



SAINT JOHN

COVINA, CA

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NOVEMBER / DECEMBER 2017

A COPTIC CHRISTIAN
BI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

"I am the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last"

(Revelation 1:11)



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BI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE
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*Verse
of the Month*



**"Bless the Lord O my soul, and forget
not all His benefits"
(Psa, 103: 1, 2).**

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**SCHEDULE of MEETINGS and EVENTS
for the MONTH of September & October 2015**

SUNDAY	WEDNESDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
+ English Liturgy 8:00 - 11:00 a.m.	+ Liturgy 8:00 - 10:00 a.m.	+ Liturgy 8:00 - 10:00 a.m.	+ Liturgy from 8-10 am
* * *			+ Women's Meeting 5:00 - 6:30 p.m.
+ Arabic Liturgy 8:00 - 11:15 a.m. (In the Old Church)	+ <u>Thursday Morning</u> + Senior Citizen Club 11:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.		+ Vespers; Bible Study 6:30 - 8:00 p.m.
			+ Beginners' Deacons- Meeting 5: 30 p.m.
			+ Elementary Meeting 7:30 - 8:30 p.m.
Servants' Meeting + 12:00 - 1:00 p.m. 2nd & 4th Sunday. + Boy Scouts 12 pm	+ THURSDAY Family Meeting 7:30 - 9:00 p.m. Fr. Augustinos	+ Arabic Youth Meeting 8:00 - 10:00 p.m. Fr. Gawargios	+ College Youth Meeting 7:00 - 9:00 p.m.

High School & J. High
Meetings 7:15 - 9:00 p.m.

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1. Thanksgiving Day (Thursday, NOV. 23):

+ On Thursday, November 23, America celebrates the National Thanksgiving Day. St. John Church celebrates this Day with a Liturgy in the morning from 8:00 to 10:00, and a breakfast with Senior Citizens.



+ The church social committee will celebrate it on Saturday, Nov. 19 from 11:30 a.m. with the turkey dinner for the new comers and the homeless. May the spirit of thanksgiving abide with us all our life.

2. The Nativity Fast (Saturday, NOV. 25):

On Saturday, Nov. 25, the Nativity Fast starts, until Christmas Eve on January 6, 2018. May the Lord grant us a blessed fast according to Isaiah 58 and Matthew 6. We need to pray much during this fast for the salvation and safety of America, Egypt and the entire world.



3. Kiahk's Vigil:

The four week-vigil of the Coptic month "Kiahk" starts on Saturday, December 9, 2017. In this month we celebrate the Virginal Birth of Christ and praise St. Mary. The prayers, praises and vigil start every Saturday after the Vespers until midnight.



4. Celebrating New Year's Eve (2017/ 2018)

St. John Church celebrates New Year's Eve on Sunday, December 31, 2017 from 7:30 p.m.

The program starts with the vespers and contains spiritual talks, praises and hymns (choir), candle-light prayers, Santa's gifts for children, and contests. There will be two Liturgies, the first ends after midnight and the second (Monday, January 1, 2018) from 8:00 – 10:00 A.M.



5. Feast of St. Luke the Evangelist Martyrdom:

On Wednesday, November 1st, the church commemorates the feast of St. Luke the Evangelist's martyrdom. His name means, "The Torch Bearer" and he actually enlightened the entire world with his two great works, the Gospel of St. Luke and the book of Acts of the Apostles. St. Luke was a physician, artist, great author, and historian. May his blessing and the blessings of his gospel be with us all. Amen.



6. H.H. Pope Tawadros:

+ On November 18, 2017, the Coptic Church celebrates the 5th Anniversary of Pope Tawadros' Enthronement. May the Lord Jesus Christ grant His Holiness health, strength, long life and Divine support.

+ St. John Church in Covina, California cannot forget that on (Saturday evening of October 17, 2015), His Holiness blessed St. John Church. He prayed the Vespers and delivered a sermon about Song of Solomon 1: 5, "I am dark, but lovely...like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon." He applied this verse on the beauty of the church in its building, design, congregation, Bishop, priests, good order and wrote that in the church autograph.



7. H.E. Metropolitan Serapion:

+ On Saturday, October 14 & 21, 2017, under the auspices and presence of His Eminence Metropolitan Serapion, Bishop Abraham and Bishop Kirellos, the Diocese invited all the servants who are serving in the fields of Senior's ministry, new comers, Arabic youth service, free from addiction, prisons ministry and foster homes services, for The DIAKONIA AND SOCIL SERVICE DAY, at St. John Church in Covina. (Details and pictures in next issue, God willing)..

8. Fr. Augustinos' 28th Anniversary:

By God's grace, on November 14, 2017, Fr. Augustinos R. Hanna completes 28 years in priesthood, serving St. John Church in Covina, CA, and St. John Magazine. Your prayers for him are greatly needed.



9. Feasts of Other Saints in Nov/ Dec:

- 1) Tuesday, Nov. 21: Remembrance of Archangel Michael
- 2) Friday, Nov. 24: Martyrdom of St. Mina the Miraculous
- 3) Sunday, Nov. 26: Departure of St. John Chrysostom
- 4) Nov. 27: Martyrdom of St. Philip the Apostle.
- 5) Dec. 4: Martyrdom of St. Philopatr Abu-Sefein.
- 6) Dec. 13: Martyrdom of St. Andrew the Apostle.
- 7) Dec. 19: Departure of St. Nicholas, Bishop of Mora

10. Victor Maximous Chosen by International Icon Committee:

The Inter-parliamentary Assembly of Orthodoxy (I.A.O.) has chosen the Coptic artist Victor Maximous, from St. John Church among 70 artists around the world to participate in the contest on the theme of "The Resurrection of Jesus Christ". The 70 were chosen as the best among 222 participants. Finally, they will select the best five paintings. May the Lord help and bless Victor in that last phase of this international competition which will take place on February 28, 2018. You can see Victor's works on: Facebook: Coptic Orthodox Art



The Life of Thanksgiving

By H.H. Pope Shenouda III



HE WHO LIVES THE LIFE OF THANKSGIVING IS A noble person, acknowledges and does not forget a favor...Never forgets any good offered to him, and expresses his thanks.

Thanksgiving is in his heart, on the tip of his tongue, for God and men. The Lord Jesus blessed the Samaritan man of the ten lepers who were cleansed. He was the only one returned to Jesus...*and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks". So Jesus answered and said, "Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine?" Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?"* (Luke 17:15-18). Therefore, when you give thanks, you are glorifying God, Acknowledging His loving-kindness to you.

If God has done something good to you through anyone, you give thanks to God and also to this person who was the means in receiving such goodness.

Most people give thanks to God at the beginning and end of each day and on occasions like New Year, feasts and certain important events in their lives, but the life of thanksgiving has its characteristics, perhaps in the first place is the saying of the apostle:

"Give thanks always for all things" (Eph. 5:20)

Giving Thanks Always

Then our giving thanks to God has no specific occasions but it is "Always". And as long as it is continuous, it covers the whole life and therefore the term "Life of Thanksgiving" applies to it.

The same teaching was explained in the first epistle of the Thessalonians, **"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks"** (1 Thess. 5:16-18).

On account of this, the Prayer of Thanksgiving precedes all prayers. All the church rituals and Liturgies begin with the prayer of Thanksgiving, also the seven prayers (in the Agbia) either in the morning or at night. We always give thanks to God "Evening and morning and at noon" We say always with the psalmist, **"At midnight I will rise to give thanks to you, because of your righteous judgments"**.

In addition to the general prayer of thanksgiving we give thanks in absolutions of the hours:

In the first hour we say, "We thank you O Eternal King, for you permitted us to pass this night in peace and brought us to the day break" we thank Him for keeping us safe during the night and giv-

ing us a new day in life.

In the Third Hour we say "We give you thanks for raising us up to pray at this hour where in you poured Your Holy Spirit in abundance, upon your disciples and honorable apostles like tongues of fire".

In the Six Hour prayer, we say "We give thanks to you O our King. The Almighty, Father of our God and Savior Jesus Christ, we glorify you because you made the time of suffering of your only begotten Son, a time of prayer and comfort."

In the Sunset prayer, we say, "We thank You, O our Compassionate King, for you granted us to pass this day in peace and brought us thankfully to the evening, and made us worthy to see the light until sunset". We thank God for every hour that passes in peace. Then, it is a continuous thanksgiving either at the beginning of every prayer or at certain occasions.

Thanksgiving for All Things

The church begins with the prayer of thanksgiving even at funerals. The apostle Paul says, **"And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God"** (Col. 3:17). "We thank you on every occasion, in every condition and for all things" So it is not only giving thanks always but also for all things because God continually makes good to us. The apostle said, **"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God"** (Rom. 8:28), either in the apparent good or in matters that seem not for good, but in fact it is good and we do not know!

For this we call God the "Beneficent". He does not do except good, and the person who believes in this God's quality, gladly accepts everything which comes from Him and says in faith "...All things work together for good" and gives thanks to God. But, some might ask and say: we believe, without doubt that whatever comes from God is good, but what about that which comes from people towards us were good, it will reach us good, but...if it were not, God will change it, and turn it to reach us good at the end.

Joseph's brothers sold him as a slave; their action was in itself evil, treachery, and lack of love, cruelty and envy. But God changed that evil into good and Joseph **"was made a father to Pharaoh and Lord of his people"**. He was the second in the Kingdom and his stay in Egypt was to preserve life. He told his brothers, **"You meant evil against me; but God**

meant it for good, ...to save many people alive"
(Gen. 50:20).

The children of God are always joyful, they thank Him for all things. And when they thank Him, not merely in compliance to the commandment "Give thanks"...as an imposed order! No because this is not the true thanksgiving. To give thanks is not just words to be said without conviction, as if performing a duty. But they thank God from all their hearts and with all confidence. They are completely confident that God will not allow anything bad to happen to them, and being Almighty, He watches all matters occurring to them, and takes a stand in their favor. For this reason, the life of thanksgiving is bound up in the life of faith, as will be seen when we talk about the virtues relating to thanksgiving. And man could thank God by words, and could offer a sacrifice of praise, peace offerings or vows, and as the prophet David said, ***"I will take up the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows to the Lord now in the presence of all people"*** (Psalm 116:13).

Levels of Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving in the life of the children of God is in levels: The least is giving thanks for the miracles, gifts, great pleasures and the plentiful good things, which no one doubts its goodness and benefit. Perhaps other than this, some do not give thanks!

There is a higher level of thanksgiving; to give thanks over little. It might be a normal level in the life of thanksgiving to give thanks over the recovery from a serious illness like cancer. But, if a person gave thanks for the recovery from a flu or cold, it indicates that in his life he is used to give thanks over many or little things. ***If we gave thanks over a few things God will make us rulers over many things.***

Perhaps, among the advantages of thanksgiving are the continuity of the blessings and its increase, as one of the Fathers said, ***"Not a gift without increase, except that without thanksgiving"***.

There is also thanksgiving over what is hidden or what is unseen. Thanksgiving for the wars and troubles, which were possible to come to us but did not because of God's protection and care. Thanksgiving for the work of God in looking after us, although we cannot see that, but we completely believe in it. Undoubtedly, Satan is doing his utmost to harm us and to make us fall. If we are now well, it is because God has stopped the harm, which we do not know...and we thank God for that.

Believe me, if God revealed the calamities we were exposed to and He cast away from us, if He uncovers this, our whole life will not be enough to thank Him.

Thanksgiving over Tribulation

This is the highest level of thanksgiving, is to give thanks for tribulations. We thank God over the tribulations from which He saved us, and this is the least. But, what is greater than this is also thank Him in tribulation, which we bear and live in. To bear or endure tribulations is a virtue. If we thank over the gifts only, then our love is for the gift not for God its giver! But if we give thanks to God over the tribulation we prove that we love God Himself and not His gifts. God only is our goal. In tribulation we see the hand of the Lord working, and that gives us joy and peace of mind and heart

The Importance of Fasting

1. It helps us keep self-control:

As one fasting abstains from eating and drinking generally for a period of time, he stops himself from eating whatever relates to animal fat. And so he learns restraint. In the process of restraining from food and drink, he/she will also restrain himself from committing sins.

2. Fasting is the evidence of being elevated above the level of the body:

In fasting, we do not give the body all that it asks or desires of food. By so doing we are elevated above bodily desires.

3. The spirit becomes stronger during fasting: During fasting, our prayers and our contemplations are deeper. Our relationship with God is stronger, even our hymns also. Fasting then is not of benefit only to fight against the negatives but it also benefits positively in strengthening the spirit. That is why the Lord said that demons couldn't be cast out "except by prayer and fasting" (Matt. 17:21).

4. Fasting has its effect in repentance:

The people of Nineveh repented. Their repentance was not only by turning from the life of evil, but it was mixed with great fasting and asceticism. God accepted their fasting and their repentance and forgave them their sins (Jon. 3; see also Joel 2:12; Psalm 35:13; 69:10).

5. Fasting has its relation with service:

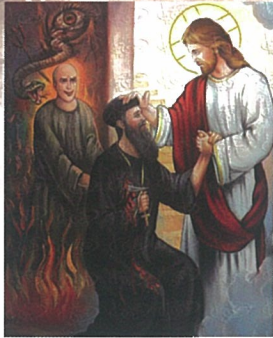
The Lord Jesus Himself is the most outstanding model of that, as He started His service by fasting for forty days. And following His steps, so the apostles, all the fathers the bishops and the newly ordained priests, they start their ministry by fasting.

Fasting not only took place at the beginning of the service of our fathers the apostles, but it also took place during their service. Listen to St. Paul when he says, "But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God...in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings..." (2 Cor. 6:4, 5; Acts 13:2,3).

6. Mixing fasting with virtues:

In order to benefit from your fasting spiritually, you have to mix your fasting with specific virtues that suit fasting and agree with it. Mix your fast with prayer, donations, spiritual readings, contemplation, and love for God.

COPTIC ORTHODOX PRIEST BRUTALLY MURDERED IN CAIRO, EGYPT CRYING FOR ACCOUNTABILITY AND JUSTICE



Another day in Egypt with another Coptic Christian murdered; this time a priest from Beni-Suef, Upper Egypt, who was in Cairo collecting humanitarian aid for vulnerable members of his parish. Fr Samaan was paying a pastoral visit to a family in Cairo and returned to the church where he was earlier to collect his mobile phone.

On the way, he was attacked by a knife-wielding assailant who chased him, stabbed him repeatedly, and then brutally killed him.

This incident makes us once again ask so many questions. Why should a priest not be able to walk safely down a street, especially a suburban street in Cairo? Why should he be chased by a man brandishing a deadly weapon and have no one run to his aid; in actual fact, everyone was running away. Why, when he lay drenched in his own blood did the ambulance service not arrive for over an hour, and then not treat him? Why, when the police finally arrived, and he lay dead, was a crime scene not secured and forensic evidence not collected to enable a robust and serious investigation? Why his assailant is immediately deemed mentally incapable without professional diagnosis, and why, if he is incapable, and a known violent criminal, is he left in the community with weapons within his reach?

After the initial shock and the immense sadness, today is a day that brings anger and I am not apologetic for that anger. I would be just as angry if this was any other person being dealt with in this way, in any other part of Egypt or indeed any other part of the world. Yet he is a Christian, a Coptic Christian, and a Coptic priest, which makes it all the more close and all the more painful.

Just this week I have been with a Coptic delegation from Cairo seeking grants to serve not only the Coptic community but the wider Egyptian community. Grants that would cover health, education and poverty eradication. Where was this wider Egyptian community however when Father Samaan ran terrified through a street being chased by a violent criminal, and where was it when he lay dying and alone? Where was it when the assailant attacked him repeatedly, and where will it be while his family and congregation grieve the loss of their father, husband, brother, pastor and friend? These are questions that need to be addressed at every level of Egyptian community and leadership.

His Grace Bishop Angaelos,
*General Bishop of the Coptic Orthodox
Church in the United Kingdom*



Crime cannot be totally eradicated, but at least it needs to be properly investigated, prosecuted, and shown to be a violation against the whole state and not just its immediate victim.

The immense pain of this incident and all that have preceded it, including: child kidnapping, forced conversion, individual targeting, bus attacks and church bombings against the Coptic Orthodox community in Egypt, leads us to hold more strongly onto the words of our Lord God in Exodus 3:7: **"I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry...for I know their sorrows."**

Coptic Christians, who have endured injustice, persecution, and loss of life for centuries without retaliation, repeatedly forgiving unconditionally, deserve to live with respect and dignity in their indigenous homeland.

While recognizing that anger may often open a path to hatred or resentment, there are times at which it is a natural expression of a human emotion, and reaction to a sense of deep injustice. I am sure that I am not alone in my anger, but that it is shared by every law-abiding person of any belief and indeed of none, who has witnessed this vicious and inhumane attack. In the midst of this anger and this sadness however I continue to pray.

I pray repose for Father Samaan, I pray for his family, I pray for his community. I pray for the wider Egyptian Christian community that feels more and more vulnerable and targeted daily against a backdrop of negligence and injustice. I pray for the wider Egyptian society, that becomes more and more discredited and compromised as these incidents continue to happen.

This anger is not void of forgiveness, but cries out for accountability and justice.





Statement

From October 17-19, 2017, we, the Coptic Orthodox bishops of North America, gathered for our semi-annual conference in Titusville, Florida and discussed the acts of sectarian violence directed against our beloved brethren in Egypt. The most recent of these events resulted in the martyrdom of Hegumen Samaan Shehata from the Diocese of Beba and El Fashen.

We joyfully commend the righteous soul of this father, the martyr Hegumen Samaan Shehata, to the Paradise of Joy, confident that the Lord will accept his soul with those whom St. John the Beloved witnessed beneath the altar: "When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?' Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed" (Rev. 6:9-11). We pray that the Lord bestow His heavenly comfort upon Fr. Samaan's virtuous wife, his children, his friends, and the beloved congregation of Christ, through the prayers of our father, His Holiness Pope Tawadros II, his partner in the apostolic liturgy, His Grace Bishop Stefanous, and all our honorable fathers, the metropolitans and bishops.

We take this opportunity to affirm the following:

First, the martyrdom of Hegumen Samaan Shehata is not an isolated event, but is one incident in a chain of recurrent events that has resulted in the loss of lives of countless martyrs and the injury of many confessors, both clergy and laity. The following are examples, just to name a few: the events of El Arish, Libya, St. Peter's Cathedral in Cairo, St. Mark's Cathedral in Alexandria, St. George's Cathedral in Tanta, St. Samuel's Monastery, and many others. These are all a result of the evil of organized terrorism targeting Christians, entrenched in an ideology of religious extremism and proliferated by a *fatwah* (religious opinion) emanating from a spirit of hate. Such a *fatwah* promotes fanaticism, violence, and discrimination against others.

Second, we recognize the admirable efforts of President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and many honorable Muslims who reject the injustice and persecution that their Coptic brethren continue to face, and deny the use of their religion as justification for these wicked and unpardonable acts.

Third, we call upon all the authorities in our beloved Egypt to deal with these criminal acts with all swiftness, severity and justice, in order to serve as an example to others, without bias or compromise. We ask that the law be applied to all without preferential treatment based on religious faith, and in such a way that brings a decisive end to the brutal voices that encourage violence against Christians. These voices are embodied in those that call for a less stringent punishment on the Muslim murderer if the victim is Christian, under the premise that Christian blood is less valuable!

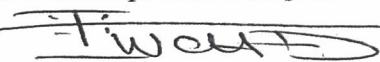
Fourth, we are deeply concerned about the reputation of our beloved Egypt, and perceive any blemish on her reputation as a direct consequence of whitewashing, dismissing or belittling these crimes, and the lack of media coverage. We are dismayed that Egypt, which served as a refuge and harbor for the Holy Family, became the site of the murder of an innocent, unarmed priest in broad daylight—a heinous crime which took place without any reaction from bystanders or intervention of witnesses, and with inexcusable delay in the arrival of emergency services! All these shameful shortcomings are widely shared in social media.

Fifth, terrorism is a worldwide problem that necessitates worldwide collaboration, as stated by President el-Sisi. Thus, we, the children of the Coptic Orthodox Church in North America, are compelled to increase our efforts throughout the Western world in raising awareness about the dangers of organized terrorism targeting Christians. We call for solidarity in aiding our motherland and President el-Sisi in confronting it unrelentingly.

Sixth, we call upon all of our churches to dedicate Sunday, October 22, 2017 to pray for all of our martyrs, confessors, their families, and for the peace of the Church and the entire world.

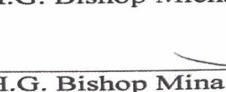
May the Lord grant the whole world His peace and repose the souls of the martyrs, comfort their families and their beloved, heal all the wounded and injured, and support all the confessors to endure these pains and sufferings and glory be to His majesty forever.


H.E. Metropolitan Serapion


H.G. Bishop Youssef


H.G. Bishop David


H.G. Bishop Michael


H.G. Bishop Mina

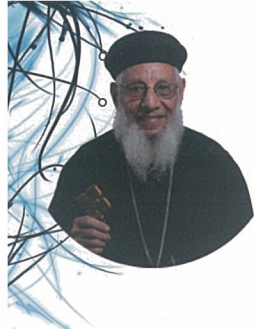

H.G. Bishop Karas


H.G. Bishop Peter


H.G. Bishop Abraham


H.G. Bishop Kyrillos


Rev. Fr. Saraphim El Souriany



Issues for the **THE SEVEN D'S** ² **YOUTH**

by Fr. Gawargious Kolta



In the last volume of this magazine, we mentioned the seven D's; that the youth has to avoid for the sake of their spiritual, psychological health and physical growth. These are dating, dancing, drugs, drinking, doubting the faith, disobedience to parents or elders, and deception by the devil's tricks and lies. We also mentioned how that dating at young age is very harmful and destructive. Now we are going to mention the problem of dancing in a young age.

2- Dancing

Many youth believe that they are mature enough to choose what they want and practice the life style of the people of the world. They consider that those who don't enjoy dancing are underdeveloped people. Others believe that enjoying dancing means that they are social people. They consider that practicing dancing is not a sinful deed, and is not against God's commandments.

They do not accept that anyone advises them to avoid dancing and consider those reactionary and undeveloped. Some of them try to convince others that dancing is not biblically wrong, as Mary the sister of Moses danced with the women of Israel, when the Lord saved her people from the wrath of Pharaoh. After they crossed the Red Sea to Sinai, while Pharaoh's chariots and his army were cast into the sea, they were dancing and singing with timbrels (Exod. 15:20, 21). They also say that King David danced in front of his people, when he brought the Holy Ark to his city (2 Sam. 6:14). Also when Jephthah defeated the Ammonites and came to his city, his daughter came out and met him with timbrels and dancing (Jud. 11:34). It is mentioned in the Psalms: "Praise with timbrel and dance" (Ps. 150:4).

But we must know that that type of dancing was religious and devotional. It is fallacy and ambiguity to consider that all those types of dancing that are biblical, are evil, because it was an expression of their joy and thanks to the Lord. It was not embracing any lust or carnal appetite. Also, there are many African churches and Christians who worship the Lord by singing and dancing, as this is related to their culture.

There are other people, who consider that dancing is an art, where most of the developed and civilized countries have special schools for dancing. Many people send their children to learn eurythmic dancing; they learn the art of dancing by special instructors. In addition, many nations have folklore dancing, which they perform in many occasions. Others consider dancing is a type of exercise that is of great benefit for their bodies.

The church is not against those types of dance, as the people who practice them do not really dance with lustful pleasure, evil

style of life, or sinful satisfaction.

We mean in this issue the slow dancing which is accompanied by lust and sinful desires. For example, any good Christian will not accept to attend a party where they watch belly dancers. There are many people who commit sins by watching or practicing such types of dancing. Also, no devout Christian thinks to attend a party where they have slow music where boys and girls are intimately embracing each other during dancing.

There are many biblical stories that foretell us the great harms that happened from parties that practice those indecent types of dancing:

1- When Moses the prophet went to the top of Sinai mount to receive the Law from God, the Israelites corrupted themselves, made a calf and danced. The wrath of God was upon them, and three thousands were killed in that day (Exod. 32:19-28).

2- During the celebration of king Herod's birthday, the daughter of Herodias danced before the party, and she pleased Herod. He promised with an oath to give her whatever she might ask. She, having been prompted by her mother, asked Herod John the Baptist's head. King Herod was exceedingly sorry, because he knew that John the Baptist was a just and holy man, but because of the oaths, he commanded that John beheaded.

The church advises the believers both the young age and also the mature ones to live differently from the people of the world, considering the following points:

1- Believers must be different from the people of the world. We must not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by renewing of our mind (Rom. 12:2). We must not imitate the people of the world, but we must walk in this world circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil (Eph. 5:15).

2- Dancing causes others to stumble. The Lord cursed the person who stumbles others, saying: "Woe to that man by whom the offenses come. It is better to put round his neck a millstone and throw him in the sea" (Mat. 18:7).

3- Dancing in the young age, most of the times, include lustful desires, leading to a sinful life as it destroys their purity. Because of the weakness of the flesh, many of the youth, who like to dance, present their members as slaves of uncleanness (Rom. 6:19). St. Paul said: "Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?" (1 Cor. 6:19). He also said clearly: "If anyone defiles the temple of God, (our body) God will destroy him" (1 Cor. 3:17).

4- Dancing will not help us to live holy life or help us to build up our spiritual life. St. Paul said: "All Things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify (build up me)" (1 Cor. 10:23).

5- Many youth who like dancing, usually go to night clubs, in the midst of the ungodly and the scornful people, and those places are not the place of the righteous people (Ps. 1:1). King Solomon advised us saying: "Do not enter the path of the wicked, and not walk in the way of the evil. Avoid it, do not travel on it; turn away from it and pass on. For they do not sleep unless they have done evil; and their sleep is robbed unless they make someone fall" (Prov. 4:14-16).

6- Some youth say that they cannot be different from other people, who would ask them to share with them dancing, considering that it is a life of fun. If they do not share with them dancing they may consider them underdeveloped people and they would not respect them. St. Paul gives an advice to such people, saying: "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:2). We must ignore their mocking, remembering the Lord's words: "Blessed are you when they revile you and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven" (Mat. 5:11, 12).

We must remember this advice: "Try to be a leader and not a follower; as the dead fish go with the water stream, but the living fish can go against the stream". Great is the man who can stand temptation, and not conformed to the people of the world. Let us remember Joseph the young man who refused to commit adultery with his master's wife, saying: "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Gen. 39:9). Let us also remember the three young men who purposed in their heart that they would not defile themselves with the portion of the king's delicacies nor with the wine which he drank (Dan. 1:8). After that, they refused to worship the king's image and they preferred to be casted into the burning fiery furnace, and the Lord saved them (Dan. 2).

7- There are some young people who are lukewarm; they try to live a holy life with Christian morals, and some of them even may serve in the church, but they are conformed to the people of the world, sharing with them dancing parties and other sins. As Christians, we must live spiritually fervent and walk through the narrow gate. We must put on the Lord and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lust (Rom. 13:14). We must not falter between two opinions; either the way of the Lord, or the way of the world. No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to one and despise the other. Loyalty to the Lord will make us conformed to His image, and the people will see our behavior and glorify Him. If we behave like the people of the world, the outsiders will blaspheme the noble name by which we are called.

I am going to give few stories as examples of the problems that happened to some youth as a result of dancing:

Story No. 1:

The father of a young girl (14 years old) came to my home

late, speaking with me in a loud voice and putting blame on the church that did not watch the bad-mannered boys who immorally behaved with his daughter. He told me that one of them brought her home drunk, and they gave her much drink till she became unconscious, and they took a picture for her, while she was dancing. He asked me to get the DVD that was taken for her. I called that boy and asked him to bring the DVD as soon as possible. When that boy came, I asked him to tell me in detail what had happened.

He said that the girl was invited to our home to join her girl friend to celebrate the 16th birthday party of his sister. They were all dancing and drinking. One of the group gave her hard liquor, and she tried it, showing that it would not affect her. She started to show up and danced alone belly dancing while she was drunk, till she felt unconsciously. He carried her home. I rebuked that boy for bringing older boys in that party with liquor, and tempting others to drink. After the boy left, I condemned her father who let his daughter to go to that indecent party that was without supervision.

Story No. 2:

I visited a family and I asked the parents about their 16 years old son, who did not come to church for few months. I asked the parents to call him from his room. After 15 minutes they came and told me that he did open the door of his room because he was with his girlfriend. I rebuked the parents who let their son do that evil deed. The mother tried to give a reason saying: "This is America the free country, and I could not prevent my son from that behavior, otherwise he could leave us to live with the girlfriend's family". After I left, I sent his Sunday teacher to visit him and he failed to meet him.

After few months, the boy came to me asking my advice, because his girlfriend got pregnant and she refused to do abortion. He told me that he met her a year ago in a party while they were dancing. She called him several times in order to join her some parties as her boyfriend. They had intimate relation till she got pregnant. Both were under age to get married. Her parents were careless, and they did not care about that matter. After few weeks, they had a fight and he quit that relation, and he asked for repentance. I told him that he had hated instruction, and his heart despised correction that he was on the verge of total ruin (Prov. 5:12, 13). He could not see his son and lived in guilt for many years. I prayed for him and instructed him about the way of salvation.

Story No.3:

A young boy came to me asking for guidance, because he could not sleep well for many days, having sinful thoughts and bad dreams. He told me that he was in a wedding reception party, where they were practicing slow dancing and he danced with a girl for more than two hours. He had sinful dreams, and he had bad desires for many days. I told him the words of King Solomon: "Can a man take fire to his bosom and his clothes not be burned? Can one walk on hot coals, and his feet not be seared?" (Prov. 6:27, 28). He admitted his mistakes and asked for advice. I gave him some advices and told him to pray every night with some Psalms, and to quit dancing in any party, even if his friends mock him and ask him to have fun in those parties.

Psalm 120

Edited by Fr. Augustinos Hanna



“Woe is me, that I dwell...among the tents of Kedar!”

A Song of Ascents (or Degrees)

Suddenly, we have left the long devotional psalm 119, and came to a small island of this short Psalm of complaints from the slander of the ungodly neighbors.

An Israelite used to sing this hymn when leaving his house to go up to Jerusalem. He thinks that the good man had suffered from the slander of his neighbors, that he was glad to get away from their gossip and spend time in the happier engagements of the holy feasts. This may be, but we trust that pious people so foolish as to sing about their bad neighbors when they were leaving them for a few days. If the Israelites wished to leave their homes in safety and then come back home to kind surroundings, it would have been the height of folly to provoke those neighbors by singing a Psalm of complaint against them.

We do not know why this Psalm is placed first in the Psalms of Ascents? We prefer the old translation, “David prayed against Doeg”, when David came to take the Ark to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6:12), David thought of Doeg and poured out his complaint. The author had been grievously slandered and tortured into bitterness by the false charges. Here is his appeal to the great judge of right and wrong, before whose judgment seat no one shall suffer slanders.

In my distress I cried to the Lord; and He heard me:

See the wonderful advantage of trouble. It makes us call on God. Slander causes deep distress. Those who have felt the edge of a cruel tongue know that it is sharper than the sword. False accusations rouse our indignation by a sense of the injustice being done. Yet, we find ourselves helpless to fight the evil or to act in our own defense.

We have no shield against the tongue of a liar. We do not know which way to turn. Like the plague of flies in Egypt (Exod. 8:21), it battles opposition, and few can stand before it. Nevertheless, in this distress we never hesitate to cry unto the Lord. Silence to man and prayer to God, are the best cures for the evil of slander.

I cried to the Lord:

This is the wisest course to follow. It is of little use to appeal to friends about slander. The more we stir it, the more it spreads. Even, sorrowful demands for justice only increase the malice of slanderers, and encourages fresh insults.

You might as well plead with wolves as with black-hearted slanderers. To cry to man is our weakness, but to cry to the Lord is our strength.

To whom should children cry but to their father? Does not some good come out of a vile falsehood when it drives us to our knees and to our Father, God?

And He heard me:

Yes, our Lord hears. He is the living God and the Creator of the ear, and thus prayer to Him is reasonable and profitable. The Psalmist remembered and recorded this instance of God hearing prayer, for it had evidently affected him greatly, and now he rehearses it for the glory of God and the good of his listeners.

The ear of our God is not deaf. God listens attentively. He catches the first accent of supplication. He makes each of His children confess, “He heard me”. He will not hear the lie against us, but He will hear our prayer against the lie. In David’s life, we find a reason why this Psalm is first. Did not this servant of God, meet with Doeg the Edomite when Doeg asked

about Abiathar, and did not that wretched creature lie and betray David to Saul (1 Sam. 22:18). The faculty of speech becomes a curse when degraded into a weapon for beating and biting people from behind their backs.

Deliver my soul, O Lord, from lying lips:

Divine power is needed to save us from these deadly instruments. Lips are soft, but lying lips suck away the life of character and are as murderous as razors. Lips should never be red with the blood of honest people's reputation nor salved with malicious lies. David says, Deliver my soul. Lying lips endanger the soul and life. Cobras, (the most dangerous poisonous serpents) are not venomous or devils more pitiless than lying lips.

Some seem to lie just for the sake of lying; it is their sport and spirit, and so, ***their lips deserve to be kissed with a hot iron.*** Better a silent generation than a lying one.

And from a deceitful tongue:

This is worse than the lying lips. Those who bow, flatter and have enmity in their hearts are horrible beings.

They are the devil's seed, and he works his deceptive nature in them. ***It is better to meet wild beasts and serpents than deceivers.*** They are monsters, and it should be a warning to liars and deceivers when they see that all good people pray against them and that even bad people are afraid of them. For a believer, this is a good reason to pray: "Deliver us from the evil one" (Matt. 6:13) can be used with emphasis concerning this business. Good Lord, deliver us from gossips, talebearers, writers of anonymous letters, forgers of newspapers paragraphs, and all sorts of liars!

Woe is me, that I dwell in Meshech, and that I dwell among the tents of Kedar!

Meshech was a son of Japheth (Genesis 5:32). His descendants occupied the wild mountain region which lies between the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea. Kedar, was Ishmael's second son (Gen. 25:13). His name signifies his descendants, the wandering tribes, "whose hand shall be against every man, and every man's hand against him" (Gen. 16:12). There is no geographical connection between these two nations. The connection is a moral one. They are mentioned together, because they were fierce and

warlike barbarians. David had never lived on the shores of the Caspian Sea, or in the Arabian wilderness. He means no more than this, the people with whom he now dwells were as savage and quarrelsome as Meshech and Kedar. He said, I am just miserable among these haters of peace. He could not tolerate living among lying neighbors, as if he were living among savage and cannibals! He cries, "Woe is me! Their sin appalled him, and their enmity provoked him. He feared that he might be living among the Arabian tents of Kedar. Their habit to travel armed to the teeth. They were a kind of plundering gipsy gangs-their hands against everyone! Those who defame the righteous are worse than cannibals (human-flesh-eaters)! Cannibals eat men after they are dead, but these wretches eat them alive!

My soul has dwelt too long with one who hates peace. A peacemaker is a blessing, but a peace-hater is a curse. ***Lodging with them for a night is dangerous; dwelling with them is horrible.*** The Psalmist had seen enough and wanted to leave. Thoughts of Saul, Doeg, Ahithophel and the like, came to mind...What a change for a man of God, from the quiet of the sheepfold to the turmoil of the court and the uproar of combat! How he must have longed to lay aside his scepter and pick up his shepherd's flute!

I am for peace:

I am peace, or peaceful; a peace maker. I love peace and love to live in peace. I hate fighting, disputes and quarrelling.

But when I speak, they are for war: My kindest words appear to provoke them, for they immediately drag their daggers. Nothing pleases them.

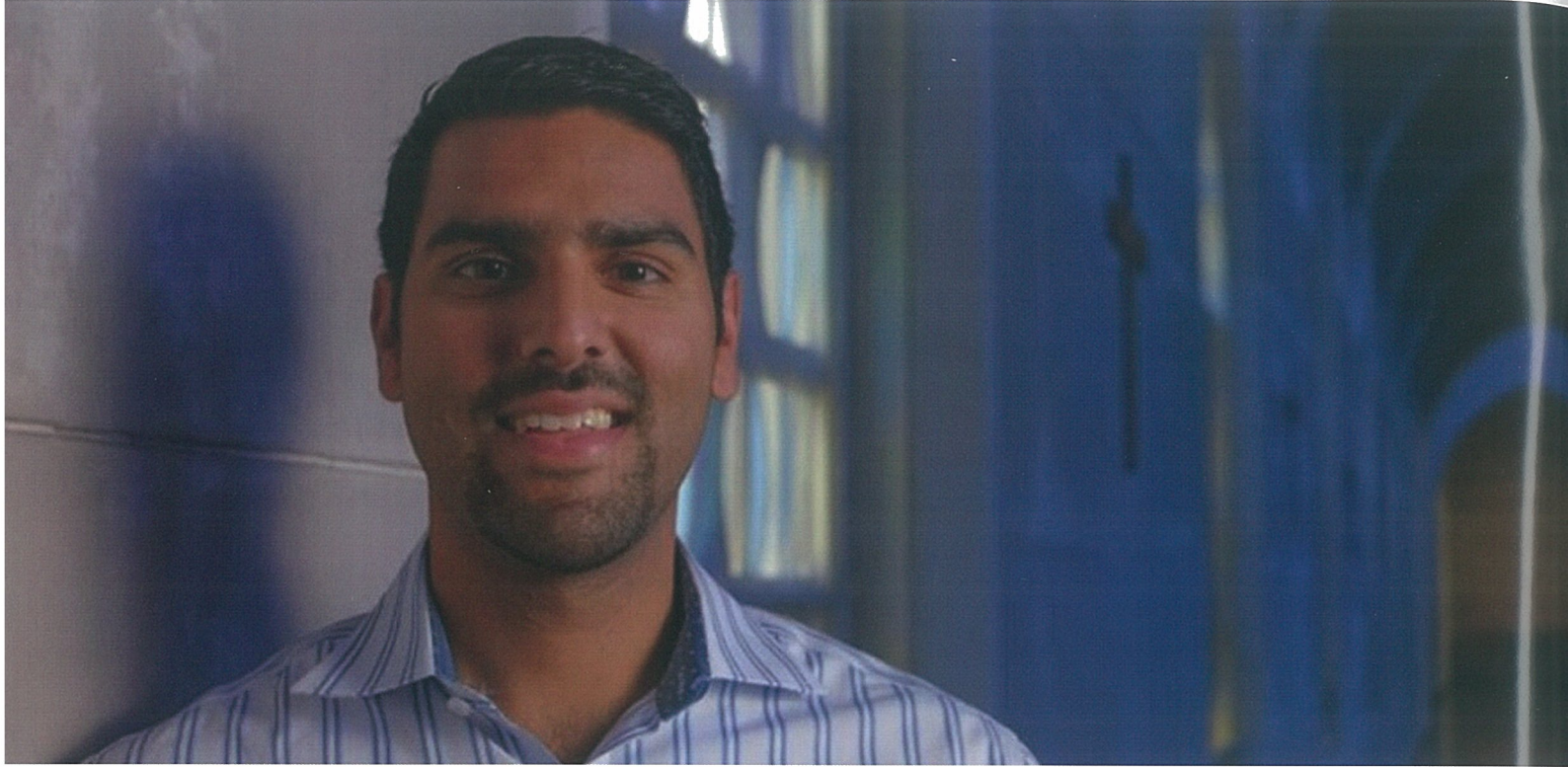
If I am silent, they consider me morose or coward. If I open my mouth, they find fault and oppose my logic.

Let those who dwell with such vicious company console themselves by remembering that both David and David's Lord endured the same trial.

It is the saint's lot to find foes even in their homes. Others beside David have lived among dragons. Others beside Daniel have been cast into a lions' den. Let those who are in quiet resting places and peaceful habitations be greatly grateful for such ease. God has given us this tranquility. None but the worldly enjoy the company of the worldly. And none but the righteous enjoy the company of the righteous,

WHY DIDN'T GOD HEAL NABEEL QURESHI?

September 18, 2017 by Natasha Crain



I don't know.

I simply do not know the answer to this question, nor can I fathom what it might be.

But I was heartbroken when I learned that Nabeel succumbed to cancer this weekend at age 34, leaving behind his wife and young daughter. My tears just kept coming after the news, even though I never had the opportunity to meet him personally.

For those who haven't followed his story, Nabeel Qureshi was a Muslim-turned-Christian Apologist who authored the best-selling books *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus*:

A Devout Muslim Encounters Christianity, Answering Jihad: A Better Way Forward, and No God But One: Allah or Jesus? A Former Muslim (born in America from a Pakistani parents). Investigates the Evidence for Islam and Christianity.

Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus tells the incredible story of Nabeel's journey to Christ through an extraordinary set of investigations, dreams and visions. After committing to Jesus, Nabeel became a Christian apologist and spent the rest of his life writing and speaking, with a heart for bringing light to the Muslim world.

When you read his story, it is amazingly clear that God

chose him for this important role.

But that clarity was also the reason so many people were shocked when he was diagnosed last year with stage 4 stomach cancer, which has a 5-year survival rate of 4 percent. The obvious question everyone wanted to ask was, "Why would God so clearly raise someone up with such an extraordinary testimony, only to let him die at this young age?"

Instead of accepting the grim outlook, however, Nabeel made it clear that he was not giving up. He started filming regular videos to document his treatment and reflect on faith during a difficult time. He prayed fervently for healing and strongly believed that healing would come, for the glory of God. *Tens of thousands of people prayed for him and fasted over the months of his treatment.* I, like so many others, anxiously awaited each video in the hope of a miracle. After all, that same question from when he was diagnosed sat firmly planted in the back of my mind: Why would God so clearly raise someone up with such an extraordinary testimony, only to let him die at this young age?

Surely, this must be for the glory of God so He can perform a miracle and demonstrate to the Muslim world that Christianity is true!

But on Saturday, Nabeel died.

When Your Faith is Wounded

Many people have shared beautiful tributes to Nabeel's life, and my Facebook feed is overflowing with posts proclaiming that Nabeel received ultimate healing. They are celebrating his life, and there is much to celebrate.

But I'm still crying.

To be honest, it's a very complex mess of tears. Tears for his wife and daughter, tears for the ministry he can't continue, tears that many Christians were wrong about having "heard from God" that he would be healed, tears that Nabeel himself believed he would be healed but wasn't, and tears for all those I've prayed for God to heal but who ended up dying anyway.

Though I don't want to admit it, many of these are tears of disappointment in God. And though I really don't want to admit it, there are some tears of bitterness in there too.

While I believe many people do experience modern-day miracles, I have not witnessed one myself despite praying for people to be healed on many occasions. At times like this, I find it incredibly hard to ask God for anything in prayer. I don't want to be let down again.

If God doesn't answer the prayers of tens of thousands of people for Nabeel's healing when there are SO many apparent reasons to do so, why should I bother to ask God for much smaller things—like for my kids to stop fighting so much? Or so the disappointed logic goes.

You see, my faith has been wounded.

I know that's not the response people expect from an apologist—someone who is supposed to be a strong defender of the faith. But perhaps that's why I wanted to write this today.

Knowing a lot of answers to questions about subjects like God's existence, the historical resurrection of Jesus, and the reliability of the Bible does not mean you never experience difficulties with faith. Everyone experiences difficulties, to varying degrees, in their spiritual journey. As such, if your faith is only rooted in the summation of your personal experiences, it can easily fall prey to fickle human emotion. Given the number of people with cancer for whom I've prayed in recent years, only to see them yield to death anyway, it wouldn't be too hard for me to never again pray for a person's healing... *if I gave in to my feelings.*

I am extraordinarily grateful I can say during a difficult time, however, that the strength of my faith rests on far more than feelings. Because I have studied apologetics in depth that understanding is an objective anchor I can reach for when my emotional ship has been rocked. This is precisely

what we should want for our kids as well. Apologetics isn't just about dealing with skeptics.

It's about dealing with life.

The fact that God didn't heal Nabeel doesn't change the fact that the evidence for God's existence is extensive, that there is compelling historical evidence for the resurrection, or that there's excellent reason to believe the Bible is God's word. Those intellectual anchors hold me firm even when life is making me feel seasick.

So Why Didn't God Heal Nabeel Qureshi?

On Saturday, the day that Nabeel passed away, I received the first printed copy of Talking with Your Kids about God in the mail. A bit ironically, I opened it to the chapter on talking with kids about how we know God answers prayers. I thought I'd end this post by sharing the conclusion to the chapter. I needed to be reminded of this as much as anyone this weekend.

In the book, this is addressing a particular question on why God doesn't heal amputees (a question often asked by skeptics). But I'm replacing the word amputees here with Nabeel in brackets. The same conclusion applies.

So what have we learned the Bible says? God answers prayers, but there are many reasons why he doesn't answer all prayers in the way we'd like.

The question of why God doesn't heal [Nabeel Qureshi] is no different from numerous other questions we could ask: Why doesn't God answer a prayer for a million dollars to instantly appear in a person's front yard? Why doesn't God answer a child's prayer to fly like a bird? Why doesn't God answer a prayer for a child's burn wounds to heal immediately rather than gradually? If we know from the Bible that God doesn't answer all prayers, we logically can't look at the outcome of any particular prayer to determine whether God ever answers prayers. What we're looking at may be one of many examples of requests that God, in his wisdom, does not grant.

A lack of certain prayer outcomes is not inconsistent with the Bible. What would be inconsistent with the Bible is if God never answered prayers.

But millions of people throughout history have claimed they've received answers to prayers. Today, according to Pew Research, almost one-third of Americans say their prayers result in "definite and specific answers from God" at least once a month, with almost one in five adults saying they receive direct answers to specific requests at least once a week. While a skeptic might claim every single one

of these millions of people is mistaken every single time, that's a belief worth being skeptical about. There's no way for Christians to prove God answers prayers, just as there's no way for a skeptic to prove God doesn't answer prayers. But if (1) there's good reason to believe God exists (as we saw in part 1), (2) the Bible is truthful and (3) God does answer our prayers, but not all of them and not always the way we want.

Some Readers' Comments

1. Alicia Mizel says: September 18, 2017

I cannot put into words just how every word all through this article resonates exactly with my feelings and thoughts since Nabeel's passing this past Saturday.

And yet I came to the same conclusion. Still tears and sadness I have the same firm belief that my salvation never did rest in my feelings.

Thank you for this article. It has reminded me and re-confirmed my thoughts. Although I am still so sad, and cannot see the Lord's reasoning through this, I know he knows what's best and the great reason behind it. He has left a great impact on the world, may we "go likewise, and do the same." ***Rest in peace, Nabeel.***

I do not understand now, but have no doubt I will someday.

2. Trish says: September 18, 2017

This was EXACTLY how I felt when I heard the news. Thank you so much for this article. I know He is God and I know Nabeel's death won't be in vain. It will produce a

teaching on social media and people are hearing his teaching more as this has happened. God loves his daughter even more than Nabeel could. He is the Creator of her and her mother and loves them more and deeper than any human could. He will watch over them through other Christians and friends. I shed tears for a brother I have never met. But I know he will be ok and his family too, and so God will be glorified through all of this.

3. Chantelle says: September 18, 2017

Thank you for this post. Nabeel's death has wounded my faith as well and I appreciate your honesty.

4. Susan Losey says September 19, 2017

It is heartbreaking . . . but ***God did answer our prayers. It may be in a way we didn't expect. Nabeel's suffering and pain is over. He stands in God's glory and presence in complete wholeness.*** Nabeel's life legacy inspires and his faithfulness will remain a wonderful example.



Together forever

I used to think that happy couples didn't have to work on their marriages. True love is free and easy, right? Actually, wrong.

The happiest of couples are those who make their marriage a priority and are committed to improving their relationship – in big and small ways, day in and day out. A happy marriage takes work. Lots of work, and a healthy dose of sacrifice, too.

How to live a good marriage?

United to the Lord, who always renews our love and strengthens it to overcome every difficulty. That sounds great, but how exactly are we to unite ourselves and our marriages to the Lord?

Well, to find out, I think we should look to the experts. For gaining marriage wisdom, share stories and testimonies from real life-couples; married from one year to 60 years, who are living out the call to self-giving love in their marriages every day.

As beautiful as weddings are, marriage has little to do with a white dress, gold rings, or fancy ceremonies or celebrations on one special day.

The real work of marriage is played out in the everyday faithfulness of two flawed individual answering God's call to self-giving love by saying "I do" and "I will" again and again, every day, throughout the joys and sorrows of a real life lived together.

You don't have to look far in today's world to hear bad news about the state of marriage. As we begin this season of beautiful wedding ceremonies, we need to pray for all marriages.

May God give all married couples the grace and strength they need to remain faithful to their commitment, in good times and in bad, until death do they part.



Satan's Last & Serious Deception

When we read or hear the media, we receive confirmation of Matthew 24, where the Lord Jesus speaks of end times, wars and rumors of wars, famines and earthquakes. We are literally bombarded with this type of negative news continuously.

But in the midst of this commotion, something very strange is taking place; it is the preparation for Satan's last victory!

What do I mean by it? Let me explain:

Satan is the great imitator of God. He is not the creator, but the destroyer; he is not light but darkness, the "father of lies", and the Bible tells us that Satan knows that he has but a short time (Rev. 12: 12).

What are his plans during this "short time"? Revelation 13, states that Satan's helper, the false prophet, "deceives them that dwell on the earth."

Satan is trying desperately to bring about a peaceful society where all can be secure and prosperous.

As a result, the whole world will think that the beast is actually the Christ. They will worship the dragon, the Antichrist and the image of the beast!

This process of development toward Satan's last victory is not something we may expect only in the future; it has been ongoing since the beginning of mankind.

But today, in these last stages of the end times, Satan is demonstrating his powers of deception on all levels of society: politics, economy and religion.

But there is also good news. It is revealed in the word "LAST" victory, because there will be no more victory for him. He will meet the Victor, Who will finally put an end to his global deception.

The Bible says, "And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the Spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming (2 Thessalonians 2:8).



How to Get Un-tattooed?!

(First printed at
St. John Magazine-in June 1998)

A newspaper columnist reported on a program for removing unwanted tattoos- specially gang-related tattoos.

A surprising thing happened after the column appeared. Over a thousand letters flooded in from young people all over the country, asking more about the program.

This remarkable response inspired the Los Angeles School District and a local cable television company to produce a film called "Un-tattoo You."

It told about the dangers of amateur tattooing and showed how difficult it was to remove small tattoos from arms and faces and larger tattoos from chests and backs.

The stars of the film were young people themselves. They talked frankly about why they were tattooed to begin with and why they now wanted the tattoos removed.

The film won a national award and is now distributed throughout the country.

The story behind the film Untattoo You illustrates an important point. All of us have done things in our lives that we now regret and would like to erase.

And this is what the sacrament of Reconciliation is all about.

What did the Bible say about tattoos?

"You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor tattoo any marks on you: I am the Lord" (Leviticus 19:28)

ALL OF A SUDDEN... 7 SHORT YEARS HAVE PASSED!»

Before Obama there was virtually no outlandish pres- ence of Islam in America

- All of a sudden, Islam is taught in schools. Christianity and the Bible are banned in schools.
- All of a sudden we must allow prayer rugs everywhere and allow for Islamic prayer in schools, airports and businesses.
- All of a sudden we must stop serving pork in prisons.
- All of a sudden we are inundated with law suits by Muslims who are offended by American culture.
- All of a sudden Muslims are suing employers and refusing to do their jobs if they personally deem it conflicts with Sharia Law.
- All of a sudden the Attorney General of the United States vows to prosecute anyone who engages in "anti-Muslim speech".
- All of a sudden, Jihadists who engage in terrorism and openly admit they acted in the name of Islam and ISIS, are emphatically declared they are NOT Islamic by our leaders and/or their actions are determined NOT to be terrorism, but other vague terms like 'workplace violence.'
- All of a sudden, it becomes Policy that Secular Middle East dictators that were benign or friendly to the West, must be replaced by Islamists and the Muslim Brotherhood.
- All of a sudden our troops are withdrawn from Iraq and the Middle East, giving rise to ISIS.



- All of a sudden, America has reduced it's nuclear stockpiles to 1950 levels, as Obama's stated goal of a nuke-free America by the time he leaves office continues uninterrupted.
- All of a sudden, a deal with Iran must be made at any cost, with a pathway to nuclear weapons and HUNDREDS of BILLIONS of dollars handed over to fund their programs.
- All of a sudden America APOLOGIZES to Muslim states and sponsors of terror worldwide for acts of aggression, war and sabotage THEY perpetrate against our soldiers.
- All of a sudden, the American Navy is diminished to 1917 Pre-World War I levels of only 300 ships. The Army is at pre-1940 levels. The Air Force scraps 500 planes and planned to retire the use of the A-10 Thunderbolt close air support fighter. A further draw down of another 40,000

military personnel is in progress.

- All of a sudden half of our aircraft carriers are recalled for maintenance by Obama rendering the Atlantic unguarded, NONE are in the Middle East.

- All of a sudden Obama has to empty Guantanamo Bay of captured Jihadists and let them loose in Jihad-friendly Islamic states. He demands to close the facility.

- All of a sudden America will negotiate with terrorists and trade FIVE Taliban commanders for a deserter and Jihad sympathizer.

- All of a sudden there is no money for American poor, disabled veterans, jobless Americans, hungry Americans, or displaced Americans but there is endless money for Obama's "Syrian refugee" resettlement programs.

- All of sudden there is an ammunition shortage in the USA.

- All of a sudden, the most important thing for Obama to do after a mass shooting by two Jihadists is disarm American Citizens.

- All of a sudden, the President of the United States cannot attend the Christian Funerals of a Supreme Court Justice and a former First Lady because of previous (seemingly unimportant) commitments.

..."By his fruits you will know him."

- All of a sudden, I am sick to my stomach.



Daily Meditations (2)

By Mark Hanna

+ Those who leave everything in the hands of God, will eventually see God's hands in everything.

+ The Spiritual Elder (St. John Saba) teaches: Blessed are those who are active in the work of prayer...feeling relaxed with the vigilance of the Holy Spirit within them."

+ Saint Augustine said: Lord I know You because You have known me, and I love You because You have loved me first. Whenever I move away from you, I grow more attached to You, I see You and I love You.

Nobody is able to love You, unless he sees You.

And nobody had ever seen You and didn't love You.

+ Our Lord, the cause of joy for our hearts ...

You promised we would see You after a short period, and this short period is our earthly life.

Thus through this period, there would be a little sadness. However, You Lord promised to turn our sadness into joy, as You previously promised all Your saints. This is the promise that we live by for and it is the one that makes it easy during our foreignness in this world.

How I wish to place this promise before my eyes everyday so that any sadness would melt away and that Your words continue to ring in the depths of my heart to remind me of Your promise of joy.

How I wish to alleviate myself above all fake joys; like all Your Saints, asking for the one which can never be taken away. How I wish to be the cause of joy for everyone around me and resist any sadness or heartache.

Practice:

+ Whenever you see something that bothers you, feel His presence through your day and enjoy.

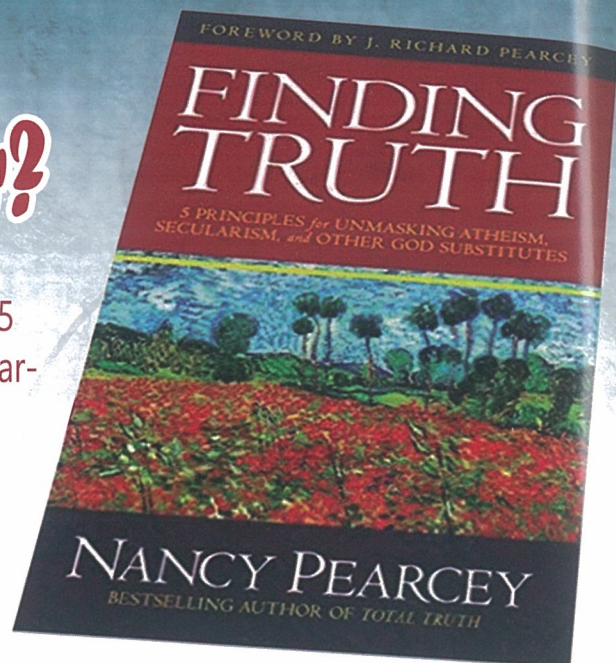
+ Try to be the source of joy of others like your Lord Jesus Christ.

What Is Your Answer?



Excerpt from the book "Finding Truth: 5 Principles for Unmasking Atheism, Secularism, and Other God Substitutes"

By Nancy Pearcey



The questions I had as a young person are not unique. Many teens and young adults struggle with intellectual questions, even if they are not intellectuals in a stereotypical sense. Just talk to those who have rejected Christianity.

Sociologist Bradley Wright at the University of Connecticut asked former Christians why they de-converted. The researchers expected to hear stories about people leaving the church because they had been hurt or emotionally wounded.

To their surprise, the reason given most frequently by former Christians was that they could not get answers to their doubts and questions. In fact, they could not even get the church to treat their questions seriously.

A former Southern Baptist (obviously still angry) said, "Christians always use the word 'faith' as their last word when they are too stupid to answer a question."

Eventually, the doubters concluded that the church did not offer answers because there are no answers. Churches have an obligation to equip their congregations to answer the questions that inevitably arise from living in a post-Christian society. Both young people and adults are subject to a constant barrage of secular and pagan ideas. Churches, schools, and families must take the responsibility for providing cogent and compelling answers.

One effective way of responding to doubters and skeptics is to help them face the real-world implications of their own views.

I once had a conversation with a teenager who had been raised in a Presbyterian family. "I don't

think I'm a Christian anymore," she told me. "That's interesting," I said. "What have you accepted instead? "What?"

"If there is no God, what then? What do you think is true, and how would you support it?"

The teen was speechless. Her entire focus had been on reacting against her parents and church. It had not occurred to her that she now bore the responsibility to think through the options for herself and make an informed search for truth.

As she began to study the alternatives, she realized that giving up Christianity was not a matter of merely deleting a few files of doctrine from her mind. Christianity is an entire worldview that undergirds many of the great ideals of Western culture, from justice to equality to universal human rights—ideals that the teenager did not want to give up.

When people raise questions about Christianity, often the best response is not to shut them down, but precisely the opposite. Start by pressing them to take more seriously the implications of their own position. As a matter of intellectual integrity, they should stop free-loading and take a fearless inventory of the logical and practical conclusions of their own convictions.

The stakes are high. What God said to the ancient Hebrews is just as true today: "I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live" (Deut. 30:19). Christianity is either true or false, but it cannot be dismissed as inconsequential.



by Jeff King

The Islamic Persecution to the Coptic Christians in Egypt

"Between the anvil and the hammer," is a British colloquialism that aptly describes the plight of the Egyptian Christian.

For 1,400 years, they have suffered under Islam with no hope in sight. The revolution brought hope for a time, but The Muslim Brotherhood quickly filled the power vacuum of the popular, but largely leaderless, uprising.

Luckily, when they grabbed power, they quickly crushed democracy which led to a second revolution where the power of the military was reinstated.

Abdel Fattah el-Sisi has made several groundbreaking pronouncements about the need to protect Christians in several speeches, but the political reality is that he has to be very careful not to offend The Brotherhood, the Salafists; and the average fundamentalist in the street.

There is great frustration among the masses toward the military as they have monopoly of perhaps 40% percent of the economy, which leads to massive corruption and economic stagnation. One wrong step and he could end up like Mubarak.

In the meantime, persecution against Christians has been escalating for a decade and is only getting worse, nor better.

The Word tells us that if "anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name" (1 Peter 4:16).

There is no shame in suffering greatly for the name of Jesus Christ; in fact, rather, Jesus told us that we would be treated as He had been. The Word tells us that these believers suffer because Jesus Himself called them out of the world, as seen in John 15:19. In the end, a servant is not greater than his master and the Church in Egypt remains between the anvil and the hammer. Therefore, we will do what we can to soften the blow and to build and bandage the Church there. Please join with us as we bandage and build His persecuted Church in Egypt and around the world.

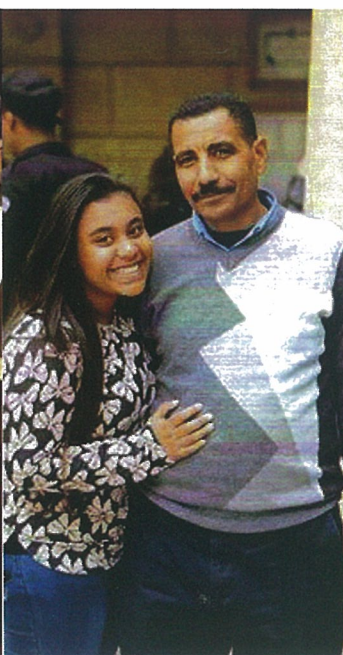
**Gamal
Tawfiq Gares**

**Nabil
Habib**

**Mariana
Fahim Helmy**

**Girgis
Ghattas Attallah**

**Nasef
Mamdouh Ayad**



El-Arish
Attack Victim

St. Peter & St. Paul's
Church Bombing Victim

St. Peter & St. Paul's
Church Bombing Victims

St. Mark's
Church Bombing Victim

Minya Bus
Attack Victim



To Obey God is to be Beautiful

"I seek not my own will, but the will of Him
Who sent Me" (John 5:30).

Why is nature so beautiful? Look at a lake, a tree, a flower, a bird, a sunset, a sunrise, why are they so beautiful? Could it be that they are beautiful because they never say "NO" to God? Does the flower ever say "no" to the sunshine God sends? Does the sun ever say "no" to God's guiding hand or order?

Nature is beautiful because it always says "Yes" to God. It never disobeys. To obey God is to be beautiful. God gave us life. He wants us to make life beautiful. How can life be beautiful?

What is the secret of a good life? Like nature, life becomes beautiful when it says "Yes" to God; when it obeys Him. Can anyone guess what was the most beautiful life ever lived? Of course, it was the life of Jesus! The life of Jesus was beautiful because it never said "no" to God's will. The whole theme of the life of Jesus was expressed in His words, "I seek not my own will but the will of Him who sent Me" (Jn. 5:30).

Can you think of some other lives that became beautiful when they said "yes" to God?

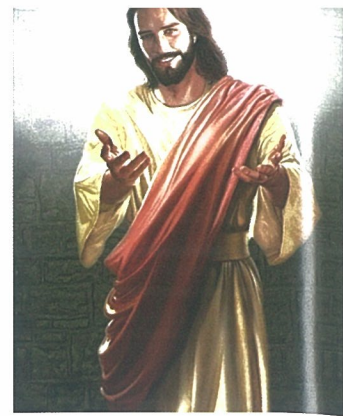
1. Samson: When he obeyed God he was strong. When he disobeyed God, he lost his power.
2. Solomon: when he obeyed God, he was the wisest man in the world. When he disobeyed God, he lost his wisdom and committed shameful sins.
3. St. Paul's life became beautiful when he gave himself to Christ on the road to Damascus; before that he described himself as the chief among sinners.
4. St. Augustine: lived an ugly carnal and sinful life, until he discovered the Lord Jesus Christ, and his life was turned completely around and became beautiful. He lamented the years that were eaten by the swarming locust (Joel 2:25).

As nature is beautiful because it obeys God, so our lives can be made beautiful by saying "yes" to God as did Christ and the saints and the great people in history.

SHORT STORY

"I NOT ONLY MADE YOU; I BOUGHT YOU!"

By Fr. Anthony Coniaris



A young man spent a long time making a sailboat. When it was finished, he took it down to the sea to try it out. The boat started to sail beautifully that he was so proud of it. Suddenly an unexpected wind blew up and pushed the sailboat way out to the middle of the sea where he could not reach it.

Gradually it disappeared from his sight. You can imagine how sad and heartbroken when he returned home that evening without his boat.

Weeks later, he saw his boat in a pawnshop window- the very boat which he had made and rigged and painted with such great care. He ran in and began to tell the owner: "That is my boat. I made it with my own hands.... I want you to give me back my boat."

His heart sank when the man replied, "I'll give it to you only if you pay the price which is marked on this tag." Sadly the boy replied, "Save it for me. Don't sell it to anyone else. I'll go out and earn the money to buy it back."

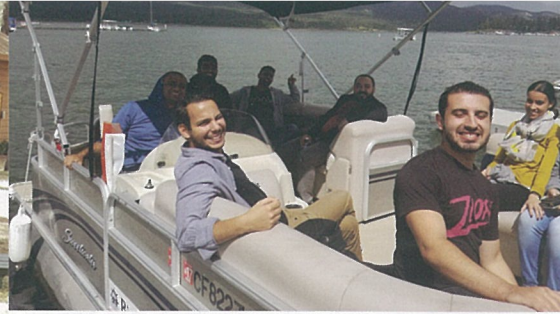
Sometime later when he returned, he paid the money and said, "Mister, I'd like to have my boat." As he left the store with the boat in his hands, he looked at it with a feeling of pride and joy and love, and said: You are mine now twice-over! Once, because I made you. Twice, because I bought you!"

The way that young man felt about his boat is the way God feels about us. The Bible says: God not only made us, He also bought us back from sin with a price. The price was the precious blood of Christ.

When we fell in sin, God lost us and we became slaves to Satan. Yet God could restore us again through redemption and He liberated us from the bondage of sin, Satan, death and hell.

We became so dear to Him because He owned us twice, once by creation and twice by buying us with the blood of the cross of His Son Jesus Christ.

Servants Retreat 2017



St John Spiritual Day





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