons, my schedule was full. However, I found time to pray, read the Bible, and attend church. But seldom did I visit with neighbors.

Next door lived a quiet, elderly couple. They had a garden plot, which the woman worked with spade and hoe. Occasionally we exchanged greetings. I wondered whether she knew the Lord as Saviour.

Finally, one evening I felt compelled to make that house call. My husband, Jim, agreed to keep an eye on our active boys. Hesitantly, I walked to her front door while praying for guidance.

The family gave me a warm welcome. But, to my dismay, other guests were present, which hindered a private talk. Thus, after a short stay, I returned home.

The next day brought sad news. During the night our neighbor had suffered a stroke. However, she remained at home under a family mem-

ber's care. (Medicare and Medicaid programs were then unknown.)

As soon as possible, I found a babysitter and hurried next door. The distraught daughter led me into a bedroom, where her mother lay in a deep coma. The doctor had given little hope for her recovery.

Remorse and grief flooded my mind. How was it with this dear neighbor's soul? Only the Lord could intervene. Kneeling in prayer, the daughter and I beseeched God for mercy and help. We committed all to the Great Physician: "Thy will be done."

A few days later, we received an encouraging report. Our neighbor had regained consciousness; her paralysis had begun to disappear. We rejoiced and gave thanks!

Yet an unfinished task remained; I needed to share God's plan of salvation with my neighbor. I made this a matter of prayer. The Lord led me to make a scrapbook, using colored pictures clipped from magazines and hand-printed, select Bible verses. My neighbor was delighted with the gift; it became her treasure. Later she was able to attend church.

Today we still need to reach others for Christ. Redeem the time! ★

—Mary Kristoff.

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THE PERFECT FATHER

What traits does the perfect father possess?

- His holy character sets him apart.
- He shows warm compassion, patience, and understanding.
- His wisdom is unsurpassed.
- His tender forgiveness is readily available.
- He is faithful to provide for his family.
- Protecting his children is a top priority.
- He is impartial in judgment.
- He never breaks a promise.
- He sets guidelines and rules.
- In love, he corrects with fair discipline.
- He is a tower of strength.
- He is unselfish and kind.
- He is always available to listen, advise, and comfort.
- He never fails.

Do you know someone who meets these high standards? There is only one—our Heavenly Father. The good news is that anyone can become a member of God’s family through faith

in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Today the need for righteous earthly fathers is great. They have an important leadership role in the home and in society. Their prolonged absence from the family can create serious problems, such as a teen’s lack of respect for parental authority. Thus, the message to every father remains “Your family needs you!”

Fathers have a variety of personalities. Some are quiet, shy, and serious. Others are more talkative and full of laughter.

Their physical form includes many sizes and shapes. Short, tall, thin, stocky—each father is unique. No two are completely alike.

But all fathers are human, which means that none is perfect. Yet love can cover a multitude of flaws. Godly fathers always desire to improve relationships and to do what is best for their families.

A good father assumes great responsibility. To meet family needs can be a heavy burden. Thus, how great is a father’s need for prayer to overcome stress, physical fatigue, and temptation!

On this special day, may we thank the Lord for each godly father. ★

—Mary Kristoff.

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THOUGHTS ON MARRIAGE

Why do so many marriages fail in today's society? Sadly, these breakups sometimes involve Christians. Has a disregard of God's rule on marriage been a factor? Believers are not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers.

The sacred marriage bond is like a yoke; both partners share the load and pull together. In this special relationship, two become one. God desires to preserve that union. "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Gen. 2:24).

God has a chain of command for each household. "The head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man" (I Cor. 11:3). In stressful moments, this threefold relationship is like "a threefold cord . . . not quickly broken" (Eccles. 4:12).

Newlyweds have an adjustment period during which personalities, likes, dislikes, and habits blend. Learning to bear and forbear can bring harmony. "To bear" is love plus support. "To forbear" is love and support plus patience. Remember the "seventy times

seven" forgiveness formula that the Lord Jesus gave to Peter.

"Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). Self-denial, courtesy, and humility foster peace. Kind words can dissolve differences.

Sometimes it is money problems that cause the friction. "Each for the other" and "What is mine is thine" express a right attitude regarding the purse and other possessions.

The husband and wife are to remain faithful to their vows. They must avoid temptation. To maintain a strong marriage, each partner must seek to please the other.

Faith, hope, and love will fortify the marriage bond. Faith in Jesus Christ is foundational. Also, having a mutual trust and respect for each other is important. Hope brings comfort and cheer. Love for God and one another preserves that lasting glow!

A failed marriage can lead to broken lives and innocent victims. If marital problems arise, pray and seek right solutions. Yield all to God's will. Never rush into a rash decision. The Lord has promised never to leave or forsake His own. He wants to make each home a foretaste of heaven. ★

—Mary Kristoff.

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THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

“Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness”—these words express our forefathers’ dreams. From our founding until now, loyal patriots have continued to sacrifice their lives, limbs, and property for freedom. Today we cherish their memory and express thanks to God.

Amid global unrest, America seeks to foster peace abroad and bring freedom to the oppressed. We also desire continued liberty to pursue worthy goals here at home.

The search to fulfill life’s dream can return a measure of satisfaction. But losses and crosses can occur; disappointment and grief can interrupt life’s joy.

Across our land, multitudes pursue happiness; but many seek it in the wrong places. Self-promotion and carnal indulgence can never bring true happiness or produce contentment.

The Bible describes how worldly pleasures fade. In his youth, King Solomon served God with a humble heart and received honor, wisdom, and wealth. Later, through neglect,

the king drifted into sin. He tried to satisfy his soul with “wine, women, and song.” “Vanity of vanities” (Eccl. 1:2) became his sad lament.

That same careless lifestyle continues to destroy individuals and entire nations. Yet a gracious God is willing to forgive and redeem those who humble themselves, pray, and turn from sin.

The Lord desires to bless and prosper our nation. “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil” (Jer. 29:11).

But the haunting question is, “Can our country continue to receive God’s blessing if its cup of iniquity continues to fill?” Sinful habits enslave; those who serve sin are no longer free.

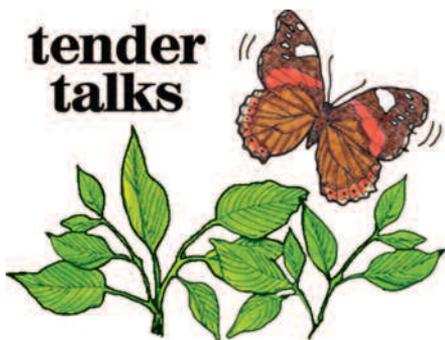
“Happy is that people, whose God is the Lord” (Ps. 144:15). Life, liberty, and happiness come through love for and obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ. A lifestyle that glorifies God will bring contentment and joy.

“Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people” (Prov. 14:34). Now is the time for God’s people to seek revival through repentance. May we use our spiritual freedom to promote and perfect national freedom. ★

—Mary Kristoff.

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HOME, SWEET HOME

While en route to Arizona, my husband, Jim, and I stopped by a Kansas community to visit a dear aunt in a nursing home. Our visit was unannounced. For the next hour we enjoyed special fellowship.

During this time, my aunt reached into her apron pocket for a harmonica. She began to play “Home, Sweet Home.” Did she long to be back home, or was she homesick for heaven? It was a nostalgic moment.

Suddenly, we realized more fully the blessings of family and home. Often we had failed to give thanks.

Truly, there is no place like home. And the family that honors the Lord Jesus enjoys a special happiness.

Being a homeowner is a great privilege; but unforeseen events can create financial woes, which can lead to bankruptcy and foreclosure. Fire, floods, or storms can destroy. Thus, we dare not forget to be thankful for our homes and loved ones.

Home ownership requires maintenance and hard work. Whether that dwelling is a cottage or a castle, it requires repairs and fresh paint from

time to time. Lawn care and snow removal are seasonal chores.

But for God’s children, the Master Builder is preparing a beautiful mansion in glory. Jesus told us that in His house are many mansions. He is preparing a place for us, and someday He will receive us (John 14:2-3). What a blessed hope!

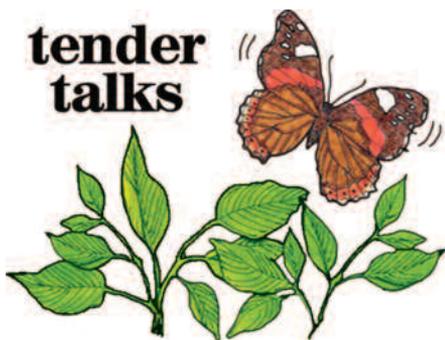
Far beyond the stars, we will be with Jesus forever. What an inheritance will be ours! We will have a mortgage-free mansion, no household bills, and no property taxes. The environment will be free of pollution, stress, and sin. We will enjoy perfect neighbors. Hunger, disease, and natural disasters will fade from memory. Our bodies will be free of pain; our hearts will feel no grief.

The New Jerusalem, with gold-paved streets and gates of solid pearl, will exceed our fondest dreams (cf. Rev. 21:21). We will worship and adore the King of kings on His glorious throne. All of heaven’s hosts will join together in praise to God’s beloved Son. “Holy, holy, holy” will be the eternal anthem. “Home, sweet home.” What a joyous hope! May we share the good news of Jesus with the whole world! ★

—Mary Kristoff.

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THOUGHTS ABOUT TOMORROW

“Tomorrow never comes.” This familiar expression is food for thought. Each tomorrow is like a mirage; after the stroke of midnight, tomorrow becomes today.

The Bible warns us not to boast of tomorrow; God alone knows the future and what will be. It is because of this uncertainty that we need to say, “If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that” (Jas. 4:15).

Yet many times we fill our tomorrows with shallow resolutions. Tomorrow we will start a more healthy lifestyle. Tomorrow we will discipline our unwise spending habits. Next week we will schedule that doctor or dental appointment.

Often tomorrow becomes a hitching post for delayed decisions. Churchgoers vow to give faithfully. Backsliders intend to repent. Others promise to quit addictive habits. Often no change occurs. Most seriously, the unsaved postpone repenting and coming to Jesus until a more convenient time.

“Now is the accepted time; . . . now

is the day of salvation” (II Cor. 6:2). Tomorrow may be too late.

It has been said, “Never put off until tomorrow what you should do today.” Now is the time to live for God. Now is the time to share the heart’s deep secrets with Jesus, Friend of friends. Now is the time to study that Book of books, the Holy Bible, and to apply its precepts. Now is the time to prepare for special Christian service. Now is the time to love one another in word and deed.

During childhood I enjoyed the present moment. Life was more carefree. As a young teenager, I lived for today. But as an older adult, marriage and family gave me concern for tomorrow. Experience taught that life has trauma and uncertainty.

A loving God invites us to cast every care upon Him. He wants to bear our burdens and to sustain us with His all-sufficient grace.

We are to look to Jesus daily with a childlike faith. We are to follow where He leads in paths of service. In this dark world, may we be quick to spread a little “Son-shine.” May we offer a caring hand and help the weak to stand. May we go that extra mile and share a cheerful smile! ★

—Mary Kristoff.

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LIFE'S UPS AND DOWNS

During the Great Depression, a young mother gave this timely advice to her five children as they sat around the table. "Remember—life is not a bowl of cherries." She wanted them to know that life includes both good and bad.

This close-knit family often sacrificed in order to survive. The mother made shirts from cloth flour sacks. The father shoveled coal from railroad cars to provide fuel for heating. Several sons took early-morning newspaper delivery routes for extra cash.

Today's economy still is subject to change. But God's love is constant. And the cherry trees still blossom and bear delicious fruit.

Yet their harvest requires hard work. Laborers must pick, inspect, and crate the fruit. During the growth period, problems can occur. Late spring frosts can damage, and invading pests can destroy. Not all is "instant" cherry pie.

Individuals still face many ups and downs. Good health can end with a sudden heart attack or a crippling

stroke. Mounting expenses can deplete savings; gain can turn to loss. Yet amid the crisis, God can make a way.

Trials come to each of us. At times, the finest seamstress rips out a few stitches. The experienced cook sees a recipe fail. The skilled carpenter misses a nail and bruises his thumb. The safe driver causes an accident.

In life's relationships, both good and bad changes occur. Misunderstanding can weaken a marriage bond; neglect can wither a friendship. To restore close ties requires the desire to forgive.

There is "a time to be born, and a time to die; . . . a time to weep, and a time to laugh" (Eccles. 3:2, 4).

Life is a balance of pros and cons. By faith, we must accept as God's will those things we cannot change.

The Prophet Job, when sorely tested, declared, "He knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold" (Job 23:10). The same God purges our cross.

Amid life's present storms, the Lord can calm our fears, quiet the waves, and bring us safely through. Memories of God's faithfulness can build a quiet trust. In Christ, our anchor holds! ★

—Mary Kristoff.

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IS CRITICISM GOOD OR BAD?

Criticism is judgment; it can be good or bad. Correction can be beneficial, while faultfinding can injure or destroy. Constructive criticism can increase knowledge and skill; destructive words can incite wrath.

How should Christians handle criticism? First, we should consider the source and the reason. Who rendered the judgment, and why? Was it valid? Was it given in a kindly manner and with the right motive?

We should accept any correction with an open mind. After reviewing the matter, we should take it to the Lord in prayer. Then, if necessary, we should make changes.

“Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath” (Jas. 1:19). The following anecdote shows how corrective criticism can be a blessing.

A young bride experimented with a new recipe, but she failed to allow sufficient cooking time. Her tired, hungry husband arrived home from work and soon was seated at the table, waiting to be served.

Proudly, his wife brought forth her culinary masterpiece. After her husband tried a few bites, she asked, “Do you like it?” Pausing a moment, he gave an honest reply. “The meat is too rare, and the dish lacks seasoning.”

How should she react? Would hurt pride prevail? This could lead to a verbal dueling match. Perhaps she should agree with her husband, add extra spices to the food, and return it to the oven. That would keep the peace, please her husband, and improve her cooking skills.

To give helpful criticism requires foresight. Pray for the right words, and use a humble approach. Be kind, gentle, and courteous. Focus on the problem with calmness. It may help to include a compliment.

“Rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee. Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser” (Prov. 9:8-9).

Which is better—truthful criticism or a false compliment? “Faithful are the wounds of a friend” (Prov. 27:6). It is good to accept both criticism and compliments with humility. Self-judgment is beneficial, and God’s correction is always right.

May our goal be to please the Lord in every way. ★

—Mary Kristoff.

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A BLESSING IN DISGUISE

God's mercies abound each day. However, at times we fail to recognize hidden blessings. The following testimony will illustrate.

In the early 1950s our family of four lived in a small rental bungalow. There was also a lean-to garage that we used to store tools.

One Saturday my husband planned to work on the car and had to drive down an unimproved alleyway to use the garage. After completing the maintenance, he left the car parked in the alley. Heavy rain came that night, but by morning the sun was shining.

We planned an early departure for Sunday school in order to pick up Bobby, our children's friend. The primary department was having an attendance contest, which our sons hoped to win.

At the appointed time everyone was seated in the car, ready to head for church. Jim was behind the wheel. But when he tried to turn and back out, the car refused to budge. We heard the engine whine and felt the rear wheels spin. My husband rocked the vehicle back and forth

without success. The tires had become mired in deep, wet sand.

Moments passed while Jim found a shovel and began to dig. By the time he had freed the vehicle, it was too late to leave for Sunday school or church (and we had not been able to contact Bobby by phone). Why had this trial occurred?

That evening in church we learned the answer. Our pastor requested prayer for Bobby. Earlier that day he had been hospitalized with polio symptoms. In those days, this dread crippling disease had no known cure.

This tragic report caused mixed emotions. We felt deep concern for that young lad but also overflowing gratitude to God for canceling our plans. This had prevented others from being exposed to polio. How great had been God's mercy!

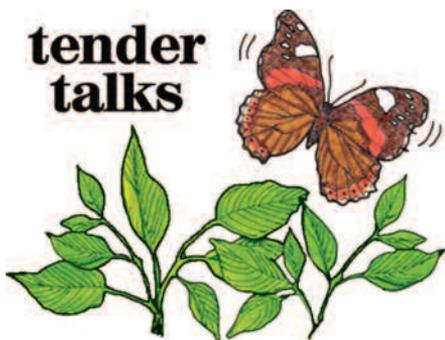
"It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness" (Lam. 3:22-23).

Thus, when life presents an unexpected, irritating delay, be patient and trust in God. It might be a blessing in disguise. May we ever give thanks for God's goodness. ★

—Mary Kristoff.

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TAKE TIME TO PRAY

Moment by moment, we need to be in an attitude of prayer. At early dawn, a talk with God provides comfort and courage to face whatever the day may hold. Later we have the privilege to commune with our Lord throughout the day.

Do we lack confidence in what to say? Do we feel that God checks our prayers for eloquence? Are fancy phrases a plus or faltering words a minus? The basics for prayer are sincere faith and unselfish motives with requests in Jesus' name. The Lord knows our hearts. He understands all languages. Always His answer is right, and always it is on time.

The Lord provides assistance in prayer. "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered" (Rom. 8:26). God hears each sigh and sees the falling tear.

Christ Jesus is our Mediator, Advocate, and Intercessor. He presents each petition to the Heavenly Father, pleads our case, and overrules the

enemy's false accusations.

Where and when should we pray? The church is called the house of prayer, but we can pray anywhere at any time.

Prayers can be long or short. As a model, the Lord's Prayer teaches the "how to" and "what to say" in confession, petition, intercession, and praise. But rather than pray a formal memorized prayer, what a joy it is to share our heart's thoughts with God.

In Gethsemane, our Lord travailed for hours in tears. Yielding all to His Heavenly Father, He prayed, "Not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42).

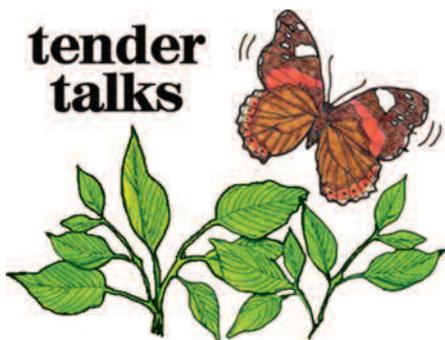
On the cross Christ agonized, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46). He pleaded for His enemies, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Volumes of unspoken grief and love were expressed in those short, pain-filled prayers.

What is our excuse not to pray? Too busy? We can talk to God while doing tasks. Too tired? Commit each burden for renewed strength. Weak faith? God's greatness is faith's measure. Too sinful? Confess and find forgiveness. Reach up to God; then reach out to others. ★

—Mary Kristoff.

This space for your church name:

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THE FAMILY TREE

After my husband's early retirement from the Indiana public school system, we relocated to northern Arizona and lived for a while among the Navajo and Hopi. During that time we met a dedicated Hopi pastor who related the following story.

At First Mesa village, a summer tourist stopped to chat with our friend near his home. Then the visitor asked, "Who were your ancestors?"

The pastor gave an unexpected reply: "Adam and Eve." That same answer applies to everyone today.

Humanity's roots go back to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. This first couple's children multiplied into more and more offspring. They began to commit grievous sins.

By Noah's time, gross wickedness filled the earth. Finally, God's patience came to an end. He sent a worldwide Flood that reduced earth's population to eight souls. Afterward, the Lord told Noah and his family to be fruitful, multiply, and live throughout the earth.

The descendants of Nimrod decided to erect a tall tower, that would reach heaven. They wanted to build

a large city, Babel, and tall tower so that they would be famous. In judgment, God divided the rebel builders into different language groups. This caused them to split up and migrate worldwide.

Humanity's family tree continues to grow. Today many people do research for ancestor information. They learn the where, when, why, and how about their ancestors. Evidence of religious persecution, poverty, adventure, or discontent may be found among the archives.

This knowledge of family history can lead to joy, sorrow, pride, or shame. Happy reunions can occur when adopted children meet their birth parents or siblings.

Of even broader scope (and still ongoing) is God's household and its history. Down through countless ages, the redeemed have represented all nations, kindreds, peoples, and tongues.

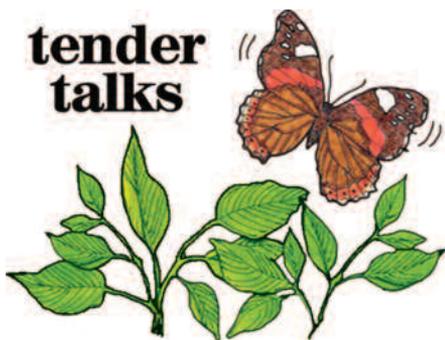
At an unexpected moment, the last sinner will be saved; that final entry in heaven's registry will complete the Lamb's book of life. Oh, what joy! At the end of the ages, God's eternal family reunion will be unspeakable glory!

Meanwhile, may our lives honor our Saviour and God's kingdom. ★

—Mary Kristoff.

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TESTIMONY TIME

In years past, during the evening church service, there was testimony time. Those heartwarming moments brought comfort and challenge. They remain cherished memories.

I recall how both old and young took turns to praise the Lord for answered prayer. God had healed a loved one, met an employment need, or provided protection in a serious accident. Others quoted a favorite Scripture verse. A few simply shared their faith in Christ Jesus as Saviour and Lord.

Today church members gather for fellowship and food at covered-dish suppers and picnics. At these social events the conversation varies; it often is sparked with humor.

Friends may compliment one another on a certain casserole dish or dessert. They may exchange comments on unseasonable weather. In rural communities, farmers may discuss their crops and try to predict the coming harvest. College students may talk about sports, job opportunities, or romance. In an election year, some may debate politics. Others may dwell on their chronic aches and pains.

For the most part, such verbal exchange is interesting, helpful, and lively. The conversation may entertain and bring a smile.

However, should not these fellowship gatherings also provide an opportunity to testify of blessings? Should we reserve “faith topics” for another time and place or consider them suitable only for the clergy to share?

At any fellowship event, should not our Lord be the honored guest? As God listens in on our talk, does it bless or disappoint?

If God is in our thoughts and His love rules our hearts, surely His praise should be upon our lips for every occasion.

This question comes to mind: What will we talk about in heaven? Will we discuss inclement weather, politics, or sports? Will the celestial city have poverty or crime problems for us to solve? Will we have unemployment issues, crop failures, or inflation worries? Will our resurrection bodies suffer aches or pains?

Earth’s woes will be past—no fears, no tears, no trauma. All will be perfect peace and rest.

Our focus will be on the Lord Jesus Christ as King of kings! ★

—Mary Kristoff.

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