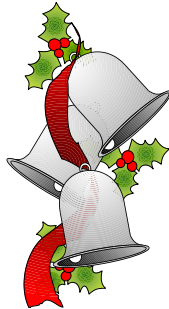


In God We Trust

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

For December I would normally write a message about Christmas, but I think the LORD wants me to give you a different message this month—one that's not about Christmas, although the fact that God's Son came into the world as a human child is a powerful reason to trust in God's goodness.



One of the most important themes of the Bible is this: **Trust God**. Consider this Bible wisdom and the promise it contains:

**Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
 and do not lean on your own understanding.
 6 In all your ways acknowledge him,
 and he will make straight your paths.**
Proverbs 3:5-6

Trust God. Trust that He loves you, and that His desires for you are for good, not evil. Also trust that He is fully able to do whatever it takes to bring about His good intentions toward you. Finally, trust that He won't change His mind about loving you, no matter what you have done or will do.



Do not lean on your own understanding. Let's face it, God is smarter than you and I are. He always knows what He is doing. You and I can't make that claim. Many times we don't consider the consequences of our actions, for ourselves or for others. Once in a while we even do something that we know God doesn't want us to do, or we fail to do something that He clearly does want us to do.

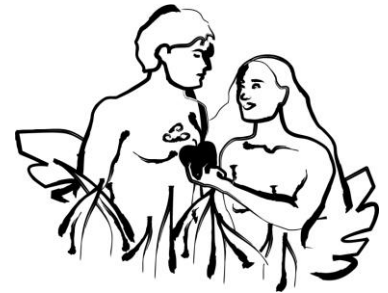
Twice in Proverbs God's word tells us that

**There is a way that seems right to a man,
 but its end is the way to death.**

Does every wrong choice result in death? No, but choosing to follow one's own path through life, rather than God's way, is ultimately disastrous. We

cannot save ourselves from death; only Jesus can do that. He will do it, if we will allow Him to.

Most of the Old Testament is about God's desire to be trusted and obeyed by His human children, and their failure often to do so. It started already in the Garden of Eden, when the serpent convinced Eve that God was a liar, and was selfishly keeping something good from her and Adam. Those two didn't trust God; so they disobeyed Him, and it cost them (and us) dearly! By their disobedience, death came into the world.



Later in Genesis we see Abraham, that great hero of the faith who "believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness." (Rom. 4:3) But he, too, had difficulty trusting God all the time. He lied about Sarah being his wife (Gen. 12), and he let himself be talked into fathering a son (Ishmael) by Sarah's maid Hagar (Gen. 16), rather than waiting patiently for God's promised miracle to occur. Finally Sarah became pregnant and bore Isaac, the son God had promised. From this we learn a principle: trusting God means waiting for His timing, even if it doesn't meet our expectations or desires.

Sometimes it's hard to trust God because things aren't going well for us. The book of Job is about that. Job was a wealthy man, he had a fine family, he had everything going for him. God allowed Satan to take it all away, leaving Job desolate and in physical pain. We don't know why God allowed that—maybe just to provide an example for us. For Job says, "even if He kills me, I will still trust Him." (13:15) Job is thinking he can argue his case with God, and depend on God to be a just judge.

Sometimes it's hard to say, "Thy will be done, LORD," because what God wants may not be what we want right now. When that happens it is even more important to trust God's wisdom and His

goodness. After all, He does know what He is doing, even when we don't.

In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. The Bible tells over and over about Israel and their lack of trust in God. Time after time they promised to obey and trust the LORD, and time after time He blessed them with land and fine herds and good crops. Then they would become self-satisfied, neglect their God, and even turn to the worship of other gods.

It would be a good thing if we today would learn from Israel's much-repeated bad examples. "In God we trust" has been the official motto of the United States for more than fifty years. This is quite ironic, because so much of what goes on in our society shows that it is absolutely not true. We trust in money and possessions, we trust our politicians (sometimes), we trust the news media, we trust our sports stars, we even trust our friends and family to some extent. But God? Unless we're in big trouble and can't figure a way out of it, most of us, most of the time, pretty much ignore the LORD. We casually abuse His name — "Oh my God! Has become such a common and meaningless exclamation of surprise that we even abbreviate it (OMG) in text-message jargon.



God is banished from public life and public view. One judge even ruled that the Ten Commandments could not be displayed in schools because students might read them and obey them! As for prayer, a few people object to it, so it is not allowed. "In God we trust"?

Biblical morality is passé. Same-sex "marriage" is rapidly becoming the law of the land. And living together, having children, without being married is accepted as normal. Some pornography is still illegal, but all of it is readily available via the Internet, and that is also seen as normal. And, to our eternal shame, abortion on demand—the sacrifice of our unborn children to the god of convenience—is not only legal, but a very lucrative business.

I could go on and on, but here's my point: we, as a society, have forgotten our roots. We no longer trust in God. We take all of His blessings for granted, and we scorn all attempts to restrain our behavior and go back to being subject to His will and His ways. **There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.** Don't be surprised if we reap what we are sowing.

And my final point, as far as this teaching is concerned, is for you: Don't let "the world"—our immoral, selfish, foolish society—or "the flesh"—your own self-indulgent desires—or the devil, who is always eager and ready to trap you—don't let anything keep you from trusting the LORD. You know He loves you, enough to suffer and die for you. He is trusting you to be His child in spirit and truth. Your part is simply to trust that He is your loving Father, in Spirit and in truth.



Sing this song with the psalmist and with me:

**Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and all that is within me,
bless his holy name!
Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits,
who forgives all your iniquity,
who heals all your diseases,
who redeems your life from the pit,
who crowns you with steadfast love and
mercy,
who satisfies you with good
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.**
—Psalms 103:1-5

The Peace of the LORD be with you.

Brother Roland

And by the way ...



Have a Blessed Christmas,
and a faithful and trusting
New Year in 2016.

When Israel went astray, the LORD showed the prophet Ezekiel how He felt about that, and how He proposed to deal with it. We Christians should be groaning and grieving about how we have gone astray.

Ezekiel 8:1-9:10

In the sixth year, in the sixth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I sat in my house, with the elders of Judah sitting before me, the hand of the Lord God fell upon me there. Then I looked, and behold, a form that had the appearance of a man. Below what appeared to be his waist was fire, and above his waist was something like the appearance of brightness, like gleaming metal. He put out the form of a hand and took me by a lock of my head, and the Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven and brought me in visions of God to Jerusalem, to the entrance of the gateway of the inner court that faces north, where was the seat of the image of jealousy, which provokes to jealousy. And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was there, like the vision that I saw in the valley.

Then he said to me, "Son of man, lift up your eyes now toward the north." So I lifted up my eyes toward the north, and behold, north of the altar gate, in the entrance, was this image of jealousy. And he said to me, "Son of man, do you see what they are doing, the great abominations that the house of Israel are committing here, to drive me far from my sanctuary? But you will see still greater abominations."

And he brought me to the entrance of the court, and when I looked, behold, there was a hole in the wall. Then he said to me, "Son of man, dig in the wall." So I dug in the wall, and behold, there was an entrance. And he said to me, "Go in, and see the vile abominations that they are committing here." So I went in and saw. And there, engraved on the wall all around, was every form of creeping things and loathsome beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel. And before them stood seventy men of the elders of the house of Israel, with Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan standing among them. Each had his censer in his hand, and the smoke of the cloud of incense went up. Then he said to me, "Son of man, have you seen what the elders of the house of Israel are doing in the dark, each in his room of pictures? For they say, 'The Lord does not see us, the Lord has forsaken the land.'" He said also to me, "You will see still greater abominations that they commit."

Then he brought me to the entrance of the north gate of the house of the Lord, and behold, there sat women weeping for Tammuz. Then he said to me, "Have you seen this, O son of man? You will see still greater abominations than these."

And he brought me into the inner court of the house of the Lord. And behold, at the entrance of the temple of the Lord, between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men, with their backs to the temple of the Lord, and their faces toward the east, worshiping the sun toward the east. Then he said to me, "Have you seen this, O son of man? Is it too light a thing for the house of Judah to commit the abominations that they commit here, that they should fill the land with violence and provoke me still further to anger? Behold, they put the branch to their nose. Therefore I will act in wrath. My eye will not spare, nor will I have pity. And though they cry in my ears with a loud voice, I will not hear them."

Then he cried in my ears with a loud voice, saying, "Bring near the executioners of the city, each with his destroying weapon in his hand." And behold, six men came from the direction of the upper gate, which faces north, each with his weapon for slaughter in his hand, and with them was a man clothed in linen, with a writing case at his waist. And they went in and stood beside the bronze altar.

Now the glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherub on which it rested to the threshold of the house. And he called to the man clothed in linen, who had the writing case at his waist. And the Lord said to him, "Pass through the city, through Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it." And to the others he said in my hearing, "Pass through the city after him, and strike. Your eye shall not spare, and you shall show no pity. Kill old men outright, young men and maidens, little children and women, but touch no one on whom is the mark. And begin at my sanctuary." So they began with the elders who were before the house. Then he said to them, "Defile the house, and fill the courts with the slain. Go out." So they went out and struck in the city. And while they were striking, and I was left alone, I fell upon my face, and cried, "Ah, Lord God! Will you destroy all the remnant of Israel in the outpouring of your wrath on Jerusalem?"

Then he said to me, "The guilt of the house of Israel and Judah is exceedingly great. The land is full of blood, and the city full of injustice. For they say, 'The Lord has forsaken the land, and the Lord does not see.' As for me, my eye will not spare, nor will I have pity; I will bring their deeds upon their heads."

Count Your Blessings

Have you thought about the many blessings you can be thankful for? Each one of us has many reasons to be grateful for God's gifts. Try making your own list. Enjoy!

Puzzle:

H S W W S F A I T H I N J E S U S C H R I S T J G C H W R O J
 A Z O M D R L K K F F Q Y M G N E J S K N U H H D H G Y V T R
 U F R X C C E D A N E T E R N A L H O M E L S T E O U Y Y G E
 P X G R H K Y H M M W N N N I F O X I F R J D L L P N Q N V W
 A G O N N Z A P T G T F J S E N Y V G P C G T A I E Q I A A O
 B V T S P I H S N O I T A L E R G N I V O L V E R F Y A L W P
 K M S T O H W V R R E L N Z S E D P K F K O I H F O R H I X T
 F O E U H F H S G A V V V R R R A L N X A L M D J R E E F A I
 A E I W T E A N T A D F R M O X E R I R J J O N S T Z A E L R
 M L T R V Q B Z T L T W P E F C Y H S H X Y E A V O A R F S I
 O Q I S D N E I R F N A I T S I R H C F C R K H W M D T O R P
 U L N R V R O U B J K K M K E O Q E P A O V S T N O A F R E S
 T B U C I N T R D L C Z Z J Y E T X S F E R U G I R E O L H Y
 H V T K S J K C V H E L U O E P I S S U J T H N B R R R I T L
 F O R G I V E N E S S O F S I N S E Y P O J X E N O B L V O O
 O S O D O G H T I W E C A E P F S B S A A P T R A W Y O I R H
 R E P G N I K R O W R O F S D N A H T E W R S T B R L V N B T
 S L P Z F T X B O S O C M M E D D R G G L P E S X B I I G D C
 P C O V O N G N I D N A T S R E D N U R O F D N I M A N V N J
 E N M L R A W H O L E N E W L I F E I A A C R R T R D G G A B
 A U K D T C J R O C I K J X F K K L Q N S C H E U S Y V K S U
 K D I M H L E S S O N S L E A R N E D D L R E A S P M A P R C
 I N V B E F P N S O W Q E E O P X L V P K W O T L P E I U E S
 N A G H F S L N D R Z K Q P U E F X I A Y N P B O L E V Q T I
 G S E P U W I G N I N R A E L R O F Y R O M E M H C E C J S H
 K T A S T S A P W I I S F C P W G K N E D W B V S G H N T I R
 I N X B U T H E F A T H E R S L O V E N L O R R A D I A G S S
 D U N O R C M E O O N A S J G A H F J T A V D M K R H E N E A
 H A C Y E D S F R Q V H H C F V L E G S F O R W A L K I N G S
 S T I B A H T S A P M O R F M O D E E R F N R H S V X O D T E

Words:

He has given me

MY DAILY BREAD
 STRENGTH AND HEALTH
 LEGS FOR WALKING
 HANDS FOR WORKING
 EYES FOR SEEING
 EARS FOR HEARING
 A MOUTH FOR SPEAKING
 SENSES FOR ENJOYING
 MEMORY FOR LEARNING
 A MIND FOR UNDERSTANDING
 A HEART FOR LOVING
 A LIFE FOR LIVING

He has given me

LOVING RELATIONSHIPS
 - SPOUSE

- CHILDREN
 - PARENTS
 - SISTERS AND BROTHERS
 - GRANDPARENTS
 - AUNTS AND UNCLES
 - COUSINS
 - CHRISTIAN FRIENDS
 - PASTORS
 - TEACHERS
 - MENTORS
 - NEIGHBORS

He has given me

THE BIBLE
 LESSONS LEARNED
 GRACE TO CHANGE
 FREEDOM FROM PAST HABITS

OPPORTUNITIES TO GROW
 CHALLENGES
 VISION FOR THE FUTURE
 WAYS TO SERVE OTHERS
 SELF-RESPECT

He has given me

THE FATHER'S LOVE
 FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST
 FORGIVENESS OF SINS
 SALVATION
 HOLY SPIRIT POWER
 HOPE FOR TOMORROW
 A WHOLE NEW LIFE
 PEACE WITH GOD
 AN ETERNAL HOME