

July-September 2005

vertical **thought**

a magazine of understanding for tomorrow's

leaders

Preparing to Lead

**Join the Few,
the Called,
the Chosen**

***Molding Your
Personality
for Leadership***

The Heart of a King

**It Does Matter
Who Your Friends Are**



Are You a **Leader?**

“If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more, and become more, you are a leader.” — John Quincy Adams

Some people seem destined to lead. Take John Quincy Adams, for example. Born in Braintree, Massachusetts, in 1767, he grew up watching the United States fight for and achieve its independence from Britain, thereby becoming a nation. And speaking of watching, he literally saw history unfold before him when he climbed Penn’s Hill above his family’s farm to watch the Battle of Bunker Hill—one of the early military confrontations between British troops and colonial volunteers who had organized themselves into an army.

His parents, John and Abigail Adams, took their responsibility of helping shape the fledgling United States of America seriously. John Quincy was given an above-average education for his time. There were few public schools, so he was primarily homeschooled.

His father, serving his country in the Continental Congress and as an overseas diplomat during the Revolutionary War, was often away from the family farm during John Quincy’s formative years. His mother was therefore primarily responsible for his education. But his father did closely monitor John Quincy’s progress and personally tutored him when he was at home.

Jesus Christ said: “You are the light of the world . . . Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” When we fulfill Christ’s command, we are leaders!

Under his parents’ guidance, John Quincy studied hard and assimilated knowledge at an astounding rate. At age 11 he joined his father in Europe and continued his studies under his tutelage. He was so skilled and mature for his age that he was appointed by Congress as a diplomatic secretary at the age of 14. He was well on his way to a life of public service that eventually included being elected president of the United States, just as his father had been. (John was the second president; John Quincy, the sixth.)

For all of John Quincy’s education, he also had a dimension that was critically important. His mother taught him Christian values and both parents shared with him their deeply held conviction that serving one’s country faithfully, honorably and with integrity was one of life’s most important ideals.

So what’s the point? John Quincy Adams lived a long time ago and we can’t all become leaders, can we? Yes! As Christians, God charges each of us to be beacons of light in a darkened world. Jesus Christ said: “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden . . . Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:14, 16). When we fulfill Christ’s command, we are leaders!

Being a Christian means being an ambassador for the Kingdom of God (2 Corinthians 5:20). When people see the way we act, think and serve others, they should be inspired to do the same. This issue is dedicated to helping you fulfill your destiny to become a godly leader! Read. Think. Apply. Succeed.

David Treybig
Managing editor



Vertical Thought is a biblically based magazine of understanding for young people ages 12-22. Our name, *Vertical Thought*, is derived from Colossians 3:1-2, which tells us to think about godly things “which are above, where Christ is.” *Vertical Thought* is published quarterly by the United Church of God, an International Association, 555 Technecenter Drive, Milford, OH 45150. © 2005 United Church of God, an International Association. Printed in U.S.A. All rights reserved. Reproduction in any form without written permission is prohibited.

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by Randy Stiver

This is the city. Near tragedy strikes at 13th and Alder. A young adult male shoots himself up with heroin and passes out in the front seat of a drug dealer's car. A spoonful of cooked heroin sits in his lap, to be his next hit when he comes to. In the backseat, his girlfriend's five-month-old baby screams from its unbuckled car safety seat.

Police find a diaper bag full of needles and other drug paraphernalia in the car, plus a pink, plastic makeup bag full of more needles. Inside the dirt-encrusted vehicle, a gas can sits next to the baby. Thankfully the infant is unharmed.

The officers try twice to rouse the young man. He taunts them as they arrest and handcuff him. "You're wasting

God expects you to live His way of life; that's part of your life's purpose. But there is infinitely more to come. You can lead among the masses of mankind by living right today, and then lead in changing the world tomorrow.

your time. I'm going to be out of jail in two days." Turning to the few onlookers, he screams at the top of his lungs, "Whichever one of you ratted me out, you're just an ___!" They watch silently as he leaves in the patrol car.

So what's the near tragedy? That the baby could have been hurt? That the young drug abuser could have overdosed? That he might actually get out of jail in two days?

Not this time. The near tragedy is that you or someone you know could have turned out to be him or his girlfriend or the drug dealer who owned the car—all young adults going nowhere at breakneck speed. The good news is that as a *Vertical Thought* reader you know a better way of living, and you're learning about an incredible future and leadership opportunity that is yours for the seeking.

Way of life from God

Revealed in the Bible is the absolute moral code of the universe. This is a dogmatic statement, but you can prove it true. And you must verify it to be true in the face of direct and shrill opposition from an extreme, immoral popular culture that permeates most college and high school campuses and life in general. This culture wants your mind and body in the worst way—the worst, sexually corrupt, degraded and destructive way.

But it can't have you. You don't belong to it. You already belong to God who created you. Your mind and body are sacred. It's where God will put His Spirit at baptism upon your repentance and commitment to Him through Jesus Christ.

A sacred mind and body is meant to live according to that great moral code. In practical terms that means no alcohol abuse (drunkenness) and no drug abuse (which is a sin because it causes instant drunkenness). It means no sexual activity before your marriage, no pornography and no lustful thoughts. It also means no bloodlust, no violence toward others, no emotional feeding frenzies on violent video games or violence-glorifying films.

That may seem like a long list of noes, but when we live the right way of life charted by God's moral code or law, there are many more yeses than noes. Two letters in the New Testament were written to a young man named Timothy. This one sentence summarizes the negatives and pans the panorama of affirmatives in God's way of life: "Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Timothy 2:22).

Today there are only a few who understand God's law of true morality in all aspects of life. Our young heroin addict and his friends certainly don't have a clue, and amazingly, even the vast majority of relatively responsible religious people don't comprehend it either. You can be among the few.

God expects you to live His way of life; that's part of your life's purpose. But there is infinitely more to come. You can lead among the masses of mankind by living right today, and then lead in changing the world tomorrow.

Future from God

Did you ever watch the cartoon series *Pinky and the Brain*? No doubt only in reruns now, there were these two mice. Pinky was the sidekick and the Brain was the brain. The plot in each episode was the same—the Brain was planning to take over the world and Pinky was to help him. It never worked; they never took over the world. But guess what God has in store for you as a part of the few?

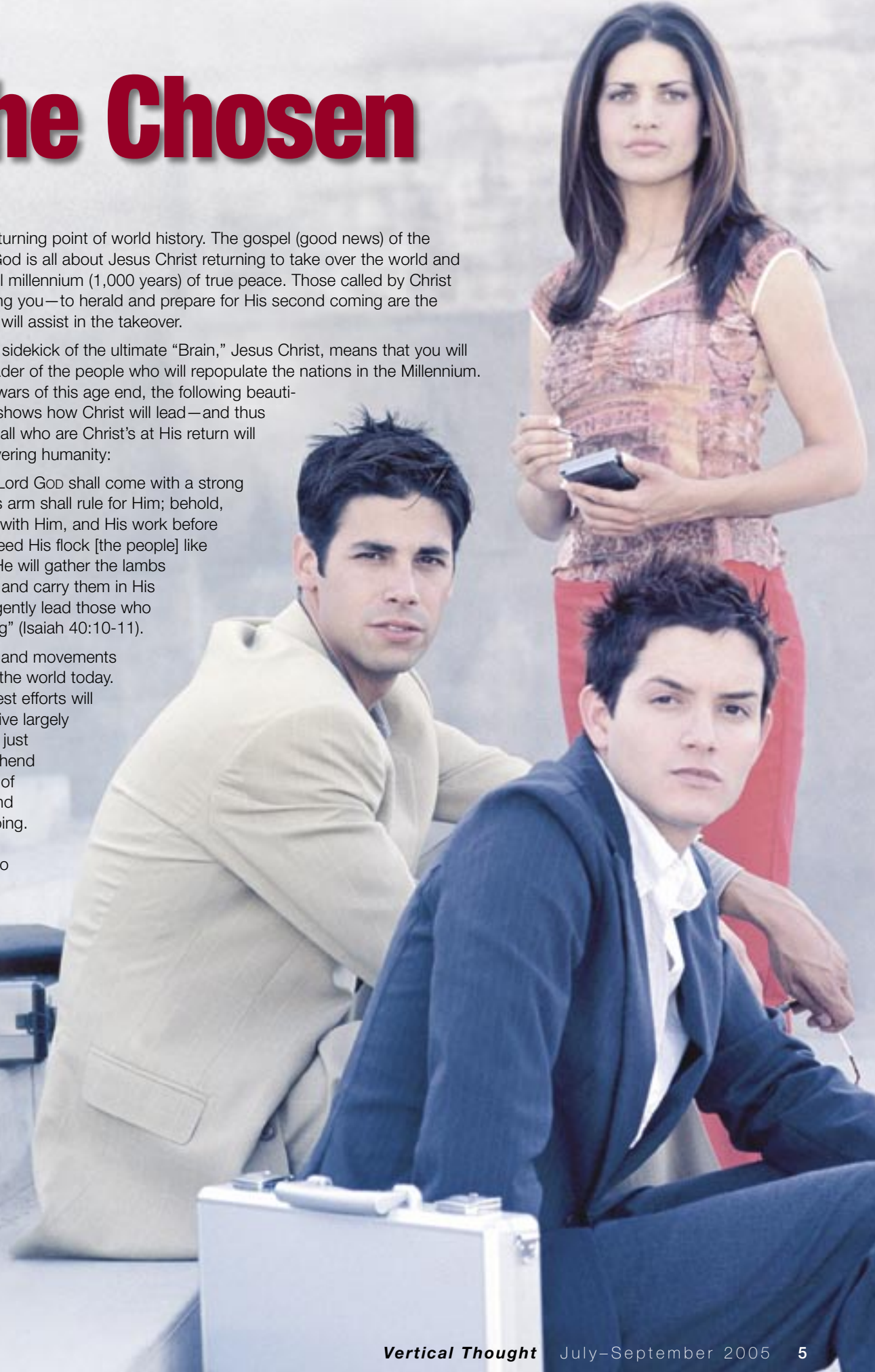
d, the Chosen

We sit at the turning point of world history. The gospel (good news) of the Kingdom of God is all about Jesus Christ returning to take over the world and establish a full millennium (1,000 years) of true peace. Those called by Christ now—including you—to herald and prepare for His second coming are the “Pinkys” who will assist in the takeover.

To serve as a sidekick of the ultimate “Brain,” Jesus Christ, means that you will serve as a leader of the people who will repopulate the nations in the Millennium. Set after the wars of this age end, the following beautiful prophecy shows how Christ will lead—and thus how you and all who are Christ’s at His return will lead—a recovering humanity:

“Behold, the Lord God shall come with a strong hand, and His arm shall rule for Him; behold, His reward is with Him, and His work before Him. He will feed His flock [the people] like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those who are with young” (Isaiah 40:10-11).

Many groups and movements want to save the world today. Sadly, their best efforts will prove ineffective largely because they just don’t comprehend who the God of the Bible is and what He is doing. But as a part of the few who



do understand God's way and plan, you will have the leadership opportunity to truly save the world in the future. The worldwide culture you will help build will eradicate the societal problems of today, including crime, marriage and family breakdown, drug addiction and such.

Before us, stretching out for 1,000 years and on to eternity, a magnificent, pulsating, brilliant and happy future filled with leading, serving and loving others beckons those who hear and heed. Relatively speaking, many are called today to know of this future, but few are chosen to live it and lead in preparing for it now (Matthew 20:16). How do you get chosen?

Calling from God

Here's a lightning bolt: Jesus Christ is not trying to save the world today. That statement runs smack against what traditional Christianity thinks. But God has a plan to offer salvation to every human being from Adam and Eve to the last baby conceived. No one will be left behind from the Kingdom of God because of living at the wrong place or wrong time. God believes in equal opportunity salvation. But not all are offered that salvation today.

Jesus said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who

sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up [resurrect him] at the last day" (John 6:44). As a vertical thinker, you are being powerfully drawn and called toward the great Savior and Messiah of all mankind. The burden of knowing the truth of God weighs on your mind and spirit. But it's a good burden. "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light," said Jesus (Matthew 11:29-30).

Jesus Christ wants you. He has chosen you for this calling to turn to Him and learn from Him, to take part in His body and work today and to provide leadership in the world tomorrow.

You were not called or chosen to be the young, ill-tempered heroin addict or his foolish girlfriend (pity that poor baby) or his drug dealer buddy. Your future is something infinitely better. As a young leader before God, you have the opportunity to help physically salvage and spiritually save these people.

So what do you do now? Respond in good faith. When God calls . . . *answer!* And join the few, the called, the chosen.

Randy Stiver is the pastor of United Church of God congregations in Coos Bay, Eugene and Roseburg, Oregon.



Q ■ Is it wrong to use euphemisms? Are they as bad as the actual words?

A ■ Euphemisms are substitute words or phrases that are considered less offensive ways of expressing something. For example, instead of saying, "Your dog died," you could say, "Your dog went to sleep" or "Your dog didn't recover." This is an appropriate use of a euphemism.

Then there are euphemisms for what are considered vulgar or coarse terms. Such euphemisms may or may not be acceptable depending on societal standards and context.

But some euphemisms are wrong even when society deems otherwise. Often people use euphemisms for the names of God and Jesus, such as "gosh," "golly," "gee" and "geez." What many people don't realize in using such terms is that they violate the spirit of the Third Commandment, which says, "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain" (Exodus 20:7). To use God's name in a vain way means doing so in a casual or idle way.

While the use of euphemisms for God's name may not be as bad as using the actual names, since there may be a sincere intent here to avoid violating God's command, it constitutes a violation nonetheless. Modifying God's name so as to avoid technically using it while still retaining a similar sound is itself a form of treating His name in a cavalier, unacceptable manner.

As a matter of respect for God, we need to remember that His name is holy (Psalm 111:9). Saying one of God's names, or even a euphemism for God, when we are upset or angry does not honor Him. Neither does using His name, or a euphemism representing His name, when we really aren't thinking of Him. Using euphemisms in these ways violates the Third Commandment.

Of course, this is not to say that God will hold us guilty for being completely unaware that some word we use is a euphemism for His name. But we might be guilty of negligence in our speech, as all of us have a responsibility to be careful in what we say (Matthew 12:36-37), which includes looking into such expressions. This applies all the more once we are aware that such substitute expressions exist and that we shouldn't use them.

If you have a question, e-mail us at info@verticalthought.org

Noah: A True Nonconformist

Many people identify with bucking the crowd and being one's own person, but how can we know when that's what we should do? Here's an example of someone who was a nonconformist for the right reason.

by Ken Auletta

Many people today seek the approval and acceptance of others. They like to fit in with the crowd. Even those on the fringes of society who rebel against the mainstream culture—the nonconformists—seek approval and acceptance from others in their own group. If you really think about it, it seems that most nonconformists are actually conforming to something after all!

But Noah was not like most people. In fact, he was unlike every other person in the world at that moment in history. Noah sought his acceptance and approval from God. In his quest to do that, he had to utterly reject the actions of those around him. He didn't fit in with the culture around him. In fact, he put himself in direct opposition to it as a "preacher of righteousness" (2 Peter 2:5).

His life of righteousness was so totally different from the world's culture, God decided to use him to continue the human race after the great Flood. As the society around him grew worse, God instructed Noah to start building an ark and to preach righteousness.

Noah and his family survived the Flood because Noah obeyed God's instructions. His story teaches us that God always delivers on His promises to those who trust and obey Him.

When no one responded to Noah's preaching, God brought a great flood that covered the entire earth. He then started the world all over again through Noah and his family. (People who died not understanding God's truth will be given an opportunity in the future to know and accept His way. To learn more about this amazing truth, request or download our free booklet *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind* at www.ucg.org/booklets.)

When commissioned, Noah had only God to guide him. It seems he had no living role models to imitate. His great-grandfather, the righteous Enoch, died a few years before his birth. Other than those few family members with him, he had no human support or encouragement.

Before the Flood, Noah had to swim against the current, and it was a difficult task. During that time humanity became so sinful that the Bible says people's intentions were "only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5). Noah was surrounded by people who had rejected the truth, and he had to live and raise his family in a world completely spoiled by the effects of sin.

Being a nonconformist for righteousness must have been not just socially uncomfortable, but also very dangerous, since the Bible describes that society as extraordinarily violent (Genesis 6:11).

You may have noticed that when people are doing wrong, they resent those who are doing good and often become hostile toward them. Noah may well have suffered threats on his life and perhaps even physical beatings as the apostle Paul later would.

Dealing with unpopularity

Noah had an unpopular job. The building of the ark on dry land was a monumental warning to the world of an impending disaster, but this must have seemed ridiculous to the people of that time. Imagine the jeers and comments Noah and his family had to endure as they labored on the ark. Even the idea of enough water collecting to cause that much flooding might have seemed a preposterous concept!

Some scientists believe that the atmosphere before the Flood was very different from ours today. Heavy rainfall may have been unknown before the Flood. Regardless of the atmospheric properties, Noah and his family undoubtedly drew plenty of sarcastic comments regarding their ark-building activity.

In the long run, Noah and his family survived the Flood because Noah obeyed God's instructions. God made a covenant with him because of his obedience, and his story teaches us that God always delivers on His promises to those who trust and obey Him.

Jesus Christ told His disciples that the mentality in society at His return would be just like that of Noah's day (Matthew 24:37-39). People will be so caught up in their activities that they will be surprised by the return of Jesus. As we await Christ's return, we need to remember that we, like Noah, must not conform to this world (Romans 12:1-2). Let's follow Noah's example by being nonconformists to sin and conformists to God!

Ken Auletta is a United Church of God member living in Central New Jersey. His career is in direct sales and promotions.

A photograph of a person climbing a rock face. The climber is wearing a red t-shirt, a red helmet, and a climbing harness. They are positioned on the left side of the frame, reaching up to grip a rock ledge. The rock face is textured and brownish. A rope is visible running vertically down the rock face.

Are You Lurking or Living?

"If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them."

Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*

by **Larry Greider**

In 1781, at age 14, John Quincy Adams (the son of John Adams, second president of the United States, and himself the sixth president) was sent to Russia as a private secretary and French interpreter for the U.S. minister to the Russian court. In 1782, at age 15, he returned to Paris, as a secretary to the commission negotiating with the British for the end of the American Revolutionary War.

Skilled in several languages, with a keen sense of diplomacy, John Quincy was quite the prodigy. He would become the secretary of state under James Monroe before being elected as president of the United States. After one term as president, he served nine consecutive terms in the House of Representatives.

It reminds me of a joke about George Washington. A stern father chastised his son by explaining that when George was a young boy at his son's age, he was a proficient surveyor. The son shot back, "But when he was *your age*, he was the president of the United States!"

It is easy to look back and see the missed opportunities of our lives and compare ourselves with others. The challenge when you are still young is to maximize the opportunities that come your way before they pass.

The world is an adventure

A good way to think about life is to see it as a type of frontier. In early American history, the opportunities were everywhere if you had the desire, vision and means to pursue them. Cities grew from intersections along river crossings and mountain paths. Necessity was the mother of invention and urgent needs provoked clever solutions. Today you might think there is nothing new to do with your life, and you could settle for a rut or routine.

Everyone has the same 24-hour day, and most people in the Western world today have the means and opportunities to do just about anything one can imagine. Perhaps the problem is that we don't imagine much. Instead we become distracted by the array of diversions that entertain us. I heard a frustrated father comment that it's hard for parents to compete for their children's attention, working against stunning music videos and pulse-pounding video games that are so real they get lost in the fantasy.

Life seems dull and unexciting when you compare your world with what can be produced in a studio and served up with surround sound and high-definition pictures. At the end of such entertainment,

Photos: Photos.com

what have *you* done? Where have *you* ventured and what have *you* accomplished? Why would you settle for someone else's adventures instead of making your own?

Life is what you make it!

Rather than getting lost in fictional or canned adventures, set goals for *yourself*. Life with normal stresses and challenges may seem boring unless you have an action list. This could include dreams, aspirations, places to visit and things to do. Hobbies can become careers, and talents can be developed just about anywhere.

Decide to be a *doer*. Get involved in athletics, music and challenges that develop your mind.

In our neighborhood there's a young man who is fascinated by motors. He used a rebuilt lawn mower engine to power a rough but workable motorized homemade wagon. This loud and ugly, but functional, machine chugs down the street with no particular style, but is the proud invention of a tinkerer. Who knows? One day he might be the engineer to build the next generation of smart cars!



In my youth, the Boy Scout merit badge program tantalized me to snoop around at the edge of discovery in the hopes of acquiring another round patch. In the process of earning badges, many a scout has stumbled onto a life skill that has led to a career path. I remember the weather station that I talked my dad into letting me place on the roof of our two-story house, complete with a primitive wind meter and directional vane.

Later I became interested in amateur radio. I can remember many hours of listening through old World War II-vintage ear-phones, trying to decipher the dots and dashes of a ham radio operator using the international Morse code. I collected call signs from around the world.

Lurker or doer?

Are you building a life, or are you just another mesmerized lurker—a passive spectator of the electronic imagery that sucks the time out of your day? Are you being entertained, while finding your life devoid of discovery?

Disconnect yourself from the traps of television, video games

and the Internet and *do* something. You'll find joy in a sense of accomplishment if you determine to be a *doer* rather than a *watcher*.

Develop your body and mind

To become an active participant in the adventure of life, there are several key areas on which to focus. One is your health. It is no secret that most young people today don't get the exercise they need to stay fit. Obesity is a national scourge.

Are you in shape? Do you know your BMI (body mass index)? Determine to get into shape by building your cardiovascular endurance. It doesn't take that long to run a mile or two, ride a bike or play some sport that keeps you moving. Have you ever taken the 12-minute test to measure your fitness? (You measure how far you can run/walk in 12 minutes. We use this test to determine fitness for our challenger camps.)

Another arena that could be critical to your development is reading. According to Morris Berman, "Roughly 60 percent of the adult population has never read a book of any kind, and only 6 percent reads as much as one book a year, where *book* is defined to include Harlequin romances and self-help manuals. Something like 120 million adults are illiterate or read at no better than a fifth-grade level" (*The Twilight of American Culture*, 2000, p. 36).

This is tragic! Reading helps develop the cognitive functions of the brain, which helps develop one's imagination, improves one's ability to think and helps one better express himself or herself.

Many successful leaders are avid readers. There is much good material available to read, so be careful you don't fall into the trap of becoming a vidiot—a person who chooses to get his information and entertainment only from a video screen.

Be a doer! When you look back at the end of your life, what accomplishments and adventures will you have in your memory bank? Many people don't fill up their lives nearly enough, usually because life just happens to them. Make up your mind to prepare yourself for life. Get a good education, including knowledge of the Bible, and resolve to take care of your health.

Why not sit down and write a wish list of places you want to visit and things you want to do? I did this many years ago and still have the list. My list has been edited, with many additions over the years. Surprisingly, hundreds of items have been checked off my list.

What about you? Will you have regrets when you settle down? I challenge you to live your life fully, but in so doing, don't forget to keep your orientation and actions *vertical*.

Larry Greider is a staff member of *Vertical Thought*, church pastor, chairman of the United Church of God Youth Education Team and national coordinator of the United Youth Camps.

Molding Your Personality for Leadership

Have you ever considered what personality type is best for leaders?

More importantly, what can you do about yours to become a more effective leader?

by David Treybig

Everyone knows that leaders come in all different shapes, sizes and physical conditions. Former U.S. presidents Abraham Lincoln and Franklin Roosevelt were about as opposite as could be. Lincoln was 6 feet, 4 inches tall, lean for his height (weighing between 160 and 185 pounds) and physically strong from outdoor work, while Roosevelt contracted polio at age 39, a condition that left him paralyzed in both legs for the remainder of his life.

In spite of their physical differences, both are recognized as great leaders—Lincoln during the Civil War and Roosevelt as the only person to be elected to the U.S. presidency four times. So one's physical condition need not be a detriment to being a successful leader.

But what about a leader's personality? Must one have a particular type of personality to be a successful leader? Are we destined for success or failure based on our innate preferences in processing information and dealing with others?

When I was in high school and college, my instructors advised me and

my classmates to read the biographies and autobiographies of famous people. The reasoning was that learning how other leaders thought, responded to challenges and worked with others would provide us a valuable education in how to be successful leaders ourselves. It was good advice at the time and remains good advice today.

In addition to reading biographies and autobiographies of successful people, we can also study various classification systems of personality or temperaments to better understand who we are and how we can better relate to others. Of course, God's Word, the Bible, also has numerous examples of leadership that help us understand God's perspective on this important subject. From my studies, let me share with you some of the keys that I believe are most important.

Called for leadership

When considering leadership, some of us, especially when we are younger, don't think of ourselves as leaders and don't think we ever will be. As we get older, some of us even reason that we don't want to become leaders because of the responsibilities and challenges that inevitably accompany leadership. We dismiss leadership as something unimportant to us.

Others, realizing the attention leaders command and the good they can do, are attracted to such positions. They do everything they can to be recognized as leaders at school, college and in the community. Does it really matter whether we become leaders or not?

While there is no doubt that our own personalities, wired into us from birth, greatly affect our thinking, God also provides critically needed guidance in how we should view leadership. Simply stated, He expects *all of us* to become leaders. God's desire is that all of us positively influence others.

No matter what our personalities, God has one eternal standard of behavior that applies to everyone. Our character should supersede our personality type as a reflection of our commitment to God and His instructions.



Photo illustration by RubberBall/Shraun Venish

When we grow up, complete our formal educations, get married and have children, we are immediately thrust into the role of being the leaders/teachers of our children (Deuteronomy 6:6-7; Proverbs 22:6). In addition to this responsibility, God wants us to positively influence others to do good works (Hebrews 10:24-25). Doing this makes us leaders.

After developing our leadership skills in this life, God also promises Christians He is calling now that we will serve Him and other people in His coming Kingdom as kings and priests (Revelation 5:10). The Bible also speaks of each of us having the opportunity to receive a crown—a symbol of leadership (1 Peter 5:4; Revelation 3:11).

As future kings and priests, we will have the opportunity to lead, teach and influence others to have happy, successful lives through love of and obedience to God. With this knowledge, there is no sense in being like the ancient prophet Jonah who tried (unsuccessfully) to run away from what God expected Him to do. Let's accept the fact that we have all been called to be leaders.

Different personalities

What type of personality is best suited for leadership? The surprising answer is that there isn't just one type of personality that God recommends for leaders. The Bible shows that God has used people with a wide variety of personalities as leaders.

Moses—the man God used to lead the ancient Israelites out of Egypt and the one through whom God communicated His laws—was a person who was reluctant to speak up in public. The Bible tells us that Moses was the most humble man on the face of the earth (Numbers 12:3) and that he argued

that he wasn't a very good speaker (Exodus 4:10).

On the other hand, Peter—the disciple of Christ who spoke publicly on behalf of the other disciples on the Day of Pentecost and who served prominently in the first-century Church—seems to have had an outgoing personality and was very comfortable speaking up in the presence of others. On numerous occasions when Christ asked a question of His disciples, Peter was the first to respond (Matthew 14:27-28; 16:15-16).

An important concept for us to understand from these two examples is that God didn't use these two men *because* of their great personalities. In fact, God used them *in spite* of their personalities. Their ability to serve as leaders came about because they yielded themselves to God's will.

In studying personality types, I've learned that almost every strength can also become a liability if it is not applied in balance and wisdom. For example, a very talkative, outgoing person may have a hard time really listening to others. Similarly, a very quiet person may be a good listener but he or she may find it hard to speak up when appropriate. Understanding our own personalities, with our inherent weaknesses and strengths, gives us a better chance of more wisely dealing with life's many and varied challenges.

Being molded into leaders

As we think about being molded into forms best suited for leadership, we have to consider what parts of us are moldable and what parts aren't. While maturity can help all of us become more balanced in our various personalities, most of us will retain our basic personality preferences throughout our lives. Even so, it is important for us to realize that personality is never an acceptable excuse for sin or mistreating others.

We also need to understand that no matter what our personalities, God has one eternal standard of behavior that applies to everyone. Our character should supersede our personality type as a reflection of our commitment to God and His instructions. Speaking of our part in the molding of our character, the Bible tells us not to conform to the world's standards but to God's (Romans 12:1-2).

To prepare for leadership in this life and the one to come, we all need to develop holy, righteous character. This means learning to think and act like Jesus (Philippians 2:5; 1 John 2:6).

Living our lives dedicated to this principle will yield great happiness and satisfaction. It is a quest well worth the effort. May we all submit to being molded into the image of Christ Himself (Galatians 4:19) so we can become better leaders for God and our fellow man.

David Treybig is the managing editor for *Vertical Thought* and pastors United Church of God congregations in St. Petersburg and Tampa, Florida.



THE HEART OF A KING



PEOPLE ARE EASILY IMPRESSED BY THE WAY SOMEONE LOOKS, BUT REAL LEADERSHIP COMES FROM WHAT'S INSIDE A PERSON—FROM THE HEART. CONSIDER THE SHEPHERD WHO BECAME KING DAVID.

BY KEN TREYBIG

Saul was tall, towering head and shoulders over the rest of the men around him. Surely this handsome young man was the kind who could rally the rest of the troops against the enemy camped on the opposite side of the valley. Yet to do that, King Saul of Israel would have to go up against the Philistine enemy giant, Goliath—who was more than nine feet tall and who wore armor that weighed a whopping 125 pounds.

How ironic that the hero and real leader of the story told in 1 Samuel 17 was an unimposing young shepherd by the name of David. He ran toward and conquered the seemingly invincible giant with only his sling and stones taken from a streambed! After this, David was not allowed to go home and was given assignments and rapid promotion in the army, a move supported by the army leaders.

When David is mentioned, many immediately think of this story of his defeating Goliath. How is it that this young shepherd, with no military training, was able to rally the Israelite army and lead them to victory?

What leadership traits did this unusual young man use to not only defeat Goliath and lead the army to victory that day, but to rapidly advance in responsibility in the Israelite army? How was it that he was later able to earn and hold the trust of those who came to him while he was running for his life from King Saul—and then again when he became king of Israel? Let's look at a few of this amazing man's leadership traits.

Humility

The first, and no doubt the most important, trait displayed by David was one on which Jesus Christ would focus many centuries later—humility. One of the trademark teachings of Jesus about leadership is found in several places in the Gospel accounts. Mark records it near the end of chapter 10 of his Gospel. Jesus said the gentiles consider those people great who “lord it over” others. But He said His disciples were to take a different approach.

Anyone who wants to be great must have the attitude of a servant—just like Jesus came with the attitude of serving humanity instead of demanding to be served by humanity. We might be tempted to call that an attitude of service, but the real lesson is humility. When the prophet Micah summed up the main points God looks for in His people, he mentioned living justly (following God's instructions), loving mercy and being humble (Micah 6:8).

Let's go back to David's encounter with Goliath to see how he expressed that attribute. When questioned by King Saul about how David could possibly fight Goliath, David answered that God had given him power to save sheep from both a lion

and a bear, and that God would do the same with respect to Goliath since Goliath was defying God (1 Samuel 17:34-37).

When taunted by Goliath as he went out to battle, David did not boast of his agility or skill with a sling, but told Goliath he came in the name of God and that God would give him the victory. God would receive the glory (verses 43-47). Though his actions were courageous, David was giving God the credit for the victory—even before it happened.

While David surely struggled to maintain this trait at times, as any person does, it was still with him in his old age. As David was fleeing for his life from his son Absalom, a relative of the late King Saul named Shimei ridiculed David and his entourage (see 2 Samuel 16). One of King David's mighty men wanted to kill Shimei, but David told him to let the man alone. After all, if his own son could seek to kill him, why couldn't this man voice his frustration at David too? It was an expression of humility that shone as a good example even in his latter years as king of Israel.

people. When a neighboring king died, David sent an entourage to express his condolences to that king's son. The son listened to some bad advice and greatly embarrassed David's servants by cutting off their beards and much of their clothing (2 Samuel 10:1-5). When David heard what had taken place, he sent word for them to stay out of sight until their hair grew back. Showing his respect for his servants, David did not want them being ashamed or ridiculed by others.

Fairness and integrity

Along with showing respect for all people, David also showed a deep sense of fairness and integrity. When David gave his word, he stood by it. When God gave him the victory over Goliath, David became good friends with Jonathan, Saul's son. When Saul began plotting to kill David, and Jonathan realized David would become the next king, Jonathan asked David to give him his word that he would always show kindness to his family. David agreed and gave his word (1 Samuel 20:12-17).



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Respect for all

Another leadership trait that David displayed was a respect for everyone. Early in his life, when King Saul began trying to kill David out of jealousy, David allowed those in debt and those in distress to join him. He didn't turn people away because they lacked wealth or status (1 Samuel 22:1-2).

Later, after he was established as king, David made a comment about longing for a drink from a well in his hometown, which was behind enemy lines at the time. Three of his mighty men broke through the Philistine camp and brought back some of that water and gave it to David. But David refused to drink it, pouring it out on the ground to God instead, showing he valued the lives of those men more than that drink he longed for. He showed that he respected them and did not take their lives lightly. They were too valuable to allow others to think they should risk their lives for David's whims (2 Samuel 23:16-19).

Years later another incident showed David's respect for his

After Saul's death, when God had firmly established David as king over all Israel, David searched to find any descendants of Saul to whom he could show kindness as he had promised. Jonathan's son was located and David restored to him all the land of his grandfather, King Saul. He also took him into the palace to eat at the king's table like one of David's own sons. David was true to his word, showing integrity, mercy and generosity (2 Samuel 9).

Later in his reign as king, when Satan moved him to sin by numbering Israel against God's command, God sent word that punishment would come. He gave David a choice of what punishment he wanted—three years' famine, three months' worth of defeat at the hand of his enemies or three days' punishment directly from the hand of God.

David chose to throw himself on God's mercy. God sent a plague and many Israelites died. He opened David's eyes to perceive the angel poised with a drawn sword over Jerusalem. David pleaded with God to spare the people and



EXCEPTIONAL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES

Not all leaders display the charisma and personal power often associated with leadership. Some leadership practices may produce few followers now, but will pay off in the long term. Consider some exceptional examples:

Build it and they won't come: What if you spent decades building a boat that could hold lots of people (and animals), but no one would sign up for the cruise, even when you told them the deadly danger of not coming? That doesn't sound like very successful leadership!

But the biblical boat builder Noah actually set an example of obedience and good character that has been admired and followed by many since (Genesis 6:8-9, 22; Ezekiel 14:14; Hebrews 11:7). And by being willing to do what was right even when he had to go it alone, he was preparing for much greater service in God's future Kingdom.

Standing up in fiery trials: You've probably heard the story of Daniel's three friends—Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego—and the fiery furnace. These Jewish captives were ordered to break God's law by bowing down before a gold idol or be thrown into the fire.

Imagine a sea of people prostrate on the ground, with three men sticking out like sore thumbs. With their faith in God, they mustered great courage and fearlessly faced the angry king of Babylon:

"Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image" (Daniel 3:17-18).

Their incredible faith and willingness to die (and

God's miracle!) impressed the king. Read his praise for God and his promotion of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego in Daniel 3:28-30.

Broken bottle heard around the world: Near the end of Jesus' life, one of His followers could sense the great turmoil and pressures He was facing. Mary wanted to do something to show her support and appreciation. She brought out a container of very expensive fragrant oil, broke off the top and anointed Him with the oil.

Though Jesus, the very Son of God who was about to give His life, appreciated her gesture, His friends thought she was wasteful and silly.

Was her extravagant act of love foolish, or was it a gift to be long remembered and a loving attitude to be imitated? Let Jesus answer:

"Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her" (Mark 14:9).

Faithful over a few things: God's training program is much different from most leadership training programs today. He is looking for people of character, obedience, faith, courage and love to serve as leaders in His Kingdom. He's looking for people like Noah, Daniel's three friends, Mary and you!

God's program may not involve ruling cities or nations at this time, but He knows that the small and large sacrifices we make now prepare us for greater service later. If we can follow Him and buck the crowd today, we can be ready to serve the crowd in the future.

Then He will say: "Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord" (Matthew 25:21).

—Mike Bennett

punish him personally, since it was his sin. He had no sense of “entitlement” or of being “above the law” just because he was king.

For God to stop the plague, He told David to erect an altar on that spot, at the threshing floor of a man named Ornan (or Araunah). When David asked to buy the spot for the altar, Ornan offered to give it to the king, along with the wooden implements to provide wood for a fire and oxen for a sacrifice.

David refused to take advantage of Ornan’s generosity and the right a king would have to confiscate property in matters of national interest or safety. David insisted on paying full price for everything, showing his integrity as well as a sense of fairness for his subject (1 Chronicles 21).

These are but a few of the godly principles displayed in the



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stories of David’s life. They are the kind of traits that made this young shepherd the great leader he became in Israel.

Anyone who has read the life of David knows that he also committed some terrible sins. David was far from perfect. In fact, it appears that he was especially lacking when it came to family matters. The dismal record of rape, murder and treason among his own children was prophesied by God’s servant Nathan as a result of David’s horrendous sin with Bathsheba. So God recorded both the good and the bad about David.

Yet when all is said and done, God said about King David, “I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will” (Acts 13:22).

The biggest factor to God was that David’s heart was right. David deeply loved God and His law, meditated on it and prized it as a great source of wisdom.

David is historical proof that leadership does not depend on heritage, size, strength or any other physical characteristic. It depends on the heart—matters of principle, character and ethics.

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A. We are pleased to hear that you are trying to stop smoking and seeking information about God’s perspective on the subject. Obviously, you recognize the fact that smoking is dangerous and harmful to your health and anyone else’s who breathes any secondhand smoke. Indeed, many people have fought the same battle you are fighting. Some find it easy to stop smoking; others find that is a very powerful addiction for them and very hard to overcome.

Scripture does not mention smoking specifically. However, it deals with smoking-related issues in principle. For one, the highly addictive nature of smoking means that it becomes a spiritual enslavement. As the apostle Paul wrote in Romans 6:16, “Do you not know that to whom [or what] you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey . . . ?” Furthermore, as all credible medical authorities agree, a smoking habit will lead to the destruction of one’s health. And God through Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 says that taking care of our physical bodies is a spiritual responsibility.

Smoking can also be harmful to the health of innocent bystanders. And Jesus said that caring about our neighbors is also one of our highest spiritual responsibilities (Matthew 22:39-40). These scriptures and others show that Christians should not smoke.

The November-December 2002 issue of *The Good News*, a bimonthly publication of the United Church of God, an International Association, included a whole section about health concerns and what the Bible has to say about them. One of the sections focused on smoking, with an article titled “Smoking and Health: The Often-Overlooked Key” (www.gnmagazine.org/issues/gn43/smoking.htm). This article has a lot of additional information about smoking, including some points on quitting.

The last half of the article gives a number of biblical principles against tobacco use. Included in that issue of *The Good News* are also several smaller articles dealing with smoking that can also be found at the previously cited link. One is a personal experience with smoking and another covers some alarming facts about smoking addiction. There is also a list of reasons for not smoking. We wish you success in overcoming smoking!

If you have a question, e-mail us at info@verticalthought.org

What leadership lessons can be learned from Prime Minister Meir and Deborah, judge of Israel? How did they lead? Who did they lead? And what made them good leaders in the historical scheme of things?

Golda Meir & Deborah the Judge

The biographies of these two women provide lessons in leadership for all of us.

by **Amanda Stiver**

On the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) in 1973, Syria and Egypt attacked the state of Israel. Sandwiched between these two heavily fortified powers, Israel was about to be squeezed to pieces in the boa constrictor of Middle Eastern warfare. One woman's leadership and planning stood between victory and defeat.

Born in the Ukraine, Golda Meir grew up in the United States and finally immigrated to Palestine before it became the modern state of Israel in 1948. She lived through and participated in events that would determine the existence of Israel: the Zionist movement, the Second World War, the Holocaust (as an observer), the 1948 war of Israeli independence, the Suez crisis of 1956, the Six Day War in 1967, the war of attrition and finally the Yom Kippur War of 1973.

When she became prime minister in 1969, Mrs. Meir began to refortify her nation militarily. This was an important decision due to the precarious situation Israel faced as an island in the midst of hostile neighbors.

In the fall of 1970, Mrs. Meir met with U.S. President Richard Nixon, strengthening friendly relations with the United States—a crucial element to success in the Yom Kippur War. The United States would later send airlifts of vitally needed supplies to bolster Israeli forces. Mrs. Meir prepared a “shopping list” of military items on the way to her American visit to make clear the needs of her nation and identify the absolute necessities for survival.

After fierce fighting and intense negotiations, the Yom Kippur War ended as 1973 came to a close. It was a short war, but in the Middle East, where land is fought for by the foot, not the mile, it was a decisive victory for Israel.

A judge in Israel

Golda Meir is not, however, the only woman leader in the history of Israel. If we step back about 3,200 years, another Israelite woman, from the tribe of Ephraim, took the lead in the land of Israel and faced down an enemy intent on the destruction of her people. Her name was Deborah, and as chief justice and primary leader of Israel she, along with her somewhat reluctant general, Barak, organized and led an expedition that defeated and destroyed Israel's enemy, the “Jabin” (king) of Canaan and his general, Sisera.

The Israelites waged fierce warfare with the Canaanites. God then sent a rainstorm that sunk the heavy, iron Canaanite chariots into a muddy mire. Lastly, a brave woman named Jael put a tent peg through the head of the evil Sisera. The result: Deborah, with Barak, established a moment of relative peace for the Israelites during a period of history characterized by oppression and fear.

The Yom Kippur War and Deborah's war were pivotal to the modern and ancient history of Israel. But apart from national survival, what leadership lessons can we learn from Prime Minister Meir and Deborah, judge of Israel? How did they lead? Who did they lead? And what made them good leaders in the historical scheme of things?

Have a shopping list

First of all, a good leader must know what state things are in and how to line up priorities. Do we have enough supplies? Are there enough people on our staff who are competent and able to do their jobs? What is the most important and pressing action to take?

Prime Minister Meir used her “shopping list” to boil down her nation's basic needs—specifically, in her case, military supplies. She went to meetings prepared, knowing what was needed, what was happening and how to convince others that something must be done.

Deborah went to Barak with a similar list given her by God. In Judges 4:6 she outlines the basic strategy: God wants you to deploy at Mount Tabor, take a force of 10,000 men from the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun, go meet general Sisera and his overwhelmingly large and fierce hordes of soldiers in battle at the Kishon River, and utterly destroy him! Oh, and trust God to give you victory. Simple, right?

Seek shared goals and vision

Despite Barak's initial wishy-washiness, he accomplished his objective with focus and energy, which brings us to the next point of good leadership: seek shared goals and vision to rally the troops. Deborah

...a good leader must know what state things are in and how to line up priorities.

also foresaw an unlikely but determined ally when God chose Jael (a Kenite woman who, in turn, had chosen loyalty to Israel) to strike down the enemy commander Sisera.



Golda Meir

As Prime Minister Meir recounts in her autobiography, her chief of staff and other advisors within the military counseled her, months before Yom Kippur, that there would be no outright war and that an expensive, precautionary mobilization of Israeli forces was therefore unnecessary.

Mrs. Meir voiced serious misgivings but bowed to their wishes, foregoing the advantage of preparedness. When the fighting really began, however, through her shared vision her generals fought long and hard to victory.

A good leader must ride out the bumps and potholes that come from a world of imperfect people. No leaders are perfect, and neither are those they lead. Therefore we must share a common vision that will see us through the hard times.

Be firm, be just

As Deborah shows, a good leader is just, but doesn't mollycoddle those he or she leads. If you are in a position of authority, be a wise, kind and firm leader. Deborah continued to work with Barak even when he refused to square off against Sisera unless she went with him. Barak wasn't instantly fired or demoted to private first class in charge of shield polishing. But there were consequences for his hesitation—he was not able to take the credit he should have for the victory over Canaan. The honor was to be shared with Deborah and Jael.

In a culture where a man's honor and worth were measured by his ability to show courage and follow through on an order from God, having a woman (a foreigner at that!) deliver the final blow to his arch nemesis among the Canaanites was a serious bombshell to his dignity. Israel had a lack of decisive male leadership at the time, and as a result the only things holding the nation together were God's mercy and His guidance through Deborah.

It's essential for a good leader to know when it is necessary to be firm and deliver a correction of focus or to lay low and let those being led learn for themselves. Good leaders cultivate good leaders around them while they lead. It's a safe guess Barak didn't do the hesitation act twice. He learned from appropriate correction delivered by God through Deborah.

Take things to heart

A final lesson to learn from these leading women of Israel is that to be a good leader, the kind to whom people turn with respect and affection, you need to take things to heart, to care deeply about and be true to the right goals. When you put your objectives above yourself, you are putting the happiness and security of those you are leading before your own needs.

Both Golda Meir and Deborah the judge were known as mothers of Israel. They cared for Israel like a mother for her child. Deborah described her role in Judges 5:7: "Village life ceased, it ceased in Israel, until I, Deborah, arose, arose a mother in Israel." As a loving and wise mother, she guided the people of Israel on the right path. Indeed God blessed her work so that for 40 years after the battle, Israel had peace and village life was safe again.

Meeting with the families of soldiers missing in action during the Yom Kippur War, Prime Minister Meir took time from her schedule to mourn with her fellow countrymen. No necessary task is too small to be part of the greater vision, and no leader is too big to participate in a seemingly small task.

Not all of us will serve as a prime minister or judge of a nation, but we will all provide some measure of leadership. Whether we are the CEO of a corporation, manager of a multinational charity or in charge of setting up chairs before church services, serving as a good leader will be appreciated by all of those around us.

Like the Israelis in their tenuous situation in the midst of the Middle East, we, too, as young people of God must be prepared to take up the mantle of leadership as a service to those around us whenever God may assign it, and cheerfully pass it along when He so desires.

Amanda Stiver, native of Oregon, graduated cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa with a degree in history from the Robert D. Clark Honors College at the University of Oregon in 2003.

What impact have your friends had on you lately? This might sound like a strange question, but your friends have influenced you—for better or for worse—more than you think. Does it really matter which friends you select? After all, shouldn't a Christian be willing to have anyone around as a friend?

Some argue that Christians should invite everyone into their circle of friends since Jesus Christ was inclusive during His earthly ministry. This belief seems appealing on its surface, but there is more to the issue than meets the eye. The Bible indicates that whom you choose as your friends has much to do with how far you will go in life.

As a former prosecuting attorney, I observed many bright and talented young people as they faced the criminal justice system. Unfortunately, their presence in a courtroom almost always came about because of unwise decisions. The collective testimony of these young defendants reveals that long before they were charged with an offense and brought before a judge, they made poor choices of friends. A few examples illustrate this point:

Chuck (names have been changed) was an intelligent high school junior who went to a privileged school and came from a good family. He was athletic, witty and well connected.

It Does Matter Who Your Friends Are

The Bible tells us that we get to decide whether we'll walk with the wise or flounder with fools. Which will you choose?

by Jason Ranew

Although he planned on attending a top university, one day he accepted some less ambitious individuals into his ever-widening circle of friends. They tempted him to try alcohol and marijuana. Soon he was comfortable with his newfound friends and habits.

One evening, following a day of surfing with his buddies, he went to a party where he drank alcohol and smoked marijuana. He left the party and was arrested for driving under the influence and possession of marijuana. He was convicted of the offenses and spent time in jail. At that point, his life wasn't ruined but his future was certainly tainted. The court made it clear to him that unless he found a new group of friends, this would not be his last visit to the jail cell.

Jennifer was a gifted, attractive teen who had everything going for her. Besides the blessing of living in an intact Christian home, she had a positive group of friends at church and school. Although everyone around her was certain she would attain her goal of becoming a veterinarian, everything changed when she started spending less time with her church friends in favor of a delinquent group at school.

Disregarding her parents' instructions, she persisted in associating with this group, which was into drugs and other illicit

activities. Within three years, she was married, divorced and had two children by two of these young men. Meanwhile, her dream of becoming a veterinarian is still on hold. As she tends to the children alone, she wonders when she will realistically be able to start college.

By all accounts, **Seth** was a good person and a law-abiding citizen, but as a high school senior, he found himself in court on a drug charge. According to what his attorney told me, he wasn't afraid of going to jail for a few days. He feared that merely *having* a drug conviction on his record would keep him out of a good university and would shatter his dream of becoming an engineer.

I worked with this sincere young man and offered him a deal that did not result in a conviction. Today he is getting ready to enter an engineering program, but if he continues to associate with the same "friends" who helped him get arrested, he might not be in the program long.



In each of these cases, a decent young person chose to form relationships with foolish and unprincipled individuals. None of these three appreciated the importance of choosing good friends who would lift them up and make them better persons. Being in a bad circle of friends influenced each of these defendants to abandon good judgment and make choices that led to the courtroom and, in some cases, jail. Beyond the criminal justice system, each person mentioned above is probably scarred for life and may never reach his or her full potential.

If you are reading this magazine, you probably want to do well in life and live in a way that pleases God and those close to you. You probably want to be a good citizen, make a good living, contribute to your church and community and achieve genuine, sustained happiness. The friends you choose and the relationships you forge will have much to do with each of these worthy goals. Your Bible has many timeless lessons and instructions that deal directly with these important issues.

Biblical advice on choosing friends

The book of Proverbs is full of instructions concerning how we can do well and become successful, including instruc-

tions on how we should choose our friends. Proverbs 13:20 instructs us that “he who walks with the wise grows wise, *but a companion of fools suffers harm*” (New International Version throughout, emphasis added). Here we are instructed that to befriend foolish people will bring harm to our lives. On the other hand, seeking out wise friends who live right will bring about blessings.

Proverbs 1:10-16 provides a compelling warning against befriending those who engage in sinful lifestyles. The passage begins, “My son, if sinners entice you, do not give in to them.” Solomon then describes the voice of these sinners: They will persuasively attempt to recruit you for a myriad of sinful or illicit actions, including bloodshed and theft (verses 11-14). In verse 15, he continues, “My son, do not go

If you know someone in business, government or your local church who has accomplished worthwhile endeavors, you can be sure that he or she was influenced by great people along the way.

Rudy Giuliani, former mayor of New York City, understands the fundamental importance of being mindful of your friends and associates. In his best-selling book *Leadership* (2002), Mr. Giuliani discusses the importance of this issue at length in a chapter titled “Surround Yourself With Great People.”

What Mr. Giuliani essentially affirms in this chapter is the consistent and predictable truth of Proverbs 13:20: If you surround yourself with great (wise) people, you will benefit in countless ways. Conversely, if you surround yourself with mediocre, immoral or unethical people, you will take on their character traits and will not do well in life.

Distinguished leadership author John Maxwell teaches this same principle. In his book *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership* (1998), Mr. Maxwell writes, “A leader’s potential is determined by those closest to him.” He calls this principle “The Law of the Inner Circle.” During His earthly ministry, even Jesus had an “inner circle” that included His most trusted disciples (Peter, James and John). Jesus also called His disciples His friends (John 15:15).

Jesus’ example

One should note that even among His disciples, not everyone was included in Jesus’ inner circle. Jesus is unique in that His potential was not determined by His friends. Even so, He set a clear example for us to follow in that He had an inner circle of trusted friends and He was careful about whom He included.

So what can we learn from the examples of Chuck, Jennifer and Seth and the writings of Rudy Giuliani and John Maxwell? There is no escaping the truth of Proverbs 13:20: “He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm.”

If you apply this principle and surround yourself with good, wise friends and associates throughout your life, you will reap limitless benefits in the forms of success, happiness and personal contribution to others.

To surround yourself with positive people, consider implementing the following strategy: Begin by replacing your negative or morally deficient friends with good ones. This might not be easy, but it is necessary to avoid having these people influence you toward unchristian values. The only way to avoid this possibility is to make a clean yet polite break with the negative group and then gradually make friends with individuals who are moral and positive. These friends will elevate you to higher standards and will help you reach your potential.

Finally, beyond being on the “receiving end” of positive friendships, resolve to *be* a positive friend yourself. Set a strong, godly example and be a light for others. In this way, you will also contribute to the lives of others.

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along with them, do not set foot on their paths; for their feet rush into sin, they are swift to shed blood.”

The apostle Paul affirms: “Do not be misled: ‘bad company corrupts good character’” (1 Corinthians 15:33).

If Chuck, Jennifer and Seth had internalized these passages, perhaps they would have avoided the life-altering conse-

quences of having an unprincipled group of friends.

These scriptures and others indicate that in order to do well, be happy and obey God, we *must* choose good, principled friends and avoid negative, immoral people.

Advice from successful leaders

Many successful and prominent leaders have discovered the importance of choosing one’s friends and associates wisely.

The Abortion Controversy

What are the facts about abortion?
Is it really murder? What does
the Bible say?

by Tom Clark



I'll never forget the day she came to my office. She had called earlier in the day, audibly upset, and asked if she could come over and talk with me. As her pastor, I naturally said that would be fine and made time for her. A little while later she walked into my office, looking very distraught with her face red and eyes bloodshot and puffy from crying. At that moment she looked much older than her 16 years. I handed her a box of tissues and sat down to hear her story.

She began telling me of her relationship with a boy at school. She had been sneaking out to be with him without her parents' knowledge, and one thing had led to another until she had very recently discovered that she was pregnant.

She knew she was too young to raise a child and her boyfriend didn't want the financial responsibility, so he had provided the money required for an abortion. Earlier that day she had added one more baby to the more than 1.5 million who were aborted that year in the United States. With tears running down her cheeks and pleading in her voice, she begged me to tell her she had not just killed her baby. She kept asking, "What do I do now?"

Although the number of abortions taking place has declined over the past decade in the United States, the numbers are still staggering. Experts estimate that worldwide there are between 36 and 53 million abortions every year—with slightly less than half of those being legally performed. "At current rates, an estimated 43 percent of American women will have at least one abortion by the age of 45" (www.family.org/pregnancy/articles/A0030222.cfm).

For 61 percent of the world's population abortions are legal, but are they right? Those who call themselves "pro-choice" consider abortion to be a legitimate form of birth control and a matter that is entirely the personal choice of the mother. As Christians, it is important for us to ask what God thinks about abortion. Is abortion morally acceptable behavior, or is it a sin before God?

What God says

Most people are aware of and agree with God's command in Exodus 20:13, "You shall not murder." But does an unborn child have life? The answer to that seems clear from the Bible, scientific sources and the practical experience of countless parents.

The Bible says that the life is in the blood (Leviticus 17:14). Medical science has shown us that within hours of conception, the tiny embryo attaches itself to the wall of its mother's uterus to begin receiving oxygen and nutrients from the mother's blood supply. Within four to five weeks (before many women even know they are pregnant), there is already an identifiable blood system in the new baby. By six weeks a beating heart is discernable.

Dr. Hymie Gordon, chairman of the Department of Genetics at the Mayo Clinic, in testimony before the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee hearings on abortion said, "By all

the criteria of modern molecular biology, life is present from the moment of conception" (www.prolife.com/FETALDEV.html).

Practical experience also demonstrates that a baby has the ability to sense and react well before he is born. His mother will often notice him responding to sound or sudden movement in the months before birth. After he is born he will generally respond to voices or sounds he heard while he was in the womb. For example, when a newborn lies on his mother's chest he will calm down as he hears the familiar sound of her heartbeat and the soothing sound of her voice.

One mother reflected that when she was pregnant with her second child, she sat with her first child, a daughter, as the daughter practiced her violin lessons. After the birth of her second child, a son, the mother noticed that when violin practice began each afternoon, no matter how painful it may have been for an adult to listen to, the infant would immediately calm down and listen quietly. Why? It seems the sound was familiar to him since he'd listened to it for months before his birth!

It is clear that our unborn children have life! They take in oxygen and nutrients through the miraculous means designed by God. Their hearts are beating. They hear and respond to the outside world and remember certain sounds after they are born. From the moment of conception, a life has begun—an awe-inspiring process by which God allows a mother and father to participate in the process of creation! To do anything to purposely destroy such a precious life is to violate the Sixth Commandment and commit murder. Simply put, abortion is a sin.

Thankfully, the innocent victims of abortion will live again in a future resurrection. Yet this does not minimize the grievous wrong of taking their lives today—or of the fact that so much of the world has declared this horrible act to be legal.

After an abortion

With this understanding, let's go back to the young lady I mentioned at the beginning. What was she to do, now that

readers of *Vertical Thought* know, it is a sin. In past issues we have written a great deal about developing and maintaining proper male-female relationships and avoiding premarital and extramarital sexual relationships. But as with nearly all cases of teen pregnancies, this young lady's problems started well before she became sexually active.

She needed to reconsider the relationship she had with her boyfriend. She needed to ask if it was a healthy relationship for a teenage girl. How was that relationship affecting other aspects of her life? How was she handling responsibilities like school, family and perhaps a job? Was she showing her parents the respect and honor she should have been? As we considered these questions, she could see where changes in her life needed to be made to avoid repeating the same mistake.

If you find yourself in a similar situation, you may need to follow this same line of reasoning to determine what areas of your life need to be changed, with God's help, so you may truly repent of this sin. As God said to King Solomon, "If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7:14).

Dealing with guilt

Repentance and making positive changes in our lives are what God requires after we realize we've sinned. Following an abortion, an additional step may be needed. The weight of this sin may result in extreme guilt, grief, anxiety and depression that are nearly impossible for some teens and women to overcome alone. Rather than allow these emotions to become destructive, it would be wise to seek the services of a competent grief counselor. A physician, school counselor or minister may be able to point you in the right direction for a counselor in your area.

And finally, as with every sin we commit and repent of, we

She knew she was too young to raise a child and her boyfriend didn't want the financial responsibility, so he had provided the money required for an abortion.

the deed was already done? What should you do if you have already had an abortion? Once again, we turn to the sure Word of God for the answer.

The great and Eternal God is a God of compassion, mercy and forgiveness. He has promised to forgive all our sins—whatever those sins may be—if we will only come to Him with a humble heart and repent (Acts 3:19). To repent means not only to ask for forgiveness but also to make the lifestyle changes needed so we do not repeat the sin.

In the case of my young counselee, there were several changes she needed to make from that point forward. Premarital sex was the cause of the pregnancy, and as regular

then need to go forward in faith, knowing that God will provide what is best for us from this point on. No one can undo the past nor make the physical consequences of sin go away. But with God's guidance and help, we can work through those consequences and strive to make wiser decisions for the rest of our lives—even after an abortion.

May it be from this day onward that you never experience the crushing grief this sin brings. Think vertically—about things from above and from a godly perspective—because there is a better way!

Tom Clark is a husband and father and pastor of United Church of God congregations in Wichita and Salina, Kansas.



Compiled by James Capo

Money Matters in Marriage

In a recent survey by Quicken, the financial management software company, respondents said that managing their finances is the biggest strain on marital relationships. OK, so we at *Vertical Thought* might question whether finances are really the biggest source of marital stress, but we certainly agree it's right up there near the top. (This survey was done by a financial company, so we can understand the possible bias).

Anyway, what did Quicken find were the major marital money problems? Overwhelmingly, the biggest problem respondents cited was not being able to control *their partner's* spending habits, at 44 percent. Another 21 percent cited "repeated questions about *my* spending habits," while 17 percent complained of their partner not sticking to an agreed-upon budget.



These were the top three, and they're really just different sides of the same problem: lack of financial discipline. So add them up, and you get 82 percent of all financial problems in marriage stem from lack of self-control, or not trusting a spouse's self-control, with money.

Other statistically significant problems were not agreeing on long-term goals (14 percent) and one

partner hiding money from the other (5 percent).

Most people don't know that God's Word teaches us sound financial principles. You can read and learn about them in our booklet *Managing Your Finances*. It's available on our Web site (www.ucg.org/booklets). And it's free. Now how's that for a no-stress financial decision and a good investment in your future marriage?

"Deadly Sins" No More?

Back in the 1200s, the Catholic philosopher and theologian Thomas Aquinas listed "Seven Deadly Sins"—severe, spiritually deadening stains on our character. These were: greed, sloth (or laziness), gluttony, envy, anger, pride and lust.

Today, according to a BBC poll reported in *Parade Magazine*, March 20, 2005, Brits no longer consider these to be deadly black marks against our character. Oh, greed is still bad, they agree. But the other six "worst sins" have been replaced with cruelty, adultery, selfishness, bigotry, dishonesty and hypocrisy, according to the majority of those polled.

So who's right? What are the worst sins? Have they changed? Who decides? Actually, different societies over the years have viewed different "sins"—well, differently. The question we really ought to ask is, "What does God (not society) say about sin?" God is the one who decides right and wrong, good and evil, sin and righteousness.

To hear what He has to say, we have to read His book, the Bible. And for a discussion of the "Big 10" from God's view,

read our booklet *The Ten Commandments*. It's free, and you can request it at our Web site (www.ucg.org/booklets).

Can TV Turn Us Into Bullies?

The more television children watch as four-year-olds, the more likely they are to become bullies in elementary school, according to a study by researchers at the University of Washington.

The study was published in the April 2005 issue of the *Archives of Pediatric & Adolescent Medicine*, and it found that every hour spent daily in front of the TV increases the odds of bullying by 9 percent, regardless of how much other time parents spent with their children in "nurturing" activities including reading with them, museum visits and such.



Since about 60 percent of TV shows contain violence, researchers suggested a possible link there. The American Academy of Pediatrics has found that watching television is also linked to attention deficit disorder (ADD) and obesity, and suggests limiting television to one to two hours a day for young children, and no TV at all for children under two (*Arizona Daily Star*, April 10, 2005).

Movie Trend Changes Direction: Family Flicks Big Winners

American society has grown increasingly tolerant—even desirous—of seeing sin freely practiced in society and depicted in its entertainment. For years, moviemakers have been adding sex scenes, violence and profanity to their films just to get a coveted *R* rating, because *G*- and *PG*-rated films have not done as well financially at the box office in the past.

But now, the trend is reversing. According to *USA Today*, March 14, 2005, "For the first time in two decades, *PG*-rated films out-performed *R*-rated films in theaters, even though Hollywood cranks out many more [*R*-rated movies]."

In 2004, the 110 *PG*-rated films made that year earned a combined \$2.3 billion at the box office, while the 540 *R*-rated films made earned \$2.1 billion. John Fithian of the National Association of Theatre Owners said this is an indication of the growing strength of family filmgoers, who want movies everyone can enjoy.

Well, almost everyone, maybe. It seems most still prefer (or at least tolerate) "a little" of the more "adult-rated" content. An additional 187 films rated the more moderately racy *PG-13* earned as much as both of the other ratings combined, at \$4.4 billion.

God's Word says we need to guard our minds and hearts against the corrupting influences all around us, and to think on those things that are true, honest, just, pure and good (Philippians 4:8). It seems more moviegoers are trying to apply this standard, at least to some degree, to their entertainment choices. How about you?

Monkeys Making News...

Charlie the Chain-Smoking Chimp

It seems that Charlie the chimpanzee at the Bloemfontein Zoo in South Africa has picked up a bad habit—literally. He has learned to smoke by picking up the discarded cigarette butts that visitors have tossed into his cage.

Zookeepers are trying to get Charlie to kick the habit. “It looks funny to see a chimp smoking,” according to a zoo spokesman, and so the zoo is having difficulty getting visitors to stop contributing to his habit by tossing him more cigarettes. And Charlie isn’t helping. He hides his cigarettes when the zoo workers are around (Associated Press report, April 22, 2005).

Capuchin Cop?

Officer Sean Truelove of the Mesa, Arizona, Police Department wants a new partner: a capuchin monkey. The officer, who builds and operates tactical robots for the SWAT team, feels that the three- to eight-pound primate with tiny, humanlike hands could be trained to unlock doors, search buildings and find suicide victims.

The Kevlar-clad monkey, wearing a tiny video camera and two-way radio, would be able to get into places no robot or human officer could go, and would “change the way we do business,” he said. He’s trying to raise \$100,000 to buy and outfit the monkey, which he would train and keep at home the same

way K-9 officers keep their canine partners.

Capuchins have been trained since 1979 to help disabled people with such things as having food served to them, brushing hair, opening doors and turning lights on and off (Associated Press report, April 25, 2005).

Evidence of Evolution? Famous Atheist Says No!

So does the fact that chimps and monkeys can be trained to respond to human commands and perform certain humanlike tasks (and even adopt human bad habits!) provide evidence for evolution? Some people think so, but the facts of known science (not the speculations of evolutionary theory) all argue against evolution, as many scientists will admit.

Professor of philosophy Antony Flew, probably the world’s most famous atheist, recently recanted his belief in atheism. He stated in the new video *Has Science Discovered God?*, released this past December, that scientific research on DNA “has shown, by the almost unbelievable complexity of the arrangements which are needed to produce (life), that intelligence must have been involved.”

For a study of the science behind creation, request or download our free booklet *Creation or Evolution: Does It Really Matter What You Believe?* from our Web site at www.ucg.org/booklets.



Q&A

Q ■ Will Christians go to heaven for 1,000 years when Christ returns?

A ■ The Bible reveals that one of the purposes for God bringing sons and daughters into His family is so they might rule as kings and priests on the earth when Jesus returns to establish the Kingdom of God (Revelation 1:6; 5:10).

When Jesus returns to earth, the saints (that is, all true Christians, whether they have died or are still living) will rise in the air to meet Christ. As 1 Thessalonians 4:17 explains: “Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”

Too know where we will be for the 1,000 years between the first and second resurrections (see Revelation 20:5-6), we

need to know where Christ will be during this time. When Jesus returns, He will descend to the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem to fight against the nations that will oppose His leadership (Zechariah 14:1-4).

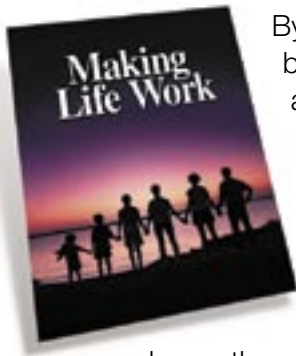
Jesus and the risen saints following Him will defeat these armies. Projecting ahead to this time in vision, voices in heaven say, “The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ” (Revelation 11:15). After defeating the armies gathered against Him, Jesus will take over the physical kingdoms of this world and His saints will then begin ruling over the nations here on earth. As Revelation 5:10, cited above, makes clear, the saints will be “a kingdom and priests serving our God, and they will reign on earth” (NRSV).

Christ likewise earlier stated, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5). Christians do not go to dwell in heaven when Christ returns; they will be on earth, ruling over the Kingdom of God.

If you have a question, e-mail us at info@verticalthought.org

Don't Suffer Like Sue!

Sue wasn't a leader. Truth be told, she was simply a follower. She followed the crowd in almost everything she did. Even her parents followed in the footsteps of the many couples who end up divorcing when the partners don't get along. The divorce occurred when Sue was 12, and before long she was following the wrong crowd at school. Following her friends to college, she got into premarital sex, contracted an STD and ran up a huge credit card debt (something everyone at college also seemed to be doing).



By the time Sue graduated, she'd written off boys because she didn't want to be emotionally hurt again and was really worried about finding a job to support herself. She had no idea where her life was taking her and whether it had any meaning. How much different her life might have been if she had read the booklet *Making Life Work* when she was younger and applied its wise biblical advice on friendships, sexuality, finances, finding a career and even the purpose of life.



Don't suffer like Sue! Request or download *Making Life Work* today at www.ucg.org/booklets. Remember, even the strong can be tempted, and you need to be prepared. Once you've read the booklet, why not share it with a "Sue" you know? It can help her too!

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Vertical Thought is written for young people ages 12 to 22.

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