

Who Is a Christian?

PIG + LIPSTICK

Samson's Weakness

July—September 2008

# verticalthought®

*a magazine of understanding for tomorrow's leaders*



# Game On!

**Trumpets,  
Trumpets  
Everywhere!**

**Answers From Genesis**

**Christian Youth in Nigeria**

# Untangling the Web

**T**he Internet has come a long way since it first began as a way for universities and government agencies to communicate. In recent years it has become available to almost everyone. And young people lead the way in accepting this technology. After all, young people today have grown up with the Internet and are generally quite comfortable communicating and getting their information via the Internet.

Matching our readership's ready acceptance of the Web, *Vertical Thought* and its predecessor, *Youth United*, have always been e-magazines. Unlike many publications that began as printed magazines and then moved to the Web, our Internet presence came first. Three years later we changed our name and began printing our magazine as well as making it available online.

Of course, it's one thing to be techno-savvy and another to be techno-smart. A recent incident illus-

trated that the ability to use the Internet doesn't necessarily represent intelligence or vertical thinking.

At Brooklyn High School on Long Island, New York, it was discovered that three 14-year-old girls beat up a 12-year-old girl because they claimed that the victim had told lies about them on the Internet. Not only did the bullies engage in ugly, ungodly conduct, they had someone film the beating and then posted it on the Internet.

Even though the beating took place on school grounds, school administrators had no knowledge of the incident until they were told of the video. Apparently the perpetrators decided to put the incident on the Web because others had filmed fights and posted them.

What this incident illustrates is the fact that the Internet is a highly public forum. What we post has the potential to be viewed by anyone with Internet access. Sadly, many have posted immodest pictures or made statements that cost them opportunities at colleges and jobs. They were surprised that people saw them on the Internet. Because so many people have created their own personalized pages, this issue of *Vertical Thought* addresses this subject in our lead article: "Facebook and MySpace: A Young Christian's Guide to Using Social Network Sites."

Continuing our focus on the Internet, our follow-up article, "The Good and Bad of Gaming," addresses the growing phenomenon of online gaming. In conjunction with this form of entertainment, many people are now said to be suffering from Internet addiction—meaning they spend too much time online.

The Internet has many benefits and is undoubtedly here to stay. Indeed, Web developers are already planning the next generation of the Web that will be far more powerful. All of this meshes with the biblical prophecy that knowledge will greatly increase at the time of the end (Daniel 12:4).

Since it seems unlikely that the Internet is going to disappear, doesn't it make sense to consider some vertical thinking on how to use it in a godly manner? This issue is dedicated to helping you steer clear of the ungodly tangles associated with the Web.



*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. © 2008 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

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# Facebook & MySpace:

## A Young Christian's Guide to Using Social Network Sites

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People

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### David Myers

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### Start Here >>

#### What do hundreds of thousands—even millions—of people check daily?

Maybe even several times a day? Their blood sugar? Their bank account? Their attitude? No! They log on to the Internet and check their social network site! Whether it be on Facebook, MySpace, Friendster, hi5, Cyworld, Bebo or any number of other sites, experiencing a part of life through a social network site is a daily routine for millions.

Social network sites have quickly become one of the primary ways young people communicate with each other. Through our personal pages on these sites we share our current mood or our latest digital pictures. We use the sites to exchange thoughts, jokes, blogs, songs and videos.

We let the world know who we are through our personal online profile. We proclaim to the Internet world what we like and dislike, what makes us happy or sad and certainly what makes us unique. These sites can be a great way to communicate with our best friends, reconnect with long lost friends and even meet new people.

For all the enjoyment that can come through these sites, are there also cautions that vertical thinkers should take note of so that their social network site experience is positive? When we set up or edit our profile, what should be foremost on a vertical thinker's mind? Following are several questions we recommend you ask as you explore the world through social network sites.



### Do I properly represent God?

Many people are inherently selfish and for the most part live just for themselves. Their profiles reflect this focus. Vertical thinkers understand that while their profiles tell the world about themselves, there is a more important focus.

They know that Ephesians 5:8 states, "For you were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; *walk as children of Light*" (New American Standard Bible, emphasis added throughout). Their home pages are not just to represent themselves, but to be reflections of what and in whom they believe.

If you take a look at your page, is there something there that indicates that you are a vertical thinker—a Christian? Or does your page look just like everyone else's? Is there something there that identifies you as a person of faith in God the Father and Jesus Christ, convicted and convinced of truth?



### Do I avoid foul language?

Does our use of language prove us to be a child of light or a child of darkness? If our page contains swear words, cuss words, base slang, euphemisms or sexual innuendo, are we reflecting light or furthering darkness? Colossians 3:8 tells us this: "But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, *filthy communication* out of your mouth" (King James Version). In principle, that means off your page too!

While we might not use this language when we speak, it has been shown that it's easier for many people to type these things than to speak them. Vertical thinkers will remove offensive language from their pages so that they properly represent their Savior, Jesus Christ.



### Do I avoid inappropriate topics?

Are there inappropriate topics on your page or your blog? As a representative of light, a young Christian is careful to be sure that the topics he or she has posted are uplifting. Subjects such as sexual activity, perversion, disrespect, character assassination, etc., have no place on a young Christian's page. Ephesians 5:11-12 tells us, "Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret" (NASB).

Also remember that when you apply for a job, potential employers often take a look at the social network sites of potential employees. Are there topics on your page that would embarrass you in the eyes of employers or cause them to reject you? Or does the content of your site confirm that you would be a good future employee?



### Are my pictures appropriate?

Are there suggestive or inappropriate pictures on your page? Our world seems bent on raising sexiness to be the highest of virtues. Vertical thinkers do not fall

**Stats:****How many teens in the U.S. have a social networking profile?****66 percent of girls from 13-17****50 percent of boys from 13-17****How many teens in the U.S. have an online journal or blog?****34 percent of girls from 13-17****20 percent of boys from 13-17**

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Teen/Parent Survey on Writing, September-November 2007. Margin of error is  $\pm 5$  percent.

**End Here >>****A few final questions**

To help us decide on the content of our pages, there are a few other questions we want to ask. Would our parents approve of our page? Would your mother (no matter how old you are) be embarrassed by something on your pages? Are you trying to hide something from your parents? If so, change is needed.

Would your pastor approve of your page? Vertical thinkers also realize that they represent their church family. Would people be attracted to the truth of the Bible and the church you are part of by the example you set on your social network site?

And most important, would God approve of your page? We are reminded in 2 Chronicles 16:9 (NASB) that "the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His." While our profile might be set to "private" to keep others from seeing our page and posts, vertical thinkers know that nothing is a secret from God.

The popularity of social network sites will no doubt continue to grow. Let's encourage each other to use ours in a godly manner. "Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe" (1 Timothy 4:12, NASB).

into the trap of posting seductive, racy or sexy pictures of themselves or others on their pages.

God's Word tells us, "Your adornment must not be merely external—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God" (1 Peter 3:3-4, NASB). Modesty and decorum should rank high on a young Christian's list as he or she decides what to post.

How about drinking pictures? Do our party pictures look just like those of horizontal thinkers? Or do our posted images reflect godly living? In the world of digital photography young people need to be aware of when and where their pictures are being taken. One bad judgment resulting in an embarrassing photo can speed around the world in a matter of minutes and then never go away!

From: [I wish I'd thought before I posted that!](#)



One bad judgment resulting in an embarrassing photo can speed around the world in a matter of minutes and then never go away!

We should also be aware that our pages can be archived and thereby preserved indefinitely. Poor judgment in posting pictures can haunt us from that time forward. Pictures that seemed fun at the time, when viewed in another context, are seen to say something different from what we intended. It is important to set our profile to "private" to help protect ourselves and our friends. This way, only those we designate as our friends will have access to our photos and other material.

**Are my songs in line with right values?**

Another way we identify ourselves as children of light is through the music we choose to listen to.

Are there inappropriate songs on your page? Do the songs you post contain raw lyrics? Are the lyrics of the songs uplifting? Are they more representative of light, or of darkness?

There are some songs that God says He detests. "Take away from Me the noise of your songs; I will not even listen to the sound of your harps" (Amos 5:23, NASB). Vertical thinkers will strive to choose music that brings honor to God and to themselves.

**Are the links on my page acceptable?**

Young Christians also need to ask themselves, "Are there inappropriate links on my page?" One of the biblical proverbs states, "He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm" (Proverbs 13:20, NASB).

The sites we link to can be seen as representing who we are. Do we post links to dark, vulgar, disrespectful sites? Or do the links we post encourage others in the direction of godly thinking and action? Are they helpful and interesting or disrespectful and degrading?

# The Good and Bad of Gaming

**Computer games are a waste of time! They are violent and ruin relationships. No, computer games are good! They help develop hand-eye coordination and online games help build relationships with others. Who's right?**

by Ken Treybig

**C**omputer gaming is big business. According to Barbara Ortutay, almost \$18 billion was spent on video games in the United States in 2007 ([www.msnbc.msn.com/id/22718374/](http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/22718374/)). Earlier this year, Rockstar Games took in a record \$500 million on worldwide sales of 6 million copies in the first week of release of *Grand Theft Auto IV*.

Games also attract a wide audience. Entertainment Software Association ([theesa.com](http://theesa.com)) reports that today's gamers include all generations and that almost equal numbers of females play computer and video games as do males. About 35 percent of American parents play, and, of those that do, 66 percent feel that playing games has brought their families closer together.

**While computer gaming has its downsides, gaming has also been shown to provide benefits to players. It's all about how it's used.**

Yet some adults believe the worst about computer gaming. They know of or have heard of people who have lived out the horror stories of being addicted to gaming and lost a job or a family over it.

## The good of gaming

However, not every gamer follows that path. In fact, one study at Arizona State University shows that trainee surgeons who play a Nintendo Wii game called *Marble Mania* demonstrate improved accuracy and faster performance in many surgical exercises. The Wii design allows players to control the game using physical gestures as well as the traditional button pushes. *Marble Mania* players roll marbles along narrow pathways and ledges, deftly tilting things to keep the marble advancing in the game.

Cumberland Elementary School in Indiana is

reported to have begun using three Wii consoles in classrooms to teach geography, math and English. The increased interaction and fun of the game system is quite popular with students. In addition, the Wii interface is being used in some hospitals to help with physical rehabilitation.

On the more personal side, a number of gamers have met online, developed a personal relationship outside the cyber world and are now happily married in real life.

## The bad of gaming

But what about those horror stories? Are they all fictional? No, there are real horror stories in the gaming world. In researching this article, I spoke with gamers who say their gaming was a factor in their losing jobs and families.

Sam (not his real name), worked for a gaming company in the 1980s and 90s. In 2002 he began playing *EverQuest*, one of the longest running massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPG), which celebrated its ninth anniversary on March 16, 2008. Many have nicknamed the game "NeverRest" and "EverCrack" (a reference to crack cocaine). Sam played for five years and says his game playing was definitely a factor in his divorce.

According to Sam, there are a number of reasons people get pulled into spending more and more time in these MMORPGs. To begin with, you can be a very different person than you are in real life, and that can be exciting. In addition, you are expected to develop your game character.

"For sure there's a lot of the 'keeping up with the Joneses' approach. If you see someone riding a horse instead of walking, you want to invest the time in the game to get a horse for your online character," according to Sam.

The social pressure comes because the really big victories in a quest (a planned online adventure activity) are only possible with a group, called a guild. Guilds schedule quests such as killing a dragon named Bob on a particular night and notify all their members. In some battles, if you don't have enough people with certain skills (such as "healers") you cannot win the battle, so there is great peer pressure to show up for events.

There is often a compensation system for attending quests, and if you don't earn enough points, you are not invited to participate again. So the pressure to play more and more to advance your character is intense.

As Sam put it, "There's never an end to the game, so if you're not playing, you feel like you're wasting time." That's why people will lose sleep staying up at night to play the online game, resulting in deteriorating performance at work due to fatigue, or will abandon real-life responsibilities, academics and relationships for their online life.

### The 911 of video games

Gerald Vera is a self-employed contract designer who creates game ideas. In his 13 years in the industry, games he has worked on have sold more than 10 million copies worldwide. Probably the most well-known game he was involved with is *Shrek2*. He has seen the industry make some big changes.

Describing the direction games are going, Gerald said, "The first games were more family-oriented, such as *Mario Brothers*. *Grand Theft Auto* is the 911 of video games in my mind because it crossed the bridge into reality."

It used to be taboo to show blood on-screen in a game during the '80s and '90s. If someone was shot, all you saw was a green splatter. Later, Gerald says, showing blood came into vogue and the race was on to make blood in a game more and more realistic, focusing even on the color and texture to achieve as true-to-life an image as possible.

There is an increasing demand for more interaction with games with a greater focus on realistic sounds as well. Within five years Gerald believes the next generation of games will have the look and feel of the real thing. The increasing focus on violence will have an impact on gamers.

In an article titled "Violent Video Games: Myths, Facts, and Unanswered Questions," Craig Anderson, Ph.D., states: "When one combines all relevant empirical studies using meta-analytic techniques, five separate effects emerge with considerable consistency. Violent video games are significantly associated with: increased aggressive behavior, thoughts, and affect [emotions]; increased physiological arousal; and decreased pro-social (helping) behavior" ([www.apa.org/science/psa/sb-anderson.html](http://www.apa.org/science/psa/sb-anderson.html)).

Christians are told to bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5), to get rid of anger, wrath and malice (the desire to hurt others) and to grow in peace, longsuffering, kindness and gentleness (Colossians 3:8; Galatians 5:22-23). These are direct opposites of the kinds of gratuitous violence that are becoming prevalent in many games.

### Language and sexuality

In addition to violence, swearing and filthy language have been added to modern games, again in the quest for more "reality." This, too, violates God's instructions. We're told to get rid of filthy language (Colossians 3:8) and not to let any obscenity, coarse joking or any kind of unwholesome talk come out of our mouths (Ephesians 5:4; 4:29).

It's important for a Christian to avoid letting filthy words into his or her mind since Christ said that out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks (Luke 6:45)—and once those words are in our minds, it can be hard to prevent them from coming out of our mouths. This is also a problem with online role-playing games according to Sam, since as a player you have no control over the subject matter being discussed by the guild on a quest.

As he described the progression of modern gaming, Gerald said that after showing more realistic violence and adding coarse language, the next boundary that fell was sexual content. More games

*Continued on page 21*

## Family-Friendly Games Make a Comeback

Some may think they're missing out on the most current games if they choose to avoid games that involve violence, bad language and sexuality. However, not only do they benefit immensely from following God's instructions in any case, but right now they can also enjoy a growing field of gaming.

Gamedaily.com reported in early April 2008 that with the Nintendo Wii and DS systems there is a growing demand for family-friendly casual gaming.



Sarah Anderson, 2K Games senior vice president of marketing, cited a recent consumer survey she conducted. When gamers were asked what they wanted most in a game, their top answer was "fun." "I've never seen that before," Anderson says. Previously, the top answers were "graphics" and "realism."

Gamedaily.com also reported on April 24, 2008, that Nintendo's fiscal year ended with soaring sales (over \$16 billion) and profits (nearly \$4.7 billion). Those represent 73 percent and 47 percent increases over the previous year.

**T**hink of the *Star Wars* trumpet fanfares composed by John Williams. Listen in your mind to morning reveille's rousing notes or evening taps' plaintive cry drifting down upon your ears.

God loves the sound of trumpets too.

Long ago God ordered trumpets blown to coordinate the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. Like more modern armies, trumpets directed and motivated the Israelite army in battle. He had His priest sound trumpets to announce religious events and ceremonies around His temple in ancient Israel.

With danger or great events on the line, you've got to have trumpets. Years ago a comedian imagined an army marching to a guitar: "Strummm ... here they come on the run. Strummm ... hurry up and get your gun. Strummm." Doesn't work, does it?

### **Horn horns and metal**

God likes trumpets, all kinds of trumpets made of metal or even horn. The earliest trumpet of the Bible was made from the horn of a ram or a bull and was called in Hebrew the *shofar*. As a simple

horn, the shofar played no variety of notes, but yielded a rich, haunting resonance or blast that could be heard over great distances. A signal horn to alert the locals in time of war, it was also a trumpet of celebration and praise toward God.

Metal trumpets, not unlike those used to play fanfares for Olympic Games ceremonies, served many purposes (see Numbers 10:1-10). The Bible first talks about a pair of silver

**TRUMPETS  
TRUMPETS  
EVERYWHERE**

*The reverberating echo of a distant trumpet stirs deep emotions and moves us to conviction and action. What does the Bible say about this instrument?*

by Randy Stiver

trumpets used during the Exodus and later in the Promised Land. Metal trumpets produced a more piercing and musical sound than the shofar.

In the priesthood of ancient Israel the number of trumpets grew to 120, accompanying the great choir and orchestra for religious musical performances at God's temple in Jerusalem (see 2 Chronicles 5:12-14).

### A festival made for trumpets

Extra trumpets were sounded longer and louder to herald the seven festivals or Holy Days that God gave His people—and ultimately all people, everywhere—to worship Him. The most trumpet-related of those annual Holy Days comes in the autumn in the northern hemisphere.

This Christian festival is called the Feast of Trumpets and, incidentally, corresponds to the Jewish New Year. God specifically designed it to be “a memorial of blowing of trumpets” (Leviticus 23:24). The Hebrew for “blowing of trumpets” is *teruah*, which denotes the alarm blast of the shofar.

Each of God's annual festivals illustrates something of His plan for man historically or prophetically. This one heralds the second coming of Jesus Christ. Every year these holy festivals let true believers relive history, past and future.

### Truth beats fiction to a pulp

Anticipating the return of Christ and the prophecies preceding it, the Feast of Trumpets features trumpet-blowing angels—seven of them. These angelic trumpets herald one earthshaking event after the other in the countdown to the Kingdom of God on earth.

The trumpet angels are described in Revelation, the last book in the Bible. Revelation reads like a dynamite combination of awe-inspiring but terrifying science fiction and an edge-of-your-seat techno-thriller. Truth beats fiction to a pulp.

### Seven angels, seven trumpets

After Jesus speaks, a host angel escorts John through the spiritual-virtual reality of the end of this evil world and the beginning of a new and incredible world tomorrow.

John lived before books had pages. The book of Revelation was a scroll—one long page rolled up and locked in its case, sealed so that only Christ was authorized to open it.

Seven seals sealed the scroll. The first four are also known as the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse—religious deception, war, famine and pestilence (see Revelation 6). *Apocalypse* is the Greek word for revelation.

The fifth seal is the Great Tribulation, a short but devastating time of trouble during which humanity will be threatened with extinction and the true followers of Jesus Christ persecuted (Matthew 24:21-24; Revelation 6:9-11).

The sixth seal signals the start of the great Day of the Lord, a time of divine intervention and retribution toward those who persecuted God's people. When this seal opens there are terrifying signs in the day and night skies—perhaps meteors and asteroids striking earth. It's scarier than science fiction because it's science fact.

The trumpets are coming! The opening of the seventh seal reveals seven trumpets: “And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets” (Revelation 8:2).

When each phenomenally powerful angelic being sounds his trumpet, cataclysmic environmental and battle devastations rock the planet and whoever is still alive (see Revelation 8 and 9).

### The seventh trumpet and hope

Stop and consider. In movies this imagery is all smoke, mirrors and computer-generated graphics—only make-believe. Not so in Revelation. This drama is *real*—to be believed.

Now comes the seventh trumpet of the seventh seal, the greatest trumpet of all the trumpets everywhere (see Revelation 11:15)! When the seventh angel blows his trumpet, the world has hope again. In the trumpet countdown to Christ's return, this is the final horn blown, so it is the “last trumpet” (1 Corinthians 15:52). Here's what happens when the events anticipated by the Feast of Trumpets unfold:

1. Jesus Christ returns to earth.
2. His true believers are resurrected (changed from physical to spiritual).
3. The nations or kingdoms of this world become Christ's kingdoms.
4. With the seventh trumpet's seven final judgments, Christ neutralizes the rebellious armies who resist Him (see Revelation 16).
5. The Kingdom of God on earth begins with divinely installed peace among men.

There are more details found in the prophecies. To learn about them, request or download your free copy of *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*.

### You and God's trumpets

Where do you fit? Did you notice the subtheme of the faithful and true believers? Only the few in this age understand the significance of God's annual Feast of Trumpets. The rest of mankind will understand later.

There will be trumpets, trumpets everywhere, but for those who know God's truth and choose to follow the true Jesus Christ of the Bible, their sound will in the end be very sweet.

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**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.

**A**sk someone who was the strongest man in the Bible and you'll likely hear "Samson." After all, it's not every day that one hears of a man who kills 1,000 men in hand-to-hand combat. Armed with only the jawbone of a donkey, Samson was one tough adversary (Judges 15:15). Set during the time of Israel's judges some 3,000 years ago, Samson's life was a highly unusual one—yet one that bears lessons for us today.

Samson's parents hadn't been able to have children when the "Angel," meaning Messenger, of the Lord appeared to the woman who would be Samson's mother. She and her husband Manoah came to realize that the Messenger on this occasion was actually God Himself (Judges 13:21-22; compare Exodus 3:1-14). It was not God the Father, whom no one

Having Samson live under the terms of a Nazirite vow—not drinking alcohol, not being defiled and not cutting his hair all the days of his life to signify his dedication to God—was highly unusual. Apparently, some people would undergo this vow for a short period of time, yet Samson was to do it for life. Incidentally, Samson is the first person we read about in the Bible to be called a Nazirite.

These events surrounding Samson's conception were clearly out of the ordinary, and there was another surprising announcement made by the Angel of the Lord. Samson, with God's help, was going to "begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines" (verse 5).

Just as they had been told, Manoah and his wife soon had their baby boy, whom they named Samson. God blessed Samson and, as he grew older, God began helping him by His Spirit (verses 24-25).

As we consider  
Samson's



# SAMSON

## Accomplishing God's Purpose—

*Some find it perplexing that this man with all his faults is among the faithful of Hebrews 11 who are awaiting God's Kingdom. What did he do to deserve this distinction? What can we learn from his life?*

by David Treybig

had ever seen or heard (compare John 5:37). Rather, it was the divine Word of God who was later born as Jesus Christ (see John 1:1-3, 14). This appearance was, of course, a highly unusual event.

The divine Messenger gave Samson's mother some good news. She was going to have a baby boy. But she was also told to be careful during her pregnancy to avoid alcohol and defiling food and, once the boy was born, not to ever cut his hair because he was to be a "Nazirite to God from the womb" (Judges 13:5). Here is another unusual request.

life, it is important for us to understand from the outset that God is not calling men today to imitate Samson's conduct. As a physical, carnal nation, ancient Israel waged war with other nations. New Testament Christians, however, look to future citizenship in God's Kingdom, which is not of this world, and do not fight in physical warfare, being ministers of life, not death (see Matthew 5:38-39, 43-44; John 18:36; 2 Corinthians 3:6).

God gave Samson the unique job of weakening the Philistine nation during the time of Israel's judges—a

job He is not giving to people today. Furthermore, like everyone, Samson did some things right and he also made mistakes.

### **Samson goes a-courting**

Soon after Samson matured, he saw a Philistine woman in Timnah whom he decided he wanted to marry (Judges 14:1-2). His parents wisely cautioned him against marrying outside his faith (verses 3-4). Yet Samson was adamant in his desire to marry her. Though his choice was not wise, God used this as a way to “move against the Philistines.”

On his way to Timnah, Samson was attacked by a young lion. With the help of God’s Spirit, he miraculously tore the lion apart with his bare hands (verse 6). He then visited his bride-to-be and apparently set a date for their wedding (verse 7).

When the date approached, Samson traveled back to Timnah and decided to check out the carcass of the lion he had killed on his previous trip. To his surprise, a swarm of bees had established a hive in the carcass and had produced some honey.

When they gave Samson the correct answer, he knew they had gotten it from the woman he was marrying.

“Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon him mightily, and he went down to Ashkelon and killed thirty of their men, took their apparel, and gave the changes of clothing to those who had explained the riddle. So his anger was aroused, and he went back up to his father’s house. And Samson’s wife was given to his companion, who had been his best man” (verses 19-20).

This marriage to someone outside Samson’s faith was a terrible tragedy on multiple counts. Samson’s eyes had deceived him into thinking that a woman of a different religion was the one he should marry. The woman faced a threat to her life and the lives of her family members. She betrayed her husband. Samson killed 30 Philistines and immediately went home to his parents without his wife, who was then given in marriage to another.

The only thing good about this sad chain of events was that God, through Samson, was beginning to weaken the Philistine nation.

# ON

## -the Hard Way

*God gave Samson the unique job of weakening the Philistine nation during the time of Israel’s judges. Furthermore, like everyone, Samson did some things right and he also made mistakes.*

At his wedding feast Samson decided to use the honey from a lion carcass as a riddle for 30 Philistine companions. If they could correctly solve the riddle in seven days, he would give them 30 changes of clothing. If they couldn’t, they’d have to give him the same. The riddle was: “Out of the eater came something to eat, and out of the strong came something sweet” (verse 14).

To make sure they got the answer and their new clothes, the 30 Philistines threatened Samson’s bride and her family with their lives if she didn’t tell them the answer to Samson’s riddle. So Samson’s wife-to-be “wept on him, and said, ‘You only hate me! You do not love me! You have posed a riddle to the sons of my people, but you have not explained it to me’” (verse 16).

Samson finally told her the answer—that bees had produced honey in the carcass of a lion—on the seventh day, and she immediately told the 30 Philistines.

### **More destruction of the Philistines**

After spending some time with his parents, Samson decided to go back to Timnah for his wife. Upon arrival he learned that she had been given in marriage to his best man. In revenge he “caught three hundred foxes; and he took torches, turned the foxes tail to tail, and put a torch between each pair of tails. When he had set the torches on fire, he let the foxes go into the standing grain of the Philistines, and burned up both the shocks and the standing grain, as well as the vineyards and olive groves” (Judges 15:4-5).

In their anger over the devastation to their crops, the Philistines burned the woman Samson had married and her father (verse 6), and in retaliation Samson killed more Philistines.

In destroying much of their food supply and killing more of their citizens, Samson now had the Philistines’ full attention, and they quickly came to arrest him. Samson allowed the men of Judah to bind

him with ropes and deliver him to the Philistines. But when the Philistines came to get him, God's Spirit again came upon him. Samson broke free of the ropes with which he had been bound, grabbed the jawbone of a donkey, killed 1,000 Philistines and secured Israel's freedom. Samson then became the judge over Israel for 20 years.

### **More trouble with women**

Toward the end of Samson's life, his eyes deceived him again. First it was a harlot at Gaza and then it was a woman named Delilah, who sought his confidence in order to betray him to the Philistines. Under relentless nagging, Samson finally told Delilah the secret of his strength—his faithfulness to his Nazirite vow to God, which forbade him from cutting his hair.

Armed with this key information, Delilah had Samson's hair cut while he was sleeping. In his weakened condition, the Philistines captured him, put out his eyes and put him in prison. But his hair began to grow again (Judges 16:17).

Falsely assuming that their god Dagon had delivered Samson into their hands, approximately 3,000 men

***Without doubt Samson made many mistakes. However, he did eventually yield to God's great purpose for his life and finished his life praying for God's help.***

and women (the Philistine leaders), gathered at the temple of Dagon to sacrifice in celebration. While there, they decided to bring Samson out to mock him. But the tables soon turned.

Though he could no longer see, Samson clearly understood God's purpose for his life—to weaken the Philistine nation. Standing between two pillars that supported the building, Samson asked God for extra strength to be avenged for the loss of his eyes and wreak final havoc upon the Philistines. God answered his prayer. Saying, "Let me die with the Philistines!" Samson pushed on the pillars and brought the temple crashing down (verse 30). He killed more Philistines at his death than he had during his whole life until then.

### **Lessons for today**

Without doubt Samson made mistakes when it came to choosing women and revealing information to

## Who Were the Philistines?

The Philistines were a race of people who lived mainly along the Mediterranean coast near the ancient Israelites. Their primary cities were Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron and Gath.

They were fierce warriors with superior iron-working skills and frequently fought with the Israelites. During the time of Israel's judges, they at times conquered the Israelites and required them to pay tribute. In Ezekiel 25:15-17 we find a prophecy of God punishing the Philistines because of their hatred and spiteful hearts toward the Israelites.

From the ancient name of their country, Philistia, comes the modern name of Palestine. It is possible that some of the Palestinians today are descendants of the Philistines.



them that he shouldn't have. However, he did eventually yield to God's great purpose for his life and finished his life praying for God's help to accomplish it. We can learn from both his mistakes and from what he did right.

Today, God has a purpose for each of our lives as well. He wants us to become children in His family (John 1:12). Will you accept the purpose for your life and live accordingly—and avoid doing it the hard way?

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# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT...

## Who Is a Christian?

**S**o what is a Christian? A couple of billion people on the planet all claim to be Christians, but their beliefs, doctrines and practices vary widely. What does being a *Christian* mean? Let's take a quick look at what the Bible says a Christian is.

The word *Christian* is used three times in the New Testament (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16). Followers of Jesus Christ were first called "Christians" in Antioch (Acts 11:26) because they believed in Christ and followed His example. The word was initially used by their detractors in a derogatory sense, but believers embraced the term as a badge of honor.

While the first-century Christians *did* follow the teachings, practices and example of Jesus Christ at that time, since then the term has virtually lost its meaning—as it's usually not accompanied by the same way of life and understanding. Today many claim to be Christians yet don't really follow Jesus' teachings.

### A Christian responds to God's calling

God's Word is quite clear that one cannot just choose to be a Christian! There is a calling or *invitation* involved. God is not calling all of mankind at this time (Matthew 22:14; John 6:44), nor the particularly rich, famous or powerful of the world (1 Corinthians 1:26-27).

God most often calls ordinary people who can more readily acknowledge their human weaknesses and learn God's way. These are people who have made mistakes, know it, yet appreciate the forgiveness that God extends to them (Matthew 21:23, 31-32). Children who have a parent who is a genuine Christian are all invited by God to also become Christians (Acts 2:38-39; 1 Corinthians 7:14).

To be a true Christian, a person must change—*really* change! Acts 2:37-39 shows that Christians must "repent" and walk a different way of life. After repentance, a Christian must also be baptized (immersed in water) by a servant of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38; 8:14-17).

In biblical terms, this process of change, of surrendering one's life and turning it over to God is called *conversion*. Obviously, a human being cannot change everything at once, but one can have a repentant attitude and turn in

the right direction, making basic changes as he or she embarks on a new path of overcoming sin, bearing "fruits worthy of repentance" (Matthew 3:8).

Following water baptism, God offers His Holy Spirit to the repentant believer (Acts 2:38). A person is not "of Christ" unless the Spirit of God is in him or her (Romans 8:9). This Spirit is imparted by the laying on of hands by an authorized representative of Jesus Christ (Acts 8:17-18). Through repentance, baptism and the receiving of God's Holy Spirit, a Christian is then able to understand the spiritual truth of God and His Word (1 Corinthians 2:11).

**God's Word is quite clear that one cannot just decide to be a Christian, one has to be invited!**

### The example of Jesus Christ

The apostle Paul also helps us understand what a Christian is by simply stating that we should imitate Paul as he imitated Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1). Later in the first century, the apostle Peter likewise reminded the Church that they were to follow Christ's example (1 Peter 2:21).

Christ's example included worshipping God on the Sabbath day (from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday) and on the Bible's annual Holy Days (Luke 4:16; John 7; compare Leviticus 23). His example also involved compassion and love for others (John 3:16; Matthew 9:36) along with keeping the commandments of God (Matthew 5:17-19).

Christians will understand the teachings and way of life in the Scriptures and will strive to live by them (Luke 4:4).

According to the Bible, a Christian is someone who responds to God's calling, repents of his sins, is baptized, receives God's Holy Spirit and lives as Jesus lived. While God expects us to be loving examples to our families and others (Matthew 5:13-16), Christians will put their calling before everything and everyone else! (Luke 14:26-33).

—Doug Horchak

# Being Christian in Nigeria

**In Nigeria it is extremely difficult for young people to become independent and able to live on their own.**

Due to extremely poor economic conditions, young men and women tend to live with their parents for as long as possible.

It is very common to see 30-year-old (or older) men and women still living at home even though they might be working. This is because young people need years of savings to be able to afford a simple place of their own and then save for a wedding. Even then, young people often depend on their parents and relatives to finance as much as 90 percent of the cost of the wedding.

Education is one of the few ways to improve one's lot, and there is often great pressure to sacrifice all—even one's religion—for the opportunity to succeed. In this difficult environment, three young people in the United Church of God prove that one can be Christian in Nigeria.



**Ronke decided to keep the Feast even though she knew it would mean failing the exam and perhaps losing an extra year.**

**Ibironke Abiona Akinbo** is 28 years old. "Ronke," as her friends call her, finished high school at age 15. It then took almost five years for her to secure a university admission to study law. She had gained admission once, but there were too many admitted and the school decided to revoke the admissions of the last 150 students. She was among them.

Now she is a student of law at the state university where she lives. Sadly, due to incessant strikes by lecturers or student riots protesting one issue or another, the school has closed many times. What she expected to be a five-year program has now extended to eight years.

In 2007, which was to be her final year, she learned there would be a mid-semester exam during the annual Feast of Tabernacles (see Leviticus 23:33-43), when she planned to be gone. Her friends urged her to cancel her plan to attend the biblical festival, but she decided to be true to her religious convictions and go anyway. Ronke decided to observe the Feast even though she knew it would mean failing the exam and perhaps losing an extra year. She decided to pray and hope that when she later sat for the final exams she would make a good enough grade to pass anyway.

After attending the Feast, she came home and took her final exams. Regrettably, she was not able to overcome the missing mid-semester exam and failed. She was really hurt and devastated. Even so, she was glad that she made the decision to attend the Feast anyway because God says to do so. And while Ronke is pained at having to lose an extra year for just that one exam, she says that she does not regret her decision and would not hesitate to make the same decision in the future!

by **Oludare Akinbo**

**Oludare Akinbo** and his wife Tohun have two children and live in Ikotun, Lagos, Nigeria. Mr. Akinbo is the associate pastor of the Nigerian congregations of the United Church of God.



**Femi Akinfolarin**, 23, is a soft-spoken, quiet young man. The church his family attends sits on a piece of land given to it within a large compound owned by his father. All of Femi's family attends this church. He, too, was an active member who played in the church band.

Then he came across a copy of *The Good News* magazine at a friend's house. He liked what he read because it made sense to him and addressed issues he had often wondered about, especially the weekly seventh-day Sabbath (from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset).

He found the local Web site for the United Church of God and attended a midweek Bible study. This led to him requesting more booklets and starting to attend Sabbath services. At first his family gave him grief over his new beliefs. They threatened to cut off the support they were

# Living Conditions in Nigeria

## Yakub Hakeem Oladimeji

28, comes from a non-Christian background. Akeem, as he is called, grew up in a polygamous home, and his parents are now separated. He came in contact with God's truth through a friend down the street from him whose entire family is in the Church of God. The family accepted him without question, and the depth of love and fellowship he received made him a regular visitor. His friend's house became Akeem's second home.

When Akeem learned about the beliefs of his friend and his friend's family, they made sense to him and he started attending Sabbath services. He was soon baptized and is now an active, committed member of the Church.



As a third-year law student, the time came for him to pay his school fees. This coincided with an unbiblical religious festival his

family observed. Even though he had not celebrated this occasion with his family for some time, this year his father insisted he come home and participate before he would give him the school fees.

Akeem was faced with a serious choice. He could go home, participate in the festival

giving him for his education and to throw him out of the house. They claimed that he had been hypnotized and brainwashed.

But Femi refused to give in to the pressure. He quietly stood his ground and continued to attend every week. In order to make sure he had money for transportation to church services, he'd start saving what he could early every week.

Over time, Femi's family has come to accept his beliefs. While his family still has reservations about him not attending church with them, Femi continues to be an active and committed member of the United Church of God in Lagos.

and collect his money or refuse to go and risk not getting the money for his education. If he couldn't pay, he'd be thrown out of school. Having struggled for more than six years just to gain admission to his school, this was no small problem.

In counseling with his minister, Akeem was advised to go home, tell his father that he was now a Christian and that he could no longer celebrate this festival, and to pray that God would touch his father's heart so he would give him the money. Akeem knew that he also had to be ready to accept whatever decision his father made. Whatever the outcome, it was time his father knew about his faith of the past seven years!

When Akeem's father learned of Akeem's beliefs, he was not pleased and threatened to disown him and have nothing to do with him if he didn't abandon his Christianity. His dad was also a lecturer at the university and could make life tough for him or even get him expelled if he so chose.

Akeem pleaded with his father to respect his desire to follow God as his conscience dictated, but his father would have none of it. Akeem left with a heavy heart, hoping that he could get financial help somewhere else. Just a few days before the deadline for paying the money, his father called him, spoke strongly and harshly to him, but eventually gave him the money.

His father was still angry with him and shocked, but somehow, he had come to respect his decision. This may not be surprising to many in the developed world, but this is indeed a miracle in Nigeria and most of Africa.

When Akeem went to pay the fees, he saw a new notice stating that all who had a certain grade point average or better were exempted from paying the school fees. As long as they maintained their grades, they would receive a cash award equal to the value of the school fees. Because Akeem's grades met the standard, he wouldn't have to pay. He had been faithful to His spiritual Father in spite of the possibility of losing out on his education.

**W**ith an estimated population in 2007 of approximately 135 million, Nigeria is often referred to as the "Giant of Africa." Nigeria is also a very poor country.

According to information published by the Federal Research Division of the Library of Congress sponsored by the U.S. Department of the Army ([www.country-studies.com/nigeria/income-distribution.html](http://www.country-studies.com/nigeria/income-distribution.html)), Nigeria's GNP per capita in 1988 ranked it below India, Pakistan and Ghana. Rising debt, falling average income and rapid inflation (20 percent yearly between 1973 and 1980) were responsible for a standard of living that was lower in the mid-1980s than it had been in the 1950s. As inflation became more severe in the 1980s, wages fell almost 60 percent.

Economic conditions in Nigeria today continue to decline. Estate agents demand an initial house rent of two to three years as advance payment excluding commission and agreement. Everything has to be done with cash and paid in advance. To own a car is considered a luxury, and 90 percent of all car owners buy them secondhand, after the cars are 10 to 15 years old.

With no steady electricity, no pipe-borne water (people dig boreholes and pump their own water into reservoirs), terrible roads and high corruption that makes every imported item (raw materials or finished products) extremely expensive by the time it gets to the hands of the consumers, the cost of running a business is very high. Every business from the mundane to the magnificent must have its own electricity generating plant in order to function. Because of this, companies are not expanding and very few new jobs are created.

More and more people are now struggling to get a degree and have the opportunity for a better income. But there are few openings for such job seekers. A company may advertise for two job openings and have as many as 15,000 applicants. Unemployment continues to rise every year as the schools churn out more graduates and the economy worsens.

# Situation Ethics = Pig + Lipstick

Would you ever kiss a pig? What if the pig were wearing lipstick? From a distance it might look a little better. But when you got closer, you'd find the same dirty, smelly pig.

**Y**ou're probably wondering what ethics has to do with swine and makeup. Granted, it's a strange picture. But it is a good way to understand the code of conduct most people have embraced today. Before we get to the pig and lipstick, let's consider a little background on ethics.

Ethics means the principles that determine morality and acceptable conduct. Everybody has ethics, whether they consciously think about their ethical principles or not.

Today people often make decisions on the basis of *situation* ethics—a belief that instead of accepting absolute, unchanging standards, decisions should be made according to the situation. Situation ethics claims that loving people is more important than rules. Thus, rules can be broken as long as the motive is love.

If situation ethics makes sense to so many people, how could it be wrong? And what could be bad about basing our

by **Barry Korthuis**

decisions on love? After all, if love is our motive, isn't that enough?

## Here comes the pig

Sometimes the simple continuation of a line of reasoning can help us understand whether such reasoning is sound. Let's assume two people are invited to kiss a pig.

Susie says, "No way. Absolutely not. I don't kiss pigs no matter what they smell or look like."

Bob says, "It all depends. I might if someone bet me money to do it. Of course, it would have to be enough money to make it worthwhile and the pig would need to look good. Hopefully, it just had a bath and might even be wearing lipstick."

This imaginary conversation colorfully illustrates the difference between someone who has absolute values and someone who decides according to the situation. Susie doesn't care whether the pig has had a bath and is wearing lipstick or not. She doesn't care if someone offers her money to kiss the pig. She has a personal rule that she is simply not going to kiss pigs.

In contrast to Susie, Bob isn't sure how he will decide. It will

depend on the circumstances. He might kiss the pig or he might not.

To be honest, we have to realize that some decisions aren't really ethical decisions. They are just personal preferences. Deciding on our favorite dessert is just a personal choice. Ethics is different because it encompasses morality and acceptable conduct. Ethics includes God's instructions. And when it comes to God's commandments, we need to be careful not to use situation ethics.

### So what's wrong with situation ethics?

Situation ethics encourages people to pick and choose which of God's laws to follow. It allows people to lie to avoid hurting someone else's feelings. It allows people to break God's laws if they think the result will be good.

But God doesn't let humanity decide what is right and wrong. In Matthew 5:17-19 Jesus Christ states that we need to keep all of God's laws. Consider verse 19: "Whoever therefore breaks one of the

least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least [by those] in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

Though situation ethics claims to be based on love, it really ignores God's definition of love. In John 14:15 Jesus says, "If you love Me, keep My commandments."

God's commandments aren't arbitrary. He gave them to us as a guide to a happy, healthy life. When we break His commandments, we can face tough consequences.

Consider what could happen if you lied to protect a friend's feelings. What would happen if your friend found out? Would it hurt your friendship? Would your friend ever trust you again?

We human beings have, as one of our greatest limitations, the inability to see the ultimate results of our actions. This is one of the big reasons God tells us not to rely on our own judgment. In Proverbs 3:5 we read, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding."

Situation ethics is just another way of rejecting God's law. By dressing it up with concepts like love and consideration, some try to make it look better—like putting lipstick on a pig. When someone rejects God's absolute truth, he is not looking past the lipstick. The pig looks pretty good, at least at first. But those who love God and want to do His will can see the pig for what it is—a pig.

### People who rejected situation ethics

In Daniel 6, some men in the Persian ruler Darius' administration got him to sign a decree forbidding people to worship anyone other than him for a short time. Daniel refused to compromise and was thrown in the lion's den, where God miraculously saved him.

We see another example in 1 Samuel 24, where David, whom God had declared Israel's next king, refused to harm the reigning king Saul when he had the chance—even though Saul was trying to kill him. David didn't compromise God's law forbidding murder even though Saul wasn't following the same instruction.

God's way leads to an abundant and happy life. He wants each of us to succeed, and He gives us an outline for a successful life. We have a choice. Either embrace God's way or prepare to kiss the pig.

**Barry Korthuis** is an operating partner for a private equity firm. Barry and his wife Sandy live in Tampa, Florida.

## The Founder of the Situation Ethics Movement

Joseph Fletcher, an Anglican theologian, developed situation ethics in the 1960s after critiquing legalism and antinomianism. Legalism is the belief that there are fixed moral laws that must always be obeyed.

Antinomianism is the belief that there are no fixed moral principles and that ethics should be spontaneous.

Fletcher believed that neither legalism nor antinomianism provided a sound basis for ethics and advocated "situationism" as a compromise. His book, *Situation Ethics*, was the centerpiece of his critique and founded much of the modern situation ethics movement.

According to Fletcher, decision-making should be based on the circumstances of a particular situation, and not on fixed law. He believed that truth is relative and that love is the only absolute. Thus, he believed that as long as love is the intention, the end justifies the means.

Ironically, Fletcher claims he founded his model on a biblical statement found in 1 John 4:8: "God is love." Yet he apparently didn't realize that the same book says commandment keeping shows our love for God (1 John 5:3) and that God never approves of law breaking. Indeed, such conduct is sinful (1 John 3:4).

What eventually happened to Fletcher? His conclusion that God's Word wasn't enough to guide decision-making led him to become an avid supporter of euthanasia and abortion. He died in 1991 an atheist.



**Situation ethics is just another way of rejecting God's law. By dressing it up with concepts like love and consideration, some try to make it look better—like putting lipstick on a pig.**

# Answers for Men

# M

any people have asked basic questions about the origins of things such as:

- “Who or what is God?”
- “What is the origin of the universe?”
- “How did life come to be?”

All these questions, and many more, are answered in the first book of the Bible, Genesis, which means *origin*. Here we receive God’s answers about many important questions—and from Someone who was there! So let’s go to this, the first book in the Bible, to find its answers to commonly asked questions.

## • When Genesis 1:1 says, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth,” who is God?

In this first verse, we are introduced to the majestic Creator God who made the entire universe—including us. The term for God in the original language is the Hebrew word *Elohim*, which is a plural term that can also have a singular meaning.

In John 1 we see why the term *God* can mean one or more persons. Here we read: “In the beginning was the

*Us* make man in *Our* image, according to *Our* likeness” (Genesis 1:26).

Both the Father and the One who became Christ were involved in creation—the second acting on behalf of the first. Hebrews 1:1-2 says, “God... has in these last days spoken to us by *His Son... through whom also He made the worlds.*” We thus see that God the Father created the universe *through* the preincarnate Jesus Christ (see also Ephesians 3:9).

## • Does the description in Genesis 1:1 fit with scientific explanations of the universe?

Yes, it does. Many scientists, through numerous lines of evidence, have come to accept the “Big Bang” theory of the universe in which the universe has a starting point. This indicates that *nothing* physical existed previous to that instant. According to this model, the universe is now expanding from that initial moment and even the background radiation from the original “explosion” can still be detected.

George S. Johnston sums it up well: “The book of Genesis has held up well under the scrutiny of modern geology and archaeology. Twentieth-century physics, moreover,

describes the beginning of the universe in virtually the same cosmological terms as Genesis. Space, time and matter came out of nothing in a single burst of light entirely hospitable to carbon-based life. A growing number of chemists and biologists

agree that life had its origin from clay templates... I would say all this is a curious development for Darwinists” (*Reader’s Digest*, May 1991, p. 31).

Even without the Big Bang model, the laws of thermodynamics—fundamental laws of the physical sciences—also indicate that the universe had a beginning. The first law states that the amount of mass-energy in the universe is constant. The second law states that the amount of energy available for work is running out.

Taken together, they require that the universe had a

**Both the Big Bang theory and the laws of thermodynamics—fundamental laws of the physical sciences— are in harmony with Genesis 1:1. Taken together, they require that the universe had a beginning with much usable energy from which it is now running down.**

*Word*, and the *Word* was *with* God, and the *Word* was God... And the *Word* became flesh and dwelt among us... the only begotten of the *Father*, full of grace and truth” (verses 1, 14, emphasis added throughout).

Thus the term *God* applies to God the Father or God the Word (who later became Jesus Christ)—or both. They can therefore act separately or together. Notice how in Genesis 1 *God* can be referred to by a *singular* personal pronoun, “*He* made the stars also” (Genesis 1:16). Or God can be referred to by a *plural* personal pronoun: “Let

# from Genesis

## Part 1

**Understanding how  
God made things in the  
beginning can help us  
understand things now.**

by Mario Seiglie

beginning with much usable energy from which it is now running down. Both the Big Bang theory and the laws of thermodynamics are in harmony with Genesis 1:1.

• **While the New International Version of the Bible translates Genesis 1:2 to say that “the earth was formless and empty,” why does it have a footnote stating that the word “was” here could be “become”?**

The original Hebrew for “formless and empty” (*tohu* and *bohu*)—“without form, and void” in the King James Version—literally means “chaotic and in confusion.” When God originally created the heavens and the earth, they were a thing of beauty.

Of the earth, Scripture elsewhere says that God “did not create it in vain, [*tohu*]” (Isaiah 45:18). We read in Job 38:4-7 that the angels shouted for joy at the sight. But we also read in the Bible that Lucifer, one of the chief angels, rebelled against God and was cast down to the earth (Isaiah 14:12-15; Ezekiel 28:14-17; Luke 10:18).

It then appears that the earth *became* a wasteland due to Satan’s rebellion, and God had to renew the face of the earth, as we read in Psalm 104:30: “You send forth Your Spirit, they are created; and You renew the face of the earth.” The following verses in Genesis 1 reveal God raising the continents to the surface and filling them with vegetation and living creatures through six days of work.

• **Do plants and animals really reproduce according to their “kind,” as Genesis 1 says, or did they evolve as the theory of evolution teaches?**

Darwinian evolution, as taught in schools, claims all plants and animals evolved from tiny, primitive ancestors. This theory asks us to believe that microscopic kinds of creatures, such as amoebas, eventually evolved into fish, then amphibians, then birds, then mammals and finally human beings!

Yet this is directly contradicted by the scientific *law of biogenesis*, which has never been known to fail! It states that 1) living matter comes only from living matter and 2) living things reproduce only according to their own kind. In other words, chickens produce eggs that produce more chickens—not some other type of creature.

Changes *within* a species, which can be called micro-evolution, do indeed occur. But macroevolution, or the

change from one animal kind to another, has never been verified in nature.

So apple trees keep producing apples, lions give birth to lions, bears engender more bears, and rabbits keep making rabbits—and plenty of them. So in this regard, science actually backs the Bible and not evolution!

• **What is meant by the statement that God created man and woman in His own image?**

Genesis 1:27 says, “So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him, *male and female* He created them.”

This means that both man and woman reflect God—that is, they are like God in some ways because “we are the offspring of God” (Acts 17:29). Indeed, it should be noted that the first man, Adam, later begets a son in his own image and likeness (Genesis 5:1-3).

Scriptures indicate that we share some of the same characteristics of God our Father, only in a more limited way. Some of our similarities include our general shape, having dominion (rulership) over the earth, and the ability to think and communicate on far higher levels than animals.

In short, being created in God’s image is what makes us human and of a different “kind” than animals. While the theory of evolution describes early man as only being capable of crude grunts, the first chapters of the book of Genesis show Adam and Eve immediately after their creation being able to name the animals, communicate in complete sentences and reason for themselves whether to obey God’s instruction to not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Being made in God’s image also indicates the ultimate purpose for which human beings were made. Amazingly, humankind was created to be of the “God kind.” Although God has made us physical beings for now, His ultimate desire is that all men and women accept His authority over their lives and eventually become part of His eternal family as His literal children (John 1:12; 2 Corinthians 6:18).

For further study, send for, download or read online our free booklets *Who is God?* and *What is Your Destiny?*

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

**F**riends are the only thing that kept Julie Zutz from going crazy when she moved from Minnesota to Boston and during the next 14 moves. An unofficial moving expert, Julie has crisscrossed the country in almost every direction for her job. She's been transferred from Minnesota to Massachusetts, Illinois to Georgia and, most recently, to Texas.

"The first six to 12 months is very hard," she explains. "That's where keeping in touch with friends keeps me from going insane."

Another veteran relocater, Amanda Stiver, says that her friends give her stability during the chaos of uprooting. "Knowing that life is going on far away means I can learn to cope where I'm at as well," says Amanda, a survivor of five moves.

Moving isn't just hard for women. Marty Henderson, who has jumped from Texas to Ohio and from Alaska to California in the last 13 years, says it can be a lonely time. "I know what it's like to move into an entirely new area and be alone," he says. "It is critical to maintain contact with family and close friends."

Even the experts agree. The Social Readjustment Rating Scale, based on research by psychiatrists Thomas

Holmes and Richard Rehe, ranks a change in residence among the top 50 stressful life events one can experience.

Everyone intellectually knows that moving is tough, but the emotions often surprise them anyway, Julie says. People usually tabulate costs for the moving van and boxes but don't count the social costs. They are just as real and play a big role in finding happiness in your new surroundings.

So are you doomed to loneliness? Of course not, Julie says. But most of the work to maintain friendships will fall on you. It's not that your friends don't care about you. Remember, for everyone besides you, it's life as usual. You have to be the one to stay in *their* lives. So what can you do?

### **Ways to reach across the miles**

- Don't wait until you're settled to pick up the phone, Julie says. Call while you're unpacking, hanging up clothes or just feeling lonely.
- Send a text message. Even if you don't have time to talk or can't find your keyboard, your cell phone is probably handy.
- Write an e-mail, Amanda suggests. Once your computer is unpacked, attach pictures of your new place and share a funny misadventure.
- Use an instant messaging service

provided by Web sites like America Online, MSN or Yahoo. They let you have real-time "chats" with multiple friends in different locations.

- Join a virtual community, Marty recommends. Web sites like MySpace and Facebook let you leave messages, share pictures, recommend movies and books and more.
- Use snail mail, says Amanda. It may be old-fashioned, but who doesn't love to find a card or letter among the pizza fliers?
- Plan a trip. Visit your old friends from time to time, and invite them to your home if they're in town.

### **Reaching out where you are**

Keeping in touch is important, but making friends in your new locale should be a priority, too, says Greg Baker, who's survived four moves in the past six years.

Know that making new friends will also take a lot of work, Julie warns. People there, too, have their own lives and social circles. To break through, you'll need to take an active role in their lives, hobbies, views and interests. So how can we do this?

- Finding your local United Church of God congregation is a must, Greg says. Our shared religious beliefs are a huge blessing, giving us instant common



Photos: iStockphoto

ground. Find contact information at [www.ucg.org/about/church.htm](http://www.ucg.org/about/church.htm).

- Volunteer. It's a great way to meet outgoing, caring people and do good in the process.

- Join a club or organization, Amanda suggests. Whether cycling, kayaking, bunko or singing is your thing, you can find other people who share your passion. It's easier to strike up a friendship when you're engrossed in another activity and the pressure is off.

- Throw a party, Julie recommends. If you wait until your home is perfect, you'll never have guests. Invite your neighbors or others you've met and order pizza. Paper plates are fine. Who wants to wash a bunch of dishes anyway?

And if the new person in town reaches out to you, please extend your hand, Marty encourages. Better yet, invite him or her to join a group activity. Remember—that new person has likely left all of his or her friends and family behind. Your gesture will be greatly appreciated.

### In the end

Even if you successfully keep in touch with old friends and make new ones, you'll still have lonely moments, especially during the first year, Julie says. "I don't know anybody who has moved who hasn't at some point upon

arrival realized that their friends are there and I'm here and feels a little bit stuck, let down or lonely. It is a phase and it will go away."

While your friendships will probably change, the closeness won't, Julie says. She has friends she hasn't seen in years, who, when they talk, pick right up where they left off.

And don't hesitate to reach out even if weeks or months have passed, Greg advises. Chances are good that you both wish you'd done a better job of staying in touch, and your friend will be happy to get a phone call or letter. "I can't say I do it often enough, but I don't let the embarrassment of not doing it in a timely manner in the past stop me," he says.

Our Creator knows we need friends. And when it comes to making friends, we reap what we sow. If we want friends, we need to be outgoing and friendly ourselves. This is something to strive for whether we're coming, going or staying where we are. After all, we can never have too many friends!

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

## MOVING STATISTICS For U.S. And U.K.

**5**—the average number of years between moves in the United States.

**16**—the percentage of people who move every year in the United States.

**56**—the percentage of moves in the United States that were local (within the same county).

**19**—the percentage of moves in the United States from one state to another.

**4**—the percentage of moves to the United States from another country.

**40,430**—number of U.S. youth ages 10 to 19 who moved March 1999 to 2000.

**18,441**—number of U.S. citizens ages 20 to 24 who moved March 1999 to 2000.

**20 to 29**—age group in the United States with the highest moving rate (one third).

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, March 2000 ([www.census.gov/prod/2001pubs/p20-538.pdf](http://www.census.gov/prod/2001pubs/p20-538.pdf)).

**3.2**—millions of people that who change their residence every year in the United Kingdom.

Source: Articleclick ([www.articleclick.com/Article/How-often-should-you-clean-your-mailing-lists-/973545](http://www.articleclick.com/Article/How-often-should-you-clean-your-mailing-lists-/973545)).

## Gaming

Continued from page 7

now include nude or scantily clad women and sexuality.

Jesus says that a man entertaining lustful thoughts about a woman who is not his wife breaks God's commandment about not committing adultery (Matthew 5:27-28). Clearly this is a huge issue in Western society as a whole and is not limited to the gaming industry. However as Western culture in general keeps "pushing the envelope" of what society will accept, the gaming industry has followed suit.

### Evaluating your gaming

Since the graphic violence, language and sexuality issues in many modern action and war games are in conflict with Christian principles, Gerald focused his gaming career on kids and fun family games. His advice is to think of gaming as the top of our "communication pyramid" and make sure you do just a small amount of that and only with games

appropriate for a Christian. His advice is that if you're playing more than two hours a day, you may have a problem.

Sam said the strongest warning sign is if you are abandoning your real life activities and responsibilities for virtual ones. Any hobby can be taken to an extreme. What is different about gaming—especially MMORPGs—is that with most hobbies you grow tired of them. Online role playing games keep changing to challenge the players so they don't lose interest; and as a result, players can easily become slaves to the game.

Games are not evil of and by themselves—especially if we are careful about the content and type of game. To get the good out of games and not the bad, strive for wise, Christian choices in the types of games you play, and be sure to limit your playing time.

**Ken Treybig** is the director of United Youth Camp Carter and pastor of United Church of God congregations in Big Sandy and Texarkana, Texas.



## Street Robbery Target—iPods

In recent years, police in Merseyside and London, England, have found that young people wearing the distinctive white headphones of iPod music listening devices are increasingly the target of muggings and robberies.

Muggings in some areas increased almost 40 percent. Small devices like the iPod and mobile phones are easily identified and removed by robbers (Will Iredale, "Street Robbery Soars as iPod Users Targeted," *The Sunday Times*, Oct. 9, 2005).

As a result of the continuing popularity of iPods, the small size, high monetary value and the distraction presented by listening to music while on the street, users need to be cautious. Stay alert and keep iPods and mobile phones out of sight (including headphones) while on the street in potentially unsafe areas.

# 93.3

**Percentage of people over age 12 who listen to the radio at least 15 minutes a week (Arbitron).**

*The Columbus Dispatch*, April 13 2008

## Grid U.K.

Concerning the latest Internet advance, "the grid," "Britain alone has 8,000 servers on the grid system—so that any student or academic will theoretically be able to hook up to the grid rather than the internet this autumn [2008]" (Jonathan Leake, *The Sunday Times*, April 6, 2008).

# >In the News<

Compiled by Amanda Stiver

## Giving to Receive Happiness

Giving gifts to other people or to charities makes the givers happier than those who don't give, according to a recent study from the University of British Columbia and Harvard University. Researchers concluded that spending money on oneself doesn't have the same happiness-causing effect as spending on others (Randolph Schmid, "Science, Bible Agree: Giving Is Better," *The Christian Post*, March 21, 2008).

Jesus Christ, the perfect example of giving, instructs us to give to others as well, saying, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

## The Internet—a Thing of the Past?

Cern, the organization that pioneered the Internet, has developed an updated Internet that will be 10,000 times faster than current broadband connections. Called "the grid," it will allow entire films to be downloaded in seconds, rather than hours and make



possible video conferencing with holographic images.

Currently used as a tool of scientific research, it is based on a grid of fiber-optic cables and powerful, updated servers allowing far greater computing than the existing Internet.

The creators of the grid predict that it will also allow "cloud computing," where computer users will store all of their information and documents online rather than in the far smaller memory available on personal computers (Jonathan Leake, "Coming Soon: Superfast Internet," *The Sunday Times*, April 6, 2008).

## Driving Decrease

The U.S. Federal Highway Administration finds that 30 percent of 16-year-olds had a driver's license in 2006, down from 41 percent 10 years ago. Montana Miller, assistant professor of popular culture at Bowling Green State University, has some theories on the reasons for the decline.

Teens "devote a lot of time to their extremely complicated social lives," said Miller, who specializes in teenage Internet socialization. "When kids used to be bored, they would drive around. Now, they get online and travel all around the world and talk to their friends."

Another likely factor is the pressure kids feel to have sterling grades, take advanced classes, volunteer and participate in myriad activities that make



their college applications impressive. Since driver education classes often cost \$300 to \$400, many teens understand that it

is expensive to purchase and maintain an automobile.

"So where are you going to find the time to learn to drive or have a job and make enough money for a car?" Miller said. (Kathy Lynn Gray, "In No Hurry to Drive," *The Columbus Dispatch*, March 3, 2008).

## Honey: The New Antibiotic?

Medihoney, a bandage made from seaweed-based material and saturated with powerful, antibacterial New Zealand manuka honey, has recently been put on the market. The new dressings, tested in hospitals and war zones, help to kill germs and speed healing by keeping wounds clean.

The bandage comes as a significant breakthrough at a time when many antibiotics are losing their effectiveness against pathogens (Linda Johnson, "Honey—Nature's Infection-Fighter—Making a Medical Comeback," Associated Press, Dec. 26, 2007).

Honey is mentioned frequently in the Bible. It is interesting that scientists continue to find additional nutritional and medicinal benefits from this natural substance.



## Explicit Photos on Cell Phones—Danger for Teens

Teens, especially girls, are increasingly sending explicit, nude pictures of themselves to boys in order to compete for romantic relationships. Experts explain that while those sending the messages think they are just reaching one person, they don't realize that the images proliferate among friends and on the Internet. The danger that sexual predators will collect them is very real (Charlie Boss, "Teen Girls' Cell-Phone Invitations Bare All," *The Columbus Dispatch*, April 13, 2008).

Explicit photos are completely outside the laws that God established to protect the purity of sex within marriage. Images are extremely hard to remove from the human memory, but equally as difficult is to remove them from the online world. Keeping a clean presence in the digital world is key to maintaining a positive reputation. The Internet and any material published there, even under privacy safeguards, is easily retrieved and made public.



## Digital Deluge

The proliferation of digital communication devices is causing a shift in person-to-person relationships, particularly between parents and children. Parents are being forced to learn the details of mobile phones, texting and Internet socialization in order to fulfill their responsibilities as guardians and protectors of their children.

Children and teenagers are defining

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## Radio Adjusts to the Digital World

A 2007 U.S. study by TNS Media Intelligence finds that spending on radio advertising dropped 3.5 percent from the previous year. Spending on Internet advertising surpassed radio advertising spending for the first time in 2007.

However a strong radio listening audience still remains, and the broadcasting industry is seeking to maintain that interest. Adapter requests on iPods are primarily for FM radio, suggesting that the listening device crowd still yearns for radio transmissions. Providing radio access on cell phones is also in consideration.

Likewise, Internet radio offers niche markets and access through Wi-Fi connections, while High Definition (HD) Radio expands the potential of traditional broadcasting signals (Tim Feran, "The Changing Face of Radio," *The Columbus Dispatch*, April 13, 2008).



**1/2** of 1,175 parents interviewed by AT&T learned how to send text messages from their children.  
*The New York Times*, March 9, 2008

Some say that the Big Bang theory of the origin of the universe is when modern science slammed a secular textbook down on logic and honest questions:

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- Where did life come from?
- Where did we come from?

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