



Dan Nolta

“Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God” (Revelation 2:7). What an encouragement to correction! We need encouragement in these days, and thus my deliberate focus on the strengths of the churches instead of their weaknesses.

At this stage—getting older and nearer the promise of heaven than ever before—I am encouraged to make corrections in my life that I know will draw me closer to the Lord I serve.

It is my prayer that you will also be encouraged to make needed corrections in your life, as we together consider the Lord’s words that were delivered to John on the island of Patmos, and recorded for us in the book of Revelation.

Pictured are our six children. The picture was taken on my seventieth birthday in the backyard of our long-since-sold Tacoma, Washington, home.

BIBLE READING: Revelation 2:1–3

Is it a hardship when your daughter and son-in-law are murder victims? Is it a hardship when the business you depend on for your livelihood burns; when thieves break into the building and take everything else left of value; when your house catches fire and your kitchen burns; when you find out that your husband has been having multiple affairs? (Actual events which occurred in rapid succession in the life of one family with a wonderful Christian mother.)

Are these the kinds of things that Jesus wanted the churches to bear? Or does it have to do with persecution, or perhaps some of the things that Hebrews 11:36–38 names, such as “jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were put to death....” Whatever Jesus refers to, he encourages the church at Ephesus with these words: “You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary” (v. 3).

That is the call to today’s church—the twenty-first-century church. We are faced with an uncertain future. Some even declare that the age of the church is past and the culture is now king. Church, Christians, now is the time to endure, to persevere; not to grow weary, but to let our light shine in the world that is getting darker by the day. “‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the Lord Almighty” (Zechariah 4:6).

SONG: Take My Life and Let It Be

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Father, my prayer today is that I might do more than endure the hardships and trials of life, but that with your strength, I might triumph in the midst of them. For I know that with you I can do all things.

—Dan Nolte

BIBLE READING: Revelation 2:8–10

“I want..., I need...,” are words often spoken by those who do not understand the difference—the difference between needs and wants, between being rich in material things and being rich in the Spirit. We are bombarded constantly by the voice of commercialism, until we really believe we are a needy people. But are we? Consider this:

If you have food in your refrigerator, clothes on your back, a roof overhead and a place to sleep...you are richer than 75% of the world's population....If you have a little money in the bank or spare change in a dish someplace...you are among the top 8% of the world's wealthy (Dan Zadra, <http://www.live-inspired.com/blog/archives.cfm/category/gift-books/page/1>).

It is not time to count our physical or material blessings, but rather our spiritual blessings. Just consider what it means to have a sense of peace in your life. Consider the wealth that is yours as provided by the Spirit of God being present. Consider what it means to you to know that you are loved by God, that your sins are forgiven, and that he has provided for your future—a home in heaven.

While I have experienced times of counting my physical blessings and saving my pennies, of making investments and planning for the future, I now find myself regretting the opportunities I missed to “invest in the Spirit.”

SONG: Count Your Blessings

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Father, today I count my spiritual blessings, all that you have deemed to be mine in Christ.

—Dan Nolta

BIBLE READING: Revelation 2:12–13

“Antipas, my faithful witness.” Would that *those* words describe all who are now reading *these* words. But what a price to be paid to have those words describe each of us—for Antipas, tradition tells us, was martyred by being roasted alive in the belly of a life-sized statue of a bronze bull.

When Antipas was advised, “Antipas, the whole world is against you,” he reputedly replied, “Then I am against the whole world!” He was a faithful witness, demonstrating a steadfast testimony to his faith in Jesus Christ, refusing—even under the penalty of death—to renounce his faith.

How often in my Christian life have I found myself embarrassed by the name of Christ. How then could I face the very real threat of martyrdom as Antipas did? There is a promise for all of us who have had similar feelings.

I find comfort in the promise that God will provide strength when we are called to meet the threat of martyrdom, or for that matter, any trial or test that is put before us. But how are we to bear up under the load of persecution or threat of death? “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble” (Psalm 46:1). And there is the answer: we have the promise that Christ is “ever present” to provide just what we need, just when we need it. Let us not fear the future or what might come our way. As Jesus often said to his disciples, “Fear not!”

SONG: Tell Me the Story of Jesus

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Father, I choose to be bold in the face of all that the world can throw at me, counting on your promise to be my “ever-present help in trouble.”

—Dan Nolta

BIBLE READING: Revelation 2:18–19

Jesus speaks the word *deeds*, and we are set back in Christian theology by over two thousand years! “I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.” Well, how much were they doing at first, and when was the time of the first? And we start to measure in our heads, “How much?” What a trap, and what a temptation!

Can we not just be encouraged with the words of Jesus, “and that you are now doing more than you did at first”? Can we not just accept that we are doing more, whatever and however much “more” is on our deeds calculator. Jesus was evidently pleased with how much they were presently doing. And by those words he encouraged them to keep it up!

And I now encourage you to keep it up. As we are exhorted in Galatians 6:9, “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”

So please don’t quit what you are doing for the Lord. Don’t quit writing, don’t quit teaching, don’t quit mowing the lawn at the church, or baking cookies to share. The context of Galatians 6 tells us that if we are doing it to please the Spirit, then from the Spirit we will reap eternal life. What could be more encouraging than that?

SONG: I’ll Go Where You Want Me to Go

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Father, my promise to you is this: I will keep writing until you tell me to stop. I will persist in doing good to all, as long as I am assured that I am doing it for your glory and not my own.

—Dan Nolte

BIBLE READING: Revelation 3:4–6

Sardis was a young but dying church, just barely clinging to life, badly in need of repentance. “Yet you have a few people... who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy.” My mind fairly explodes with the implications of those words. But I would rather focus at this moment on the phrase, “They will walk with me.” They are held up for us as the encouraging example of this weak, almost closing-its-doors church. Most of us can understand the situation at Sardis.

“They will walk with me”—and need we say more than that? For to walk with him has enough of its own implications. Those words imply that at least some of them were in fellowship, harmony, being of like mind and purpose, and going the same direction as Christ.

Add to those words, “dressed in white.” Is it the white of purity, or the dazzling white of glory?

To know that their clothes were yet unsoiled leads us to choose the white of purity, but does it really matter? Their clothes were yet unsoiled, they remained faithful, walking with Christ in the midst of the immoral. They were worthy.

Friends, keep your clothes clean; be worthy to walk with Christ wherever he leads.

SONG: In the Garden

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Father, it is the issue of purity that is ever before me. It is purity of motive, it is moral purity, it is purity of attitude. For this day, “Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.”

—Dan Nolta

BIBLE READING: Revelation 3:7–13

Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love—so named because it was founded by two brothers with a love and loyalty toward one another worthy to have a city named for them. Theirs was a love so loyal that one brother resisted the pressures of Rome to betray that love. With resistance to that pressure came the threat of an ugly death (witness the death of Antipas as noted in Tuesday's writing).

The love of the brothers is reflected in this letter to the church in Philadelphia. The brothers' love is mirrored by the love of Christ for us, so genuine that he will make even liars come and fall down at our feet (the beloved) and acknowledge that we are the loved of God.

More promises come to the inhabitants of the city of Philadelphia: they are to be made a pillar in the temple; the name of the city of God (the new Jerusalem), as well as the name of God, will be personally inscribed upon the inhabitants. Imagine, the new name of Jesus is to be written upon all of the believers in that city of brotherly love. The new name will be inscribed upon them, as the owner of a book writes their name on the fly leaf, so that there is no question as to ownership—all will know they belong to him!

The question might be asked: when are these things to be fulfilled, or have they been already? I shall leave the answers to the scholars, and right now be content with imagining that day when we shall stand before him in our new heavenly home, encouraged by a city whose name is Philadelphia.

SONG: Blessed Be the Name

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, may I demonstrate to my brothers, both by birth and by adoption, the love that was modeled by the brothers of Philadelphia.

—Dan Nolta

BIBLE READING: Revelation 3:19–22

This morning as I read and re-read the invitation that seems to overpower this passage, I wonder, “Which of the three is the invitation?” Is it Jesus standing at the door in open invitation to each of us to invite him in? Or is it the invitation to join him on his throne before the Father? Or perhaps it’s the lesser-recognized invitation to repent.

My choice is his invitation to repent. Repent from bad deeds done; repent from bad attitudes; repent from self-centeredness. Repent! Rather than perceiving *repent* as a negative, I choose to see it in a positive light. Isn’t it the opportunity to repent that opens the door to genuine forgiveness by Christ? Isn’t it the opportunity to repent that is the door to new life for each of us?

If this is true, then repentance is the factor that determines our future. Earnest, genuine repentance demonstrates our desire to enter into this new life in Christ that is offered in the words, “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.”

Repentance is the door; it is the gate to the sheepfold whereby we, the wandering ones, are welcomed into the fold. It is just inside this door that our heavenly Father stands, ready to welcome his prodigal children home. That alone encourages me to daily repentance and correction to my path.

SONG: I Surrender All

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, make clear to me today the path that lies beyond my repentance and forgiveness. Lead me on to maturity in my Christian life.

—Dan Nolta