



# COMPASS CHECK

Helping you turn your spiritual compass toward God

## *What Makes You a* **CHRISTIAN?**



| What Does the Bible Say About  
Those in Need?

| How the Amazing Peacock's  
Feather Refutes Evolution

What No One Will Tell You  
About Abortion |

Words With a Friend |

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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 you to respond to the gospel message.

## Compass Corner

*Dear Compass Checkers,*

Do you ever get hard questions in life? I don't mean things like, solve for x when  $x^2+2x+1 = 4$ , but questions about life. As a pastor, I get hard questions all of the time, and to be honest, sometimes I have a tough time answering them!

There are a few questions like that in this issue. Questions like: What do I do when I see a homeless person in need? Surely you've been in this situation. Maybe at the end of an on-ramp, or on a street corner, you've seen someone holding up a sign, asking for money. Should I help them or just walk on by?

Perhaps it's a question about yourself. Maybe you feel like you need to make changes in your life, and bear some positive fruit. How do you do that? Is there anything you, as a teenager, can do to really improve your life?

Maybe the question is one that doesn't affect you directly. Perhaps a friend is considering having an abortion. What would you say to them? Would you just tell them they're wrong and need to repent, or is there something more you should say and do? Choosing the right words at the right time can be difficult—will you help or hurt the situation?

Then there are the questions that other people ask us: Why do you believe in creation and not evolution? Doesn't nature and science support Darwinian evolution?

Here's a tough question I was recently asked: What makes you a Christian? Does going to church on Saturday and not keeping Christmas do it, or is there more to it than that?

These are some tough questions you might face, and in fact, I am willing to bet some of you have already faced. In this issue, we'll explore all of these and hopefully give you the encouragement and help to answer these and any other tough questions life throws your way!



Dan Preston, *Compass Check* editor, pastors in North and South Carolina, enjoys UYC, the outdoors and getting dirt under his fingernails in the garden and garage.

## Q *What Does the Bible Say About Those in Need?*



In the Bible, there was a woman in Bethany who anointed Jesus in preparation for His burial; she broke an alabaster jar of expensive oil and poured it over His head. The disciples rebuked her for being so wasteful, saying she could've sold it and given the money to the poor. Jesus states, "Let her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a good work for Me. For you have the poor with you always, and whenever you wish you may do them good; but Me you do not have always" (Mark 14:3-7).

It almost seems like Jesus was recommending neglecting the poor at that moment. This is surprising, considering many other verses in the Bible, and Jesus Himself, makes it clear that generosity to those in need is an important part of being a Christian:

"Then Jesus, looking at him [a rich man], loved him, and said to him, 'One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me'" (Mark 10:21).

"What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled,' without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead" (James 2:14-17, English Standard Version).

"Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will reward them for what they have done" (Proverbs 19:17, New International Version).

So what does He mean when He chastises the disciples and commends the woman? How can we know when and how to give?

*Jesus' response shows that there are times for giving to others, and times for extravagant displays of worship, celebration and feasting.*

### **FINDING THE RIGHT BALANCE**

Jesus' response shows that there are times for giving to others, and times for extravagant displays of worship, celebration and feasting. God separates special times, like the Feast of Tabernacles, where the focus is on rejoicing and enjoying good things. We shouldn't feel bad about those times or think that we need to constantly deny ourselves because there are still those who are suffering. God understood the importance of times of indulgence as an aspect of our worship that reflects His extravagant goodness. The woman in Bethany wanted to express her love for Jesus through a physical outpouring of something of great value. Jesus knew her heart, and rebuked the disciples rather than her. God doesn't want us to be so concerned with costs or efficiencies that we lose our ability to passionately worship Him.

### **GOD'S ECONOMIC SYSTEM**

Jesus makes it clear that there will always be those in need, either as a result of their own actions, or actions that are out of their control. Poor financial decisions, house fires, medical bills, health issues, addictions, family fractures and other life realities can each lead to someone needing assistance. There will always be those who find themselves in dire economic situations and wind up with an inability to provide for their basic necessities.

Because of this, in ancient Israel, God put a system in place where those who had a loss of economic opportunity could choose to work for someone for a period of time, trading their labor for meals and a roof over their head. After a six-year period of service, they were released on the seventh year and received a jump-start on getting themselves reset financially (Deuteronomy 15:10-11). Also, a part of this system was a land Sabbath, when the land was not sown or worked; anything that grew naturally was to be gleaned by the poor, as it was not to be harvested. Additionally, every 50<sup>th</sup> year was the Jubilee year (seven cycles of seven years), when all outstanding debts were forgiven, and all properties returned to their original owners (Leviticus 25). God provided ways for people to improve their situation with governmental and social structures and guidelines. Although no current nation follows God's exact guidelines for Israel, many do have social programs designed to help those who find themselves in dire straits.





The Bible also makes it clear that He expects everyone to work hard and contribute what they can. The apostle Paul explained, “For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat” (2 Thessalonians 3:10, King James Version, and read through verse 15).

Paul is addressing believers in Thessalonica, where there were some who were taking advantage of Church members by being idle and refusing to work. He instructed the Church members not to provide them with church aid unless they were willing to work to contribute. This instruction was meant to admonish them, in order that they would come back into God’s economic system and His way of life.

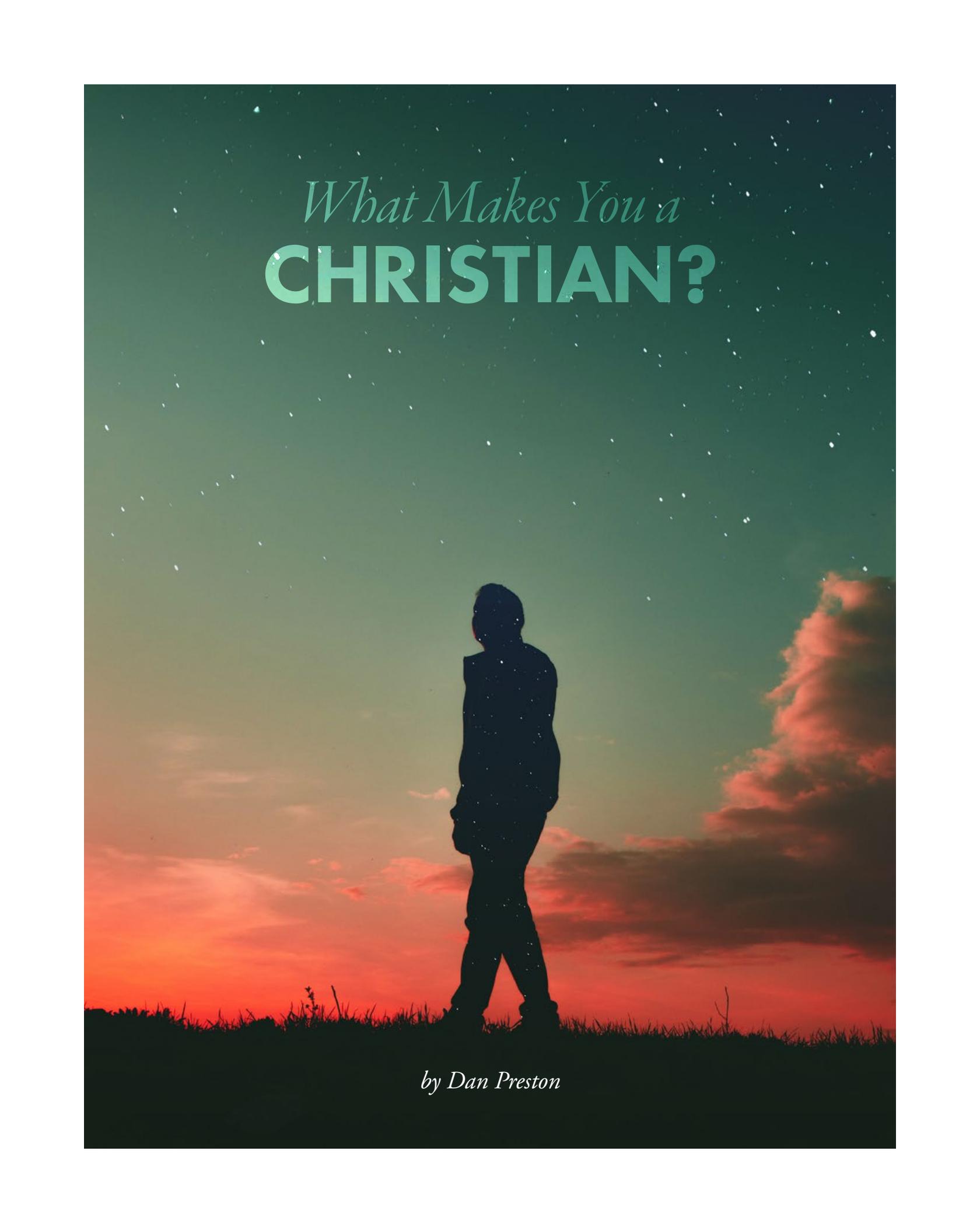
Especially in our time today, it can be difficult to discern who is truly needy, and who is taking advantage of the generosity of others. We should know enough about whom we are giving to and what we are giving to ensure we are truly helping rather than enabling an existing issue. But this complexity doesn’t take away our responsibility to help and be generous with what we have.

### **GET INVOLVED**

So, what can you do? Solomon wrote that we should not “withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to act” (Proverbs 3:27, NIV). There are many ways to get started. You could get your whole family involved and volunteer at your local soup kitchen or homeless shelter, or make up supply baskets to give to those who are truly in need. Sometimes it’s even better to give someone food, gift cards, bags of essentials or clothing instead of handing out money. You could also save up some money to donate to a trustworthy organization. The United Church of God is a part of the Good Works and LifeNets programs that offer practical assistance to disadvantaged people throughout the world ([ucg.org/members/outreach/good-works](http://ucg.org/members/outreach/good-works)). This is a great way for you to be confident that your donation will go to those who are truly in need.

There is no question that as Christians we have an absolute responsibility to care for those who are in need. This is not only our responsibility, but should also be our desire—to help others whenever we are able. Generosity and giving are part of our identity as Christians, one part in a rich and full spiritual life that aims to reflect not just one element of God’s character, but all of it. **CC**

*Solomon wrote that we should not “withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to act” (Proverbs 3:27).*



*What Makes You a*  
**CHRISTIAN?**

*by Dan Preston*

**IN** addition to working on *Compass Check* and being a pastor, I occasionally get to answer PCD letters (Personal Correspondence Department).

Back in the day, people used to write to the home office asking questions about what we believe, or for advice in dealing with an issue they might be going through. Nowadays, they mostly send emails, and I was recently asked to answer one of those emails. Here's the question I was asked: "I'm no Christian and I wanna be one. The only problem is that I don't know where to start from. Please help me know and be friends with Jesus."

I was taken aback by this question. Most questions are more specific, asking things like, "Why do you go to church on Saturday instead of Sunday?" or "Why is abortion a sin?" While those questions are somewhat more difficult to answer, they do have specific answers, which can be explained in a few scriptures. But the question of "What Makes You a Christian?"—Whoa! That's a *big* question . . .

### WHAT WOULD YOU SAY?

Have you ever thought about what makes you a Christian? Is it simply believing in God and accepting Jesus Christ as your Savior? That's how many people would define it. But that doesn't speak much to your personal character. Lots of people would agree that God exists and that Jesus is their Savior, but they don't bother to live by the guidelines given in the Bible.

Let's narrow the question down a bit more. What makes you different from other people who call themselves Christians? Is it the fact that you don't keep Christmas and Easter? Or maybe it's because you don't eat ham sandwiches or shrimp cocktails? Those things surely make you different from the vast majority of Christians on earth today, but are they what define your Christianity? Let me ask it another way: Do you want to be defined by the things that you *don't* do, or by the things that you *do*?

Let's go a step further. What is it about your life right now that if Jesus Christ were to come back and see how you are living, would show Him you are bearing His name? Just the fact that you are keeping the Sabbath and Holy Days? Those are things we should definitely do, but even the people who hated and killed Jesus kept the Sabbath and the Holy Days. Observing those doesn't *make* you Christian.



## What makes you a Christian? Is it simply believing in God and accepting Jesus Christ as your Savior?

### ACTUALLY BEING A CHRISTIAN

The Bible gives a simple explanation of what a Christian is in Romans 8:9: "But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His." Christians are defined as those who have the Holy Spirit dwelling in them.

So what about people who have not yet been baptized and received the laying on of hands that is necessary for God to give His Spirit (Acts 8:16-17)? Does it mean that you, as a teen who perhaps has not been baptized, are not a Christian? Have your efforts to understand the Bible and obey God been in vain?

Not at all. God desires that all people come to Him and be saved (1 Timothy 2:4). This is a lifelong process, often referred to as a walk, or journey. No two people are at the exact same

spot on this journey. Some, perhaps your parents or grandparents for example, began their journey 40 or 50 years ago. They have been baptized and received God's Spirit many years ago. Others, such as the gentleman who wrote the email, are perhaps just beginning their journey toward being a Christian. Still others—such as you, a teen raised in the Church—are somewhere in between.

nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

While the woman at

John 14:15, Christ pointed out that love must be the motivation behind our obedience when He said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments."

We must worship God out of total love and respect for Him and His Son, Jesus Christ.

So how about truth?

What does it mean to worship God and Jesus in truth? This gets back to some of those things like not eating pork, or why we go to church on

Christian isn't defined *only* by what we do, but if we are truly Christian, the things we do will reflect the truths of the Bible.

## YOU ARE A CHRISTIAN!

Too many times (especially in the religious world), people try to focus on arguing one truth against another. Worshipping God in spirit and truth is oftentimes one



*Christ explains that there is much more to worshipping God than just being in a certain place or following certain rituals. He explains that we must worship "in spirit and truth."*

## ANSWERING THE QUESTION

Getting back to the question at hand—"What Makes You a Christian?"—the gentleman who wrote me the email was not the first person to ask such a difficult question. In John chapter 4, Christ meets a Samaritan woman at a well. At that time, Samaritans and Jews did not get along (compare verse 9). Contrary to what the woman might have expected, Christ began to have a conversation with her, and soon the discussion turned to how to worship God. Christ answered her starting in John 4:21-24, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain,

the well's question was more specific, dealing more with the act of worship and understanding who Jesus was, it still boils down to the same basic question: What Makes You a Christian? Christ explains that there is much more to worshipping God than just being in a certain place or following certain rituals. He explains that we must worship "in spirit and truth." So what does it mean to worship in spirit and truth?

To worship in spirit means that when we obey God, we do it *not* because we want to avoid a punishment or gain a reward, but rather, because we *want* to. We don't worship God because we think we *have* to. We obey Him, not out of fear, but out of love. In

Saturday and not Sunday.

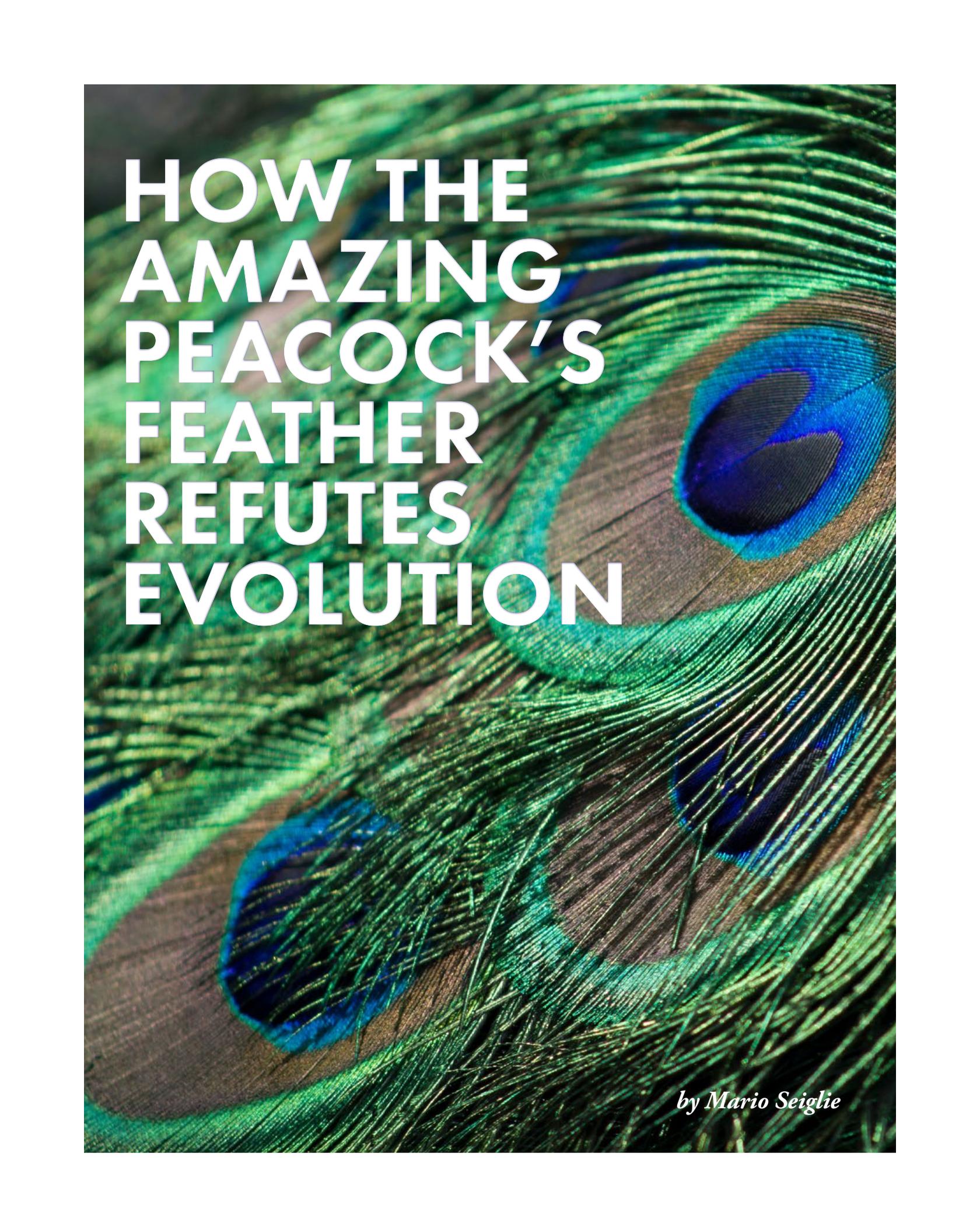
In John 17:17 (New Living Translation), Jesus tells His followers (that includes you and me!), "Make them holy by your truth; teach them your word, which is truth." God's Word, the Bible, is truth.

Furthermore, the Bible defines *what truth is*. When we read and study what the Scriptures say, it's clear that the things you have likely been taught from an early age are a part of what truth is: keeping the Sabbath, loving your neighbor and being humble and respectful in your words and actions. Being a

of those arguments. Some people say, "I worship God in the spirit of the law; therefore I don't need to worry about the details of how I do that [the truth]." Others might argue, "I'm keeping the letter of the law perfectly, just as the Bible says; therefore, it doesn't matter how I feel about doing it." Neither one of these statements is correct. The correct answer is that we must do *both*; worship God in spirit (with the right attitude), *and* in truth (according to the Bible). When we do both of these in harmony, we are living as Christians! **CC**



*Dan Preston pastors congregations in Charlotte and Hickory, North Carolina, and Columbia, South Carolina, and is still working on worshipping God in spirit and truth.*



# HOW THE AMAZING PEACOCK'S FEATHER REFUTES EVOLUTION

*by Mario Seiglie*

Surely, one of the most outstanding examples of beauty in living things is when a peacock unfurls its majestic feathers to form a multi-colored tail fan. It's hard not to look at it with breathless wonder.

Yet, as Charles Darwin, the main proponent of the theory of evolution, wrote to a friend, "The sight of a feather in a peacock's tail, whenever I gaze at it, makes me sick!" (*Letter to Asa Gray*, April 3, 1860, *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin*, Vol. 2, 1911, pp. 90–91, emphasis added throughout).

Why in the world would he say that? Normally, a naturalist like him would marvel at such an intricate, colorful and harmonious design. Yet, he did touch on the reason for his disgust in his famous book, *The Origin of Species*. He mentioned that some naturalists "believe that many structures have been created for the sake of beauty . . . Such doctrines, if true, would be absolutely fatal to my theory" (Mentor Edition, 1958, p. 184). In other words, when he noticed the carefully crafted masterpiece that is a peacock's feather, he saw a serious threat to his theory of evolution!

### SPECULATION ABOUT SEXUAL SELECTION

In order to combat the idea of creation for the sake of beauty, Darwin came up with yet another questionable theory, which he called "sexual selection."

He speculated in *The Origin of Species*: "This leads me to say a few words on what I have called *Sexual Selection*. This form of selection depends, not on a struggle for existence in relation to other organic beings or to external conditions, but on a struggle between the individuals of one sex, generally the males, for the possession of the other sex. The result is not death to the unsuccessful competitor, but few or no offspring . . . thus Sir R. Heron has described how a pied peacock was eminently attractive to all his hen birds. I cannot here enter on the necessary details; but . . . I can see no good reason to doubt that female birds, by selecting, during thousands of generations, the most melodious or beautiful males according to their standard of beauty, might produce a marked effect" (ibid, pp. 94-95). Notice that he wasn't sure of his claim, but supposed it could be true.

### ACTUAL RESEARCH ON THE SUBJECT

Yet, when scientists actually tested his idea that female peacock hens (peahens) were more attracted to the "most melodious or beautiful males" they found, to their dismay, that was *not* the case.

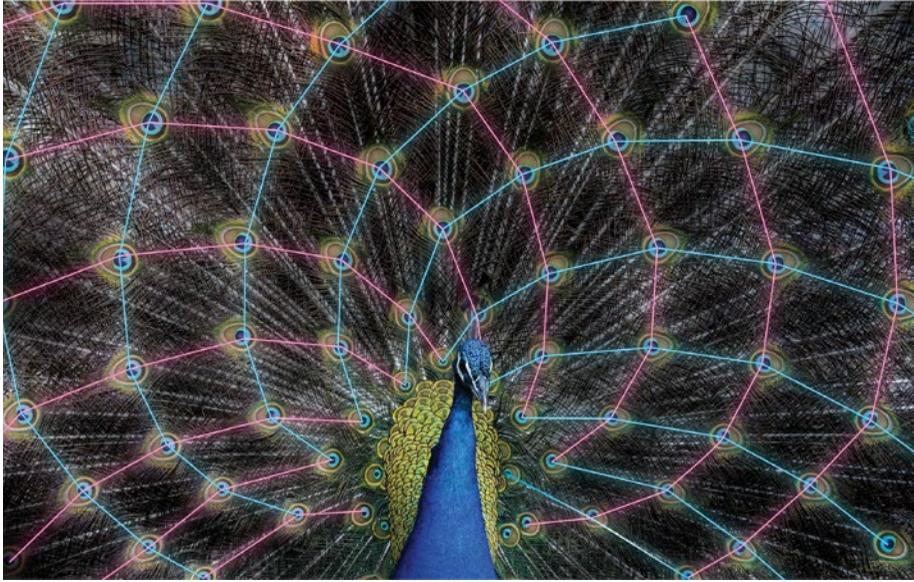
Painstakingly, researchers at the University of Tokyo studied peacocks and peahens in a zoo for *seven years*. They carefully photographed each male during the tail-fanning display ritual and counted the number of eyespots—a measure of the tail's quality. They next examined whether females chose mates with the best-quality tails. During this period of observation, the scientists observed 268 suc-



*Charles Darwin, the main proponent of the theory of evolution, wrote to a friend, "The sight of a feather in a peacock's tail, whenever I gaze at it, makes me sick!"*

cessful matings. But to their surprise, they found that females mated with drab-tailed peacocks *just as often* as with the flashy males! They concluded that the peacocks' tails were not the reason for the females' attraction to a partner—a result at odds with Darwin's theory of sexual selection (*Animal Behaviour*, April, 2008, pp. 1209-1219).

Let's take a closer look at a peacock's feather, which made Darwin nauseous because it challenged his theory that there was no proof of God in nature. It is ironic that in the Bible, God once asked a man



**THE PEACOCK'S FEATHERS FORM A COMPLEX PATTERN WITH PAIRS OF COMPLEMENTARY SPIRALS IN OPPOSING DIRECTIONS.**

called Job: “Did you give the beautiful wings to the peacocks?” (Job 39:13, Modern English Version). Job had questioned God’s wisdom—a mistake Darwin would later duplicate. Clearly, neither Job nor Darwin ever created any such thing—or for that matter, anything else!

### THREE FEATURES OF A PEACOCK'S FEATHERS THAT DEFY DARWINIAN EVOLUTION

#### 1. Iridescence

What causes the peacock’s brilliant multicolored sheen in the sunlight?

Scientists were puzzled about those shining colors until, under the microscope, they found the peacock’s feathers do not have colored pigments as they once thought; but rather, a prism-like structure resembling overlaid roof tiles. Each of these tiles refracts light at a carefully-adjusted angle to give it that stunning luminous color. It is called iridescence and is also found—among other creatures—in hummingbirds, ducks and butterflies.

#### 2. Eye Spots

Some notable features of the remarkable patterns of a peacock’s fan are the beautiful eye spots. An average peacock

has around 200 tail feathers with some 170 eye spots. Normally, the feathers are shed each year and then regrow, all repeating the same precise pattern. It is difficult to imagine all these eye spots gradually evolving, with each barb of the feather fitting its precise location to produce such astounding beauty.

#### 3. Fibonacci Sequence

Perhaps the most uncanny evidence of design in a peacock’s feather has to do with its intricate spiral design. Spirals like this are found throughout nature (sunflowers, pinecones and pineapples, for instance) and are often described as the “Fibonacci sequence” in mathematics. The peacock’s feathers form a complex pattern with pairs of complementary spirals in opposing directions (see graphic).

These are just some examples of awesome design in nature that undermine Darwin’s famous theory of evolution. At the molecular level, the elaborate patterns on the peacock’s feathers are ultimately possible because of automated molecular machines and genetic codes that do God’s bidding inside the cell, showing the unmistakable evidence of intelligent design.

As Michael Behe answered a religious skeptic: “To be *convinced* of the existence

of God, the skeptical [biologist Jerry] Coyne wants a nine-hundred-foot-tall Jesus to appear to the residents of New York City, or something equally dramatic. Some of us [biochemists] view *the genetic code and the intricate molecular machinery of life as rather more spectacular* than a supersized apparition” (Ibid., p. 76).

The theory of evolution, thanks to mounting biochemical evidence against it, is quietly being discarded by an increasing number of scientists. It is turning out to be a bygone, 19<sup>th</sup> century idea from Charles Darwin that is unable to explain the complexity of life, biological nanomachines and the genetic code at the molecular level.

Its refutation brings to mind 1 Corinthians 3:19, “God catches the wise when they try to outsmart him” (Contemporary English version). While scientific research provides much value to human life, let us remember the greatest scientist of all—the Creator of the universe! **CC**

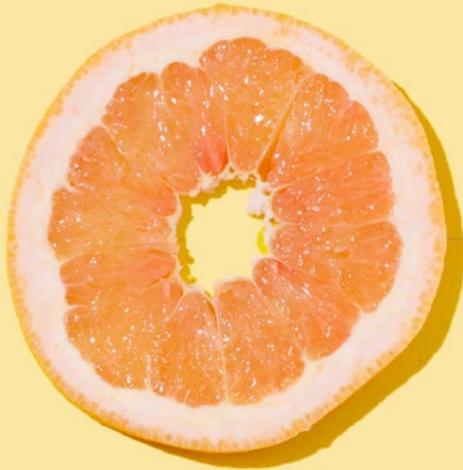
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Mario Seiglie teaches archaeology and intelligent design at Ambassador Bible College.

# BEARING FRUIT



**A**pples, blueberries, figs, grapes, oranges, plums and pine-apples are all delicious and nutritious fruits. Our Creator created these, as well as many other amazing fruits, together with lush plants. After creating them, He saw that they were good (Genesis 1:12).

A balanced and nutritious diet includes a variety of fruits. We enjoy these fruits and should praise God for them. Now, imagine an orchard with fruit trees that continually fail to produce fruits, in spite of the agricultural efforts made by the gardener. This would surely make the gardener unhappy and dissatisfied.

## LIFE IN ZIMBABWE

Here in Zimbabwe, we face the unusual scarcity of cash, fuel and many other daily essentials. Frequently planning ahead, gathering information and waiting in queues (lines) just to get items are daily headaches for us. We are often required to set aside at least an hour or more just to withdraw cash or refuel. I remember having to walk from my workplace to the

banks several times, join a queue, wait patiently and control myself whenever some would dodge the queue (jump the line) right in front of me.

To avoid the lines, some of my workmates advised bribery. While this would save time, God's Word teaches us otherwise. A Christian should not use bribes to get ahead, or unfairly save time at the expense of fellow bank account holders or motorists. I appreciate the importance of planning ahead, waiting patiently, practicing self-control and having love for others. In all this, I pray for help from God to avoid improper conduct in spite of the hardships. This is just one personal example of how God can help us bear fruit.

## THE VINE AND BRANCHES



How does God feel when we do not bear fruit? John 15:1-2 says, "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He

prunes, that it may bear more fruit." Do you know the One who is like the vine? It is Jesus Christ, our Savior. Do you know who the gardener is? It is our Heavenly Father. We are all branches (followers) attached to the vine (Christ Himself). Jesus Christ does not mince words. Any branch which does not bear fruit is cut off.



## WHAT KIND OF FRUIT?

What kind of fruit is being referred to here? Is it an apple or a plum? Neither, but the delicious taste and nutrients of those fruits could be likened to our faithful obedience and earnest desire to seek God's Kingdom and His righteousness. The fruit we are to bear is described by the apostle Paul in Galatians 5:22-23, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law."

The apostle Paul was inspired by our God to write about the fruit of the Holy Spirit for our edification. A teachable Christian can compare his or her behavior, as well as their manner of relating to God and others,



*While you may not yet be baptized or have received the gift of the Holy Spirit, you can still be an active member of the body of Christ (God's Church).*

to the fruit of the Holy Spirit. The perfect example of living this way is of course Jesus Christ!

### **HOW CAN WE PRODUCE THIS FRUIT?**

One suggestion about how to produce this fruit in your life is to ask yourself each morning if you are bearing the fruit of the Holy Spirit. By doing so, you will be thinking about these fruits as you go through your day, and will see opportunities to grow in each aspect.

John 15:4 clearly states that no branch

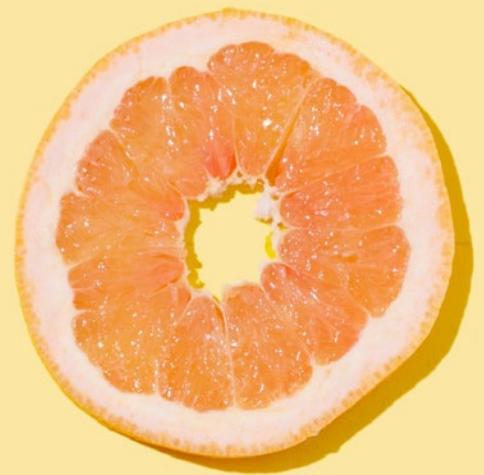


can produce fruit alone. Each branch has to be joined to the vine. Remember that Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church of God. While you may not yet be baptized or have received the gift of the Holy Spirit, you can still be an active member of the body of Christ (God's Church). Part of being joined to the vine is congregating with fellow believers and obediently observing all of God's Holy Days.



Verses 5-6 lay out the basis of producing much fruit, and the consequences of being separated from the vine (Jesus Christ). Verse 7 instructs us to stay joined to Christ and to follow His teachings, including keeping the Holy Days. Verse 8 states, "By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples." Producing much fruit shows that we are faithful and obedient followers of Christ!

The next time you bite into an apple or a plum, or relish a juicy red grape or watermelon, think about the spiritual fruit you are bearing, as a branch attached to the vine! **CC**



*Sydney Nyamasok is a member of the Harare, Zimbabwe, congregation. He enjoys singing, songleading, and would love to learn to play musical instruments.*

# WHAT NO ONE WILL TELL YOU ABOUT ABORTION



*Unwanted pregnancies can be painful on many levels for all involved. What can you do if you find yourself or a loved one in this situation?*

*by Terri Eddington*

*Due to the sensitive nature of this subject matter, we recommend that younger teens discuss this issue with their parents before reading the article.*

A

teen girl walked into the pregnancy resource facility where I once volunteered. Her face was deeply etched with emotional pain, and her demeanor spoke of suffering and stress.

Our mission was to support mothers with untimely pregnancies—so the scenario was not an unusual one. But before there was any opportunity to address the grief-stricken girl, a woman stridently pushed through the door and walked to the front desk.

Her face also told a story—a story of resentment and anger. She asked for her daughter “to be seen *right away!*”

Unbeknown to us at the time, despite the building’s signage being perfectly clear, her mother mistakenly thought she had taken her daughter to an abortion clinic. Her daughter was indeed “seen right away,” and staff assisted her through the normal process where she ultimately heard her baby’s heartbeat. The sound of the heartbeat altered the scenario from “a problem” to a *baby*—and not just any baby, but her baby.

You can imagine the ensuing tension when she emerged from the room. She wanted her baby!

Heartbeats never lie. Heartbeats tell of the life within the womb. However, the girl’s mother vowed the pregnancy would not continue—insisting this was not a baby, it was a mistake. The girl was terse in her response, accusing her mother of fearing the shame of neighbors and their church learning about the pregnancy. In a flash she was whisked out the door and driven to an abortion facility, which had been her mother’s intent all along.

I don’t know the rest of the story, but I do know that in trying to erase the problem, the resulting tragedy would have unintended consequences that would likely last a lifetime.

After many years I still recall the expression imprinted on the girl’s face. *If only* her mother had stopped for just a moment to look beyond her own disgrace to truly see, she too would have grasped what the rest of us saw carved all over her daughter’s demeanor—anguish, torment and possibly irreconcilable damage to their relationship.

This story demonstrates how easily emotions can surge and overwhelm people confronted by an unintended pregnancy, pushing them to consider desperate measures.

**GOD IS IN THE  
RESTORATION BUSINESS.  
HE IS THE MENDER OF  
BROKEN LIVES, HEARTS  
AND SPIRITS, FOR ALL  
WHO HAVE ERRED.**

### **THE UNINTENDED PREGNANCY**

Teens, if you find yourself caught in a similar predicament, consider some of the following principles prior to making hasty decisions born of shame or the prospect of altered life plans. Also understand that my intent is not to dredge up pain lingering in

anyone who mourns prior choices. To you, I simply remind you of Jesus Christ's redemptive sacrifice that makes it possible for you to forge ahead anew.

If you contact a pro-choice clinic contemplating abortion, realize the solutions presented will speak to every single one of your fears and offer a fix that *promises to erase them all*—and what a temptation this is when complicated thoughts and emotions rage within. “Stop, look and listen” before you cross this road. Stop—control your emotions instead of letting your emotions control you. Look—at all options and visualize how you might feel 15 years from now about your decision. Listen—to Scripture (Numbers 32:23), because sin always has consequences.

As a teen, your circumstances may not allow for raising a child. So, consider what a blessed gift adoption would bring to another family. As has been said, “There is no such thing as an unwanted child; there are only ‘un-wanting parents.’”

Recognize the inspiration others find in those who choose to do the right thing even when it's the hard thing. When you step up to the plate, you encourage others to do the same. Your choice today can be a shining example to others who stumble tomorrow.

## FUNDAMENTAL LESSONS FROM A BIBLICAL EXAMPLE

Consider the story of David and Bathsheba found in 2 Samuel 11-12 (you might want to pause for a moment and read it quickly). David had sex with another man's wife, and the result was an unintended pregnancy. To try and cover it up, David tried to make Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, think it was his baby. When that didn't work, David saw to it that Uriah was killed in battle. With that story in mind, consider the following:

- Compounding a bad decision with another bad decision is never a good idea. Be aware of the progressive

component of sin—i.e., sin that isn't repented of often leads to more and worse sins—and halt the destructive cycle. Choosing to have an abortion does not “undo” the sin and consequences of premarital sex; it only adds more sin and consequences to it.

**RECOGNIZE THE INSPIRATION OTHERS FIND IN THOSE WHO CHOOSE TO DO THE RIGHT THING EVEN WHEN IT'S THE HARD THING. YOUR CHOICE TODAY CAN BE A SHINING EXAMPLE TO OTHERS WHO STUMBLE TOMORROW.**

- Seek godly counsel. It cannot be emphasized enough just how much you need a sounding board during this time of vulnerability. Seek out a supportive family member, pastor or trusted mentor—someone who will bring calm, spiritual perspective and accountability to the table.
- What you've already *done* doesn't have to dictate what you do *next*. Be courageous and make the next choice a step in the right direction. Sometimes what presents itself as an “easy way out” of the short-term difficult circumstances becomes the hardest way forward in the long term.
- The real choice before you is to either *refuse* or *accept* responsibility for your choices. In King David's case, the escalating chaos ended only when he acknowledged his sins, repented and took responsibility for his mistakes.
- Turning to God in confession of sins and repentance doesn't mean we escape consequences, but it does begin our moral reset and the path to true

healing and peace.

- Don't let the *past* determine your *future*. Champions of faith, like King David, aren't champions because they didn't sin, but because they repented and didn't let their sin define them.
- Understand that your past does not hold back God's future work in and through you. David and Bathsheba went on to have four sons (1 Chronicles 3:5), including Solomon, of whom it was said, “The LORD loved him” (2 Samuel 12:24). In the years to come, David and Bathsheba's lineage is a thread that is woven through many biblical men and women of faith and ultimately directly to Jesus Christ.

The struggle for parents who learn of their daughter's pregnancy can sometimes be as hard for them as it is for her. If you are a teen impacted by an unintended pregnancy, consider the opportunity you now have to exhibit godly character by taking responsibility and making wise decisions going forward. Also consider that while this is a challenge you may never face personally, you may someday have a friend, coworker or sibling who does. By sharing with them your thoughts on how to handle the situation in a responsible way, you can be a light in their life when they are in a time of darkness.

God is in the restoration business. He is the mender of broken lives, hearts and spirits, for all who have erred. As we consider unintended pregnancies and those who find themselves in this dilemma, let us mercifully support and comfort them with the same mercy and comfort “the Father of mercies and God of all comfort” gives to us (2 Corinthians 1:3-7) when we face seemingly insurmountable challenges. **CC**



Terri Eddington is a huge work in progress, who appreciates God's graciousness, love and mercy in her life more than words can say.

W O R D S

W I T H A

F R I E N D

*by Katherine Rowland*



met my best friend at church when I was almost 30 years old. Conveniently, my best friend's daughter noticed that her mom and I had the same first name and announced that we should be best friends! Inconveniently, sometimes it seems as though our first name is the only thing we have in common. We have very different personalities. One is loud, and the other is quiet. One of us talks a mile a minute, and the other can sit for whole blocks of time without speaking. One is introverted, and the other is extroverted. We have different hobbies, passions, professions, ideas and opinions.

On top of all of that, we have never lived close to each other. When we met, we lived an hour apart and would see each other only at church. Now, we live about four hours apart, and we have seen each other only once in the past year. Since we cannot spend a lot of time doing things together, we have to keep up our friendship with words.

Even with email and the phone, words can be tricky. Sometimes we misunderstand each other. Sometimes one of us says the wrong thing at the wrong time. Sometimes we disagree, and we are not always as careful as we could be in choosing how we disagree. We have had to learn how to use our words to build up our friendship, instead of breaking it down.

I was thinking about this the other day when I read this passage from Ephesians: "Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need. Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers" (Ephesians 4:28-29).

What does instruction about stealing have to do with how we use our words in friendship? The first thing I noticed was that Paul gave two different instructions, but the idea behind each instruction is similar. First, he wrote that the person who has been a thief shouldn't steal, but should work to be able to give something to others who are in need. In

verse 29, it says that we shouldn't say bad things to each other, but instead should say things that edify and impart grace. You could boil these down to "don't take away from others; give to them."

If I want to be a good friend when I am using my words, I need to choose words that won't be harmful to my friends, but will strengthen and encourage them—words that will build them up. In a healthy friendship, if I do this for my friend, he or she will do the same for me. This makes each of us stronger and strengthens the friendship.

What are some ways we can use our words to help our friends?

### **FIRST, KNOW YOUR FRIEND**

Proverbs 27:14 tells us "He who blesses his friend with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, it will be counted a curse to him." Even the nicest words, if said at the wrong time or in the wrong way, can be unpleasant to others. Before we start talking, we should think about how our friend might be feeling, or what they might be experiencing, and how our words might come across. This is especially true if we have something critical to say, or advice to give, but it's smart to consider even if we just want to talk about our day. If my friend is worried, sad or has had a terrible day, it might not be best to start proudly talking about how awesome things are for me!



**IF I WANT TO BE A GOOD FRIEND,  
I NEED TO CHOOSE WORDS THAT  
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FRIENDS, BUT WILL STRENGTHEN  
AND ENCOURAGE THEM.**



**WHEN WE NEED TO SAY SOMETHING TO A FRIEND THAT MIGHT BE HARD FOR THEM TO HEAR, WE NEED TO STOP AND THINK ABOUT WHETHER WE ARE ACTUALLY TRYING TO HELP THEM, OR WHETHER WE WANT TO PROVE OUR POINT.**

### **NEXT, CHECK YOUR INTENTIONS**

I'm pretty good at justifying what I want to say or do. Sometimes, I want to set someone straight about something, and I am completely convinced that how I am thinking about the topic is the right way to think about it. I feel I am helping my friend by showing them that they're wrong.

Maybe it isn't surprising that most of the time, this isn't the right approach.

When we need to say something to a friend that might be hard for them to hear, we need to stop and think about whether we are actually trying to help them, or whether we want to prove our point or that we are right. Our goal should be to win our friend, not to win an argument. Romans 12:16 reminds us not to be wise in our own opinion and Ephesians 4:15 instructs us to tell the truth in love.

### **NOW, CHECK YOUR WORDS**

In the verse in Ephesians, Paul said we shouldn't let any corrupt talk come out of our mouths. There are different ways to think about the word, "corrupt." In another place in Ephesians, Paul warned against "foolish talking" and "coarse jesting" (Ephesians 5:4). In Colossians 3:8-9, he wrote that we should put off "anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language" and that we should not lie to each other. But it's more than what we *don't* say.

In Philippians 4:8, we're encouraged to meditate on whatever things are true, noble, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous and praiseworthy. If we are thinking about these things, our words will reflect them too. That doesn't mean we can never express sorrow or anger or talk about a hard day. It does mean we can talk about difficult things in the light of our hope in God and with the intention of looking for the good.

### **ABOVE EVERYTHING, SHOW LOVE**

The New Testament is full of instructions to love one another. Christ taught that loving our neighbor is one of the two great commandments (Mark 12:31). Peter wrote that we should love one another above all (1 Peter 4:8). Paul wrote that love is the greatest of all the spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 13:13). It is clear we are to treat one another with deep love, no matter what. Love looks for the good in the other person. Showing love to our friend means we aren't striving to correct them or show we are smarter than they are. We love them as they are and appreciate the differences between us.

Even though we are not perfect, my best friend and I have a strong friendship because we have learned to use our words better throughout the years. We may not have a lot of interests in common, but following these steps has helped us choose words that build up each other and our friendship. **CC**



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# COMPASS CHECK

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