

**TEARS OF REPENTANCE** There is a legend that says that once upon a time the Angel Gabriel called all the angels together. Each one was asked to visit earth and bring back to heaven the one gift that he thought would be most pleasing to God, the gift he thought would make God most happy. One angel saw a martyr dying for the faith -- he brought back a drop of his blood. Another brought back a small coin that an old destitute widow had given to the poor. Another returned with a Bible that had been used by an eminent preacher. Still another brought back dust from the shoes of a missionary laboring in a remote wasteland for many years. Others brought back similar things. One angel, however, saw a man sitting by a fountain in a town square. The man was looking at a child playing nearby. The man was a hardened sinner, but looking at the little child playing he remembered his own boyhood innocence. As he looked into the fountain he saw the reflection of his hardened face, he realized what he had done with his life, and now recalling his many sins he was sorry for them. Tears of repentance welled up in his eyes and began to trickle down his cheeks. At that point the angel took one of these tears and brought it back to heaven. And according to the legend, it was this gift that God chose before all the others as the one most dear to Him, the one that pleased Him the most, the one that made Him most happy.

We smile at this little story but it has a basis in fact. Recall the story of the prodigal son -- recall the great joy the father experienced when his repentant son returned to Him. And recall the Scripture passage: "There is more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 just men who do not need repentance."

**I**nto thine hand I commit my  
spirit: thou hast redeemed me,  
O Lord God of truth.  
Psalm 31:5

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**“Only when you can be  
extremely pliable and soft  
can you be extremely hard  
and strong.”**

**Zen proverb**

This jalopy is getting into bad condition. The steering gear is so worn and wobbly that I have to use a cane to keep it from running off the road. The headlights are so dim that they show up only about a half or a third as much as they used to. The horn is a mere squawk. I only get about a tenth of the speed out of it that it gave a few years ago. And as for climbing hills, or even gentler slopes, the less said the better. It is clear that it is going to have to be junked one of these days.

But the real I who lives inside this jalopy is a different story. God is much more real and his truth shines more brightly. The companionship of Christ is more constant through His Holy Spirit, and He holds out a hope for a new model, after this jalopy is junked. This, I think, is what Paul had in mind when he spoke of the reward that God, the righteous judge, would give him on that day. I think it is also what he was writing to the Philippians about his own body which was in a hazardous state, "I rejoice and I intend to rejoice. I hope all of you will rejoice with me." Paul labeled his new model spiritual and eternal, as compared with our present model, physical and decaying.

This then is the lively hope that I can have. I know I do not deserve a new model, and if God, the righteous judge, determines that I should not have it, that is all right too. In any case, righteous judge is His middle name, sandwiched between His first and last names, both of which are LOVE.

So, I am fine, thank you. How are you?

By Dr. Joseph LeRoy Dodds to his granddaughter, Margo.