

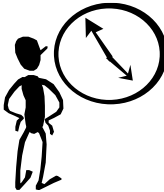
THE BATTLE CREEK BULLETIN

Inside this issue:

<i>Children Do Come with Manuals!</i>	1
<i>A Man is Judged by His Strength</i>	4
<i>P.M. sermon outline:</i> Worry	6
Duty Rosters	7
Announcements & For the Record	8



Time of Assembly



Sunday:

Bible Study 9:00 a.m.
Worship 10:00 a.m.
(Or every other week)

Bible Study 4:00 p.m.
Worship 5:00 p.m.

Wednesday:

Bible Study 7:00 p. m.

Children Do Come with Manuals!

By Jefferson David Tant

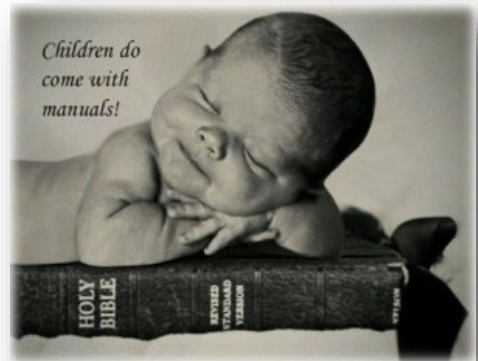
Some months ago, my wife and I bought a new car. Well, it is about five years old, but it was new to us. Thankfully, it had an important document in the glove box — an Owner’s Manual. I don’t think I will ever learn about all the gadgets that the car has, but in following the manual we have learned how to drive the car and make use of all the important things that make the car useful. And the manual gives information concerning taking good care of the car so that it will have a long and useful life.

Don’t we all have items, gadgets, and machines that come with an Owner’s Manual? Even our refrigerator has one. We want to know how to take good care of things that are important to us, from our refrigerators to our automobiles. That just makes good sense, doesn’t it?

But what is absolutely the most important “thing” that parents have? Well, it’s not a “thing,” but a precious child — God’s gift. And that child came with an owner’s manual. It’s called a Bible.

Now, all parents want their children to be successful. That’s why we send them to school, so they can get an education and make their way in the world. And good parents are diligent in tending to their children’s education. They see to it that their children get their homework done, limit their TV and computer times, etc., and prepare for their exams so they can graduate.

That is all well and good. But parents



must also remember that there is an even final exam — the Day of Judgment. We are familiar with the words of Paul in II Corinthians 5:10-11: *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men, but we are made manifest to God; and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences.”*

Allow me to apply one phrase to the point of this article: *“Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we teach our children.”*

So, just what instructions does our “Owner’s Manual” give concerning raising our children? We get some good advice in Deuteronomy 6:4-9:

“Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”

With respect to the “doorposts,” the Jews give the name "Mezuzah" to certain pieces of parchment, which they fix on the doorposts of their houses, understanding this precept in a literal sense. A small metal holder containing a verse of Scripture is attached to the doorpost, and whenever a person leaves the house, one’s fingers pass over it as a reminder. They were even on the doorposts of the hotel rooms where my wife and I stayed when we were in Jerusalem.

Did the Hebrew children have to learn math and language, etc? Obviously so. But there was something of greater importance, for while their learning in math was good for some years, their learning in spiritual matters was good for eternity.

That reminder might be good, but if “remind” is all it does, then it’s of no more use than the practice of many who have a Bible sitting on the shelf or on the coffee table in their homes. It’s not studied but serves as a reminder.

Now, some may say, “We take our children to church on Sunday and Wednesday, and they get to study the Bible in their classes.” Good! So how about sending them to school for half a day each week. That would be about the same number of hours spent at church services. I think you see the point.

Now, turning to the New Testament, we see some useful passages. *“Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord”* (Ephesians 6:4). *“Bring them up”* is from the Greek *“ektrepho,”* to rear up to maturity, i.e. (genitive case) to cherish or train:--bring up, nourish.”

If your son wanted to be a scientist or your daughter wanted to be a doctor, could that goal be accomplished by studying two or three hours a week? You know the an-

swer. Note that Paul's admonition wasn't to Bible class teachers or preachers. It was to fathers.

Ok, what about mothers? We remember Paul's words to his son in the gospel, Timothy. "*For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am sure that it is in you as well*" (II Timothy 1:5). Timothy's father was not a Christian, but his faith was so strong that it impressed the apostle Paul. Who had taught Timothy? Evidently his mother and grandmother.

When my wife and I had children at home, we would have daily Bible studies/devotions around the breakfast table. We also invited neighborhood friends of our children, two of whom were baptized into Christ.

It is well known that in the United States, a large percentage of students who enter college believing in God lose their faith. Why? Consider the following quotes.

"We try to arrange things so that students who enter as bigoted, homophobic, religious fundamentalists will leave college with views more like our own... We are going to go right on trying to discredit you (fundamentalist parents) in the eyes of your children, trying to strip your fundamentalist religious community of dignity, trying to make your view seem silly rather than discussable. We are not so inclusivist as to tolerate intolerance such as yours" [Prof. Richard Rorty, in his essay "Universality and Truth"].

"Every child in America entering school at the age of five is insane because he comes to school with certain allegiances towards our founding fathers, towards his parents, toward a belief in a supernatural being... It is up to you teachers to make all of these sick children well by creating the International Children of the Future" (Chester M. Pierce, Harvard Professor addressing public school teachers" [Berit Kjos, Brave New Schools, p. 161].

So the question is, "How do we prepare our children for warfare and for heaven?" The apostle Paul gives some good advice about this.

"Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints" (Ephesians 6:13-18).

Parents, are you carefully following the "Owner's Manual" in the discipline and instruction of the Lord?"

A Man is Judged by His Strength

By Matthew W. Bassford

In Judges 8:12, during the aftermath of his crushing victory over the Midianites, the Israelite leader Gideon captures two Midianite kings, Zebah and Zalmunna. Because they played hardball in those days, in Judges 8:20, Gideon commands his son, Jether, to execute the captives. Jether, who is still young, shrinks back from the unpleasant task.

In response, the kings taunt Gideon. According to Judges 8:21, they tell him, “*Strike us down yourself, for a man is judged by his strength.*” Gideon promptly complies, which seems like a counterproductive outcome for Zebah and Zalmunna.

Nonetheless, strength has been an essential attribute of masculinity ever since God created them male and female. Though there are exceptions, men generally are the ones with the big muscles. It changes the way we think and the way we think of ourselves.

Though nobody ever would have confused me with Charles Atlas, I’ve spent most of my adult life trying to keep in shape. I’ve worked out regularly for years, even taking my exercise regimen on the road when I travel. It allowed me to do things that I valued: lifting heavy things for my wife, helping brethren move, and being able to throw my body into any task without fear of failing or getting hurt. Being strong and capable made me feel good.

Those days end for every man. For me, they ended early. I found myself unable to gain strength and muscle without halfway killing myself to get there. On the other hand, losing strength became very easy. Spend a week sitting on the couch, and boom! 98-pound weakling.

I figured it was middle age. It wasn’t. It was ALS.

Since my diagnosis, my decline has continued. I can stroll, but I can no longer walk briskly, much less jog or run. I’ve lost most of my pinch strength in both hands. I used to open stuck jars for Lauren; now she must open food wrappers for me. All the body-weight exercises I used to perform regularly are out of reach. Barring a miracle, whether medical or otherwise, my condition will worsen until I become a quadriplegic and eventually die.

There have been many lessons in this. First, it showed me how strength has shaped my worldview, even in matters not involving physical strength. If you are strong enough to rely on direct action and bulling your way through, that will affect the way you solve every problem. I spent 40 years of my life doing that without realizing why.

Conversely, my recent experiences have taught me greater sympathy for women. I simply didn’t understand what it was like to belong to “the weaker sex”. If you can’t rely on your own strength, if you are surrounded by people who are stronger than you are, and if you often have to ask for help, all that will shape the way you behave too. It

will make you less direct, more cautious, and more concerned with maintaining relationships.

Being forced into a position of weakness is hard, especially if you are used to a position of strength. I hate, hate, hate having to ask Lauren for help when I'm getting dressed Sunday mornings. Buttoning a shirt used to be a trivial matter; now it is an exercise in hand-cramping agony. Any rational person would get somebody whose fingers still work right to do it, but if I have time, I will fight with those buttons for 20 minutes or more. My pinch strength has left me, but I apparently am determined to cling to my self-reliance.

Finally, of course, this experience has transformed the way I see my relationship with God. It is evident to me now that I've spent my preaching career not understanding II Corinthians 12:1-10. I knew what all the words meant and thought I understood it, but I didn't get it. Yeah, yeah, a thorn in the flesh. That's like when your knee hurts, right?

Not exactly. It was a messenger of Satan. It tormented Paul. I believe that when Paul says he pleaded with the Lord three times to remove it, that doesn't mean one-two-three prayers. It means praying about a subject so comprehensively that your prayer is complete in the same way that the triune God is complete. Paul prayed thus; Jesus said no.

Therefore, when Paul says in II Corinthians 12:9 that he intends to boast in his weaknesses, that's not a well-OK-then-moving-on. It represents the wrenching acknowledgment that strength that mattered desperately to him is never going to be restored to him, and he is going to have to spend the rest of his life without it. Indeed, more subtly, the weakness that is the subject of Paul's boasting is not only the thorn in the flesh. It is the pride that only could be defeated by the application of the thorn.

I've spent a lot of time wondering why God allowed me to have ALS. I know there's a reason. Christ doesn't keep us from suffering, but He does make our suffering meaningful if we seek Him through it. Is it because my ALS is supposed to teach me to be kinder and more compassionate to others? Is it because I'm supposed to use my writing about it to enlighten and inspire?

Those things may be true, but I must at least entertain the possibility that I needed to develop ALS for my own sake. When I was strong, it was awfully easy to trust in my own strength, not merely for the lifting of heavy objects but for making my way through life. ALS has rubbed my nose in the foolishness of such a delusion. It's hard to be self-reliant when you can't button your own shirt.

I must learn to boast in my own weaknesses too. I must learn to embrace them and the emptiness they leave in my life. As with Paul, only then can my weakness be filled with the strength of God.