

Lift Me Up



He sets on
high those who are
lowly, and those who mourn
are lifted to safety.

—Job 5:11



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Dedication

To the Tuesday morning ladies' class
at North Jackson Church of Christ
in Jackson, Tennessee, but
especially to Phyllis, my friend
of many years



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Much gratitude is due to Peggy Cole Coulter and Debra G. Wright. May God bless both of them as they, too, strive to be lifted up.



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Introduction

Lift Me Up

“The fear of man brings a snare:
but whoever trusts in the Lord
shall be safe.” Proverbs 29:25

The Lord lifts up those who trust in Him, those who believe to the point of obedience and glorify His name by walking in the light. God truly lifts up His children as they overcome sin and make their way toward heaven. The apostle Paul wrote, “And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom” (2 Timothy 4:18).

Do I really believe those words Paul wrote to Timothy? Do I trust, as did Paul, that God is at work in my life to aid me and help me in my passage through this world?

I certainly am not as strong as Paul. I am sometimes frightened by many things, but that is part of the human condition. And the uncertainty is intensified if God is not the center of one’s existence. Obedience to the gospel, an ever-growing faith in God, an intense involvement in Scripture, an acknowledgment of the great sacrifice that Jesus made, and the realization that the Father has a plan for our lives provide an antidote for fear. I need to remember Paul’s words to the church in Rome, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31).

Are you afraid of being alone because you’ve lost those dear to you? Are you scared because you have no one on

whom to depend when problems arise? Are you apprehensive about growing older and perhaps becoming frail or ill, or are you young and unattached and anxious about what the future holds? Are you troubled about how to bring up your children, or are you worried that your adult offspring are disobedient or not living up to their potential in God's kingdom, the church? Are you fearful because of the possibility of financial problems? Are you afraid of death? The list is endless.


I have been prey to many worries and misgivings and have felt dread and apprehension all too often in my life. Yet, when I give in to these fears and anxieties and allow them to take hold in my mind and in my life, I must realize that I am allowing Satan—how politically incorrect it is to believe in the existence of the devil!—to have power over me. God is always in control, and He takes care of His own. Henry F. Lyte, in his beautiful hymn, “Abide with Me,” called God the “Help of the helpless.” In my own experience, my Lord has never refused to aid me. My God has never failed to make a way for me, and there is no reason to think that He will stop helping me now. The primary lesson I have had to learn is that God's way is not always my way (Isaiah 55:8–9).

In times of doubt, in times of fear, I simply have to remember that God is keeping watch, waiting and willing to lift me up. One only has to recognize God's power and grace as the psalmist did when he petitioned the Father, “Hold me up, and I shall be safe” (Psalm 119:117). I need also to acknowledge in my heart as did the psalmist, “The Lord raises those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous” (Psalm 146:8).

There's an adage that states, "Give your problems to God—He's up all night anyway." Once again it was an unnamed psalmist who said, "He who keeps you will not slumber" (Psalm 121:3). I realize that it is the nation of Israel that was spoken of in this scripture, but the principle applies to any child of God. Our Lord neither slumbers nor sleeps. In the intensive-care waiting room of life, the Father is keeping vigil with us and for us.

Solomon, the writer of most of Proverbs, expressed the thought that God wants to lift us up another way. "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it, and are safe" (Proverbs 18:10). Remember that the phrase "is safe" is a Hebrew expression that really means "is set aloft." The idea is that one is secure—one is lifted up—when he is in proper relationship with God.

Even though God's chosen people, the children of Israel, deviated from God's plan for them over and over again, in reality, they knew only the Lord could help them or lift them up. Each time the Hebrew people turned to Him, they realized God was the source of relief for their problems, whether those problems were physical or spiritual, and He was the one who could raise them up above their difficulties. The prophet Isaiah communicated that idea even more succinctly when he wrote, "For I, the Lord your God, will hold your right hand, saying to you, 'Fear not, I will help you'" (Isaiah 41:13).



*Hold me up,
and I shall
be safe.*

—Psalm 119:117

Oh, yes, I want God to help me and hold my right hand, and my left one also, for that matter, especially when the going gets rough. Life is so much easier when one asks God to hold her up and help her stand.

The chapters in this book include an examination of thirteen scriptures from the book of Proverbs that can serve as a reminder that the Lord our God fully intends to lift us up if we will only allow Him to do so. Oh, I want Him to set me on high and claim me for His own. Don't you?

Do Not Consent

“My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent.” Proverbs 1:10

When an individual is tempted to behave in such a way she knows is wrong, she does not have to sin; she still has the power to choose the right course. One does not have to succumb to temptation. There is always a way out. Solomon advised that we always act on that option of refusal. It was Solomon, the third king of Israel, not some twentieth-century slogan writer, who first said, “Just say no.” Solomon cautioned, “My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent” (Proverbs 1:10).

Inspired by the Spirit, the apostle Paul put it another way,

No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Resisting sin is a continuous process, day in and day out. Admittedly, it is not always easy, but it can be done. Of course, there are ways that we can protect ourselves up front. There

are things that we can do to prevent temptation from entering our lives unnecessarily.

Choose Your Friends Wisely

We can choose our friends carefully. We can determine to surround ourselves with those who will help us get to heaven rather than hinder our progress toward that magnificent place. Do your friends exert a negative or positive influence on your spiritual life? Make no mistake; it will be one or the other. Neutrality in friendship is not possible. Someone once said that friendship is not a spectator sport. We are involved with our friends either to our benefit or our detriment. As a teenager, I chose many friends who did not help me in my Christian walk, and even today, I still thank God that He allowed me to live through that period in my life until I learned to choose my friends more wisely. Many of us, if we are truthful, could probably make that statement.

Sometimes the power of the devil comes in the guise of a friend whom we dearly love. If the influence exerted on us by our companions or family is negative or harmful in some way, it is a certainty that Satan has his hand in the relationship and that he is pleased at the results. The devil may even make us feel secure in the company of those who may be detrimental to our spiritual health. Our reasoning may become clouded.

As my children were growing up, they would sometimes blame a friend for their own inappropriate behavior by saying, "He asked me to do it." I would respond with that age-old mother's-reply, "If he asked you to jump off a cliff, would you do that also?" Then I would quote Exodus 23:2, "You shall not follow a crowd to do evil."

We may allow those we love to cause us to lose control. Yet it is the individual's responsibility to govern his own behavior. From the beginning, humans have been prone to blame others. Adam blamed Eve for his sin: "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate" (Genesis 3:12). Yet on the day of judgment, each of us will face God and give an account of our lives. We will not be able to point the finger of blame at someone else. Each of us is answerable for her actions. It will not be acceptable to say, "My friend caused me to drink or do drugs or to gossip or to be unkind or to steal or to lie or to sin sexually."

You Alone Are Responsible

Paul wrote to the church in Rome, "So then each of us shall give account of himself to God" (Romans 14:12). That same apostle worded the warning somewhat differently in a letter to the Christians in Corinth. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10). Those are sobering thoughts. God is going to hold me responsible for my behavior, and He will judge me accordingly. The friends I have chosen will certainly have been an influence on my sentence or acquittal and my punishment or reward, but I alone am responsible. If there is blame to bear, it will be mine.

Joseph realized the importance of "Do not consent." Do you remember that Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officers, had "left all that he had in Joseph's hand" (Genesis 39:6)? It would have been so easy for Joseph to take advantage of his position.

However, Joseph was a man of God as well as an honest servant.

Imagine how emotionally torn Joseph must have felt when Potiphar's wife asked him to have sexual intercourse with her, not once but "day by day" (Genesis 39:10). Mrs. Potiphar nagged Joseph and assaulted him daily with requests to fulfill her illicit

desires. Without a doubt, Joseph was a young virile man, and it would have been so easy to say, "What difference will it make? No one will know."

*So then
each of us
shall give
account of
himself to
God.*

—Romans 14:12

Yet Joseph did not consent to forbidden sex. He did not give in to the enticement of that woman. He did not agree to an adulterous relationship. In fact, he told her, "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9). We tend to forget that every sin is against God. Other lives may be affected by our sins, but ultimately, it is God who

is wronged. David knew that (Psalm 51:4).

A person may suffer for doing right. Joseph did, and many times we will also, at least temporarily. Still God did not desert Joseph. We are told, "The Lord was with him; and whatever he did, the Lord made it to prosper" (Genesis 39:23). Paul warned Timothy, "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12).

Because truly living righteously will bring suffering, I have grown to value greatly the words that Paul wrote to Timothy, "This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him, we shall

also live with Him. If we endure, we shall also reign with Him” (2 Timothy 2:11–12). Isn’t that a wonderful thought! We will reign with Jesus! That sounds a whole lot like being set on high.

When we allow God to lift us up, we will consistently follow God’s plan for our lives and will flourish in every way that matters. Oh, we may not have great wealth or power or fame, but we will possess that which is priceless—a relationship with the Father based on our belief in Him and our obedience to Him. We can be joyful because the peace of God which surpasses all understanding is ours for the taking when we refuse to be anxious, when we’re prayerful, when we’re thankful (Philippians 4:4–7).

Don’t Trade Eternity for a Moment

As Joseph looked beyond his circumstances, he realized that his life had followed a pattern designed by God. His jealous brothers meant evil against him, but God used all that had happened for Joseph’s good (Genesis 50:20). In doing what was right, refusing to yield to sin for a season, Joseph saved not only his life but also the lives of all his father’s house.

It is vitally important for Christians today to look for God’s design in their lives rather than giving in to what seems right for the moment, by associating with companions who will corrupt, or by becoming a partaker of worldly pleasures that can lead to spiritual atrophy or even a complete falling away from Christ.

Solomon wrote, “Can a man take fire to his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?” (Proverbs 6:27). We tend to become like those with whom we associate. Even the world knows this. The lyrics of the country song, “Play with Fire,” proclaim:

“Don’t be concerned. It’s time I learned. Those who play with fire get burned.”

Are You Different?

Because it was undoubtedly an important concept, Paul wrote on two different occasions that “a little leaven leavens the whole lump” (1 Corinthians 5:6; Galatians 5:9). Why should a child of God want to blend in with the world and become one of them? A Christian should stand apart. A Christian should be different. We are to be “special” people (1 Peter 2:9), and if we aren’t special, if we aren’t different from the world, it is very likely that we are not walking in the light (1 John 1:6–7).

In a long intercessory prayer, the Messiah Himself stressed that while His disciples are in the world, they should not be of the world. Jesus entreated the Father for protection from Satan for His followers. “I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one” (John 17:15). How wonderful and reassuring that the Son of God was not only praying for His apostles and other first-century disciples, but He was also imploring God on behalf of those of us who follow Him today. The Savior of the world prayed for me; He prayed for you. “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word” (John 17:20).

Yes, it is important to remember Paul’s warning concerning the company we keep. “Do not be deceived, ‘Evil company corrupts good habits’” (1 Corinthians 15:33). If we are not careful, the influence of worldly associates can lead us to spiritual destruction. What seems to be clever sophistication is actually a highly contagious spiritual disease. Rather than blooming and


flourishing religiously, we may wither and our beliefs may die if we allow ourselves to be infected by poorly chosen friends. People of similar personalities or interests tend to associate with one another. Birds of a feather really do flock together. As Christians we need to be striving to imitate Jesus rather than aping people who possess suspect morals and engage in unrighteous behavior. We need to interact with those individuals who encourage us to live godly lives rather than with those who would corrupt us. Without a doubt, we will become like those with whom we congregate.

Paul phrased this same idea another way when he communicated with the church at Ephesus: “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them” (Ephesians 5:11).

Just as a mirror reflects one’s countenance, the hearts of companions mimic each other’s thoughts, plans, and actions. “As in water face reflects face, so a man’s heart reveals the man” (Proverbs 27:19). One modern paraphrase (*The Book*)

states that verse another way, “A mirror reflects a man’s face, but what he is really like is shown by the friends he chooses.”

It is only common sense to have as friends those who will help us to grow spiritually and emotionally. “He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed” (Proverbs 13:20). On two different occasions I have seen young mothers divorce husbands and destroy families



The Messiah
Himself stressed
they should not
be of the world.

simply because a best friend had just done the same thing. These were Christian women who chose their friends poorly. As a result lives were destroyed, or at the very least, negatively changed forever.

In the World, Be a Light

However, we do not need to be fanatical in our avoidance of certain individuals. If we become sufficient unto ourselves or isolated from others, how do we reach out to the lost? After all, we are *in* the world, just not *of* the world. To avoid any contact that might be harmful, we would have to stay locked up somewhere in a room all alone. People who say they do not go to church because some church-goers are hypocrites are not thinking very logically. Here is an unsigned article in a church bulletin that expressed that thought well.

The man who says he is kept away from religion by hypocrites is not influenced by them anywhere else. Business is full of them, but if he sees a chance at making money, he does not stop for that. Society is crowded with them, and yet he never thinks of becoming a hermit. Married life is full of them, but that doesn't make him remain a bachelor. Hell is full of them, and yet he doesn't do a thing to keep himself from going there. He wants to have you think that he is trying to avoid the society of hypocrites, and yet he takes not a single step toward heaven, the only place no hypocrites can go!

Rather than being influenced adversely by questionable companions, we need to be strong enough spiritually and emotionally to have a positive effect on them when our paths cross.

Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome, “For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself” (Romans 14:7). We can influence others for the cause of Christ by the lives we live daily.

A Smooth Path

An easy way to avoid giving in to sin is to keep our lives simple. One of the most beautiful requests in the Bible was made by David, the shepherd and king, who petitioned, “Teach me Your way, O Lord, and lead me in a smooth path, because of my enemies” (Psalm 27:11). We should remember that those who would entice us to sin are our enemies, even if they wear the guise of friends. If our friends are urging us to possess more, spend more, or even rush more, for all practical purposes, they may have become our enemies.

The psalmist’s prayer was both simple and profound: “Lead me in a smooth path, God.” Perhaps David’s request should be ours. It is much easier for God to lift us up when we are not concerned about the trappings of the world.

✦ *Lead me in a smooth path, God.* Let me walk around hate rather than through it. Even before the destruction of September 11, 2001, it was obvious that there was much hate in the world, but I don’t have to let that hate complicate my life or touch me unnecessarily. Make me aware that hatred is a breeding ground for sin.

✦ *Lead me in a smooth path, God.* Help me to walk without fear or needless worry and doubt. Help me to recognize problems that I can’t solve and march on to other things. Yet at the same time, let me walk with the fear that is a true

concern and which leads to knowledge, and to change that will help me to consent not to sin.

- ✦ *Lead me in a smooth path, God.* Help me to keep confusion from underfoot. Keep me lifted up. Remind me that with focused effort, I can lead a calm orderly existence, at least as far as my spiritual life is concerned.
- ✦ *Lead me in a smooth path, God.* Walk in front of me as I make decisions. Help me to avoid poor judgments and senseless mistakes. Help me to make right any wrongs that I have done to others. In fact, Lord, help me to recognize when I have caused others pain.
- ✦ *Lead me in a smooth path, God.* If I come to places where there is no road, help me to build one with hope rather than with despair.
- ✦ *Lead me in a smooth path, God.* Don't allow my life to get too complex, but keep me busy. Keep me working. Let any recreation be filled with innocent activities. Help me to purge any appearance of evil from my life (1 Thessalonians 5:22). Let mischief be left far behind. If social media or any form of technology is distracting me from a close walk with You, cause me to put those things aside. Remind me of the psalmist's words, "Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things, and revive me in Your way" (Psalm 119:37).
- ✦ *Lead me in a smooth path, God,* as I refuse to consent to do evil. Let that path be so smooth and plain that I can see any obstacles and, with Your help, overcome them. Remind

me, Lord, who I am and where I am going. When I am enticed, and I will be at some point in time, help me not to consent. Lift me up, Lord. Keep me safe.

Questions

1. What advice does Solomon give to a person who is tempted to sin? (Read Proverbs 1:10.)
2. How can one protect herself from temptation? Why is it important to choose friends carefully?
3. What disguise might the devil wear?
4. Is each individual responsible for her own actions? How do you know this? (Read Romans 14:12 and 2 Corinthians 5:10.)
5. How did Joseph avoid being enticed by sin?
6. Explain Proverbs 6:27.
7. What application does 1 Corinthians 15:33 have in our lives?
8. Can one isolate herself from sin totally? Explain your answer.
9. What does Romans 14:7 tell us about personal responsibility to others?
10. What did David mean when he asked God to lead him in "a smooth path"?

My Progress

What have you learned about enticement?



Know the Power Of Your Hand

“Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in the power of your hand to do so” (Proverbs 3:27).

If God is to lift us up, we must love others, and the proof of that love is our service to them. Sometimes others do not want us to love them, or at least they behave as if they don't. In those cases, service may become difficult or even hindered. The actions of others, however, do not relieve us from our responsibility to them.

Johnny Ramsey, a minister of the gospel, once told a story about a boy and his dog. It seems that the young man and animal were the very best of friends. They did everything together, and because there was such a deep bond between boy and dog, they were practically inseparable. One day the dog was caught in a wire fence and could not free himself. When his master attempted to release the dog's hind legs, the animal bit him. Instinct had kicked in, and the dog was doing only what came naturally. Still, the boy did not retaliate or leave

his friend. Instead, he worked from another position to free his dog. The young man loved his pet enough to keep trying to serve him.

We need to love others to such a degree that even when they behave in an unlovable manner, we won't give up on them—at least, not until we have done everything possible to help them. Matthew 10:12–14 depicts a scenario where it may not be possible to love or aid people as we would wish. Yes, it is true that there may come a time when a person has to “shake off the dust under your feet as a testimony against them” (Mark 6:11), but often we accept defeat much too soon. Perhaps we may have to employ a different strategy, just as the little boy did to help his dog. It is almost always in the power of our hands to help others, and God will lift us up for doing so.



The Power in Your Hand

Sometimes it is such a little thing. I live on a busy highway, so I was not surprised when a stranger rang my doorbell one Sunday afternoon. He told me that he had delivered pizza to our house before. Then he said his father was in the hospital, and he needed money for gas in order to take his mother to visit. He asked for ten dollars and promised to pay it back the following Friday. The man was neat and mannerly, and I thought what a blow to his pride it must have been to ask a stranger for money. I only had nine dollars, but I gave it to him as a gift—not as a loan—and I assure you the blessing was mine more than it was his.

Oh, I am not so naive that I don't realize that his story may not have been true, but the blessing was still mine because my