

Summer 2003

This being the twenty-fifth year of ministry on the hill, I can state unequivocally that God's grace is the only explanation as to why we remain a quarter of a century after those first serious Bible students knocked on our door. In other words, His grace started this ministry and His grace continues to sustain it today. We have many wonderful memories, several of which are recorded in a journal that I review from time to time. Thanks for being part of the dream, and thanks for going on with Jesus. There is no way we could express our gratitude for your prayers and support over the years. It has been worth every second of the journey and has resulted in the most exciting adventure we could have imagined. There have been "highs" beyond articulation and "valleys" attempting to overwhelm, but the "Constant" has been Jesus, who alone has been our strength, shield, and comfort.

FAMILY NEWS

Kim, Benjamin and I have enjoyed the summer thus far. We took time to get away for a few days, which was very relaxing. Benjamin also played machine-pitch baseball for the first part of the summer, and we all had fun rubbing elbows with his teammates and their families. We learned some things from this experience that will be needed down the road, just as every situation is an opportunity to teach your child something new about life, people in general, and their Creator. We spend much time doing that, constantly looking for new ways to make learning fun. Kim remains a constant source of encouragement to both Benjamin and me, and faithful friend to the end.

As far as family news goes, one of the most exciting things to report has to do with my dad. As some of you know, he was wounded in World War II and lost the vision in his right eye. His injury occurred some fifty-seven years ago during the Battle of the Bulge—after having landed with the Fourth Division at Normandy (first wave at Utah Beach) and fighting through France to help liberate Paris from German control. Dad recently developed a cataract on each of his eyes, but before operating on dad's good eye, his doctor elected to "experiment" with his bad eye to see if vision might be restored. The cataract would need to be removed and a new lens inserted. Long story short, dad can see through his right eye for the first time in fifty-seven years. His vision is distorted, but at least we know he has a "spare with potential" should something happen to his good eye. As long as I live, I will never forget the moment the nurse removed his patch and asked if he could see through the eye that had been defective all these years. There was an eye chart located across the room, and true to form, just as dad has done everything else during his eighty-one years on the planet, he very calmly stated, "I can read the letters on that chart"—no emotion whatsoever in his voice. Mother and I added some "zip" with our very verbal "Praise the Lord," and my gut told me the nurse wanted to do the same—her professionalism not allowing such, however. The climax occurred when his doctor arrived. I could tell he was "tickled pink" and so excited for dad. It reminded me of the story of John 9:1-41, where Jesus healed the man born blind. What a day to remember!

MINISTRY NEWS

Last semester I continued teaching The Gospels from a Jewish Perspective on Tuesday nights (my fourth semester of this study, which will continue at least one more semester). I am very encouraged with what I am learning about Jesus as I research this subject. What a leader He was—in every sense of the word. His flawless character drew the most interesting responses from

those exposed to His ministry. They either loved Him or hated Him, for there was no middle ground. Therefore, He received ridicule from the religious community yet reverence from those seeking life. I have also noticed His patience with the apostles, overlooking their temporary shortcomings to see the bigger picture—their potential after His ascension. Those guys “did not” get what He was saying during His earthly ministry. However, the transformation that occurred in Acts 2 was incredible! Therefore, there is much hope for me in 2003.

As some of you know, I have been writing Bible studies for the past several years. We mail them out on a consistent basis and are very encouraged with how God seems to have used them. A few weeks ago I received a letter from a missionary requesting permission to translate the courses into two languages— Russian and Ukrainian. We consented, naturally, for the courses will be taught in Bible schools within those countries once the work is completed. They will also be posted on a website in those languages for anyone interested in accessing them. We look forward to seeing how God uses these materials and hope to someday visit the schools where they are being utilized. We also heard recently that our Romans and Hebrews courses are being used as resource materials in a seminary here in the states, again confirming God’s grace and sovereignty.

We have added Just Thinking to our website, a feature you can access for input from God’s word. It will be updated as often as possible, giving you a variety of things to “think about” as you walk with Christ.

The Gospel study is now available on CD. Also, if you should desire to view our newsletter online rather than receive it through the postal service, just let us know.

We are more thankful every day that God sent Rebekah Edwards and Shae Newsome to live on the hill. They are godly young ladies and a great source of encouragement to all. Brandon Karstetter continues to live here as well. He wears many hats, the main one relating to the servicing of our website (www.lifeonthehill.org). We are thankful for his heart for Jesus and his willingness to do “whatever” when called upon. Rich Jones also lives here, and has done so periodically for the past three years. We look forward to what God has in store for him in the future.

Our retreat schedule for the remainder of the year is filling quickly. A variety of churches and Christian organizations have reserved weekends for the summer, fall and winter months. If you should desire to bring a group to the hill, we would suggest that you call or email us as soon as possible (email address—contact@lifeonthehill.org).

EVENTS IN THE REMAINDER OF 2003 SPONSORED BY B.A.S.I.C. TRAINING

Note: Additional dates will be posted on our website as they are scheduled. **August 19** Tuesday night Bible study begins at 7:00 p.m. We will continue our study of the Gospels. **September 5-6** Bible School—the first eight chapters of the book of Romans—begins Friday (5th) at 6:00 p.m. and ends Saturday (6th) at 5:00 p.m. You can register online. **October 17-19** Annual fall retreat for men and women, both single and married. We have had much fun on this weekend in the past and hope to see several of you this fall. You can register online.

A WORD OF THANKS

God's faithfulness continues to amaze us. Thank you for your prayers, support and faithfulness in pressing on to know Christ. We consider ourselves blessed because we are allowed to teach people about Jesus on a consistent basis. To have time to pray, study, write and tell others about Christ is our idea of a dream come true. Without you this could not occur, so thanks, and may you be blessed, dear friends, by He who is our life!

THOUGHTS FROM THE HILL SUMMER 2003

The following is taken from my notes on The Gospels from a Jewish Perspective. This study will continue at least one more semester. Notes, tapes and CD's are available if you should desire to dig deeper.

John 15:1-8

1 "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2 "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He take away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it, that it may bear more fruit. 3 "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. 4 "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me. 5 "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing. 6 "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch, and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. 7 "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you. 8 "By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples (NAS)

Jesus states that He is the vine and His Father is the vinedresser (John 15:1). Every branch in Jesus that does not bear fruit, the Father "takes away" (v.2). Be careful with the phrase "takes away," for in the Greek it can also be translated "to raise from the ground, to raise upward, elevate, lift up or to draw up." A branch in the Holy Land could not produce fruit while lying on the ground. This caused the caretaker to "lift up" the branch by placing a rock or similar object underneath it, allowing it to properly produce. Thus, every branch that does not bear fruit the Father "lifts up." How encouraging! On the other hand, every productive branch is pruned by the Father to enhance its fruit-bearing capability (v.2). This "pruning" in our lives seems painful but results in additional fruit as we yield to Christ's life within. The disciples were already clean because of what they had heard from the Savior (v.3), His words cleansing them in that it had begun to rectify their thinking, even though much of what they had heard remained information. Later, however, on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), this information would become revelation and the Christ in the disciples would change the world.

Considering what we discussed in John 14:10 (that Jesus did no works—the Father doing everything through Him), it is easy to comprehend what Jesus means by the word "abiding" (John 15:4). For believers to abide in Jesus basically means to live by His life (Romans 5:10; Colossians 3:4), just as Jesus lived by His Father's life (John 14:10). In other words, to "abide" means to live by the life of another, the "another" being Jesus, who in turn, is living by the Father's life. The by-product of abiding in Him is having Him abide in us (John 15:4) by manifesting His presence in and through us. No fruit can be borne otherwise (John 15:4). This means that the only meaningful fruit borne through our lives will result from the activity of the Father through the Son as we yield to the Son's life within us (John 15:5; Romans 5:10). No self-effort will produce such fruit (John 15:5).

What follows in John 15:6 must be taken through the full counsel of God's word for proper interpretation. Some, as a result of taking this verse out of context, have concluded that believers who do not abide in Jesus are cast into hell—thus forfeiting their salvation. I disagree with this view for the following reasons. First off, Jesus is addressing the manner in which fruit can be borne through the believer's life in the first six verses of this chapter. Second, 1Corinthians 3:12-15 speaks of how the "quality" of each believer's works (fruit) will be judged by God. Although the works which fail the test will burn, the believer will be saved, "yet so as through fire" (1Corinthians 3:15). What works, then, will pass the test? Those done as the believer trusts Christ's life within to accomplish them. The works that burn are those done in the believer's strength. Remember, it is the "quality" (how the works were accomplished) that is the issue in 1Corinthians 3:12-15—not quantity.

When all the church is judged at the judgment seat of Christ (2Corinthians 5:10), only those works done by the Father, through the Son, and in turn, through the believer, will withstand the test of fire. Therefore, I view John 15:6 as dealing with the burning of the believer's bad fruit, not the believer himself, for he is "saved, yet so as through fire" (1Corinthians 3:15). All works of the believer will be judged, not the believer himself, for he will be presented to the Father "blameless with great joy" (Jude 24). However, his works done in his own strength are sinful (Romans 14:23) and are recorded, but no penalty is associated with these works. The penalty for these deeds was dealt with through the cross. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1), so the judgment seat of Christ (2Corinthians 5:10) is not for the purpose of condemning the believer, but for judging the "quality" of the believer's works (1Corinthians 3:13). Followers of Christ will be rewarded for those times they trusted Him to accomplish the work.

So long as believers abide in Jesus and His words abide in them, their prayers will be answered (John 15:7). Why is this so?

"Abiding" enhances the maturing process, and with maturity comes the ability to pray more meaningful prayers and trust God with the results of those prayers—even when His answer is "no."

As fruit is borne through us, by allowing Christ to do the fruit-bearing, we bring much glory to the Father and thus prove to be Jesus' disciples (John 15:8). If Jesus lived by the Father's life, and continues to do so today, His disciples will live their lives in the same manner. They will yield to Christ's life within, Who, in turn, is yielding to the Father.

When I teach on the subject of living by the life of another, I am normally asked to describe how one experiences such a thing. For me, at least, it begins with practicing Christ's presence in all that I do. It is, therefore, believing (whether I feel like it or not), that Jesus is working through me as I go about my daily routine. To be honest, much of the little I know about this subject I have learned through failure. However, the failure does little to discourage me. Why? The little I know, and what I have experienced since coming to know it, is one hundred times better than the best of times I experienced while attempting to do the work myself. So have fun today as you practice living by our Savior's life. He truly is the victory that always, in every situation, overcomes the world.

B.A.S.I.C. Training, P.O. Box 13 989 Hardin Wadesboro Rd. Hardin, Ky. 42048 Phone (270) 437-4172 contact@lifeonthehill.org