



## IS THE WORLD GETTING BETTER? (Part Three)

As we come now to Part Three, I realize that writing about things being **better** is somewhat “controversial.” Some believe a preacher should talk about how **bad** everything is getting! Gloom and doom. “Everything” is not better today, of course, but **many** things are! *That* will be our focus here.

About **166 million** Americans wear prescription eyeglasses. Without glasses, many of these could not drive, watch television, or even recognize faces of those around them. Thousands who read—whether it is the Bible or something else—are able to do so because of reading glasses.

People mentioned in the Bible who had poor eyesight include: Isaac, Jacob, Eli, and the prophet Ahijah (Gen. 27:1; 48:10; 1 Sam. 3:2; 1 Kings 14:4). Some people were nearsighted (2 Peter 1:9). Reportedly, Nero used a concave emerald in order to aid his nearsightedness when watching sporting events. Imagine how any of these people back then would have appreciated a pair of eyeglasses!

During the last four years of her life, we took care of my mother, Florence, in our home. Though she had passed age 90, she could still walk (howbeit with difficulty). It became helpful to use a wheelchair. I gained an extra appreciation for access to sidewalks, handicap parking spaces, etc.

Many years ago, an uncle (who died before I was born), served as a fireman in Riverside, California. As the result of an injury, infection set in, causing his death. I am told that if antibiotics had been available back then, he would have survived.

There was a time when many did not realize (or tried to *ignore*) that smoking was dangerous to one’s health. The law *now* requires warning labels on packages of cigarettes. They can no longer (since 1971) be advertised on television, but warnings **against** smoking are allowed.

It is now known that exposure to **lead** can cause long-term health problems. Lead is a metal mentioned in the Bible, along with gold, silver, bronze, iron, and tin (Num. 31:22). There was a time when many people believed tomatoes were poisonous. But the real problem was the lead in pewter plates. Tomatoes, being high in acidity, leached lead from the plate, resulting in death from lead poisoning.

In the United States, paints containing lead were banned in 1978. Many countries have also banned lead in gasoline. Lead pipes for drinking water have been largely replaced by plastic pipes (PVC). These are all steps in the right direction!



Unlike earlier times, protection for restaurant customers is provided by Health Departments that inspect for food safety and cleanliness, providing an A, B, or C rating. Compare this to an analogy used by Isaiah: “...all tables are full of vomit and filthiness, so that no place is clean” (Isa. 28:8). Places like that would **not** have passed inspection!

So often we take clean drinking **water** for granted. But back over the centuries, contaminated water often caused sickness and, sometimes, death (cf. Exod. 23:25). Timothy, even though he was young, had to deal with “often infirmities” because of impure water (1 Tim. 4:12; 5:23). Today, churches and other organizations have done a noble work by helping people in poor and developing countries to have safe drinking water.



Setting broken bones has been around for centuries and is even mentioned in the Bible (Ezek. 30:21). But how different (and better) treatment is today because of X-rays! Now a doctor can better know how to set and bind up a broken leg or arm. I have always found it amazing how an X-ray can “see” through skin and provide an image of human bones that are otherwise invisible.



A form of X-ray is even used by railroads to find internal defects in tracks. Thanks to Elmer Sperry who invented this technology nearly a century ago, train travel is safer and more reliable. A Sperry rail detector vehicle can inspect steel rails (“seeing” inside them) at speeds up to 50 mph.

But none of this can compare with what **God** sees! Humans can see the *outside* of a person, but God sees the *heart*! “Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7).

“There is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are **naked** and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account” (Heb. 4:13). The Greek word translated “naked” is *gymnos* from which the word “gymnasium” is derived, a gym among the Greeks being a place “for naked exercise.”

An old gospel song about God’s eyes comes to mind:

**God’s eyes see everything no matter what you do.  
He sees you when you’re smiling,  
He sees you when you’re blue.  
Now you may think your hiding,  
doing things you know are wrong,  
You may be fooling someone,  
but He sees what’s going on.**



As a young preacher holding meetings near San Diego, the pastor told me he was going to pick up a pizza after church that night. I asked, “What is pizza?” He explained it is round, is made with cheese, has a tomato sauce, and is baked in a very

hot oven. I had never heard of it. Today it is estimated that 94% of Americans eat pizza on a regular basis.

**Foods** mentioned in the Bible include: Apples, almonds, barley, beans, bread, butter, cheese, cucumbers, dates, eggs, figs, fish, garlic, grapes, honey, leeks, melons, milk, mustard, olives, onions, pomegranates, raisins, salt, vinegar, wine.

But on this list, we don’t find pizza, hamburgers, French fries, potato chips, hot dogs, chocolate, coffee, carbonated beverages, corn on the cob, tacos, Chinese food, or ice cream.

We have heard the saying:

“You scream, I scream, we *all* scream for ICE CREAM!”

A story is told about a missionary who had spent much of his life in a foreign land. Returning to America on a ship, ice cream was served. He had never had ice cream. “Eating ice cream must be a **sin**,” he exclaimed, “*it tastes so good!*”

As a boy, I can remember family gatherings at my grandparents’ house. They had a wooden ice cream maker with a crank. The ingredients for the ice cream were placed in a metal cylinder surrounded with ice and rock salt. People at the gathering took turns cranking. It took a lot of cranking, but finally we had ice cream.



Most people enjoy ice cream, now available in many flavors—and with no cranking required!

Today, a variety of nuts are readily available in vacuum-packed cans or jars, *already cracked and ready to eat!* Machines have been invented that remove the pits from dates and olives.

We may open a can of pineapple, seldom thinking it has traveled thousands of miles—possibly from Hawaii or the Philippines. And because of canning methods today, it is available in season or out of season!



I like to drink orange juice with my breakfast. But in earlier times, this would have only been available at a certain season and certain locations. My father was born and grew up in Carl Junction, Missouri (near Joplin). At Christmas, children at the local church were given a little bag with various treats, including something considered very special: an *orange!*

Oranges grow in warm climates. In contrast, apples need a cold climate. But today, because of modern transportation, things are **better**: apples and oranges are available all over the country.

Without silverware (as we know it), Jesus and the disciples would break off a piece of bread and dip it a gravy or sauce. This is called a “sop” in the *King James Version* (John 13:26). Newer translations have “morsel” or “bread dipped in a dish.” But if a

*slice* of bread was desired, this required a knife. That changed in 1928, the year Otto Rohwedder of Davenport, Iowa, invented the world’s first bread-slicing machine! Today most loaves of bread come already sliced.

In earlier centuries, people may have figured out ways to toast bread, but they did not have a toaster!

There is no reason to suppose that anyone in the Bible drank coffee, the tree producing the coffee bean being native to **Ethiopia**. Though the government official—converted by Philip on the road to Gaza—was from Ethiopia (Acts 8:26, 27), it is unlikely the bean had been used for coffee at that time. By the 16<sup>th</sup> century coffee was known in Persia, Egypt, Syria, and Turkey. It made its way to Brazil (the world’s largest producer of coffee) and to America—**big time**. It is estimated that Americans drink about *400 million cups of coffee a day!*

Some early Adventists opposed drinking coffee, and also the use of meat products. John Harvey Kellogg, superintendent of the Battle Creek Sanitarium (founded by Ellen G. White), developed Kellogg’s Corn Flakes as a meat substitute. Charlie Post, influenced by Kellogg, came out with his own brand using his name: *Post* Toasties and a coffee substitute, *Postum*. Well over a century later, these products are still around.

Millions today enjoy carbonated soft drinks. The man who invented (or discovered) carbonated water, making this possible, was Joseph Priestly (1733-1804). He was a noted scientist and also a preacher. In 1767 he was called to be the minister of Mill Hill Chapel near Leeds, England. Little did he realize that someday products with carbonated water—like *Coca-Cola*—would be available **world-wide**. Reportedly the only two countries where *Coca-Cola* is *not* sold are Cuba and North Korea.

The original syrup for *Coca-Cola* was developed by Major John Pemberton in **1886**, to which carbonated water was later added. We might suppose this is the oldest of soft drinks that are still around. However, Dr. Pepper began to be sold on a commercial basis as early as **1885**, though for years was only a regional drink, originating in Waco, Texas. Earlier still, a form of Hires Root Beer dates from **1876**.

But Vernor’s Ginger Ale boasts a still earlier date: **1866**. According to legend, James Vernor, a pharmacist, had experimented with a medicinal tonic of vanilla and spices, adding ginger to calm the stomach. He left the mixture in an oak barrel when he went to serve in the Civil War back in 1862. When he opened the barrel upon his return, the beverage had a zesty, gingery flavor from being aged in wood.



For millions today who enjoy any of these soft drinks, had they lived in earlier centuries, these were unavailable and unknown.

Century after century, people faced a challenge about keeping meat, milk, and other food items from spoiling. All of this changed with the invention of the refrigerator. Back then, when the “fatted calf” was killed, the meat had to be eaten right away (Gen. 18:7, 1 Sam. 28:24; Luke 15:23). An exception would be when meat was dried and heavily salted to prevent the growth of bacteria (“Jerky”). Figs were commonly dried, as were grapes which became “raisins” (1 Sam. 25:18).



Different kinds of **tools** are mentioned in the Bible: hammers, plows, sickles, shovels, hoes, saws, etc. The *Philistines* were evidently experts at sharpening tools, a point seldom noticed:

“All the Israelites would go down to the Philistines to sharpen each man’s plowshare, his mattock, his ax, and his sickle” (1 Sam. 13:20). The next verse explains their pay scale for sharpening.

Two Bible verses speak of *mowing* grass (Psa. 72:6; Amos 7:1). This was probably done with some primitive cutting device. What a difference between that and a *riding lawn mower* today!

In earlier times, an **acre** of land was described as “the area plowed by a yoke of oxen in a day” (1 Sam. 14:14, note in NKJV). **One acre** a day. A large modern *tractor* can plow as much as **80 acres** in a day!

For centuries, people used **brooms** to sweep floors (Isa. 14:23; Lk. 15:8). What would they think of a modern *vacuum cleaner*?

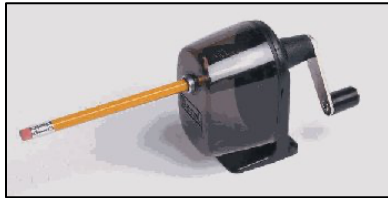
The Bible mentions people cutting down trees with an **ax** (Deut. 19:5; Luke 3:9). How much easier things would have been if they owned a *chainsaw*!

In the Bible, a **hammer** was used for a variety of purposes, including breaking a rock in pieces (Jer. 23:29). Compare a modern-day *jackhammer*!

The word “carpenter” is used twice in the New Testament—references to Jesus and Joseph (Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3). We are not told precisely what items they made in the carpenter shop at Nazareth, but it may have included wooden barrels, gates, and doors. It seems a bit awkward to even put this into words: How different that carpenter shop would have been if they had jig saws, circular saws, electric drills, nail guns, sandpaper and superglue!

Bible commentators show that a “penknife”—mentioned in the book of Jeremiah (36:23)—was used to sharpen a reed which was, back then, used as a pen.

Later, when pencils were invented, they were sharpened with a knife, and the knife was eventually replaced with a *pencil sharpener*!



We are prone to take walking or driving across a **bridge** for granted. There have been bridges in past centuries, but not on the scale we know them today. Bridges are not mentioned in the Bible and were, apparently, not common. Consequently, knowing the location of a “**ford**” (defined as *a shallow location that may be crossed by wading*) was important information (Gen. 32:22; Josh. 2:7; Judges 3:28).

We read in the book of Judges that Jephthah, a “mighty man of valor,” whose mother was a “harlot” (Judges 11:1), “seized the **fords** of the Jordan.” This, a strategic crossing, became a **deathtrap** for the Ephraimites. Here Jephthah and his men killed thousands of Ephraimites who tried to cross over at this location (Judges 12:5, 6).

Three unique bridges I have crossed come to mind just now. One is the San Francisco Golden Gate Bridge with its amazing span of 4,199 feet between towers. I was 13 when I first crossed the bridge with my parents. It was so foggy (a common form of natural air conditioning in summer), only the lower portion of each tower was visible as we drove across!

In 1987, with traffic stopped for a few hours, a crowd (estimated as high as 800,000 people) flocked onto the bridge for its 50th anniversary. The weight of this many people caused the bridge to sag seven feet, flattening its usual convex. A dear Christian lady (who considered me one of her favorite preachers) was on the bridge that day. She has passed on now, but hanging on the wall of her home was a photo of this event.

A number of times over the years I have visited the Royal Gorge Bridge, near Cañon City, Colorado. It crosses the gorge at 956 feet above the Arkansas River, the *highest* bridge in the United States. Far below, trains moving along on the railroad tracks that parallel the river, look like *tiny* miniatures. The Arkansas River actually begins in Colorado, then flows across Kansas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas where it meets the Mississippi River. It is the sixth-longest river in the United States.



Then there is the famous London Bridge, unique in that it is no longer in London. It is in **Arizona**! Built in the 1830s, it spanned the River Thames in London for well over a century. When it needed to be replaced—in 1968—it was purchased by Robert McCulloch, founder of Lake Havasu City. The stones were carefully numbered and then reassembled, crossing a portion of the Colorado River. It remains a popular tourist attraction in Arizona, probably second only to the Grand Canyon.



It was under a portion of this bridge (when in London) that William Booth saw many homeless and hurting people huddled together. As a result, in 1865 he established mission stations to feed and house poor people who were often neglected by the more traditional churches. Today this noble outreach, the Salvation Army, operates in 134 countries, helping millions each year with faith, encouragement, meals and shelter.



Back over the centuries, some people cared about dogs and had them for pets. “...the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table” (Matt. 15:27 NKJV). But dogs were commonly despised and forced to be scavengers, eating anything they could find in order to survive. Food not fit for human consumption was thrown to the dogs (Exod. 22:31; 1 Kings 14:11; 16:4).

A pool in Samaria was known as a place where prostitutes bathed. After King Ahab was killed in battle, his chariot was brought to this pool to be washed. Here hungry dogs licked up his blood. “They washed the chariot at a pool in Samaria where the

prostitutes bathed, and the dogs licked up his blood” (1 Kings 22:38 NIV).



of her hands,” as illustrated in this old drawing (2 Kings 9:30-37).

Things are **better** now: instead of dogs being left to roam the streets, most towns and cities have a humane society to provide shelter and help dogs (and cats) find a home. In the last 100 years, more and more have considered a pet as part of their family. It is estimated that 66% of United States households (86.9 million homes) own a pet.



Just as a neighbor was about to take this photo of me at the piano, unexpectedly my dog “Buddy” jumped up on the bench. It was like he wanted to be in the picture!

Unlike centuries past, when dogs were often considered worthless, their worth has now been widely recognized. Their hearing ability is 4 times greater than humans, causing them to be effective watchdogs. Their sense of smell is reportedly 10,000 times more acute than a human's. They can detect illicit drugs, even when being smuggled inside the tires of a car. Many police departments have a K-9 unit, a valuable asset in search and rescue. Dogs can lead the blind and provide companionship to disabled people and others.

There is only one place the Bible mentions a dog *breed* by name, the **greyhound** (Prov. 30:31 KJV). But the *precise* meaning of the Hebrew word so translated is uncertain—some translations say a **strutting rooster!**

In times past, elephants were hunted and slaughtered in order to obtain **ivory** from their tusks. Ivory was imported by Solomon, along with gold, silver, apes, and peacocks (2 Chron. 9:21). His unique throne was made of ivory and overlaid with gold (1 Kings 10:18-20). Houses of rich people had walls, doors, ceilings, and furniture inlaid with ivory (1 Kings 22:39; Amos 3:15; 6:4).

As recently as the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Kenyan elephant herds were devastated because of a demand for ivory, to be used for piano keys. By the 1970s, the piano industry had abandoned the use of ivory as a key covering material. Today the use of ivory for billiard balls, cutlery handles, ornamental items, and piano keys, has been replaced with plastics.

There are 88 keys on a piano which strike about **230** strings (depending on model). Compare this with a musical “instrument

of **ten** strings” (Psa. 33:2; 92:3; 144:9) as in the accompanying illustration.

The Shofar, often translated in the Bible as a “trumpet” (Psa. 150:3; Josh. 6:5), was a hollowed-out ram's horn, quite primitive by today's standards.

What were considered *quality* musical instruments at the time of Solomon (2 Chron. 9:10,11), would seem like toys compared to musical instruments today. I am thinking of a Hammond Organ with a Leslie Speaker, or a Keyboard which can duplicate a multitude of sounds!



In centuries past, **wood** was commonly burned for heating and baking (Jer. 7:18; Ezek. 38:10; Acts 28:3). When there was a scarcity of wood, sometimes dried cow's dung was burned or, as a last resort, human dung (Ezek. 4:12-15). How much better, and *cleaner*, it is today to use electricity or natural gas!

Sometimes dried grass was used to heat an oven: “...the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven” (Matt. 6:30). A recipe may call for a baking time of 55 minutes at 350 degrees. This would be simple and routine today. But ovens in earlier centuries did not have this capability.

Suppose we were to go back in time—say 150 years—knowing everything we know now. We would look for a switch to turn on a light in our house, only to realize we would need to ignite an oil lamp to have light.

In the kitchen, there would be no microwave to heat a meal. A fire would need to be built. Needing to keep food fresh, there would be no refrigerator. Instead of turning on a faucet for water, a trip to a well would be required.

There would be no radio, telephone, television, washer, dryer, air conditioning or vacuum cleaner. Without a postal system, there would be no mailbox. There would be no garage with a car, but perhaps a barn with a horse for transportation.

A “bathroom,” as we know it, would be non-existent. The bathtub would be a washtub; the toilet an outhouse.

Life today is **better** because we have a wire bringing electricity into our house, a pipe bringing natural gas for heating, a pipe for water coming *in* and a sewer pipe going *out!*

Granted, “everything” is not better, but we are **blessed** in so many ways! We have reasons to **rejoice**—not only for *spiritual* blessings, but also for *material* blessings that make our lives better (Deut. 26:11).

Charles Spurgeon said: “I do not think the church rejoices enough. We all grumble enough and groan enough: but very few of us rejoice enough.” In the words of an old hymn, we should “praise God from whom ALL blessings flow!” —RW

**RALPH WOODROW**  
**PO BOX 21**  
**PALM SPRINGS, CA 92263**

**E-mail: [ralphwoodrow@earthlink.net](mailto:ralphwoodrow@earthlink.net)**  
**Phone: (760) 327-6049**  
**Website: [ralphwoodrow.org](http://ralphwoodrow.org)**