

Church of God, The Eternal

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Greetings to God's Kingdom in embryo:

One of the most inspiring revealed truths taught by God's end-time apostle was that we were all created with the potential to become members of the God Family; to share the glory, power, majesty and all that it means to be God—as God is God—provided we walk worthy of our career when we are called.

Question: Why were we called, brethren?

Was it not to prepare NOW to be part of the bride who will marry Jesus Christ? Was it not to prepare NOW to marry into the God Family? We began a spiritual career at baptism: a spiritual career that would require a lifetime of constant prayer, a spiritual career of making every word of God active and operative in our lives, a spiritual career of digesting that Word through meditation all the day long, a spiritual career of occasional (monthly) fasting for self-control and constant, active, determined effort to become a doer of the Word to acquire understanding. Our reliance on God and our desire to draw close to Him through the continuous use of His spiritual tools is the very foundation of godly character; the very character we must have before Christ will allow us to be a part of the bride.

Many kid themselves today that they are converted when they are not fulfilling their long-term conversion process. They are going along complacently—preparing to experience the weeping and gnashing of teeth. They are allowing spiritual lethargy to consume their commitment to their baptismal covenant vows to prepare for the church's marriage to Jesus Christ. The spiritual pitfalls for many can be summed up in just three words—"Someday I'll . . . !" "Someday I'll" commit to fulfilling all of my spiritual responsibilities on a daily basis so that I can become the Father's own spiritual creation—fit to become part of Christ's help meet.

Many of God's called today are physically and spiritually sick because they are suffering from an illness that is paralyzing nearly the whole of God's called people. This sickness usually sets in sometime right after baptism. It is known as the "I am saved"

disease. This disease can and has caused many to enter into a powerless condition in the living of God's way of life. This disease has attacked the minds of many of God's people in this day of affluence. This disease is now causing and has caused many to fail to meet their daily responsibilities of giving the time and energy required to stay close to God—to keep themselves physically and spiritually fit. This spiritual sickness is known as the sin of procrastination. Because of procrastination, many are still suffering severe consequences.

The sin of procrastination can destroy and has already destroyed, for many, their commitment to the long-term conversion process. Procrastination—putting things off—can be a deadly, sinister enemy. How? Christ's parable about the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1–13) addresses this problem. All the virgins (God's Kingdom in embryo) wanted to meet the bridegroom, but only five were wise, ones who had increased the earnest amount of oil (symbolic of God's Holy Spirit) in their vessels they received at baptism. The other five had neglected to increase the earnest amount of God's Holy Spirit in their lives. They had procrastinated by placing more importance on something else. Afterward, Christ said to them (the rest of God's Kingdom in embryo), I know you not. Why? Because it takes time to overcome and develop godly character. The sword of God's Spirit in us must increase for our carnal nature to decrease. As a result, the five foolish virgins (of God's Kingdom in embryo) were not allowed to become part of Christ's wife in the marriage ceremony.

What spiritual lesson does this parable have for us? Simply stated, if we put off our preparation NOW to prepare for the marriage to Jesus Christ, we will not qualify to be part of His help meet during the Millennium and beyond. Any time we fall victim to procrastination, various barriers will hinder us from fulfilling our baptismal covenant vows. That is the bad news. But the good news is that those barriers can be identified and torn down, allowing us to prepare adequately for that marriage to Jesus Christ.

Let us now examine some barriers that sinisterly hinder our long-term conversion process in our preparation for the marriage to Jesus Christ.

Wrong Priorities

Every day it seems we are faced with an unending amount of decisions. Some we make thoughtfully and some we make purposely, aware of our options. Others, we just simply ignore because they are just not that important to us. We think, "Oh well, *someday I'll* get serious about the commitment I made to God concerning my baptismal covenant vows." For many, "someday I'll . . ." has become a spiritual pitfall, where any success is trapped in a permanent state of procrastination.

We must remember that the choices we make will determine what we will accomplish. Making wrong choices is often caused by setting wrong priorities. This is what happened to Martha. She thought it was more important physically to serve Jesus and the other guests in her home than to sit at Jesus' feet and hear His words. In fact, she complained that her sister, Mary, was making the wrong decision by failing to serve with her (Luke 10:38–40). But Martha was wrong. Martha was distracted by matters that, in the light of Jesus Christ's visit, should have been secondary.

And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful [distracted and worried] and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful [to put on the Lord Jesus Christ—the Armor of Light (Romans 13:12, 14)]: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her (Luke 10:41–42).

Jesus Christ said in John 6:63: "the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." They give instruction in HOW to become a God Family member. That was not going to be taken away from Mary.

It is easy, it is a part of our nature, to become a victim of setting wrong priorities when it comes to keeping ourselves physically and spiritually fit. It takes strong character to rise above this trap and do what is needful. Jesus Christ said in Matthew 6:33, "But seek [coveting, earnestly striving after] ye FIRST the kingdom of God, and his righteousness" [emphasis mine]. Brethren, I promise and assure you, that can only be done through the continuous use of God's spiritual tools.

Brethren, there is a deadly, sinister enemy that attacks many of God's called usually right after baptism or when the pride of life becomes our first priority. There is a spiritual stumbling block that manifests itself within our nature when it comes to seeking God's Kingdom and righteousness first above all else. Setting right priorities is essential in overcoming this stumbling block—this deceitful plague of our own procrastinating minds. It sets the stage for doing what ought to be done first.

Overcommitment

Even if you set the right priorities, too many commitments can lead to procrastination. Your desire for accomplishment can outstrip your time to draw close to God. Procrastination is a thief of time. I believe the number one thief of time, which can cause us to procrastinate, is the improper use of television. It delays us in getting things done.

Jesus said to count the cost before following Him:

If any man [called of God] come to me, and hate not [love less in comparison] his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also [his nature which can cause his pride of life to dominate], he cannot be my disciple [my future world teacher in the Millennium]. And whosoever doth not bear his cross [being committed to fulfill his baptismal covenant vows], and come after me [following my example], cannot be my disciple [my king/priest in the Kingdom of God]. For which of you, intending to build a tower [God's spiritual temple of which you are], sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient [time to draw close to God] to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation [meaning of God's spiritual temple], and is not able to finish it [because of the deadly, sinister enemy of procrastination], all that behold it [the building of God's spiritual temple] begin to mock him. Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish (Luke 14:26–30).

Why? Because the stumbling block of procrastination blocked his way. Good intentions are not enough. Many of God's called have used talking as a substitute for action. When it comes to drawing close to God, there is no such thing as a future decision, only a NOW decision that determines what will happen in the future. We must pay the price today to achieve success in our calling. We should have understood fully the seriousness of the responsibility we were taking on when we were baptized. Baptism is when we began our lifelong judgment period—a stupendous creative process—if we can escape the stumbling block of procrastination. Qualifying to be a God is a costly business. The end result is either literal birth to eternal life in the God Family or eternal death brought on by the lake of fire.

We cannot allow too many commitments to lead us to procrastination. No commitments should be made without first counting the cost—will it cause my physical and spiritual conditioning to deteriorate? Overcommitment can become a barrier that will cause us to be unable to fulfill our long-term conversion process. This principle of counting the cost should apply in every area of our lives, because procrastination can cause us to enter a period of severe consequences, now and into the future.

True, God does expect a lot from us, and He will give us the strength and resources to accomplish far more than we might think we can. But do not overburden yourself by burning the candle at both ends. Face facts and be realistic. Do not take on more than you can chew. Do not beat yourself up so much during the day that your commitment to stay close to God cannot be accomplished.

Spiritual Laziness

Doing the will of God is extremely demanding. It requires a lot of effort on our parts. Attending to our spiritual careers by drawing close to God, going to work, spending time with family, showing a loving concern for friends, neighbors and God's own people, taking care of household chores—the list can seem endless at times. Without hard work, your daily "To Do" list will still be there.

The failure to get things done can often be traced to laziness. In Proverbs 24:30–34 God gives much counsel to His called-out ones—a physical example we can apply spiritually. Here God relates the story of the field of the slothful and how it is all grown over with thorns and nettles, and the stone wall was broken down.

I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding [or void of how to work]; And, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face [surface] thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. [This is a description of a property that has had very little effort and energy expended on maintenance and improvement.] Then I saw, and considered it well: I looked upon it, and received instruction. [We can receive spiritual instruction from this.] Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: So shall thy poverty [like a highwayman] come as one that travelleth [as one that is a bandit or vagabond]; and thy want as an armed man [an armed robber].

When we become complacent or succumb to laziness in spiritual matters, our lives (vineyards) become infested with the works of the flesh (thistles and nettles). There is no fruit for God. Our spiritual defenses (the walls) are down, and the evil one can begin to influence our thinking. The result of spiritual neglect and lethargy is poverty in the truth of God, the Spirit of God, and the fruits of God.

Proverbs 6:6–11 is an OUTCRY against laziness. The ant is an object lesson to us as it scurries back and forth, keeps on the move, and often carries oversized loads. It gets a lot accomplished without benefit of a boss, foreman, or superintendent.

Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler [no boss, foreman or superintendent], Provideth her meat [her bread] in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest.

The sluggard here is a habitually lazy person. He is admonished to learn two important lessons from the ant:

1. The ant has no leader, overseer, or ruler. This means that the ant does not need a taskmaster standing over it to make it work; it is a self-starter.

2. The ant is wise enough to prepare for predictable circumstances.

Spiritually, God wants His elect to be character builders when no one else is looking. He wants them to prepare for the marriage of Jesus Christ NOW because He knows that procrastination will only bring a period of severe consequences—the weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Hebrews 6:11–12 seems to be written for those caught in the pitfall of spiritual laziness:

And we [the ministry] desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: That ye be not slothful [spiritually lazy], but followers [imitators] of them [who are fulfilling their long-term conversion process] who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

It is only when we fulfill the will of God in our prayers and Bible study that God will give us the faith to inherit the promises. Spiritual lethargy can bring about procrastination and procrastination can put an end to long-term commitments to our salvation process.

Paul tells us that we should not be lagging in diligence to our spiritual careers. "Not slothful in business [not lazy in zeal to your spiritual career]; fervent [boiling over] in spirit; serving the Lord" (Romans 12:11).

Here we are reminded of the words of Jeremiah, "Cursed be he that doeth the work of the [Eternal] deceitfully [the Hebrew word here means negligently], and cursed be he that keepeth back his sword from blood [meaning those who refuse to get into the battle of eradicating the sin of spiritual procrastination]" (Jeremiah 48:10).

God wants us to be self-starters without the need of supervision to fulfill our long-term conversion process. We need to stop practicing procrastination by removing the barrier of spiritual laziness in all our spiritual responsibilities.

Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest [once your allotted time to make changes inwardly—your converted lifetime—has ended] (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

Spiritual laziness—to procrastinate—can be a barrier in the seeking of God's nature, mind and character.

Fear

Have you ever let fear stop you from doing something? Fear of drowning or deep water can lead to being inactive in many types of water sports. Fear of speaking in front of a group can lead to never being a part of any speech club. Fear of heights can lead one to be inactive in many things. The barrier of fear can cause procrastination. It did with ancient Israel. Remember what happened to Israel in the wilderness? They received a glowing report about the land that flowed with milk and honey. But they were afraid to face the land's inhabitants, who were said to be giants. Because of fear, due to a lack of faith, they rebelled against God's will and spent forty years wandering in the wilderness.

Many procrastinate in doing God's will today because they fear to step out in faith. Being fearful is a lack of faith which can be overcome. David had unconditional trust in God which casts out fear.

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up [devour] my flesh, they stumbled and fell. Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this [in such extreme adversity and calamity] will I be confident [in serenity of mind, if God be for me, who can be against me] (Psalm 27:1–3).

David here, through living faith in God's promises, triumphs in undaunted courage, fearless before the victory, and is as sure of all God's rewards and benefits as if the crown of life were already upon his head. There is no fortitude like that of unconditional trust in God, which David had in order to overcome the negative effects of fear.

God wants us to seek the faith that Christ had which comes by hearing (Romans 10:17), which comes by asking (Luke 17:5), and which comes by drawing close to God (James 4:8). When we fulfill our spiritual responsibilities, only then will God give us the faith—His own faith, which is a gift (Ephesians 2:8)—to replace the barrier of fear so we can trust God unconditionally in everything.

Agape love can also help us conquer the negative effects of fear. "There is no fear in love [God's law-abiding love]; but perfect love [love which God's law requires] casteth out fear [the fear of consequences]: because fear hath torment [of the lake of fire]. He that

feareth [because he is disobedient to law-keeping] is not made perfect in love [living as God's law requires] (1 John 4:18).

When we live by God's law, His statutes, His judgments, making every word of God active and operative in our lives, fear—a period of severe consequences, the weeping and gnashing of teeth—can be overcome through the power of God's Spirit. "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power [which we can receive through the spear of prayer and the sword of the Spirit], and of love [God's own law-fulfilling love flowing in us], and of a sound mind [not being tossed about by every perverted doctrine]" (2 Timothy 1:7). God wants us to conquer the negative effects of fear by seeking the faith of Jesus Christ through prayer, hearing and meditation so that the barrier of fear will not cause us to procrastinate in our long-term conversion process—to prepare for the marriage of Jesus Christ.

Forgetfulness

We all live in a world where we are constantly challenged by the pride of life. It is easy to overlook physical and spiritual responsibilities that need our attention. But does forgetfulness justify procrastination? Of course not! The barrier of forgetfulness—our failure to remember—can be a cause of procrastination. It can literally control us because we do not have an organized approach, a program, a schedule—a structure to hang our lives upon. We just let life—what comes naturally—happen to us.

Certainly, Matthew 6:33 gives us the spiritual framework we need for growth. "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things [our physical needs] shall be added unto you." But without a physical framework for growth, even a grapevine will not produce any worthwhile fruit regardless of how good the soil, the rain, the sun or the vinedresser. So, in addition to our spiritual support, we need a physical program, a definite plan, a realistic schedule. But before the thought of having a schedule overwhelms you, consider one KEY which all successful people use: they write down what they intend to do—what requires their attention. They make lists for daily, weekly, monthly or even yearly responsibilities. My wife does that. She even keeps a "Honey Do" list for me. As you cross things off your list when you do them, it gives you a great feeling of accomplishment as you see them marked off daily, weekly, etc.

Follow God's example. Throughout the Bible, God has put many of our responsibilities both physically and spiritually down in writing—meat we must review often in due season. God wants us to succeed in the physical realm (in the principles of healthful living) in addition to the spiritual. "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper

and be in health, even as thy soul [your spiritual life] prospereth [inwardly, day by day, as we make God's word active and operative in our lives]" (3 John 2).

By writing things down that need doing, we can jog our memories. If a responsibility is especially difficult for us to accomplish (like prayer and Bible study), place it at the top of your list. Do you want to succeed? If you are writing down your goals, even just those things to be done on a daily basis, you are succeeding in overcoming a barrier to procrastination. Writing things down that need doing plants a seed in your memory. They will start to demand time, consideration and determinate attention.

You are today the sum of your previous thoughts and experiences. You will be tomorrow the sum of today's thoughts and experiences (Proverbs 23:7). Writing down what you want to do and accomplish will start you going in the direction to become what you want to be physically, socially, emotionally, financially, athletically and ultimately spiritually. It is important to start simply to make it easy to achieve some successes. This will begin to form the habit of succeeding in your thinking and doing, and help prevent discouragement.

Discouragement and Depression

Life in today's world is complex and unimaginable. While modern technology has offered many conveniences, it has also created an environment that makes just day-to-day living a struggle. Much of the world's population is jammed into cities—piled one upon another. With people come cars, buses and hours of traffic jams. Some of you know what it is like. Millions live in a highly competitive, concrete jungle. It is hard for some just to keep food on the table. It is hard to manage financial hardships, to deal with sickness and disease. The family, in many cases, no longer is a place of warmth and security but a source of strife and contention for husbands and wives, parents and children. A lack of proper education can bring discouragement.

This is the kind of society in which we live. And it creates stress. As stress levels increase, problems and difficulties are harder to deal with and despondency, depression and discouragement can set in. The Bible has excellent examples of servants of God who, in the face of intense trials and workloads, became discouraged. Their situations caused them to begin thinking negatively. They were inclined to give up.

Job, for example, felt that his trial was just too much to bear. He was despondent to the point of wanting to die (Job 6:1–4, 8–10). Moses, whom God personally put in charge to responsibly lead Israel, became so depressed at one point because of his workload, that he asked God to kill him (Numbers 11:11–15). Elijah, whom God used to perform many mighty

miracles, also was subject to depression and discouragement (1 Kings 19:4). He probably thought that the miracle at Mt. Carmel would have been the means of affecting the conversion of the whole court of Ahab and Jezebel. But, finding that not to be true, he was greatly discouraged and decided to hide himself [as God had him hide himself in the past] (1 Kings 17:3).

Discouragement and depression come from many sources and appear in many forms. They can sneak up on us when we least expect it. We can be so excited and positive, and then all of a sudden our world is upside down. Nothing seems to go right. Mr. Armstrong taught that there is a cause for every effect. We just have to get to the source of the cause, or otherwise the barriers of discouragement and depression will cause us to be victimized by "Someday I'll . . ." I believe that spiritual weakness, physical transgression of the principles of healthful living, a lack of proper education, and financial hardships are the greatest sources of depression and discouragement.

To put off doing what we know we should do causes discouragement which can lead to depression. We must fight discouragement by not allowing a cutting remark, an unattained goal, or the feeling that no one cares, to produce negative feelings that destroy our zeal. Do not defend your conscience through justification, or find excuses for procrastination in any facet of your life—in your responsibilities to your family, your education, your job or especially in your responsibilities to God.

God expects us to ACT on what we know. If you have been putting off fulfilling your responsibilities to God, you could be a victim of the most dangerous kind of procrastination—spiritual procrastination. The only way I know to fight that is to be filled with the mind of God and the fruits of His Holy Spirit. And that only takes place as you draw close to God.

Submit yourselves therefore to God [come under obedience to His every word]. Resist the devil [standing against him by having on the whole armor of God], and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God [through the continuous use of His spiritual tools], and he will draw nigh to you [God only works as we work. We are in a cooperative venture with God. He matches effort for effort when we do our part. We become God's own spiritual creation.] Cleanse your hands, ye sinners [through faith in Christ's dual sacrifice for sins that are past]; and purify your hearts [use the offensive weapons of the sword and the spear—prayer], ye double minded [those vacillating between two natures]. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness [fasting]. Humble yourselves in the sight of the

[Eternal], and he shall lift you up [so you can produce the fruits of the Spirit] (James 4:7–10).

If we draw close to God, we can say as the Apostle Paul did in spite of his many hardships, "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed. . . . For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day" (2 Corinthians 4:8–9, 16).

Paul certainly had many reasons to get discouraged and depressed. His letters and the Book of Acts record many unpleasant predicaments in which he found himself (2 Corinthians 6:8–10; 11:23–33). Yet he did not let circumstances dishearten him!

I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:11–13, *New International Version*).

As long as we hold to God, God will not forsake us (2 Timothy 3:11–12). He promises that He will deliver us (Psalm 34:19). You need not suffer under the cloud of discouragement and despair. You can win the battle over depression by keeping yourselves physically and spiritually fit.

Act Now

Now that you have observed some of the various barriers that hinder us from doing God's will and have learned how to avoid becoming a victim of procrastination, what is your reaction? Unfortunately, we all fall victim to procrastination at times. Are you convicted of the need to stop procrastinating? Are you now ready to change since the need is real? Do you get the picture of what you can do?

With your focus on understanding the God family vision, go for the royal crown of your eternal inheritance. Run in such a way that you may obtain it [your victory over procrastination]. Do it, not as athletes to obtain a corruptible crown, but for an incorruptible crown (1 Corinthians 9:24–25). "Therefore then, [out there in front of] so great a cloud of witnesses . . . run with patient endurance and steady and active persistence the appointed course of the race that is set before us [to complete our long-term conversion process according to our baptismal covenant vows]. . . . think of Him who endured . . . so that you

may not grow weary . . . losing heart . . . make firm and plain and smooth, straight paths [according to the faith once delivered] . . . that go in the right direction [as the truth was revealed]" (Hebrews 12:1, 3, 13, *The Amplified Bible*).

The Spirit that is never quenched, the love that never waxes cold, the purpose that never changes, the thought that never wanders unrighteously, the faith that never wavers, the mind that never procrastinates, these are the masters of victory. Make every day victorious and what Jesus Christ said in Matthew 24:45–47 will apply to you:

Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing [not saying "Someday I'll . . . "]. Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods.

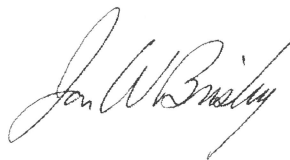
God has given each one of us physical and spiritual responsibilities, and He expects us to be doing them now—to prepare for the marriage of Jesus Christ. Do not seek in vain our marriage to Jesus Christ by ignoring top-priority matters. Overcome procrastination—NOW!

God willing, "someday I'll" see you in the Kingdom of God.

Your servant under the spirit of revealed truth,



Robert Litz



Jon W. Brisby