

IS THE WORLD GETTING BETTER?

There are some who tell us in all seriousness that “everything is getting worse and worse!” It seems popular, even in some pulpits, to talk about how bad everything is getting—“and getting worse all the time!” But the evidence is overwhelming that MANY things are better than they have ever been, especially in countries that enjoy the blessings of civilization.

This is not to say there is not a lot of evil in the world. Many things are not as they should be. Nevertheless, progress has been made in the right direction. It will be our purpose in this message—in harmony with Philippians 4:8, “...think on things of good report”—to talk about some of the GOOD things God has blessed us with and for which we should be thankful.

Twice I have taken the free tour of Abraham Lincoln’s house in Springfield, Illinois. In 1887, when his son Robert donated the house to the State of Illinois, he stipulated that it be open to the public at no charge.

The Lincolns purchased this house in 1844 from Charles Dresser, the pastor who had performed their wedding ceremony a couple years before. During the next 17 years, with a growing family, the house was enlarged, including the expansion from a story-and-a-half to a full two stories.



This would have been considered a very nice house in its day. But it had no electric lights or appliances. No radio, record player, television, telephone, microwave, refrigerator, washer, dryer, computer, vacuum cleaner, air conditioning, or garage with a car!

Lighting was by oil lamps. Cooking was done over a woodstove. Fireplaces provided an uneven heat. There were no automobiles during Lincoln’s lifetime. Transportation was by horse and buggy, kept at some distance at the back of the property, along with the outhouse.

Today, just a moderate, average home in America would be far superior!

When Lincoln (as the newly elected president) left Springfield by train for Washington D.C., on the way he attended the Sunday School class of D. L. Moody in Chicago. Days later, when he stepped off the train in Washington to assume the presidency, it was a relatively small, somewhat dirty city, and with only a handful of federal buildings, including the Capitol with its unfinished dome. There were no paved roads.

Today there are over 2 MILLION miles of paved roads in the United States.

In 1917, the main highway through Indio, California had been paved, but there was no white line down the center. While driving her Model T Ford on this highway, June McCarroll—a woman doctor—was run off the road by an approaching truck. Because of this near fatal accident, she came up with the idea of the white line. Being unable to get much interest from officials and others about her idea, she took it upon herself to hand-paint a white stripe down that stretch of highway.



A monument near the intersection of Indio Boulevard and Fargo Street in Indio honors McCarroll as the inventor of the white line, which is now used on highways worldwide.

Some years ago, while preaching in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, I mentioned that from there to my house in Palm Springs was a distance of 1,710 miles. But, amazingly, the I-10 Freeway that connects the two cities, provides virtually non-stop travel the entire distance!

We commonly think of “art” as great paintings or sculptures from the past. But I think the vast coast-to-coast Interstate system can qualify as such. Those who designed, surveyed, and built these highways, have benefited everyone. We have “entered into their labors” (cf. John 4:38).

With today’s tractors, graders, and huge earth-moving equipment, highway construction has come a long way since a “Fresno” scraper pulled by horses was invented in 1882. The name “Fresno” was based on the California city where many of these were manufactured.



At the time of Lincoln, huge balloons inflated with hydrogen gas were used during the American Civil War. Being able to reach an elevation of 1,000 feet, an operator could relay information about the location of the opposing army through a telegraph wire to soldiers on the ground. From a balloon like this, land for miles around could be seen.

Today, we can see the ENTIRE PLANET from space!

Orville and Wilbur Wright are credited with inventing, building, and flying the world's first successful motor-operated airplane. Milton Wright, their father, was a Christian



pastor and traveling evangelist. The names Orville and Wilbur were chosen because of Orville Dewey and Wilbur Fisk, two Christian ministers Milton admired. The Wright Brothers' first flight near Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, took place on December 17, 1903.

A mere 65 years later—in 1968—the first Boeing 747 was rolled out of the plant in Everett, Washington, the world's largest building by volume. Both the building (which we toured some years ago) and the planes constructed there, are modern marvels.



The Presidential 747, Air Force One, is shown in the accompanying photo at the Palm Springs Airport. Can anyone compare the Wright brothers' plane with a plane like this and fail to see the amazing progress?

In October 1819, the first Christian missionaries to Hawaii left Boston for the 18,000-mile voyage around the tip of South America (there was no Panama Canal at that time). After **five months** in cramped quarters, with bouts of seasickness, and other difficulties on board the ship, the Hawaiian Islands finally came into view.

Today, a non-stop flight from Boston to Hawaii takes just over **11 hours!** Flying west (with the sun), a flight leaving Boston at 8 AM arrives in Hawaii by early afternoon, at 1:10 PM!



My Aunt Thelma did not live far from the Golden Gate Bridge when it was completed in 1937. Years later, as a boy, I recall her talking in glowing terms about this bridge—how it is

supported by cables and can even sway in the wind. I had never heard of a bridge like that! The many wires from which the supporting cables are made, if separated into one continuous length, could wrap around the earth over three times! Each day, people in about 112,000 vehicles cross the bridge. I don't suppose any of them think things were better when the bridge was not there!

My grandparents migrated westward from Missouri to California, arriving in Riverside in 1919 with six children. Their oldest son, Edward (from whom I have my middle name), was the only one who knew how to drive a car. Long stretches of the road (later

known as "Route 66") were unpaved. It was the first long distance highway to be entirely paved, but that was not until 1938.

The contrast between a car similar to the Buick in which they traveled, with what would be considered an *average* car today, is **striking!**



Today's cars are thousands of inventions rolled into one. Truly a work of art.

Would anyone want to go back to using a crank to start a car? Or what about rolling down the window, extending the hand and arm to signal a turn? One wonders why it took so long for blinkers to come into existence. The same can be said about seat belts!

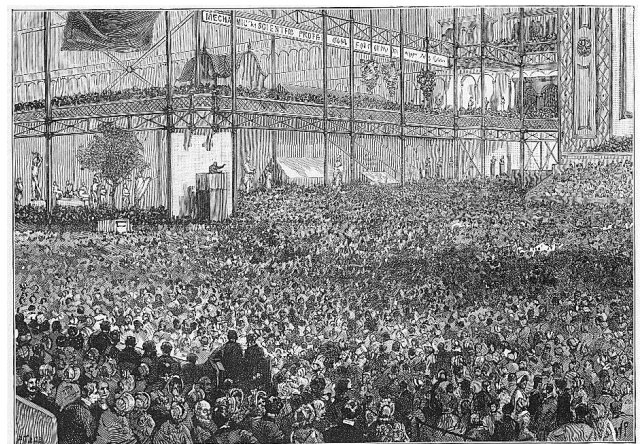
Most people who drive *enjoy* driving. This is reflected in advertising jingles from years past: "What a thrill to take the wheel of a smart new Oldsmobile!" or "See the USA in your Chevrolet!" For security concerns, American Presidents are not allowed to drive on the open road. Others do the driving and Secret Service personnel are in charge. A number of Presidents have said this is one of the things they miss.

For quite a few years, some relatives of mine owned a 1941 Packard automobile which they bought new. It was a luxury 4-door sedan, olive green in color, and had a feature that seemed like a novelty at the time—a **heater!**

Today heating and air conditioning have become standard in cars.

If there had been banks in the first century, the man who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, could have made a deposit in Jerusalem and a withdrawal at Jericho, without carrying money and becoming a prey to thieves.

Instead of walking on a treacherous path where he was beat up and left half dead, today he could drive those 21 miles in a car! Think how good the air conditioning would have felt to him in the hot climate of Jericho, 846 feet below sea level, the lowest city in the world!



The accompanying drawing portrays noted minister Charles Haddon Spurgeon preaching to a crowd of 23,654 people at The Crystal Palace in London. Quite a feat in **1857**—years before the microphone was invented! Today, because of microphones, not

only can a large crowd hear a speaker, his words can circle the *world* through a variety of communication channels!

I remember the first time I saw a television set. It had been purchased by some neighbors. It had a 7-inch, black and white screen, in a large cabinet. It was overwhelming to me as a boy—to be in Riverside and to not only hear, but to be able to **see** someone in Los Angeles, sixty miles away. But it was happening—somehow an invisible signal was coming through the air and picked up by an antenna on the roof!

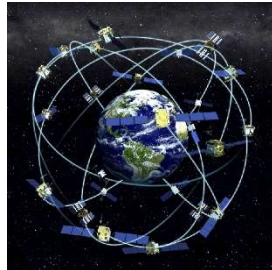
Today, would anyone want to go back to a small screen black and white television? Would we not prefer a large flat-screen with full color?

I recall hearing people in the early 1960s speak in negative terms about the space program. The idea of sending a man to the moon was ridiculed: “We have not solved the problems here on earth, why would we try to send a man to the moon?” Some affirmed it would never happen—that *God* would not permit it. They compared it to those Babel builders who sought to construct a tower into heaven (Gen. 11:1-9). A passage from the Psalms was also quoted: “The heavens are the LORD’S: but the earth he has given to the children of men” (Psa. 115:16).

Some thought the worst. One Christian publication I received at the time said: “Astronauts may bring back germs from the Moon and usher in the seven last plagues of the book of Revelation!”

Today we all benefit from technology that came out of the space program—the use of satellite communication whereby even Christian television programs can be beamed all over the world! Because of satellites, early warnings about approaching hurricanes can save the lives of thousands.

There was a time, not long ago, when we struggled with roadmaps, tried to read street signs or addresses at night, or stopped to ask directions. Now with a simple GPS (Global Positioning System)—an “eye in the sky,” as it were—precise directions are provided from an array of orbiting satellites.



In 1804 Lewis and Clark set out to explore the vast land areas between St. Louis, Missouri, and the Pacific Ocean. In facing the unknown, they met with overwhelming challenges. Their expedition took two years, four months, and ten days. Think how much easier things would have been had

they owned a helicopter, GPS, or cell phone! **Today** the entire world has been explored and photographed!

Years ago, while in Washington D.C., on two occasions I spent time doing research at The Library of Congress. Upon checking in and securing a desk, library workers retrieve the desired books for you. This is necessary because its collection fills about **838 miles** of bookshelves!



Now, because of the Internet, information from millions of books—“good and evil”—can be accessed right in one’s home!

For years I used *Strong’s Concordance* to look up words in the Bible, to find references, and check meanings in Greek or Hebrew. Now, it is simpler and quicker to pull up all this information (and much more) with a computer.

In times past, a dictionary (book) was a wonderful tool for English word definitions. Now all of this is available on-line—not only for definitions, but to find similar words, how to use them in a sentence, their etymology, and even the ability to *hear* how a word is pronounced, in English or some other language!



In 1978 I was one of the speakers at a Bible Conference at the Glen Eyrie Castle, located on the lovely grounds of the Navigator’s Conference Center in Colorado Springs. A pastor from England (who was also a speaker) remarked to me that we (in the United

States) have a great opportunity to mail Christian literature vast distances—that his literature outreach in England was much more limited.

Prior to this conversation, I had not thought much about it. But every year—for over 50 years—I have sent printed messages through the mail at the bulk non-profit rate. It is indeed a “great opportunity” in that the per-piece price is the same whether it is nearby—or as far away as Hawaii, Alaska, Maine, or Puerto Rico!

We are all benefited because of the postal system. While postage rates seem high today, when we consider the service, speed, and distance a letter can go for the price of a stamp, it is a bargain. The Pony Express provides an interesting comparison. When it was founded in 1860, it carried mail from St. Joseph, Missouri, to Sacramento, California. It required 75 ponies and over 10 days to make the trip. The initial rate for a letter was **\$5.00** for each half ounce!

Would you want to go back to the Pony Express?

Those who believe that “everything can only get worse and worse,” have little incentive to help improve conditions. They tend to look for the worst, talk about the worst, expect the worst, and may fail to acknowledge any progress that is made, especially if it is connected with the government.

Social Security has benefited many people. But when that concept was promoted by President Franklin Roosevelt, some church folks were suspicious. Might he be the “Beast” of the book of Revelation—giving everyone a *number*? (Rev. 13:17,18). But in receiving an identifying Social Security number, everyone got a *different* number—not one number like 666. Years later, even the most critical didn’t hesitate to cash their Social Security checks!

Government control of zoning within a city is a good thing. Otherwise, a person might build a house on one lot, only for a junkyard to go in next door! Without government control of money, counterfeiters could soon destroy the economy. Inspections of restaurants and gas pumps provide a helpful service. DNA testing has convicted the guilty and set the innocent free!

I wonder what a Caesar or Solomon, in all their glory, would have thought of the exotic international meals Americans take for granted today: pineapple from Hawaii; potatoes from Idaho; peanuts from Georgia; apples from Washington; corn from Iowa; artichokes, avocados, and dates from California; coffee from Brazil; bananas from Guatemala, melons from Mexico—and the list goes on and on!

That things are better today can be seen in something as (seemingly) insignificant as *ice cubes*. Beginning in the 1800s, ice in huge blocks was cut from frozen lakes in New England and shipped south by barges in heavily insulated containers. It was an expensive operation, but one whereby wealthy people in warmer climates, like Florida, could have ice in their drinks.

Today we take having ice cubes for granted, such having become increasingly available since the first electric household refrigerator was sold in 1927. Would anyone want to go back to not having a refrigerator?

Multiplied thousands of people are alive today who would have died with diseases considered incurable 75 years ago. Today, through advanced knowledge about vitamins, diet, health, germs, etc., it is possible to cure and, better still, *prevent* many afflictions in the physical body. Think of the progress in surgical procedures, diagnosis, chiropractic knowledge, and dentistry.

Even as medical knowledge has increased to help humans, veterinarians today are able to provide better care for our pets.

Were it not for eye glasses, multitudes of people would be unable to drive a car, watch television, or read. But an inexpensive pair of eyeglasses (even from a .99 cent store), can bring small print into focus. Optometrists admit that a cheap pair of reading glasses is satisfactory for this purpose.

Following his term as President, to his credit, Jimmy Carter set out to promote a number of very helpful causes, like Habitat for Humanity. Another pursuit was the eradication of the horrid Guinea Worm Disease. When the Carter Center began this program in 1986, about 3.5 million people in Africa and Asia were afflicted. **Today** it has been almost totally eradicated!

I was probably in the first grade when we first had a telephone. Our number was 2650-W. It was a party line. When making a call, the operator would say, "Number please." Some time later, dial phones became available by which one could dial a number himself. Still later came push-button phones with touch-tone dialing.

It will not be necessary to go into details about how phones have advanced. Multiplied thousands of cell phones are in use that are capable of all kinds of things, including taking photos that require neither film nor developing!

Having a cell phone is not only a convenience; it can be a lifesaver in a highway emergency.

Today, on average, there are 100 *million* Bibles printed each year. Before the invention of the printing press, only a few people owned a personal copy of the Bible. It took an industrious scribe about one year to hand-copy a Bible. How many of us could afford a year's wages to own a Bible? Yet today, Bibles are readily available. If anyone cannot afford a Bible, there are organizations like the Gideons that will provide a free copy.

In earlier times, even if Bibles had been available, most people did not know how to read. Much progress has been made. It is now estimated that around 86 percent of adults worldwide can read.

Was the world or this country better in the days of child labor? Was it better in the days of slavery? Was it better when travel was in covered wagons? Was it better when women could not vote or own property? Was it better when lights burned coal oil? Was it better when it took months for missionaries to get to a foreign field?

Conditions may not be as they should, but on the whole, people have better food, better clothing, better housing, better health care, better education, better working conditions, better pay, better shopping, and better transportation than in the past.

With today's technology, ships at sea no longer depend on lighthouses for guidance. Fire lookout towers atop mountains have become obsolete. Computers have replaced typewriters.

Today there are organizations to encourage clean, wholesome activities for boys and girls; organizations to aid the blind, the handicapped, the underprivileged, the retarded, and the elderly; organizations to prevent cruelty to animals and provide shelter. Progress is made in Alzheimer's research. Such things speak of kindness and progress in the right direction.

Despite all the "good things" the Lord has allowed us to enjoy in this day, there are those who suppose things are getting worse all the time. And while the Bible does say that "evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived" (2 Tim. 3:13), this may simply refer to the fact that one sin leads to another sin; one lie leads to another lie; those who head in the wrong direction get further and further away from that which is right.

"But the path of the **just** is like the shining sun, that shines *ever brighter* unto the perfect day" (Prov. 4:18). Where sin abounds, grace shall *much more* abound (Rom. 5:20). Let people of faith everywhere look on the bright side, thankful for the progress that has been made!

Is there evil in the world? Yes! No doubt about it. But while "everything" is not as it should be, we are BLESSED in many ways!

In closing, the words of a hymn, written in 1897, come to mind:

*When upon life's billows you are tempest-tossed,
When you are discouraged, thinking all is lost,
Count your many blessings; name them one by one,
And it will surprise you what the Lord has done!*



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