1970

A Better World Begins With Me

Becky Burris

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The Church of Christ
Tuscumbia, Alabama

by
BECKY BURRIS

Compliments of The R. W. Fair Foundation, Tyler, Texas
**A Better World Begins with Me**

By Becky Burris

One day it suddenly occurred to me that I couldn't sit and twiddle my thumbs and expect the world to get better. No. If this is to be a better world, I must make it better myself. At least, I must make it better all around me.

I didn't have much—just my heart and my head and my hands. My heart spoke first. "You can't pile up rocks to heave at your neighbors and make the world better," it told me. "You can't invent bigger and more horrible atomic bombs to drop on your neighbors and make it better.

"Rocks and bombs belong to hate. That is what is wrong with the world today—everybody is trying to out-hate everybody else. It never has worked, and it won't work now.

"The only weapon powerful enough to destroy hate is love. Against the ghastliness of modern war, love alone can prevail. Love only can cure the world's ills. To make the world a better place, all you have to do is fill the world with love."

Simple, isn't it?
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Simple, isn't it?

The incomprehensible thing is that love is free. It lies all around us, waiting to be picked up and nourished and harvested and used.
You don't have to impoverish a country to build up a stockpile of love. You don't have to float loans, or raise taxes, or sell government bonds to produce it.
People go to the ends of the earth seeking diamonds and uranium. But diamonds and uranium won't stop war.
Love, which will, gets trampled into the dust under restless, searching feet.
My head spoke next.
"Before you can make the world better," it pointed out, "you must be better yourself. You must clean everything out of your heart and fill it with love."
I got to work. It was a hard job. I was rusty at loving. Others, anyway. I loved myself. I was self-centered and grabby and given to whining and finding fault. I had to study love and how to get it. I went to the Bible. "Love thy neighbor as thyself," it told me. I worked hard. I couldn't do it alone, so I asked God to help me.
"Take every unworthy thought from my heart, God," I prayed, "and fill it up to the very brim with love!"

God did, and it was wonderful. I had to help, of course. I shoveled and shoveled. I dug and hacked away at malice and envy and greed. Little by little, they faded into nothingness. I felt light and airy and full of joy. My life was different. I came out of the shadows into the sun.

My head was pleased.

"Take your home next," it said. "Make life sweeter now for the ones you live with every day."

"Don't let them laugh, God," I prayed, alone in my room.

I started next morning. "L-Day," I called it. It was the first day I let love tell me what to do.

I got up early. To my husband, still drowsing, I said, "Honey, let me bring you some coffee in bed!"

He was puzzled, but pleased. (Heretofore, I had lain in bed and begged him to bring me coffee.) I got him coffee, then gave him a good morning kiss. That's something else we'd neglected.

"I love you," I said. I'd never done that before so boldly. Then I cried, gaily, "What would your majesty like for breakfast?" I saw pleasure in his eyes. I'd made him feel important.

In a better world, everybody must be made to feel important.

Awakening our son, I called him "darling."

He came out tucking in his blue jeans, grinning. "Did you call me 'darling,' Mom?"

"Yes, I did, Son." I gave him a hearty kiss. "I love you, honey. Mothers who love their little boys call them 'darling.' I'm going to call you 'darling' a lot from now on. And every day I'm going to tell you I love you."

He laughed and blushed; but he liked it, too.

We hadn't been a demonstrative family. That's where we had been wrong. Affection must be freely shown. There should be nothing embarrassing about letting people know we love them. We wouldn't have trouble-makers, I'm convinced, if people loved one another more and showed it.

What's wrong with us? Are we mad? Why are we so stupid? Why haven't we human beings vast quantities of love? We need love that foams up all over us and
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What's wrong with us? Are we mad? Why are we so stupid? Why haven't we human beings vast quantities of love? We need love that foams up all over us and
all over every other human being we come near.

That one little thing—and our quest for a better world would end.

We punish juvenile delinquents when all they need is love. Bad children are cheated children. They grow up without love. Starving for it, they go berserk. They steal and kill and destroy, getting revenge.

My family has a regular ritual now. Every day my husband tells me he loves me. I tell him I love him, too. And both of us tell our son we love him.

Corny? Not a bit. Delightful! We live different lives since we began it. The little world of our home is a better world.

I thought up a scheme to make them happy. It consists mostly of laughing at things, so our house is a jolly place. I surprise them with novel ideas. I praise them a lot and sacrifice myself to please them.

"Let me do it!" I cry, where I used to be lazy. "It won't take a minute!" "I'd enjoy doing it!" "Oh, let me—let me!"

In my muddling way, I'm trying to be like Jesus. He went about, you recall, doing good deeds. He was—and he told us to be, too—the servant of all.

Nobody was so lowly that Jesus didn't love him and help him.

"splendid!" my head said, noting our happy home. "Now, branch out."

next door lived a little lady of 84, all alone. I'd been nice to her in a skittish way for years. Skittish, because I dreaded being regaled with ailments. "I'm so rushed," I'd gasp when she caught me. "I can hardly stop for a moment to talk."

When I found I must make the world better, I changed.

I went next door and took some cake. The little old lady was sick. She was happy I'd thought of her. She said bashfully, "Do you mind if I give you a teeny, weeny kiss?" I said, "I'd love it."

She brushed my cheek with lips as soft as the petal of a rose. I gave her frail body a squeeze. I was glad it happened. The next day she lapsed into a coma. A week later, she slipped away to heaven with a little smile.

God giving me a nudge? I think so.

God will give you nudes, too. All you have to do is obey them.

In my block are big, old houses. Many of them have beenremodeled into apartments. In those apartments live lonely old
all over every other human being we come near.

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ladies. I'd give a tea, I decided, and invite them all. Nobody gives parties for old ladies, much.

I went to each house, making friends and issuing invitations. One lady had fallen and sprained her ankle. "But I'll be well," she exclaimed happily, "by next Wednesday!"

She was. They all came to tea, and we had a lovely time.

The world is full of lonely old ladies—and old men, too. It's full of lonely middle-aged folks, too, and of lonely children. All of them should be invited to parties. They need to be noticed and made to feel important.

When you do something about lonely folk in your town, you make it a better world.

BETTER-WORLDING is my business now. I went to a meeting. Women had gathered to study mental and emotional health. I asked them, when given an opportunity to speak, "What are you doing to make this a better world?"

They looked at one another in silence.
"I guess nothing," they murmured, almost every one. Then they brightened. "Perhaps improving our own personalities will make the world better!"

"It certainly will," I told them, "if you use your good personalities to improve the world." I looked around at their shining faces. "And," I added with a smile, "I can't see how you could avoid doing that."

Well-adjusted people are working all the time to make the world better. It is unkind, unhappy, and bitter people who make it worse. They are our real enemies. They include Communists.

Communists are Communists, I'm sure, because they are miserable. Ill-equipped for life and unhappy, they can't bear to see anybody else happy. They slash out and bang things around. In a great upheaval, they think they'll come out on top. They could come out on top any day if only they'd fill their hearts with love.

One lady at the meeting said, "I'm working with the Bowl. We give free concerts two nights a week all summer. Expensive programs, and all we take is a collection. I'm sure Bowl programs make the world better."

"Certainly!" I agreed. "I am familiar with Bowl concerts. I'd say all you people connected with that good project are outstanding better-worlders."

One sweet little lady, whose face glowed, said shyly, "I put cookies out for the garbage man."

Everybody laughed. I laughed, too, but I was touched. "How do you do it?" I asked, intrigued. The garbage man is human, too. "How do you distinguish between his gift cookies and the —?"
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"I put them in a box, on top of the can," she said. "The first time I put them out, I tacked on a little note saying, 'These are for you, with thanks.'"

We all agreed she is making her little world better.

Another woman took courage then and said, "Sometimes I call people on the telephone and tell them I like them."

We looked at her with sudden interest.

"People's don't always know that," she said, blushing a little. "I'd be very happy, sometimes, if somebody called me up and told me."

"The Golden Rule," I murmured, thinking that I would, too.

My greatest thrill came when Ruth called, all agog. Ruth is a self-sufficient divorcée. She had hooted at the very idea of better-worlding.

"You'll howl," she said, exultantly, over the phone. "Honestly, it's a scream! Here I am, big as life, running a nursery school!"

I was amazed. Ruth had never done anything useful. "You mean, you've got a job?"

"Young mothers — servicemen's wives," Ruth bubbled. "In our court. The community laundry. They do their washing there. Babies stumble around under their feet. I asked one of them if she'd like me to watch her youngsters while she washed. She fell on my neck. And now, honey, I've got dozens! I run a regular nursery school—tell 'em stories, kiss their wounds. It's the first baby-tending I ever did in my life—and I love it!"

"Of course you do," I said happily, blinking. There was a new note in Ruth's voice. For the first time in her life, she had put somebody else before herself. She had learned what it means to serve.

Again I thought of the Golden Rule . . .

_We better-worlders must observe the Golden Rule at all times. We must keep our hearts filled with love, our heads actively engaged in thinking up ways to help others, and our hands busy performing many good deeds._

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Schools and Libraries,
or to friends in personal and business letters?

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