

While dying from cancer, Dr. Fisher assured his wife: *Compared to eternity, this life is only a short preamble. So, good night, darling . . .*

Till the Morning

Dr. Oral Fisher's private little world crashed about him the morning of March 20, 1969. The day before, he had undergone surgery on his left cheekbone. Now it was eleven o'clock, and his wife, Ruth, had just entered his hospital room.

"Well, honey, what did they find?"

"Dear, the news isn't as good as we had hoped. I wanted the doctors to tell you first, but I couldn't wait any longer to come to see you. Most of your pain has been caused by the benign condition that you have had for many years, but deep within the bone they found a tumor."

"Is it malignant?"

It was. Thirty-six-year-old Dr. Fisher, a specialist in eye surgery, knew at that moment that his prognosis was "good but guarded." Before long, however, the cancer spread throughout his body. He died November 29 that same year.

During the course of his illness, Dr. Fisher wrote this little book--a testimony of courage, quiet joy, and faith. His words are filled with hope and are always positive--yet never cloying.

Any reader will find Dr. Fisher's booklet an inspiration--but especially those who may, like him, be going through the trauma of a life-threatening illness.



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Till the Morning

Oral E. Fisher, M.D.

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About the Author

Oral Elvin Fisher was born on November 20, 1932, at Milan, Indiana, to Everett and Bertha Fisher, and died at Loma Linda, California, November 29, 1969, at the age of 37.

As a boy he joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church and attended Cicero Academy in Indiana, then went on to Emmanuel Missionary College, now Andrews University, and La Sierra College, now Loma Linda University. In 1955 he graduated as a physical therapist and spent the next two years working especially for children with cerebral palsy.

In 1959 he returned to Loma Linda as a student in the School of Medicine and graduated at the top of the class of 1963.

Dr. Fisher took his internship at Glendale Adventist Hospital and married Ruth Lorensen, on October 7, 1963. Their daughter, Karl Joelle, was born on November 9, 1967.

After interning, Oral was invited by Dr. Robert Shearer to take a residency with him in ophthalmology at the Los Angeles County General Hospital, and in 1967 he joined the faculty of the Department of Ophthalmology at Loma Linda University.

He loved both the teaching and practice of medicine, and his skill as an ophthalmologist was regarded with great respect by his colleagues.

A versatile man, Oral loved music. He was well-known

for his singing both as a soloist and as a singer with the Voice of Prophecy. He was an active church member and enjoyed working with wood, making much of his own living room furniture.

Besides these activities, Dr. Fisher especially enjoyed the outdoors. His favorite spot was Adam's Lake in British Columbia. His most enjoyable summer was spent during postgraduate studies at Colby College in Maine while living in a log cabin on the edge of a lake and watching the sun rise as he boated in the early morning.

During his last illness Dr. Fisher's wife, Ruth, placed Bible verses on the wall of his bedroom at his request. These were printed in large letters so he could read them from his bed. These texts consisted largely of promises. He read them often until the last few weeks when he was unable to focus his eyes, and they brought him great comfort.

Of these verses the most meaningful one to him was Romans 8:38, 39: "I have become absolutely convinced that neither death nor life, neither messenger of Heaven nor monarch of earth, neither what happens today nor what may happen tomorrow, neither a power from on high nor a power from below, nor anything else in God's whole world has any power to separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord."--Phillips.

A. Graham Maxwell
Charles W. Teel

Foreword

For a long time I have planned to write this little booklet to share with my patients, but the project became lost, along with many other good intentions, in the busy schedule of a young physician.

A serious illness is what gave me the time to write as well as to re-emphasize just how much my faith and confidence in a loving, completely trustworthy God means to me. The booklet is simply a statement of my personal faith in God and how I have arrived at it. It includes some of the experiences between God and man that have been most significant to me.

Those of you who already know and trust God may find, I hope, something fresh and stimulating that will strengthen your faith. To those of you who may be facing one of life's great crises, such as I face as I write the booklet, may it be of comfort.

Some of you may have never believed in a personal God or in traditional Christianity, because you have seen apparent inconsistency and mystery surrounding some of these teachings. I hope that this endeavor to show that a meaningful faith in God may be gained in a consistent and logical manner will stimulate you to honestly re-examine your positions.

I wish to express my special appreciation to Dr. Graham Maxwell, director of the Division of Religion at Loma Linda University, who has so greatly helped me in forming the concepts of God portrayed in these pages.

A Time of Crisis

My private little world crashed to an abrupt halt the morning of March 20, 1969. The day before, I had undergone four and one-half hours of surgery on my left cheekbone at a large university medical center. This was the climax of weeks of increasing pain and anxiety. Because I was still feeling the effects of the anesthetic I did not awaken early the morning after surgery. But when ten o'clock came and neither my wife nor my surgeon had come by I vaguely wondered why. Later I learned that my busy surgeon had had an early-morning case and was too busy at the time for any lengthy explanations about my problem. At eleven o'clock my wife came in. She had been at the hospital since eight-thirty but had avoided coming to my room, hoping that the doctors would get there first. Almost my first words were, "Well, honey, what did they find?"

With calm composure she answered, "Dear, the news isn't as good as we had hoped. I wanted the doctors to tell you first, but I couldn't wait any longer to come to see you. Most of your pain has been caused by the benign condition that you have had for many years, but deep within the bone they found a tumor."

"Is it malignant?" I asked.

Malignant! This must be one of the ugliest words in the English language. I knew it was especially hard for her to break this news because she is a registered nurse and understood what effect this could have on our life

together. Because I am a physician, I too understood. I am 36 years old, a specialist in eye surgery. Less than two years ago I finished the many long expensive years of medical training. Was it for nothing?

There were some encouraging aspects concerning my case. The doctors felt they had been able to remove the tumor fairly adequately, but as is the case with many malignancies, no one could be certain. I knew how my chart would read: "Immediate prognosis good; remote, guarded." At times I had been forced to write those words on my own patients' charts. They mean simply that the outlook for recovery from the operation is good, but conditions beyond that are uncertain.

The doctors decided that I should have radiation treatment in order to be as certain as possible that any remaining tumor cells were dead. This thought was almost more frightening to me than the presence of the tumor itself.

My difficulty began in childhood, when my parents had noticed the left side of my face beginning to enlarge. I was taken to a number of local physicians and was finally referred to a specialist in a nearby city who decided I had a tumor which should be treated with X-ray. At the age of nine I was given a long series of treatments. Years later it was discovered my problem had not been a tumor, but, rather, a harmless condition, which often requires no treatment. But the damage was done. One hazard of heavy X-ray treatment given during childhood for nonmalignant conditions is the development of cancer in the area many years later. This was the probable cause for my present condition.

Needless to say, I faced a serious crisis and an agonizing decision. Physicians are just as subject to fear and anxiety as is anyone else when faced with a serious illness, perhaps even more so because of their knowledge of all the possible complications.

At such times of crisis there are many sources of comfort and strength. A physician in whom one has confidence, and who takes the time for little extra things

that are so important to any patient, is a great help. Kind nurses and other hospital personnel do much to help make the long days and nights endurable. It is also heartwarming to see the myriad of thoughtful things one's friends do at such a time. A wife whose love and loyalty you never doubt during the dark and trying times is perhaps a man's greatest earthly comfort. Yet none of these people, no matter how much they may want to, can dispel the uncertainty of the future when one has a life-threatening disease.

In their despair people may turn to God, many for the first time. Some experience the beginning of a lifelong relationship with Him, while others experience something only to forget it as soon as the immediate crisis is past. A few, who do not understand, turn to God only to blame Him for causing their predicament.

I had come to know God well enough to have confidence and faith in Him long before this crisis. The crisis only showed how much this God I have come to worship and admire means to me.

The God That I Know

A very much alive, loving, personal God, who is interested in individuals, isn't a popular theme in this day and age when many do not believe in God. Sometimes these are people who have been taught that God is a severe, tyrannical judge, who is only too willing to consign people to burn forever if they deviate from His strict and arbitrary code of behavior. I don't blame people who feel this way for thinking that God is dead. The truth is, such a god never existed.

The evidence for the existence of a Supreme Being to me seems overwhelming. The question is, What kind of Supreme Being? Are faith and confidence in Him justified by the evidence that we have? What is faith supposed to be? I believe these are questions we have a right to ask.

One often hears devout persons say, "You must have faith." But if you were to ask a dozen people what they mean by "faith," you would probably get a dozen answers. Perhaps we chuckle as we read of the little boy who defined faith as "believing what you know ain't so," yet many feel this way, although they might describe it in more sophisticated language. In other words, they feel that faith is blindly believing something for which there is no tangible evidence.

Personally, I could never accept this as a valid definition. As a medical student much of my time was spent learning to weigh evidence, on the basis of which to come up with right and logical answers. As a physician I must be able to look at evidence honestly and logically, or my patient's health may suffer. My approach to faith in God is much the same. Only after I look logically and honestly at all the evidence about God and His character can I know whether I wish to place my confidence and trust in Him. Faith then, instead of being some kind of blind belief, is confidence in God based upon adequate evidence.

To what source does one turn when he wishes to find evidence about God? For centuries men have found that that ancient book we call the Bible is an accurate record of God's dealings with man. It has been attacked by countless skeptics over the centuries but it has always withstood the tempest. Some of its worst attackers have become its staunchest supporters. It isn't my purpose in this short booklet to launch into any extensive defense of the Bible, although there is much evidence to offer that it is more than an ordinary book. The single greatest evidence to me that this Book is extraordinary is its consistency and coherence in telling the story of God's love for man, in spite of the fact that it was written over many centuries, under highly varied circumstances, by men who differed widely in their backgrounds.

At first glance God doesn't always look good in the Bible. This is especially true of parts of the Old Testament; but Inspiration didn't gloss over these

difficult experiences. They are told as they happened. But in case any should misunderstand some of the things He was forced to do for man's ultimate good, God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to this earth to live and die as a man, to settle forever the question of what kind of person God really is. The story of Jesus' life is recorded in the first four books of the New Testament; and when I want to find the clearest picture of God, this is where I look.

The very fact that God the Son was willing to become a human being, to live in most unfavorable circumstances, and, ultimately, to die for crimes He never committed, speaks much about His unselfishness and loving nature. What ruler of any nation on earth would be willing to leave his position of leadership and honor in order to live and die in the lowliest fashion, even for his best friends? Jesus Christ left infinitely greater power, glory, and honor than the most exalted position any earthly monarch ever knew in order to show us what God is like.

What was Christ like? He rarely spoke severely to anyone. In fact, He never spoke severely to anyone except those who felt they were already so good that they had it made, and, even then, there were tears in His voice. These He called play actors or hypocrites, and repeatedly warned them that as long as they had this attitude of being better than other men, they were in great danger. In all the story of His life, one cannot find one instance of His speaking a discouraging or unpleasant word to anyone who felt the need of being a better person, no matter how sordid the person's past might have been.

In dealing with all kinds of people from all levels of society, Jesus was consistently and untiringly kind and gracious. Whether or not one was born on the "wrong side of the tracks" made no difference to Him. He was constantly criticized by the churchmen of His day because of His friendly association with people at the lower end of the social ladder. Yet, He was just as gracious with the wealthy, powerful Nicodemus. Tax

collectors or publicans were the social scum of the day; they were considered traitors by their countrymen. Their financial practices would never have withstood the searching eyes of a modern-day congressional committee. Yet, one of these, Levi Matthew, became so changed by his confrontation with Christ that he not only gave up his dishonest practices, but became one of His twelve disciples. There was something so irresistibly attractive in the character and personality of Jesus that the chief of the tax gatherers, a little man by the name of Zacchaeus, without a sermon or a hint of scolding, exclaimed, "look, sir, I will give half my property to the poor. And if I have swindled anybody out of anything I will pay him back four times as much" (Luke 19:8, Phillips).

Christ's patience with those who repeatedly made serious mistakes and committed acts that we would consider most shameful is truly amazing. His closest friends, who never seemed to understand how infinitely patient God is, once asked, "Lord, how often am I to forgive my brother if he goes on wronging me? As many as seven times?"

Jesus replied, "I do not say seven times; I say seventy times seven" (Matthew 18:21,22, N.E.B.). In other words, there is no limit to the patience of our God, as long as man retains any desire to be forgiven and to live a life of sincerity and honesty.

Almost everyone has heard the story Christ told to illustrate God's great willingness to forgive and accept in spite of man's rank ingratitude. The story of the prodigal son illustrates eloquently that it is never too late to be accepted of God, no matter what a person has done, so long as there remains a willingness to communicate with God and a desire to live a better life.

A story that illustrates beautifully the tact, kindness, and wisdom of God is told in John 8:2-11, Phillips. Its testimony requires no comment.

"Early next morning he returned to the Temple and the entire crowd came to him. So he sat down and began to

teach them. But the scribes and Pharisees brought in to him a woman who had been caught in adultery. They made her stand in front, and then said to him, Now, master, this woman has been caught in adultery, in the very act. According to the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women to death. Now, what do you say about her?

"They said this to test him, so that they might have some good grounds for an accusation. But Jesus stooped down and began to write with his finger in the dust on the ground. But as they persisted in their questioning, he straightened himself up and said to them, Let the one among you who has never sinned throw the first stone at her.' Then he stooped down again and continued writing with his finger on the ground. And when they heard what he said, they were convinced by their own consciences and went out, one by one, beginning with the eldest until they had all gone.

"Jesus was left alone, with the woman still standing where they had put her. So he stood up and said to her, Where are they all--did no one condemn you?"

"And she said, No one, sir."

"Neither do I condemn you," said Jesus to her. Go home and do not sin again."

These are but a few of the many instances found in the Gospels that show the love, patience, and graciousness of our God. Many have gotten the idea that God the Father and Christ are different. They seem to think that God the Father is a stern judge and that Christ somehow understands us better and tries to persuade the Father to be easy on us. Christ plainly said this is not so, but rather that He came to reveal to us the character of the Father.

On one occasion Philip asked, "Lord, show us the Father and we ask no more." Jesus answered, Have I been all this time with you, Philip, and you still do not know me? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (chap. 14:8-10, N.E.B.). "When that day comes you will make your request in my name, and I do not say

that I shall pray to the Father for you, for the Father loves you himself" (chap. 16:26, 27, N.E.B.). "My Father and I are one" (chap. 10:30, N.E.B.). From Christ's own words, then, one must conclude that there is no difference between Christ and God the Father--they are one in character, in purpose, and in their great love for man.

The picture of God in the Old Testament is not always as easily understood as the picture that is presented in the Gospels. In fact, some of these glimpses seem so out of character for a loving God that some people have lost their faith in the Bible and even in God Himself because of them. What happened over the centuries? Did God mellow and become less angry and more loving? To me this is unthinkable. It is always well to remember that Christ, as a human being, gave us the best understanding of God. But an honest person cannot ignore situations in the Old Testament in which God appears arbitrary and severe. Is there an explanation for this seeming discrepancy?

To discover whether answers could be found, I recently sat in a class with a group of university students in a free-for-all discussion during which each perplexing area was discussed. It was a most rewarding experience. Although we didn't solve all the problems or presume to always understand why God acted as He did, it was amazing to see how many of these situations did clear up to reveal a loving God consistent with the picture Christ gave us. Let's consider just a few of these situations.

God sometimes makes some rather disparaging-sounding statements about Himself. Take for example Exodus 20:5, "I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me." This sounded quite unfair to me. "If you don't do what I tell you, I will punish your children, your grandchildren, and even your great-grandchildren!" However, could this not be a way of saying, "There are certain great principles in this universe which when violated bring as the natural

consequence problems and distress that may be felt for generations. Our knowledge of science convinces us that this is true from the standpoint of both heredity and environment. But why would God state it the way He did?

Let us consider the kind of people God was speaking to. It was certainly not an assembly of well-educated scientists. Rather, it was a few hundred thousand illiterate, undisciplined, recently freed slaves. God had to speak to them in a language that they could understand. This is a clue that explains many difficult passages in the Old Testament. God always meets man where he is capable of understanding. Sometimes lines of communication have become so poor between God and man that the only things that could make an impression at all upon human beings were force, fire, and threatenings. I am convinced that sometimes God is willing to run the risk of being misunderstood by some, and to use methods that He does not prefer to use, in order to remind men that He is still around.

God had chosen the nation of Israel to preserve a knowledge of His character in the world. They were to demonstrate the advantage in following the great orderly, universal principles that God has given for our good. Through them, in a special sense, He was to be revealed to the world so that honest individuals would find adequate evidence upon which to make their decision about Him.

It was not a very promising group that came out of Egyptian slavery. They had all but forgotten the true God. They were undisciplined as only an oppressed people who have suddenly tasted freedom can be. They were wandering in one of the most desolate spots on earth. If this group of several hundred thousand persons were to fulfill its purpose, is it any wonder that rebellion and cheating were dealt with promptly and, apparently, rather severely? Can you imagine the problems of organization and discipline in a crowd of this size, which included the aged, women, and children, wandering through a hostile desert? Recently we have seen modern

armies fall completely apart in this area of the world, even with their most modern equipment and communications systems.

It is interesting to note that in spite of remarkable happenings connected with their deliverance and journey (Exodus 14:19-30; 16:14-32; 17:3-7), the children of Israel seemed to have little respect for God, so He instructed Moses to bring the people to the base of Mount Sinai where He would show them again His power and majesty and remind them of His law, the observance of which would result in their happiness and prosperity. Here in great upheavals of nature God revealed Himself as a most powerful and majestic Being (Exodus 19:16-20). One would think that this great demonstration would have made a deep and lasting impression. But apparently it didn't, for before Moses could get down from the mountain the people had decided they preferred to worship a calf that they had made from their golden jewelry rather than the God who had so recently and marvelously revealed Himself to them. The festivity connected with worship of the calf was not simply an innocent pastime; it was a fertility cult rite brought from Egyptian heathenism and associated with the most degrading immoral practices.

Why does the God of Sinai seem so different from the God of Calvary? God was revealed on both mountains. At Sinai God was dealing with a nation of people who had become degraded through four hundred years of servitude. Living in a culture containing thousands of gods--even gods of the flies and frogs--the issue was whether the God of heaven was supreme. Was He more powerful and mighty than the heathen gods to which these people had been exposed? The marvelous thing is that God was willing to answer this question on a level that these people could understand, even though in doing so He Himself might be misunderstood.

As the centuries rolled by, this chosen nation repeatedly disappointed God. They often turned to gods of wood and stone until finally God had to give them up to

the consequences of their own rebellion. But even then, He exclaims as would a concerned, loving parent, "How can I give you up, O Ephraim! How can I hand you over, O Israel!" (Hosea 11:8, R.S.V.).

I often think of God as a kind and wise, but effective, schoolteacher in His dealing with humanity. A good teacher, when faced with a class of rebellious roughnecks, may have to resort to disciplinary measures he would prefer not to use but which he knows are necessary in order to gain an atmosphere in which those desiring to learn will have an opportunity. He will do everything possible to win the rebels, but if his best efforts fail, he may be forced to expel the ones who clearly show no interest in anything except disrupting the system. Sometimes things have gotten so bad in this world that God has had to resort to stern measures so that the individual who wants to know about God can make an intelligent decision.

At one time God found only eight persons in all the world with whom there was any hope of His communicating. All the others had irrevocably decided upon rebellion against God and His principles, despite every reconciling effort on His part. They were drowned in a great universal flood (Genesis 6:5-7; 7:1-24).

A casual reading of this story in Genesis may make God appear tyrannical to some--"Keep my laws or I'll drown you or burn you." However, an examination of all the facets of the situation reveals that God is not the tyrant He may at first appear to be.

First of all, it is significant that God does not conjure up certain laws and rules and then proclaim that those who are on His side will have to abide by these just because He says so. Rather, there are certain great principles of unselfishness and orderliness operative in the universe that it is necessary for a creature to obey if he is to live happily with his fellows. They are as natural as the law of gravity and perhaps even more unchangeable. God does not change them, because they are a part of His character.

These principles, as adapted to humanity, are stated in the Ten Commandments. Through God's infinite wisdom He knows the sure consequences of rebellion against them. Were an entire population to make its final, irrevocable decision to disregard these laws of life, the consequences would be chaos and misery. At times human beings have rebelled to such a degree that God has seen that to continue their existence would serve no useful purpose, either to them or anyone else. The great Deluge is one notable example. The final judgment of this world will be another.

At the close of earth's history everyone will have made his choice for or against God and the laws of life. Those who have chosen rebellion will reap the awful, but natural, consequences of their lawless behavior. They will meet a just and merciful end (2 Peter 3:9, 10). An end vastly different from the horrible and unjust picture of a God who tortures lost souls forever in unquenchable flames.

Another situation shedding light on God's character is found in the experience of Elijah, one of the greatest of the prophets. Several hundred years after their experience at Mount Sinai, God was still trying to keep alive a knowledge of truth through the Israelite nation. By this time the nation had divided into two kingdoms. The northern kingdom had reached a low point in its history. Through the influence of a weak, selfish king and an idolatrous, wicked queen reverence for the true God had been all but banished from the land. This was the situation Elijah faced when he stood alone for God against the 450 prophets of Baal, the heathen weather god, and the 400 prophets of the groves on Mount Carmel. The story is recorded in 1 Kings 18:20-40. Thousands of Israelites watched to see whether there was still a God in heaven. God revealed Himself in a most convincing and spectacular manner--again with fireworks and by the death of heathen priests who had duped Israel into idolatry. Thousands were convinced they should serve God.

One notable exception to this marvelous change was Jezebel, the wicked queen. She sent word to Elijah that she intended to have his head shortly. At this point the great prophet's courage failed him and he fled. But God came to him and treated him ever so gently in spite of the fact that he temporarily lost his faith. In that barren wilderness God taught Elijah some important things. Heretofore Elijah had observed God as He worked in mighty upheavals of the forces of nature and celestial fireworks. Now, lest even His trusted prophet should forget that this was not His preferred way of talking to His people, He hid him in a safe place and caused a great fire, an earthquake, and a mighty whirlwind to pass by. Elijah expected God to be in each of these and was surprised when in the quietness there came a still, small voice that spoke to Elijah's receptive conscience. This was God--God speaking as He prefers to speak.

All too frequently throughout the history of this world there have been too few who were interested in listening to God. Many are perplexed because the gracious God whom we serve resorts to methods that appear to be somewhat out of character and cause Him to be misunderstood. But let us not forget that this is simply an extreme effort to save from the natural consequences of their own rebellion those who would not otherwise listen. But this is not God's preferred method. The supreme example of His preferred method was revealed when He said in effect, "I will go to the world Myself. I will live as a man among men. I will even allow My rebellious creatures to kill Me in a shameful manner, so there can be no question about the kind of person I am."

What more could He do? What more could I ask as evidence that He is completely trustworthy and deserving of my highest confidence, trust, and admiration?

A Time to Sleep

That people die is a fact all too obvious to humanity. To those of us who are physicians, death is certainly no stranger. Death eventually comes to all men. To some who are very old, feeble, and often lonely, it may be a welcome relief. Others may be struck down in youth, or at the height of their career. The Grim Reaper is not even a respecter of infancy and childhood.

God is often blamed for death. I have seen people come bitter and hate God because they thought He took an innocent child's life. On the contrary, there is much evidence that God is the Life-giver--the Source of life--not the life-taker. God does not decree when each shall die. People die for a myriad of reasons for which God is certainly not responsible. Not long ago a friend of mine was killed in a head-on collision because someone driving another car was drunk and crossed the highway center divider. Can you blame god for this person's intoxication?

I recently watched a young man die who was hit by an automobile. He had been playing a variation of the game known as "chicken." He stood in the middle of the road while his buddies drove their car at high speed toward him. He was to jump clear only at the last second. He waited an instant too long and paid with his life. Would credit this to God?

We die because we violate the great natural laws of health, sometimes knowingly, sometimes ignorantly. It is now recognized that long-continued cigarette smoking often causes lung cancer. If a man continues to smoke in spite of this knowledge, gets lung cancer and dies, can he blame God?

Admittedly, the cause of much suffering and death is not as obvious as in the above examples, but they do serve to illustrate the fact that God is not some giant puppeteer who capriciously pulls the strings of life and

death. If God ordinarily is not responsible for death, then who is?

Sometime in the distant ages of the past one being whom God had created, and whom He had honored above all other creatures of the universe, became dissatisfied with his position and became jealous of God. He accused God of being not a gracious, loving Being, but an arbitrary, unreasonable ruler. Finally he openly rebelled against God's government. He was convincing enough to persuade one third of all the angels in heaven to follow him in rebellion. God had said the way of happiness and life was to be found in certain great universal principles of love, unselfishness, and concern for others. "Not so," said the rebel. "These rules infringe on the rights of intelligent beings. We will not obey."

Now, if God were like most human beings, He would have said, "You are a rebel; I have warned you over and over; now you obey Me or I will destroy you." He could easily have done this. After all, He had the power. He had created this being. But since that is not His nature, He said, "I'm sorry that you still persist in this, because I can see it will result in much trouble and terrible suffering. Nevertheless, I will give you the chance to demonstrate whether or not your charges are just."

So this is how Lucifer, "the light bearer," the prince of angels, became Satan the "adversary." He succeeded in convincing the first two people on a small planet called Earth that God was wrong and he was right; so they joined him in his rebellion. What has resulted to all humanity has been sickness, sorrow, and death. It is not because an arbitrary God manipulates us, not even because an angry God has said, "You have broken My rules, so I will punish you," but because for thousands of years the human race has faced the consequences of being in disharmony with the great universal principles that naturally bring health, life, and happiness.

We have been under the influence of the great rebel, the adversary, or Satan, and human history has shown what the sad effects of this influence have been on

humanity. This story of the origin of rebellion in the universe has been narrated in my own words, but it's based on the following Biblical record: Ezekiel 28:12-17; Isaiah 14:12-14; Revelation 12:7-9; Luke 10:18; Romans 5:12; Genesis 3.

One of the most commonly misunderstood biblical passages regarding God and His relationship to death is Job 1:21: "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away." This statement, made by a good and patient man named Job, represents his understanding of the situation at the time. The entire first two chapters of the book of Job show it was Satan and not God who caused Job's suffering, and it is Satan, not God, who causes ours.

A Time to Awaken

The death of the redeemed is not the end of their existence. The teachings of the entire Bible stress this. The Bible is filled with promises that the dead will rise again. It would be much more difficult for me to face my serious illness with courage were it not for this belief. Though often in difficulty, Job was certain of life after death (Job 19:25, 26). The Bible speaks of the resurrection as the "blessed hope" (Titus 2:13).

Christ, our example, was a symbol of all who will be raised to life. Listen to the apostle Paul speak of this in 1 Corinthians 15:12-23, Phillips:

"Now if the rising of Christ from the dead is the very heart of our message, how can some of you deny that there is any resurrection? For if there is no such thing as the resurrection of the dead, then Christ was never raised. But if Christ was not raised neither our preaching nor your faith has any meaning at all. Further it would mean that we are lying in our witness for God for we have given our solemn testimony that he did raise up Christ--and that is utterly false if it should be true that the dead do not, in fact, rise again! For if the dead do not rise neither did Christ rise, and if Christ did not rise your

faith is futile and your sins have never been forgiven. Moreover, those who have died believing in Christ are utterly dead and gone. Truly, if our hope in Christ were limited to this life only we should, of all mankind, be the most to be pitied!

"But the glorious fact is that Christ did rise from the dead: he has become the very first to rise of all who sleep the sleep of death. As death entered the world through a man, so has rising from the dead come to us through a man! As members of a sinful race all men die; as members of the Christ of God all men shall be raised to life, each in his proper order, with Christ the very first and after him all those who belong to him when he comes."

This great raising to life is to take place when Christ returns to earth:

"The Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words" (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17, R.S.V.).

Christ Himself promised many times that He would return to this earth--not to live and die as a human being, but as the rightful Ruler of the world. He promised that all who die believing in Him would experience life again. One of the most famous of these promises is found in John 14:1-3:

"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."

In unmistakable language He promises in Matthew 24:30, 31, R.S.V.:

"Then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven,

and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory; and he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."

Throughout Matthew 24 and in many other places Christ left clues as to the time of His return. From studying these signs in the light of present world conditions, I am convinced that the coming of Christ, with the great awakening of the dead, is not far in the future. The apostle Paul told the Christian believers in ancient Corinth that when Christ comes back the Christian dead will be raised to immortality, to life that shall never end (1 Corinthians 15:51-54). But the question is, What kind of life?

If that life were as it is now on this earth, many would not want to live forever. If we still had to endure pain, sickness, disloyalty, selfishness, and crime, eternal life would not be a desirable goal. These things, as we have seen, are caused by the great adversary, Satan, and having by this time proved to all the universe the sad results of his rebellion, he will exist no more (Ezekiel 28:19).

Life after death has long been caricatured as floating on a cloud, strumming a harp endlessly. Many people consciously or subconsciously have accepted this interpretation but have found little desirable in this kind of existence. Were this a true picture of eternity, I would certainly have to concur with them. Very briefly, I would like you to look at a few pictures of the afterlife that mean much to me. One of Christ's closest friends, the beloved John, while an old man exiled on a lonely, rocky island, gives a clear and beautiful picture of life after the resurrection. Listen to this wonderful description as found in Revelation.

"Then he showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on

either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. There shall no more be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall worship him; they shall see his face, and his name shall be on their foreheads. And night shall be no more; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they shall reign for ever and ever." (Revelation 22:1-5, R.S.V.).

"They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water; and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes" (chap. 7:16, 17, R.S.V.).

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a great voice from the throne saying, Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away" (chap. 21:1-4, R.S.V.).

Isaiah was a man who lived many centuries before John. He believed in this God we have talked about and he was given a glimpse of the conditions of the afterlife of those who have become friends of God in this world. Picture the enrapturing scene as he describes it in Isaiah 65:17-25, R.S.V.:

"For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. . . . They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and

another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity; for they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the Lord, and their children with them. Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, says the Lord."

From these descriptions I can only conclude that the life hereafter will be in a very real place, with real people doing actual and interesting things without the hindrances of disease and death and all the disappointments of this life.

What is the price of this eternal life? It is amazingly little. It is the same whether a person is rich or poor. First of all, there must be a willingness to look at evidence with honesty--evidence for God's existence, His revelations of Himself in the Bible, His dealings with humanity, and especially His clearest revelation in the life and death of Jesus Christ. Then one must decide whether he finds this God worthy of admiration, worship, love, and loyalty. If he finds these requirements are just and is convinced that they are for his best good, he places his life, his entire being, in the hands of God, willing to do in His strength whatever may be required of him.

Even though we fail because of our human weakness, God forgives if we confess and renew our consecration to Him. We can trust Jesus Christ, who lived without mistake and showed that God's laws are fair and just. He has promised that all who believe in Him and are loyal to Him will be accounted as being as perfect as He is. Eternal life is certain. Millions, finding the evidence for God's love and graciousness more than adequate, have committed their lives to Him. My greatest privilege is to be counted among this group, and because I trust Him, I can face with courage the prospect of a very shortened

stay in this world. I am completely convinced that the great adversary of souls can do nothing to me in this life that can prevent my citizenship in God's eternity.

Good Night Until the Morning

This was to be a glorious chapter. The story of a miraculous healing from one of the most dreaded diseases of our time--metastatic cancer. The case was well documented--no cure is known to man. My husband felt that perhaps God would choose this case to strengthen the faith of His people by showing that His power to heal has not changed. And so he lived with this hope. And yet at the same time he knew that if God did not heal him he would accept the results in faith until the day when our questions will all be answered.

During his illness many friends joined in this hope and a regular "prayer time" each day was set. What a tremendous blessing this was to us as we realized that friends all over the country, indeed all over the world, were praying for him at six o'clock each evening. Added to this, several special groups of ministers and other men and women of God came to pray for a special revelation of God's healing and power. And their prayers were heard and they were answered according to God's unlimited love and infinite wisdom. Perhaps this last chapter, then, is the story of a miracle after all. Not the kind of miracle we hoped for and for which we prayed, but a greater miracle. The miracle of a man who passed patiently through extreme suffering and met death with no fear at all, because he knew that his God was in charge and all was well. The miracle of a weak, sinful human being, so filled with God's gracious spirit as to be able to reveal to others the love and character of God. The miracle of a soul now sleeping, ready and waiting for

a grand eternity with this loving Creator, Saviour, and God.

While my husband was very ill he made a tape recording for me and one for his parents. This was kept by a friend and given to us after his death. It has been a wonderful inspiration and blessing to us and I would like to share some excerpts from it with a prayer that it will be an inspiration to others as well.

"At this point we still don't know whether the Lord will perform a miracle and I will live longer, but as we have discussed so many times, the Lord often isn't free in the setup in this old sinful world to do the things that He would like to do. So in case worse comes to worse I wanted to tell you a few things on tape that might make things a little easier for you because I am sure that this will be one of your darkest hours. . . .

"Above and beyond all, dear, don't lose faith. I know these situations are hard to understand. As I have told you, I went through a terrible time of crisis in my own life regarding this problem. But I think I solved it, in fact, I am sure I solved it. I don't understand everything about it, but at least I have learned enough about God to know He is infinitely loving, that He is as sorry as we are, probably much more so, when these things happen. He cries with us. He goes through them with us. . . .

"So, good night, darling, until the morning."

To this I can only add, with God's help, I will be there to say, "Good morning, darling," with our little daughter at my side.

Epilogue

Dr. Fisher died on November 29, 1969. The warmth and composure of his faith--especially during the last few months of his life-- were an inspiration to those around him. In spite of the increasing discomfort, he always spoke so well of God and seemed to be more concerned

with reassuring and strengthening the faith of his visitors.

This scripture, a favorite of special meaning to Dr. Fisher, was read at the funeral:

"I am convinced that there is nothing in death or life, in the realm of spirits or superhuman powers, in the world as it is or the world as it shall be, in the forces of the universe, in heights or depths--nothing in all creation that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Romans 8:38, 39, N.E.B.

If you found this little book helpful, you will appreciate reading *Living With Suffering* by Paul Heubach.

On March 10, 1983 Professor Heubach was struck by a speeding car. His hurtling body crumpled the hood, shattered the windshield, and dented the roof before it was catapulted into the street behind the automobile.

Twenty years earlier Heubach's booklet *The Problem of Human Suffering* had appeared in print. At that time, what he wrote had been basically theoretical. Now the tables had been turned. Heubach had encountered a brush with death.

"To sit in an easy chair and philosophize about suffering is one thing. To suffer, is another. And to be able to rejoice in suffering is something else," he comments.

So Professor Heubach has written a new booklet--*Living With Suffering*. While he penned the manuscript, his right leg was immobilized in a cast; he had to hobble around on crutches; and he was suffering with osteomyelitis.

Out of this pain comes practical help for all Heubach's fellow sufferers. It is possible to live with suffering--and not lose faith but to grow in character and to develop a deeper trust in God.

Review and Herald Publishing Association is pleased to share *Living With Suffering* with readers everywhere. It is available at your local Adventist Book Center.
