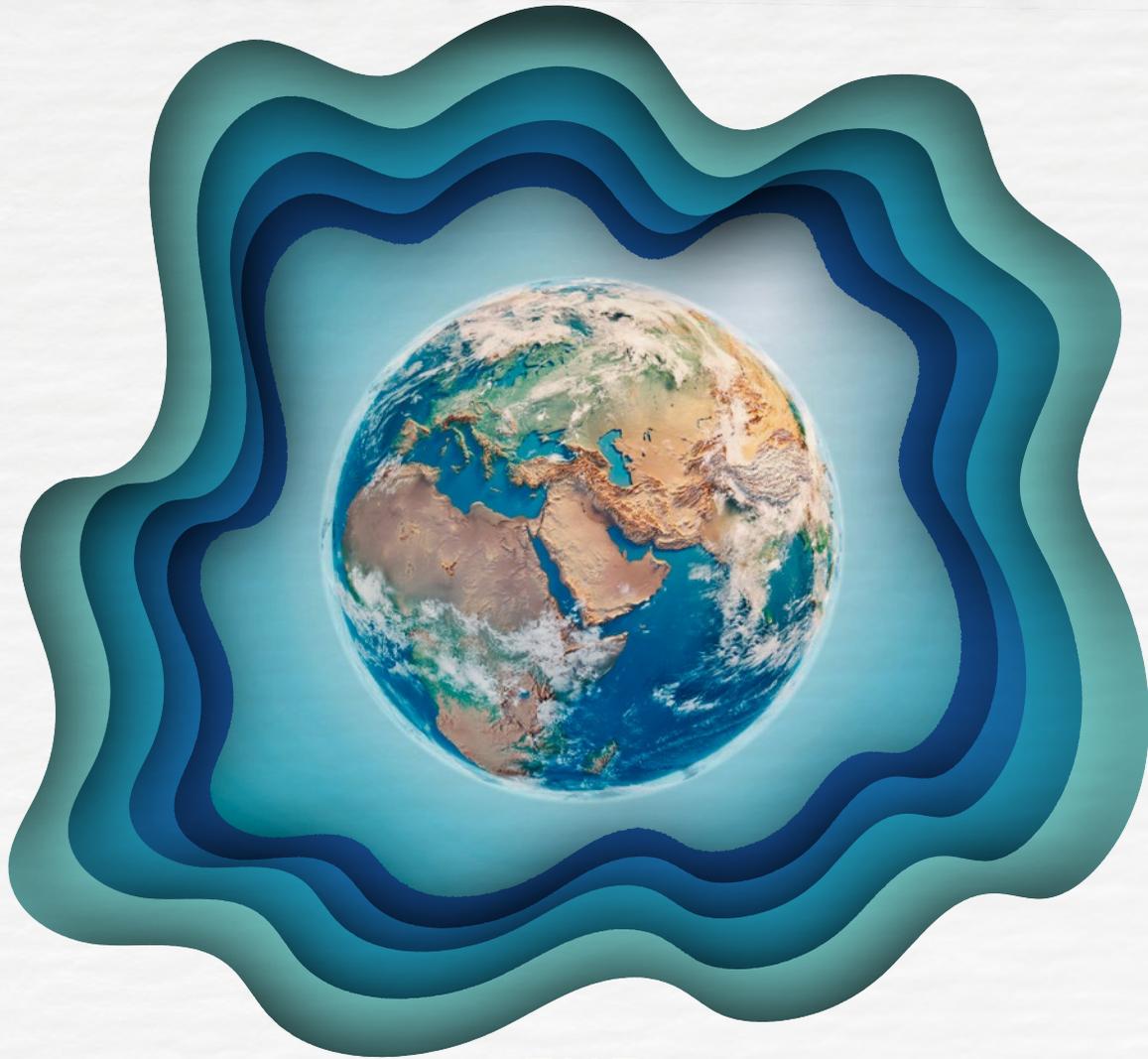




# COMPASS CHECK

Helping you turn your spiritual compass toward God



## THE UNIVERSE CRADLE FOR LIFE

| Let's Talk About Sex

| Apologetics 101

The Most Important Decision  
of Your Life |

Follow the Flags to Contentment |

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## COMPASS CHECK

*Compass Check* is a biblically based magazine for young people of the United Church of God, an International Association (UCGIA). Our name, *Compass Check*, describes youth aged 12-18 pointing their spiritual compass toward God.

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The goal of *Compass Check* is to inspire Church youth, ages 12-18, to respond to the gospel message.

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# COMPASS CORNER



*Dear Compass Checkers,*

Summer is here in full swing, and I hope you will be enjoying time at one of our fantastic United Youth Camps. Personally I look forward to being at our new camp—Woodland, Georgia.

## FORGET ABOUT BEING “PICTURE PERFECT”

Have you ever looked at your social media pages and got the impression that everyone else was living a perfect life but you? Reality check—the perfect life does not exist. That concept is only in our heads. I read of a guy who was on the beach in Southern California, but as he took a video of himself he told his audience that he was in the Florida Keys! It doesn’t pay to believe everything on social media.

God tells us in 2 Corinthians 10:12 (New International Version throughout): “We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise.”

Comparison to others is a joy killer! God does not compare us to others—only to ourselves and how we are living up to the standards of His way of life. Psalm 62:12 says, “and that you, O Lord, are loving. Surely You will reward each person according to what he has done.” Be the very best person you can be with the inspiration of God in you, and do not waste time comparing your life to others.

This summer issue of *Compass Check* is about helping you grow in your relationship with God.

I’d enjoy getting your feedback about *Compass Check* magazine and suggestions for future articles.

Until next time, your camp friend,



Steve Nutzman, *Compass Check* editor, is a church pastor in Idaho, Oregon and Utah, and is the United Youth Camps national coordinator. [compasscheck@ucg.org](mailto:compasscheck@ucg.org)

# Dear Readers

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I

took a class in college all about testimony literature, meaning literature that tells a person's account of an experience. The writer of a piece of testimony literature is a witness to a significant event and writes to record his or her perspective

about what happened.

Usually when we hear the words "testimony" or "witness," it's in the realm of law. Someone's testimony in a courtroom is a formal statement given under oath in response to questions from a lawyer, and a witness is someone who has knowledge about an event relevant to a trial. I've also heard "personal testimony" used to describe a Christian telling the story of being saved.

But the literature class made me think differently about the many verses in the Bible that talk about testimony and being a witness. They go beyond the standard English uses in a way that for me opened up a lot of added meaning and depth.

## 1. BEING WITNESSES CONNECTS CHRISTIANS ACROSS TIME

One way testimony literature is powerful is that it binds a group of people through shared experience. The disciples of Christ were eyewitnesses of the gospel, the good news about God's plan for the world. They wrote down the events that happened during that time and their experiences so that future generations would know the truth and to help keep the story from getting distorted or forgotten.

We continue to act as witnesses and extend their work today by believing that what's written in the Bible is truth and sharing that belief with others. We know this is an important responsibility of the Church from what's written in Acts 1:8: "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

This charge gives all followers of Christ a sense of purpose that's the same no matter when or where you're born. The Bible as testimony literature connects us all with a story, plus a purpose that stems from that story.

## 2. SHARING OUR STORIES HELPS US AND OTHERS IN OUR SPIRITUAL WALKS

Another way testimony literature becomes meaningful is the way it helps those involved process impactful events and understand their own feelings about them. Accepting the role of witness means not denying or ignoring what has happened. Instead it means taking on the duty of sharing the truth about

God boldly, which includes the need to explore what that means for each of us personally, along with making sure we are representing Him in the way that He wants.

It's definitely not always an easy role, since there are those who don't want His story told. But God knows this responsibility helps us develop spiritually and understand Him more completely. He says, "You are My witnesses ... and My servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe Me, and understand that I am He" (Isaiah 43:10).

There's also an interesting connection between the Holy Spirit and testimony. Becoming baptized and receiving the Holy Spirit adds an even greater dimension to our ability to testify and be witnesses of the truth about God (John 15:26-27). That's something to look forward to if you're not yet baptized. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we can share our personal stories of God's intervention in our lives, along with the testimony of other witnesses from the Bible to help those we encounter in the world learn about God (John 17:20).

True testimony, and our true identity as spiritual witnesses, creates a strong connection between us as God's people through our shared experiences as Christians. It also deepens our relationship with God as we communicate and express what He's done and what He's doing.

So, ask older Church members to share their stories. Explore the testimony of Christ's disciples in the gospels of the Bible. And start to share your own stories about when you've felt God work in your life. Because we gain a lot when we become witnesses like David in Psalm 66:16 and say, "Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will declare what He has done for my soul."

Your friend,



*Kourtney Kovanis*

Managing editor | [kourtney.kovanis@gmail.com](mailto:kourtney.kovanis@gmail.com)

# What Do “Messiah” & “Jesus Christ” Mean?

**E**

ver wonder where the names “Jesus Christ” and “Messiah” come from?



The term *Christ* is an English derivative of the New Testament Greek word *christos*, which means “anointed.” The equivalent Hebrew word in the Old Testament is *mashiach*. This term is transliterated in the King James New Testament as *messias* (John 1:41; John 4:25), a word that has come down into modern English, including many Bible versions, as “Messiah.” Both *Christ* and *Messiah* mean “anointed” or “anointed one.”

What was the significance of anointing? *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* states: “In the Hebrew Bible, the term is most often used of kings, whose investiture was marked especially by anointing with oil (Judges 9:8-15; 2 Samuel 5:3; 1 Kings 1:39; Psalms 89:20 ...), and who were given the title ‘the Lord’s anointed’ (e.g., 1 Samuel 2:10; 1 Samuel 12:3; 2 Samuel 23:1; Psalms 2:2; Psalms 20:6; Psalms 132:17; Lamentations 4:20)” (Bruce Metzger and Michael Coogan, editors, 1993, “Messiah,” p. 513, emphasis added).

In the Bible, anointing is an act of *consecration*—setting one apart for the holy work of God. It was symbolic of the pouring out of God’s Spirit

onto someone (compare Isaiah 61:1; Romans 5:5)—representing God’s power and intervention to help the anointed perform the duties of a certain office. Jesus Himself was “anointed...with the Holy Spirit and with power” (Acts 10:38).

The Jews of Jesus’ day eagerly anticipated a specific prophesied figure referred to in several scriptures as the Messiah or Anointed One, a great King of the lineage of David who, by the power of God, would restore Israel and rule the world. Jesus of Nazareth was that Anointed One—and He will yet fulfill these prophecies.

## WHAT ABOUT THE NAME “JESUS”?

How did He receive this name, and what does it mean? In Matthew 1 we find that Mary was discovered to be pregnant during her engagement to Joseph. Joseph was considering how to best handle the difficult situation.

“But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins’” (Matthew 1:20-21).

The Greek name “Jesus” is a transliteration of the Hebrew name *Yehoshua* or *Yeshua*, the English form of which is “Joshua.” This name literally means “God is salvation.” So the angel’s message to Joseph was “You shall call His name ‘God is salvation,’ for He will save His people from their sins.” That name tells us of Jesus’ purpose in God’s plan—that it is through Him that God carries out His plan to save humanity from death, giving us eternal life in His family. **CC**

(Edited from the Bible study aid *Jesus Christ: The Real Story*)

# THE MOST IMPORTANT DECISION OF YOUR LIFE

W

hat is the most important decision that you

will ever make? It's not what college you will go to, or what career you will pursue. It's not even who you will marry. While these are all very important, none of them is the most important. The most important decision of your life is baptism (Mark 16:16)—the choice to follow God's Way for the rest of your life, thereby gaining eternal life. Baptism is a necessary ceremony to show that you are going to follow God's Way, and it is commanded in Acts 22:16. Baptism is the outward representation of the old man dying and being washed away. It is made possible by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, our Savior. After baptism you receive the gift of God's Holy Spirit to help and to guide you (John 14:16; 15:26).

Baptism is extremely important, but how do you know if you are ready for it? Most of us have grown up in the Church of God, and we

have been living God's Way our entire lives. Because of this, we won't get that "Aha!" moment like someone who is called into the Church. This is a moment in which a light bulb turns on, brought on by discovering the truth of God's Way for the first time, starting a wonderful desire to follow God. This wildfire eventually either settles down into a slow burn, or it burns out. This slow burn is what is required to endure to the end. Being reared in the Church, we are typically at that slow burn stage already. This can make it difficult to know if you are ready for baptism.

When I was first thinking about being baptized, I knew it was what I eventually wanted, but I didn't know if I was ready. One day I was positive I was ready, the next I would be worried that I wasn't. I talked to friends who had already been baptized, trying to get an idea of how to tell when you are ready, and that helped a little. I prayed a lot, asking for a way to tell if I was ready, and I eventually talked to my

pastor. He offered me some things to read which really helped. When I finally made the decision to be baptized, the following questions became clear. Is this the way of life that I want to follow for the rest of my life? Did I feel like God was calling me? Did I believe Christ had died for my sins and that He loved me? Yes, yes and yes. Once I answered those questions, I no longer had anything holding me back, and I was able to make the decision. It was the best decision I ever made.

If you are thinking about baptism, but you're hesitant because you are afraid you might make a mistake after you are baptized, don't be, because you will. We all do. Romans 3:23 says, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"—even after baptism. The key is to repent and ask God for forgiveness. Then do your best not to do

it again. You will have God's Spirit to help you.

So, if you are thinking about baptism, that's great! You are on the right track. However, it is an extremely serious and important decision, not to be made lightly. This is why we don't practice child baptism. You are spiritually getting engaged to Christ, so that you can become part of the future bride of Christ. There is no backing out, so take your time and make sure you can run the course and pay the price (Luke 14:28; Hebrews 12:1; 1 Corinthians 9:24).

When you have thought and prayed about it, talk to your parents and seek counseling from your pastor. They will help you prepare, but they can't make the decision for you. The final decision comes down to you. This is the most important decision you will ever make. **CC**



Kyle Bacher is from Grand Junction, Colorado. He is 18 years old and attends services with the Grand Junction congregation.



# *apol·o·get·ics*

## 101

I am someone who likes proof. I like evidence. I don't want someone to say, "This is true" without showing me proof. Are you like that? I think it's a good trait to have. It is very important to be able to use evidence, facts and reason to defend what we say and what we believe. There's a growing belief that the Bible cannot coexist with science, reason and facts. Because of this thinking, many people have stopped believing the Bible.

I studied chemistry in college, and went on to teach high school chemistry and physical science. One of the topics I was asked to teach in my physical science class was the universe. Talk about a big subject! The curriculum included the beginning of the universe and the Big Bang Theory. As I was explaining the current understanding and theory that the universe began over 13 billion

years ago with a "big bang," one of the students got upset, said he was a Christian and didn't want to hear any of this. I wasn't using the word evolution or saying there wasn't a God, but many God-believers have been programmed to become defensive about science because of the idea that science and religion do not agree.

So, after class I talked with the student and explained that nothing I was teaching disproved the Bible, but instead fits well within the biblical narrative. The Bible begins, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). I explained that there is a lot of scientific evidence to support the theory of the Big Bang, but the theory doesn't contradict the Bible or disprove the existence of God. The Bible never states the earth was created 6,000 years ago.

It does, however, give us a glimpse

into how God created the universe, and it is pretty awesome. What's even more awesome is that scientists agree they have no idea what caused the Big Bang.

Notice this quote from Mike Wall at Space.com: "So the very beginning of the universe remains pretty murky. Scientists think they can pick the story up at about 10 to the minus 36 seconds—one trillionth of a trillionth of a trillionth of a second—after the Big Bang."

So they can use science to trace back to just after the "bang" started but not the actual event, what caused the event or what was going on before the event. To me, it's a pretty simple answer as to what caused it—God.

Why have I shared all of this? Because we have to be careful not to let ideas that science and religion don't mix affect our faith or belief that the Bible is truly the inspired Word of God. These two categories coexist. They

don't contradict one another.

I admit there are aspects of science that people try to use to disprove the Bible or God, including evolution. But most of science is in agreement with the Bible. (Search "Is the Bible True?: Science and the Bible" at [ucg.org](http://ucg.org)). The aspects that aren't in agreement, like the theory of evolution, have holes in the evidence or reasoning and should not shake our faith.

Let's get back to my title, Apologetics 101. What is apologetics, and what does it have to do with this topic?

The word apologetics comes from the Greek word *apologia*,

defend our actions according to our biblical beliefs. We have to be able to give an answer about how we live and what we believe.

People question the validity of believing in God or the Bible. Many people say the Bible isn't true, science disproves it, it doesn't make sense, there isn't a God and Jesus Christ wasn't real. Have you heard that? Over one third of "Generation Z" claims to be agnostic or atheist, meaning they either don't know or don't believe in God and don't really care if God exists.

If we are going to be able to

defend the wrong hoop during a game while the other team easily makes a basket? We must begin by knowing what we are defending—God and His Word. We must study it and seek to understand it. Then we have to know what we need to defend against. It's similar to making a game plan in basketball. As a team, you need to know how you are going to defend—man-to-man, zone or switch on pick-and-rolls. How are you going to defend their best scorer? A good team comes up with a defensive game plan. They study the other team and are prepared to defend their hoop when the other team runs their plays.

If we want to defend God and His Word, we must know what we are defending, what arguments may come up and how to answer them. If you wait until they are coming at you, then you will be caught off guard, and they may get an easy basket.

In addition to reading and learning God's Word, how do we prepare our defense?

Pray and ask God to give us the answer and defense when needed.

Read the United Church of God's articles and booklets on creation versus evolution and other apologetic topics. There is a whole booklet dedicated to helping us defend against the idea that macro-evolution is true (Search "Creation or Evolution" on [ucg.org](http://ucg.org)).

Continue reading this magazine. There will be more articles with specific topics on apologetics in the future.

Remember what Proverbs 18:17 says: "The first one to plead his cause seems right, until his neighbor comes and examines him." So be sure to ask questions, don't just believe what someone tells you to be fact. **CC**



Aaron Creech lives in Eastern Pennsylvania with his wife, Whitney, and their three small children where he pastors Bethlehem, Lewistown, and York. He serves at summer camp and is the camp director for Winter Camp.

*If we are going to be able to defend our faith, it won't only be about teaching the Bible; it will also be about defending the Bible as true and God as real.*

which means "to speak in defense of." It's like in a courtroom when someone makes an accusation, and you have to defend or reply to the charges. In terms of our faith and religion, it is a Christian's attempt to defend his or her beliefs and actions against criticism of the Bible to those who refuse to believe in God. Apologetics can be boiled down to a statement or argument based on reason and facts to defend our beliefs.

Have you ever had to defend your beliefs? Maybe someone asked you about why you don't go to games on Friday nights, why you miss two weeks of school every fall or why you don't celebrate Christmas. I received those questions a lot while in school.

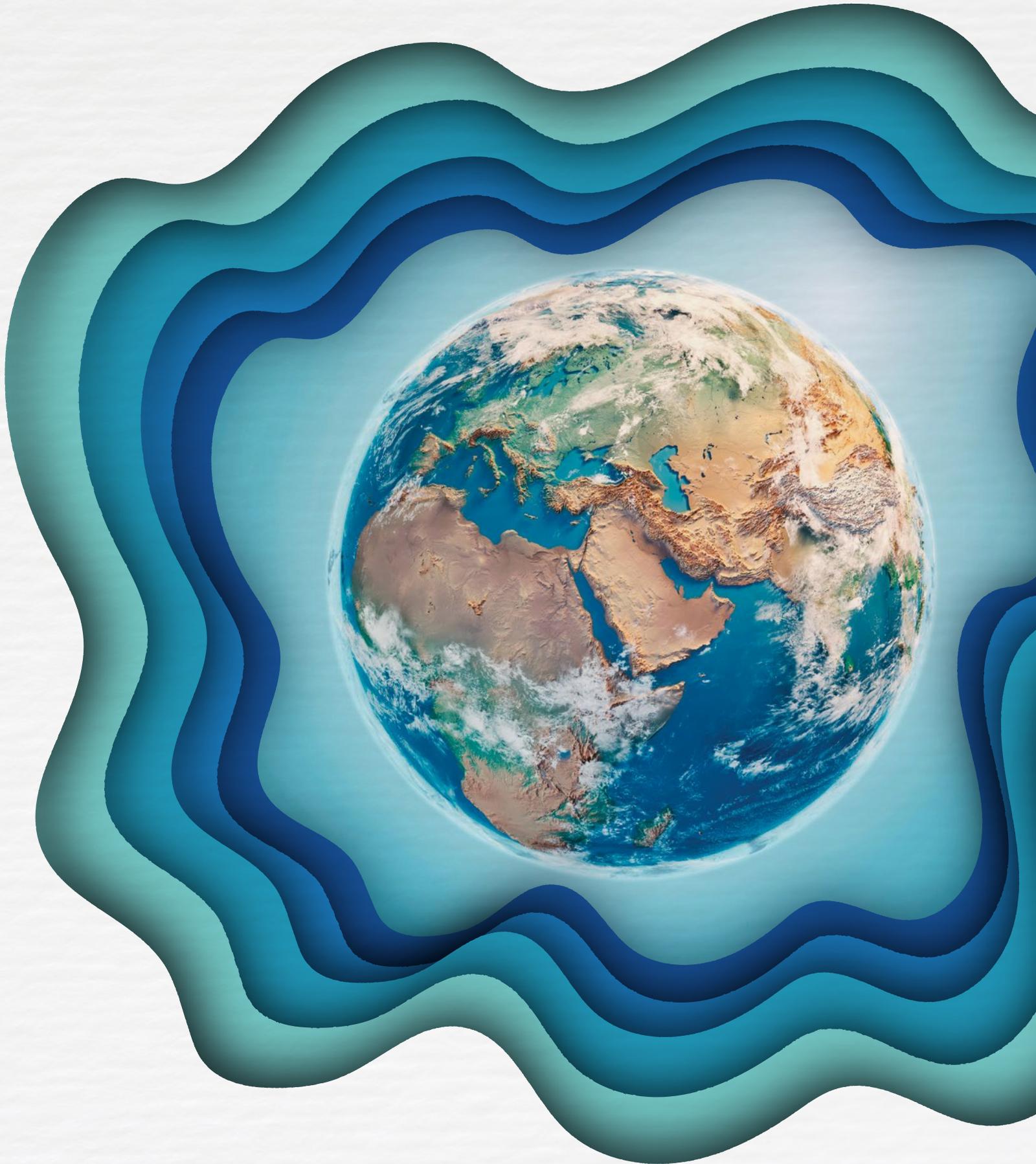
When we answer those questions, we are using apologetics to

defend our faith, it won't only be about teaching the Bible; it will also be about defending the Bible as true and God as real.

Can you do that? That's a big challenge, but I believe you are up to being an apologist for God, a defender of God.

In 1 Peter, the word *apologia* is used. "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense [*apologia*] to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear" (1 Peter 3:15). Peter said we have to always be ready to give a defense for our hope.

How do we do that? To defend something, we have to know what we are defending and what we are defending





# THE UNIVERSE

## CRADLE FOR LIFE

*by Mario Seiglie*

W

hen we look around, can we still wonder and appreciate the amazing Creation from the microcosm

to the macrocosm? So much has been carefully designed for us to truly enjoy, and most importantly, it can strengthen our faith!

Youth should be a time of imagination and exploration—of asking the “big” questions about life and of wanting to know more about the wondrous world that surrounds us and its intricate creations.

King David, from the time of his youth, marveled at what he saw in the earth and sky and declared, “When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him?” (Psalm 8:3-4).

In the first chapter of Genesis, the Bible majestically describes the three great acts of creation—(1) the universe, including the earth (Genesis 1:1); (2) a reshaping of the surface of the planet to have life on Earth, consisting of plants and animals (Genesis 1:2-25); and (3) mankind (Genesis 1:26-27).

Therefore, God raised the continents from a vast ocean of water and prepared the conditions necessary to receive life. He then filled the earth with a variety of living things that now populate every nook and cranny of the planet. When He commanded the living creatures to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the sea, and let the birds multiply on the earth” (Genesis 1:21-22), as we shall see—He was not exaggerating!

We normally take all of this for granted, accustomed to seeing the astounding gamut of life, from the tiny ant to the huge elephant or the gigantic whale.

Can we fully appreciate the care and precision that it took to put all of this together? It is compelling evidence for the existence of God and for Creationism—the belief that God created the universe. We see Creation and its creatures were not a lucky accident, as evolution teaches, but that the universe is a carefully designed masterpiece by the Creator God.

Years ago, I was struck by a statement made by two French scientists, known as the Bogdanov twins, in an interview where they were asked *why* there existed such order in the universe.



*Few realize how incredibly special the light and heat are that arrive on Earth in the precise amount and type to sustain life.*

“This is a fundamental question,” they answered. “The most striking feature of the universe is that *order began from the very start*—at its initial stage. According to some physicists, *everything occurs as if mankind was born in a universe ‘created for them,’* in effect, *intentionally* designed for human beings. *It is similar to preparing a bedroom before the birth of a baby*” (“The Universe Was Not Born from Chance,” *Le Point*, June 10, 1991, emphasis added throughout).

Also, the late NASA astronomer John A. Keefe noted, “If the universe had not been made with the most exacting precision we could never have come into existence. It is my view that these circumstances indicate the universe was created for man to live in” (Robert Jastrow, *God and the Astronomers*, 1992, p. 118).

So how is the universe a “cradle” for mankind? Let us go over some of these key findings made by scientists. This evidence certainly points to a Creator God.

### **1. LIGHT: OUR LIFE-SUSTAINING SOURCE**

When we wake up in the morning, the sunlight begins to seep through the windows. Then, once outside, we are warmed by that same sun.

Yet few realize how incredibly special the light and heat are that arrive on Earth *in the precise amount and type* to sustain life. Of all the vast ranges of solar energy possible to bathe the earth, they happen to be just the correct wavelength and quantity to produce the beneficial effects on life. How fortunate and thankful we should be.

“Our atmosphere participates,” notes astronomer Guillermo Gonzalez, “in one of the most extraordinary coincidences known to science: an eerie harmony among the range of wavelengths of light emitted by the Sun, transmitted by Earth’s atmosphere, converted by plants into chemical energy, and detected by the human eye...The near-ultraviolet, visible, and near-infrared spectra—the light most useful to life and sight—are a razor-thin sliver of the universe’s natural, electromagnetic emissions: about one part in  $10^{25}$ . That is much smaller than one star out of all the stars in the entire visible universe, about  $10^{22}$ ” (*The Privileged Planet*, 2004, p. 66).

But what would happen if the light and heat radiated from the sun did not fall within this minuscule

range of possibilities?

“Our amazement grows further,” adds biochemist Michael Denton, “when we note that not only is the radiant energy in this tiny region the *only radiation of utility to life* but that radiant energy in most other regions of the spectrum is *either lethal or profoundly damaging*. Electromagnetic radiation from gamma rays through X rays to ultraviolet rays is all harmful to life...”

“Moreover...this fitness [of light] is not merely for simple microbial life, but for the complex organisms *such as ourselves*. It is fit to provide the warmth upon which all life on the earth’s surface depends. It is fit for photosynthesis, which generates the reduced carbon fuels, whose oxidation provides energy for all complex life on earth, and it is fit for vision, the key adaptation through which our own species gained knowledge of the world” (*Nature’s Destiny*, 1998, pp. 53, 70).

Light is a type of energy that is still not well understood by physicists. They say it has no mass, thus it can travel at the maximum velocity in the universe, the speed of light. Certainly, without light, there would be no life, and so it is a prerequisite for life.

And so, it is quite appropriate to read in the Bible, “Then God said, ‘Let there be *light*, and there was light’” (Genesis 1:3).



The Bahamas as seen from space.

## 2. WATER: THE MIRACULOUS LIQUID

If we marvel at the very narrow range of sunlight, which coincidentally has the right characteristics for life to thrive on Earth, in second place would come another wonder—the uncanny characteristics of *water*.

Washing dishes, taking a bath, drinking, walking in the rain, brushing our teeth—all of these constitute some of the multiple ways water is essential for all of us.

Scientists are awed by the unique features of water that permit life to flourish. For instance, just before it freezes, water does an about-face at 39° F. (4° C.) and begins to expand instead of contract, thus becoming lighter as it converts into ice. If this were not so, when a lake or river froze over, the ice would sink to the bottom and eventually the lake or river would be frozen solid, killing all the fish and preventing thawing in the spring. It would prove fatal to the chain of life on Earth.

Furthermore, water has a surprising quality when it turns into a gas. Though water is 800 times heavier than air, when it evaporates, it becomes lighter than air, thus forming clouds that cover over half of the earth's atmosphere. It makes the miracle of life-sustaining rain possible.

Another amazing property of water is how gently but effectively it acts as a universal solvent. While easily dissolving

“Without water, life that exists on the earth would be impossible.”

—Biochemist Michael Denton

an enormous variety of substances, it is not strong enough to wear down the rocky cliffs by the seashore—otherwise all the continents would have long ago crumbled into the sea.

“It turns out that, as a solvent, water is indeed ideally fit,” notes Denton, “so much so that water approaches far nearer than any other liquid to the alkahest, the universal mythical solvent of the alchemists. This is a property of critical importance to water's biological role... What is so very remarkable about the various physical properties of water as cited above, is not that each is so fit in itself, but the astonishing way in which, in many instances, several independent properties are adapted to serve cooperatively the same biological end” (Ibid., p. 31, 40).

Do all of these peculiar but wondrous characteristics of water just happen by chance? Or were they designed to sustain life once it was created?

As Denton remarks, “Although water is one of the most familiar of all substances, its remarkable nature *never* fails to impress . . . Water forms the fluid in which occur all the vital chemical and physical activities upon

which life on earth depends. Without water, life that exists on the earth would be impossible...Most organisms are made up of more than 50 percent water; in the case of man, water makes up more than 70 percent of the weight of the body...As far as the thermal properties are concerned, water would appear to be *uniquely*, and in many different ways, *ideally* adapted for life on earth” (Ibid, pp. 22, 30).

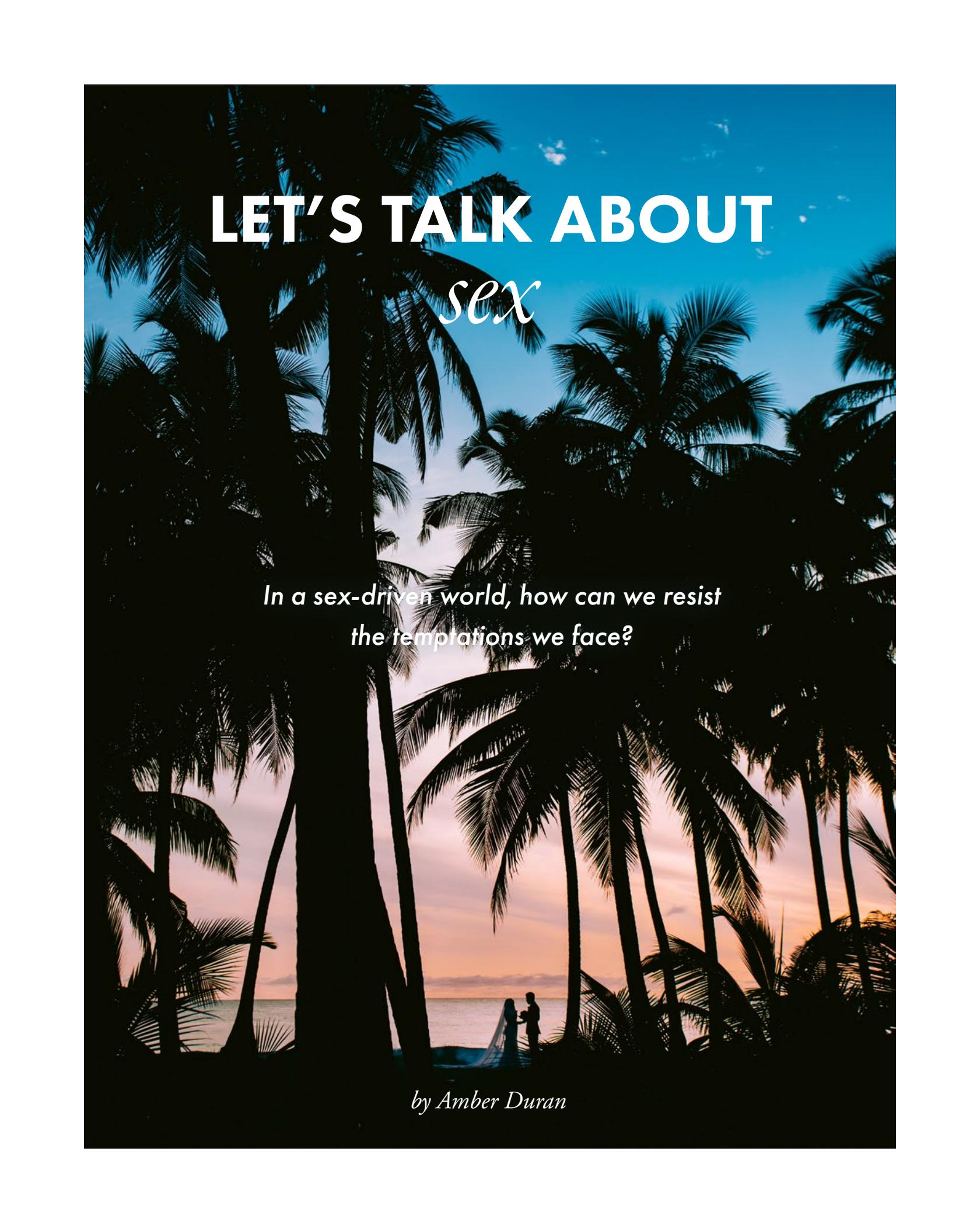
Scientists still puzzle over the *origin* of the enormous quantity of water on Earth, covering 70 percent of its surface. They also do not know where all the salt came from to produce the precise ratio found in saltwater that acts as a mild antiseptic and sustainer of life in the sea.

How apt it is to read, “Thus God *made* the firmament [atmosphere], and *divided the waters* which were under the firmament from the *waters* which were above the firmament [the clouds]; *and it was so*” (Genesis 1:7).

These examples just touch the surface of how Creation and the Bible go together as hand and glove—all to the honor and glory of God. Look for part 2 of “The Universe: Cradle for Life” in the next issue of *Compass Check*. **CC**



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A tropical sunset scene with palm trees and a couple on a beach. The sky is a mix of blue and orange, and the palm trees are silhouetted against it. A couple is visible in the distance on the beach.

# LET'S TALK ABOUT *sex*

*In a sex-driven world, how can we resist  
the temptations we face?*

*by Amber Duran*



S

ex seems to be everywhere: It's accessed through music, movies, TV, cellphones, computers, and even classes in school. We should avoid the wrong discussion of the subject, but is there a right conversation to have?

Though sex grows more and more casual in society as a cultural norm for dating, it certainly isn't the first thing on our list of topics to talk about at Sabbath services with our buddies or the adults casually asking us about our week.

But sex shouldn't be a taboo subject. In the right setting at the right time, sex is a subject we need to be open about, because being in the dark about it can make things worse.

It is crucial that we involve God in this conversation. After all, the creator of a thing certainly knows its proper use. God made sex for us with intention. But as a society we have warped this beautiful gift God made for marriage by not following His guidelines.

The apostle Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 4:2-5 (NIV), "For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. It is God's will that you should be sanctified; that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God."

Taking this to heart, many Christian couples have an honest conversation while dating and make a commitment to wait till marriage.

What does it even mean, sexual immorality? I mean, it's unlikely that in everyday conversation that you'll ever say, "I'm choosing to refrain from sexual immorality." If you do, quite possibly you might be met with blank stares. In this particular verse, the word for sexual immorality in the original Greek text is *porneia*. In *Strong's Greek Dictionary*, we learn this word can mean prostitution, sexual

intercourse driven by lust, sex outside of marriage, homosexual acts or other acts of perversion listed in Leviticus 18.

But the word *porneia* goes deeper than that. It encompasses the mind, the body and the spirit. This verse's goal is to tell the reader that sex in all forms, outside the realm of marriage, defiles the body and the spirit. Sex has a great impact on every aspect of our person, today and in the future. In fact, being sexually immoral is a sin specifically mentioned that can keep you out of God's Kingdom (Revelation 22:15). So, in action and in thought we are to keep ourselves pure from sexual immorality.

*The following are real stories from real people about their struggles with sex. Names have been changed to preserve anonymity.*

#### **BUT HOW?**

Lily grew up in the Church knowing that sex before marriage was wrong. When she started dating someone who held that same belief, she thought they were in the clear. She thought they were both strong in that choice. But later she felt like no one had prepared them for the attraction they would feel or how strongly it would pull at them. They were just told to wait. "Don't do it." She thought she was strong and would never compromise; but, sadly, they did. Though they never went "all the way," exploring other sexual options left Lily wracked with guilt. Though Lily ended up married and happy with this man, that first year of marriage she hated sex. She didn't feel like she deserved it because of the mistakes she made before marriage. Lily knew this wasn't what God intended in her marriage, but the guilt kept her from enjoying the godly potential for her marriage for quite some time.

Sometimes you can feel like the only message you hear from your parents or church is: "Don't."

Well, yes, that is true. God says don't, and we've already reviewed a scripture where He has told us that this is so. You can learn more about this by reviewing 1 Corinthians 7 in your personal studies.

The real question is how? If the temptations are so alluring, so strong, what defense could we possibly have against it?

God is our defense! He is our rock and our salvation (Psalm 18:2). When you find yourself struggling with something, ask yourself some basic questions:

- Have I prayed to God about this for as much time as I have spent worrying about it?
- Is this in line with my commitment to and knowledge of God's way of life?

God says that to avoid sin and experience sex as a blessing, sexual actions must be saved for marriage. If you are dating with the intention of marriage, is there ever a good reason for you to be alone with someone of the opposite sex outside a public venue? To some this might sound a little strong. It is very easy to rationalize these things as OK, but in reality, these can be tempting scenarios that put us at potential risk for compromising our values.

Joseph was a good example of this. Read Genesis 39:11-12. Joseph literally had to run away from a sexual temptation in front of him, just as we are told to do in 1 Corinthians 6:18: "Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body."

We don't need to set ourselves up for failure, when every influence from the world is already doing that. We want to be pure and save ourselves for marriage, but sometimes we also want to date

like the world dates. To be honest, it just doesn't work that way.

We can get to know potential mates without putting ourselves in compromising situations. We can take steps to avoid precarious situations and, in turn, prevent a lot of personal hurt and anguish caused by giving in to sexual temptations.

According to a 2002 study by the U.S. National Library of Medicine National Institutes of Health, by age 20, 75 percent of people had premarital sex, and by age 44, 95 percent had. The conclusion to this: sex is a part of dating in the world around us, but, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death" (Proverbs 14:12). That's why we strive to do what is right in God's eyes, not man's.

## **A BATTLE OF BODY AND MIND**

Jesus tells us in Matthew 5:28 that "whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." One of God's intentions for us is to refrain from lust: seeing something and feeling sexual desire or even acting on that desire with someone else or, in some instances,

by yourself. This is where we talk about pornography.

Worldwide, porn is a \$4.9-billion industry. Nearly half of young adults say they have come across it at least once a week, even when they aren't seeking it out, according to research done by Barna Group, a Christian polling firm based in California.

A Barna Group study also found that 77 percent of Christian men age 18-30 admit to watching porn on a monthly basis, 36 percent say they view it daily and 32 percent admit to being addicted to porn. Women are also not immune. According to the Institute for Family Studies, while women still use pornography much less than men, use is on the rise, but also includes other forms of porn, including material deemed erotica, such as novels that depict graphic sexual scenes or Internet chat rooms, where there is more of a connection to an individual.

We are ignorant if we think that we are immune to the pulls of pornography in the Church. John's story is evidence of that. He grew up in the Church—a third-generation Church of God member. As many households do, he had a computer in his room. His problem with pornography and masturbation started when he was 11. Most of his life he struggled with low self-esteem and keeping his grades up in school. When he moved to

a new school district and had no friends, he turned down a devastating road—porn. He knew it was wrong but couldn't stop. He would have this high, a rush of endorphins, but immediately afterward he was awash with guilt and slipped into depression. It was a dark secret. He was tormented with anxiety over his family finding out. At 17 he realized he couldn't deal with this on his own, and even though he grew up in the Church,

*If the temptations are so alluring, so strong, what defense could we possibly have against it? God is our defense!*

his first inclination wasn't to turn to God; instead he felt his last resort was suicide. Thankfully, God stepped in—twice. The first time a church friend struggling with the same thing pointed John to Sex Addicts Anonymous (SAA).

John began attending SAA meetings. To overcome, he had to admit that alone he was powerless, and he needed God's help. He had to be honest with God about his sins. He had to remove temptation, which meant removing or restricting access to the devices that opened him up to this particular sin. He installed security on devices that blocked certain types of websites, and he turned himself over to other activities—studying God's Word, praying, exercising and more.

Though he went months without incident, the guilt of what he had already done enveloped him in further depression, and he again looked at suicide. This time, though, he prayed that God would kill him. He didn't want to hurt his family through his suicide, but he didn't think he could live with what he'd done. His answer came quickly. God miraculously lifted his depression soon after his prayer. Months later he was baptized and continues seeking God's will in his life.

Sometimes the answers we seek aren't what we expect. John is now happily married but lives and struggles with this addiction every day, like Paul attests in Romans 7:14-20 about how we all war within ourselves against sin. With God's help, we continually work to overcome (Romans 8:37).

God doesn't arbitrarily make guidelines on how to live our life because He wants to keep pleasure from us. As the creator of sex, He knows its power and the blessings of it within the safe boundaries of God-ordained marriage. The ultimate purpose of marriage is so that husband and wife can "be heirs together of the grace of life" (1 Peter

*It can seem like an impossible request, and, on your own, it really could be. But you're not alone.*

3:7)—in other words, help each other to attain the Kingdom of God!

### **A SHEEP AMONGST WOLVES**

In Ephesians 6:16, we are told that Satan is shooting fiery darts at us. Now, I've never physically been on fire. But safety professionals say if you find yourself in this situation, stop, drop and roll, right? When we face a sexual temptation, the first thing we need to do is stop. Stop looking at it, stop contemplating it. Drop what you are doing and turn immediately to God. Ask for strength to overcome, to roll out of the situation you are in before giving in to the temptation.

One of the beautiful things about prayer is that it can be done anywhere, any time. I've prayed from bathroom stalls, in my car driving down the road, while exercising. God is always there to hear us (1 John 5:14).

It can also help to talk privately about the challenges of sexual temptation before marriage with someone you trust in the Church, another important reason we develop relationships with people in our congregations beyond our age group. Your parents should always be there to talk about these things with you. But if that is not your situation, God's people can be there for you too, especially ministers. Older adults have been through these temptations; some have overcome; some have given in

but were able to learn from it and turn themselves around. They can help you understand how to keep yourself from situations where you may be tempted to give in to pressures of sexual temptation. Use the wisdom of your parents and church family to your benefit.

Until you are married, there are other important things God wants you to focus your time and thoughts on. In 1 Corinthians 7:32, 34, Paul says, "He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord—how he may please the

Lord . . . The unmarried woman cares about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit."

So, when your God and your Church tell you to be the exception, to stand against what is the norm, it can feel like you're a sheep in the midst of ravenous wolves. It can seem like an impossible request, and, on your own, it really could be.

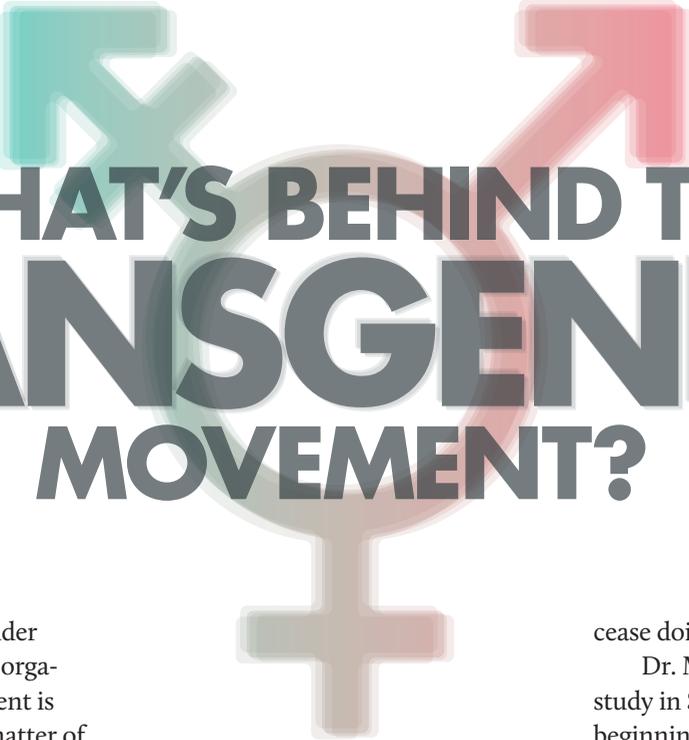
But you're not alone.

You have a Shepherd guiding you through it all, who was tested and tempted and tortured and yet still overcame (Hebrews 4:15). He sympathizes with you. He knows how hard it can be to fight temptation and that there are battles we lose.

Ultimately, He helps us overcome to win the war. That's all that counts, that we keep fighting and keep turning to God when we've done wrong. We need to continue to fight the good fight of faith (1 Timothy 6:12). With Christ on our side, we can overcome anything (Philippians 4:13). **CC**



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# WHAT'S BEHIND THE TRANSGENDER MOVEMENT?

**T**he push of the transgender agenda by media, news organizations and government is promoted as simply a matter of human rights and fairness. But is that the real issue, or is something considerably different at work? And what insight does the Bible offer about this issue and society's acceptance of it?

## UNDERSTANDING A DISORDER

Dr. Paul McHugh, longtime chief psychiatrist at Johns Hopkins Hospital—which pioneered sex-change surgery until experience demonstrated it wasn't beneficial—states in a *Wall Street Journal* editorial that “policy makers and the media are doing no favors either to the public or the transgendered by treating their confusions as a right in need of defending rather than as a mental disorder that deserves understanding, treatment and prevention” (“Transgender Surgery Isn't the Solution,” June 12, 2014).

He describes those who feel they are the opposite sex to be suffering “a mental disorder in two respects.” The first, he explains, “is that the idea of sex misalignment is simply mistaken—it does not correspond with physical reality.” And the second “is that it can lead to grim psychological outcomes”—including, but not limited to, a dangerously

high suicide rate (ibid., emphasis added throughout).

He describes the transgendered as suffering “a disorder of ‘assumption’ like . . . anorexia and bulimia nervosa, where the assumption that departs from physical reality is the belief by the dangerously thin that they are overweight.” And we don't encourage these to lose more weight or get liposuction!

One thing that's horrible about the widespread acceptance of transgender surgery, and advocating it for ever-younger people, is that, as McHugh writes, “when children who reported transgender feelings were tracked without medical or surgical treatment at both Vanderbilt University and London's Portman Clinic, 70%-80% of them spontaneously lost those feelings.”

Further, Johns Hopkins University's tracking of those who underwent transgender surgery found that “their subsequent psycho-social adjustments were no better than those who didn't have the surgery,” leading the institution to

cease doing such procedures.

Dr. McHugh also cites a long-term study in Sweden, which “revealed that beginning about 10 years after having the surgery, *the transgendered began to experience increasing mental difficulties. Most shockingly, their suicide mortality rose almost 20-fold above the comparable non-transgender population.*”

And a recent report by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention stated that *more than four in 10* transgender Americans had attempted suicide.

Transgender advocates have persuaded several liberal American states to pass laws banning psychiatrists, “*even with parental permission, from striving to restore natural gender feelings to a transgender minor.*” In other words, mental health professionals are forbidden by law from actually helping children afflicted with this disorder—they are only allowed to encourage them to remain in their conflicted state of mind!

This legal climate has led misguided physicians in some states to administer puberty-delaying hormones to gender-confused children to make later sex-change surgeries less traumatic.

But “*given that close to 80% of such children would abandon their confusion and grow naturally into adult life if untreated,*” explains Dr. McHugh, “these

medical interventions come close to child abuse. A better way to help these children [is] with devoted parenting.”

“At the heart of the problem,” he concludes, “is confusion over the nature of the transgendered. ‘Sex change’ is biologically impossible. People who undergo sex-reassignment surgery do not change from men to women or vice versa. Rather, they become feminized men or masculinized women. Claiming that this is a civil-rights matter and encouraging surgical intervention is in reality to collaborate with and promote a mental disorder.”

But this particular disorder has become a tool of those promoting “anything goes” when it comes to sex and sexual practices.

Moreover, it appears that the ultimate goal of many activists is to eliminate the concept of gender altogether (search “When the Binary Burns” at [ucg.org](http://ucg.org)).

## Those who follow God are to be lights to those in need of God’s healing.

### IN DEFIANCE OF THE CREATOR OF HUMAN SEXUALITY

Of course, this goes directly against God who created mankind. His Word, the Bible, tells us right up front: “So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them ... And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply ...’” (Genesis 1:27-28).

Our Creator is the One who established human beings as being either male or female—with a key reason being so that they can reproduce and multiply those who are made in His image (compare Genesis 5:1-3). Moreover, He designed human family and marriage to represent an ultimate spiritual relationship (see our free study guide *Marriage and Family: The Missing Dimension* to

learn more).

And God wants the male-female distinction to remain. In His inspired Word, He rebukes the blurring of gender lines, declaring: “A woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman’s garment, for all who do so are an abomination to the LORD your God” (Deuteronomy 22:5).

Some have argued that mere transvestitism wouldn’t be loathsome to God—that this must be referring to a pagan worship practice. Yet there is no hint of this here, so it’s best that we take this instruction exactly as it’s stated. Still, there is a connection to paganism.

Many of the false philosophies we see today can be traced back to ancient Babylon and, even before that, to the lies of the serpent in the Garden of Eden—Satan. And he is the one who introduced sexual shame and corruption.

### WHERE TO NOW?

Think about all this in the context of the culture war being waged in the present time. Satan still has those who would assist him in his quest to debase and destroy mankind through the elimination of heterosexual marriage, family roles and the concept of gender altogether.

The lie in Eden and Babylon is still with us today—in merely another form. There are even those who deny their fleshly reality and claim to be something

else. And there are others who want to live entirely in an unreal world of gender fluidity or as neither male nor female.

People caught up in the confusions of culture and society today need healing and relief. Our Creator God understands that we each have struggles, human failings and hardships to overcome. Those who follow God are to be lights to those in need of God’s healing.

If you’ve supported ideas about gender that aren’t biblical, God calls on you to repent. And He forgives. If you are one who struggles with gender identity, seek Him with your whole heart for the healing of your mind—and also seek out professional help from counselors who perceive this problem correctly.

The number of transgender individuals is still relatively tiny, but the number of those embracing and condoning this problem is increasing by leaps and bounds.

Where will the window of what’s acceptable shift to next? Things still unspeakable today may be the headlines of years soon ahead. Riki Wilchins, the transsexual activist quoted in the article “When the Binary Burns,” sees the work of transgender advocates as important to the goal of eradicating the male-female structure of society, noting that they have “finally and perhaps unwittingly opened the gender Pandora’s Box, and over the next few years all sorts of unexpected non-binary things . . . are about to come popping out.”

May God through Jesus Christ “deliver us from this present evil age” (Galatians 1:4)—soon! **CC**



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## *Follow the Flags to Contentment*

**I** remember laughing and enjoying coffee with one of my friends once when he switched to a more serious tone. He said, “I’m getting older, and I’m not where I envisioned myself years ago. I’ve made purposeful efforts to better myself, but they have all been failures.” And then he hit me with a bombshell: “I’ve come to the conclusion that I must be messed up.”

Whoa. What struck me was the amount of pressure and worthlessness in his voice.

Feelings like this can happen to anyone regardless of the stage in life. Pressure and worthlessness can creep in while struggling with any number of life issues—hard decisions, uncooperative health, pressure from friends, school or job frustrations, relationships or singleness.

All this pressure can be overwhelming. Many want to just-stop-feeling-it, but what if we could *use* it to get rid of it? What if like a figurative rubber band, we could use its own power to flick it far from us? If we only knew how.

There is a solution. In a way, the Bible says: follow the flags to find contentment.

There is a time and place for stress—good stress, like when we need to step up and take responsibility. But the pressure I’m talking about negatively affects our self-worth and is often related to our sense of contentment about our status or things.

In Philippians 4, Paul is writing a kind of thank you note to the Philippians for how much they care and want to give. In verses 11 and 12, he says, “Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.”

For some of us who struggle with contentment, these verses sound like a fairy

tale. It’s the fact that we are not in the state we want to be (or others expect us to be) that causes anxiety, stress, pressure. How is Paul able to say he’s found contentment no matter what situation he finds himself in?

The *Jamieson-Fausset-Brown* commentary says this about Philippians 4:11: “...The Greek word for ‘content’ literally expresses ‘independent of others, having sufficiency in one’s self.’” The commentary goes on to explain, “Christianity has raised the term [of contentment] above the ‘haughty self-sufficiency of heathen stoicism’ to the contentment of the Christian, whose sufficiency is not in self, but in God.”

The stoic self-sufficiency described in the commentary depends completely on the human individual involved. This is similar to the state of mind that God warned the Israelites about. He predicted that they would enter the promised land, forget God and start believing they alone were responsible for the wealth and cities they inhabited. In contrast, true Christian sufficiency is based on God, who makes us self-sufficient because of who He is. It’s a contentment not based on things or status but on our identity in God.

Do we all of sudden find this right sense of self-sufficiency and contentment just by being a Christian or being baptized? Clearly not. How do we actually find this right type of contentment? Much like conversion, contentment is a process, and one proverb shows us some flags for how to find it.

Proverbs 30 records the words of Agur, who describes himself as “more stupid than any man” (verse 2). He seems to be clearly aware that he is not sufficient on his own—the foundation for finding godly contentment.

In verses 7-8, Agur shows his God-reliant attitude by making his requests to God, knowing he can’t provide for himself: “Two things I request of You.

(Deprive me not before I die): remove falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches—feed me with the food allotted to me.”

When I read this scripture, I usually focus on “give me neither poverty nor riches,” but Agur’s first request is the bigger deal in regards to contentment. He says in verse 8, “Remove falsehood and lies far from me.” The reason so many of us experience discontentment is we believe a big lie.

Every big lie is very personal. My friend who concluded that he “must be messed up” fights a lie that says, “I should be married by now.” Lies like this tell us that we should be or have certain things, and because we don’t, the lies go on to conclude “I must be messed up” and even “I must not be worthy.” These lies create pressure and false expectations, which then lead to comparing ourselves unfairly

certain college won’t make you content. Rather, each situation is just a different state with different benefits and challenges. None of us *needs* anything more than what we have to be content. The writer of Hebrews says, “be content with such things as you have” (13:5).

So we come back to the question: How do we find contentment? One approach is to use the section in Proverbs 30 as a series of flags that show us the path toward contentment. Proverbs 30 shows a person self-aware enough to ask God for what he needs. But there are levels of self-awareness. The key to becoming more self-aware is to ask ourselves *why* we feel or do certain things.

If we notice a particular hurt or pressure affects our value as a person, then that should raise a red flag, and we are likely dealing with the first

contentment at the end.

The tricky thing is that a haughty type of contentment can masquerade as the godly one. For those who do have the status and things they want in life, sufficiency and contentment must still be from God. We all have to recognize there are shortcomings in our character and that we have not achieved perfection as Christians. That’s a status we can never achieve on our own, but that God desires for us and is faithful to give us if we endure.

We started in Philippians, where Paul was able to be content in whatever state he found himself. The next verse is Philippians 4:13, which says, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” God has definitely given all of us this verse to encourage us to achieve our far-off dreams. But this verse is actually set in the context of contentment, of being okay with what we have even without achieving any of those dreams. Paul said, “I know how to abound, and I know how to be abased,” so when he says “I can do all things,” it’s in the context of accepting the season we’re in, or what we have, good

or bad. The verse can be expanded to talk about achieving our dreams also, but not without first seeing that we are sufficient in our identity with God. That has to come first.

When we remove the lies and see the truth about our lives through God’s eyes, we create a runway that can get us to contentment. So, ask “Why?” on your path to removing the lies and finding contentment. **CC**

*Imagine hurts and pressures like the lights on an airport runway. With the right perspective you’ll eventually see the lights line up, showing a path forward, exposing those lies.*

to others. These comparisons then reaffirm our false conclusions, creating a vicious self-defeating cycle.

The truth is, if we put “getting something” as the key to our contentment, we will never find contentment. If we cannot be content where we are, new issues will always pop up, moving the goal posts of contentment farther down the field, always putting it out of reach.

Solomon said, “He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; nor he who loves abundance with increase. This also is vanity” (Ecclesiastes 5:10). So, what is it that is stopping you from being content?

Making lots of money, finding someone to marry or getting into a

request of Agur. We need God’s help to remove falsehood and lies far from us.

The way I imagine these hurts and pressures in our brains is almost like all the lights on an airport runway. If you look at a runway from the wrong side, it’s just a bunch of random lights. However, if you change your approach to the runway by asking yourself “Why?” you’ll eventually see the lights line up, showing a path forward, exposing those lies. If we can then submit the lies to God and see the truth, we’ll find



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Jason-David Nitzberg grew up the eldest of five children in a his-hers-and-theirs family, and now lives in Cincinnati, Ohio, with his cool roommates and his pet jellyfishes.

# COMPASS CHECK

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