

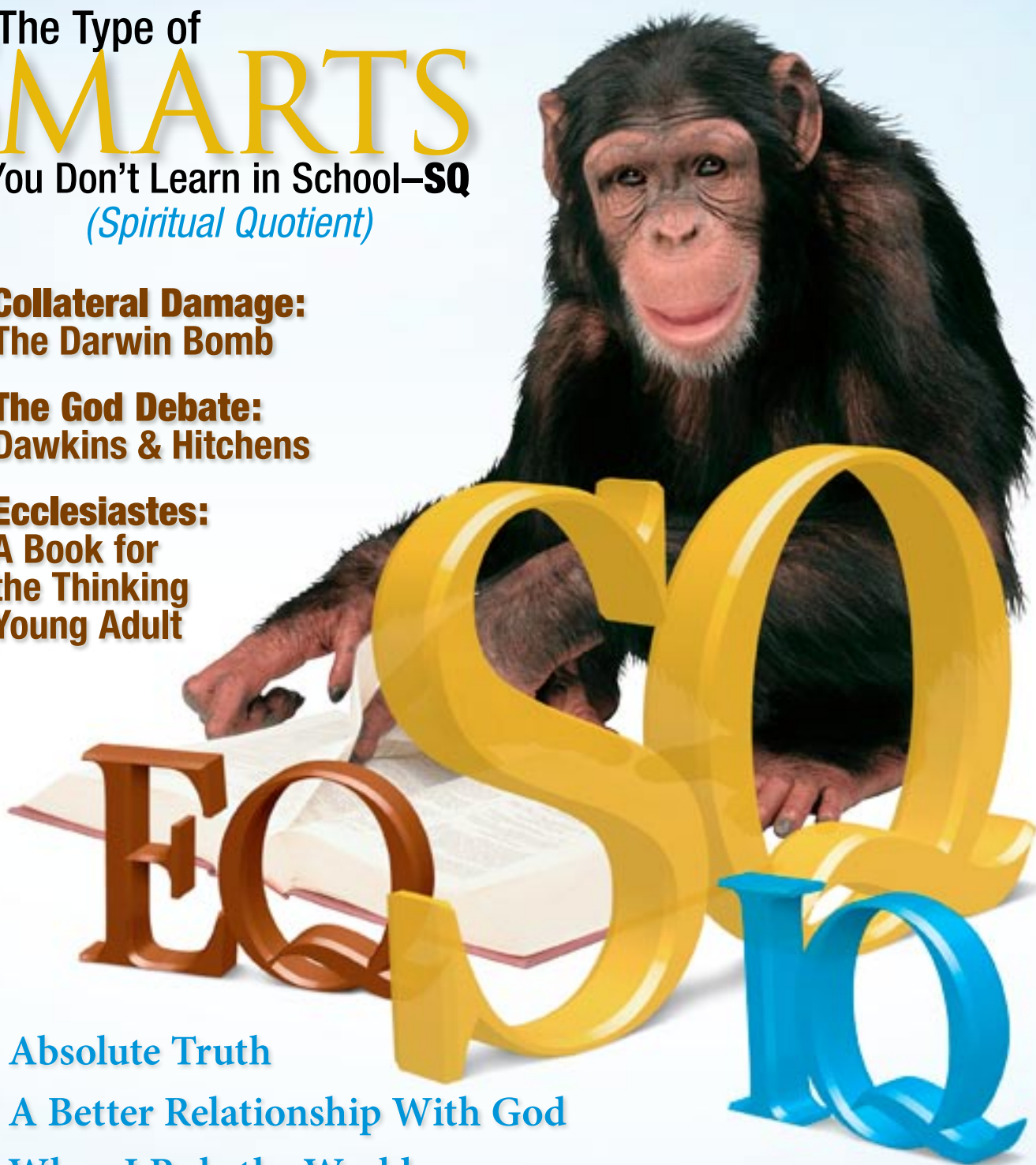
The Type of
SMARTS

You Don't Learn in School—**SQ**
(Spiritual Quotient)

**Collateral Damage:
The Darwin Bomb**

**The God Debate:
Dawkins & Hitchens**

**Ecclesiastes:
A Book for
the Thinking
Young Adult**



Absolute Truth

A Better Relationship With God

When I Rule the World

Sherlock Holmes of Intelligent Design

Self-Esteem or Self-Worth?

In the 1980s the self-esteem movement began sweeping through society. It was assumed that people needed a healthy dose of compliments—regardless of their performance or actions—in order to be happy and successful. The gurus of self-esteem told us that all we needed to do was to love ourselves more, accept ourselves unconditionally and respond to any shortcomings with self-nurturing affirmations that we're good enough just as we are.

It sounded so great and felt so good to think of ourselves as successful, regardless of what had been said or done, that millions of parents and teachers accepted the premise. Young people began receiving participation awards instead of ones based on hard work and accomplishment. Anyone who was unsuccessful or discouraged was diagnosed as suffering from low self-esteem.

The movement penetrated churches, and supposed scriptural support was discovered in the biblical instruction to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 19:19). And it felt

Study Reports,” advancement.sdsu.edu/marcomm/news/releases/spring2007/pr022707).

Professor Jean Twenge, a coauthor of the study, “noted that people high in narcissism lack empathy for others, are aggressive when insulted, seek public glory and favor self-enhancement over helping others look good.”

She explained that “current technology fuels the increase in narcissism. By its very name, MySpace encourages attention-seeking, as does YouTube” (ibid.). Sadly, narcissism—an emphasis on loving ourselves to the exclusion of others—was foretold by the Bible to be common at the end of this age (2 Timothy 3:1-2).

Confirming that something was wrong with the self-esteem movement, many gang members and people in prison were found

to have very high self-esteem. This led Dr. David Arredondo to conclude that “gang members have too much self-esteem and too little self-worth” (Center for Restorative Practice, Feb. 28, 2007, restorativepractice.org/blog/?p=28).

The Bible also warns us against overemphasis on self. Philippians 2:3 says, “In lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.” Each of us is special, but not in the way so many self-help gurus have taught. This issue is dedicated to helping each of us have a biblical perspective of our worth, a better relationship with our Creator and a godly worldview.

“In lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.”

good to love ourselves. After all, how could we love our neighbor if we didn't first love ourselves? Yet the biblical directive here is based on the premise that we already love ourselves. It doesn't imply that we need to build up more self-love.

In February of this year, five psychologists turned the tables on the popular perception that the self-esteem movement has been good for us. Having administered the Narcissistic Personality Inventory to 16,000 college students between 1982 and 2006, these psychologists found that “narcissism and entitlement among college students are at an all-time high” (“Gen Y Loves Itself Too Much, SDSU



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. © 2007 United Church of God, an International Association. Printed in U.S.A. All rights reserved. Reproduction in any form without written permission is prohibited.

Publisher: United Church of God, an International Association

Council of Elders: Bob Berendt, Aaron Dean, Robert Dick (chairman), Bill Eddington, Jim Franks, Roy Holladay, Clyde Kilough, Victor Kubik, Richard Pinelli, Larry Salyer, Richard Thompson, Leon Walker

Church president: Clyde Kilough Media operation manager: Larry Salyer Managing editor: David Treybig

Staff: Scott Ashley, Dan Dowd, Larry Greider, Doug Horchak, Amanda Stiver, Randy Stiver, Ken Treybig, Rachel Venish, Shaun Venish, Kristin Yarbrough Copy editors: Becky Bennett, Mike Bennett, Tom Robinson Web design: Aaron Booth Editorial reviewers: James Capo, Todd Carey, Paul Luecke, Doug Johnson, Jim Servidio

To request a free subscription to *Vertical Thought*, visit our Web site at www.verticalthought.org to locate the office nearest you.

Vertical Thought is sent free to all who request it. Your subscription is provided by the voluntary contributions of members of the United Church of God, an International Association, and others. Donations are gratefully accepted and are tax-deductible in the United States and Canada. Scriptural references are from the New King James Version (©1988 Thomas Nelson, Inc., publishers) unless otherwise noted.

Unsolicited materials: Due to staffing limitations, unsolicited materials sent to *Vertical Thought* will not be critiqued or returned. By their submission authors agree that submitted materials become the property of the United Church of God, an International Association, to use as it sees fit. This agreement is controlled by California law.



4 Spiritual Quotient: The Type of Smarts We Don't Learn in School

The understanding of life's purpose is an important but often neglected part of intelligence.

6 Building a Better Relationship With God

Here are five tools that can help us build a stronger, closer friendship with God.

8 The God Debate

Can atheists "prove" there is no God? We consider the claims of two atheist writers, Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens.

10 Ecclesiastes: The Thinking Young Adult's Guide to Life

The Bible is filled with special treasures. Here is a great book addressing some of the most important issues of life.

12 Collateral Damage: The Darwin Bomb

What seems like a good idea at the moment doesn't always turn out to be a good idea in the long run. So it is with the theory of evolution.

15 Absolute Truth: A Matter of Opinion?

As a college student my core beliefs were challenged. How would you respond to the question of whether there is absolute truth or not?

16 Intelligent Design's Sherlock Holmes

Here is the amazing story of a professor who did some detective work to determine if the universe was intelligently designed.

18 Good Thoughts and Your Computer

Playing computer games is a common pastime for many young people. Unfortunately, there are pitfalls to some cyber fun.

20 When I Rule the World

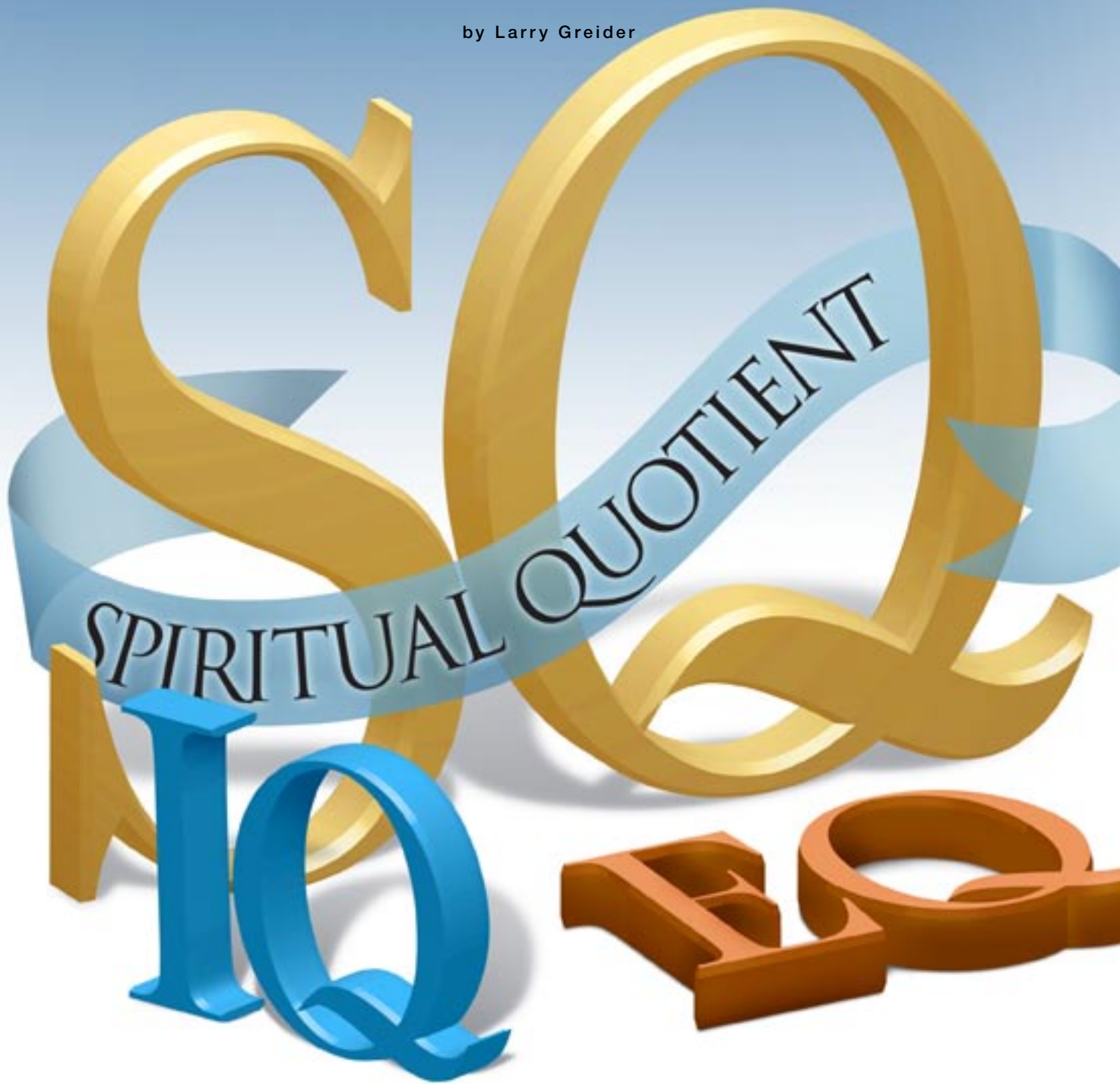
Not observing popular holidays and keeping the Sabbath were awkward for me. When I was young, I talked big; later, a conversation with my parents helped me understand.

Regular Features:

22 In the News

THE TYPE OF SMARTS WE DON'T LEARN IN SCHOOL

by Larry Greider



The understanding of life's purpose is an important
but often neglected part of our intelligence.

Shaun Venish

For many decades, the world has put great stock in the intelligence quotient (IQ). Psychologists came up with ways of testing IQ—one's intellectual or rational intelligence—to predict success in life. The higher the number, the belief went, the greater the intelligence and therefore the higher the success one could expect. But sheer intellect is only part of the true measure of our intelligence.

Emotional intelligence is another important aspect. In the 1990s, psychologist Daniel Goleman popularized the concept in his best-selling book *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*. He used findings from neuroscience and psychology to show the importance of an emotional quotient (EQ) to success in life.

He defines emotional intelligence "as a set of skills, including control of one's impulses, self-motivation, empathy and social competence in interpersonal relationships" (www.danielgoleman.info).

Another dimension

It wasn't long before other authors were

The prophet Jeremiah likewise wrote: "I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps" (Jeremiah 10:23). People may have natural talents and abilities, but verses such as these explain that we can only learn the most important lessons of life by seeking God. Put another way, we have a missing dimension in our thought processes.

God's Word explains that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9). Humanly, we want to decide for ourselves apart from God what is right and wrong. This kind of thinking was represented by "the tree

can receive His Spirit, which joins with our human spirit. This empowers us to understand the things of God, to discern good and evil and the difference between the holy and the profane.

What about those not yet old enough to make the lifelong commitment of baptism? The Holy Spirit can be *with*, though not yet *in*, those not yet ready for it, as the example of the disciples shows (John 14:17).

Sadly, it seems that humanity is largely still in the dark when it comes to knowing what is really important. For most of us it takes some event or contact with God's truth for us to realize that we don't know what we don't know. For centuries mankind has been searching for meaning, yet the Holy Bible is God's message to man. Through it, God says: "Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other" (Isaiah 45:22).

Do you suspect that God has put within us a desire to do more than just repeat

For centuries mankind has been searching for meaning, yet through the Holy Bible God says: **"Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other."**

recognizing another new dimension to human intelligence—a spiritual quotient (SQ). This is the intelligence involved in questions about the meaning of life and ultimate values.

But is this so-called spiritual quotient really new? Don't the ancient writings of the Bible indicate that man needs this added dimension to be able to attain his full human potential?

Consider this: "But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. For 'who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?' But we have the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:14-16).

of the knowledge of good and evil" in the Garden of Eden shortly after the creation of man.

God had explained to Adam and Eve that eating the forbidden fruit of this tree meant death because they were incapable of discerning good and evil by themselves (Genesis 2:17).

They needed God's help. After Satan tempted Eve and Eve convinced Adam to eat of the fruit of this tree, they were expelled from the garden and lost close, intimate contact with God (Genesis 3:23-24).

Solving our problem

Apart from God, human beings follow Adam and Eve's mistake in thinking. In order to solve this inherent problem, we need to reconcile with God. Through repentance and baptism, we

a pattern of taking care of our physical needs, acquiring material goods, developing casual relationships and hoping to enjoy some peace and tranquility before fading away? Or are our lives purely existential moments lived only for the here and now?

God's purpose for human beings

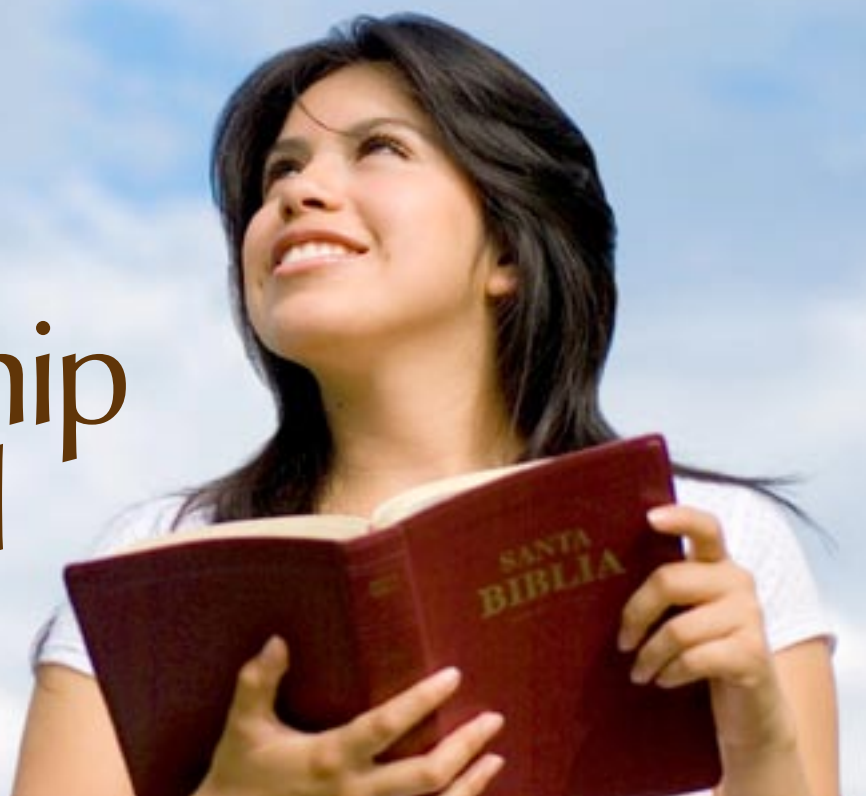
The Bible reveals that there is much more to God's purpose for mankind than just living for the moment. God has placed eternity in our hearts (Ecclesiastes 3:11) and wants to share His vast creation with us by allowing us to become members of His eternal family (Ephesians 3:15; 1 John 3:1). As a reader of *Vertical Thought*, you know that we often discuss this amazing plan. And as you think more about God's

Continued on page 21

Building A Better Relationship With God

Here are five tools that can help us build a stronger, closer friendship with God.

by Mike Bennett



Prayer: God Wants to Hear From You!

If you were given the opportunity to talk with the U.S. president or the queen of England, what would you say? You would probably be a bit nervous, and would think a lot about what you should talk about. But One far more powerful and important than the president or queen wants you to talk to Him! And He doesn't want you to be nervous, but to share what's on your mind and to pour out your heart to Him.

God loves us so much and understands what we are going through. That's why we can "come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

How should we pray? Christ's disciples wondered the same thing, and asked Him to teach them (read it in Luke 11:1-4 and Matthew 6:5-13). He told them prayer wasn't for show, and it wasn't about saying the same thing over and over again. But He did give us a framework of the types of things to pray about:

- Praising and thanking God.
- Praying for God's Kingdom to come, and for His will and work to be done today.

- Requesting that our needs and the needs of others be met, whether healing, food, wisdom or protection.
- Seeking forgiveness and the help to forgive others.
- Asking for protection from temptation and the evil tempter.

In addition to getting on our knees in private (King David did so at "evening and morning and at noon"—Psalm 55:17), we can talk to God in our minds throughout the day (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). Read David's Psalms and other heartfelt prayers of the Bible to see more about how this spiritual tool can help you draw closer to our Creator. See also an article from our sister publication, *The Good News*, on prayer (www.ucg.org/reprints/pdf/PrivilegeofPrayer.pdf).

Meditation: How Do I Apply This Today?

When we've prayed for understanding and then carefully read the Bible, a natural next step is to think about what we've read and how it relates to the situations in our life. That's what biblical meditation is all about.

It's not about emptying our minds or relaxation techniques or mystical experiences at all. It's "directed thinking, reflection, contemplation or concentration" and it helps make

prayer and Bible study "meaningful instead of mechanical, inspiring rather than superficial" (see the *Good News* article on meditation at www.ucg.org/reprints/pdf/Meditation.pdf).

Some meditations are recorded for us in the Psalms. The psalmist said meditation helped make him wiser than his enemies and led him to restrain his feet "from every evil way" (Psalm 119:97-104).

Meditation helps us know where we are going—"ponder the path of your feet," as Solomon put it (Proverbs 4:26).

Some passages worth pondering: 2 Corinthians 10:3-5; Philippians 4:8; Colossians 3:1-2.

God told Joshua to meditate on the Book of the Law "day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it" (Joshua 1:8). Once again, the key is doing!

Get more *Vertical Thought* on the Web!

New VT articles every month. And now weekly commentaries from teen and young adults around the world. Life, trends and current events with a view to the Kingdom of God.

[www. VerticalThought.org](http://www.VerticalThought.org)



Fasting: A Serious Power Tool

The Bible has many examples of people of God who voluntarily went without food and drink for a time to humble themselves and draw close to God (Ezra 8:23; Esther 4:16; Psalm 35:13).

Christ said His disciples would fast and explained that particularly vexing situations can sometimes only be dealt with by prayer and fasting (Matthew 9:15; 17:21). In that way, fasting can be looked on as a power

tool for building our relationship with God (see the *Good News* article on fasting at www.ucg.org/reprints/pdf/FastingSpiritualPowerTool.pdf).

But there are some things to understand first. Biblical fasting is not for show (Matthew 6:16-18). It's not to be undertaken lightly if your doctor or parents (if you're under 18) object. It's not to try to get something from others or to try to force God to do what we want (Isaiah 58:3-4).

Fasting should first and foremost be about personally drawing near to God (James 4:7-10; 1 Peter 5:6-7). It should also be about compassion and sharing with others (Isaiah 58:6-7).

Since the Creator God is the source of all power, drawing closer to Him and casting our cares and worries on Him will give us the spiritual strength we need, even while feeling physically weak.

Bible Study: Listening to God

A person who does all the talking and never listens ends up with a very one-sided friendship—or no friendship at all. So besides talking to God, we need to hear what He has to say.

Most of us are blessed today to have a copy of the Bible right in our own home. Can you imagine just hearing the Bible read once a week and trying to remember it through the week? People through history memorized major parts of this most important of books. God even told each king of Israel to write out a copy of the Book of the Law—found in the first section of the Bible—and to “read it all the days of his life” (Deuteronomy 17:18-19).

Why do we read the Bible? It is as necessary for our spiritual life as food is physically (Matthew 4:4). Both the Old and New Testaments show us how God thinks and how we can become like Him (take a few minutes and look up Psalm 119:105; Luke 24:44-45; 1 Corinthians 10:11; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; and 2 Peter 3:15-18). We can pray that God will open our understanding and help us grow and be “doers of the word,” because just reading is not enough (James 1:21-25).

For more information, see the *Good News* article on Bible study (www.ucg.org/reprints/pdf/LearnLiveLovetheBible.pdf), and the booklet *How to Understand the Bible*. You may also check out our online Bible Reading Program (www.ucg.org/brp) and the 12-lesson *Bible Study Course*. You can request the free booklet and course from our literature library at www.gnmagazine.org/litreq/


Fellowship: Friendship With God and His People

It's a dangerous world out there, and sometimes it's just good to know someone has “got your back”—is watching out for you. God put His people in His Church to support, encourage and learn from each other (1 Corinthians 12:25-26; Philippians 2:1-5). Of course we also can offend and hurt each other, but one of His goals is for us to learn to reconcile and to get along. In that way, the Church is a workshop for living His way of life.

Biblical fellowship is a three-way relationship between us, God and His people (1 John 1:3). God puts us each in His Church where He wants us, with our own specific part to play (1 Corinthians 12:18; Ephesians 4:16). He listens lovingly to our conversations and records His precious people in a book of remembrance (Malachi 3:16-17).

God warns us not to “neglect our meeting together” because we so desperately need to encourage each other to “outbursts of love and good deeds” (Hebrews 10:24-25, New Living Translation). For more information, see the *Good News* article on fellowship (www.gnmagazine.org/issues/gn69/spiritualgrowth_key.htm).

Mike Bennett, a minister of the United Church of God, is the managing editor of *United News*. He and his wife Becky and their two daughters live near Cincinnati, Ohio.



Recently, two of the world's most vocal atheists published books to defend their claim that there is no evidence for God's existence. Richard Dawkins (*The God Delusion*) and Christopher Hitchens (*God Is Not Great*) have presented their best arguments for their position that God does not exist and that religion poisons the world. Ironically, their own books provide much "evidence" to the contrary.

So what are their claims? As vertical thinkers, let's consider their reasoning and conclusions. Common arguments by atheists against God include:

- **Comparing the God of Israel to all gods through history.**

In the minds of atheists, all gods take on the same value. Whether it is Zeus, Thor, Baal, Vulcan, Vishnu or the God of the Bible, there is no difference in their eyes. They conclude that all gods have been humanly contrived to accommodate the social and psychological needs of man.

The God Debate

**Can atheists "prove"
there is no God?**

by Doug Horchak

- **Discrediting the notion of God because of violence done in His name.**

As atheists evaluate history, they often note how many times violence, genocide, killing, rape, murder and war have happened in the name of God. Whether the Spanish Inquisition, the Crusades or the ethnic cleansing in Kosovo and Africa, these types of violence are commonly cited as the hypocrisy of religion and a result of belief in God. Atheists conclude that there could be no benevolent, loving God behind this.

- **Claiming errors and duplicity of Scripture.**

Many atheists deny the existence of the Judeo-Christian God based on alleged discrepancies of the Bible. Examples of biblical disagreements they cite include issues related to history, science, the teachings of Jesus, death, murder and war. If the Word of God—the Bible—contradicts itself, they reason, the book cannot represent the mind of an omniscient God.

- **Showing that paganism is in mainstream Christianity.**

Both Dawkins and Hitchens cite the fact that, although mainstream Christianity claims its origins from Jewish forefathers and the writings of the Bible, much of its doctrine, ceremony, images and worship have their origins in pagan practices actually condemned by the God of Abraham. They correctly note that the origins of Christmas and Easter (mainstays of many churches) come from Babylon, Egypt

and Greece—not the true, Creator God of the Bible.

Atheists point out that these practices are hypocritically borrowed from earlier pagan religions. If the forms of worship are this flawed, they reason that claims by these same worshippers that God really exists must likewise be hypocritical.

• Asking who designed God.

When trying to debunk *intelligent design* (a movement of scientists claiming that the complexity of systems enabling all life to exist cannot be adequately explained by Charles Darwin's theory of evolution), atheists fall back to what they believe is the mother of all questions: *Who designed or created God?* In answer to Christians saying that God is the original cause of all things, they want to know who created *Him*. Since there is no acceptable answer to this question (at least to them), they believe that there clearly can be no God.

• Concluding that Darwinism must be true!

Atheists believe that there is only one answer to the origin and development of life: that of Darwinian evolution. Most professors, teachers and scientists in the fields of zoology, anthropology and biology believe and teach this theory as fact. Atheists see this instruction by educators as further proof that there is no God.

When atheists make sense

You might be shocked to know that some of the observations from which atheists argue make perfect sense! When you consider the observations and knowledge of religion and history that avowed atheists embrace, it is easy to see *why* they struggle with believing in a Creator God! Much of the historical evidence of religion, biblical interpretation and deeds done in the name of God discredit religious people's efforts to justify their belief in God. Some facts to consider:

- The many gods in varied cultures through history *do not* represent the true God. These gods are often deceptive and evil.
- The varied practices, doctrines and historic acts of Christians through the ages (in the Middle East, Europe, America and around the world) *are confusing and hypocritical*.
- The confused and often contradictory interpretations of the Holy Bible by so many denominations, sects, groups and individuals are mind-boggling. These individuals have *misrepresented the Bible!*
- Many of the practices that began in the church of Rome in the second and third centuries were borrowed from the pagan customs of the pre-Christian world. The observance of Christmas, Easter, New Year's Day and even worship on Sundays is not taught in the Bible!

A missing dimension, once again

Fact is, we do live in a world that is confused about virtually everything—including God, science, morality, religion and the Bible! While many people (like Hitchens and Dawkins) assume that the history of mankind and religion represents a God-centered worldview's best shot—actually, the opposite is true! The history of mankind generally represents man's rejection of God. Human history doesn't represent God at His best, but man at his worst!

Want to read more? Read it online or download a PDF of our booklet here:

www.GNmagazine.org/booklets



For nearly 6,000 years man has been devising his own view of morality and life—which includes various forms of religion (including Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, etc.). What we see in the practice, teachings and history of these religions is too often generated and designed solely by human beings—not by God at all!

Jesus Christ told His disciples nearly 2,000 years ago that, as time went on, the masses would be deceived by many claiming to be His true representatives. He said: "Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many" (Matthew 24:4-5, King James Version).

Put another way, the vast majority of the world's religions and religious leaders would be counterfeits. The result is that millions of people have been deceived by Satan the devil—the real ruler and god of this age (2 Corinthians 4:4; Revelation 12:9).

While there are as many views of the meaning of the Bible as there are religious sects, even this confusion was foretold by God! The written history of the God of Israel is unlike the accounts and historic writings referring to any other deity in human history. In the writings of the Holy Bible, God is referred to as transcending the physical realm, including the many gods conceived in the human mind. The gods of images and human imaginations are nothing compared to the invisible, all-powerful God of the Bible!

Evidence of a Creator

The Bible tells us that people, having the physical creation before them, are truly "without excuse" when it comes to knowing that God exists (Romans 1:20).

Interestingly, while the modern intelligent design movement acknowledges that the creation truly was created, a majority of educators deceptively decries the concepts of irreducible complexity and design inference as non-science. Even so, a large and growing body of scientists and educators today realizes that this complex universe could not exist without some intelligence behind it!

In more than one place in the Bible, God tells us that "the fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God'" (Psalms 14:1; 53:1). And yet, some of these same "fools" that have sadly rejected the idea of a loving, omniscient, creator God *do* have a clear understanding of the hypocritical, confusing and often violent history of mankind and his many religions.

Their fundamental error is that they attribute such confusion and chaos in man's history to the best the idea of God can offer, when, in fact, man's sordid past (and his immediate future) are the result of man's rejecting the true Creator.

Doug Horchak, a husband, father and coordinator of the United Youth Corps program, pastors congregations in Dallas and Sherman, Texas.

The withered old king sat in a quiet corner of his favorite garden on his golden chair quietly considering how his reign had gone from good at first to bad in his later years. Perhaps it was a tear of what-should-have-been that glistened in the corner of his eye.

Of all the kings in all of history, Solomon had been handed the highest and best chance to succeed. God had given young Solomon his throne, peace, phenomenal wealth and more wisdom than any man had ever had.

All that fabulous wisdom and Solomon let his harem of wives lead him into pagan idolatry. "Smart, smart—stupid! How *could* I have done this? And what can be done now?" he scolded himself.

The sad yet hopeful irony of Solomon's foolish failings imparts to us powerful lessons of phenomenal insight in

Times about the dilemma of cultural mistrust brought about by modern terrorism with: "All that is needed, then ... is the wisdom of Solomon."

Young adults need that wisdom too.

Solomon began his wisdom education as the young son of King David, who wrote: "The mouth of the righteous speaks wisdom, and his tongue talks of justice. The law of his God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide" (Psalm 37:30-31). Solomon learned very early the foundational wisdom of divine law.

When he became king of Israel, he asked God for even more wisdom, which God happily gave him. He was wiser than anyone to that time and since with the exception of Jesus Christ Himself (1 Kings 3:10-12).

The young king made brilliant judgments. People were happy and prosperous during his reign. The reputation of Solomonic wisdom spread everywhere: "So King Solomon surpassed all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom. And all the kings of the earth sought the presence of Solomon to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart" (2 Chronicles 9:22-23). The 12-

Ecclesiastes:

The Thinking Young Adult's Guide to Life

The Bible is filled with special treasures. Here is a great book addressing some of the most important issues of life.

by **Randy Stiver**

his short and largely autobiographical book called *Ecclesiastes*. Because of its divine inspiration and artful literary quality, its 12 chapters come jam-packed with wry observations and down-to-earth wisdom. *Ecclesiastes* is hugely powerful as a young adult's guide to life.

Life and times of King Solomon

Our 21st-century writers of literature, religion and world news commentary routinely reference King Solomon, who ruled the ancient kingdom of Israel from approximately 970 to 930 B.C. Noted British author Theodore Dalrymple concluded his July 8, 2007, article in the *Los Angeles*

tribed kingdom of Israel became the destination of choice for non-Israelites the world over to personally witness Solomon's wisdom during his four-decade reign.

However, a man can't marry 700 wives, plus have 300 concubines (women of lesser legal standing than a wife) and not pay a fearsome price. God always intended that there be only one man and one woman in each marriage. One can be equipped with wisdom but still act foolishly. "For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the LORD his God" (1 Kings 11:4).

"Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil."

The price was a divine prophecy that Solomon's dynasty over the 12 tribes of Israel would end with him. His son would retain only two tribes (Judah and Benjamin—1 Kings 11:31), ruling over the remaining nation known as the house or kingdom of Judah, the descendants of which became known as Jews. Another man would be king of the 10 tribes in the northern part of the country, which became known as the house or kingdom of Israel. To learn the identity of its descendants today, read the article series "The Tribe Tracker's Guide to the Future" (www.verticalthought.org).

Solomon had let God, Israel, the other nations and himself down. There he sat, withered and old, "Smart, smart—stupid!" True wisdom has value for us only when we use it to guide our lives. For so long Solomon did not—using his God-given wisdom only to evaluate his worldly pursuits and rightly conclude that they were vanity (Ecclesiastes 2:3, 9).

Ecclesiastes: the book

At last the king came to his senses, returning to godly wisdom and a desire to proclaim it. The autobiographical book of Ecclesiastes was very likely his final testament of truth, his last chance to undo some of the evil done by his sinful example and regain some measure of an honored reputation.

Ecclesiastes should therefore be understood in the context of the entire Bible and in the light of its humble profession of faith in the contrite conclusion: "Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil" (chapter 12:13-14).

The title *Ecclesiastes* is a Greek translation of the Hebrew word *Qoheleth*, meaning "one who gathers an assembly" or "preacher." All Israel assembled at Jerusalem during God's festivals, especially in the fall for the Feast of Tabernacles. That would have provided a prime opportunity for visiting dignitaries to see the king at the helm of his nation declaring the power of his wisdom.

Ecclesiastes addresses just such a combined assembly representative of men and women of all tribal origins and age groups. Thus it begins: "The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. 'Vanity of vanities,' says the Preacher; 'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity'" (1:1-2). The context shows he is speaking of physical life "under the sun" (verse 3).

"Vanity of vanities" is a Hebrew superlative, as in "the greatest vanity." The word translated "vanity" means "breath or vapor." Physical life of itself is not substantive, bringing no lasting fulfillment and happiness. Only a proper relationship with God will do that, as the book shows.

Ecclesiastes addresses all the opposites of human behavior and thinking: love and hate, oppression and social justice,

futility and purpose, foolishness and wisdom. It speaks to the human ideals: friendship, marriage, productive work, duty, contentment and emotional balance. It is perhaps the most succinct study of the foibles of human nature: power, greed and arrogance.

The first two chapters are autobiographical. Solomon uses himself as a case study seeking the meaning of life. He presents the theme for us all: Why are we here?

Four overlays of the preacher's message

- God will judge all nations under heaven throughout history. No one will be left out, no evil unnoticed, no matter who you are or where you came from. God sets the standard for man, not man for God.
- Social justice vs. oppression. Youth have a keen sense and desire for fairness. Justice is seldom found in the world today because of oppressors in families, communities and nations. But God will straighten out this crooked world.
- The joy of life as God's gift to mankind. "The underlying mood of the book is joy: finding pleasure in life despite the troubles that often plague it. Those who fear and worship God should experience this joy; they should rejoice in the gifts God has given them" (*The Nelson Study Bible*, introduction to Ecclesiastes, p. 1078).
- The greatness of God's work or plan. "He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end" (3:11). God created human beings with the desire to keep living and with curiosity about the future. That's why some people give themselves religiously to fruitless or futile causes—they seek divine meaning in their lives. However, a "cause" already awaits us—the Kingdom of God.

The core of the book gives lessons on wisdom and the tendencies of human nature along with God's teaching for a happy life. Some are presented as proverbs, others as direct instruction like "whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might" (9:10).

Ecclesiastes makes you think. The sooner in your life that you start thinking vertically—the way Christ thought—the wiser you will be, the fewer miseries you will suffer and the more happiness you will enjoy.

Use Ecclesiastes as a guide for your life. Take it from old King Solomon. Don't come to the end of your life regretting the choices you made. "Don't be smart, smart—stupid. Be smart, smart—wise!"

Randy Stiver is the pastor of United Church of God congregations in Columbus and Cambridge, Ohio, and is a regular guest on the *Beyond Today* television program.

Collateral Damage: The Darwin Bomb



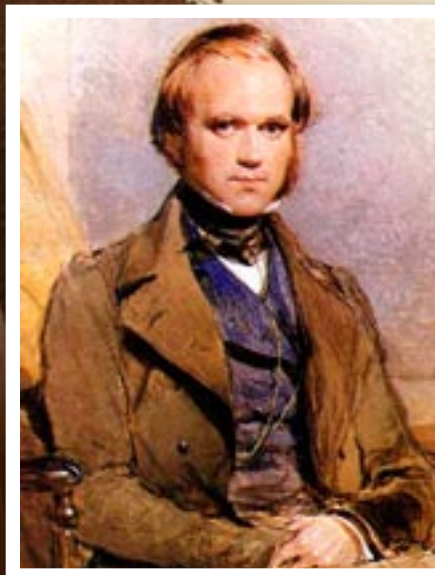
What seems like a good idea at the moment doesn't always turn out to be good in the long run. So it is with the theory of evolution.

by David Treybig

When Charles Darwin observed animals and began formulating his theory of evolution, he probably never dreamed of causing humanity grief or degrading the human condition. Instead, he wanted to advance scientific knowledge. Through his theory of evolution, he offered an explanation of how life might have come into existence apart from God. He termed the process natural selection, which he claimed caused gradual changes in life-forms over millions of years. It was a revolutionary idea that has had a monumental impact far beyond the field of science.

Yet what Darwin offered to the scientific world in 1859 in his book *The Origin of Species* has precipitated a great deal of collateral damage—that is, unintended consequences. Sadly, few in society at large have considered the repercussions of his landmark idea. Like a bomb shattering an innocent silence, the shock waves from Darwin's supposition continue to relentlessly pummel society.

How the theory of evolution evolved and how it has been defended is a story filled with irony, deceit and even religious-like faith held by nonreligious people. Here is a tale stranger than the animals Darwin observed on the Galapagos Islands.



Rejecting religion

Before offering his theory of evolution, Charles Darwin completed a degree in theology. In his studies, surely Darwin had noted the Bible's revelation that "in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1) and that "God created man in His own image" (verse 27).

Yet Darwin's theory rejected the biblical explanation of special creation. He was unsure whether life initially came about through a Creator or of its own accord. In any case, Darwin supposed that different gradual evolutionary changes in various life-forms accounted for the variety of creatures—mammal, fish, fowl, etc.—alive today.

Why did Darwin abandon biblical teaching? Why did he offer a completely unproven theory that was in opposition to the Bible? As it turns out, Darwin apparently wasn't well-grounded in the Scriptures and, as science is discovering, the evidence is mounting that his theory is likewise flawed.

In rejecting religion, Darwin struck a chord that resonated with many in his day and continues to resonate today. In holding to Darwin's theory, some mistakenly think they are free from the rules and laws of a Creator. Assuming that God is not in the picture, they mistakenly believe that they are free to decide for themselves what is right and wrong. Had such individuals only read and accepted the Bible, they could have known that Adam and Eve tried the same thing—rejecting God—several thousand years ago and suffered a terrible consequence for such faulty thinking.

In rejecting God's revealed knowledge and deciding for

Darwinian Double-Talk: Micro vs. Macro

The term *evolution* has two meanings that can be confused, a fact that supporters of Darwin's theory of evolution often exploit in their efforts to "prove" their position. Evolution, in the sense of limited variation within existing groups of animals, undoubtedly takes place. It is common to see variations in finches, dogs and cats, but these variations are limited to change within each group. These comparatively minor changes fall within the category of microevolution and do not produce gradual change from one group to another or the creation of a new species.

Macroevolution—the kind of complex changes that would lead to speciation (formation of new species) and eventually new kinds of creatures as theorized by Charles Darwin—has never been proven. There seems to be a barrier inherent within nature that does not permit such complex changes. The Bible refers to these separations in stating that creatures reproduce according to "kind" (Genesis 1:24-25).

Even though the common types of evolution cited in science textbooks fall within the category of microevolution, supporters of evolution often fail to make this distinction, allowing students to mistakenly believe these examples are proof of macroevolution.

private, emotional knowledge that varied for each individual.

And what was the result of this newly emerged two-tiered worldview of science and religion? Pearcey writes: "If natural causes working on their own are capable of producing everything that exists, then the obvious implication is that there's nothing left for a Creator to do. He's out of a job. And if the existence of God no longer serves any explanatory or cognitive function, then the only function left is an emotional one: Belief in God is reduced to an escape hatch for people afraid to face modernity" (pp. 153-154).

Continuing, she astutely notes, "The major impact of Darwinian evolution does not lie in the details of mutation and natural selection, but in something far more significant—a new criterion of what qualifies as objective truth" (ibid.).

Thus, the introduction of Darwin's theory opened up an all-out debate over truth. Ironically, Darwin's supporters claimed that religion was just a humanly devised invention to help people during times of trouble. Ah yes. Humanly devised—as if the theory of evolution wasn't!

Evolution under the microscope

In reflecting upon his theory of evolution, Darwin knew there were dauntingly unproven aspects of his hypothesis. For example, he admitted that the complexity of the eye presented certain problems. He also acknowledged that there was no fossil record proving the gradual changes in life-forms that he imagined had taken place. He simply hoped that fossils would eventually be found to prove him correct.

Given the weaknesses of his theory, Darwin was surprised at its positive reception. Today it seems that Darwin himself

"The major impact of Darwinian evolution does not lie in the details of mutation and natural selection, but in something far more significant—a new criterion of what qualifies as objective truth."

themselves how to live, Adam and Eve lost access to the tree of life, which represented the opportunity to live forever (Genesis 3). Sadly, Darwin and his supporters were undeterred by biblical history. It seems they didn't want to "retain God in their knowledge" (Romans 1:28)—much less hear what God had to say through the pages of the Bible. They mistakenly thought their course of action gave them freedom—an enticing word often used in propaganda.

A new worldview

Nancy Pearcey in her 2004 book *Total Truth* explains that prior to Darwin, the knowledge of God and the knowledge of physical things were considered to blend together in one harmonious worldview. The observation of Proverbs 1:7—"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction"—was generally considered by educated people to be true.

Pearcey makes the point that although secularizing forces were already at work to divide science and religion, Darwin's theory of evolution crystallized a new worldview suggesting that science was absolute knowledge that could be analyzed and quantified, while religious belief represented

had more doubts about his theory than many Darwinian devotees who have accepted it without question.

Yet under the microscope of inspection, scientists and competent thinkers have jointly discovered serious flaws with Darwin's theory. A number of the theory's supposed proofs have been found inadequate. Consider some of the tired, worn-out, inaccurate examples that unfortunately are still being offered as evolution's best proofs (see chart at bottom of page 14).

The church of Darwin

With no valid evidence to prove Darwinian evolution and mounting scientific evidence against it, supporters of evolution find themselves increasingly challenged to maintain their faith. It's an awkward position demanding unquestioning adherence.

When evolutionary theory is challenged by scientific evidence such as that offered by the intelligent design movement, some are surprised that Darwinian supporters almost always respond by claiming that intelligent design is thinly disguised religion. Yet technically, one doesn't have to believe in a particular God or creed to believe in intelligent

Issue	Darwinism	The Bible
The creation of matter	No explanation.	Matter was created by God.
The origin of man	An accident of nature.	Created by God in His image.
The relationship of man to animals	Man is a highly developed animal.	Man has dominion over the animals.
The value of human life	Everything is based on survival of the fittest.	God honors and respects all life.
Abortion	Of no consequence. Each person decides.	Life is precious from conception.
The Bible	Presents irrelevant myth.	Instruction on how to live a good life now and for eternity.
Truth	Determined by each person.	Determined by God.
Life after death	When one dies, that's all there is. There is no afterlife.	The opportunity to live forever as a spirit being in God's family.

design since the arguments for intelligent design are made from scientific evidence alone.

Sadly, it seems that those who faithfully hold to Darwin's theory don't want to acknowledge the accumulating body of scientific information undermining their position. The reason they don't is obvious. Their worldview is at risk. If the creation indeed has the fingerprints of the Creator—as mounting evidence indicates—they will have no excuse for ignoring God. Indeed, the Bible says just that (see Romans 1:20).

For the academic world to accept intelligent design would be as monumental a change as was the acceptance of Darwin's theory. Unwilling to face the evidence, true-believer Darwinians respond by trying to discredit the science as religion. Ironically again, these days it seems to take more faith to believe in Darwinism than it does to

believe in the Creator God of the Bible.

Collateral damage

Since its detonation, the Darwin bomb's blast wave has impacted just about every field of study, with some seriously negative consequences. While Darwin's devotees are fond of talking about all the deaths associated with religious wars, they don't like to be reminded of the immoral, materialistic worldviews that have been built upon or justified by Darwin's theory.

A biography of Joseph Stalin explains that Stalin considered Darwin's book *The Origin of Species* proof that there was no God (E. Yaroslavsky, *Landmarks in the Life of Stalin*, pp. 8-9).

As a seminary student, Stalin encouraged a fellow student

Continued on page 19

Supposed Proof	Darwin Spin	Observable Reality
Finch Beaks	Finches on the Galapagos Islands grow different-sized beaks depending upon their habitat. This is evolution in action.	When the finches' habitat returns to normal, so does the size of their beaks. This is minor adaptation to circumstances, not evolutionary change leading to a new kind of bird.
Fruit Flies	By exposing fruit flies to various chemicals or radiation, researchers can produce mutations with different-sized wings. This is evolution in action.	After more than 50 years of experimentation, all that has been produced is dysfunctional fruit flies. None have become new insects or even improved fruit flies. They don't fly as well as their predecessors.
Peppered Moths	During the industrial revolution in Britain, smoke and soot made it easier for birds to see and eat lighter-colored moths on dark tree trunks. Darker-colored moths became predominant. Another proof of evolution.	This supposed proof turns out to be a myth. Photos were staged to illustrate the point. Further investigation has shown that these moths do not normally perch on tree trunks.
Haeckel's embryos	A strong supporter of Darwin, German scientist Ernst Haeckel created a chart showing the similarity of the embryos of vertebrates. The close similarity of each vertebrate proves its common evolutionary ancestry.	Although Darwin thought this chart represented the strongest proof of his theory, Haeckel's drawings were misrepresentations. He deliberately drew his sketches of embryos to look more alike than they really are.

ABSOLUTE TRUTH

A Matter of Opinion?

As a college student, I found that my core beliefs were seriously challenged. How would you respond to the question of whether there is absolute truth or not?

by Sean Yarbrough

When I was a senior in college, I took an introductory philosophy class. The professor covered a number of well-known philosophers and explained their ideas by challenging the ideas of his students. Being an avid debater, my hand went up nearly every time the professor laid down his challenge.

"Is there a cause for every effect?" he asked.

"Obviously," I would answer. "No effect occurs in a vacuum."

"But have you observed every effect?" he would calmly reply.

"No," I would admit.

"Then you can't be sure that a cause exists for every effect, can you?"

We had many exchanges like this during the semester, and I believe they helped me identify many of the assumptions underlying my core beliefs.

During one of these exchanges, we discussed the views of Scottish philosopher David Hume. According to Hume, human knowledge can only be based on experience. Since

"If there is no such thing as truth, then the phrase 'there is no such thing as truth' cannot be true," he explained.

The claim that there is no such thing as truth is self-contradictory! While this does not prove the existence of truth, it does mean that skeptics may have a logical disadvantage when making certain statements to support their position.

What is truth?

Skepticism about the existence of truth did not begin with the musings of Scottish philosophers. In John 18:38, Pontius Pilate asked Christ in perhaps a mocking or world-weary way, "What is truth?"

Today, this same sentiment is expressed in the debate over moral relativism. In schools across America and elsewhere, students are being taught that there are no moral absolutes—no objective standard of morality that applies to all people everywhere. Those who claim otherwise are usually characterized as ignorant or prejudiced. Unfortunately, the indoctrination of young people by such educators has proven to be very effective.

According to a recent study by the Barna Group, nearly half

While people who claim there are no moral absolutes often speak of showing tolerance toward all beliefs and values, there is at least one value that relativists can seemingly never manage to accept ...

we interpret our experiences very subjectively, and we can't possibly experience everything in the universe, we can't make universal claims about anything.

"Therefore," my professor rhetorically concluded, "there is no such thing as truth."

This radical statement flew in the face of everything I'd been raised to believe about right and wrong, good and evil. After all, Christ's statement in John 17:17 clearly reads, "Your word is truth." From a purely hypothetical perspective, both Christ and Hume could have been wrong, but both could not have been right!

I wanted to raise my hand and object, but I wasn't sure how to respond to this outrageous challenge. Fortunately, my professor pointed out the logical problem with his previous statement for the class.

of Americans in their 20s and 30s believes that morality is based on "what is right for the person" instead of godly principles ("A New Generation of Adults Bends Moral and Sexual Rules to Their Liking," Oct. 31, 2006).

Yet rejecting God's principles of morality comes at a high price. For example, research shows that living together before marriage doubles the rate of divorce (Patrick Fagan, "How Broken Families Rob Children of Their Chances for Future Prosperity," The Heritage Foundation, June 11, 1999) and lowers one's self-esteem (Susan Brown and Monica Longmore, "Union Type and Adult Self-Esteem," Center for Family and Demographic Research). By replacing God with one's feelings as the guide for deciding right and wrong, people are forced to try to learn how to be happy the hard way.

Continued on page 19



Intelligent Design's Sherlock Holmes

Here is the amazing story of a professor who did some detective work to determine if the universe was intelligently designed.

by Mario Seiglie

As a teen, I loved to read Sherlock Holmes detective stories. I marveled at his ability to figure out the most difficult cases with his incredible deductive and inductive powers. “Elementary,” he would say as he solved another puzzling crime. I was so fascinated with these tales that I bought *The Complete Sherlock Holmes* at a used bookstore. This work contained the entire Sherlock Holmes collection of 56 short stories and four novels written by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. I relished every adventure.

Little did I know I would eventually run across another type of Sherlock Holmes while studying the intelligent design movement—a revolt of prominent scientists and professors against Darwinian evolution. This time, the Sherlock Holmes would turn out to be William Dembski, a professor of mathematics and philosophy. He used his mathematical skills to solve what seemed an impossible task—determining if something in nature is purposely designed or just formed as a result of physical processes.

This issue has always caused a heated debate among evolutionists and creationists. Creationists insist living organisms show such complexity, purpose, completeness and, in many

cases, symbiosis that they had to be intelligently designed. Not so, say evolutionists. They allege all these creatures show only “apparent” design and were formed by random mutation and natural selection over eons of time.

The trouble is that since no one has ever seen any living creature arise from scratch, be it bacteria or man, its origin has to be deduced from what already exists—whether it is a living organism or the fossilized remains of one. So far, there are only two conceivable explanations for the existence of living things on earth—either they were created by an intelligent source or they are the result of unguided natural laws or chance.

Enter Dr. Dembski. He designed a scientific test to determine whether something is intelligently designed or not.

The three-filter test

Imagine three filters, like nets with ever-narrowing holes, each on top of the other. He established the parameters for each filter based on the laws of probability. Every object or event in nature can be tested by these three filters, and only if something is intelligently designed will it end up going through the final filter. He calls this testing method the “Explanatory Filter.”

“Roughly speaking,” Bill Dembski writes, “the filter asks three questions in the following order: 1.) Does a law explain it? 2.) Does chance explain it? 3.) Does design explain it?”

He calls the first filter the “Contingency Filter.” This catches any phenomenon that is simply the result of natural law or of high probability of occurring by chance. For instance, a ball repeatedly dropped has a 100 percent chance of falling to the floor and is explained by natural law—gravity in this case. This action is caught by the first filter.

The second filter is named the “Complexity Filter.” This catches any occurrence with a higher probability than one chance in 10^{150} . This figure is derived by multiplying the number of elementary particles in the universe (10^{80}) by the maximum age of the universe (10^{25} seconds) by the maximum rate of particle transactions per second (10^{45}). This is the maximum of physical possibilities in the history of the universe.

The third filter he identifies as the “Specification Filter.” This is the one that is extremely hard to go through—the probability of the circumstance occurring by chance is less than one in 10^{150} . If someone gets a royal flush of hearts in poker, for example, it is an extremely rare event. It is so improbable that

mathematicians calculate it only happens once every two and a half million games (actually 2,598,960 games) or approximately once per year in the United States.

What if someone is dealt two royal flushes in a row? This is nearly an impossible event—if it happened to you in the days of the Wild West, you had a good chance of being shot as a cheater. Yet this consecutive event would still be caught by the second filter—it would just be a very improbable occurrence, but still within the bounds of nature.

Dr. Dembski has been so conservative in his calculations that an object or an event can only pass through the third filter if it has the probability of occurring with the frequency of 25 royal flushes in a row! Anything that would happen more frequently would be caught by the first or second filter and would not be classified as necessarily intelligently designed. He wants to be absolutely certain that what goes through the third filter is not caused by natural laws or

chance and can only be explained by an intelligent source.

Results of the test

When Dr. Dembski tests the bacterial flagellum (the means by which a bacteria can move) with the probability filters, it easily passes the threshold for design! Here is something not only highly improbable, but that has specific complexity. He calculates the probability of the flagellum's 40 proteins coming together by chance is the equivalent of being dealt 190 consecutive royal flushes! So it easily passes his barrier of 25 repeated royal flushes. Clearly something more than chance occurrence is involved here.

Dr. Dembski points out this method of determining whether something is intelligently designed or not has never produced false results. You can read more details and examples of these results in his book *No Free Lunch* (2002).

This test meets the rigorous scientific standards of probability. It is also objec-

tive, since it doesn't determine what intelligent source designed the end product that passed through the third filter and is based on empirical verification. The evolutionist critics, although vocal, have not been able to find a legitimate weakness in the method. DNA, RNA, proteins, plant and animal organs, for instance, all pass through the three filters and are classified as being intelligently designed.

This is therefore a powerful mechanism in the arsenal of the intelligent design movement. After Michael Behe's concept of irreducible complexity, Dr. Dembski's explanatory filter is a second major tool of the intelligent design movement against Darwinian evolution.

So when subjecting something to this exam of the three filters, if it passes the third one, even the famous Sherlock Holmes would conclude, "Elementary! It is intelligently designed."

Mario Seiglie is a father and the pastor of United Church of God congregations in Garden Grove, California, and Honolulu, Hawaii.

Intelligent Design vs. Evolution

In recent years intelligent design (ID) has been proposed by several prominent scientists as a better explanation for life than Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. While it would take multiple pages to fully document the ID position and the counterarguments of evolutionists, here is a brief summary.

An important point to keep in mind is that vertical thinkers don't exclude biblical evidence from their decision-making process. The Bible reveals that only fools would try to reason without this critical information (Psalm 14:1; Romans 1:20-22).—*Sean Yarbrough*

ID Argument	Evolutionist Response	Evolutionist Weaknesses
Three successive questions are used to detect design in living matter: Does natural law explain it? Does chance explain it? Does design explain it?	The process of elimination cannot be used to draw definitive scientific conclusions. It is necessary to have prior knowledge of design to detect its presence. There is no direct evidence for design.	No additional categories other than that of design have been proposed to explain what natural law or chance cannot. Of these, design is the only logical inference. There is no direct evidence for evolution.
Some biological structures could not have evolved from a simpler state. They are "irreducibly complex" and could not function without all parts fully assembled and operational. Partial, nonfunctioning structures would be disadvantageous and would not be passed on by natural selection.	Structures or parts of structures could have been dormant or used for other functions before being selected for their current role over long periods of time.	While components of some structures are arranged sequentially so that the successive removal of components never leads to the complete loss of function, components of irreducibly complex structures cannot be removed without such loss.
The large amount of information found in structures such as DNA forms a complex language and is a product of intelligence.	Inherent properties in the molecules of these structures appear to direct their own function.	Researchers are unable to identify these supposed properties.
Nature cannot create new information. It can only work with information already present.	This does not apply to biological systems. Simple life-forms can evolve into complex ones.	There is no evidence that one species has ever evolved into another.

Good Thoughts and Your Computer

Playing computer games is a common pastime for many young people. Unfortunately, there are pitfalls to some cyber fun.

by Vince Szymkowiak

A 13-year-old goes into his bedroom and turns on his computer. Pretty typical so far. Within a few seconds, he sends a fictitious representation of himself out into cyberspace. This fictitious character, created by our 13-year-old friend, is a criminal. The criminal decides to rob a bank, and in the process shoots four people. This teenager spends one hour playing this game, enjoying every minute, and makes up various crime scenarios. Another hour goes by and homework that evening suffers.

Harmless make-believe? Not really. The scenario described is, in fact, a real trend as teenagers enter the world of cyberspace. According to a recent *U.S. News & World Report* article (May 21, 2007, p. 66), some are creating "avatars" (or virtual representative of themselves) and using the computer to instruct their avatar to do just about anything.

The article mentions a 15-year-old who pretended that her avatar was a "cyberprostitute." The immoral behavior in this "parallel life" has been rationalized away as harmless because it was only make-believe.

What does the Bible say about pretending to harm others? And what does the Bible say about acting out an imaginary life of prostitution? Is it just harmless fun?

Thoughts are important

God's Word is very plain in this regard. God clearly explains that we are responsible for all of the thoughts and attitudes that come through our minds. Evil thoughts should be replaced by good thoughts before these thoughts become sin. Harmful attitudes should also be replaced by wholesome attitudes.

God tells us we are to cast down "arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, *bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ*" (2 Corinthians 10:5, emphasis added). Proverbs 23:7 says, "For as he thinks in his heart, so is he." And Jesus made it clear that dwelling on wrong thoughts in one's mind is sin (compare Matthew 5:28).

The real person, the one we really are, is made up of the sum total of our innermost thoughts. We are responsible for our thoughts, no matter how make-believe they may seem to be.

Bad thoughts often come into our minds, seemingly out of nowhere. The Bible refers to these thoughts as

"fiery darts" thrown at us by the devil (Ephesians 6:16). The devil did so with Judas: "The devil... put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot... to betray Him" (John 13:2). Judas, instead of repenting of those thoughts and throwing them out of his mind, dwelt on them and let them grow into a plan. Then he carried out the plan of betraying Jesus. He should have rejected those bad thoughts immediately!

The book of James tells us that we all are tempted and that if we continue to desire that bad temptation, it will give birth to sin, which, if not repented of, results in death (James 1:12-15). We are responsible for our thoughts; we must cast any and every evil thought out of our minds before it festers.

Keys to overcoming

One good way to overcome bad thoughts is to replace them with good thoughts. Romans 12:21 tells us, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." Think on positive things. Get some exercise. Listen to good music. Even petting the family dog can help us reject negative thoughts!

Exercise restraint when you use the Internet. You may think no one is watching you as you click on various Web sites, but truly God and His angels see all that you do. Avoid the porn sites. Get the software to block them. Don't make friends with strangers in some chat room just because they sound so genuine. They could actually be predators who may try to meet you. Don't create avatars that break the Ten Commandments. Don't even enter the world of cyber make-believe.

God urges us to always keep our thoughts pure, to think on things that are true and good (Philippians 4:8). Godly thinking leads to positive behavior and a happy life. Negative thinking leads to negative behavior and a depressing, unhappy life.

Above all, we need to strive to please God every day. As the Psalms say, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart [the thoughts in my mind] be acceptable in Your sight" (Psalm 19:14).

And if you have a fantasy avatar that is involved in bank robbery, prostitution or other sin, why not get on your computer and delete it?

Vince Szymkowiak is a father and the pastor of United Church of God congregations in St. Louis and Rolla, Missouri, and Fairview Heights, Illinois.

Want to read more? Read it online or download a PDF of our booklet here:

www.GNmagazine.org/booklets



Collateral Damage

Continued from page 14

to read Darwin's book so his friend would also understand that "talk about God is nonsense" (ibid.). With reassurance from Darwin that there was no God with rules against killing other human beings, Stalin felt justified in holding his own values. He had no qualms about murdering millions of his countrymen in an effort to build a better state.

In Nazi Germany, Adolf Hitler's concept of breeding a master race was based on the "survival of the fittest" concept inherent in Darwin's philosophy. Whether or not Darwin's own views were racist, his theory and even the full title of his book—*On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*—aligned with Hitler's racist worldview and his killing of 6 million Jews in his effort to build a superrace.

Again, if we don't rely on God for the truth that it is wrong to murder other human beings, people's choices simply become matters of personal opinion.

Is the killing of millions of people the outcome Charles Darwin desired in writing *The Origin of Species*? Of course not. But the collateral damage associated with Darwinism doesn't end with Stalin and Hitler. It has continued its relentless march through numerous fields with perhaps none more striking than that of moral conduct.

If people are animals, as Darwin suggested, there is nothing wrong with them mating with whomever and whenever they wish. Disregarding biblical instructions governing our sexual conduct has led to the destruction of numerous families and untold heartache. Chalk it up to collateral damage.

Furthermore, if people are simply animals, then it really doesn't matter if a woman chooses to have an abortion. With this mind-set, millions of babies have been aborted before they ever drew their first breath. More collateral damage.

When writing *The Origin of Species*, did Darwin anticipate that his philosophy would be instrumental in destroying marriages and snuffing out the lives of millions of babies? Surely not. But a faulty premise inevitably leads to faulty conclusions. The negative effects of immoral conduct justified by Darwin's theory continue to add up.

How strange that so many support a mistaken idea that has evolved into a materialistic philosophy devaluing human life and undermining mankind's faith in his Creator. How sad to see all the unnecessary heartache. Why not acknowledge God as God and choose to live a lifestyle of blessing and restoration, not of collateral damage?

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

Absolute Truth

Continued from page 15

Vertical thinkers caught in the crossfire of today's culture war need to understand the frightening implications of a society without absolute moral truth. If there is no objective standard of behavior, nothing can be labeled as "wrong." If the majority of people began to tolerate pedophilia and euthanasia, then sex with children and killing sick people would no longer be considered wrong. Sexual assault, theft and other violations of our liberty and property could cease to be treated as criminal.

Intolerance

And here we come to the crux of the matter. While people who claim there are no moral absolutes often speak of showing tolerance toward all beliefs and values, there is at least one value that relativists can seemingly never manage to accept: intolerance. Yet they can also be quite intolerant themselves.

Ask any self-proclaimed moral relativist if there is anything that he or she cannot tolerate and you will likely get a list of attitudes and practices ranging from racism to genocide. Clearly, these things are evil and should not be tolerated. However, our very refusal to tolerate evil

Our very refusal to tolerate evil assumes the existence of moral absolutes. But without a set of objective principles to guide our thinking, evil is just different.

assumes the existence of moral absolutes. But without a set of objective principles to guide our thinking, evil is just different.

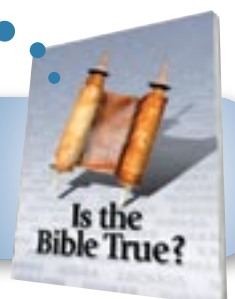
We can come to know and understand absolute truths about morality and human behavior through studying the Bible.

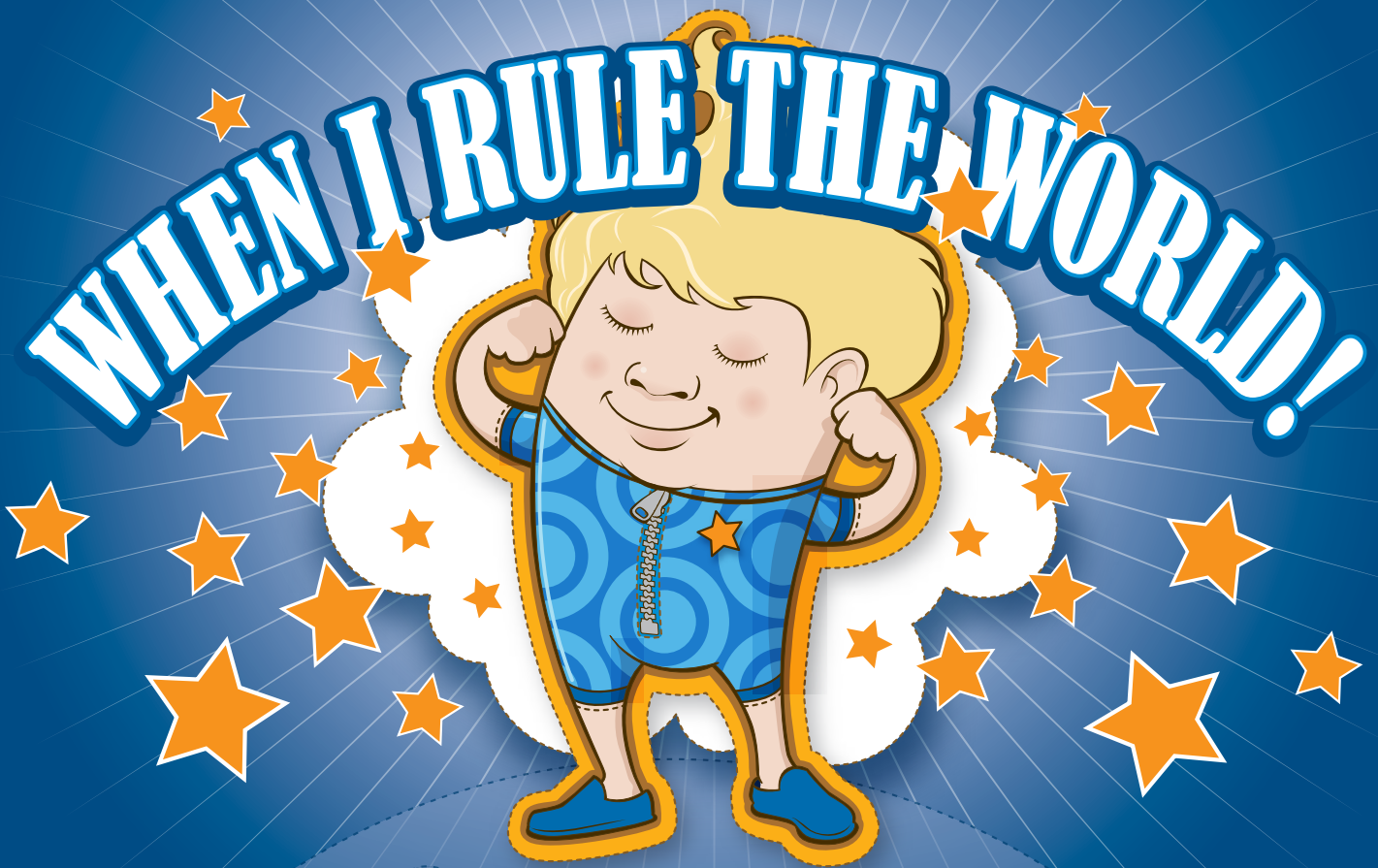
Don't let anyone, even your philosophy professor, fool you into believing he or she is morally neutral or that absolute truth simply doesn't exist. In fact, the next time someone tells you there is no such thing as truth, you can honestly say, "That's just *your* opinion."

Sean Yarbrough is an occupational therapist with Tampa, Florida, General Hospital's spinal cord injury program.

Want to read more? Read it online or download a PDF of our booklet here:

www.GNmagazine.org/booklets





Not observing popular holidays and keeping the Sabbath were awkward for me. When I was young, I talked big; later, a conversation with my parents helped me understand.

by Kristin Yarbrough

The snow was piling up outside the classroom window, and I had nothing to do but watch it. I usually had music class right after lunch, but today I was sequestered—along with two boys who were Jehovah’s Witnesses—away from the rest of the second-graders while they practiced for the annual Christmas program. Missing the candy and songs at our Halloween party was still fresh in our minds.

“I’m sick of this!” I told the boys. “We miss all the fun, and these stupid holidays aren’t even real. Why does everyone keep them?”

“But everybody thinks they’re real,” one of them explained. “That’s why they do it.”

“Well, when I rule the world, no one will keep them,” I answered. “We’ll do things my way then.” One major point of understanding—the fact that I would be assisting Jesus Christ in His role of King of Kings—momentarily eluded this power-hungry 7-year-old.

“And I will be in charge,” I added. “The Bible says so.”

However, that time didn’t come in second grade. Or in third or fourth. When I entered middle school, missing parties and cupcakes was replaced by skipping Friday night dances and my team’s Saturday volleyball tournaments. It seemed that observing God’s Holy Days and Sabbaths made me miss out on too much fun. By high school, the idea of sitting at home while my friends were

at football games and proms was just too much.

Late one Saturday afternoon, after we came home from church services, I told my parents that I would not be going back with them the next week. They told me that they were disappointed, but knew they couldn’t force their beliefs on me.

“Oh, it’s not that I don’t believe what you believe,” I told them. “I’m just sick of missing all the fun on Friday nights and Saturdays.”

That didn’t sit well with my father. “You know, even if you don’t go to church anymore, it doesn’t mean we’re going to help you get to places on Saturday,” he said.

“But that’s the whole point!” I whined.

My mother tried a different approach. “You know, if you didn’t believe in the Sabbath, that would be one thing,” she said. “But if you believe what the Bible says is true and ignore it anyway, that’s a real problem.”

“Why?” I retorted. “Well, the Bible says that God has no forgiveness for those who understand His way of life but choose another path,” she explained.

I thought about this prospect. “So then what would happen to me if Jesus Christ returned?” I asked.

As usual, my mother answered gently. “Those who obey God’s law will rule with Christ for a thousand years after His return,” she said. “And those who died without ever

understanding His laws or even hearing of Christ will have their opportunity after the Millennium. God will deal with the rest of the people later. He is the only one who knows what's in their hearts and could know what they really understood," my mother told me.

I sat in silence for a while. As far back as I could remember, I had always known that I could help rule the world after Christ's return. But I hadn't really thought about what I had to do to make God's promise a reality. Revelation, the book that explains the most about that time, looked like a good place to start.

I didn't have to read too far. Just a couple pages in, Revelation 2:26 says God will give power to those who keep His works until the end.

Hmmm. Since the end hadn't come yet, I guessed that keeping His laws was still a requirement. And it made sense. I knew that God would require people to keep His laws and Holy Days in the Kingdom. I knew this because I remembered hearing a scripture about Egypt being cursed for refusing to attend the Feast of Tabernacles (Zechariah 14:18). Jesus had said in the Gospels that God's law was still in effect, and if it was required back then, and required in the future, I knew it was required now.

A few books back, 2 Timothy 2:12 backed up my conclusion: "If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us."

That sounded pretty scary, a lot worse than staying home during some Friday night football games. I decided to look up one more verse—one about God's other promises for the Kingdom. In Luke 18:29-30, Jesus told His disciples that they would be rewarded for the things they had to give up in order to obey Him: "There is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come eternal life."

That settled it. To follow God, others had obviously missed out on much more than I had. I hated to admit it, but I'd rather have given up a dance than my brother, even when he asked me to drive him to the movies.

The next morning, I told my parents that I would be going to church services with them the next Sabbath and promptly forgot about our conversations and my study until the next Feast of Trumpets. But when the minister read the passage about meeting Christ in the air, I smiled inwardly. I was glad I'd made the decision that gave me a chance to assist Christ in ruling the world. Then, maybe we could even have football games after sundown on Saturday night.

If you'd like to learn more about what days we should observe, be sure to download or request our free booklets *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Keep?* and *Sunset to Sunset: God's Sabbath Rest*.

Kristin Yarbrough is a freelance writer who lives in Brandon, Florida, with her husband Sean and daughter Katie.

SQ (Spiritual Quotient)

Continued from page 5

purpose for living, His revealed education increases your spiritual quotient.

We human beings can only reach our full potential when SQ, IQ and EQ all work in harmony. The parable of the talents (Matthew 25) demonstrates that developing our talents is worthwhile, but the goal must be to also follow the laws of God and understand His purpose for our lives. We must remember that when we die, we don't get to take any physical things with us, only our hopefully well-developed (converted) mind. God then promises to raise us up as immortal beings.

In the first book of the Bible, Genesis, God gave man the responsibility to manage the creation. This included dominion (rule) over the animals (Genesis 1:26). Also, as custodian of the earth, man was to dress and keep his environment, which wasn't a jungle but a garden designed by God Himself. When we understand that we have the responsibility of stewardship of the earth, there should follow a sense of duty to our Creator and Benefactor.

Our Creator wants us to
work together as a family.
After all, that's what He has
in mind for us for eternity!

Understanding and accepting this God-assigned responsibility should also help us realize that our Creator wants us to learn to work together as a part of a family. After all, that is what He has in mind for us for eternity.

God wants mankind to learn the way of life that produces peace and joy for all. A person is often the most miserable when consumed solely with self-interest and when he shuns contact with others. God made us to enjoy relationships, including an eternal relationship with Him.

Explaining this to His disciples and us today, Jesus said, "No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you" (John 15:15).

What is your spiritual quotient? A good way to develop it is to read your Bible and keep reading *Vertical Thought*. If you do, you may be surprised by how much your IQ and EQ will rise as well.

Larry Greider is national director of the United Youth Camps and Challenger II programs and pastors the United Church of God congregation in Los Angeles, California.



Downside of Texting

Texting, the routine typed messages zipping between cell phones, has become the latest emblem of the teenage world. From Saudi Arabia to the Philippines to the United States, texting has gained popularity largely because it is secretive and provides a sense of group identity. However, some experts are worried that the shallowness of constant texting to the exclusion of face-to-face interaction or even phone conversation will cause developmental problems in young people.

Wireless companies are creating new packages for parents to purchase that allow unlimited text messaging in response to phone bills of epic proportions from their kids overusing the text feature. Parents are likewise having a hard time understanding this new standard of youth culture and its implications for the future (Margaret Pressler, "For Texting Teens... When the Phone Bill Arrives," *Washington Post*, May 20, 2007).

Given these concerns, instead of texting, be sure to also develop camaraderie through face-to-face conversation. This will help build stronger bonds of friendship as well as the use of language skills.

1,000%

The increase in the number of couples who live together without marrying since 1960—

Associated Press, May 11, 2007

>In the News<

Compiled by Amanda Stiver

Internet Privacy—Impossible

Privacy settings on Web sites like MySpace and Facebook are proving to be less than confidential. Employers are searching such Web sites to find information on potential employees. For young people applying for work, realize that photos, writing or activities on the Web are open to those who know how to look—even if they are under a privacy setting. "Think of it as being in a very large, public place like Yankee Stadium, taking the microphone and broadcasting your personal information to 50,000 people there. If you don't want everyone in the stadium to know the details of your personal life, then keep them to yourself," suggests Theresa O'Neill, a career counselor at Rutgers University–Newark (Wayne Parry, "Private Photos? Not on the Internet," *Associated Press*, July 13, 2007).

Computer-Gaming Dependency

The medical community is taking addiction to the fastest growing form of electronic game in the world—the Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game (MMORPG)—seriously. Dr. Maressa Hecht Orzack, a clinical psychologist and director of the Computer Addiction Study Center at McLean Hospital, Belmont, Mass., hopes that computer gaming addiction, which affects millions of people, will soon be added to the official list of compulsive disorders. The Smith & Jones addiction consultancy in the Netherlands is comparing MMO (massively multiplayer online) withdrawal to drug addiction. Other experts are comparing the similarities in the brain's chemical reaction to computer gaming to that of compulsive gambling ("Massively Addictive," www.videogames.yahoo.com, July 13, 2007). Dr. Orzack relates symptoms that might indicate a gaming problem: ignoring friends, avoiding or being late for work and deteriorating family relationships. Activities that take precedence over our responsibilities to God, our family and friends are not in accordance with God's will for our lives. Sixty hours a week of computer gaming time qualifies as a job, not a hobby.



Fashion Sensibility

Famed clothing designer Liz Claiborne died recently and her legacy is a company that offered "attire that was feminine, affordable, easy to care for, and, most important, 'appropriate.'" Sadly the much of the fashion world has not embraced those ideas. Instead, lingerie stock now changes with the seasons because younger women are not embarrassed to wear inner-wear as outer-wear (Naomi Riley, "In the



Stacy London

World of Women's Wear: Sense and Sensibility," *The Wall Street Journal*, July 6, 2007).

TV personality Stacy London, host of TLC network's *What Not to Wear*, has this

to say about overexposing clothing trends: "You don't want to show too much skin at work—unless you're a lifeguard." She bewails the tendency of designers to produce clothes that are impossible to wear without exposing excessive quantities of skin, including mini and babydoll dresses. Likewise she tries to inform viewers that pajamas aren't appropriate outside of the house. Ms. London credits her father with instilling "a certain sense of propriety and right and wrong in me, which plays into my fashion sensibility" (*ibid.*).

Colleges Decline Disclosure

Presidents of 46 liberal arts colleges have refused to participate in parts of the *U.S. News & World Report* annual survey of higher education institutions in the United States. They imply that the rankings are misleading to prospective students. While it seems to be a stand against the stressful college admissions process, columnist Robert Samuelson believes it is just the opposite. He contends that “the ranking tables also expose users to masses of objective, comparative information: SAT scores, acceptance rates, graduation rates, student-faculty ratios.” While the report cannot give complete accuracy to readers, he doesn’t feel that colleges will provide alternative, unbiased information to prospective students either. He concludes that students will learn “a life lesson in cynicism: how eminent authorities cloak their self-interest in high-sounding, deceptive rhetoric” (“Universities Teach Lesson in Cynicism,” *Investor’s Business Daily*, June 28, 2007).



Wait! There’s More ...

If you would like more “In the News” articles, jump over to our Web site. Once there, you can also find timely commentary on current events that affect you!

VerticalThought.org

Jeremiah Details Confirmed

In the halls of the British Museum, as reported by *The Daily Telegraph*, Michael Jursa, a professor from Vienna, made an astounding discovery among a collection of 130,000 ancient Mesopotamian cuneiform tablets. While studying the tablets for Babylonian financial accounts, Professor Jursa came across the name of Nabu-sharrussu-ukin, the chief eunuch of Nebuchadnezzar II, king of Babylon. Comparing the 2,500-year-old tablet with the biblical account, he found in the book of Jeremiah a reference to Babylonian

chief official Nebo-Sarsekim (39:3, NIV), the same individual, but spelled differently in Hebrew. The tablet records his payment of 0.75 kilograms of gold to a temple in Babylon. British Museum expert Dr. Irving Finkel said: “This

is a fantastic discovery, a world-class find. If Nebo-Sarsekim existed, which other lesser figures in the Old Testament existed? A throwaway detail in the Old Testament turns out to be accurate and true. I think that it means that the whole of the narrative [of Jeremiah] takes on a new kind of power” (“Tiny Tablet Provides Proof for Old Testament,” *The Daily Telegraph*, July 13, 2007).



HPV Vaccine Under Question

The effectiveness of the recently approved vaccination for human papillomavirus has come under question in an editorial in the *New England Journal of Medicine*. The vaccine, called Gardasil and owned by Merck & Co., proved 98% effective at preventing precancerous lesions of the cervix from two variants of the HP virus, HPV 16 and 18. However, the efficacy of the vaccine dropped to 17% when all precancerous lesions were considered in the study funded by Merck. Experts have suggested caution regarding the immediate use or even the legislation of inoculation, as was attempted by the state of Texas. Too many questions are unanswered regarding overall effectiveness, time-length of protection and potential adverse side effects. Concern has been raised over the fact that replacement may occur. If the vaccine removes the damaging effects of HPV 16 and 18, other variants of the virus may fill in and continue to cause cancerous lesions (John Carreyrou and Keith Winstein, “Medical Journal Questions Efficacy of HPV Vaccine,” *The Wall Street Journal*, May 10, 2007).

140dB

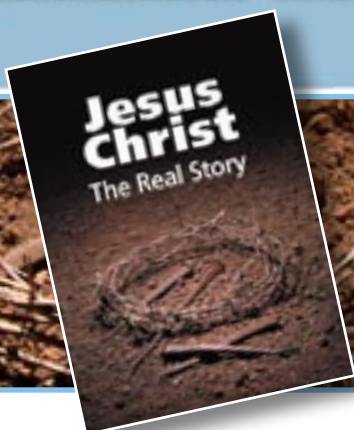
Peak sound levels of a rock concert. Frequent exposure to sounds above 85 decibels can damage your hearing— Bernadine Healy, M.D., *U.S. News & World Report*, July 16, 2007

Hooked Up and Disturbed

“Hooking up” is the term that, sadly, defines the sexual lives of teenagers, especially young women. The practice of casual sex, encouraged by the media and entertainment industry, turns out to be even more dangerous than previously thought. Laura Sessions Stepp, in her book *Unhooked: How Young Women Pursue Sex, Delay Love, and Lose at Both*, analyzes the reasons the hooked-up culture is so devastating for women. She asserts that the bad habits picked up from hooking up with multiple sexual partners on a regular basis can damage the potential for long-term commitment in marriage. Oxytocin, a hormone produced in the brain, promotes feelings of connection and love and

is produced by breast-feeding mothers, helping them bond with their children. It is also produced during sex. Males produce less of this chemical during sex, and it is suppressed by testosterone. Stepp asserts that this is why girls are in turmoil after casual sex and boys are less affected. Girls are not prepared for the emotional toil of hooking up, and this often leads them into alcohol abuse, anorexia, and emotional disturbance (Barbara Meltz, “Hooking Up Is the Rage, but Is It Healthy?” *The Boston Globe*, Feb. 13, 2007). God’s law provides the solution to this problem. It prohibits sex outside of single, monogamous, heterosexual marriage. Reestablishing right behavior after having been absorbed by the hook-up culture is a difficult task, but not impossible when actively seeking God’s help and His way of life.

How do you think of **Jesus Christ?**



If you're going to think about
Him at all, you need to have
accurate information.

Request your **FREE** booklet:

Jesus Christ: The Real Story



← New content served up weekly!

- *Vertical Thought* Commentary
- *Vertical Thought* Web articles
- Answers to your every question
- Archived articles for reading and research

www.VerticalThought.org