

Country Living- Preparing a People

By: Jim Hohnberger

Our loving Creator has a plan for the lifestyle of His people. It was not His purpose to crowd people into cities, huddled together in high-rise apartments and tightly built subdivisions. In the beginning He placed our first parents amidst the beautiful sights and sounds He desires us to rejoice in today. The more nearly we come into harmony with God's original plan, the more favorable will be our position to secure health of body, and mind and soul.

God's original plan has not changed. We will still reap real benefits by seeking to live as He designed us to live. One of my favorite authors, Ellen G. White, has written extensively about the necessity of making the spiritual prosperity of ourselves and our families our very first consideration when choosing a place to live. I recommend reading the chapter "Choice and Preparation of the Home" in *Ministry of Healing* and the booklet, *Country Living*.

When we choose a place to live, God would have us consider first of all the moral and the religious influences that surround us and our families. We should choose the location most favorable to our spiritual advancement. Instead of living where only the works of men can be seen, where the sights and sounds frequently suggest thoughts of evil, where turmoil, rush and confusion bring only weariness and disquietude, we need to live where we can look upon the works of God. Here we will find rest of spirit, mind and body in the beauty, the quietude and the peace of nature. Here our eyes can rest on the green pastures, the majestic

forests, and the rolling hills, the valleys and the inspiring mountains. Here, in the country, one may look up to the blue sky, unobscured by the city's dust and smog, and breathe the fresh, invigorating air of heaven.

God designed that the home of our first parents was to be a pattern for **all** other homes. While we can't duplicate the Garden of Eden today, we can come into harmony with God's original plan. In the surroundings of the holy pair was a lesson for all time--that **true** happiness is found, not in the indulgence of pride, luxury and extravagance, but in communion, fellowship, and harmony with God. If men would give less attention to the artificial and the materialistic and would cultivate greater simplicity, they would come far nearer to entering into the purpose of God in their lives. Pride and ambition are never satisfied, but those who are truly wise will search for the true purpose of life—to bring their lives into full and complete harmony with God.

Jesus came to this earth as God's ambassador, to show us how to live so as to secure life's best results. What were the conditions chosen by the infinite Father for His Son? A secluded home in the Galilean hills; a life of simplicity; the quiet of dawn or twilight in the green valley; the holy ministries of nature; and the soul's communion with God--these were the conditions and opportunities of the early life of Jesus.

His quiet, simple life, and even the silence of the Scriptures concerning His early years, teach an important lesson. The more quiet and simple the

life of the child, the more free from artificial excitement, and the more in harmony with nature, the more favorable is it to physical and mental vigor and to spiritual strength.

Yes, Jesus is our example. There are so many who dwell with interest upon the period of His public ministry, but they pass unnoticed the teaching of His first 30 years. Jesus had to develop and form a character just the same as you and I do, and our heavenly Father gave Him 30 quiet, simple years in the Galilean hills to prepare Him for the greatest work ever done on earth.

You will notice a similar pattern followed by the great majority of the best and noblest men of all ages. Read the history of Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, of Moses, David and Elisha. Study the lives of men of later times who have most worthily filled positions of trust and responsibility

How many of these were reared in country homes? They knew little of luxury. They did not spend their youth in amusement. Many were forced to struggle with poverty and hardship. They early learned to work, and their active life in the open air gave vigor and elasticity to all their faculties. Forced to depend upon their own resources, they learned to combat difficulties and to surmount obstacles, and they gained courage and perseverance. They learned the lessons of self-reliance and self-control. Sheltered in a great degree from evil associations, they were satisfied with natural pleasures and wholesome companionship. They were simple in their tastes and temperate in their habits. Governed by principle, they grew up pure and strong and true. When called to their lifework, they brought to it physical and mental power, buoyancy of spirit, ability to plan and execute, and *steadfastness in resisting* evil that made them a positive power for good in the world.

Let us consider just one of these men. What was God's prescription for Moses to prepare him to lead His people out of bondage?

"By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward." Hebrews 11:24-26.

Moses was qualified to take pre-eminence among the great of the earth, to shine in the courts of its most glorious kingdom, and to sway

the scepter of its power. His intellectual greatness distinguishes him above the great men of all ages. As historian, poet, philosopher, general of armies, and legislator he stands without a peer.

Yet, God did not consider Moses to be prepared for his great work. Infinite wisdom had still further training for him amid the solitude of the mountains. Forty years in the quiet mountains--in the school of self-denial and simplicity--would be his true training ground. Here his own heart would be brought into full and complete harmony with God's; this solitude was to be his training before he could be an effective tool to deliver God's people from their cruel bondage.

We would probably have dispensed with that long period of toil and obscurity, deeming it a big waste of time.

Friends, do you want to dispense with God's prescription to prepare us as He did Moses and many others? Do you want to go out to save God's people as Moses did, before he was prepared? I love the following illustration found in *The Ministry of Healing* pg 472:

"In the full light of day, and in hearing of the music of other voices, the caged bird will not sing the song that his master seeks to teach him. He learns a snatch of this, a trill of that, but never a separate and entire melody. But the master covers the cage, and places it where the bird will listen to the one song he is to sing. In the dark, he tries and tries again to sing that song until it is learned, and he breaks forth in perfect melody. Then the bird is brought forth, and ever after he can sing that song in the light. Thus God deals with His children. He has a song to teach us, and when we have learned it amid the shadows of affliction, we can sing it ever afterward."

God wants to teach us a song. John the Baptist was placed in the wilderness for 30 years to learn that song. The apostle Paul after his Damascus experience was not sent out immediately, but was sent into the wilderness of Arabia for three years to learn that song. See Galatians 1:15-18. God wants to teach us all the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb. See Revelation 15:3-4. Friends, this is what country living is all about. It is to "make ready a people prepared for the Lord." Luke 1:17. It is not to go hide in selfish isolation atop a mountain and wait for the Lord to return. Nor is it to build lavish homes or facilities that lift up man and indulge his pride. Nor is it to build up self-sufficient outposts in which to glory and feel secure. The history of King Nebuchadnezzar certainly teaches us that the strength of nations,

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as of individuals, is not found in the facilities that appear to make them invincible. For **our strength is measured only by the fidelity with which we allow God's purpose to be accomplished in and through us.** We have only to read the history of men such as Elijah, Elisha, King David, Daniel, Joseph, Luther, Huss, Jerome, and Wesley to see that man's strength comes only from *inward fidelity to God*, rather than man-made facilities and armaments. King Hezekiah, when receiving the envoys from Babylon, was tested of the Lord. Would Hezekiah exalt the God of heaven as his strength and greatness? No - instead he "shewed them the house of his precious things, the silver, and the gold, and the spices, and the precious ointment, and all the house of his armor, and all that was found in his treasures; there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah shewed them not." 2 Kings 20:13. Is man's security or sufficiency ever in the works of our own hands? No! Never! It is only in the great I AM. The apostle Paul sums it up in five words: "Our sufficiency is of God." 2 Corinthians 3:5. Neither is country living a hiding place or a storehouse to run to in the time of trouble, nor a place to idle away our days in selfish leisure and recreation. No, no; true country living is none of these, but it is for the purpose of learning a new song as did John the Baptist, the apostle Paul and the patriarch Moses. They each were as that caged bird placed there by their heavenly Father to learn that new song.

Country living, if used properly, acts as a veil, as in the story of the caged bird, which shields us from the detrimental influences and distractions of the cities. For cities have become hotbeds of vice and corruption; on every hand are found the sights and sounds of evil. Everywhere are enticements to sensuality, worldliness, materialism and dissipation of every kind. The tide of corruption and crime is continually swelling. Every day the press and the six o'clock news bring the records of violence, robberies, murders, suicides, and crimes unnameable. And these atrocities have become of so common occurrence that they hardly elicit a comment or awaken surprise.

There is also an intense passion for money-making, a constant whirl of excitement and pleasure seeking, a thirst for display, luxury and extravagance. All are forces that upon our youth as well as ourselves, have an almost irresistible power. The youth, having nothing to do, often

obtain a street education, and form close associations with undisciplined, non-Christian children, in which they acquire habits of vice and worldliness.

The physical surroundings in the cities are also a peril to our health. The constant liability to contact with disease, the prevalence of foul air, impure water, the crowded, dark, unhealthful apartment complexes, are just some of the many perils to our physical health.

Truly Christian qualities are better gained in a retired country atmosphere.

I have a deep conviction that there is not one family in a hundred who will be improved physically, mentally, or spiritually, by residing in the city. Faith, hope, love, happiness, can far better be gained in retired places, where there are fields, and hills and trees. Take your children away from the sights and sounds of the city, away from the throb and whine of traffic and sirens, and their minds will become more healthy. It will be found easier to bring home to their hearts the truths of the work of God.

Send the children to schools located in the city, where every phase of temptation is waiting to attract and demoralize them, and the work of character building is **tenfold harder** for both parents and children.

Parents, are you losing your children? Are they becoming more and more like the world? Where are you living? Can you not see that God has said, "Escape for thy life; look not behind thee; ... escape to the mountains"? Genesis 19:17. And the apostle Paul has admonished us, "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate." 2 Corinthians 6:17. You see God understands that by **beholding** we will become changed. Therefore when we choose a home for our families, God would have us first consider the moral and religious influences that will surround us and our children. The scriptures summarize it well in Philippians 4:8, "Finally brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

Could God have said it any simpler or made it any plainer? It is our duty to cut off every influence, to break up every habit, to sunder every tie, that keeps us from the most free, open, and hearty committal of ourselves and our families to God. This is the purpose of country living. This is the veil of protection that country living can provide, if we will rightly address ourselves to it. But

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being sheltered from the evil influences of the city alone is not enough. Just for a moment consider the heathen in the remote jungles of the world. They are certainly in a retired country setting, but they are not made righteous by their setting. Jeremiah 3:23 says, "Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains; truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel."

God sent John the Baptist, the apostle Paul and the patriarch Moses to their secluded settings to get something. It wasn't just a change of surroundings that prepared these men for their work. It was time and communion with God; much time and communion. He sent them there for the purpose of restoring in them the image of God, to teach them a new song and to take that new song from the mountain out to the multitude. This goal then became their life's work.

Was 40 years in the mountains for Moses too long, or the 30 years in the wilderness for John the Baptist, or the three years of quiet communion with his Lord for the apostle Paul? Were the periods too long? Was there any unwise decision to take Moses to the wilderness while the people of God languished in bondage--cruel bondage? No! There was no better use of the time.

God knew that Moses needed to spend forty years in the humble work of a shepherd. The habits of care taking, of self-forgetfulness and tender solicitude for his flock, thus developed, would prepare him to become the compassionate, longsuffering shepherd of Israel. No advantage that human training or culture could bestow, could be a substitute for this experience.

Did infinite wisdom count the period too long or the price too great? God knew what Moses needed. Moses, before his 40 years of country living, was self-sufficient, self-confident, proud, zealous, highly educated, and very impatient. After his 40 years in the country, Moses was self-distrustful, humble, meek above all men, timid, reverent, slow of speech and patient.

Now Moses was ready to rightly represent God because He had partaken of the attributes of God's character. Moses was ready to be God's man because he had become intimately and personally acquainted with the great I AM.

Has God's prescription of time, change of surroundings and communion with Him lost its effectiveness? Does it still apply to us today in the hustle land bustle of our fast-paced modern society? Can a prescription like this still be effective? God's prescription has not lost its effectiveness friends, it never will. We have lost the prescription. Like Moses, God has a plan for everyone of us. But often we go ahead of the Lord, or try to accomplish

our work in our own strength. Or we try to do the work before God has prepared our lives. We go ahead of the Lord and have to learn some very difficult lessons.

Ask yourself this question. Am I accomplishing the plan God has for my life? The only way you will find the true answer is to take time to test this prescription. You must take time. We must take time to go to God's Word to see whether the life we are living, the pace we are going, the work we are doing, is it in accordance with God's prescription for our life. We need time! Not time for selfish pleasure, but time to slow down and get clear directions from our Father in heaven. We need time to think about what matters most in life. What is the most important thing? How much time must I set aside to bring my family to the throne of grace? Friends, take time to compare yourself with the standard of God's Word and the character of Jesus. Then apply the prescription to your life, then to your own family members, and then God will lead you to bring His people out of bondage. This is what country living is all about--**preparing a people.**

Power For Living



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